Revista Canaria de

ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Universidad de La Laguna 70 2015

Revista Canaria de

ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Revista Canaria de
ESTUDIOS INGLESES
Universidad de La Laguna

PUBLISHER
Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de La Laguna
Campus Central. 38200 La Laguna.
Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
E-mail: svpubl@ull.edu.es

DESIGN
J.H. Vera/Javier Torres/Luis C. Espinosa

TYPESET BY
Servicio de Publicaciones

ISSN: 0211-5913 (edición impresa) / ISSN: e-2530-8335 (edición digital)
Depósito Legal: TF 275/81

Revista Canaria de
ESTUDIOS INGLESES
70

Servicio de Publicaciones
UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA, 2015

REVISTA canaria de estudios ingleses. —Nº 1 (1980)—. —La Laguna: Universidad, Servicio de Publicaciones, 1980—
Semestral
ISSN 0211-5913
1. Literatura inglesa-Publicaciones periódicas 2. Lengua inglesa-Gramática-Publicaciones periódicas I. Universidad de La Laguna. Servicio de Publicaciones, ed.
820(05)
802.0-5(05)

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

RCEI invites contributions of articles in such fields as linguistics, literature, critical theory, history, and cultural studies within the English Philology. Manuscript submissions, presented in English between 4,500 and 5,500 words, should conform to the guidelines found in the latest *MLA Style Manual*. For specific instructions on style contact the editorial office. Authors are expected to send their contributions as an attachment to *rceing@ull.es* and mail three double-spaced, printed copies with wide margins. Short abstracts (about 100 words) in English and Spanish are required, along with the key words (4-8) of the essay in both languages. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to introduce stylistic changes and to adjust illustrations. Further details on submissions: http://webpages.ull.es/users/rceing/submissions.html.

Any acknowledgments must appear as an initial, unnumbered note. Footnotes, numbered consecutively throughout the manuscript, must be, in the case of quoted material, after the punctuation mark (indented quotes) or the quotation marks. Digressive or excessively lengthy footnotes should be avoided. Subsequent references to a previously cited work require only the author's last name but in the case of previous citations to more than one work by the same author, a title must appear (as is clear, *op.cit*. is not to be used).

Each contributor should send a note stating specifically his/her manuscript is only being considered for publication by *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. Authors may republish their own material, provided such republication provides due acknowledgment. Published twice yearly, in April and November.

Editorial correspondence and all copies of books to be considered for reviews should be addressed to the Editor, *RCEI*, Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Facultad de Filología, Universidad de La Laguna, Campus de Guajara, 38200 La Laguna, Tenerife, Islas Canarias, España. Decisions on articles submitted are normally made within three months and those accepted published within a year. As is traditional academic practice, *RCEI* only publishes (blind) peer-reviewed essays. For further details on *RCEI* editorial policies, please visit our website: http://webpages.ull.es/users/rceing.

The *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* is scanned, indexed, abstracted or ranked by the following: ABELL (Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature), Agence Bibliographique de l'Enseignement Supérieur, AustLit (The Resource for Australian Literature), BD-ISOC, British Humanities Index, Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA), CARHUS, CINDOC, CIRC (Clasificación Integrada de Revistas Científicas), Dialnet, DICE, DULCINEA, ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia), ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities), Google Scholar Metrics, Humbul Humanities Hub, IBR (International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences), IBZ (International Bibliography of Periodical Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences), IN-RECH, JournalBase, Latindex, Linguistics Abstracts On-Line, LLBA (Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts), MIAR, MLA Directory of Periodicals, MLA International Bibliography, Periodicals Contents Index, RESH, SCImago Journal Rank, RI (Regesta Imperii), Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, WorldCat, The Year's Work in English Studies, and Zeitschriftendatenbank.

To consult the frequency of international and national citations of articles published in our journal, please visit this site: http://webpages.ull.es/users/rceing/citations.html.

Our e-mail address is: rceing@ull.es

For further details concerning journal exchange, back issues, etc., please contact:

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses
Servicio de Publicaciones
Universidad de La Laguna
Campus Central
38200 La Laguna (Tenerife, España)
E-mail: svpubl@ull.edu.es

CONTENTS

"INDIAS FROM AFAR": NARRATING THE INDIAN DIASPORA

Mª Luz González, guest-editor

INTRODUCTION

Over twenty million Indians live outside their country of origin. The Indian diaspora virtually covers every part of the world and undoubtedly constitutes a unique source of cultural wealth. In fact, that of India comprises the second largest diaspora in the world after the Chinese one. This special issue of RCEI is dedicated to the modern India diaspora which emerges as a result of the British occupation. In the nineteenth century, thousands of Indians were carried off as cheap hand labour to work in tea and sugar plantations of different British colonies, such as South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Malaysia, and many other places, or they were employed in the railway construction, as it happened, for instance, in East Africa, specifically in Uganda. Today the Indian diaspora is the consequence, in many cases, of this past circumstance. Nonetheless, it is impossible to speak about a unified Indian diaspora. The world Indian community is the result of multiple factors that have contributed to form its eclectic nature.

Topics such as Indianness, female subjectivities, the domestic space and the keeping of traditions, hierarchical relationships between race, class and gender, South-Asian Muslim identity, Women movements in India, and life writing, are all subjects that the reader of this special issue will find in this volume.

In the first essay, Felicity Hand offers an ample study of the representation of the female in East African Asian literature through the eyes of writers such as M. S. Vassanji, Peter Nazareth and Jameela Siddiqui. Hand also exposes how, in spite of the social privilege they enjoy as Asians in East Africa, Indian women have to struggle to find their own spaces at home, becoming active agents in the construction of new social positions. Hand laments, however, that the East African Asian woman (and her subaltern condition) has not been sufficiently treated in fiction. In the following essay, Maurice O'Connor examines South Asian Muslims' identity in the United Kingdom, highlighting the fact that authentic and essential Islamism should be distinguished from more radical postures that act as deformations or misrepresentations of their faith. O'Connor also explains how the South Asian Muslims living in Great Britain face a double dilemma: on the one hand, they are considered a minority and are excluded from any kind of national discourse; on the other, they must struggle against the propagation of the most radical Islamic groups. In order to illustrate all these ideas, the author offers a cultural analysis of different novels by Pakistani writers, such as Hanif Kureishi, Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, among others.

Antonia Navarro's essay, in turn, provides a historical overview of women movements in India till the present to demonstrate that the national front supporting Hindu nationalism, Hindutva, is currently giving a simplistic and reduced notion of Indianness, instead of its heterogeneous and complex true character. Hindutva ideology defends the idea that the essence of India must be found in the keeping of its traditions. So any activist movement concerned with gender equality is considered to be anti-Indian by the radical nationalists. Nonetheless, Navarro argues that women movements in India had existed long before its independence from the British Empire, in fact, from pre-colonial times, so their argument, she concludes, is not well-founded. Finally, the last essay deals with Salman Rusdhie's latest work: *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*. Celia Wallhead focuses especially on the hybrid nature and the different genres and subgenres in which this piece may be classified: mainly as a pseudo-autobiography, a detective story or a literary opus. Similarities and differences with Coetzee's *autre*-biography and Barthes' autobiography "against itself" are also discussed in this study.

ARTICLES

COPING WITH KHANDAANITY IN DIASPORA SPACES: SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN IN EAST AFRICA[1]

Felicity Hand
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Abstract

This paper provides a survey on the representation of the female East African Asian in literary texts and poses a series of questions on the role of the South Asian woman in East Africa. It seeks to unravel the extent to which South Asian women created their own space within the rigidly established colonial hierarchy. It examines the portrayal of them by writers such as M.G.Vassanji and Peter Nazareth and, more recently, Jameela Siddiqi as either victims of an equally rigid family structure or active agents in the negotiation of new forms of female subjectivity through taking advantage of the privileged social position of Asians in East Africa. Finally it suggests that women are more capable of actively welcoming the prohibited and the transgressive and consequently dismantling obsolete barriers. However, despite the deconstruction of gender relations in Jamila Siddiqi's work with its embedded critique of the double standards rife within the South Asian community, the paper concludes by observing that the novel that comes to terms with both the female East African Asian's subaltern state as a woman and her privileged social ranking as an Asian is yet to be written.

Keywords: South Asian Women in East Africa, Diaspora Writing, Literary Femaleness.

Resumen

Este artículo da una perspectiva de la representación de la mujer asiática en el África Oriental en textos literarios, y formula una serie de cuestiones sobre el rol que la mujer surasiática tiene en dicha zona. Se intenta descifrar hasta qué punto las mujeres del sur asiático crearon su propio espacio dentro de la jerarquía colonial firmemente establecida. Examina, asimismo, el retrato que de ellas han hecho escritores como M.G. Vassanji y Peter Nazareth y, más recientemente, Jameela Siddiqi como víctimas de una estructura familiar igualmente rígida, o como agentes activos en la negociación de nuevas formas de subjetividad femenina aprovechándose de la posición social privilegiada de los asiáticos en África Oriental. Finalmente, se sugiere que las mujeres son más capaces de asimilar activamente lo prohibido y lo transgresor, y de este modo desmantelar las barreras obsoletas. No obstante, a pesar de la deconstrucción de las relaciones de género en la obra de Jamila Siddiqi con su crítica implícita de los dobles raseros dentro de la comunidad surasiática, el artículo concluye constatando que la novela que trate tanto del papel subalterno de la asiática africana por ser precisamente mujer, como de su ranking social privilegiado por ser asiática, no se ha escrito todavía.

Palabras clave: Mujeres surasiáticas en África Oriental, escritura de la diáspora, la mujer en la literatura.

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the settlement of South Asians[2] in East Africa has been narrated almost exclusively as a male experience. The Lall children in M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) are third generation Africans, Anand Lal Peshawari, Vikram's paternal grandfather, was one of the many Indians who built the East African railway. We are told little of the grandmother's story, she laid no railway tracks but raised a family in a hitherto unfamiliar territory. There has been a dearth of academic research into the female East African Asian experience but in recent years creative writers of East African Asian origin are filling in the gaps and telling the stories –so often neglected and underestimated– of what Dana April Seidenberg has called "the forgotten pioneers" (93). Male and female responses to the immigrant condition are not –cannot be– lived in the same way. That women's experiences differ considerably from men's is borne out by the following quotation from Avtar Brah in which she describes how diaspora experiences are gender determined:

> Clearly the relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations, mediated as it is by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of disruption and displacement as one tries to reorientate, to form new social networks, and learns to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities. Within each generation the experiences of men and women will also be differently shaped by gender relations. (Brah 194)

How have South Asian women created their own space within the rigidly established colonial hierarchy? Do writers such as M.G. Vassanji and Peter Nazareth and, more recently, Jameela Siddiqi portray them as victims of an equally rigid family structure or do they suggest that they have negotiated new forms of female agency by taking advantage, as it were, of the privileged social position of Asians in East Africa? Many of the novels of the writers mentioned above beg the question as to how long one must live in a place in order to claim it as "home." Do women become attached to the new land quicker and less painfully than men? Are they more capable of actively welcoming the prohibited and the transgressive and consequently dismantling obsolete barriers? In this article I wish to address these issues and unravel the role of South Asian women in the construction of an East African Asian community. I will be discussing the work of various East African Asian writers, men and women, but before dealing with them, I would like to outline the sociocultural

[1] Research for this essay has been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, project FFI2012-32626.

[2] As will be discussed later on, the South Asian diaspora of East Africa is an extremely heterogeneous group, linguistically, religiously and culturally but I am using the term "South Asian" as shorthand.

constraints of what M. G. Vassanji has termed "khandaanity," in other words the concept of honour and prestige that is usually referred to as *izzat*.[3]

Behind the notion of *izzat* lies the fear, control or shaping of women's sexuality as the purity and honour of the family –if correctly upheld– can replace lack of money or social power. Within the South Asian diaspora, the appearance of a monolithic community is maintained in public and calls for cultural purity mean that the usual contradictions and divergences of any lived culture, including those labelled as "traditional," are hidden from the prying eyes of outsiders in the name of unity and coherence. The burden of preserving this image of a homogeneous community, faithful to its ancestral customs and traditions is, to a large extent, placed on the shoulders of the women. Thus the site for the preservation of India, its culture and its traditions, is the family. The domestic space, domain of the woman, is where Indianness has to be affirmed and where honour provides a moral framework for correct behaviour. The Indian woman is expected to be responsible for maintaining the Indian home in the diaspora by remaining true to her Indian womanhood through the preservation of her family's –and therefore the community's– respectability. The diaspora context often encourages a kind of "siege mentality [which] aids cohesion and masks heterogeneity, especially in terms of voices of dissent" (Sen 46) which in turns leads to the glorification of South Asian mores and codes of conduct and an excessive conservatism. This phenomenon is not just confined to Indians in East Africa as it is a common reaction among the various diasporic communities around the globe. Immigrants become frozen in an India of the past and their attempts to preserve their culture translate into rigidly holding on to the values that were prevalent at the time of their departure, ignorant of the fact that Indian society has moved on.[4] The adherence to the strict code of conduct inscribed in *izzat* or *khandaanity* –often with the complicity of women themselves– inform the narratives of the writers, both male and female, that will be dealt with in this article.

2. THE SOUTH ASIAN PRESENCE IN EAST AFRICA

Fiction written by and about East African Asians problematises what sociologist Avtar Brah has called *diaspora space.* Diaspora space refers to the area where people can, so to speak, cultivate their cultural hybridity and their diversity in background, faith and language, through the variety of different responses shown by male and female characters in diverse situations. Brah defines it as

> the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple

[3] Vassanji coins this Hinglish expression from the Cutchi-Gujerati word *khandaan* meaning respectability. See *The Gunny Sack* (83).

[4] I have discussed this phenomenon within South Asian communities in the UK and the USA. See Hand 1999 & 2004.

> subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate, and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptively mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. (Brah 208)

I find Brah's theory particularly appropriate in my discussion as she herself is a Ugandan of Indian origin.[5] Like Jameela Siddiqi and Peter Nazareth, Brah writes from first-hand experience about the upheaval surrounding the forced expulsion of Asians from Idi Amin´s Uganda in 1972. These "twice migrants" (Bhachu, 1985) have been immersed in a complex ontological puzzle as regards their identity and filiation. In Siddiqui's second novel *Bombay Gardens* (2006) Baby, now a resident of Great Britain, muses: "I am only Indian by race. I was raised as an African girl, in a small village in East Africa. And, in my country in East Africa, being Indian had, at one time, been the biggest crime one could commit" (17).

How did an Asian community lay down roots in East Africa in the first place? In the following section I will briefly trace the history of South Asians in East Africa in order to understand the stereotypes that cling insistently to them and which writers like Siddiqi and Vassanji are challenging. The one-dimensional view of Asians as either villains or victims tends to rely too much on the construction of the Asian during British colonial rule, whereas the truth is that East Africa was the focus of Indian trade much before the Europeans ever set foot in either India or Africa. However, it is true that South Asians came to inhabit the African continent, most visibly in South and East Africa, in unprecedented numbers under the British colonial machinery. Since their arrival during the colonial era, they have been haunted by the pervasive stereotype that they came to Africa as "middlemen," serving the interests of the British Empire and forming an exclusive ethno-cultural community that saw itself as superior to the indigenous African. Despite the fact that Salim in V.S. Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* (1979) states that his family had lived in Africa for centuries,[6] people of South Asian origin like him are read as "Indians" rather than "Africans," and more specifically as "dukawallahs," and, what's more, as collaborators in the British imperial enterprise in East Africa.

South Asians have played a key role in the context of Indian Ocean trade for many centuries. India had long-standing mercantile connections with East Africa as part of the ancient network of the Indian Ocean as early as the first century of the Christian Era. Marco Polo in 1260 AD mentions Gujerati merchants on Africa´s east coast and later in 1497 Vasco da Gama reached Malindi

[5] In the introduction to her study Brah argues that her own personal life "has been marked by diasporic inscriptions" (1).

[6] "Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries. But we came from the east coast, and that made the difference. The coast was not truly African. It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place, and we who lived there were really people of the Indian Ocean. True Africa was at our back. Many miles of scrub or desert separated us from the up-country people; we looked east to the lands, with which we traded– Arabia, India, Persia. These were also the lands of our ancestors. But we could no longer say that we were Arabians or Indians or Persians; when we compared ourselves with these people, *we felt like people of Africa*" (Naipaul, 2002:12; emphasis mine).

and encountered Indian merchants in Mozambique, Kilwa and Mombasa (see Hollingsworth, 1960; Desai, 1993 & Hall, 1998). Up to the beginning of the 16th century, the Indian presence on the East African seaboard was substantial. Indians clearly played a key role in the area, even though it was limited to coastal contact because they did not penetrate into the hinterland.

After the Portuguese and later the British East India Company established their trade monopoly in the Indian Ocean, Indian economic links with East Africa began to suffer. However, Indian activity and influence developed new forms and the return of the Imams of Muscat to Zanzibar in the early 19th century marked a strong revival of the Indian commercial connection with East Africa and a change in character of Indian association. Indian merchants began to acquire an increasingly important role in the commercial and financial life of the island to the extent that during the sultanate of Sultan Seyyid Said they provided the main banking and financial services. Although they began in a modest fashion as seasonal traders Indians soon spread out to command a vast network of commerce with the growth of permanent Indian settlements, not just in Zanzibar and its sphere of influence but throughout the region. The Imperial British East Africa Company recruited Indian workers and police and employed Indian administrative staff at its various stations in the interior and along the Swahili coast. This extension of Indian trading activity into the interior became particularly marked during the early years of the British colonial era, although the real pioneers were old established merchants in Zanzibar.

Together with the railway "coolies," and partly because of them, the institutions of the British Raj were transplanted along the Uganda Railway: Indian laws, police, postal and currency systems, administrative practices. Recruitment of labour from the Punjab started in 1897 and carried on till 1901, during which period 32,000 Indian workers were recruited for service. The attraction for the labourers to migrate to East Africa lay in the higher earnings that could be earned there for the same type of work as they did in India. East Africa was envisaged as a kind of "America of the Hindu" by the colonial power, who had no qualms about luring unsuspecting Indians to Africa and other parts of the Empire to serve as cheap labour (Lepper, 1915; Tinker, 1977; Elder, 1992). Dhanji Govindji, the patriarch of Vassanji´s *The Gunny Sack* (1989),[7] tells his daughter-in-law: "The railway goes from Mombasa all the way to the lake in the interior, and everywhere the train stops there is an Indian settlement. The line was built by our Indians, every stationmaster is an Indian, and every conductor is also one of ours. Our people are doing well under the British" (GS 37).

The Indian role in middle-grade employment was not only restricted to government services since their activities as skilled staff and artisans steadily expanded, both in

[7] Henceforth the following abbreviations will be used for the novels discussed in this article: *The Gunny Sack* GS; *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* VL; *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* FV; *Bombay Gardens* BG; *In a Brown Mantle* BM; *The General is Up* GU; *Day After Tomorrow* DT.

private employment and in business. In Uganda the principal export crop was cotton, which was exported mainly to India and in fact the cotton business became virtually an Indian monopoly. With the arrival of European settlers, Nairobi and other places in British East Africa became concentrations of major commercial activity. European-owned workshops, garages and retail stores spread, increasing the demands for skilled Indian workers. The Indians who emigrated to East Africa at the turn of the twentieth century also included educated professional people, such as doctors and lawyers. The largest single influx of 32,000 indentured workers to build the Kenya-Uganda railway was in fact a short-term phenomenon, but which gave rise to the myth that the present Asian population in East Africa are mostly the descendants of the "coolies" (Desai 120), a myth that is widely believed by many Africans, despite the fact that only 6,724 of the original thirty-two thousand chose to remain behind. Thus for at least a millenium the Indian presence in East Africa had been confined to the Swahili Coast, but the first two decades of the 20th century witnessed a rapid growth of the Indian role in the interior of East Africa. In one of his lesser known works, Winston Churchill, at the time under secretary of state for the colonies, appeared to praise the pioneering spirit of the Indian:

> It was the Sikh (and Punjabi Muslim) soldier who bore an honourable part in the conquest and pacification of these East African countries. It is the Indian trader who, penetrated and maintained himself in all sorts of places to which no white man would go or in which no white man could earn a living, has more than anyone else developed the early beginnings of trade and opened up the first slender means of communications. It was by Indian labour that the one vital railway on which everything else depends was constructed. It is the Indian banker who supplies the larger part of the capital yet available [...] (Churchill 34)

The British imposed legal restrictions on landholding and farming practices which guaranteed the Indians' dominant economic position in the East African colonies, especially in trade and in the towns. Thus trade and craftmanship were relegated to Indians while Africans were encouraged to work in the European agricultural system and to supply cheap labour in the towns that were developing in response to European and Indian activities. In this way a hierarchy of races was encouraged to flourish, which would in no way favour future African-Indian relations in the post-colonial era.

The movement of Asians around the British East African territories would be enshrined in the 1883 Act which granted Indians freedom of movement without restriction and settlement within the British Empire. The 1886 Amendment to the 1883 Emigration Act encouraged Indian immigration into East Africa especially as indentured labour. In 1890 the so-called "Open up the Hinterland Policy" empowered the Indians to move inland. Convergence on colonial territory at the beginning of the 20th Century meant contestation over African space especially since Indians were now moving inland rather than remain, as they had done up till then, in the coastal areas. In a sense, these laws would instigate the consolidation of the vision of Asians as exploiters and colonial stooges, willing to carry out the dirty work of the Europeans, which is really how Winston Churchill saw them.

3. NARRATING IN-BETWEENNESS: FROM RAILWAY COOLIE TO FENCE-SITTER

One of the early, better known novels about an East African Asian is V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) published seven years after Peter Nazareth's first novel *In a Brown Mantle* (1972) and eight years after Bahadur Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow* (1971), neither of which have achieved the literary success of Naipaul's work. Naipaul's focus may not have been specifically the Asian experience in East Africa as in fact his novel deals with what he sees to be the post-colonial chaos of an unnamed country, similar to Zaire under the regime of Mobuto Sese Seko. The protagonist, Salim, leaves his family and coastal surroundings to venture into the interior and set up a shop at the bend of an unnamed river. His experience is, however, an isolated one. He barely interacts with Africa and Africans, he, in fact, lives up to the stereotype of the exploitative dukawallah but without the support of an extended family and community behind him. His Indianness will eventually single him out as a foreigner in the newly independent nation, which he will have no choice but to abandon. Naipaul's character is a loner, whose relationship with Africa is distant, remote, almost calculating (Nazareth, 1995: 68-9).

A Ugandan of Goanese ancestry, Peter Nazareth vividly describes the ambiguous position of the Goans, focussing on their singularity and alienation from Damibian –read Ugandan– society in both of his novels, *In a Brown Mantle* (1972) and *The General is Up* (1991). The *Wagoa* regarded themselves as a cut above the other Indians and in fact refused to be lumped together with the *Wahindi*. Their self-classification above the other Asian communities because of their greater moral integrity is disclosed as the utmost hypocrisy in Nazareth's texts,

> Ronald [D'Mello] decided to retrace his steps towards one of the Damibian bars and find himself a woman... The Goans were very Victorian. Their girls were expected to be respectable and straightlaced and anti-sensual. The result was that the honest men had to hunt out Damibian women who did not have the Goan problem. (GU 18)

Women in these early East African Asian narratives are virtually invisible, Nazareth´s work being almost exclusively male-centred with the few women who are featured relegated to the role of sensuous African women: "There was nothing like a Damibian woman, Ronald thought. ... The woman and he made some small-talk all the way back home, walking hand-in-hand. The darkness all around felt comforting and Ronald was gradually absorbed into a black womb [...]" (GU 21).

I will return later to the feminization of Africa, echoes of which can be found in Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, tell-tale signs of the erasure of the female Asian presence and the masculinization of Asianness in the East African context.

Bahudur Tejani´s *Day After Tomorrow* goes even further in his romanticising of African cultures at the detriment of the lifestyle and values of the Indian community (Elder 129). Both *In a Brown Mantle* and *Day After Tomorrow* eerily forecast the upheaval of the explusion of the Asians from Uganda in 1972. Tejani is critical of the Asians´ singleminded work ethic, out of touch with the raw sensuousness of African

life. He paints a heartless portrayal of Samsher´s father - the quintessential dukawallah, suspicious of any education that will drag his son away from his real vocation: the shop. Curiously, the optimism inherent in Tejani´s novel vis-á-vis mixed marriages contrasts sharply with the tone of novels published a generation later, such as the social stigma and incomprehension surrounding the love affair of Njoroje and Deepa in Vassanji´s *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and the down-to-earth humour which reveals the hypocrisy as regards "mixed" relationships typical of Jameela Siddiqi´s work.

Asians, in particular the *dukawallah*, have earned rather unflattering portrayals in much East African writing. Shiva Naipaul wrote in his *North of South* that "nowadays, the Asian is portrayed as little more than a miserly dukawallah who ceaselessly exploited and cheated innocent Africans. His past distorted, he is in the process of being eliminated from the present" (111). Kenyan scholar J.K.S. Makokha (82) has suggested that indigenous African peoples in East Africa inherited anti-Asian sentiments from the British. He argues that "seen contextually through a historicised perspective [they] have become a kind of racialist tradition that is learned like all traditions are, and passed over from generation to generation." In this respect historian Dana April Seidenberg writes:

> Apart from natural xenophobia that occurs almost everywhere, East Africa notwithstanding, anti-Asian resentment was a continuation of a systematic colour-coding of society which ... ran deep into the foundations of colonial society. With no strong ideological framework in place to define an ecumenical state of diverse cultures, and no economic programme to support it, Africans were dependent on their xenophobic attitudes, these exacerbated by biases implanted by the colonial state. African elites and others began to express anti-Asian sentiments as Asians began to become successful in a predominantly [postcolonial] African country. (188)

Thus, even within the general category of "middlemen" groups, East African Asians constituted an extreme case because they were caught in the racist dynamics of colonial or white settler societies. The almost inevitable antipathy of the underprivileged masses was further exacerbated by the racism of the dominant minority, as well as, of course, by the Asians' assumption of cultural superiority over Africans (van den Berghe 293). Their intense pride in their cultural heritage led them to look upon European culture with ambivalence and accept as axiomatic their ethnocentric belief in their *cultural* superiority over Africans. This notion of cultural superiority is highlighted in *The Gunny Sack* in an anecdote told to Salim by his mother and which curiously occurs in Nazareth's novel, *The General is Up* (1991). In *The Gunny Sack* Kulsum narrates to her sons her theory of creation,

> [God] fashioned three identical dolls. He put the first doll into the oven to finish it, but alas, brought it out too soon: it came out white and undone. In this way was born the white race. With this lesson learnt, the Almighty put the second doll into the oven, but this time he kept it in for too long. It came out burnt and black. Thus the black race. Finally the One and Only put the last doll inside the oven, and brought it out at just the right time. It came out golden brown, the Asian, simply perfect. (GS 89)

In Nazareth´s novel Arab troops brought in by a thinly disguised Idi Amin, get drunk and abuse the native Africans, "Hey slave! Why did God cook you for so long? Why did he not take you out of the oven when you were done just right, like us?" (GU 40). This creation myth has two obvious readings. One humourous reading is that Africans and Europeans are not quite "right" but perhaps what is more important, the text underscores the in-betweenness of the Asian. The story raises the liminal, interstitial essence of the Asian to mythical heights and Kulsum´s narrative reveals an intense cultural and racial pride in its endogamy. One of the major grievances hurled at the Asians by Idi Amin, the strong man of Uganda after the coup against Milton Obote in 1971, was that they did not intermarry with Africans. While it is true that not many South Asians entered into legal marriages with Africans, Vassanji's Dhovinji Govindi lives with and has a child with an African, Bibi Taratibu. When word gets back to India that "our sons are keeping golis, black slaves in Africa. And there are *children*, half-castes littering the coast from Mozambique to Karachi" (GS 14) Govindi abandons his mistress and marries a Zanzibari Indian. This early liaison and the lost African link is what forms the backbone of the novel. I will be returning to the quest for Africanness later on.

As stated above, contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of East African Asians are descendants of skilled free immigrants. Many came from destitute and low status groups in India and many, if not the majority, experienced a substantial rise in economic and social status in East Africa. Indian immigrants in East Africa tended to belong to one of three main sectors, namely, the civil service, the army or commercial enterprise. The Asians found themselves in a new type of caste system based on skin pigmentation. They experienced upward mobility but also a ceiling on that mobility. They would become a buffer group between the Europeans and the Africans, a convenient scapegoat for both and a highly visible stumbling-block in the way of African "advancement" (van den Berghe 279). Allegations were often levelled against them for abusing their privileges and for general malpractice in these three main spheres. In this respect the Indian merchants with whom Africans dealt were sometimes almost as unscrupulous as the European settlers and bureaucrats in their dealings with them. Austrian-born Hindu monk and anthropologist, Agehananda Bharati, puts his finger on the image that Asians have –possibly unwittingly– constructed for themselves.

> Asians are sneaky, mistrustful, they stick to each other and do not mix with others, they are arrogant, they cheat in business, they are cowards, their houses are dirty, they are obnoxiously thrifty, they lower the living standards of their neighbours because they do not spend money even though they could afford luxuries and encourage other people's wealth; they are clannish, they monopolize trade within their fold, they are not trustworthy in business nor in social matters. (Bharati, 1972: 170)

In this scheme of things, Asians were always well-known even before they were encountered, such is the power and overdetermination of stereotypes. For the European colonial purveyors of negative myths about the East African Asians,

this was mostly a way of perpetuating the existent political arrangements which favoured white settlers.

By 1939 the Indians' place in the Government and society of Kenya had become fairly well stabilized, somewhere in the scale of privilege, power, and prestige between the position of the European community at the top and that of the Arab and African communities at the base. Before reaching this position of segregated but comparable economic and social comfort, the Kenyan Indian population found itself faced with discrimination resulting primarily from European greed for the best land and fear of Indian/ African political affiliation against them. The arrival of independence[8] brought with it a restrictive sense of nationalism linked rather too closely with race. Indians occupied a predominant position in the economic life of East Africa but were politically isolated. The younger generations of Indian settlers did not appear to have much of an economic and social future in East Africa and tended to shy away from political activism. Strong apprehensions of post-independence social and economic difficulties were felt by the *duka* owners all over East Africa. Owned almost exclusively by Gujerati-speaking Asians, they were slowly being crowded out by African cooperatives and by the increasing boycott from former African clientele. Only the top industrialists and the very few large-scale Indian farmers seemed to have a clear future ahead of them. Independence constitutions in the new East African nation states made generous provisions for citizenship – a person could become a local citizen automatically on independence or could have the option to become one within a specified time or retain his/her pre-independence status. The entire future of the Asian community would hinge on that crucial choice and the much publicised hesitation earned them the unflattering epithet of "fence-sitters."

Political turbulence in the region, which culminated in the 1964 revolution in Zanzibar, contributed to a general feeling of insecurity among the Asians. The decision to retain British or Indian citizenship arose from the fear that to give this up would be tantamount to giving up the right to any kind of protection in the event of confiscation of property or persecution. The general rush as the period of grace drew to a close led many Africans to see the Asians as opportunists and 'paper citizens,' only becoming citizens to avoid the adverse effects of Africanization (Simatei 75). Africanization policies were carried out in countries like Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and, most notoriously, Uganda, where the Asians were unceremoniously expelled in 1972 and their possessions expropriated. Many of these Uganda Asians migrated to Britain, India and Canada (Bhachu; van Hear). The Indians of Britain's East African colonies were as much a part of the colonial structure as the British themselves, despite the fact that in the post-independence era they themselves would suffer the consequences of fear, hostility and plain envy. Traditional imperial history has failed to do justice to the intricacies of the tripartite social situation

[8] The first of Britain's East African colonies to achieve independence was Tanganyika in 1961, followed by Uganda in 1962, Kenya and Zanzibar in 1963 and Malawi in 1964. Tanganyika and Zanzibar joined to form Tanzania in 1964.

in these colonies by oversimplifying an elaborate hierarchy of races, promoted by the colonial masters themselves for their own political purposes. As South African based Kenyan scholar Dan Ojwang puts it, "the Asian diaspora has, throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, acted as a scapegoat for the complicated ways in which East Africa has become drawn into modernity" (2005: 5). It also has to be said that the Indian diaspora was based on the principle of self-gain and that there is a sinister side to it, namely the Indian involvement in the financing of the slave trade in Zanzibar (Hollingsworth 29; Salat 169).

One of the early Asian settlement areas in East Africa was Zanzibar and it features as a powerful site that poses a direct challenge to the "myth of the railway coolie." It is significant that Vassanji has his patriarch begin his new life precisely in Zanzibar, "[w]here Indians had lived and traded for centuries" (GS 11). The presence of the ancestors of present-day East African Asians in Zanzibar even before the British set foot in Africa proves the long-lasting genealogy and belongingness of the community. Notwithstanding these historical credentials, the citizen status of the Asian exploiter –invariably male– is questioned not just because he is sabotaging the progress of East Africa, but mostly because he is perceived as a foreigner, a stranger who has no right to plunder his country of adoption. Following this logic, no one casts any doubt as to the citizen status of the black exploiter (Kahyana, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, the Indian participation in African nationalism was seen to be excessively lukewarm, with notable exceptions such as Isher Dass,[9] who in 1929 accompanied Jomo Kenyatta, then an emerging leader, to London to present Kikuyu problems before the imperial government and the four Indian lawyers who participated in the defense of Jomo Kenyatta at the Kapenguria trial in 1952-3 during the emergency (1952-1960). Jay in Mira Nair`s film *Mississippi Masala* (1991) bitterly complains of the treatment meted out to him by the Ugandan government in 1972 and refuses to accept the Africanization policy which stated that "Africa is for Africans, black Africans." He considers himself to be as Ugandan as his childhood friend Okelo and argues that as a lawyer he had defended Africans against Indians. M.A. Desai, the editor of *East African Chronicle*, helped to print articles in Swahili for Harry Thuku (the father of African nationalism in Kenya) and Makhan Singh, who organised the Labour Trade Union of East Africa in 1936, was the founder of African trade unionism. The stumbling block to more fluid relations with the Africans was the Asians' privileged class position which did not allow Indians to fully identify with African nationalism and therefore did not earn them any significant degree of political legitimacy and respect in the eyes of Africans (Jain, 1993).

The Devonshire Declaration of 1923 had denied Indians racial equality with whites and condoned the continuation of all existing disabilities. This had meant that any European aspiration to achieve self-government as in other parts of southern

[9] In Neera Kapur-Dromson's memoir, *From Jhelum to Tana*, Isher Dass is remembered for his presumed complicity with the colonial government and was in fact murdered by two Indian workers in 1942 (2007: 243-245) and see Hand (2011).

Africa would be frustrated, and that colonial society in East Africa would clearly be constructed in a rigid hierarchical fashion. The Africans in general terms viewed the Asians with growing distrust and hostility, no doubt encouraged by Europeans' propagation of stereotypes of Asians as exploiters of Africans in order to prevent any kind of subaltern solidarity from taking root. If the truth be told however, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, the Indian liberal politician, was one of the many exceptions that proved the rule. He was an ardent campaigner for African paramountcy and lectured all over India in order to promote African –as opposed to Indian– interests in Africa during this period (Park 352). Despite these significant political actors, the racial stratification firmly entrenched in East Africa, together with the Indian propensity to social exclusiveness, merely reinforced their weak political position and general isolation. In Vassanji's novel, Vikam Lall reflects on how, after independence, the comfortable situation of the Asians would act against them: "Here I was, a young Asian graduate in an African country ...carrying ... the stigma from a generalized recent memory of an exclusive race of brown "Shylocks" who had collaborated with the colonizers...Black chauvinism and reverse racism were the order of the day against Asians" (VL 276).

What Homi Bhabha has termed "in-between" spaces[10] are the meeting grounds where different cultures converge and interact. They are also arenas for establishing new forms of commonality and for challenging monolithic interpretations of indigeneity. The question "who belongs?" follows on from "how long does one need to live in a place in order to belong?" One of the major hurdles that East African Asians were to face –and by extension many diasporic communities– was the notion of Africanness being equated with blackness and as opposed to whiteness. Being African was not being white, in which case where does that situate the brown? Brown Africans were forced into a shady, borderland zone from which they had to contend with establishing their cultural credentials – the title of Nazareth´s first novel, taken from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, exemplifies this perfectly.[11] On one hand, they needed to distance themselves from the African labourer while on the other, they could not identify too closely with the white ruling elite as they were themselves colonized peoples. Both white and black were the Other and this propelled them into carving out a clearly defined Indian space for themselves. This "in-between" space would become a buffer zone for the Africans and the Europeans with the Indians uncomfortably lodged in the middle or falling between two stools, as Salman Rushdie calls it in his *Imaginary Communities* (15) In subsequent years

[10] "These 'in-beween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal– that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself...It is in the emergence of the interstices –the overlap and displacement of domains of difference– that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated" (Bhabha 1-2).

[11] "Who is the third who walks always beside you?/When I count, there are only you and I together/ But when I look ahead up the white road /There is always another one walking beside you/ Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle" (quoted *BM*, p. viii).

their reduced numbers and the parallel growth of the African middle class have considerably eased the pressure on them in this respect.

Despite the pioneering efforts of Tejani and Nazareth, among others, possibly the most complex literary constructions of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa are to be found in the work of M.G. Vassanji, himself a living example of hybridity. Born in Nairobi of parents of Gujerati Indian descent, he grew up in Dar es Salaam, studied in the United States and now resides in Canada. His work has contributed enormously to the visibility of the Asian communities in East Africa, ranging from his first novel *The Gunny Sack* (1989) through to his most recent novel to date, *The Magic of Saida* (2013) not forgetting his short story collections, *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *Elvis, Raja* (2005). In an interview given in 1991 Vassanji stated one of his motives for writing about the Asian community in East Africa:

> people in East Africa [...] don't have [...] a historical sense, of where they come from. There is a vague kind of oral history telling them where they come from but it's not something that you read about; it's something that's constantly changing, and if you just compare it with what goes on in the West where everything is recorded you can see that our lives have not been recorded. (Nasta 19)

In the case of the East African Asians, the task ahead is not merely that of recording histories but rather it is a twofold enterprise –challenge stereotypes and map Indo-African pasts– so Vassanji's novels undertake a two-stranded objective. First, they narrate the genesis and genealogies of East Africans with cultural roots in the Indian subcontinent. Many of his works, and in particular his first, *The Gunny Sack*, embrace whole sectors of the Asian communities and large areas of Asian settlement. He is by no means confined to any one country as, of course, before and during the colonial period, national frontiers had little, if any, significance. Second, Vassanji seeks to subvert and deconstruct the stereotypical image of the Indian settler in East Africa by revealing a whole complexity of characters, situations, political positionings and motivations. His characters range from the ubiquitous shopkeeper (for example Pipa in *The Book of Secrets*) to high-ranking political advisers (Vikram Lall), from Ji Bai, the owner of the gunny sack of the title to a pharmacist (Deepa, Vikram Lall's sister). He focuses on what he calls the Shamshi community, modelled on Ismaili Muslims, but his novels feature Goans as well as Gujerati and Punjabi Hindus. His is an overarching project but what is called for is a counter narrative in the sense proposed by Bhabha: "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries –both actual and conceptual– disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities [...]" (149).

The Asian contribution to the independence struggle is only recently being acknowledged.[12] Two novels that rewrite the histories of East Africa from 1885 to the present from the perspective of the forgotten Asian pioneer and nation-builder are Vassanji´s *The Gunny Sack* and *The In-between World of Vikram Lall*. African attitudes and views of the Asians arose largely out of the political, social and economic context of colonial society in which the Europeans manipulated attitudes against the Asians, which may explain, in part, African reluctance to view the Asian as a fellow Kenyan, Ugandan or Tanzanian. Asians themselves were manipulated to act as middlemen, and took the blame for an exploitative colonial system: "Wittingly or unwittingly, the Indians became the handmaidens of modern capitalism in East Africa, a role they would later come to rue as social conflicts increased" (Ojwang, 2005: 7).

It is also true that the social customs and way of life of the Asians themselves did little to ingratiate them with the Africans, even though East African Asians have departed to a certain extent from traditional Indian culture and have become Africanized as well as Europeanized – one could indeed speak of a process of *hybridization* unlike in South Africa where the African influence on the Indian community has been less pronounced, due, obviously, to the apartheid regime which promoted the separation of the country's ethnic groups. East African Asians speak Swahili especially on coastal and island areas such as Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam and Mombasa and the number of loan words from Swahili that have crept into languages such as Gujerati and Punjabi is considerable, while South African Asians are becoming English-speaking South Africans. Politically South African Asians have a longer history of organized resistance to oppression. Since 1890s they have opposed white minority rule but mainstream Asian politics in East Africa was more conservative and sectarian than in South Africa. Some radical Indian leaders identified with African demands (for example the Kenya Freedom Party for the 1960 elections), but generally Asian leadership, despite opposing the white settlers, followed a policy of extracting concessions from the colonial government by collaborating, however grudgingly, with it. The South African Indian Congress was a radical movement while its East Africa counterparts were reformist. The dominant reaction to the Kenya war of independence and accelerating pace of change in late 1950s was one of "increasing fear and ambivalence towards African demands" (van den Berghe 289). It is this ambiguity and complexity that Vassanji deconstructs in his writing.

[12] The increasing visibility of Asian Africans can be verified by the continuing success of the magazine *Awaaz*. The magazine is principally concerned with the dissemination of both historical and current information on the South Asian community in East Africa, and in Kenya in particular. *Awaaz* reaches out beyond the Asian community as Kenyans of all ethnic backgrounds, as well as people living abroad, count among its readership. Its multicultural credentials are proved by its sponsorship of an Asian-African cultural event called the "Samosa" Festival (which is an acronym for *South Asian Mosaic of Society and the Arts*) and which aims to participate more fully in the mainstream social and cultural life of Kenya. However, it must be said that the editors and contributors to *Awaaz* may be more radical and more committed than the Asian community as a whole, who remain the backbone of Kenyan´s business circles and continue to reside in the more affluent suburbs of Nairobi, far from the poverty and squalor of much of the capital. See http://awaazmagazine.com/.

In East Africa people of South Asian descent tend to be referred to as "Asians" not Indians or Pakistanis. "Asian" has become an East African synonym for all domiciled people of Indian or Pakistani origin, while "Indian" seems to be applied to guests or temporary visitors from India. In his social survey of Asians in East Africa, Agehananda Bharati claims that "there is virtually nothing of sociological significance about the minority which would hold for all its constituent groups" (Bharati, 1965: 15). The Asians are not really a "community" as they are fragmented into a multiplicity of religious, linguistic and caste groups. They include Hindus, Sunni and Shia Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Roman Catholics and Protestants. They speak Hindi, Urdu, Gujerati, Tamil and Telegu. Yet there is a sense in which East African Asians are a community–in colonial times they were a racial caste of intermediate status between the colonial masters and the "natives;" they played the role of "Jews," i.e. scapegoated, pariah minorities of middlemen. So the community is a product of outside forces in the larger society (van den Berghe 277) and the shared experience of rejection, prejudice and scapegoating forms the basis for solidarity and group consciousness. Asian communities came to realise that the only means of survival in post-colonial East Africa was to unite despite their internal fissures because where "everyone else saw "Asian", the Asians saw Shamsi, Bohra, Ismaili, Hindu, Sikh, Memon, Ithnashri" (GS 178). East African Asians are a highly urban group with 80-90% of people living in urban centres, and they are concentrated in mercantile, service, clerical and industrial occupations. They have remained a small minority, in part because of severe limitations on immigration once Africans replaced them in low-skilled occupations but at the same time a highly visible minority (van den Berghe 279). Altogether, they are characterized by their high degree of urbanization, relative wealth, physical distinctiveness, enforced ghettoization, exotic culture and style of dress, endogamy and sectarianism. Paradoxically, such a group hemmed in geographically, economically, culturally and socially has unwittingly created the impression of physical omnipresence, economic affluence and occult omnipotence, which is actually the result of the immense power of the distortion of racial prejudice. Treated as a pariah caste, Asians organized their ghetto existence along pre-existing lines of solidarity, i.e. religion, language and *jati*. Van den Berghe calls them a "bewildering diversity of little endogamous and mutually mistrustful groups" and claims that "the Asian 'community' is, in fact, a culturally modified (and often impoverished) microcosm of the great Indian kaleidoscope" (van den Berghe 280).

4. BEYOND THE RESTRICTIVE BOUNDS OF KHANDAANITY

The Gunny Sack (1989) can stake a claim as the founding narrative of East African Asians as in this novel Vassanji appears to acknowledge the strong influence of women on their respective communities, Ji Bai being the source of the gunny sack of the title from which Salim will extract momentoes and build up his own personal history. Indeed, Neloufer de Mel states that Vassanji "centres marginal voices by uncovering what patriarchy usually absorbs" (de Mel 169). By and large

this is true but a close look at his first novel reveals an interesting male diaspora discourse, which never quite succeeds in obliterating the female role but which relegates it to the backstage. The settlement of South Asians in various parts of East Africa is narrated from a very masculine perspective, which, at times, is even a curious indentification with the European colonizer: "We Indians have barged into Africa with our big black trunk, and every time it comes in our way. [...] I should have come with a small bag, a rucksack. Instead I came with ladoos, jellebis, chevdo. Toilet paper. A woollen suit. And I carried them on my head like a fool" (GS 250-1).

The rigidity of the big, black trunk with its almost phallic resemblance contrasts vividly with the gunny sack –a far more practical and flexible container to carry around– which will clearly provide Salim with more meaning and understanding than his trunk. This quotation refers to Salim's initiation at Camp Uhuru where he is sent to do his National Service. The masculinization of the Indian in this extract is an unexpected development of the colonial trope of the conquered territory as feminine and the coloniser –invariably European– as masculine. Early on in Vassanji's novel the language employed to describe the African landscape and its people evokes nineteenth century orientalist narratives. Dan Ojwang points to the "imperialist, patriarchal discourse of a feminized, submissive Africa" (Ojwang, 2000: 45) in Salim's reconstruction of Dhanji Govinji's first encounter with East Africa, which also alludes to an enticing, alluring Africa, full of erotic promise:

> The wise and enterprising sought other frontiers; the rest stayed on, enchanted by the island's [Zanzibar's] perfume and musk and spice ... the soft rustling movements behind silky veils, the giggles behind lattice screens ... the mysterious look of two eyes through the slit in a veil, chilling you to the heart and then with a movement of the lashes commanding you, "Come" and you follow the trace of the halud through the teeming streets to wherever it will lead you, ready to lay down your life for its bearer. (GS 11)

Moreover, the African landscape is constructed as a fertile ground where the –in this case, Indian– explorer-conqueror can sow his seed. The use of the trope of the womb is a telling one and suggests a future hybrid relationship not devoid of ambiguity: "Matamu [...] is the town where my forebear unloaded his donkey one day and made his home. Where Africa opened its womb to India and produced a being who forever stalks the forest in search of himself" (GS 48).

This feminization of a mysterious, unfathomable Africa in the early days of Indian settlement in the interior smacks of Conradian hearts of darkness, "One could go deeper and deeper into [Africa] and perhaps never return" (GS 39). Salim's grandfather, Huseni, the son of an Indian father and an African mother, finds affinity with his African heritage and abandons his father, now appropriately married to an Indian wife. His father laments the loss of his son who he feels has been irretrievably drawn into identification with his African mother alone: "[Dhanji Govindji] was resigned and wistful. Africa has swallowed him up, Bai, taken him back into her womb [...]" (GS 39). The male narrative is obliged to overstate the courage of the first settlers who –without the acknowledged accompaniment of any women– wrote

their names on the blank pages of African territory and paved the way for future urban development: "the pioneers [...] struck out in the wilderness in the wake of the railway, shopkeepers to their compatriot coolies, artisans, stationmasters and infantrymen, before finally making their homes in the new capital Nairobi" (GS 76).

The ideology governing gender relations at the turn of the twentieth century, which witnessed a large influx of workers from India to build the Uganda railway (1897-1901), continued to be based on the necessity to control and safeguard women's sexual purity, men's honour and social status being heavily dependant on it. In the East African context this translated into an excessive enclosure of the various Asian groups within their own communities for fear that their daughters (or wives) would be led astray by African men. Jameela Siddiqi seems to prove the truth of this in the easy seduction of Mohanji´s once innocent daughter-in-law by her African house-boy. Of course Siddiqi´s purpose is to reveal the double standards behind *khandaanity*. Appearances had to be preserved, grandchildren needed to be born, hence the lightning courtship and hurried marriage of Mohanji´s favourite son, unexpectedly followed by the premature birth of an extremely dark-skinned baby. As the defeated father-in-law admits, "No price is too big a price to pay for the conservation of family izzat" (FV 24). This cultural exclusivity was further underscored by the growing racial segregation instigated by the British colonial government. Women´s purity was worshipped at the altar of tradition and it led to girls being groomed for the only career that was left open to them: marriage and motherhood. In the first half of the twentieth century there is nothing specifically Asian about this as working outside the home –and even less following a professional career– were options open to a minority of women anywhere in the world. What is of interest in the East African Asian context is the constantly lurking fear of miscegenation, with the African male cast into the role of potential ravisher. This led to an overprotection of young women who "had to be married off as early as possible [because] [...] every drop of [a daughter´s] menstrual blood descended on her father´s neck like the blade of a guillotine, and to avoid death by such a gruesome method, elaborate dowries were arranged from day one" (FV 13).

During the years of indentured labour in East Africa, there was a scarcity of Asian women, unlike the plantation colonies, such as Mauritius and Trinidad, where men and women migrated together. Despite being officially frowned on, many Asian men had long-standing relationships with African women. However, the arrival of Asian women during the second decade of the century reinforced the ethnic network and interethnic marriage. This situation calls to mind the changing attitude of the British in India at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the arrival of the memsahibs put an end to any sexual relationships –official or otherwise– between white men and Indian women. The British closed in on themselves and became a close-knit caste-like group which lived in dread of the threat of the lascivious Indian male. In East Africa it would be the African who would represent a similar sexual menace for Indian womanhood. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown suggests this similarity in her autobiography *No Place Like Home* (1995),

> The children of the black/Asian liasions would be called *chotaras*, a word that we used to denigrate people and describe anyone who wore bright colours like luminous pink and green. Terror of contamination and failure encouraged the transformation of Asian women into porcelain ornaments, symbols of purity and wealth, exactly like middle-class Victorian women. (1995: 57)

Standards of sexual purity were less applicable to men and certainly the attraction of the African woman was understood and even condoned. The Asian male, so solicitous of his wife's and his daughter's chastity, was less likely to curb his own inclinations when the "shameless" African woman threw temptation in his way, as Nazareth's novels have shown. Vassanji's Salim, himself a descendant of a mixed race sexual relationship, finds himself both fascinated and terrified at the sensuous possibilities offered by African women. At a festival he attends with Edward bin Hadith, the tailor and one of his mother's admirers, he feels

> Behind me, around me, as I watched my friend dancing, the crowd pressed in, black bodies I'd never been so close to, scent of soap, of perfume, of sweat, flaps of buibui fanning my hot dusty face, soft warm curves of women pressing through filmy buibui, enveloping, inviting, absorbing as I stood there senseless in the heat, the flying dust, the odours, all the while my dukawallah hand clutching the hard silver shilling in my pocket that would take me home. (GS 185)

Emigration, whether as a free person or as an indentured worker, involved economic gain and social and geographical mobility but for women, their lives tended to remain as cloistered and as circumscribed by the family as ever. Women's responsibilities centred on managing the home and bringing up the children. It is only relatively recently that any attempts to reveal the circumstances surrounding the lifestyles of the Asian women who settled in East Africa have been undertaken. Diaspora narratives have been almost totally concerned with men's exploits from the humble but dogged dukawallah providing commodities in the remote areas to the educated political activists in the urban centres. Considering the enormous importance given to marriage and the social disapproval of celibacy, it stands to reason that behind, or next to, every dukawallah, there stood his hard-working wife. If little has been written about the dukawallah as an individual, even less is known about his wife's, mother's, daughters' or sisters' experiences, hopes, fears, or expectations in the diaspora. Siddiqi attempts to set the record straight through her portrait of Mrs. Mohanji, "a quiet unassuming woman who rarely spoke in the presence of men" (FV 160) but who "seemed to possess the greatest wisdom and sensitivity in terms of dissecting the many finer nuances of human nature" (FV 161). Mrs. Mohanji's firm belief in dignity actually turns out to be an excuse to pass the burden of the household onto the shoulders of her widowed daughter, returned unceremoniously to her father's home. Her daughter could hold her head up high as she now was in charge of running the household while she could spend her time weaving and performing "various protracted, lengthy religious rituals" (FV 161).

Marriages, of course, were arranged between families with similar backgrounds but, as mentioned above, until a sizeable community of eligible young

people were available in East Africa, many young brides were sought in India and for these women marriage also involved emigration to a new, unknown land without the comfort and support of familiar surroundings. A fictional portrayal of one of these young girls who came directly from India to join their newly married husbands in East Africa is Sheila, Vikram Lall's mother. Marriage tended to mean economic dependence on the in-laws, hence the importance attached to a bride´s jewellery, which would serve her as a kind of insurance policy should the need arise (Seidenberg 99). During the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972, hundreds of women left the country weighed down with their bridal finery and gold as in some cases they were not allowed to take anything except the clothes they wore. Jameela Siddiqi gently pokes fun at the hastily departing Asian women: "Although supposedly dispossessed, homeless and destitute, no other chapter in history had witnessed such heavily laden refugees – heavy with worry about an uncertain future, but even heavier with weight of gold" (FV 281).

Until the years following the independence of the former East African colonies and the increasing implementation of Africanization policies which were aimed against the more prosperous members of the Asian community, few Asian women had paid employment. The home was, for the majority and in particular for the more economically privileged, the nucleus of their aspirations. In accordance with an ideology of gender that becomes so ingrained that the women themselves can justify and defend their own social and spacial constraints, middle-class Asian women in East Africa, pampered by servants who did everything for them, considered themselves a cut above other women –especially those who worked– precisely because of their enforced idleness. There were, of course, notable exceptions to this leisurely life-style. Many Asian women provided the economic support for their families whenever husbands died, were absent or failed to fulfill their traditional role as breadwinners. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's father was significantly below standard in this respect. Her mother often relied on the goodwill of neighbours to eke out a living. Likewise, Asian women in the more remote parts of East Africa were poles apart from the carefree middle-classes in the cities. The stereotype of the dukawallah holding the fort for the cause of progress is invariably male, by which the help, support and comfort provided by the female pioneers is, with a sweep of the pen, erased from the narrative. In a similar way to the experiences of many early women migrants anywhere in the world, the hardships and alienation suffered by these women in East Africa have been, in general, unrecorded and underestimated.

Contact between Asian women and indigenous Africans was limited to orders issued to servants, in the case of the middle-classes and brief exchanges during the course of a sale in the case of shopkeepers' wives. Socially, there was little, if any, contact among the middle and lower classes, as Asian women were painstakingly cocooned within their community and discouraged –if not openly prohibited– from establishing friendships with the blacks. Women were seen as "potential war booty [and] stand out as the markers of ethnic and racial boundaries, to be vigorously defended from the external threat" (Ojwang, 2000: 58). As is often the case, the women themselves were the most vigilant when it came to observing the limits of modesty and respect. Awal, the stepmother of Juma, the father of Salim, the narrator

of *The Gunny Sack*, keeps her daughters-in-law perpetually on their toes: "'If your pachedis keep slipping off your heads, use a nail,' she would rail, in her constant efforts to preserve her home's khandaanity: that snobbish form of respectability which every family, however crooked, lays claim to" (GS 83).

As women were the guardians of culture and the transmitters of traditional values –whether they believed in them or not– any sign of rebellion in a daughter or daughter-in-law had to be crushed immediately (Hand, 2011: 108-110). Mr. Mohanji, Jameela Siddiqi's caricature of the stingy dukawallah, is shocked out of his senses when his new daughter-in-law has the audacity to demand time off from the shop in order to go out with her new husband alone together. He proceeds to lecture her on good dukawallah behaviour:

> We don't go to dinner parties, and we don't invite people to dinner. If they drop in at food time, then they're welcome to join us. We only issue invitations for weddings and for virgins' feasts. We don't mix with the snooty Asians who live in the European area. We only do business with them. They come to the shop and buy their groceries. We ask after their health, they ask after ours, and that's it. We don't concern ourselves with their big talk of poetry and politics. We stick to our own kind. Like decent people, we eat dinner in our own house and then call on someone of our own community, just for a chat, and we never take more than a cup of tea in anybody's house. Those are our rules. That is how we live. (FV 221)[13]

Jameela Siddiqi, in her two novels both of which are set in multiple locations including a thinly disguised Uganda, has completely reversed any image of the demure, obedient South Asian woman. *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* features a divorced woman, a rebellious daughter-in-law, a child of ambiguous sexuality, as well as mixed race sexual encounters and a Hindu-Muslim elopement. Siddiqi's first novel, and to a lesser extent her second, *Bombay Gardens*, are made up of a series of vignettes which narrate, what appear to be, totally unconnected stories. *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* contains four different time frames which, as the novel progresses, finally converge into "a typical senseless Bollywood lost-and-found disaster," (319) or rather do not, as it turns out that Siddiqi has so successfully blurred the frontier between reality and fantasy that what we have been reading is a film script and not a real life tragicomedy at all. One of the frames relates the childhood in Uganda –called "Pearl" in the novel– of an eight-year-old child, commonly referred to as the Brat around the time of the forced emigration of thousands of people of South Asian descent. The Brat's mother is a middle-class, theoretically liberal Muslim who carefully draws a line between herself and the shopkeeping class, epitomized by the Mohanji family. The second frame centers on the friendship between Ash, an East African of mixed parentage struggling to write his first film script, and Sonia, a white, Urdu-speaking former SOAS graduate, who makes a success out of every project, however bizarre, that she sets her mind

[13] The social importance of food and cooking amongst Asians is brilliantly described by Alibhai-Brown in her more recent memoir (2008) and see Hand (forthcoming).

to. The third, much smaller frame, is the story of a nineteenth-century courtesan, Tameezan who becomes besotted with an archi-famous musician, the Grand Ustad. Finally, the fourth and, seemingly most important, time frame concerns the filming of a docu-drama on the life of the very same courtesan, which in itself contains alternative realities. This film is being financed by a mysterious wealthy East African Asian gentleman, whose only condition is that the producer-director, none other than Sonia, casts a Bollywood actress of his choice in the starring role.

One of the most striking characters is Seema Henara, the Brat's mother, a maths school teacher, snobbishly conscious of her class position far above the Mohanji family. An interfering, hypocritical do-gooder, who is found murdered in her bed during the Asian expulsion, she is far from being a likeable character and yet through her Siddiqi criticizes the double moral standard that operated and posits an alternative to marital drudgery:

> All married men had mistresses, if not officially, then certainly on a casual basis. That´s what men were like, and you just accepted it if you wanted to go on being married to them. But if you actually found the courage to boot them out, then it meant you were someone very special, someone who was not afraid of being single and someone who was not afraid of the future. For this reason, Mrs. Henara commanded a lot of respect in the local community. Other women, trapped in unhappy marriages, secretly envied her freedom. And the men admired her too, especially those who regularly cheated on their wives. For them, Mrs. Henara was an exceptionally attractive woman who, by kicking out her husband, had surely made herself available on the good mistress-candidates list. (FV 59)

The sanctity of the family is the hindance to opting for another life outside marriage. However, in her discussion on Indian women migrants in the United States Keya Ganguly reaches conclusions that have bearing on the situation of women in other parts of the Indian diaspora.

> Despite the constraints that the patriarchal family system imposes on women, it is the force and effect of racism and post-colonial de-centering that inscribe their lives and everyday resistances. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that the family remains the only 'traditional' cultural support and source of renewal for the women. (45)

The family in Vassanji's fiction may remain a solid prop for some women but for others it becomes a prison. The younger generation of women in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* react differently to the notion of family as cultural support. Deepa runs away determined to marry Njoroge, her Kikuyu childhood sweetheart. On her return she is subdued and turns into an adult woman overnight. On the other hand, Yasmin, the Muslim girl Vikram befriends during his stay in Dar es Salaam, is willing to venture out into forbidden territory as Vikram himself muses: "Ours was a relationship straining for definition. We spoke about many things together, even about how the other Indian students looked askance at us" (VL 233). He becomes the subject of communal prejudice in the Asian community of Dar es Salaam as he is a Hindu Punjabi and she a Cutchi Muslim. Vikram recognizes the

same kind of female strength that his sister possesses: "there was a part of her that evidently sought to escape beyond the restrictive bounds of her community. It did not deter her that I did not belong to her faith" (VL 211).

Yasmin admires Deepa for her "spunk" as she calls it. Vikram's lack of determination, linked with the news that even Deepa's defiance of parents' and community rules could be crushed, lead her to give him up and find herself a partner from her own community. The third young woman character is Shoba, Vikram's wife. Theirs is a real marriage of convenience. Shobha is no firecracker like Deepa as she seeks her pleasure within the confines of the family,

> I don't think she disliked or hated me either; there was an element of condescension perhaps, or the fact that I was a mere middleman, a dalal as she called it, an agent of others. But she believed in the sanctity of the family and the home, which remained a contented one. There were outings with our children Ami and Sita, there were the large extended family gatherings on Sundays, there were the films. (VL 340)

Vassanji suggests a diaspora space that is dangerous and exciting, enticing but at the same time deeply enriching. Deepa and Njoroge find themselves in "the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native*" (Brah, 1996: 209; emphasis in original) as both are confronted by a new dynamic, border-crossing. Ironically, although Deepa and, to a lesser extent, Yasmin, take on board the perils of the diaspora space, they end up returning to the fold, voluntarily or by force. Shobha, the embodiment of tradition, will ironically be the one to abandon her husband, but only when his involvement in political corruption becomes too shameful to bear. In Tejani's novel Nanziri, the forceful African nurse that Samsher will eventually marry, understands that "a brown figure was far more acceptable among the black figures than it would ever be the other way [because] the Africans had kept their creative social life, where a man was still a man, not his colour" (DT 118).

The fact that it is the male Asian character who claims the diaspora space as his own arena where he can forge a whole new value system and bury the spectre of miscegenation for good hardly needs any further comment. The female Asian has generally remained banished to the back room of East African Asian writing, invisible and totally silenced. In this respect Vassanji has elaborated on Tejani's one-sided view of interracial relationships and the latter´s –possibly exaggerated– faith in the Africans´ innate sense of freedom and humanism by suggesting that an Indian girl might fall in love and desire to marry an African boy.

Rather than single out essential features of the Asian communities of Kenya, it makes more sense to focus on the borders of the South Asian diaspora, on what it defines itself against. Diasporas seek to construct alternative public spheres that maintain identifications outside the national space in order to live inside but with a difference. Mr. Lall, born and bred in Africa was, "proudly Kenyan, hopelessly... colonial – went to India once, and brought back my mother" (VL 21). His practice is to accommodate with the host country, in this case complicated by the three-tier racial hierarchy in place in Kenya, and, at the same time, resist its norms. His reaction to Deepa's claim that she has the right to choose her own husband leaves no doubt:

"What do you mean you will marry anyone whom you want? Papa exploded. We are not Europeans, remember that, we are desis, Indians. Proud Indians, we have our customs, and we marry with the permission and blessings of our parents! You will do as you are told, girl!" (VL 200-1).

It is revealing that his understanding of the host country is *Britain* not Kenya with its native black inhabitants. The Lall parents are unwilling to enter Brah's diaspora space.[14] Mrs. Lall identifies very closely with India (she was born and brought up there unlike her husband) and thus reacts as a first generation migrant rather than as a member of an established diaspora. She tells her daughter that: "There's nothing wrong with being an African or Asian or European. But they can't mix. It doesn't work" (VL 206).

Dasgupta & Das Dasgupta suggest that fear of assimilation into what they see as an alien, inferior way of life has taken a heavier toll on women than men,

> Confronted by [...] the practice of individual choice of partners [...] first-generation parents have become anxious about the preservation of their cultural way of life. This fear of cultural erasure has further led these immigrant parents to adhere more strongly to Indian traditions. Moreover, as the keepers of culture, the mothers are actually showing more conservatism than the fathers. (120)

Deepa has flouted custom, she runs away from home only to return when she discovers that Njoroge has succumbed to her mother's pleadings and has called the affair off. She marries Dilip on the rebound and although dutifully performs the role of wife and mother, cannot stop seeing her childhood love again. By openly being seen with an African in her shop she risks being ostracised by the whole community and her husband is forced to aid the murder of Njoroge to avoid shame and scandal being attached to the family name. Blame for Dilip's accidental death in a motoring accident is attached to her and she is even spat upon in public by a fellow Asian. The diasporic community rules its women with a rod of iron,

> The burden of being 'Indian' seems to be on the women in the Community more than on the men. [...] Since the community strongly believes that its very integrity as a group depends on the loyalty of the second generation to certain old world values, it spares no effort to draw the latter into the vortex of tradition. The behaviour of [...] women is closely monitored. Trangressions from ideal notions of femininity, heterosexual chastity and faithfulness to 'the community' face disapproval. (Rayaprol 183-189).

The double standards of "the community" are ridiculed in Jameela Siddiqi`s post-feminist works, which overturn patriarchal norms completely. She does not simply turn the tables and empower her women characters in order to disempower the men. Nobody escapes her ironic vision of the narrow-minded and regrettably short-sighted view South Asians cherished of Africa and Africans. In Peter Nazareth's words, she

[14] However, at the end of the novel, after the death of his mother, Vikram's father will seek comfort in the arms of an African woman.

"frees the feminine to orchestrate a new recital" (Nazareth, 2002: 76) but this new recital draws attention to the pettiness and bigotry of the East African Asians of either gender. The fact that her character the Brat turns out to be a boy dressed up as a girl by his mother in order to keep custody of the child suggest her more fluid understanding of gender as performance rather than a biological given: "I don´t care if they say I´m a boy. Fine, I´ll be a boy on the outside if it pleases them, but inside I still feel like a little girl" (FV 331). The deconstruction of gender relations in Siddiqi's work points to a new understanding of the dynamics of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa, as complex and multifaceted as any community anywhere in the world.

5. CONCLUSION: IN SEARCH OF AFRICANNESS

Salim Juma names the gunny sack bequeathed to him by Ji Bai "Shehrbanoo" as every momento he retrieves from its interior triggers off a new story. Each object recalls a forgotten link in the history of the descendants of Dhanji Govindji. One of the tantalisingly missing links is the story of Govindji's African mistress and great-grandmother of Salim. Her life story has been suppressed from the narrative as an embarrassing secret best left untold. Salim muses,

> What was she like, this gentle one, this Bibi Taratibu, given to my ancestor for comfort on lonely, breezy African nights when mango and coconut trees rustled and crickets chirped and the roaring ocean echoed with reminders of a distant homeland? From what ravaged tribe, gutted village, was she brought to the coast, and did she not also think of her home, her slaughtered father and uncles, her brothers and sisters also taken away [...]. (GS 29).

Taratibu, "patience" in Swahili, is the clue to understanding and coming to terms with the African heritage. Certainly, Dhanji Govindji "risked damnation for her son" (GS 184). Interestingly, Salim is both fascinated and repelled by the sensuality of African women, which harks back to Said´s *Orientalism* (1978). In a similar fashion, he fears the native quarter of Dar es Salaam, where the family move from a Nairobi rapidly turning into a hell, seething with rumours of the horrors of the Mau Mau amid the paradise that the Asians had created. Indeed the African quarter goes "right into the bush" (GS 35). Salim's great-grandfather embarks on a physical journey in search for his African roots in the form of his mixed-race son Huseni, who, perhaps lured by his own African identity, disappears one day into the heart of Africa. Vassanji makes Govindji's quest come to nought as he spends all his life savings together with his community's resources. He is, at the time, the Mukhi [headman] of Matamu so this act of embezzlement will in fact lead to his own murder.

Interracial relationships in Vassanji's novels tend to be problematic, not because of the clash of values between the couple but inevitably for the external pressures put upon them, in other words, the power of *khandaanity*. Thus Bibi Taratibu is hastily dispached to make way for a "proper" Indian wife and her part in the family saga is swept under the carpet, as Kulsum warns Salim: "Black ancestry was

not something you advertised. Kulsum had two girls' marriage prospects to think of. A whiff of African blood from the family tree would be like an Arctic blast, it would bring the mercury of social standing down to unacceptable levels" (GS 184).

In his discussion of the works of Peter Nazareth, John Scheckter suggests that the Asians must find their security in linkage, not lineage, and their legitimacy in cooperation, not filiation (Scheckter 92). Their Africanness can only be grasped through association rather than intermarrying with Africans until the painful historical burden of exploitation that has kept the groups apart slowly merges into a new understanding of Africanness.

> "Why do you call me 'Indian'"? I too am an African. I was born here. My father was born here – even my grandfather!"
> "And then? Beyond that? What did they come to do, these ancestors of yours? Can you tell me? Perhaps you don't know. Perhaps you conveniently forgot – they financed the slave trade!"
> 'Not all of them' –
> "Enough of them!"
> [...] And what of your Swahili ancestors, Amina? If mine financed the slave trade, yours ran it. It was your people who took guns and whips and burnt villages in the interior, who brought back boys and girls in chains to Bagamoyo. Not all, you too will say [...]. (GS 258-9)

In an exhibition held in Nairobi in 2004 to celebrate the often underestimated Indian contribution to African politics, the chairman of the Asian African Heritage Trust, Pheroze Nowrojee claimed a space for South Asianness within the hybridized society of East Africa. He argued, "Our social identity rests on our bi-continental tradition. We are both Asian and African. We are Asian Africans" (Tharoor 2004).

Generally speaking, as the mistrust of the Asians has been dissipated and their role in boosting the post-colonial economies of East African nations is finally being acknowledged, there has been a sea change in attitude among the Asians themselves. The Nairobi exhibition is an example of how citizens of countries such as Kenya or Uganda with ancestral roots in the Indian subcontinent are claiming their identity as "Asian Africans" and celebrating their hybrid selves in the diaspora space together with fellow citizens of black African origin. The possibility of a true hybrid society may not be feasible in East Africa or anywhere in the world as despite the current climate of globalization people tend to hang on to their differences with a vengeance. The image of the Asians as "sticking together" and, by extension, refusing to enter fully into Brah's diaspora space, is persistently mocked by Siddiqi, who laments the cultural isolation of the diaspora from its homeland.

> If only those blinkered Indian nationalist leaders and their descendants had taken the trouble to come and study the mechanics of multi-religious harmony in Pearl, then they would have found a perfect model of their cherished dreams. And they would have also learnt the vital lesson that this kind of give-and-take among the settlers from India, was only possible out of a sense of having a common enemy –the Black Man. (FV 83)

This passage indicates that the African has been upgraded from a feminized docile, complacent, willing receptacle – the black womb – to a sexually aggressive, ruthless, despotic menace – the Black Man, and even nowadays marriages between Asian women and African men are still the exception that proves the rule.[15]

Siddiqi´s parodic treatment of the Indian settlers in East Africa provokes more laughter than epistomological satisfaction. Her choice of a Rushdiesque repertoire of grotesque stereotypes –Naranbhai in *Bombay Gardens* and Mr. Mohanji in *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* embody the bigoted dukawallah to perfection– instead of more in-depth character portrayals excludes a more meaningful narrative of the constraints and pressures surrounding the female diasporic experience. The twists and turns in both her plots and the ruthless unearthing of Asian quirks pave the way towards a new understanding of the closed society, the African *chota bharat*. Despite the welcome female slant in Vassanji´s and Siddiqi´s work and the valuable contribution to East African Asian cultural history of Alibhai-Brown's and Kapur-Dromson's memoirs, the novel on the female East African Asian, which explores both her subaltern state as a woman and her privileged social ranking as an Asian, is yet to be written.

Reviews sent to author: 23 November 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 2 February 2015.

WORKS CITED

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. *No Place Like Home.* London: Virago Press, 1995. Print.

—— *The Settler's Cookbook*. London: Portobello Books. 2008. Print.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge. 1994. Print.

Bhachu, Parminder. *Twice Migrants.* London: Tavistock Publications, 1985. Print.

Bharati, Agehananda. "A Social Survey" in Dharam P. Ghai, ed. *Portrait of a Minority. Asians in East Africa.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1965. 13-63. Print.

—— *The Asians in East Africa. Jayhind and Uhuru.* Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1972.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities.* London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Churchill, Winston S. *My African Journey.* 1908. London: Mandarin, 1990. Print.

Dasgupta, Sayantani & Shamita Das Dasgupta. "Sex, Lies, and Women's Lives. An Intergenerational Dialogue" in Shamita Das Dasgupta, ed. *A Patchwork Shawl. Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. Print.

---

[15] Journalist Rasna Warah, author of *Triple Heritage* (1998), is married to a black Kenyan but claims that "The worst thing that might happen to us as a group is that we just dwindle and fade away." http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/1243587.stm

De Mel, Neloufer. "Mediating Origins: Moyez Vassanji and the Discursivities of Migrant Identity" in Abdulrazak Gurnah, ed. *Essays on African Writing* 2 *Contemporary Literature*. Heinemann, 1995. Print.

Desai, Niranjan . "The Asian Influence in East Africa", in Motwani et al. 118-126. Print.

Elder, Arlen A. "Indian Writing in East and South Africa: Multiple Approaches to Colonialism and Apartheid", in Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed. *Reworlding. The Literature of the Indian Diaspora.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1992. Print.

Ganguly, Keya. "Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood." *Cultural Studies* 6.1 (January 1992): 27-50. Print.

Hall, Richard. *Empires of the Monsoon. A History of the Indian Ocean and its Invaders*. HarperCollins, 1998. Print.

Hand, Felicity. "Shaking off *Sharam*: the Double Burden of British Asian Women," in *On Writing (and) Race in Contemporary Britain*. Ed. Fernando Galván & Mercedes Bengoechea. Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 1999. 133-138. Print.

—— "The Old Rules Aren't Always Right: An Analysis of Four Short Stories by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni". *Atlantic Literary Review* 5. 3-4 (2004): 61-77. Print.

—— "Impossible Burdens: East African Asian Women's Memoirs." *Research in African Literatures* 42. 3 (Fall 2011): 100-116. Print.

—— "'Picking Up the Crumbs of England': East African Asians in Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's Autobiographies." Forthcoming. Print.

Hollingsworth, L.W. *The Asians of East Africa.* London: Macmillan, 1960. Print.

Jain, Prakash C. "The Socio-Economic History of Indians in Kenya", in Jagat K. Motwani, Mahin Gosine & Jyoti Barot-Motwani, eds. *Global Indian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. New York: Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, 1993. 131-142. Print.

Kahyana, Danson. "Narrating National Identity: Fiction, Citizenship and the Asian Experience in East Africa". *Africa Development* (Senegal), 28. 1. 2 (2003): 97-111, available at www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/files/kahyana.pdf. Web.

Kapur-Dromson, Neera. *From Jhelum to Tana.* New Delhi: Penguin India, 2007. Print.

Lepper, G.H. "An America for the Hindu". *The Empire Review* XXVIII. 164 (1915): 108-117. Print.

Makokha, Justus Kizito Siboe. *The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Post-Colonial Reading Of Selected Novels of MG Vassanji.* MA Thesis, Department of Literature, Kenyatta University, 2006. Print.

Motwani, Jagat K. Mahin Gosine & Jyoti Barot-Motwani (eds). *Global Indian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.* New York: Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, 1993. Print.

Naipaul, Shiva. *North of South*. 1978. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980. Print.

Naipaul, V.S. *A Bend in the River.* 1979. Picador, 2002. Print.

Nair, Mira (dir). *Mississippi Masala*, 1991. Print.

Nasta, Susheila. "Interview: Moyez Vassanji". *Wasafiri* 13 (Spring 1991): 19-21. Print.

Nazareth, Peter. *In a Brown Mantle*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972. Print.

—— *The General is Up.* Toronto: Tsar Publications, 1991. Print.

—— "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag". *Okike. An African Journal of New* Writing 31 (October 1995): 63-69. Print.

—— "Review of *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*". *World Literature Today* 76. 3-4 (Summer/Autumn, 2002): 85-86. Print.

Ojwang, Dan Odhiambo. "The Pleasures of Knowing: Images of 'Africans' in East African Asian Literaure". *English Studies in Africa* 43. 1 (2000): 43-64. Print.

—— "'The Bad Baniani Sports Good Shoes'. 'Asian' Stereotypes and the Problem of Modernity in East Africa". *Africa Insight* 35. 2 (June 2005): 4-14. Print.

Park, Richard L. "Indian-African Relations". *Asian Survey* 5. 7 (July 1965): 350-358. Print.

Rayaprol, Aparna. "'Can You Talk Indian?' Shifting Notions of Community and Identity in the Indian Diaspora", in Surinder S. Jodhka, ed. *Community and Identities. Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001. 163-190. Print.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticisms 1981-1991.* London: Granta Books, 1991. Print.

Salat, M.F. "The End of the Beginning: A Note on the Afro-Indian Diaspora", in Adesh Pal, ed. *Theorizing and Critiquing Indian Diaspora.* New Delhi: Creative Books, 2004. Print.

Scheckter, John. "Peter Nazareth and the Ugandan Expulsion: Pain, Distance, Narration". *Research in African Literatures* 27. 2 (Summer, 1996): 83-93. Print.

Seidenberg, Dana April. *Mercantile Adventurers: the World of East African Asians 1750-1985.* New Delhi: New Age International, 1996. Print.

Sen, Purna. "'Crimes of Honour', Value and Meaning", in Lynn Welchman & Sara Hossain, eds. *'Honour'. Crimes, Paradigms and Violence Against Women*, London: Zed Books, 2005. 48-63. Print.

Siddiqi, Jameela. *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*. London: Bogle-L'Overture, 2001. Print.

—— Jameela, *Bombay Gardens*, London: Lulu, 2006. Print.

Simatei, Tirop Peter. *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa.* Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 2001. Print.

Tejani, Bahadur. *Day After Tomorrow.* 1971. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau (Kenya), 1977. Print.

Tharoor, Shashi. "We're all Kenyans here", *The Hindu*, November 7th 2004. http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2004/11/07/stories/2004110700470300.htm <accessed 10th October 2014>.

Tinker, Hugh. *The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.* Oxford: O.U.P., 1977. Print.

Van Den Berghe Pierre L. "Asians in East and South Africa", in Pierre L. van den Berghe, ed. *Race and Ethnicity in Africa.* Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975. 275-299. Print.

Van Hear, Nicholas. *New Diasporas. The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities.* London: UCL Press, 1998. Print.

Vassanji, M.G. *The Gunny Sack.* Anchor Canada, [1989] 2005. Print.

—— *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, Edinburgh: Canongate, [2003] 2005. Print.

SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM IDENTITY IN THE UK

Maurice O'Connor
Universidad de Cádiz

Abstract

This paper aims at examining the specific identity of South East Asian Muslims within the United Kingdom. Recent world events have brought Islam into the public eye and we shall explore the effect these events have had on Islamic faith communities residing within Britain. An affiliation with an internationalised Islamic brotherhood seems to be a comfort zone for many disenfranchised Asian youths who proceed from a Muslim heritage, and we shall look at how this identity may enter in conflict with an ideal of citizenship. The exclusion of these minorities from the discourses of nation can be identified as part of the problem, but we shall also examine issues of class as motivating factors. We shall be very careful to differentiate between a small minority that embraces *jihadism*, the notion of *jahiliyya* and other radical positions that are in fact distortions of Islamic faith, and a much broader based faith community that feels trapped between secularism and an ever more polarised radical Islam. We shall elucidate upon how this population of South East Asian Muslims find themselves caught within a complex and sometimes incommensurable dilemma. On the one hand, they must confront the radicals within their own community who are distorting their faith values for their own ends, while on the other they must face an autochthonous community who will not truly accept their faith as part of the national fabric. This disjunctive makes a finding of their place in society more complicated as compared to their Hindu counterparts.

Keywords: UK South-Asian Muslim Identity, Contemporary minority Literatures, the Islam Dilemma.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la identidad concreta de los musulmanes de ascendencia sud-asiática dentro del Reino Unido. Los acontecimientos recientes en el mundo han hecho que el Islam esté más que nunca en la palestra pública, por lo que exploraremos el efecto que este hecho ha tenido para las comunidades de fe islámica residentes en Gran Bretaña. El formar parte de una hermandad islámica internacionalizada parece gustar a muchos jóvenes asiáticos desfavorecidos de ascendencia musulmana, y comprobaremos cómo dicha identidad entra a veces en conflicto con el ideal de ciudadanía. La exclusión de estas minorías de los discursos de la nación puede identificarse como parte del problema, pero examinaremos también influencias de clase como factores desencadenantes. Tendremos cuidado de diferenciar muy bien las minorías ajustadas que abrazan el *jihadismo*, la noción de *jahiliyya* y otras posiciones radicales que son realmente distorsiones de la fe islámica, y una comunidad de fieles mucho más amplia que se siente atrapada entre el secularismo y un Islam radical mucho

más polarizado. Dilucidaremos cómo esta población de musulmanes del sudeste asiático se encuentra atrapada en un dilema complejo y a veces inconmensurable. Por una parte, deben confrontar los radicales dentro de su propia comunidad que distorsionan los valores de su fe para conseguir sus fines, mientras por otra encaran una comunidad autóctona que no aceptaría verdaderamente su fe como parte de la construcción nacional. Dicha disyuntiva los coloca en una posición social mucho más complicada que la de sus homólogos hindúes.

Palabras clave: Identidad musulmana del sudeste asiático en el Reino Unido, literaturas contemporáneas de minorías, el dilema del Islam.

There is a tendency by some Indian Studies scholars to equate 'Indianness' essentially as 'Hindu,' which, in turn, silences the also Islamic nature of Indian identity. If we look at the founding of the Indian nation state and to its most prominent symbol, its flag, we find that the white that separates the orange from the green functions as an emblem of peace between Muslims and Hindus.[1] Partition, on the contrary was the geopolitical expression that these two faiths could not coexist within a single "India" and subsequently Pakistan was born as the "home of Islam." A common belief existed amongst a section of Indian Muslims that Hindu India regarded them as inferior and that, once colonial rule was terminated, they would no longer be safe in India.

Hanif Kureishi quotes his father as saying: "The Hindu regards himself as heir to the oldest conscious tradition of superior colour and as the carrier of the purest and most exclusive stream of blood which created that colour, by whose side the Nazi was a mere parvenu" (2004 51). This solemn indictment, pronounced by a secular Bombay Muslim and advocate of Western culture, is indicative of the rift that existed between a proportion of Hindus and Muslims at the tryst of Partition. Nonetheless, we must juxtapose this communal-related grievance against Mohammad Omar Farooq's (2001) who assures that the rise in power of the Muslim League was significantly aided by strategic support from the Colonial administration whose ulterior motive was to counteract the growing influence of the Indian Congress. Other Islamic parties were entire creations of the colonial regime which, as Farooq indicates, implies that the British played a communal card so as to weaken the independent movement through the archetypal stratagem of "divide and rule." British imperialism, therefore, was instrumental in provoking this antagonism that would result in Partition.

Ziauddin Sardar (2004), when speaking of the upheaval of his native East Punjab and being caught between two vying forces, indicates that "this application of force, the open warfare between two new identities anxious to recruit me, was the latest round in a long-running partition process [...] Partition was about attempts to distil what I should regard as my heritage into some new singular and potent essence" (21). This separation of colonial Indian into two "opposed" nations subsequently produced the largest exodus of peoples known to humankind (an estimated 25 million people) and, within the subcontinental collective consciousness, Partition has

[1] Interestingly, this motif was borrowed from the Irish independence movement where the green and the orange symbolise peace between Catholics and Protestants.

become the single most important event that defines their modern era.[2] Nevertheless, despite the mass migration of Muslims to the newly-founded state (principally these migrations came from East Punjab, Rajasthan Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Bihar) India has a current population of some 150 million Muslims.

1. SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

The majority of British Muslims hail from the Indian subcontinent and Islam continues to be an important cultural reference for many. The majority of first generation émigrés, however, viewed the question of faith as a private affair and assimilation to western cultural mores was preferred over a public display of their Muslim identity. As Yasmin Hai (2008) testifies, whilst her father's generation would recite the works of Urdu poets or talk about the "great Islamic accomplishments of the past" in private, Indians had to modernise and become progressive, not repeat the same mistake of the past and cling to "old, regressive ideas" which had allowed them to be colonised in the first place (13). This ideological positioning is juxtaposed with the attitudes of a visible minority of second generation South Asians who prefer see themselves as Muslims first and foremost. This affiliation with revivalist Islam affords them a singular public identity outside the discourses of nation. Increasingly, there is a marked resistance within Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (less so amongst Indian Muslims) to assimilation, to secularism, which they see as eroding their cultural values. In the case of Bangladeshi origin communities (the most recent arrivals and, therefore, at the bottom of the class and economic ladder) a sector of its disenfranchised youth use their affiliation with an internationalised Islamic brotherhood as a way to mask their own identity as diasporic Bangladeshis, which they may feel has negative connotations within British society (Kibria 2008).

Before continuing with this affiliation with global Islam, the pertinent question that arises here is if many Asian Muslims (to use the awkward umbrella term) suffer overt and covert exclusion from mainstream British society due to culture difference or if this exclusion has more to do with material motivations. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2000) reveals that seventy-five per cent of British Pakistani and Bangladeshi children live in relative poverty (162-163). Within the last twenty years in Britain, there has been a pronounced move away from the exclusionary and racialised politics of the Thatcher era to an ethos of multiculturalism as fomented

[2] In a great deal of Indian literature (Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali) produced around the time of Partition what we find are narrative strategies that bring forth what Alex Padamsee (2008) defines as a "concept of uncertainty" and "undecidability". The fractured nature of Kushwant Singh's short stories are exemplary of how this Partition literature mirrored the political reality of those troubled times. Urdu short stories written twenty-five years after Partition continued to draw from this fracture motif as "since Urdu writers and readers were drawn at this time from a constituency that cut across religion, region and political affiliation – and for this reason they tended to see themselves as a microcosm of the larger Indian society in 1947" (Padamsee 53).

by New Labour. However, as Rehana Ahmed (2009) indicates, this apparent accommodating of cultural difference is more superficial than profound and, whilst token gestures to culture difference are used for public display by the establishment, underneath we find that the class stratification of society is still firmly in place. Viewed from a minority perspective, making the crossover into mainstream white society whilst holding on to cultural values that are alien to western liberalism, is problematized to say the least. Cultural difference, it would seem, is a motivating factor that can lead to being materially disadvantaged.

> The limits of liberal multiculturalism are exposed when members of a minority group enact, or seek to enact, cultural practices (e.g. arranged marriages; the wearing of the Hijab; protests against 'offensive' creative works) which threaten the liberal ideology of autonomous individual 'choice' or 'freedom', thereby positioning themselves beyond liberal 'tolerance.'(Ahmed 28)

Within a post 9/11 context, Muslims have suddenly found themselves at the centre of a media attention which can foment negative connotations as regards their cultural difference. This, in turn, complicates further their socio-economic position within a liberal capitalist society.

Whilst Pakistani and Indian Muslims do not feel the same need to "cover up" their national filiations as the aforementioned Bangladeshi disenfranchised youths, there is a tendency amongst a section of both communities to look at the "plight" of Muslims globally and to affiliate with the discourses of Islamic brotherhood. (Young men with no qualifications and limited access to the job market especially use this affiliation to move away from the bottom of the social scale in the UK). The radicalisation of sectors of diasporic Muslim[3] community in the UK can be defined by endogenous and exogenous factors (Abbas 2007). The pervading sense of alienation and disenfranchisement felt by these communities, on the one hand, and the augmenting of international "jihadis" who interpret Qur'anic ideals to their own ends on the other, has been instrumental in pushing a small number of Muslims towards the adopting of extreme positions.[4] Whilst the *ulema* (community of Muslim scholars) traditionally exercised a strong influence within their local communities, certain sectors of the South Asian community are becoming

[3] The radicalisation of Islam stems back to Egypt and to the figure of Sayyid Qutb who, during his imprisonment for his alleged implication in the assassination of Nasser, wrote *Milestones* which declared that the entire world (Muslim countries included) was in a state of *jahiliyya*, the abode of absolute ignorance. This led Qutb to the conclusion that "the rule of God's law must be the way of the world" and that "Jihad was now all-out war between the Brotherhood [an organisation founded by Hassan al-Banna that saw Islam as a complete way of life which amalgamated religion and state] and everyone else" (Sardar 34-5). Qutb's ideals resonated especially amongst Muslim students who perceived him as a type of Islamic Che Guevara and his radical interpretation of Islam quickly transcended Egypt's borders to penetrate the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. Qutb was sentenced to death in 1966 and his hanging was perceived as an act of martyrdom amongst the Islamic community.

[4] A radicalisation of "traditional" religious values has also emerged within parts of the Hindu and Sikh communities where an ideological entrenchment is also occurring.

increasingly influenced by Islamic groups such as the Saudi-sponsored Wahhabi/Salafi scripturalism or the Palestinian-founded Hizb at-Tahrir that aspires to a unitary Islamic state (caliphate), to which they have ready access via internet (Lewis 2006). Notably, the inner city "rude boys" and the Muslim students[5] on campus within the UK are gravitating towards these globalised Islamic positionings and this indicates that, for many South Asians, their expression of Islam is intricately linked to identity politics. In the case of the ghettoised population, this new affiliation helps boost the self-esteem of those who feel alienated, not just by secularism, but from a society that does not fulfil their economic aspirations. This material exclusion augments a fractured sense of belonging[6] which comes about when an autochthonous population resists accepting these diasporic groups as part of the nation. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2000) calls for the need to look beyond race and to class distinction so as to understand the exclusion that many minorities suffer from. It is worth mentioning that the highest proportional prison population amongst minorities is to be found amongst Bangladeshi Muslims. Instrumental to their lack of mobility is a lack of achievement within the education system which, amongst other factors, can have to do with the language of the community. (Mothers are the traditional educators within the family fold, yet they often lack sufficient linguistic skills in English due to the fact that they do not fully engage with mainstream society.) Failure to get on thus becomes another motivating factor in that, without the sufficient qualifications, they find themselves at the bottom of pile within society. This social exclusion (both racial and class-motivated) can lead to the adoption of Islamic fundamentalism.

It must be pointed out that this adherence to the radical discourses of groups such as Hizb at-Tahrir is not representative of the majority of British Muslims and is comparable in its "fringe" status to the phenomenon of the British National Party (Appleton 177). These radicalised groups, unfortunately, become highly visible through acts of extreme violence and subsequently become confused as being representative of a much broader cross section of British Muslims. Furthermore, there is an undoubted "media value" in focusing on these radicalised sectors of the Islamic community, or offering images of women wearing the burka or hijab (when in fact a large proportion do not) which tends to manipulate negatively perceptions of British Muslims.

The suicide attacks on the twin towers in New York in 2001, the Madrid train bombings in 2004, and the London suicide bombings are all testimony to the seriousness of international jihad and have subsequently been the cause of an increasing Islamophobia with the West. The New York attacks of 9/11 have been instrumental in defining Western attitudes towards Islam, and the London bombing of 7/7 has only magnified these attitudes that 9/11 spawned. Within mainstream Britain, a certain sector of the population see British Muslims actively resist inte-

[5] The majority of Muslim tertiary level students come from South Asian communities. See Appleton (2005) for a detailed discussion.

[6] It can also be argued that during the 1980s there was a much more notable sense of cohesion amongst different ethnic minorities to fight together for racial equality and social justice. The Thatcher era ushered in an ethos of individualism and the smashing up of collectivism. The effects of this can be seen in how the sense of mutual help between distinct minorities became diffused.

gration, are subsequently unpatriotic and even condone terrorist acts (Field 2007). Whilst Hindu and Sikh communities seemingly pose no threat to a British collective consciousness, these and other global events have focused attention on the Muslim community, which is seen by many as threatening.

Within the UK this new sense of suspicion (that has arisen regarding these communities) has led to a questioning of multiculturalism. This attack not only comes from its traditional enemies within the right, but also from some parts of the left, which blame tolerance to difference as being instrumental in allowing radical Muslims a free hand. While certain' madrassas cannot be equated with training grounds for "terrorists,"some are places where extreme jihad ideologies are fomented or where international jihadists look to for new converts.[7] The connection between' madrassas and the perpetrators of 7/7 was subsequently also partly to blame for these negative views of multiculturalism within the UK. This latest backlash has much to do with the paradigmatic shift within public perception of Islam of recent years which has switched from the exotic and sensual stereotype to that of the Muslim fanatic (Brown 2006). This about-turn became visible for a while during the Rushdie affair in the late 1980s and early 1990s and has gained currency in the face of the increasing current global jihad which has directly affected the UK. Traditionally, British society could be seen as tolerant of "minority" groups and adapted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards distinct ethnic and faith groupings. Paradoxically, as Yasmin Hai observes, despite the more meritocratic and tolerant nature of the nineties' in Britain, a certain sector of the younger Muslim Asian population (we could include Sikhs and Hindus here) were taking refuge in their religious cultures (232).

South Asian moderate Muslim intellectuals such as Ziauddin Sardar (2004) and Tariq Modood (2007) question the hegemonic nature of Western discourses of secularism and liberal individualism as juxtaposed with faith communities and see its "intransigent nature" as an obstacle to developing a more inclusive form of multiculturalism: "The thinness of some multicultural approaches, which focused on superficial differences –the 'saris, steel bands and samosas' syndrome– and not enough on faith, spirituality and power relations, was a feature that many of our interviewees [...] have been attempting to challenge and deconstruct" (Modood & Ahmad 201). Modood and Ahmad's informants[8] also spoke of a monopolisation of "Hindu Indian culture" within the media, where South Asian was seen as synonymous with Hindu. This lack of visibility of Muslims within the media could thus be interpreted as being linked to a preference for non-challenging differences such as Bollywood, and the consensus amongst some South Asian Muslims was that multiculturalism was a superficial and fashionable construct incapable of taking

[7] The Algerian Djamel Beghal, key organiser of the 7/7 London suicide bomb attacks, had been known to have used Leicester's mosques as a recruiting ground (Suri 53).

[8] Modood and Ahmad have used informants selected from a broad section of "moderate" Muslims who include prestigious figures such as Lord Nazir Ahmed, Humayun Ansari OBE, Humera Khan, co-founder of the women's Muslim group the an-Nisa, Yusuf Al-Khoei, trustee of Forum against Islamophobia and Racism etc.

onboard true difference. A section of South Asian Muslims look to the history of Islam to contextualise the notion of multiculturalism and point to factual examples to show that Muslim pluralism has historically existed where there has been one dominant faith (Modood & Ahmad 206). The general consensus amongst Modood and Ahmad's informants was that mainstream and "moderate" Muslims were all pro-multiculturalism as long as that included faith communities. Eugenia Siapera (2007) assures that many British Muslim citizens are encouraging a debate which addresses the traditional left values of justice and equality, but viewed from the positioned perspective of being a Muslim in Britain. This position attempts to negotiate a third way that sees the practice of Islam as being culturally specific to a British Muslim identity.[9] This rejects both a turning away from Islam in favour of assimilation and the radical position that all British cultural outputs are alien to Islam[10] and thus pose a threat to its purity (Appleton 2005).

The lack of meaningful dialogue between secularism and faith perspectives within Britain is also extended to a lack of dialogue within Muslim communities. This is an important point as to lay the weight of blame solely on Western secularism, the "demonising" of Muslims or the phenomenon of adjacent cultures installed within the UK for radical scripturalism or jihad is not presenting the full picture. Sardar criticises what he defines as the "Modern Muslim" who is "opaque [...] arrogant of 'his' Islam" and advocates a return to the ideals of the Islam where "reason has always been the equal and necessary partner of faith" (67, 250). In *Unimagined: A Muslim Boy Meets the West* (2007), Imran Ahmad explores the disjunctive nature of dual identity and of how, as a Pakistani Muslim who wishes to adapt to life in the UK, he must negotiate his way through the complicated paths of assimilation while simultaneously maintaining his faith. Whilst the utopian idea of a global Islamic state united in peace and brotherhood do appeal to him, he secretly admits to loving "the heady freedom and excitement of the Western world, just as it is" (245). Like Sardar, Ahmad sees reason as the only path to faith and abhors the "superstition and prejudice that has wrapped itself around Islam like a cancer" (238).

Ahmad's commentary marks a general shift within the moderate British Asian Muslim community regarding its attitude towards radical Islam. The polemic caused by the publication of the *Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie brought this radicalisation to public attention and was met with condemnation across the

[9] This concept is not a new one, and we can find a similar attitude towards Muslim faith that was fomented in Aligarh University in Uttar Pradesh. The college's founder, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan advocated that an education which made Muslims proficient in Western ways would afford them agency. This appropriation, however, did not entail a compromising of Islamic ideals (Hai 9).

[10] For some South Asians who come from a Muslim heritage but have chosen secularism, an engaging with Islam becomes a means of understanding their dual identity. Yasmin Hai sees her new affiliation with the Qu'ran as a means of connecting her with her mother's heritage which she also perceives as being important to her cultural identity.

board within the Muslim community.[11] Whilst "moderate" Muslims were not advocating a *fatwa* against Rushdie, there was a consensus that he had gone too far:

> As a British Muslim, didn't Rushdie know how fragile the elders in the community were? The pressures they were under, the fears that made them cling so fiercely to religion? His community didn't consist of Hampstead liberals, politically and culturally sophisticated, able to toy with sacred cows. Couldn't he have been more judicious with his art? (Hai 211)

Alibhai-Brown (2000) also expresses her disillusionment with the liberal consensus after the *Fatwa* was imposed on Salman Rushdie. She asserts that "we became orphans, simultaneously losing liberalism –until then the rock of our education– and Islam because of the insane way it was manifesting itself" (268). Edward Said (1993), when reflecting upon the paradoxical nature of the Rushdie affair assures, "To have provoked Islamic fundamentalism when once he had been a virtual representative of Indian Islam–this testifies to the urgent conjunction of art and politics, which can be explosive" (373).

The events of 11 September 2001 brought to a head the internal dialogue within the British Muslim community when the moderates realised they needed to publically speak out against the "hijacking" of Islam by a "West-hating militant ideologues" (Modood & Ahmad 190). So, whilst previously "moderate" Muslims were questioning liberal ideas of free speech and of how not all positioned ethnic and religious groups had the same access to the discourses of power, now they had to focus their attention on the fascist and xenophobic nature of fanatical Islam[12] from within. September 11 was the inflection point in this readdressing of Islamic identity amongst Muslim Asians and, as Hai points out,

> Everything was different now. We British Muslims could no longer afford to remain aloof. We had to stop behaving like immigrants, hiding in our mental ghettos and start asking ourselves some uncomfortable questions about our place here. It was time we faced the fact that we were British citizens. (291)

Shiraz Maher, a former activist within Hizb ut-Tahrir, speaks of how British Muslims refuse to engage with anything beyond community and are becoming "suffocated" through this isolation from mainstream Britain (*The Sunday Times*, 13 January 2008). This phenomenon is augmented with the advent of digital broadcasting that is creating "digital ghettos." In this closed off world, a hyper-reality can be created where the passive consumers of world events that solely intersect with Islam means that certain Muslims can become prone to developing a victimisation complex. If we take the social

---

[11] The Indian government decided on October 8 1988 to ban Rushdie's novel (only twelve days after its publication) realising the inflammatory effect it could have on India's then 100 million Muslim population.

[12] Ziauddin Sardar publically issued "fatwas" against the Islamic fanatics in *The Observer*, 23 October 2001.

disenfranchisement of many Asian youths in the UK, and add to this the lazy editorial jumps made on Muslim stories within the conventional media (Hai 247), then we find a perfect breeding ground for radical Islam, more often than not constructed on false myths and partisan readings of the Qu'ran. Maher, himself captivated by the emotional "security" the Hizb ut-Tahrir offered, rejected both his British identity and his ethnic South Asian background as he appropriated the discourses of radical Islam. Only when researching the development of Islamic political thought in late colonial India at Cambridge did he begin to see the cracks in the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology: "My research caused me to find marked points of rupture in both the historical and theological narrative of what the Hizb was having me believe" (*The Sunday Times* 12 August 2007).

A key motif within this ideology is that Muslims in Britain are living in *jahiliyya*, a state of ignorance and barbarism which is referenced within the Qu'ran (Yai 274). To counteract this "state of ignorance," Hizb ut-Tahrir defends the creation of a puritanical caliphate, an enterprise they see as being in conflict with secularism and individualism, the cornerstone of Western Enlightenment values. The glaring paradox is that, while the postwar South Asian generation came to Britain in search of a more entropic and non-interventionist society, many of their offspring now wish to return to a more orthodox form of social organisation where Islamic ideology leaves no room for other interpretations of governance. The tragedy of this radicalised generation is that they seek refuge in a distorted reading of the Qu'ran that has little to do with religion and a lot to do with the politics of identity. Underpinning this affiliation with radical Islam is the masking of an ingrained sense of insecurity produced by a rejection they feel at the lack of equal opportunities (both socially and economically), and succumbing to these Islamic discourses endows them with a sense of belonging which the nation does not afford them. However, as Hai aptly concludes "Britain refused to see the Muslim extremists in their country as their story" (329) and the post 9/11 hollow rhetoric of Enlightenment values by the media and politicians has done little to further an understanding of this complex issue. This could lead us to concluding that multiculturalism is being increasingly viewed, both by "white" and other ethnic assimilated groups, as a weakening of "national" values and a sham, while those "Western-hating" ethnic groups become increasingly entrenched in the politics of violence and applaud any "victory" against the West, no matter how brutal it may be. Gilroy (2004), however, would prefer to view British society as being a "convivial culture" while Alibhai-Brown (2000) assures that ethnic groups in the UK (she includes "white English") are becoming more at ease with diversity, but, paradoxically are feeling more insecure about their identity.

2. ISLAM AND COMMUNITY

A recurring motif in Hanif Kuresihi's early work is how migrancy denies the subject a single identity, which in turn produces the sensation of becoming trapped between two distinct cultures that are themselves internally divided. As a secularist whose father is from an Indian Muslim background (the Kureishis were originally from Bombay but moved to Karachi after Partition) he has developed a particular interest in how Islamic ideology is shaping the identity of much of the

Muslim population in the UK. In *The Black Album* (1995), Shahid Hasan embodies a segment of that second generation of British Asian Muslims who find navigating between their secular British identity and their Islamic heritage an arduous task. These two positions are personified by Deedee Bridgewater, Shahid's literature teacher, and Riaz, ideologue to a group of disenfranchised Muslim students. There is a crossover between the sense of disenfranchisement certain Pakistani characters in the book suffer and Kureishi's personal experiences of being branded a "Paki" when growing up. Shahid suffers from the type of existential confusion border identities can produce –the narrative describes him as having "many warring selves" and of suffering from "provisional states" that "alternate from hour to hour" (157)– and this uncertainty creates in him a series of ambivalences that divides his sense of affiliation. Shahid's background and history is one of a youth who rejects his Pakistani cultural heritage to momentarily embrace its total opposite, white racist ideology. This paradoxical association with a discourse that abhors people like him speaks of an acute sense of self-loathing, a recurring theme in many migrant discourses. Kureishi's signalling of the detrimental act of mimicry flags up intertextuality with Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* where Chamcha, the mimic man, transforms into a beastly type of satyr which functions in the text as a parody of his attempts at impersonating the archetypal Englishman (Holmes 2001).[13]

As with Hari Kunzru's Pran in *The Impressionist*, Shahid in *The Black Album* has become "unavailable to himself" and this lack of self-knowledge produces a pendulum-like oscillation in his attempts to construct an identity for himself. From National Front convert, Shahid initiates a process of revaluation of his own cultural heritage through Islam's sense of universal brotherhood.[14] This new affiliation has, however, a hazardous supplementary discourse which is that of radical Islam. Unlike his new comrade, Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali-Shah (alias Trevor Buss,[15] his "real" name), he will not readily subscribe to dogma. The central conflict that the narrative thus explores arises from Shahid's desire to be seduced by an Islamic sense of belonging on the one hand –construed as a refuge from the complexities of a postmodern and fragmented society– and his need to develop as a writer on the other. His sexual involvement with his literature teacher Deedee Osgood contextualises this conflict between a liberal notion of "free speech" and a complete surrender to Riaz's interpretation of Islam and jihad.

Seen from a post 9/11 perspective, the relevance of The Black Album is that it represents one of the first fictional accounts of the radicalisation of those dispossessed Muslim Asian youths who, while born and bred in the UK, were no longer seeing themselves as British. In McCabe (1999) Kureishi affirms that British society still finds itself trapped within a colonial dictum and it is an issue that still needs to be dealt with

[13] Kureishi has Shahid exclaim that he is turning into a monster.

[14] Ziauddein Sardar (2004) affirms that "A mosque is the essential accoutrement for strangers desperate to build a home in a new land" (1).

[15] A curious intersection with Kureishi's real life, in that Buss was the author's mother's maiden name.

if British society wishes to redefine itself as regards ethnic absolutism. Kureishi is not mitigating the pernicious effects of fundamentalism –the attempts to create "Islamic" purity and to exclude all things English– but, as a writer, he attempts to map out the route that many Asians from Muslim backgrounds take towards radicalism:

> During the 10 years between the Southall riots and the demonstration against The Satanic Verses, the community had become politicised by radical Islam, something that had been developing throughout the Muslim world since decolonisation. This version of Islam imposed an identity and solidarity on a besieged community. It came to mean rebellion, purity, integrity. But it was also a trap. Once this ideology had been adopted –and political conversations could only take place within its terms– it entailed numerous constraints, locking the community in, as well as divorcing it from possible sources of creativity: dissidence, criticism, sexuality. Its authoritarianism, stifling to those within, and appearing fascistic to those without, rejected the very liberalism the community required in order to flourish in the modern world. It was tragic: what had protected the community from racism and disintegration came to tyrannise it (The Guardian, 5 April 2006).

The burning of *The Satanic Verses* is a pivotal moment in *The Black Album* and it is a moment when characters define themselves. There is a carnival-like atmosphere in the college yard as Riaz and his followers rally round to torch Rushdie's novel: "And the former Trevor Buss and Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali-Sha, alias Brother Chad, who was brandishing it [the copy of *The Satanic* Verses] at the sky, laughed triumphantly" (236). Shahid, on the contrary, feels ashamed by the event, and can no longer keep up his schizoid affiliations to both his "Islam brothers" and the world of liberal letters that Deedee Bridgewater personifies. As they stand, these two positions are irreconciliable and the psychomachia the text explores is precisely which side Shahid will come down on. Riaz has entrusted him with his religious poetry but, in an act that speaks volumes of his resistance to dogma, infuses the "purity" of Riaz's verses with strong sexual innuendo inspired by this raucous relationship with Deedee. As Holmes (2001) keenly observes, this inscribing of the profane upon the spiritual shows "the impossibility of monologism and the inevitability of dialogism" (301) and as the burning of *The Satanic Verses*[16] exhibits, the denial of this dialogism and the imposition of a single world view is as pernicious as the colonial syndrome still latent in British society.

In "My Son the Fanatic" (1997), Kureishi returns to the theme of secularism versus Islamic fundamentalism through the antagonistic positions of: paradise versus the terrainal; Puritanism versus hedonism; chastity versus libertinism etc. The short story explores a return to fundamentalism through the vehicle of the filial rupture as

[16] Holmes (2001) identifies an interesting intertextuality with *The Satanic Verses* where, as Shahid is to Riaz, Salman the Persian is scribe to Mahound. Rushdie's scribe, as the trickster of many oral tales, alters the divine message given to Mahound and, when this "playfulness" goes unnoticed upon revision, serves to highlight the discursive nature of all faiths and dogmas. This was seen as part of the heretic nature of Rushdie's text and, like Kureishi, the author sets about demonstrating how all religious or other ideologies can be open to reconstruction or reinterpretation.

a means of dramatising the social rift between radical belief and secularism which is a growing trend within many South Asian Muslim households. Parvez, the Punjabi diasporan, has assimilated within British culture and is proud at having been able to provide his son Ali with all his material needs. For no "apparent" motive, Ali has succumbed to a puritanical vision of Islam and the glaring irony is that it is the son who criticises the father for his "unclean" and Western material ways. Parvez, as a child, has been humiliated at a Qu'ranic school in Lahore and since then has divorced himself from Islam. However, he must suffer a new rebuttal at the hands of his son who chastises him for his close "friendship" with another woman. The only departure in the narrative from an otherwise Manichean positioning is Parvez's aggression as retribution for his son's humiliation of him. The story's closing line has a bloodied Ali calmly retort to his father's violence: "So who's the fanatic now?", and it is this final ambiguity in the father's characterisation that Kureishi exploits in his screenplay of the film of the same name.

While "My Son the Fanatic" offers no way out of the impasse created by fundamentalism, *The Black Album*, like Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, ends up on an upbeat note with both of their characters negotiating their Islamic identity. Both novels come down on the side of secularism, and this easy transition can be seen as both optimistic and somewhat naïve. It is within the narration of the secondary characters of *Brick Lane* that the Islamisation of London's Bengali migrants is overseen, and here we find a medley of (always) male firebrands and ideologues who coerce their community into radical positions. So, while a sense of Islamic brotherhood (personified through the Bengal Tigers) is beneficial in that it affords a cohesive community response against racism, their radical interpretations of faith hijack all other ideological postures. Monica Ali contextualises this monologic rubric in the narrative through varied specificities: families go without so as to fund the construction of a mosque back in the "homeland"; "salaat alerts" are sent out via mobile reminding devotees of prayer time; Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine all become single "conspiracies" against Islam as viewed through the prism of ideology extreme; and all forms of music (including the Sufi devotional variant) are considered "un-Islamic" by the local Islamic ideologues.

These radical positionings in *Brick Lane* are put under scrutiny primarily through the "illicit" romance between Karim, firebrand and alma mater of the Bengal Tigers, and Nazneen. The first glaring inconsistency in Karim's puritanical Islamism is his own participation in adultery, a state of *haram* (prohibited act) he unproblematically assimilates into his ideology of martyrdom and permanent *jihad*. The novel also flags up similar contradictions in faith positions such as the practices of extortionate money-lending between fellow Muslims. (Any form of money-lending is problematic in Muslim communities and extortion is definitely considered *haram*.) A pivotal moment in Nazneen's coming of age within the novel is when she comes to see Karim's visions of an "Islamic renaissance" as being just as flawed as her own husband's illusions of total assimilation within bourgeoisie England. Furthermore, she now understands that, behind Karim's transformation from inner city rude boy to jihadi propagating Islamist, lies a male ego-driven hunger to be at the centre of things so as to ideologically manipulate the masses. By positing women as being

less prone to adopting radical positions, the novel thus deconstructs the perceived steadiness of male characters and shows how their lack of flexibility and dogmatic views on life (both Chanu's absolute faith in positivism[17] and Karim's blind surrender to his version of Islam) become their downfall. On the contrary, female characters are seen as being less vocal and, while they do not engage in discursive abstractions, they are more apt in managing the difficult task of cultural transformation.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also tells a story of the travails of cultural adaption. Changez is a young Pakistani boy on his sojourn in the US and while the American and British societies are distinct by nature, Hamid's tale does have an allegorical quality to it that makes it interesting to comment upon in the light of what we have been previously discussing. The story is framed as a dialogue between Changez, now returned from the US, and an unnamed male interlocutor with whom Changez engages with at the Old Anarkali Bazaar of Lahore. The novel's ambiguity resides in the fact that we only know about Changez through the story he is telling the American stranger, and the reader is invited to fill in other details which are left at the story's margins. Changez's first words to the American frame the novel's ambiguous nature: "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard. I am a lover of America" (1).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist references the inner conflicts Changez is faced with when attempting to adapt to American society, and there are certain commonalities between the protagonist's experiences and those of South Asian Muslims arriving to the UK. Changez (a brilliant Pakistani student who has been cherry picked to come and study in the US) goes through a series of transformations which the narrative suggests are directly influenced by the prevailing sense of alienation he feels in the face of a Western society. Subsequently, he develops strategies to mask this sense of alienation. What Hamid suggests from the outset is that when Changez first arrives to the US he has no special affiliation with his Muslim faith beyond what is dictated by tradition, and the reader receives no that this faith marks his public identity in a visible manner. In fact, Changez goes to great lengths to assimilate into mainstream American society, and the degree of his cultural mimicry becomes evident on a business trip to Manila (Changez has graduated with honours from Princeton and has been headhunted by Underwood Sampson & Company, a New York-based multinational) in the manner he reacts to the scenes of poverty he witnesses. They remind him of his own country and his initial reaction is to exaggerate his newly-constructed American identity as a means to distance himself from the poverty he witnesses. This initial reaction, however, is short-lived, and he feels shame at this sham he is acting out.

Changez's need to develop his talents through the "American Dream" is coupled by his attraction to an archetypal white American female. Changez has met Erica at Princeton and finds himself desperately courting her with an "Eastern sophistication" that she finds strange yet endearing. Themes of miscegenation are recurrent in diasporic

[17] As Cormac (2006) observes, Chanu "repeatedly refuses to confront the realities of his situation in favor of a fantasy built on pedagogic notions of both Bangladesh and England" (703).

fiction and, while the "opposites attract" motif lies on the surface within the narrative, a deeper reading of Changez' attraction to Erica, whom he describes as a "Greek Godess" (101), can be linked to a symbolic occupying of the national body through the seducing of the white woman. Whilst Erica's family find his decorum impeccable and are impressed with his credentials, there is always an underlying yet palpable sense of "difference" that Changez knows is not so easily surmountable. Both the complex mechanisms of his own cultural mimicry which begin to produce a self-loathing in him, and the fraught nature of miscegenation (which the narrative makes even more difficult through Erica's private past traumas) have a destabilizing effect upon Changez.

This is why it should not come as a surprise that Changez's first reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers is one of quiet glee. It is as if an attack on America were some personal form of blowback[18] for the sense of inadequacy and frustration he feels because his assimilation into American society has not been as seamless as he might have wished. Changez grapples with the glaring contradictions of this reaction and asks himself the question: "why did a part of me desire to see America harmed? I did not know, then; I knew merely that my feelings would be unacceptable to my colleagues, and I undertook to hide them as well as I could" (84). Changez thus buries his "uncharitable and inhumane reaction" (90) to the suffering caused by 9/11 and persists in his attempts to assimilate at all costs into upper class New York society, principally through his association with Erica whom he accompanies on fundraising missions for the victims of the World Trade Center. Changez's relation with Erica is thus central to the ambiguities that the text is flagging up. He assures that she "vouched for my worthiness; my way of carrying myself –I flattered myself to believe– suggested the impeccability of my breeding; and, for those who enquired further, my Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card were invariably sufficient to earn me a respectful nod of approval" (97). Yet, his ultimate goal of assimilation into this echelon of society flounders due to Erica's incapacity to surrender to him, and Changez laments that "her body had rejected me" (103). He carries this rejection quietly inside him as he does the backlash that the Twin Towers attack is causing in his part of the world: "I ignored as best I could the rumors I overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli: Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding

[18] Chalmers Johnson, uses the term "blowback" to explain the dangers the US's global imperial practices:
"'Blowback'" is shorthand for saying that a nation reaps what it sows, even if it does not fully know or understand what it has sown.[...] It refers to the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people. What the daily press reports as the malign acts of "terrorists" or "drug lords" or "rogue states" or "illegal arms merchants" often turn out to be blowback from earlier American operations. [...] "Historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States. In addition, the military asymmetry that denies nation states the ability to engage in overt attacks against the United States drives the use of transnational actors [that is, terrorists from one country attacking in another]" (Chalmers, 2000, 8-12).

mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centres for questioning or worse" (107).

Changez battens down the hatches and soldiers on "clad in his armour of denial" (108). However, behind this armour lies an augmenting unease at the islamophobia he witness around him. His indignation at America's attack on Afghanistan grows stronger and, more telling, the pain Erica's slow retreat from him causes. What Hamid suggests in his novel, yet never explicitly says, is that Erica's distancing from Changez and her steady retreat into the nostalgia of her first and only love Chris is what ultimately tips the balance for Changez. In a corporate world where public image is paramount, Changez performs the symbolic resistance of growing a beard as a means of protest at what he sees as America's increasingly pernicious influence upon Pakistan. While Changez is now fully aware of how his own participation in the US corporate world makes him complicit with American hegemony, it is on a business trip to Chile where he receives his ultimate "epiphany."

This moment of self-revelation comes about through his chance meeting with Juan-Bautista, proprietor of a small editorial who tells Changez the story of the janissaries, Christian boys who were captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in their army. Juan-Bautista assures Changez that these janissaries, assimilated by force to an alien culture, "were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to" (172). Juan-Bautista tells this story to Changez as a means to exemplify what he sees as Changez's possible surrender to an alien (American) culture. This analogy of the janissaries that Hamid offers becomes a means to frame Changez's subsequent turnabout. He confesses to his American interlocutor that, "There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war" (173). While he has always been uncomfortable with America's ruthless pragmatism and its hegemony in his part of the world, he is now determined to sacrifice his "American dream" to be true to himself, whatever that "truth" may be. He defines this rupture with America as the "breakup of a romantic relationship that involved a great love [...] followed by a sense of euphoria at finally being liberated," although he feels haunted by a "desperate and doomed backpedalling of regret" (179).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist thus reads as the allegorical journey of a young South Asian Muslim who travels from meritocracy to fundamentalism. Changez is brilliant enough to break through any glass ceiling that American society may put in his way, but it is cultural difference and his own resistance to a total suppressing of this in the name of integration which turns Changez in the opposite direction. In the hands of another writer, this turnabout could seem Manichean, yet, until the very end of the novel, Hamid resists any simplistic denouement. Changez tells his American interlocutor that, "As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own authority. [...] Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own" (190). This is

the story Changez seems to be telling himself as a means of justifying or mitigating what the reader starts to suspect is his engagement with fundamentalism.

Worth noting is the fact that being Muslim is never specifically referenced as a motivating factor for this fundamentalism. Changez is now a university lecturer whose mission on campus is to awaken his students into an active engagement with politics, principally to "free" Pakistan from American influence. His "ex-janissary skills" (203) help rally students "of all possible affiliations – communists, capitalists, feminists, religious literalists [...]" (204). Changez thus becomes the mentor of "bright, idealistic scholars" one of whom has subsequently been arrested by the American Secret Services, accused of planning to assassinate a development assistance coordinator. Notwithstanding, Changez assures his "American friend" that he is a believer in non-violence; "the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me" (206) he assures us, although the manner in which Changez is baiting this American seems to suggest otherwise. In the novel's final pages, Changez tells his interlocutor that because of his now high profile status which is due to a radical interview he gave (this interview, he adds, has been included in the American "war-on-terror" montage) he feels like "a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow" (207-208). The American, however, has ceased to listen to Changez, and is now reaching for his gun as Changez's accomplices close in for what we presume will be the American's assassination. This final "sting in the tail" leaves one wondering how much of what Changez has been telling the American is fabulation (the "perhaps you are convinced that I am an inveterate liar" (208) is as much directed to the reader as it is to the American) and leaves us with little empathy for Changez or, at best, an inkling of the complexities of fundamentalism.

One might question why Mohsin Hamid takes such a pessimistic view on the possibility of assimilation for South Asian Muslims in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and one could accuse him of producing a contrived plot. A cursory glance at recent world events, however, bears out how fiction can pre-empt reality. One news story of a 30-year-old former financial analyst who tried to blow up a car on Times Square in May 2010 seems to give credence to Hamid's allegory. Similar to the fictional Changez, Faisal Shahzad hailed from a comfortable middle class Karachi-ite background, had moved to the US when he was 19 where he studied computer science and then business at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut, and was assimilated into American society. A similar case is that of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the twenty-two year old Nigerian who attempted to blow up a North West airlines flight to Detroit on December 25 2009. Abdulmutallab was also from a privileged class, had enjoyed a private education in Togo and had subsequently gone on to study mechanical engineering at University College London. Across the globe, the lure of Islamic fundamentalism is (correctly) attributed to the poverty and injustices experienced by many who live in estamental societies where entropy is a fantasy. However, the cases of Shahzad and Abdulmutallab also bear out that radical Islam cannot solely be explained away through dialectical materialism; the ideology of fundamentalism is both attractive and potent for other reasons.

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* prefers to take a more ironic stance on the travails of assimilation and cultural differences through her saga of three ethnically diverse families which includes the Iqbals, a Bengali family who first come to the UK amidst

the large post World War Two influx of fellow South Asians. Samad Iqbal, father to twins Magid and Millat, battles against his impure and un-Islamic ways, which include alcohol and "self-abuse", or "the sin of *istima*" (lusting after other women). Samad is tormented by a sense that life in Britain and its daily temptations is leading him astray from the precepts of Islam. Smith's narrator treats Samad's continual self-flagellation with more than a pinch of irony and we feel that Samad is in fact quite at home with his earthly vices, despite his sudden interjections in his local (O'Connell's) of: "I am corrupt, my sons are becoming corrupt, we all are soon to burn in the fires of hell" (192). Samad thus becomes intent upon sending one of his sons back to the homeland to become "a real Bengali, a proper Muslim" (215). Subsequently, he suffers a continual internal debate of "which son" and, until the last minute, it is his best friend Archie (a declared atheist and fellow patron of O'Connell's) who helps him spirit Magid back to Bangladesh without the knowledge or consent of his wife Alsana.

This plot device that Smith uses of the separated twins bears certain resemblance to Salman Rushdie's Saleem and his wicked nemesis Shiva in *Midnight's Children*. Much of what unfolds in the rest of Smith's *White Teeth* becomes a "what if" scenario; what if it were Millat who was sent to live in the Chittagong hills of Bangladesh instead of his brother Magid. This physical separation of the twins serves to highlight how identity can be performative by nature, where culture and society play a salient role. Magid's correspondence to his parents from the Chittagong hills makes his life seem more pastoral in comparison, and Samad feels that his "unpopular decision" has been validated. In Magid's letters, Samad detects "some change of tone, some suggestion of maturity, of growing Eastern wisdom" and that his son "is for God, not for men" (215). Meanwhile, Millat has developed into a full-blown teenager, with an intense engagement with 80s modernity. Smith makes a point of giving us a check list of Millet's "stuff" which includes: Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* album; a poster of *Taxi Driver*; a video of Prince's *Purple Rain*; his shrink-to-fit Levi's 501; his Converse baseball shoes, or his copy of Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (222). He also joins an urban gang, all of whom share his South Asian background. They are all archetypal "angry young men" who have suffered in the past because of their ethnic differences: "People had fucked with Ranil, when he sat at the back of the class and carefully copied all teacher's comments into his book. People had fucked with Dipesh and Hifan when they wore traditional dress in the playground. [...] No one fucked with them anymore because they looked like trouble" (232).

We meet Millat's "crew" on their way to a protest against Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, despite the fact that they don't even know who the author is. Rushdie is simply a visible target onto which they can vent their frustration, and Smith seems to be saying that much of what went as indignation against *The Satanic Verses* was merely the couched language of identity politics. As retribution for his participation in the burning of *The Satanic Verses*, when he arrives back home he finds that Alsana has also made her own bonfire in the family back garden feeding it with most of *his* stuff (his *Catcher in the Rye* copy, his *Mean Streets* video, his signed photograph of Chuck D., etc.). Her wry response to her son's radicalism is telling in that, although a traditionalist, she is not participating in politicized reactions against secularism: "Everything is sacred or nothing is. If he [Millet] starts burning other people's things, then he loses something sacred too. Everyone gets what's coming, sooner or later" (237).

For the Iqbals, the confusion that Millat experiences because of his cultural hybridity becomes known in the household as "*The Trouble with Millat*" and motivates what is the archetypal split between first generation diasporans and their second generation offspring. For Alsana, her fears of his "dissolution" and "disappearance" (i.e. him becoming English and losing his Bengali identity) are fundamentally linked to Millat's interest in white girls: "Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night of visions of Millat (genetically BB; where B stands for Bengali-ness) marrying someone like Sarah (aa where 'a' stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (Ba) [...]" (327).This growing rift between Millat and his parents causes his gravitating towards the Chalfens, an upper middle class Jewish-Catholic family (they were also once immigrants of Eastern European extraction) who take him under their wing and become fascinated with him despite his sponging and moodiness. Whilst he finds his own family suffocating and uncomprehending, at the Chalfen household he finds a sympathetic ear to which he can voice all the confusion he feels. Much of this confusion can be traced back to his hybrid identity and is specifically motivated by miscegenation. Millat (as his father before him) feels a strong attraction towards white women and subsequently has to face down criticism from his Muslim friends. His animal magnetism becomes a problem –the narrative assures that "there have always been and always will be people who simply exude sex" (368-9)– and it is Joyce Chalfen who best defines the nature of his lasciviousness when she assure that "boys like that want the tall blondes, don't they? I mean, that's the bottom line, when they are that handsome" (320). As surrogate mother figure, Joyce Chalfen attempts to "sort out Millat's problem with white women" which the narrative assures are "numerous" (368). Millat, trapped between the secular values of free choice and an idealized identity constructed through Islam, develops a psychomachia where these two opposing ideologies do battle inside his head.

As Millat graviates more towards the Chalfen's, his mother Alsana feels that they are "Englishifying him completely" (345), which is her way of expressing that she no longer understands the complexities of her own son's identity. Alsana's niece, Neena, assures her aunt that "he's running away from himself and he's looking for something as far away from the Iqbal's as possible," and advises her to let him go his own way (346). Neena suggests that she worry less about the pernicious effects of the Chalfen's and focus more on his involvement with KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation). Millat stays more and more away from the family home and he becomes ever more destabilised as he oscillates between the intellectual and liberal atmosphere of the Chalfen household and his affiliation with KEVIN. *White Teeth* thus locates Millat's almost psychoid behavior as being the result of finding himself poised between cultures that should not necessarily be in conflict but, because of the ideological appropriation of faith values for political ends, have become incommensurable. This conflict within Millat spirals. He turns to Joyce Chalfen who is the only person who has the language to explain his angst and her conclusion is that:

> Millat was filled with self-revulsion and hatred of his own kind; that he had possibly a slave mentality, or maybe a colour complex centred around his mother (he

> was far darker than she), or a wish for his own annihilation by means of dilution in a white gene pool, or an inability to reconcile two opposing cultures [...]. (375)

Joyce's analysis seems to bear true; he is incapable of sustaining his relationship with Karina Cain, the "African goddess" (his only "true love"), and subsequently splits up with her in a torrent of rage. This emotional failure on his part motivates a "vow of celibacy" and his involvement with KEVIN becomes more intense. Smith thus equates Millat's sense of self-loathing, product of his own split-identity, with an ideological appropriation of Islam. This use of Islam as a means of expressing public identity gained prevalence in the UK from the 1980s onward amongst certain South Asian Muslims. Although a strain of Islamic conservatism could always be found amongst the older Muslim diasporic community in Britain, for the majority being a Muslim was principally a matter of private identity, contained either within the home or the walls of the mosque.

While Millat struggles with his own psychomachia, his twin brother Magid in the Chittagong hills is having quite a different experience. While immersed within a traditionalist Muslim society, Islam holds no special place for him, and he is also freed of the tribulations of his twin brother's cultural in-betweenness. Science, however, is foremost upon his mind and, through the now established ties between the Iqbal and the Chalfen family, he has become penpals with Marcus Chalfen, *pater familus*. Through their correspondence, Marcus recognizes Magid's brilliance. Their epistolary relationship intensifies, and Magid subsequently returns to the UK and ends up living with the Chalfens. Marcus is head researcher of a genetic engineering project and Magid commences work on "FutureMouse," Marcus' project which garners much publicity within the media, opening up the debate of the "morality" of tinkering with the genetic codes of humans and ultimately the ethics of "playing God." While there are many motivations that fuel the filial rift between the twins, Magid's involvement in Marcus' project becomes a convenient scapegoat upon which Millat can focus all his rage and confusion. Magid subsequently laments that: "My brother shuns me. [...] He marks me like Cain because I am a non-believer. At least not in his god or any others with a name" (429).

Through this Cain and Abel motif, Smith effectively deconstructs perceived notions of eastern sensuality and mysticism versus western rationalism and empiricism. Magid was the one who was chosen to return to Bangladesh so as not to be contaminated by the West's corrupting influences and to become a "proper Muslim", yet he returns to the West to become involved in "FutureMouse" which can be seen as a metonymic representation of secularism's highest aspirations. Magid thus becomes foil to his lustful and religiously fanatic brother who is ironically a product of western modernity. Yet, as the narrative later points out, both occupy the same temporal space within history:

> The brothers will race towards the future only to find they more and more eloquently express their past, that place where they have *just been*. Because this is the other thing about immigrants ('fugees, émigrés, travellers): they cannot escape their history any more that you yourself can lose your shadow. (466)

While Magid's belief in his rationalism and empiricism brings him serenity, Millat struggles with this constructed Islamic identity that KEVIN affords him. Similar to Shahid Hasan in Kureishi's *The Black Album*, this identity, shaped through ideology, becomes a refuge from the fraught nature of his own cultural hybridity yet, like his father Samad before him, he struggles with his natural bent to be a *bon vivant*: "In fact, the problem with Millat's subconscious [...] was that it was basically split-level. On the one hand he was trying really hard to live as Hifan [KEVIN's maximum ideologue] and the others suggested" (444). However, he is still fascinated with the American Mafioso genre (*The Godfather*, *GoodFellas*, *Mean Streets, etc.)* which he projects his fantasies onto:

> Worst of all was the anger inside him. Not the righteous anger of a man of God, but the seething, violent anger of a gangster, a juvenile delinquent, determined to prove himself, determined to run the clan, determined to beat the rest. And if the game was God, if the game was a fight against the West, against the presumptions of Western science, against his brother or Marcus Chalfen, he was determined to win it. (446-447)

Equating Millat's fundamentalism with a Mafioso-style ethos culled from the mythologies of western modernity is *White Teeth's* most risky proposition. Smith, however, does not solely attribute his radicalism to a testosterone fuelled gung ho-ness. Her narrator looks deeper into Millat's anger and reveals that his fundamentalism is also about readdressing the shame and injustices his father suffered when he first came to the UK. Millat wants to believe he has a "second generation attitude" and that, through his militancy, he will redress "the long, long history of us and them" (506). At first, these conflicting motivations can seem at best confusing and at the worst contrived. In the book's favour, Millat's sudden mood swings and internal milieu are "true to character" of the archetypal angry teenager who is attracted to rebellion and certain ideologies upon which they can channel this anger. Nonetheless, there are many things about the awkward denouement of *White Teeth* that do not ring true. Millat ends up trying to kill his own father at the official unveiling of "FutureMouse" (he is saved, for a second time, by his best friend Archie) and one is left wondering if Smith's contrived plot line of fundamentalism and hybridity is moreover put together to please a western audience that demands fresh narratives on multiculturalism rather than to illuminate upon the complexities of border existences.

The period of the late 1970s in the UK was marked by a vibrant inter-ethnic rapport between South Asians, Black Caribbeans, Africans, etc. The links between these communities were forged as a means to face down the overt and violent racism that was commonplace within urban centres. This united front became a place of refuge for many who were struggling to find their place in society that was still imbued in the arcane discourses of nationalism, and which had not as yet embraced multiculturalism. If we compared this cross-ethnic solidarity and activism of the late 70s with how ethnicities interact today, we find that this unity has been severely weakened. In today's Britain, multiculturalism has become an "accepted" reality amongst the majority of its citizens, and many people belonging to distinct ethnic

minority groups (many of whom reside in deprived inner city areas) show a tendency to retreat into insularity. It is perceived that there is no longer any "common cause" through which they can channel their concerns.

Manu Islam's *Burrow*, set in 1970s Britain, bears out this inter-ethnic rapport of the late 70s and furthermore shows how Islam resided within the private sphere of South Asian Muslim's lives (*Burrow* specifically deals with the Bangaldeshi community of East London). The novel traces the tribulations of Tapan Ali, a Bengali émigré who has landed in London's East End during the late 1970s. As an illegal immigrant, Tapan is constantly looking over his shoulder which leads to a subterranean existence and hence the book's title "Burrow". He becomes prey to people of his own community; people like Poltu Khan who are suspected of tipping off Immigration on the whereabouts of illegal immigrants. Through Tapan's contact with the diasporan Bengali community, Islam introduces the reader to the day-to-day functionings of this community and what becomes immediately apparent is that the precepts of Islamic faith within the community, whilst conservative in their outlook, have not become politicised or radicalised. A point in hand is when Tapan visits Doctor Karamat, a local intellectual for whom Tapan is writing a column. Once inside the Doctor's apartment, *Burrow*'s narrator observes: "At first he [Tapan] thought that the man [Doctor Karamat] followed a strict, austere interpretation of Islamic codes concerning representation. But he found it hard to believe since, among Bangaldeshi Muslims of his generation, this kind of rigidity was rare" (157). Tapan, while accepting the conservatism of the older generation of Bengalis, has a limited rapport with the community at large and prefers to seek out like-minded people, both from his own and other ethnic backgrounds. (One poignant example in *Burrow* is how comrade Moo Ya (a Chinese diasporan) helps rescue Tapan from the police during the battle of Brick Lane in the summer of '78.)

It is amongst these people that he feels most comfortable with; a people who understand his own sense of deracination. Despite all being "junkies for England" (161) they too are confused by the conflictual nature of their in-betweenness; they feel divorced from the ethics and behaviour of their parent's generation but are still searching for their place within British society. Although Tapan is an émigré, he identifies with this sentiment and confesses to Nilu (his girlfriend) that, "I've nothing to go back to Bangladesh for. It might sound funny, but –despite all the difficulties– I feel at home here [London]" (166). The reason why Tapan feels so much at home in London despite the obstacles that are put in his way is something that the novel suggests but never explicitly says. Tapan's romantic visions of "England" have been culled since his youth. His grandfather once gave Tapan a book on England which is described as "the most beautiful land on earth" (7). Much of London's appeal for Tapan lies in the cultural mix to which he is exposed to, a cosmopolitanism that excites his imagination. On the contrary, he distances himself from those people of his own community such as the Most Venerable Pir-Sahib who glibly assures that: "what the scientist fellows are propagating is full of fundamental flaws and mistaken notions. [...] A single verse of the Koran will debunk them a thousand times" (52). While for Tapan, Pir-Sahib represents that strain of scripturalism against which he must resist,

it is precisely these and other discourses of fundamentalism that lead to a radicalisation of certain elements of the South Asian Muslim community in times to come.

Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, while examining this radicalisation of Muslim diasporic communities in Britain, prefers to focus more on the intimate dramas and omit the larger context of jihad and the internationalising of radical Islam. Within the text women, struggle to liberate themselves from Islamic constraints present within a ghettoised diasporic community. These constraints can come from both a masculine surveillance of women's "morality" and from within the family fold where the mother/daughter relationship is seen as suffocating the female offspring. The text takes the latter as one of its narrative focuses and contextualises it through the complex relation between Mah-Jabin and her mother, Kaukab, a devoted Muslim. Kaukab personifies that migrant section of South Asians who feel both bewildered by and excluded from a society that upholds specific moral codes alien to their core religious beliefs. The nameless North of England setting of the novel is referred to as Dasht-e-Tanhaii, translated as both "The Wilderness of Solitude" and "The Desert of Loneliness", and this toponym captures, in a very visual way, the sense of isolation from white society that many South Asians suffer from. Thus, Dasht-e-Tanhaii becomes Aslam's microcosm of this diasporic experience and the author flags up the pernicious effects of this isolation; the community's obduracy in its enforcing of Islamic codes of conduct.

Mah-Jabin becomes victim of this intransigence and is sent off to Pakistan on her mother's insistence and against her own will at the age of sixteen, where she is married off to her cousin who mentally and physically abuses her. It is only years later, when Kaukab comes across a malicious letter from Mah-Jabin's ex-husband, that Kaukab comes to realise the hell her daughter has been through. This epiphany, however, comes too late and, while she commences to engage with the destructiveness of her own blinkered vision, her estrangement from her offspring is too complex for her to rationalise. Ironically, it is Mah-Jabin who most defends Kaukab against her brother Ujala's barrage: his accusations of her filiation with a religion that condones "amputations, stoning to death, flogging" (322); his rage against his mother's "ignorance". Mah-Jabin (who has experienced daily life in Pakistan) attempts to mitigate these shortcomings by contextualising her mother within a Pakistani socio- cultural context. Kaukab, however, refuses to see women's roles in Pakistan as being jaundiced, and it is this incommensurable vision that fuels the family rift.

The alternative model Aslam offers is through the figure of Shamas,[19] a non-believer whose flexibility becomes a bridge to his children who have unanimously rejected their mother's singular vision. Shamas is a prominent and respected member of community; however, despite his impeccable credentials, he does not escape the polarisation of a society that has become increasingly radical. A dramatic vehicle the narrative uses to contextualise this intransigence is the murder of a local couple

[19] Shamas draws certain parallels with Aslam's own father who was a communist, poet and film producer in Pakistan, but who had to struggle when the Aslam family moved to Huddersfield.

who have defied the strict Islamic mores imported from rural Pakistan and by living together outside marriage. Jungu, brother of Shamas, is one of the victims of this intolerance, and the brutal killing of him and Chanda becomes symbolic of the nefarious outcomes of a frustrated Islamic righteousness that aspires to impose its version of a *pensée unique*.

The supplementary tragedy of this violence is Kaukab's incapacity to engage with the sub-text of the killing; that these "crimes of honour" (Chanda has been murdered by her own brothers as part-retribution for her "unclean act") form a part of an extended practice, both in Pakistan and in the UK, of similar acts of violence in the name of Islam.[20] Emotionally, she is incapable of fully grieving the death of her beloved brother-in-law, as this comes into conflict with what her religious convictions dictate, and this isolates her both from her husband and her offspring and, ultimately, from herself. Her dictum: "Jugnu died because of the way he lived" expresses her generalised frustration at the rejection of Islam in her household in favour of secularism and of the openness with which things she considers taboo are discussed.[21]

This retreat into Islam and Kaukab's complete surrender to dogma becomes paradigmatic of a wider phenomenon that is occurring globally amongst sectors of Muslim communities. Apart from the anxieties that exclusion from society produces, Aslam offers an alternative reading of being blinkered from other realities through religion:

> to exist within the world of grown-ups is to encounter pain and disappointment as well as joy and fulfilment. Every day friends fail us, lovers abandon us, we don't get the rewards we deserve, we make decisions that are wrong and then we have to live with the consequences of those mistakes. But turning to religion means we don't have to think anymore – we are told what to think, what to eat, what to wear, who to meet, who to talk to. (*Three Monkeys Online* July 2005)

Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, whilst contextualising this surrender to conservative interpretations of Islam within a ghettoised Pakistani community in the North of England, also transcends issues of Islamic faith and diasporic identity to embrace universal themes of rites of passage, love, abandonment, filial ruptures etc. Rather than essentialising notions of ethnicity, he composes a pastoral narrative structure that draws many of its motifs from classical Islamic and Indian subcontinental literature including the central leitmotif of the moth and the flame, or the Islamic concept of the search of the beloved –man's search for his lover as a motif of his soul seeking God.

Through his appropriation of an Islamic resource-base, Aslam is consciously revising current perceptions of Islam and opening up a much older and richer world of Muslim erudition which he coalesces with a world literature. This

---

[20] Islam, in an interview with Michael O'Connor, states that all the incidents depicted in *Maps* are based upon documented cases both in Pakistan and England. http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page2/_nadeem_aslam_interview.html.

[21] She is shocked by her son's Charag's art which explores, in an explicit manner, themes of sexuality.

appropriation of his cultural heritage, positioned with a secular context, mirrors that of many writers, artists and intellectuals from the Indian subcontinent who profess a Muslim heritage. This positioning is the most visible within the British media and arts and is a strategy many second and third generation settlers have employed in their negotiation of a hybrid British identity. The flip side to this assimilation is a rejectionist and isolationist ethos fomented by an essentialised vision of Islam that feeds from anti-Western discourses of writers such as Sayyid Qutb[22] or even the bin Laden. A third positioning adopted by South Asian Muslim faith communities is constructed through a rejection of this oppositional ideology; they prefer to perceive Islam and the West as "interlocking narratives: interconnected, open politico-cultural systems that have learned and continue to learn from one another" (Appleton 177). It is this integrationist and dynamic Islam that perhaps needs to become more visible so as to diffuse the potential of society becoming ever more polarised as certain sections persist in their skewed notion that all Muslim faith values are contra secularism.

Reviews sent to author: 28 October 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 15 February 2015.

WORKS CITED

Abbas, Tahir. "A Theory of Islamic Political Radicalism in Britain: Sociology, Theology and International Political Economy." *Contemporary Islam* 1. 2 (August 2007): 109-122. Print.

Ahmad, Imran. *Unimagined: A Muslim Boy Meets the West.* London: Aurum Press, 2007. Print.

Ahmed, Rehana. "Occluding Race in Selected Short Fiction by Hanif Kureishi." *Wasafiri* 24. 2 (June 2009): 27-34. Print.

Ali, Monica. *Brick Lane*. 2003. New York: Scribner, 2004. Print.

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain*. Penguin Books: London, 2000. Print.

——— *Mixed Feelings: The Complex Lives of Mixed-Race Britons*. London: The Women's Press, 2001. Print.

[22] Appleton (2005) displays how the "anti-Western" discourses of this radical Islam in fact were borrowed from Western sources such as anarchism considering the fact that they have no precedent in Islamic thought (178). In this respect he shows how, by being a product of a Western intellectual tradition, they are anti-Western but cannot be considered *non*-Western.

Appleton, Michael. "The Political attitudes of Muslims Studying at British Universities in the Post-9/11 World (Part 1)". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25. 2 (August 2005): 171-191. Print.

Aslam, Nadeem. *Maps For Lost Lovers*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2004. Print.

Brown, Malcom D. "Comparative Analysis of Mainstream Discourses, Media Narratives and representations of Islam in Britain and France Prior to 9/11". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26. 3 (December 2006): 297-312. Print.

Cormack, Alistair. "Migration and the Politics of Narrative Form: Realism and the Postcolonial Subject in *Brick Lane*." *Contemporary Literature* 47. 4 (Winter 2006): 695-721. Print.

Farooq, Mohammad Omar. "Partition of Indian and the Creation of Pakistan". July, 2001. http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/writings/other/azad/india_wins.htm. Web.

Field, Clive. "Islamophobia in Contemporary Britain: The Evidence of the Opinion Polls 199-2006." *Islam and Christain-Muslim Relations* 18. 4 (October 2007): 447-477. Print.

Gilroy, Paul. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Hai, Yasmin. *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter: Becoming British*. London: Virago Press, 2008. Print.

Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. London: Penguin Books, 2007. Print.

Holmes, Frederick. "The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West: Kureishi's *The Black Album* as an Intertext of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*." *Paperson Language and Literature* 37. 3 (Summer 2001): 296-313. Print.

Johnson, Chalmers. *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*. New York: Owl Books, 2000. Print.

Islam, Manzu. *Burrow*. London: Peepal Tree, 2004. Print.

Kibria, Zazli. "The 'New Islam' and Bangladeshi Youth in Britain and the US". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31. 2 (February 2008): 243-266. Print.

Kunzru, Hari. *The Impressionist*. 2002. London, Plume, 2003. Print.

Kureishi, Hanif. *The Black Album*. New York: Scribner, 1995. Print.

—— "My Son The Fanatic". In Hanif Kureishi *In a Blue Time*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1997. Print.

—— *My Ear at His Heart*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2004. Print.

—— "Fear and Paranoia." *The Guardian* 5 April 2006. Print.

Lewis, Philip. "Only Connect: Can the Ulema Address the Crisis in the Transmission of Islam to a New Generation of South Asians in Britain?" *Contemporary South Asia* 15. 2 (June 2006): 165-180. Print.

Maher, Shiraz. "How I Escaped Islam." *The Sunday Times* 12 August 2007. Print.

——"Muslim Britain is Becoming One Big No-go Area." *The Sunday Times* 13 January 2008. Print.

Mccabe, Colin. "Hanif Kureishi on London". *Critical Quarterly* 41.3 (Autumn 1999): 37-56. Print.

Modood, Tariq, & Fauzia Ahmad. "British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism". *Theory, Culture & Society* 24. 2 (2007): 187-213. Print.

O'Connor, Michael. "Writing Against Terror –Nadeem Aslam." *Three Monkies Online*, July 2005. http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page2/_nadeem_aslam_interview.html. Web.

Padamsee, Alex. "Uncertain Partitions: 'Undecidability' and the Urdu Short Story." *Wasafiri* 1. 23, Issue 1 (Winter 2008): 1-5. Print.

Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. London: Picador, 1988. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. 1993. London: Vintage, 1994. Print.

Sardar, Ziauddin. *Desperately Seeking Paradise*. London: Granta Publications. 2004. Print.

Siapera, Eugenia. "Multiculturalism, Progressive Politics and British Islam Online." *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 2. 3 (February 2007): 331-346. Print.

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*. London: Penguin, 2000. Print.

Suri, Sanjay. *Brideless in Wembley*. Penguin Books, India: New Delhi, 2006. Print.

Walsh, Declan. "Times Square bomb: Inside the bomber's backyard." *The Guardian* 5 May 2010. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/05/faisal-shahzad-terrorism-motives-puzzle. Web.

INDIANNESS, HINDU NATIONALISM AND AUTHENTICITY: UNITED FORWARD WOMEN, CAPABLE INDIA[1]

Antonia Navarro[2]
Universidad de Córdoba

Abstract

This paper examines how Hindutva is currently hijacking the heterogeneous notion of Indianness, and reducing it to a very simplistic and radical entity, always viewed through the lens of its own radical ideology. In that sense, the women's movement has been manipulated by those guards of tradition and authenticity. In order to prove that the women's movement in India has a long and rich history, an overview of those women who rebel against their prescribed gender role as well as an analysis of current Feminism in India are offered.

Keywords: Women Movements in India, Indian Identity Problematized, Historical Overview

Resumen

Este artículo examina como el Hindutva está atacando actualmente la noción heterogénea de la identidad india, reduciéndola a una entidad simplista y radical, vista siempre bajo la lente de su propia ideología radicalizada. En este sentido, el movimiento de mujeres ha sido manipulado por estos guardianes de la tradición y de la autenticidad. Para probar que el movimiento de mujeres en La India cuenta con una historia rica y longeva, se ofrecen tanto una perspectiva de esas mujeres que se rebelaron contra el rol prescrito para su género, así como un análisis del movimiento Feminista contemporáneo en La India.

Palabras clave: Movimientos de mujeres en la India, problematización de la identidad india, perspectiva histórica

1. INTRODUCTION: AND AIN'T I AN INDIAN

The discussion on Indianness is a recurrent topic in a variety of fora in India. Almost everyday, one can often hear or read somebody arguing that a certain group of Indians is disobedient, antagonistic and has little respect for the Indian culture, tradition as well as social values. Poet Arundhathi Subramanian states in the secularist newspaper *The Hindu* that

> To uncritically applaud the country's nuclear muscle seems to be one way of being Indian. To metamorphose from miniskirts to saris seems to be the popular media's strategy of shedding Western contamination. Local political parties believe Indianness can be acquired by banning Valentine's Day and renaming the Prince of Wales Museum, the 'Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya,' and later on she continues arguing that "there are the local 'back to our roots' obscurantists who want classical dancers and musicians to be emissaries of a 'pure untainted' Indian culture. (n.p.)

Well known incidents such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the Gujarat carnage in 2002 have made Indians place emphasis on secularism again. Secularism in the political, as opposed to ecclesiastical sense, requires the separation of the state from any particular religious order. Then, how could we explain the changes in the history textbooks by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government to the extreme that two eminent historians –Panicker and Sarkar– had their volume on the freedom struggle called back from the press, or the Sangh Parivar organizing campaigns against Deepa Mehta's film on Varanasi widows, *Water*, so that the shooting was aborted? To remember a few other cases, Maqbool Fida Hussain's painting on goddess Saraswati nude provoked a scandal, so that his paintings and photographs were excluded in 2008 from the Indian Art Summit; and till recently, the anti-Christian violence in Orissa perpetuated by a Hindu fundamentalist organization (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) has already killed many innocent people for fear of conversions and emancipation of Tribals and Dalits.

The main responsible for this surge of Indianness related to me idea of nationalism is Hindutva (a movement which advocates for Hindu nationalism), being its stated objective to instil national pride in every Indian with the motto "United Hindus, capable India." Its final goal is to make India a Hindu nation and prove that Hindus are Vedic Aryans. The principal representative political party that sustains the ideology of Hindu nationalism is the right-wing BJP, in power from 1998 to 2004, and a strong opposition (Varshney Ashutosh 231) till it won the general elections of 2014.

There are those who believe Indian culture must draw on traditional indigenous idioms if it is to be meaningful and anchored, and most importantly, if it is to be authentically Indian. In that sense, the women's movement has been manipulated by those guards of tradition and authenticity. In our current times, there are many outspoken intellectual voices who have had the courage and commitment to critique Hindutva ideology. However, the majority of those who do not convey to the norm of displaying a classical idea of Indianness suffer from invisibility or black mail. For

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 70; 2015, PP. 67-88

[1] Ironic mixture of Hindutva' motto "United Hindus, capable India" and the women's campaign "A Consortium of Pub-going, Loose and Forward Women" against moral policing by religious conservatives in India.

[2] The author wishes to acknowledge the funding provided by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness for the writing of this essay (Research Project "Bodies in Transit," ref. FFI2013-47789-C2-1-P) and the European Regional Development Fund for the writing of this essay.

example, some of these authors make a huge effort to be published, and when they find a space, they are barely reviewed.

In my interview with feminist publisher Ritu Menon, she stated that there are many kinds of censorship in India; little formal censorship but a lot of other informal and perverse censorship which is related to economy, society, political parties, culture, self-censorship, the censorship of the market, the censorship of institutions, including educational institutions, and street censorship. These are people who form in the street (of course they have an organized backing) and psychically violate or disrupt or make impossible for freedom of expression to exist (Navarro 104). Githa Hariharan deals with this issue in her novel *In Times of Siege*, in which the protagonist, a History professor in New Delhi, has to deal with Hindu fundamentalists after his writing of a lesson on a 12th century poet and social reformer, and that attracts the unexpectedly violent attention of a Hindu fundamentalist group, who demands that the lesson be withdrawn from the curriculum. The Munch hires goondas to storm the university and wreck the professor's office. He refuses to apologise, arguing for a plural interpretation of history but the University authorities succumb to blackmail from the fundamentalists' side.

I believe this kind of Hindutva ideology is significant to understand the Indian women's movement, and more specifically, the question of Indianness from the stay-at-home intellectuals' perspective. Contemporary Indian feminists are victims of a prejudice, vis-à-vis their regional counterparts. Since proficiency in English is available only to people of the intellectual, affluent, educated classes, a frequent judgement is made that the activists, and their works, belong to a high social strata, and are cut off from the reality of Indian existence. Regarding women's writing, it has been much criticized that the depiction of the psychological suffering of the frustrated Brahmin housewife is a superficial subject matter compared to the depiction of the repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes that we find in regional authors writing in vernacular languages like Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, etc. There is the nativist literary bastion, which believes that the whole question of English is a colonial hangover and consequently not Indian enough. However, numerous writers such as Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, agree with the fact that authors practising in English do not need to write about poverty and tsunamis or Himalayan yogis to prove that they are genuine Indian or sound like authentic Indian.

As a consequence, what happens in India is that English-speaking activists, in their struggle against right-wing extremism, have played an honourable and often a leading role in spite of the different types of censorships they are suffering from. They have published books and essays documenting the errors and excesses of Hindutva. They have also made films and staged plays recalling and extolling the inclusive ideals of the multi-ethnic democracy Indians live in, like for example novelists Kiran Nagarkar, Vikram Chandra or Githa Hariharan and fimmakers like Paromita Vohra. India's first and oldest feminist press, Kali for Women, has been publishing titles by and about women activists, others which are more theoretical, in order to increase the body of knowledge on women in India and to provide with a space to the women's voices. One of their so many successes has been to publish

English translations of fictional writings by women from other Indian languages and to deal with women's lives under fundamentalism.

In 2009, a group of activists of the Sri Ram Sena (the Army of Lord Ram) barged into the pub "Amnesia – The Lounge" (Bangalore, India), and beat up a group of young women and men, claiming the women were "violating traditional Indian values."[3] The founder and leader of SRS, Pramod Muthalik, declared that they did that in order to "save our mothers and daughters." He had already announced an action plan to target couples found dating on Valentine's Day: "Our activists will go around with a priest, a turmeric stub and a mangalsutra on February 14. If we come across couples being together in public and expressing their love, we will take them to the nearest temple and conduct their marriage."[4] As a response, a few young women in Bangalore, India, started the Pink Chaddi[5] Campaign to protest against the Sri Ram Sena threats on them. Tens of thousands of Indian women have joined a protest organized on Facebook (A Consortium of Pub-going, Loose and Forward Women), to strike back against moral policing by religious conservatives.[6]

In order to prove that the women's movement in India has a long and rich history, I will offer an overview of those women who rebel against their prescribed gender role. The women's movement in India has been heterogeneous in its different forms in diverse parts of the subcontinent. Its plurality, but at the same time union among women, has made it a strong movement. The presence of women in the public sphere has been significant, as their mobilization has been part of major events in the history of India. However, there are also millions of ordinary women in the country who struggle to survive in order to remake their family and social lives, whether fighting for water and electricity, literacy, safe contraception, or resisting sexual harassment.

2. PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

For a long time, feminists ignored their own tradition of a succession of women saints and other women writers who had inverted and even subverted the classic ideals of womanhood embodied in the hegemonic texts. Now, empowerment enables women to take greater control over their lives and to transform the world by means of literature.

During the pre-colonial period (that is, from 13th-c AD to 18th-c) we come across a long lone of women saints: Mahanubhav women, Varkari women, ... The Mahanubhav sect emerged in the second half of the 13th –century. Some of its components were Mahadamba, Kamalaisa, Hiraisa, Nagaisa, Chakradhar (the founder of the sect). Chakradhar's radical measures included a ban on the ritual isolation of

[3] http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2009/02/02/blog01/1233598715.html.

[4] http://www.hindu.com/2009/02/06/stories/2009020657590100.htm.

[5] Chaddi means underwear in Hindi.

[6] More information about the campaign at http://thepinkchaddicampaign.blogspot.com. Fiction writer Sunny Singh has also published her views on this topic in her own blog, http://sunnysinghonline.blogspot.com/2009/02/panties-pubs-and-protests.html

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 70; 2015, PP. 67-88

menstruating women, a common feature of Brahmanism. Baisa, another woman, also rebelled against the gender-based rules which permitted natural bodily movements and expressions for men but imposed severe restrictions on women.

On the other hand, the Varkari tradition tried to understand the full depth of women's protest in Maharashtra; the tradition of the Varkari sect remains today as a source of inspiration and comfort. Feelings are more important than learning, status and privilege. According to Lele (1981: 33), the Varkari poets spoke for a community of the oppressed (*sanvasarasranta*), criticizing the ideology through a philosophy of devotion in life known as Bhakti. The Varkari movement produced a long line of women saints. Women of all castes and regions in Maharashtra, such as Janabai, Muktabai, Gonai, Rajai, Ladai, and Bahinabai, left a rich body of literature.

All men saints in the Varkari movements always supported the cause of women. Janabai's poems offer us a combination of a deeply felt sorrow, a product of the fact that she was born as a woman. Bahinabai, even though a Brahmin by birth, she accepted Tukaaram, a Varkari saint of shudre origins, as her guru. She emerges as a woman who had come to terms with the problem of life, ready to take on a positive, active note, and who knows that life has come to an end for her. She defied the traditional ideal of a *pativrata* (a loyal wife) defended by the orthodox patriarchal order.

The years 1818-1984 span the period of colonial domination. Colonialism gave rise to a new English educated class of intellectuals which absorbed some of the radical bourgeois ideas from its western counterpart. There appeared a new body of creative and critical literature in Marathi, both by women and about women. There are three important 19thcentury women: Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910), Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) and Anandibai Joshi (1865-1889).

Tarabai inherited the tradition of the counter-cultural revolt by the oppressed non-brahmin castes of Maharashtra under the revolutionary leadership of Jotirao Phule who challenged all aspects of the brahmanical hegemony and gave a bitter and comprehensive exposure of brahmanic ideology. Tarabai offered the first fully worked out analysis of the ideological fabric of Hindu patriarchal society. She also has the distinction of being the first Indian feminist literary critic. Pandita took the courageous step of accepting Christian faith even though she came from the highest bracket of the Maharashtrian Hindu social order (she was by birth a chitpavan brahmin). She carried throughout her life a simultaneous battle against both the Hindu and the Christian religious hierarchies as well as against Hindu and Christian masculinist social norms. Joshi, after her marriage at the age of nine, she was compelled by her husband to embark on a course of western-style education, in a typical colonial reformist fashion. She was the first Indian woman to study modern medicine.

The 19th century social reformers in India, the 20th century nationalists, communists and leaders of anti-Brahmin movements were already living in a world informed by western ideas, as their lives were defined by the far-reaching changes generated by colonialism. However, the model of Indian womanhood became similar to that of the Victorian British one. There are many theories about when the feminist thought was found in India, either introduced by the contact of the western world or as part of the Indian tradition.

A few books on the status of women in India were published, such as Mill's *History of British India* (1826), in which he stated that women's position was the indicator of society's advancement. The formula proposed was: "Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted." He also stated about the Hindu society that "nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women [who] are held in extreme degradation" (n.p.) The nationalist historian A. S. Altekar corrected Mill in his *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (1938), by giving an appreciation of Hindu culture's treatment of women, and joining the project for the compulsive glorification of the ancient and medieval past of India. That proposed "Golden Age" was described as a time of near equality with men. According to him, around 1000 BC women's situation suffered a decline, precipitated by the acceptance of non-Aryan women into Aryan households. He argued that there was a positive treatment of Hindu women, even though women were subordinate to men, because they were protected and respected.

By mid-18th century, women's status had hit rock bottom and begun its slow recovery with improvements in education, age of marriage, widow-remarriage, laws and customs, and recognition of women's economic potential. For the historian, women, the "fair sex," were naturally subordinate to men. The prehistoric people that he imagined consisted of patriarchal warriors in a setting in which men's dominance and protection over women was natural. The mark of man's civilization was the extent to which he controlled and curbed his power and gave women their rights. He also showed that the decline of women's status was due to the limited education resulting from early marriage. Biology was destiny, and he worried about the strain of intense study on women's health that could bring harm to the race. Though people historically practiced child marriage, preferred males, and prohibited inter-caste marriage, society was according to him harmonious. And finally, he justified fathers who preferred sons as these fathers loved their daughters, young brides were well treated in their husbands' homes (their youth made adjustment easier), and most wives lived up to the ideal of *pativrata*. As a conclusion, men were good husbands.

Ironically, the reform movement was initiated by men, with activists such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Malabari Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, and Karve, among others. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's struggle for the abolition of sati could mark the beginning of the movement for reform on behalf of women. They fought for legal reforms, for a legally equal position in society; the struggles were, essentially outside the home and the family. They fought to uproot the social evils of sati widow immolation, the custom of disfiguring widows, the ban on the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows, child marriage, age of consent, property rights and illiteracy through legal interventions. They were engaged in advancing the status of women by promoting their education and obtaining for them legal rights to property.

Women in this phase were categorized along with lower castes as subjects of social reforms and welfare instead of being recognized as autonomous agents of change. The emphasis was on recreating new space in pre-existing feminine roles of caring. The women involved were those related to male activists, elite, western educated, upper caste Hindus.

At the beginning of the last decades of the 19th century, culture and politics united in a productive partnership in India, when the nationalist project disturbed the advance of empire. As Tharu and Lalita put it, the changes that took place in these decades set up the scenarios that underlay national life until the late sixties, and further, the cultural conjunctures of the eighties and early nineties need to be understood in the light of those earlier configurations (44). 19th century concerns included the fight against social practices such as dowry, child marriage, *purdah*, and the prohibition of widow remarriage as well as an education that would enable women to perform their roles as wives, mothers, and school teachers in an enlightened and socially useful mode.

Women formed part of the independence movements of the late 18th and early 19th century, and contributed to the freedom of India from the British. During the period 1915 to 1947 struggle against colonial rule was intensified, and nationalism became the prominent cause. When M. K. Gandhi led his salt march, many women forced him to include them in the movement. Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was an important social reformer, among others such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule and Savitri Bai Phule. Gandhi legitimized and expanded Indian women's public activities by initiating them into a new philosophy of Ahimsa or non-violent civil disobedience movement against the Raj. One of the basic tenets of this philosophy is that in order to fight a non-violent revolution, it is necessary to build moral powers. Gandhi called for the people to arm themselves morally. He declared, thus, that equality for women would be one of the central objectives of his political program. He emphasized that nothing less than the total involvement of the entire population in the non-violent struggle for freedom would be adequate. It was imperative to involve women in the mass movement. He urged women to step out of their homes and join him. He exalted their feminine roles of caring, self-abnegation, sacrifice and tolerance.

Women-only organizations like All India Women's Conference (AIWC), and National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged. Women were grappling with the issues of scope of women's political participation, women's franchise and civic rights of women in Indian constitution. Provisions for women's upliftment through affirmative action, maternal health and child care provisions (crèches), equal wage equal work, etc. State acquired the patronizing role towards women. The main specific event was the All India Women's Conference in 1920, where women posed their views on the struggle for independence, women's education and the right to vote. The question of women's suffrage was raised in 1917, and many women were skeptical that the granting of universal adult suffrage would result in equality for women. However, in the early twenties the provincial legislatures voted in favor of enfranchising women on the same basis as men.

Sarojini Naidu became in 1925 the first woman President of the Indian National Congress, an important success. Women's organizations demanded equal rights, such as the All India Women's Conference on women's education, which was organized by the Women's India Association in 1927 and which reconstituted itself into a permanent national body. Muthulakshmi Reddi, who resigned from the Legislative Assembly as a nationalist in 1930 when Gandhi was arrested, felt that women were being forced into a situation in which their interests were being subsumed in the designs of the Congress party. In 1942, Jawaharlal Nehru, while preparing for an attack from Japan, called women to fight as equals outside the

homes, which –according to Tharu and Lalita– reveals how invisible the subjugation of women had been rendered in the ideology of liberal nationalism (88). The utopia ended soon when the social and cultural ideologies and structures failed to honor the newly acquired concepts of fundamental rights and democracy.

3. POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD: 1947–1969.

The years immediately following independence saw an emergence of publications on Gandhi and nationalist women. Some important books are: Neera Desai's *Woman in Modern India* (1957), P. Thomas's *Indian Women through the Ages* (1964), Manmohan Kaur's *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement 1857-1947* (1968), and a revised edition of A. S. Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (1959). These books mark the beginning of scholarship on women that placed women and gender questions at the centre of the analysis and interrogated records in new ways.

Desai and Thomas were more concerned with their Indian audience and less preoccupied with convincing the world that Hindu civilization was kind to women. So, although old-fashioned in many ways, Desai and Thomas wrote women-centered texts, espoused feminism, and championed democracy and pluralism. Neera Desai's *Woman in Modern India* (1957) analyses the Vedic society, Buddhist period, Puranic Hindu society, Muslim rule, and the British Raj, and she found out that there was no "golden age" for women, as antiquity was patriarchal, and "great women" were under male domination. She argues that the *Puranas* were written to establish Brahmins as the highest class, which further excluded women and limited their influence. As for the Muslim rule, these women had further restrictions on rights and freedom because of *purdah* and polygyny.

According to Desai, the brightest spot was during the *bhakti* movement with its democratic tendencies, promotion of vernacular languages, and acceptance of women as spiritual equals. Later, the British men sought to change their society, and women benefited from the changes. Western ideas and technology justified and facilitated the exploitation. For Desai, 20th century women's entry into political and social organizations had an elitist nature. It is true that women gained gender equality in the Constitution, but the old fossilized, oppressive institutional and ideological legacy prevented them from enjoying rights granted under it.

She was critical of the "pseudo-scientific" theories that defined sex-differences as fundamental, since the main differences among women are those related to their class, caste and religion. Desai basically described women in modern India as economically vulnerable, dominated by patriarchy, politically and educationally disenfranchised, and socialized. For the times, this was a new, even radical view.

On the other hand, P. Thomas's *Indian Women through the Ages* (1964) moved chronologically from the Indus Valley civilization to post independence India. As Desai, he did not find a golden age in ancient India, but rather increased subjugation of women. He found out that during the Middle Ages, Brahminism had deprived women of their individuality and they remained in subjugation until the 19th century. Women's emancipation in the 19th century culminated in the legal and constitutional rights.

For him, improvement in women's status was a function of three forces: British rule, a general awakening in 20th century Asia, and the Indian freedom movement. During the fifteen years after independence, only the upper classes had benefited. Men and women were fixed categories: men dominated, women were subordinate. He concluded that the cause of women's subjugation was Brahminism for the institutionalization of a priesthood that suppressed both women and other Indian communities preventing sex equality, true democracy, and Indian pluralism.

Gandhi and Shah view the Women's Movement in India in the form of three waves. Briefly, the first began with the mass mobilization of women during the national movement. During a decade after independence, women engaged less in political activity. The writer who had earlier refused to accept the housing offered by a colonial authority, in the fifties and sixties slips back into the family. During this period, a substantial number of poets and novelists were writing in English along with several literary movements that were taking place in vernacular languages such as the Nayi Kahani movement in Hindi, Navya in Kannada, the Digambara Kavulu in Telugu, the Adhunika Kavitha in Malayalam, and the Navkavya and Navkatha movements in Marathi. The canon of most Indian literatures was being consolidated in those years, while many women's writings were forgotten.

It was not until the late sixties when the movement saw its most activist phase as it brought a more realistic change, paying attention to economic and external issues such as dowry deaths, the problems of divorce, inheritance and abortion laws, and the practice of sati. The second wave, from the late sixties onwards, saw a resurgence of political activity by women due to the fact that growing unemployment and rising prices led to mass uprisings. There was a growth of middle-class women's organizations in urban areas as well as organizations of working women fighting for their right to independent livelihood and basic resources like credit, training and access to technology. According to these authors, this second wave saw mass participation of women in popular upsurges against the government, and power structures in general, but the third wave, which emerged in the late seventies, had a specific feminist focus.

4. THE 1970S.

After Independence, when the Congress Party came into power, India lived a sense of complacency in women's organisations. 19th century Indian reformers made efforts on behalf of women, but limited change to the domestic sphere. Gandhi and the Indian National Congress remained the acknowledged champions of women while the period from 1947 until the mid-1970s received the most attention. By the mid-70s, interest in women's status was renewed, since women were disturbed by the total invisibility and neglect of their economic roles. By the late sixties, the economy began to collapse, and away from the metropolitan cities, promises of social and economic justice remained unredeemed. Urban unemployment remained high and the prices of essential commodities rose along with food shortages. Example are the anti-price-rise agitations of 1972 and 1973 organized and led by women, and the Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad, which ran popular campaigns against the

harassment of women students in 1973. The Self Employed Women's Association struggled for equal wages, and the Chipko movement for the women's right to land.

The period 1970-1985 can be considered the phase of the women's movement that excavated the past and criticized the then present. The 1975-1977 period of Emergency marked the beginning of the women's movement in India. The search for answers was carried out during a difficult political time in India's modern history. Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of emergency coincided with the inauguration of International Women's Year. Many women who belonged to organizations critical of Mrs. Gandhi went to prison while others published underground papers, went into hiding, or remained silent and waited for new opportunities. When the Emergency was lifted in 1977, India witnessed a renewal of feminist activity.

The publication of *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* in 1974 was crucial. The committee that made the research was appointed in 1971 by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare on a United Nations request for a status of women report for International Women's Year in 1975. The aim was to examine the Constitutional, legal and administrative provisions that had a bearing on the social status of women, their education and employment, and to assess the impact of these provisions. They conducted studies and interviewed approximately 500 women from each state. In this report, they concluded that the position and rights of women in Indian society had not significantly changed, as women's status had not improved in the twenty-five years since independence.

The Indian Council of Social Science Research had an advisory committee on women's studies. Vina Mazumdar was asked to engage in further research on women's lives and work in contemporary India. This was the first systematic effort to question what constitutional guarantees of equality and justice actually meant to women. We find no broad generalizations about women in the research, and the analysis was interdisciplinary. When categorizing, they chose economic divisions with the political and social, and implications.

By the late seventies, issues related to women were being raised in a range of forums, and women's groups had emerged all over the country. The feminist journal *Manushi* started in 1979, providing an important voice for the emerging movement. The rape laws were changed, and issues related to family violence, the law, the household, health care, education, curricula, the media, and women's working conditions were set up. Gender was intrinsic to these rearticulations of social life in which women writers played an important part. By the end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s, the women's organisations discussed about rape, domestic violence, dowry, personal law, sati, and promoted the creation of new women-sensitive laws or amendments to existing laws. The strategies were diverse, such as public campaigns, demonstrations, street theatre, consciousness raising workshops, study circles, and advocating for legislative changes.

There was a flowering of interdisciplinary anthologies on Indian women, to name just a few, by Alfred de Souza, Devika Jain, and B. R. Nanda. Romila Thapar deplored the essentialism of historical documents, and concurrently a number of historians were discovering and recovering women's documents. Historians, working in the field, located manuscripts, private papers, collections of journals, and records of

organizations in trunks, *godowns*, and sometimes trash barrels. The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library's oral history project systematically contacted women freedom fighters for interviews and offered to house their private collections. In Madras, C.S. Lakshmi carried out wide-ranging interviews with Tamil women from all walks of life, then focused specifically on women writers, singers, dancers, and musicians, and hunted for obscure periodicals by women in archives and private collections. In North India, Gail Minault began her discovery of the records that led to *Secluded Scholars.* Gail Pearson searched police records in Bombay for details of women's participation in Congress-sponsored marches and demonstrations. Researchers used old records to ask new questions, interviewed women who had lived through the struggle for independence, tried to preserve women's documents, and crossed disciplinary boundaries in search of answers to complex questions, such as the feminist scholars: Rama Mehta, Bharati Ray, Aparna Basu, and Vina Mazumdar who turned to their mothers and grandmothers, and women in their communities to learn about the past. There was a passion for social justice shared by researchers and the connection between activism and the intellectual enterprise. Ashis Nandy suggested the importance of rethinking psychosocial phenomenon in relation to woman and womanliness.

Women's Studies began in India. The Research Center for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University in Bombay began its work in 1974 with Neera Desai as director. The key area of inquiry was the women's social and economic condition. Micro-studies exploring single industries, tracing regional data, and studying neglected populations created a body of literature that provided material for later synthetic works. These studies attended to caste, class, religion, and regional differences.

According to Tharu and Niranjana, the main task for feminist theory during the 1970s and 1980s was to establish gender as a category that had been rendered invisible in universalisms of various kinds. They demanded changes that would make the law more sensitive to the cultural and economic contexts of women's lives (through eve-teasing campaigns, dowry deaths investigations, demonstration of inequalities in women's access to health care systems, etc.). In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a new set of political questions appeared, such as engagement with issues of caste and religious affiliation/community and with new problems emerging from the liberalization of the economy. They relate gender analysis with class analysis, stating that the humanist subject and the social worlds legitimized bourgeois and patriarchal interests (235). Summing up, the 70's witnessed the beginning of a range of left and democratic movements.

5. THE 1980S.

By the 80s the Indian state formally shifted its broad economic policy towards an opening up of the economy, liberalisation. This implied an adoption of a model of economics where trade liberalization and export-led growth were seen as the only plausible development strategies for becoming competitive globally. Important changes marked this process affecting the Indian society at large and women in particular.

Vina Mazumdar opened the Center for Women's Development Studies in Delhi. Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita founded in 1978 *Manushi*, India's leading feminist publication, in Delhi, which brought together scholarship on women with accounts of activism and personal testimony. In 1984 Ritu Menon and Urvashi Bhutalia founded the feminist publishing house Kali for Women, as an independent non-profit trust. The biannual Review of Women's Studies*, Economic and Political Weekly,* was also founded in 1986, and provided a valuable forum for the publication of new scholarship on women and gender.

Influential works were Gail Omvedt's *We Will Smash This Prison: Indian Women in Struggle* (1980), Barbara D. Miller's *The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India* (1981), and Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita's *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from Manushi* (1984).

Indian women were organizing themselves to protest injustice and fight for their rights. They led rallying cries that focused world attention on the deadly nature of son-preference and systematic and pervasive violence against women. The 80s witnessed the first national Women's Studies conferences and a host of local, regional, and national meetings focused on specific themes. The First National Conference of the Women's Movement was held in 1980 and discussed rape and abuse of women due to the Mathura Rape Case. This led the government to make an amendment in laws pertaining to rape in 1983. Section 498 A under the Indian Penal Code dealt with domestic violence, and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 was amended in 1984 and in 1986. The personal law was also created in 1985 after the Shahbano Case. The Supreme Court gave the right of a Muslim woman to maintenance.

During all these Conferences, women discussed divorce (*talaaq*) for Muslim women, sati due to the case in Rajasthan in 1988, women's reproductive rights, as they demanded that women's health should not be focused on their reproductive aspects. They struggled against hazardous contraceptives, especially those forced upon poor women.

Since the 80s, most autonomous groups, without party affiliations or formal hierarchical structures, are funded by non-governmental organizations. However, there has been a large scale co-option of feminist rhetoric by the state, which means that there has been a shift from 'struggle' to 'development' in the agenda of women's organizations. At the same time, the women who participate in these groups have become politicized and in many cases victimized by their employers –many of them have lost their jobs – as they attend Conferences that are against the government when actually they are working for it.

The debate in the autonomous women's groups was about how feminist politics could best be conducted. The critique from women in the Left parties was that these groups were urban and middle-class and therefore could not represent Indian women since the role of feminists was to raise questions within mass organizations. On the other hand, women within the autonomous groups pointed out that it was necessary for them to stay independent while allying on a broad platform because Left parties and trade unions were as patriarchal as any other.

The growth of international trade in goods and services, foreign and multinational investment, that is, the direction of trade and investment towards economies with low labour costs has affected the lives of women. Globalization has witnessed the increasing role of international institutions in the lives of men and women such as the

International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. Issues of food, health, medicine affected poor women directly. However, the traditional centre, the state, whom the women's movement addressed its issues is no longer in a position to take action.

In the 80's, Maxine Molyneux made a distinction between strategic gender interests and practical gender interests. While the first referred to those interests that would significantly alter gender and power relations and contribute to women's empowerment through effecting patriarchal bargains with state and men, practical gender interests took care of the immediate interests of women that no doubt enhanced their well-being but did not significantly alter the gender and power relations. Then, every man and woman is likely to spell out a different need list as his or her individual preference. Strategic gender needs in a grassroots framework cannot be stipulated without taking cognisance of what is happening at the local level and their impact on both men and women. Strategic gender empowerment cannot merely enable women to overcome patriarchal relations of domination of men over women.

6. THE 1990S

The World Conferences of the United Nations dealt with the internationalisation of women's issues. The Conference on Human Rights, which took place in 1992, recognized women's rights as human rights. The 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing created a women's network around the world.

At the same time, a number of national level political parties were created in India, such as the A.I.D.W.A. (All India Democratic Women's Association), All India Women's Conference, National Federation of Indian Women, and Mahila Dakshata Samiti. India's integration into the global economy had repercussions on people's lives; agriculture, industry, health, education ... These forces plus patriarchy further oppressed women and other marginalised groups. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 aggravated religious communalism, and the communal carnage in Gujarat 2001 saw an extreme sexual violence against women.

So, with this background, we find the period 1986-1997, in which categories were challenged, and colonialism reassessed. Studies tried to redefine Indian history within a post-colonial framework, weaving gender into the meta-narrative, and developing theoretical perspectives. Since 1986 there has been an increase in the number of books, journals, and journal articles focused on women and gender in South Asia, and growing international interest in the topics addressed in these publications. This new direction in the study of women and gender in India made two influential works appear: *Women in Colonial India* (1989), edited by J. Krishnamurthy, and *Recasting Women* (1989) edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. Both volumes included previously published work, but their appearance as collections set the tone for future scholarship.

Krishnamurthy's *Women in Colonial India* raised the question of sources, lamented the dearth of material in official records about economic issues, and explained how "the ideology of the women's movement" suggested new ways of reading from the margins and interpreting silences. Women's lives were represented in ways that were faithful both to how women saw themselves and how they were

viewed from the outside. So, this period realizes the importance of studying women as participants in their own right and, at the same time, in relation to men.

Lucy Carroll and Gregory Kozlowski discussed how reformist colonial law affected women and both challenge Altekar's simplistic assumption that women's emancipation began with British rule. Tanika Sarkar, writing about the Gandhian movement, and Madhu Kishwar, highlighted the persistence of traditional elements in the reform movement. Together, these authors challenged accounts applauding the work of Indian social and political reformers.

Sangari and Vaid's *Recasting Women* linked academics to activism and stressed the important of understanding how the British reconstituted Indian patriarchy. They gave special attention to the resurgence of patriarchy in post-independence India manifested in atrocities against women, such as dowry murder and widow immolation, communal violence, and the marginalization of women in production. They created a powerful challenge to previously held assumptions about public and private spheres, the relationship of materiality to social issues, and the nationalist reform agenda for women.

Their concern was to understand how patriarchal institutions and discourse, reconstructed during the colonial period, continued to be effective in keeping women in their place. Thus, by moving away from women's history and embracing feminist historiography, the goal was to "recast" women, then gender, and finally history.

Women Writing in India: 600 B. C. to the Present, edited by Susie Taru and K. Lalita, was another influential work. Volume I (1991) offered translations of women's writing from the 6th century to the early 20th century, and volume II (1993) contains 20th century women writers representing eleven regional languages. Their aim was to recover women's writing as they had been marginalized, misrepresented and misjudged. They place the story of Muddupalani's life and writing as an allegory of the enterprise of women's writing and the scope of feminist criticism in India. In their introduction, they make an overview of feminist theory and criticism. They claim that not all literature written by women is restricted to allegories of gender oppression, and that ideologies –familial, of nation, of empire, etc.– are not experienced and/or contested in the same way from different subject positions. Given the specific practices and discourses through which individualism took historical shape in India, the working classes, the non-white races, Dalits and Muslims had to be defined as 'Other' in order that the Self might gain identity. This anthology has been very influential, having attracted the criticism of many academics. One of them is Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1993), who focuses on the editors' statement that the recovery of women's writing, feminist literary criticism, and writing by women itself, are political rather than aesthetic activities.

All these are synthesizing works that sum up the existing scholarship and portray women as agents constrained by patriarchal attitudes and institutions. Another influential research was Radha Kumar's *A History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (1993), a wonderfully illustrated look at women's movements and activism. Geraldine Forbes's *Women in Modern India* (1996) focused attention on how women perceived their world and acted in it. Drawing on women's writings, organizational records, magazines and journals, oral histories, and private papers and letters, she presented

socially and politically active upper and middle-class women as thoughtful participants in the events of their time. Bina Agarwal's *A Field of One's Own* (1994) is an encyclopedic account of gender and land rights, and Susan S. Wadley's *Struggling with Destiny in Karimpur, 1925-1984* (1994), is a longitudinal study in which she lets villagers of this North Indian place tell their own story.

Scholars no longer investigate "women's problems" but rather ask why women and their issues are seen as problematic. For those who are in India, writing women's history is a political act. As Mill justified, British rule by referring to women's status and modern politicians seek to use history, and especially the history of women, for their own ends. The writing of women's history has been influenced by trends in history as well as newly uncovered sources and the changing political climate. Historical analyses that focus on representation without concern for material existence have sparked a great deal of controversy. For example, articles that defend *sati* or extol the charms of *purdah* seem detached from the real world and an understanding of the extent to which these customs oppress women.

The writing of history has been dramatically affected by the efforts of scholars to search out and preserve women's records. Organizations such as SPARROW (Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women) founded in Mumbai in 1987, face formidable obstacles in its attempt to preserve women's photographs, recordings, and oral histories. SPARROW is not alone and many women's organizations as well as libraries and archives are actively engaged in collecting and preserving material by and about women.

Rosalind O'Hanlon delineated three advances historians have made in addressing questions of social change in colonial Indian society: first, the break with colonial rhetoric about tradition and Indian women; secondly, a new understanding of the modernizing Indian woman in late 19th and early 20th century; and lastly, new insights into gender and the construction of colonial hegemony.

Women's history has had an immense impact on Women's Studies and the work of historians is considered vital to the enterprise. During this period, we also find single memoirs of prominent women, such as Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal, *An Indian Freedom Fighter Recalls Her Life* (1994), edited by Geraldine Forbes; Lakshmi Sahgal's *A Revolutionary Life: Memoirs of a Political Activist* (1997); and collective memoirs such as Sumitra Bhave's *Pan on Fire* (1988) which gave voice to *dalit* women; and Stree Shakti Sanghatana's *We were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (1989). All these projects were meant to retrieve women's writings and voices stimulated reflection on agency, victimhood and women's cultural differences.

Malashri Lal's *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English* suggests a methodology for Women's Studies in India, filling the gap feminist theory could not satisfy due to the inability of western modes to explain the Indian situations in life and literature. She claims that the term 'feminism,' with its western connotations, is a largely suspect term in India (25). She goes on differentiating the popular notion of feminism and the prevalent idea of 'woman' in India. The first is linked with aggressive gender positioning and is thought to be man-rejecting and anti-family, while the assumed idea of a gentle and in need of protection woman still persists. For a woman to become feminist, she must take the initiative and

therefore is considered unpleasant by society. On the other hand, if she is recipient of action done in her favour by male promoters of female dignity, she is then seen as part of progressive society. Since 'feminism' is an imported word for which there is no equivalent in the Indian languages, it places a few Indian women in a category seen to be foreign. Lal explains that in Hindi, *Narithwa* appears as a non-aggressive term meaning women's concerns. However, the matter is one of nomenclature rather than belief, since the concepts of feminism (read: demand for economic freedom, employment, legal fairness, etc.) when introduced as 'women's concerns' are understood easily through rich vernacular languages. An excellent report about common people's thoughts on feminism in India is Paromita Vohra's *Unlimited Girls.*

According to Jain (1991), differences of cultural behavior and family structures have shaped the feminine perspective in the Indian subcontinent differently from the developments in Western cultures. She claims that the changes, which took place with the feminist movement, were the natural aftermath of a political upheaval –women joined the workforce, were educated and became economically independent, supported families – because it submerged in the freedom struggle. Thus, women did not question the accepted social structures, as all this led to a reinforcing of traditional attitudes (67).

7. CURRENT FEMINISM IN INDIA.

The idea that feminism is a concept associated with people who disrupt social structures, mainly the institution of marriage, is a stereotype. As we have argued above, the history of women's movements in India is very rich and dates long before India got Independence from the British Empire. However, the concept of identity politics acquired currency mainly in the early 90's.

Feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. There is no abstract definition applicable to all women at all times. Feminism is articulated in different ways depending on local situations and issues such as time, country, culture, education, as stated in *Feminism in India* edited by Maitrayee Chaudhuri (4). Within a country, it is also articulated differently by different women depending on their class, background, level of education, consciousness etc. Feminism is felt as a duty to bring to a large public the richness and scope of the intellectual effort of women' studies to locating, understanding and explaining problems connected with the relationship of men and women, of women to each other and of both to society and social institutions in general, in order to find solutions.

Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan state in their *Feminism and Its Relevance in South Asia* that a feminist is one "who recognizes the existence of sexism (discrimination on the basis of genre), male domination and patriarchy, and who takes some action against it" (3). However, it has to be accompanied by action, by challenge to male domination. This action can take any form. For instance, a woman's decision to educate and pursue a career, or not to be humiliated, or her decision not to have children are feminist actions. Feminism is not a one-dimensional social critique but a multi-layered transformational, political and ethical practice. In

feminist studies, women are both the subjects and objects of study. As male biases were uncovered in existing theory, feminist studies re-examined society and social theory and concluded that as women and women's perspective were missing form the social sciences, history, literature, and so on.

An excellent study on feminism related to caste issues can be found in *Gender and Caste*. Feminist scholars have certainly engaged with caste issues through studies of women labor, sociological studies of women from diverse caste communities, studies of kinship, and research on poverty, to name just a few sites. But the recent debates about caste and feminism make a rather different argument, and one that cannot be collapsed into an assertion that feminism has responded to the gendered manifestations of caste inequality through its orientation towards social transformation (2003: 4).

Feminism speaks with many voices. The main strands of feminism in India are liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Islamic feminism and Gandhian feminism. However, within this common understanding, there is room for considerable disagreement. According to Suma Chitnis, there are at least three specific points on which the perceptions of large number of Indian women diverge from those of the western-influenced feminists. By far, the most conspicuous of these is the average Indian woman's disapproval of feminist anger. The second is their somewhat mixed and confused reaction to the feminist emphasis on patriarchy and particularly on men as the principal oppressors. The third is their relative inability to tune in to the demands for equality and personal freedom.

For example, American societies have, since the last three or four decades of the 18th century, loudly asserted equality. Yet, they have refused to accept women as equals. Women have had to fight for in spite of the commitments that were made. The situation in India is altogether different. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The several hierarchies within the family (of age, sex, ordinal position, affinity and consanguinity and other kinship relationships) or within the community (particularly caste, but also lineage, learning, wealth, occupation and relationship with the ruling power) have been maintained and integrated by means of a complex combination of custom, functionality and religious belief.

It is argued by many theorists that this concept of equality, as a correlate of the concept of individual freedom, is alien to Indian society. It was first introduced into Indian culture through western education and through the exposure of western-educated Indians to liberalism at the beginning of the 19th century. But it did not become an operational principle of Indian life until the country achieved independence and adopted a democratic system of government. At that point, the constitution granted women political status fully equal to that of men.

Thus, activist Madhu Kishwar rejects the term 'feminism,' arguing that the particular socio-historic context in which the movement arose in the West is specific to that culture, as the agendas in the Indian circumstances and culture are different from those in the West. In her essay "Why I Am Not a Feminist" (1990), she discusses several examples to support the idea that the term 'feminism' is inadequate in the subcontinent, saying: "[w]e need to understand the aspirations and nature of women's stirrings and protests in different epochs in the context of the dilemmas of their age, rather than impose our own aspirations on the past" (5).

There is another fact in the Indian scene that makes it different from that of the feminist movement in the West: many of the catalyzing agents to either improve the status of women or to include in socio-political and religious movements have been Indian men. Nancy A. Falk has a deeper analysis of this issue in her "*Shakti* Ascending: Hindu Women, Politics, and Religious Leadership during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (1995). Even the term 'Hindu' is proposed as complex, as it covers many communities (legally, in India, the term includes Buddhism, Jainism, and the Sikh traditions). So, she proposes considering questions of gender in the contexts of caste, class, and age hierarchies. Furthermore, Vasudha Narayanan argues that both terms 'feminism' and 'rights' are alien to the Hindu discourse, as they both concepts carry a special Western flavor (26).

Feminism in the West emerged as a powerful challenge to existing power structures and gender equations at the level of the family, the economy and the polity. However, this word still evokes no such positive connotation in India. Most of those men and women who fought valiant struggles for women's rights in India did not feel the need to use the term for their ideas and work. Furthermore, many Indian activists argue that feminism, as appropriated and defined by the West, has too often become a tool of cultural imperialism. In recent years it has become fashionable to talk of the distinct nature of Third World feminism. The underlying assumptions and basic ideology remain essentially the same: an analysis of how women are represented in colonial and postcolonial literature, which challenges assumptions and stereotypes about women in both literature and society. Though both colonialism and patriarchy have been closely entwined historically, an end to formal empire has not meant an end to the oppression of women in the former colonies. Postcolonial feminists point out the ways in which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized, ironically sometimes by postcolonial authors who might claim to be challenging a culture of oppression.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her introduction "Cartographies of Struggle" to her *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, points out that the political struggle of women in India is the fight against racist, colonialist states and for national independence. Kumari Jayawardena, in writing about feminist movements in Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, defines feminism as "embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system" (1986: 2). Mohanty goes on to assert that these movements arose in the context of (a) the formulation and consolidation of national identities which mobilized anti-imperialist movements during independence struggles, and (b) the remaking of pre-capitalist religious and feudal structures in attempts to 'modernize' third world societies (9).

Although the term 'feminism' was not born in South Asia, the concept stands for transformational process which started in South Asia in the 19th century and early 20th century, as an organised and articulated stand against women's subordination, during struggles against foreign rule and against the local despotism of feudal monarchs. There are two definitions of feminism which were accepted by women from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in two South Asian Workshops. As put by Bhasin and Said Khan:

> feminism is an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at the place of work and within the family and conscious action to change this situation [...]. Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation. (3)

We could argue, then, that feminism is not a foreign ideology, as feminist consciousness arose long ago.

According to Ruth Vanita, in her chapter "Thinking Beyond Gender in India," any women's movement must take, firstly, repairing the structures of heterosexual marriage and family, making them somewhat more equitable or secondly, that of rethinking genre and sexuality to liberate both women and men into developing different kinds of family or collective living. Women's movements in India have only taken the first direction, that of reforming marriage and the laws (73). Theories seem so abstract and though they are attractive, women need to understand day to day problems and they want to know what to do when facing sexual division at work, doing the housework or taking care about the family. Problems come from the past, so interpreting it is a way of finding solutions, but it requires a great deal of information about society, culture, economy and politics.

One problem is suggested by Maithereyi Krishnaraj, who considers that there is not enough material in India to teach women studies, although there is an abundance of books from the West. Every theory or analysis is stifled. However, there are theoretical discussions in learned journals, but the language used is not accessible to students or common people which are far from institutions of higher learning, without the kind of resources these privileged institutions enjoy. Women's organizations are trying to provide training programmes with easily comprehensible material, in order to give students a beneficial feedback. Krishnaraj complains that if there are readable sources, they are in English so they must be translated into their regional languages for a wider readership. She highlights, though, that Mandira Sen, of Stree Kolkata, produced a series of small books on "Concepts, in an easy, plain and readable style." Those books presented a broad theme of "theorizing" on a range of issues worked on by many women studies' scholars. While women's studies may be located in a particular faculty, the content and approach is inevitably interdisciplinary. Now there are selections edited by well-known scholars, coming out regularly but they are only for specialized readers. Kamla Bhasin, the founder of Jagori (a documentation, training, communication & resource centre on women-related issues) and of SANGAT (South Asian Network of Gender Activists & Trainers), trains social workers on issues related to patriarchy, gender, women's movement, feminism, sustainable development, etc., but since she finds that the literature on these issues is very academic and most of it cannot be understood by activists, Bhasin has written her booklets in a question and answer form, which have been translated into almost thirty languages. *Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia* is one of her series of pamphlets, where we can find for example "Understanding Gender" and "Exploring Masculinity." And more recently, Mary E. John, Director at the Center for Women's Development Studies in New

Delhi, has edited *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*, where she provides a map of the development of women's studies in India from the 1970s to the 1990s.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Does the question of Indianness refer to "The Hindu Way of Life," as scholar Meera Nanda argues in her book *Breaking The Spell of Dharma*? We could conclude that we cannot offer a monolithic definition of Indian identity, as India is a multicultural nation, with thousand of different languages, communities and traditions that cross borders in spite of the fact that nationalistic discourses emphasize a uniform Hindu culture. As Arundhati Subramaniam states:

> I believe it is important to periodically reassert one's resistance to this quest for the "identifiably Indian" – a quest that tells us more about the seeker than the sought. Underlying it, clearly, is another guise of colonialism, based on the premise that there is a core Indianness that can and should be identified, labelled, itemised and brandished like a visa (to what might seem like Destination Literary Paradise but is actually a literary ghetto). Not so very different, after all, from the fundamentalists back home who are forever devising Procrustean means to arrive at unitary cultural identities.

Activists' groups devoted to promote gender equality are stigmatized by fundamentalists as anti-Indian, as they interpret such a concept as a western phenomenon. This ideology seems to contradict the documents which prove that the women's movement in India has a long and rich history which dates during the pre-colonial period. Intellectuals have joined the cause by clearly stating that demanding equality is not un-Indian.

Reviews sent to author: 2 October 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 4 March 2015.

WORKS CITED

Agarwal, Bina. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.

Altekar, A. S. *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978. Print.

Ashutosh, Varshney. "Contested Meanings: Indian National Unity, Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Anxiety" *Daedalus* 122 (1993). Print.

Bhasin, Kamla and Nighat Said Khan. *Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986. Print.

Bhave, Sumitra. *Pan on Fire: Eight Dalit Women Tell Their Story.* New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1988. Print.

Chaudhuri, Maitrayee, ed. *Feminism in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004. Print.

Chitnis, Suma. "Feminism: Indian Ethos and Indian Convictions" in Rehana Ghadially, ed. *Women in Indian Society: A Reader*. New Delhi: Sage publications, 1988. Print.

Desai, Neera. *Woman in Modern India.* Bombay: Vora, 1977. Print.

Falk, Nancy E. "Shakti Ascending: Hindu Women, Politics, and Religious Leadership during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in Robert D. Baird, ed. *Religion in Modern India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001. Print.

Forbes, Geraldine. *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Print.

Gandhi, Nandita and Nandita Shah. *The Issue at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992. Print.

Jain, Jasbir. "The Feminist Perspective: The Indian Situation and its Literary Manifestations" in Niaz Zaman and Shawkat Hussain, eds. *Other Englishes: Essays on Commonwealth Writing*. Dhaka: the University Press Limited, 1991. 66-75. Print.

Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986. Print.

John, Mary E. *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008. Print.

Kaur, Manmohan. *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement, 1857-1947*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1968. Print.

Kishwar, Madhu. "Why I am not a Feminist" *Manushi* 61 (nov-dec 1990): 2-8. Print.

Krishnamurthy, J. ed. *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and the State.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989. Print.

Kumar, Radha. *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993. Print.

Lal, Malashri. *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2000. Print.

Lele, Jayant, ed. *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981. Print.

Mill, James. *The History of British India*. New York: Chelsea House, 1968. Print.

Miller, Barbara D. *The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Lourdes Torres and Ann Russo, eds. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991. 1-47. Print.

Narayanan, Vasudha. "Brimming with *bhakti*, Embodiments of *shakti*: Devotees, Deities, Performers, Reformers, and other Women of Power in the Hindu Tradition." in Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, eds. *Feminism and World Religions*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999. 25-77. Print.

Navarro Tejero, Antonia. *Talks on Feminism: Indian Women Activists Speak for Themselves*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2009. Print.

O'Hanlon, Rosalind. *A Comparison Between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India.* Madras: Oxford University Press, 1994. Print.

Omvedt, Gail. *We Will Smash This Prison: Indian Women in Struggle.* London: Zed Press, 1980. Print.

Pearson, Gail O. *Women in Public Life in Bombay City with Special Reference to the Civil Disobedience Movement*. Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1979. Print.

Rao, Anupama, ed. *Gender and Caste*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003. Print.

Sahagala, Lakshmi. *A Revolutionary Life: Memoirs of a Political Activist*. New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1997. Print.

Sahgal, Manmohini Zutshi. *An Indian Freedom Fighter Recalls Her Life*. Geraldine Forbes, Ed. & Intr. Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1994. Print.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* New York: Pantheon, 1978. Print.

Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History.* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989. Print.

Sanghatana, Stree Shakti. *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle*. London: Zed, 1989. Print.

Subramanina, Arundhathi. "The question of Indianness" *The Hindu* (3/23/03) http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mag/2003/03/23/stories/2003032300690100.htm. Web.

Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita, eds. *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Early Twentieth Century*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. Print.

Tharu, Susie and Tejaswini Niranjana. "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender" in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds. *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Thomas, P. *Indian Women through the Ages: A Historical Survey of the Position of Women and the Institutions of Marriage and Family in India from Remote Antiquity to the Present Day*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964. Print.

Toward Equality, Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India. New Delhi: GOI Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1974. Print.

Vanita, Ruth and Madhu Kishwar, eds. In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from Manushi. London: Zed Books, 1984. Print.

—— *Gandhi's Tiger and Sita's Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture.* New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006. Print.

Vohra, Paromita, dir. *UnLimited Girls*. Sakshi productions, 2002. Wadley, Susan S. *Struggling with Destiny in Karimpur, 1925-1984*. California: University of California Press, 1994. Print.

MEDITATIONS ON GENRE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *JOSEPH ANTON*

Celia Wallhead
University of Granada

Abstract

In Salman Rushdie's book *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), the narrator alternates between first-person and third-person and leaps from the present back to his childhood. He combines the sub-genres of life writing with a novelised account, stressing the concept of story. In the former, we study the implications of "memoir," the possibility of defining the work as an example of J M Coetzee's "*autre*-biography" or autobiography "against itself" à la Barthes. Through the contribution of the latter aspect, read as a literary novel and also a detective story, Rushdie has created a work in which all these apparently defining factors are present and which can therefore only be described as generically "hybrid."

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* genre, life writing, novel.

Resumen

En la obra de Salman Rushdie *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), el narrador usa primera persona y luego tercera persona y salta desde el presente a su niñez. Une varios sub-géneros de autobiografía con una versión novelizada, con el énfasis sobre el concepto de contar historias. En el aspecto de autobiografía, estudiamos las implicaciones de "memoria", la posibilidad de definir la obra como un ejemplo de "*autre*-biografía" inventada por J M Coetzee, o incluso de autobiografía "contra sí misma" de Roland Barthes. Como también se puede leer como una novela literaria o como una novela policíaca, el conjunto pide que lo llamemos híbrido, ya que todos estos factores de definición están presentes.

Palabras clave: Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* género, autobiografía, novela

1. AT FIRST GLANCE

If we begin *Joseph Anton* by scanning the title pages or turning to the end to scrutinise the "Acknowledgements" (*Joseph Anton* 635-6), we see that Salman Rushdie calls his book a memoir: "I would like to thank all those whose help and advice shaped this memoir: [...]" (635). We find "A Memoir" also on the front cover,

though in very small letters, while "Joseph Anton" and "Salman Rushdie," in that order, one at the top and the other at the bottom, both come in gold lettering of the same size. This is deliberately ambiguous, for since the title of a book may come at either bottom or top, if we were not more familiar with the name of Salman Rushdie, we might wonder who was the author and which name formed the title. In her article "Playing Hide and Seek with Names and Selves in Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton, A Memoir*," Geetha Ganapathy-Doré reminds us of Rushdie's desire to write a novel with the name of the protagonist as eponymous title, as in *David Copperfield* or *Tom Jones* etc. (12, note 2, which references Seth Lehrer's interview of Rushdie at the University of California at San Diego on 22 September, 2012). In considering names to adopt when he went into hiding, he apparently rejected "Conrad Chekhov" (Ganapathy-Doré 14), among others, thus by choosing these authors' less obvious Christian names, there is further ambiguity. On the inside title page, there is a frame with the two names, again in that order, though with Salman Rushdie in slightly smaller letters, as the name contains two letters more and has to fit into the same space. Because of the frame, the effect on the inside page is to suggest that Joseph Anton and Salman Rushdie are at one and the same time both title and author. Ganapathy-Doré is quite right when she points out in her article that to call it just a memoir is not as straightforward as it might appear. Firstly, the book itself does not give us much help regarding the punctuation after the main title *Joseph Anton*. Should it be a comma, as Ganapathy-Doré suggests, a colon (as it appears in her bibliography), a full stop or even a dash? Whatever we opt for, the idea is of apposition, thus suggesting that the work *Joseph Anton* is endowed with truth as is a memoir, but it is the assertion of the author and the author's stance is what is ambiguous:

> Besides, the book's subtitle "A Memoir" reinforces the presupposition of truthfulness. The memoir is a sub-genre of self-writing much like the letters, diary and notebook entries woven into the text of *Joseph Anton.* What is really fictional about the narrative is the posture of utterance, not its diegetic substance or its time frame. (Ganapathy-Doré 13)

With this problematics in mind, especially concerning the "posture of utterance," we can delve a little further into the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Rushdie's approach. But first let us examine a relevant aspect of the incident that changed Rushdie's life.

2. RUSHDIE AND THE NOVEL

Commenting upon "the Rushdie case" in *The Location of Culture,* Homi Bhabha attributes the blasphemy perceived in *The Satanic Verses* less to secular social causes involving diasporic identity, otherwise interpreted as Rushdie's apostasy from Islam and secularization, and more to the profane spaces to which the sacred concepts of the faith have been translated in the novel (Bhabha 322). Just as Islam prohibits the visual depiction of the human form in art, it frowns upon the verbal

depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in any space that is not sacralized, which would mean the genre of the novel –and, of course, the comic or satirical magazine, as we have seen recently with tragic outcomes– regardless of how the Prophet were portrayed therein. Bhabha strengthens his argument by reference to the ignominious "accoutrements" of the description of Muhammad and his wives:

> The fundamentalist charge has not focused on the misinterpretation of the Koran, as much as on the offence of the "misnaming" of Islam: Mohamed referred to as Mahound; the prostitutes named after the wives of the Prophet. It is the *formal* complaint of the fundamentalists that the transposition of these sacred names into profane spaces –brothels or magical realist novels–is not simply sacrilegious, but destructive of the very cement of community. (Bhabha 322)

Rushdie has tried on many occasions to explain himself, even justify himself, up to the point where he felt he had crossed a line as regards his principles, and regretted it (*JA* 275-276). He has written about the novel and the fatwa in "In Good Faith", "Is Nothing Sacred?" and "One Thousand Days in a Balloon" (*Imaginary Homelands* 393-414; 415-429; 430-439), in "February 1999: Ten Years of the Fatwa" (*Step Across This Line* 2002: 265-267); and a decade after this piece, in *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012), he sets out in full detail the effects upon his life of the fatwa from its proclamation in February 1989 to almost the time of writing (a reference to an event in 2011, p. 630). Thus, as a writer, he lays claim to the space of the novel to set out his ideas without respecting the prohibitions of his former faith. Equally, in *Joseph Anton,* he claims the right to incorporate a mixture of genres, to include what looks novelistic with "memoir," when originally was strictly factual. He makes of this work what Henry James called the novel: "a loose, baggy monster."

3. *JOSEPH ANTON* AND THE GENRES OF LIFE WRITING AND OF DRAMA AND THE NOVEL

In this latest work, Rushdie lays claim to certain textual spaces and communities of readers as the rights of a writer, especially a polyfacetic writer –novelist and critic– like himself: memoirs, novels, essays, and within these, he asserts his dignity and undoubted principles. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* can be read as any of the following genres, and we see which readerships would be involved and what their interest would be:

1. Life writing, memoir/diary: to record intimate details and thoughts in the first person, apparently for himself but which others may contemplate, looking over his shoulder.
2. Non-fictional account: the details are made public, which may affect the choice of material, thus a readerhip interested in the details of the effects of the fatwa are told what appears to be the truth, but it is a truth edited by the writer.

3. A re-enacting, sometimes reading almost like a play in which Rushdie is yet again an actor: a going back years later and an attempt to explain.
4. Literary novel (3rd-person protagonist) and intertextual references (models): in the name of literature.
5. Detective story: of general interest, on how the victim managed to evade the pursuers.

The book can be read as any of these genres or sub-genres, and the effect on the first, on the life writing, is to make it an "enhanced" form of life writing. To read *Joseph Anton* as a detective story, with the police trying, if not to catch a criminal at least to prevent a crime, does not detract from its nature as autobiography, since it is true that Rushdie was the potential victim of a crime (For the offended Muslims, of course, he was the perpetrator of the initial crime). Equally, since Rushdie is a novelist and critic, that he should incorporate analysis of his own work and criticism of that of others into the account is a justified part of his life story. Overall, *Joseph Anton* manages to combine all of the genres and sub-genres into what Ganapathy-Doré calls a postmodern fuzzy hybrid, as we shall see.

Yet the combination of the genres changes the nature of its autobiographical aspect. Rushdie has written his own biography, and it is the version he wishes to be known, thus it is only one version, or a version actually alternative to the full truth. The first three of these sub-genres all fall under the loose umbrella of autobiography. But when autobiography combines with what is ostensibly a novel, it can be more or less "true", based on facts, according to the wishes and objectives of the author. *Joseph Anton* is undoubtedly based upon fact, upon what really happened to Rushdie in those two decades straddling the millennium, the beginning of the twenty-first century. Like most writers, Rushdie will have kept at least one diary or notebook at a time, in which he recorded not only what happened to him, but what he thought and felt about it all. Doubtless, also, his thoughts will have included his immediate reactions and his later ponderings, which, over a twenty-year period, may or may not coincide. These jottings will have formed the nucleus of this "Memoir," as he calls it, but at the time, their function will have been an aide-mémoire. As he "wrote up" these jottings, as a professional and successful writer with a known following, he would have fleshed them out for his imagined readership. Some writers insist that they just write for themselves, with no audience in mind, but it is difficult to conceive of Rushdie writing in such a vacuum. Furthermore, he knew that he had a bifurcated readership: those who sympathise with him and enjoy reading his works with a more or less critical stance in terms of the literary merit rather than the ideologial concerns, and his opponents, who are unlikely to be persuaded anyway. So in *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* Rushdie tries to at once reveal and conceal himself, to create the paradox of a somewhat fictitious autobiography.

Of course, Rushdie is not the first to conceal himself in his autobiography and will not be the last, as autobiographies are notoriously "unreliable" in terms of the truth.To offer a parallel: Nabokov, both a biographer and autobiographer, does not tell the truth, or not the whole truth; as I have written elsewhere: "When Nabokov wrote his autobiography *Speak, Memory,* he put into it what he wanted to be known

about himself, and he comes over as a chess-playing butterfly enthusiast with little of the inner motivation an audience likes to learn about a writer" (Wallhead 455).

The bias of the partial truth or the imaginative act of elaboration upon the truth brings us back to Rushdie's idea of using the concept of story to overcome the problem of the paradox presented by the generic separation or differentiation through cataloguing of non-fiction and fiction.

4. ON THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL: SUBGENRES IN *JOSEPH ANTON*

When the book came out, it was made known to those that did not already know, that "Joseph Anton" was the code name Rushdie used when in hiding after the pronouncement of the *fatwa*, based upon writers he admired, Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov, and thus that the book was an autobiographical account of his life at least during the period after the condemnation of his book *The Satanic Verses* in February 1989, or "life after the *fatwa*." As Ganapathy-Doré sums up, and much more succintly than Rushdie's own explanation of this semi-fictionalizing of his self: "the name Joseph Anton perfectly expresses the feelings of alienation and melancholy that emanate from Chekhov's writing and connects them with the stoic motto of the sailor James Wait in Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus* [...]: 'I must live until I die' (165)." (15; Ganapathy-Doré's reference here is directly to *Joseph Anton*). Yet when we begin to read, we see that the text is not a first-person narration and the protagonist is referred to as "he". The Prologue has the subtitle "The First Blackbird" and in referencing Hitchcock's film *The Birds,* it gives an account of the day on which Rushdie heard of the *fatwa* as if he were suffering the same life-threatening terror as the characters of the film. The filmic reference functions as a trope to place the story within the context of gothic horror. This strategy may be interpreted as a distancing technique, while at the same time transmitting to the reader the real fear Rushdie felt.

The second paragraph tells us that it was Valentine's Day (*JA* 3) but it does not say of which year. However, as the narration goes on to quote the text of Ayatollah Khomeini's condemnation of "'the author of the 'Satanic Verses' book'" (5; in quote marks to express disagreement with Khomeini's erroneous naming of the book, without the article) the person in question is obviously identified as Rushdie. Other factual references that confirm the autobiographical nature of the account are mentions of his family members and their places of residence in Karachi, London and California. Intimate information concerning his son Zafar (his only son at the time) such as the address where he lived with his mother Clarissa, Rushdie's first wife, is also included (7). So there is no doubt that at least the Prologue contains autobiographical material, although Rushdie tries to make the account mysterious by making it appear the story of an anonymous "he". Chapter I then begins: "When he was a small boy [...]" (19), thus going back in time to start at the beginning of his life, again with an anonymous narrator. This may be an aspect of the ambiguity of what Ganapathy-Doré called his "posture of utterance," as we saw (13).

But, we may ask ourselves, is a memoir, even if it is a long and complete one, the same as an autobiography? Geetha Ganapathy-Doré expresses her misgivings:

> *Joseph Anton* is neither an autobiographical novel, where the distance between the author and the narrator is sufficiently wide for the reader to clearly distinguish between the two, nor a fictitious autobiography where the real is transfigured by the narrator. Moreover, it cannot be considered autofictional because Rushdie does not choose to give preference in this account "to the adventure of a language rather than to the language of adventure," as Serge Doubrovsky puts it (1997, dustjacket). (13)

Rushdie certainly uses the language of adventure, in so far as *Joseph Anton* is a detective story too. Ganapathy-Doré concludes, more generally, that "[h]is memoir constitutes a fuzzy, hybrid and postmodern variety of writing that combines elements of autobiography, autofiction, detective fiction and metafiction and blurs the borderline between fact and fiction" (13). In her conclusion that the book is not autofictional because it does not prioritise Doubrovsky's "adventure of a language," we assume she means that Rushdie does not create a narrator whose words are self-referential and differ in some way from what we know of Rushdie, and is producing something absolutely new (hence "adventure"). But as we explore what she called the "posture of utterance," in the book, we can round out a little more the implications of writing "a memoir" and then explore all the possible genres and sub-genres that this umbrella term may encompass.

4.1. On the memoir

Definitions of "memoir" point up differences within the genre (or rather, sub-genre of life writing):

> By the nineteenth century there was a definite hierarchy of values in relation to self-representation with memoirs occupying a lower order since they involved a lesser degree of "seriousness" than autobiography. As Laura Marcus puts it: "The autobiography/memoirs distinction –ostensibly formal and generic –is bound up with a typological distinction between those human beings who are capable of self-reflection and those who are not" (21). (Anderson 8)

That Rushdie might not be "capable of self-reflection" is risible, nor can we suspect him of lack of seriousness in this work, so we cannot apply this distinction too pedantically. Certainly, he might want to aspire to the generic category of autobiography, as it has traditionally been associated not only with middle-class (western) and masculine modes of subjectivity, but also with a canon of works celebrating the extraordinary lives of "great men". In the nineteenth century it was felt that "Autobiography should rather belong to people of 'lofty reputation' or people who have something of 'historical importance' to say" (Anderson 8). Time will no doubt confirm that the Rushdie case will have been of historical importance, but we hope that the quality of his work and its multiple messages will in the long run

prove to attract readers rather than the circumstances of its composition. But in any case, as Anderson continues, attitudes began to change in the latter part of the 20th century, as the subject of an autobiography no longer had to be a great man or a genius, as long as noble values continued to be in play: "an important group of modern critics writing in the 1960s and 1970s deduced abstract critical principles for autobiography based on ideals of autonomy, self-realization, authenticity and transcendence which reflected their own cultural values" (2001: 4).

Perhaps "authenticity" is the word to be applied in the context of Rushdie's book: he wants his readers to accept the truth value of this account, but the obverse of this is his equal need to distance himself from the subject of his travails.

4.2. Auto/biography as story

> "All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another". (Hélène Cixous & Mireille Calle-Gruber 177)

Rushdie overcomes the paradox presented by the generic cataloguing of the two modes, autobiography and memoir alongside fiction, by concentrating on the idea of story. Storytelling covers all genres except perhaps lyric poetry; even epics have narratives. He begins the first chapter of this work with a long explanation of how not only his childhood and boyhood, but indeed, his whole life, has been marked by the stories his father told him and his attitudes towards them:

> When he was a small boy his father at bedtime told him the great wonder tales of the East, told them and retold them and remade them and reinvented them in his own way – the stories of Scheherazade from the *Thousand and One Nights,* stories told against death to prove the ability of stories to civilise and overcome even the most murderous of tyrants; and the animal fables of the *Panchatantra*; and the marvels that poured like a waterfall from the *Kathasaritsa gara,* the "Ocean of the Streams of Story," the immense story-lake created in Kashmir where his ancestors been born; and the tales of mighty heroes collected in the *Hamzanama* and the *Adventures of Hatim Tai* [...]. To grow up steeped in these tellings was to learn two unforgettable lessons: first, that stories were not true (there were no real "genies" in bottles or flying carpets or wonderful lamps), but by being untrue they could make him feel and know truths that the truth could not tell him; and second, that they all belonged to him, just as they belonged to his father, Anis, and to everyone else, they were all his, as they were his father's, bright stories and dark stories, sacred stories and profane, his to alter and renew and discard and pick up again as and when he pleased, his to laugh at and rejoice in and live in and with and by, to give the stories life by loving them and to be given life by them in return. Man was the storytelling animal, the only creature on earth that told itself stories to understand what kind of creature it was. The story was his birthright, and nobody could take it away. (*JA* 19)

So if we live in stories, we must ask questions like: What is the relevance of the truth factor? Who has the right to tell stories? Who has power over them? Rushdie

asks all this in relation to his own story about half-way through *Joseph Anton*. Here he lays claim to a right to tell a story from his point of view and he does so with defiance. Later in the book, he recalls his address to the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, where he received the Kurt Tucholsky Prize, awarded to writers who resisted persecution:

> At the heart of the dispute over *The Satanic Verses,* he said, behind all the accusations and abuse, was a question of profound importance: *Who shall have control over the story?* Who has, who should have, the power not only to tell the stories with which, and within which, we all lived, but also to say in what manner those stories may be told? For everyone lived by and inside stories, the so-called grand narratives. The nation was a story, and the family was another, and religion was a third. As a creative artist he knew that the only answer to the question was: *Everyone and anyone has, or should have that power.* We should all be free to take the grand narratives to task, to argue with them, satirise them, and insist that they change to reflect the changing times. We should speak of them reverently, irreverently, passionately, caustically, or however we chose. That was our right as members of an open society. In fact, one could say that our ability to retell and remake the story of our culture was the best proof that our societies were indeed free. (360)

Because of the different "communities" he belongs to: family, nation, culture, ideology, and because of his eventful life, Rushdie sees different selves in these contexts and stages. He writes of these selves when recording the "solidarity and love" shown to him by twelve hundred people at his surprise entrance at the annual benefit event for Canadian PEN in Toronto. But the *fatwa* has turned his life into a before and an after, thus he has at least an old self and a new self, though this new self is a Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde type of doppelgänger which is out of his control:

> This business of being turned into an icon was very odd, he thought. He didn't feel iconic. He felt... *actual.* But right now it might just be the best weapon he had. The symbolic icon-Salman his supporters had constructed, an idealised Salman of Liberty who stood flawlessly and unwaveringly for the highest values, counteracted and might just in the end defeat the demon version of himself constructed by his adversaries. (365, suspense marks and emphasis in the original)

This persona invented for him by his supporters is far less dangerous, but also falsifies what he might consider his essential self, his sense of the basic and less transitory with regard to his character, attitudes and feelings. While taking care not to fall into the fallacy of the essentialist or Romantic notion of selfhood, our self-realisation tends to see itself building upon a solid and stable basis: "We are captivated by an uncanny sense that each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form, and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self," writes Weintraub (xiii). The protagonist-narrator-Rushdie experiences this self in the here-and-now and finds it strange to have a new persona "extracted" and made public and famous as if he were the bearer of a banner for others to acclaim.

As regards Rushdie's use of the third person to refer to himself, Chapter One focusses immediately on a "small boy" and his story is told in the third person, but

it then proceeds to refer to his father as Anis and his mother as Negin Rushdie (*JA* 19), thus after an oblique beginning, the protagonist and author are identified and equated through the details to do with his family story. There is a caveat, however, as Rushdie reveals only what he wants to reveal, and in the naming of his sisters there is a "subtle mixing of real, fictive and untold names" as Ganapathy-Doré explains (19). Similarly, in the "Prologue: The First Blackbird" (*JA* 3-16), the narrator at first focusses on an anonymous third person protagonist and situates the events on "Valentine's Day" with no year, though before long, or already, we know that it is 1989 and that the anonymous hero becomes identified as Rushdie the author himself, as his wife, almost immediately named as Marianne Wiggins, asks him: "'How does it feel [...] to know that you have just been sentenced to death by the Ayatollah Khomeini?'" (3). Also, the quote from the text of the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* naming him indirectly as "the author of the 'Satanic Verses' book" (5), confirms his identity, but now, the narrator affirms, that identity has become confused. In this story, the narrator does not recognise himself, or at least not his "old self": "He was a new self now. He was the person in the eye of the storm, no longer the *Salman* his friends knew but the *Rushdie* who was the author of *Satanic Verses,* a title subtly distorted by the omission of the initial *The*" (5).

What worries Rushdie concerning this demon self is that if you repeat something often enough, it becomes true: "(Repeated denials could establish a new truth that erased the old one.)" (436). Thus, he has little control over this particular self, however much he denies its existence.

From St. Valentine's Day 1989, Rushdie found himself caught up in a new story. He speaks of his "old self" (5), a state of being which no longer holds sway in his life: "But he also knew that his old self's habits were of no use any more. He was a new self now" (5). What he most protests about is that his new self, himself as protagonist of a new story, has not been chosen or controlled by himself, his new selves have been grotesquely invented by others:

> *The Satanic Verses* was a novel. *Satanic Verses* were verses that were satanic, and he was their satanic author, "Satan Rushdy", the horned creature on the placards carried by demonstrators down the streets of a faraway city, the hanged man with protruding red tongue in the crude cartoons they bore. *Hang Satan Rushdy.* How easy it was to erase a man's past and to construct a new version of him, an overwhelming version, against which it seemed impossible to fight. (5)

He compares himself to King Charles I, who, however much he declared that he did not recognise the authority or legitimacy of those who dethroned him, was killed by them, and Rushdie further protests that he is no king, merely "the author of a book" (5). We must not forget, however, that the Ayatollah Khomeini was not unaware of the adage "The pen is mightier than the sword" (even if he may not have known it had been coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton).

Perhaps when Philippe Lejeune penned his definition of autobiography and wrote of the development of the personality, he was thinking of the possibility of a succession of selves: "A retrospective prose narrative produced by

a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (193). Such a definition reads like the stages of a life-story in chronological order. But Linda Anderson has pointed out the problems with this definition, noting that even its author was not satisfied with it:

> However, Lejeune himself remained dissatisfied with this since it did not seem to provide a sufficient boundary between autobiography and the adjacent genres of biography and fiction. A certain "latitude" in classifying particular cases might be admitted but one condition for autobiography was absolute: there must be "identity between the *author,* the *narrator,* and the *protagonist*" (Lejeune 1982: 193). However, the difficulty is how to apply this condition since the "identity" Lejeune speaks of can never really be established except as a matter of *intention* on the part of the author. (2)

When Rushdie asserts that the nation is one story, the family another and religion yet another, his point is that every linear event or series of events that develop in time can be seen as a story, with its beginning, middle and future end. Yet on separating these stories he overlooks the complicating problem of the overlap of these story domains: they do not exist in isolation, for while the idea of nation may be imaginary, as Benedict Anderson asserts (2006), families exist more or less within their nation(s). That is one problem, and another is the question of truth. To return to that initial question we had posed in considering stories: some "stories" demand to be considered and respected as truth, while others do not. Linda Anderson references Candace Lang in a wide concept of authoriality: "Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it" (Lang 6), but adds a caveat concerning what is strictly life-writing done by one and the same person:

> However, autobiography has also been recognized since the late eighteenth century as a distinct literary genre and, as such, an important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction. (Anderson 1-2)

In the Romantic or transcendental view of art we mentioned before, it could be envisaged that these different selves and stories are in search of an author, an autobiographer, to bring them together: "...autobiography [...] is turned to in the first place because it offers an unmediated and yet stabilizing wholeness for the self. [...] it offers the possibility of alleviating the dangers and anxieties of fragmentation" (Anderson 5). What makes Rushdie's account interesting is this difficulty in finding wholeness, in reconciling two opposing views of himself. The only path through the problem is for Rushdie to show us that neither one is true. His experiences also seem to confirm the idea that identity, far from being essential, is a social construct. The "posture of utterance" is Rushdie in his different contexts, fulfilling his various literary ambitions and offering himself to his different readerships.

4.3. Prosopopoeia

That autobiography is "plagued" by such questions that are difficult to answer to everyone's satisfaction was argued by Paul de Man in his essay "Autobiography as De-Facement" (1979). As Linda Anderson comments:

> As his own alternative point of departure, de Man proposes that autobiography is not a genre at all but "a figure of reading or understanding" that is in operation not only within autobiography but also across a range of texts. He identifies biography with a linguistic dilemma which is liable to be repeated every time an author makes himself the subject of is own understanding. The author reads himself in the text, but what he is seeing in this self-reflexive or specular moment is a figure or a face called into being by the substitutive trope of prosopopoeia, literally, the giving of a face, or personification. The interest of autobiography, according to de Man, is that it reveals something which is in fact much more generally the case: that all knowledge, including self-knowledge, depends on figurative knowledge or tropes. Autobiographies thus produce fictions or figures in place of the self-knowledge they seek. What the author of an autobiography does is to try to endow his inscription within the text with all the attributes of a face in order to mask or conceal his own fictionalization or displacement by writing. Paradoxically, therefore, the giving of a face, prosopopoeia, also names the disfigurement or defacement of the autobiographical subject through tropes. In the end there is only writing. (12-13)

This harks back to the epigraph at the beginning of this section: Cixous's "one story in place of another." Relating the idea of prosopopeia to Rushdie's "posture of utterance," one might say that Rushdie is saying to the reader "Now you see me, now you don't." But de Man's view cannot be refuted because a life has been converted into text and in doing so, a writer must inevitably have created a story for the reader, with him or herself as a persona, and not just given a list of dates and events.

4.4. *Autre*-biography

The idea that one's life-story is converted into a semi-fictional personification also calls up the concept of "*autre*-biography". This is a term coined by South African writer J.M.Coetzee about himself. Coetzee is the author of a trilogy of fictional memoirs: *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997), *Youth* (2002) and *Summertime* (2009), and by the time of this third installment, the protagonist John Coetzee is dead, so we see that fortunately, these are not entirely based on fact. Both Rushdie and Coetzee underwent linguistic and territorial dislocation, a sense of hovering between languages and cultures. *Autre*-biography is a postmodern combination that suggests that there is never a single version, and as Coetzee himself said: "all autobiography is *autre*-biography", meaning that there is no one truth. As María J. López comments as regards the French *"autre"*:

> This adjective has become generalized among Coetzee's critics in order to describe the inextricability between truth and fiction, personal engagement and detachment that we find in all the works in which he deals with his own self. The term "*autre*-biography" was actually coined by Coetzee himself in the "Retrospect" of *Doubling the Point* (1992a: 394), in which he indulges in a typically Coetzeean autrebiographical exercise. In a 2002 interview with David Attwell, he similarly asserts that "All autobiography is *autre*-biography". (216)

Alternatives in life are preferably chosen by the subject, but these different "others" or "other selves" are dangerous and frightening when imposed upon one. As Rushdie queries and laments:

> How to tell the stories of such a world, a world in which character was no longer always destiny, in which your fate could be determined not by your own choices but by those of strangers, in which economics could be destiny, or a bomb? (*JA* 69)

4.5. Autobiography "against itself"

There is a similarity, too, with Roland Barthes' autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (by Roland Barthes, one might add –as long as he wrote it), "the most famous attempt", says Linda Anderson, "to write an autobiography 'against itself'" (70). Rushdie's use of the third person is one of the most salient similarities:

> While purporting to be an autobiography, it deconstructs from within the major assumptions underlying the genre. The text's most salient break with tradition is achieved through discarding the first-person singular and substituting instead multiple-subject positionings: "he", "R.B.," "you" and "I" exchange places almost arbitrarily in an attempt to reinforce the effect of distance between the writer and the written text: "I had no other solution than to rewrite myself –at a distance, a great distance– here and now [...]. Far from reaching the core of the matter, I remain on the surface" (142) (Anderson 2001: 70; suspense marks in the text)

5. *JOSEPH ANTON* AS NOVEL

5.1. The literary novel

Turning now from the forms of autobiography, I would like to comment briefly on the other two sub-genres of the novel in *Joseph Anton.* Regardless of the truth content, the work undeniably reads like a novel. The 3rd-person protagonist contributes to this, as do the intertextual references. The opening comparison to Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds* also points to other genres of popular culture. But then references to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (346), Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* (319), Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (431), G.K.Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (359), and Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller...* (351) remind us of political suppression of cultural artifacts, as does, of course, the refer-

ence to the condemned books: *Lady Chatterley's Lover, Ulysses, Lolita* (115). Another aspect that makes it read like a postmodern self-conscious novel is the explanation he gives of the genesis of *Midnight's Children.* The decisions he took regarding narrative strategy sound like self-conscious, internal literary criticism:

> History rushed into his pages, immense and intimate, creative and deconstructive, and he understood that this dimension, too, had been lacking from his work. He was a historian by training and the great point of history, which was to understand how individual lives, communities, nations and social classes were shaped by great forces, yet retained, at times, the ability to change the direction of those forces, must also be the point of his fiction. He began to feel very excited. He had found an intersection between the private and the public and would build his book on that crossroads. The political and the personal could no longer be kept apart. This was no longer the age of Jane Austen, who could write her entire oeuvre during the Napoleonic Wars without mentioning them, and for whom the major role of the British Army was to wear dress uniforms and look cute at parties. Nor would he write his book in cool Forsterian English. India was not cool. It was *hot*. It was hot and overcrowded and vulgar and loud and it needed a language to match that and he would try to find that language. (55-56, emphasis in the text)

5.2. The detective story

Finally, *Joseph Anton* is definitely a detective story with a beginning, middle and possible end: how the victim managed to evade the pursuers. It is successful in 3 ways: 1) so far he has eluded his pursuers (and we hope he continues to do so); 2) the "plot" is an engaging story of the stages of the "adventure" with suspense, etc.; and 3) no doubt it is/will continue to be a best-seller. It is not a "whodunnit," as nothing, that is, no crime, has been committed, but crime novels can be enjoyed even if we know from the beginning who the criminal is: the how or why becomes the focus, rather than the who. Similarly, novels that presume to be many-coated, for example –to cite Nabokov again– *Lolita*, where Humbert Humbert, the narrator of the main part of the novel, tells us on his first page that he is a murderer: such novels engage the reader in the pursuit of the details as well as the motivations.

But in Rushdie's latest work, the attempted explanations and overtures of appeasement come at a price: one cannot preach successfully to those whose ears are stopped, and reiterated attempts can aggravate. Also, what I wonder is if, just as the novel that contained Muhammad provoked the ire of Ayatollah Khomeini and much of the Muslim world, this novel has upset the police, for a new field of possible grievance opens up: the security services. In his Acknowledgements he thanks the members of his protection teams and says that he has changed their names (635-636) but much is revealed. The revelation of secrets, one of the trump cards of both the detective story and the memoir, in this case, may offend both sides. One hopes not.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In *Joseph Anton,* Rushdie has combined different genres –life writing and the novel– and different sub-genres, like the literary novel and the detective story, to produce a multi-faceted work that can be read exclusively as any of these or as a mixed-bag. When Geetha Ganapathy-Doré called it "a fuzzy, hybrid and post-modern variety of writing" (13), it was because she maintains that the work asks to be read in its full combination and that the lines between the genres or sub-genres are not clear. She places it within the temporal frame of the postmodern and this can be justified also in terms of content, as today we no longer have to distinguish categorically between genres as in the classical tradition –the memoir no longer has its strict limitations– and can mix the formal and serious with the popular and comic. Postmodernism has also taught us that there is no one truth, there are only points of view, and Ganapathy-Doré quite rightly shows that Rushdie has a "posture of utterance" which is varied, but which is the perspective, or multiple perspective, he wishes his readers to share with him.

Rushdie was an actor at Cambridge and there is an element of posturing about his stance, but this is more understandable when we recognize that he is a sort of *doppelgänger* or has more than one self. There is the Salman Rushdie he feels himself to be and has always been, however much in development as he grew to maturity, and as a socially-constructed rather than an essential self, and there are the selves he has been forced to become: "Satan Rushdy," "Salman of Liberty" and the "Joseph Anton" or even worse, the "Joe" or the "Arctic tern" (*JA* 149) of the period of his enforced hiding. The posturing may run in the family, as his father, Anis Ahmed, adopted the surname Rushdie in honour of Ibn Rushd or Averroes.

It is all a form of prosopopoeia, as Salman Rushdie creates selves that are personifications of himself, faces that try to mask, as de Man suggested, the fictionalization that forms a layer superimposed over the self-knowledge. There are similarities to Coetzee's *autre*-biography, but Rushdie shows less of a free hand, it would have been preposterous to have included the death of "Rushdie" or "Joseph Anton" in this work, as Coetzee did in his. There are also similarities to Barthes's autobiography "against itself," especially in the different stances, first and third person, and the distancing between the author, narrator and the surface of the text.

The questions we have to ask ourselves are whether this mixing is successful, and what we mean by successful. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir,* is not a great novel like *Midnight's Children,* which also has a large component of autobiography, while not ostensibly an autobiography. By comparison, *Joseph Anton* is inferior and will not be remembered as long as the prize-winning novel. But Rushdie did not intend to write such a work. We assume he considered, quite rightly, that there would be "out there" a readership interested in what happened to him and in what it is like when someone has to go into hiding. So he has given us a detective story where the object is also the subject, the victim gets to write the story. And story is the appropriate word: Rushdie is able to combine strict factual description, autobiographical detail and tell the story of a victim all as if they were stories. This is done fairly smoothly, there are just one or two points of transition that seem to jar, like the beginning,

referring to the Hichcock and then going back to his boyhood, but we could say that even there, Rushdie makes the juxtaposition conspicuous in order, precisely, to draw attention to the playful nature of the varied narrative stance. So we can say that if we accept that the work is of a hybrid nature, it is successful, for the postmodern outlook invites variety and even contradiction.

Reviews sent to author: 14 January 2015. Revised paper accepted for publication: 30 March 2015.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* 1983. London & New York: Verso, 2006. Print.

Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography.* London & New York, Routledge, 2001. (The New Critical Idiom Series). Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes.* Trans. Richard Howard. London: Macmillan, [1975] 1977. Print.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, [1994]2004. (Routledge Classics). Print.

Cixous, Helene & Mireille Calle-Gruber. *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing.* London & New York, Routledge, 1997. Print.

Coetzee, J.M. *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life.* London: Vintage, 1997. Print.

—— *Youth.* London: Vintage, 2002. Print.

—— *Summertime.* London: Harvill Secker, 2009. Print.

Coetzee, J.M. and David Attwell. "All Autobiography is *Autre*-biography: J.M.Coetzee Interviewed by David Attwell". Judith Lütge Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengani H. Ngwenya and Thoma Olver eds. *Selves in Question: Interviews on South African Auto/biography.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. Print.

De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-Facement." *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 919-930. Print.

Ganapathy-Doré, Geetha. "Playing Hide and Seek with Names and Selves in Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton, A Memoir.*" *Atlantis* 35.2 (2013): 11–25. Print.

Lang, Candace. "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism." *Diacritics 1*2 (1982): 2-16. Print.

Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Contract", in Tzvetan Todorov, ed. *French Literary Theory Today.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. Print.

López, María J. "J.M.Coetzee's *Summertime:* Mistranslation, Linguistic Unhousedness, and the Extraterritorial Literary Community." A*tlantis* 35.1 (June 2013): 51-67. Print.

Rushdie, Salman. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir.* London, Jonathan Cape, 2012. Print.

Wallhead, Celia. "Vladimir Nabokov and (auto)biography: The Meaning of 'Real' in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*". *Estudios en honor de Rafael Fente Gómez*. Eds. Miguel A. Martínez-Cabeza, Neil McLaren & Luis Quereda Rodríguez-Navarro. Granada: University of Granada Press, 2007. 453-462. Print.

Weintraub, Karl. *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography.* Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Print.

MISCELLANY

THE DISCURSIVE USE OF HUMOUR IN THE DESCRIPTION OF BRITISH PREMIERSHIP PERCEPTION: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SUE TOWNSEND

Nieves De Mingo Izquierdo
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

Abstract

Humour, and particularly the (fine?) art of mocking politicians, holds a multifaceted discursive character and has proved to be very valuable for the formation of politicians' public image, reflecting, at the same time, people's perceptions of their leaders. Sue Townsend, one of the most popular and loved English writers, author of the worldwide famous series of *Adrian Mole* diaries, supplied her readers with an extended list of hilarious descriptions and witty comments on two paramount figures of British politics in the 20th century: Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. Townsend's mocking criticism contributed to the literary discursive construction of their premiership from the perspective of the average citizen which provides the reader with an invaluable tool to analyse the British life of their time.

Keywords: Discursive humour, public opinion, perception, premiership, Sue Townsend.

Resumen

El humor posee un indudable carácter discursivo y se constituye como un elemento clave en la construcción de la imagen pública de la clase política de un país, reflejando al mismo tiempo la percepción que los ciudadanos tienen de sus líderes. Sue Townsend, una de las autoras inglesas más populares y queridas, autora de la famosa serie de diarios de Adrian Mole, presenta a sus lectores una larga lista de cómicas descripciones y agudos comentarios sobre dos figuras clave de la política británica del siglo xx: Margaret Thatcher y Tony Blair contribuyendo así a la construcción discursiva de la percepción de ambos líderes desde la perspectiva del ciudadano común, lo que proporciona al lector un valioso instrumento de análisis de la vida Británica del momento.

Palabras clave: humor discursivo, imagen pública, percepción, líderes, Sue Townsend.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has most likely existed a close connection between humour and politics in different ways from the very establishment of leadership; and once writing developed, literature turned into one of the most fertile fields to cul-

tivate the art of mockery, especially targeting the political leaders of a society. Reflecting on political satire, Popa insists on the rare value of humour as a "corrective for poor political behaviour" (Tsakona and Popa 19) for it seems to operate as a way of protest and not as an instigator of change. However, the mere function of pressure release provides humour with a valuable quality from the social point of view, as it lets off steam, which otherwise would cause the "social pot" to explode.

British literature has produced admirable samples of political satire throughout history from Chaucer and Swift to Byron and Orwell, and it continues manifested in books and plays as its source proves to be endless. Tsakona and Popa distinguish between two modalities of political humor, the one practiced on politicians and the one practiced by politicians for their own purposes, namely, to generate successful connections with their alleged electorate (Tsakona and Popa 7). Referring mainly to the first type we cannot fail to acknowledge the extraordinary value of Sue Townsend's works when analysing her personal contribution to the discursive construction of Margaret Thatcher's and Tony Blair's premierships mainly developed through her *Adrian Mole* diaries series[1] and the novel *Number Ten*.

The British premiership's image and its perception on the part of British public changed forever after 1979. In the introduction to his exceptional volume on post-war Europe, the late historian Tony Judt describes the period between 1945 and 1979 as an "interim age: a post-war parenthesis, the unfinished business of a conflict that ended in 1945 but whose epilogue had lasted for another half century" (2). As far as Great Britain is concerned, World War II implied the end of an era and the following years up to Margaret Thatcher's premiership were characterized by external repositioning and internal reconstruction. This mainly relied on the extension and full development of the welfare state, supported by Tories and Whigs alike in the spirit of the so-called "post-war consensus." The 1980s put an end to all this. With Margaret Thatcher in power, Great Britain underwent major economic and cultural changes which persisted well after her resignation throughout Blair's term of office (cf. Jenkins 2-12). Both leaders were subjected to praise and, of course, severe criticism and political satire flourished and manifested in all possible formats. Sue Townsend, was not alien to this trend and played her part in helping construct the public image of the premiers by using the tool of humour with mastery.

[1] Especially valuable for this task are *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole 13 and ¾*, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole, Adrian Mole. The Cappuccino Years* and *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*.

2. FORGING THE IRON: THE MOCKING DISCOURSE ON MARGARET THATCHER

Sue Townsend developed her acute criticism of Margaret Thatcher mainly through *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* and *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts 14 and ¼, w*ith occasional hints in *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years.* In all these three she used the productive technique of fictive diary which owes much of its effectiveness to the constant work on the part of the reader to interpret the characters' remarks and stances while trying at the same time to close "the gap between writing and living" (Abbot 51) experienced by the characters as writers of their diaries in a manifold metafictional game.

Much has been said about the reader-response theory and the so-called interpretive communities and it is not my intention to delve into that. Suffice to say that the role of the reader is paramount as far as political satire is concerned, particularly in the works under consideration here as reader response operates in a double way: passive, with the reader's agreement or rejection of the comic effect displayed by Townsend in the case of the Mole diaries which, in turn, would allow humour to perform two of its most prominent functions according to Tsakona and Popa,[2] (4) and active, by acting "with the benefit of hindsight" in the case of *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts 14 and ¼* as the full meaning of the diary entries is only disclosed when contrasted with actual facts. As Tony E. Jackson points out, "almost all the novel's success depends on just how the audience responds to the narrator as a "speaking" person" (24). In this case, the response to the literary mockery depends on the different degrees of knowledge of both, the situations portrayed or the real facts the writing anticipates.

Satire is served. In Sue Townsend, the mocking discourse on Margaret Thatcher articulates mainly around two categories: gender and morality. Thatcher's gender was one of the favourite topics for her satirists and to question it was a popular way of mocking her:

> The problem is that very few people [...] could put up with Bert for more than a couple of days.
> I asked him if there was any chance of him turning Catholic, he said, 'about as much chance as there is of Mrs. Thatcher turning into a woman!' (Townsend, Adrian Mole from Minor to Major 357) Naturally I asked her what the 'Grand Plan was'. She said 'I'm to be the first Woman Prime Minister in Britain'.
> I said, 'And Mrs. Thatcher? She never existed?'
> 'Mrs. Thatcher is a man in drag, everybody knows that' she said contemptuously. (Townsend, *Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years* 246)

[2] Tsakona and Popa reflect on the functions of humour referring to "inclusive function" when interlocutors agree on the content and targets of humour, and "exclusive function" when they do not, thus widening the social gap between humorous critique and the receptors (Tsakona and Popa 4).

However, Thatcher played "the gender game" masterfully presenting herself as a common housewife and mother while conveying, at the same time, images of force, domination and assertiveness. Thus, she created a public image with a plurality of readings, easily prone to angry criticism which, although obscured by subsequent historical circumstances, was revived bitterly at the time of her death in 2013. She was the first woman to become Prime Minister in the still male-dominated world of British politics and she certainly used this to her own benefit:

> I could end up as Prime Minister. Is it so inconceivable? Not, in my opinion. Mrs. Thatcher was once a humble housewife and mother. So, if she can do it, why can't I? (Townsend, *True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole* 24)

Being a woman seemed to position Thatcher closer to the alleged gender stereotypes that female politicians portray. According to Huddy and Terkildsen, female candidates seem to be better able to deal with "compassion issues" (121) such as poverty, education and children and health policies whereas male candidates are generally linked to big business and military and defense issues. Thatcher broke the mould. She started the dismantling of the welfare state with neoliberal measures, trying to impose her personal beliefs on the market economy and the individual (meaning "family" in most cases) effort, sweeping aside opposition and vanquishing the toughest men in the country; the miners of the NUM. She presented herself as a woman in the widest sense of the term but spoke and reacted as a strong male leader, performing her leadership in a confounding way for public opinion who responded in many cases with extreme mockery, most of the times targeted at her "gender-switch"[3]:

> I am not sure how I will vote. Sometimes I think Mrs. Thatcher is a nice kind sort of woman. Then the next day I see her on television and she frightens me rigid. She has got eyes like a psychotic killer, but a voice like a gentle person. It is a bit confusing. (Townsend, *Adrian Mole from Minor to Major* 163)
> School dinners are complete crap now. [...] I am considering making a protest to Mrs. Thatcher. It won't be our fault if we grow up apathetic and lacking moral fibre. Perhaps Mrs. Thatcher wants us to be too weak to demonstrate in years to come. (Townsend, *Adrian Mole from Minor to Major* 113)[4]

Thus, as far as the construction of public opinion is concerned, it is of capital importance Thatcher's performance of her own gender. She used to display her femininity in the most traditional way, defining herself at the same time as the "best man for the job," and using a discourse of conflict and battle ill-suited to her slightly

[3] The most visible example would be her *Spitting Image* puppet which shows her with male suit and tie speaking with a deep male voice. See, for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1jY5fYjV-U> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOFvgiCyChA&list=RD_AzIkjO3G0&index=16>.

[4] This was precisely one of the arguments put forward by the opposition when Thatcher removed free milk in schools for students over seven. The whole thing gained her the rhyming soubriquet of "Thatcher, the milk snatcher."

old-fashion image.[5] In this public performance she was well aware of the media presence and started to control her appearances recurring on some occasions to public displays of her privacy, always carefully engineered, so as to convey the image of a nice and elegant wife and mother who, by chance, was Prime Minister as well.[6] In this sense, Thatcher was a sort of "feminist nightmare" as she exemplified a contradiction, a woman who had succeeded in such a closed and male dominated realm working shoulder-to-shoulder with men and, at the same time, representing conservative family values and offering a model of female behavior that feminists rejected (cf. Nunn 17).

However, as if imbued with the contradictions of the character, Townsend's contribution to the mocking discourse on Margaret Thatcher in terms of gender represents a general current of criticism which does not aim at radical political change through humour (cf. Tsakona and Popa 2). On the contrary, rather than celebrating the access to power of a woman the humoristic discourse displayed rejoices in making fun of Thatcher's gender operating this way with quite closed and traditional categories which is, in turn, a surprising contrast with part of Townsend's narrative with a clear feminist tinge.

Sue Townsend's satire on Thatcher has another facet. This is displayed in *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts 14 and ¼*, which becomes the alleged diary of a young Margaret (not Thatcher yet) but Roberts where the most important characteristics of her future leadership feature as essential components of her personality from a very early age. This time Townsend plays with a key element of Thatcher's personality: her religious upbringing.

Thatcher's discourse toyed with morality and religion as the source of social values and insisted on the fact that economic recovery was impossible without moral regeneration (cf. Grimley 78-94). This moral regeneration owed most of its content to Christian values which, in the words of Thatcher showed a particular trait, very useful for her political convictions: "Christian contribution to political thinking, however, is that the individual is an end in himself, a responsible moral being endowed with the ability to choose between good and evil." Thus, the Methodist free will belief turns into the justification of political measures. However, Townsend contradicts this alleged morality by placing young Margaret as her father's assistant in fooling their shop customers by grinding chalk to mix it with flour or adding water to drinks. The family sense of morality consists of an opportunistic bending of religious norms to their own benefit:

> Help father to water down the dandelion and burdock. Out of two dozen original bottles we managed to eke out one dozen more. Father, *who is a good Methodist*,

[5] For an excellent study on Margaret Thatcher's performance of genre and the creation of public opinion, see Nunn's full volume.

[6] Opening the way to further Labour' s wide use of media coverage of Tony Blair' s personal matters and, conversely, the extended use of media with political purposes on the part of the PM. On the clash between politicians' private and public spheres, see Corner and Pels 69-75.

> explained that our actions were perfectly moral, and that Jesus's trick with the loaves and fishes was an honourable precedent [my emphasis]. (Townsend, *True* 146)

In a strict Methodist environment, the teenage Margaret displays an almost inhuman self-discipline:

> Woke up at 4 am, refreshed after an hour and a half's sleep. Just for fun read *Intermediate Chemistry* and committed to memory the more difficult formulae. However, life cannot and should not, be one endless round of pleasure, so at 5am rose and went downstairs" (Townsend, *True* 146)

And places herself as the best positioned to be chosen for eternal salvation through hard work, although gaining enemies everywhere:

> Dear Mr. and Mrs. Roberts,
> Margaret's behavior has been giving me a great cause for concern. At all times she is neat, clean and controlled. She is top of every subject [...] but Margaret is wearing out my staff with the constant requests for more work [...] This morning I came to school early and found her mopping the lavatories. All very laudable, you may think, but her mania for work is making her very unpopular with the other girls" (Townsend, *True* 143)

Her future contempt for permissiveness is already present in her adolescence but at all times, her criticism seems to be all for naught:

> School dinner [...] was unnecessarily extravagant. I counted two sultanas per square inch in the spotted dick. I complained to the school cook but she rudely told me to 'move along' claiming that I was holding up the second helpings queue. (Townsend, *True* 149).

Well aware of the factual circumstances of Thatcher's premiership, the reader cannot fail to notice the comic effect of the written entries of Townsend's literary character in her diary:

> A traveler from London [...] passed on a rumour he had heard that a future socialist government would introduce free milk to schools. Father went the colour of barley and had to sit down. [...] If the filthy socialists ever do take power, I shall refuse to drink free school milk". (Townsend, *True* 137)
> Glancing through the accounts I noticed a new entry: 'Mrs. Roberts, wages. Sixpence a week'. [Her mother had declared herself on strike unless paid for her services]
> So, Father has capitulated to industrial action, has he? How despicable! That is something I would never *ever* do. (Townsend, *True* 159).

Controversial as it was, Margaret Thatcher's public image displayed different aspects of gender and religion, which were the object of contradictory discourses of praise and mockery. So strong a character (as she was) could leave no one indifferent. For better or worse she laid the foundations of modern-day

Britain and turned into a major figure of reference for writers like Sue Townsend, who portrayed her presence and personality in the most comic terms, and Hilary Mantel' s last work *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher and Other Stories*.

3. BLAIR'S PITCH PROJECT: SPEECH AND REALITY UNDER NEW LABOUR

On May 2, 1997, Tony Blair entered the doors of 10 Downing Street as the successor to the conservative PM John Major, after a landslide victory. The milestones in his career prior to this day demonstrated perfectly the codes and modes in which his premiership would develop. Among them, language, and speech would turn into the key elements in helping to (de)construct his public image.

For a significant number of Britons, Blair personified the hope of a better future they envisaged free from the constraints of Thatcher's restrictive policy. In order to raise these hopes and channel the discontent of public opinion towards the Conservative Party, Blair played the public image card masterfully. Through his chief press secretary, Alistair Campbell, he was able to use the media as had never been done before, allowed his private life to interfere with his public sphere in order to project an idea of proximity to the average (especially middle class) citizen and controlled his public appearances and speeches managing to create a sort of convincing discourse only questioned during the build-up to the Iraqi war.

Sue Townsend's socialist leanings did not impede her from condemning Blair's policy and his failure to fulfil British citizens' hopes (Townsend, "Diary"). Her criticism is displayed mainly in *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction* and in the superb *Number Ten*. The comic effect combines, in the first case, speech and satire. Blair's speeches are referred to in an indirect way as samples of the official discourse on the Iraqi war. The entries written by Adrian in his diary clearly showed disdain for those who dared to question the truth of Blair's statements in that time. Nevertheless, Adrian's efforts in showing the PM as a truthful leader do obtain precisely the opposite results:

> Mr. Blair was speaking about the danger to the world if tyrants like Sadam Hussein were not challenged. How anybody could doubt Mr. Blair's word is a mystery to me. The man radiates honesty and sincerity. (Townsend, *Adrian Mole and the Weapons* 154).

Once again, Adrian fails to see what is most evident to the majority of the British population and the reader "joins the dots" in order to understand Townsend's narrative trick. On knowing perfectly well the development of the facts, the reader fully grasps the criticism and laughs at Adrian's lack of insight when facing reality, something that Townsend masterfully links to his character's surname as a defining attribute.

> Mr. Blair looks at the camera lens with such a knowing expression, as if to say, I am privy to top-secret information. I know more than I can say. That is why the British people must trust Mr. Blair." (Townsend, *Adrian Mole and the Weapons* 259)

On this and other occasions, Blair's well known aptitudes for theatre –he took part in some plays in his youth– are highlighted so as to reinforce the fact that he is lying, just playing speech games devised to cheat the British public[7]:

> So Mr. Blair and Mr. Bush stand alone against tyranny. Our Prime Minister has been making the speeches of his life. His nostrils flare, his chin sets in a determined way and his eyes blaze with passion. (...) what an actor Mr. Blair would have made. The National Theatre's loss is the British public's gain. (Townsend, Adrian Mole and the Weapons 268).

Therefore, Townsend stresses the longtime connection between politicians and lies, which in this case is more striking due to the allegedly social awareness of Labour governments (Swift).

Townsend also targets word games and political correctness so as to highlight the striking results of the Blair government's policy on renaming the most usual components of everyday life as if a name change implied an improvement of their condition. This makeover started with the name of the Labour Party being turned into New Labour and reached climax precisely with the outbreak of the Iraqi war and the infamous weapons of mass destruction:

> David outlined his plans. 'We take 'Labour' out of the party's name. The word Labour has totally negative connotations; it's associated with sweat and hard work, trade unionism and protracted and painful childbirth' [...] Alexander said drily 'If we drop the 'Labour' from 'New Labour' We're left with one word, 'New'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 16)

Number Ten is a witty satire on Tony Blair developed through his literary persona, Edward Clare (note the phonetic similitude between both last names). The novel starts with a hilarious comic depiction of Blair's entourage at 10 Downing Street, including his wife and children –particularly Morgan, his eldest– and his closest collaborators. Nobody is spared from Townsend's mockery:

> 'Anyroadup', says Alexander McPherson[8] can we sort out a few things Ed? We've got an arse of a week. there are half a dozen reports out, crime's up [...] and the mortuary workers are striking on Monday unless they get a ten per cent pay rise and a thirty -five hour week'.
> Edward said 'In Africa a little kid dies every ten seconds from a water-borne disease'.

---

[7] Ben Page points out: "In October 2000, 46% of the populace rated Blair trustworthy. In September 2006 the figure was 29%" (436).

[8] The name chosen for Alistair Campbell–the Scottish echoes of both surnames are evident.

> Alex replied, 'Yeah, my heart bleeds at the thought, but we'll be knee-deep in fuckin' corpses if we don't sort the body-washers out'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 13)
> Adele's nose[9] was extraordinarily large. He father Guy Floret had remarked on seeing her for the first time, only moments after she had been born '*Mon dieu, ma pauvre enfant. Elle est Pinocchio*'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 18)

The starting point of the plot is a terrible experience on live television during which Edward is asked about all kinds of matters and he spectacularly fails to know the answer to a simple question: the price of a pint of milk, which makes him realize he has lost contact with the country and its citizens.[10] In order to solve this, he embarks on an incognito trip accompanied by only one of the guards from the door of Number Ten, Jack Sprat. And, as if the situation were not funny enough, Townsend twists the knife further: Edward will be travelling disguised as a woman.

The middle and low class reader, amused by Townsend's proposal of a Prime Minister in drag is, at the same time, confronted with the different episodes and incidents of the story and unmistakably identifies with the misadventures of Edward and Jack, particularly as they try to utilize public services. Townsend, in order to create the comic effect and (mainly) to display her sharp criticism, operates with three elements which appear at the same time within the same plot:

3.1. The sequential narrative of the journey around England and the sheer contrast between the real country and the one portrayed by official discourse

Reality appears in front of Edward's eyes as a series of events which make him experience in flesh and blood what the average citizen must face every day: deterioration of neighbourhood life, decay of the National Health Service, mounting crime, and others.

The journey of both protagonists refers to previous narratives of the kind, among them *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain in which the main plot line turns around the same idea of a ruler who, feeling estranged from his subjects, decides to travel around his country in disguise:

> We were dressed and barbered alike, and could pass for small farmers, or farm bailiffs, or shepherds, [...] yes, or for village artisans, if we chose, our costume being in effect universal among the poor [...] We slipped away an hour before dawn, and by broad sun-up had made eight or ten miles, and were in the midst of a sparsely settled country. (Twain)

---

[9] Adele Floret stands for Cherrie Blair-note both French first names.

[10] Ben Page states: "In October 1997, just 6% thought Blair was out of touch with ordinary people; by the time he announced his resignation, 51% thought so" (436).

In fact, both stories belong to the extended folk tradition of the hero's journey,[11] which starts with a disruption of the ordinary world and proceeds in several stages, representing both an outer journey of realization and effective contact with factual reality and an inner journey of self-discovery and personal repositioning towards the original issue which initially launch the hero into the world (Vogler 5). Therefore it turns into a quest-narrative, in which the aim of the quest is not the finding of a magical object but of an answer to unsolved issues of personal nature.

The plot progresses as in a *road movie* for it "provides a ready space for exploration of the tensions and crises of the historical moment during which it is produced" (Cohan and Hark 2). Precisely this encounter with truth at the "historical moment" presents Edward with the vision of the other side of the coin of his own reality, through some situations in which he feels overwhelmed as he is unable to deal with the disparity between the facts and the previous image he had forged of them:

> Jack said, 'During the war there was a day nursery on every corner so that the women could go to work'.
> The Prime Minister replied irritably, 'There are innumerable measures in place to facilitate single parents going back to work, Jack.' [...]
> When he got back inside the car he said savagely to the Prime Minister, 'It was twelve-fifteen on a Wednesday afternoon, so why wasn't the library open?'
> The Prime Minister said nothing but he felt vaguely ashamed. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 150)

However, the irony pervading all these episodes does not lack humour:

> While Jack waited to request a trolley he read a scrawled notice [...]
> *Welcome to the Casualty Department: waiting times*
> *Children: 2 hours / Minor injuries: 2 hours / Major injuries: 2 hours'*
> (Townsend, *Number Ten* 159)
> 'Volume of traffic, innit', said Ali. 'It's always like this at Walsall. Last time I done this journey I got stuck for three and a half hours'. [...] By the time traffic was moving again the three men had memorized the words of 'Knock on Wood' and had even perfected an in-car dance routine which included synchronized knocking on each other's heads'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 214)

Along the road and throughout the plot, Townsend is confronting the real country with the fairy-tale one portrayed by politicians and, as is usual in her narrative, she takes sides with the unprotected citizens whose perception of their Prime Minister has shifted dramatically since the hopeful times of his first election.

---

[11] For a complete study of the trope of the hero's journey, see Hobby, of course in debt to Vladimir Propp's previous analysis on the folk tales.

3.2. The alterity of the constituent dimensions of both main characters

Edward Clare and Jack Spratt cannot be more dissimilar, and the contrast provokes quite a comic effect: Jack is a lower working class, righteous, matter-of-fact, self-made man, confirmed bachelor and highly cultivated despite his humble origins:

> He was the black sheep of a large extended family. None of whom had ever bought a video recorder from a shop. [...] Once, at Sunday dinner, seated at the kitchen table [...] Jack had tried to explain to his family that with exams he would be able to get ahead in the world and get a good job.
> 'Such as what?' Said his stepfather [...].
> 'I want to be a policeman' [...] There was silence, and then a huge burst of laughter. His sister Yvonne spluttered on a half-chewed piece of lamb and mint sauce. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 28)

Edward is a high-middle class man, university graduate, passionate husband, declared Christian and supporter of a "middle-way" socialism far from the extremes of previous Labour leaders:

> Edward was pleased that his prayers had been answered. He glanced at the vividly coloured picture of Jesus that hung above his bed. [...] Edward's father had sometimes grumbled about the picture, saying, 'Eddy, your bloody Jesus looks like Errol Flynn in drag. But Mummy must have liked Edward's Jesus picture, because once a week she cleaned the picture glass with pink Windowlene and made it sparkle'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 3)

Despite the antithesis represented by the two protagonists, and precisely because of it, Jack becomes the experienced "mentor," a key element in the travel narratives, (Vogler) which provides the hero with the necessary insight and guidance into the "Special World":

> During the Prime Minister's absence, Jack took the opportunity to talk to Mick [a man who had been making a pass at Edward –dressed like a woman– in the train to Edinburgh] 'You say one more word to my sister and I'll tear your head off your shoulders and sell it to the lion house at the zoo'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 86)

However, Townsend spares us any possible Quixote-Sancho-like grandiloquence with her irrepressible humour:

> Jack had pointed out that the Prime Minister would be displaying rather a lot of hairy flesh, [...] an hour later, when Jack was smearing the depilatory cream behind the Prime Minister's knees with a little spatula, he thought to himself 'this is beyond surreal'. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 97)

In addition, this plot line follows the typical steps of a "buddy movie" (cf. Fuchs 194-210) as, eventually, the paradox represented by both protagonists' opposed natures and their conflict, in unison, against the world is resolved:

> James [a crack addict living with Jack's mother] seem to be under the impression that they were government agents [...] when he saw that the tobacco tin was missing he accused Norma of using all of the crack herself [...] Yvonne [Jack' s sister] went and stood behind her mother and put her arms protectively around Norma's shoulders.
> Jack saw that the Prime Minister was also afraid and did the same for him. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 304).

3.3. Gender assumption and performance

The fact that Edward Clare tours the Midlands dressed like a woman provides the journey narrative with a third interesting dimension. Cross-dressing is a common comic device in a number of books and films.[12] It implies the assumption of the conceptual frameworks in which gender is displayed (cf. Suthrell 5), based on belief systems difficult to rule out as they pervade all areas of life, albeit unconsciously on some occasions. Thus, Edward's female alter ego, Edwina, features some of the most strikingly conventional characteristics of the "femme fatale" which provokes surprising feelings in Edward himself and the 'expected' reactions in the men around:

> He had to get away to somewhere quiet where he could think, not only about the landfill tax and its ugly repercussions but also about the alarming fact that he felt more comfortable wearing his wife's clothes than he did wearing his own. He sat down on the toilet-seat cover and looked through his shoulder bag for lipstick and Pan Stik. [...] then carefully drew around his mouth with the lipstick. He practiced a few womanly expressions in the mirror. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 85)

Consequently, this journey narrative turns into a "female" journey narrative as soon as Edwina takes the floor, for the plot follows the conventions of women's road narratives as far as the possibility of escape from physical confinement is concerned (cf. Ganser, 13-14). Either for Edward or Edwina, the longing for freedom is, eventually, what impels them to start the journey. The metaphor of Pete, the budgie belonging to Jack's mother, flying free from its cage at the end of the story is quite symbolic in this sense.

---

[12] See for example the display of cross-dressing in some Mark Twain's stories or the main narrative line in the film *Some Like It Hot*.

However, all these theoretical considerations, deep as they may seem, do not fail to give way to humour. Townsend's narration of the transformation process of Edward into Edwina is, once more, an opportunity for comedy:

> It took only thirty-five minutes (including a close shave and eyebrow tidy) to transform Edward into Edwina, and it would had taken less had Edward not insisted initially on wearing a suspender belt and stockings. (Townsend, *Number Ten* 68)

Townsend's narration also becomes a mockery of Tony Blair's perceived gender, which she had already performed in *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole 1999-2001*:

> In fact, Tony has undergone a feminization: his hair has turned fluffy, his voice has softened, his expression is girly, his hands move as gracefully as a geisha's. Is he on a course of hormones that will eventually transmogrify him into Toni-the first woman Labour Prime Minister? (Townsend, *The Lost Diaries* 99).

Therefore, the public perception of Toni Blair is also reinforced by the same gender stereotypes as in the case of Margaret Thatcher. In addition, not only does Townsend play with that perception and turns his character Edward into Edwina but she also makes him face the truth through the vision of his alter ego: the political discourse of New Labour is as disappointing as its leader.

4. CONCLUSION

Both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair transformed the British society of their time through their strong leadership, and offered a vast amount of "material" either to criticize or praise them when trying to model the public's perception of their premierships. Possessing strong personalities, both searched to fashion the citizens' course of action in the case of Thatcher, and the vision of the government's course of action in the case of Blair (cf. Curtice and Fisher 233), which implied setting up a game of persuasion carried out through different means according to their personalities. Margaret Thatcher played with her gender and personal religious values, somewhat disconcerting in a way, as none of these elements seemed to fit into the usual traditionally established frameworks. Tony Blair employed words to construct speeches which, in turn, modeled the official discourse of his terms of office in a clear attempt to make public opinion come to terms with policies which were, in the best possible scenario, disappointing for the Labour voter. Being the highest representatives of the political system, both leaders were subjected to close scrutiny the public whose views responded to the different discourses or counter discourses simultaneously operating.

Sue Townsend's contribution to the shaping of public opinion of Thatcher's and Blair's premierships is, undoubtedly manifest in her sharp criticism but laced with brilliant humour. The mocking discourse on Margaret Thatcher was

generally defined in terms of gender and Townsend follows the path but adds the alleged moral dimension of the character, thus playing with the most significant traits of Thatcher as acknowledged by herself. Tony Blair, once the great white hope of the country, becomes an object of the same mockery through gender parameters–although with different dimensions as Thatcher played with her femininity and the assumptions connected to it either to fulfill or confront them. In the case of Blair's fictive counterpart, Edward Clare, gender is (mostly), not questioned; cross-dressing is used by Townsend as a literary device to introduce comedy. Deceptive as he was, Blair is mocked mainly due to his inability to confront reality which he perceives disguised as Edward Clare while travelling around a country already unrecognizable to its own citizens.

Reviews sent to author: 8 February 2015. Revised paper accepted for publication: 15 April 2015.

WORKS CITED

Abbot, H. Porter. *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action.* London: Cornell UP, 1984. Print.

Cohan, Steven, and Ina Rae Hark. Introduction. *The Road Movie Book*. Ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. London: Routledge, 1997. 1-14. Print.

Corner, John, and Dick Pels. *Media and the Restyling of Politics: Consumerism, Celebrity and Cynicism*. London: Sage, 2003. Print.

Curtice, John, and Stephen Fisher. "The Power to Persuade? A Tale of Two Prime Ministers." *British Social Attitudes: Continuity and Change over Two Decades (the 20th Report).* Ed. Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Lindsey Jarvis, and Catherine Bromley. London: SAGE, 2003. 234-251. Print.

Fuchs, Cynthia J. "The Buddy Politic." *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. Ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. London: Routledge, 1993. 194-210. Print.

Ganser, Alexandra. *Road of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Road Narratives (1970-2000*). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. Print.

Grimley, Matthew. "Thatcherism, Morality and Religion." *Making Thatcher's Britain.* Ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 78-94. Print.

Hobby, Blake, ed. *The Hero's Journey*. Ed. and Introd. Harold Bloom. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009. Print.

Huddy, Leonie, and Nayda Terkildsen. "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37.1 (1993): 119-147. Print.

Jackson, Tony E. *The Technology of the Novel: Writing and Narrative in British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009. Print.

Jenkins, Simon. *Thatcher and Sons: A Revolution in Three Acts*. London: Penguin, 2006.

Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.

Nunn, Heather. *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2002. Print.

Page, Ben. "Culture and Attitudes." *Blair's Britain, 1999-2007*. Ed. Anthony Seldon. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 436-467. Print.

Suthrell, Charlotte. *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture (Dress, Body, Culture)*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004. Print.

Swift, Jonathan. "The Art of Political Lying." 18 Feb. 2015. Web. <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/47797/>.

Thatcher, Margaret. "The Moral Basis of a Free Society." *Daily Telegraph* May 16. 22 Feb 2015. Web. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103687>.

Townsend, Sue. *Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years*. London: Penguin, 1999. Print.

——— *Adrian Mole from Minor to Major*. London: Methuen, 1991. Print.

——— *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*. London: Penguin, 2004. Print.

——— "Diary." *New Statesman* (18 Oct. 2004). 28 Feb. 2015. Web. <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/149085>.

——— *The Lost Diaries of Adrian (1999-2001)*. London: Penguin, 2008. Print.

——— *Number Ten*. London: Penguin, 2002. Print.

——— *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole 13 ¾*. London: Methuen, 1991. Print.

——— *True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole, Margaret Hilda Roberts and Susan Lilian Townsend*. London: Penguin, 1989. Print.

Tsakona, Villy, and Diana Elena Popa. *Studies in Political Humour: In Between Political Critique and Public Entertainment*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. Print.

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. 28 Feb. 2015. Web. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/86/86-h/86-h.htm>.

Vogler, Christopher. Foreword. *Myth and the Movies: Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films*. Stuart Voytilla. Studio City: Michael Wiese, 1999. 1 Mar. 2015. Web. <http://www.tlu.ee/~rajaleid/montaazh/Hero%27s%20Journey%20Arch.pdf>.

INTEGRATION, ASSIMILATION, AND IDENTITY IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* AND BARBARA AND CARLTON MOLETTE'S *ROSALEE PRITCHETT*

Silvia Castro Borrego
Universidad de Málaga

You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones
And all kinds of Swing Mikados
And in everything but what's about me–
But someday somebody'll Stand up and talk about me,
And write about me–
Black and beautiful–
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me Myself!
Yes, it'll be me.
–Langston Hughes

Abstract

Two plays representative of the social analysis and change taking place in the United States during the late 1950s through the 1970s are Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun,* and Barbara and Carlton Molette's 1970 play *Rosalee Pritchett.* It may appear odd to discuss these two plays together. Hansberry's *Raisin* was viewed by many at the time as an integrationist play, the diametrical opposite of the Molettes' *Rosalee Pritchett.* While the playwrights are generally taken to represent opposite ends of the spectrum of African American thinking and behavior at the time, ironically, in their portrayal of responses to the challenges confronting African Americans at the time their works intersect. Both plays continue to inspire African Americans more than thirty years after their productions. Film director Spike Lee even refers to Lorraine Hansberry's play as part of African American history: "*Raisin* is still fresh, it's still relevant. Lorraine Hansberry was a visionary" (Lee xlvii). These two plays show the development of the Black Arts Movement in the theatre and the formulation of a Black Aesthetic from the sixties through the early 1970s stressing revolution in racial dynamics in the United States. This Afrocentric analysis of both *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Rosalee Pritchett* rediscovers the depth and breadth of Hansberry's and the Molette's social and political concerns as manifest in their work.

Keywords: Integration, assimilation, identity, Afrocentric theatre, The Black Aesthetic, Neo-racial sensibility

Resumen

La obra de teatro escrita por Lorrain Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun,* estrenada en Broadway en 1959, y la obra de Carlton y Barbara Molette titulada *Rosalee Pritchett,* estrenada en 1970, son representativas del cambio y análisis social que aconteció en los Estados Unidos a finales de los años cincuenta y en las décadas de los años sesenta y setenta. A primera vista el análisis de estas dos obras en apariencia tan dispares puede resultar extraño, ya que *Raisin* fue visto por muchos como representante del teatro integracionista de finales de los cincuenta, mientras que *Rosalee Pritchett* era una obra separatista. Sin embargo, ambas obras tienen un nexo de unión y es que las dos ofrecen respuesta a los retos a los que se enfrentaban los Afro Americanos en este período histórico. El presente artículo analizará la temática de ambas obras teatrales desde una perspectiva Afrocéntrica, por su relevancia política y social que aún hoy sirve de inspiración a dramaturgos norteamericanos contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: Integración, asimilación, identidad, teatro afrocéntrico, a Estética Negra, sensibilidad neo-racial

1. THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND NEO-RACIAL SENSIBILITY.

By the late 1990s African American scholars see the need to re-address the issue of the persistent racial inequality in America, and they contend that racial stratification remains a serious source of inequality in U.S. society (Brown ix). These black scholars point to contemporary allegations of "Post-race," referring to the millions of North Americans who consider that racial difference or racial discrimination no longer exists, obviating any need to consider this category as a social factor. This line of argumentation might mislead us into thinking that the contemporary U.S. has reached its long-desired status of a colorblind society and that, given the success of the Civil Rights Movement, there is no longer any need for color-conscious policies. However, to accept that premise is to live in a state of illusion, believing that contemporary African Americans are not confronted with situations loaded with subtle racism in their everyday life. Those defenders of a "Post-racial era," then, may live in self-deceipt, just as the characters of the Molette's play *Rosalee Pritchett* do, thinking that they are above racial prejudice only because they have reached middle-class status. Ralph A. Banks unmasks the fallacy of the colorblind theory, and encourages us to fight this fiction, suggesting that we acquire a "neo-racial sensibility" which "recognizes the persistence of racism and segregation and troubling racial inequalities" (47-50).[1] In fact, 30 years ago the Molettes' alerted both reader and public alike to the dangers of living their lives disconnected from the truth of their own

[1] One just needs to remember the events in Norway and London and other English cities. In Oslo, at least 77 people died at the hands of a right-wing extremist, and in London, Birmingham and Manchester five people died in July and August 2011 in the riots that broke out after the police killed a young black man. In 2012 Trayvon Martin was shot and killed in Sandford, Florida, and in August 2014 Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri.

cultural sources. This is precisely the message that Toni Morrison has put forward with her project of re-memory which encourages African Americans to resist forgetting who they are and what brought them to the present through an active engagement with the deliberate act of remembering, which she claims, is an act of "willed creation" (Morrison 235). Morrison urges Black people to look into the traces of cultural memory –what Harry Elam call "a cultural engram"– which is engraved into the psyche, and stimulated by cultural materials such as plays, rituals and music.

Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* addressed the tensions implicit in being both black and female, rejecting the notion that either characteristic was limiting. She aimed at the expansion of both categories –race and gender– as markers of identity and the shift in the concept of identity among African American individuals in the post-civil right era of the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, Carlton W. Molette and Barbara J. Molette's play *Rosalee Pritchett* clearly exemplifies the themes of Black struggle. When New York City's *Negro Ensemble Company* presented *Rosalee Pritchett* by the young husband-and-wife playwright team, the company introduced a play that not only received excellent reviews, but fully exemplified the company's consistent emphasis on "themes of Black Struggle." The Molettes' *Rosalee Pritchett* continued the analysis of the impact of white values on black society first seen in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun.* But within a ten-year span the impact of white-middle class values on the African American community had changed greatly. The Younger's dream of integration has been interpreted by both blacks and whites as an attempt to assimilate into white middle-class America. In contrast, the Pritchetts in *Rosalee Pritchett* are living with the illusion that they have already been assimilated into the white middle-class. The illusion of their successful assimilation, however, is transformed into a bitter recognition of the truth of their lives when Mrs. Pritchett suffers a brutal rape at the hands of white law officials.

Assimilation is still the driving force behind the American dream –as the recent studies of colorblind theory point out– the vehicle by which one seeks to achieve the ever-elusive American dream. Yet it is also strongly related to W.E.B. DuBois' concept of double consciousness as he conceived it in 1903: "one ever feels his twoness –an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (45). The term double consciousness, as defined by DuBois, still aptly defines Black Americans' struggle to identify according to their own set of values and culture, while at the same time striving to be accepted by white society in order to share equally in the fruits of the American dream.

Assimilation, a major theme in both of these plays, is an ideology that gives rise in the 1970s to its dialectical opposition, namely the Black Aesthetic. As promulgated by Addison Gayle in his volume *The Black Aesthetic* (1971) this ideology simultaneously opposed the dominant Western, European-based American cultural aesthetic and supported the aesthetics of African American ethnicity. In this context, Lorrain Hansberry was considered as an integrationist, and integrationists were simplistically viewed as assimilationists, positively so by most whites and negatively so by some African Americans. As Geneviève Fabre points out, social relations in the theatre resembled those in the larger society: for whites, domination, authority, and monopoly;

for blacks, exclusion, lack of initiative, half-silence (9). It was therefore hard to work out a compromise between the strategies for integration, which valued the white world, and those for Black self-determination rooted in African American cultural sources. The difficulties for reaching such a compromise are among the reasons why Hansberry's play gave rise to such controversy. The play's title, from Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem" in *Montage of a Dream Deferred,* effectively showed how the dream of equality and civil rights for African Americans and their political and cultural goal for black self-determination was constantly frustrated. Written shortly before riots erupted in the ghettos across the nation, *Raisin in the Sun* seemed to calm down the people who feared violent uprisings, and contributed to demonstrating that life in the ghetto does not always lead to crime or disgrace. Integration within this context becomes a well-deserved reward for the moral choices the members of the Younger family have made with great effort on their part. As Harris notices, the characters of *Raisin* "made the monster of segregation appear to be not only something that could be tackled, but something that could be overcome" (22).

Raisin in the Sun, however, has been criticized for ignoring the values of the black world but in 1959 it was well received, on the one hand, "because blacks were more concerned about interracial issues than intraracial issues" (Harris 38) and, on the other, because "audiences identified with Mama Lena and her family because they recognized themselves in her or in members of her household" (21). In its resolution of conflict, black audiences generally saw an image of an African American family dealing with issues of identity and choice that were important to black people.

Hansberry's play, while hard hitting, could be read as a "pull yourself up by your bootstrap" type of play-which is one of the reasons it played so successfully on Broadway. While it contained tough messages, they were presented through figures familiar to the white American public on a superficial level.

In contrast to Hansberry, Carlton and Barbara Molette were viewed as "revolutionaries" and "militants" because their play, *Rosalee Pritchett,* directly confronted the oppressive tangle of assimilation-the ways African Americans responded to it that were in conflict with their own agency. Aimed at a primarily black audience, the Molettes' play lifted the veil covering assimilation, presenting it straightforwardly to the public. The Pritchetts and those blacks who lived by the standards and white values imposed on them by white society were seen as traitors to their own race. Black doctors and lawyers, successful black businessmen who felt superior to the poorer blacks, exhibit an arrogance that disconnects them from the roots of black folk culture. By the 1970s Black America began to question the Civil Rights Movement and the ideology that had undergirded it.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Black Americans were reclaiming their own culture. Daniel Moynihan and Nathan Glazer, in their "Moynihan Report" (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1965) to the nation, alleged that black people did not have a culture, that they only imitated whites, and therefore had no ethnicity. The Moynihan report was seen by prominent black intellectuals and politicians as racist, and they dismissed the report as an attempt to impose white, middle-class values on poor blacks whose behavior was simply different from, not inferior to the norm

Within this context, assimilation became increasingly subject to critique by those for whom such an ideology and strategy no longer made any sense. The years from 1964 to 1969 witnessed lectures, debates, and panel discussions organized by scholars, organizations, and institutions that sought to align themselves with the Black Arts Movement. The topics covered the major themes of integration, acculturation, and the relations between blacks and American culture. Black and white intellectuals engaged in a dialogue to exchange ideas and feelings, and for the first time in the history of American theatre black dramatists discussed their work with critics before a black audience. By the 1970s, black theatre began to define its audience in specific terms. It eliminated first the whites, then the black bourgeoisie, those in the black community who had internalized the values of the dominant society. Art was created and dedicated for black people. That was the beginning of Afrocentric Theatre.

The beginning of the contemporary Black Theatre Movement took place in Harlem, with Amiri Baraka (then Leroi Jones) as head of the movement with his ground breaking play *Dutchman* (1964). Baraka contended that the use of dramatic arts had to be a weapon in the struggle for black liberation. The Black Theatre Movement espoused plays dealing with race relations in the US: plays directed as much to whites as to blacks. It was a theatre used to confront the system on a cultural level: invective plays aimed at denouncing the system for the past and present injustices that it inflicted on black people. The plays accomplished one thing that both Baraka and the rest of emergent young playwrights (among which were the Molettes) declared theatre must do: raise the consciousness of their audiences about the Black experience.

Presented by the Morehouse-Spelman Players in Atlanta on March 1970, it harshly condemned the imitation of society's most meaningless bourgeois practices. By the late sixties the development of the Black Arts movement in the theatre, the increased emphasis on Black pride, and the formulation of a Black aesthetic stressing racial revolution, had created a receptive climate for black nonparticipation in the white world. Blacks felt that they had their own culture and felt proud of it, and they wanted to show it. Black drama reclaimed the unquestionable right to express a life that no white person could experience and that no outsider could properly convey. *Rosalee Pritchett,* then, is among the plays that took on the mission of warily deconstructing the tantalizing myth of the American dream and debunking the promises of integration.

By the 1970s the American dream for African Americans had dissipated, deferred and postponed for too long and too repeatedly. In its challenge to white supremacists' hegemonic ideals, the Molette's play became part and parcel of that battle, of the black struggle for racial and social equality. The female characters in *Rosalee Pritchett* were very much like the "assimilated" character of George Murchison in *Raisin,* whose dearest dream was to be en route to making it the American way:

"to get the grades... to get a degree"(83)[2] to which one could easily add "to marry white." Thus, both *Rosalee Pritchett,* and *Raisin in the Sun* pondered, what had become of the American dream? *Rosalee Pritchett* clearly represented the disillusion of the Civil Rights Movement. The American dream in the post sixties had become a nightmare, since the lives of the black middle class had turned insipid. As Barksdale commented, referring to the Black ladies in *RP,* they had become "so encumbered by the meaningless values of the white middle-class that its members have lost all sense of identification with their race" (824). While Hansberry critiqued the white supremacist dream that was American reality in 1959, the Molettes attacked the bourgeois practices of the black middle-class in the 1970s.

The deferred dream Langston Hughes invoked in his great poem "Harlem" informed both *Raisin* and *Rosalee Pritchett*. If Hansberry's play projected the possibility of that dream's becoming a reality, the angry tone of *Rosalee Pritchett* demonstrated that the much-awaited dream had in fact, exploded. The content and performance of *Rosalee Pritchett* clearly indicated that blacks and whites inhabited separate and probably irreconcilable worlds.

2.

What happens to a dream deferred?Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?

Lorraine Hansberry revolutionized Black theatre in America when her play *A Raisin in the Sun* became the first play by an African American woman produced on Broadway, running for 530 performances. This play won *The New York Drama Critics Circle Award*, making her the fifth woman, the youngest playwright, and the first black woman in America to receive such an honor.[3]

Raisin marked the beginning of a "serious and mature Negro Theater in America" (79). The play offered a positive portrayal of a black family to black audiences: the survival of the family as a unit in spite of living in an environment structured to oppress and exploit them. The play also raised other thorny questions relevant for the African American communities of the late 1950s: abortion, ownership of the insurance money, who was head of the household, and the quest for higher education as an important mechanism not only to obtain financial rewards but most importantly because of its intrinsic value for the black community of much needed services of health professionals. The different generations of the Younger's family

[2] Further references to this work will be given within the text as RS, and will make reference to this edition.

[3] Lorraine Hansberry contributed to American theatre with two other plays that were also produced on Broadway: *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* (1964) and the posthumously produced *Les Blancs* (1970). Hansberry's vision and understanding of playwriting was sociopolitical at its heart, and through her art, we perceive Hansberry as a resolute activist. Her autobiography *To be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969) references some of the events that shaped her writing.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 70; 2015, PP. 123-142

differ in their ideas of what constitutes security for the family, but the broader theme that brings the different issues of the play together is racial uplift.

In the play, the insurance money serves as a catalyst, projecting the family into a situation that not only causes dramatic conflicts, but tests their individual characters. Hansberry wanted to explore the specifics of Black life, the ideas and urges that fueled their lives politically and personally. The play suggests that somehow apparently disparate things come together when Walter Lee refuses Lindner's offer and Lena insists that her grandson Travis stays in the room when this conversation takes place. In his speech turning down the Clybourne Park bribe, Walter brings along with him the true, life-sustaining traditions of his Black heritage embodied in his family, including his son, the next generation and future bearer of the family values. These values that emphasize community and continuity, a sense of family tradition and heritage, are rooted in a solid identification with the Black community which "offers them sustenance to keep on surviving and dreaming" (Gallego 132).

However, in the late 1950s, when the play debuted, Walter Lee was not seen as a hero by white audiences. He played the role of the angry black man, an image that many white liberals found threatening because of his aspirations to own a liquor business, and the critique of his white employer. The fact that both Walter Lee and his father were black men with jobs and part of a black household helped to debunk the belief that African American values generated households dominated by women. Lorrain Hansberry's assertion that Lena was "the Black matriarch incarnate" is highly misleading because the content of the play contradicts this idea. In the 1950s there were very few representations of black females in theatre and in the media, and almost all of them were images of black women in subservient roles to white families. The strength of Lena within her family is problematic for whites who saw a black female character's assertion of strength or independence as a threat. This prejudiced gaze would also interpret any sign of respect by an adult male family member as subservience.

The fact that Walter Lee listens to his mother who is also the elder of the family is a sign of respect in consonance with the cultural heritage of Black family life. Walter Lee does not have to follow Lena's advice because as Lena clearly states in Act II, Scene 2, "I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be" (87). The concept that Lena exerts control over her family, emasculating the male in the household is the product of white male prejudice. According to C. Molette, Walter Lee emerges in *Raisin* as a true Afrocentric hero when he changes his behavior as a result of self-realization. Rising to his legitimate status as head of the household and coming to terms with his own manhood inspired by a sense of values rooted in his own family's perception of security and advance for the race, Walter Lee opens up to a harsh world of new opportunities for himself, his family, and for the rest of Blacks everywhere in the US.

Hansberry's political and social agenda included the recovery of the Negro interest and pride in an African past that had begun in the 1930s by Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes or Countee Cullen. She wanted to overcome the stereotyped image of Africans and to present them as they really were. Her portrayals of the ignorance of both Lena and George Mur-

chison about the different aspects of cultural memory and links between Black America and Africa illustrate her idea that both blacks and whites in America needed to be educated about the achievements and values of Africans. African Americans needed such information even more than whites did because their self-images and self-understanding depended in part upon their pride in their shared cultural heritage. However, Hansberry never intended to glorify African culture at the expense of African American culture.

Asagai, Beneatha's African schoolmate and friend, gives hope assuring that life is endless, full of cyclic renewal. From his point of view, fulfillment follows disappointment. The message is loud and clear: never surrender; keep on fighting. Asagai helps Beneatha to complete an African American identity rooted in African culture, history and beliefs–he gives her a Nigerian robe, African music, and criticizes her "unnatural" pressed hair, which he blames on "assimilationism" (49). Thus, Asagai introduces audiences to the beauty of all these vital aspects of African tradition. As Hansberry remarked in an interview, she viewed Asagai as representative of the "emergence of an articulate and deeply conscious colonial intelligentsia in the world" (Terkel 41). However, Hansberry does not romanticize the problems inherent in African patriarchy.

The Youngers are going to move into a white neighborhood not because they want to integrate, but because they have the right to do so–"it meant moving into a better neighborhood with better homes and facilities, not into a white ghetto just to snuggle up with whites" (Mayfield 267), because five generations of hardworking, honest people have made a deferred dream possible. The deep spirituality and connection with ancestry have won out over racist assimilationist attitudes. As Steven Carter points out, "integration is not the issue. Rather, the test that the Youngers face is of their willingness to take potentially fatal risks to get out of an intolerable situation and to force change upon an oppressive system" (22). What Hansberry wanted to show with her play was "the many gradations even in one Negro family, the clash of the old and new, but most of all the incredible courage of the Negro People" (Dannett 262). Baraka asserts that the concerns he once dismissed as middle-class–buying a house and moving into 'white folks' neighborhoods'–are in fact reflective of the essence of black people's striving and the will to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression. Baraka further suggests that "there is no such thing as a 'white folk's neighborhood' except to racists and to those submitting to racism" (19-20).

Ruth, Walter's wife, is the victim of both racism and sexism, she's pregnant with a child she cannot afford, and her inner life is dangerously deteriorating when she falls into hopelessness which turns to self-destructive behavior. The idea of moving into a new house invigorates her inner strength, makes her forget the idea of abortion, and enables her to alleviate the misunderstandings and differences between the generations of the Younger family.

In the end, although Walter discards his original dream, he's ready for future challenges and he gains hope. Hansberry creates substantial characters that live and grow. The Younger family symbolized the opposing systems of thought that continue to tear the country and the African American community apart, each character individu-

ally, and the family as a whole. The contest was also between the individual and the collective good. This was not a play simply about upward mobility or integration, but about the need of the African American community to embark upon a journey towards wholeness which entailed self-determination and identity, values which presented the black family "as a critical enduring site of cultural memory (Elam 46), legitimizing the Younger's family's right to the American dream and recognizing that "transgressing the color line is not going to be without difficulty, violence, or casualty" (Matthews 571). With her play, Hansberry identified "the seeds of what will later become the Black Power movement" warning that "continued white separatism may generate a violent separatist backlash" (Matthews 576). In *Raisin* we can appreciate the pervasive presence of racial discrimination in both job opportunities and home ownership.

3.

> *Black theatre is now the most vital, exciting theatre in America. Whites can enjoy some marvelous experiences... and some dreadful ones, too. But until we pay our dues, white folks must attend black theatre with humility; it's a place to learn not only about black folks, but mostly about ourselves.* (James V. Hatch)

The Negro Ensemble Company officially formed in 1967 by actor Robert Hooks. It paved the way for Black Americans to present a voice that had been aggressively stifled for three hundred years. As source and sustenance for black actors, directors, and writers, *The Negro Ensemble Company* has worked to break down walls of racial prejudice through art. *The NEC* became the proving ground for some of the country's brightest black actors, actresses and playwrights, and an expression of the Black experience in the U.S.

Rosalee Pritchett would easily fit within the company's repertoire for the play is a moving comment on the ever changing social values of Black America. The play proves the absurdity of attempting to gratify pseudo-bourgeois tastes while North American society is suffering from a prolonged racial nervous breakdown. *Rosalee Pritchett* is a grim play: none of the characters at the end has learned anything regarding renewal and change; the message seems to be that a massive social paralysis has taken place, fixing situations into racially rigid patterns. The Molette's aim would seem to be that the audience should leave this play perturbed and dissatisfied. All the black characters in the play have suffered a brainwashing of sorts, as they have been totally assimilated by white upper-middle class values.

Rosalee Pritchett is a play intended for an African American audience because it does include a description of experiences generally known among whites in order to inform or persuade them about African Americans. As a result, white audience members often feel that the characters were insufficiently explained, inadequately motivated or two-dimensional. As such, *Rosalee Pritchett* is a short play rather than full-length because the plot does not have to grow out of characterization, but can grow, instead, out of other environmental and experiential forces. When analyzing *Rosalee Pritchett* there is a difference of opinion among critics about what the audience

needs to be told about the characters.[4] The Molettes have written a play informed by the principles of African American drama, exposed by Carlton Molette in his article "The Way to Viable Theater? Afro-American Ritual Drama" (1973). One purpose of this Afrocentric ritual would be the sense of community; a feeling of togetherness which in the case of *Rosalee Pritchett* turns into an absence of a sense of community. This is a strategy to isolate both characters and public, to cause estrangement in the black audience, so that the public does not identify either with the actors or with the play. Another principle of Afro-American ritual drama would be a call for authenticity, formalism being the main stylistic concern. Formalism intends to project an ideal form, so the actors do not need to pretend to be somebody other than themselves. African American aesthetic calls for "soulful behavior" which consists of the building of emotional intensity through rhythm, creating a total spiritual involvement with a proper purgation of emotions. Another purpose of the Afro-American ritual drama is to be functional, thus *Rosalee Pritchett* has deliberately sought to change the values of African Americans rather than to validate or strengthen existing ones.

Rosalee Pritchett is a one act play in four scenes, taking place in a southern city during a race riot. In the play Rose is an ultra-grand colored lady who meets with her three black friends, Belle, Dorry and Doll to play her weekly game of bridge. The action in Scene 1 takes place at Dorry's house, where the ladies' snobbish talk reveals their total adherence to white middle-class values. Besides the dialogue, the scene is presented with several shots of slides on rear projection screens. The production that took place at St. Marks Playhouse, New York, in 1971, under the direction of Shauneille Perry,[5] used 300 slides on four different rear projection screens. For instance, Rose's speech explains how she is at the hospital because she has suffered a nervous breakdown. It shows her in very middle-class social venues, including cocktail parties and art galleries events in the company of her white friends which are juxtaposed with pictures of the riot and of burning of buildings. Throughout the play's action, which all takes place in form of flashbacks, Rosalee is sitting in a hospital room on an upstage platform participating in the dialogue and, with pantomime, in the scenes taking place below.

Rose first appears before the public in a baggy and unfashionable hospital garb, declaring that she is in the hospital because she has had a nervous breakdown as a consequence of the riots in the city. Even if her husband, Dr. Pritchett, has warned her not to go out at night because it might not be safe, she believes she is quite safe in the neighborhood where she and her friends live, since the riots are occurring in the downtown ghetto area. Talking to her friends, Rose declares that "out here, a woman is safer at night than she would be downtown in broad daylight" (826). Rose and her friends desire to detach themselves from the incidents

[4] For instance, Arthur Sainer, reviewer of the play for the *Village Voice* in 1971, thought that "the characters are pidgin people, unable to generate their own lives. It's too bad, because the material is potentially rich, the ideas worth exploring. But the exploration doesn't happen." January 28: 59.

[5] Interestingly, Shauneille Perry, playwright and director, is Lorrain Hansberry's cousin.

that they label as "vandalism" and the riots because they think that they belong to the middle-class white society that has nothing to do with the embarrassing events taking place downtown. Rose and her friends consider themselves above the rest of blacks in town because they have scaled the social class ladder and moved into the middle-class. The reader only suspects from the beginning that the so-called "riots" are no other than the efforts of less fortunate blacks to fight against racism and the lack of civil rights in the area. For instance, Rose's husband, Dr. Pritchett, refuses to help cure those blacks hurt in the fighting downtown because, according to his wife, "he doesn't want to offend his regular patients" (827).

There is a total lack of identification of the characters with the on-going struggle for racial and social equality in the country. The women are very upset because their dinner parties might not be celebrated as their black maids are frightful of going out at night during the curfew. These black maids together with the rest of blacks taking part in the riot are classified as "poor and choosy niggers" by Rose and her lady friends. These women, as one might suppose, have high expectations for their sons: they expect them to marry white–but not "trashy" white, and to marry rich. Their admiration for white middle-class values has blinded them and they hold poor lower-class black people responsible for the alleged lootings and racial violence taking place in the city. Dr. Pritchett, has even refused to attend any colored people injured in the riots, fearful that his white business associates "might interpret that he is mixed up in the vandalism" (827).

During the 1970s black play writers were more concerned with intraracial issues, a topic which is still relevant today. In *Rosalee Pritchett* the Molettes actively fight against those blacks who had no sense of an African American culture, and had distanced themselves from lower-class African Americans –activists, writers, and middle-class blacks because in trying very hard to reach the American dream, by moving into upper-class white neighborhoods, and striving to demonstrate to the white world that they were the same, that equality indeed was a fact in America, they had lost touch with the roots of black folk culture. There is also a strong commentary on family values when Rose talks about her son's situation with her friends. The fact that her son, who is attending medical school, has been invited to join a white fraternity, is interpreted by the group as "moving up in the world" (827). By entering the white social university world, he will hopefully marry into a rich white family, thus making real the "American Dream." We also learn that Rose is the first Negro woman to join the "Daughters of the American Revolution" (828), signifying on her own efforts to climb up the social ladder into the world of whiteness, and ironically indicating the unwillingness of the snobbish black bourgeois to join The Civil Rights Movement.

In Scene 2, we learn through Rose's soliloquy that the town in which the characters live has had Martial Law imposed while riots are going on all around it. At this point, Rose's presence on the stage is only represented by a small pool of light, signifying the invisibility of Rose as a character in the play, and as an African American on the larger stage of American culture. Invoking Ralph Ellison's notion of black invisibility, the play works with the idea that African Americans are invisible people simply because white people refuse to see them. Such a notion renders Rose's character two dimensional, as her representation moves from figurative to literal invisibility.

The Molettes take the concept of invisibility one step further in this play when they make Rose, a black character, invisible for a black audience. African Americans who have been assimilated refuse to see Rose as much as Rose and the rest of the characters in the play refuse to see themselves and other African Americans. Rose puts down members of the Black Movement whom she calls "lazy, shiftless niggers" (828), while she refers positively to the assimilationists as being responsible for the "Negro businesses." Further, she relates how one of her friends has been shot downtown, and points out the injustice of blaming this crime on the National Guard when white police, according to Rose, are just there to protect all citizens, especially those "law-abiding citizens" like herself: "It's no telling what those niggers might try next. Somebody had to take control of the situation, and I'm glad our governor had the courage to stand up for law and order" (828). Obviously Rose feels very secure that her husband's professional status will protect her from the racists. However, she will bitterly find out that, as Malcolm X used to say, "they don't mess with us because we are rich or poor, light-skinned or dark skinned, Protestant, Catholic or Muslim, white collar or blue collar but because we are black" (qtd. in Bailey 23).

Scene 3 introduces four national guardsmen who are patrolling the streets of Rose's neighborhood, thus eluding their responsibilities to patrol the areas where they are needed, namely in the ghetto areas where the riots are taking place. The National Guard, composed of all white men, are portrayed by African American actors in white-face. This technique is used for reasons other than to convey the idea of a minstrel show-in-reverse.[6] The playwrights' notes to the director in *Rosalee Pritchett* explained that they used black actors to portray the white roles because they had a sincere doubt that most white actors could or would accurately portray these black playwright's perceptions about the motivations of the white characters in this play.

Frequently, the meaning of a character in an African American play is communicated through experiences that the actor holds in common with the African American members of the audience. Whites who are often oblivious to these attitudes and values will have difficulty accepting the truth of African American reality.[7]

According to the Molettes, "one such truth that underlies African American behavior is that whites, in general, are frequently held in contempt by African American people" (209). Thus, *Rosalee Pritchett*'s inherent contradiction and the hidden powerful message of the play is that if most blacks see whites with contempt, why would they want to assimilate and emulate white, Eurocentric culture? This idea brings to the fore the absurdity of the black community that aspires to

[6] Plays performed as minstrel shows in reverse call for an all black cast performing in white face.

[7] For instance, when African American novelist Toni Morrison wanted to write a book about black people, in the language of black people, without having to look over her shoulder to explain her world to white people, she gave the following opening to her novel *The Bluest Eye*: " 'Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.'" To white people, 'Quiet as it's kept means... 'Quiet as it's kept.'... but to black people," Morrison explained, "it means a big lie is about to be told. Or someone is going to tell some graveyard information, who's sleeping with whom. Black readers will chuckle" (Qtd. In David 40).

follow white cultural values and ideals. Thus, whites expect African American drama to exhibit what they regard

> as authenticity of external detail. This usually means having African American character types who fit easily into preconceived Eurocentric notions about who and what African American people are. Therefore, pimps, prostitutes, dope addicts and petty thieves are regarded as authentically African American while doctors, lawyers, bankers or college professors for instance, are not regarded as authentically African American. (*Premise* 210)

Also implied is the question the Molettes want to send their audience: are the black ladies in *Rosalee Pritchett* "oreos"?[8] Rose as a grand colored lady is compulsively seeking not just to enter white society but to establish an intimate relationship with a white person. In other words, the idea here is that the African American will be somebody only to the extent that he or she is able to connect his or her own goals and aspirations to the goals and aspirations of the white people they look up to.

The Guardsmen in the play are portrayed as complete racists whose only aim is to "keep them niggers in their place" (830). They are heavily armed, and they assert their manhood by ordering people around at gun point, proud of their absolute power and authority. For instance, one of the Guards, Lowe, believes in the power of the authority exerted by guns, and tells the others about his instruction in the education of his sons: "... you take my sons, by the time the oldest one is twelve, he'll be able to shoot the warts off a frog. Believe me, that's the way to raise boys" (829). Thus, the play problematizes the relationship between white manhood and violence, connecting this argument with issues concerning the racist attitudes of white manhood in American society during the 1970s.

The Guards suffer from a terminal case of "Afrophobia" or "Afrophobic" behavior when they demonstrate that their only way of securing an identity is by inflicting harm on blacks; "First nigger that showed his black ass, I'd shoot the shit outta him" (829) they declare. This violent white behavior, the Molettes state, grows out of values that result from a general fear of African people and African culture. The play depicts

> whites who commit violent acts against African Americans [...] not [...] because they have chosen to do wrong. They are doing what seems to them to be the right thing to do at the time, no matter how misguided their actions might be. Their behavior reflects their values. (*Premise* 222)

Evil lies, and in this the Molettes agree with James Baldwin, in the system that instills racist values, not in the individual who reacts to perpetuate and defend

[8] "Oreo" is a term of disparagement used by black people to describe a person who is black on the outside and white on the inside" (211).

them[9] and they contend that "Black people in America exist in an environment of institutional racism" (*Premise* 221).

The play's flashback action shows that while Rose drives home from her bridge party she is stopped on the road by the Guards who arrest her under the charge of "curfew violation." She repeats over and over that she lives in a nice neighborhood that never had any trouble. Not paying any attention to Rose's demands to be allowed to go home, the Guards get into her car to beat and rape Rose. The play shows us that rape is not a crime of uncontrollable sexual passion, but one used to vent misogyny and, in this case, racism and to exert physical, political, and economic control. That the perpetrators of crime here are agents of the law and lawful authority suggests that the root of rape was a violent physical assertion of white power. The rape scene in *Rosalee Pritchett* illustrates how rape continues to be the most lethal weapon used to oppress, suppress, and dehumanize black women in order to subvert their efforts to lead independent lives.[10] In the case of Rose, rape emerges as a narrative strategy tragically undermining the liberatory impulses that characterizes the Civil Rights Movement happening downtown, and that the protagonist, in her refusal to accepting the struggle of the rest of the blacks in the city, also rejects. Thus, rape "functions as a narrative violence that abrogates transgressive desire and frustrates the utopian political aspirations that underlie such desire" (Barnett xii).

In Scene 4, Rose's bridge table is joined by Thelma, a newcomer to the group, and also a social climber. The friends totally ignore what has happened to Rose, who just appears to be a victim of a nervous breakdown. Their responses to her rape are superficial, irresponsible and not at all supportive of their friend. Belle completely changes the subject not wanting to explore, in any great detail, Rose's situation, which they qualify as "hysteria,"[11] and the friends keep on talking about absolute trivialities. For instance, Doll says, thinking of Rose: "Maybe she'll recover from her hysteria in time for the luau (spring dinner)" and Dorry responds all in surprise: "Has she really been hysterical? I guess she would be after being raped like that. O well... Say! Guess where we're going for our summer vacation..." (835). According to Mel Gussow, reviewer of the play for *The New York Times,* the point of the play is not really the rape, but the fact that the other women are unmoved by it. Interestingly, however, the action of rape is deliberately concealed in the play. The historical fact of the rape of black women by white men has been referred to so

[9] James Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie* provides, according to the Molettes, "an example of an African American character who chooses to confront the forces that seek to take away his human dignity." In *Black Theatre, Premise and Presentation.*

[10] Sexual violence and the rape of black women have been used by patriarchy to suppress expressions of freedom and sexual freedom. According to Pamela E. Barnett, "rape is violence not only to individual persons, but violence aimed at preserving and perpetuating social domination." Thus we should focus on the issue of "rape's broader cultural meanings and consequences" (xi).

[11] The Molettes are signifying on 19th century white conceptions of womanhood which saw any deviance from the values of the cult of true womanhood as hysterical or mentally disturbed women. The irony in the case of the play at hand is double, because black women were excluded from the definitions of womanhood established by the true womanhood code.

many times, that the Molettes feel it has lost its potency and its ability to enrage. The authors therefore concentrate on the aftermath of rape to show how the women handle it, and how the impact of Rose's sexual assault on the audience is stronger after she and her friends refuse to admit it ever happened.

At the end of scene 1, the women playing bridge are in whiteface make-up to show their acceptance as blacks of the white values they have chosen to emulate. These women suffer from total amnesia regarding the situation of racial tension and violence in the U.S. during the 1970s exhibiting an acute detachment from the values rooted in their African American cultural and social background. These upper class Negro women live with the illusion of being white, of being considered equal to whites and of being accepted as part of mainstream society. The women of the play suffer from amnesia because they fail to recognize the rape of a black woman by a gang of powerful white men as a way of putting blacks down, using sexual violence to control black womanhood, reducing them to mere sexual objects and toys.

Rosalee Pritchett is as shocking as it is provoking, causing distress to both audience and reader. At the end the curtain does not fall because nothing is over. According to the Molettes, curtain calls contradict some fundamental Afrocentric assumptions about what theatre presentations are for and the relationships that ought to exist among performers and between performers and audience. As mentioned before, one of the tenets of Afrocentric rituals, is to celebrate the affirmation of a sense of community, a feeling of togetherness, which is broken when the actor concentrates his performance exclusively on the real character he is portraying in the play –the idea of realistic mimesis– shutting off the reality of the audience's presence from his/her consciousness. It is the Molettes' opinion that the curtain call is a marketing strategy to sell the stars of the production as well as the production. Theatre in the Eurocentric context has become a commodity, and curtain calls are designed to elicit applause and thereby generate positive opinions about productions and stars. Thus, according to Afrocentric theatre, the primary purpose of curtain calls is not to provide an opportunity for the audience to show its appreciation of the performers, but to block the audience out of the actor's conscious awareness because the actor "must be able to perceive and respond to the audience behavior that occurs in response to the performance" (*Premise* 163).

The use of independent but interrelated short scenes in *Rosalee Pritchett* together with the simultaneous staging of two levels of representation (Rose and the bridge table), along with screening and pictures in flashbacks demonstrates how the playwrights and director substitute the lineal development of the story with a cyclical or circular structure that breaks the unity of time, place, and action, thereby enriching the play's potential meanings. What Bertold Brecht calls "the alienation effect" effectively captures the impact of such a polifacetic play: rapid transitions between violent and comical moments; the unselective distinction between selfishness and heartlessness, on the one hand, and rather foolish snobbery and frivolity on the other; frozen images with the support of audiovisual material (pictures, music, songs) that invite the public to think and be alert and to have a critically receptive mood to what is being staged. Rose's past and present occupy scenic spaces simultaneously in the play. The play provokes feelings of bitterness and scorn, and as reviewer Clayton Riley comments after watching the staging of the play, "there is a great sense of sorrow" to be felt at the bridge party "at the terrifying

malaise eroding the spirit of its players" (Riley column 5). As Carlton Molette points out, "the Afro-American aesthetic places a very high value upon emotionally motivated behavior," or what he calls "soulful behavior," and transmitting this spiritually motivated behavior is one of the major achievements of the play.

Rosalee Pritchett achieves a positive goal by focusing upon the negative. It is a clear example of an Afrocentric play that makes a useful statement to Black audiences by portraying Black characters who fail. It offers a negative portrayal of African American characters in the effort to cause African American audiences to gain the insight to avoid similar negative circumstances. The audience must be concerned with what has happened to cause such a monumental failure. The fact is that both blacks and whites live in a state of self-deception: blacks cannot see the racism of American society because they live with the illusion of having been assimilated into it, denying themselves the chance to construct a true identity. Whites, on the other hand, are unable to see blacks as full citizens, overtaken by prejudice and racism. The play is successful so long as the audience gains insights into what has generated the downfall of the protagonist.

The issues addressed by the play are more complex than whether or not the African American protagonist will prevail at the end of the play, because in real life we are as likely to learn from our negative experiences as much as from our positive ones. The issues of racism, assimilation, violence, family and friendship coexist in America with an environment of institutional racism on a continual basis, and sometimes its impact is more severe than we are able to recognize at first sight. As Mel Gussow affirms, "the struggle is not so much against white supremacy as against a more insidious form of racism–the imposition of values by whites on blacks and the acceptance by blacks of those values." Moreover, the play condemns whites as models, and blacks as passive receivers.

4.

> *The history must be taught, and if not in the schools then at home. But that won't or can't be done until our home life, our families, get back on track. It's a vicious cycle. We still have a long, long way to go. (Spike Lee)*

Both *Raisin in the Sun* and *Rosalee Pritchett* are open-ended, and the playwrights use this strategy to encourage the audience to arrive at their own conclusions. Although *Rosalee Pritchett* may seem more strictly interrogative in the sense that the play concludes as it begins, with the social climbers at the bridge table –and in this respect, the authors leave the responsibility of finding a solution to the problem to the viewer– Carlton and Barbara Molette and Lorraine Hansberry are aiming at a corrective reading of history, questioning what seems self-evident.

The examination of *Raisin in the Sun* and *Rosalee Pritchett* suggests different but thoughtful and enduring approaches to the themes of integration, assimilation, difference and African American identity. The two plays, however, have a connection. That connection is established by their treatment of the ideology and practice of assimilation, which was a major topic –although unstated as

such– of Black American theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. The development of the dream of integration is portrayed from the perspectives of Hansberry's hopeful view in *Raisin* as well as the Molettes negative conception of *Rosalee Pritchett.* The bourgeois practices seen in *Rosalee Pritchett* are a sign of assimilation because they indicate the black characters' need to be accepted by white society. They perform an identity dictated by the standards and values of a society they look up to but which does nothing to change those aspects of their identity and culture which oppress and dominate racial and ethnic minorities. The fictitious post-racialism displayed by Rosalee Pritchett and her circle clearly endangers the racial dynamics of American society because this case of colorblind assimilation permits a nearly willful blindness to ongoing discrimination and a clear disregard of persistent racial inequalities. Ironically, as Banks contends, the danger of colorblindness assimilation lies in the fact that it prohibits overt discrimination even though it benefits historically disadvantaged racial minority groups, while it allows covert discrimination even if it subordinates already disadvantaged groups (51). Each play expresses and examines assimilation and its impact on male/female relationships, female agency, as well as class and race issues. All of these are addressed because they are shaped by assimilation into an American dream that defines success in white middle-class terms, or that defines the issue of identity in white terms.

Contrasting *Raisin* as representative of the theatre of the late 1950s that celebrates African American culture as universal in the plight of African Americans to overcome racism and oppression, with the Molettes' initiative in the 1970s of creating a space where African American community and art yearns for separatism and independence, provides a dramatically clear example of the fundamental and revolutionary change in racial dynamics and politics taking place in North America against the backlash of oppression and racism. The change shows that the disillusion of the impact of white middle-class values on black culture and people shifted in the ten years span that separated the productions of both plays.

The American social and political spheres demonstrate the understanding and subsequent development of African American culture and values: while integration was seen as desirable by blacks in the late 1950s, as illustrated by Hansberry's play, a few aspects of it were rejected by those blacks who saw the persistent prejudice and racism in some white sectors of American society in the late 1960s coinciding with the burst of the Black Arts Movement which promulgated black pride and a raise of black consciousness as clearly stated by the Molette's play. Both plays present perceptions that are different within the same cultural scenery. Since the differences do exist, assertions will continue to be made about the diverse perspectives as to what constitutes truth in African American theatre. Both perspectives are born out of the specific political concerns of the late 1950s and 1970s and how they affected the African American community and its artistic expression. Possibly both perceptions regarding the commitment and purpose of African American drama are equally valid, legitimate, and appropriate for their own situations. Both plays are conceived by very concerned people. As Riley points out,

> Their concerns are with the pitch and flavor of contemporary Black life, its ambivalences and contradictions, its emotional peaks and valleys, and the almost illogical beauty attending its rapidly changing days and nights. (*NYT* 1971)

Both *Raisin* and *Rosalee Pritchett* are born out of politically active minds engaged in finding ways to overcome racism and oppression in the larger terrain of North American life. Both plays recognize that they must use their artistic vision to show the breath and depth of the black experience on local, national and international levels. They effectively show that black people, even at the poorest levels, have great strengths as well as weaknesses. These artists offer guidance and vision on how to break through the web that racism and intolerance have woven around society while they trigger conversation and debate about workable solutions.

Reviews sent to author: 20 September 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 1 February 2015.

WORKS CITED

Banks, Ralph R. "Beyond Colorblindness: Neo-Racialism and the Future of Race and Law Scholarship." *Harvard Blackletter Law Journal* 25 (2009): 41-56. Print.

Baraka, Amiri. "A Critical Reevaluation: A Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion." 9-20. *A Raisin in the Sun (Expanded Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition) and The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window.* E. Robert Nemiroff. New York: New American Library, 1987. Print.

—— *Four Black Revolutionary Plays.* Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill, 1969. Print.

Barksdale & Keneth Kinnamon. *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology.* New York: MacMillan, 1972. Print.

Barnett, Pamela E. *Dangerous Desire: Literature of Sexual Freedom and Violence since the Sixties.* New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Bayley, Peter A. "A Look at Contemporary Black Theatre Movement." *The Crisis* (February 1983) 23. Print.

Brecht, Bertold. *Escritos sobre Teatro.* Tomos 1-3. Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1982-83. Print.

Brown, Michael et al. *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society.* California: University of California Press, 2003. Print.

Brown-Guillory, Elizabeth. *Their Place on the Stage. Black Women Playwrights in America*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. Print.

Carter, Steven R. *Hansberry's Drama. Commitment Amid Complexity.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. Print.

Cheney, Anne. *Lorrain Hansberry.* Boston: Twayne, 1984. Print.

Dannett, Sylvia G. *20th Century.* Vol. 2 of *Profiles of Negro Womanhood*Yonkers. NY: Educational Heritage, 1966. Print.

David, Ron. *Toni Morrison Explained.* New York: Random, 2000. Print.

Dubois, W. E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk.* 1903. New York: Signet, 1969. Print.

Ellam, Harry J. "Remembering Africa, Performing Cultural Memory: Lorrain Hansberry, Susan-Lori Parks and Djanet Sears." In Marc Maufort and C. De Wagler eds., *Signatures of the Past: Cultural Memory in Contemporary Anglophone North American Drama.* Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008. 31-48. Print.

Fabre, Geneviève. *Drumbeats Masks and Metaphor: Contemporary Afro-American* Theatre. Trans. Melvin Dixon. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983. Print.

Gallego, Mar. "Family (and) Politics in Lorrain Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*." In Pilar Madrazo, ed. *Visiones Contemporáneas de la Cultura y la Literatura Norteamericana en los Sesenta."* Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2002. 127-133. Print.

Gayle, Addison, Jr. *The Black Aesthetic.* New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1971. Print.

Gussow, Mel. "Theater: Condemning an Insidious Form of Racism." *New York Times* 22 Jan., 1971. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man.* New York: Random, 1952. Print.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun.* New York: Signet, 1959. Print.

—— *To Be Young, Gifted and Black. Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words.* Adapted Robert Nemiroff. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

Harris, Trudier. *Saints, Sinners, Saviors.* New York: Palgrave, 2001. Print.

Harrison, Paul Carter. *The Drama of Nommo: Black Theater in the African Continuum.* New York: Grove Press, 1972. Print.

Hayes, Floyd W. Hayes, ed. *A Turbulent Voyage: Readings in African American Studies.* San Diego: Collegiate Press, 1992. Print.

Hatch, James V. "A White Folks Guide to 200 Years of Black and White Drama." *The Drama Review* 16 (December 1972): 5-24. Print.

Hughes, Langston. "Harlem" in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. & Nellie Y. Mckay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1267. Print.

Lee, Spike. "Thoughts on the Screenplay." Robert Nemiroff, Ed. *A Raisin in the Sun. The Unfilmed Original Screenplay.* New York: Plume: 1992. Print.

Mayfield, Julian. "Lorrain Hansberry: A Woman for All Seasons." *Freedomways* 19.4 (1979): 263-267. Print.

Matthews, Kristin. "The Politics of Home in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun." *Modern Drama* 51. 4 (Winter 2008): 556-578. Print.

Molette, Carlton W. and Barbara J. *Rosalee Pritchett* in Richard Barksdale & Keneth Kinnamon, *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology.* New York: MacMillan, 1972. Print.

—— *Black Theatre. Premise and Presentation.* Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1992. Print.

—— *Afrocentric Theatre.* New Jersey: Xlibris, 2013. Print.

Molette, Carlton. "The Way to Viable Theater? Afro-American Ritual Drama." *Black World* 22 (April 1973): 4-12. Print.

Molette, Barbara J. "Black Women Playwrights: They Speak: Who Listens?" *Black World* 25 (1976): 28-34. Print.

Morrison, Toni. "Memory, Creation and Writing." *Thought* 59 (December 1984): 385-390. Print.

Moynihan, Daniel and Nathan Glazer. "Moynihan Report" US. Dept. of Labor, 1965. www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/webid-meynihan.htm Retrieved on 15 july 2013.Web.

Riley, Clayton. "Notwithstanding, I liked Them." Review of *Rosalee Pritchett* in *The New York Times* 7 Feb. 1971. Print.

Williams, Mance. *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s. A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985. Print.

KURT VONNEGUT' S DUAL ROOTS

Javier Martín Párraga
Universidad de Córdoba

Abstract

Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) was one of the most acclaimed and influential American novelists of the twentieth century. His literary corpus achieved universal prominence with the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in the year 1969 and from that date hundreds of scientific papers have been dedicated to him. Vonnegut was also one of the most popular writers of the period and his works won widespread recognition This paper analyzes Vonnegut's complex roots, linked both to Germany and the USA, delving into the author's quest for authenticity and exposing how this conditioned his whole literary production.

Keywords: American Postmodernism, Kurt Vonnegut, German-American relations.

Resumen

Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) es uno de los novelistas norteamericanos más aclamados e influyentes del siglo veinte. Desde que en el año 1969 se publicó *Slaughterhouse-Five*, han aparecido cientos de textos científicos sobre un autor que consiguió ser apreciado por lectores de los más diversos ámbitos sociales. El presente artículo analiza las complejas raíces del novelista, que se vinculan tanto con Alemania como con los EEUU. Para llevar a cabo este objetivo, estudiaremos en profundidad la compleja búsqueda de unas raíces auténticas que el autor lleva a cabo a lo largo de su vida así como el impacto que esta búsqueda tiene en su corpus literario.

Palabras clave: postmodernismo norteamericano, Kurt Vonnegut, relaciones germano-estadounidenses.

In *A Man Without a Country* Kurt Vonnegut summarized an idea that is central both to his understanding of the world and to his literary corpus, "a husband, a wife and some kids is not a family. It's a terribly vulnerable survival unit" (48). In order to fight the loneliness and sense of fragility that this situation created, the author tried to be part of an artificial extended family. The main goal of this paper is to analyze the two territories he explored when searching for roots: his German ancestry and the American society in which he was nurtured.

Robert Merrill suggests that the first biographical detail that must be taken into account when dealing with Vonnegut's novels is his German heritage,[1] "We should review Vonnegut's curious status as a German American" (73). Kevin Alexander Boon points out that Vonnegut's ancestry conditions the way he deals with life and literature:

> Kurt Vonnegut is a self-professed agnostic firmly grounded in the tradition of his German freethinking relatives. As such, his morality comes without metaphysical props. Instead, his moral thinking and writing reflect a rhetorical orientation- one for which the self is never disembodied from the community, the history, and the discourses of which it is a part. (135)

Dennis Stanton Smith shares Boon's opinion on how influential Vonnegut's German roots are: "The Vonnegut's, a family of German descents, held beliefs on pacifism and atheism, beliefs that figure prominently in Vonnegut's works" (5). I consider that these scholars' observations are very important, since they explain one of the most problematic points in Vonnegut's career: the author could be considered as an experimental author from a technical point of view, but nevertheless he is much more concerned with conveying a moral message (we could even speak of a didactic aim) that is not very often found in some of the most prominent writers of the period, such as John Barth, Donald Barthelme or Thomas Pynchon. In this sense, Bill Gholson explains that, "the fact that his characters raise moral questions indicates a belief that moral decisions are possible, making Vonnegut one of the few 'postmodern' writers maintaining hope in an age when the concept of a coherent identity is in question" (140). In *Like Shaking Hands with God*, the author explains his Horatian understanding of literature and does not hesitate to state the following: "your book should have political consequences" (1999, 21). [2]

Vonnegut's embrace of a traditional understanding of literature that goes back to Samuel Johnson rather than exploring more experimental paths attracted a legion of young readers and the attention of many scholars and fellow writers such as Tonny Tanner, Leslie Fiedler, Peter Reed, Jerome Klinkowitz or John Updike. Nevertheless, many critics have considered that Vonnegut's didactic concern and social aim have had a negative impact on the quality of some of his novels: "His books are not only like canaries in coal mines (his own analogy) but like the cormorants of the Galapagos Islands, who, in their idiosyncratic evolution, have sacrificed flight for the getting of fish" (Moore 273).

---

[1] As David Goldsmith explains, Vonnegut's very surname links him with Germany in an almost geographical manner, since the name Vonnegut comes from the German river Vonne (VIII).

[2] I am well aware that the debate of whether postmodernism shows a certain tendency towards a belletristic literature that might expose some of its writers to amorality is extremely complex. In the present paper I'm merely transmitting Vonnegut's personal conclusion, "I think it can be tremendously refreshing if a creator of literature has something on his mind other than the history of literature so far. Literature should not disappear up its own asshole, so to speak" (Hayman 185). It is also important to mention that some scholars, such as Leslie Fiedler of Jerome Klinkowitz, share the author's judgment.

As I have defended above, Kurt Vonnegut was convinced that his social and political concerns derived from his German ancestry. Nevertheless, and regardless of how influential his German roots might be, the author's connection with the land and culture of his ancestors must be considered as an extremely problematic one. The dominant mood toward Germany in the US during the author's infancy was not very positive. As Stanley Schatt explains, the author perceived this situation and became concerned with it from an early time: "As a German, he was very sensitive about the growing anti-German sentiment on campus [...]" (Schatt 15).

In *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage* (1981), Vonnegut devotes a whole chapter of the book, "Roots," to deal with his German origins. The author explains that due to the anti-Germanic angst of the period he was completely deprived of any German root:

> The anti-Germanism in this country during the First World War so shamed and dismayed my parents that they resolved to raise me without acquainting me with the language or the literature or the music or the oral histories which my ancestors had loved. They volunteered to make me ignorant and rootless as proof of their patriotism. (333)

As it is evident from the quotation above, Kurt Vonnegut sincerely regrets his lack of a true German heritage. Apart from *Palm Sunday*, the anxiety toward his German roots (or, more accurately, toward the lack of them) is also a very prominent theme in most of Vonnegut's short stories and novels. Vonnegut's references to his complex German roots began as soon as his college years, when he wrote a weekly column to Cornell students' magazine. As Peter Reed points out: "This column might seem to show again a German-American's concern for fairness, and to reflect some of the isolation and frankly anti-British sentiment that was still quite widespread in the country at this time" (18). Nevertheless, the most direct references to this German theme do occur in Vonnegut's fictional texts. In this sense, it is possible to trace a series of references to German origins in almost every novel from Vonnegut's corpus, but this theme stands as a key one in mostly three of the novels: *Mother Night* (1961), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and *Deadeye Dick* (1982).

In the autobiographical introduction to *Mother Night*, Vonnegut refers to his German origins in two different manners: On the one hand the writer tells an anecdote that explains how the Vonnegut family decided to detach themselves from their German roots, or at least to give more prominence to their recent American ones. In this case, Vonnegut remembers "some laughs about my aunt, too, who married a *German* German..." (vii). The second reference to Germany that can be found in this introduction attests that Vonnegut considers that even though he has German origins the fact of having been born in the US deprives him of belonging to Germany in a direct and meaningful manner. Therefore, he did not have any connection with the Nazi regimen: "If I'd been born in Germany, I suppose I would have been a Nazi, bopping Jews and Gypsies, and Poles around, laving boots sticking out of snowbanks, warming myself with my secretly virtuous insides" (viii).

The autobiographical elements Vonnegut includes in the introduction are certainly interesting, but the most prominent examples of the author's German

roots take place in the fictional section of the book. From the very first line of the narrative, the protagonist of *Mother Night* points out how problematic his roots are: "I am an American by birth, a Nazi by reputation, and a nationless person by inclination" (3). Howard W. Campbell claims to be "nationless by inclination," but nevertheless he seems to be a German by inclination: "Campbell was proud of himself as a writer in German, indifferent to his skill in English" (x). This character complains that New York is not Heaven at all but rather, "It was Hell for me– or not Hell, something worse than Hell" (15). It is not surprising that Campbell considers New York as Hell, since even if he is an American citizen "by birth" he decided long time ago to live in Germany as a true German citizen: "My father and mother left Germany in 1939, when war came. My wife and I stayed on" (18). Besides the family pressure and the threats of WWII, Campbell decides to stay in Germany, and even he serves the allies as a spy he keeps considering that "Germany is the most misunderstood country in the world" (64). In any case, his family does not share his ideas on how misunderstood Germany is, or his pretended loyalty to the Nazi cause, and Campbell's decision to stay in Germany and support the Nazi Regime (even though he was an American spy and not a real Nazi) causes his parents a great trauma: "My father and mother died. Some say they died of broken hearts... They did not disinherit me, though they must have been bitterly tempted to do so" (32). By the end of the narrative, Campbell is completely obsessed with his own roots and the role he played while he was pretending to be a Nazi; unable to deal with his own internal dilemma, he commits suicide. Interestingly enough he does not hang himself for crimes against humanity. On the contrary, as this character explains: "I think that tonight is the night I will hang Howard W. Campbell, Jr., for crimes against himself" (175).

As we see, the question of belonging to Germany, of being a German, is central in *Mother Night* as well as in Vonnegut's life. Coincidences do not end here, since character and author seem to share the same fate: it is never fully possible for the writer to be rooted to Germany as a real German and Campbell's problem is exactly the same one. The same applies to Vonnegut and Campbell's family's attitudes toward Germany. The novelist claims to be proud of his German roots, even if those roots were in fact not very prominent and he is far from being a German; and Campbell is also proud of being a German, even he is "an American by birth." In both cases, too, this impossibility of becoming rooted within Germany or a German tradition is a source of anxiety and trauma to both the author and the character.

Becoming rooted to Germany becomes a terrible source of anxiety to the protagonist of a novel that includes a biographical introduction in which Vonnegut stated: "This is the only story of mine whose moral I know. I don't think it's a marvelous moral, I simply happen to know what it is: We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (vii). Nevertheless, the message is quite ambiguous, since if we are really what we pretend to be, Campbell is undoubtedly a German citizen, but a genuine Nazi too. This explanation seems to be supported by Vonnegut himself, who explained in an interview, "Howard W. Campbell was an authentically bad man" (Reilly 222); but this explanation is also extremely unsatisfactory, since as Vonnegut has also expressed in many other interviews, "I've never written a story with

a villain" (Shenker 22). Thus, the character of Howard W. Campbell becomes an extremely problematic one since his roots can only be understood in terms of a virtually insolvable Schrödinger paradox or in an equally complex Heideggerian *sous rature*.

Vonnegut's German roots re-appear from the very title of his masterpiece, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The complete title of the novel, which pays homage to the pre-nineteen century tradition of long and far-fetched titles, includes a broad summary of the main themes of the novel[3] in which the Indianapolis author makes clear that the novel was written by "Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. a fourth generation German-American [...]." Nevertheless, the novel in which this fourth generation German-American author deals with his complex German roots in a more direct and interesting manner is *Deadeye Dick* (1982). The protagonist of this novel, Rudy Waltz, is in many ways an alter ego of Vonnegut and the author makes this point clear from the autobiographical preface to the novel: "The crime he committed in childhood is all the bad things I have done" (10). Even this character is not a German but an American citizen, and even though he never gets to visit Germany or to speak German at all, Germany becomes a key aspect in his life. When Rudy's father was a young man he was sent to Vienna to be treated for a sexual illness and to study art. During this period he fell in love both with Austria and Germany. His fascination with the Germanic culture became intensified when he met a young Austrian painter: Adolf Hitler. Ruddy's father helped Hitler, who was extremely poor at the moment, and they almost immediately became friends. Once again, Rudy's Germanic roots are quite complex from a moral point of view ("Think of that: My father could have strangled the worst monster of the century, or simply let him starve or freeze to death. But became his bosom buddy instead" 17). His father's relation with Hitler will change Rudy's life in a crucial manner: "I sometimes think that I would have had a very different sort of soul if I had grown up in an ordinary little American house [...]" (19). So, when Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany he invites Rudy's family to visit him and spend some time in Germany as the Führer's guests. The whole family accepts the invitation and goes to Germany, excepting Rudy, who was only two years old at that point. When Rudy's relatives return from Germany six months later their love and admiration of Germany and Hitler have been intensified:

> According to Mother, he (Father) had undergone a profound spiritual change in Germany. He had a new sense of purpose in life [...]. He would become a teacher and political activist. He would become a spokesman in America for

[3] The unabridged title of the novel is the following one: "Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade. A duty-Dance with Death. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. A Fourth-Generation German-American now Living in Easy Circumstances on Cape Cod (And Smoking Too Much), Who, as an American Infantry Scout *Hors de Combat*, as a Prisoner of War, Witnessed the Fire-Bombing of Dresden, Germany, "The Florence of the Elbe," a Long Time Ago, and Survived to Tell the Tale. This is a Novel Somewhat in the Telegraphic Schizophrenic Manner of Tales of the Planet Trafalmadore, Where the Flying Saucers Come From. Peace."

> the new social order which was being born in Germany, but which in time would be the salvation of the world. (36)

Thus, Rudy's life starts to be affected by Germany in a crucial way: "I myself am in one picture of the paper. It is of our entire family in the street, in front of the studio, looking up at the Nazi flag" (35). Rudy's family came back from Germany, and flew the Nazi flag, in 1934, a time in which "flying a Nazi flag in Midland City was no more offensive than flying a Greek or Irish or Confederate flag, or whatever" (35). As a matter of fact, before the US entered World War II there was certain sympathy towards the Nazi movement in Indianapolis, as Vonnegut explained in his introduction to *Mother Night*:

> My personal experience with Nazi monkey business was limited. There were some vile and lively native American Fascists in my home town of Indianapolis during the thirties, and somebody slipped me a copy of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, I remember, which was supposed to be the Jews' secret plan for taking over the world. (vii)

In any case, as soon as the US entered World War II against the Nazi regime and its allies, the situation changed, and Rudy's family's sympathies with Hitler and his regime became certainly problematic: "Somewhere in there the Nazi flag fell down. Father stopped travelling [...] Father wouldn't even leave the home or talk on the telephone, or look at his mail for three months or so" (38). Once World War II had ended the neighbors didn't forget (or excuse) Rudy's family's "Nazi" past. So, Rudy was raised in an environment in which the Germanic tradition was praised as the highest cultural and historical manifestation in the world, but at a certain point he was suddenly and completely deprived of this source of influence: "The subject of Hitler and the new order in Germany seemed to make people angrier with each passing day, so he (Father) had better find something else to talk about" (44). Besides his family reluctance to go back to their "German" past, the neighbors kept insisting on blaming them and Rudy was often attacked by other local boys in the following terms: "Ey, Nazi" (89), even Rudy did never get to visit Germany or know Hitler... or even understand the Nazi question very well since he was just a two year old boy when his father became such a pro-German activist. The references to Germany, German characters or characters that are somehow related to a Germanic past are very frequent in the rest of Vonnegut's corpus as well, but it should be noted that in his most recent novels the author deals with his German origins in an increasingly more indirect and subtle way, to the extent that as Robert Merrill points out, "In Bluebeard Vonnegut's Germanic heritage is so transformed it becomes Armenian!" (81).

As I have shown in this section of the paper, his parents, who were somehow ashamed of their own roots due to the tensions between Germany and the US in World War I, and especially because of the Nazi regime during the following World War, did not give Kurt Vonnegut a German education. However, I cannot agree with Robert Merrill's opinion that "Vonnegut's childhood roots are known primarily by their absence" (76).

So far, I have expressed that Vonnegut's parents decided not to provide their son with a German education and tried to educate him following truly American ideals and beliefs. In the case of Vonnegut the notion of America (and consequently of being American) must necessarily be linked with the historical period of the Great Depression and post-depression years. During the past fifty years the writer has been identified as a science fiction writer, a black humorist and a satirist. Consequently, trying to pigeonhole his literature has been one of the greatest concerns of the critics. Vonnegut himself has always rejected all these labels, arguing the following: "I'm part of the generation of 1922 and that's it. We have a large number of writers–myself, James Jones, Joe Heller, Norman Mailer– who were all born in 1922" (Abádi-Nagy 33). As this quotation shows, Vonnegut has always wanted to call attention upon the Great Depression years. As Jerome Klinkowitz explains, the Great Depression had a negative effect on the family economy, but nevertheless it helped Vonnegut to understand life in a more egalitarian manner, so for Vonnegut these years were not traumatic at all: "(the Great Depression) forced Kurt into a more egalitarian life-style which he now credits as one of his greatest childhood treasures" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 1). This scholar also makes clear how important the Great Depression was for Vonnegut: "Although the firebombing of Dresden is usually considered the most traumatic event in Vonnegut's life, both as a writer and as a person, he himself considers the Great Depression to have been a far more difficult ordeal for the country as a whole" (1, 31) and William Rodney Allen, scholar and close friend of Vonnegut, shares Klinkowitz's opinion (xiii).

The Great Depression had a number of immediate effects on Vonnegut and his family: the father, who had been a very prominent architect, became jobless most of the time and the mother "became depressed and withdrew from her children's lives" (Marvin *Companion* 3). Vonnegut explains how the Great Depression affected his mother in several of his novels. In the autobiographical prologue to *Jailbird* (1979), the novelist regrets that, "my mother had declined to go on living, since she could no longer be what she had been at the time of her marriage– one of the richest women in town" (8). Vonnegut also expresses this idea in *Timequake*, his final novel: "My mother was addicted to being rich, to servants and unlimited charge accounts, to giving lavish dinner parties, to taking frequent first-class trips to Europe. So one might say she was tormented by withdrawal symptoms all through the Great Depression" (28).

As a matter of fact, Vonnegut's mother was never able to overcome the trauma produced by the Great Depression, and on Mother's Day, 1944, she decided to take her own life by consuming a fatal overdose of sleeping pills. Vonnegut's novels show many references to mothers who are distant, crazy and there are also some extremely important references to mothers killing themselves with sleeping pills. In this sense, Klinkowitz thinks that this fact is especially evident in the novel *Deadeye Dick*: "had *Deadeye Dick* been provided with a prologue as full as those in the novels that preceded it, Kurt Vonnegut might well have retold the story of his mother's death" (2, 125).

Unlike his mother, Vonnegut's father did not resent this lack of social status or by the economic situation of the family (that was not that bad after all, especially if we compare it with the situation of most of American middle class families of the period), but was certainly affected by the Great Depression, as Vonnegut explains in

his autobiographical prologue to *Jailbird*: "So I have to say that my father, when I got to know him, when I myself was something like an adult, was a good man in full retreat from life [..]. So an air of defeat has always been a companion of mine" (10). This "air of defeat" certainly seems to permeate the whole of Vonnegut's corpus but it is especially evident in *Galápagos*, a novel in which a human-induced apocalypse dooms humanity to de-evolution... a phenomenon that, in Vonnegut's opinion is not a bad thing at all, since as we are explained in *A Man Without a Country*: "Evolution can go to hell, as far as I am concerned. What a mistake we are" (9).

As I advanced above, Vonnegut's father's reasons for retreating from life were quite different from his wife's. In his case, the Great Depression deprived him of what was most valuable to him: not his social status or his properties, but his job. As Thomas F. Marvin explains, Kurt Vonnegut senior was one of Indiana's most prominent architects,[4] but "the Great Depression of the1930s put a halt to building, and Kurt, Sr., had no work from 1920 to 1940" (2). Without any project to carry on, Vonnegut's father felt he was completely useless, becoming a "dreamy artist" (Reilly 227), just as Rudy's father is a dreamy artist in *Deadeye Dick*.[5]

Because of the family's economic situation, young Vonnegut had to leave Orchard School, the expensive private high school he was attending and was enrolled in a public institution. Besides the loss of social status and academic prestige this situation implied, Kurt Vonnegut was delighted with this change: "I got pulled out of an elitist private school [...] and sent to a public high school. Which was swell. I liked it; it was interesting. The Depression cost me nothing" (Allen 270). In another interview the author explains that, paradoxically enough, the Great Depression was a positive experience not only to himself but to American society as a whole, since it created a sense of union and brotherhood that is: "How did Americans beat the Great Depression? We banded together. In those days, members of the unions called each others 'brother' and 'sister'" (op.cit. 103). This sense of brotherhood is one of Vonnegut's main obsessions, since as he explained in the famous 1973 Playboy interview: "Do you know what nucleation is? I don't, but I'll pretend I do. It has to do with how big something has to be in order to grow rather than to die out" (Standish 82).

As it has been said many times before, the idea of loneliness being the most frequent and worst problem in American society is almost omnipresent in Vonnegut's novels, as well as being a common feature in many other postmodern authors, from Donald Barthelme to Salman Rushdie. I think the most interesting examples of this theme occur in the following novels: *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) and *Slapstick, or Lonesome no More!* (1976). From my point of view, Lawrence R. Broer is completely right when he explains that "while most critics stress the sociological

[4] Kurt Vonnegut, Sr.'s most important buildings can still be visited at Indianapolis, and they include a theater and the Indiana Headquarters of the Indiana Telephone Company.

[5] The resemblances between the protagonist's father and Vonnegut's own father are certainly remarkable: both are ashamed of their German past, both are failed artists (or artists with interrupted careers), both are gun collectors, both are absent parents and both insist on the fact that their sons shouldn't have anything to do with the arts.

aspects of this novel (*Slapstick*), it is its psychological dimension that constitutes the story's complexity and special poignancy" (66). In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* Kurt Vonnegut deals with this theme of isolation in the following way: Eliot Rosewater is an extremely wealthy American citizen who has inherited a huge fortune as well as the direction of an ancient foundation inaugurated by his ancestors, *The Rosewater Foundation*. Traditionally this foundation had been a way of evading (or at least cutting down) taxes, but Eliot Rosewater decides he is going to direct his foundation in a way that's beneficial to poor people and not only to the Rosewater family. At the beginning of the narrative Eliot is drinking far too much, he has no descendants and his marriage is collapsing. Thus, Eliot abandons New York and begins a journey through the US that's really a spiritual quest, almost a *Bildungsroman*. Anyway, his journey and quest prove unsuccessful till he arrives to Rosewater County, a small town in Indiana from where his family (and fortune) originated. Once in this community, Eliot's search can be considered over, and his spiritual quest fulfilled: "I *am* home. I know now that this has always been home [...]" (41).

The protagonist's main purpose in Rosewater County will be that of helping Rosewater people: "I am going to care about *these* people" (n.p.). Eliot considers Rosewater people need him, as a paternal-like figure, to care about them because they live in a state of absolute loneliness and isolation; so he will play the role of the father in this community. Nevertheless, and besides his noble intentions, his goals are extremely difficult to reach. On the one hand Eliot's own family is even more disturbed than before, since his wife cannot cope with Eliot's obsessive piety and is finally diagnosed "Samaritrophobia [...] hysterical indifference to the troubles of those less fortunate than oneself" (48) and, finally, abandons him. If his own family is not able to become a part of the bigger family Eliot is trying to form, Rosewater people aren't either. Rosewater citizens do really admire Eliot and in a way he is beloved, but as a "monarch" (46) not as a father. So, Eliot's foundation, besides his motto "HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?" (57), is not very successful in fighting the isolation he has so cleverly identified.

In any case, this character's actions are not fully fruitless, since he is able to make Diana Moon Glampers feel she was a member of a real family for the first time in her sorrowful life: "(She) was a sixty-eight-year-old virgin who, by almost by anybody's standard, was too dumb to life. No one had ever loved her. There was no reason why anyone should. She was ugly, stupid, and boring" (65). Eliot does not offer Diana any money, or other sort of material help. Since her problems are social and medical, there is not much Eliot can do besides listen to her and make her feel she is important to someone in other words, to make her feel that she is a member of a family. But by helping her in this way, Eliot Rosewater is really helping her more than any of her real relatives has ever helped her, and thus Diana understands how important and beautiful Eliot's aims are: "You gave up everything a man is supposed to want, just to help the little people, and the little people know it. God bless you, Mr. Rosewater" (70). Nevertheless, the affection Rosewater people feel toward Eliot Rosewater and the success with Diana Moon Glampers are not enough to maintain Eliot's project and his utopia begins to fall apart. On the one hand it starts to collapse due to Eliot's father's desire to have his son medically treated, and on the other hand it is his own personal condition that makes his dream unviable:

"He had had one hell of a night, not only with telephone calls, but with people coming in person at all hours, more of half of them drunk" (171).

The situation becomes extreme when a young lawyer, Norman Mushari, decides to take Eliot to Court to prove his sanity (in the hope he is declared legally insane and deprived of the control of the *Rosewater Foundation*, that will be from that point on directed by a far-away relative of Eliot, who is, obviously, Norman's client). From that moment on, Eliot's father decides enough has been enough: Eliot must abandon Rosewater County and his failed utopian extended family: "This part of your life is over. It had to end sometime" (179). By this point, Eliot is so disenchanted with his project that "[he] accepted this, or seemed to. He didn't argue with it, allowed that he had better washed up and get dressed for the trip" (180). As for Rosewater people, they really feel sorry for Eliot's departure: "'Oh, Mr. Rosewater- if you go away and never come back, we'll die'" (184), but they are also conscious of the fact that Eliot's presence in Rosewater County was not so necessary at all, since when Eliot asks one woman why they think his presence is so necessary, she is not able to formulate a coherent answer: "'I don't know'" (185). After this incident Eliot Rosewater finally understands his utopia is over and he must go away, and thus when he is asked whether he wants a one way or a round ticket out of Rosewater County, "Eliot did not hesitate.' One way, if you please'" (200). When he is finally in the bus and leaving Rosewater and his project Diana Moon Glampers tries to stop him for the last time: "*You're* my church group! You're my *everything!* You're my government. You're my husband. You're my friends" (201), but Eliot's own emotional breakdown and sense of failure are so intense that Diana's moving words do not make him feel any better at all.

Shortly after having finally abandoned Rosewater County "everything went black for Eliot" (206). The blank period lasts for a long time (about a year), and when he finally recovers his consciousness he is in a mental hospital, with such a fit and slim body and good mental condition as to appear in a popular magazine under the headline, "(The) SANEST MAN IN AMERICA?" (210). Besides his apparent ideal state, "Eliot felt his soul cringe, knew he could never stand to return to Rosewater County again" (217), so he decides that he must keep being a part of the Rosewater community, the Rosewater family he tried to create, by becoming an actual relative of many of the inhabitants of Rosewater County. Thus, he decided that "[he] will legally acknowledge that every child in Rosewater County said to be mine *is* mine, regardless of blood type. Let them all have full rights of inheritance as my sons and daughters" (221-2).

Slapstick, or Lonesome no More! (1976) was not well received by the majority of critics, and as Vonnegut explained in a 1997 interview, "all of a sudden, critics wanted me squashed like a bug" (Hayman 184). In the prologue to the novel, the author explains two points that are especially relevant to our study. On the one hand, Vonnegut declares that "this is the closest I will ever come to writing an autobiography" (1) and, on the other hand, he mentions explicitly "my childhood in the Great Depression" (1), and explains that this historical period conditioned the way he understands life in general and literature in particular. Vonnegut explains that one of the reasons why he had such a happy childhood besides the terrible economic situation was that, "when we were children in Indianapolis, Indiana, it appeared that we would always have an extended family of genuine relatives there"

(4). Nevertheless, "by the time the Great Depression and a Second World War was over, it was easy for my brother and my sister and me to wander away from Indianapolis" (5). The reasons why after the Depression and WWII the role of the family is not so important to young Kurt and his brother and sister are various, but especially because of the loss of the German roots I've analyzed throughout the essay and because of the high mobility demanded by post-WWII American society.

In *Like Shaking Hands with God* Kurt Vonnegut affirmed the following: "That's the story of my life, too. I went to a good high school, and everything was noise after that" (77). In this paper I have studied in depth the questions that obsessed the author during this period of his life: trying to come to terms with his complex German roots while he became a true American citizen. The above quoted sentence expresses the author's own conclusions: no matter how hard he tried, Germany was extremely far both from a physical and an emotional point of view and, unfortunately (or not), Vonnegut's real heritage and tradition could not be but those of Mark Twain.

Reviews sent to author: 22 September 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 19 February 2015.

WORKS CITED

Abádi-Nagy, Zoltán. "Serenity, Courage, Wisdom: A Talk with Kurt Vonnegut." *The Vonnegut Chronichles: Interviews and Essays*. Ed. Marc Leeds & Reed, Peter J. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996. 15-35. Print.

Allen, William Rodney. *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. Literary Conversations Series. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999. Print.

Boon, Kevin A. *Chaos Theory and the Interpretation of Literary Texts: The Case of Kurt Vonnegut*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997. Print.

Broer, Lawrence. *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994. Print.

Fiedler, Leslie. "The Divine Stupidity of Kurt Vonnegut". *Enquire* 74 (1970): 195-204. Print.

Gholson, Bill. "Narrative, Self, and Morality in the Writing of Kurt Vonnegut". *At Millennium's End: New Essays on Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. Kevin A. Boon. Albany: State University of New York, 2001. 135-49. Print.

Goldsmith, David H. *Kurt Vonnegut, Fantasist of Fire and Ice*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972. Print.

Hayman, David. "Kurt Vonnegut: The Art of Fiction". *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. William Rodney Allen. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003. Print.

Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Structuring the Void: The Struggle for Subject in Contemporary American Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992. Print.

—— *Vonnegut in Fact: The Public Spokesmanship of Personal Fiction*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998. Print.

Marvin, Tomas F. *Kurt Vonnegut a Critical Companion*. Westport: Greemwood Press, 2002. Print.

Merrill, Robert. "Kurt Vonnegut as a German American". *The Vonnegut Chronichles: Interviews and Essays*. Ed. Marc Leeds & Reed, Peter J. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996. 73-85. Print.

Moore, Lorrie. "How Humans Got Flippers and Beaks: A Review of *Slapstick!*". *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. Leonard Mustazza. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994. 271-73. Print.

Reed, Peter J. *The Short Fiction of Kurt Vonnegut*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997. Print.

Reilly, Charles. "Two Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut". *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. William Rodney Allen. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003. 196-230. Print.

Schatt, Stanley. *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976. Print.

Shenker, Israel. "Lights Comic Paths of Despair". *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. William Rodney Allen. The University Press of Mississippi. 20-23. Print.

Standish, David. "Playboy Interview with Kurt Vonnegut". *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. William Rodney Allen. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003. 76-111. Print.

Stanton Smith, Dennis. *Cliffsnotes on Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five*. New York: Hungry Minds, 1997. Print.

Tanner, Tony. "The Uncertain Messenger (Kurt Vonnegut. Jr.)". *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970*. Ed. Tony Tanner. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 181-201. Print.

Updike, John. "All's Well in Skyscraper National Park: Review of *Slapstick*". *Critical Essays on Kurt Vonnegut*. Ed. Robert Merrill. Boston: G.K.Hall & Co., 1976. 40-47. Print.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater; or, Pearls before Swine*. New York: Holt, 1965. Print.

—— *Mother Night*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1966. Print.

—— *Slaughterhouse-Five; or, the Children's Crusade, a Duty-Dance with Death*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1969. Print.

—— *Slapstick: Or Lonesome No More!* London: J. Cape, 1976. Print.

—— *Jailbird: A Novel*. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1979. Print.

—— *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1981. Print.

—— *Deadeye Dick*. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1982. Print.

—— *Galápagos: A Novel*. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1985. Print.

—— *Timequake*. New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1997. Print.

——. *A Man without a Country*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005. Print.

——. *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage*. New York: Dial Press Trade Paperbacks, 2006. Print.

Vonnegut, Kurt, and Lee Stringer. *Like Shaking Hands with God: A Conversation About Writing*. New York:Seven Stories Press, 1999. Print.

RIDLEY SCOTT'S DYSTOPIA MEETS RONALD REAGAN'S AMERICA: CLASS CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DISCLOSURE IN *BLADE RUNNER: THE FINAL CUT*

Fabián Orán Llarena
Universidad de La Laguna

"The great owners ignored the three cries of history. The land fell into fewer hands, the number of dispossessed increased, and every effort of the great owners was directed at repression."
(John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*)

Abstract

Blade Runner has been the object of multiple inquiries over the last three decades. However, this essay analyzes the socio-political discourse of the text, one aspect yet to be elucidated. Taking as basis the 1992 re-edited version (*Blade Runner: The Final Cut*), the essay studies the film as a critical and contextualized response to Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989). The essay scrutinizes how the materiality of the socio-economic system presented in the film, and the discourses that revolve around it, embody a critical representation of the policy-making and cultural discourse of Reaganism. Thus, the ensuing text characterizes the film as a (counter) narrative that deconstructs the conservative ideology of the 1980s.

Keywords: Reaganism, supply-side theory, hegemony, underclass, Off World.

Resumen

Blade Runner ha sido objeto de múltiples consideraciones durante las últimas tres décadas. No obstante, este ensayo analiza el discurso político-cultural del film, un aspecto aún por dilucidar. Tomando como base el remontaje de 1992 (*Blade Runner: The Final Cut)*, se estudia el film como una respuesta crítica y contextualizada a la presidencia de Ronald Reagan (1981-1989). El ensayo escruta cómo la materialidad del sistema socio-económico presentado en el film, y los discursos que se construyen en torno al mismo, son una representación crítica de las políticas y el discurso cultural del Reaganismo. Así, el texto caracteriza el film como una (contra)narrativa que deconstruye la ideología conservadora de la década de los 1980.

Palabras clave: Reaganismo, Teoría de la Oferta, clase marginada, hegemonía, *Off World*

Very few films in contemporary American cinema have generated philosophical discussion, market exploitation, popular worship and entrenched criticism, all at once. *Blade Runner* has been, indeed, subject to all of these tendencies. The film premiered poorly when it was released in June 1982. Reviewers considered Scott's slow-paced blend of film noir and science fiction, as well as its opulent dystopian setting and inquiries about the boundaries of humanity, pretentious and too reliant on special effects (Alonso 7).[1] It was the summer of a much kinder sort of science fiction, *E.T*, as its unprecedented success attests.[2] The fact that Steven Spielberg's feel-good tale conquered both box offices and the audiences' hearts while *Blade Runner* was, at first sight, condemned to ostracism revealed eloquently how popular culture was beginning to articulate the sharp shift at play in American politics. After the violent and anti-establishment stories of Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich, and other filmmakers from the New Hollywood, other kind of cultural discourse was to dominate American popular cinema through the 1980s; one attuned to the political landscape Republican president Ronald Reagan would tailor during his two terms (1981-1989).[3] An agenda constituted by economic anti-interventionism, polarizing evangelical rhetoric, rehistoricization of the recent past, military reinvigoration, and patriotism was reciprocated with a string of box office successes that bears strong kinship to the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Suburban stories strengthening the importance of the nuclear family *(E.T*, *Back to The Future* [1985], *The Breakfast Club* [1985]), escapist tales reminiscent of adventure serials and comic book strips *(The Ghostbusters* [1984], *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* [1989]), and a new type of hyperbolic masculinity (epitomized by the second [1985] and third [1989] installments of the *Rambo* series) became the most cherished cultural products of the Reagan Era.[4]

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 70; 2015, PP. 155-168

---

[1] See *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner* (313-115) in which Paul Sammon compiles the critical reception of the film.

[2] See the extensive and extraordinarily well documented article on *ET* published in *Wikipedia*. Quite interestingly, the article also comments how Ronald and Nancy Reagan were "moved by the film after a screening at the White House."

[3] I recommend two volumes that take as subject the intersection between Reaganism and cinematic discourse: Alan Nadel's *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America*, and Susan Jeffords' *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*.

[4] There was, nonetheless, a battery of films released during the 1980s that engaged in demythologizing Reagan's America and that did get wide public attention. The best examples are Oliver Stone's unvarnished, highly critical couple of Vietnam War films *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). However, it is hard to imagine some of the crudely violent and/or socio-culturally rebellious top grossing films of the 1970s such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Godfather Part II* (1974), or *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) faring as favorably in the 1980s. In addition to this, several films ranking in the annual top 10 grossing films list of the 1970s are head-on critiques on mainstays of American culture such as family values, heterosexuality and individualism (an unthinkable reality in the 1980s). See *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), among others. To check the figures supporting these thoughts, see http://www.teako170.com/box70-79.html.

However, parallel to this filmic and cultural sway towards conservatism, people reacquainted gradually with *Blade Runner*. The palimpsestic texture of its aesthetic,[5] and more pointedly, the ambiguities of the plot (mainly the real nature of protagonist Rick Deckard) prompted heated debate in the internet and in magazines among the increasingly large number of fans (Alonso 24, 25). Aware of the enthusiasm accruing on the film since its failed release, producers and director Ridley Scott reedited the film to attract the people that had been dissecting its intricacies for a decade. The result crystallized into *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (1992).[6] The plot remains almost intact. In the 2019 Los Angeles, humankind has conquered outer space employing genetically engineered organic robots (replicants) to work on the so called "Off Worlds." Four replicants scape from one of these colonies and return to Earth to have their four-year lifespan extended. Private investigator Deckard is forced by the authorities to kill (or, as it is euphemistically put, "retire") the rebellious replicants. Nonetheless, subtle variations were made: the noir-like voice-over is wiped out (making Deckard more unfathomable), the original happy ending is substituted by a much uncertain and cryptic denouement, and, most importantly, the narration shows that Deckard is a replicant (thus, he is, in fact, eliminating their equals).

Films from the Reagan era have produced fecund and active critical engagement. However, it is surprising that the reappearance of *Blade Runner* in 1992 by means of its reediting and rerelease, and the slight yet very eloquent alterations made upon it, have passed unnoticed as object of study. Its reenactment as a cultural narrative, just a few years after Ronald Reagan left office, poses the need for a close analysis. Time has invested the story and its images with new meanings. As we will see, several elements in the narration represent a very critical examination of Reagan's presidency. The film characterizes an economic and social system whose functioning and structuring encapsulate a speculative reading of the economic, political, and cultural practices of Reaganism.

Apart from a receptacle for plot events, the cityscape in *Blade Runner* is a dualistic space fraught with contrapositions and clashes that bring the political disclosures of the film to the fore. The Los Angeles envisioned in the film is not only prophetic.[7] Reaganism instigated and ensured the fall of the already declining economic agenda of liberalism, a form of Keynesian management still redolent of the achievements of the New Deal that had dominated American economy since postwar years. Reagan saw fitting to introduce new approaches to an economy stagnant for most of the 1970s. A host of cultural observers and historians have analyzed in quite critical terms those policies of

---

[5] A disparate set of influences make up the eclectic stylistic signature of the film: French artist Jean Giraud "Moebius", the Gotham City designed by Bob Kane in the early *Batman* issues, German science fiction classic *Metropolis*, and classical film noir.

[6] We will be referring to the film, however, as *Blade Runner* for the rest of the text

[7] In *Dangerous Days: The Making of Blade Runner* (2007), film critic Kenneth Turan comments this:

"Whenever I walk around downtown I think this is becoming more and more like *Blade Runner*". In his in-depth study of the film, Jesus Alonso states that contemporary cities are partially like the LA designed by Ridley Scott and his crew (56).

deregulation and strong reliance on free market that came to be known as Reaganomics. The socio-economic system presented in *Blade Runner* adheres to this line of thought as it intends to deconstruct and pinpoint the contradictions interred within the dynamics of Reaganomics. In the representation of urban spaces we may encounter two divergent realms: on the one hand, images that contribute to ensure and validate the grand discourses of mainstream institutions, and, on the other, the shadow city, "that part of the hypercity which not only conflicts with the formal, institutionalized images of the city, but actively seeks to challenge, invert or subvert them' (Darias-Beautell, 354). In *Blade Runner*, we see a constant friction between macro- and micro- perspectives upon the futuristic Los Angeles. Through the latter, the shadow city is revealed, a locus that exposes the threats of economic deregulation and supply-side theory, and the undercutting of the welfare system (both mainstays of the Reaganite agenda).[8]

A handful of critics have stressed that the economic bonanza Reagan claimed to have generated had less to do with a uniform growth than with a markedly uneven wealth distribution, conveniently disguised as overall national reinvigoration, and dangerously built upon an "orgy of debt and interest" (Nadel 27). "[T]he spending binge that gave the Reagan years a glow of prosperity," historian Paul Boyer contended, "had been built on the back of a massive trade deficit, and thus had been financed by a vast outflow of I.O.U.s" (120). Gordon Gecko's iconic line "greed is good" in *Wall Street* (1987) seemed to be the cultural subtext that entitled the creation of a "new wealth [...] built on insubstantial paper transactions, overleveraged credit, and sharp dealing that from time to time crossed over into illegality" (Wilentz 203). Within this so called "Era of Greed", the GDP of the United States in 1986 was 104 percent, that is, what Americans spent on goods and services exceeded by four what they actually produced, thanks to the oft-vilified Japanese, Canadian and German capital (Reinhardt 125). The concern many commentators reflected upon was that future generation will be the ones paying the I.O.S through which Reaganism was financing American economy.

Blade Runner opens with a long shot of a slightly gloomy yet exuberant Los Angeles: characteristically wide, luminous, and unmistakably set in the future as a flying car crosses the skyline. The perfected technology, along with Vangelis' appealing score, proffers an ode to opulence. After the first indoors sequence, a new long shot is presented to us, this time at a lower level of the cityscape. Nonetheless, the spatial and economic semantics remains the same. A gigantic virtual billboard of a geisha-looking woman covers the entire façade of a skyscraper. Consumerism has gained such dominance that is literally superimposed upon the cityscape, suggesting the strengths of the market (and, so we assume, of the national economy).[9] The hipercity that is presented to us during the first minutes of the film conforms to the Reaganite narrative and its pervasive culture of greed.

[8] See David Mervin's *Ronald Reagan and the American Presidency* (97) in which supply-side theory, as opposed to the Keyneasian interest in the demand-side, is pithily explained.

[9] Furthermore, the image of the Asian woman also indicates the weight of foreign markets, essential in the "orgy of debt" of the 1980s.

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 70; 2015, PP. 155-168

The selection of long shots, emphasizing a sense of overall richness, runs in parallel with the way "Reaganites dismissed concerns about the skewed distribution of wealth by pointing the wealthier society overall" (Gill 226).

However, film grammar morphs and, thus, the ideological texture of the film is disclosed. An extreme low-angle shot relocates the gaze of the film on the ground floor. The technological paraphernalia and the formidable infrastructures are below now, out of reach, and the plot is framed in the shadow city (where it will remain for the most part of the narration). As the film is re-contextualized spatially, advertisements of the Off World announce the appeal of leaving Earth: "A new life awaits you in the Off World colonies, the chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure". That Reaganism sought to self-identify as "vigorous, joyful, and optimistic" as opposed to the "gloom and misery of the other side who talked about problems and taxes" (Naipaul) is an agreed-upon cornerstone of its cultural discourse. The conservative apparatus did not fail to characterize Ronald Reagan as an "easygoing, *decent* fella [...] someone "just like you and me"" (Miller 76). Exuding this purported bond with the average citizen, this self-merchandising as "Mr. Everyman" (Hamby 348), made identification easy "allowing the public to see itself as the beneficiaries rather than the victims of the rampant lack of regulation he fostered" (Nadel 8). But the film eschews from embracing the Reaganite narrative and its patriotic *joie de vivre*. The camera cranes further down until it reaches a rain-washed, crowded street where tacky neon lights and junk food stalls dominate the space. In opposition to the previous long shots depicting a technological apogee, subsequent scenes enhance a sense of structural poverty that underpins the entirety of the zero level. We encounter, throughout the plot, homeless people warming themselves up near fire buckets, extreme pollution and overpopulation, crumbling infrastructures, abandoned buildings, and unhealthy living conditions, an urban landscape that have much more in common with the ingrained poverty of the world of *favelas* in *City of God* (2002) than with any other cinematic portrait we have ever seen of Los Angeles.[10] This visual emphasis on the clash between the empowered macro-perspective and the decadent micro-perspective of the shadow city starts indicating the real consequences of the Reaganite praxis:

> In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan accelerated the withdrawal of the federal government from assistance to the cities. The result was a decade disastrous for cities and their poor. As city governments confronted increased poverty, homelessness, crumbling infrastructures, rising drug abuse, crime, and AIDS, the federal government virtually stopped building housing, shrank its aid to cities, reduced benefits to individuals, and raised the taxes of the poor at the same time it lowered them for the rich. (Katz 463)

The city of Los Angeles imagined in *Blade Runner* reflects Reagan's lack of interest in funding and ensuring urban balance. As journalist Andrew Kopkind argued

[10] The setting design contributes to this greatly: the crew took a setting from the 1920s and re-built it, making it narrower and filling it with garbage, traffic, and abandoned scenery (Alonso 52).

as early as 1984, "[s]ince Reaganism sets the terms of the debate; it need not be overly concerned about the details. It holds the high ground; what happens at the lower levels is curious but not crucial" (Boyer 94-95). The city's exacerbated polarization displays the likely consequences of such dissimilarities. And furthermore, thanks to its dualistic spaces, the film positions itself as (counter)narrative of Reagan's discourse on wealth and prosperity. Whenever the camera zeroes in on the impoverished city ground or when it shows Deckard's car being almost dismantled in the street, the film refutes the "American miracle" proclaimed by Reagan as well as his idea of how supply-side theory made "economy bloomed like a plant that had been cut back and could now grow quicker and stronger".[11] It is not surprising that the macro-perspective is controlled by huge advertisements of Coca Cola or Pan-An. But as pointed out previously, the power and solidity of big business is not matched, in turn, with a well-established average consumer as the abundant images of poverty on the ground level certify. By means of presenting an economic landscape totally subjected to big business, powerful enough to become an enormous material part of the city, the discourse of the film validates the argument asserting that "Reaganomics is based, in large part, on the belief that only the large corporations can revitalize the American economy" (Carnoy and Shearer 113-114).[12] Moreover, along with the very materiality of the city, the film makes explicit the Reaganite narrative by leaving any form of government totally absent and unnamed.

In his first inaugural speech, Reagan offered one of his most famous lines: "[G]overnment is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." This head-on statement was not merely an ostentatious claim. It prefigured the economic management that was to predominate in the ensuing years, that is, transferring agency and influence from federal government to the markets. This anti-government position is examined in the film in rather negative terms. The narration renders, in visual terms, an oppressive sense of corporate culture. As opposed to Reagan's glorification of free enterprise, in *Blade Runner* the corporate apparatus seems claustrophobically omnipresent, literalized on the walls of the cityscape as well as on the acoustic spaces through various advertisements. Corporations appropriate the city's architecture and atmosphere while government is apparently absent. However, there exist deeper implications in the relationships between the socio-economic system represented in *Blade Runner* and the anti-government discourse endorsed by Reaganism. In both cases, the system provides a message of regeneration. Whereas in *Blade Runner* the Off World offers mottos such as "more space, all new" or "live clean", Reagan's coined the celebrated "Morning in America", a promise to restore the moral strengths and affluence lost due to the wounds of Watergate, Vietnam, and the stagflation of the

[11] See Reagan's "Farewell to the Nation".

[12] The film's warning of the dangers of supply-side theory did not lack links with a reality acknowledged even by members of the Administration: "[David Stockman, Reagan's Budget Director] admitted that supply theory in general [...] was just a euphemistic cover (he called it "a Trojan horse") for the so called trickle-down idea dating back well into the nineteenth century and discredited since the onset of the Great Depression–the idea that further enriching the already rich would eventually produce great economic benefits for lowlier Americans" (Wilentz 145).

1970s. Both the Off World and Morning in America are projected as inclusive, classless discourses. But evidences confirm that the prospects of comfort and stability they promote are attainable for specific upper class groups.

On the grounds that only large corporations and big business would reignite national economy, and provided with wide fiscal relief, wealthy tax-payers employed the advantages granted by Reaganomics "for conspicuous consumption (such as expensive foreign cars) or for stock exchange speculation rather than productive investment" (Kemp 221) as wealth distribution kept growing disparate. During the decade, for "those in the top 1 percent of the income bracket, capital gains grew by 112 percent and salary income grew by 81 percent, whereas for those in the bottom 90 percent of the income distribution, a whole decade of work yielded only a 3.9 percent wage increase" (Edsall, Edsall 196). Reagan's Morning in America was, after all, hidebound by a class-oriented nature. Attuned to this, the Off World of *Blade Runner* is beyond the majority's means. The first hint of this is the extreme overpopulation of the city (and the subsequent lack of decent living conditions) and the poverty that strikes most of the citizens[13]. This demographic and social reality seems strange given the fact that a "golden land of opportunity" such as the Off World is supposedly available for the entire population. The structural forces that shape this situation are brought to the fore when the film introduces us to J.F. Sebastian, a genetic designer living in an almost abandoned building who suffers a degenerative disease:

> Pris: What's your problem?
> Sebastian: Methuselah syndrome.
> Pris: What's that?
> Sebastian: My glands, they grow old too fast.
> Pris: Is that why you're still on Earth?
> Sebastian: Yeah. I couldn't pass the medical.

Echoing the sadly famous "preexisting conditions" that insurance companies use for refusing to provide medical coverage, the scene manifests the real nature of the Off World and its implicit class-bound discourse. In elucidating the agency of spaces as ensuring the hegemonic status, David Harvey sketches an idea paramount for both the Off World and, implicitly, for Reagan's Morning in America: "[o]ne of the principal tasks of the capitalist state is to locate power in the spaces which the bourgeoisie controls, and disempower those spaces which oppositional movements have the greatest potentiality to command" (237). *Blade Runner*'s dystopia conforms to this description right down to very last detail. With its polarized spaces, the ground level has become an enormous inner city, alienated and undercut, and most importantly, conveniently fortified (those affected by illness are to remain in the zero level), while the outer space colonies appears as a "golden opportunity" targeted for everybody but achievable for those who can afford it or are physically fit. When the flying advertisement at the onset

[13] When we first see the replicant Pris, she will hide beneath a pile of garbage.

of the film portraits the Off World as a "chance to begin again", we ignored its actual status as a privatopia. Similarly, American population at large remained unaware of how Reagan's economic policies of freeing the markets and lowering taxes turned the United States into the most economically stratified society of the first world and the world's largest debtor (Gill 227, Wilentz 206).

In the film, government is not mentioned. However, we see forceful structural drives at play when there is any sign of danger for the system. Expansion towards outer space is a staple for the economic scaffolding of America in the late 2010s. As much as large governmental institutions remain invisible in *Blade Runner*, these are not inexistent. Framed in a subtle sense of Orwellian surveillance, structural forces are put to work in order to eradicate any deviance that may destabilize the hegemonic power. This is best exemplified in the way authorities function when dealing with the main event of the narration (the four replicants' scape from the Off World). The replicants, created and exploited by and for the system, mobilize to transcend their deterministic roles and thus achieve better life standards. Trying to overcome the status assigned by the system will be too great a danger for the latter. Firstly, Deckard's murderous quest is an example of hegemonic exploitation. As a replicant who ignores his real nature, he is being utilized to preserve the same system that has him subjugated by means of artificial memory implants which provide him with a sense of "humanity". And secondly, and most significantly, his mission is nothing but a systemic procedure aimed to wipe out an uprising that challenges social stratification. The invisible yet expeditious system of *Blade Runner* operates under the same premises of Reagan's anti-interventionism, that is, a form of government that apparently does not intend to interfere in social life but which, implicitly, engages in configuring material conditions in ways it privileges certain sectors of society:

> [E]mpirical evidence shows that federal government interventionism (in the economic, political, cultural, and security spheres) has *increased* over the last thirty years. In the economic sphere, for example, protectionism has not declined [...] In the social arena, state interventions to weaken social rights (and most particularly labor rights) have increased enormously (not only under Reagan, but also under Bush Senior, Clinton, and Bush Junior). [...] [T]here has been no diminution in federal interventionism in the United States, but rather an even more skewed class character to this intervention during the last thirty years. (Navarro 22)

As seen above, the Off World quintessentializes this, but so does Reaganomics in many ways. When Reagan claimed that "as government expands, liberty contracts,"[14] he distilled the agenda of the 1980s conservatism as well as the neoliberal policies that have dominated American politics since then. But also, these words certified the contradiction embedded in both Reaganomics and the Off World, that is, the "promotion of an anti-interventionist discourse in clear conflict with the actual increased state interventionism to promote the interests of the dominant classes and the economic units [...] that foster their interests" (Navarro 26). Several

[14] See Reagan's "Farewell to the Nation."

authors have engaged in documenting this type of double-sided political practices. Michael Zweig has succinctly summarized the polarizing large-scale effects that Reagan's non-interventionism brought about: "60 percent of all the gains in aftertax income from 1977 to 1989 went to the richest 1 percent of families. The bottom 80 percent of the population got just 5 percent of the increase." (65). Building on this, Alan Nadel maps out Navarro's maxim that anti-interventionism "intervenes" much more than one would expect. Nadel deconstructs Reaganism's anti-interventionist discourse and describes an economic program that, as the insulated dystopian America of *Blade Runner*, deploys the discourse of anti-interventionism and free market to establish a firm two-class society:

> Tax systems firmly weighed against the middle class, coupled with the subsides to business that create low-wage jobs, rewards for transferring jobs abroad, decreased support and subsidy for higher education, and permission to trim or eliminate health benefits and pension–all contributed to the unregulated growth of a population that has lost many of its middle-class options, or fallen into the category of the working poor, or, even worse, has joined and impoverished underclass. (26)[15]

This takes place at the level of the superstructure. But how do the different characters react and interact with the narrative of alleged anti-interventionism that constitutes the political landscape depicted in the film? In the history of science fiction film there are innumerable cases of characters or different elements in the narration being clear-cut metaphors of contemporary social concerns[16]. As opposed to this, the replicants are not disguised forms of a particular sector of American society. However, there exist very significant points of intersection between the exploited human-looking robots of *Blade Runner* and the maligned American underclass that went through a period of further impoverishment and discredit in the 1980s.

As a consequence of its market-centered policies, Reaganomics reduced investment in welfare.[17] Aid for the poor and the unemployed was terribly damaged as billions of dollars were taken from such programs and re-directed to military spending (Boyer 133, Wilentz 141). But unlike previous, less sophisticated conservative agendas, Reaganism was buttressed by the work of social scientists and intellectuals who had recently researched and published on the negative effects of the welfare system (their target was, mainly, Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society"). Poverty and marginalization, they contended, had been enhanced by financing the lowest sectors of society on a continued basis, causing a "culture of dependence"

---

[15] To see more data and research on wealth redistribution in the Reagan Era see Mike Davis's *Prisoners of the American Dream* (268), William C. Berman's *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* (93-95), and Ian Derbyshire's *Politics in the United States: From Carter to Bush* (77, 115).

[16] Science fiction during the 1950s is rich in this sense as very diverse types of aliens and monsters allegorized the prevailing anti-communism as well as the atomic fear. See, to name a few, *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *Them* (1954), or *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956).

[17] However, Jimmy Carter had already passed similar laws due to lobbying pressures. See Bruce J. Schulman's *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (128) and Derbyshire (39).

that had debilitated individual action and eagerness for entering the workforce. The champion of this new take was Charles Murray, whose controversial writings informed much of Reagan's policies.[18] Murray and his supporters hold that innate intelligence (or lack of thereof) is what conditions social status most decisively: "[L]ow IQ continues to be a much stronger precursor of poverty than the socioeconomic circumstances in which people grow up" (127).[19] Murray's line of thought has been widely criticized for ignoring and simplifying the varied vectors of oppression and structural inequalities that produce and contribute to poverty. Thomas Sugrue, one of the most outspoken critics of Murray's school, condenses this opposition and expresses the discourse that *Blade Runner* puts forward in regard to the underclass:

> [A]s the political spectrum in the United States drifted rightward in the 1980s, behavioral and cultural explanation of poverty moved into mainstream. A growing number of social scientists and policy makers argued that a new urban "underclass" had emerged whose poverty was rooted in antisocial attitudes and actions [...] In the hands of scholars and pundits, the term "underclass" has become a powerfully evocative metaphor. Allowing these commentators to ignore a reality far more diverse than they care to admit, the term has become a shorthand way of bundling together America's poor under a label that conjures up images of racial inferiority, violence, family breakdown, and uncontrolled sexuality [...] In a single word, the term "underclass" encapsulates middle-class Americans' most intimate fears and reaffirms their sense of social and moral superiority. (Sugrue 246-247)

Instead of embracing the essentialist assumption that poverty lies mainly on innate conditions, the depiction of the underclass in *Blade Runner* is multifaceted even though the replicants must face the most inescapable ill-fated destiny. They are, nonetheless, a perfected version of the worker from a corporative perspective (and, therefore, from the stance of Reaganomics). Their extremely short lifespan provides a four-year disposable worker with, allegedly, no emotional responses that may problematize the tasks imposed. They are the most suitable units for the ultimate capitalist state and, implicitly, for Reaganomics: "most work schedules are extremely tightly ordered, and the intensity and speed of production have largely been organized in ways that favour capital rather than labour [...] all part and parcel of a daily work rhythm fixed by profit-making rather than by the construction of humane work schedules" (Harvey 231). Due to the strict temporal trajectory they are subject to, the replicants become metaphors of the type of worker demanded by supply-side theory: de-unionized, rapidly and easily interchangeable for other, and left adrift in the market to be used by large companies. Echoing the macro/micro duality explicated earlier, this sense of dominance underpins the first indoors sequence of the film, where "waste disposal" replicant Leon has his humanity tested. Pure sci-fi as it is, the sequence has strong connections with the emergence of stringent

[18] See Alonzo Hamby's *Liberalism and its Challengers* (358-359).

[19] In the book quoted in this text Murray repeatedly states that his object of inquiry is white poverty (something many liberal commentators tend to forget).

methods of control on the part of employers: "[i]n the 1980s the union proclivities of workers are increasingly monitored in elaborate pre and postemployment screening and data collection. Employers commonly rely on psychological examinations, polygraph tests, and (in a return to more traditional methods), direct surveillance of the shop floor" (Fantasia 67). Interviewed by an arrogant white collar, Leon ends up shooting him. The dialogue is plunged into a rarified atmosphere of surveillance. Machinery in the form of cameras permeates the visual construction of the scene, interfering in eye-line matches of the editing. The subtext of the sequence will resonate in the entirety of the film: the lowest sectors of society are to be constantly scrutinized and chased by larger structures of power. But in narrating the ensuing manhunt dynamics, the film shows that, unlike humans, the purportedly one-dimensional robots are able to develop emotional competences and affective responsibility: "it's only the replicants who, through most of the film, display intersubjectivity by caring about each other [while] all the humans [...] live alone, without any apparent intimate relationship to anyone else" (Barad 29). If Murray homogenized the elements that generate and perpetuate poverty by focusing on innate conditions, *Blade Runner* "humanizes" the replicants de-personalized and reified by and for the system by granting them a range of disparate emotions (love, rage, revenge, and redemption). When, few moments before dying and having saved Deckard's life, Roy Batty recites his legendary monologue about the wonders he has witnessed in his lifetime, the film finally fractures the assumption of the "underclass" as a monolithic social entity supposedly prompt to decadence and stagnation.

Nowadays audiences are more than used to see films from the past being re-made and re-released. *Blade Runner* is *rara avis* in this regard as well. Although it is clear that its numerous re-edits respond to a profit-oriented strategy on the part of the studio, there is virtually no other re-edited film as culturally eloquent and politically meaningful as *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. Apart from the complex and engaging questions it poses about what constitutes being human, the film forces the viewer to re-consider critically what do we understand by anti-government positions and to what extent is the narrative of free market and non-interventionism really deprived of constraints and very precise class-based intentions. The examination of Reaganism in the film under these premises, and the far-reaching consequences of the current economic crisis further strengthen the idea that the (economic, social, and cultural) narrative of deregulation must be always under scrutiny and critical revision since it is built up upon quite contradictory terms that represent its polarizing aims as an individualist quest towards freedom. In the 2010's this may come as too self-evident for many. However, *Blade Runner* discusses these problems and offers a very critical conclusion as early as 1992. This discourse, as the dying Roy Batty said, should not be "lost in time, like tears in rain".

Reviews sent to author: 2 September 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 25 February 2015.

WORKS CITED

Alonso, Jesús. *Blade Runner: Lo que Deckard no sabía*. Madrid: Akal D.L, 2001. Print.

Barad, Judith. "Blade Runner and Sartre: The Boundaries of Humanity." *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*. Ed. Mark T. Conrad. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007. Print.

Berman, William C. *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Print.

Boyer, Paul. "The Latter Years". *Reagan as President: Contemporary Views of the Man, His Politics, and His Policies*. Ed. Paul Boyer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990. Print.

Carnoy, Martin and Derek Shearer. "Reaganomics: The Supply Side of the Street". *Reagan as President: Contemporary Views of the Man, His Politics, and His Policies*. Ed. Paul Boyer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990. Print.

Darias-Beautell, Eva. "Who's Afraid of the Urban? Canadian Literatures Go Downtown." *Canadian Studies: The State of the Art*. Ed. Klaus-Dieter Ertler et al. Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2011. Print.

Davis, Mike. *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*. London: Verso, 1987. Print.

Derbyshire, Ian. *Politics in the United States: From Carter to Bush*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1990. Print.

Edsall, Thomas B., and Mary D. Edsall. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991. Print.

Fantasia, Rick. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Print.

Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print.

Hamby, Alonzo. *Liberalism and its Challengers: From F.D.R to Reagan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990. Print.

Katz, Michael B. "Reframing the Underclass Debate". *The "Underclass Debate": Views from History*. Ed. Michael B. Katz. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Print.

Kemp, Tom. *The Climax of Capitalism: The U.S. Economy in the Twentieth Century*. London: Longman, 1990. Print.

Mervin, David. *Ronald Reagan and the American Presidency*. London, New York: Longman, 1990. Print.

Miller, Mark Crispin. "Virtù, Inc.". *Reagan as President: Contemporary Views of the Man, His Politics, and His Policies*. Ed. Paul Boyer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990. Print.

Murray, Charles, and Richard J. Herrnstein. *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks Book, 1994. Print.

Nadel, Alan. *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1997. Print.

Naipaul, V.S. "Among the Republicans." *New York Review of Books*. 25 October 1984.Print.

Navarro, Vincent. "The Worldwide Class Struggle". *More Unequal: Aspects of Class in the United States*. Ed. Michael D. Yates. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007. Print.

Reinhardt, Uwe. E. "Reaganomics, R.I.P". *Reagan as President: Contemporary Views of the Man, His Politics, and His Policies*. Ed. Paul Boyer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990. Print.

Sammon, Paul M. *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 1996. Print.

Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002. Print.

Troy, Gil: *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Print.

Wilentz, Sean. *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1972-2008*. New York: Harper, 2008. Print.

Zweig, Michael. *The Working Class Majority: America's best kept secrets*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000. Print.

Filmography

Apocalypse Now. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. United Artists, 1979. DVD.

Back to the Future. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Universal Pictures, 1985. DVD.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut. Dir. Ridley Scott. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 1992. DVD.

Born on the Fourth of July. Dir. Oliver Stone. Orion Pictures, 1986. DVD.

The Breakfast Club. Dir. John Hughes. Universal Studios, 1985. DVD.

Carnal Knowledge. Dir. Mike Nichols. Avco Embassy, 1971. DVD.

City of God. Dir. Fernando Meirelles. Miramax Films, 2002. DVD.

Dog Day Afternoon. Dir. Sidney Lumet. Warner Bros., 1975. DVD.

E.T. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1982. DVD.

The Exorcist. Dir. William Friedkin. Warner Bros., 1973. DVD.

The Ghostbusters. Dir. Ivan Reitman. Columbia Pictures, 1984. DVD.

The Godfather: Part II. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures, 1974. DVD.

Metropolis. Dir. Fritz Lang. UFA, 1927. DVD.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Paramount Films, 1989. DVD.

The Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Dir. Don Siegel. Allied Artists Pictures Corporations 1956. DVD.

Platoon. Dir. Oliver Stone. Orion Pictures, 1986. DVD.

Rambo: First Blood II. Dir. George P. Cosmatos. Tri-Star Pictures, 1985. DVD.

Rambo III. Dir. Peter McDonald. Tri-Star Pictures, 1988. DVD.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Dir. Jim Sharman. 20th Century Fox, 1975. DVD.

Them. Dir. Gordon Douglas. Warner Bros., 1954. DVD.

The Thing From Another World. Dir. Christian Nyby. RKO Pictures, 1951. DVD.

Wall Street. Dir. Oliver Stone. 20th Century Fox, 1987. DVD.

Other sources:

REAGAN, Ronald. "Farewell to the Nation". 11 January 1989. Audio.
REAGAN, Ronald. "Inaugural Address" 20 January 1981. Audio,

INTERVIEW

SMALL PRESS LEGENDS: JOHN MARTIN

Abel Debritto
(Brown University, USA)

John Martin (1930), founder of Black Sparrow Press, was both publisher and editor for 36 years, retiring in 2002. He is most noted for helping to launch the literary career of Charles Bukowski and re-publishing the works of John Fante. He published over a dozen titles annually, with more than $1 million in sales, including works by Wyndham Lewis, Paul Bowles, Robert Duncan, Theodore Dreiser, Joyce Carol Oates, D.H. Lawrence, Diane Wakoski and many other influential writers. Martin sold Black Sparrow's backlist to David R. Godine in 2002, and publication rights to Bukowski, Paul Bowles, and John Fante, were sold to Ecco Press, where they still appear, with the now-famous covers designed by his wife Barbara Martin.

A.D.: Could you please elaborate on your background before you started Black Sparrow Press in 1966?

J.M.: My father was killed in an automobile accident in 1939 when I was eight, and that eliminated financial security for our family. There was enough insurance for my mother to continue raising her three children. I couldn't attend college, and had to go to work right out of high school. I enjoyed my own *factotum*, I had many crummy jobs, but I always did very well in them. I can remember two times when I was hired as extra labor, and ended up becoming the general manager. In 1959, the year I got married, I landed a job with an office supply, printing, and furniture company. I was there for ten years. I helped build that company up from just three people working out of a garage, myself and the two owners, into an impressive enterprise with forty employees, doing millions of dollars a year. That's where I got my expertise as far as building a company up from nothing.

After about eight years I realized I had accumulated a collection of rare books that I could easily sell in order to launch my own publishing venture –I was tired of working for others– and that's exactly what I did. So I sold my collection of first editions–in those days rare literary first editions were cheap, I rarely paid more than five dollars for a book. At that point I had invested three thousand, maybe four thousand dollars, in the collection over the previous 15 years. I sold the collection to UCSB [University of California at Santa Barbara] for fifty thousand dollars.

The agent who made the sale for me took his ten percent. After taxes, I ended up with about thirty five thousand, and that's what enabled me to start Black Sparrow.

A.D.: What made you collect first editions and rare periodicals before Black Sparrow Press came along?

J.M.: I am a born collector. I love that era of writing, 1900-1940, or even prior to that, because I love the work of Henry James and Walt Whitman, for example. My collecting passion began with Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*–I named my daughter Carrie. I think that book is *the* first great novel of the 20th century. I collected all the people you've heard of from that era–D.H. Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, etc.–and over time I built up an impressive library of first editions. Also included were the moderns, starting with Charles Bukowski. That's the collection I sold to UCSB.

A.D.: What was the main reason for launching Black Sparrow Press?

J.M.: Many contemporary poets that l admired, everybody from Charles Bukowski, to Robert Creeley, to Robert Duncan, etc., didn't have a regular, reliable publisher. I figured that with the experience I'd had building up the commercial supply company I might be able to build up my own publishing company. Over time I was able to accomplish just that.

A.D.: So the idea behind starting out Black Sparrow Press was publishing all those great authors who didn't have a publisher?

J. M.: Right. Heading the list was Charles Bukowski. I ran into his work in an underground magazine [*The Outsider*]. I was so taken I thought, "My God, this is the Walt Whitman of our day!" I called him on the phone, we were both living in Los Angeles, and set up a meeting. In *Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame*, there's a foreword by Hank [Charles Bukowski] where he talks about that first meeting. While there, I noticed piles of unpublished manuscripts and typescripts on the floor and in his closet–that was, in essence, the first three Bukowski books I published, *At Terror Street and Agony Way*, *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills,* and *Mockingbird Wish Me Luck*.

A.D.: It all came from that stack of manuscripts?

J.M.: Yes. Over the years I continued to edit Bukowski's poetry books for Black Sparrow and later for Ecco Press, totaling some 2,600 published poems. There's another thousand unpublished poems out there, in magazines and tabloids, but I didn't want to publish lesser work. Hank would sit in the evening, writing poems and stories, and drinking, and sometimes towards the end of the evening the poems got loose and vague–not his best work. So I edited out those poems. Even to this day, however, I continue to find wonderful old poems buried in obscure literary magazines that I never knew about. You've got to remember there were no computers back then. Everything had to be done by snail mail, I'd write to magazines that never responded, I couldn't do research online, etc. I'm amazed I found as much stuff as I did, first published elsewhere in the 1950s and 1960s.

A.D.: Did you come up with the name "Black Sparrow"? What's the story behind it?

J.M.: The name "Black Sparrow" came from two sources. First, I had admired an elegant Paris press run by a married couple in the 1920s called "Black Sun Press." Harry and Caresse Crosby published the likes of James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, etc. I was enamored of their use of the term "Black." Then while I was thinking things over, I received a publication announcement in the mail from a "Purple Heron Press." Too fancy and somewhat annoying! The sparrow is considered a trash bird, a pest, but very hardy, and no amount of pesticides seems to be able to eradicate them. So I took the elegant "Black" and added the trashy but sturdy "Sparrow." Thus was born "Black Sparrow."

A.D.: What about the company's logotype? I think Bukowski was the first one to give it a try, but you settled on Barbara's design. Is that right?

J.M.: Yes. Hank made a couple of early drawings, but they missed the mark. Then Barbara came up with her memorable design for the sparrow. She revised the sparrow twice over the years, to its present sleek appearance.

A.D.: When you started Black Sparrow Press, did you still have your old job?

J.M.: Yes, for about two years. It was a very tough two years. My job was from 8 until 5. I was the general manager. I ran the print shop among other things–that's where I learned about printing. I was there every day from 8 until 5, I would go home for dinner, and then I would go to my Black Sparrow office and work from 7 until midnight or later.

A.D.: Did you do that for two years? That's tough indeed.

J.M.: Well, I had no choice, and I had no employees then.

A.D.: I guess hiring someone to help you out was out of the question back in the day.

J.M.: Yes. There was no profit yet. You'd be amazed at how quickly those thirty five thousand dollars disappeared. In one year, from 1968-1969, I published thirty five books on my own, three a month, with no help, except from my wife Barbara, who did the designing–I'd like to say that Barbara's great designs were the result of her efforts alone. I would call her attention to other artwork and designs from time to time, but she always went her own way. Later on, I published D.H. Lawrence's *The Escaped Cock*, and it had such a big sale, I couldn't handle it. I tried to do the shipping nonstop on the weekends, but after two or three weeks, still unable to ship all the orders, I hired my first employee. A shipping clerk!

A.D.: So you had your first employee ever thanks to that D.H. Lawrence book?

J.M.: Yes. That was in 1973.

A.D.: Then business picked up and you finally had to hire more people.

J.M.: Yes, I had my shipping clerk, and then I hired an assistant, and a bookkeeper. [Editor] Seamus Cooney, who taught at Western Michigan University, had come aboard a few years earlier, and he was a great help. Then over time there were about seven additional people employed directly or indirectly by Black Sparrow, most of them located at our print shop in Santa Barbara.

A.D.: Even though Black Sparrow Press was doing well, you kept the company small.

J.M.: Yes. That we accomplished so much, with such a small staff, still amazes me.

A.D.: When you started out, Black Sparrow Press was a truly small press, and you knew that most small presses barely broke even. What compelled you to keep going?

J.M.: I had built another small company up from nothing, that's what. There was a time, about 1968 or 1969, I was spending more money than I was taking in. One day I sat down to get the orders ready, see how much I was owed, that kind of thing, and I realized I had about sixty days either to move into profit, or go back to work for someone else. About a month went by, and then for the first time ever, more money started coming in than I owed. A glorious moment. From that time on, Black Sparrow was profitable.

A.D.: In those early days, did you ever consider applying for grants or government money to stay afloat?

J.M.: No.

A.D.: How come?

J.M.: *Northwest Review* –I think it was *Northwest Review*– published a thick book listing every small press in existence at the time that sat unread in my office. One night years later, I picked it up, and I found I was one of a few small presses still active. Most of the others, most of whom who relied on grant support, were gone. I think it's better not to depend on other people's money to make you successful.

A.D.: From day one you put out a series of collectibles, special editions of the same book. Did you do that in order to secure some sort of extra income?

J.M.: Sure! They sold quickly and they sold at a premium price. They helped pay for the book's production expenses, and afterwards the paperbacks supplied the profit.

A.D.: What was the nature of those other limited publications that came out via several imprints, such as Burn Again Press, that were actually Black Sparrow books? Why did you do that? Was it just for fun?

J.M.: Yes, they were fun, but another reason was this: I had a group of very loyal bookstores and rare book dealers, and in order to keep them all happy, in order to keep them buying as many Black Sparrow books as they could, I published these other very collectable limited editions via other imprints. I would publish as few as fifty copies, and would let those favored bookstores have them for their own best customers. So it was helpful all around.

A.D.: Those books have become hard-to-find collectibles now.

J.M.: Yeah, some sell for a thousand dollars or more.

A.D.: Going back in time again, when did it become crystal clear to you that Black Sparrow Press could stay afloat as long as you wanted?

J.M.: I guess that actually began in 1971, when I published [Bukowski's] *Post Office.*

A.D.: That made you think that you could probably run Black Sparrow for a number of years?

J.M.: Yes. By that time I had built up an audience for Bukowski's books. He was always our best-selling author. He wrote a book a year. He excited everybody by being so prolific. And we're talking about 200-300 page books, not slim volumes of poetry. Bukowski's readers demanded big, thick books. And they got them.

A.D.: Bukowski used to complain that you didn't put out more books per year. You published one or two books a year, but he was so prolific he wanted more!

J.M.: Really? He never complained to me. I let him do all kind of little pamphlets over time, and then he had City Lights books.

A.D.: And yet, that was not enough for him.

J.M.: I published every good poem. I didn't publish the bad poems just to make money. If I had put out a book of really bad poetry, that would have killed the momentum.

A.D.: After the success of *Post Office* in 1971 you realized that Black Sparrow Press was going to be there for the long run. Did you have in mind any specific ideas as to what kind of literature you would continue to publish?

J.M.: I was committed to publishing contemporary American poets, but there weren't too many of them that I admired. I was only interested in free verse. I would tell every Black Sparrow author at the time they signed up, "I am your publisher now, I'll publish everything you write, you don't have to worry about who's going to publish your next book." Certain poets like Edward Dorn, Diane Wakoski, Robert Kelly, Tom Clark, Wanda Coleman, Charles Reznikoff, I published them for nearly forty years.

A.D.: Are you saying that your publishing decisions were primarily based on your own literary taste?

J.M.: Yes, definitely.

A.D.: Do you recall–roughly–how many authors did you publish with Black Sparrow Press?

J.M.: I'd say about fifty... I published Eugenio Montale, he was the most famous living Italian poet at that time. I did a Montale book, and then he got the Nobel Prize for Literature... I had to like a book before it was published.

A.D.: Did you do all the reading?

J.M.: Yes.

A.D.: I know publishers can't pick favorites, but are there any authors or books that you are especially proud of?

J.M.: I am proud of all my poets and all my books, but Bukowski will always stand out.

A.D.: And besides Bukowski?

J.M.: I loved Charles Reznikoff. He is such a wonderful neglected poet. He had a lifetime of no real success, often publishing himself. He wrote great poetry from 1918 until the 1970s, when he died. He was an important American poet who was not appreciated until the end of his life. And I had many other favorites.

A.D.: What about Wanda Coleman?

J.M.: I loved Wanda Coleman. She was the one Black Sparrow poet that I pampered and babied. When she was in financial hot water, which was all the time, she knew she could call me in the middle of the night–which she did many times–because she needed a quick two hundred dollars to get by. She became angry at me when I sold Black Sparrow. Her reliable publisher suddenly vanished, and she didn't like it.

A.D.: That's too bad. I think she passed away late last year.

J.M.: Yes, a few months ago.

A.D.: You just said that Coleman became angry when you sold Black Sparrow Press. Was it hard for you as a publisher to deal with so many authors over the years?

J.M.: Well, they would send me their work, and they would get back a beautiful book in return–Barbara's covers were amazing. Black Sparrow books sold well and generated author's royalty. What's not to like? I got along very well with all my authors. No drama at all.

A.D.: Authors are known to be touchy, especially when it comes to editing their books.

J.M.: I rarely had to drastically edit anyone's book. My authors knew what they were doing. Thing is, they were all jealous of Bukowski. They would sell about 1,500 copies and he'd sell 20,000 copies. The other poets would say, "Well, maybe I don't sell as well as Bukowski, but without Bukowski Black Sparrow wouldn't be able to publish me."

A.D.: Bukowski was clearly your best-selling author. Who came in second and third?

J.M.: As far as poetry goes, I would say Diane Wakoski. There was a time when her books sold as well as Bukowski's. But after a while his sales took off, and he left everyone behind.

A sale of as few as 3,000 copies, that's all I asked. I could make enough money on the sale of 3,000 copies to pay production costs, royalty to the authors, salaries, and so forth, with something left over. However, when a book sold in the tens of thousands, that made everything much easier!

A.D.: Having Bukowski allowed you to publish the other authors that you liked.

J.M.: Right.

A.D.: When sales were good, how many books did you–roughly–print per year? You said you printed 35 books one year in the late 1960s.

J.M.: Yes, there were 35 separate titles published in one year late in the 1960s. That was a unique moment. Many of those 35 books were poetry pamphlets.

A.D.: What about later on? Just before you sold Black Sparrow Press in 2002, I guess you were publishing more books per year?

J.M.: Actually, less. Over the last fifteen years the books we published got larger and larger. No more small books. By that time, we were publishing just twelve books a year, plus the occasional limited edition by Bukowski or one of my other authors. I was publishing Wyndham Lewis. His books were out of print since the 1930s, and he was such an important writer and painter. Editing a book like that would take almost a year to get it ready for the printer. Things were going as fast as they used to, and we still managed to do twelve books a year plus the occasional collectible.

A.D.: Didn't you reprint Windham Lewis' *Blast* 1 and 2, and then put out *Blast* 3 as a tribute issue?

J.M.: Those were big sellers for me. We sold more than twenty thousand copies in all.

A.D.: That's a lot!

J.M.: Yes, it is. Lewis was an important writer. Back in 1915, he got everybody who was anybody to contribute to the two volumes of *Blast*: Ezra Pound, Ford Maddox Ford, T. S. Eliot, all the important English authors of the day. The Black Sparrow editions of *Blast* had (and still have, from another publisher) a continuing academic sale as important classroom textbooks for university English majors

here [United States] and in England. You should have seen the thousands of letters I got from professors who would say, "You can't let it go out of print, I've been teaching this every year for ten years, it's a great teaching book."

A.D.: Let's talk briefly about Bukowski now. You put out *Post Office* in 1971 and it was a good seller. That was shortly after the verbal agreement where you promised him a monthly $100 check for life, if he quit his job at the post office to write full time.

J.M.: Yes, and soon he was receiving more than that. By the end of the day, I was paying him $10,000 every month. And then, at the end of the year, I'd pay him whatever was still due.

People ask me, "How did you manage to keep Bukowski loyal to Black Sparrow?" There were many big publishers that wanted Bukowski. I answered that question by asking, "If you were guaranteed a $10,000 check every month, would you walk away from that?" How could he walk away? In many of Hank's letters to me, he'd say, "Don't worry, John, nobody is going to publish me but you. You were there for me when I needed you, and I'm not going to abandon you when you need me." Hank was very loyal. Let's say he'd gone to Random House. What do you think they would have done to his books when they edited them? They would have squeezed all the juice out! As a publisher, you had to give Bukowski plenty of leeway to do what he wanted to do. It would have been a terrible mistake for him to go to a commercial publisher. Bukowski, all the way back to that first book, *At Terror Street and Agony Way* in 1968, never bothered to select the poems for his own books. He would send me everything he wrote, by the week. I would keep his manuscripts on file. Then once a year I would go through the manuscripts, pick out two hundred pages, three hundred pages worth of poems, put them in order, do whatever small editing was necessary, and send Hank the proposed manuscript. He never changed a thing. If you read his letters to me, he says about *Hot Water Music* [1983], "I understand very well what you are doing, and it works." Not that I did a lot, though, I didn't have to. Just a little touch here and there. Another thing, Hank didn't have his MSS on hand. He'd make two copies of a poem, send one to the magazines, and the other one to me. So most everything was kept in my office. I was free to select poems for a new book, from any year, from the oldest to the most recent. That way I could make the richest possible selection.

A.D.: One more question about Bukowski: what did you like the most about his work? What was there that you thought it was so good? You said before he reminded you of Whitman!

J.M.: He was in a sense a contemporary Whitman. I stand by that. But when he was a young man writing out of anger and despair, he wrote the kind of poem you find in *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills* [1969], poems that took risks, with long, extravagant lines. He took every chance in that book, and made it work. Later on, his poems became more direct and more

focused. If you compare *The Days Run Away* to *The Last Night of the Earth Poems* [1992], there's a profound sea-change, because he was changing. He was becoming wiser with age, he could see and understand more.

[German agent and translator] Carl Weissner once said, "God, I love the early poems, the wild poems." I replied, "Yes, they are great. But now Hank is wiser, smarter. He can say twice as much in half the space." And he could. Hank's last poems are like shafts of light that go straight to the heart.

A.D.: He's more of a philosopher in his late poems. Those poems are very powerful and moving.

J.M.: Oh, yes. Linda [Bukowski] pointed out, "He's become a Buddha. He's interested in Buddhism. He thinks that way now." And you can see in his poetry that his poems had become more profound. There's a small seven word poem ["art"] where he says, with one word printed above the next, "as / the / spirit / wanes / the / form / appears." That's what happens to many writers of both poetry and prose. The "spirit" that first animated them begins to fade, and then they get caught up in "form." Bukowski was never interested in "form" for its own sake. He wrote in free verse right to the end.

Finally, there's a wonderful novel he wrote in his final days, *Pulp* [1994]. It was a send-up of hard-boiled detective writing, a la Chandler and Hammett. It's a very funny even profound book! If Hank hadn't died, I wonder what he would have written next?

A.D.: I remember him saying he was tired of writing about himself and that's why he was trying new avenues. Some people don't like that book, but I think it is funny and very well done.

J.M.: I agree. If some people are looking for a confessional or autobiographical Bukowski book, that's not what it is.

He died in 1994, and I had many wonderful unpublished poems left over. I began to gather them into books. I started with *Betting on the Muse* [1996], a four-hundred-page book, then *Bone Palace Ballet* [1997], a three-hundred-page book, and so on. Finally there were another seven books, poems written from the 1950s to the 1990s, published by Ecco Press.

A.D.: You said you sold Black Sparrow, and I was wondering about that. How come you chose to close up shop when business was still good?

J.M.: That was easy. I had been working since high school, and then with Black Sparrow for almost another forty years. I sensed in 2000 that the publishing industry in the United States was on the verge of collapse. For many years we had three or four hundred bookstores that bought books from us regularly. Then there were another thousand or so bookstores that bought occasionally. By 2002 our market had shrunk drastically, independent bookstores were going out of business left and right, we were now selling to the 100 independent bookstores that were left. Everything else sold was going to either Barnes & Noble or Borders. We had those two big customers, and yes, they were buying lots of books. We would get huge orders from each, once a week. But Borders was on the verge of collapse, and Barnes & Noble was living on borrowed time. I saw the end of the book industry as I

knew it. I could have continued, but right at that time HarperCollins came to me and offered to buy the publication rights to Bukowski, Paul Bowles, and John Fante. It was a godsend. Black Sparrow would not have survived for the next ten years. There are no bookstores left!

As for Ecco Press, the part of HarperCollins that now publishes Bukowski, Bowles, and Fante, they have taken wonderful care of those books.

A.D.: Is Bukowski still selling well?

J.M.: Yes. The books that I sold to Ecco, are all still available and have been reprinted many times.

A.D.: I heard through the grapevine that HarperCollins offered you a very good deal back in 2002 for Bukowski, Paul Bowles, and John Fante. Can you disclose a ballpark figure? What really caught my attention, though, was that you sold the remaining Black Sparrow Press inventory to Godine for $1. Is that right?

J.M.: The amount paid to me by HarperCollins for publication rights shall remain confidential.

I always liked David Godine. I sold him the rest of my back list, well over a hundred thousand books, for $1, on the condition that he would continue to sell them, continue to pay the author's royalty, and reprint them when possible.

A.D.: In retrospect, how do you assess Black Sparrow Press' importance in the small press arena?

J.M.: Black Sparrow remains one of the only self-supporting, highly successful, widely distributed, purely literary presses.

A.D.: Talking about small presses, do you think they are history? Or is there a future to them?

J.M.: It may be a while before there is another period like 1960-2000 that will support independent literary publishing the way Black Sparrow was supported.

A.D.: With everything going digital and people reading ebooks in their electronic devices, small presses might have a tough time in the future because most people may no longer buy print books.

J.M.: Everybody I know has a Kindle. You can travel around the world with a Kindle, or just across town, and have tens of thousands of books at your disposal.

A.D.: Do you have a Kindle?

J.M.: No.

A.D.: I'd like to wrap it up with a question you might find trite. After all these years running Black Sparrow Press, do you have any regrets? Would you have done things differently?

J.M.: How many people get to live out their personal dream? To live on their own terms? And be involved with so many talented authors? Black Sparrow's books finally spread all over the world. We sold our beautiful books in France, Italy, Germany, South America, Mexico, Canada, England, and here in America. I'm kind of embarrassed to even refer to the thousands of letters we received saying, "Your books are absolutely the finest I've ever seen! What are you going to publish next year?" I never heard a breath of complaint against Black Sparrow. We did what we did as honestly and in the best way we could. We supported many authors and their careers.

Black Sparrow finally accomplished exactly what we set out to accomplish so many years ago. No regrets at all.

A.D.: Thanks, John.

J.M.: My pleasure.

Reviews sent to author: 16 September 2014. Revised paper accepted for publication: 15 January 2015.

REVIEWERS FOR THIS ISSUE *RCEI*: MAY 2015

ULL Reviewers
Manuel Brito
Aída Diaz
Isabel González
María Luz González
Tomás Monterrey
Juan Ignacio Oliva
Justine Tally

External Reviewers
Rodrigo Andrés (Universitat de Barcelona)
Olivier Brossard (Université Paris Est-Marne la Vallée (France)
Fernando Galván (Universidad de Alcalá)
Olga González Calvo (Universidad de Alcalá)
Mariam Pirbhai (Wilfrid Laurier University-Waterloo, Ontario (Canada)
Esther Rey Torrijos (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)
Irene Sanz Alonso (Universidad de Alcalá)

RCEI 69 (DECEMBER 2014) - ERRATUM

Karen Bennett's academic affiliation was erroneously given as the University of Lisbon. Dr Bennett is in fact affiliated to the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (UNL) and the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES).

The title of the paper, "The Projection of Critical Attitude in Research Article Introductions by Anglo-American and Spanish Author" in the table of contents should read "The Projection of Critical Attitude in Research Article Introductions by Anglo-American and Spanish Authors."

We also failed to include as a footnote the following acknowledgement in relation to this paper:

*This research has been carried out within the frame of, and is a contribution to, the project "English as a lingua franca across specialised discourses: a critical genre analysis of alternative spaces of linguistic and cultural production" (Project Reference FFI2012-37346), and to the research group InterLAE (Interpersonalidad en el Lenguaje Académico Escrito / Interpersonality in Written Academic Language), Diputación General de Aragón (H21).

SERVICIO DE PUBLICACIONES
UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA

ULL | Universidad de La Laguna