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Relational Identities and Politics in African-American and Postcolonial Pakistani Women's Literary Counter-Narratives

Ayesha Siddiq

This thesis explores the question of “identity” in feminism through an intertextual reading of African-American and Pakistani women’s writing. Its comparative approach to women-centred counter-narratives is also informed by a transnational, postcolonial frame alert to continuities between colonialism and neocolonialism. Although “identity” has become less central in some current linguistic and ontological modes of feminist inquiry, given the enduring relevance of identities both as social meaning-making processes and as repressive political categories, this thesis reshifts focus towards identities by foregrounding their emancipatory potential for feminist politics.

Through critical engagement with Judith Butler’s and Allison Weir’s theories of relationality and with the epistemological and ontological dimensions of selected counter-narratives, this thesis reconceives identities as relations of interconnection and interdependence, thus encompassing but also moving beyond definitions in terms of restrictive social categories. Through investigating the (re)narration of histories and (re)presentation of discourses in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1991), and Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009), the thesis seeks to develop a relational conception of identities, agency, and coalition in a feminist historicist, relational framework. As well as expanding the sparse comparative scholarship on Pakistani and American literatures, this study considers the peculiar positionality of African-Americans vis-à-vis other “postcolonial” groups in the emergence of the U.S. as a neocolonial power. A valuable lens for understanding such transnational politics is found in a feminist analysis of the intersecting histories of racism and imperialism and their contemporary neocolonial manifestations. The contribution of this thesis is thus twofold: it newly brings together the arenas of African-American and Pakistani women’s counter-narratives that renegotiate identities and histories in relational terms; in doing so, it also starts to imagine an anti-imperialist transnational feminist political paradigm that conceives individual and collective identities and political alliances within a relational social ontology.

**Relational Identities and Politics in African-American
and Postcolonial Pakistani Women's Literary
Counter-Narratives**

Ayesha Siddiq

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English



Department of English Studies
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For

Ammi Jaan

Abbu Jaan

Kiswah

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Introduction

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.

(Oscar Wilde)

Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.

(Toni Morrison)

The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference.

(Audre Lorde)

Despite their discrete cultural and historical contexts, postcolonial and African-American women's literatures are marked by a shared investment in the subversive practice of storytelling. Storytelling here is a powerful mechanism for "building historical consciousness in community" aimed at "un-learning the dominant language" in order to "learn how to un-write and write anew."¹ The process of counter-narration has both an epistemological and an ontological dimension; as Chandra Talpade Mohanty puts it, not only does it serve as "a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history," it also "often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged."² The ontological dimension of counter-narrative presents a fruitful site for reconceiving feminist questions of identity. Indeed, as this thesis will explore, in postcolonial and African-American women's oppositional discourses, narrative takes on a performative

¹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 148.

² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003) 78.

function in contesting dominant discourses and renegotiating identities through a dialogic process of (re)narrating histories between self and other, text and reader, individual and community. This shared process of negotiating narratives and identities anew provides an opportunity to reconceive the process of identity formation through a historicist, relational feminist approach that broadens the focus of “identity” beyond restrictive social categories to identities as relations of interconnection and interdependence.

Although central to the narratives of marginalised groups, especially African-American and postcolonial women’s selected literary narratives, the question of identity (in terms of a collectivist approach to activism) has become less central in postmillennial feminist thought, “where the focus is explicitly *not* on identity.”³ Whilst most poststructuralist feminists have increasingly shifted towards a “non-identity” model that “eschews identity” to redefine “politics in terms of pragmatic political action,”⁴ the counter-poststructuralist⁵ “ontological turn” in feminist theory has equally assumed a “post-identitarian” perspective in adjusting the focus from “subjectivity” to “objectivity”⁶ and from “identities” to the “politics of acts.”⁷

³ Nadine Ehlers, “Identities,” *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, eds. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016) 346.

⁴ Susan Hekman, “Identity Crises: Identity, Identity Politics, and Beyond,” *Feminism, Identity and Difference*, ed. Susan Hekman (London: Routledge, 2013) 5, 23-24. I will return below to a detailed analysis of this and other approaches to the question of identity in feminist thought.

⁵ “Postmodernism” and “poststructuralism” are often used interchangeably by feminists, though Judith Butler, among others, advises against conflating the two. Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992). I prefer “poststructuralism” in my focus on the impact of the work of poststructuralists on feminist theories. However, “postmodern” and “postmodernism” may be used occasionally in this thesis to refer broadly to the movement or the period itself (of which poststructuralism is a part) and its representative features.

⁶ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke UP, 2010) 1-2.

However, given the enduring social relevance of identities both as interpersonal meaning-making relations and as repressive political categories, grounded in the intersection of bodies and discourses, any conceptual model of “non-identity” or the “post-identitarian” is perhaps premature. Indeed, the “post” in “post-identity” dovetails with the “post” in postcolonial, among other posts, in haunting our profoundly unequal world as a kind of return of the repressed. Although seemingly implying “the notion of historical progress,” at best, or “a constant move towards better (read: more equitable) times,” at least, for Janani Subramanian, the “post” “does not signify a revolutionary moment in identity politics,” but “a tacked-on ending to a narrative that is ongoing rather than finished, circular rather than linear, and fractured rather than unified.” Whether a temporal marker or a conceptual shift, “post” betrays a self-fulfilled prophecy amidst our neocolonial world whose persistent oppressive systems recurrently reveal the “unfinished business” of race, class, gender, sex, colonialism, and capitalism.⁸ Indeed, given the neocolonial co-optation of feminism for its political, economic, and military agenda, as evident in “the racialized and gendered” “feminist” rhetoric of the “war on terror,” the identity question continues to be critical for both feminist and postcolonial studies.⁹ Thus, given the personal and political significance of identities in defining and regulating our lives in a real world, can we conceive feminist politics by relegating the concept of

⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) 189.

⁸ Janani Subramanian, “Post Identity,” *Spectator* 30.2 (2010): 6.

⁹ For an overview of the exploitation of feminist discourse in the ideology of the “war on terror,” see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Terror: A Speech after 9-11,” *Boundary 2* 31.2 (2004): 81-111; Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Rashmi Varma, “On Common Ground? Feminist Theory and Critical Race Studies,” *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 232-60; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Robin L. Riley, eds. *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

“identity”? If it is impossible to dismiss identities as irrelevant or immaterial, can we reconceive them in terms of fulfilling or emancipatory relations?

This thesis explores these questions through an intertextual reading of African-American and Pakistani women’s writing in a transnational postcolonial context that allows a reimagination of identities in a relational social ontology. The thesis examines Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1991),¹⁰ and Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009).¹¹ Critically engaging with Judith Butler’s and Allison Weir’s theorisations on relationality alongside African-American and Pakistani women’s counter-narratives, the thesis seeks to reconceive feminist questions of identity, agency, and coalition. Both Butler and Weir critique the false conception of the individualist modern subject in staking out their theoretical positions on relationality; whilst Butler’s notion of relationality in a common human corporeal vulnerability offers a powerful reimagination of community for reflective coalitional politics, Weir’s conception of identities as both relations of power and relations of interdependence provides an emancipatory reconception of individual and collective identities and agency. Deploying Butler’s call for a reconceptualisation of representation to facilitate the Levinasian face-to-face encounter alongside Weir’s insight on “transformative identification” and “reinterpretive preservation” in the shared context of women’s counter-hegemonic narratives, this thesis develops a

¹⁰ The novel was first published as *Ice-candy Man* in 1988 in the UK. All references are to the U.S. title, *Cracking India*, published in 1991.

¹¹ Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987); Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2005); Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991); and Kamila Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

relational conception of identities, agency, and coalition that is anchored in recognising mutual vulnerability and consolidating connections through sharing stories, (re)narrating histories, and (re)presenting discourses in a relational framework. Each of the four primary texts engages in ontological narrativity in reclaiming histories and redefining identities through a dialogic process between self and other, text and reader, narrator and narratee, or individual and community. Together, these texts speak to each other in a shared context of counter-imperialist histories of struggle that facilitates transformative identifications across spatio-temporal boundaries, thus generating a new ontological narrative anchored in inexorable human discursive, material, social, and historical relationality as grounds for an alternative transnational feminist political paradigm.

My choice of the selected literary contexts was determined by two factors: the sparse scholarship on the comparative study of African-American and postcolonial women's writing and the intertextual relations in African-American and Pakistani women's texts via the intersecting histories of racism and imperialism. African-American and postcolonial literatures are each wide-ranging fields that also meet in significant critical and theoretical dialogues; however, there is little research on this overlap, particularly in the arena of women's writing. The limited available scholarship has largely focused on writers of African descent together; this narrow critical outlook not only passes over a rich field of comparative research but also situates critical practice within racially inflected demarcations. By foregrounding the narrativisation of the peripheral experience, positionality, and resistance instead, this

project extends the critical lens to other postcolonial contexts.¹² Besides, given the peculiar positionality of African-Americans in the emergence of the United States as a neocolonial power, a feminist analysis of the intersecting orders and effects of the U.S. history of slavery and racism and the colonial history of the Asian subcontinent and the contemporary “war on terror,” in the Pakistani context in particular, provide a valuable lens to map the political import of the translation of colonial discourses into neocolonial narratives and their implications for transnational feminist politics. Although recently U.S. imperialism has gained critical attention, its relationship to “internal” or neocolonialism has remained undertheorised in interdisciplinary literary and critical research. Given the neocolonial co-optation of feminist discourse, the convergence between African-American and postcolonial literary studies is not only a theoretical and analytical obligation but a material urgency for the Third World.¹³ Bringing multiple locational and historical politics into dialogue can generate readings of the myriad ways in which these texts, contexts, and histories intersect in their resistant struggles; the ways in which the writers of these texts intervene in the hegemonic narratives to (re)negotiate identities and (re)narrate histories from alternative perspectives; and the ways in which the conjunctions between these literary texts provide a relational network that can serve as a model for feminist politics.

¹² Although my project also focuses on marginalised women, its emphasis is not on race per se. Owing to the scopic limitations of the thesis, my chosen contexts serve as a sample to conceive a relational paradigm of feminist politics that can also operate in a transnational and transcultural framework, based in a contextualised and historicised analysis.

¹³ By “Third World” I mean marginalised communities around the world including those within the West.

My particular texts have been chosen on three grounds: their imaginative rendition of a historicised imperialist oppression of women, their representation of women's oppositional consciousness via counter-narratives, and their depiction of the colonial-to-neocolonial discursive and material transition in modernity. Whereas *Incidents* and *Beloved*, a slave and a neo-slave narrative respectively, trace the passage from slavery to emancipation whilst highlighting the persistently racialised U.S. social and political milieu, *Cracking India* and *Burnt Shadows* chart a parallel colonial-neocolonial trajectory in the Pakistani context. Although outlying as a nineteenth-century autobiographical text published on the cusp of the Civil War, *Incidents* has been chosen, in part, for being the first written representation by a black woman of her own experience of slavery, and one written as an intervention in hegemonic U.S. representations.¹⁴ *Beloved*, though set in the Reconstruction era, provides a revisionist history of the repressed past of slavery that accounts for its repercussions in the neocolonial world. Correspondingly, in the Pakistani context, *Cracking India* is a revisionist narrative of women's experience of the defining moment in the country's history—the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent—that explores the subsumption of women's identities and narratives in the pedagogical nationalist account, whilst *Burnt Shadows* is a return to the spatial and temporal connections between that repressed past in both the national and global consciousnesses and its ramifications in the neocolonial world. Reading these narratives intertextually reveals crucial literary, theoretical, and historical junctures that help map their interactive, reconstructive practice in a transnational feminist topography based in relational politics of identities, agency, and coalition. Whilst

¹⁴ Although Mary Prince's West Indian slave narrative is the first narrative published by a slave woman, my focus here is on the U.S. context.

literary narratives represent emancipatory sites for feminist renegotiation of identities and reclamation of histories, the critical project of bringing together women's alternative narratives from discrete spatial and temporal zones allows a negotiation of transcultural barriers that forestall relationality as grounds for feminist theory and praxis.

The thesis comprises four chapters besides the introductory section that lays out the theoretical framework in four parts: the first part provides a critical survey of the major developments in the conception of identity in feminism in order to situate relational theories of identity in the wider context of feminist philosophy; the second section develops the theoretical framework of the thesis by exploring the concept of relationality in Derridian and Levinasian philosophy and Butler's and Weir's theories; the third part provides a rationale for a "postcolonial" intertextual reading of African-American and Pakistani women's writing; and the final section reviews the intersecting critical, theoretical, and feminist lenses in African-American and postcolonial studies through which textual analyses will be refracted. Each main chapter engages in a critical reading of a literary text alongside one or more theoretical paradigms on identity in seeking to generate a creative dialogue between the two in order to explore how literary texts reflect and inform yet challenge theoretical assumptions. Textual readings are also informed by their respective contexts of production that are looked at both independently and intertextually to explore their interconnections in a broader shared political and historical context. This intersection of text, theory, and history is governed by two major critical questions: How do women's oppositional narratives contest hegemonic structures and (re)negotiate identities through a dialogic process of (re)narrating histories? How can the common context of women's interactive narratives and resistance, across divisive

boundaries, provide a relational framework for reconceiving feminist questions of identity, agency, and coalition?

The first chapter, “Contesting Subjectivities and Ideologies: Consubstantiality and Feminist Address in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” brings together understandings of constitutive rhetoric and Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology in analysing *Incidents*’s “consubstantial” narrator-addressee and individual-community relationship, an active relationship that departs from the individualistic paradigm of the male slave narrative. The chapter examines the narrator’s disidentification with antebellum ideological state apparatuses through constitutive rhetoric that draws on literary and social representations of “womanhood” to form a consubstantial or mutual relation with her Anglo-American women audience. Yet the narrator also undermines those very ideals through a juxtaposition of black and white women’s respective subjectivities in the antebellum gendered social mechanism. Deploying apostrophic counter-interpellation as feminist address, the narrator seeks to reconstitute her audience as feminist critical subjects in her revised notion of identities and politics.

The second chapter, “Writing the Past, Righting the Present: Intertextuality and Performativity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” engages in a postcolonial reading of *Beloved* via Julia Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality and Homi K. Bhabha’s pedagogical-performative paradigm. Analysing its intertextuality with anterior literary and historiographical texts, *Incidents* in particular, the chapter reads *Beloved* as a performative intervention into the dominant “pedagogical” American national and historical consciousness, seeking to re-address the past and re-render African-American identities. The text’s semantic practice is found to be transformative of both

slave narratives and historical texts, thus at once transcending the colonisers' history and resuscitating African-American tradition. Through resummoning the symbolic ancestor's voice, *Beloved's* revisionist discourse foregrounds the regenerative potential of a repressed past for performing alternative individual and collective identities. The chapter concludes by extending *Beloved's* intertextual framework to other postcolonial contexts in order to probe its promise for feminist political identifications transnationally.

Within this transcultural intertextual model, the next chapter, "Negotiating Borders: Gender, Nation, and Syncretism in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*," juxtaposes *Beloved's* oppositional discourse on slavery to Sidhwa's alternative narrative of Partition. Following Sidhwa's trajectory from individual to collective memory, the chapter analyses *Cracking India* as a revisionist history of women's experience of Partition that attempts to bridge the gap between a cataclysmic historic event and its public memory in order to recast contemporary social and political relations. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, I explore the nation-woman dyad of the Partition discourse, which employed "woman" as a token of identity politics whilst simultaneously denying her voice, selfhood, and identity. Contra the abjection of "the Other" in nationalist narratives, the text's alternative imaginary, based in a communal paradigm, engages with repressed heterogeneous history and culture in order to foreground the urgency of reclaiming syncretic identities in a relational sociality.

The last chapter, "Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Reimagining (Inter)National Communities in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*," furthers the exploration of the transition of colonial discourses into neocolonial prerogatives in mapping a

transformative reclamation of histories within a transnational topography, one that interlinks some of the most devastating catastrophes of the last six decades: the Second World War, the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the post-9/11 “war on terror.” The chapter critically analyses nationalism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism in the context of postcolonial studies in order to explore the text’s pluralistic ethical model that moves beyond the circumscriptions of these paradigms. By interweaving seemingly discrete spatio-temporal zones in a complex mesh, the text’s narrative world espouses a self-other relationality based in the universal experience of human loss that can serve as the springboard for deeper cultural and political solidarity in the face of persistent imperialism.

Rewriting narratives is a mode of renegotiating identities; remembering repressed histories is a process of boundary-crossing.¹⁵ By mapping this renegotiation in a transnational context, this thesis seeks a relational notion of identities, histories, and coalition via an undeniable human interdependence. The commonalities between these texts thus have significant implications for feminist politics: writing from the margins, each author struggles for voice in the hegemonic structures; each text deploys narrative as an interactive practice to generate alternative identities and discourses; and each text develops a relational conception of politics based in mutual loss and connection. Bringing these texts into a dialogue not only furthers our critical understanding of the intersections and persistence of imperialist discourses and histories, it also provides an interface for developing a transnational, relational

¹⁵ Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994) 12.

feminist political paradigm that can respond to the “culturally imperialist exploitation of feminism”¹⁶ in the new millennium.

1 Feminism and Identity

No overarching definition can suffice for the complex array of concepts that identity entails; this is evident in the very definition of the term that is beset by the sameness-difference paradox. Identity comes from the Latin word *idem* meaning “same,” yet this sameness is contingent on difference. Identity implies that we are identical with ourselves as well as with others in sharing “common identities,” yet it also means that we are different from others in claiming our individual identities.¹⁷ Identity, then, is our conscious perception of a sense of self that is identical to and yet unique from “the other entities that possess that identity.”¹⁸ It is this sameness-difference question, both between men and women and among women, that has figured as one of the most controversial concepts in feminist philosophy since its inception as the following analysis will show. I must begin with a disclaimer though. Given the diversity of feminist thought, any attempt at a genealogical trajectory is quickly rendered into an interwoven web of contesting theoretical outlooks; tracing feminist historiography of identity is thus subject to imposing form on a variegated field. Indeed, this very search for geneses paradoxically exceeds the origins as the identity debate precedes the formal onset of feminist theory.¹⁹ Therefore, whilst

¹⁶ Butler, *Precarious* 41.

¹⁷ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity P, 2008) 2-3.

¹⁸ Hekman, “Identity” 5.

categorising feminism into different strands, this analysis will be mindful of their internal inconsistencies as well as outward convergences.

1.1. Identity: A Historical Overview

The feminist question of “identity and difference” can be traced back to the “theory of sex unity” derived from Plato’s doctrine of “the sexless soul” intrinsic to all humans that “determines the identity of the woman or man,” instead of the material body, thus proving that “there are no . . . differences between woman and man.”²⁰ The inherent mind-body dualism of this position, also informing Cartesian philosophy, was formative of early feminist thought. Indeed, the paradigmatic shift that the Enlightenment engendered in the Western philosophical tradition also furnished the intellectual milieu for first-wave feminist politics. Its central liberal doctrine of the quest for progress of a universal, rational, and autonomous human self, modelled on Rene Descartes's metaphysics of rationality and Immanuel Kant's rationalist moral philosophy, provided the seedbed for early feminist philosophy. Given its challenge to the conventional institutional authority, the autonomous selfhood provided grounds for questioning women’s institutional relegation. Nevertheless, the pioneers of the liberal doctrines, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others, were reluctant to extend liberal principles to

¹⁹ Valerie Bryson identifies an early account of the difference-equality question in the European “debate,” *Querrelle des femmes*, in the early fifteenth century in which Christine de Pizan invoked “the authority of “women’s own experiences” and their “sex’s innate intellectual equality with men.” Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003) 5.

²⁰ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 BC-AD 1250*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Eden P, 1985) 60-62. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991) V 454 d, 454 e, 455 b.

women on account of their alleged inferior nature and reason, views reflective of the Aristotelian naturalist assumptions of difference.²¹

Mary Astell's work reflects the first articulation of women's equal rational endowment to demand equal opportunities for its cultivation whilst the most prominent challenge to the hierarchy of natural gender difference came from Mary Wollstonecraft's attribution of it to the institutional deprivation of education and liberty to women. Likewise, Catherin Macaulay, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Taylor Mill's work ascribed "difference" to inadequate social and educational exposure.²² Whilst this humanist ideal of selfhood allowed first-wave feminism to demand "equality," liberal feminism also came under attack for upholding an androcentric model that relegated corporeality, engendered political solipsism, and overlooked difference.²³ Indeed, in comparing white middle-class women's feminist cause to the abolition movement focused on the plight of enslaved black men, liberal feminism at once slighted slaves' predicament and erased black women. However, notably, the same period also raised the question that has since concerned feminist theory:

²¹ For Rousseau's views, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1921) *Online Library of Liberty*, Web. 12 May 2016. For a good overview, see Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) 3. Also see Bryson 13. For the Aristotelian view on male-female difference, see Aristotle, *Politics I & II*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 1260a and *Generation of Animals II*, trans. A.L. Peck (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1943) n.p. *Internet Archive*, Web. 12 May 2016.

²² Mary Aston, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (London: Wilkin, 1695) 63-64; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Deidra Shauna Lynch, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009) 43; Catherine Graham Macaulay, *Letters on Education* (London: C. Dilly, 1790); John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869); and Harriet Taylor Mill, *The Complete Works of Harriet Taylor Mill*, ed. Jo Ellen Jacobs (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998).

²³ For an overview of the critique, see Bryson 14, 42; Allison Mary Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983); and Rosmarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview P, 2014) 11.

Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech problematised the notion of "woman" as early as 1851. Indeed, as the next chapter will show, Jacobs's *Incidents* presents a literary counterpart of this challenge to the concept of "woman." Despite these inherent tensions, the general principle underlying the first wave was the equality of men and women based in a shared uniform human identity.

Transition between the first and the second wave of feminism is perhaps best reflected in the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. De Beauvoir's conception of women's identity, encapsulated in her oft-quoted declaration, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman," was the first explicit vocalisation of femininity as a social construct. Mapping the existentialist model of the subject-object conflict onto a male-female binary, de Beauvoir attributed biological determinism, psychological subservience, and economic subjugation to the social production of female identity as "a sexed being": "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him. . . . He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other."²⁴ Besides her white middle-class perspective and her "individualistic solutions to women's collective oppression,"²⁵ de Beauvoir has mainly been criticised for an androcentric approach to identity based in a transcendence-immanence binary that condemns traditional feminine experience in presupposing masculinity as the norm. Inspired by de Beauvoir's work, the US feminist, Friedan, attributed women's lack of "identity" to the internalisation of the "feminine mystique" that reduced their existence to the consummation of domesticity, thus "stop[ping] their growth and education short of identity." Whilst Friedan's notion of identity as the fabrication of a

²⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997) 16.

²⁵ Bryson 134.

feminine mystique is similar to de Beauvoir's "myth of the woman," unlike de Beauvoir, Friedan did not view feminine experience as intrinsically oppressive but rather integral to womanhood.²⁶ Friedan and de Beauvoir represent a bridge between the two waves: whilst both reflect the progressive politics of the first wave, they also herald the essentialist and social constructionist positions of the second, underlying the later "identity crisis."

Broadly speaking, the second wave of feminism from the 1960s onwards saw a shift in debate from "equality" to "difference," reflected in the transition from liberal to radical, cultural, and socialist feminisms.²⁷ The question of gender identity was now viewed in terms of the sovereignty of the patriarchal social system as the central cause of women's oppression which re-rendered the inquiry: "is identity (femaleness and femininity) an essential, fixed characteristic of women, located in the body, experience, or the psyche?; or is it historically and culturally specific and socially formed?"²⁸ Radical feminists demarcated women's ontological, epistemological, and sociological concerns from men's based on sexual difference, thus championing a "sisterhood" whose exclusive basis in sexual oppression erased crucial differences between women. Cultural feminism took sexual difference a step

²⁶ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010) 293.

²⁷ Like the first wave of feminism, the second wave was also marked by divergent views; for instance, liberal feminism of the second wave generally extended the first-wave liberalism by positing a homogenous female self, grounded in reason and autonomy and subject to the same social status as men. Grosz, however, categorises second-wave feminism as "feminism of difference." Elizabeth A. Grosz, "Conclusion: What is Feminist Theory?" *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, eds. Carol Pateman and Elizabeth A. Grosz (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986) 190-204 and "The In(ter)vention of Feminist Knowledges," *Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and the Critique of Knowledges*, eds. Barbara Craine, Elizabeth A. Grosz, and Marie De Lepervanche (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988) 92-104. Also see Chris Beasley, *What Is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* (London: Sage, 1999) 55.

²⁸ Ehlers 349. Anti-patriarchy finds its early expression in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) later developed, significantly, by Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970).

further by emphasising the essential biological differences between the sexes, valorising the ontological superiority of feminine nature, and urging women to seek the true feminine identity suppressed by patriarchy.²⁹ Socialist feminism departed from radical and cultural feminism by introducing class as the dominant feature of oppression, which reinforced liberal feminism's sameness-equality position.³⁰ Regarding women's "identity" as a product of "*false consciousness*" in a patriarchal, capitalist social structure, socialist feminism concentrated on the "two-system" model of sex and class oppression, whilst relegating other inflections of identity.³¹ Generally, most strands in second-wave feminism have been criticised for essentialism and ahistoricism: as Hekman observes, whilst these feminists revealed the fallacious assumption of "the neutral, disembodied citizen of the Western liberal tradition" by disclosing it as masculine, their notion of "woman" "did not provide the desired political solution for feminist politics," for this "'woman' turned out to be white, heterosexual, middle-class."³²

²⁹ Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* critiqued the artificial femininity imposed by patriarchy and urged women to discover their true femininity reflected in female sexuality and motherhood. See Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: Women's P, 1979); *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (London: Women's P, 1984); *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's P, 1986); and Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986). Adrienne Rich argued for the reclamation of an essential female identity contra patriarchy's suppression of female body, mind, and sexuality. She located all women on a "lesbian continuum," irrespective of their sexual orientation, that implied a sociality based on essential femaleness. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5.4 (1980): 631-60.

³⁰ Grosz, "In(ter)vention" 92-104. Socialist feminism stemmed from Marxist feminism that arose out of Frederick Engels's work and grew rapidly in the U.S., Britain, Germany, and Russia. See Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Penguin, 1986). For a comprehensive analysis, see Bryson 94-125.

³¹ Ehlers 350. Juliet Mitchell, Alison Jaggar, Iris Marion Young, and Heidi Hartman's work represents different versions of this dual system ranging from the supremacy of class over sex, vice versa, or an interaction of the two. See Tong 108.

³² Hekman, "Identity" 10.

Psychoanalytic feminism was another major development in feminist conceptions of identity. Despite its initial rejection for patriarchal underpinnings and biological determinism,³³ psychoanalysis came to be re-evaluated during the 1980s for its insights into the social construction of gendered identities. Critiquing the tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis that attributed women's biological, psychic, and moral inferiority to "penis envy" and "the lack," feminists like Juliet Mitchell reconceived masculine and feminine identities in terms of psychic processes and social structures, thus re-rendering the phallus as the signifier of patriarchal oppression.³⁴ Another strand within psychoanalytic feminism, object relations theory, originated in the work of Melanie Klein and "established relations with 'objects' as the central principle in identity formation."³⁵ Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Jessica Benjamin, among others, developed this model to situate gendered identities in pre-oedipal infant-mother relations; for them, the differential parental responsibilities and childrearing practices contributed to individualist or relational identities of men and women respectively. Both Chodorow and Dinnerstein posited dual parenting to extend relational dynamics to both parents in order to reorganise the social and psychic construction of identities.³⁶ Jessica Benjamin, however, attributed unequal male-female relationships to the "breakdown in the fundamental tension between assertion of self and recognition of other," so that the dominant-subordinate psychic

³³ Simon de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Shulamith Firestone, and Kate Millett were all critical of psychoanalysis.

³⁴ Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

³⁵ Wendy Hollway, "Relationality: The Intersubjective Foundations of Identity," *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, eds. Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (London: Sage, 2010) 219.

³⁶ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

and social constructions that inhibit relational bonds must be recast through representational practices.³⁷ Despite their radical insights, object relations feminists have generally been criticised for overemphasising psychic as opposed to social relations, focusing on a strictly heterosexual model of the family, universalising and essentialising gender, and revaluing oppressive feminine qualities.³⁸

Despite their diverse conceptions of identity, the above strands have all been charged with essentialism, ethnocentrism, and ahistoricism in their bid to conceive “woman” as a uniform category for universal sisterhood.³⁹ Black feminism critiqued this Eurocentric model’s erasure of other intersectional constituents of women’s identities such as race, class, sexual orientation, etc.⁴⁰ Whilst Audre Lorde believed that the “homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood” did not exist, bell hooks regarded this “vision of sisterhood . . . based on the idea of common oppression” as “a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women’s varied and complex social reality.”⁴¹ This gap led to a significant

³⁷ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) 49.

³⁸ For a comprehensive critique, see Allison Weir, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 44-45. I will return to this in my analysis of relationality below.

³⁹ See Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (London: Women's P, 1990); bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto P, 1983); *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2015); *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End P, 1989); *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End P, 1984); Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, ed. N.K. Bereano (Trumansburg: Crossing P, 1984) 114-23; and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991). For a history of racial prejudice in feminism, see Angela Yvonne Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (London: Women's P, 1982).

⁴⁰ For more on this, see Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York: Feminist P at CUNY, 1982).

⁴¹ hooks, *Margin* 43-44; Lorde 116.

development in Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of "intersectionality" that critiqued feminism's "single-axis framework"⁴² by highlighting "the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimension of Black women's" experiences. Indeed, *Incidents*'s disidentification with the Ideological State Apparatuses reflects exactly this point; since "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism," the "problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure."⁴³ Patricia Hill Collins further developed this "matrix of domination" model in calling for a rearrangement of feminist politics to account for black presence via "a both/and conceptual stance of Black feminist thought."⁴⁴ Alice Walker's "womanism" was another variation on "difference" that replaced "feminist" with the fluid identity of "womanist" to address the historical racism in feminist theorisations of identity.⁴⁵ Within black feminism, once again, there are divergent views as to the experience and representation of black women: Collins subscribes to feminist standpoint theory that accords black women's peculiar experience a privileged perspective unavailable to others, thus homogenising the notions of "woman," "black," and "African" besides erasing differences within black women.⁴⁶ Black British feminist, Heidi Safia Mirza,

⁴² Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* Iss. 1 Article 8 (1989): 139.

⁴³ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43.6: (1991): 1241. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing" 140.

⁴⁴ Collins x, xii, 21.

⁴⁵ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London: Women's P, 1985).

⁴⁶ Feminist standpoint theory is a contemporary offshoot of socialist feminism, reflected in the works of Nancy Harstock, Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith, Alison Jaggar, and Donna Haraway, that applies a Marxist (György Lukács) conception of the proletariat's "privileged" stance to women based

challenges such a fixed model of black identity as “naïve” and “essentialist” in arguing for “a multi-faceted discontinuous black identity that marks [black women’s] difference.”⁴⁷ Indeed, as the next chapter will show, *Incidents* reflects a contestation of the essentialist standpoint view through the identificatory model of constitutive rhetoric. This counter notion of a fluid, “border” identity is also reflected in the works of Chicana, Asian-American, Native-American, indigenous Australian, and postcolonial feminisms.⁴⁸

Postcolonial, Third World, and transnational feminisms share with black feminism their critique of homogeneous identity categories and historical reductionism by introducing “nation” into the matrix of gender, sex, race, and class.⁴⁹ Chandra Mohanty’s seminal essay, “Under Western Eyes,” forms a stringent critique of Western feminism’s construction of the monolithic category of “Third World women” “as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and

on the material realities of their lives. For a good overview, see Sandra G. Harding, ed., *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁷ Safia Heidi Mirza, “Introduction: Mapping a Genealogy of Black British Feminism,” *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Safia Heidi Mirza (London: Routledge, 1997) 16.

⁴⁸ For details, see Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). Also see the works of Cherríe Moraga and Maria Lugones. For similar concerns in Asian-American, Native-American, and indigenous Australian feminisms, see the works of Trinh T. Minh-ha, Donna Hightower Langston, Aileen Morton-Robinson respectively, among others.

⁴⁹ Despite its derogative implications, some postcolonial feminists, including Mohanty, prefer the term “Third World” as representing self-empowerment. I will return to this point below. Third World feminism is a broad term that is often used interchangeably with postcolonial feminism and includes the works of feminists both in and outside the so-called Third World. For an overview, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991); Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminisms* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1994). Also see the works of Nawal el Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, Isabel Letelier, Achola Pala, Leila Ahmed, and Kumkum Sangari among others.

desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions.” This epistemological reductionism not only elides the multidimensional identities and experiences of Third World women but also consolidates the dichotomous colonial power structures in which the voiceless victims of the Third World look up to the civilised Western women for representation.⁵⁰ Drawing instead on the “idea of imagined community” based on oppositional politics in “divergent histories and social locations,” Third World feminism proposes “political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance.”⁵¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s influential work takes further Mohanty’s critique of identity and representation by questioning the very viability of these concepts: “that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network . . . of strands that may be termed politics, ideology economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on” that “produce the effect of an operating subject.”⁵² If it is impossible to posit a coherent notion of the subject, then the representational politics of the subaltern are further subject to erasure. Despite these epistemic complexities though, Spivak acknowledges the urgency of the political project of feminism by arguing for “a strategic use of positive essentialism.”⁵³

The exigency for coalitional politics, accommodative of difference, also underlies transnational feminism that builds on postcolonial and Third World

⁵⁰ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Third World Women* 55.

⁵¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,” *Third World Women* 4.

⁵² Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006) 281.

⁵³ Spivak, “Subaltern” 281.

feminisms by incorporating into the analysis capitalist globalisation, neoliberalism, religious racism, and neocolonialism. As opposed to Western feminism's centre-periphery model of sisterhood, according to Mohanty and Jaqui Alexander, transnational feminism posits "a comparative, relational . . . feminist praxis,"⁵⁴ based in "a multinational and multilocal approach"⁵⁵ that is open to conflict. In their critique of the mainstream feminist conceptions of identity and representation, black and postcolonial feminisms align with poststructuralist feminism; however, the extent to which they agree on the fluidity of identity categories is different. Whilst the former challenge the erasure of difference in the putative category of "woman," the latter, as represented in Spivak's work, question the very ontological basis of identities. This tension underlay the "identity crisis" in the aftermath of the linguistic turn in theory.

1.2. Identity and the Poststructuralist Turn

Arising in the post-1960s French political and intellectual milieu and represented principally in the works of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, poststructuralism, as an ontological and epistemological inquiry, rejected the Enlightenment tenets of reason, truth, and knowledge, underpinning many previous feminist theorisations of identity.⁵⁶ Informed by his notion of "différance," Derrida's

⁵⁴ Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements," *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, eds. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997) xv.

⁵⁵ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity," *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, eds. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994) 3.

⁵⁶ Poststructuralism is a broad field that comprises an array of theories. I will briefly recapitulate the major theoretical ideas that have inspired feminist perspectives on language, identity, and power.

deconstructive methodology challenged Western metaphysics's foundations in "logocentrism" and "phallogentrism." Language, he argued, does not depict reality but comprises an infinite set of interrelations among words, deferring meaning interminably. The mediation of reality by experience and its subjection to linguistic iterability preclude the possibility of any transcendental signified or metanarrative to explain reality, leaving us with linguistic relations conducted from partial perspectives. Meaning, on the contrary, emerges in the knowledge-power matrix; according to Foucault, "truth" and "knowledge" are discursive productions of institutional hegemonies that demand subjectivation through the regulation of social practices.

The indeterminacy of language, the inaccessibility of truth, and circumscribed human agency are ideas closely related to Lacanian theories of psychosexual development that attribute human identity to the internalisation of socio-linguistic structures; a child's entry into the Symbolic order inaugurates her identification with the existing structures of gender, race, class, sexuality, etc., based on the masculine discourse that posits femininity as "lack." Because humans are not the originators but the products of meaning, Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan reject the possibility of a fixed essence as the basis of identity, thus dismantling the very myth on which had so often hinged feminist politics of identity. Replacing a unitary, coherent self with a discursively formed, indeterminate subjectivity, poststructuralism stripped the category "woman" of positive epistemological or ontological value, thus rendering any notion of collective identity problematic.

In dismantling the androcentric universal subject of modernity and in destabilising transcendental belief systems, poststructuralism was politically

conducive to feminism. Particularly, given the first and second waves' critical cynosure (white, middle-class, heterosexual woman), the fluid postmodern subject presented an invigorating avenue. However, poststructuralism's epistemological scepticism was accompanied by an ethical cynicism inimical to feminist thought. Its rejection of identities for their essentialist ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions threatened to erase the always-already invisible female subjectivity; its postulation of a determined subjectivity problematised the question of agency and resistance; its linguistic and discursive primacy relegated the experiential aspect indispensable to any understanding of identities in human sociality; and its rejection of foundationalist narratives and totalitarian epistemologies threatened, at once, to efface the historical narratives of the marginalised and to relativise feminist discourse. Indeed, pushed to the limits, poststructuralist critique of identity seemed to mimic a return of the repressed generic liberal subject, shorn of essential differences, that consumes the peripheral in its absolute contingency.

No wonder, then, that poststructuralism came to be viewed as a crisis in feminist theory that sparked a strong backlash from some feminists who regarded it as "apolitical, ahistorical, irresponsible, and self-contradictory." Diane Bell and Renate Klein argue that it takes the "heat off patriarchy"⁵⁷ whilst Somer Brodribb rejects it as anti-feminist, "masculine ideology" that "exults female oblivion and disconnection" and lacks a "model" for "global" politics.⁵⁸ Barbara Christian famously deplored the implications of poststructuralism's "academic hegemony" for "the energetic emerging

⁵⁷ Diane Bell and Renate Klein, "Foreword—Beware: Radical Feminists Speak, Read, Write, Organise, Enjoy Life, and Never Forget," *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, eds. Diane Bell and Renate Klein (London: Zed Books, 1996) xxvi.

⁵⁸ Somer Brodribb, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism* (Melbourne: Spinifex P, 1993) ix, xvi, xix.

literatures” of “people of color, feminists, radical critics, creative writers who have struggled for much longer than a decade to make their voices . . . heard.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the texts in this thesis represent some of the first articulations of the long-repressed voices and subjectivities that some versions of poststructuralist anti-essentialism apparently neutralised. Thus, whilst bell hooks agrees with Christian in being “suspicious of postmodern critiques of the ‘subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time,” unlike Christian, she recognises that this critique is “useful for African-Americans concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity” to launch “renewed black liberation struggle.” Yet she also cautions that “[g]iven a pervasive politic of white supremacy which seeks to prevent the formation of radical black subjectivity, we cannot cavalierly dismiss a concern with identity politics.”⁶⁰

Thus, whilst for some feminists, poststructuralism was “a narrative of progress” that purged feminism of its theoretical limitations, for others, it was “a narrative of the fall” that derailed feminism off its political route.⁶¹ Even so, the anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist critique irrevocably altered the feminist theoretical landscape, necessitating a revised epistemology to ground feminist political practice. Three dominant approaches can be identified in the subsequent robust body of feminist scholarship: the first outrightly rejects the modernist fictitious subject in positing a substanceless, decentred, and multiplicitous subjectivity that

⁵⁹ Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory,” *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987): 53.

⁶⁰ bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness,” *Yearning* 28-29.

⁶¹ Rita Felski, “The Doxa of Difference,” *Signs* 23.1 (1997): 1.

obviates any notion of stable individual or collective identities;⁶² the second combines elements of both the liberal modernist and the postmodernist subjectivities in order to retain identities for feminist politics.⁶³ Both these approaches pose limitations and paradoxes. The first position not only defies its deconstructive philosophy by substituting the modernist substantive self with a postmodern substanceless subject (a reversal of the binary rather than its deconstruction), it also problematises questions of agency and resistance: if the autonomous, self-reflexive, coherent subject was politically naïve, its contrapositive discursive, fragmentary, decentred subjectivity is politically inefficient. On the contrary, whilst the second position accommodates essentialist and foundationalist critique, it often reverts to the coherent, self-reflexive modernist subject for theorising political practice.⁶⁴ Thus, common to both approaches is the modernist-postmodernist binary that their theoretical detours consolidate rather than deconstruct. The third approach seeks to displace this binary in reinterpreting the subject as both a discursive construction and a creative agent;

⁶² This approach is reflected in the works of Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, and Donna Haraway among others. However, this model does not apply uniformly; whilst Butler posits a substanceless subject whose agency is suspect (as I will go on to show), Kristeva's subject-in-process offers resistance. Even so, both reject any notion of collective identities for feminist politics. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 2011); *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997); Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); and *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1991).

⁶³ My first two approaches here share their basic premise with Hekman's division in "Reconstituting the Subject: Feminism, Modernism, and Postmodernism," *Hypatia* 6.2 (1991): 44-63.

⁶⁴ For this approach, see Linda M. Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13.3 (1988): 405-36 and *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self: Studies in Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006); Linda M. Alcoff, Michael R. Hames-García, and Satya P. Mohanty, eds., *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Macmillan, 2006); Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) and "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); and Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

however, it posits a rigid “non-identity” position by rejecting all conceptions of coalition informed by identities as “inevitably . . . fixing identities.”⁶⁵ I will briefly trace this trajectory in order to contextualise my own later approach to a relational conception of feminism.

Whilst some feminists outrightly rejected poststructuralism as a viable source of feminist inquiry, others argued that feminism predated poststructuralism in its politics of difference.⁶⁶ Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Eve Sedgwick, Monique Wittig, and Donna Haraway are among poststructuralist feminists whose work on identity has been particularly influential. Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva revised Lacanian psychoanalysis to challenge women’s identity as Other in a phallogocentric signifying economy. Tracing the absence of the feminine in the Western imaginary, Irigaray argues that by denying women an independent, sexually specific identity, this phallogocentric model reduces the feminine to “the inverse, indeed the underside, of the masculine.” Thus, she takes to reinscribing a feminine imaginary into the Symbolic through feminine language based in female sexuality that has the potential to disrupt the masculinist Symbolic order. Cixous draws on Derridian *différance* to critique Western metaphysics’ dualisms (Man/Woman, Culture/Nature, Logos/Pathos, etc.) that render woman both inferior and Other. Her concept of

⁶⁵ For this approach, see Hekman, “Identity” 5; “Reconstituting”; and “Beyond Identity: Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics,” *Feminist Theory* 1.3 (2000): 289-308; Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005); Denise Riley, “Am I That Name?” *Feminism and the Category of ‘Women’ in History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); and Bernice Johnson Reagan, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color P, 1983) 356-69. Also see the works of Nancy Fraser and Norma Alarcón. In their rejection of collective identities, Kristeva’s and Butler’s theoretical positions also endorse this view.

⁶⁶ Patricia Waugh argues that “feminism has, to some extent, always been ‘postmodern’” in its critique of the Enlightenment discourses of the universalist subject, experience, and knowledge. Patricia Waugh, “Postmodernism and Feminism,” *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998) 179.

écriture féminine, as Showalter defines it, “the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text,”⁶⁷ urges women to write themselves back into the Western philosophical, social, and historical texts in order to reinscribe their identities.⁶⁸ Despite their significant development of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Irigaray and Cixous have both been criticised for a reversal of psychoanalytic phallic hierarchies, the construction of essentialist male and female imaginaries, and the association of writing with male and female sexualities.⁶⁹

Kristeva’s work, however, departs from the essentialist models by conceiving identities as fluid linguistic and social entities. As my textual analyses in chapters three and four will elaborate, Kristeva’s conception of individual identity as a “subject-in-process,” mediating between the symbolic and the semiotic, is politically liberating. Kristeva reintroduces the feminine into the symbolic by complementing Lacanian paternal language with the pre-Oedipal language of the semiotic associated with the maternal body; whereas the masculine “logical mode” of the symbolic tends to fix identities, the feminine “poetic mode” of the semiotic signifies negativity. In allowing both men and women access to the semiotic, Kristeva circumvents essentialism: “a woman cannot ‘be’” as it is a social construct of bourgeois humanism

⁶⁷ Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 185.

⁶⁸ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985); *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993); Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 875-93; and Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987).

⁶⁹ Weir, *Sacrificial* 91-96. Others, however, argue that they deploy “essentialism for strategic purposes” and do not posit essential, inherent gendered identities. Sue Vice, “Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory,” *Contemporary Feminist Theories* 170. I return to the notion of strategic essentialism below.

that must be deconstructed.⁷⁰ Likewise, she argues that mobilisation in the name of a human essence “exposes one to the risk that the so-called good substance, once it is unchained, will explode . . . to become an absolute arbitrariness.”⁷¹ Kristeva, however, has been taken to task by Butler for consolidating the authority of the paternal Symbolic and for conceiving lesbianism as psychotic. Butler asserts that in “arguing that the semiotic contests the universality of the Symbolic,” Kristeva “defends a maternal instinct as a pre-discursive biological necessity, thereby naturalizing a specific cultural configuration of maternity” and “claiming the cultural unintelligibility of lesbianism.”⁷²

Butler, Sedgwick, and Wittig have then deconstructed the compulsory heterosexuality central to most feminism: taking a materialist feminist approach, Wittig rejected the notion of women as a “natural group” and regarded heterosexuality as “a political regime” whilst Sedgwick debunked institutional compulsory heterosexuality and reconceived homosexuality as a “speech act.”⁷³ Butler agrees with both in underscoring the arbitrary relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality; however, she deconstructs the very distinction between sex, as a given biological

⁷⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Woman Can Never Be Defined,” trans. Marilyn A. August *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981) 137-141.

⁷¹ Kristeva, “Women's Time” 204. Also see Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982); *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982); *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984); and *Strangers*.

⁷² Judith Butler, “The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva,” *Hypatia* 3.3 (1989): 104. Also see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “French Feminism in an International Frame,” *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 154-184 for a critique of Kristeva's Eurocentric approach in Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Marion Boyars, 1977).

⁷³ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon P, 1992) ix; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 3.

category, and gender, as an acquired social construct, by declaring both sex and gender as social constructions of the normative heterosexual economy: “if gender is the social significance that sex assumes within a given culture . . . then what, if anything, is left of ‘sex’ once it has assumed its social character as gender?”⁷⁴ No longer believable as an interior “truth” of dispositions, gender is “a performatively enacted signification” and “a repeated stylization of the body” that constitutes the identity it purports to be.⁷⁵ However, although “gender is always a doing,” this deed is not necessarily initiated by an *a priori* “‘I’ . . . but the ‘I’ itself emerges only within the matrix of gender relations themselves.”⁷⁶ If gender is a performance, then the construct “woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” and that is “open to intervention and resignification” through subversive performance.⁷⁷ Butler thus rejects any “universal basis for feminism” in a “common identity” and “the unproblematic unity of ‘women.’” Nevertheless, she does not foreclose the possibility of “representational politics” but urges to reformulate it within “a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize.”⁷⁸ Butler’s theory has still been criticised for being apolitical and paradoxical: Allison Weir, another feminist whose work this thesis draws on, argues that even when Butler allows limited agency through subversive performance, she does not indicate how we move from “accidental failures to repeat” to conscious “practices of parody” without

⁷⁴ Butler, *Bodies* 46.

⁷⁵ Butler, *Gender* 45.

⁷⁶ Butler, *Gender* 34; *Bodies* xvi.

⁷⁷ Butler, *Gender* 33.

⁷⁸ Butler, *Gender* 20, 7.

allowing for “the reflexive mediation of a knowing, critical subject.”⁷⁹ Butler’s later work, however, is more emphatically political as she theorises a conception of relationality endemic to human corporeality. I will return to this below to outline its significance for my project. In general though, most poststructuralist feminists endorse a “non-identity” model “that eschews identity altogether” in redefining “politics in terms of pragmatic political action” and “concrete political goals.”⁸⁰

1.3. Reclaiming Identities: Alternative Imaginaries

Whilst the above feminists believe that “collective feminist action need not presuppose a theory of female identity,”⁸¹ others argue that “if we cannot conceptualise women as a group, feminist politics appears to lose any meaning.”⁸² Feminists belonging to the latter group, such as Diane Fuss, Elizabeth Spelman, Iris Marion Young, Chantal Mouffe, Seyla Benhabib, Anne Phillips, Allison Stone, and Rita Felski, have sought a middle ground between poststructuralist and humanist notions of identity.⁸³ Their difference from the poststructuralist feminists discussed above can be encapsulated in Patricia Waugh’s distinction between “strong” and “weak” postmodern feminisms; whilst the former is radical and utopian in its conception of “hybridity, nomadism, fragmentation and endless fictionality” that

⁷⁹ Weir, *Sacrificial* 126.

⁸⁰ Hekman, “Identity” 23-24.

⁸¹ Toril Moi quoted in Bryson 135. Butler argues the same in *Gender* 22.

⁸² Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997) 18.

⁸³ See, for instance, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,” *Social Text* 21 (1989): 83-104; Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, eds., *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon P, 1988); and Felski, “Doxa.”

“offer an escape route from biological, social and cosmic determinism,” the latter “accept[s] the human need to invest in grand narratives,” yet “reject[s] monocausal varieties and insist[s] that knowledge is [culturally] embedded.”⁸⁴ Indeed, some strong versions posit a fluid, centrifugal, power-ridden subject that is theoretically incapable of politics, for resistance presupposes a reasonably coherent subject, cognizant of power to initiate resistance. Whilst in this section I analyse the weak versions that presuppose such a critical feminist subject, I also want to emphasise that the “strong” version is equally and persistently intruded upon by this subject, which explains its recourse to “strategic essentialism.”

The most notable instance of this is Spivak’s observation that “[s]ince one cannot not be an essentialist, why not . . . carve out a representative essentialist position” to do politics, “while remembering the dangers in this?”⁸⁵ She proposes “a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest,” which would allow us “to use the critical force of anti-humanism,” whilst “shar[ing] its constitutive paradox.”⁸⁶ This “strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword”⁸⁷ implies a provisional acceptance of collective identities to mobilise struggle, whilst remaining self-reflexively critical. Both proponents and detractors of identity politics have criticised Spivak’s position for inherent fallacies. Butler argues

⁸⁴ Waugh 182-92.

⁸⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Strategy, Identity, Writing,” *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990) 45.

⁸⁶ Spivak, “Subaltern” 205. D. Riley also suggests that we “act as if [women] existed.” D. Riley 112. Likewise, Baden and Goetz endorse Bina Agarwal’s suggestion to replace “romantic sisterhood” with “strategic sisterhood.” Sally Baden and Anne M. Goetz, “Who Needs [Sex] When You Can Have [Gender]? Conflicting Discourses on Gender at Beijing,” *Feminist Review* 56 (1997): 20.

⁸⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 3.

that strategic essentialism cannot ameliorate the problem because “strategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended,” and, in this case, “exclusion itself might qualify as such an unintended yet consequential meaning.”⁸⁸ Weir regards such “ironized” and “nominalized” identities “just as simplistic as unreflective essentializing” because despite avoiding “a shared essence or universal experience,” this model “nevertheless takes women’s identity as something that is given and objective.”⁸⁹ And Priyamvada Gopal asserts that “resorting to admittedly discredited concepts like essentialism and positivism,” based in binary thinking, is “an unwitting act of bad faith” that betrays an unwillingness to confront the challenge of theorising “a defiant and difficult (rather than merely strategic) commensurability of human concerns.”⁹⁰ Feminists who have defied bad faith have accepted the challenge to walk this theoretical minefield, however, not without complexities.⁹¹

Seyla Benhabib’s “weak postmodernism” signifies a dialectic of “positive” Enlightenment legacies and poststructuralist critique of autonomous selfhood, absolute rationalism, foundationalism, and ahistoricism to conceive a socially constructed subjectivity based in an “interactive universalism” that is attentive to “the

⁸⁸ Butler, *Gender* 6.

⁸⁹ Allison Weir, *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory between Power and Connection* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013) 66, 71. Also see Alison Stone, “Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 1.2 (2004): 135-53.

⁹⁰ Priyamvada Gopal, “Reading Subaltern History,” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 161.

⁹¹ There is a broad field of feminist work that can qualify as “weak” postmodernism or that maintains a middle ground between modernist and postmodernist accounts; however, I am focusing on a select few feminists’ work to drive my point home.

concrete other.”⁹² Deploying Jurgen Habermas’s communitarian ethics, Benhabib posits a “contextualist theory of knowledge”⁹³ that resorts to rational moral debate to accommodate difference in a universalism. It proposes that we “reverse perspectives among members of a ‘moral community’ and judge them from the point of view of other(s).”⁹⁴ There are several problems with Benhabib’s position: for instance, I agree with Young that the notion of “identifying moral respect and reciprocity with symmetry and reversibility of perspectives tends to close off the differentiation among subjects that Benhabib wants to keep open.”⁹⁵ As my analysis of relationality will elaborate, these “appropriative” models of identification need to be replaced with “transformative identification” that opens both self and other to conflict and change, thus necessitating an on-going process of mutual rearrangement of individual identities.

Young’s alternative notion of identity is focused on two defining ideas. The first is a model of asymmetrical reciprocity that conceives identity “as a product of linguistic and practical interaction” of non-coherent individuals whose membership in social groups, instead of a “common nature,” determines their affinity in shared assumptions.⁹⁶ Young’s second model shifts from “social group” to “serial collectivity” that conceives women “as a collective” without shared attributes. The unity of a “series” is contingent on individuals pursuing their own ends “with respect

⁹² Benhabib 11.

⁹³ Waugh 190.

⁹⁴ Benhabib 32.

⁹⁵ Iris Marion Young, “Comments on Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self,” *New German Critique* 62 (1994): 167.

⁹⁶ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 8-9, 44-48.

to the same objects conditioned by a continuous material environment” and “in response to structures . . . created by the unintended collective result of past actions.” These “practico-inert structures” engender the “gendered serialized existence,” but “they do not determine or define it.”⁹⁷ However, because “seriality” does not by default generate politics, Young has to forge a “relationship between series and groups”: seriality then must evolve into a “self-conscious collectives of persons with a common objective that they pursue together.” This seems to collapse the serial-group distinction as politics are contingent on a collective unity.

Alison Stone compares Young’s model to “strategic essentialism” in its affirmation of “universal norms which constitute all women as women.” Stone’s alternative “anti-essentialist” model of a “non-unified group” is that of feminist genealogy: ⁹⁸ “women always become women by reworking pre-established cultural interpretations of femininity” whereby “they become located . . . within a history of overlapping chains of interpretation,” without sharing any common attributes. Despite its genealogical lexicon, Stone’s model seems quite similar to Young’s idea of passive participation in “practico-inert histories.” Besides, genealogical fluidity seems to be beset by a paradox: on the one hand, the model must deny “any common understanding or experience of femininity,” which makes it unintelligible and redundant: if all women live their “femininity” differently without points of convergence, we lapse into relativism that obviates the very epistemological inquiry. Alternatively, if the model presupposes shared experience or understanding for “all women [to] remain identifiable as women” (which, I believe, it does, particularly in

⁹⁷ Iris Marion Young, “Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective,” *Signs* 19.3 (1994): 724-35.

⁹⁸ Stone 136, 148.

using “tree” as a metaphor for feminist genealogy without acknowledging the tree’s solid roots), it regresses into the quintessential model of women “as a group” that “can mobilise together” in view of a “distinctly oppressive” history.⁹⁹ Hence, we come full circle to the “collective” category model of politics. As I will go on to argue, relationality challenges this collectivity in its shift away from categories to multiple contesting relations in a contextualised and historicised framework.

No wonder, then, according to Hekman, “identity politics seems to be the perfect solution for feminist politics” as it allows women to choose from “a plethora of identities” for collective politics. Paradoxically, identity politics owes both its rise and fall to poststructuralism: although it was “an offshoot of the post-structuralist rejection of a fixed, essential identity,”¹⁰⁰ it has met its most incisive critique from the same quarters. In being “focused on racial, religious, sexual, ethnic, gender, or national identity” for mobilising struggle against oppression, identity politics, in feminism, “emerged out of challenges to the movement raised by the women who felt left out.”¹⁰¹ However, despite its proclamation of “a rebellion against the general category ‘woman,’” identity politics replicated “the very exclusionary moves that initiated the turn to specific identities.”¹⁰² By embracing identities that “are not of their own choosing” but “precisely those imposed by the society they are challenging,” proponents of identity politics “reify rather than redefine those

⁹⁹ Stone 135-53.

¹⁰⁰ Hekman, “Identity” 3.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Ryan, “Having It All: The Search for Identity and Community,” *Identity Politics in the Women’s Movement*, ed. Barbara Ryan (New York: NYU P, 2001) 321.

¹⁰² Butler, *Bodies* 118.

differences.”¹⁰³ Advocates of identity politics have hit back by accusing poststructuralism of political insouciance; they argue that “identity politics in itself is neither positive nor negative” because it simply foregrounds the “irrefutable fact” of the political relevance of identities. For them, it is “a false dilemma to suppose that we should either accept pernicious uses of identity or pretend they do not exist”¹⁰⁴ because neither position explains “the social, political, and epistemic significance of identities.”¹⁰⁵

A major offshoot of identity politics is post-positivist realist theory developed by Satya P. Mohanty, Paula M. L. Moya, Linda M. Alcoff, and Michael R. Hames-García.¹⁰⁶ Bypassing both “authentic” and “unreal” positions that “seriously underread the real epistemic and political complexities” of identities, Satya Mohanty’s post-positivist theory understands identity “in terms of objective social location” based on “a cognitivist conception of experience” that can be “a source of both real knowledge and social mystification.”¹⁰⁷ This “realist theory of social or cultural identity” draws on experiences as “raw material” for constructing identities without falling into naive empiricism or “theoretically-unmediated knowledge.” Rather, they rerender poststructuralist definitions of “objectivity” and “knowledge,”

¹⁰³ Hekman, “Identity” 11.

¹⁰⁴ Alcoff et al., 5-7.

¹⁰⁵ Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, *Reclaiming identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (California: U of California P, 2000) 10.

¹⁰⁶ Moya and Hames-García 9-12. Satya P. Mohanty introduced the post-positivist notion of identity in “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition,” *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 41-80 and developed it in his later work. For other prominent perspectives on identity politics see Alcoff, “Cultural” and *Visible*; Ann Ferguson, “Resisting the Veil of Privilege: Building Bridge Identities as an Ethico-Politics of Global Feminisms,” *Hypatia* 13.3 (1998): 95-113; and D. Riley. For a critique of their positions, see Hekman, “Reconstituting,” “Beyond,” and “Identity.”

¹⁰⁷ S. Mohanty, “Epistemic” 54.

arguing that “objective knowledge can be built on an analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias or interest,” which, in turn, helps us “distinguish those biases that are limiting or counterproductive from those that are in fact necessary for knowledge, that are epistemically productive and useful.”¹⁰⁸

There is much to appreciate in this position. It underscores the social and historical situatedness of identities, which foregrounds their relationality. It also accounts for the experiential dimension of identity mislaid in most poststructuralist theories’ exclusive focus on their epistemological status alone.¹⁰⁹ And it underscores a subject’s access to “real knowledge” based on “real experiences,” which is significant for any theorisation of agency. However, its *a priori* construction of “the real” is problematic. Since subjects’ reading of the real occurs in relation to a politically contingent “nonunitary complex of social practices and systems of representation,” Ramón Saldívar inquires if “‘the real’ in realist theory is available both postpositively and empirically?” In other words, how do we differentiate between “experiences that produce dynamic and negotiated judgment and experiences that simply produce *false consciousness*”?¹¹⁰ I will return to this below in outlining the risk of false consciousness even in a relational notion of identity. Besides, whilst some of the above strands lapse into appropriative identification, a post-positivist focus on

¹⁰⁸ Satya P. Mohanty, “Can Our Values Be Objective? On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics,” *New Literary History* 32.4 (2001): 804.

¹⁰⁹ Hekman, “Identity” 18-23.

¹¹⁰ Ramón Saldívar, “Multicultural Politics, Aesthetics, and the Realist Theory of Identity: A Response to Satya Mohanty,” *New Literary History* 32.4 (2001): 854.

location or category undertheorises the significance of identification which is crucial to coalitional politics as I will go on to argue below.¹¹¹

At the turn of the new millennium, however, the most stringent critique of poststructuralist feminism has come from the so-called ontological turn reflected in the new materialist and affective feminisms that have accused poststructuralism of failing to “fulfill its promise as a theoretical grounding for feminism.”¹¹² For them, poststructuralism reflects a “critical prison-house” in its “exclusive” focus “on representation, ideology, and discourse” at the cost of “lived experience” and “corporeal practice.”¹¹³ Both fields of inquiry reflect a conceptual shift away from language, culture, power, and discourse to matter, body, biology, and materiality. Whilst new materialism reorients focus on “the reality of matter, space, and time,”¹¹⁴ the affective theory redirects it on the corporeal dimension of emotions, feelings, and affect. However, the “ontological” turn is not as innovative as some of those feminists involved would like us to think; as Anu Koivunen observes, to talk about the “turn” is “to ignore generations of feminist scholarship on articulating subjective and social

¹¹¹ Weir, *Identities* 63.

¹¹² Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, “Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory,” *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008) 1. For new materialist and affective feminisms, see Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004); *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994); and *Time Travels*; Vicky Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs* 28.3 (2003): 801-31 and *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007); Rosi Braidotti, “Feminist Epistemology after Postmodernism: Critiquing Science, Technology, and Globalisation,” *Interdisciplinary Science Review* 32.1 (2007): 65-74; Clare Hemmings, “Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation,” *Feminist Theory* 13.2 (2012): 147-61; Nikki Sullivan, “The Somatechnics of Perception and the Matter of the Non/Human: A Critical Response to the New Materialism,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 19.3 (2012): 299-313; and Coole and Frost.

¹¹³ Alaimo and Hekman 4.

¹¹⁴ Grosz, *Nick* 3.

experiences of injustices,” especially in racial and postcolonial studies.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, despite their respective positions, both materialist and affective feminisms call for the “the primacy of matter in our theories” in shifting focus from “subjectivity” to “objectivity”¹¹⁶ and from “identities” to the “politics of acts.”¹¹⁷ Whilst this “post-deconstructive rethinking of ontology” is a welcome move, as it incorporates poststructuralist insights into its re-emphasis on embodiment and materiality, its distance from identities is equally problematical.

Given our subsistence in, to use Ehlers’s words, a “world that is less than ideal” and that continues to be governed by “masculinist norms and humanist assumptions,” the conceptual models of “non-” or “post-” identities seem premature. Indeed, our very bodies “are identified by knowledges” about them that “we are compelled to identify with and understand our sense of self through.”¹¹⁸ In particular, whilst most “Third World” women, especially those beyond the Western world, are still struggling to gain voices or (re)define their sense of self, as this thesis elaborates, it is both untimely and unwarranted to divest the feminist theoretical map of the question of identity. Given the personal and political significance of identities in a real world, whose meaning is contingent on identities and in which oppression is tied to

¹¹⁵ Ann Koivunen, “An Affective Turn? Reimagining the Subject of Feminist Theory,” *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*, eds. Marianne Liljeström and Susanna Paasonen (London: Routledge, 2010) 22. For more on the critique of the “ontological turn,” see Sara Ahmed, “Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the ‘New Materialism,’” *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15.1 (2008): 23-39; Maureen McNeil, “Post-Millennial Feminist Theory: Encounters with Humanism, Materialism, Critique, Nature, Biology and Darwin,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 14.4 (2010): 427-37; and Sullivan.

¹¹⁶ Coole and Frost 1-2.

¹¹⁷ Grosz, *Time* 189.

¹¹⁸ Ehlers 360.

identities, can we conceive feminist politics by relegating the concept of “identity”? Is it possible to theorise coalitional politics that neither regress into the problematic modernist-postmodernist binary nor reject identities altogether as paradoxical? If it is impossible to dismiss identities as irrelevant or immaterial, can we reconceive them in terms of fulfilling or emancipatory relations? How can we theorise a transnational feminist conception of identities that does not compromise on difference but rather re-renders it as a critical constitutive element of identities? The next section will lay out the framework for exploring these questions through the thesis via a relational notion of identities, agency, and coalition.

2. Relationality and Relational Theories of Identity

The *OED* defines “relationality” in its respective linguistic and social dimensions as the attribute of a “word or particle expressing relation between other words” and as “relating to, or characterized by human relationships.”¹¹⁹ In signifying linguistic as well as social meaning-making processes, both these definitions are apposite to the analysis of the theory of relationality and the development of my enquiry. Whilst semiology teaches us that signs make sense in a differential relation on an associational plane, sociologically, humans make sense of their being in relation to others. In other words, the relational principle, if you will, inherent to poststructuralism as well as the very definition of identity inheres the possibility of a relational notion of identity: as Hekman sums up, “to have an identity is to simultaneously be unique and similar to others in our order.”¹²⁰ Identities make sense

¹¹⁹ “relational,” def. A 1 & B 2 *OED Online* Oxford UP, n.d. Web. 28 Sept. 2016.

¹²⁰ Hekman, “Identity” 5.

in differential relations within a sociality; sociality cannot be established without individualities. Just as semiotics rejects inherent meanings of signs independent of metonymic relations, the relational notion of identity deconstructs the Cartesian autonomous, self-reflexive, and self-originating subject at the root of the Western conception of identity with a relationality that constitutes and precedes individualities. I will briefly analyse the links between semiological and sociological contexts of relationality via Derridean *differance* and the Levinasian notion of the “face” in order to lay out their significance for Judith Butler’s and Allison Weir’s conceptions of relationality, which will be key reference points in this thesis. Whilst Butler actively draws on Levinas in theorising relationality in her post-9/11 work, Weir develops her concept of relational identities by revisiting poststructuralist and psychoanalytic relational feminist theories. By bringing their theories into dialogue with each other within the shared context of women’s oppositional literary narratives, I will develop a notion of relationality that can allow a reconception of the questions of identity, difference, agency, and coalition in feminist transnational theory and praxis.

Let us begin with Derrida’s definition of *differance*:

Differance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be “present,” appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is

called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not.¹²¹

Differance creates the possibility of conceptuality by means of a presence; however, this presence is not “absolutely” present as it is beset by a spatial and temporal absence: instead of referring to itself, “the signified concept” is “inscribed in a chain or a system” within which it refers to other concepts in a “systematic play of differences.” Meaning thus generates from the differences between signs manifested in the trace that each sign contains of the other signs. The endless shift in signification relayed by one sign to another is contingent on this trace that Derrida terms “absent-presence”; trace is neither pure presence nor pure absence but an endless array of nodes that constitutes the network, rendering meaning possible. Despite poststructuralist valorisation of absence over presence, it is this “absent-presence,” the very trace, however ephemeral, that makes signification possible within a past-present-future nexus. Likewise, humans are tied in a network of inextricable relations, within a socio-historical matrix, that render life meaningful; social identities are marked by differance in never being fixed, internally homogenous, or stable and in being unintelligible outside the relations with the others that define them. Although the trace or irreducible presence is self-effacing, it is also indispensable to the intelligibility of the sign and thus lies at the heart of differance, identities, relationality, and sociality. “Trace” renders “difference” as a connective constituent of identities; reorients the other as a part of my identity/the self; and, thus, underlies the urgency for probing my connection with the other. Indeed, Derrida compares

¹²¹ Jacques Derrida, “Differance,” *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 142-3.

difference to both “semiological difference” and “the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas.”¹²²

Levinas’s ethics of alterity is based on this “inter-human relationship” inspired by the Jewish ethics of non-violence. However, the concept per se is not new to Western metaphysics; relationality can be traced to Hegelian “mutual recognition,” Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” concept, Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world,” and Bakhtin’s “dialogical” self among others. Levinas, however, sets up his theory against Western “ontological” tradition since Socrates that presupposes a “self-sufficient *cogito*” and that effects “a reduction of the other to the same.”¹²³ Whilst this ontology or “egology” is a philosophy of power, Levinas posits his “meontology” as a philosophy of ethics because, for him, ethics occurs “prior” to essence and being, “conditioning them” and defining “a difference between oneself and the others.”¹²⁴ Ethics redefines subjectivity as “heteronomous responsibility” as opposed to “autonomous freedom”: “I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an ‘I’, precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual ‘I.’”¹²⁵ This accountability is “the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity,”¹²⁶ anchored in my confrontation with “the face of the Other” that simultaneously induces violence and responsibility in

¹²² Derrida, “Difference” 130.

¹²³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991) 43; Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: SUNY P, 1986) 27.

¹²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985) 10-14.

¹²⁵ Levinas and Kearney 27.

¹²⁶ Levinas, *Ethics* 95-101.

my desire to kill and the face's counter-demand. Although "ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity," Levinas observes that "the appearance in being of these 'ethical peculiarities' . . . is a rupture of being."¹²⁷ This relationality is anchored in "the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness." Levinas's ethical model takes the alterity inherent to relationality as the condition of ethicality: "The Other is not other with a relative alterity" that "exclude[s] one another by their definition, but calling for one another by this exclusion, across the community of their genus." Thus, Levinas disagrees with Derrida's interpretation of the paradox of metaphysical language; whilst Derrida sees "the deconstruction of the Western metaphysics of presence as an irredeemable crisis," Levinas finds in it "a golden opportunity for Western philosophy to open itself to the dimension of otherness and transcendence beyond being."¹²⁸ This thesis partakes in this ethical project of opening up to otherness by teasing out the implications of relationality for feminist politics via a critical engagement with Butler's and Weir's theorisations of relationality vis-à-vis selected women's literary counter-narratives.

2.1. Relationality in Corporeal Vulnerability: Judith Butler's Ethics of Responsibility

Through "a cultural transposition" of Levinasian philosophy, Butler extends the concept of the "face" to politics.¹²⁹ Whilst, for Levinas, responding to the "face" involves recognising its precariousness and demand simultaneously, Butler probes

¹²⁷ Levinas, *Ethics* 86-87.

¹²⁸ Levinas and Kearney 23, 26-28.

¹²⁹ Butler, *Prekarious* xii-xiii.

why certain faces fail to elicit the Levinasian response. She cites the internalisation of the media representations of “enemy” faces during the post-9/11 Iraq and Afghan wars as inhuman or evil incarnate in order to probe the “struggle at the heart of ethics” that forestalls commandment and vindicates violence—the criteria for normative humanity. As my analysis will elaborate, both *Beloved* and *Burnt Shadows* directly engage with this question via the colonial construction of normative humanity: “what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death.”¹³⁰ Butler addresses this ethical dilemma via her notion of relationality as “the fundamental sociality of embodied life” to “reimagin[e] the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss.” For Butler, loss and vulnerability define our “socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.”¹³¹ It is the “transformative effect of loss” in our lives that bears out the criticality of these attachments:

It is not as if an “I” exists independently over here and then simply loses a “you” over there, especially if the attachment to “you” is part of what composes who “I” am. . . . On one level, I think I have lost “you” only to discover that “I” have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost “in” you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as the tie by which those terms are differentiated and related.¹³²

¹³⁰ Butler, *Precarious* 142-50.

¹³¹ Butler, *Precarious* 20, 28, 31, 36.

¹³² Butler, *Precarious* 22.

Despite our locational and historical differences, this relationality, stemming from the indissoluble nodes of our embodied sociality, can facilitate a collective “appeal to a ‘we,’” anchored in a shared consciousness of loss that furnishes incontrovertible political grounding: “If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the ‘we’ is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against,” and if we do, “we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation.” This is an emancipatory way of “imagining community” in which we share a common condition separately, which “affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation but also as an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives” that compels us “to take stock of our interdependence.”¹³³

Relationality thus reorients self and other as mutually constitutive: “I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others.”¹³⁴ Thus, proximity of “the unfamiliar” or “difference” is not disturbing but productive of my ability “to forge new ties of identification and reimagine” a collective “human community.”¹³⁵ Butler extends this model of relationality to global feminist politics by calling for a restructuration of representational systems and a reimagination of community to avert the “dehumanization of the face,” the “derealisation of the ‘Other,’” and the suspension of “the precariousness of life” in order to bridge “the cultural barriers against which we struggle when we try to find out about the losses” of others. It is our

¹³³ Butler, *Precarious* 22-27, 33-34.

¹³⁴ Butler, *Precarious* 46.

¹³⁵ Butler, *Precarious* 38.

personal “exposure” to vulnerability and loss that sensitises us to “the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability,” thus creating “a point of identification with suffering” itself. This “apprehension of a common human vulnerability” facilitates a “vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered.”¹³⁶

Although a powerful theorisation of relationality, Butler’s model poses two complications. First, Butler’s conception of incommensurable difference is paradoxical to her theoretical position. Despite her assertion of the co-implication of self and other that facilitates identification, Butler also insists that we retain our differences whilst sharing precariousness and loss separately. However, I argue that the very need to recognise the other’s vulnerability requires an opening up to the other’s difference without which identification is not conceivable, as evident in the media representations of the “enemy” that Butler quotes. If it is impossible to collapse self-other difference, it is also problematic to reify it. The transnational relational feminist approach of this thesis reorients difference as a constitutive element of identity, exposure to which provides an opportunity to open the self to risk, conflict (read: difference), and self-change.

Secondly, Butler’s poststructuralist conception of the subject poses a dilemma: for vulnerability to “be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter,” we need a knowing subject; however, Butler also asserts that “I cannot know myself perfectly or know my ‘difference’ from others in an irreducible way,” which poses “a problem for ethics and politics.”¹³⁷ Butler resolves this problem by grounding recognition and agency in the impressionable body; it is the corporeal

¹³⁶ Butler, *Precarious* 46-47.

¹³⁷ Butler, *Precarious* 43.

dimension of vulnerability that allows recognition of our mutual precariousness to loss and injury. However, I argue that the impressionable body or corporeal inscription does not translate *tout court* into recognition, but rather calls for a reflection on the part of a critical subject to render corporeal experience into the requisite recognition. Weir's notion of relationality is insightful on both these counts as are women's interactive counter-narratives that allow a conception of a reasonably critical subject engaged in reaching out to the other via the difference that also connects them.

2.2. Relationality in Connection: Allison Weir's Conception of Identities and Freedom

Unlike Butler's evasion of the notion of identity per se, Weir acknowledges that "identities cannot be escaped" because as "social beings, we depend on the construction of identities to create and sustain meaning." Weir traces the identity problematic to a tendency in feminist thought, since de Beauvoir, to collapse together two different critiques of identity: its "reductive equation" with the repression of "difference" and its critique as "a sacrificial logic" that excludes women. Weir attributes this to an unequivocal acceptance of de Beauvoir's model of identity as a product of subject-object opposition which bases affirmation of individual and collective identities on the inversion of this binary. Weir seeks to reframe this opposition via poststructuralist and psychoanalytic relational feminist theories; whilst the former regards identities as exclusionary fictions that screen "the systems of language and power which constitute us," the latter holds the androcentric

autonomous self responsible for repressing relational dynamics of identity.¹³⁸

However, “[w]hile relational theories do consider power relations and while theories of identity as an effect of power do consider intersubjective relations, each tends to undertheorize the other.”¹³⁹ Besides, despite their specious divergence, these positions converge on the assumption, unchanged since de Beauvoir, that identities are necessarily the repression or negation of the other. By combining insights from the two paradigms, Weir develops “a normative ideal of self-identity” that addresses feminist critiques of “atomistic individualism” by reframing identities as “relatively nonrepressive, nonsacrificial” sources of social engagement, “constituted through both relations of power and relations of mutuality.”¹⁴⁰

Weir critiques the poststructuralist “subjectivation paradox” of identity reflected in both Foucault’s work and Butler’s theory of performativity: identity “is produced through subjection to power; and it is this power that enables our agency.” Weir attributes this ideal of negative identity and freedom to the liberal conception of an “unencumbered individual” which, despite being an impossibility, “persists as the unmourned object of desire” in poststructuralism, thus precluding any notion of identity “that is not, or not only, produced by the law, or that is more or other than a subjugation that enables.” To elaborate this, Weir asks with reference to Althusserian interpellation: “For what if the name is called not by a policeman but a friend or lover . . . a parent who loves us or a community that cares for us?” As my analysis of *Incidents* in chapter one will outline, whilst the narrator rejects the hegemonic

¹³⁸ Weir, *Sacrificial* 3-7.

¹³⁹ Weir, *Identities* 4.

¹⁴⁰ Weir, *Identities* 53.

interpellations, her counter-interpellations to the narratees do not invoke restrictive social categories but relations of love, care, and solidarity. Thus, as opposed to Butler's "undercomplex" conception of identities as repressive and exclusionary, Weir theorises a relational conception of identities as heterogeneous, conflictual, and multifaceted relations produced through power as well as meaningful connections that "constitute sources of freedom for individuals and collectives."¹⁴¹ Weir sums up her conception of relationality:

1) The risk of connection, and of sustaining relationship through conflict; 2) relational identities, constituted through both relations of power, and relations of mutuality, love, and flourishing; 3) relational autonomy: freedom as the capacity to be in relationships one desires, and freedom as expansion of self in relationships; 4) connection to past and future, through reinterpretive preservation and transformative identification.¹⁴²

Weir's notions of "reinterpretive preservation" and "transformative identification" will be key reference points in my textual analysis as they foreground the past-present-future nexus within and across texts, contexts, and histories underlying relationality.

Indeed, this relational notion of identities requires a shift from "identity" as a metaphysical category to an ethical, political, and historical understanding of identities and freedom as connections to defining communities. It requires a shift from third-person social categories that define us to the first-person singular "I"'s

¹⁴¹ Weir, *Identities* 3-13.

¹⁴² Weir, *Identities* 46.

connections with a first-person plural “we.” Thus, the central question now is of “connections” instead of “sameness,” so that the category “women” is not simply an effect of power but also that of “transformative relations of identification and resistance among and between women.” Weir displaces the normative model of women’s “essential” collective identities as the basis for solidarity by arguing that “women come to recognize a position shared with other women *very different from themselves* only through an orientation to solidarity that is facilitated by this identification,” which then determines their shared identity as women. This collective “women” is “an identity in process” as it is “being re-created in part by feminists engaged in practices of identity-building, as well as world-building.” In this revised context, “*identity politics* is about *an active historical, political process of identification with, shaping and creating a ‘we.’*” Thus, “relational identity . . . is the basis for any viable collective identity, at any level, and hence for identity politics.”¹⁴³

As my textual analyses will elaborate, women’s counter-narratives reflect an understanding of identities as both power relations and interpersonal connections: whilst these women contest hegemonic discourses and identities, their oppositional narratives also provide an alternative understanding of histories, identities, agency, and coalition as profoundly relational.

Although both Butler and Weir critique the “false individualism of modern culture” to underscore our relationality,¹⁴⁴ there are crucial differences between the two positions that also mark their respective paradoxes. Butler situates relationality in an always-already constituted corporeal vulnerability as opposed to Weir’s location of

¹⁴³ Weir, *Identities* 72.

¹⁴⁴ Weir, *Identities* 100.

it in meaningful interpersonal connections. Whereas Butler resists conceptualising relational identities, Weir theorises notions of both individual and collective identities. Whilst Butler circumvents identity politics in conceiving relationality in a broader context of shared vulnerability and collective responsibility for transnational feminist politics, Weir's model of relationality presupposes identity politics. As we saw above, Butler's position is indicted by some as dystopic; Weir's "utopian vision for a future" based in the "eradication of domination," on the other hand, seems to undermine power at times. Power can be resisted, but it can never be eliminated. Finally, whether in demanding parodic performance or a recognition of vulnerability, Butler's model is problematised by her poststructuralist notion of the "unknowing" subject. Weir, on the contrary, ascribes rather too much agency to the subject in demanding an analysis of its "objective positions in power relations" to ascertain "what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose."¹⁴⁵ Butler's counter-question is critical here: "How will we know the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose?" And, I would add, what will prompt this "objective" self-analysis in the first place given my complacency with my identity?

This complexity is manifested in Weir's analysis of Saba Mahmood's study of the Egyptian women's piety movement.¹⁴⁶ Mahmood identifies a paradox in the movement: whilst these women claim space in the previously denied male spheres (i.e. the mosque), this negotiation takes place within the patriarchal structure that has historically restricted their agency. Weir argues that this is a paradox in terms of the "negative" models of freedom that conceive agency only as resistance, as opposed to

¹⁴⁵ Weir quotes Charles Taylor to make this point. Weir, *Identities* 24.

¹⁴⁶ See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2005).

the relational notion of freedom as both resisting and inhabiting norms. For the pietists, freedom is “a practice of belonging,” meaning that “their agency is *not* a practice of resistance to norms, and *not* a struggle for individual freedom from social constraints, but is a practice of enacting the will of God. And the pietists do not consider their submission to God’s will to be in any way oppressive.”¹⁴⁷ Although Weir’s conception of freedom as resisting as well as inhabiting norms is powerful, it requires critical theorisation of our ability to differentiate oppressive from enabling norms. Given the possibility of false consciousness, Weir’s position, the pietists’ “submission to God’s will is imposed by no one but themselves,” comes across as naïve; how do we know if submission is inhabitation or accommodation? Weir seems to answer this: doing or avoiding things for God makes it “easy for you [pietists] to strive for Him against yourself and your desires.” This implies an evident split between desires and obligations that renders the mosque exercise a practice of assuagement. Indeed, Weir seems to be vacillating between “ranking one’s desires according to the values and ideals that are most important to us” and militating “against yourself and your desires” to connect to ideals. Hailing from a society in which women are customarily made to discipline their desires to the “will of God” to make existence “lighter,” this view of agency reflects serious limitations to me.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Weir, *Identities* 123-28.

¹⁴⁸ Weir, *Identities* 131-37. Weir views as emancipatory the pietists’ resistance against their secular husbands to engage in the piety movement, and regards it as an “autonomous” practice of “reworking and renegotiating connections.” To quote a counter example of a woman’s resistance against her husband, Bushra from Lahore, Pakistan fled to Syria along with her three young daughters and a son to join IS. Although a quintessential case of resistance by a Pakistani woman against male authority in an exacting patriarchal culture, this act problematises questions of identity and freedom in connections. Bushra defined her identity and agency in terms of meaningful connections to God and the IS community; however, her “identity” and “agency” are obviously controversial here. Weir’s declaration then becomes highly suspect: “The piety movement suggests that freedom can be found in belonging to a defining community, in which one feels supported to explore and to strengthen one’s relationship to one’s ideals.” Weir, *Identities* 142, 147. Umar Cheema, “News Article,” *The News International* Jang Group of Newspapers, 31 Dec. 2015. Web 1 Feb. 2016.

Although Weir rightly addresses Western feminism's reduction of all Muslim women as equally oppressed and its conception of freedom only as resistance to norms, her alternative position, in this case, is dangerously undertheorised.¹⁴⁹ This impasse requires a re-evaluation of the relationship between freedom and ethics in the context of both power relations and meaningful connections that I will go on to identify and investigate through literary texts. As the subsequent analyses will show, these texts do not always unreflectively consolidate communal identities, but they also contest their presumptions and ascertain their implications in a broader shared context of connections and resistance.

2.3. Transnational Relationality: Narrative, Representation, and Identification

This dilemma is manifested in all three conceptions of relationality discussed above: relationality's ethical and political fecundity is constantly disrupted by its persistent denial. Given our cognizance of our mutual constitution in an interdependent world, whence the temptation to kill when faced with the other, the inability to recognise vulnerability in certain faces, and the consolidation of ties through oppression and violence? Whilst it may not be possible to explain human defiance of relationality, it is certainly conceivable to augment its ethical potential. This requires a reconceptualisation of relationality in a cross-cultural context that circumvents narrow identity politics; instead of focusing on the ideals that "matter to

¹⁴⁹ Weir recognises this loophole in her theory: "how can we know when accepting our connections is an enactment of freedom and when it is a capitulation to domination?" However, she does not address it. Weir, *Identities* 141.

me,” as Weir proposes,¹⁵⁰ we must situate them in a larger human framework, as Butler does, that makes us responsible for connections that do not necessarily originate in us but that we are given over to in a mutually constitutive relationality based in connections as well as vulnerability. It requires an identificatory confrontation of self and other that transforms our respective identities vis-à-vis our differences. The crucial questions are: how do we do this and what will prompt us to do it?

Bringing together insights from Butler’s and Weir’s theories can provide some answers. Whilst Weir’s analysis of identities and freedom in meaningful connections is powerful, it undertheorises power, particularly in its demand for “objective” self-analysis to forge ties. Contrarily, whilst Butler’s broad notion of a common human embodied vulnerability provides a powerful rationale for self-analysis and collective politics, its construction of the subject or agent problematises questions of agency. Using Butler’s notion of revised representational practices alongside Weir’s insights on “reinterpretive preservation” and “transformative identification” in the shared context of women’s counter-narratives, we can develop a feminist conception of identities, agency, and coalition that is anchored in recognising vulnerability and consolidating connections through sharing stories, (re)narrating histories, and (re)presenting discourses in a relational framework.

Butler calls for a reconceptualisation of representation to address the erasure of the human that precludes mutual recognition of the precariousness of life, thus forestalling “an apprehension of our commonality.” She asserts that an ethical

¹⁵⁰ Although Weir emphasises establishing “a meaningful life with others,” she bases this on the problematic notion of “self-analysis” in power structures. Weir, *Identities* 23, 42.

encounter with the other initiates an “address that we cannot preempt”; within a relational framework, this confrontation facilitates identification with a common vulnerability. Butler sums it up:

I cannot muster the “we” except by finding the way in which I am tied to “you,” by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again.¹⁵¹

This implies that both the contiguity and confrontation with the other transform my own identity interminably to recognise the other’s difference as part of my sense of self on a relational plane. Butler’s demand for self-other proximity, revised representations, recognition of mutual vulnerability, and cultural translation for global feminist coalition is coterminous with Weir’s position on “reinterpretive preservation” as a model for collective feminist politics.

Reinterpretive preservation effects “the continual renewal of meaning” that allows identities to constantly develop through narrative (re)presentation. Weir develops her notion of “reinterpretive preservation” via Iris Marion Young’s conception of “preservation”: because the narratives of our histories are not fixed, “part of the creative and moral task of preservation is to reconstruct the connection of the past to the present in light of new events, relationships, and political understandings.”¹⁵² Weir takes it further via “transformative identification”:

¹⁵¹ Butler, *Precarious* 151, 46-49.

¹⁵² Young quoted in Weir, *Identities* 59.

Through the telling and retelling of our stories to ourselves and to each other, we combine the conscious assumption of the oppressions and violence that have shaped us with the affirmation of belonging, and the transformation of the future. In doing this we are not simply affirming our identities or our homes, nor are we rejecting them to leap into the negativity of the future. Nor are we oscillating between affirmation and negativity, or resolving this opposition. We are engaging in a process of transformative identification: through reinterpetive preservation we transform ourselves, and hold ourselves together, through struggle, and without denying any of the suffering and tragedy this entails.¹⁵³

Bringing together African-American and postcolonial Pakistani women's alternative discourses on history from disparate cultural and historical backgrounds creates such a relational interface based in "transformative identification" and "reinterpetive preservation." This mediatory space foregrounds a shared context of connections, vulnerability, suffering, and resistance that can inform a revised transnational feminist paradigm of coalition. Whilst each of the literary counter-narratives engages in reinterpetive preservation individually, bringing them together facilitates transformative identifications across narratives that helps conceive "an ethical, relational model of identity as a historical, dialogical process of making meaning"¹⁵⁴ across multiple locations and histories.

Women's counter-narratives also address the power question in both Butler's and Weir's theories: contextualising the practice of (re)narration in women's writing

¹⁵³ Weir, *Identities* 60.

¹⁵⁴ Weir, *Identities* 78.

allows a reconception of the subject as both a discursive and ontological entity, constituted through power discourses and anchored in material relations.

Nevertheless, it is one capable of reconstituting discourses and renegotiating identities via both power relations and interpersonal connections. The interactive practice of (re)narration and (re)negotiation is not just a binary relation of the subject's resistance to law; it is also an intersubjective process that confronts self and other in an identificatory relation which encompasses "engagement with the other, requires learning about her world, learning to take her perspective, and thus forever changing my own."¹⁵⁵ This identification is not appropriative but transformative of identities as "through identification with the other we transform ourselves, and we construct a new 'we': a new identity." Narrative thus assumes an ontological dimension in reconstituting identities through the act of narration; as such, "what constitutes us as collectivities, as 'we's in the face of a myriad of differences and conflicts" are the "stories we tell each other, our desires for and with each other, our difficult and fraught relations to each other." What will prompt us to learn from each other and subject ourselves to self-analysis is the persistent narration of our stories in a cross-cultural context that will furnish us with a transnational historical consciousness that will allow recognition of shared connections and mutual vulnerability. The cross-cultural, interactive practice of (counter-) narration will not only foreground our mutual dependence in a profoundly interconnected world, it will also facilitate further connections through negotiating transcultural barriers to constantly form and (re)transform relational identities.

¹⁵⁵ Weir, *Identities* 78.

Each text in this project is engaged in the reclamation of identities and histories through a dialogic process between self and other, author and reader, narrator and narratee, or individual and community. Together these texts speak to each other across historical and temporal bounds in a way that offers a relational model of identities and coalition for transnational feminist politics based in inexorable human interdependence. *Incidents*'s counter-hegemonic nineteenth-century narrative deploys constitutive rhetoric to form a consubstantial relation with white women; *Beloved*'s narrator forms an author-reader-text transposition to perform regenerative identities; *Cracking India* appeals to the syncretic potential of identities in a multiplicitous community to counter the pedagogic national narrative; and *Burnt Shadows*' pluralistic model calls for an ethics of interdependence in a deeply interconnected modern world. Bringing the oppositional narratives, alternative representations, and interactive politics of these texts from different moments together facilitates "transformative identification" and "reinterpretive preservation" in a transgeographical framework. This cultural translation confronts self and other in a shared context that allows us to maintain irreducible difference yet recognise it as a source of connection, mutually transform identities by embracing dissent, and establish an emancipatory commonality. Indeed, the reinterpretive preservation of both oppressive and redeeming narratives as well as the very practice of "telling ourselves to each other" create connections that "hold us together, and allow us to change, and that is where we can find freedom."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Weir, *Identities* 12.

3. From “Post” to “Neo” Colonialism in the African-American and Pakistani Contexts

This section will lay out the intersecting social and political contexts for a comparative reading of African-American and Pakistani women’s writing. I will consider the debate over the term “postcolonialism” and its implications for a study of postcolonial and African-American literatures, analyse “neocolonialism” and its manifestation in the Pakistani and African-American contexts, and review comparative scholarship on postcolonial and African-American literatures in order to outline the contribution of this project.

3.1. “Postcolonialism”: A Debate in Terms

Although Edward Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), is widely accepted to have inaugurated the field of postcolonial studies, the term “post-colonial” per se owes its first use to Ashcroft et al.’s influential work, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989).¹⁵⁷ This generic term, in its various articulations (“Postcolonialism,” “Post-colonialism,” and “postcoloniality”), has been subject to rigorous critique on account of the problematic spatial, cultural, historical, and temporal implications of the prefix “post,” the hyphen, and the root “colonial” that I will touch on below.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁵⁸ For debate on the term, see Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, “What Is Post(-)Colonialism?” *Textual Practice* 5.3 (1991): 399-414; Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial,’” *Social Text* 31-32 (1992): 99-113; Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *Social Text* 31-32 (1992): 84-98; Stephen Slemon, “The Scramble for ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995) 45-52; and Bill Ashcroft, “On the Hyphen in ‘Post-Colonial,’” *New Literature Review* 32 (1996): 23-32. For a good overview see, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margeret Iversen, introduction, *Colonial Discourse/ Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margeret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 1-23; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin,

The controversial hyphen owes its origin to the designation of recently independent colonies in the post-war period as “post-colonial” states in order to signify a chronological shift;¹⁵⁹ however, the transposition of this usage into the social and cultural arenas proved contentious. The hyphen has also come to signify “the heart of the controversy” in postcolonial studies—the debate between Marxist and poststructuralist paradigms, represented in the cultural materialist and colonial discourse theories respectively. The hyphenated form has been preferred to distinguish the field of “post-colonial” studies from one of its sub-categories, colonial discourse theory.¹⁶⁰ Bill Ashcroft terms the hyphen a “‘space-clearing’ gesture” that foregrounds “the materiality of political oppression” in colonised societies as opposed to privileging discourse. He distinguishes the hyphenated term from both “relativist exclusivism” and “ironic inclusivism” reflected on the “continuum of postcolonial practice extend[ing] from . . . reductionist essentialisms at one end to postmodernism at the other.”¹⁶¹ Although this distinction still applies in theory, both the hyphenated and the unhyphenated forms are now widely used to represent the cultural, political, historical, and economic impact of colonialism.¹⁶²

The “ritualistic ubiquity” of the prefix “post” has equally been criticised for signalling “a widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical ‘progress.’”¹⁶³

Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts (London: Routledge, 2013) 204-209; and Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2015) 28-39.

¹⁵⁹ Ashcroft, “Hyphen” 24.

¹⁶⁰ Ashcroft et al., *Key* 204.

¹⁶¹ Ashcroft, “Hyphen” 23-30.

¹⁶² Ashcroft et al., *Key* 205.

¹⁶³ McClintock 85.

“Post” “implies an ‘aftermath’ in two senses—temporal, as in coming after, and ideological as in supplanting”;¹⁶⁴ the first implies a chronological marker of the onset of the “postcolonial” whilst the second is a deceptive signified of the putative end of a period. This “ambiguous spatio-temporality”¹⁶⁵ erases crucial differences. As Anne McClintock argues, the historical rupture implied in “post” “belies both the continuities and discontinuities of power that have shaped the legacies of the formal European and British colonial empires.”¹⁶⁶ Shohat adds that the professed dissolution of colonialism, proclaimed in “a passage into a new period and a closure of a certain historical event or age, officially stamped with dates,” undermines “colonialism's economic, political, and cultural deformative traces in the present.” The prefix not only “inhibits forceful articulations of what one might call ‘neo-coloniality,’” it also “re-orient[s] the globe . . . around a single, binary opposition” that “neutralizes significant geopolitical differences.”¹⁶⁷

Finally, the root “colonial” is problematic in implying the inscription of colonialism on “a clean slate,” which erases “indigenous ideologies, practices and hierarchies” that interacted with the experience of colonialism.¹⁶⁸ Besides, put together, the prefix and the root, with or without the hyphen, form a deceptively uniform category for diverse colonial histories and locations. For instance, Ashcroft et al. first defined the term “post-colonial” “to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” This

¹⁶⁴ Loomba 28.

¹⁶⁵ Shohat 102.

¹⁶⁶ McClintock 87.

¹⁶⁷ Shohat 101-05.

¹⁶⁸ Loomba 37.

overarching definition, that also includes the U.S. as postcolonial, groups this body of literature “in a common past,” based in “the experience of colonization,” that also “hints at the vision of a more liberated and positive future.”¹⁶⁹ However, others caution against the unqualified use of the term that “may license too readily a panoptic tendency to view the globe within generic abstractions voided of political nuance.”¹⁷⁰ Aijaz Ahmad argues that such broad definitions render “colonialism” “a transhistorical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the world or another, so that everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later, at one time or another, of being coloniser, colonised and postcolonial.”¹⁷¹ Shohat critiques it for collapsing “very different national-racial formations”¹⁷² whilst Carol Boyce Davies observes that this definition effects “a highly problematic subsuming of non-Western cultures . . . while further hegemonizing the West.”¹⁷³ Christopher Wise finds this definition “deficient within the African-American (and other) context(s)” for its “depoliticized heuristic for the study of ‘Minority’ and/or third world texts” and its erasure of difference, “both in terms of the cultural distinctiveness (or autonomy) of various postcolonial literary traditions” and “the proportionate suffering (or damage) experienced by the human subjects of these traditions.”¹⁷⁴ Because the term and its

¹⁶⁹ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 2, 23.

¹⁷⁰ McClintock 86.

¹⁷¹ Aijaz Ahmad, “The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality,” *Race and Class* 36.3 (1995): 9.

¹⁷² McClintock 82; Shohat 102.

¹⁷³ Davies 82.

¹⁷⁴ Christopher Wise, “The Dialectics of Negritude: Or, the (Post)Colonial Subject in Contemporary African-American Literature,” *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*, eds. Gita Rajan, Radhika Mohanram (Westport: Greenwood P, 1995) 42.

definition have been equally controversial, some critics have proposed alternative appellations.

The rubric “post-colonial” was preceded by terms such as Third World literature or Commonwealth literature; whilst these terms have been critiqued for “privileging a European perspective,” upholding a new-old binary, and excluding any reference, positive or negative, to colonialism,¹⁷⁵ the term “postcolonial” has been considered “more palatable and less foreign-sounding” than “Third World Studies,” “less accusatory” than “Studies In Neo-colonialism” or “Fighting Two Colonialisms,” and “more global” than “Commonwealth Studies”—and hence equally problematic. Shohat prefers the term “Third World” in its implication of “a common project of (linked) resistances to neo/colonialisms.” She reckons that

one has the impression that the ‘post-colonial’ is privileged [in the academy] precisely because it seems safely distant from ‘the belly of the beast,’ the United States. Whereas the critique posed by African American studies and the alternative (non-Eurocentric) worldview asserted by Afrocentricity cut uncomfortably close to home, postcoloniality seems to offer its opposition from a distance.¹⁷⁶

Shohat proposes a rearticulation of the “post-colonial” as “post-First/Third Worlds theory” or “post-anti-colonial critique” as a movement beyond a relatively binaristic, fixed and stable mapping of power relations between “colonizer/colonized” and

¹⁷⁵ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 22.

¹⁷⁶ Shohat 108-11.

“center/periphery.”¹⁷⁷ Davies suggests “post-European(-colonial)ity” which addresses “all the many colonialities and resistances to them throughout history,”¹⁷⁸ and Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge have proposed “post(-)colonialisms” as plural to reflect its heterogeneity, with the hyphen in parenthesis to deflect the temporal implications. McClintock, however, believes that a substitute term would be subject to the same theoretical issues and that we may continue to use “post-colonialism” “judiciously in appropriate circumstances” along with other terms that address colonial legacies. Jenny Sharpe offers that “the postcolonial be theorized as the point at which internal social relations intersect with global capitalism and the division of labor,” so that we “define the ‘after’ to colonialism as the neocolonial relations into which the United States entered with decolonized nations.”¹⁷⁹ Finally, Loomba wants to extend this colonial-neocolonial paradigm to minority racial groups within the U.S. in arguing that instead of its spatio-temporal implications, postcolonialism should be seen “more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” as this position “allow[s] us to include people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-American” or Asian and African diasporas.¹⁸⁰ Whilst my project reflects this broader sense of “postcolonialism” in foregrounding the intertwined histories of racism and colonialism and their repercussions in the neocolonial world, I, nevertheless, retain separate terms to avoid collapsing many discrete elements of the two contexts.

¹⁷⁷ Shohat 108.

¹⁷⁸ Davies 86.

¹⁷⁹ Jenny Sharpe, “Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race,” *Diaspora* 4.2 (1995): 106.

¹⁸⁰ Loomba 32-33.

3.2. From Colonial to Neocolonial: The Patchy Roads to Freedom in the African-American and Pakistani Contexts

The term “neo-colonialism,” as the new “instrument of imperialism,” was coined by the Ghanaian politician Kwame Nkrumah to describe the economic and political subjugation of African countries despite formal independence: “The essence of neocolonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.”¹⁸¹ A country may be both postcolonial in being formally independent and neocolonial in its economic, cultural, and political subjugation as apparent in “the contemporary imbalances between ‘first’ and ‘third world’ nations.”¹⁸² Neocolonialism has taken on various forms in military, political, economic, and cultural spheres: the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, United States Aid for International Development, free trade zones that exploit cheap Third World labour forces, the emergence of transnational Asian capital and capitalist classes, and the powerful multinationals are but some manifestations of the “revamped economic imperialism [that] has ensured that America and the former European colonial powers have become richer” whilst “their ex-colonies have become poorer.”¹⁸³ In cultural terms, this “imperialism-without-colonies” has had “an impact as massive as any colonial regime” in the hegemony of the “US finance capital and huge multi-nationals to direct the flows of capital, commodities, armaments and media information around the world,” often in

¹⁸¹ Nkrumah Kwame, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Nelson, 1965) ix.

¹⁸² Loomba 28. Also see McClintock 88.

¹⁸³ Sharpe 185; McClintock 92.

the garb of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. In the military arena, the U.S. wars in Korea, Vietnam, Libya, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq, among others, “have every characteristic of a renewed military imperialism, and a renewed determination to revamp military hegemony.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, despite flag independence, Western and the U.S. hegemony over the colonised nations as well as the marginalised indigenous populations has doggedly persisted in the imperialist paternalistic cultural, economic, and military structures. I will briefly analyse neocolonialism in the African-American and the Pakistani contexts below.

As we can see, the status of the United States as “postcolonial” has undergone a transformation since its first articulation in Ashcroft et al.; the stringent critique of the “historical amnesia” reflected in Ashcroft et al.’s position has shifted the inquiry from whether the U.S. is postcolonial to whether the minority racial groups within the U.S. qualify as postcolonial. The concept of “the black internal colony” itself can be traced back to “a long intellectual and activist tradition that identified a colonial relationship between white and black America”: it was as early as 1852 that Martin Delany called African-Americans “a nation within a nation”;¹⁸⁵ in 1945, W. E. B. Du Bois commented on “the quasi-colonial status” of “Negroes in the United States who are segregated physically and discriminated [sic] spiritually in law and custom,” thus “occupy[ing] what is really a colonial status”;¹⁸⁶ in 1961 Frantz Fanon wrote of “the need” for African-Americans “to attach themselves to a cultural matrix” of other

¹⁸⁴ McClintock 90.

¹⁸⁵ Robert L. Allen, “Reassessing the Internal (Neo) Colonialism Theory,” *The Black Scholar* 35.1 (2005): 2.

¹⁸⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Human Rights for All Minorities,” *W. E. B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses 1920-1963*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Pathfinder P, 1970) 183.

postcolonial groups as “[t]heir problem is not fundamentally different from that of the Africans”;¹⁸⁷ and in 1965, Kenneth Clark argued that “the dark ghettos are social, political, educational, and - above all - economic colonies. Their inhabitants are subject people, victims of the greed, cruelty, insensitivity, guilt and fear of their masters.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, by the late 1960s, the “internal colonialism” construct was frequently employed in the rights movements by African-Americans, Native-Americans, Asian-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Chicano students who were inspired by Third World liberation struggles.¹⁸⁹

Although conceived in good faith, this model of “internal colonialism” has been considered problematic in being prone to erasing “the historical specificities of different national formations.”¹⁹⁰ Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani argue that the “particular relation of past territorial domination and current racial composition that is discernible in Britain, and which lends a particular meaning to the term ‘postcolonial’” does not apply to the U.S.¹⁹¹ Sharpe observes that the “internal colonialism” paradigm “draws too sharp a distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements of populations. In doing so, it equates immigration with assimilation and colonization with racism, thus neglecting racism in immigration.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove P, 1963) 196.

¹⁸⁸ Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1989) 11.

¹⁸⁹ R. Allen 2-10. Also see Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton: Africa World P, 1990).

¹⁹⁰ Sharpe 182.

¹⁹¹ Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, “Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, ‘Postcoloniality’ and the Politics of Location,” *Cultural Studies* 7.2 (1993): 293.

¹⁹² Sharpe 183.

Similarly, Spivak terms the post-civil rights movements “postcolonial” owing to the groups’ “internal colonisation”; however, she notes that these “original groups have not equally emerged into postcoloniality.”¹⁹³ Frankenberg and Mani propose the term “post-Civil Rights” for the African-American situation whilst noting that this term, too, needs to be “conjugated with another” in order to articulate the difference between African-Americans and other minority groups based on “a rigorous politics of location.”¹⁹⁴

However, despite the controversy around terminologies, critics underscore the possibility as well as the urgency for a politics of convergence. Frankenberg and Mani acknowledge that “modes of racialization specific to the history of certain Others are available for extension to other Others”¹⁹⁵ whilst Sharpe observes that “[g]iven its history of imported slave and contract labor, continental expansion, and overseas imperialism, an implication of American culture in the postcolonial study of empires is perhaps long overdue.”¹⁹⁶ Christine Macleod contends that “if the historical experiences of rupture, exile, subjugation, social marginality, and linguistic and cultural dispossession count for anything in the definition of a colonized identity, then it is hard to see how African-Americans can possibly be excluded from the discussion.”¹⁹⁷ And Robert Allen believes that “the articulation of the concept of

¹⁹³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Teaching for the Times,” *MMLA* 25.1 (1992): 11. bell hooks has also compared “black experience” to that of “internal colonialism.” bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 148.

¹⁹⁴ Frankenberg and Mani 293.

¹⁹⁵ Frankenberg and Mani 297.

¹⁹⁶ Sharpe 181.

¹⁹⁷ Christine MacLeod, “Black American Literature and the Postcolonial Debate,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 27 (1997): 54.

coloniality of power offers the prospect of developing a global paradigm of the colonial relationship that will also provide a deeper theoretical understanding of the powerful resistance that continues to emerge in subaltern communities and nations around the world.”¹⁹⁸ Indeed, in view of the persistent economic, cultural, and political subjugation of racial minority groups within the U.S., he underscores the continuing relevance of this construct “in its neocolonial formulation” as well. Allen argues that in the late 1960s, the “pressure from the civil rights movement and the exigencies of Cold War politics” morphed the colonial relationship between white and black Americans into “a neo-colonial situation.” In view of the Black Power movement and urban rebellion

the white power structure sought to maintain hegemony by replacing direct white control of the internal black colony with indirect neo-colonial control through black intermediary groups, much as in the era of national independence struggles classic colonialism gave way to neo-colonialism in the Third World . . . the neo-colonial strategy sought to co-opt cultural and bourgeois nationalists and incorporate parts of the black middle class as an intermediary buffer group, while at the same time launching a program of repression against radicals and revolutionary nationalists and wholesale incarceration of black youth.¹⁹⁹

Although African-American history of slavery, the civil rights struggle, and the contemporary racial structure in the U.S. reflect a discrete trajectory, they are

¹⁹⁸ R. Allen, “Reassessing” 10.

¹⁹⁹ R. Allen, “Reassessing” 4, 7. Allen also includes practices like COINTELPRO among aspects of internal neocolonialism.

anchored, in Chandra Mohanty's words, in a "simultaneous and historicized exploitation of [the] Third World."²⁰⁰ These convergences of simultaneous colonial histories and different counter-struggles will form the subject of the comparative analyses of women's narratives in this thesis.

Whilst the "neocolonial" situation of African-Americans is, at times, a subject of critical debate, Pakistan's neocolonial status is more obvious. Pakistan is among those countries whose post-independence economic, political, and cultural histories developed in a dialectical relation with shifting global geopolitical forces and post-war U.S. foreign policy.²⁰¹ Although nearly a hundred-year-long rule of the British Empire ended with the Indian Subcontinent's partition into the independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, "Britain [also] left the base for neo-colonialism" that the U.S. scrambled to occupy.²⁰² Post-independent Pakistan faced dire institutional, economic, and strategic deficits owing to the loss of both structural and industrial hubs to India and the incipient state's geostrategic vulnerability. Given "the cooling of Anglo-Pakistani relations over the Kashmir issue," Pakistan was forced to turn elsewhere to seek both economic aid and geopolitical defence against Indian regional preponderance.²⁰³ Whereas, for Pakistan, the United States appeared the most plausible option for assistance on both counts, for "US strategists Pakistan was the most important nation-state in the region for military-strategic reasons" owing to "its

²⁰⁰ C. Mohanty, "Cartographies" 52.

²⁰¹ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst, 2009) 125.

²⁰² Maud Russell, "United States Neo-Colonialism: Grave Digger in Asia," *Far East Reporter* Apr. 1969: 2.

²⁰³ Talbot 209. Also see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 2.

proximity to the Soviet Union and its position in relation to the Middle East.”²⁰⁴ West Pakistan’s separation on ethnic grounds further debilitated the state, challenging the very ideology that apparently braced the new nation-state. The Pakistani leadership responded by consolidating the crumbling Islamic identity of the nation, on the one hand, and seeking foreign aid against Indian hegemony, on the other. However, for the consummation of this twin project, the leadership was faced with a dilemma: “whether Pakistan should pursue a pan-Islamic foreign policy or enter a Cold War driven regional defence organisation sponsored by the USA.”²⁰⁵ As Talbot notes, “[f]ears of a Soviet invasion did not figure in Pakistani minds to the extent that they did in Washington” because it was “India [that] was still perceived as the principal threat”,²⁰⁶ thus, whilst Pakistan sought aegis against India, the United States co-opted the country for its imperialist interests. The formation of the anti-Soviet Islamic coalition patronised by the U.S. resolved the Pakistani leadership’s dilemma as it got the best of both worlds.

Immanuel Wallerstein’s argument about the U.S. leverage to prop up or topple governments in other countries, in line with its own geopolitical interests, is applicable to a significant part of Pakistan’s history.²⁰⁷ The 1977 military coup by General Zia-ul-Haq that ousted the Soviet-tilted Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is quoted as one

²⁰⁴ Talbot 95-106. Mark T. Berger, “After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism,” *Third World Quarterly* 25.1 (2004): 14. Also see John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, 3rd ed. (London: Pluto, 2002).

²⁰⁵ Talbot 141.

²⁰⁶ Talbot 268.

²⁰⁷ For a similar analysis of U.S. intervention, see McClintock 89.

such intervention that decisively altered the political map of the country.²⁰⁸ The ensuing decade-long, most devastating regime in the country's history sanctioned radicalism, gross human rights violations, and a drug and weapon culture, besides sowing the seeds for a haunting legacy in the form of the Taliban.²⁰⁹ Indeed, the U.S. bid to create its "anti-Soviet shock troops" also laid the groundwork for "terrorism." The anti-Soviet alliance played on Afghan sentiments by recruiting and urging young men to shore up their "honoured religion" against "an alien ideology." The U.S. in alliance with the Arab states supplied financial and military aid; Pakistan provided its Northern terrain for training camps; and Afghanistan (and other Muslim countries) offered human ammunition to build the American Empire: "Out of this conflict, which was to claim 1.5 million Afghan lives and only end when Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 . . . emerge[d] a second generation of Mujaheddin who called themselves Taliban."²¹⁰ It takes another or perhaps several theses to account for the privation, devastation, and affliction that have been the fate of several countries since the rise of the Taliban and the onset of the so-called "war on terror"—a vicious circle created by nationalist and imperialist interests. Although *Cracking India* was published in this era, the selected text that engages the neocolonial

²⁰⁸ As Talbot observes, "Whether or not one agrees with the contention that a foreign hand wrenched power from Bhutto, it is undeniable the longevity of Zia's regime was linked with the entry of Soviet forces into neighboring Afghanistan." Talbot 246, 249.

²⁰⁹ Although it is impossible to exonerate Pakistani kleptocracies for the social, political and economic disintegration of the country, yet as Lazarus observes: "there is no contradiction between identifying the criminality and ineptitude of postcolonial rulers and recognizing that they were and are at the same time the creatures of larger powers . . . it is likely that none of them would have been able to come to power, and that it is certain that none of them would have been able to stay in power for as long as they did, without the direct, active, and sustained support of the United States, self-proclaimed 'keeper of the peace' in the post-1945 period." Neil Lazarus, "The Global Dispensation since 1945," *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial* 19-40.

²¹⁰ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010) 13.

repercussions of this period directly is *Burnt Shadows* as Shamsie situates U.S. imperialism within the trajectory of the colonial history to underscore the interconnections of women's struggle in an interdependent social and historical reality.

Although recently U.S. imperialism has gained critical attention, its relationship to "internal" or neocolonialism has remained undertheorised. How is American imperialism overseas linked to its internal colonialism? How does the concept of transnational relationality translate in this nexus of internal-external colonialism? A quick look at some of the figures will help foreground the intersecting social and political contexts in which the textual analysis will be situated. For instance, the Reagan administration's \$3.2 billion military aid package for General Zia to wage its proxy war in Afghanistan had direct repercussions for minority groups within the U.S. Whilst "the budget cuts of the Reagan years and the recurring recessions . . . battered the economy in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s" because of which hundreds of jobs were lost, and "small black businesses by the thousands were destroyed,"²¹¹ the same budget was deployed for waging an unnecessary war, killing millions of innocent lives, and engendering intractable warlords.

Whilst the U.S. war propaganda exploits feminist rhetoric to justify its civilising mission, women both inside and outside the U.S. are the worst victims of its imperialism.²¹² The persistent pattern of "diverting spending" and "undermining

²¹¹ R. Allen, "Reassessing" 6.

²¹² For a detailed analysis of war's gendered effects in Iraq and the U.S., see Huibin Amelia Chew, "What's Left? After 'Imperial Feminist' Hijackings," *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Robin L. Riley (London: Zed Books, 2008) 75-90.

economies” for imperialist gains is reflected more starkly in an increase in poverty, particularly among the minority groups within the U.S. As Mohanty et al. note:

The most dramatic example of the impact of US wars on women inside the country was the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on the poor and working-class black population of New Orleans in 2004; federal money designated for engineering repair and maintenance of the levees that eventually failed had been ‘moved to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq.’ Those unable to escape the hurricane and subsequent flooding were primarily poor women of color and their children.²¹³

Whilst women in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq, among others, “struggle with the impact of US invasion, war, and imperialism,” some women in the U.S. suffer likewise whilst some are implicated in other women’s suffering in being recruited in these wars for want of other options economically.²¹⁴ In the face of these material realities, Christine Macleod’s question regarding the reluctance to engage in interdisciplinary and comparative projects between African-American and postcolonial studies is crucial:

cui bono? Whose interests are best served when the various sites and categories of liberation struggle are cordoned off from each other or discouraged from acknowledging a cognate agenda? From the historical

²¹³ C. Mohanty et al., “Introduction: Feminism and US Wars—Mapping the Ground,” *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Robin L. Riley (London: Zed Books, 2008) 10.

²¹⁴ C. Mohanty et al. observe, “Women’s participation as US soldiers in this war has expanded under the economic pressures of the ‘poverty draft,’ with a disproportionate risk of assault and death falling on women of color, who were over 50 percent of US enlisted women in 2003.” C. Mohanty et al., “Introduction” 9.

record it is clear that the only beneficiary of such subaltern fragmentation is the dominant group, the rulers. In . . . the realm of cultural politics there may be little to choose between the apparently progressive pluralism of ‘separate but equal’ and the old imperialist strategies of ‘divide and conquer.’²¹⁵

Likewise in underscoring the need to analyse “the increasingly fraught (but rarely discussed) relationship between postcoloniality and Afrocentricity,” Ann DuCille attributes their separation to the fact that the former “seems to offer its opposition from a distance,” without implicating the U.S. Given that African-American and postcolonial studies have much to learn from and teach one another, DuCille argues that these disciplines should “be less suspicious of one another and more suspicious of the academy that keeps them [apart].”²¹⁶

This thesis is a small contribution towards this end in sharing Macleod’s conviction that notwithstanding the debates regarding terminologies, it is “time to acknowledge that the complex social positioning of African-Americans at the very heart of the First World imperium presents us with the aftermath of the colonial encounter in its most extreme and challenging form.”²¹⁷ Given the rise of the U.S. as a neocolonial power, convergence between African-American and postcolonial studies is not only a theoretical and analytical obligation but a material urgency for multiple peripheries in the Third World. Only by bringing diverse locational politics into dialogue can we generate readings of the myriad ways in which their past and present

²¹⁵ Macleod 54.

²¹⁶ Ann DuCille, “Postcolonialism and Afrocentricity: Discourse and Dat Course,” *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*, eds. Werner Sollors and Maria Diedrich (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994) 29, 34, 41.

²¹⁷ Macleod 55.

are entangled in matrices of unrelenting colonial relations. This thesis creates such an interface by bringing together African-American and Pakistani women's resistant narratives based in a common vulnerability and mutual connection, whilst being cognizant of their experiential, locational, and historical differences, in order to develop a transnational feminist political paradigm that recognises our co-implication. The thesis thus explores three major questions: how do women's counter-narratives contest dominant representations and renegotiate identities within a relational framework; how does an intertextual analysis of women's alternative narratives from discrete spatial and temporal zones further our understanding of the interconnections between colonial and neocolonial histories and discourses; and how can the convergences between women's experiences, positionality, and resistant strategies be mapped on to a transnational relational framework for reconceiving feminist coalitional politics?

3.3. Scholarship on the Convergence of African-American and Postcolonial Literatures

Despite critical, theoretical, and historical convergences between the two fields, as John C. Gruesser notes, "only a handful of postcolonial theorists have sufficiently accounted for black American literature," and "African Americanists have in general been resistant to postcolonial theoretical concepts."²¹⁸ Besides, the scholarship on the convergence of the two fields has generally focused on Afrocentricity or the African diaspora. One of the earliest articulations of this was the literary and ideological paradigm of *Négritude*, developed by the Martinican Aimé

²¹⁸ John Cull Gruesser, *Confluences: Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2005) 2.

Césaire and the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, that came under attack for its construction of an authentic black identity and culture as essentialist and counter-racist.²¹⁹ Pan-Africanism was another such model, based on the unity and homogeneity of African peoples, that “ignore[d] historic and local specificity in the name of nonetheless existing common experiences and interests.”²²⁰ A critique of such models of cultural nationalisms inspired Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993)—one of the first theoretical attempts to map the convergence of displaced black ethnicities in the metaphor of “the black Atlantic.” However, Gilroy’s “postcolonial” model also focuses on the African diaspora, in particular, African-American, black Briton, and the Caribbean peoples.²²¹ Earlier critical attempts to link the two fields also centred on the diasporic model, including Houston A. Baker’s *Reading Black: Essays in the Criticism of African, Caribbean, and Black American Literature* (1976) and Bonnie Barthold’s *Black Time: Fiction of Africa, the Caribbean and the United States* (1981). In general, there has been little to no engagement with non-African postcolonial groups, especially between African-American and Pakistani women’s writing. I will briefly recapitulate the available scholarship on confluences in the two fields in order to further frame the contribution of my work.

One of the first attempts by U.S. scholars to take the field of inquiry beyond the African diaspora was “*Race, Writing, and Difference* (1987) that collated critical perspectives by some of the pioneers in each field including Edward Said, Gayatri

²¹⁹ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 20.

²²⁰ Martin Japtok, introduction, *Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and the U.S.*, ed. Martin Japtok (Trenton: African World P, 2003) x.

²²¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993).

Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Kwame Anthony Appiah, Hazel V. Carby, Barbara Johnson, and Houston A. Baker among others. Bhabha's own seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994) includes a reading of the "interstices" in Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer's work in order to "initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation."²²² Likewise, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman's *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (1994) redefined "postcolonial" to include "diasporic communities, 'ethnic minority' communities within the overdeveloped world as well as formerly colonised national cultures,"²²³ thus including the works of African-American theorists as well as postcolonial theorists of Indian descent. In "The Dialectics of Negritude" (1995), Christopher Wise takes up "the fundamental task of breaking down the divisive, reified structures which separate various groups from one another." Instead of overcoming the difference between the two, he aims "to 'estrangle' [ostranenie] or deliberately and creatively 'violate' the African-American context by dialectically juxtaposing it within an (admittedly limited) semic complex, which may thereby serve to demonstrate its 'postcoloniality' and renew our perception of it." Nevertheless, his focus is to engage with the "dilemma" of "the ongoing problematic of négritude" for "effective political engagement."²²⁴ Gruesser's *Confluences* (2005) is a commendable attempt to bring together postcolonial discourse theory, Gates's theory of Signifyin(g), and Gilroy's Black Atlantic model "to identify points of correspondence and build bridges between" African-American and postcolonial studies: within each

²²² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004) 2.

²²³ Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, "Theorising Post-Coloniality: Intellectuals and Institutions," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 373.

²²⁴ Wise 35-36, 41.

theoretical rubric, he analyses works by authors ranging from Salman Rushdie, Jean Rhys and V. S. Naipaul to Harriet Jacobs, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Pauline Hopkins. Given the dearth of scholarly work on the two fields, *Confluences* is a significant contribution as it also includes women's writing against Gilroy's primary focus on "the texts of black American men";²²⁵ however, in his brief survey of the field, Gruesser disregards the few but significant works on or by women writers, except Ann DuCille's pioneering essay.

For instance, one of the most significant intersectional works is Carole Boyce Davies's *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994) that challenges the models of Afrocentricity for their "location of 'Black' as a descriptor wholly located in the African experience," and critiques black feminist criticism's exclusive location in African-American women's experiences. Davies expands the notion of "black" to include women of colour around the world based in their "migratory subjectivity" as a way of assuming agency. She argues that without a "comparative approach to Black women writers . . . we remain locked into the captured definition of the term 'Black' or 'American' or 'minority' as it is in the dominant discourse."²²⁶ Although limited in scope, Christine Macleod's "Black American Literature and the Postcolonial Debate" (1997) makes a strong case for a study of the interconnections between postcolonial and African-American studies by arguing that "the black experience in America vividly illustrates and parallels various configurations of postcolonialism" and that "many aspects of the theoretical debate itself might be clarified, interrogated, sharpened, enriched—and perhaps even realigned with meaningful practice" if

²²⁵ Gruesser 2, 17, 19.

²²⁶ Davies 3, 33-37.

approached from a postcolonial perspective. *Postcolonial Perspectives* (2003), an anthology edited by Martin Japtok, applies a “postcolonial approach” to race and gender as “unifying elements” in the works of women of African descent in order to identify their “oppositional strategies” and “alternative value systems” for “coalition building.”²²⁷ However, despite an attempt to deemphasise “race,” the collection’s focus on “African descent” reintroduces it to govern the analysis. Gina Wisker’s *Post-Colonial and African American Women’s Writing* (2000) is a wide-ranging work that self-consciously addresses the dearth of comparative scholarship on “twentieth-century post-colonial and African American writing by women.” Besides including both black and white writers, “who are genuinely taking a critical, postcolonial perspective”²²⁸ on race and gender, Wisker’s work is broader in including women writers from Africa, the Caribbean, South Africa, India, Australia, Aotearoa, Canada, Britain, South-East Asia, Oceania, and Cyprus. However, the ten novelists and poets in “the Indian Sub-Continent” section do not include any Pakistani or Bangladeshi authors. An exception to this is Sunita Sinha’s *Post-colonial Women Writers* (2008) that begins with Jane Austen and includes African, African-American, Australian, Canadian, British, Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi women writers; however, the purpose of Sinha’s book is a critical representation of “the exemplary canon of women’s writings” rather than focusing on their “postcolonial” intersections.²²⁹ This thesis thus attempts to address one of the significant gaps in the comparative scholarship by bringing together the critical arenas of African-American and Pakistani

²²⁷ Japtok xiv.

²²⁸ Gina Wisker, *Post-Colonial and African American Women’s Writing: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 1-2, 4, 31.

²²⁹ Sunita Sinha, *Post-Colonial Women Writers: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2008).

women's writing in order to explore their literary, theoretical, and historical junctures. The intertextuality of their revisionist histories, alternative imaginaries, and resistant strategies allows us to reconceive transnational feminist politics within a relational political paradigm.

4. African-American and Postcolonial Critical, Theoretical, and Feminist Intersections

Postcolonial and African-American studies converge on various critical issues such as diaspora, rupture, exile, double consciousness, hybridity, the self-Other binary, mimicry, intersectionality, etc., that feed into the practice of counter-narration. This section thus traces the counter-discourse models in each field in order to contextualise my reading strategies in the succeeding chapters. I conclude by arguing that bringing these theoretical perspectives into dialogue through women's counter-hegemonic narratives can help reshape transnational feminist criticism, theory, and praxis.

4.1. Counter-Discourse in African-American and Postcolonial Studies

Two of the central theoretical paradigms in postcolonialism, colonial discourse theory and postcolonial counter-discourse,²³⁰ can be traced back to Said's foundational works *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*; whilst the former explains the European culture's discursive construction of the Orient-Occident binary to establish its cultural ascendancy, the latter introduces "contrapuntal reading" to

²³⁰ The term "counter-discourse" was coined by Richard Terdimen; however, the concept finds its manifestation in Said's contrapuntal reading as well as the general "writing back" paradigm in postcolonial theory. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

contest these discursive formations. Said defines “Orientalism” as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction” between “the Orient” and the “Occident” “by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.” Indeed, the East was Orientalised to consolidate the identity of the West: the Orient as a primitive, uncivilised, irrational, undeveloped, aberrant, inferior “Other” defined the modern, civilised, rational, developed, humane, and superior Western self. This colonised-coloniser binary construction rationalised the colonial project of “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over” the Orient.²³¹ Said argues that constructs such as “Orientalism or Africanism” are not “god-given essences” but “contrapuntal ensembles” that are “results of collaboration” between Arab and African histories and “the study of the East or Africa in England.” *Culture and Imperialism* then elaborates on the counter-discursive practice of the Orient that contests the colonial narrative through the hermeneutics of “contrapuntal reading”: this comprises a rereading of “the cultural archive . . . not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.” Contrapuntal reading addresses both imperialism and its resistance “by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded.”²³² Colonial discourse theory then provides the means for postcolonial counter-discourse that not only rereads the dominant texts but also writes back to them. We find a parallel discursive model in African-American studies in the critical work of Toni Morrison.

²³¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003) 300-01.

²³² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993) 79.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison observes that despite “a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence,”²³³ “until very recently . . . the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white.”²³⁴ Morrison owes this to the centrality of a white-black dichotomy in the construction of American literary and national consciousness: “National literatures [focus on] describing and ascribing what is really on the national mind,” and “the literature of the United States has taken as its concern the architecture of a *new white man*.” As such, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer,” and even the “fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self.”²³⁵ Morrison probes the “literary uses” of this “fabricated” non-white Africanist presence in the notion of “Americanness” that was “constructed--invented--in the United States.” The writerly imagination conceived the American dream on a blank canvas by painting a “new white man” against an aphotic zone; the erasure of black presence pitted an ideal Americanness against a dark Africanism. Morrison’s “project is [thus] an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served.”²³⁶ John N. Duvall rightly observes that Morrison’s notion of Africanism is “a rapprochement between ethnic and postcolonial studies” in its intertextual relations with Orientalism: “Just as Said sees British colonial understanding of the Oriental Other as telling us more about white colonial identity than about Islamic people, Morrison details the way the representation of the

²³³ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992) 5.

²³⁴ Morrison, *Playing* xii.

²³⁵ Morrison, *Playing* 14-17.

²³⁶ Morrison, *Playing* 90.

Africanist Other tells us much more about white American identity than it does about actual black people.”²³⁷ This convergence of postcolonial and African-American studies is also reflected in the predominant critical and theoretical perspectives in each field; the “writing back” paradigm of postcolonial counter-discourse has much in common with the signifyin(g) practice in African-American literature and culture.

The “writing back” model in postcolonial theory harks back to Ashcroft et al.’s *The Empire Writes Back*; deriving their title from a newspaper article by Salman Rushdie, “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance” (1982), Ashcroft et al. assert that “once the imperial structure has been dismantled,” the “‘Empire writes back’ to the imperial centre” in order to contest dominant narratives and cultural hegemony.²³⁸ This “writing back” to the “canonical” texts involves a deconstructive methodology that challenges the Eurocentric historical and literary models, re-inscribing them and “restructuring European ‘realities’” from a postcolonial perspective, “not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based.” “Writing back” is thus not a one-on-one exercise whereby the periphery retaliates “through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but [a practice that works] even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery in the first place.”²³⁹ The postcolonial counter-discursive paradigm is mirrored in Gates’s theory of Signifyin(g).

²³⁷ John N. Duvall, “Introduction: A Story of the Stories of American Fiction after 1945,” *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945*, ed. John N. Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) 7.

²³⁸ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 6-7.

²³⁹ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 32.

Signifyin(g) is a rhetorical mode of language in African-American culture based on the Yoruba figure of Esu-Elegbara in African religious tradition. Gates defines it: “he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language—is our trope for repetition and revision.”²⁴⁰ Gates translates this oral tradition into literary parody and pastiche as practiced by African-American autobiographical and fictional writing. He differentiates between motivated and unmotivated signifyin(g): whereas motivated signifyin(g) “functions as a metaphor for formal revision,” reflective of parody, and represents “the discrete black difference,” the unmotivated signifyin(g) “takes the form of the repetition and alteration of another text,” which is “refiguration as an act of homage,” marking “not the absence of a profound intention but the absence of a negative critique.”²⁴¹ Thus, signifyin(g) shares with counter-discourse an oppositional strategy that is not simply locked in a one-to-one relationship between centre and periphery but also reaches outwards.

As subsequent textual analyses will show, women’s counter-narratives draw on a variety of intertextual approaches to not only subvert the dominant narratives and power structures, as outlined in Said and Morrison’s theories, but also formulate alternative identities and discourses based in meaningful connections with defining communities. Jacobs’s counter-discourse on women’s experience of slavery establishes an alternative “consubstantial” relation with her audience; Morrison’s revisionist narrative of slavery shifts the focus “from the described and imagined to

²⁴⁰ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “The ‘Blackness of Blackness’: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey,” *Critical Inquiry* 9.4 (1983): 686.

²⁴¹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xxi.

the describers and imaginers”; Sidhwa’s alternative account of Partition invokes the Subcontinent’s heterogeneous history and culture; and Shamsie’s revisionist narrative foregrounds the liminal space between our rigid cultural identities via our undeniable human interdependence. Bringing these narratives together creates a bigger narrative of the profound interconnections of our histories of struggle and resistance that can serve grounds for the recognition of our relationality, especially in view of the neocolonial challenge to feminism.

4.2. Feminism and Neocolonialism: A Relational Perspective on Global Responsibility

As early as 1994, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan underscored the urgency for feminism to address the issues of gender and geopolitics in “transnational scattered hegemonies,” mirrored in postmodernity, neocolonialism, and ethnic/national/religious fundamentalisms, in order to create “the basis for multiple, allied, solidarity projects.”²⁴² Linking the U.S. domestic and foreign policies that together contribute to racist practices at home, patronisation of anti-democratic and anti-feminist regimes abroad, and conflict and war, they urged U.S. feminists to probe “the relationship between transnational economies and the intensification of religious fundamentalism” and “to fight against this kind of aid on their home ground” instead of condemning particular religions “as the center of patriarchal oppression.”²⁴³

This has become even more complicated and urgent given the co-optation of feminism in the post-9/11 world that obscures the material effects of war on women.

²⁴² Grewal and Kaplan 17, 20.

²⁴³ Grewal and Kaplan 17-26.

DuCille's observation that "there is a thin line between postcolonial and neocolonialist discourse"²⁴⁴ is starkly obvious in Spivak's insightful observation that the "war on terror" is "alibied in the name of women,"²⁴⁵ deploying feminism to reenact the colonial rationale of "white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men."²⁴⁶ Butler agrees that by "retroactively transform[ing] the liberation of women into a rationale for" war, the U.S. uses "feminism as a trope" to restore "the presumption of First World impermeability."²⁴⁷ However, this feminisation of war rhetoric has repercussions for women both inside and outside the U.S. Mohanty et al.'s *Feminism and War* provides an extensive analysis of the "'feminist' motivation for US military aggression" by identifying "the ways in which the USA has gendered, racialized, and sexualized its practice of imperialist wars" for "capitalist" gains. The authors argue that "the restructuring of both US foreign and domestic policy" for military and corporate objectives exemplifies "a new mobilization of historically embedded colonial practices and rhetorics of male superiority and white supremacy; of female vulnerability, inadequacy, and inferiority; and of the subjugation of oppressed masculinities of men of color."²⁴⁸

Given this collusion of colonial and neocolonial narratives in the perpetuation of both the internal and external imperialist practices of the U.S., Carol Boyce Davies observes that "since the term 'American' has become synonymous with United States

²⁴⁴ Ducille 39-40.

²⁴⁵ Spivak, "Terror" 91.

²⁴⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 303.

²⁴⁷ Butler, *Precarious* 143.

²⁴⁸ C. Mohanty et al., "Introduction" 3.

imperialistic identity,” “African-American constructions of ‘Black’ subjectivity or African-American identity have to be subjected to . . . scrutiny because they participate so heavily in the United States constructions of itself.” She argues that the Du Boisian “double consciousness speaks of the need for the African-American to understand the conflict s/he feels as both “American” and Black. But this conflict, or worse its absence, can be dangerous for other people around the world, as African-American participation in the United States military reveals.”²⁴⁹ She asks:

How do African-Americans participate in this major recolonizing project and US imperialism? Further, how do United States Black women/women of color, often the most dispossessed on the ladder of social and economic resources, pursue their own liberation? Is it through alliance with oppression or in resistance? And, similarly, does Black feminist criticism and politics have the potential of occupying a similar position with respect to a variety of related discourses, other Black women’s literatures and subordinated identities . . . ?²⁵⁰

It seems to me that the U.S. neocolonialism has altered the dynamics of feminist politics by placing African-American women in a complex relation vis-à-vis other Third World women, in the same way as white feminists were earlier accountable for black women’s erasure; the inability to challenge U.S. hegemony would both reflect historical amnesia on the part of African-American feminists and implicate them in the oppression of women in other parts of the world. Indeed, the onus seems to be on African-American intellectuals this time: the double consciousness tied up with the

²⁴⁹ Davies 9, 25.

²⁵⁰ Davies 26.

hyphenated African-American identity must serve to establish a relational interface that allows travelling to the other's world²⁵¹ in order to understand our mutual connections, shared vulnerability, and collective responsibility in an interdependent reality. Sharing personal and public, individual and collective narratives and bringing them together through interdisciplinary and comparative feminist literary and cultural studies are a step towards this goal and, as this thesis hopes to show, a significant one at that.

²⁵¹ The phrase "travel to the other's world" comes from Maria Lugones's vision of a reconceived identification. Quoted in Weir, *Identities* 69.

Chapter 1 Contesting Subjectivities and Ideologies:

Consubstantiality and Feminist Address in Harriet Jacobs's

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

I can never be what I ought to be until
you are what you ought to be. This is the
way our world is made. . . . We are
interdependent.

(Martin Luther King Jr.)

The significance of gender in the literary representation of American slavery remained largely uncharted until Jean Fagan Yellin's 1981 authentication of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as the cornerstone of the historiography of female slavery.²⁵² The first U.S. slave narrative penned by a woman, *Incidents* signifies a paradigmatic shift in the genre, which, ironically, contributed to its initial dismissal as inauthentic.²⁵³ Confronted with the double bind of extricating black women from "the myth of the Negro" and "the myth of the woman,"²⁵⁴ *Incidents* both challenges the dominant representations of enslaved women and transcends the normative model of the slave narrative. As opposed to the latter's appropriation of American individualism, reflective of the Franklinian and Emersonian notions of

²⁵² See Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs's Slave Narrative," *American Literature* 53.3 (1981): 479-86; *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004); and Harriet Ann Jacobs et al., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, vol. 1 & 2 ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008). For a history of the authenticity debate, see Jean Fagan Yellin, "Texts and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*," *The Slave's Narrative*, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 262-82.

²⁵³ *Incidents* was dismissed as fictional partly for its departure from the representative male slave narrative paradigm. See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972) 234 and Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 45-46.

²⁵⁴ The phrases come from Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999) 28.

selfhood, *Incidents* improvises on mainstream discourses to foreground a relational conception of identities. This chapter thus reads Louis Althusser's theory of ideology alongside that of constitutive rhetoric in analysing *Incidents* as an interrogation of the antebellum "ideological state apparatuses" through the narrator's disidentification with and contravention of them. Notwithstanding the desire to be intercalated into the basic tenets of humanity via the prevalent constructs of selfhood and womanhood, *Incidents* also impugns the adequacy of those ideals through the narrativisation of a woman's experience of slavery. Indeed, the narrator purposefully draws on the literary and social representations of womanhood in order to form a consubstantial relation with her readership of Anglo-American women. However, her constitutive rhetoric censures those very ideals through a juxtaposition of women's differently subjectivated positionalities in the antebellum patriarchal social mechanism whilst her apostrophic counter-interpellations seek to reconstitute her audience as feminist critical subjects in her revised conception of identity, representation, and coalition in a relational social framework.

1. Power, Subjectivation, and Agency: Reinterpellation via Constitutive Rhetoric

This section introduces the Althusserian conception of subjectivity and the theory of constitutive rhetoric to contextualise the chapter's theoretical framework based in Burkean notion of consubstantiality and Ellen Rooney's theorisation of feminist address. In "Ideological State Apparatuses" Althusser explains the process of ideological subject formation as follows:

all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects . . .

ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among

the individuals (it recruits them all) or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing.²⁵⁵

Although a compelling analysis of ideology’s function of subjectivation that produces individuals’ “imaginary relationships” to their “real conditions of existence,”

Althusser’s conception of subjectivity is rather mechanical, especially given its

implicit political determinism. Terry Eagleton attributes this to Althusser’s

“misreading” of Lacan in substituting the “volatile and turbulent” Lacanian subject,

“punctured and traversed by insatiable desire,” with “serenely centred entities,”

reflective of the Lacanian ego instead: thus, “to expel desire from the subject is to

mute its potentially rebellious clamour, ignoring the ways in which it may attain its

allotted place in the social order only ambiguously and precariously.”²⁵⁶ Butler also

critiques the Althusserian “unilateral act” of subjectivation that posits interpellation

“as a simple performative” without acknowledging the “interpellating law[’s]”

exposure to rupture that can challenge “the monotheistic force of its own unilateral

operation.” Indeed, the projected uniformity of subjectivity may be supplanted by a

“parodic inhabiting of conformity”—“a signifying excess of any intended referent”

over and against “the disciplining intention motivating the law.”²⁵⁷ Whilst Butler

²⁵⁵ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Essays on Ideology*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1984) 47-48.

²⁵⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991) 144.

²⁵⁷ Butler, *Bodies* 81-85. Although Althusser made a passing allusion to “good” and “bad” subjects, Michel Pêcheux further developed three receptive modalities: the universal or good subject, the subject of enunciation or the bad subject, and the disidentification model “of a non-subjective position.” Michel Pêcheux, *In Language, Semantics and Ideology*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1982) 155-59. For other critiques of Althusser’s theory, see Rosemary Hennessy, “Women’s Lives/Feminist Knowledge: Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique,” *Hypatia* 8.1 (1993):14-34 and Steven B. Smith, “Althusser’s Marxism without a Knowing Subject,” *The American Political Science Review* 79.31(1985): 641-55.

rightly critiques Althusser's inert subject, as Weir observes, her own conception of agency, as "misrecognition that resists the law," is also grounded in the same "subjectivation" model. Viewing agency as simply "responses to the call of the law" closes off "the possibility of multiple contesting and conflicting relations" of subjectivity; as opposed to "the binary opposition of the law and its subversion," Weir views agency as both resisting power relations and inhabiting enabling relations.²⁵⁸

Incidents models this complex understanding of agency: signifyin(g) upon the ideological constructs with a counter-discourse, the narrative at once subverts the call of the law and offers alternative notions of identity. In employing the disciplining structures against themselves to unveil the complicity of the antebellum social, legal, and religious institutions in the perpetuation of slavery, the text is an uncanny echo of the Althusserian orchestration of subjectivity. The narrator's life and text challenge the identity accorded by the antebellum social mechanism both literally and metaphorically; the ex-slave's passage from slavery to freedom as much as the narrative event represents her disidentification with the hegemonic structures and a refusal to be hailed into the system. Through the feminist address of her constitutive rhetoric then, anchored in a self-other and individual-community nexus, the narrator reconstructs her identity and reinterpellates her audience as feminist political subjects in her revised social imaginary, informed by meaningful relations as opposed to the "interpellating law."

Both "a genre of discourse" and "a theory for understanding rhetorical processes," constitutive rhetoric engages in a formative process that constitutes a

²⁵⁸ Weir, *Identities* 7-9.

collective identity for its audience through the course of rhetorical narrative, and calls for its affirmation through political action. The constitutive model of rhetoric harks back to the Sophists' emphasis on the discursivity of knowledge as opposed to the persuasive model of Aristotelian rhetoric. Kenneth Burke's notion of consubstantiality further diverges from the Aristotelian paradigm in playing up rhetoric's formative mode of identity as opposed to positing an anterior self to which rhetoric appeals.²⁵⁹ However, it was James Boyd White who coined the term "constitutive rhetoric" to define the art of "constituting character, community, and culture in language."²⁶⁰ Maurice Charland further developed the theory drawing on Edwin Black's notion of the discursive production of the audience image, Michael MacGee's rhetoric of collectivisation, Burke's identification model, and Althusserian interpellation²⁶¹ in his focus on the significance of "diegesis, narrative structure, and its modes of address" that facilitate identification.²⁶² All models, however, converge on the seminal idea of positing the audience as subjects in history with a collective identity formed through address in order to demand political action apropos that identity.

Although my analysis reflects an understanding of Charland's model, it redirects emphasis to Burke's conception of consubstantiality alongside Ellen

²⁵⁹ Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 616-17. Burke uses "consubstantiality" in a particular sense. Any two entities are "consubstantial" on account of identification between them based on some real or imagined shared interest. As opposed to sharing a common substance, consubstantiality implies "ambiguities of substance"; thus, the two entities retain their "uniqueness" whilst being consubstantial. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969) 21-22.

²⁶⁰ James B. White, *Heracles' Bow: Essays on the Rhetoric and Poetics of the Law* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985) x.

²⁶¹ James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001) 106-08.

²⁶² Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Québécois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73.2 (1987): 133-50.

Rooney's analysis of feminist mode of address. Whilst Charland's notion of constitutive rhetoric frames the ideological production of an identity category as "a transhistorical subject" vis-à-vis "a transcendental collective interest" that surpasses individual or historical limitations,²⁶³ the Burkean model of consubstantiality underscores the rift that inheres in all identification. For Burke, consubstantiality entails "ambiguities of substance," so that to identify is "to confront the implications of division": "In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time, he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and con-substantial with another." Drawing on "the old philosophical" meaning of substance as an "act," Burke argues that consubstantiality "may be necessary to any way of life"; because "a way of life is an acting-together," it implies "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitude that make [people] consubstantial." Burkean consubstantiality accentuates rhetoric's facilitation of a "mediatory ground" between discrete entities that allows the dismantlement of oppressive identities and the formation of an affinitive sociality.²⁶⁴ Indeed, identification, for Burke, is "hardly other than a name for the function of sociality."²⁶⁵ I find Burke's notion of consubstantiality—identificatory consociation across discrete individualities—very useful for feminist politics of what Weir calls "transformative identifications" that "risk the difficult work of connection through conflict, openness, and change," instead of essentialist, assimilationist, or appropriative modes of identification.²⁶⁶ It is particularly insightful

²⁶³ Charland, *Case* 140.

²⁶⁴ Burke 21-25.

²⁶⁵ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 266-67.

²⁶⁶ Weir, *Identities* 3.

in analysing *Incidents*'s rhetorical address that seeks to reconstitute narrator-narratee identities through drawing parallels between black and white women's respective social positionalities, whilst simultaneously recognising the difference that underlies the identification in order to shape a relational coalitional network.

The consubstantial politics of constitutive rhetoric are coterminous with Ellen Rooney's analysis of the performativity of the idiom of address as a "mediatory ground" in feminist texts. Rooney argues that instead of "policing a discourse for inclusion . . . rhetorics of address create constituencies, that is, form feminist subjects, rather than simply accommodate them." Feminist address entails "an apostrophe to the reader that is constructive, that brings into being a feminist position by means of a reading. This of course makes it an address that cannot be guaranteed in advance. And it may even begin in accusation."²⁶⁷ This performative aspect of apostrophic modality displaces "feminist specificity" from the narrator to "the mode of apostrophic address," and its "feminist narrative" "can illuminate the construction and the dissolution of the feminist as a critical subject . . . as a rhetorical and a narrative effect." Rooney situates her analysis in the problematics of "the subject of feminism and the relations among women."²⁶⁸ Given the controversy regarding women's representation as a "formed yet unformed class," Rooney proposes the apostrophic exhortative story as "one model of feminist narrative" and "feminist critical subject" for collective politics: "Insofar as the . . . story is about you or me . . . it performs a kind of apostrophic twist on this process of appropriation, conversion, and subjection.

²⁶⁷ Ellen Rooney, introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 16.

²⁶⁸ Ellen Rooney, "What's the Story? Feminist Theory, Narrative, Address," *Differences* 8.1 (1996): 3.

This is a narrative in which the addressee must appropriate the particular feminist subject and language position the narrator pronounces.”²⁶⁹ Drawing on Emile Benveniste’s and Barbara Johnson’s analyses of formative discourse and apostrophe, Rooney underscores that

the apostrophe tells *you* (to extend my initial fiction) as a feminist . . . the call to the (somehow) absent addressee exposes “the relation between direct address and the desire for the other’s voice” . . . this desire is for the raised “voice,” the voice of the feminist subject the narrator animates but refuses directly to identify with/as.²⁷⁰

Rooney’s notion of such a gap coincides with rhetorically produced consubstantiality. Although Rooney regards “this structure of address [as] the whole story” that “rhetorically announces the feminism of the addressee of the narrative to come,”²⁷¹ I argue that the narrative account serves as the field for consubstantiality that sanctions the address and facilitates a rhetoric of constitution which, in *Incidents*, is a counter-narrative to the antebellum ideological apparatuses. Rooney’s analysis helps complicate the conception of rhetoricity as a male purview, and provides a useful model in analysing *Incidents* as offering a re-interpellating, consubstantial constitutive rhetoric that employs apostrophic modality in seeking to morph the narrator’s audience into feminist critical subjects in its revised social imaginary.

²⁶⁹ Rooney, “Story” 5.

²⁷⁰ Rooney, “Story” 6.

²⁷¹ Rooney, “Story” 2.

Incidents's communality over and against the male slave narrative's individualism has been touched on by a few scholars.²⁷² My analysis elaborates on the text's communal paradigm by analysing its manifestation in narrative technique, structure, and mode of address as well. *Incidents* is driven by a conflict between the narrator's "self-identity" and the "absent-presence"²⁷³ of her socio-legal subjectivity: the text thus maps her transitional struggle from an "object" to a "subject" position through a processual relational nexus with her readers. As we will see, whereas the legislative construct of "double character" negates slaves' personhood, will, desire, virtue, and oppression, the narrator subverts the antebellum hegemonic "texts" by deploying statutory loopholes to wrest her own voice and transfer it to her audience through apostrophic recurrent interpellations that seek to constitute them as political subjects in her alternative discourse. The textual analysis below is thus divided into three sections that build towards the central argument of *Incidents*'s co-optation of the sentimental genre and constitutive rhetoric for consubstantial relational politics: the first part analyses the "double articulation" of *Incidents* in its mimicry of the sentimental genre that produces "a black difference," the second part examines this co-optation of the genre to contest the "double character" of slave women's legal subjectivity, and the last part focuses on narrative renegotiation of identities and agency in a feminist relational sociality.

²⁷² See Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) 34; Mary Helen Washington, "Introduction: Meditations on History: The Slave Woman's Voice," *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women 1860-1960*, ed. Mary H. Washington (New York: Doubleday, 1987) 3-15; and Jean Fagan Yellin, introduction, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* by Harriet Ann Jacobs, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) xxxii-xxxiii.

²⁷³ As I will go on to argue, slaves' legal "double character" at once allowed and denied their socio-legal subjectivity.

2. Mimicking the Sentimental Genre: *Incidents*'s "Double Articulation"

During fugitive slave Linda's confinement whilst hiding in the attic (Linda Brent being the name given by Jacobs to her autobiographical persona), her grandmother, Aunt Martha, invites two guests to Christmas dinner at her house: a white constable and a free coloured man.²⁷⁴ The "motive" is to allow them access to the house in order to dispel potential suspicion of Linda's presence; hence, towards the end of their tour, they are taken close to Linda's hiding place "to look at a fine mocking bird . . . [her] uncle had just brought home" (119). Whilst the entire exercise is a mockery of both the white and the black fugitive hunters, the final reference to the "mocking bird" in the piazza, brought home by Uncle Philip, serves as a perfect metaphor for Linda's position, for the "den" from which she mocks potential hunters was built by her uncle to harbour the "mocking bird" awaiting its flight. The symbol of the "mocking bird" is significant as the northern mockingbird, also known as "Mimus polyglottos, of Mexico and the southern and eastern United States [is] noted for its habit of mimicking the calls of other birds."²⁷⁵ Mimus polyglottos, transliterated as "many-tongued mimic," is an apt figure for the narrator of *Incidents* who creates her narrative through "mimicking" and "mocking" mainstream narratives and discourses.

²⁷⁴ For clarification I will reserve "Jacobs" for the author and use "Linda" for the protagonist.

²⁷⁵ "mockingbird," def. 1 *OED Online* Oxford UP, n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

Indeed, given the absence of an appropriate aesthetic medium to render a slave woman's experience, *Incidents*'s "double articulation" cuts across several genres;²⁷⁶ the text forms a montage of the slave narrative, the sentimental genre, the picaresque novel, confessional and spiritual autobiography, and elements of African folklore. However, despite drawing on the dominant formal and discursive structures, the generic as well as narrative mimicry repeatedly produces its excess and difference. Since Jacobs was the first ex-slave to explicitly broach the proscribed subject of enslaved women's sexual exploitation to the puritanical nineteenth-century white middle-class readership, she was obliged to make her narrative palatable to her audience in order to facilitate identification. *Incidents* thus draws on two of the predominant literary and social paradigms of the nineteenth-century with which white women identified—the Cult of True Womanhood, centred on four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity and its reflection in domestic fiction.²⁷⁷ The separate-spheres ideology of the nineteenth century was grounded in the gender binaries of a self-governing, rational, adventurer man versus a subservient, sentimental, domesticated woman. Barbara Welter argues that the nineteenth-century American man offset his guilt for indulgence in secular materialism by rendering the white woman a repository of rectitude.²⁷⁸ The signifying excess of this moral edifice

²⁷⁶ Bhabha describes "mimicry" as "double articulation" that forms "a complex strategy of reform" and "poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers." Bhabha, *Location* 122-3.

²⁷⁷ For more on the Cult of True Womanhood and the Sentimental genre, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151–74; Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975); Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978); and Jane P. Tompkins, "Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History," *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 81-104.

²⁷⁸ Welter 151.

was displaced onto the black woman who functioned both as a scapegoat for repressed desire and an exotic site of promiscuity; the methodic reduction of the white woman to a “naturally passionless” angel in the house wrought the counter-identity of Jezebel to implicate black women in their sexual exploitation.²⁷⁹ *Incidents* unfolds within this consciousness. In stylising her narrator, Linda Brent, as a sentimental heroine, Jacobs sets her up, to use Bhabha’s terms, “*as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*”;²⁸⁰ tapping the symbolic repository of white womanhood to interpellate her audience, the narrative also underscores its insufficiency for black women, whilst simultaneously reflecting a metonymic juxtaposition of both black and white women within the oppressive social structure to enable mutual identification.

Scholarship on *Incidents*’s narrative form is divided between critics who decry the sentimental genre’s consumption of the narrator’s voice and those who, despite addressing the representational inaptness of the form for black experience, endorse the narrator’s “triumph over the limits of the form” and its corresponding ideologies.²⁸¹ Elaborating on the latter, my analysis addresses the putative inefficacy of the form by engaging with the narrative structure and mode of address within the framework of Burkean consubstantiality and Rooney’s feminist address. Burke argues that rhetorical consubstantiality requires “overplaying a role,” despite its “falsity,” in order to

²⁷⁹ For more on the sexual stereotypes associated with black women, see Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976) and White.

²⁸⁰ Bhabha 122.

²⁸¹ For a critical overview, see Raymond Hedin, “Strategies of Form in the American Slave Narrative,” and Annette Niemtow, “The Problematic of Self in Autobiography: The Example of the Slave Narrative,” *The Art of Slave Narrative: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory*, eds. John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner (Macomb: Western Illinois U, 1982) 28 and 107 respectively; Carby 61; Yellin, “Texts” xxxii; Washington 5-6; and Smith, *Self-Discovery* 28-43.

“protect an interest”; a practice that “brings rhetoric to the edge of cunning.”²⁸² This notion of “cunning” coincides with both the postcolonial construct of “mimicry” and the African-American practice of signifyin(g).²⁸³ Indeed, the narrator alludes to the pre-emptive value of “cunning” as a signifyin(g) practice for slaves: “Who can blame slaves for being cunning? . . . It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants” (100-101). This “Competition in Cunning” against masters resonates with the structural stylisation of the sentimental genre vis-à-vis the readership. Indeed, one may trace two distinct voices in *Incidents* corresponding to the first-person narrator and the implied author; whereas Linda Brent is a self-styled sentimental heroine, the implied author’s lucid voiceover defies the romanticisation of the tragic mulatta. The employment of the pseudonym, Linda Brent, creates a distance between the narrator and the author that allows the narrator to access predominant ideologies through Linda’s persona whilst critiquing them through the implied authorial intervention. Indeed, this signifying surplus—mimicking yet dissociating—is also reflected in Jacobs’ deprecation of the sentimentalisation of her story in her riposte to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s proposal to interpolate her narrative into *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “I wished it to be a history of my life entirely by itself, which would do more good, and it needed *no romance*” (emphasis added).²⁸⁴ This desire to own and personalise her narrative insinuates a deflection from the excessive

²⁸² Burke, *Rhetoric* 36.

²⁸³ For more on the “signifyin(g)” practice in *Incidents*, see Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989) and “Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: The Re-Definition of The Slave Narrative Genre,” *Massachusetts Review* 27 (1986): 379-87; Johnnie M. Stover, “Nineteenth-Century African American Women’s Autobiography as Social Discourse: The Example of Harriet Ann Jacobs,” *College English* 66.2 (2003): 133-54; and Anne Bradford Warner, “Carnival Laughter: Resistance in *Incidents*,” *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, eds. Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 216-32.

²⁸⁴ Yellin, “Written” 482.

melodrama of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* towards *Incidents's* pragmatic discourse too evident to be eclipsed by the narrative's sentimental scaffold, appropriated for a vantage point in constituting a critical class of readers.²⁸⁵

Thus, through the course of the narrative, the narrator engages with the sentimental genre only to deconstruct its underlying assumptions by pitting them against a black woman's "subjugated standpoint" and "situated knowledge."²⁸⁶ In *History and Class Consciousness*, György Lukács posits the self-reflection of the oppressed as a liberating force to contest ideologies through a broad analytical reasoning capacity that sets it apart from the oppressor class's myopia. The proletariat's positionality and the ensuing knowledge of the social whole offer "a unique element" whose "surpassing of immediacy [the vision of the oppressor] represents an aspiration towards society in its totality." This vision, that evades the oppressor group, becomes a source of "action" for the oppressed.²⁸⁷ Lukács's concept of the oppressor's "identical subject-object" positionality also underlies bell hooks' margin-to-centre thesis as it does the feminist standpoint theory. It constitutes the "consciousness" of the "wholeness" of seeing what is "unknown" to the oppressors and developing "an oppositional worldview," reflected, in this case, in the narrator's epistemic position and marginalised consciousness as posed against her audience's

²⁸⁵ Whilst late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criticism generally dismissed sentimental novels or domestic fiction for its alleged promotion of "cultural evils," recent scholarship has reinterpreted its potential for radical transformation of society. See Tompkins 82-100 and Baym 30-35. My purpose is not to reinforce the sentimental-rationalist (feminine-masculine) binary by contrasting Stowe's approach to Jacobs's; instead, my analysis seeks to emphasise the inadequacy of the dominant sentimental representations of slaves and slavery that *Incidents* addresses through improvising the genre.

²⁸⁶ Patricia Hill Collins uses the terms to refer to the socially inflected "standpoint" of black women. Collins 269-70.

²⁸⁷ György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin P, 1971) 149-209.

blinker social vision that Jacobs contests via formal and thematic mimicry.²⁸⁸

However, unlike some feminist standpoint theorists' essentialisation of this positionality, *Incidents*'s narrative discourse creates the possibility of extending this perspective to the other by inviting its audience to share Linda's "standpoint" through transformative identification in a dialogic context of storytelling. This creates what Burke refers to as "a mediatory ground" that facilitates opening up to the otherwise reified "difference" or demarcated standpoints.²⁸⁹

Rooney posits three kinds of "feminist narrative form" that are insightful in analysing *Incidents*'s alternative discourse. The first is "my story as the story of *your* feminism" in which there is an irreducible gap between the narrator and the addressee as the former's outsider status prevents access to the addressee's "feminist" position. Rooney refers to this as the "you would have been so angry" model. The second form is "my story as the story of *my* feminism" that replaces apostrophe with a "direct claim upon feminist anger." The third model is "*your* story as the story of *my* feminism," which is the most privileged form of address as "it travels across political and communal boundaries."²⁹⁰ *Incidents*'s apostrophic address is a merger of the first and the third modes; Linda tells her story as the story of the narratee's politics, urging inclusion into their values via the "you would have been so angry" model that elicits response from the addressee. However, at the same time, she also implicates the audience in her own story by narrating "your story as the story of my feminism" in which the story of the narrator and that of the narratee converge at crucial points,

²⁸⁸ Hooks, *Margin* ix.

²⁸⁹ Burke, *Rhetoric* 25.

²⁹⁰ Rooney, "Story" 10-15.

causing a shift from urging inclusion into the addressee's politics to revising those politics to re-constitute the narrator and the addressee as political subjects in a revised political paradigm that also recognises their differences.

The epigraph on the title page ushers in this narrative constitution of a political class of women by challenging Northerners' epistemic stance regarding slavery as well as the inadequacy of the hegemonic "word": "Northerners . . . have no conception of the depth of *degradation* involved in that word, SLAVERY" (xxxv). This inquest into "logos" or "the word" acquiesces with the second epigraph that counters the Biblical invocation to vindicate slavery by wielding Scriptural writ (an excerpt from Isaiah) to contest the institution and summon a class of women to partake of her "voice": "Rise up, ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters! Give ear unto my speech" (xxxv).

The preface further attempts to establish the narrator-reader nexus that will underlie the text's constitutive rhetoric to interpellate Jacobs's audience. The very first word engages the "Reader" to whom Linda explains the motivation for her narrative by shifting focus from the narrator to the narratee and from the personal to the political. The purpose of her narrative is not "to attract attention" or "excite sympathy for" her own suffering; rather, "I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South" (1). The narrator seeks to create a "we" by deploying first- and second-person apostrophic address that invokes the liminal positionalities of "women of the North" and "women at the South" in order "to arouse" the former to the "condition" of the latter. The plea to provoke white women entails a call for shaping their political identity by stepping out of the domestic sphere into the public arena as political

subjects. As Yellin observes, in being “[i]nformed not by ‘the cult of domesticity’ or ‘domestic feminism’ but by political feminism, *Incidents* is an attempt to move women to political action.”²⁹¹

Despite Jacobs’s confident reclamation of her narrative from Stowe’s potential appropriation, her prefatory remarks echo the self-deprecation conventional of nineteenth-century women writers’ anxiety about their literary and artistic creativity.²⁹² “I wish I were more competent to the task I have undertaken,” but given my “motives,” “I trust my readers will excuse [my] deficiencies” (1). By foregrounding authorial incompetency as well as racial marginality, the narrator at once concedes the social distance from her readership whilst urging them to establish a connection. Likewise, her desire to “add my testimony to that of abler pens” couches a reference to Stowe’s fictional account, juxtaposing it to a black woman’s personal testimonial (1-2). Although the “no fiction” declaration underscores a break from sentimental, melodramatic fiction, the preface ends on precisely such a seductive note to the reader about a proleptic journey into the “deep, and dark, and foul . . . pit of abomination,” further reinforced by editor Lydia Maria Child’s admission of “indecorum” in presenting a “peculiar phase” of slavery and its “monstrous features” with the “veil withdrawn” (4).

Child’s introduction collaborates with Jacobs’s preface to underscore the narrator-narratee connection by displacing the “delicate-indelicate” binary of white

²⁹¹ Yellin, introduction xxxii.

²⁹² Smith observes that given the predominantly male nineteenth-century literary scene, female writers reflected their anxiety “by their tendency . . . to disparage their own accomplishments in autobiographical remarks.” Smith, *Self-Discovery* 31.

and black women's social categorisation with "my sisters in bondage" (4).²⁹³ The use of relational lexicon to describe Linda's association with Child and other white families reinforces the "credentials of her character," besides serving a protracted link between her and the audience (3). Child's act of elevating chattel to sisters in her introduction serves as a refracting medium between Jacobs's preface and the ensuing narrative, and supplements her desire to shape and stimulate a group of "conscientious and reflecting women at the North to a sense of their duty" (4). Weinstein observes that these overtures to slave narratives "instruct the reader how to read the narrative";²⁹⁴ however, Jacobs's preface and Child's introduction also help identify and constitute the projected audience by evoking certain conceptual categories on which the narrator and the readers must concur for them to recognise a consubstantial relation.

Linda's character is also stylised to facilitate transformative identification with the audience; in line with the domestic fiction and the seduction novel conventions, Jacobs establishes Linda as a sentimental heroine through the first ten chapters.²⁹⁵ As opposed to the slave narrative's traditional opening of "the institutional assault on the biological family," *Incidents* opens with domestic fiction's classic exposition:

²⁹³ The prefatory documents of slave narratives, termed "white envelopes" by John Sekora, served as authentication documents regarding both the narrative and the author. John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 32 (1987): 482-515. Also see Cindy Weinstein, "The Slave Narrative and Sentimental Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 115.

²⁹⁴ Weinstein 115.

²⁹⁵ Baym and Tompkins have conducted an in-depth plot analysis of the sentimental genre whilst Weinstein has "read slave narratives in dialectical relation with sentimental novels" to outline their respective constitutive elements. This part of my study reads *Incidents*'s form and conventions against some of these generic descriptions to argue that *Incidents* aligns more closely with the sentimental genre than the slave narrative. Baym 23-37; Tompkins 82-100; and Weinstein 115-27.

“parental loss [as] a point of departure.”²⁹⁶ The text mimics the sentimental novel’s opening with “the loss of a mother that initiates the heroine’s woes”²⁹⁷ by representing its slave protagonist under threat of orphanhood and domestic upheaval. Linda is “fondly shielded” in “a comfortable home” before the “fortunate circumstances” of her blissful childhood are disrupted by the death of her mother, followed by the loss of her father, and the subsequent collapse of the “home” and the “family” (5-6). Contrary to Francis Smith Foster’s observation of the slave narrators’ denial of “the viability of the slave family” in order “to increase the pathos of the homeless victim,”²⁹⁸ *Incidents*’s narrator orchestrates one; besides tracing her own lineage to the particulars of her grandmother’s sale and the ensuing familial relations, Linda repeatedly employs terms like “foster-sister,” “foster-mother,” etc., for master-slave innominate relationships. Thus, characteristic of a sentimental heroine, she begins to mourn her loss just as the plot sets in: “my heart rebelled against God, who had taken from me mother, father, mistress, and friend” (10), and begins to “travel from one adoptive family to the next.”²⁹⁹ This critical relocation from an initial “happy” family to her “new home,” which encounters the customary “cold looks, cold words, and cold treatment,” also heralds the heroine’s predicament: the “narrow bed” on her entry into Dr. Flint’s home portends her sexual harassment and subsequent struggle (9).

²⁹⁶ Weinstein 116.

²⁹⁷ Baym 37.

²⁹⁸ Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994) 38.

²⁹⁹ Weinstein’s description of a sentimental heroine, Weinstein 117.

Whilst Jacobs mimics the sentimental genre's conventions to facilitate a consubstantial relation, she also introduces recurrent rifts in identification in order to narrate the enslaved women's difference that must be confronted by the audience. For instance, in making frequent use of juxtaposition to provide parallel images of slaves and their masters, the text both depicts and blurs the binaries of humanity/inhumanity, benevolence/malevolence, honour/dishonour, and virtue/vice advocated by the slavery apologists. In the first chapter the narrator introduces her "family" alongside the mistress's to draw comparisons; pitting her grandmother, Aunt Martha's generosity against her mistresses' malevolence, Linda unsettles the master-slave binary by quoting the mistress's "begg[ing] as a loan" Linda's grandmother's hard-earned cache meant for purchasing her children (6). Likewise, at the mistress's death, Dr. Flint's refusal to reimburse the money or the candelabra purchased with grandmother's labour displaces the "honor of a slaveholder to a slave" instead. Similarly, Linda's mother is juxtaposed to her "foster sister" mistress, who were "both nourished at . . . grandmother's breast" and "played together as children"; however, the "*whiter* foster sister" lacked compassion for her "most faithful servant." Whereas Linda, her mother, and grandmother are conscientious "servants" who "love" their mistresses, both the mistresses fail to live up to their honour and the promise of manumission: the grandmother was sold on the auction block, Linda was "bequeathed" to her mistress's niece, and five other foster slave siblings were "distributed among her relatives" (7). Invoking both "Southern laws" and "God's word," the narrator critiques the legitimacy of the institutions that turned humans into the "property" of proprietors with whom they "shared the same milk" and "blood," yet who denied them the status of even a "Christian neighbor" (8).

Indeed, Jacobs dedicates an entire chapter to the critique of the institutionalisation of slavery by the church. Quoting the “Pious Mr. Pike[’s]” sermon at length for the “sinful creatures,” who were “highly amused” by it, the narrator mocks the “white-faced, black-hearted,” “blind,” and “hypocrite” doctors of divinity. Jacobs satirises the misdirected philanthropy and hypocrisy of the American churches that dispatch “the Bible to heathen abroad, and neglect the heathen at home” (73). Once again, she unsettles the semiotic binaries of colonial epistemology. Beginning the paragraph with a critique of the institutional deprivation of “the water of life” to slaves like Uncle Fred who are “thirsting” for it, the narrator builds up a comparison of the “heathen abroad” and “the heathen at home.” However, she goes on to disrupt the anticipated analogy of African-Americans (heathens at home) with Africans (heathens abroad), in being deprived of religious enlightenment, by introducing a third constituent into the comparison. It is “American slaveholders” that are coterminous with “the savages in Africa” in withholding the “Fountain of Life” from the slaves at home as well as in perpetuating the vile practice of slavery:

[M]issionaries go out to the dark corners of the earth; but I ask them not to overlook the dark corners at home. Talk to American slaveholders as you talk to savages in Africa. Tell them it is wrong to traffic in men . . . sinful to sell their own children, and atrocious to violate their own daughters. (73)

By comparing American slaveholders to the so-called “savages” in Africa, the narrator unsettles the quintessential notion of civility/savagery on which hinged the white colonial identity. Significantly, the recapitulation of Mr. Pike’s sermon is followed by the ex-slave woman’s counter-discourse that indicts Christianity as an

institutional structure hollowed of moral order and reduced to monetary rituals at “the price of blood” (74-75).

This scathing critique typical of the “you would have been so angry” narrative form is, once again, followed by “condensation symbols” to reinforce the “mediatory ground” for recognising consubstantiality. Jacobs constitutes the narrator-reader contractual relation around their social situatedness in drawing on symbols like motherhood, virtue, Christian love, New Year’s eve, “the dream of . . . girlhood,” “woman’s pride,” “a mother’s love,” etc., to facilitate transformative identification (85). Doris Graber defines “a verbal condensation symbol” as “a name, word, phrase, or maxim which stirs vivid impressions involving the listener’s most basic values. The symbol arouses and readies him for mental or physical action.”³⁰⁰ David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley underscore “connectivity” in the rhetorical value of condensation symbols that emerges from “ties to situational and strategic notions.”³⁰¹ Linda’s first direct apostrophic address draws on context-dependent positionalities as a point of departure for “connectivity”: “O, you happy free women, contrast your New Year’s day with that of the poor bond-woman!” (16). Yoking happiness to freedom, the narrator explains the contradictory meanings that Christmas and New Year carry for black and white women on account of these festive occasions’ concurrence with the annual hiring and sale events. One community’s bliss and celebration signify the other’s woe and mourning; one’s festivity comes about at the expense of the heartless breaking of the other’s precarious ties. The addressees’ “pleasant season” is marked by blessings, “[f]riendly wishes,” and “gifts” as their

³⁰⁰ Doris A. Graber, *Verbal Behavior and Politics* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1976) 289.

³⁰¹ David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley, “Condensation Symbols: Their Variety and Rhetorical Function in Political Discourse,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 26.3 (1993): 201-02.

children bring “little offerings” and “raise their rosy lips for a caress”; the same season brings “peculiar sorrows” to a slave mother whose “haggard face” “leads [her] children to the auction-block” in order to “be torn from her.” Whilst “the system . . . has brutalized her,” stripping her subjectivity of the spectrum of human emotion, Jacobs’s representation of an enslaved woman’s experience restores a “mother’s instincts” and “agonies” to her (16). The “perfect picture” of “two beautiful children playing together . . . a fair white child” and “her slave . . . sister”—that juxtaposes one’s “sunny sky” with the other’s “inevitable blight,” one’s “womanhood” and “happy bridal morning” with the other’s “cup of sin, shame, and misery”—is meant to educe maternal sentiments (29). Through contrasting white and black women’s positionalities in the social structure, the narrator implicates the narratee in enslaved women’s excruciating slavery; it is the institutionalised dispossession of black women that enables the bliss of white women. Interposed with condensation symbols, the accusatory addresses reinterpellate the audience through the “you would have been so angry” mode: “Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child . . . heard her heart rending groans . . . seen her bloodshot eyes . . . could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, *Slavery is damnable!*” (23).

Thus, whilst modes of identification, the sentimental novel conventions and the condensation symbols, facilitate a consubstantial relationship between the two groups of women, they also recurrently underscore the underlying difference between them in a way that foregrounds their respective positionalities in the antebellum gendered system. Deploying consubstantiality—identification and commensurability notwithstanding irreducible difference—the text’s constitutive rhetoric brings the narrator-addressee to a “mediatory ground” that allows a reception of the apostrophic

address and the narrator's story in order to effect an identificatory perceptual shift on the part of the reader and to evoke their "raised voice."

3. Navigating Legal Loopholes: "The Trials of Girlhood"

Besides the indictment of the church, Jacobs also dwells on the role of the antebellum legal structures in the perpetuation of slavery. Through the narrativisation of Linda's experience, Jacobs exposes the legal narrative of the "double-character" of black women's subjectivity, whose specious prerogative redoubled her oppression. Thomas Cobb's *Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery* (1858) defined the double-character of a slave as a vantage point against the absolute chattelhood of the Roman slaves; however, as scholars have observed, this "mixed character" was concocted to facilitate exploitation.³⁰² Although the fraction of personhood, implicated in the double character, entitled the slave to the protection of her "existence" without rights, for this existence was accounted as the property of the master, this personhood was recognised only in its capacity as a labourer, a sexual partner, a reproductive agent, and a potential criminal. Besides, this nominal personhood was further commodified and dehumanised by exploiting a slave's (re)productivity beyond human capacity. Within this double character framework, an enslaved woman's rape was not only a legal nonentity in being unimpeachable, it was also an implausibility given the

³⁰² For a legal analysis of *Incidents*, see Christina Accomando, "'The Laws Were Laid Down to Me Anew': Harriet Jacobs and the Reframing of Legal Fictions," *African American Review* 32.2 (1998): 229-45; Lauren Berlant, "'The Queen of America Goes to Washington City': Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, Anita Hill," *American Literature* 65.3 (1993): 549-74; Jeannine DeLombard, "Adding Her Testimony: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* as Testimonial Literature," *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities*, ed. C. James Trotman (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002) 30-48; and Mark M. Rifkin, "'A Home Made Sacred by Protecting Laws': Black Activist Homemaking and Geographies of Citizenship in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18.2 (2007): 72-102. For enslaved women's "double-character" and its legal complications with reference to *Incidents*, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 79-112 and Andrea Stone, "Interracial Sexual Abuse and Legal Subjectivity in Antebellum Law and Literature," *American Literature* 81.1 (2009): 65-92.

proslavery apologists' construction of the "known lasciviousness of the negro."³⁰³

Thus, the law denied enslaved women protection against sexual assault on account of their always-already presumed promiscuity and the inviolability of black bodies.

Locating Linda's "trials" within this legal matrix through sentimental rhetoric, Jacobs undercuts the legitimacy of both constructs. The chapter "The Trials of Girlhood" immediately follows Uncle Benjamin's defiance and flight in "The Slave Who Dared to Feel like a Man" in order to mark a slave woman's distinct experience of slavery. Whilst Uncle Benjamin fled to escape physical abuse, Linda's very youth, virtue, and "pure principles" are imperilled by "a vile monster" who entices her with "unclean images" (27); however, despite her "disgust and hatred," Linda's legal subjectivity, as her master's chattel, voids resistance. In narrating the "trials" of slave "girlhood," the narrator recasts virtue, crime, rape, property, and personhood in order to underline the contingency inherent to the ethics of legality. The narrative mode oscillates between "*my* story as the story of *your* feminism" and "*your* story as the story of *my* feminism" forms as the narrator implicates the addressee in the stakes in consubstantially linking her story to that of white women.

By declaring white women's participation in black women's oppression as well as its consequences for white women, the narrator fleshes out their co-implication in an oppressive system. Jacobs indicts Northerners for their complicity in the perpetuation of slavery on two grounds: their return of the "poor fugitive back into his den" and their "pr[ide] to give their daughters in marriage to slaveholders." The

³⁰³ Thomas Read Rootes Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America: To which Is Prefixed an Historical Sketch of Slavery* (Philadelphia: T. & J. W. Johnson, 1858) 82-100.

slave's den is juxtaposed to Southern homes inhabited by Northern women whose pre-marital "romantic notions of a sunny clime" and "the flowering vines" that shade the "happy home" are soon devastated by their husbands' breach of the "marriage vows." The violation of black women is yoked to the invasion of the Northern women's Southern homes through explicit tropology of rape: "Jealousy and hatred enter the flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness" (36). However, the analogy refrains from reductive correlation by retaining a rift in identification through dwelling on a black woman's peculiar oppression in this structure.

Despite this shared vulnerability, white women participate in black women's exploitation. Because she witnesses "[c]hildren of every shade of complexion" mock her "fair babies" in her own house, the white mistress succumbs to rivalry as opposed to empathy (36). She fails to recognise that as expendable property, the enslaved woman's subjection to her master's "will in all things," including physical and sexual consumption of her body, renders her resistance illegitimate and unproductive. Thus, "[t]he mistress who ought to protect the helpless victim" fails to assume her political locus by locking the enslaved woman into twofold oppression; whereas Dr. Flint wanted to install Linda in his chamber to harass her, Mrs. Flint ensconced her in her compartment to keep a petrifying vigil over her (27). The mistress who "pitied herself as martyr" considered Linda "an object of her jealousy" and "hatred," reflecting her disdain towards the enslaved woman's torment (33). Whereas the mistress fails to read Linda's story as her story, Linda can commiserate with her from her oppressed positionality. This indictment of the white mistress is followed by a return to the audience in the very next sentence: employing accusatory address, the narrator shifts from rhetorical to a personal tone to implicate the addressee and invoke their "raised voice": "Surely, if you credited one half the truths that are told you concerning the

helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke. You surely would refuse to do . . . [what] the lowest class of whites do [sic] for him at the south” (28). The narrator sets forth to forge a political class of conscientious whites, women in particular, assigning them an ethical amenability; in posing a direct question to her audience, the narrator contests literary and social silence regarding legally sanctioned moral infractions: “why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the north? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right?” However, whilst the narrator demands the reader’s voice to supplement her “weak pen,” it is the latter that disrupts the silence by navigating the tabooed arena of enslaved women’s sexual exploitation (29-30).

Although Linda’s resistance is a crime in legal terms, the narrator teases out the relativism of crime and virtue in the antebellum legislative context. Whilst pro-slavery rhetoric incriminated the black woman in her “rape” by propagating accounts of her inherent sensuality and ever-present consent,³⁰⁴ the narrator underlines the racialisation of virtue and criminalisation of ethics for black women: “a slave . . . is not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime in her to wish to be virtuous” (31). The benchmark of definitive rectitude for white women is proscribed as transgression for black women; in instructing Linda to be a “Christian” by joining the church, Dr. Flint also advises her to become his concubine: “You can do what I require; and if you are faithful to me, you will be as virtuous as my wife” (75). In other words, a “virtuous” slave is a legal nonentity as a black woman’s chastity is contingent on her noncompliance with the conventional morality and the transaction of her corporeality, the conduct of which sustains a white woman’s virtue. Within this

³⁰⁴ Cobb 100.

ethical matrix, Linda's desire for conjugality, as opposed to consensual rape, qualifies as transgression; her wish to "be a virtuous woman" by preferring "the honourable addresses of a respectable colored man" to "the base proposals of a white man" is met by "a lesson about marriage and free niggers," "silence," and counsel to "redeem your character" (40). The narrator foregrounds the legal aporia of the classification of a legally sanctioned always-already rapeable body as promiscuous; although the law prohibits an enslaved woman's desire to subscribe to white ideals, the same hegemonic ideals are brought to bear in its adjudication of a black woman as promiscuous. Jacobs reframes Linda's resistance to Dr. Flint's entitlement to the sexual consumption of her body as both a "crime" and a "virtue," unveiling the paradox of antebellum constructions of female subjectivities.

Inserting the chapter "A Lover" between Dr. Flint's persecution and Mr. Sand's seduction, Jacobs shows the impossibility of upholding white notions of "virtue" for a black woman locked in the legal matrix of slavery. "The Lover" becomes a point of departure for Linda as she realises that "the law [gives] no sanction to the marriage of [slaves]," meaning that "the husband of a slave has no power to protect her" (37-38). Although slave households were established as a common practice, they merely served to proliferate the master's capital, for the law also endorsed the disintegration of slave "families," which rendered their conjugation a legal nonentity. For instance, although "a clergyman performed the ceremony" of Linda's aunt's marriage, the union hung in the balance owing to the precarious "consent of her master and mistress" who even mediated their slaves' intimacy (143). Into the bargain, the law sanctioned that "the child shall follow the condition of the *mother*, not of the *father*; thus taking care that licentiousness shall not interfere with avarice" (76). By pointing to the "avarice" and "licentiousness" of the slaveholders,

the narrator unsettles the hierarchies of civilised/savage and virtuous/promiscuous underlying racial and legal rhetoric. Although the fictions of the slave marriage and family employed religious and legal lexicon to underscore the philanthropy of the patriarchal institution, those very discourses were also hailed to sanction the vows' revocation. In her refusal to fall prey to this legal quicksand, Linda displaces "virtue" as the constitutive ideal of a "true" woman with self-reclamation; her subscription to Henry Patrick's motto of "Give me liberty, or give me death" (99) unsettles sentimentalism's virtue-death binary.³⁰⁵ Whilst Linda cannot access white standards of "virtue," she equally rejects the exploitative black construct in her venture to performatively redefine virtue and identity through her "illegitimate" resistance against Dr. Flint's "legitimate" sexual harassment.

Jacobs approaches this most precarious narrative moment, her protagonist's transgression, very cautiously: "A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl's Life" is preceded by two chapters detailing the atrocities of plantation slavery that afford a view into that "cage of obscene birds" that instigated the "perilous passage." This escalation of tension culminates in a direct address to underscore the climactic.

And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. (53)

³⁰⁵ Kimberly Drake makes a similar point regarding the "survival" intent of Jacobs's narrative that "refuses to follow the dictates of those [conventional] codes to their typical extreme, suicide or social disgrace, because her intention in writing a slave narrative is survival." Kimberly Drake, "Rewriting the American Self: Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs," *MELUS* 22.4 (1997): 105.

However, the sentimental rhetoric of this excerpt is soon followed by the narrator's recollection of pragmatic premeditation on her part to transition from an object to a subject position: "My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There is might in each" (85). It is "for the sake of defeating him" and preventing him from "trampling his victim under his feet" that she opts for the redeeming "plunge into the abyss" (53). Given the inevitability of rape, enforced procreation, and mother-child severance, the "prematurely knowing" Linda premeditates a liaison with Mr. Sands with "deliberate calculation," thus overruling the complacent and promiscuous stereotypes of black women's sexuality. This is also reflected in the narrative juxtaposition of Linda's repentance of her conduct on the reader's values with a rationalisation of it via a slave woman's standpoint. The emphasis on a "truthful account," the "cost" of revelation, and a confession of transgression pre-empt the reader's judgment: "I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. . . . I knew what I did and I did it with deliberate calculation" (54). Despite drawing on confessional rhetoric, the narrator's retrospective "sorrow and shame" is undercut by the implied author's rationalisation of the "sins" whose culpability is attributed to the institution of Slavery: "I wanted to keep myself pure . . . but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me" (54). The anthropomorphic rendition of the institution makes it coextensive with its perpetrators as the author underscores the relativism of legal and moral boundaries.

The female enslaved body—a repository of desire, enforced labour, and procreative capital— was a private and commercial asset for the slave master. The enslaved woman's "rape," at once a legal nonentity and a material likelihood, therefore, rendered a slave woman's morality problematic. In proscribing marriage or

resistance, the law made her body a public site of consumption with impunity. Linda, however, reclaims her body and sexuality by manipulating the loopholes in this legal structure: whilst she cannot legally resist Dr. Flint's harassment, she deploys her desire to deter his access to her body. Instead of allowing the commodification of her body by Dr. Flint, Linda deploys it to have a voluntary relationship and children with Mr. Sands, thus turning tools of victimisation—sexuality and progeny—into means of emancipation. Linda purposefully chooses a rival that Dr. Flint cannot persecute personally or legally; Mr. Sands, a white lawyer who later becomes a congressman,³⁰⁶ symbolises both the law and its loopholes that Linda exploits by employing Sands as an apparatus to resist Dr Flint's advances. Prior to the physical "loophole of retreat" in the attic, Linda deploys metaphorical loopholes; the signifying excess of her legal subjectivity allows her the option of liaison with an influential white man who can both stave off her master, an impossible task for a free black lover, and offer prospects of emancipation (55).

Hortense Spillers underscores the genderlessness of the captive slave body by arguing that procreation outside lineality and "parental right" is "the reproduction of the relations of production" and not motherhood.³⁰⁷ Linda's understanding of these relations of production drives her resistance against them; she recognises that the maternal affect without legal sanction is subject to persecution, which is why she opts for a procreative alternative that offers prospects of claiming motherhood by eventually owing her children: "Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well supported; and in this case, I felt confident I should obtain the boon"

³⁰⁶ For Mr. Sands' historical identity and his career as a congressman, see Yellin, *Life* 26.

³⁰⁷ Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 77-79.

(55). Despite its legal non-recognition, she bemoans slavery's "violation" of the sanctity of black sociality and domesticity; the resistance against such violation becomes the impetus to her passage from procreation to motherhood. Scholars have attributed motherhood as a vehicle for Linda's new identity and a catalyst for her desire for emancipation.³⁰⁸ I argue, instead, that the desire to own her body, claim her inevitable future children, and wrest her freedom from Linda's incentives before the onset of motherhood. Her "deliberate calculation" is inclusive of the desire to redefine the inevitable procreation by using it to her advantage; because Dr. Flint "never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife," Linda chooses a potential father able to purchase them for her (55). Hence before the appropriation of a "new tie to life" (58), relationship with a more influential partner promises respectable motherhood through emancipation. However, once a mother, her children's uncertain fate intensifies her subsequent struggle and desire.

Saidiya Hartman argues that the "naiveté of a fifteen-year-old girl and the slave's longing for freedom facilitate Linda's seduction by Sand's eloquent words."³⁰⁹ This assertion, however, undermines Linda's deliberately calculated consensual seduction within the constrictions of her legal positionality. Whilst Linda is portrayed as a young, vulnerable sentimental heroine being lured by two powerful men, this representation is qualified by the retrospective narrator's description of her as a "prematurely knowing," self-possessed young woman. Indeed, as opposed to expressing amorous inclinations towards Mr. Sands, Linda chalks up "[r]evenge,

³⁰⁸ See Braxton 3; Smith, *Self-Discovery* 34; and Gloria T. Randle, "Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Mediating Spaces in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *African American Review* 33.1 (1999): 52.

³⁰⁹ Hartman 106.

calculations of interest added to flattered vanity and sincere gratitude for kindness” as the impetus for her liaison (55). Hovering between Scylla and Charybdis, Linda opts for Mr. Sands because “[i]t seems less degrading to give oneself than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment” (55). The use of the active structure “giving yourself” as opposed to submission emphasises her agency, notwithstanding its constriction. Freedom, for Linda, is resistance to compliance; however, she is scrupulous to add that this relative “freedom” is merely a “less degrading” act as it is still undergirded by a certain “control,” though less abusive than Dr. Flint’s power dynamics: “With all these thoughts revolving in my mind, and seeing no other way of escaping the doom I so much dreaded, I made a headlong plunge” (55). The oxymoronic juxtaposition of “deliberate calculation” and a “headlong plunge” signify the textual ambivalence regarding Linda’s actions and the implied author’s retrospective narration. The “shame” and “remorse” at the reminiscence of the relationship seem to emanate more from a sense of self-deprecation in her inability to fully escape the structural exploitation as opposed to her incapacity to preserve hegemonic standards of virtue or ethicality. The “doom [she] so much dreaded” and actively averted by the “headlong plunge” is not the loss of “virtue” as that applies to the relationship with Mr. Sands as well: it is the self-esteem and integrity that Linda would have lost in her forfeiture to Dr. Flint and that she partly preserves by “defeating” him (55).

In order to vindicate her transgression, the narrator revisits the convergence of the narrator-narratee stories via an ethics of affinity by declaring that “the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy” (55). This refrain from complicity in the desecration of white homes both

calls for a reciprocal response and disrupts the myth of black promiscuity as a threat to white chastity. Indeed, by providing testimony of her seduction by Dr. Flint as well as Mr. Sands and by quoting instances of the interracial sexual relations between white women and enslaved men, the narrator teases out the rhetoric of black licentiousness by exposing the black body as an unacknowledged object of desire as opposed to a symbolic threat to white chastity.

In further narrating “incidents” that entail potential judgement, the earnestness of the narrator’s apostrophic address intensifies the urgency to recognise consubstantiality; however, these recapitulations also repeatedly employ rhetoric of contrast to accentuate the difference that underlies the identification. When the narrator broaches the rationalisation of her liaison with Mr. Sands, she vindicates herself by signalling the contingency of moral and legal configurations. Her apostrophic address thus works to re-interpellate her audience:

O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood. . . . O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. (54)

This apostrophic supplication contrasts black and white women’s distinct subjectivities—the former’s absolute subjection and the latter’s relatively privileged social position, particularly in the legal provisions of “home” and “shelter.” Because the “virtuous reader” cannot apprehend what “it is to be a slave,” the narrator exhorts revised “standards” of “virtue” and “womanhood” for those not “shielded by the law” (54).

In a letter to Amy Post regarding her manuscript, Jacobs proposed to render both her person and text open to the judgement of Northern white women: “I ask nothing – I have placed myself before you to be judged as a woman whether I deserve your pity or contempt.”³¹⁰ This rhetorical framework is reproduced in the narrative construction of her audience as judge: “O, ye happy women. . . . Do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely!” (55). However, through the course of the narrative, her constitutive rhetoric problematises any potential judgement on part of the implied reader by underlining their restrictive vision that the narrative seeks to supplement. It is the narrator’s alternative ethics that re-adjudicate the social imaginary and shape a “raised voice” that the readership is urged to share: “The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others” (55). The antithetical shift from the “painful and humiliating memory” to a revision of “standards” reflects the ambivalence of the narrative voice; the likelihood of the haunting memory, expressed in the auxiliary “will,” is qualified by the bid for a revised moral code, and the “calm” re-evaluation in hindsight cautions the reader to hold off the sentimental, revulsive response. The implied author’s assertive voice, once again, overrides the narrator’s sentimental tone in rendering morality a matter of power sanctioned by social and legal structures.

Indeed, the narrative’s alternative ethical paradigm, alert to black women’s positionality and experience, is reflected in the implied author’s satirical intimations that punctuate the otherwise stylised sentimental rhetoric: whereas the sentimental

³¹⁰ Yellin, *Papers*, vol. 1, 236-7.

heroine acts out of instincts,³¹¹ Linda's actions are "calculated"; the emotionally charged "conversion moment" of sentimental novels³¹² is inverted by *Incidents*'s climax that divests the protagonist of "virtue" and jolts her audience out of their complacency; as opposed to domestic fiction's conformation to conventional morality, the narrator deconstructs ideological tenets; whilst the sentimental novel didactically instils rectitude, *Incidents*'s rhetoric complicates ethicality vis-à-vis iniquitous laws; and, finally, as opposed to the virtue-death idealism of the plenary ethics of sentimental Uncle Toms, the narrator foregrounds politics of resistance and agency.

Indeed, the narrator steers the readers against a sentimental or voyeuristic reading of her "story." Describing her aunt's funeral arranged by Uncle Phillip, Linda mocks the credulity of the Northerners in reading the scene as a positive, sentimental reflection of the paternalistic institution: "Northern travellers . . . might have described this tribute of respect to the humble dead as a beautiful feature in the 'patriarchal institution' . . . and tenderhearted Mrs. Flint would have confirmed this impression, with handkerchief at her eyes. We could have told them a different story" (146-47). This "different story," in a white "but not quite" medium, requires an alternative reading strategy as well; unlike "the mistress [who] dropped a tear, and returned to her carriage, probably thinking she had performed her duty nobly" (146), the readers must deflect melodrama or voyeurism in order to "read *her* story as the story of *their* feminism." Likewise, the narrator quotes her mistress's attitude towards her slaves in order to caution the reader against such a response to Linda's narrative.

³¹¹ Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1987) 16-19.

³¹² Gregg D. Crane, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 104.

Jacobs begins by satirising Mrs. Flint's professed debilitating femininity: "like many southern women [she] was totally deficient in energy. She had not strength to superintend her household affairs." However, she undercuts this qualification by mocking her strong stomach: yet, "her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash" (12). Hence, her caveat to the reader: Linda's story is to constitute feminist political subjects as opposed to sentimental or dispassionate voyeurs.

This (mis)reading is alluded to again in both her grandmother and her mistress's denunciation of Linda at the disclosure of her relationship and pregnancy. By making her confession to the reader first, the narrator allows the narratee to share her "feeling of satisfaction and triumph" in her revelation to Dr. Flint as well as to relate to her anguish in her exposé to her grandmother (56). The narrator emphasises that both the grandmother and the mistress judge Linda by false benchmarks; whereas the mistress locates Linda's transgression outside the oppressive politics of bondage, the grandmother weighs up her conduct against the paradoxical "true principles," signified in her confiscation of Linda's "mother's wedding ring and her silver thimble." Both these judgements have already been problematised by the narrator in her rhetorical supplications to the reader who is now expected to be privy to the narrator's view: "if she could know the real state of the case," as the reader now does, "and all I had been bearing for years, she would perhaps judge me less harshly" (56-57). Thus, the narrator foregrounds the uninformed and unwarranted judgements of the grandmother and the mistress in order to urge her readers to complete an informed reading of her "story."

In analysing the subject-object liminality in feminist address, Rooney quotes Barbara Johnson's analysis of apostrophe as "a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life and human form into the addressee, turning silence into mute responsiveness."³¹³ However, when the desire is for a "raised voice" that obscures the subject-object divide, ventriloquism becomes an "inadequate term" in being "unable to capture the 'uncertainty' of this appropriation."³¹⁴ In the case of *Incidents*, ventriloquism becomes further complicated since the narrator's demand for a "raised voice" is refracted through both the narrator and the addressee's "voices"—a two-way interaction. Linda's apostrophes ensue from an appropriation of the narratee's voice (sentimental genre and rhetoric) as well as its rearticulation (mimicry and signifyin(g)), thus effecting transformative identification with that voice whilst revising it. The reader is then urged to reciprocate this address through a similar transformative identificatory relation with black women's voice in order to elicit various "raised voices" that are coterminous on a relational plane despite ensuing from distinct positionalities.

Thus, the narrator's appraisal of black and white women's consubstantiality in the antebellum racialised and gendered legal structures creates a space for recognising their mutual vulnerability and interdependence. Both white and black women are entangled in a network of institutional relations that privilege patriarchy; the former serve to conserve patrilineality by producing children whilst the latter provide the financial means to sustain the structure itself. As Spillers observes, "African-American women's community and Anglo-American women's community, under

³¹³ Johnson quoted in Rooney, "Story" 5.

³¹⁴ Rooney, "Story" 7.

certain shared cultural conditions, were the twin actants on a common psychic landscape . . . subject to the same fabric of dread and humiliation. Neither could claim her body and its various productions . . . as her own.”³¹⁵ Yellin also attributes the notion of “the slavery of woman,” rampant in the writings of contemporary women activists including Child, to the possibility of an identificatory relation between “freeborn white feminists” and “a black fugitive slave woman like Jacobs.”³¹⁶ White women’s post-marital civil death—their legal disentanglement to property, children, and civil liberties—was likened to the slaves’ social death, a parallel that was likely to have resonated with *Incidents*’s audience. However, in underscoring connectivity across discrete subjectivities through dwelling on black women’s peculiar position in the antebellum social structure, *Incidents* refrains from collapsing the two modalities. The text demarcates “appropriative” from “transformative” identifications in demanding that Jacobs’s readers “risk the difficult work of connection through conflict,” “openness to the other, and self-change.”³¹⁷ This requires a repositioning of their “selves” vis-à-vis black women by viewing their respective stories through a relational lens that foregrounds collective responsibility.

4. “Home” and the Politics of Relationality

Incidents’s constitutive rhetoric revises the antebellum social, ethical, legal, and religious structures by fleshing out their contextual relativism within the

³¹⁵ Spillers 15.

³¹⁶ Yellin explains this in the writings of Child, the work of Angelina and Sarah Grimké, and in the statements of Conventions of American Women against Slavery and Female Anti-Slavery Societies. Yellin, introduction xxxii, 258-59. This analogy had also appeared in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft.

³¹⁷ Weir, *Identities* 3.

framework of domestic fiction. In this context, the text's treatment of the metaphor of home, thematic linchpin of domestic fiction, is significant. The text juxtaposes the violation of both black and white homes by the patriarchal institution with the relational ties of the community that subversively deploys these very homes as supportive mechanisms. In view of the structural denial of homes to black women and the domestic restriction of white women, the text provides a subversive model of homes as private spaces that can be deployed for political resistance through an interracial relational coalition. This literal use of the domestic space for political resistance coincides with the narrator's contestation of white women's metaphorical "homes," their complacent identities, that must be disrupted and rearranged vis-à-vis black women's positionality.

Whereas "home" connotes comfort, safety, and belonging, the narrator brings a slave's experience to bear upon this metaphor of domestic space to explicate its signifying excess. By evoking several homes—slaveholders' homes, slave households, Northern homes, and English underclass homes—the narrator dwells on the institutionalisation of homes and its repercussions for slaves. As opposed to legally sanctioned homes, the subsistence of her parents' "comfortable home" is imperilled by their children's uncertain future in being "liable to be demanded" ultimately. Likewise, despite its "charms," Linda's grandmother's "snug little home" is divested of her progeny in being situated within the Southern slavocracy. Notwithstanding the grandmother's free black status, her domestic harmony is relentlessly violated by the trespasses and invasions of Dr. Flint and the white functionaries. For instance, in the post-Nat Turner insurrection muster, the white marauders' inspection of grandmother's home is narrated through explicit sexual metaphors to underscore the vulnerability of black homes: "we heard the tramp of feet

and the sound of voices. The door was rudely pushed open; and in they tumbled, like a pack of hungry wolves. They snatched at everything. . . . Every box, trunk, closet . . . [was] invaded, and the contents tasted” (64-66). Linda admits that “even the charms” of that “snug little home, surrounded with the necessities of life . . . failed to reconcile” her and her brother to their “hard lot” (17).

Whilst most critics regard her grandmother as an emblem of the true womanhood and domesticity that Linda desires but fails to measure up to,³¹⁸ I argue, instead, that the figure affords a foil to Linda who mocks her “beautiful faith coming from a mother who could not call her children her own” (17). Through Linda’s distance from her grandmother’s conceptual ethics, the implied author critiques some slave narratives’ confessional and conversional rhetoric which undermined, in Smith’s words, “the value of independence of mind and will” and explicated a “view of human existence as a drama of suffering that earns one a heavenly reward.”³¹⁹ Aunt Martha is represented as an advocate of the divine mechanism intrinsic to US slavery in that she enjoins her children from escape in attempting to establish black domesticity within Southern slavocracy. A pious, virtuous, and devoted maternal figure, Linda’s grandmother devotes her life to establishing “a home” and actualising a family; however, her effort to forge domestic bliss is intermittently disrupted by the persecution of her children and her incapacity to salvage them. Finally, she is forsaken, pictured in charge of a house that yearns kindred. Through the miscarriage

³¹⁸ See, among others, Jean Fagan Yellin, “Through Her Brother’s Eyes: *Incidents* and ‘A True Tale,’” *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, eds. Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996) 49 and Carby 57.

³¹⁹ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 13.

of this domestic enterprise, the narrator lays bare the dilemma of applying nineteenth-century white middle-class values to black women.

This consciousness enables Linda to spurn Dr. Flint's proposals of "a home of [her] own, and to make a lady of [her]" as "a living death," in opting for a homeless relation with Mr. Sands followed by the liberating seven-year confinement to a crawl-space attic as a detour to an impregnable prospective home (53). Flint's "home" implies corporal and psychic incarceration, whilst the attic's somatic internment offers a free space to plot emancipatory prospects, besides symbolising a triumph over Dr. Flint and the apparatuses he signifies. The physical discomfort of various hideouts—the store room in Betty's mistress's house, the retreat under the planks, and the attic in her grandmother's house—exceed the mobility of the "homes" offered to Linda. Despite their compression, the hideaways afford homeliness and agency. For instance, the "dismal hole" of the attic, that "was to be [her] home for a long, long time," turns into "a little den" that becomes "less dreary" as she makes an aperture to see and hear "the merry laugh of . . . two little faces . . . looking up" (116). Indeed, this "dreary" hole is enlightened with the knowledge that accords Linda power over Dr. Flint; whilst remaining unobserved, she can survey his activities through her relative freedom in her confinement. The hole of "retreat" becomes a "peeping-hole" through which she gazes into the future. The (dis)comfort of the attic also allows a view of Dr. Flint's struggle and frustration as a "comedy" (130); Linda relishes the "Competition in Cunning" with the master in which she persistently confounds him through counterfactual intelligence and misleading letters addressed to him from various Northern cities.

Whilst slavery denies the sanctity and privacy of black domestic spaces, they are nevertheless employed subversively by Linda as spaces of resistance and means to emancipation as her journey to freedom traverses both black and white homes. Indeed, her toil through her seven-year confinement and eventual escape are a far cry from the male slave's self-determined individualistic odyssey. William L. Andrews argues that "*Incidents* unveils for us not just a private but a clandestine set of women's support networks, often interracial in their composition, which presided over perilous black female rites of passage in which the stakes were, quite literally, life and death."³²⁰ Linda's narrative is permeated with tributes to both black and white "friends" and the consociation of "the better class of the community" that extended support through her flight. As opposed to accounts of male slaves' individualistic trajectories of escape, Linda charts the assistance of all her associates from her retreat to emancipation. Weinstein argues that a major distinction between the sentimental and slave protagonists is the rescue-escape model: "[t]he former are rescued, the latter must escape."³²¹ However, *Incidents* mediates between the two modalities as the narrative expressly depicts a combination of escape and rescue strategies, corresponding to Linda's "determined will" and the community's consociation. When forsaken by the Flints, Linda finds refuge in her mother's friend's home before reconciliation with her grandmother. During her flight, she experiences her first ambush in Betty's mistress's house, a white woman who defies both the Southern law and her patriarchal husband in harbouring a fugitive. A seven-year refuge with her grandmother is followed by her flight to the North, which is arranged by a family

³²⁰ William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988) 254.

³²¹ Weinstein 119.

friend, Peter. In the North, both the Mrs. Bruces assist Linda in her struggle to claim herself and her children. Linda's acknowledgement of the assistance of both black and white associates foregrounds the possibility of creating a mediatory space for the transformative convergence of self and other that the reader is also urged to occupy.

Yellin observes that a "central pattern in *Incidents* shows white women betraying allegiances of race and class to assert their stronger allegiance to the sisterhood of all women."³²² However, Hazel Carby impugns Yellin's suggestion of an "American sisterhood" in *Incidents* by arguing that "'Sisterhood' between white and black women was realized rarely in the text of *Incidents*. Jacobs' appeal was to a potential rather than an actual bonding between white and black women." Carby argues instead that the narrative "place[s] white female readers in the position of having to realize their implication in the oppression of black women, prior to any actual realization of the bonds of "sisterhood." ³²³ However, Jacobs's characterisation is a bit more complex; through creating a rift within the community between "good" and "bad" nonracialised modes of action, Jacobs represents potential models for her audience. By presenting black fugitive hunters and spies (the unnamed "free colored" man and the slave named Jenny) as well as white friends and associates (Betty's mistress and the two Mrs. Bruces) Jacobs displaces racial models with relational ones.

Finally, it is significant that whilst Linda's physical escape traverses Southern slaveholders' domestic spaces through the network of friends, her metaphorical triumph over antebellum institutions via the composition of her counter-narrative takes place within a Northern anti-fugitive, slavery apologist's home where Jacobs'

³²² Yellin, introduction xxxiii.

³²³ Carby 51.

furtive nocturnal composition of her narrative avoids the notice of Mr. Bruce.³²⁴ This symbolises the text's assignment of political import to domestic spaces by envisioning the commencement of political subversion at home; however, it does not culminate there as the ending interrogates the domestic constriction of women's agency.

The final reminiscence concerning the difference of "my story" from "your story" occurs in the last apostrophic address: "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. . . . I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however, humble" (201). The narrator's allusion to the omission of the domestic genre's convention of a conclusive marriage is an active reminder of the narrative's political upshot, besides reflecting the constriction of black women's social prospects. Instead of a sublime conjugality of the protagonists, the culmination of *Incidents* brings tidings of Dr. Flint's death and the emancipation of the vitiated heroine who preferred liberty to either virtue or death. However, although "free from the power of slaveholders," this freedom is merely "an improvement in [her] condition" as structural discrimination yet curbs further self-realisation (201). Whereas *Incidents* foregrounds the provision of juridically sanctioned homes as a springboard to African-Americans' social integration, the concluding absence of consanguinity and homelessness also signifies a relentless, pervasive struggle, which diverges from grandmother's domesticity that simulated white paradigms. The indeterminacy of the dénouement signifies perpetual resistance and political activism to rerender the social system.

³²⁴ Jacobs composed the narrative "secretly and at night" "while living under Willis's [Mr. Bruce's] roof." Yellin, introduction xviii.

This reading is further reinforced by the fact that Child revised Jacobs's original ending which included the John Brown episode—a conclusion that would have resonated with the rhetorical spirit of the narrative in its displacement of melodrama with revolutionary politics.³²⁵ Child wrote to Jacobs in a letter dated 13 August 1860: "I think the last Chapter, about John Brown, had better be omitted. It does not naturally come into your story, and the M. S. is already too long. Nothing can be so appropriate to end with, as the death of your grand mother" (sic).³²⁶ Whereas some critics have addressed this omission in terms of Child's design to align the narrative to a nonviolent politics of reformation,³²⁷ I want to shift focus to the narrative's subversion of the sentimental genre; in this context, Jacobs's choice of a revolutionary concluding metaphor follows naturally from the text's "double articulation" that continually disrupted sentimental conventions. As opposed to using the "domestic" figure of grandmother as an ideal to conclude the narrative with, Jacobs opted for John Brown as a symbol of resistance. This politicised identification on which she originally ended her narrative also coincides with Jacobs's activist philanthropy, outside the domestic space, during the Civil War.³²⁸ However, in either

³²⁵ As opposed to nonviolent anti-slavery campaigns represented in Frederick Douglass's activism among others, John Brown advocated armed insurrection to abolish slavery. In response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, John Brown established a militant group, The League of Gileadites, to prevent fugitives' return to the South. In 1859, Brown along with his supporters attempted a raid on Harpers Ferry to initiate slave insurrection; however, it proved unsuccessful. John Brown was eventually sentenced to death in the same year. Historians have argued that Brown's activist campaign and the Harpers Ferry raid helped precipitate the Civil War. For an overview, see David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Vintage, 2006).

³²⁶ Yellin, *Papers*, vol. 1, 279. Also see Yellin, *Life* 141.

³²⁷ Bruce Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Ending to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *American Literature* 64.2 (1992): 256; Albert H. Tricomi, "Harriet Jacobs's Autobiography and the Voice of Lydia Maria Child," *ESQ* 53.3 (2007): 238; and Caleb Smith, "Harriet Jacobs among the Militants: Transformations in Abolition's Public Sphere, 1859–61," *American Literature* 84.4 (2012): 743.

³²⁸ See Yellin, *Life* 182 and Yellin, introduction xx.

case, the ending of the narrative is ambivalent in its lack of closure, fixity, or completeness, something that signifies the protracted struggle for emancipation, reformation, and self-reclamation—an endlessly deferred “home” for black women.

Charland argues that “while classical narratives have an ending, constitutive rhetoric leaves the task of narrative closure to its constituted subjects.”³²⁹ *Incidents*’s lack of definite closure thus calls for the reciprocal “raised voice” of the addressee to extend its political project. The narrator’s life, person, and text represent a radical voice that responds to hegemonic “hailing” via disidentification, resistance, and counter-discourse. However, this alternative narrative exceeds the “binary model of the law and its self-subversion”³³⁰ by re-articulating interpellation as a relational practice of consolidating connections across divisive boundaries. In “preserving” her “story” through its “reinterpretation,” the narrator co-implicates the narrator and the narratee in each other’s stories; through the juxtaposition of their respective subjectivities within the institutionalised patriarchy, the narrator creates a mediatory space for effecting transformative identification across differences. The text’s re-interpellating constitutive rhetoric employs apostrophic mode in seeking to morph her audience into feminist political subjects in a relational conception of politics; however, this revised notion of collective politics does not presuppose “a totalizing identity”: rather, it signifies fluidity of “‘we’ -relations, struggles and solidarities.”³³¹ The narrator’s standpoint departs from Althusserian policing in hailing potential carers, allies, and empathisers who are prevailed on to partake in the narrator’s

³²⁹ Charland, “Case” 143.

³³⁰ Weir, *Identities* 7.

³³¹ Weir, *Identities* 9.

resistance against structural and institutional oppression. Thus, instead of locating her freedom merely in “escape” or “subversion,” the narrator also seeks agency “in the ties that bind us and hold us together.”³³²

³³² Weir, *Identities* 9-10.

Chapter 2 Writing the Past, Righting the Present: Intertextuality and Performativity in Toni Morrison's

Beloved

There is no greater agony than bearing
an untold story inside you.

(Maya Angelou)

In her speech to the Ninth Army's Colored Division in 1864, Jacobs urged the soldiers to "take the dear old flag and resolve that it shall be the beacon of liberty for the oppressed of all lands, and of every [one] on American Soil."³³³ It is the relentless urgency of that unrealised vision over a hundred years later that partly explains the rise of the genre of the neo-slave narrative. In explaining "the social logic of the literary form," Ashraf A. Rushdy situates the emergence of the neo-slave narrative in the literary, social, and historical context of the 1960s and 1980s that necessitated a return to the antebellum slave narratives and earlier black heritage in order to address contemporary issues arising from the Black Power, Civil Rights, and Black Arts movements.³³⁴ Reading *Beloved* alongside *Incidents* thus not only contests the linearity of the colonial narrative, it also reinstates a critical past elided in the national consciousness. This chapter then engages in a "postcolonial" reading of *Beloved* via Kristevan intertextuality and Bhabha's pedagogical-performative paradigm.

Analysing *Beloved*'s intertextuality with anterior literary and historiographical texts,

³³³ The address appeared in the 20 August 1864 issue of the newspaper, *The Anglo-African*. See Yellin, *Life* 182.

³³⁴ Ashraf A. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 13, 228.

particularly *Incidents*, the chapter reads the novel as a performative intervention into the pedagogical U.S. national and historical consciousness that seeks to re-address the history of slavery and re-render African-American identities. *Beloved*'s dynamic engagement with both slave narratives and historical texts at once transcends the colonisers' history and resuscitates African-American tradition. Through resummoning the ancestor's voice, the text's revisionist discourse foregrounds the regenerative potential of a repressed past for performing alternative individual and collective identities.

Although the concept of intertextuality pre-exists its twentieth-century versions,³³⁵ the critical term "intertextuality" itself is attributed to Kristeva's transformative integration of insights from Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics and Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of language in her seminal work of the 1960s. As opposed to the Russian Formalist and New Critical emphases on the text as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object, Kristeva's poststructuralist stance mapped psychoanalytic insights and Bakhtinian dialogism onto the structuralist notion of relationality to theorise textual productivity. Intertextuality figures every text as a palimpsest imbricated with traces of prior literary, artistic, social, cultural, political, and historical texts whilst being receptive to further re-textualisation and re-contextualisation. Reading a text thus becomes a perpetual movement between and beyond texts, and "the text [itself] becomes the intertext."³³⁶ Intertextuality has

³³⁵ For an overview, see María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept," *Atlantis* 18.1-2 (1996): 269.

³³⁶ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2011) 1.

undergone a wide range of theoretical renditions since Kristeva's initial coinage;³³⁷ however, there are at least two distinctive aspects of Kristeva's theory: first, its view of the text "as a system (or an infinity)" of several other textual structures that converge "with history and reality . . . in textualized form"; second, its view of the subject "as composed of discourses," "a signifying system," and a text "in a dynamic process."³³⁸ Both these aspects are particularly useful for a postcolonial intertextual analysis; indeed, the notions of textual infinity and the dynamic subject-in-process lend themselves to Bhabha's conception of the performativity of national identities that enables subversive discourses and practices.

The "relationality" of intertextuality, as figured in connections between several textual fields, provides a useful framework for counter-discursive postcolonial literature whose interpretive enterprise cuts across social, cultural, and historical terrains. As "accounts of intertextuality reflect visions of society and human relations" across "section[s] of society" and "period[s] of history,"³³⁹ the concept serves as a

³³⁷ For instance, Roland Barthes' theory of intertextuality shares its poststructuralist underpinnings with Kristeva's; however, unlike Barthes, Kristeva does not announce the wholesale demise of the author. Later theories of intertextuality by the French critics Gerard Genette and Michael Riffaterre depart from Kristeva's and Barthes's in their structuralist basis. Other developments include Harold Bloom's theory of the Anxiety of Influence and the feminist responses to his male-oriented project, Gates's theory of Signifyin(g), postcolonial versions of intertextuality, and postmodern historiographic metafiction. See Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977); Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992); *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997); *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); Michael Riffaterre, 'The Self-Sufficient Text,' *Diacritics* 3.3 (1973): 39-45; "Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse," *Critical Inquiry* 11.1 (1984): 141-162; "Compulsory Reader Response: The Intertextual Drive," *Intertextuality: Theories and Practice*, eds. Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990) 56-78; Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1997); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000); Gates, *Signifying*; and Linda Hutcheon, "Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism," *Textual Practice* 1.1 (1987): 10-31 and *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

³³⁸ Alfaro 271.

³³⁹ G. Allen 5.

useful tool for revisiting the constitution of postcolonial identities within multi-layered power structures and restrictive historical legacies. Intertextuality's endorsement of "a new vision of meaning . . . resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy"³⁴⁰ divulges discursive fissures that provide occasions for performing alternative worldviews. Morrison's oeuvre and *Beloved*, in particular, share in this decolonisation struggle concerning postcolonial aesthetics, the revisionist import of postcolonial texts, the hybridity and ambivalence of postcolonial identities, and the cultural liminality of postcolonial experience. Taken together, these aspects call for the dynamic interpretive framework of intertextuality to situate the text in a complex grid of intersecting relations between textual, authorial, and readerly discursive fields so as to challenge the dominant linear historical narrative.

1. Intertextuality and Performativity: The Postcolonial Subject-in-Process

Kristeva's introduction of Bakhtin's oeuvre to Western academia in the 1960s led to the first articulation of intertextuality in her essays, "The Bounded Text" and "Word, Dialogue, and Novel."³⁴¹ As opposed to the systematicity of structural linguistics that involves a separation of the individual and the social, Bakhtin's work accentuates the "intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word" in social contexts, so that "language for the individual consciousness . . . lies

³⁴⁰ G. Allen 6.

³⁴¹ The two essays were initially published in *Semeiotikè* (1969) and later translated into English in Kristeva, *Desire*.

on the borderline between oneself and the other.”³⁴² Saussure’s abstract system of language is inherently dialogic and political for Bakhtin, for “[n]ot only the meaning of the utterance but also the very fact of its performance is of historical and social significance”³⁴³ in iteratively contesting meaning and reality. Because language embodies a response to prior utterances, signifying practices, and valuation schemas, and seeks out supplementary models and responses, no individual word or text can be neutral, univocal, or monologic. Kristeva’s enterprise of “opening linguistics to society”³⁴⁴ thus produced a “cultural form of Sausserian linguistics”³⁴⁵ via intertextuality.

In explicating intertextuality, Kristeva defines the text as “a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language” in its connections with “different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances.” The text is “a productivity” which means:

first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive) . . . and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.³⁴⁶

³⁴² M. Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 293-4.

³⁴³ Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Pavel N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985) 120.

³⁴⁴ Alfaro 275.

³⁴⁵ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity P, 2003) 15.

³⁴⁶ Kristeva, *Desire* 36.

A labyrinthine network, the text figures a contentious site of multifaceted social, cultural, and historical interfaces that are both formative of the text and representative of its socio-historical proliferation. Kristeva accentuates the significance of “the general text (culture)” for semiotics by introducing the concept of the “ideologeme,” which “is the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices).” The internal meaning of each text engages in a tense interaction with its external meanings, so that the ideologeme does not signify a hermeneutic shift from “linguistic” to “ideological,” but it determines the semiotic process itself by an intertextual reading of the text as part of the social and historical texts. Signified in utterances, the ideologeme is the textual articulation of social conflicts that obviates univocity. In postcolonial texts, the ideologeme may figure as utterances of race, class, gender, identity, colonialism, imperialism, etc., that forestall textual monologism by spelling contentious social and historical issues.

Further explicating intertextuality in “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” Kristeva introduces the concept of “poetic language” informed by Bakhtin’s notion of “the ‘literary word’ as an *intersection of textual surfaces*.” Poetic language operates via three dimensions of the literary word in textual space: the writing subject, the addressee, and external texts: “The word’s status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus).” The “*status of the word* as a minimal structural unit” contextualises the text within social and historical texts that are formative of the author and constitutive of her text

in the same way as the reader functions as a discourse in her engagement with the text's discursive field.³⁴⁷ This creates a synchronic textual space that transcends the abstractions of univocal discourse or "linear history." As opposed to a self-contained signifying unit of monologic authorial discourse, poetic discourse forms an interwoven fabric of past, present, and future textual relations in a horizontal-vertical matrix, opening up the text to infinite ideological, social, cultural, and historical interconnections.

Kristeva's notion of poetic language stems from her semiotic-symbolic model of "the poetic subject-in-process"; as opposed to the Cartesian "unitary or static" subject, Richard Kearney explains, "the speaking/writing subject" is "split between heterogeneous levels of language—unconscious and conscious, structural and phenomenological, physiological and social."³⁴⁸ Thus, as subjects of desire driven by drives, both the writer and the reader are implicated in *transposition*—a third process that Kristeva adds to the psychoanalytic model of the unconscious processes of condensation and displacement signified by metaphor and metonymy. As opposed to the "source-study" models of intertextuality,³⁴⁹ transposition characterises the cathartic struggle for a transmutable appropriation of anterior signifying practices, representing "the passage from one sign system to another" that results in "new thetic positions," for texts do not simply draw on prior "textual units" but perform a transformative function on and through them. Transposition is a particularly crucial phenomenon for postcolonial and feminist politics as it embodies the performative

³⁴⁷ Kristeva, *Desire* 65-6.

³⁴⁸ Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy: Phenomenology, Critical Theory, Structuralism*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 335.

³⁴⁹ G. Allen 52.

potential for contesting static identities and monologic power structures. Indeed, Bhabha's performative-pedagogic paradigm of national identity is situated within the Kristevan conception of the thetic, poetic, split subject-in-process.

Bhabha defines "the nation" or "the people" in terms of a "double narrative movement" characterised by pedagogy and performance. Whilst pedagogical is a linear, univocal, and plenary nationalist narrative originated in the past that defines "the people," performative is the fluid, supplementary, and temporal narrative manifested in national subjects' continual "cultural identifications" in the present. As opposed to the narration of nation "as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity" in a horizontal space, Bhabha emphasises its operation in "double-time"; the narrative construction of the nation is marked by "a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative." Thus, the pedagogical constitution of an *a priori* body politic is exceeded by the infinite performativity of national life in the present; whereas pedagogy posits a solid national identity, performativity exceeds that fixity by endlessly re-narrating and re-defining the nation. National subjects thus embody an epistemic problematic as they mark neither the origin nor the destiny of the national narrative; instead, they signify "the cutting edge" between the "homogeneous" community and its "contentious" forces and identities.³⁵⁰ This ambivalence in the narrative strategy of the nation is crucial for postcolonial negotiation of identities as it "produces a continual slippage of categories, like

³⁵⁰ Bhabha, *Location* 209.

sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or ‘cultural difference’” that become the context for “cultural identifications” and resistance.³⁵¹

Indeed, Bhabha’s notion of the split between the national subject and the national discourse, in the former’s slide “from one enunciatory position to another,”³⁵² follows Kristeva’s transposition model of the destruction and reconstruction of “thetic position[s]” of a subject-in-process³⁵³ that entails a transgressive potential for individual and collective identities. For Bhabha, this “liminal signifying place is internally marked by the discourse of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.” Because the “disjunctive temporality of the nation” facilitates the emergence of “meanings and practices . . . locate[d] in the margins of the contemporary experience of society,” Bhabha locates here the potential agency of the “the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent,” whose “counter-narratives of the nation” can “continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries.”³⁵⁴ He compares this pedagogic-performative model to Kristeva’s “woman’s time” in explicating its potential “redefinition of the nation as a space for the emergence of feminist political and psychic identifications.”³⁵⁵ For both Kristeva and Bhabha, the interstices of nation-space reflect “a double temporality,” mediating between the historically fixed nationalist narrative and its continual rupture through cultural heterogeneity; from this “liminal movement” emerge postcolonial, (anti)neocolonial,

³⁵¹ Bhabha, *Location* 201.

³⁵² Bhabha, *Location* 208-11.

³⁵³ Kristeva, *Revolution* 59-60.

³⁵⁴ Bhabha, *Location* 212-14.

³⁵⁵ Bhabha, *Location* 219.

racial, gender, and ethnic minority discourses. *Beloved*, like *Incidents*, is a crucial site of this discursive subversion and performative disruption reflective of transposition; whilst *Incidents*'s alternative discourse presents a fissure in the antebellum institutional structures that erased black women's voices and subjectivities, *Beloved*'s transformative re-reading of colonial discourses challenges the erasure of that very history in the nationalist narrative.

The intertextual nexus, characterised by non-linear temporality, occupies centre stage in *Beloved*. The text's "double referentiality"—both to social reality and pre-texts³⁵⁶—marks the richness of its multi-layered structural and thematic fabric, densely interwoven in a range of intertextual relations. As a neo-slave narrative, *Beloved* is a transformative extension of the politics of the slave narrative genre; as an alternative discourse on the history of U.S. slavery, it affords a revisionist historiographic lens; as, in Bhabha's and Kristevan terms, a performative poetic discourse, it reimagines American national consciousness through the prism of African-American heritage; and as a postcolonial text, it opens up space for transgeographical, transnational, and transhistorical politics. I will explore this multidimensionality of the text in three sections that correspond to Morrison's conception of the retrieval of black history as a twofold task. Morrison asserts:

The reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can't really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. . . . You have to stake out and

³⁵⁶ I borrow the phrase from Douwe Fokkema, "The Rise of Cross-Cultural Intertextuality," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 31.1 (2004): 7.

identify those who have preceded you - resummoning them, acknowledging them is just one step in that process of reclamation.³⁵⁷

My analysis traces this double-edged mode of reclamation: the first part explores the text's "resummoning" of the ancestor's voice through an intertextual reading of the gendered experience of slavery as found in *Incidents* and *Beloved* vis-à-vis the classic and the neo-slave narrative forms;³⁵⁸ the second part reads *Beloved*'s revisionist discourse as a paradigmatic performative eruption in the linear pedagogy of U.S. national and historical consciousness, foregrounding the regenerative potential of a repressed past in order to rerender African-American identities in the present.³⁵⁹ The concluding section re-contextualises this performative reimagination in a transnational context to explore its scope for feminist political identifications in view of the convergence of the legacies of slavery and colonialism in the contemporary neocolonial world order. I conclude that it is the intertextual network of relationality and interconnectedness that offers the possibility of forming transnational alliances to

³⁵⁷ Christina Davis, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994) 224-5.

³⁵⁸ For other intertextual readings of *Beloved* and slave narratives, see Marilyn S. Mobley, "A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in *Beloved*," *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993) 357-65; Elizabeth A. Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered* (Westport: Greenwood P, 1999); Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2002); and Martha J. Cutter, "The Story Must Go on and on: The Fantastic, Narration, and Intertextuality in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz*," *African American Review* 34.1 (2000): 61-75.

³⁵⁹ For other postcolonial readings of *Beloved*, see Lynda Koolish, "Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representations in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Postcolonial Theory/Postcolonial Text," *African American Review* 29.3 (1995): 421-38; Mariangela Palladino, "History, Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Neither East Nor West: Postcolonial Essays on Literature, Culture and Religion*, ed. Kerstin W. Shands (Stockholm: Södertörns Högskola, 2008) 53-63; Mary J. S. Elliott, "Postcolonial Experience in a Domestic Context: Commodified Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *MELUS* 25.3-4 (2000): 181-202; Sally Keenan, "'Four Hundred Years of Silence': Myth, History, and Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Recasting the World: Writing After Colonialism*, ed. Jonathan White (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1993) 45-81; and S. Mohanty, "Epistemic."

disrupt pedagogical extensions of nationalist and imperialist enterprises through the “eternal self-generation” of inter(intra)national subjects in the “liminal signifying space” of performative temporality.³⁶⁰

2. From *Incidents to Beloved*: Intertextuality in the Neo-Slave

Narrative

The term “neoslave narrative” was coined by Bernard Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987) to describe “residually oral modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom.”³⁶¹ However, this “genre of retrospective literature about slavery” has since evolved to include a wide range of texts, set in different eras from slavery to the present.³⁶² Tracing its origin to its late twentieth-century context of production, Rushdy defines the genre as “contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative.”³⁶³ As opposed to Rushdy’s focus on male slave narratives, Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu explores women authors’ subversive narratives of enslaved women’s experience based on a “family-identity-freedom” model in place of the male slave narrators’ “literacy-identity-freedom” paradigm.³⁶⁴ Angelyn Mitchell, however, prefers the term “liberatory narratives” in her focus on the emancipatory potential of these revisionist narratives for their readership.³⁶⁵ And Arlene R. Keizer

³⁶⁰ Bhabha, *Location* 212.

³⁶¹ Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1987) 289.

³⁶² Valerie Smith, “Neo-Slave Narratives,” *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 168.

³⁶³ Rushdy, *Neo-Slave* 3.

³⁶⁴ Beaulieu 9.

has defined neo-slave narratives as “‘contemporary narratives of slavery’ to cast a wider interpretive net” that includes both Caribbean and African-American authors.³⁶⁶

The terminological diversity corresponds to the “experimental” form of the neo-slave narrative that can range from the realist novel, historical fiction, magic realism, “pseudo-autobiographical” narratives, “the novel of remembered generations,” and science fiction to postmodern pastiche, irony, satire, parody, and African-American literary conventions.³⁶⁷ However, these protean narratives converge upon a focal idea that can be summed up in Smith’s words: “the centrality of the history and the memory of slavery to our individual, racial, gender, cultural, and national identities” and a revisitation of the past to navigate “contemporary cultural, historical, critical, and literary discourses.”³⁶⁸ In deploying an earlier form to address the persistence of racial dichotomies in mutated forms, the neo-slave narrative is both stylistically and thematically intertextual; it signifies on its parent genre by revising its distinctive structural elements from a modern perspective whilst simultaneously interrogating “old racial hierarchies and prejudices under new forms”³⁶⁹ in post-abolition eras.

³⁶⁵ Mitchell 4.

³⁶⁶ Arlene R. Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004) 3.

³⁶⁷ Ashraf A. Rushdy, “The Neo-Slave Narrative,” *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, ed. Maryemma Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 90. Smith, “Neo-Slave” 168.

³⁶⁸ Smith, “Neo-Slave” 168.

³⁶⁹ M. Giulia Fabi, “Reconstructing the Race: The Novel after Slavery,” *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, ed. Maryemma Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 35.

In his intertextual approach to the study of the neo-slave narrative, Rushdy sees form as constitutive of “historical understanding” as the past is “regenerated within the contemporary forms through which its story is told.” He points out two major motives for the development of the form: first, black authors wanted to reclaim the slave narrative from its contemporary appropriation by replicating the assertion of the literary authority of their ancestors; and second, they wanted to return to the genre that had equipped slaves’ “political subjectivity in order to mark the moment of a newly emergent black political subject.”³⁷⁰ Rushdy’s reclamation argument is reinforced by Morrison’s 1980s reflection on the stylistic and political motivation for *Beloved*: “for a long time, the art form that was healing for Black people was music. That music is no longer exclusively ours. . . . So another form has to take that place, and it seems to me that the novel is needed by African-Americans now in a way that it was not needed before.”³⁷¹

The correlation between the reclamation of the form and the reassertion of the self is crucial in understanding *Beloved*’s intertextual relations with anterior texts. Reading intertextually comprises ascertaining “how a given text creatively alludes to and possibly rewrites a predecessor text, evokes the political dynamic in the field of cultural production, and inscribes into that dialogue its concerns with the social relations in the field of power.”³⁷² In this framework, *Beloved* “reaccentuates,” to use a Bakhtinian term, African-American literary tradition,³⁷³ *Incidents* in particular,

³⁷⁰ Rushdy, *Neo-Slave* 6-7.

³⁷¹ Toni Morrison, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2008) 59.

³⁷² Rushdy, *Neo-Slave* 14.

³⁷³ Also see Mobley 363 “reaccentuation”.

engaging with themes that are insistently relevant in African-American feminist political struggle. Indeed, Mitchell argues that the neo-slave narrative emerged out of the “Black Woman’s Creative Renaissance of the 1970s . . . in order to provide new models of liberation by problematizing the concept of freedom”³⁷⁴ whilst Beaulieu asserts that the neo-slave narrative “is the inevitable literary outgrowth of both the civil rights movement and the feminist movement.”³⁷⁵ Thus, neo-slave narratives, in an intertextual feminist framework, perform a dual function: tapping into the untouched arenas of black women’s experience of slavery, they provide alternative visions on the past as well as the present through an intertextual, performative re-reading of both.

Whereas my analysis shares with Rushdy its emphasis on the intertextual underpinning of the form, it realigns focus on the performative reimagination of national identities that mediates both form and content as Morrison re-writes an anterior genre in order to commemorate the ancestors as well as to address the “national amnesia”³⁷⁶ inherent to the pedagogic modality’s elision of marginalised narratives and histories. Morrison explicates this intertextual connection with slave narratives in terms of “sustenance”³⁷⁷ to emphasise the inspirational depth that her precursors proffer: “I go sometimes and, just for sustenance, I read those slave narratives—there are sometimes three or four sentences or half a page, each one of

³⁷⁴ Mitchell 4.

³⁷⁵ Beaulieu 4.

³⁷⁶ Bonnie Angelo, “The Pain of Being Black: An Interview with Toni Morrison,” *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994) 255.

³⁷⁷ Morrison’s observation also lays bare the phallocentrism of Bloom’s intertextual theory of the anxiety of influence since his thesis miscarries in its encounter with the African-American women’s literary tradition as Morrison explains it.

which could be developed in an art form, marvelous.”³⁷⁸ The prodigious potential of these “sentences” underlies Morrison’s fiction’s “symbiotic” relationship to her “own literary heritage”³⁷⁹ as she acknowledges the foundational role of ancestors as “instructive” sources of “a certain kind of wisdom”³⁸⁰ that is a means of rejuvenation. Indeed, whereas *Incidents* reflects motivated signifyin(g) in its oppositional “talking back” stance to the sentimental genre’s constraining conventions via black difference, *Beloved*’s unmotivated signifyin(g) is a homage to her female ancestors’ literary prowess.³⁸¹ This section then explores the intertextual relationship between *Beloved* and *Incidents*, focusing on their historical and cultural contexts of production, the intertextual relations between the formal aspects of the two texts, and the representation of the gendered experience of slavery and its insights into contemporary racial politics.

Although writerly consciousness itself signifies a textual field embedded in an intersection of semiotic practices enunciated in the text, writers also consciously draw on what Gérard Genette refers to as “hypotexts”³⁸² which, in the case of *Beloved*, include slave narratives, the memoirs and diaries of slave owners, and other historiographic texts. However, the text is particularly indebted to two sources—

³⁷⁸ Robert Stepto, “Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison,” *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994) 29.

³⁷⁹ Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2008) 65.

³⁸⁰ Morrison, “Rootedness” 62.

³⁸¹ Gates differentiates between motivated signifyin(g) as “formal revision” that produces a “black difference,” as in parody, and unmotivated signifyin(g) as a “repetition” that is an act of “homage.” Gates, *Signifying* xxi.

³⁸² Genette, *Palimpsest* 5.

Incidents as the first U.S. slave narrative written by a woman and the historical account of Margaret Garner. In re-writing literary and historical discourses, *Beloved* is an imaginative extension of Morrison's editorial project, *The Black Book* (1974),³⁸³ motivated by the wish to acknowledge 300 years of oppressive black history through its inclusion into the mainstream historical narrative. *The Black Book* comprises a scrapbook-format recapitulation of black history from the seventeenth to the twentieth century based on a collection of photographs, newspaper clips, bills of sale, illustrations, letters, essays, sheet music, etc. The book includes the story of Margaret Garner: a fugitive slave woman in Boone County, Kentucky who killed one child and attempted to take the lives of others to prevent them from being reclaimed back into slavery. However, despite being deeply moved by Garner's story, Morrison also "wanted to invent her life"³⁸⁴ on a broader canvas of a historical narrative of slavery. Whereas Garner was captured and returned to slavery, Morrison's imaginative rendition symbolises intertextual transposition that "demands a new articulation of the thetic"³⁸⁵ in performing a re-accentuation of her story.

Likewise, whereas *Incidents* has become the "Ur-text" owing to its exclusivity as "the constructed discourse of the major concerns and issues that have organized and structured much of the African American woman's life," Morrison's transpositional re-reading of the text foregrounds new "thetic positions" for readerly engagement and enaction. *Beloved*'s intricate intertextual relationship with *Incidents*

³⁸³ Morrison et al., eds., *The Black Book* (New York: Random House, 1974).

³⁸⁴ Marsha Darling, "In the Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994) 248.

³⁸⁵ Kristeva, *Revolution* 59-60.

is informed by Morrison's twentieth-century standpoint that helps realise the potential of those "sentences or half a page" in *Incidents* that rendered "unspeakable, thoughts unspoken" (*Beloved*, 235). Although *Incidents* relinquished the conventional reticence of the slave narrative in incorporating enslaved women's sexual exploitation, yet, as Morrison observes, the "milieu . . . dictated the purpose and the style" of these narratives and prevented the authors from dwelling on the "more sordid experiences" or their "interior life." For Morrison, "a writer who is black and a woman – the . . . job becomes how to rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate.'"³⁸⁶ Whereas Jacobs draws the veil on the "pit of abomination" which one can only realise "by experience" as "[n]o pen can give an adequate description" of it (*Incidents*, 2), Morrison deploys "the act of imagination . . . bound up with memory"³⁸⁷ to explore the interiority of the experience that remained uncharted in the testimonies of her literary ancestors. *Beloved* signifies eruptions in the gaps and elisions of *Incidents* as Morrison's enquiry hones in on "freaks of despotism . . . too filthy to be repeated" (*Incidents*, 192). In *Beloved* thus converge Morrison's transformative re-readings of the historiography, slave narratives, *The Black Book* model of African-American history, and the 1980s U.S. socio-political milieu.

However, this intertextual interpretive framework operates via a broader author-text-reader nexus that seeks to effect transposition in the act of reading as well. In the Kristevan intertextual model, the discursive field of the author in tandem with that of the addressees on the horizontal axis crisscrosses with the vertical axis of the antecedent literary or historical corpus. *Beloved* is contextualised within the social and

³⁸⁶ Morrison, "Site" 70.

³⁸⁷ Morrison, "Site" 76.

historical texts that are formative of the author and constitutive of her text; however, Morrison also acknowledges the performative role of the reader in her texts as she wants “to have the reader work with the author in the construction of the book.”³⁸⁸ This suture between various “textual surfaces” calls for an active role on the part of the reader as agent in exploring the connections across literary, social, and historical texts in order to generate further hermeneutic possibilities from the readerly perspective. The reading act redirects the reader to historical texts, to slave narratives, to African-American history, and to the legacy of slavery—a detour that furnishes the reader with a revised perspective to decipher contemporary racial politics. The text, then, becomes a synchronic textual space in its “absorption and transformation” of other texts, read and rewritten by the writerly and readerly consciousnesses.

This synchronic textual field posits a non-linear historical model that brings the past into dialogue with the present. Whereas *Incidents* was published on the verge of the Civil War, contesting the institution of slavery which lay beneath the veneer of the American ideal of liberty, *Beloved* emerged in a parallel social context of disenfranchisement and racial disparities in the 1980s. Mitchell sees *Beloved* as a response to the glaring forgetfulness of the history of slavery evident in “the retreats and reversals in civil rights legislation”: “If the 1970s may be characterized as unsympathetic, then the 1980s may be characterized as retrograde. Affirmative action goals, or quotas . . . busing, public housing, welfare programs, and civil rights” were major concerns during the Reagan years (1981-1989),³⁸⁹ not least because domestic funding had been redirected for the Soviet-Afghan War.

³⁸⁸ Morrison, “Rootedness” 59.

³⁸⁹ Mitchell 107.

Indeed, almost three decades after its publication and in our new millennium, *Beloved*'s message remains germane to the current U.S. milieu. Whereas the election of the first African-American president in 2008 seemingly heralded a breakthrough in U.S. race relations, the recent upsurge in racial discrimination, violence, and hate crimes, within a racialised criminal justice system, mirror the pall of slavery that continues to hang over the U.S. social order. Indeed, I write this in the immediate aftermath of the Charleston Church shooting—a mass killing of nine innocent black men and women by a white man at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on 17 June 2015. Despite the perpetrator's broad daylight confession to racially motivated violence, termed "an act of racial terrorism" by the NAACP president, the Federal Board of Investigation refuses to qualify it as a terrorist act because as Brit Bennett aptly puts it, "In America's contemporary imagination, terrorism is foreign and brown."³⁹⁰ Similarly, the divisive post-Charleston backlash against Confederate imagery in South Carolina is a testimony to the lingering antebellum Southern ideology. This heated public dispute signifies the continued unwillingness to acknowledge a dark history. Whilst it took yet another massacre for the legislators to reconsider the legitimacy of the Confederate emblem in South Carolina, public use of Confederate symbols and monuments continues in other states. In illuminating current race relations, texts like *Beloved* are pivotal as, to quote Rushdy, their "insistence on the interdependence of past and present is . . . a political

³⁹⁰ Brit Bennett, "White Terrorism Is as Old as America," *The New York Times* The New York Times, 19 June 2015. Web. 4 Aug. 2015.

act,” and one that “advocates a revisioning of the past as it is filtered through the present”³⁹¹ in order to readdress both.

Given this intertextual past-present nexus, it is no wonder Morrison picks up precisely where Jacobs left off: “the dark and troubled sea” of post-Emancipation racialised America, symbolised by a lack of “home” (*Incidents*, 201). Set in 1873, during the Reconstruction era, *Beloved* lingers on Linda’s observation of emancipation as an “improvement in my condition” and her desire to “forget” the “dreary years . . . passed in bondage” (*Incidents*, 201). Set in a house that is distinctly unhomely and symbolic of post-war African-American civil disenfranchisement, the narrative shuttles back and forth between memories of slavery and Reconstruction, contextualising their relevance for the 1980s through frequent allusions to pervasive racial violence and the inefficacy of social reform in the narrative present. Indeed, at one point, Morrison compresses all the salient historical events into one paragraph to underscore their arbitrariness in view of the persistence of racial hegemony: “No more discussion, stormy or quiet, about the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, God’s Ways and Negro pews; antislavery, manumission, skin voting, Republicans, Dred Scott, book learning, Sojourner’s high-wheeled buggy, the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio, and the other weighty issues that held them in chairs” because the “end of the War” merely brought “short, flashy results,” overridden by “the Klan,” condemning blacks to an “unlivable life . . . interrupted by a short-lived glory” every now and then (204).

³⁹¹ Ashraf A. Rushdy, “Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *American Literature* 64.3 (1992): 567.

The respective social and historical contexts of *Incidents* and *Beloved* dictate the formal and thematic aspects of the texts; whilst slave narratives were meant to deploy slave testimonials against the atrocities of slavery in order to create a resonance with the predominant white readership, urging them to endorse the abolishment of the institution, the post-Civil rights era posed different challenges. Driven by a desire to reclaim black literary and cultural heritage as well as the need to address the lingering encumbrance of slavery, Morrison's purpose, as Mobley observes, "is not to convince white readers of the slave's humanity, but to address black readers by inviting us to return to the very part of our past that many have repressed, forgotten or ignored."³⁹² Thus, the formal innovations directly correspond to the challenges of each text's moment of production. The "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (*Beloved*, 235) that struggle to break through the prudent veneer of decorum in *Incidents* are laid out bare on the pages of *Beloved*. Morrison's poetic licence allows her to work Jacobs's frequent innuendoes and elisions into an account of the intricate psychological experience of slaves. The "incidents" that Jacobs passes over are the locus of repressed memories summoned up by Morrison's aesthetic vision, unfettered by the authenticity qualification of the slave narratives. Indeed, Morrison's attempt to "fill in the blanks"³⁹³ creates stimulating points of convergence between the texts, whilst retaining her contemporary vantage point.

For instance, Morrison blends elements of African-American folklore (auricular prose, supernaturalism, communal storytelling, work songs, blues, and jazz) with the modern aesthetic conventions at her disposal (narrative plurality,

³⁹² Mobley 363.

³⁹³ Morrison, "Site" 72.

fragmentation, perspectivism, defamiliarisation, multivocality, scepticism, discontinuity, and nonlinearity) that shifts the political import of her neo-slave narrative. The aesthetic order that Jacobs wielded through her deployment of the sentimental genre and rhetoric is disrupted by the structural unboundedness of *Beloved* that unleashes further the horrors of slavery. Morrison's revisionist narrative probes the psychological depths of the slaves' experiences through narrative strategies unavailable to Jacobs despite her inventive subversion of the available genres. Whilst in her description of a "vision" she had of her children during her "retreat," Linda makes a diffident allusion to her addressees' reductive reading of black experience as "the superstition of slaves" (*Incidents*, 107), Morrison subverts the Western tradition of realist historical fiction by deploying a magic realist form³⁹⁴ to underscore the legitimacy of black experience as much as to problematise the binaries of history and narrative, truth and fiction. As Wendy B. Faris argues, "the defocalized narrative and bridging techniques of magical realism challenge the colonial authority of European realism by disengaging it from the empirical basis on which that authority seems to be built."³⁹⁵ Morrison renders the challenge doubly transgressive in drawing on African-American folk beliefs perceived as "magical" from outside. *Beloved* also shares with much postmodern (and postcolonial) fiction its challenge to "the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of

³⁹⁴ Morrison argues that magic realism is a misnomer for her work since the term arises from a Latin American tradition whilst "non-realist" elements in her work stem from African-American cosmology. In line with my overall "postcolonial" framework, I use "magic realism" to underscore the interconnections of the non-realist elements of African-American and postcolonial texts—a point I will return to in the next section.

³⁹⁵ Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004) 154.

representation.”³⁹⁶ Morrison situates the reader at the forefront of this intertextual interface, so that “to re-write or to re-present the past” becomes a mutual author-reader-textual project to “open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological.”³⁹⁷

The omission of the authenticity stipulation and the interrogation of history transform the narrator-addressee relationship in *Beloved*; whereas *Incidents* had to cater to its readers’ scepticism regarding black authorship, *Beloved* plunges the reader into a labyrinthine textual field alongside the characters to confront the chaos and disintegration of slave consciousness. Morrison comments on the significance of this textual strategy for the reader: “the compelling confusion of being there as they (the characters) are; suddenly, without comfort or succor from the ‘author,’ with only imagination, intelligence, and necessity available for the journey.”³⁹⁸ Thus, the very epigraph, “Sixty million and more” signifies the magnitude of the hermeneutic task as Morrison sets up “my people” as her implied readers (*Beloved*, v, vii) in direct contrast to Jacobs’s hailing of “Northerners” and “white women” (*Incidents*, xxxv). Jacobs’s tightly constructed narrative with clearly defined and methodically integrated chapters is contrasted by the absence of chapter titles in *Beloved*, its space-time fragmentation, and its highly complex narrative technique, rich in stream of consciousness and interior monologues. Whereas Jacobs’s narrative is lodged between prefaces, testimonials, and introductions, directed towards her white audience to

³⁹⁶ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 92.

³⁹⁷ Hutcheon, *Poetics* 110.

³⁹⁸ Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham: Duke UP, 1994) 397.

endorse the integrity of the author and the authenticity of the narrative, *Beloved's* opening confronts the reader with an unsettling, uncanny, and disquieting pronouncement of the poltergeist that haunts 124 Bluestone Road.

The apocalyptic beginning of the novel *in medias res*, weighed down by emotional and historical baggage, reverses the slave narrative's opening search for names and origins. *Beloved* opens in a "gray and white house" deserted by the living and haunted by the deceased, and thus "[s]uspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead" (3-4). Whilst it takes Jacobs ten chapters of preparation to lay out the circumstances of her liaison, *Beloved* begins with the appallingly visceral passage of Sethe's sexual transaction for the inscription of seven letters on her slain daughter's tombstone. In one fell swoop, Morrison pulls the reader up short with the grisliness of both infanticide and sexual abuse:

Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone . . . her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil. (6)

The nineteenth-century slave narrator's post-emancipation, future-facing, self-assertive stance in her retrospective narrative is displaced by a sinister gloom and starkness that pervades *Beloved's* opening. Mitchell argues that at the outset of the novel, "Sethe's immurement in 124 Bluestone revisits Linda Brent's in the garret," however, I offer that Linda's partly self-imposed confinement is a countermeasure to her master's abuse, so that the garret becomes a refuge that affords her the agency to plan her future. For Sethe, on the contrary, "the future was a matter of keeping the

past at bay” (51); because she lacks the sense of self afforded by Linda’s privileged status and vantage, Sethe is caught in an infinite process of “beating back the past” (86). This relentless repression of the past on the part of the characters produces a persistent desire in the readers to apprehend the same.

Whilst most narratives of ex-slaves remained buried, many others were ghost-written by abolitionists. As William L. Andrews observes, “only rarely did escaped female slaves ask for or receive the kind of attention that encouraged them to dictate or write their life stories.”³⁹⁹ Even *Incidents*, an authentic slave narrative, represents a rather privileged slave woman’s life as Jacobs regarded the situation of “most of [enslaved women] far worse” than hers (*Incidents*, 1). Morrison’s imagination taps into those untouched lives through fleshing out the ones available; the textual field thus represents a fluid, synchronic space that supplements the slave narrative’s themes of commodification, sexual abuse, motherhood, literacy, selfhood, individualism, and community from a modern perspective. Although *Incidents* attempts a demythologising of black women’s sexuality by navigating the taboo of their sexual exploitation as well as substantiating their “maternal instincts” and “maternal love,” Jacobs keeps a fine balance between motherhood and self-identity. Morrison, on the contrary, through reimagining Margaret Garner’s story, lays bare the havoc that maternal love can play within an oppressive matrix.

Although Linda understands the motivation for infanticide as well as the dilemma faced by enslaved mothers: “Sometimes I wished that he might die in infancy. . . . Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying

³⁹⁹ William L. Andrews, introduction, *Six Women’s Slave Narratives*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xxxii.

child to life! Death is better than slavery” (62), her privileged status allows her a sense of self that she demarcates from her maternal subjectivity. Indeed, Linda is engaged in two parallel yet distinct wars: one against Dr. Flint’s emotional and physical abuse to salvage her integrity and the other to reclaim her children from slavocracy. However, as I argued above, it is her self-esteem that sets her on the voyage to freedom in the first place, followed by her struggle to retrieve her children. Morrison’s protagonist, Sethe, on the contrary, represents a relatively less privileged slave whose sense of self is devastated by her slave subjectivity, reducing her identity to a fierce preoccupation with maternal function: “Milk was all I ever had” (187), and “All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl” (19). *Beloved* lays bare the full-blown complexities of *Incidents*’s passing allusions to enslaved women’s acts of infanticide as Morrison attempts to fill “the void of the historical discourse on slave parent-child relationships and pain.”⁴⁰⁰

Elder Baby Suggs’s loss of eight children by six men, followed by her realisation that “nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children” (28), desensitises her maternal bond. When she finds herself again pregnant by the man who had promised to allow her to keep her third child but “traded [him] for lumber” next spring, she concludes that “[t]hat child she could not love and the rest she would not” (28). Although Baby Suggs brings to mind Linda’s benevolent grandmother, the former shares with Linda and Sethe the lost faith that Aunt Martha managed to uphold, and Sethe shares with Linda the early loss of maternal love. However, whilst Linda’s other relations sustained her, Sethe’s displacement and the ensuing trauma incapacitated her. Indeed, the only memory that Sethe has of her

⁴⁰⁰ Morrison, *Playing* 22.

mother is “a circle and a cross burnt” in her skin on the rib that the latter showed her to help Sethe identify her if need be. However, Sethe never receives the opportunity to share her mother’s company or even identify the mark after she is hanged. It was Nan, the nursing slave, who later told Sethe that she and Sethe’s mother had travelled by the sea from Africa. On board during the Middle Passage, Sethe’s mother was repeatedly raped by the crew, but she threw all the babies away except Sethe to whom “she gave the name of the black man . . . [she had] put her arms around” (74). It is in Sethe’s interior monologue that we discover the reason for her “anger” at her mother: “nobody’s ma’am would run off and leave her daughter, would she?” (240). Sethe’s inability to come to terms with her mother’s desertion of her owes to her failure to relate to her mother’s reaction to enslavement and commodification, in the same way as the community’s failure to relate to Sethe’s matricide alienates them from her.

Even Ella, who represents another shocking maternal experience, is unable to identify with Sethe despite having spent her “puberty . . . in a house where she was shared by father and son” whom she called “the lowest yet” and “against whom she measured all atrocities.” Whereas Ella judges Sethe’s “rage in the shed” as “prideful” and “misdirected,” she is herself implicated in an infanticide of sorts: “she had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by ‘the lowest yet.’ It lived five days never making a sound” (301-2). Indeed, the traumatic maternal experiences of both Sethe and Ella have vitiated their capacity to form identificatory relations. This deformative effect of enslavement also extends to Denver’s asymmetrical relationship with her mother, Sethe, as well as her “fear” of Sethe that is divulged in her interior monologue: “All the time, I’m afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again” (242). Through these problematic maternal and communal relations, Morrison traces the stereotype of slaves’

inhumanity to the vicious economy of a slavocracy that warped personal relationships and impaired maternal subjectivity.

Morrison thus fleshes out Jacobs's assessment of emancipation as merely "an improvement" in black women's condition, as the racist and gendered discourses and structures of the institution continue to define black women's lives even after its abolition (201). Indeed, the narrative begins with a repetition of the key traumatic scene of the novel: the "stealing" of Sethe's milk in the barn by schoolteacher's nephews as he inscribed notes in his journal, and whilst Halle, Sethe's husband, watched helplessly from the loft. The post-emancipation reenactment of the scene reflects the persistent definition of black bodies as "available" objects of desire: when Sethe visits the engraver to have her murdered daughter's headstone carved, the engraver's inscription, like schoolteacher's, traverses Sethe's body, writing it off as an exchange commodity or a breeding animal. In return for ten minutes of sex, Sethe struggles to dispense with the deadweight of infanticide, only to supplement her anamnestic millstone with yet another "rememory": "rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new" (5).

Besides, the slaughterhouse for which Baby Suggs is "too old," Stamp Paid's "ribbon," Denver's fear of the "whitepeople" beyond their doorstep, *Beloved's* possible history as a woman incarcerated by a white man, and Sethe's frequent allusions to black women's fate in the country "with anything God made liable to jump on [them]" (80), which overrides Paul D's wish to oust *Beloved*, all speak to the perseverance of racial and sexual violence in the post-Emancipation era. Indeed, Stamp Paid is stumped as he catalogues racial violence in the present:

Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing. (212-213)

Stamp Paid's acute query, "What *are* these people? You tell me, Jesus." echoes schoolteacher's nephew's shock at Sethe's act, "What she go and do that for?" as Morrison, like Jacobs, unsettles the pedagogical binaries of human/animal, civilised/barbarian, superior/inferior, coloniser/colonised in foregrounding the interstitial space that constitutes and implicates both in the "jungle" created by one for the other. Just as Jacobs problematises the Christian enlightenment of white Americans by comparing them to "savage" Africans in their practice of slavery, Morrison explores the provenance of the "jungle" that pervaded the institution and lingered in its aftermath: "Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them" (234).

Indeed, post-Emancipation persistence of the colonial power structures translates into their internalisation on the part of the community, which explains Baby Suggs's unrequited "call" in the Clearing. Baby Suggs calls on the congregation to reclaim their selves and connect with the others through owning, cherishing, and loving their "flesh," their bodies, and their "beating hearts" because "Yonder they do

not love [it]" (103-104). However, the extent to which the "hearts" have been forsaken to the ideology that subjugates the bodies prevents the performance of liberating individual and collective identities, a lesson the community must learn to claim full freedom. Morrison's return to her literary ancestors for "sustenance" translates into the text's return to the history of slavery for rejuvenation, as she lingers on the possibility of transgressing power relations through black communal practices. For instance, in Alfred, Georgia, when Paul D and his fellow inmates are subjected to a chain gang that is meant to arrest physical movement and deny verbal communication, they deploy their eyes to commiserate with each other: "[n]ot one spoke to the other. At least not with words. Their eyes had to tell what there was to tell: 'Help me this mornin; 's bad'; 'I'm a make it'; 'New man'; 'Steady now steady.'" (126-7). The "best hand-forged chain in Georgia" is redeployed by them to form a connection, for "[t]hey talked through that chain like Sam Morse." As conversation was denied, they "sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings" (128). Thus, the very power structure that subjugates can also be subverted through a communal act of reciprocity: "For one lost, all lost. The chain that held them would save all or none" (130). By summoning slave communality, Morrison urges her black readers to resurrect their oppressive yet inspirational history; by returning to the damaging effects of slavery, she prods her white readers to (re)view the present intertextually with a harrowing past in order to interrupt dominant pedagogical narratives.

As I argued in chapter one, *Incidents* departs from the male slave narrative paradigm in its emphasis on an interaction between selfhood and community as opposed to the male slave narrators' invocation of the white American ideals of

individualism and self-determination. Morrison further addresses these gaps by underlining the potential of self-assertion in affirmative interpersonal relationships. Paul D's relationship with Sethe; Sixo and the Thirty Mile Woman's intimacy; Halle's relationships with Sethe and Baby Suggs; the slaves' kinship at Sweet Home; and the black community of Cincinnati reflect a return to the African cultural values of communal solidarity as opposed to individual and rhetorical appropriation of white models. Frederick Douglass, for instance, wilfully omitted his wife's definitive part in his escape in fashioning a self-assertive, masculinist identity along the mainstream white ideals.⁴⁰¹ However, in contrast to the "glorious resurrection" of Douglass's spirit in the aftermath of the dramatised face-off with Covey that "rekindled" the "embers of freedom" and invigorated the "sense of [his] own manhood,"⁴⁰² we witness Paul D's systematic emasculation and profound identity crisis. In taking up the sexual abuse of male slaves, alongside that of female slaves, Morrison infiltrates a significant part of slave history that remained shrouded in slave narratives as well as historical documents and to which Jacobs makes only a discreet allusion. In its circumventive style, *Incidents* insinuates the sexual abuse of the slave Luke, whose master's "excessive dissipation" deprived him of his limbs but not dissoluteness; this bed-ridden master, "a mere degraded wreck of manhood . . . took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism . . . of a nature too filthy to be repeated" (192). One of the most powerful episodes in *Beloved*, Paul D's chain gang experience in Alfred, Georgia, explicitly depicts this abuse: "Kneeling in the mist they waited for the whim of a guard, or two, or three. Or maybe all of them wanted it. Wanted it from one

⁴⁰¹ Washington 8.

⁴⁰² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself*, ed. Benjamin Quarles (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 104.

prisoner in particular or none—or all” (127). Similarly, although Garner bestows “manhood” of a kind on his slaves to feed the sense of his own virility, the very names he assigns them undercut any selfhood as the “Pauls” reflects a mass, lacking any individuality, yet the “Pauls” themselves transform that mass into a subversive group of “pals” who share a sense of kinship despite their adversity. Their patient wait for Sethe to choose one of them at Sweet Home, their potato and corn “feasts,” and their concerted escape plan reflect a communal affinity Sethe recalls later: “But it’s where we were. . . . All together” (16).

However, schoolteacher’s arrival disperses them, precipitating their collapse that translates into a fundamental identity conflict for Paul D that persists eighteen years into his freedom and leaves him wondering as to “where [his] manhood lay?” (147). It is this quest for self-identity that brings the wandering Paul D back to Sethe as the text links their pasts which converge on a present that provides them both with possibilities of self-affirmation in a reciprocal bond. The potential recuperative relationship between Sethe and Paul D is represented by inserting their coupling between the chapters that recount their individual experiences of sexual exploitation and their ensuing escape from Sweet Home and Alfred, Georgia, respectively. Morrison reimagines the kind of relationship Linda conceived with her black lover, which had to be supplanted by a transactional relationship as the only way out of sexual slavehood. Despite Mr. Sands’s purported “kind words” and “sympathy” at Linda’s “circumstances” (54), he failed to fully comprehend Linda’s plight. In Paul D, however, Morrison fashions a feminist model of masculinity; it is partly the mutuality of their past, physically oppressive and sexually abusive, that explains Paul D’s singular compassion in becoming the kind of man who “could walk into a house and make the women cry. . . . There was something blessed in his manner. . . . Strong

women and wise saw him and told him things they only told each other” (20).

Beaulieu argues that “[g]ender-blurring becomes for Morrison one of the most effective, and poignant, ways to demonstrate the inhumanity of slavery;”⁴⁰³ indeed, gender-blurring also slackens rigid boundaries, allowing a performance of identities across gender binaries. And, hence, we witness one of the most compassionate male literary representations in *Beloved*. Yet, it is significant that it is Sethe, a black woman with whom Paul D shares a past, who becomes a source of his salvation, prefiguring a promising future for both emanating from a memory of Sethe’s simple gesture of averting her eyes from Paul D’s iron collar that, even in appalling circumstances, restores his sense of self. For Morrison thus the quest for self-identity is a process of individuation that is profoundly connected to enriching interpersonal and communal relationships that draw on a collective regenerative past to perform alternative identities. Structurally, *Beloved* is engaged in a similar intertextual task of linking anterior texts in a temporal present that affords reformative possibilities.

Kristeva’s notion of the text as “a productivity” views the text’s “relationship to the language in which it is situated” as “redistributive”; the text engages in a “destructive/constructive” process that generates new and productive hermeneutic possibilities.⁴⁰⁴ *Beloved* exercises this “redistributive” function on various historical and literary texts through the author-reader-text nexus that engenders new meanings and interpretations. Susan Bowers observes that “Morrison’s modeling of her novel on the slave narrative is one way of giving African Americans back their voices.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Beaulieu 77.

⁴⁰⁴ Kristeva, *Desire* 36.

⁴⁰⁵ Susan Bowers, “*Beloved* and the New Apocalypse,” *Toni Morrison’s Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David L. Middleton (New York: Garland, 1997) 213.

Indeed, whereas schoolteacher's use of the ink Sethe made to record her "animal characteristics" reflects the bloodstained pedagogical colonial narrative, complicit in the exploitation of African-Americans, Morrison's intertextual project restores a voice to her ancestors that has rejuvenating potential for revising contemporary African-American identities. The text of schoolteacher's "notes" is as inaudible in *Beloved* as the silenced voice that the "lump" in the mistress Mrs. Garner's "neck" exacts on her, whilst Sethe and Paul D acquire a voice. Although, owing to its loss to history, slaves' narrative may never be fully recovered or redeemed, a revisitation of the history and rekindling of the past is fundamental to a re-evaluation of the present.

Beloved thus performs a "transposition" on slave narratives; whereas Jacobs's constitutive rhetoric sought a "mediatory ground" with her audience in order to formulate a subtle critique of the pedagogical narrative that denied humanity and citizenship to African-Americans, Morrison's neo-slave narrative's modern perspective, with a shift in address, challenges the very foundations of that pedagogy through a performative intervention into the national and historical consciousness crafted against the always-already erased black presence. *Beloved's* performativity lies in its return to the history to reclaim the present and to redefine black identities; by rewriting an anterior genre Morrison at once venerates the precursors and addresses the pedagogic collective memory. Whereas Morrison chooses to re-write the history of slavery based on the "rememories" of an ex-slave woman, she restores the "disremembered" past's regenerative potential through the daughter, Denver, who performs a new middle passage between an oppressive past and an overwhelming future. Thus, as the first section of my analysis traced the gendered experience of slavery through a return to the slave narratives, the second part pursues the

recuperative potential of the legacy of that history in the future-facing performative reimagination of the present.

3. Challenging Colonial Epistemology: A Performative Reimagining of Pedagogical Identities and Narratives

As outlined in my introduction, Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* traces the self-reflexive "fabrication of an Africanist persona" in mainstream American fiction, directed at a white readership, in order to set apart her alternative project of imagining black identities as "not merely looking or looking at" but as "*becoming*."⁴⁰⁶ *Beloved* is a realisation of this performative "becoming" that profoundly engages the reader in re-reading narratives, re-writing histories, re-negotiating historiography, deconstructing colonial epistemology, and reimagining African-American identities. Morrison's approach is apposite to the postcolonial "writing back" model in its intertextual transposition. In elaborating on Ashcroft et al.'s initial theorisation of the "writing back" model as an oppositional discourse, Richard Terdiman cautions against "the danger of the adversarial discourse becoming locked in a complicitous relationship with the discourse under fire."⁴⁰⁷ Byron Caminero-Santangelo also critiques such a "postcolonial hybridity . . . typology which defines postcolonial cultures in terms of their oppositional relationship with the West."⁴⁰⁸ He proposes going "beyond writing back" to an innovative take on the intertextual relationships between multiple texts along Bakhtinian lines. Likewise, Helen Tiffin describes this

⁴⁰⁶ Morrison, *Playing* 90, 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Terdiman 19. John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London: Continuum, 2002) 4.

⁴⁰⁸ Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *African Fiction and Joseph Conrad: Reading Postcolonial Intertextuality* (Albany: SUNY P, 2005) 1.

“operation of post-colonial counter-discourse” as “dynamic, not static,” which “does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but . . . to evolve textual strategies which continually ‘consume their own biases’ . . . at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse.”⁴⁰⁹

Tiffin and Caminero-Santangelo’s ideas coincide with the Kristevan intertextual model informed by poetic discourse, which exceeds the one-to-one relationships of binary models. Kristeva contrasts the 0-2 sequence of literary semiotics (“double”—“*one and other*”) with the 0-1 sequence of the structuralist dyadic sign, scientific methodology, or Aristotelian logic (“true-false, nothingness-notation”). The 0-2 logic signifies a subject-in-process and a polyphonic discourse situated within intersecting social, cultural, and historical texts. Morrison’s project aligns with this transformative as opposed to the oppositional model of “writing back.” To begin with, as a sequel to the slave narrative, *Beloved*’s transition to the post-Emancipation socio-political structure also switches the implied audience from exclusively white to both black and white. This shift in address lends a revised meaning to the “writing back” model as her counter-discourse offers recuperative potential of a repressed past for both groups. Besides, Morrison’s work reimagines black identities and histories outside the hegemonic white-black, presence-absence, and self-other binaries through a return to African-American cultural tradition that provides potential for the performance of regenerative individual and communal identities in a relational social and historical context.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Helen Tiffin, “Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995) 99.

⁴¹⁰ Indeed, the production, reception, and acknowledgement of *Beloved* also represent a compelling performative mediation into mainstream American canonicity. As Nicol and Terry observe, Morrison’s “presence has reshaped US literature” and academia. Accolades including the first Nobel

A question that Morrison recurrently returns to is also raised by Bhabha:

“How does one encounter the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present?” Her opus represents the split that occurs in the national subject in its “ethnographic perspective of culture’s contemporaneity” from a posited pedagogical position and its continual performative excess. This subject-object positionality offers “both a theoretical position and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse.”⁴¹¹ This section thus reads *Beloved* as a performative intervention into American national, historical, and literary consciousness that interposes the Africanness that has always “hover[ed] at the margins of the literary imagination.”⁴¹² *Beloved*’s revisionist perspective forms an intertextual relation with the reader in challenging the nationalist pedagogy of Americanness from a “third space”⁴¹³ that redefines African-American identities via a return to black history and culture; however, Morrison views this renegotiation as an individual as well as a communal process, grounded in identificatory relations.

Prize for an African-American author, the inclusion of African-American women’s writing as a central component of curricula, and the proliferation of the discourse on the history and legacy of slavery signify the performative upshot of Morrison’s fiction that has carved a space for African-American aesthetics in the mainstream U.S. literary and cultural tradition. As Beaulieu notes, since the publication of *Beloved*, “American textbooks now include the findings of 1960s’ revisionist scholarship . . . of American history. The debate over a national apology for the wrongs of slavery has been rekindled, and there is a talk of a national monument to slavery.” This concurs with the text’s performative renegotiation of African-American identity that foregrounds fissures in the densely woven fabric of the racialised U.S. national consciousness. See Kathryn Nicol and Jennifer Terry, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: Toni Morrison: New Directions,” *MELUS* 36.2 (2011): 7 and Beaulieu xiv.

⁴¹¹ Bhabha, *Location* 215-16.

⁴¹² Morrison, *Playing* 5.

⁴¹³ Bhabha defines “third space” as “a cultural space” created by the “non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures,” “where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences.” It is an interstitial, productive space of hybrid identities that challenges claims to “singular or autonomous” colonial authority and facilitates the “performative nature of differential identities” and the possibility of “an interstitial future . . . in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present.” Bhabha, *Location* 312-3.

3.1. Identities and Histories: The Psychic Crisis of Internalisation

At the centre of *Beloved* is the identity crisis encapsulated by Sethe in the last section of the novel: “That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up.” Indeed, “this is what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble,” (295) and this is what underlies the subversive logic of the text—the emotional, psychic, and spiritual rejuvenation of black identities devastated by the internalisation of enduring hegemonic narratives. *Beloved* epitomises this psychic crisis by portraying the fragmentation of individual and communal identities incurred by an assimilation of colonial notions of ethicality into one’s sense of self. The text then reworks the role of transformative identification through a reinterpretation of the past that reflects a temporal shift from introjecting dominant identities and discourses to establishing regenerative identifications in interpersonal relationships.

This thematic model of forming transmutational identificatory relationships as opposed to internalising dominant discourses, manifested in the intertextual relationships between individuals and communities, between the past and the present, and between subjugation and self-reclamation, is also woven into the structure of the text. Commenting on the role of the reader in *Beloved*, Morrison explains that she wanted to make the reader experience the same alienation on encountering the text as the slaves had on being snatched “from one place to another, from any place to

another, without preparation and without defense.”⁴¹⁴ Thus, the horizontal and the vertical axes of the text are deeply entangled as the formal structure of the text embroils the reader in its performative interactive project by riveting them in a rigorous participative mode. The reader is plunged into the imaginative project of the recovery of the “interiority” of slave experience and is prompted to create a revised narrative of history by knitting together loose threads of dispersed consciousnesses. This complex hermeneutic circle reinforces the individual and collective responsibility in the historiographic urgency to disinter anterior texts in apprehending and reworking contemporary relations.

The main plot of the novel is an amalgamation of various partial narratives that are scattered through the text; the *medias res* beginning thrusts the reader into the uncanny “house” of fiction, spilling over with multiple disjointed narratives. The Sweet Home “rememories,” Sethe’s escape, Denver’s birth, Baby Suggs’s experience with the community, Sethe’s infanticide, and each character’s personal history are blown into smithereens to replicate the trauma at the structural level that the authorial and readerly consciousnesses must mutually grapple with. Despite a predominantly third-person omniscient narration, the text has multiple focalisers; the narration of a single event filters through various characters’ consciousnesses, floating in and out intermittently. The narrative mode shifts from third-person account to interior monologue, from direct narration to analepsis and prolepsis, and from writerly discourse to oral tradition as Morrison sends the reader endlessly back to the past, to previous moments in the text, and to preceding words, images, and cues to decipher the present. For instance, the recollection of Denver’s birth and Sethe’s escape is

⁴¹⁴ Morrison, “Unspeakable” 396.

communicated in fragments and filtered through various characters' consciousnesses, spread over several chapters, with a substantial demand on the reader to participate in the retrieval. The narration of Sethe's escape is broken into four dispersed narrative events: Denver's reminiscences of Sethe's narration to her, Denver's recollection of it to Beloved, Sethe's narration of it to both, and Sethe's remembrance of it with Paul D, with the omniscient narrator's mediation in each case. The pivot of the novel, Sethe's murder of her baby daughter, "crawling already," is narrated right in the middle of the text; however, given the dispersal of information and the foregoing cues, the reader flits back and forth between the past and the present to grasp the ungraspable—an exercise that corresponds to the text's urgency for national subjects' return to the past in order to make sense of the present. The narrative technique of piecing together fragments, weaving narratives, and sifting character consciousness creates the author-text-reader symbiosis in its rigorous demand for reader participation in the performative reclamation of histories and identities.

Beloved's intricate stylistic techniques, complex narrative mode, fragmented characterisation, and dense rhythmic prose correspond to the 0-2 logic of poetic discourse. Whereas the monologic discourse of the 0-1 model reflects "linguistic, psychic, and social 'prohibition'" and "God, Law, Definition," poetic logic transgresses finitude, univocity, linguistic axioms, and conventional ethics. Kristeva terms literal, univocal, and communicative meaning "phenotext" which is contrasted to the "genotext" of the presemiotic drives in "'phonematic devices,' such as rhythm and intonation, melody, repetition and narrative arrangement."⁴¹⁵ *Beloved's* genotext exceeds "societal, cultural, syntactical, and other grammatical constraints"; its non-

⁴¹⁵ Kristeva, *Desire* 69-70, 86.

linearity “disturbs, ruptures, and undercuts” the dominant structures in articulating the ambivalent colonial experience of the other at the political fringes.⁴¹⁶ This author-text-reader plexus signifies a relational performance: whereas slavery stipulated that “definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined” (225), for Morrison, “it is the affective and participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience that is of primary importance”⁴¹⁷ in redefining those relations. Just as the elements of disjointed character consciousness need to be tessellated in the jigsaw puzzle of history, a parallel interaction is enacted between the author-reader discursive fields in the text’s intertextual domain. Morrison’s performative re-reading of the slave narratives for “sustenance” extends to the reader’s performative regenerative reading of Morrison’s narrative that takes textual performance a step further.

The opening establishes a connective, restorative thread between the disremembered history and the contemporary reality, as Morrison interleaves black history into the mainstream narrative through the “rememories” of Sethe, a doubly colonised ex-slave woman. The novel opens amidst gloom and inertia; the house, 124 Bluestone Road, is the sepulchre of “dead Negro’s grief” whilst the name “bluestone” prefigures the pink headstone of Beloved’s grave (5). Indeed, the grief is personified as a malevolent poltergeist of the baby Sethe killed to protect her from slavery and that now haunts the Cincinnati house occupied by Sethe and Denver, just as traumatic memories of the harrowing past haunt Sethe’s mind. Although “she worked hard to

⁴¹⁶ Leon S. Roudiez, introduction, *Revolution in Poetic Language* by Julia Kristeva, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 5.

⁴¹⁷ Morrison, “Rootedness” 59.

remember as close to nothing as was safe . . . her brain was devious”; the slightest of cues and “suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes” (6-7). Sethe’s life becomes a perpetual teeter between the past and the present, for her daily routine is reduced to a struggle to fend off the past: “Working dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day’s serious work of beating back the past” (86). This struggle is further stoked up by Paul D’s arrival eighteen years after Sethe’s departure from the Sweet Home slave community. Unlike Sethe, Paul D had been rather successful in “shut[ting] down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing,” but when he sees Sethe, the “closed portion of his head open[s] like a greased lock” (49). Paul D’s return is double-edged: whilst their shared history represents a potential liberation from their existential impasse, it also unlatches their repressed memories. Incarnated as the poltergeist, the past that connects them also stymies their physical and emotional intimacy; the moment Denver informs Paul D of the ghost’s presence, Sethe and Paul D’s reminiscences of Sweet Home are disrupted: “They were not a twosome anymore” (15). And, later, as Paul D touches the “chokecherry tree” made by the cowhide scars on Sethe’s back to “learn . . . her sorrow” (20), the baby ghost makes a vicious intrusion into their intimacy, forcing Paul D to engage in a scuffle to exorcise the ghost.

However, the dismissal of the ghost does not purge them of the indelible past that weighs heavily on both Sethe and Paul D’s lives. Indeed, the traumatic past has ravaged their sense of self; Sethe apprehends her self-identity in terms of her maternal subjectivity and her children’s identity as an extension of herself. However, the economy of slavocracy has warped her notion of motherhood as well, so that she conceives of it as ownership of her progeny as is mirrored in her extensive use of

possessive pronouns to refer to her children: “Here she is my Denver” as she introduces her daughter to Paul D as the only child she can now claim possession of (13). Elsewhere Morrison regards that “a bad word, ‘belong.’ Especially when you put it with somebody you love. . . . You can't own a human being”;⁴¹⁸ however, Sethe believes that her children are a part of herself that she will protect any which way: “The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean” (296). As such, her resistance to schoolteacher’s avowal of his property rights makes for a role reversal whereby Sethe recovers the proprietorship of her children to dispose of them at her own discretion; whilst she kills one daughter to protect her from schoolteacher, “Sethe would die to protect” the other one from the past that has consumed them all the same (117). Morrison’s counter-discourse critiques this practice of reclamation that executes a reversal of the coloniser-colonised binary.

Paul D’s past matches up to Sethe’s in its traumatic repertoire, however, the nature of their defence mechanisms varies; whilst Sethe’s present is spasmodically punctuated by intrusive memories and traumatic images such as the stealing of her milk by schoolteacher’s nephews, the cowhide whip during pregnancy, schoolteacher’s animal profiling of Sethe, and Sethe’s murder of her child, Paul D’s trauma manifests in his dissociation from his past that he entombs to forge ahead in life: “It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. . . . [When] he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open” (133). Paul D has

⁴¹⁸ Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (London: Vintage, 2005) 306.

“willed himself into being” by dislodging all “doubts,” “regrets,” and “unanswered questions” that demanded confrontation, whereas Sethe fails to crowd out the invasive memories. Both of them have “preserved” their past without “reinterpreting” it; it is the transformative practice of reinterpetive preservation that allows us to retain the past whilst also apprehending its emancipatory potential for the present in order to overcome an oppressive history for a better future.

Sethe and Paul D’s reunion thus triggers both a morbid anamnesis and a communal past, with the former forming a rift in the desire for recuperation of the latter; their strain to repress past traumas is offset by their sporadic return to them as they fail to register that a cathartic union entails a confrontation with the grievous past and its restrictive legacies. In their desire to “make a life” together (55), both attempt to tuck away their deepest scars in a teeming repository of the unconscious; Sethe pulls a veil over her infanticide whilst Paul D disavows his loss of selfhood: “Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn’t get back from,” so they “keep the rest where it belonged” (86). The encroachment of their respective traumas upon their yearning for companionship is best reflected in the love-making scene when their physical intimacy fails to engender a psychic union as both Sethe and Paul D recall their individual memories from Sweet Home in utter silence. The physical union triggers memories of interconnected but individually experienced events that converge on the sensual corn image; however, as opposed to a mutual recollection, the fragments of their discrete reminiscences are pieced together by the third person narrator. Their proximity fails to spawn a deeper emotional and psychic union, mirrored in their awkward silence soon afterwards: Sethe didn’t move because ‘[s]he did not want to call Paul D’s attention back to her’ (28) whilst “Paul D looked through the window above his feet” (26). Likewise, their simulation of familial

intimacy at the carnival barely culminates in the union of their shadows that evince looming misery: “they were not holding hands, but their shadows were” (59). The import of this mirage bears out as their return to 124 coincides with the homecoming of the incarnate baby ghost, Beloved, whose transformation from poltergeist to a flesh-and-blood ghost represents the more substantial form the past assumes in view of its incessant repression. “She had appeared . . . on the very day Sethe and he had . . . a right good time—like a family” (79), and her return ushers in a tension between their gravitation and Beloved’s intervention until the latter effectively cleaves them apart.

Although *Beloved* is ostensibly symptomatic of the disruptive past that engenders identity crises for Sethe and Paul D as well as Denver, she also signifies the redemptive potential inherent to an otherwise oppressive past. I will return to this point by explicating the psychic crises of all three characters vis-à-vis Beloved after an unpacking of her character’s tropological complexity. There is dissension among critics on the “identity” of Beloved; whilst some argue that textual evidence establishes her identity as a stray woman, others believe that Morrison meant to portray the baby ghost.⁴¹⁹ However, the plurality of the text precludes a definitive explanation as Beloved’s fragmented monologue and other characters’ appraisals proffer plenty of cues for multiple readings. Sethe initially thinks that “Beloved had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door. Then she must have escaped to a bridge or someplace and rinsed the rest out of her

⁴¹⁹ For an overview of the different readings of Beloved’s character, see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, “Narration, Doubt, Retrieval: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Narrative* 4.2 (1996): 116; Elizabeth B. House, “Toni Morrison’s Ghost: The Beloved Who is Not Beloved,” *Studies in American Fiction* 18.1 (1990): 17-26; and Pamela E. Barnett, “Figurations of Rape and the Supernatural in *Beloved*,” *PMLA* 112.3 (1997): 418-27.

mind” (140). Stamp Paid construes her identity from a rumour about “a girl locked up in the house with a whiteman over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. . . . Folks say he had her in there since she was a pup” (277), and Beloved reinforces it by confiding to Denver that “she knew one whiteman” (141). Based on her interior monologue, we may attribute her traumatised state to her braving of the Middle Passage and the concomitant trauma of her mother’s suicide. On the other hand, “the water [Sethe] voided . . . like a breaking womb” on Beloved’s arrival, Beloved’s inquisitions of Sethe regarding her “diamonds,” and her humming of the song that “[n]obody knows” but Sethe and her children permit her reading as the baby returned. Morrison herself states that she intended Beloved to be both a ghost and a real character,⁴²⁰ and when Paul D inquires of Denver, “You think she sure ‘nough your sister?” Denver replies, “At times I think she was—more” (314), and this “more” may also signify “Sixty million and more” of Africans consumed by the Middle Passage.

Indeed, Morrison’s complex text counteracts the desire for meaning consumption and a wholesale retrieval of history, a strategy which allows multiple metaphorical readings. The supernatural reading coincides with Morrison’s insistence on the coexistence of the supernatural and the real in the “cosmology” of black people. She observes that whilst for black people “superstition and magic” are just “another way of knowing things,” they are “‘discredited knowledge’ for others, ‘only because Black people were discredited.’”⁴²¹ In order to reclaim a “discredited” history then, Morrison deploys an ostracised perspective. Indeed, the postcolonial rendition of

⁴²⁰ Darling 246-54.

⁴²¹ Morrison, “Rootedness” 61.

magic realism likewise “represents the ‘writing back’ of the margins to the centre . . . blurs the binaries of modern thought . . . critiques the assumptions of the Enlightenment . . . shows up the limitations of European rationalism, [and] . . . reveals the ethical failings of realism.”⁴²² The fluidity of the supernatural or magic realist mode can also be linked to Kristevan notion of the “double” in poetic language. Kristeva contrasts the self-contained unit of signification typical of the monologic discourse of some epic and realist narratives to poetic discourse in non-realist, nonlinear, fragmented texts. As a double, *Beloved* exceeds closure and resists comprehension; she is the estranged daughter, a Middle Passage survivor, a beleaguered stray woman, the incarnate past, the “Sixty million and more,” and yet more. This is particularly evident in Sethe and *Beloved*’s monologues when *Beloved* cannot process Sethe’s apologies because she is a double, one and more: she is the daughter that has returned and also the woman that is lost; she is the child that was murdered and also the child that braved the Middle Passage. Her signifying excess evades articulation; hence, the surplus in the interaction between Sethe and *Beloved*: *Beloved* asks questions Sethe cannot process, and Sethe answers queries *Beloved* has not put. *Beloved* becomes a brimming repository pregnant with multitudinous historical traumas that can neither be confined to an individual memory nor signify the entire history, thus symbolising the impossibility of any representation fully accounting for the history of slavery. *Beloved* is just a conjoint endeavour between the author and the reader to wrestle with a tortuous past in order to reclaim the present.

⁴²² Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2009) 6.

As a daughter returned from “the other side,” Beloved also embodies the pre-oedipal infantile subjectivity with an unyielding desire for the mother since “Beloved has eyes only for Sethe” (143). Kristeva’s theory of psychosexual development accentuates the maternal role in the evolution of the subject, for she posits signification constitutive of the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic. In having been separated from her mother in the semiotic stage prior to the construction of self-identity, Beloved represents the transformative force of the semiotic chora.⁴²³ Her deranged body, “new skin, lineless and smooth” (61), unsophisticated language, sweet tooth, unsatiated hunger for narrative, and her yearning for “the join” to replace the self-other rift are reflected in her opaque discourse: “how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing. . . . I am looking for the join” (252). The omission of punctuation in the transcription of her monologue underlines Beloved’s pulverised identity that struggles with self-other boundaries, thus forcing the reader to experience the disintegration in being confronted with a chaotic enunciation. This hermeneutic quandary preoccupies the reader in being put to decipher a text that forecloses the paternal language of the symbolic. However, whilst the semiotic drive’s revolutionary potential resides in its recurrent disruption of the symbolic, its dispersal of subjectivity can break down semiotic-symbolic boundaries precipitating the subject dangerously close to psychosis as, eventually, Beloved’s psychotic propensity overwhelms Sethe whose self-other distinctions appear to be eroded, making it “difficult for Denver to tell who was who” (283).

⁴²³ For another psychoanalytic reading of *Beloved* via Kristevan theory of the abject, see Helene Moglen, “Redeeming History: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 17-40.

As a return of the repressed and driven by a consumptive desire for Sethe, Beloved invades Paul D and Sethe's intimacy in order to be accounted for. Morrison deploys the imagery of turtles to portray the next lovemaking episode between Paul D and Sethe, witnessing which sends Beloved running into the woods where she stares at turtles' copulating in the water: "The gravity of their shields, clashing, countered and mocked the floating heads touching" (124). Beloved's unaccounted presence mocks Sethe and Paul D's attempt to forge a relationship, and the turtle motif recurs when Beloved resorts to seducing Paul D to stymie their intimacy. Beloved's attraction unsettles Paul D as he attempts to combat the push and pull she exercises on his "tobacco tin," reminding him of "[s]omething, look like, I'm supposed to remember" (278). Paul D had "willed himself into being" by packing away damaging experiences that demanded confrontation until Beloved "moved him" both physically and psychologically. In order to bring Sethe and Paul D apocalyptically close to their innermost conflicts, Beloved instils an irresistible urge in Paul D to break away from Sethe. Bemused yet apprehensive, he is propelled from Sethe's room to the rocker in the parlour, to Baby Suggs's room, to the store room, and, thence, to the cold house where Beloved, finally, hones in on him: "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name." Beloved's literal description of touching "the inside" and calling "my name" signifies the urgency to meet the past head-on, and, as the return of the repressed, she gets the better of Paul D who complies unawares: "he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made...as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin" when Beloved "turned . . . the way turtles had." The intimacy with Beloved inches him closer to his past until "the lid gave," and "he reached the inside part": "Red heart. Red heart" (137-8).

Beloved reignites Paul D's deepest scar that was "rusted shut" in the tin; although Garner had conferred on him a masculine identity, the iron hand of "Schoolteacher changed [him]" until he became "something else [that] was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (86). The peculiarly named rooster, Mister's gaze; the realisation of the "dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future" (226); and the emasculating treatment by schoolteacher displaced Paul D's manhood with a void: "But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again" (85). Now that conflict is rekindled in his perplexity at being the kind of "grown man fixed by a girl" (149). Although he feels pressed to confide in Sethe that he "can't break" the spell Beloved has cast on him, Paul D is also shamed by the fact that "he was not man enough to break out" on his own, and needs Sethe's help (149). When he, finally, approaches Sethe, the looming threat to his depleted manhood displaces the confession of his vulnerability with a desire for its re-assertion:⁴²⁴ "I want you pregnant Sethe. Would you do that for me?" he asks instead of making the revelation (151); "suddenly it was a solution: a way to hold onto her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell" (128). Although the disruptive force signified in Beloved's intimacy moves Paul D closer to the repressed past, it is a deeper connection with that history that will facilitate a performative reimagination of his identity.

Besides Paul D and Sethe, almost all characters in *Beloved* are battling an ineluctable and unsettling force from the past that limits their sense of self and their

⁴²⁴ Beaulieu and Mitchell make a similar point though they approach it differently. Beaulieu argues that Paul D resorts to "an age-old way of proving manhood" by asking Sethe to have a child whilst Mitchell argues that he does so "to reaffirm his manhood in a conventional way because the spirit Beloved causes him to question his masculinity." See Mitchell 65 and Beaulieu 99. My focus, instead, is on Paul D's identity crisis that Beloved disinters.

relations with others. Despite his self-proclaimed exemption from all past “debts” and his self-assigned lifework of consolidating a black community, Stamp Paid’s fixation on the past materialises in his inadvertent instigation of a breach between Sethe and Paul D by apprising the latter of Sethe’s past—her infanticide. The gravity of his action dawns upon him in retrospect; however, this rift carries a regenerative possibility for Paul D and Sethe, as well as the community, given that they go on to assimilate their past into their present realities. Although the past is resistant to absolute redemption, the attempt, however flawed, at the retrieval and integration of the past into the present is a crucial performative exercise in the reconstruction of present identities and future realities. Thus, when Paul D enquires of Sethe about the infanticide recorded in the newspaper clipping Stamp Paid has shared with him, Sethe’s attempt at explanation resists comprehension as she can barely skirt around the topic: “She was spinning . . . turning like a slow but steady wheel . . . but the wheel never stopped.” Sethe’s “wheeling” makes Paul D “dizzy”: “At first he thought it was her spinning. Circling him the way she was circling the subject. Round and round, never changing direction.” However, Sethe is circumventing the topic designedly as her very experience is inherently unnarratable: “she knew that the words she did not understand hadn’t any more power than she had to explain” (187-189). The narration of this encounter flits from Sethe’s consciousness to Paul D’s with the intermediation of the third-person narrator. Sethe’s direct discourse is a fragmented, off-topic stream of consciousness that veers off Paul D’s question, so that the narration of the crux of the story is taken over by the third-person narrator: “Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask.” Sethe’s rationale for infanticide exceeds the 0-1 logic of “Definition,” symptomatic of the

monolithic pedagogic discourses that mythologised, stereotyped, and criminalised an experience that exceeds “definitions” and that can perhaps only be deciphered through transformative identification with pain, loss, and vulnerability: “If they didn’t get it right off—she could never explain” (192).

This incapacity of pedagogic language to account for experience is reflected in the strain that *Beloved* sustains between “sounds” and “words,” accentuating music, cadence, rhythm, beat, and song over the exclusivity of “words” that signify unspeakability as well as hegemony. 124 is “spiteful,” “loud,” and “quiet,” but the “words” are indecipherable to the outside world (3, 199, 281); Beloved wonders how she “can say things that are pictures” (248); Sethe is happy that there will be “no [white] notebook for [her] babies” (233); Baby Suggs “didn’t deliver sermons or preach” (208), but her “powerful Call” asked the community to “shout,” “laugh,” “cry,” and “dance” whilst “the others opened their mouths and gave her the music” instead of words (103-104) ; Stamp Paid tells Baby Suggs that she “can’t quit the Word (209) whilst she believes that “the Word, didn’t count” because “[t]hey came in her yard anyway” (212); and, finally, the “Thirty Women,” who came to save Sethe with their presence and voices, declare that in the beginning “there were no words” but “sound” (305). This emphasis on “the sound” displaces “the Word” that signifies the hegemonic language wielded in the oppression of black people for hundreds of years, supplementing it with the performative potential of the alternative language of African-American folklore and musical tradition.

This is also reinforced by the text’s engagement with a white historical text, the recurrent motif of the newspaper, as a signifier of the pedagogical narrative and dominant moral benchmarks. For instance, Stamp Paid’s preservation of the eighteen-

year-old newspaper clip that he shares with Paul D represents the univocal narrative of “whitepeople’s” objectification of, and verdict on, Sethe’s act that the community brings to bear in its own judgement of Sethe. Indeed, both Stamp Paid and Paul D know what the newspaper epitomises: “Paul D knew that it ought to mess him up” because “[i]t would have to be something . . . whitepeople would find interesting, truly different, worth a few minutes of teeth sucking” (183) for a black to appear in the newspaper. Yet, their internalisation of the dominant discourse precludes a reinterpretation of this text. Indeed, as long as Paul D ignores “whatever it was those black scratches said” and “Stamp Paid wanted him to know,” he cannot “read” the newspaper clipping in the way Stamp Paid reads this “white” text. One may view Paul D’s recurrent answer “This ain’t her mouth” as an unwillingness to accept the past, which is reinforced by the hush around the disinterment of this report, a conscious burial of the “secret” whose import has always been an unconscious part of their lived reality (199). However, Paul D’s intermittent “This ain’t her mouth” also shows that as long as his “reading” does not rely on the “text” in the clipping, he is unable to see Stamp Paid’s point. It is Stamp Paid’s reading aloud of the “text” that begins to correspond to the image for Paul D, factoring out the Sethe that he had known all along: “the more he heard, the stranger the lips in the drawing became” (180, 155) until he begins to view her from Stamp Paid’s eyes: “This here *new* Sethe didn’t know where the world stopped and she began. Suddenly he saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see” (193). Paul D, then, pronounces the same verdict that schoolteacher had conferred on Sethe: “you got two feet, Sethe, not four” (194), translating the newspaper “reading” into Sethe’s valuation as subhuman. Paul D not only judges Sethe amiss but is also unable to identify with her despite his own share of “shame” and “secret” (194). Morrison uses the metaphor of “unnavigable” forest and jungle to

refer to the racial mythologies and stereotyping of blacks; it is significant that the moment Paul D questions Sethe's humanity, "a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (193-195). Paul D draws on the white myth of slaves' inhumanity without accounting for Sethe's enslaved status that was before a mutual point of identification between them, thus reifying boundaries rather than bridging them.

Whereas Sethe's internalisation of the dominant discourses reduces her relationships to terms of ownership, Paul D and the community's assimilation of the colonial ethicality blinds their moral judgement to Sethe's positionality. Although white women might fail to connect with an enslaved woman's reaction to commodification and dehumanisation, which explains Jacobs's travail in establishing an identificatory narrator-addressee relationship, the community of ex-slaves in *Beloved* shares Sethe's positionality, yet they fall short of recognising this mutuality. It is not despite but because of that shared oppressive history that they fail to participate in a relational connection and, instead, buy into the newspaper adjudication that signifies the bewilderment of the sheriff, schoolteacher, and the nephews at Sethe's act, "What she go and do that for?" (176). Whereas Stamp Paid believed that Baby Suggs should neither "quit the Word" nor blame God because "Sethe's the one did it," he overpassed her query, "And if she hadn't?" (211). Morrison neither condones nor condemns Sethe's act, though she reiterates Jacobs's message that "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (*Incidents*, 55). In this newspaper reading exercise, Morrison situates the reader in a position that allows richer hermeneutic possibilities than Stamp Paid and Paul D's locus, thus inciting the reader to engage in an intertextual, transformative, and performative re-reading of the dominant texts.

Significantly, despite his shock at the discovery of Sethe's past, it is not Sethe that scares Paul D off, but "the woman upstairs." Paul D who had lived his life at the brink of death, withstanding multiple traumas, and who had exorcised the poltergeist within moments of his arrival at 124 is suddenly scared of the ghost, wondering "how to make it an exit not an escape" when he is about to abandon Sethe (194). What Beloved sets on stoking is finally exploded by Stamp Paid's revelation, reducing Paul D to a homeless wretch on the church threshold: "His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey" (257-8). Paul D's cognizance of the gravity of Sethe's act also digs up his own share of wounds—the conflict at the heart of his "Red heart." On the church steps, he scrutinises his sense of self, questioning the colonial epistemology for the first time: "For years Paul D believed schoolteacher broke into children what Garner had raised into men"; now, he wonders if Garner was "naming what he saw or creating what he did not?" Was his consciousness of his manhood "Garner's gift or his own will? . . . Did a whiteman saying it make it so?" (260). Paul D threads his way through the past events, wrestling with the import of things "rusted shut" and questions "packed tight in his chest" for years, as he wonders if it was the "word" or some inherent truth that instated identity. In his "reinterpretation" of the past, Paul D comes to question the exclusivity and the determinacy of the dominant "word" by which he judged both himself and Sethe, an apprehension that eventually returns him to Sethe with whom he shares a past that carries the potential for a performative redefinition of identities.

The identity crisis experienced by ex-slaves and intensified by Beloved's return is also bequeathed to the next generation; because Sethe's conception of relationships simulates the structures of inequality based in "belonging" and "ownership," it is no wonder that Denver follows suit. Denver has lived her life in

“the original hunger” in being denied a normal maternal bonding owing to Sethe’s submersion in the past and apathy towards the present (139). The lack created by the absence of the maternal gaze forces Denver to seek identification elsewhere: in nature via her “emerald closet” (45); in the absent presence of the baby ghost companion; and, finally, in the arrival of “her Beloved” who becomes the mirror for Denver to resuscitate the self, fragmented and alienated by a warped mother-daughter relationship: “for Denver, looking was food enough to last. But to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite” (139). She manoeuvres Beloved’s craving for stories by taking pains “to construct out of the strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved” so as to procure her gaze (90). So pressing is her need to love and be loved by another that she is willing to trade Sethe off for Beloved, allowing her self to be consumed by the juggernaut that Beloved embodies. When Beloved plays a petrifying game of hide-and-seek with Denver in the cold house, her fleeting evaporation unhinges Denver, threatening a regression and disintegration worse than the “original hunger” because “[t]hen it was for herself. Now she is crying because she has no self.” In the “darkness” of the “cold house,” Denver fears she cannot “halt the melting” of her body as “she does not know where her body stops” (144). Denver relegates her subjectivity to the consumptive force signified by Beloved, and, in the aftermath of Beloved’s disappearance, she shuts herself up in the cold room “because there is no world out there” until Beloved returns (145). Indeed, the text creates a perverted oedipal triangle in which Denver wants Beloved who wants Sethe who is too preoccupied to reciprocate with either initially. Because Denver could never become the object of her mother’s desire, she pursues the object of her mother’s desire instead, which is a fixation on the past, the personification of which, Beloved, becomes Denver’s world until she threatens to consume them all.

Once Sethe realises that Beloved is the daughter returned from “the other side,” the roles shuffle, and “the two of them cut Denver out of the games,” locking Sethe in a deathly strife with Beloved and, by extension, the past (282). Whereas Denver’s desire was unreciprocated by both Sethe and Beloved, the latter are now enmeshed in a vicious circle that swings from “lullabies” to “arguments” and from “need” to “desire.” Tensions ratchet up between Beloved, who “never got enough of anything,” and Sethe, who “ran out of things to give her,” so that “Beloved invented desire,” a longing voracious in its demand for Sethe to recompense the loss Beloved had suffered. However, Sethe “didn’t really want forgiveness given [either]. She wanted it refused” to perpetuate the hungry circle (282-3). Beloved usurps even Sethe’s oedipal role; when “Sethe tried to assert herself—be the unquestioned mother whose word was law . . . Beloved slammed things” (285). Sethe was “licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved’s eyes” (68), and as Beloved thrives on Sethe, the latter languishes increasingly until the creeping darkness of 124 gradually engulfs them all, leaving them “limp and starving.” In the absence of an identificatory mother-daughter connection, Denver had lived her life in an enigmatic fear of “the thing [in Sethe] that makes it all right to kill her children” (243); however, her entanglement with Beloved as much as her surveillance of the two puts her mother’s position into perspective as she begins to see a reversal of her relationship with Sethe in Sethe’s relationship with Beloved: “she knew Sethe’s greatest fear was the same one Denver had in the beginning—that Beloved might leave” (295). Both Paul D and Sethe are fixated on their identities as pedagogical objects anchored in the past. Beloved comes to signify the irrepressible past that also offers the drive for performative self-generation through its reinterpretation, an insight they must gain in order to overcome the

traumatic past. However, given their entrenchment in the past, this move must eventually come from Denver.

Whilst Sethe's rationale for infanticide does not appease Beloved, it does resonate with Denver, bringing home the realisation that perhaps "the thing in her that could kill" had been less threatening than the thing that was taking Sethe over now. Denver realises that the "job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved." The switch from "Sethe" to "her mother" in the predicate reflects a shift in Denver's perspective as a silent observer of the struggle between the two women. This is the first occasion of Denver's expression of love for her mother, for until then "the choice between Sethe and Beloved was without conflict" (123). As long as she was ensnared in the appropriative identifications of "a love that wore everybody out," Denver could neither understand Beloved nor identify with Sethe (286). However, her status as an engaged listener to their stories brings home the consumptive appetite of the repressed past, signified by Beloved, "locked" in strife with the present, represented by Sethe and herself. As a return of the repressed past, Beloved triggers Paul D, Denver, and Sethe's identity crises; however, they struggle to realise that although a revisitation of the past is crucial in deciphering ongoing relations, a capitulation to its disruptive energy can consume the present. Denver is the first to attain this timely realisation because "[t]he present alone interested Denver" (141); as opposed to being lodged in the past like Sethe or keeping it lodged in the unconscious like Paul D, Denver comes to recognise the liberating potential that past identities and stories bear for a performative redefinition of the present.

3.2. Performing a Regenerative Middle Passage

Having been born at the transitional site of the Ohio River during Sethe's journey from slavery to freedom, Denver signifies the collective performance of a new middle passage; her story works as a propitious intermediary channel between an oppressive past and an overwhelming future, with the reader in tow. Indeed, her very birth was a product of collaboration between a white girl and a black woman who were both performing boundary crossing (heading for the North and Ohio respectively) for deliverance. As such, Denver becomes the locus of the initiation of the textual performance of a transformative passage as Morrison equips the reader with a vantage point that they share with Denver whilst she silently processes Sethe and *Beloved*'s perforated dialogues.⁴²⁵ Whereas earlier Denver locked herself up in the "cold house," refusing "to open the door because there is no world out there" (145), her intermediary position and her discovery of Sethe's past allow her to step out from 124 which, for Sethe, is "all there is and all there needs to be" (215). Whilst Sethe, Paul D, and the community are inundated by the malevolent force of the past that has also sabotaged their ability to form connections, Denver's reinterpretation of the past in relation to present exigencies brings home the urgency to unravel the "noose" that "ringed 124" by seeking revitalising ties. Symbolic of the need for the new generation's intervention, Denver embraces a psychic rebirth to restore life to the community: "it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would" (281). Thus, Denver "stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge" (286); however, the performance of

⁴²⁵ Rushdy makes a similar point regarding Denver as "a site of participation" for readers, however, my reading focuses on the performative middle passage that she comes to signify for both the readers and the community. Rushdy, "Daughters" 586.

this redemptive voyage must mediate the ancestor's voice, which is why a presentiment of the uncertainty and "the bad . . . waiting for her" outside their enclosure stops Denver short momentarily until she has a vision of Baby Suggs who "laughed, clear as anything": "'You mean I never told you nothing? . . . Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my.' 'But you said there was no defense.' 'There ain't.' 'Then what do I do?' 'Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.'" (287-288). Although Baby Suggs never judged Sethe's act, she was dispirited by its weight and the community's distance, which encumbered the two women's relationship. Denver embodies Baby Suggs's spirit in that she not only comes to apprehend Sethe's actions but also facilitates symbolic reconciliation between Baby Suggs and Sethe through the rapprochement between Sethe and the community. Morrison's return to the slave narrative for a revival of the precursors' self-assertion signifies a performative regenerative passage that is translated into Denver's return to Baby Suggs for succour.

The text's recurrent motif of "eyes" ties in with an exploration of identity formation within interpersonal relationships that bear the crux of performative self-reclamation. For instance, Sethe thinks "how much her eyes enjoyed looking in [Paul D's] face" (56), "Beloved has eyes only for Sethe" (143), Denver craved both Sethe's and Beloved's gaze, Mister's gaze stripped Paul D of his manhood, and the chain gang members performed their liberation through communication with eyes. Eyes become a metaphor for identification or alienation. When Denver exits the house on her transitional passage between 124 and the black community of Cincinnati, she is apprehensive of the eyes she meets, so that her first encounter with two men, whose voices she hears before they appear, is overwrought: "Denver lowered her head," and "kept her eyes on the road," casting about for an escape as they approach; "Two men.

Negro. Denver breathed. Both men touched their caps and murmured, ‘Morning. Morning.’ Denver believed her eyes spoke gratitude but she never got her mouth open in time to reply” (289). It is the recognition that Denver sees reflected in their eyes that restores her poise. “Braced and heartened by that easy encounter,” Denver allows her gaze to run free and “look[s] deliberately at the neighborhood” now. Her next meeting with Lady Jones further reinforces her self-assurance as she responds to Lady Jones’s interpellation: “‘Oh, baby,’ said Mrs. Jones. ‘Oh, baby,’” and “Denver looked up at her.” The look in Lady Jones’ eyes accompanied by words of endearment simulate a maternal recognition that Denver’s “original hunger” had craved for and that instantaneously instates her subjectivity: “it was the word ‘baby,’ said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman” (292). The third momentous happenstance is Nelson Lord’s greeting: “All he did was smile and say, ‘Take care of yourself, Denver,’ but she heard it as though it were what language was made for. The last time he spoke to her his words blocked up her ears. Now they opened her mind” (297). The relational dynamics of compassionate eyes, both black and white, also aid the reception of “words” previously blocked out. Thus, as an emissary of Baby Suggs, Denver becomes the first to respond to her grandmother’s performative “call” of “claim[ing] ownership” of oneself through communal ties. All her life Denver had “wait[ed] for my daddy” to come “help me” (242); now, her desire for a paternal saviour mutates into relational self-assertion, mediated by the maternal ancestor.

Although prior to her freedom, Baby Suggs had shared the dislocation of the enslaved, her first moments of freed life connected her with her “body” and her “heart.” From then onwards, Baby Suggs “devoted her freed life to harmony,” extending her spiritual odyssey of self-reclamation into the community (165-6). After

Sethe and her children's arrival, Baby Suggs strove to establish a domesticity denied in slavery; this domestic space distinguished itself from the image of nineteenth-century white homes in its provision of a recuperative communal zone conducive to redefining identities, restoring dignity, and establishing solidarity: "124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed." Even Sethe "had claimed herself" in the "twenty-eight days . . . of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company; knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits" (111). However, despite partaking in Baby Suggs's "harmony," its collective, performative meaning was lost on the community; instead of drawing strength from a mutual past and a shared present to engender a redemptive future, after the infanticide, the community remained anchored in pedagogical colonial ideologies. Baby Suggs's grace in first arranging "a feast for ninety people" was reciprocated with envy: "Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things?" (161). Instead of hailing their entitlement to autonomy and care after years of enslavement and oppression, the community questioned the legitimacy of proprietorship for the newly freed: "Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave." Thus, when schoolteacher arrived to apprehend Sethe and her children, the community refrained from interceding owing to their view of Baby Suggs's forging of a free black domesticity as trespass into the dominant culture's domain: "Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (163).

On account of their internalisation of subjugation, the community failed to recognise the subversive potential of the "excess," over and above hegemonic boundaries, for individual and collective regeneration. The "Clearing" address was a purging ritual that was meant to disencumber them of self-depreciation, but Baby

Suggs's message, "the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine," did not sink in (102-103). Contrary to her call for self-reclamation, they judged her conduct by internalised dominant benchmarks; her "grace" was misconstrued as "pride," her agency met with "fear," "her great big heart" received "condemnation and spite," and her "powerful Call" in the Clearing was "mocked and rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard" (202, 208). Morrison highlights the way the dynamics of slavocracy play out into the so-called Reconstruction both on individual and collective levels; the community displays its ownership of ethics by buying into the lingering colonial epistemology. It is not only their failure to avert Sethe's tragedy but also their fixation on the past in later holding away from Sethe that makes for a collective misfortune that disillusion Baby Suggs and severs community links.

Now Denver's connection with the community furnishes them all with a redemptive prospect; their present response to "the trouble" at 124 betrays their own craving for the lost "grace" as they recall "the days when 124 was a way station, the place they assembled," and they share with Denver the "harmony" they relinquished (293). They might have concluded that the "pride" at 124 "had run its course," but they were also "sorry for the years of their own disdain" (294). Now Ella is able to identify with Sethe: "There was also something very personal in her fury. . . . The idea of that pup [her own child from "the lowest yet"] coming back to whip her too set her jaw working" (303-305). Baby Suggs's message of performative retrieval of selves and histories finally comes home to the community: "Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. . . . The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind" (302). Denver's mediatory passage links the community to Baby Suggs's legacy; the community restores that legacy to Sethe

through a collective performance of Baby Suggs's Clearing ritual that reinterprets the past to open up the present.

Just as the "Thirty-mile Woman got away with [Sixo's] blossoming seed" (270), the spore of regeneration, proliferation, and communal healing, the community's "thirty women" perform a similar recuperative passage. The "thirty women made up that company and walked slowly, slowly toward 124" to reciprocate Denver's journey to them and to reenact Baby Suggs's "grace": "there they were, young and happy, playing in Baby Suggs' yard, not feeling the envy that surfaced the next day" (304). Instead of relying on words, they resort to sound to confront Beloved. Morrison rewrites the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,"⁴²⁶ as the "thirty women" sing a revised passage of their own: "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (305). This can be interpreted in multiple ways; for one, their beginning had commenced with Baby Suggs's performative "call" in the Clearing that displaced words with therapeutic music. Besides, in evoking the "play" in Baby Suggs's yard, they stretch back to the ancestors who gained strength from slave songs whilst they were denied written words. Also, keeping in view the recurrent sound-word trope, Morrison weaves black folklore into the text: a traditional ghost story, the return of the dead, elements of jazz, blues, slave songs, and antiphony. As opposed to relying on "the Word [that] was with God," the text challenges the literary and historical deities: thus, "the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that *broke the*

⁴²⁶ "Book of John" 1:1 *biblehub.com* n.d. Web. 27 Sept. 2016.

back of words” (emphasis added), replacing them with communal, therapeutic, and powerful music (308).

The intensity of the re-enactment of the Clearing ritual also stirs Sethe: “For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves.” When Sethe had visited the Clearing with Denver and Beloved to summon Baby Suggs’s spirit, she was choked as the suspended past foreclosed a solitary call; now the communal cry “broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash” (308). In “Rootedness,” Morrison explicates antiphony or the call-and-response tradition by comparing it to the performative rite of congregation in which “the shouter is performing some rite that is extremely subjective, [and] other people are performing as a community in protecting that person.” She draws this analogy to explain the effect that fictional art should have on its audience, “the same way that a musician’s music is enhanced when there is a response from the audience.”⁴²⁷ Thus, whilst the community engages in a performative rejuvenation that engenders both individual and communal healing, the text performs a parallel rousing rite of passage that demands reciprocation from the audience.

Indeed, the constant tension between “word” and “sound” throughout the text ties in with its own structural performativity; whereas the “word” represents the Western literary and historical tradition, the “sound” is a metaphor for African-American culture. Morrison asserts:

Black Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art, above all in the music. That was functional. . . . My

⁴²⁷ Morrison, “Rootedness” 56.

parallel is always the music, because all of the strategies of the art are there. . . . The power of the word is not music, but in terms of aesthetics, the music is the mirror that gives me the necessary clarity. . . . I have wanted always to develop a way of writing that was irrevocably black. . . . Sometimes I hear blues, sometimes spirituals or jazz and I've appropriated it. I've tried to reconstruct the texture of it in my writing.⁴²⁸

In terms of Kristeva's fluid understanding of poetic discourse, the African-American musical tradition is a black "text" that permeates *Beloved*'s textuality. Morrison interpolates "sound" (a metaphor for black cultural tradition) into the hegemonic "word" (the newspaper, historiography, etc.) as she intercalates black history into the dominant narrative. For example, *Beloved* approximates the Blues at various levels; whilst the Clearing ritual, later re-enacted by the thirty women, as well as the interior monologues of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved follow the call-and-response structure of the Blues, the form is also replicated at the narrative level in the participatory, performative narrator-reader relationship. Besides, Blues musical elements abound at the structural level in the form of emotive, lyrical, and rhythmic prose; adrift narrative structure; the repetition of themes, images, and metaphors; and the replication of the AAB verse structure of the Blues in the three parts of the text, with the first two escalating the trauma that is redeemed in the last section. Hence textual performativity at both formal and thematic levels ensues from Morrison's revisionist enterprise that re-reads Western literary and historical discourse intertextually with the silenced African-American "texts." Since the "word" in history has belonged to the coloniser,

⁴²⁸ Morrison quoted in Gilroy 78.

Morrison's revival of the black musical tradition and her communion with the ancestors mediate the hegemonic "word" to legitimise and reclaim black texts.

As the "thirty women" are recreating the past in their performance, the white abolitionist Bodwin, on his way to collect Denver, is also reminiscing about his personal history. Just as "spaces" plunge Sethe back into the past, Bodwin's "destination" also "turned his thoughts to time"; however, Bodwin's space-time ruminations stand in stark contrast to those of the congregation. Whereas the past evokes painful memories, oppression, and servitude for the assembled community, it recalls "Precious things" and lost "treasure" for Bodwin. Sethe's infanticide, that had jeopardised the entire community's wellbeing, is dismissed by Bodwin after a fleeting recollection of its instrumentality in furthering the abolishment cause: "Good years . . . full of spirit and conviction. Now he just wanted to . . . bring back the new girl and recall exactly where his treasure lay" (306-7). Although the Bodwins are represented as benevolent whites, Morrison reminds us that they merely "hated slavery more than slaves" (162). The preservation of a racialised social structure in the post-Emancipation era is reflected in the servitude of "the third generation" of Baby's family to the Bodwins and is symbolised in the figurine Denver encounters on her first visit to their house. The grotesque image of a grinning "blackboy's mouth" and his body kneeling with the script "At Yo Service" underlines Reconstruction's barely changed power structures (300).

It is no wonder, then, that Sethe (mis)takes Bodwin for schoolteacher, who "is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing," as she runs towards him with an ice pick in her hand. Though Sethe misreads the scene, there is also a shift in her focus from the past to the present as she lets go of Beloved's hand to attack the

“threat” instead: “Sethe is running away from her, running and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. . . . Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind” (309). Morrison’s rewriting of the earlier scene of schoolteacher’s visit underscores the continuities and discontinuities with the past: whilst schoolteacher came to claim ownership of his slaves, Bodwin is picking up their servant, Denver. However, as opposed to the earlier vulnerability of Sethe and her children, Denver is not only capable of self-defence, but she also halts another tragedy in tandem with the community: “Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling.” This new “hill of black people” replaces the one from Beloved’s reminiscences of the Middle Passage as Denver and the community’s intervention and consociation perform a revised passage that redeems Sethe and exorcises Beloved. The spearhead in this transitional passage is Denver, “the first one [to] wrestle her mother down. Before anybody knew what the devil was going on” (313). Whilst Beloved represents the national stasis encapsulated by “Sixty million or more” that were “disremembered and unaccounted for,” Denver signifies the performative retrieval of the remembering and reclaiming generation. The consumptive past is now overcome as Beloved is forfeited for Sethe’s rejuvenation; Beloved “erupts into her separate parts” whilst Sethe survives and reconnects (323). As the community re-performs Baby Suggs’s Clearing ritual, the text reinterprets a repressive past in order to engender a restorative future.

Morrison’s repetition of earlier textual events towards the end of the novel, in line with the African-American folk tradition of storytelling and the cyclical form of the Blues, resonates with the collective need to revise the past; the Clearing ritual, schoolteacher’s visit, the newspaper motif, and Baby Suggs’s bathing of Sethe are all

re-rendered. Thus, when Paul D returns to Sethe's house, he sees "old newspapers gnawed at the edges by mice"—"faded" pages, having lost their legitimacy and exclusive hold on truth as *Beloved* has reworked historical texts (318). Although the newspapers have paled for Paul D in the aftermath of Beloved's precipitation of his self-analysis vis-à-vis the repressed past, their symbolic weight is still preoccupying Sethe. Thus, the moment Paul D enters Baby Suggs's room whose bed now Sethe occupies, she declares: "I made the ink, Paul D" (320). It is Paul D's turn to be Sethe's mirror for recouping her identity, and he begins with the body as Baby Suggs had. Sethe, however, wonders if there is "[any]thing left to bathe. . . . And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?" However, her subjectivity remains intact as it is Beloved's parts that have dispersed, and Sethe can read that in "the blessedness" of Paul D's "waiting eyes" (321).

The "carnival colors" that Paul D notices on the quilt recall both Baby Suggs's post-Emancipation love for colour and Paul D, Sethe, and Denver's tentative familial kinship at the carnival. This memory of the curative relationship with Sethe, that Beloved had interrupted, reminds Paul D of Sixo's explanation of his love for the "Thirty-Mile Woman": "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order" (321). This memory reconnects Paul D to a similar emotion that Sethe had stirred in him at Sweet Home and that was later re-enacted at the carnival. The crisis underlying the humanity and manhood that Garner permitted whilst the schoolteacher denied is resolved by a single fulfilling memory: Sethe's "tenderness about his neck jewelery . . . how she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that" (322).

It is his reunion with Sethe that endows a sense of self denied in all other encounters: he had been looking for Sethe for eighteen years, he made love to her the day he entered 124, and “he loved [her] a little bit more every day” (136), but all that time, his “tobacco tin” had shut off the healing potential of the past along with its traumas. Now, he realises that a single affirmative memory of recognition can potentially recompense for a lifetime of oppression; that Sethe’s silence had been more meaningful than Garner’s or schoolteacher’s “word.” It is in a mutually inclusive identificatory relationship, based in reinterpretations of both the oppressive and redeeming dimensions of history, that he finds his sense of self. Sethe’s identification with his psychic distress had made her avert the critical gaze that she nevertheless received from both Paul D and the community as “he [had] behave[d] like everybody else in town” once he learnt about her past (204). However, Paul D’s reappraisal of the past, after his confrontation with Beloved, impresses upon him the realisation that identities lie in the performance of meaningful interpersonal relationships as opposed to the pedagogy of oppressive definers. It was none but Sethe who “restored him his manhood,” which is why he wants to “put his story next to hers” in shaping a restitutive future: “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow,” and this tomorrow belongs to Sethe as much as it does to Denver: “You your best thing, Sethe. You are” (322).

Kristeva conceives of intertextuality or transposition as “the passage from one signifying system to another [that] demands a new articulation of thethetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality,” just as Bhabha’s notion of performative identities entails “sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another.”

Transposition is performative in its “abandonment of a former sign system” and “the passage to a second . . . system”⁴²⁹ through an interaction between the subject-addressee horizontal axis and the text-context vertical axis. *Beloved* exercises this transformative practice on both slave narratives and prior historical texts within the framework of author-reader-text transposition through a dual move that at once resuscitates the African-American tradition and transcends the colonisers’ history. It thus creates new thetic positions for the narrator, characters, and readers that transmute traumatic memories into reformatory retrospection for performing alternative individual and collective identities. Morrison’s performative discourse dismantles the pedagogical Africanist presence in the American historical consciousness through a return to the African-American literary and cultural tradition in order to resurrect its potential for a liberating narrative.

This is reinforced by *Beloved*’s ambivalent absent presence towards the end of the novel that signifies the coexistence of the past and the present in place of the erstwhile warring tension between the two. Although the community “forgot her like a bad dream,” as a vestige of the past that has shaped their reality, she “cannot be lost.” “Remembering seemed unwise,” yet the novel ends with “*Beloved*” as she comes to epitomise the transgressive force of African-American double-consciousness whose traces remain in the community’s psyche (324). As the concluding “word” of the novel, her lingering presence, representative of the past, must constantly interact with the present without jeopardising identities and communities. I agree with Jill Matus’s reading of the play on “pass on” in the line “This is not a story to pass on” (324): “Pass on” means both to “transmit” and “disappear or die,” meaning that this is

⁴²⁹ Kristeva, *Desire* 59-60. Bhabha, *Location* 211.

a story that must not “die or fade away.”⁴³⁰ African-Americans must preserve the liberating potential of an adapting history, culture, and tradition against the persistent oppressive pedagogical national narratives in order to seek self-determination and pass its secret on to others.

4. Re-contextualising Performativity: *Beloved* in a Transnational Postcolonial Context

Commenting on the “national” significance of *Beloved*, Beaulieu argues that the neo-slave narrative consolidates American “national spirit” and agrees with Trudier Harris that “Morrison has written a national epic” that has “reclaimed America for the best of itself.”⁴³¹ However, the idea of a “national epic” bolstering national spirit relegates the African-American double consciousness that shapes Morrison’s narratives, besides putting a closure of sorts on a fluid, iterative text. I want to situate *Beloved* in a broader framework by supplementing its intertextual plenitude and subversive potential in terms of other postcolonial (con)texts and in view of U.S. imperialism.

Both Bhabha’s pedagogical-performative model and Kristeva’s intertextuality are indebted to Derridean notion of the essential “iterability” of a linguistic sign that is never “exhausted in the present of its inscription” and that “can give rise to an iteration” beyond empirical subjects.⁴³² This iterability is encapsulated in Kristeva’s

⁴³⁰ Jill Matus, “*Beloved: The Possessions of History*,” *Toni Morrison: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998) 120.

⁴³¹ Beaulieu xv, 58.

⁴³² Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988) 9.

“splitting of the writer into subject of enunciation and subject of utterance.” Kristeva argues that narration is always structured in relation to an other, thus creating “a dialogue between the subject of narration and the addressee.” Whereas utterance presupposes an authorial self, once transcribed in the textual field, enunciation breaks free from the speaking subject in its encounter with the reader. Unlike Roland Barthes, Kristeva maintains the discursive position of the author: “he is neither nothingness nor anybody, but the possibility of permutation . . . from story to discourse and from discourse to story.”⁴³³ The split between utterance and enunciation creates the space for readerly participation as the iterability of the text evokes responses and associations, one step removed from the subject of utterance. Morrison also acknowledges this utterance-enunciation nexus in observing that “the imagination that produces work which bears and invites rereadings, which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones, implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language.”⁴³⁴ She links the “richness” of her writing to reader response:

They always say that my writing is rich . . . if there is any richness, is what the reader gets and brings him or herself. The folktales are told in such a way that whoever is listening is in it and can shape it and figure it out. It’s not over just because it stops. . . . It’s passed on and somebody else can alter it later.⁴³⁵

The cyclic form of folktales shares with intertextuality the productive possibility of reading across multiple localities. I, as a feminist reader from a postcolonial South

⁴³³ Kristeva, *Desire* 74.

⁴³⁴ Morrison, *Playing* xii.

⁴³⁵ Darling 253.

Asian context, bring my own readerly metaphors to the hermeneutic exercise in reading *Beloved* from a Third World transnational feminist perspective in the twenty-first-century world order dominated by U.S. imperialism, which offers unique insights into its politicised aesthetic. Not only does this re-contextualised reading foreground the convergence of the legacies of slavery and colonialism in the neocolonial world, it also generates an interface for feminist politics through transformative identifications and reinterpretive preservation across the historical narratives of various peripheral groups.

Within this framework, Sethe's relationship with the community can be mapped onto African-Americans' interaction with other postcolonial groups; Sethe's refusal to look beyond her boundary is as detrimental to her as the community's betrayal and ostracism of her is to them. The community moves Sethe to the uttermost margin, an oppressed person among the oppressed; however, enshrouded in a larger oppressive structure, both parties equally remain blind to their complicity in their mutual displacement and vulnerability. As victims to the internalisation of dominant narratives, neither side is able to transcend the barriers that divide them. Finally, it is Denver whose transformative identification with Sethe's "story" as well as reciprocal response to Baby Suggs's "call" replaces the "noose" with communal connections. Morrison's performative intervention into the pedagogy of U.S. national and historical consciousness foregrounds the empowering potential of double consciousness for African-Americans that can facilitate a relational nexus between the past and the present in order to reclaim and transform both for a restitutive future. This recuperative double consciousness must also be deployed for transformative identification with other postcolonial groups to challenge contemporary U.S. imperialism.

Carol Boyce Davies's emphasis on the potential retention of African-American double consciousness for coalitional politics is crucial here. Helene Hiniš compares Davies's "investment in contextual commonalities, convergences, spaces of affirmative negotiations among differing locations" to Chandra Mohanty's "temporality of struggle," which is "a 'chronotopic' dimension whereby the 'inherited locations' of gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality join forces with the chosen, 'strategic locations' of the self to subvert existing power relations." Given its provision of "a space of multiple and non-synchronous dialogue" for contemporary black feminism,⁴³⁶ Mohanty's "temporality of struggle" coincides with Bhabha's performative temporality in its "deployment of freak social and cultural displacements," of "border and frontier conditions," in order "to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity."⁴³⁷

Beloved's processual communal paradigm can thus be mapped on a transnational context. Whereas *Beloved*'s enunciatory aesthetics represent the "contentious, unequal interests and identities" of black people, this textual "third space" can also serve to "initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation"⁴³⁸ in a transnational context with other marginalised groups through transformative identification and reinterpetive preservation. The next two chapters, indeed, serve to explore this "third space" or dialogue between Jacobs's and Morrison's alternative discourses on slavery and Sidhwa's and Shamsie's revisionist narratives of colonial and neocolonial histories. Such an interstitial space

⁴³⁶ Helene Hiniš, "Review," *MELUS* 23.4 (1998): 201-04.

⁴³⁷ Bhabha, *Location* 244.

⁴³⁸ Bhabha, *Location* 209, 2.

looks beyond national boundaries to allow various oppressive and regenerative narratives to converge for a collective performative feminist enunciation that necessitates a perspectival and subjectival transmutation in order to generate a “we” that is infinitely traversed by our indelible relationality.

Chapter 3 Negotiating Borders: Gender, Nation, and Syncretism in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*

The gap between the living and the dead
and the gap between the past and the
present does not exist. It's bridged for us
by our assuming responsibility for
people no one's ever assumed
responsibility for.

(Toni Morrison)

A contorted and violent genesis of a nation, the 1947 Partition of the Indian Subcontinent is one of the greatest catastrophes of the twentieth century that was relatively eclipsed in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Prompting one of the largest migrations in human history, Partition transported about fifteen million people across borders, instigating the massacre of a million and a half, and abduction, rape, and violence against about a hundred thousand women over a period of a few months.⁴³⁹ However, these historical facts have been categorically elided in the Indo-Pak official historiographies of the materialisation of the so-called two-nation theory.⁴⁴⁰ Although the past few decades have produced an interest in

⁴³⁹ There is no official or historiographical consensus on the exact figures. For a good overview, see Paul R. Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946–47: Means, Methods, and Purposes," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5.1 (2003): 71–101; Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (London: C. Hurst, 2000); Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009); Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013); and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1998) and "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28.17 (1993): WS2-WS11.

⁴⁴⁰ For an overview of the historiographical bias and celebratory textbook accounts of Partition, see Talbot and Singh, Butalia, and Menon.

reengaging with the human dimension of the “political drama” of Partition,⁴⁴¹ “the Partition still remains off-limits in Pakistani historiography”⁴⁴² with a serious dearth of feminist historical and postcolonial literature.⁴⁴³

The first Partition novel written by a Pakistani woman, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* attempts to bridge the gap between this cataclysmic historic event and its public memory in recasting contemporary social and political relations. Dwelling on the intersection of gender, class, and ethnicity, the novel engages with the Partition experience of women, children, and lower-caste Indians who have remained largely inconspicuous in official historical accounts.⁴⁴⁴ As such, whilst the novel echoes *Incidents* in its re-presentation of women’s distinctive experience of institutionalised oppression, it mirrors *Beloved*’s disruption of the national and historical amnesia in view of the persistence of hegemonic power structures. Indeed, there are some interesting parallels between *Beloved* and *Cracking India*’s contexts of production: a year apart in publication, both texts came out in the turbulent 1980s when both the US and Pakistan’s involvement in the Soviet-Afghan war had substantial social and political repercussions for them. Although neither text directly engages with its context of production, both are significantly defined by it as their revisionist narratives underline the contemporary relevance of the elided national histories. Indeed, I argue that in being published four decades after Partition and in the midst of

⁴⁴¹ See, for example, Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996); Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale UP 2008); Menon and Bhasin; Butalia; and Menon.

⁴⁴² Talbot and Singh 23.

⁴⁴³ Nighat Khan is the only historian who has written on Pakistani women’s experience of Partition. See Talbot and Singh 23.

⁴⁴⁴ Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* is an exception in its attempt to capture the marginal voices of women, children, and “the untouchables” through oral histories.

the unfolding Cold War, *Cracking India*, like *Beloved*, serves as an annotation to the nationalist metanarrative, outlining the need to readdress the collective memory of Partition in illuminating and reshaping contemporary social conditions.

Following Sidhwa's trajectory from individual to collective memory,⁴⁴⁵ this chapter analyses *Cracking India* as a revisionist history of Partition that contests the colonial and nationalist discourses via marginalised experiences of the event. The analysis is divided into three parts. Drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection, the first part explores the woman-nation dyad in the nation-state discourse of Partition, which employed "woman" as a token of identity politics whilst simultaneously denying her selfhood or identity. Examining the ambivalence of this figure as both exploitative and celebratory, this section also explores its links to the conflicts over identity, belonging, and community in the midst of the Partition violence. The second part critically engages with Thomas McCarthy's notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (loosely meaning "overcoming the past") in reading the text as a challenge to the nationalist narrative's silence on a collective history in order to reshape public memory and deal with a past that continues to haunt multifariously. The last section brings Kristeva's ethics of alterity and Spivak's question of the subaltern's representation in conversation with Weir's identificatory model of politics to analyse the text's return to a forgotten history via the subcontinent's pluralistic historical tradition. The textual return to a heterogeneous past challenges the chauvinistic Partition ideology and its contemporary reinstatement by proffering a syncretic notion of identities and agency in a co-implicated reality.

⁴⁴⁵ Protagonist Lenny shares certain autobiographical facts with the author: an 11 year old Parsee girl suffering from polio, Sidhwa, like the narrator-protagonist, experienced Partition first-hand.

1 The Sacred Abject: Woman-as-Nation in the Partition Discourse

Recent historical and literary research has largely focused on the religious and ethnic nature of the conflict that contributed to the outbreak of the Partition massacre, singling out women's bodies as its privileged site.⁴⁴⁶ I wish to add a psychoanalytic lens to this perspective in further understanding the complicated nature of this unprecedented violence in terms of the identity crisis inherent to the Partition ideology of disjunction and severance. Significantly, for Kristeva, as Cecilia Sjöholm puts it, "political forces cannot be explained by economic or historic currents alone." In augmenting the historical analysis through unravelling "the negative forces operating in the subject,"⁴⁴⁷ the Kristevan psychoanalytic perspective proffers stimulating insights into contentious historiographical issues.⁴⁴⁸ It also helps foreground the gap the novel is attempting to bridge between current national identity and requisite historical consciousness; seeing history as a process sensitises us to contemporary social disparities and political upheavals as infiltrations from the colonial past.

⁴⁴⁶ For an overview of the scholarship on *Cracking India*, see Nandi Bhatia, "I Know the Difference between What I See and What I Only Want to See": Remembering India's Partition through Children in *Cracking India*," *The Public Intellectual and the Culture of Hope*, eds. Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam (Toronto: UTP, 2013) 89-106; Kavita Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2008); Paromita Deb, "Religion, Partition, Identity and Diaspora: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*," *South Asian Diaspora* 3.2 (2011): 215-30; Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (Toronto: UTP, 2006) 67-93; Rani Neutill, "Bending Bodies, Borders and Desires in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Deepa Mehta's *Earth*," *South Asian Popular Culture* 8.1 (2010): 73-87; and Shreerekha Subramanian, *Women Writing Violence: The Novel and Radical Feminist Imaginaries* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013) 75-111.

⁴⁴⁷ Cecilia Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005) 3.

⁴⁴⁸ For instance, most scholarship on Partition tries to understand the motivation for the unfathomable nature and magnitude of violence against long-time associates and friends, especially women, that took by surprise both the colonial management and the political parties. See Brass 72.

Kristeva's model of psychic development departs from Freudian and Lacanian taxonomies in its focus on the maternal body in the preoedipal stage and the corresponding semiotic-symbolic signifying structure constitutive of subjectivity. According to Kristeva, the semiotic is "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases" that originates in the maternal space of undifferentiated preoedipal mother-child concord that she names the "chora" and that is released in signification through "vocal and kinetic rhythm."⁴⁴⁹ The transition from the "chora" into the mirror stage enacts the process of abjection, which is "a precondition of narcissism" and a prerequisite for entry into the symbolic. This transitional phase is characterised by the transposition of the pleasure of waste expulsion from the body into maternal abjection, mediated by identification with an imaginary father, which deflects the pre-objectal desire, determines self-other boundaries, and facilitates entry into the symbolic. Whilst this self-other demarcation, integral to the constitution of subjectivity, urges the child to engage in abjection by rejecting the very origin of its being, this appropriated selfhood nevertheless resists fixity in forever straddling an unstable self-other line.⁴⁵⁰ In its wish to sustain a stable identity, the subject engages in perpetual strife against the maternal abject through its projection onto all that is deemed abject: filth, defilement, corpses, the grotesque, and various manifestations of alterity. Despite this persistent abnegation of the abject however, as a residue of the semiotic propinquity, it rebounds sporadically, threatening to disintegrate our sense of order, identities, and boundaries: "the abject has only one quality of the object and

⁴⁴⁹ Kristeva, *Revolution* 25-6.

⁴⁵⁰ Kristeva, *Powers* 13.

that is being opposed to I. . . . Abjection is therefore a kind of narcissistic crisis.”⁴⁵¹

Indeed, the object is situated in the subject-object liminality and hence is characteristic of rites of passage:

Abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. . . . Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.⁴⁵²

Thus, the “two heterogeneous realms” of the semiotic-symbolic continue to work in a dialectical relationship; whereas the symbolic represents stasis, the semiotic signifies “negativity” that disrupts the homogeneity of the former.⁴⁵³

However, although the semiotic proximity to the archaic maternal space is threatening to self-identity, for Kristeva, its negativity also inheres in the liberating potential of constantly disrupting the univocal identities of the symbolic through a return to the maternal. Whilst the Lacanian notion of subjectivity compromises on the drives in its emphasis on desire against an absolute inaccessibility to the Real, the Kristevan semiotic-symbolic dialectic of signification replaces the “lack” of the Lacanian unitary subject with negativity. This subversive force of the maternal semiotic is productive of a perpetual crisis in identity, creating a “subject-in-

⁴⁵¹ Kristeva, *Powers* 1, 14.

⁴⁵² Kristeva, *Powers* 9-10.

⁴⁵³ Kristeva, *Powers* 48-51.

process.”⁴⁵⁴ Kristeva adds a “fourth term” to the Hegelian dialectic by positing negativity as the force that negates the loss underlying the provenance of the ego, so that the Hegelian dialectically mediated, unitary self is subjected to negativity anew, further splitting the self and hence forestalling the possibility of a fixed identity. Kristevan negativity precludes absolute synthesis:

This explosion of the semiotic in the symbolic is far from a negation of negation, an *Aufhebung* that would suppress the contradiction generated by thethetic and establish in its place an ideal positivity, the restorer of presymbolic immediacy. It is, instead, a transgression of position, a reversed reactivation of the contradiction that instituted this very position.⁴⁵⁵

As opposed to Hegel’s dialectic of unity, Kristevan “negativity . . . is essentially the *death wish*,”⁴⁵⁶ an ever deferred process of identity formation that draws on the presymbolic semiotic “chora” to intermittently rupture the symbolic, thus also creating the possibility of revised social and political relations.

Kristeva bases her ethics of love on negativity that postulates “a subject in process/on trial” as opposed to an “impenetrable subject.” For Kristeva xenophobia arises from the incapacity to recognise the other within us, which culminates in hatred and abjection; an ethics of love recognises the alterity and the split inherent to subjectivity that enable “the subject [to] understand the other, sympathise with the other, and more, take the place of the other, because the subject *is* other.”⁴⁵⁷ This

⁴⁵⁴ Kristeva, *Revolution* 130-1.

⁴⁵⁵ Kristeva, *Revolution* 69.

⁴⁵⁶ Kristeva, *Revolution* 131.

⁴⁵⁷ Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 149.

subject-on-trial lies in the liminal space between the sublime and the abject; it recognises alterity as inherent to subjectivity and is thus “capable of bringing about new social relations” via revised identities.⁴⁵⁸ It is along this continuum of the debilitating effects of abject liminality and the liberating potential of negativity that I wish to locate my analysis of the representation of the watershed in the Indian Subcontinent’s history in the first and the second sections.

As we have seen, Kristeva’s conception of the semiotic theorises mother as both the abject and the “truth”;⁴⁵⁹ Kristeva argues that whilst “sign and time” are represented by the Father in the symbolic, what it represses in the drives is their “truth” which “can be imagined only as a *woman*.” However, women’s reduction to the maternal function in the symbolic logic generates a “misplaced abjection”⁴⁶⁰ that erases her “truth.” This notion of the cultural overdetermination of the maternal body as the abject is germane to the mother-woman-as-nation discourse of decolonisation and, in particular, that of the Subcontinent’s Partition.⁴⁶¹ The discursive construction of nation-as-woman-mother is a conventional trope of the political rhetoric of decolonisation that evokes the maternal as a symbol to mobilise an oppositional

⁴⁵⁸ Kristeva, *Revolution* 105.

⁴⁵⁹ Kristeva, “About Chinese Women,” trans. Seán Hand *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 153. Similarly, in *Powers* she argues that the “abject is edged with the sublime.” Kristeva, *Powers* 11.

⁴⁶⁰ Oliver 160. For details, see Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater,” trans. Leon S. Roudiez *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 160-186 and *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987).

⁴⁶¹ The convergence of nation and gender in nationalist discourses has received considerable critical attention by feminist scholars. See, for instance, Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 2006); Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State*, consultant ed. Jo Campling (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Elleke Boehmer, “Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa,” *Motherlands, Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. Susheila Nasta (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992) 3-23; Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women’s Sexuality in South Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1996); and Loomba, *Colonialism* 180-182.

discourse. In the anticolonial nationalist discourse of the Subcontinent, Mother India emerged as a common trope in the arts: “Bharatmata . . . bound in chains waiting”⁴⁶² to be re-appropriated from the coloniser by her masculine progeny.⁴⁶³ However, in the wake of the political conflict arising from the Muslim League’s demand for a separate country, Bharatmata took on a revised signification with Partition symbolising a threat to the sacrosanctity of Mother India. As Butalia writes:

Partition represented an actual violation of this mother, a violation of her (female) body. The picture carried by the Organiser, with the woman’s body mapping the territory of India, and Nehru cutting off one arm which represented Pakistan, is a powerful and graphic reminder of this.⁴⁶⁴

This metaphor of the defilement of maternal corporeality was mirrored in the violence against women’s bodies during the communal strife. Kristeva argues that “[o]bsessional neuroses . . . [and] psychoses, have the distinctive feature of ‘reifying’ signs . . . of slipping from the domain of ‘speaking’ to the domain of doing,” thus “allowing the return of the repressed to be inscribed in the reification under the guise of the uncanny affect.” As such, the “symbol ceases to be a symbol . . . the sign is not experienced as arbitrary but assumes a real importance.”⁴⁶⁵ This reification of the sign is reflected in the discursive practice of the tropological construct of woman-as-national honour that reduced her person to a body that became a site of both sacred

⁴⁶² Ranjana Ash, “The Search for Freedom in Indian Women’s Writing,” *Motherlands, Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. Susheila Nasta (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992) 153.

⁴⁶³ See Ash 153; Menon 120; Talbot and Singh 2-3; Butalia 149; and Loomba 182.

⁴⁶⁴ Butalia 150.

⁴⁶⁵ Kristeva, *Strangers* 186.

discourse and its desecration. Given the symbolic construction of the maternal as abject yet sacred, the politics of *contamination* and *decontamination* played out, significantly, on women's bodies.

Scholarship has analysed the use of women's bodies as "somatic texts" that carried violent inscriptions from members of opposing communities, serving as "tokens of exchange." Whereas violence against women of the other community has been interpreted as an attempt to contaminate the national identity of "the Other,"⁴⁶⁶ the instances of violence against and abduction of women by men of their own communities pose an anomaly.⁴⁶⁷ The notion of "misplaced abjection" adds an interesting lens to the historical analysis to understand these aspects of the violence through teasing out individual and collective identity crises occasioned by Partition discourse entrenched in the symbolic figuration of women. Kristeva argues that "abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level." Just as religious rituals embody purification rites to jettison the abject from the "symbolic system,"⁴⁶⁸ the need to imagine a nation or a community prompts a rejection of the abject other. In each case, the rejection is directed at our own interiority; it is the denunciation of the "uncanny" in us by projecting it onto others: "the other of the death, the other of the woman, the other of the uncontrollable drive."⁴⁶⁹ In the Partition scenario, personal and social identities are disrupted by the nation-state discourse grounded in mother-nation identification,

⁴⁶⁶ Menon 121. Also see Menon and Bhasin 44 and Subramanian 100.

⁴⁶⁷ See Menon 140 and Butalia 146, 286.

⁴⁶⁸ Kristeva, *Powers* 65, 68, 78.

⁴⁶⁹ Kristeva, *Strangers* 191.

so that the erstwhile “canny” milieu transmutes into the “uncanny”; the attendant anxiety to re-arrange self-other boundaries transitorily pushes the limits of the semiotic-symbolic border and precipitates violence against the abject other—women and minorities.

Although Partition historiography generally eschews the portrayal of a utopian pre-Partition Hindu-Muslim conjunction, scholarship concurs on the attribution of the divisive, religious identity politics to colonial policies.⁴⁷⁰ Despite the sometimes contested notion of the Machiavellian British divide-and-rule policy in India, most scholarship concurs that it was primarily the colonial administrative measures and taxonomical constructions that, as Jisha Menon records, “calcified fluid, flexible, and heterogeneous cultural practices into the antinomies of religious majority and minority.” The institutional practices increasingly sanctioned discrete Hindu and Muslim identities entrenched in “the idea that people sharing a particular faith constituted an identifiable group with common interests, which marked them off from another group, which practiced a different faith.” This yoking of religion with politics created a “particular way of imagining community [that] affirmed certain commonalities through the category of religious identity while underestimating other axes of similitude and association. . . . The result was the flowering of a new communal rhetoric, and ultimately, of the Pakistan movement.”⁴⁷¹ Indeed, Gyanendra

⁴⁷⁰ See Menon 7. Also see Jalal 1; Shahnaz Rouse, “Gender, Nationalism(s) and Cultural Identity: Discursive Strategies and Exclusivities,” *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, eds. Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (London: Zed Books, 1996) 43.

⁴⁷¹ Menon 10. Also see Jalal 1 and 223; Talbot and Singh 29; and Partha Chatterjee, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Aid (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990) 233–53. As Daiya argues, the novel alludes to this in deploying Lenny’s disabled body as a metaphor for “the legacy of British colonialism: disease and a disabled South Asia.” Daiya 78.

Pandey argues that the “[c]ommunal strife, or conflict between people of different religious persuasions was represented by the British colonial regime in India as one of the most distinctive features of Indian society, past and present” to reinforce the binary.⁴⁷²

Thus, the coexistence of diverse ethnicities, prior to the colonial discourse that eventually transmuted into Partition stipulation, was disrupted by the discursive formulation of the two-nation theory that underscored the heterogeneity of Hindus and Muslims, qualifying them as two distinct “nations” whose coexistence as a homogenised body politic was implausible. Although an ironically paradoxical rationale at its inception, given the homeostasis of various religious and ethnic groups in the Subcontinent, the two-nation discourse gradually indoctrinated a conceptual division among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs that culminated in communal violence unprecedented in the Subcontinent’s history. The nation-state discourse with its lexicon of genesis and the dismemberment of Bharatmata became the matrix within which the conflict was played out. The ideological impetus to re-position the self, vis-à-vis religion as the determining factor of identity, to obtain entitlement to the new nation-state dismantled the individual and collective sense of identities, belonging, and community.⁴⁷³

This anxiety over realigning identities along altered contours evoked self-other dichotomies in which the erstwhile canny self-same is reappraised as the abject other

⁴⁷² Gyanendra Pandey, “The Colonial Construction of ‘Communalism’: British Writings on Banaras in the Nineteenth Century,” *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. 6 ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996) 132.

⁴⁷³ For a historical account of this, see Menon 8-9.

that must be rejected, annihilated for the self to survive. Although the abject other is generally the national other, it is redirected to the maternal body owing to its symbolic representation as the abject, thus further evoking primal severance, the fragility of boundaries, and an eruption of the bodily, reminiscent of the proximity to maternal corporeality that endangers the sense of self in the elusiveness of borders. This echoing of the originary interdependence precipitates a desire to possess and annihilate the female body—archetypal of maternal corporeality—hence, the abject is mutilated to reinforce abjection, to restore order, and to calibrate identities. Kristeva elaborates on this double bind of the psychic struggle:

Constructed on the one hand by the incestuous desire of (for) his mother and on the other by an overly brutal separation from her, the borderline patient, even though he may be a fortified castle, is nevertheless an empty castle. . . . The ego then plunges into a pursuit of identifications that could repair narcissism.⁴⁷⁴

However, these identifications are experienced as “in-significant,” “null,” and “devitalized” by the subject who is suspended in between: “powerless” outside, “impossible” inside.”⁴⁷⁵

Benedict Anderson’s theory of the nation as an “imagined community” echoes in the nation-state discourse of Partition that unsettled inveterate communities to the point of holocaust in the anticipation of a national community that had yet to

⁴⁷⁴ Kristeva, *Powers* 49.

⁴⁷⁵ Kristeva, *Powers* 49.

materialise.⁴⁷⁶ However, Anderson's tracing of the cultural genealogy of nationalism to secularism is diametrically opposed to the predication of the two-nation theory upon the vision of a religious community, reminiscent of the Islamic dynastic rule in the Subcontinent's history. Indeed, Partition was conceptualised as a purification rite; Mother India was to be dissected to create "Pak-istan," translated as "the home/land of the *pure*." In imagining the new, uncontaminated nations, each faction discarded the other/the impure/the abject, fields that were projected on to women and minorities, in particular. The colonial penetration of land was replicated in the new cartographic practices of Partition where crossing boundaries entailed identity threat, foray, and crisis in which woman, as the symbol of land, became the site both to be appropriated for oneself as well as protected against the other.

Whereas literary and historiographical analyses allude to the rendering of "abducted" women as contaminated, I argue that it was the double-edged symbolic representation of the woman-as-sacred and the maternal-abject that partly contributed to her violation in the first place in the desire to reassert masculine national identities. Kristeva argues that the "attempt to establish a male, phallic power is vigorously threatened by the no less virulent power of the other sex, which is oppressed. That other sex, the feminine, becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed in order to affirm male identities."⁴⁷⁷ This ambivalent desire of the masculine subjects of the new nation to subjugate, violate, and annihilate the (m)other in a dialectic of phallogentric re-assertion created a gendered replication of the Manichean allegory of coloniser/colonised, subject/object, self/other, causing a

⁴⁷⁶ Benedict R. O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁴⁷⁷ Kristeva, *Powers* 70.

regression into the imaginary fixation on absolute difference. *Cracking India* reflects this psychic conflict between the obsessive compulsion to perform and internalise new identities and the cognitive dissonance of this venture which, as I will explore, divulges the emancipatory potential of negativity and syncretism inherent to the subject-in-process.

Sidhwa represents the fetishisation of nation-as-woman through the metaphorical rendering of the figure of Ayah as India. Lenny's nanny and the protagonist of the novel, Ayah is introduced as the frequent object of the male gaze, something that "educates" Lenny who is conditioned to view Ayah as men, ranging from "peddlers" to "the Englishman," do:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars in crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretenses to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. (12)

Fetishised as a "Hindu goddess," Ayah is surrounded by apostles from different religions and ethnicities including Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsee, Punjabi, Pathan, and even "Chinaman." Ayah's "circle of admirers" is jointly enamoured by her charisma, and their conference on the political strife is, at first, "just a discussion among friends." Even as the Partition discourse sprouts "a subtle change in the Queen's Garden" with people fragmenting into factions, "[o]nly the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her" (105). However, as the narrative progression unfolds the anxiety triggered by the Partition discourse, Ayah's admirers experience a psychic dilemma, moving from an

initial sense of the idiosyncrasy of the Partition ideology to a gradual conflict at the realignment of identities. As the conflict escalates, so that its discursive force infiltrates even a village like Pir Pindo, “too deep in the hinterland of the Punjab . . . for larger politics to penetrate,” “[t]here is a dissension in the ranks of Ayah’s admirers,” too, who now come “[i]n twos and threes, or singly” (157). The disintegration of the group signifies the singular claims of the suitors at odds with one another in their unanimous fervour for Ayah (read: (m)other); whilst everyone still claims a right on her, their devotion fragments into individual desires and crises. Thus, the eruption of “religious differences” plays havoc with prior individual and collective identities, and the chronotropic shift ostensibly changes them dramatically: “It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols” (101).

Although the upsurge of religious differences is rather abrupt and categorical here, the corresponding mutation of identities is an uneven passage; the experience of occupying a liminal space evokes the semiotic indeterminacy of the pre-symbolic, triggering a violent desire to restore order by annihilating the abject other. Frantz Fanon’s insight into the colonised man’s itinerary into freedom (I use the masculine (pro)noun advisedly) provides a useful lens for analysing the Partition violence as does his etiology of ethnic riots that stem from the degeneration of postcolonial “national” consciousness; however, I am primarily interested in exploring the former. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon argues:

Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. . . . [It] is quite simply the replacing of a certain “*species*” of men by another “*species*” of men . . . the veritable creation of new men . . . the “*thing*” which has been colonized

becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself (emphasis added).⁴⁷⁸

Fanon's phallogocentric analysis reduces the anti-colonial struggle for freedom to a colonised man's violent strife with the coloniser over the assertion of masculinity. Indeed, "the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" which is "a cleansing force. . . . It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."⁴⁷⁹ However, Fanon's psychoanalytic take on decolonisation glosses over the fact that in his attempt to take the coloniser's place, the colonised masculine subject deconstructs the Manichean allegory of coloniser/colonised, self/other, assertive/submissive, masculine/feminine only to displace female subjectivity in re-appropriating his masculinity. The physical violence against the coloniser is accompanied by an epistemic violence against the (m)other/women in order to rearrange the binary for phallocentric re-assertion.

Indeed, Fanon's own theoretical project betrays this crisis. Commenting on Fanon's erasure of the female from his theories, bell hooks argues that he "offers paradigms for the healing of the dispossessed, colonised black body politic," however, "in this dialectic he writes gender through race. . . . In Fanon's case, remembering the mother requires a return not only to the black body but to the black female body. Symbolic matricide allows for the erasure of that body so that the fraternal paradigm can be posited as the site of hope and possibility."⁴⁸⁰ The Fanonian psychoanalytic

⁴⁷⁸ Fanon, *Wretched* 35-37.

⁴⁷⁹ Fanon, *Wretched* 86, 94.

⁴⁸⁰ bell hooks, "Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History: What's Love Got to Do with It?" *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay P, 1996)

approach to the emasculated black man's struggle for identity is undergirded by an epistemic violence in the erasure of the doubly colonised female subject. This textual abjection corresponds to Fanon's theory of decolonisation as a "violent phenomenon," reflective of atavistic maternal abjection. In other words, it is possible to read Fanon's theory against the grain; by challenging the universalist nature of the Oedipus complex in Freud and Lacan, Fanon's analysis asserts his own masculine sovereignty through the double move of the rejection of a Eurocentric psychoanalytic model, on the one hand, and maternal eviction from his project, on the other. By linking white women's "Negrophobia" to their sexual frustration, Fanon's analysis implicitly foregrounds black masculinity, whilst the black woman, for Fanon, is beyond theorisation: "I know nothing about her."⁴⁸¹ This disavowal reflects a struggle to disengage from the maternal abyss that threatens to engulf his own theoretical project. Although, the coloniser-colonised relations in the Algerian or Martinican context diverge from those of the South Asian pre-Partition milieu, it is insightful that Fanon's phallogentric model, with its provenance in violence and abjection, finds its cognate in Partition. Indeed, the Partition context was marked by both physical and epistemic violence against women in inscribing on their bodies the denial of entitlement to the new nation-state.

This dynamic is reflected in *Cracking India* via the tropological use of gendered lexicon by male characters in order to combat identity crisis and affirm

82-83. Also see Lola Young, "Missing Person: Fantasising Black Women in *Black Skin, White Masks*," *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay P, 1996) 88; and Gwen Bergner, "Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*," *PMLA* 110.1 (1995): 75-88.

⁴⁸¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 2008) 138.

phallic identities. A classic example of this is found when Ice-candy-man volunteers to have his Sikh companion's house evacuated of the Muslim tenants. Challenging the Law-of-the-Father, Ice-candy-man proposes to "take matters in hand" and employ "time-honored remedies" instead of contacting the police. Narrating the same incident to Ayah, he explains the intruders' attempt to intimidate the women in the house: "We opened our lungis . . . our dangling dingdongs . . . exposed . . . so that only [the women] could see us" (132). Given Ice-candy-man's Muslim membership, he has no religious motivation in "staging the show" but to re-assert his masculinity in a time of community upheaval. The "hulla-goolla" (commotion) that the scare causes the women feeds his sense of self as much as narrating the incident to Ayah does, who serves as the audience through which he attempts to locate his machismo: "The triumph on his face is infectious: he sees it reflected in ours, and his teeth show increasingly white as his lips stretch and stretch into a smile in his narrow face. He crushes the stub of his cigarette into the grass" (132).

However, the shocking episode that serves as the main catalyst to violence is the arrival of the train from Gurdaspur, bringing dead and mutilated bodies instead of his relatives: "'Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!'" Ice-candy-man's grip on the handlebars is so tight that his knuckles bulge whitely in the pale light" (159). This encounter with the mutilated corpses and severed body parts, instead of the anticipated family, not only threatens his very survival but also embodies proximity with the abject that transmutes his grief into violence to recalibrate the self-assertive subject-object binary. As Kristeva argues, the corpse is the ultimate "Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part. . . . Imaginary uncanniness and real threat . . . what disturbs identity, system, order. What

does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”⁴⁸² Thus, besides spawning a sense of virility and a symbolic death, this traumatic proximity to the corpses reminds Ice-candy-man of his own contingency, which further triggers violence against the (m)other. This episode unleashes Ice-candy-man’s cathexis, leading to absolute violence that culminates in Ayah’s abduction: “I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur . . . that night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life!” (166).

Ice-candy-man’s social status further complicates an unravelling of his neurotic fixation. Being a prostitute’s son from the *Kotha*, he is an outcast, “represent[ing] a shady, almost disreputable type” (37), whose social ineptitude is reflected in his arbitrary switching of occupations that climaxes in his regression into the maternal: after abducting Ayah, the object of his obsession, he transports her to the same *Kotha* that had engendered him and re-names her Mumtaz after the Moghul Emperor, Shah Jahan’s consort whom he had built the Taj Mahal. This renaming merges his personal desire to vanquish and claim ownership of the maternal body with the collective desire to re-occupy and re-engrave the “motherland” with a religious identity, evocative of ancestral pride, thus signifying women’s token status in personal, national, and colonial hegemonies.

The maimed body parts, specifically young women’s breasts, thus carry multiple significations. As patriarchal encryptions of the other’s impotence to protect their women (mother/nation), they signify a psychic battle which is reiterated, later, in the Sikh raid on Pir Pindo. Prognosticating the Sikh attack, the village council advises

⁴⁸² Kristeva, *Powers* 4.

women thus: "Rather than face the brutality of the mob they will pour kerosene around the house and burn themselves. . . . The young men will engage the Sikhs at the mosque, and at other strategic locations, for as long as they can and give the women a chance to start the fire" (210).⁴⁸³ Here, deceased-thus-impenetrable female bodies symbolise their protectors' virility against the other; the annihilation of the female bodies pre-empts the threat to masculine identity by reverting violence from the other, albeit by deploying women as sacrificial tokens. The Sikhs' countermove aims at precisely such an infiltration during their foray on Pir Pindo. Over the cleric's carcass, Sikh assailants traverse the threshold of the mosque to rape women inside its bounds. As the signification of the mosque is contingent on its facilitation of consecration, the trespass by the other/the irreverent/the abject despoils the mosque of its significance, relegating it to a grotesque carnivalesque site resounding with "laughter," "exclamations," "moans," "groans," and shrieks (214). The mosque's penetration and women's rape represent violation of sacred sites; the intensely private, personal, sublime, and non-public territories of mosque/holy shrine and woman/mother are ravished to emasculate the other's identity contingent on the patriarchal conception of the fortification of the trinity: religion-nation-woman. At another level, this triad, symbolised in women's mutilated bodies and young women's sundered breasts, also signifies the "[f]ear of the archaic mother," which according to Kristeva, is "essentially fear of her generative power . . . a dreaded one, that

⁴⁸³ Butalia has recorded such historical incidents where women committed suicide or were killed by male relatives to "protect" their "honour." Didur quotes Gandhi's evaluation of this practice in his "Speech at Prayer Meeting": "I have heard that many women did not want to lose their honour and chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think that is really great because I know that such things make India brave. After all, life and death is a transitory game. Whoever might have died are dead and gone; but at least they have gone with courage. They have not sold away their honour. Not that their lives were not dear to them, but they felt it was better to die with courage rather than be forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslims and allow them to assault their bodies." Didur 3.

patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing.”⁴⁸⁴ Thus, whereas on the individual level, mutilated breasts enact a symbolic separation that threatens identities, on the collective level, they symbolise the annihilation of the “generative power” of the nation-state’s other.

Violence in the novel is thus engrained in an identity crisis bordering on subject-object liminality, which precipitates violence against woman-as-nation and the maternal-object to assert phallic identities and national boundaries. However, this desire to reify borders in order to eject the object and assert stable identities is constantly threatened by the force of negativity within the subject that counters univocity and fixity. As the next section will elaborate, these subjects-in-process are constantly vacillating between compulsive rejection and subliminal acceptance of the self-same other.

1. Between Abjection and Sublimation: Negativity and Narrative Syncretism

The inherent syncretism of identities that emanates from the tension between narcissistic abjection and irrepressible negativity and that recurrently disrupts univocal identities and narratives is perhaps best manifested in the text’s characterisation. The masculinist nature and the gendered lexicon of the Partition discourse echo in the respective identity crises of the characters; whilst some characters are engaged in an individual striving to calibrate identities, others struggle to forge a community to consolidate bonds. The semiotic-symbolic tension is reflected in the interactions between Ice-candy-man, Masseur, Imam Din, Hari, and other

⁴⁸⁴ Kristeva, *Powers* 77.

“admirers” of Ayah. Whilst Ice-candy-man is an epitome of the fragmentation of the self in the liminal abject space, Masseur’s syncretic identity brackets his religious affiliation. Although the child narrator does not attribute a religious identity to either Ice-candy-man or Masseur, the former’s conduct during the massacre is determined by his newly acquired religious identity whilst the reader is hard pressed to identify Masseur’s religious orientation. Although he lives in a “Muslim mohalla” (neighbourhood), Lenny’s description of his “shaven bodhi-less head” at the discovery of his body complicates his religious association that had no apparent bearing on his demeanour whatsoever. His ability to win Ayah’s heart and his “impassioned plea[s] for reason,” harmony, and coexistence in the midst of massacre (“there are no differences among friends. . . . We will stand by each other”) reflect the syncretism inherent to identities in Kristeva’s model (140).

Whilst Ice-candy-man and Masseur increasingly symbolise opposite worldviews, Imam Din comes to signify a more complex subject-on-trial or subject-in-process who ostensibly acquiesces to a revised identity commanded by changing circumstances; however, the desire to internalise this enforced subjectivity is neutralised by a persistent psychological collision against it. For instance, initially, Imam Din is successfully interpellated into the Hindu-Muslim Partition ideology reflected in a desire to internalise it through compliant repetition:

Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor [and] turning into religious zealots, [Imam Din and Yousaf] warn Mother they will take Friday afternoons off for the Jumha prayers. On Fridays they set about preparing themselves ostentatiously. . . . All in white check prayer scarves thrown over their shoulders...they walk out of the gates to the small mosque. . . . Sometimes, at odd hours of the day, they spread their mats on the front lawn and pray when

the muezzin calls. Crammed into a narrow religious slot they too are diminished, as are Jinnah and Iqbal, Ice-candy-man and Masseur. (101-102)

This meticulously executed ostentatious performance reflects the exigency to reiterate and reinforce the new subjectivity; however, the miscarriage of the enterprise is reflected in two later incidents that reveal the negativity inherent to the split in subjectivity. Despite an on-going psychic effort to calcify boundaries, the enforced performance constantly produces an excess and a slippage, ever disconcerting.

The first episode is the second incidence of the “sport” with Hari’s *lungi*. Belonging to the *Dalit* caste, Hari is located at the lowest rung of the social ladder and thus decides to “ride the [Partition] storm out,” as he has “nowhere to go” (167). Unable to assert his self (read: masculinity) and avert impending violence, he experiences a literal and symbolic castration in his religious conversion that is grafted into his body through a shaven bodhi and circumcision. Indeed, the new name that he acquires after conversion is an ironic attempt to regain the displaced masculinity—“Himat Ali” means “audacious Ali,” with Ali being the prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law celebrated for his exceptional valour. Thus, the post-Partition version of the “sport” is peculiar and ominous: the transition from “the light, quick patter of bare feet” to “the harsh scrape and drag of leather on frozen earth,” Imam Din and Yousaf’s curses, and Hari’s “alarmed cry” reflect the mutation of the routine amusement into a matter of asserting distinct masculine, religious, and national identities. The shawl around Hari and his “lady’s cardigan (Mother’s hand-me-down)” feminise him in a position against which Imam Din and Yousaf proclaim their

masculinity.⁴⁸⁵ But, despite “a gruff uncontrollable edge to his voice,” Imam Din returns Hari’s shawl to end his ungainliness as “[h]e is not at ease with cruelty” against his own community (125-26).

Imam Din’s cognitive dissonance is further reflected in the equivocation between his compulsive repetition of the revised religious identity and an irrepressible sense of prior belonging to community. This performative contradiction is played out during Ayah’s abduction scene when finally Imam Din is overpowered by his relational position in the community as opposed to his enforced religious subjectivity. First, Imam Din saves “Hari-alias-Himat Ali” from a second public display of emasculation by “vouch[ing] for him” when the mob demands a view of his circumcised penis to certify his religious conversion. However, in order to save Ayah from the mob, Imam Din theoretically renounces his religious identity by taking “an oath before Allah” that “she’s gone.” This unanticipated move surprises Lenny: “suddenly, very clearly, I hear him say: Allah-ki-kasam, she’s gone” (193). Whereas Hari’s recital of *Kalma* exonerates him, Imam Din’s renunciation of the same does not incriminate him: the fact that on Ayah’s discovery no one impeaches Imam Din for his false oath, a major religious sin, reflects that the politics at play are located elsewhere. Thus, in Imam Din, the split between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated climaxes as his constative assertion reflects a disruptive force that exceeds his enforced performance.

This subversive performance is also represented in the text’s self-referential engagement with borders, their conflict, and transgression that contests colonial

⁴⁸⁵ Madhuparna Mitra makes a similar point with reference to violence. See Madhuparna Mitra, “Contextualizing Ayah’s Abduction: Patterns of Violence against Women in Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*,” *Ariel* 39.3 (2008): 35.

epistemologies and nationalist taxonomies in favour of syncretism. Ashcroft et al. posit that the “syncretic” displaces the “centre,” rendering the marginal “the formative constituent of reality”: it “supersedes the geometric distinction of centre and margin and replaces it with a sense of the complex, interweaving, and syncretic accretion of experience.”⁴⁸⁶ *Cracking India*’s negotiation of borders at multiple levels likewise unsettles monocentric narratives of colonialism, nationalism, and patriarchy; as opposed to what Elleke Boehmer calls the hegemonic “unitary or ‘one-eyed’ forms of consciousness,”⁴⁸⁷ the text foregrounds pluralism and “dissemination.”⁴⁸⁸ Tellingly, the setting of the novel is the border city of Lahore along which “India is . . . broken” (101). Whilst the colonial narrative, translated into the Partition discourse, represents this border as calcifying distinct identities and communities, the novel’s trajectory renegotiates this border as the Bakhtinian “chronotope of threshold; highly charged with emotion and value,”⁴⁸⁹ that embodies a liminal terrain of identities and connections. The novel’s hybrid form is a mosaic of autobiography, revisionist history, testimonial literature, and realist fiction that allows Sidhwa to access the discourses denied to women, albeit by blurring genres and unsettling binaries. Corresponding to Jacobs’s confrontation with a lack of an established representative medium, Sidhwa opts for a composite form for an acquisition of her voice and its aesthetic extension.

The multiplicitous marginal subjectivities of the narrator as a polio-stricken child, an ex-colonised woman, and a religious minority further lend a dialogic

⁴⁸⁶ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 104.

⁴⁸⁷ Boehmer 7.

⁴⁸⁸ I borrow the term from Bhabha, *Location* 199.

⁴⁸⁹ Bakhtin 248.

perspective to narration. The narrative technique itself is double-voiced; although the novel is mainly focalised by the first-person participant child narrator, Lenny, the narrative mode circumvents homodiegetic narration in unfolding through an interaction between child narration and adult reflection. Childlike in her candour, Lenny's observations are punctuated by her adult consciousness's re-cognition of the recollected events; for instance, whilst the following passage captures the child narrator's struggle to make sense of what appears a nonsensical idea of Partition, it also represents the adult narrator's hindsight analysis of the collective disregard for the dire costs of Partition: "There is much disturbing talk. India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then?" (101). Similarly, when bodies are being butchered and bonds severed in the hysteria, it is the child's perspective that foregrounds the preposterousness and unintelligibility of this defining historical and political event; whilst the adult narrator retrospectively witnesses people "shrink" and "dwindle" into religious "symbols" with Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Indian-Christian, and Parsee tags, the child narrator wonders, "What [religion] is God?" (101-102).

The text engages with multiple identities across ethnic, religious, class, and gender confines to explore the experiences of women, children, the "scheduled castes," and the lower economic classes who have been "virtually untouchable" in the historical records.⁴⁹⁰ The representation of this dialogical worldview, inclusive of minorities, is facilitated by the child narration that recounts the Partition upheaval through familial and communal relations as opposed to the nationalist and religious

⁴⁹⁰ For a historical view on this, see Butalia 197, 235.

narratives' self-referentiality. Child focalisation allows representation of otherwise marginalised narratives in the larger picture, such as Hari and Moti's tragic conversion, Ranna's narrative, Pappu's predicament, and even Imam Din's conflict; however, whilst the child's point of view facilitates a connection with the peripheries, it also represents the parameters of fully recuperating the traumatic experiences. It was only "some years later" that the narrator apprehended the "scope and dimension of the massacres" that she tries to retrieve in her narrative (96). This striving to reconcile childhood memories with adult reflection, at the narrative level, echoes the urgency to imbricate the elided history into the national consciousness, at the social level.

The text's deployment of the syncretic processes of abrogation and appropriation further contests both colonial and nationalist narratives' suppression of cultural diversity. Sidhwa subversively redeploys the colonial literary and linguistic repertoire in suggesting that, as Ashcroft et al. put it, "the message event, the 'scene of the Word,' has full authority in the process of cultural and linguistic intersection."⁴⁹¹ The text forms a mosaic of linguistic variety that corresponds to the diversity of social and ethnic groups; it is laden with what Bakhtin lists as "social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions."⁴⁹² The text is rich with glossing (*jana*, *bijli*, *pahailwan*, *phulkas*, *masti*, etc. (20, 30, 56, 58, 116)); untranslated words and colloquial expressions (*choorails*, *shaitan*, *tamasha*, *hulla-*

⁴⁹¹ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 65. Indeed, the novel represents the metonymic gap through several textual strategies outlined by Ashcroft et al.

⁴⁹² Bakhtin 262.

gulla, etc. (31, 56, 85, 132)); interlanguage (“a going-out sari,” “Their looks lack salt!” (17, 34)); syntactic fusion (“do soo-soo?” (104)); vernacular transcription (“no munneeey,” “vaaary much” (82)) as well as an interface between translated and untranslated words to underscore contextual resistance to transcription. Often, the narrator introduces a native word followed by its English translation in a subsequent reference—“Simla-*pahari*” becomes “Simla Hills” (34, 40), Ayah’s “*palloo*” is rendered “the hem of Ayah’s sari” (37, 39); Lahore’s red light area is *Kotha*, “roof,” *Heera Mandi*, and “diamond market” (252, 278)—to underscore the loss of meaning in rendition. The text’s heteroglossia is manifested in characters’ diverse speech types, ranging from standard to Indian English and peppered with Urdu and Hindi words, to represent various religious, social, and ethnic voices that clash and challenge the monolithic colonial and nationalist discourses informing the two-nation theory.

Indeed, abrogation and appropriation perform a dual subversion: whilst they challenge the colonial binary constructions of self/other, coloniser/colonised, they also signify the inherent syncretism of the colonised culture. Sidhwa makes several allusions to the greatest subcontinent poets, including Ghalib, Iqbal, Mir, and Faiz; to Indian folklore; and to classical Indian music to evoke a non-religious cultural diversity that contests the hegemonic discourses. Whilst Sidhwa unsettles the centrality of the colonial worldview, she also undermines any notion of a monolithic authentic nationalist identity displaced by Partition. Summoning a rich historical legacy, India is represented as a motley of cultural proliferation. This voicing of difference accords a centrifugal tendency to the narrative as opposed to the closure underlying unitary conceptions of pedagogic identities. Thus, besides “a metaphoric

entry for the culture into the ‘English’ text,”⁴⁹³ as Ashcroft et al. put it, the novel also foregrounds the cultural and ethnic diversity that is persistently repressed in present-day Pakistan just as is the Partition memory.

2 *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Post-Partition Pakistan

In “What is a nation?” Ernest Renan observes that “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.”⁴⁹⁴ *Cracking India*, I argue, addresses these “forgotten” elements of the history on which national identity is predicated; by re-visiting Partition, the novel not only reimagines the suppressed marginalised voices, it also exposes the precarious foundations of national identity. Like *Beloved*, the text’s subversion of the hegemonic narratives is twofold: in resummoning the disremembered Partition history from a marginalised perspective that challenges celebratory historiography, the text also addresses the “national amnesia” of the contemporary autocratic Pakistani political and social milieu on account of its reconsolidation of the chauvinistic Partition ideology. *Cracking India* was written and published during the Zia regime (1978-1988), a religious-nationalist military dictatorship that intensified religious fundamentalism to forge a nationalist identity for its own political gains.⁴⁹⁵ The text thus urges readers to engage in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: a return to the repressed past to understand and re-render contemporary social and political relations. Like *Beloved*’s alternative narrative, *Cracking India* does not provide an “oppositional”

⁴⁹³ Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 51.

⁴⁹⁴ Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 11.

⁴⁹⁵ Although Sidhwa refers more explicitly to the oppression of this regime in her later novel, *An American Brat* (2006), it is significant that *Cracking India* is written and published during the military regime of Zia.

discourse, but calls for a return to the subcontinent's pluralistic landscape in order to recast current national, social, and political relations.

Although the hold of religion in Pakistani politics is attributed to “the Pakistan ideology” espoused during the independence struggle, in practice, religion and politics were yoked retroactively during the succeeding political regimes. As Michael Leifer observes, the Pakistan movement created “political mobilization on religious lines but only in the service of temporal ends” instead of implementing religious doctrine in public life or “aligning the lives of the faithful with the *Shari'a*.”⁴⁹⁶ The movement germinated in Aligarh University, the hub of modern Western secular education, as opposed to religious seminaries, and it was led by secular politicians thoroughly schooled in Western politics. Indeed, ironically, there was no political consensus on the “Islamic-ness” of the very Partition ideology that motivated the violence; mainstream religious bodies resented the Pakistan Movement and the Muslim League, dubbing them as “unIslamic.”⁴⁹⁷ Whilst the significance of the “two-nation” theory as a mobilisation discourse for engendering communal violence and forming premises for subsequent religious-nationalist politics cannot be overstated,⁴⁹⁸ it is also true that in the Pakistani socio-political topography, religious nationalism per se emerged in

⁴⁹⁶ Also see Ayesha Jalal's analysis of it as “a political tactic and not an ideological commitment” as well as Jinnah's distance from communal or religious politics. Jinnah believed that “religion should not enter politics” and did not envision Pakistan as “a theocratic state.” See Jalal 5, 14, 42, 95-96, 277.

⁴⁹⁷ Indeed, Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of the Islamist conservative organisation, Jamat-e-Islami, famously chided Jinnah for reflecting “no knowledge of the views of the Qu'ran.” Michael Leifer, ed., *Asian Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2000) 148-9.

⁴⁹⁸ Hekman's critique of parochial identity politics is crucial here. She argues that identity politics are problematic partly because the theorists' desire to “advocate a conception of identity as fluid and fictitious,” or, I would add, to deploy it as a source of political mobilisation, does not resonate with political actors who instead embrace essentialism. Hekman, “Identity” 11. Hence, the separatist Partition discourse that was deployed for political mobilisation by the Muslim League leadership was reified by the masses that culminated in communal violence during the Partition and that was redeployed in cementing religious identities during the Zia regime and the Cold War.

the years leading up to the 1980s and reached its zenith during Zia's fascist rule. In an eerie twist, the personal trauma of Zia's family's migration during Partition⁴⁹⁹ fused with the public trauma of the cessation of West Pakistan to frame his vision of a religious state that also became the rationale for his military dictatorship. This social order instilled fundamentalism and chauvinism deep into the moral fabric of society, leaving behind a baneful legacy of indoctrination, bigotry, and fanaticism that has since haunted Pakistan. This political context forms the silent backdrop of *Cracking India*, cautioning against the pitfalls of religious nationalism by summoning the disremembered history.

In "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery," Thomas McCarthy cites the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* practice in the 1980s and 1990s as a model for the U.S. to engage in a similar process of dealing with the persistent racial injustice anchored in its national past. McCarthy's analysis of "the cultural and political costs of suppressing painful memories and refusing to mourn" and "the role that publicly working through the past can play in reshaping national culture and identity"⁵⁰⁰ provides a useful insight into the post-independence Pakistan. However, certain variations between the German-U.S. and the Pakistani contexts deserve deliberation. McCarthy argues that "the collective past is a burden on the present, and the stronger the memories of it the greater the burden,"⁵⁰¹ as manifested in the repressed memories of *Beloved*'s characters. However, in post-

⁴⁹⁹ Menon notes that "Zia was profoundly influenced by his family's migration from Jullundhar to Peshawar. At an international Islamic conference, the president declared: 'I will tell you what Islam and Pakistan mean to me. It is a vision of my mother struggling on, tired, with all her worldly possessions in her hands, when she crossed the border into Pakistan.'" Menon 102.

⁵⁰⁰ Thomas McCarthy, "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery," *Political Theory* 30 (2002): 623-24.

⁵⁰¹ McCarthy 626.

independence Pakistan, the burden of the unacknowledged collective past is heavier in the total absence of its memory; the national consciousness harbours a celebratory account of history grounded in an unacknowledged amnesia. Whereas McCarthy identifies a gap between the U.S. historiography and public consciousness, in the Pakistani context, there is a void in each area; there is no comprehensive historiographic body of work, public acknowledgement, commemoration, or aesthetic representation of the violent history undergirding the nation-state's genesis,⁵⁰² except individual, fragmented memories of the muted survivors whose absence in the collective consciousness signifies the persistence of the rupture's legacy. *Cracking India*'s narrative space thus offers the site on which the narrator constructs a commemorative monument to the forgotten history.

Sidhwa's alternative historical narrative opens with a self-reflexive invocation to the "fire of the verse" accompanied by a rejection of the "sign" and the dominant "Word." Quoting a translated excerpt from the celebrated, British-knighted national poet of Pakistan, Sir Muhammad Iqbal,⁵⁰³ Sidhwa's epigraph situates the narrator as the signified "abject," condemned to "exclusion" and "taboo" by the "sign" (the masculine authority of the nation-state signified in Iqbal's quote), yet whose revised

⁵⁰² Morrison's comment on the lack of sites commemorative of slavery that inspired some of her work also applies in the Pakistani context. Whilst all the national monuments in Pakistan—Wazir Mansion and Ziares Residency (Jinnah's birthplace and later residence respectively), Jinnah's Mausoleum and Museum, Iqbal's Mausoleum and Museum, Pakistan Monument, and Minar-e-Pakistan—pivot on the celebration of the duo who are valorised as having conceived and visualised the ideal of the separate nation-state, there is no public commemoration of the loss, violence, and catastrophe that Partition engendered.

⁵⁰³ The nationalist narrative hails Iqbal (1877-1938) as the poet of the East and the visionary national figure who dreamed the "dream of Pakistan" as a separate Muslim state; however, historiographic accounts challenge this univocal, celebratory narrative. See Jalal 12 and 122 who argues that Iqbal's proposal did not call for "the division of India" and "was set firmly within an all-India context." Likewise, "Jinnah's 'Pakistan' did not entail the partition of India."

narrative is a disruption of the very sign that persistently “represses” its “eternal return.”⁵⁰⁴ The epigraph reads:

Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear?

Am I the rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year?

The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me no more to be faint.

With dust in my mouth, I am abject: to God I make my complaint.

Sometimes You favor our rivals then sometimes with us You are free

I am sorry to say it so boldly. You are no less fickle than we. (11)

As a doubly marginalised figure, a Parsee woman living and writing during an Islamic fascist regime,⁵⁰⁵ Sidhwa’s world is as “compressed” as the polio-stricken narrator, Lenny’s physically contracted world.⁵⁰⁶ As part of the abject other of the nation-state, attempting to narrate an abjected history, Sidhwa makes her readers confront the double abject. Situating herself in the epigraph as the “abject” other condemned to “silence,” the narrator deploys her “story” to instantiate a rejection of the symbolic representation of the celebrated national legacy (the figure of Iqbal here) by incorporating into it the abject and the repressed counter-narratives.

The repression of this brutal originary narrative of the nation-state is reflected in the rift between the narrator’s individual memory (and that of other witnesses and victims) and the collective national consciousness. Repressed memories, however, infiltrate the text, metaphorically, through the child narrator’s physical trauma of

⁵⁰⁴ Kristeva, *Powers* 14, 17.

⁵⁰⁵ The first edition of the novel was published in 1988 by which time Sidhwa had migrated to the U.S. However, she had started writing the novel in 1982.

⁵⁰⁶ The narrator’s self-attribution as “abject” in the epigraph appears more than arbitrary when juxtaposed with her later account of an experience of being “abjected.” I return to this below.

polio as reflected in her traumatic dreams and, literally, through her proximity to the communal violence. Indeed, Lenny's debilitating experience of polio, established at the outset of the novel, symbolises the adult narrator's traumatic memories of Partition: "There is an unbearable weight on my chest. I moan and cry. . . . How long will the horror last? Days and years with no end in sight" (15-16). The "unbearable weight" of memory that has been elided in the national consciousness wrestles for expression in view of "the horror" that continues to haunt in the contemporary world. Here, Sidhwa's "rememory" lies in the "mediatory zone" between the individual and the collective consciousnesses;⁵⁰⁷ the national imperative has suppressed "images" that "haunt" and "compress" her world.⁵⁰⁸ Thus, Lenny observes: "It gets so that I cannot sleep. . . . I lie with my eyes open staring at the shadows that have begun to haunt my room. . . . And when I do fall asleep the slogans of the mobs reverberate in my dreams, pierced by women's wails and shrieks—and I awake screaming for Ayah" (224-225). This dialogic narration, switching between naive and complicated frames of reference, marked by childhood experience and adult recollection, reflects events immediate to Sidhwa's graphic memory that have been elided in the collective

⁵⁰⁷ My argument about the gap between individual and public memory, which eventuates Sidhwa's narrative, corresponds to Paul Ricoeur's mediatory zone of memory. Scholarship on the notion of memory is divided on the binary of interiority and exteriority, that is, individual and shared memory. Paul Ricoeur differentiates between "the tradition of inwardness" school that regards memory as an individual phenomenon of subjective nature as opposed to the school of "the external gaze" which accords all memory a collective existence. Ricoeur, on the contrary, posits three zones of memory: between individual and collective memory lies the mediatory zone of exchange. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004) 96-120.

⁵⁰⁸ In one of her interviews, Sidhwa refers to her haunting memories: "There are certain images from my past which have always haunted me. Partition was a very violent experience. . . . Although I was very young then, I saw chance killings, fires, dead bodies. These are images which have stayed with me. There were also the stories I grew up with." Bapsi Sidhwa and Preeti Singh, "My Place in the World," *Alif* 18 (1998): 292. This continuum of haunting memories between the traumatic experience and narrative recollection permeates other works by Sidhwa including the novel *The Bride* (1983) and her collection of short stories *Their Language of Love* (2013).

national awareness.⁵⁰⁹ Besides Lenny, who shares some of the autobiographical facts of Sidhwa's life, Ranna's testimony,⁵¹⁰ Ayah's story, and other characters, events, and images reflect fragmented and displaced voices erased in historical accounts that inform national identity. Indeed, Sidhwa's use of the historical present in narrating the history of Partition foregrounds its immediacy to personal memories as well as current social and political relations.

The personal and political are, indeed, inextricable for the narrator, especially given the concurrence of her birthday with that of the nation-state. Her personal trauma becomes complicated in the absence of a corresponding national trauma. What makes this absence perilous are its "cultural and political costs" that the nation continues to recompense.⁵¹¹ The text solicits reconciliation between the central and the peripheral, the dominant and the bordering memories in order to create a more syncretic political identity that allows dealing with the present through coming to terms with the past. Indeed, post-independence Pakistan requires what McCarthy refers to as "Walter Benjamin's idea of reversing the usual triumphal identification with history's winners for an anamnestic solidarity with its victims."⁵¹² The inability of the nation, at the time of Sidhwa's writing, to decipher the crisis as a return of the repressed necessitates *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which the text initiates. The novel highlights that the "past...is still present [and] refuses to pass away," and its haunting memories have transmuted into violence, social and political unrest, minorities'

⁵⁰⁹ As she observes in an interview, "the ominous roar of distant mobs was a constant of my awareness." "New Neighbors," *Time Magazine* Time Inc., 11 Aug. 1997. Web. 12 Sept. 2014.

⁵¹⁰ Ranna's narrative is based on the historical testimony of Rana Khan. See Sidhwa, *Cracking India* 291.

⁵¹¹ McCarthy 623.

⁵¹² McCarthy 628.

oppression, fanaticism, and neocolonial intervention that remain indecipherable in view of an “[un]familiarity with the causal background to contemporary . . . problems.”⁵¹³ Thus, the narrative is not merely a project of self-actualisation, but it is also an endeavour to incorporate testimonies of Partition into the collective memory; the narrating self’s attempt to reinterpret the narrated self calls for a similar symbiotic relationship between the national past and the present.

McCarthy’s analysis of “our past and present” in terms of slavery and “home” politics overlooks U.S. imperialism in its focus on developing “transracial political solidarity required for democratic solutions.”⁵¹⁴ *Cracking India*’s context of production, however, evokes the neocolonial manifestation of colonial practices and discourses: the text’s presentiment, “History will repeat itself” echoes this phenomenon (139). Whilst Lenny’s dreams about the Nazi soldier, the callous dismemberment of bodies, and the “crucified children” herald the upcoming Partition massacre (142), the novel itself serves as a premonition of the graver upshot of the contemporary Indo-Pak conflicts, religious colonisation, and neocolonialism. It thus calls for a Gadamarian hermeneutic of “effective history” and a fusion of horizons⁵¹⁵ to spotlight the gap between the nation-state ideals and its contemporary reality, both significantly defined by colonial forces. Jill Didur argues that “the adult narrator’s attempt to make sense of why she is haunted by her memories of this period over forty years later – emphasises the limited and unequal notion of citizenship that asserted

⁵¹³ McCarthy 645.

⁵¹⁴ McCarthy 638.

⁵¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004).

itself in the postcolonial context.”⁵¹⁶ I would add that the haunting memories also intimate that the patriarchal colonialist-nationalist collusion that engendered a bloody Partition and its attendant politics of hate is being reinstated in the contemporary socio-political structure.

The novel’s alternative story calls for a hermeneutic of effective history that re-evaluates the contemporary religious and nationalist fanaticism through tracing its roots in the Subcontinent’s colonial history. This relational connection of the past and the present, the individual and the collective memory, and personal and public histories can help forestall further violence and disintegration. This textual practice of individual and communal renarration to form connections and revise identities corresponds to the characters’ parallel engagement in story telling; indeed, throughout the text Mother, Ayah, Hamida, Ranna, Imam Din, and Lenny relate stories as opposed to the “always economical . . . single word” of “Father” that the text challenges (157).

3 Relationality and the Politics of Representation

One of the most controversial critical questions in postcolonial studies pertaining to the representation of the subaltern voice and agency has also figured in the critical debate on *Cracking India*. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak makes two crucial assertions: first, given the discursive construction of subjectivity, the representation of the subaltern as a sovereign subject or a subaltern collectivity is a myth; secondly, given the historical erasure of the subaltern “voice-consciousness,” any attempt to retrieve the subaltern voice or agency is subject to “epistemic

⁵¹⁶ Didur 69.

violence.”⁵¹⁷ Whilst the import of Spivak’s argument is to urge intellectuals to interrogate representational systems (as opposed to its sometimes reductive misapprehension as forswearing the intellectual project itself),⁵¹⁸ Spivak does not theorise an alternative mode of representation or politics of coalition except in her notion of strategic essentialism conceived elsewhere. This confronts us with at least two problems: first, as I argued in my introduction above, strategic essentialism, as a representational or coalitional model, is analytically problematic; secondly, in Lazarus’s words, the emphasis on “structured inarticulacy” of the subaltern can “fetishiz[e] difference under the rubric of incommensurability.”⁵¹⁹

Indeed, this fetishisation of difference also lurks underneath Kristeva’s ethics of alterity. Kristeva rightly indicts both the narcissistic and group identities for being founded on the exclusion of our own interiority, so that dealing with our own alterity, the other within us (the “return of the repressed or excluded other”), is the key to accepting the other in the form of the stranger. However, “mak[ing] the social relation interior to the psyche,”⁵²⁰ as Kristeva does, relegates the identificatory politics of social relations, something that risks a reification of otherness and that also partly explains Kristeva’s distance from any notion of collective identity. Interestingly, this is mirrored in the Eurocentric vision of Kristeva’s own intellectual project in *About*

⁵¹⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) 271-313.

⁵¹⁸ Spivak’s assertion that the subaltern cannot speak has often been misinterpreted as implying that the subaltern women never had the opportunity to speak. Also, her notion of “epistemic violence” has been interpreted as implying the futility of the intellectual project. Spivak addresses some of these criticisms in her later work. See “Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors (1993-94),” *The Spivak Reader*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 287-308 and Spivak, “Subaltern.”

⁵¹⁹ Lazarus, “Introducing Postcolonial Studies,” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* 9.

⁵²⁰ Kristeva, *Strangers* 182-92; Oliver 149-152.

Chinese Women as she is herself unable to transcend the boundaries of alterity. As Spivak observes, Kristeva's "obsessively self-centered" engagement with the Chinese women is a project of self-actualisation; it is "about her *own* identity rather than theirs" as is evident in her construction of us-and-them boundaries.⁵²¹ This binary vision recurs in one of Kristeva's autobiographical articles, "My Memory's Hyperbole," in which she remarks:

While the Latin American or Arab Marxist revolution is brewing on the doorstep of the United States, I feel closer to truth and liberty when I work within the space of this challenged giant, which may, in fact, be on the point of becoming a David before the growing Goliath of the Third World. I dream that our children will prefer to join this David, with his errors and impasses, armed with our erring and circling about the Idea, the Logos, the Form: in short, the old Judeo-Christian Europe.⁵²²

As Oliver observes, by pitting the Third World as the monster Goliath against the United States as the small David, Kristeva renders the former a "threatening Other" against which the Western culture can assert its identity. Thus, "Kristeva's Eurocentrism flies in the face of her analysis of love and her call to embrace the stranger/foreigner."⁵²³ Indeed, overlaid with Christian mythology, Kristeva's vision for "our" children to join David tends to sanction the smooth transfer of the colonial burden from Europe to the United States, whilst maintaining the civilised-uncivilised binary. It is significant, then, that Weir regards any undue emphasis on alterity,

⁵²¹ Spivak, "French" 158.

⁵²² Quoted in Oliver 131.

⁵²³ Oliver 131.

difference, or “the refusal of identification” as a kind of “*indifference*” which stems from a rejection of the relations of “interdependence” that require going beyond simply recognising the “other’s separateness, independence, difference.”⁵²⁴

Thus, despite Spivak and Kristeva’s shared concern for coalitional politics, their theoretical positions are confronted with the foundational question: How does one “learn from and speak to” or represent the subaltern, the other, the stranger?⁵²⁵ Keeping Spivak’s crucial stipulation in view, it is possible to conceive other ways of reaching out to the subaltern: practices that neither utterly stifle her voice nor claim its unproblematic recovery; that self-reflexively grapple with the invasiveness inherent to the representational act; that recognise the irreducible difference between self and other; and, yet conceive all boundaries as permeable in attempting to connect with the other. A relational approach to reimagining the subaltern embodies one such mode of representation based in transformative as opposed to appropriative identification with the other, whilst being cognizant of the mutual irreducible differences. According to Weir, this mediatory practice engages in “a transformative historical process” that requires “an openness to the other . . . to vulnerability, critique and self-critique” in order to connect self and other, past and future, through an identificatory relationship. This “traveling to the other’s world” is a kind of identification that is not based on “presumed sameness,” nor is it informed by “shared oppression” alone, but it is aimed at acknowledging the “difference” of the other and recognising our own implication in webs of power in order to effect a perceptual and subjectival shift vis-à-vis each

⁵²⁴ Weir, *Identities* 77.

⁵²⁵ Spivak, “French” 156.

other's differences.⁵²⁶ Indeed, the Kristevan notion of alterity as the repressed interiority is a powerful idea to deal with the threatening alterity of the other, once it is combined with the notion of transformative identification in social relations that can help bridge gaps and form connections between self and other, past and present, through an interactive process.

Cracking India reflects this relational paradigm in both narrative structure and characterisation as outlined above. The adult narrator forms a dialogic nexus with her younger self in her return to the past to offer an alternative discourse that (re)views the present in connection to the past. The recurrent convergence and divergence of the two voices creates an aesthetic effect that corresponds to the narrator's parallel cognitive struggle to connect personal memories with those of the survivors in reimagining the subaltern through a relational connection between self and other, the past and the present. Correspondingly, various characters engage in a similar transformative process of identificatory and relational connection across gender, religious, and class divides in order to form a communal solidarity that challenges the hegemonic representation.

To begin with, the text attempts to imagine the subaltern through a transformative identification between the narrator and other characters' relational positionalities in the power structures. Through Mother's relationship with Father, Lenny's interaction with Cousin (and the adult narrator's retrospective analysis of it), Pappu's treatment by Muccho, and Muccho's own social status, Sidhwa extends the abject status of women like Ayah and Hamida in the Partition discourse and violence to the everyday realities of all women's lives, cutting across class, gender, religious,

⁵²⁶ Weir, *Identities* 64, 78.

and ethnic confines. The adult narrator's personal experience of woman-as-object forms a link with her characters: the crux of the Partition discourse, "one man's religion is another man's poison," only makes sense in hindsight when the adult narrator "experience[s] this feeling of utter degradation, of being an untouchable excrescence, an outcast" when she holds out her hand to "a Parsee priest at a wedding and he, thinking I am menstruating beneath my façade of diamonds and a sequined sari, cringes" (125).⁵²⁷ Likewise, the paragraph explaining the "mystery of the [recovered] women in the courtyard . . . wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman" (224) is followed in the very next paragraph by "the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bedroom. Mother crying, wheedling, Father's terse, brash, indecipherable sentences. Terrifying thumps. . . . Sounds of a scuffle," and Lenny's discovery of the bruises on her mother's body that the adult narrator deciphers in retrospect (224).

Whilst Mother's privileged status serves to contrast her experience of violence with that of the abducted women, Lenny's privilege is juxtaposed to the *Dalit* child, Papoo. Whilst Lenny's young cousin is fixated on her "feminine" body and tries to school her into the patriarchal ideals of femininity, Papoo's doubly oppressive subjectivity as a *Dalit* female child locks her firmly at the heart of the repressive patriarchal structure. Indeed, Muccho's ill-treatment of her daughter, Papoo, recalls the relationship of Pecola and Pauline Breedloves in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) in which Pecola is the scapegoat of her mother's revulsion at her own multiply marginalised, socially insignificant status.⁵²⁸ Corresponding to the token status of

⁵²⁷ Kristeva regards menstrual blood as a significant source of abjection that "threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate." Kristeva, *Powers* 71.

⁵²⁸ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970).

women in the Partition, Papoo's child marriage represents another facet of the patriarchal familial structure in which women are, in Irigaray's words, "utilitarian objects and bearers of value,"⁵²⁹ exchanged in order to lift respective burdens; whilst Papoo's parents relieve themselves of the burden of raising a female child, her "middle-aged" husband receives "a child-bride" and a female caretaker to perform household labour. Indeed, Ayah's abduction is followed in the very next chapter by Papoo's marriage, juxtaposing Ayah's rape to the "eleven or twelve" year old Papoo's marriage to a man her father's age: just as Ayah's eyes return silence, Lenny can only "imagine . . . the shock, and the grotesque possibilities awaiting Papoo" (189-199). However, despite these relational connections between various narratives and subjectivities, Sidhwa's own privileged status as an educated woman belonging to an elite Parsee family cannot be glossed over in relation to the marginalised women further down the hierarchal order whose experiences she attempts to represent. Indeed, the retrospective narrator's recurring commentary on class difference recognises her privilege over more marginal women, and, as Didur argues, Sidhwa also concedes her complicity in the oppressive social fabric through Lenny's repentance on betraying Ayah.⁵³⁰

However, whilst the text attempts to reach out to the subaltern, it also undercuts the possibility of a wholesale retrieval of historically repressed voices by using child focalisation as the principle narrative technique. As such, though the novel represents Ayah as a text loaded with political significations before and after Partition, it evades a definitive retrieval of Ayah's own voice in relation to her

⁵²⁹ Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," *This Sex* 175.

⁵³⁰ Didur 90.

abduction and rape; this gap signifies the inaccessibility of the subaltern voice as well as the national consciousness's wilful silence on the subject. When the mob drags her out from Lenny's house, we do not hear Ayah but see her "mouth slack and piteously gaping . . . staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes" (195), signifying the ineffable. Indeed, Ayah's abduction is followed by a narrative void on her whereabouts until six chapters later we find her at Ice-candy-man's *Kotha*. The shift from Ayah's "gaping" mouth and "terrified" eyes to her "vacant" eyes and "mutilated . . . vocal cords" further accentuates both the absence of the subaltern's historical voice as well as the inadequacy of language (and representation) to fully render her experience. This is also reinforced through the child narrator's inability to make sense of the abducted women's "voices": although the neighbouring camp for the recovered women is full of activity, Lenny, like Stamp Paid in *Beloved*, can only hear their voices without registering the meaning: "[t]here is very little chatter among the women. Just apathetic movements to and fro" as the camp resonates with "hideous wails" (201). Even Ranna's narrative as a child survivor of the massacre requires a disruption of the first-person narration owing to its resistance to being transcribed by Lenny; however, as opposed to the absence of Hamida's or Ayah's narratives, Ranna's story is incorporated as a nested narrative. Even so, the impossibility of fully recuperating the experience is reflected by the unfolding of the narrative in fragments, what Bhatia calls a "patchwork of memory,"⁵³¹ as well as the image of the indelible scar on Ranna's head that signifies more than his spoken narrative can convey. The "grisly scar like a brutally gouged and premature bald spot" that soon "acquired the shape of a four-day-old crescent

⁵³¹ Nandi 98.

moon” (206) is a living emblem of the elapsed past, whilst its crystallisation into the crescent symbolises the crescent in the national flag; whereas the latter constitutes a national insignia of progress and religious identity, the crescent-like scar on Ranna’s head symbolises the persistent spectre of the disremembered holocaust and the oppression of the marginalised, on which the emblem of the nation-state’s identity rests.

However, notwithstanding the novel’s concession of the impossibility of the complete retrieval of the repressed voices, the text also attempts to re-present the subaltern by according her qualified agency.⁵³² For instance, during Godmother’s visit to the *Kotha*, the power dynamics between Ayah and Ice-candy-man reflect the former’s resistance against the enforced subjectivity. Although physically at his discretion, Ayah’s “harsh” tone and curt responses to him; Ice-candy-man’s “subdued” demeanor towards her with “face drawn, apprehensive,” “eyes, red with the strain of containing his tears”; and his appeal to Godmother to “persuade” Ayah denote an ability to deploy her residual power as opposed to absolute acquiescence. Whereas Ayah’s “despairing” demeanour represents being “haunted by her past, Ice-candy-man is haunted by his . . . macabre future [which] already appears to be stamped on his face” (276). Ayah’s use of the auxiliary twice—“I will not live with him” and her insistence, “I will go” whether her family accepts her or not—represents the remnants of her prior agency translated into the persistent desire to resist and re-

⁵³² Ambreen Hai claims that “Ayah herself has no voice of agency”; Didur argues that Ayah’s post-Partition agency is constricted in comparison to her prior “fluid agency”; and Subramanian argues that although Ayah as a subaltern does not speak, she does reflect resistance. My textual reading agrees with the latter and contrasts Ayah’s agency to some other representations of the Partition survivors as absolute victims. Didur 18, 92; Subramanian 77, 91; and Ambreen Hai, “Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.2 (2000): 409.

connect, despite Godmother's estimation of her as being "[e]mptied of life." The narrator juxtaposes Godmother's assimilation of patriarchal logic to Ayah's expression of her "will": "What's happened has happened," says Godmother. "But you are married to him now. You must make the best of things. He truly cares for you" (274).

Tellingly, however, the text does not homogenise the subaltern as a single consciousness represented in Ayah. Ayah's resistance and agency, however circumscribed, are juxtaposed to Hamida's resignation to her "fate" as she refuses to opt for "rehabilitation": "It's my kismet that's no good . . . we are *khut-putli*, puppets, in the hands of fate" (234). Ayah's residual sense of self as reflected in her desire to start anew stands in stark contrast to Hamida's submission. Indeed, in Mahmood and Weir's terms, Hamida is "inhabiting norms"⁵³³ by accepting her "fallen" status, her so-called fate, her new abode, and her separation from her children as beneficial for both. However, in its contrast between Hamida's capitulation and Ayah's struggle, the text foregrounds Hamida's inhabitation of negative norms, norms that are constraining and exploitative. Hamida's submission is also reminiscent of Saadat Hassan Manto's powerful short story on the gendered violence of Partition, "Khol do" translated as "Open it."⁵³⁴ At her father's arrival to receive her, the abducted Sakina reflexively opens her trouser cord as she overhears the instruction "open it" directed at the window. This "puppetlike" response reflects the incapacitation of her cognitive ability. Whilst Manto has been criticised by feminists for representing Sakina as an absolute victim, Sidhwa provides a more heterogeneous imaginary. As opposed to

⁵³³ Weir, *Identities*

⁵³⁴ Saadat Hasan Manto, "Open it," trans. M. Asaduddin *Black Margins: Stories*, ed. M. U. Memon (New Delhi: Katha, 2001) 200-3.

Hamida's resignation, Ayah's negotiation indicates her desire to redefine her identity and re-appropriate her agency by opting for a re-connection with a defining community.

In so doing, *Cracking India*'s alternative representation revises other Partition texts as well as the historical narrative. First, it displaces most Partition novels' closure with a woman's recovery by a patriarchal character⁵³⁵ with the community's transgression of its social precincts to facilitate connection and rehabilitation. Indeed, at the pinnacle of the riots, Masseur's disappearance from the narrative domain followed, four chapters later, by the discovery of his corpse undercuts the stipulation of a patriarchal saviour as much as Godmother and the community's influence undermines Ayah's "legal" husband's authority. Secondly, the novel revises the historical account of the National Recovery Programme's "rehabilitation" of abducted women across borders against their will by allowing Ayah the "choice" to return to her family.⁵³⁶ The text creates a space of boundary-crossing syncretism in which characters negotiate the power structure. Ayah is able to identify with a resistant identity as opposed to the one imposed on her in the *Kotha*, which motivates her desire to exit her incarceration and to cross the border to connect with her community. Ayah's wilful passage over the Indo-Pak border signifies the novel's insistence on the

⁵³⁵ Catherine Innes mentions several novels in which woman-as-mother-incarnate is saved by her male partner. Catherine Lynette Innes, "Rewriting Her Story: Nation and Gender," *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, ed. Catherine Lynette Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 140-41.

⁵³⁶ See Menon and Bhasin on enforced "rehabilitation" of women by the post-Partition National Recovery Programme on each side of the border in which abducted women's recovery became a gauge of national honour. Women who had accepted their new "homes" on account of having borne children to their abductors were severed from their new "families" and were forcefully returned to their unwelcoming biological families or to rehabilitation homes. Thus, "rehabilitation," too, transmuted into the reinstatement of the national honour by restoring women to their rightful owners. Menon and Bhasin, "Recovery" WS2-WS11.

permeation of borders—textual, personal, collective, national, and historical—as opposed to the rigid boundaries of the Partition discourse and its legacy in the Subcontinent. Just as Morrison “wanted to invent [Margaret Garner’s] life”⁵³⁷ on a broader canvas of the historical narrative of slavery, Sidhwa reimagines these postcolonial women’s lives via the “poetic license” of her memory (149).

The rift between the imposition of oppressive identity categories and their renegotiation through relational connections is also manifested in the text’s challenge to the corporeal reduction of women’s identities in the colonialist and nationalist imaginaries. For instance, the interpersonal communication of most characters in the novel involves gendered bodies. Besides the dead, mutilated, and ravished bodies of the massacre, the convergence of the group on Ayah’s body, the “play” on Hari’s body, Cousin’s fondling of Lenny’s body, Father’s violent inscriptions on Mother’s body, and Papoo’s corporeal punishment and marital rape single out women’s bodies as sites of conflict and aggression. The communication between characters is also laden with gendered somatic metaphors (“penises” and “balls” “cut off,” hands “fit for bangles,” fleeing “with tail between...legs,” etc.) that deploy the feminised and sexualised body as a referent to underscore the primacy of the male sign (139, 140, 166-7). This embodied discourse is also symptomatic of women’s disentanglement from the incipient nation-state, with their identities deferred in being shaped and reshaped vis-à-vis the hegemonic desire. For instance, the post-Partition gendered social structure is reflected in the removal of the Queen’s statue from the garden; this “unwomaned” site does not so much reflect a desire to remove colonial imagery as to oust women from the public sphere in line with the newfound religious-nationalist

⁵³⁷ Darling 248.

ideology. Thus, the former “color” of the garden gives way to “the austerity of the black burkas and white chuddars that shroud the women” (249), symbolising their persistent social death at the nation-state’s birth. The “unwomaned” void also symbolises the absence of any public site of commemoration of the Partition violence against women. Indeed, the “fallen” women’s camp and the *Kotha* seem to signify the only “homes” for these women in the aftermath of Partition: a cloistered, abjected, demarcated, and partial citizenship. Thus, as Boehmer observes, whilst “figures of mothers of the nation are everywhere emblazoned . . . the presence of women in the nation is officially marginalized.”⁵³⁸ Like Linda and Sethe, decolonisation for these women does not bring deliverance from the oppression that persists in recast forms.

However, the narrative does not assume closure at the rehabilitation camp or in Ice-candy-man’s *Kotha*, sites that have rendered women items of exchange; whilst women’s identities are constitutive of violence and are reduced to sexualised bodies in power structures, the text foregrounds the possibility of reimagining identities in relational connection via textual syncretism, the narrator’s self-reflexive dialogism, and the community’s ethics of solidarity. The separatist Partition politics are juxtaposed to the narrator’s syncretic identity that connects across gender, class, ethnic, and religious boundaries. Her proclamation: “Christmas, Easter, Eid, Diwali. We celebrate them all” is reinforced by the family’s diverse ethnic circle. Even Lenny’s dolls range from “Black golliwogs, British baby dolls with pink complexions” to an “Indian adult doll covered in white cloth” (147). It is Lenny’s ability to connect beyond social hierarchies that makes her conscious of class divisions and helps her recognise Hamida’s place “on a mat in our room” next to her

⁵³⁸ Boehmer, “Stories” 6.

bed; prompts her tolerance of Hamida's "irksome caress[es]" lest she "hurt her"; sensitises her to her privileged social status vis-à-vis Papoo, Chidda, and Ranna; and allows her to "love" and "pray for" everyone, including the "Ice-candy-man" (43, 225). The child narrator's non-subscription to social indoctrination allows the interrogation of the adults' acceptance of the givenness of social stratification.

Similarly, although Lenny's mother has limited agency vis-à-vis her own position in the patriarchal setup, her deployment of her relative privilege becomes a source of connection for her. Weir argues that when one is unlikely to escape or subvert oppressive identities especially if they give meaning to our life, "it is always possible to re-create and transform them by living them differently" as well as by critiquing one's own position in relations of power.⁵³⁹ It is Mother's ability to recognise mutual vulnerability that allows her to befriend ethnically diverse members of the community as well as to exit her cloistered domesticity to extend support to them through the recovery and rehabilitation of kidnapped women. Mother's decision to end her own domestic incarceration reflects her "desire to create a new home—a new identity—through . . . find[ing] new ways of connecting with other women, with members of other oppressed groups, [and] to continue a process of self-creation through expanding her cycle of self."⁵⁴⁰ Finally, focalised as a saviour by the child consciousness, Godmother with her "tentacular arm," "immense power," and "a network of espionage" is able to form connections across diverse boundaries: "People bring to her their joys and woes. Show her their sores and swollen joints. Distilling the right herbs, adroitly instilling the right words in the right ear, she secures wishes,

⁵³⁹ Weir, *Identities* 36, 15.

⁵⁴⁰ Weir, *Identities* 52.

smoothes relationships, cures illnesses, battles wrongs, solaces grief and prevents mistakes” (223). Employing her pervasive influence and resourcefulness, Godmother facilitates Ayah’s recovery and Ranna’s rehabilitation, besides providing support to other members of the community. However, although the child viewpoint elevates Godmother, the retrospective adult narration also undercuts her patriarchal complicity through Lenny’s interrogation of Godmother’s views.

Indeed, the novel’s alternative conception of community challenges the “deep, horizontal comradeship” of the “imagined” national community,⁵⁴¹ in its focus on meaningful connections that transcend restrictive national boundaries. The text displaces the nation-state’s masculinist imaginary, in which “exteriors superimpose a . . . set of distracting impressions” forestalling “hearts and minds” (103), with an alternative community of men and women cohered by recuperative ties that cut across ethnic, religious, gender, and class binaries. In her analysis of the “imagined community” of women in the novel, Subramanian posits “sisterhood” as the staple of rehabilitation⁵⁴² whilst Hai critiques the novel’s “binarism that insists that men are agents of violence, politics, and history, while women are victims, witnesses, or healers.”⁵⁴³ In their focus on “sisterhood” and “binarism,” both analyses simplify the text’s complex characterisation that exceeds taxonomical structures by representing both male and female characters as partaking in violence as well as communal regeneration. For instance, Muccho, Masseur, Imam Din, Yousaf, and Sharbat Khan do not fit this binary; whilst Muchho inflicts violence on her own daughter, Masseur,

⁵⁴¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined* 7.

⁵⁴² Subramanian 75-111.

⁵⁴³ Hai 409.

Imam Din, Yousaf, and Sharbat Khan deflect the indoctrination of Partition ideology in identifying with prior communal relations. Indeed, the text shows that identification can be based on connections with prior syncretic community as in the case of Imam Din; a relation of love and reciprocity as in the case of Masseur; a familial connection as in Lenny's tacit assistance in her mother's struggle with Father at the dinner table every night; through communal ethics reflected through Mother, Electric-aunt, and Godmother's rehabilitation efforts; and in personal relations as in the case of Ayah. Contrary to the static imagined communities of nation-states, the text's relational model foregrounds syncretic identities that imply anticlosure and facilitate border transgression.

Thus, whilst the Kristevan subject-in-process is a powerful conceptualisation of political resistance, it must also call into play the identificatory politics of an interdependent human sociality in order to forestall alterity's negative contingency. *Cracking India* attempts this demythologisation of alterity at both formal and thematic levels through its relational engagement with women and minorities' experience of Partition as abject others, its interpolation of individual memories into the collective national consciousness in order to address the forgotten history, its transformative engagement with the past in order to renegotiate nationalist and colonial hegemonic narratives, and in its challenge to univocal religious and nationalist identities through the syncretic potential inherent to identities. In its reinterpetive engagement with both the debilitating and liberating potentials of the past, the text not only resummons the disremembered history, it also urges a re-evaluation of the present via the past. As Lenny's initial "compressed" narrative voice, weighed down by memory, eventually gains "the power to talk" at the end of the narrative, a corresponding transmutation is called for in the "narration of nation"—a vision *Burnt Shadows* furthers significantly.

Chapter 4 Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Reimagining (Inter)National Communities in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

Let's face it. We're undone by
each other. And if we're not,
we're missing something.

(Judith Butler)

In its alternative historical imaginary, *Burnt Shadows* shares the revisionism of *Incidents*, *Beloved*, and *Cracking India*; however, it departs from these texts in two ways. First, Shamsie maps her alternative discourse within a transnational topography as the novel traces the interplay of private and public histories through some of the most devastating catastrophes of the last six decades. Secondly, in its dynamic engagement with neocolonialism, *Burnt Shadows* joins in the critical postcolonial project of tracing the spatio-temporal continuities of colonialism in the present era. By integrating the Second World War, the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 9/11, and the “war on terror” in an intricate web, *Burnt Shadows* foregrounds the relationality that binds as well as undoes humans in an interconnected world. Elleke Boehmer points out “two dominant inflections of the postcolonial”: a “hybridizing inflection” stimulated by globalisation to promote “transgressive trans-border movement and multicultural exchange” and a “resistance inflection” that is “preoccupied with *resistance to empire* and its post-imperial aftermath.” The first, for Boehmer, is reflected in the magic realist novel whereas the

second finds expression in national narratives.⁵⁴⁴ However, *Burnt Shadows*' social and historical imaginary exceeds this dyad: whilst espousing transnationalism, the novel also debunks the neoliberal globalisation myth, limiting cosmopolitan ideals, and both imperial and resistant nationalisms in favour of a non-restrictive, relational ethical paradigm that endorses an interdependent social ontology.

This chapter is thus divided into four parts. The first part briefly discusses nationalism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism in the context of postcolonial studies in order to demarcate the text's pluralist model anchored in a shared human vulnerability to loss that can serve as the basis for deeper cultural, social, and political connections. The second and the third parts analyse the text's transnational canvas that links various seemingly discrete histories within the entwined structures of colonialism and neocolonialism to foreground the urgency to re-evaluate our collective global history for a coexistent future. The last section situates textual analysis within the contemporary cultural context to explain the pressing need for feminism to reclaim its struggle in the neocolonial world.

2. Beyond Restrictive Frameworks: Revisiting Nationalism, Globalisation, and Cosmopolitanism

The upsurge of nationalism in modern history has encountered an ambivalent reception in postcolonial theory and praxis; although deeply linked with the capitalist colonial venture initially, nationalism also came to signify a break from imperialist enterprise through anti-colonial liberation struggles. The Subcontinent offers a classic

⁵⁴⁴ Elleke Boehmer, "Postcolonial Writing and Terror," *Terror and the Postcolonial*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 143.

case study for this double-edged nature of nationalism in modernity; the nearly hundred-year-long British imperialist dominion in India also sowed the seeds for anti-colonial nationalist sentiments that increasingly lacerated the Subcontinent's ethnic mosaic through a narrative of religious nationalism, the protagonists of which were schooled, ironically, in the imperial tutelage of modern nationalism.⁵⁴⁵ The extent to which anti-colonial nationalism was indebted to the colonial imagination of national identity is a topic outside the scope of this analysis. I am interested, instead, in exploring the susceptibility of the ideology of nationalism to the politics of hate and interventionism. Whereas nationalism has been maligned in its colonial garb, its anti-colonial resurgence has garnered approbation as a liberating mechanism for the colonised.⁵⁴⁶

Although it is problematic to regard nationalism as “inherently” aggressive, it is my contention that in its both so-called positive and negative manifestations, the ideology of nationalism, informed by putative racial essentialism, cultural uniqueness,

⁵⁴⁵ Both the pioneers of Indian nationalism and the respective spokespersons of the Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the All India Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had trained as lawyers in Inns Court and Lincoln's Inn, London respectively. Benedict Anderson refers to such native leaders as “bilingual intelligentsias” that drew on “the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century,” though Partha Chatterjee has challenged Anderson's model of anti-colonial nationalism as a “derivative discourse.” For details, see B. Anderson, *Imagined* 118; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and The Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) and *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

⁵⁴⁶ Tom Nairn and Dominique Schnapper have pointed out the “Janus faced” nature of nationalism as a “support for social solidarity, democracy and self-government” as well as a source of “hostility towards other peoples, exclusion and discrimination, conflicts and wars.” See Malcolm Anderson, *States and Nationalism in Europe since 1945: The Making of the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge, 2000) 4. This double-faced notion of nationalism corresponds to Partha Chatterjee's distinction between political and cultural nationalism as restraining or liberating respectively. For a detailed discussion on the recuperation of nationalism for anti-colonial politics see Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 68-143 and Benita Parry, “Liberation Theory: Variations on Themes of Marxism and Modernity,” *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 125-49.

or religious and ethnic supremacy, has been largely predisposed to parochialism. Indeed, as Michael Mann observes, “whether overt or latent, nationalism has dominated modern warfare”; the two World Wars were both “brought about by Europe’s failure to manage its own ethnic nationalisms.”⁵⁴⁷ The end of the Second World War was, however, claimed to have ushered in the death of nationalism in European societies’ so-called “‘post-national’ attitudes.”⁵⁴⁸ And by the 1970s, this “most magnificent gift” of Europe came to be portrayed as an aggressive “‘Third World’ phenomenon.”⁵⁴⁹ Nationalism, nevertheless, persevered, in both “the ‘good’ variety” and “the ‘bad’”⁵⁵⁰ in the post-war as well as the post-Communist world order. Although the Cold War rhetoric was organised around a binary of totalitarianism versus liberalism, as Malcom Anderson observes, it “ignore[d] nationalist principles in favor of universalist claims” only when the latter were “a vehicle for expressing Russian and American national ideals.”⁵⁵¹ Likewise, despite the Western labelling of “Third World” nationalism as atavistic, anarchic, and irrational “power-mongering,”⁵⁵² American nationalism in the post-Communist and the post-9/11 world as well as European nationalisms informing the contemporary refugee crisis stem from similar ideologies.

⁵⁴⁷ Michael Mann, “The Role of Nationalism in the Two World Wars,” *Nationalism and War*, eds. John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013) 172.

⁵⁴⁸ M. Anderson 2.

⁵⁴⁹ Chatterjee, *Nation* 3-4.

⁵⁵⁰ Chatterjee, *Nation* 3-4.

⁵⁵¹ M. Anderson 12.

⁵⁵² Lazarus, *Nationalism* 69.

Eric Hobsbawm thus qualifies nationalism as “inherently violent” in any form.⁵⁵³ Neil Lazarus, however, distinguishes between imperialist and anti-imperialist nationalisms in highlighting the latter’s significance for liberation struggles. Lazarus wants to “retain the categories of ‘nation’ and ‘universality’” even in our project of “speaking for all humanity” as “*some* claims to nationhood are legitimate and emancipatory, and must be upheld by socialists.”⁵⁵⁴ Whilst one might disagree with Hobsbawm’s essentialisation of nationalism, it is also problematic, as the subsequent textual analysis will elaborate, to draw a neat, divisive line between imperialist and anti-imperialist forms of nationalism given their complex interconnections in the contemporary world. A cursory survey of the last millennium makes evident that nationalism in both its imperialist and anti-imperialist manifestations has posed unique challenges; whilst metropolitan nationalisms have translated into the globalisation myth supposedly allowing geopolitical sovereignty, the coercive nationalisms of postcolonial states have equally been problematic in their suppression of heterogeneity and their instigation of violent disputes, both by occluding minority ethnic and gender groups and by forestalling more egalitarian cross-cultural alliances.⁵⁵⁵ Although it may neither be possible nor desirable to abandon nationalist identities altogether, postcolonial politics must develop an ethical discourse whose epistemology transcends provincialism and circumvents nationalist rhetoric, without compromising on empowering cultural identities which may serve as the very source

⁵⁵³ Lazarus, *Nationalism* 73.

⁵⁵⁴ Lazarus, *Nationalism* 73-5, 143.

⁵⁵⁵ Within the South Asian context, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are prototypical examples of this. The separation of the Bengal province from Pakistan on ethnic grounds and the contemporary ethnic, nationalist, and religious conflicts within Pakistan and India, not to mention the Kashmir dispute, are but some examples.

of interconnections, in order to promote a relationality based in collective, progressive politics of equity.⁵⁵⁶ In this context, globalisation and cosmopolitanism have been hailed as egalitarian alternative worldviews.

Although globalisation is pitted against nationalism as a corrective mechanism for underdevelopment and as promoting transnational solidarity, the persistence of contemporary imperialism is closely linked with the capitalist interests of hegemonic states, couched in the reformist rhetoric of globalisation.⁵⁵⁷ Despite its emphasis on a “rapid process of intercontinental economic, social, and political integration,”⁵⁵⁸ globalisation is as controversial a concept as nationalism since, as Sabanadze writes, it has come to “displace much more politically charged concepts such as imperialism and neocolonialism.”⁵⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu detangles the “myth of Globalization” as “homogenization,” whose “innocent-sounding words” are grounded in “a whole

⁵⁵⁶ Most leading postcolonial critics and theorists recognise the significance of nationalism as a decolonising mechanism; however, they are highly critical of the localism of postcolonial nationalisms and favour a cross-cultural consciousness instead. Franz Fanon asserts that “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension,” whilst Said regards the “progression” of “Nationality, nationalism, nativism” as “constraining,” and argues for a “post-national” “pluralistic vision of the world.” Stuart Hall argues that “ethnicity” or cultural identities need to be “decouple[d]” from nationalist, imperialist, racist, and state violence whilst Spivak recognises that since nationalism will not disappear, we must “detranscendentalize” it in favour of “a critical regionalism with trans-frontier jurisdiction.” Fanon, *Wretched* 247; Said, *Culture* 277, 287; Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995) 227; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Nationalism and the Imagination,” *Lectora* 15 (2009): 75, 94.

⁵⁵⁷ The relationship between nationalism and globalisation has been viewed in three principle threads: the first privileges globalisation’s displacement of nationalism’s provincialism in its vision of an emancipatory transnational alliance; the second view upholds a fruitful coexistence of globalisation and nationalism; and the third critiques globalisation’s reinforcement of aggressive nationalism. Eric John E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 14.

⁵⁵⁸ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 13. Also see Gary J. Wells, Robert Shuey, and Ray Kiely, *Globalization* (New York: Novinka Books, 2001); Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country* (Budapest: CEU P, 2010) 17; and Andrew Jones, *Dictionary of Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity P, 2006).

⁵⁵⁹ Sabanadze 20.

philosophy” of “cynical capitalism,” neoliberalism, “fatalism and submission.”⁵⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Derrida asserts that the “so-called globalization” has engendered “disparities between human societies” that “have probably never been greater . . . in the history of humanity.”⁵⁶¹ Lazarus likewise critiques Hobsbawm’s appraisal of globalisation and nationalism as mutually exclusive by arguing that historically “the two tendencies are typically twinned, mutually supportive and entailing . . . *and* that inter-nationalization is not (necessarily) secured at the expense of national polity or economy.”⁵⁶² Thus, despite its putative promise of addressing conflicts and underdevelopment, globalisation, as a transnational collaborative mechanism, remains controversial. Indeed, as *Burnt Shadows* illustrates, we need a realignment of the lexicon of postcolonial politics a step removed from the binaries of “nation” and “universality” and the nationalist tropology towards a relational discourse. The text’s imaginative canvas reflects a worldview that crosses divisive borders without erasing emancipatory cultural identities; however, both nationalism and globalisation do not seem conducive to this end.

One alternative arena for reinventing universalist ethics has centred on cosmopolitanism. Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held argue that, “as a global political theory,” cosmopolitanism underscores the “moral obligations owed to all human beings based solely on our humanity alone, without reference to race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, political affiliation, state citizenship, or other

⁵⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity P, 1998) 34-36.

⁵⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) 122.

⁵⁶² Lazarus, *Nationalism* 71-72.

communal particularities.” Cosmopolitanism has been primarily hailed in its departure from “traditional state-centric models” in advocating “the liberal moral features of individualism, egalitarianism, and universalism beyond the borders of the state *while* also insisting that these moral features should act as key regulative principles in forming global institutional structures.”⁵⁶³ However, cosmopolitanism has met with criticism on account of its “autonomous subject” and its citizenship model. It is argued that cosmopolitanism restricts “the self’s responsibility for others” in positing an “unproblematically free” self, thus forestalling “self-questioning” and “ethical awakening,” which runs counter to “cosmopolitanism’s strong aspiration to a more just world order.”⁵⁶⁴ Besides, as Derrida observes, cosmopolitanism requires a redefinition of the “old Greco-Christian” “ontotheological” emphasis on the delimiting notions of “world citizenship,” “world state,” or “state sovereignty” for “a universal alliance or solidarity that extends beyond the internationality of nation-states and thus beyond citizenship.” He posits an ethics of responsibility that is centred on “the other” and is based on “unconditional hospitality,” which is the condition of love, coexistence, and ethics.⁵⁶⁵ Derrida’s position is closer to “cultural” cosmopolitanism’s notion of a “global risk society” informed by “the capacity to be harmed” in a

⁵⁶³ Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held, introduction, *The Cosmopolitanism Reader*, eds. Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held (Cambridge: Polity, 2010) 1-2. The origins of cosmopolitanism are attributed to Cynic Diogenes of Sinope (400-323 BC) in his avowal of being “a ‘citizen of the world’” in response to the question of his origin. Contemporary cosmopolitanism draws on the political philosophy of Immanuel Kant in focusing on “issues of cosmopolitan morality and its meaningful application through roughly five interrelated themes: global justice, cultural cosmopolitanism, legal cosmopolitanism, political cosmopolitanism, and civic cosmopolitanism.” Brown et al., 3-4.

⁵⁶⁴ Eduard Jordaán, “Cosmopolitanism, Freedom, and Indifference: A Levinasian View,” *Alternatives* 34.1 (2009): 84-85. For a critique and re-visioning of cosmopolitanism see, for example, David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009) and Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997).

⁵⁶⁵ Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 123, 129-31.

vulnerable world,⁵⁶⁶ as it critiques the autonomy of the subject and deemphasises citizenship. This qualified understanding of cosmopolitanism, based in a vulnerable mutual reality, is contiguous with Levinas's notion of "the face of the Other" that Judith Butler draws on in her problematisation of the concept of the precariousness of life and that will form the theoretical framework of my analysis in this chapter.

Levinas's notion of "the face of the Other" takes cosmopolitanism's ethical enterprise a step further by broadening the scope of responsibility for the other. Instead of focusing on a rational, autonomous subject in a global citizenship context, Levinas proposes intersubjectivity based in a model of responsibility that is inherent to human relationality. The very proximity to "the face of the Other" instates one's ethical responsibility before extrinsic affiliations can intervene since "the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death." The demand put by the face, "thou shall not kill," circumscribes my own autonomy and "subordinates my existence to the other"⁵⁶⁷ since, as Butler adds, even if "I put an end to my fear of my own death by obliterating the other . . . I would have to keep obliterating" in order to survive. Levinas's nonviolence stems from "a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence" that can potentially be resolved in a relational coexistence.⁵⁶⁸ In its shift away from national and political affiliations in a global context, this ethical model transcends the provincialism of nationalism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism.

⁵⁶⁶ Brown and Held 10-11.

⁵⁶⁷ Levinas and Kearney 23-24.

⁵⁶⁸ Butler, *Precarious* 137.

Butler deploys Levinas's notion of the face to rethink "the relationship between representation and humanization" in the post-9/11 context; whilst the Levinasian "face" invokes both precariousness and commandment simultaneously, the media representation of the victims of the "war on terror" either obliterated the face through nonrepresentation or dehumanised it through personification, both to justify violence. Butler calls for a recuperation of "the face" through revised representation that reimagines human community via relational ethics of responsivity and responsibility, anchored in our fundamental exposure to and transformative experience of loss that ties us in a relational "we." For Butler, the "fundamental sociality of embodied life" implicates us "in lives that are not our own," and thus creates room for "a normative reorientation for politics" that can address the fraught contemporary global relations by developing a universal ethics of interdependence.⁵⁶⁹

Burnt Shadows's alternative historical imaginary draws on such a relational understanding of bliss and loss in re-narrating histories through an interconnection of public and private narratives. The interdependent reality of the vast narrative canvas debunks nationalism, capitalist globalisation, and restrictive cosmopolitanisms in favour of an ethical model of relationality that binds self and other in a symbiotic relation of love and loss. Levinas argues that being "in relation with the other face to face . . . is also the situation of discourse."⁵⁷⁰ Indeed, "face and discourse are tied. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse."⁵⁷¹ Thus, Butler adds, "the Other is the condition of discourse. If the Other is obliterated, so too is

⁵⁶⁹ Butler, *Precarious* 140, 28.

⁵⁷⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, trans. eds. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 9.

⁵⁷¹ Levinas, *Ethics* 87.

language, since language cannot survive outside of the conditions of address.”

However, Butler also concludes that although “language communicates the precariousness of life that establishes the ongoing tension of a non-violent ethics,” “language arrives as an address we do not will, and by which we are . . . captured . . . held hostage.”⁵⁷² However, whilst language can be constraining, it is also productive of new discourses, relations, identities, and communities. Although we are given over to language, its iterability is also formative of self-other interaction; whilst it implicates us in restrictive power relations, language also generates recuperative connections through inter-subjective relations and counter-address as analysed in *Incidents*’s feminist address. *Burnt Shadows* also deploys this interactive dimension of discourse to urge politics of relationality. The text refracts a self-other relation through the text-reader narrative interaction; by making its readers confront the obliterated faces and forgotten histories from an alternative perspective, *Burnt Shadows* endorses politics of connection, responsibility, and responsivity that humanise “the face of the Other” and recognise the precariousness of life via our co-implication.

3. Linking Empires, Remapping Imperialism

In this section, I will briefly review the critical debate on 9/11 scholarship in order to demarcate *Burnt Shadows*’s aesthetic project. I will then trace the novel’s historical and geographical passage through textual analysis of its subsections “The Yet Unknowing World” and the “Veiled Birds” that link Nagasaki and Partition within a colonial-neocolonial matrix.

⁵⁷² Butler, *Precarious* 139.

Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton redefine “postcolony” in its neocolonial form as “the effective continuation of the authority structures of the colony in the post-imperial nation” despite “flag independence.” They assert:

The colonial forms of present-day terror or the *terror of the postcolonial* . . . demands a turn (back) to certain modes of imperial history in order to understand and to explicate these apparent continuities. In particular, “postcolonial terror” requires that we turn back to the colonial archive of violence and repression . . . which finds such prominent afterlives in counter-terroristic formations today.⁵⁷³

They agree with Ania Loomba’s emphasis on the need to re-evaluate “the colonial past in relation to ‘the new empires of our times’ by supplying contemporary imperialism with ‘a historical conscience—and consciousness.’”⁵⁷⁴ However, they observe that postcolonial cultural and literary studies have “largely neglected the back-history of today’s postcolonial or late colonial terror . . . in the so-called postcolony.” In particular, such studies have sidestepped “one of the most pressing postcolonial issues of our age, the contemporary neo-imperial hegemony of the United States.” Boehmer and Morton identify a gap in the post 9/11 terror studies’ failure to “probe the deeper histories of the present,” “the continuities between historical formations of colonial sovereignty . . . and their reappearance in the current wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Northern Pakistan.” They assert that postcolonial studies need to discern the colonial Other in the “fearsome yet faceless figure of the

⁵⁷³ Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, “Introduction: Terror and the Postcolonial,” *Terror and the Postcolonial*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 7.

⁵⁷⁴ Ania Loomba et al., “Beyond What? An Introduction,” *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, eds. Ania Loomba et al. (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) 14-15. Also quoted in Boehmer and Morton 9.

terrorist” that is invoked to rationalise the neocolonial mission, “fully motivated by the military, political, and economic interests of the United States and Britain.”

However, Boehmer and Morton argue that unlike postcolonial studies’ negligence towards the politics of the “postcolony,” postcolonial literature has taken up critical questions of neocolonial violence and sovereignty.⁵⁷⁵

However, Boehmer and Morton’s argument becomes complicated in view of the critique of American literature’s insular approach in the aftermath of 9/11.

Richard Gray points out two major limitations of 9/11 fiction: first, most novels are subject to provincialism in their focus on “trauma” and the “personal” in which the “crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated,” and “cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists,” thus, “reducing a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education.”⁵⁷⁶ Whilst the personal is undoubtedly political, any political valence of the personal is erased in these texts for Gray. Secondly, in these texts’ “encounters with strangeness,” or Islam as “the sinister other” that has replaced the communism that once “enabled American self-definition,” “a kind of imaginative paralysis tends to set in.” Gray underscores the need for American writers to represent the “multiple, complex, and internally antagonistic” nature of their culture within social and historical context.⁵⁷⁷ Endorsing Gray’s argument for a “centripetal” focus, Michael Rothberg urges “a complementary centrifugal mapping that charts the outward movement of American power.” He

⁵⁷⁵ Boehmer and Morton 7-13.

⁵⁷⁶ Richard Gray, “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis,” *American Literary History* 21.1 (2009): 134.

⁵⁷⁷ Gray 147.

believes that “[t]he most difficult thing for citizens of the US empire to grasp is not the internal difference of their motley multiculture, but the prosthetic reach of that empire into other worlds.” The 9/11 novel needs to turn to “foreign” wars in “mapping America’s extraterritorial expansion” and to provide “cognitive maps that imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others.”⁵⁷⁸

Rothberg’s argument for a “centrifugal” tendency is reinforced by Shamsie’s own assertion of the American novel’s “domestic” approach in principally “look[ing] inward even as the American government looked increasingly outward.” She argues that American fiction writers of her age “are little concerned with the history of their own nation once that history exits the fifty states,” so that 9/11 becomes “a traumatic event as ahistorical as an earthquake.”⁵⁷⁹ Shamsie asks,

Where is the American writer who can tell you about the places your nation invades or manipulates? . . . Your soldiers will come to our lands, but your novelists won’t. The unmanned drone hovering over Pakistan, controlled by someone in Langley, is an apt metaphor for America’s imaginative engagement with my nation.⁵⁸⁰

Throughout her 2012 article, originally presented as a talk at Yale University, Shamsie, like Jacobs, directly and repeatedly addresses the reader as “you,” an address that demands the recognition of “the face of the Other” to create the

⁵⁷⁸ Michael Rothberg, “A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel: A Response to Richard Gray,” *American Literary History* 21.1 (2009): 152.

⁵⁷⁹ Kamila Shamsie, “The Storytellers of Empire,” *Guernica* n.p. 1 Feb 2012. Web. 18 Aug 2016.

⁵⁸⁰ Shamsie, “Storytellers” n.p.

possibility of discourse. This coincides with the novel's narrative discourse that approximates self and other by bridging spatial and temporal gaps via its structure. Like Jacobs, Morrison, and Sidhwa, Shamsie steps into an historical void in order to retell 9/11 from an alternative perspective that seeks to break down the binaries of perpetrator/victim, civilised/savage, terrorist/terrorised. By integrating major events of the last six decades in an intricate web, *Burnt Shadows* deconstructs the myopic vision reflected in the Western binary of a pre- and post-9/11 world and offers a collective consciousness for re-viewing contemporary global situation. The text's alternate transnational imagination links *Incidents* and *Cracking India*'s counter-narratives on colonialism to contemporary neocolonial configurations, whilst it extends *Beloved*'s critique of U.S. imperialism and historical amnesia outside national boundaries. In doing so, the novel links the histories of colonies and postcolonies; highlights women's peculiar positionality within the colonial and neocolonial contexts; and foregrounds the commonalities of ostensibly remote resistant struggles. By interweaving various conflict-stricken locational and historical contexts in a complex mesh, the novel's "discourse" confronts self and other, thereby creating a new narrative of our constitution in an interlocked world that can serve as a basis for solidarity.

Commenting on the mainstream 9/11 U.S. cultural accounts, Judith Butler critiques their "first-person narrative point of view" that begins in a vacuum with the "violence we suffered." Even attempts at tracing the violence back into history resort to "[i]solating the individuals" like Bin Laden, thus writing it off as "a personal pathology" in order to "absolve us of the necessity of coming up with a broader

explanation of events.”⁵⁸¹ This is symptomatic of Pankaj Mishra’s observation that the attacks on the World Trade Center towers “deepened a historical solipsism in the United States and brought on a weird amnesia in post-imperial Britain.”⁵⁸² In each case, it is writers with border consciousness that have navigated the unexplored territories, for most alternatives to “the first-person narrative” of 9/11 have come from women authors outside the U.S.⁵⁸³ Child et al. argue that whereas for most male writers “the 9/11 Event is the starting point (or point of rupture),” women’s writing represents it “as part of a dense configuration that makes up the Zeitgeist characterised by an extraordinarily complex temporality,” and in the case of *Burnt Shadows*, “9/11 becomes the end point,”⁵⁸⁴ for Shamsie reaches far back into the past to “probe the deeper histories of the present.”⁵⁸⁵ *Burnt Shadows*’s third-person narrative point of view eschews the first-person traumatic interiority of most U.S. 9/11 fiction by allowing its readers a relatively distanced perspective on the complex diegetic world of the novel, overlaid by several fragmented plots in a tightly interlaced fabric.

⁵⁸¹ Butler, *Prekarious* 5.

⁵⁸² Pankaj Mishra, “After 9/11: Our Own Low Dishonest Decade,” *The Guardian* The Guardian, 2 Sept. 2011. Web. 16 Aug 2016.

⁵⁸³ Childs et al. reinforce these claims with reference to male writers whose writing lacks a “sense of a shared History, of a Grand Narrative.” They argue that “the most interesting contemporary women’s writing enables us to understand the violent effects of 9/11 . . . differently from the way in which male authors have engaged with it . . . women writers have pinpointed . . . a new climate of uncertainty and fragility.” Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook, and Sebastian Groes, introduction, *Women’s Fiction and Post-9/11 Contexts*, eds. Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook, and Sebastian Groes (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015) xii. However, as opposed to a male-female difference, I would focus on border consciousness as some male authors have written equally powerful, conscious accounts, for instance, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008).

⁵⁸⁴ Child et al., xi.

⁵⁸⁵ Boehmer and Morton 8. Notable 9/11 novels are Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Frederic Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World* (2004), John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), Jay McInerney’s *The Good Life* (2006), Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), and Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011).

"How did it come to this, he wonders."

Thus begins the anamnesis of a "subjectless" being in a "spaceless" and "timeless" zone that opens the prologue of *Burnt Shadows* with a dislocation similar to that of the opening of *Beloved*. However, whereas *Beloved* represents the haunted national house, Shamsie's sinister prologue signifies her novel's outward reach. The indeterminate determiners, "his," "him," "this," underscore the "withdrawal of subjecthood" from the inmate, the identity of whose "biopoliticized bare life"⁵⁸⁶ is given away by just three potent words: the "cell" in which he sits stripped, in anticipation of an "orange jumpsuit" (1). Having the unnamed Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp as the opening setting serves as a perfect analogy for the novel's engagement with the temporal continuities of colonialism. Amy Kaplan's reflection that Guantánamo is "haunted by the ghosts of empire" rings true as the novel traces the private history of the inmate's family that is entwined with public histories and enmeshed in abiding colonial power structures.⁵⁸⁷ As the frame narrative plugs Guantánamo into the protracted history of colonialism, it also blurs the binaries of terrorist/victim, guilty/innocent, and juridical/non-juridical. Indeed, the cluster of chilling images evoked by the very setting Guantánamo,⁵⁸⁸ symbolic of colonial terror and violence, complicates the signifiers "terror" and "terrorist" that are otherwise treated as non-relational entities always directed at fixed referents, that is, colonial

⁵⁸⁶ Derek Gregory uses the term to explain the Guantánamo prisoners' status as mere bodies. Derek Gregory, "Vanishing Points: The Global War Prison," *Terror and the Postcolonial*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 69.

⁵⁸⁷ Amy Kaplan, "Where is Guantánamo?" *American Quarterly* 57.3 (2000): 837.

⁵⁸⁸ The Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp is a military prison belonging to the United States and located in Cuba. It was established to detain and prosecute prisoners of war crimes; however, it has been used for indefinite detention, torture, and abuse of detainees, some of whom have been proven to be innocent. For a critical overview, see Butler, "Indefinite Detention," *Precarious* 50-100; Gregory; and Kaplan.

others.⁵⁸⁹ The framing prologue works to contextualise the ensuing network of embedded narratives that map several spatial and temporal zones in order to link seemingly unrelated histories in a cosmos of interdependence. Instead of centring on 9/11, the novel begins with the neocolonial sovereignty in a literally lawless offshore territory,⁵⁹⁰ linking it to colonialism in ways that disrupt the primacy of 9/11 as ground zero and America as the exclusive victim of terror and violence. By tracing U.S. imperialism to the bombing of Nagasaki as well as the Cold War, Shamsie, like Jacobs, Morrison, and Sidhwa, rerenders the mainstream pedagogic narrative.

The four sections of the novel retrace four cataclysmic events—the Second World War, Partition, the Cold War, and 9/11 and the “war on terror”—escalating tension from the shortest first section to the lengthiest last. The omission of the representation of 9/11 event itself corresponds to its subsidiary status to the colossal tragedies with interminable repercussions that, in some ways, heralded 9/11. The text’s response to “*How did it come to this*” follows both an extended personal history and a protracted history of 9/11 embroiled in complex ways. The four sections are set in four cosmopolitan metropolises, Nagasaki, Delhi, Karachi, and New York, where nationalist, colonial, and capitalist interests relentlessly disrupt individuals’ attempts to form meaningful relationships, resulting in disasters that are written off as the clash of civilizations. Through tracing the interrelated histories of two families, the Weiss-Burtons and Tanaka-Ashrafs, Shamsie represents the impassable colonial divides that

⁵⁸⁹ For instance, Gregory argues that Guantánamo is “saturated with a colonial past that is reactivated in our colonial present,” thus “undercut[ting] the pernicious claim that terror and torture always refer to the actions of others.” Gregory 88.

⁵⁹⁰ Guantánamo Bay is a controversial territory between the U.S. and Cuba; the U.S. occupation is against Cuban wishes. Besides, the practice of indefinite detention violates international law.

impede personal desires to permeate boundaries and that alienate people to each other's loss. The novel draws on the Qur'anic tale of the spider's web as a motif to link various narratives, characters, and histories. In deploying the scriptural allusion as a metaphor for interpersonal bonds, Shamsie, like Morrison, references culturally specific traditions to relate the alternative historical account. Indeed, throughout the novel, the spider motif, signifying a personal network of relations, is constantly disrupted by a public milieu of distrust engendered by nationalist-colonialist narratives. The linchpin of the novel, Hiroko Tinaka, is a multiplicitous character with an interstitial consciousness that brings the diverse narratives, people, and histories together in foregrounding unacknowledged human relationality.

Burnt Shadows opens in "The Yet Unknowing World" of Nagasaki as Shamsie highlights the imperialism and militarism of hegemonic nation-states in the Second World War. Whilst German fascism is invoked by Konrad Weiss's displacement and his awkward position in both the Burton household and Nagasaki, the powerful tropes of "the bomb" and "the Kamikaze" pilots signify American and Japanese imperialism respectively, both of which are proleptic of the 9/11 suicide bombers (13). On his arrival in Nagasaki, Konrad is captivated by its multicultural milieu; the "mixture of Japanese and European architectural styles" and the "uncomplicated" syncretism of Europeans and Japanese presents "a world of enchantment" that urges him to inscribe this diversity on his imaginative canvas. However, the increasing chauvinism of the "war fractures every view," displacing harmony with negativity (6). Owing to "the paranoia of Imperial Japan," Konrad's "notebooks of research and observation about the cosmopolitan world that had briefly existed" become "evidence of treason"; however, "determined to see a pattern of

people moving towards each other,” Konrad continues “researching his book instead of writing it” (68).

Shamsie uses birds, flight, and shadows as metaphors for transition, connection, loss, and historical remnants through the novel. Konrad’s fascination with the evolving cosmopolitan world of Nagasaki finds expression in his “purple-winged birds”—the “eight purple-leather notebooks” he strings up to record the potential coexistence of the East and the West. However, the bomb cremates “his book mobile” “to a blackened stump,” nipping his little optimistic planetary world in the bud (45). The “long shadow” cast by Konrad’s nuclear incineration on a rock signifies the permanent marks of the horror that will haunt succeeding generations (29). Similarly, when Hiroko discovers the “strange and yet familiar” response of her body to Konrad’s, after their public intimacy in defiance of cultural conventions, she “feels as though there are wings attached to her, on the verge of lifting her off the ground entirely,” and the sense of liberation urges her to dress in her mother’s silk kimono “with three black cranes swooping across her back” (22). However, Konrad and Hiroko’s brief dream of transcending cultural barriers crumbles as suddenly the bomb hits and their “world goes white,” searing the birds permanently into Hiroko’s body (23). At the end of section one, we are reminded that although the bomb will cast “a long shadow” over the years to come, even the shadows are “buried” as the world seems to have descended into an oblivion regarding the implications of the horror of Nagasaki (29). Whereas Morrison communicates America’s “national amnesia,” the “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken,” through the metaphor of the tree of scars on Sethe’s back (*Beloved*, 235), Shamsie extends that marking to a transnational sphere through recalling “[t]he unspeakable day” that etched charred shadows into Hiroko’s back and silently buried Konrad’s rock shadow (*Burnt Shadows*, 99). *Burnt Shadows*

thus works to uncover these “long” “shifting shadows” that history has cast on later generations (223).

The next section “Veiled Birds” opens in Delhi in 1947 as Hiroko exits claustrophobic post-war Japan to seek connections abroad. The abrupt shift in the setting links the aftermath of World War II to the hasty British exit from India to probe the deeper contingencies of political contexts and histories.⁵⁹¹ Within one section, Shamsie encapsulates the colonial dynamics in the Subcontinent, the hollow civilising mission, the ill-advised Partition, and the ensuing traumatic migration and genocide.

Although unlike Sidhwa, Shamsie does not engage in a dialogue with historiographical accounts, like Morrison, her alternative discourse is intertextual in its allusions to E. M. Forster, Rudyard Kipling, Michael Ondaatje, and Ahmed Ali. By invoking or rewriting prior literary texts, Shamsie at once writes back to the Empire and foregrounds its neocolonial configuration. “Veiled Birds” echoes Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924), the title of the last section, “The Speed Necessary to Replace Loss,” comes from Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992),⁵⁹² and Henry (later Harry) and his daughter Kim evoke Kipling’s *Kim* (1901). In the novel James Burton calls Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) “a damned book,” “an overblown piece of

⁵⁹¹ Scholarship has analysed the rushed British exit from India owing to its depleted resources in the post-war context. See, for instance, Jalal 123, 175, 221, and 243. Also, William Dalrymple observes, “After the Second World War, Britain simply no longer had the resources with which to control its greatest imperial asset, and its exit from India was messy, hasty, and clumsily improvised. From the vantage point of the retreating colonizers, however, it was in one way fairly successful. Whereas British rule in India had long been marked by violent revolts and brutal suppressions, the British Army was able to march out of the country with barely a shot fired and only seven casualties.” William Dalrymple, “The Great Divide: The Violent Legacy of Indian Partition,” *The New Yorker* Condé Nast, n.p. 29 June 2015. Web. 30 Dec. 2015.

⁵⁹² Maya Jaggi, “When Worlds Collide,” *The Guardian* The Guardian, 7 Mar. 2009. Web. 12 May 2015.

hyperbole,” and “nonsense that was being praised as an Indian masterpiece.” For James, it was “Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster at their patronizing best.” Sajjad, however, quotes from the novel frequently to show “the beauty of its sentences” (39). And Shamsie also reworks Forster in her narrative through Sajjad’s character that contests, to quote Leela Gandhi, “the controlling mechanisms of imperial textuality.”⁵⁹³ The intellectual tension between an autodidact Indian and a colonial mentor problematises colonial epistemological binaries. Both the Qutub Minar episode and Sajjad’s later indictment echo Aziz’s fate at the Marabar Caves in *A Passage to India*. The deep-seated distrust of Indians that sabotaged interracial relationships in the earlier novel is reiterated in *Burnt Shadows*; however, Shamsie attributes the irrepressible tension between the coloniser and the colonised to a wilful construction of barriers that demarcate their personal and social worlds and withhold the connections between them.

In James, Shamsie creates a patriarchal colonial authority that reverberates in his relationships with Elizabeth, Hiroko, and Sajjad. Indeed, James’s relationship with Sajjad becomes a metaphor for the colonial mission: “It was Konrad who had first discovered Sajjad” “as though he were a continent” (37), and Sajjad’s journey through the novel reinforces a pattern of discovery, exploitation, displacement, and disintegration. Although Sajjad serves as an apprentice to James who had “promised” him “a place in his law firm” (89), their relationship signifies the spurious civilising mission; casting a net of hollow promises, James draws Sajjad in only to exploit him

⁵⁹³ Leela Gandhi uses the phrase to describe Viswanathan’s analysis of colonial investment in English Literary Studies as a controlling mechanism. Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia UP, 1998); 145. Also see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (London: Faber, 1990).

for leisure as an intelligent partner in chess. The dynamics of the chess game strictly mark the coloniser-colonised binary; it is always James who “choose[s] when to undercut and when to affirm the barriers” between them (39). James’s “discarded clothes” that he passes on to Sajjad also become a “metaphor for the end of Empire.” He does not mind transferring his castoff to Sajjad so long as he gets “to choose the moment at which it becomes his” (35), paralleling the ease with which the British exited the Empire after consuming the resources it offered. Indeed, James’s discarded jacket, like Hiroko’s burns, becomes a motif of the colonial legacy that haunts the family through the novel.

Language is treated as another defining feature of the coloniser-colonised dichotomy. To return to Levinas via Butler, the “face and discourse are tied”; it is because the face speaks that it enables discourse, which, in turn, is the condition for a political community. “If the Other is obliterated, so too is language,” and this absence of address forestalls intersubjective relation.⁵⁹⁴ Just as *Incidents* and *Beloved* deploy direct address and performative invocation respectively to engage the audience in their oppositional discourse, *Burnt Shadows* probes the significance of language for relationality. James’s distance from the colonised world is reflected by Sajjad’s “impatience at the Englishman’s failure after all this time to understand that all-important Urdu word” “mohalla” as contrasted to Sajjad’s proficiency in English. Similarly, in response to Sajjad’s question about whether an Englishman would ever write a “masterpiece in Urdu,” James declares, “we were [not] interested in entering your world in that way” (40). Receptiveness to the other’s world is contingent on the desire to establish discourse; language helps reach towards the other’s consciousness

⁵⁹⁴ Butler, *Precarious* 139.

in a way that is crucial to forming new relationships. It was language lessons that first brought Hiroko and Konrad together and that, later, connect Hiroko and Sajjad. Indeed, multilingualism becomes a trope for relationality in the novel, for the “more languages you learned . . . the more you found overlap,” emphasising the commonality that is discounted in the presumption of the so-called incompatible worlds (258).

This colonial world of impenetrable boundaries is disrupted by the entrance of Hiroko who shares the authorial diasporic consciousness. Like Linda, Ayah, and Denver, Hiroko crosses borders in metamorphically redefining identity and claiming agency. Her loss has been productive of an ability to inhabit various cultures simultaneously, which enhances relationships instead of hampering them. Whilst James, used to pigeonholing people, “was oddly perturbed by this woman who he couldn’t place” (46), Hiroko manages to form identificatory bonds with all as her ability to connect with “the face of the Other” exceeds divisive borders. She discerns the sadness in Elizabeth’s “face” the moment she sees her, wondering what Konrad’s “features might have looked like if his life had been unhappy” (54). And Hiroko is “the one to show both Sajjad and the Burtons that there was no need to imagine such walls between their worlds” (82). Being above the Indians in rank whilst below the English in class, Hiroko forms an uneasy bridge between the two that the Burtons, however, are not willing to cross over. Despite spending a good part of the day with the Burtons, Sajjad routinely travels, to use bell hooks’s phrase, “from margin to center”⁵⁹⁵ and back in his commute “from Dilli to Delhi,” for within the same city, the British and the Indians inhabit two different worlds (41). Whereas the Burtons have

⁵⁹⁵ Hooks, *Margin* ix.

never transcended the Delhi boundary despite their long abode in the city, Hiroko soon expresses a desire to see “Sajjad’s Dilli.” The Qutub Minar episode mocks the civilising mission of the Empire as Sajjad informs the group of India’s rich civilisation with which the English are utterly unfamiliar. Sajjad is, however, affronted by being the informant: “an Indian, introducing the English to the history of India, which was his history and not theirs,” for, to them, his history was a “picnic ground.” This makes him wonder why “the English [had] remained so English?” whilst all other conquerors became Indians, and he observes, after Partition, everyone “will be leaving their homes,” but “the English . . . they’ll be going home” (81-82). This sense of dislocation within his native city and the “separations and demarcations” created by the Empire continue to mark the “postcolonial” milieu (33): the displacement of Indians within the Subcontinent and the Indo-Pak antipathy are the devastating legacies of colonialism and Partition that have severed families, disrupted ties, and sparked several wars and interminable conflicts.

Burnt Shadows thus juxtaposes the Burtons’ rigidity to Hiroko’s transition and liminality, which brings deliverance to other characters as well. Sajjad speaks his heart out for the first time at the Qutub Minar, something which “would not have happened if Hiroko hadn’t been standing there, disrupting all hierarchies” (83). Similarly, Elizabeth asserts her agency through her association with Hiroko; by encouraging Hiroko to smoke at social gatherings (an act frowned on for women), she gains a sense of defiance that she eventually exercises against James by abandoning him. However, despite recognising the underlying similarities in the organisation of the British and the German Empires, Elizabeth struggles to break free from her colonial bias, as reflected, particularly, in her relation with Sajjad. Although she is able to connect with Hiroko, Sajjad’s world is *terra incognita* for Elizabeth, which

makes her spurn Hiroko and Sajjad's union as "impossible": "His world is so alien to yours . . . a world you either grow up in or to which you remain for ever an outsider . . . you don't belong in his world" (97-98). However, for Hiroko, belonging comes with the recognition of the other on the same ontological and epistemological level as the self, something she accomplishes in her relationships with both Elizabeth and Sajjad, and which is a challenge for most characters in the novel. Her border consciousness conceives barriers as "metal that could turn fluid when touched simultaneously by people on either side" (82). What Hiroko finds "strange" is not other people's worlds but their inability to identify with each other's worlds despite commonalities, as is mirrored in her response to Elizabeth: "Delhi must seem so strange and unfamiliar, but nothing in the world could ever be more unfamiliar than my home that day. That unspeakable day. Literally unspeakable. I don't know the words in any language" (99). Whereas "other" cultures are uncanny for the Burtons, what Hiroko finds strange is people's incapacity for mutual identification between peoples and cultures that, in turn, vindicates violence: "I still don't understand. Why did they have to do it? Why a second bomb? Even the first is beyond anything I can . . . but a second. You do that, and see what you've done, and then you do it again. How is that . . .?" (99). It is the recognition of human vulnerability in "the face of the Other" that is the question in both cases; the Burtons cannot perform that recognition, and Hiroko wonders at their inability to do so.

In both the Qutub Minar episode and the intimate scene between Hiroko and Sajjad, Shamsie rewrites Forster's Marabar Caves episode. Adela Quested's desire to see "the real India"⁵⁹⁶ is echoed in Hiroko's wish to see "Sajjad's Dilli"; however, the

⁵⁹⁶ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Penguin, 2005) 21.

positionality of the two women governs their reactions. Whereas Forster's Adela projects her own desire on Aziz, the Qutub Minar episode ends with Hiroko's candid indication of her feelings for Sajjad. It is rather Elizabeth who is offended at her own inability "to get past that armour of charm and indifference" of Sajjad that had captivated everyone (84). Hiroko and Sajjad's connection dissolves barriers that define the Burtons' relationship with him. By focalising their intimate scene from both the third-person and Elizabeth's view, Shamsie juxtaposes the perspectives that Hiroko and Elizabeth bring to bear on their construal of the situation owing to their respective realities. Whilst sparks of genuine love and mutual desire between the two make Hiroko bare her charred back to Sajjad, the fear of the colonial Other causes Elizabeth to perceive him as a sexual threat. Hiroko's "parting the blouse as though it were stage curtains" to expose her "bare flesh" followed by the "ripples" and "shudders" that their "physical intimacy" sends are re-focalised, in an abrupt shift, through Elizabeth as "Hiroko in a state of partial undress, yelling and pummelling" a concupiscent Sajjad (92).

In Hiroko and Sajjad's union, the novel rethreads the narrative that had been ruptured in Konrad and Hiroko's dream of cultural transcendence. Once again, personal relationships are entangled with public tragedies; whereas Konrad and Hiroko's future is buried forever in the seared shadows of the war, Sajjad and Hiroko are evermore displaced by Partition (and eventually severed by the Cold War). Like Sethe and Paul D, Hiroko and Sajjad become symbols for the colonial dislocation of people; as survivors of "Partition and the bomb," their identities are reduced to "Muhajir" and "hibakusha" respectively (181, 222, 238). However, instead of allowing their loss to consume them, they deploy it to establish a mutually constructive relationship. Their intimacy is reminiscent of Paul D's discovery of the

“tree” on Sethe’s back; whereas Sethe would rather bury her scars, it is Hiroko’s desire to defy the “hibakusha” stigma that propels her journey to India and that also makes her purposefully display to Sajjad the “charcoal-coloured bird-shaped” marks of the bomb on her back as she admits, “I don’t want to hide these burns on my back, but I don’t want people to judge me by them either” (100). Hiroko’s traumatic experience translates into an ethical model of identification with the other that is reciprocated by Sajjad owing to their shared and respective displacement and loss. The relationship that *Beloved* envisages for Sethe and Paul D is reflected in that of Hiroko and Sajjad; whilst Sethe and Paul D’s repression of the traumatic past disrupts their desire for intimacy, Hiroko and Sajjad’s confrontation with the past bridges the gap between them.

Through juxtaposing Hiroko’s and Sajjad’s respective relations with the Burtons, entwined with the colonial structures, Shamsie probes the self-created personal barriers that translate into larger public conflicts dubbed as “the clash of civilizations.”⁵⁹⁷ The text brings to the fore the impenetrable edifices erected by colonial nationalisms that estrange people and alienate them to others’ loss, thus reducing an interdependent world to us-and-them boundaries. The British colonial policies echo in modern US war ideology and both are analogous to Japanese imperialism and German fascism. For Germans, “the protection of German blood and German honour” justified genocide (69); for Americans, “the bomb . . . had to be done to save American lives” (62); for the Japanese Empire, all non-natives posed a threat; and, as for the British, the paramount consummation of the colonial mission

⁵⁹⁷ Kamila Shamsie, “Kamila Shamsie discusses her book *Burnt Shadows*.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Picador Books, 18 Dec 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcK07vOcV7k&spfreload=10>.

blinded them to the horror that a hasty Partition engendered. By situating Partition between Nagasaki and postcolonial 1980s Pakistan, Shamsie makes spatio-temporal links between colonialism and neocolonialism that resonate in contemporary capitalist globalisation and geopolitics.

4. Re-tracing 9/11: Religion, Nationalism, and Neocolonialism

Burnt Shadows's next section "Part-Angel Warriors" is set in 1980s Pakistan when the country was serving as a barricade against the Soviets and a harbour for the Afghan "freedom fighters" in the Cold War. The oxymoronic title refers to Afghan Mujahedeen whose participation in the Soviet War was hailed by the US as serving a noble geopolitical cause, though the same came to epitomise evil following its germination into the Taliban.⁵⁹⁸ *Cracking India*'s context of production, 1980s Pakistan, forms the novel's silent backdrop when nationalism coalesced with Islamisation—the worst legacies of Partition—to engender a fascist social order. *Burnt Shadows*, however, actively imbricates the two as section three jumps from Partition to the turbulent 1980s, during which nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and sectarian politics took deep root in the country's political soil. A brief overview of the contemporary social and political scenario is crucial to deciphering the links that Shamsie makes between these seemingly remote contexts.

As both Wallerstein and McClintock observe, over the last century, the U.S. has repeatedly "acted to install a dictatorship, prop up a puppet regime, or wreck a democracy" in other countries, "training and aiding totalitarian military regimes in

⁵⁹⁸ For instance, the American movie *Rambo III* represented the hero as "fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan and was dedicated to 'the brave Mujahideen fighters of Afghanistan,'" however, as Shamsie notes, "after 9/11 this dedication was changed to 'the people of Afghanistan.'" Shamsie, "Storytellers" n.p.

anti-democratic, ‘counter-insurgency’ tactics” in line with its own geopolitical interests.⁵⁹⁹ Pakistan is one of the states at the receiving end of this. Although it is impossible to exonerate Pakistani military and civil regimes for their vested interests and complicity, U.S. foreign policy has, undoubtedly, had a profound impact on the political history of Pakistan, particularly during the repressive Zia regime. During Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s reign, Pakistan’s relations with the U.S. were particularly strained owing to the former’s anti-American stance and nuclear programme, a trend that persisted even after Zia’s takeover. This meant that Pakistan’s military and economic aid was terminated in April 1979 as the Carter administration’s stance on human rights and nuclear non-proliferation deemed Pakistan “unworthy of assistance.” However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan turned the tide within weeks as the Carter administration baited a “\$400 million economic and military aid package” which Zia traded for the Reagan administration’s heftier \$3.2 billion.⁶⁰⁰ Whilst the U.S. transformed Zia “overnight from an international pariah” to its “front-line ally in the fight against communism,” its patronage of unelected institutions, the comprador class, and the fascist regime played havoc with democratic processes. Pakistan’s status as a close ally in the war against the “evil empire” prevented the Reagan administration from “rais[ing] too many embarrassing questions either on the nuclear front or on the human rights issue” that were both at their zenith.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ Wallerstein, “America” 8; McClintock 89-90.

⁶⁰⁰ Talbot 246-9.

⁶⁰¹ Talbot 250. As Talbot observes, “in January 1982, Amnesty International charged the Pakistani authorities with torture, imprisonment and other human rights abuses. . . . The Pakistan Human Rights Society in August 1983 registered its protest against the flogging of women as an Islamic punishment. In one reported case a woman, Lal Mai was lashed by a man in front of a 5,000-strong crowd . . . as a punishment for zina (adultery).” Ironically, the Zia regime’s human rights violations and gender violence were later mirrored in the Taliban governance in Afghanistan; but, at that point, “the Reagan White House turned a blind eye to both human rights and non-proliferation

Whilst Shamsie's *Broken Verses* (2005) focuses on the violent Islamisation and anti-democratic milieu of the Zia era in detail, "Part-Angel Warriors" revisits the period in relation to its propagation of indoctrination and terrorism. Shamsie traces the trajectory of radicalisation that reached its apex in the years to come; ironically, the discourse of the West-Islam binary, with the former representing "the enemies of Islam," was being reinforced by the very regime propped up by the U.S., paving the way for "terrorism." For instance, the bookstore Hiroko visits in Karachi is raided by radicals who destroy books with "un-Islamic" covers; on Hiroko's query, the store owner explains un-Islamic covers as those with "portraiture" of "women" (142). The metaphoric rendition of the nation as woman/mother in the Partition discourse, engaged with in *Cracking India*, re-surfaces in the Islamisation campaign of the 1980s when piety and religiosity were epitomised by policing of women's bodies. Woman-as-nation continues to be the site, as Lata Mani puts it, "on which various versions of scripture/tradition/law are elaborated and contested."⁶⁰² As a teenager growing up in Karachi, Raza is not immune to the rampant Islamisation around him, despite his parents' distance from it; his remarks echo the woman-nation dyad when he tells Hiroko that he is ashamed of inviting his friends home with "you walking around, showing your legs. Why can't you be more Pakistani?" (131). Once again, nationalism comes to be defined through the figure of woman: Pakistaniness is directly proportionate to the amount of clothing on a woman's body that protects her from the other's gaze and retains the national honour. Indeed, Raza's misfortune owes

violations on the grounds of the Soviet threat." However, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, "Congress was to strike back with a vengeance." Talbot 245-50. Also see Arundhati Roy, "The Algebra of Infinite Justice," *The Guardian* The Guardian, 29 Sept. 2001. Web. 17 Aug 2016.

⁶⁰² Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998) 70.

much to the inadequacies of the nationalist curriculum that made Islamic Studies a compulsory subject as it becomes a stepping stone for his law degree. The “genius” Raza’s failure twice in the Islamic Studies exam reflects the ideological chasm between the individual and national views on religion. Sajjad “cursed . . . the government which kept trying to force religion into everything public,” making “devotion” a “public event” and a “national requirement,” and Hiroko was reminded of the Japanese jingoism during the war as well as “the Emperor” (145-7). Indeed, Raza’s three attempts at the exam, with the final one being successful, signify the gradual and inexorable assimilation of the enforced state ideology into public life. Thus, Hiroko wonders: “‘Islamisation’ was a word everyone recognized as a political tool of a dictator and yet they still allowed their lives to be changed by it” (182).

Shamsie contrasts the “confusion of a still-forming nation,” whose religious nationalism tears away at the fabric of society, with the harmonious relationship of Sajjad and Hiroko who coexist despite embodying two different cultural and historical backgrounds (182). Sajjad had never been indoctrinated into the Partition ideology, and Hiroko’s border consciousness is entirely comfortable with her “foreigner” status in Pakistan: “she had no interest in belonging to anything as contradictorily insubstantial and damaging as a nation” (204). Although their allegiance to their respective cultural roots is represented by the Delhi and the Sumi-e paintings that Hiroko and Sajjad gift each other, their bond is also consolidated by the very loss of those origins. As “two of the world’s great forward-movers” (146), they forestall their trauma from sabotaging their union and deploy it instead to establish connections: “we both had too much loss in our lives, too early. It made us understand those parts of the other which were composed of absence” (163). They deploy their loss and vulnerability to create a liminal “place” from “absence”; their relationship is not

driven by likeness, for both hold on to their little idiosyncrasies—Hiroko would not make “fresh tea” for Sajjad, and Sajjad would not become “fastidious enough”—but rather arises from the very vacuum that loss had created in their lives (163).

Hiroko’s historical consciousness, accompanied by her apathy towards nationalist rhetoric, affords an interstitial positionality; unlike Sethe, Hiroko draws on her trauma to forge relations of identification and coexistence. However, “the dead on her back” weighs heavy on the next generation: like Denver, Hiroko’s son, Raza, is haunted by his mother’s past (49). Indeed, on Raza converge German, Japanese, Indian, and Pak-Afghan histories of loss and trauma which feed his deep identity crisis. Konrad’s, Hiroko’s, and Sajjad’s losses intertwine in the crisis that Raza experiences, a process reflective of the burden of harrowing histories taking their toll on contemporaneity. Whereas Denver’s discovery of Sethe’s story facilitates her spiritual journey, it is precisely Raza’s obliviousness to his mother’s story that engenders his predicament. Reminiscent of Denver’s experience with Nelson Lord, Raza’s identity crisis is triggered by his friend’s rejection of him for being a “hibakusha’s” son. Raza has lived his life on the peripheries: “Not an outsider, just a tangent. In contact with the world of his moholla, but not intersecting it. After all, intersections were created from shared stories and common histories . . . from this intersecting world Raza Konrad Ashraf was cast out” (189). His name represents three histories and identities—German, Indian, and Pakistani—none of which he can fully identify with, not least because his appearance defies them all which is why he finds more “balance” in taking the name Raza Hazara, and is sucked into the Afghan community where he “never had to duck his head forward so his hair would hide his features” (207). Raza’s identity crisis contributes to his tribulations in the same way as the Afghan boys’ displacement leads to their indoctrination. Just as the Afghan

boys are bought into the rhetoric of *Jihad*, Raza is lured by Harry's empty "promise of America," only to be disillusioned by it eventually (191). After Raza's disappearance, Hiroko wonders: "What did we do that was so wrong? . . . how could he . . . go to one of those camps just because he saw it as occasion for his own adventure?" (236). Hiroko realises, then, that her wish to protect Raza by keeping her history from him was ill-conceived because had he known the horror of Nagasaki, he would have viewed war and conflict differently: "When Raza was young I didn't want him to know what I had lived through but I wanted him to understand the awfulness of it. . . . I wish now I'd told Raza. Told everyone. Written it down and put a copy in every school, every library, every public meeting place" (293).

Whilst Raza's disorientation stems from a repressed past, Harry's identity crisis is grounded in an inevitable conflict between his national affiliation and personal history. Whilst the British had "reached the end of their history" (53), James's son Henry Burton's transition to Harry (evocative of Harry S. Truman) signified a shift in imperial power from the British Empire to U.S. imperialism. Harry's cognitive dissonance thus denotes the tension at the heart of the colonial construction of self through the other. Henry, for whom India was "home," felt disorientated in Britain and was eventually lured by America's "multiculturalism," yet he had still been unable to find a home. "It was loneliness" that took him to Pakistan "in search of a past that was as irretrievable as his parents' marriage or his own childhood" (150). He is constantly pulled towards Sajjad, Pakistan, and Delhi, but the historical baggage and nationalist affiliations encumber their relationship. As his transition from the British Henry to the American Harry coincides with the shift in empire, his father's earlier relationship with Sajjad is replicated in Harry's relationship with Raza in the false hopes he gives him, which enrages Sajjad: "You're

just like your father, Henry, with your implied promises that are only designed to bind us to you” (193). The shift in the nature of empire is reflected in the move from coloniser-colonised to First-Third World nationals and the correspondent capitalist globalisation and geopolitical power that the U.S. represents. For instance, Raza is a “translation genius” who “can name . . . [his] salary in corporations around the world” (304); however, given his national affiliation, he is “just another Pakistani” that the Americans will dispose of “after extracting all that was useful from him”. As a “Third World national,” he has no claim outside the service he can render (307).

Indeed, Harry signifies the myth of globalisation and “liberal pluralism, which had emerged as a central discourse for framing both the terms of domestic national unity and U.S. global power during the early Cold War.”⁶⁰³ Taking his white, male, heterosexual privilege for granted, Harry observes: “In America, everyone can be American. That’s the beauty of the place.” However, Raza’s double consciousness recognises the narrow definition of “American” in the nationalist multiculturalism of the U.S.: “Not me. . . . You look like Clint Eastwood and John Fitzgerald Kennedy. So of course you can be American. I look like not this and not that” (185). Indeed, although “America allowed . . . migrants as part of its national fabric in a way no other country had ever done,” it required one to “show yourself willing to be American” and uphold American nationalism (171).⁶⁰⁴ *Burnt Shadows* critiques the nexus of nationalism and globalisation that creates a binary of economically powerful

⁶⁰³ Boehmer and Morton 191.

⁶⁰⁴ As Loomba observes, “the United States projects its own nationalism (and that of its allies such as Israel) as being inclusive, multiracial, and democratic, and the nationalism of others opposed to it (from Russia, China, Afghanistan or Palestine) as sectarian or bigoted. Thus US national culture is understood to embody the spirit of globalization, whereas other national cultures are archaic, medieval, sectarian, or sectional.” Loomba 204.

and weak nations that also penetrates individual lives and relationships, thus rendering some lives more significant and valuable than others simply on account of geographical placement or national affiliation. Despite his ambivalent identity, Harry buys into the American ideal of a multicultural democracy and putative cosmopolitanism: “he fervently believed Communism had to be crushed so that the U.S. could be the world’s only superpower.” He is fascinated by “the idea of [power] concentrated in a nation of migrants,” but is unable to see beyond the veneer of democratic multiculturalism, a façade for American nationalist and imperialist interests (172). Shamsie encapsulates American imperialism in Harry’s mind map: “In Harry’s mind, there was a map of the world with countries appearing as mere outlines, waiting to be shaded in with stripes of red, white and blue as they were drawn into the strictly territorial battle of the Afghans versus the Soviets in which no one else claimed a part” (203). Harry is riveted by the idea of “a single democratic country in power, whose citizens were connected to every nation in the world,” and wonders “how could anything but justice be the most abiding characteristic of that country’s dealings with the world?” This was “the future Harry saw,” and for which he participated in the war (172).

However, Harry’s personal history and his association with the Tanaka-Ashrafs gradually come to overshadow larger public events as he scrutinises American versions of liberalism and cosmopolitanism through his personal relationships. It is too late when he realises that it was “internationalism, powered by capitalism” that underpinned the façade of justice: “Different worlds moving from their separate spheres into a new kind of geometry” (203). Shamsie also alludes to the supremacy of American imperial interests that overlooked Pakistan’s nuclear programme, which further fuelled regional instability and conflict between Pakistan

and India, besides being a global threat. Whilst Partition sowed deep-seated hate and distrust between the two nations, American expansionist interests further intensified this acrimony: “Now Pakistan was developing its nuclear programme. The CIA knew. And as far as Harry could make out all they were doing in response was gathering information that confirmed this was so and then funnelling more money into the country, making possible the huge expenditure that such a programme required” (178). Through Harry’s gradual transition, later juxtaposed to his American colleague Steve’s rigidity, Shamsie exposes the nationalist brand of American neoliberalism, couched in the rhetoric of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. By linking the rise of American imperialism in World War II with the trajectory of Pakistani religious nationalism from Partition to the 1980s, Shamsie rewrites the itinerary of 9/11 and terrorism from a marginalised perspective that challenges hegemonic narratives and foregrounds American complicity.

3.1. “Jihadi Blowback”: 9/11 and the “war on terror”

In the midst of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy’s myopic vision, anchored in the ideal of global supremacy, translated into the creation of a body of warlords (Mujahedeen or “freedom fighters”) to fight its proxy war against the Soviets on Afghan soil, soil that the U.S., like the British Empire, conveniently abandoned at the end of its mission. However, the war ideology, informed by the faithful-infidel and Islamic-un-Islamic binaries, had been deeply internalised by this puppet army and its subsequent factions that eventually translated into the so-called “Jihadi blowback,” initially manifested in the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. exonerated itself by shifting the blame onto an “abstract enemy” in a dehistoricised world to further vindicate a chain of imperial wars against the “abstract” Other.

Shamsie's fictional and critical work addresses this self-exoneration by the US that projected its fears and responsibility onto an abstract terrorist Other. Shamsie explains that in the post-9/11 "moment of darkness," when the attacks were painted as a hate crime against American freedom with no reference to American foreign policy, she found herself looking to writers who could respond to the prevalent question, "Why do they hate us? . . . Who are these people and what do they have to do with us?" In the absence of any such novel from the post-Cold War generation, Shamsie resolved to write one which would trace American complicity in the current terror-stricken world.⁶⁰⁵ *Burnt Shadows* directly engages with "America's proxy war" in an expository vein by historicising the narrative of the conflict and engaging the reader in discourses omitted from the mainstream accounts. The text is punctuated with historical references that unsettle the mainstream 9/11 narrative. Whilst at times, the text deploys symbolism to evoke the historical context, at other moments, the third-person narrator chimes in directly: it was a desire to "crush" "Communism . . . so that the US could be the world's only superpower" that prompted the U.S. to form an anti-Soviet Islamic coalition (172). In alliance with the Arab states, the U.S. supplied money, arms, and ammunition that were "brought by the CIA and transported by the ISI from the Karachi docks to the training camps along the border" (162). The ludicrousness of the war is shown by the fact that it had "[r]ecruits from all over the Muslim world," and "Harry couldn't help enjoying the idea of Pakistan, India and Israel working together in America's war," in which the casualties were Afghans and other indoctrinated Muslim nationals (203). However, "the CIA's decision to turn its back on Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal" proved fatal as it was soon followed by the unanticipated "Jihadi blowback" (280).

⁶⁰⁵ Shamsie, "Storytelling" n.p.

Muhammad Hanif's comic satire *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) captures this sinister outcome of the U.S. foreign policy in the party thrown by the American ambassador in Pakistan to celebrate Cold War victory. A character named "OBL" is an attendee whose awkward presence at the party as an ally is indispensable yet disconcerting for the American hosts: although, at first, he was "at the centre of [the] party . . . suddenly . . . in an instant the party deserted him." America's exploitation of Mujahedeen for the Soviet war followed by its abandonment of a radicalised, trained, and armed body of warlords that wanted its share in the spoils is aptly represented by the ravenous OBL (Osama bin Laden) "strolling on the empty lawns amid discarded paper plates, half-eaten hot dogs and chewed-up bones . . . suddenly remember[ing] that he had not as yet eaten."⁶⁰⁶ This image echoes in Arundhati Roy's assertion that Bin Laden was "sculpted from the spare rib of a world laid waste by America's foreign policy."⁶⁰⁷

In *Burnt Shadows*, Steve attributes the term "Jihadi blowback" to Harry who had been the first to explicate it in the aftermath of the CIA's abandonment of Afghanistan (280). The "logic of blowback," originally outlined by Chalmers Johnson, is explained by Nicholas Royle with reference to America's construction of "an unknown enemy":

Here, very legibly, was the logic of the double and the diabolical. It quickly emerged that the prime suspect responsible for orchestrating the atrocities in the US had, in the past, himself received military training and support from the

⁶⁰⁶ Muhammad Hanif, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (London: Vintage, 2009) 283.

⁶⁰⁷ Roy, "Algebra" n.p.

US. . . . The spectre of jihad returns. . . . Blowback blows uncannily back down history as well as into the shadowy, tottering projections of the future.⁶⁰⁸

Derrida compares the phenomenon of “blowback” to “autoimmunity,” the self-destructive biological process by which “a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion” “itself works to destroy its own protection”: “Immigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States, these hijackers incorporate, so to speak, two suicides in one: their own . . . but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed, and trained them.”⁶⁰⁹ Thus, those dubbed “terrorists” were not “absolute others,” impervious to the Western psyche, as they were trained in “Western ways by a Western world that itself . . . invented the word, the techniques, and the ‘politics’ of ‘terrorism.’”⁶¹⁰ However, as Spivak, Butler, Boehmer, and Derrida all note, not only is the term terrorist disingenuous, the war is also, in Spivak’s words, “waged on an abstract concept, ‘terror,’” thus conveniently becoming “part of an alibi every imperialism has given itself, a civilizing mission.”⁶¹¹ By presenting Islam or Muslims as the emblem of terrorism, without acknowledging American responsibility, the Western media espoused a racialisation of religious identity after 9/11, which echoed the racialisation of groups within the U.S. to facilitate American domestic self-definition. As the protagonist of H. M. Naqvi’s *Homeboy* (2009) observes, “I finally got it. I understood that just like three black men were gangbangers, and three Jews a

⁶⁰⁸ Nicholas Royle, preface, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) viii. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000).

⁶⁰⁹ Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 95.

⁶¹⁰ Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 115.

⁶¹¹ Spivak, “Terror” 82.

conspiracy, three Muslims had become a sleeper cell.”⁶¹² Thus persists the historical practice of the vindication of American supremacy and imperialism through the racialisation of other identities—black, Native-American, communist, Muslim Other, and counting.

Burnt Shadows re-traces the history of 9/11 in order to contest its designation as a “major world event” that precipitated several wars. Derrida argues that if 9/11 “gave us the impression of being a major event” and if “major event” means mass murder via advanced technology, then modern history is, unfortunately, laden with such tragedies.⁶¹³ Indeed, what qualified 9/11 as major was, as Spivak puts it, it being “an unprecedented attack on the temple of Empire.”⁶¹⁴ Wallerstein agrees that “the Twin Towers” were “a perfect metaphor” of America’s “unlimited aspirations” and “technological achievement,”⁶¹⁵ and thus they were “phallic symbols,” for Childs et al., of the Empire and capitalism’s exploitation of the other.⁶¹⁶ For Butler, 9/11 was a “major event” because the Western world and the U.S., in particular, experienced a “loss of their First Worldism” which is

a loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one’s own boundaries transgressed. The loss of First World presumption is the

⁶¹² Hussein M. Naqvi, *Home Boy* (New York: Shaye Areheart Books, 2009) 121.

⁶¹³ Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 88.

⁶¹⁴ Spivak, “Terror” 83.

⁶¹⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, “America and the World: The Twin Towers as Metaphor,” *Social Science Research Council, After September 11*. Web. 16 Oct. 2015. 4.

⁶¹⁶ Childs et al., xx.

loss of a certain horizon of experience, a certain sense of the world itself as a national entitlement.⁶¹⁷

This “national entitlement” to the world is reflected in Harry and Kim’s worldviews; both judge 9/11 as “major” to the exclusion of the trajectory of events that led to it, their assessment reflecting the cultural and literary representations of 9/11 that sought to restore U.S. sovereignty. Shamsie captures this scramble to reassert power in the title of the next section of her narrative, “The Speed Necessary to Replace Loss.” Set in New York and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, this section’s title signifies the impetuous response to 9/11 driven by the strategy to “replace loss” by causing more loss instead of (re)viewing oneself and one’s history as part of a global community.

Burnt Shadows circumvents the ahistorical approach of much 9/11 fiction in the novel’s representation of the event in a truly global historical context that traces a sixty-year violent history as the condition of possibility for 9/11. The text reimagines the Nagasaki bombing, revisits colonial India, lingers on the links between Partition legacy and Cold War geopolitics, and addresses the Soviet-Afghan War, however, the only two occasions on which the novel describes 9/11 are both anticlimactic: “when the buildings fell” and “the fires burning out,” phrases relayed from the perspectives of Hiroko and Elizabeth who have been witnesses to the protracted violent history (289, 251). This is juxtaposed to Harry’s and, the next generation, Kim’s outlook. The provincialism of their worldview is illustrated by Hiroko’s pique at Kim’s response to her question about what was going on in the world: “That’s not the world, it’s just the neighbourhood.” As Elizabeth puts it, “the fires burning out” outside do not qualify as

⁶¹⁷ Butler, *Precarious* 39.

“the world’s most significant event” for Hiroko in the face of a potential atomic war between Pakistan and India portending havoc worse than Nagasaki, though again outside the U.S. boundary (250-1). By underscoring the magnitude of violence in a wider history that was being overshadowed by one “major event,” the text mocks insular nationalist visions that conceive of separate domestic realities as opposed to an interlocked world. This is conveyed in Elizabeth’s ironic comment: “I’ve lived through Hitler, Stalin, the Cold War, the British Empire, segregation, apartheid, God knows what. The world will survive this” (266).

Similarly, when Harry receives the news of 9/11 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he is “stunned by his reaction to it, the depth of his fury, the wish for all the world to stop and weep with him.” Despite being in a country that “had lost more than two and a half million people in a war which seemed to have pauses rather than an end,” he cannot grieve for their losses as he mourns his own (271). Whereas Harry chides Steve for being unable to understand his genuine grief at Sajjad’s death, he is blind to his own prejudice. Through a contrast between Harry’s and Steve’s responses to Sajjad’s death, Shamsie depicts the levels of disconnect from the other’s world. It was impossible for Steve “to recognise that it was grief, pure grief, not guilt at all, that had unmoored him so completely from his every aspect.” The disposable life of a “Third World national” is so insignificant for Steve that even the tragic death of an innocent victim fails to prompt compassion from him: “You think because he was Pakistani I couldn’t have loved him?” Harry asks (241). Similarly, Harry’s inability “to connect those numbers [war casualties in the Congo] to his emotions” signifies the dismissal of innocent lives as “collateral damage” owing to a lack of identification with the loss of the other (271).

On his return to New York, Harry realises that grief no longer completely holds the city: “He had expected to come back and find the city as he’d last seen it near the end of September with a great pall downtown, survivor’s unease uptown, but instead he found an ongoing collision between the city’s forward-strutting nature and the demands of tragedy which insisted grief must be held on to like a dying lover” (269). The scramble to restore the “emptied skyline” divests the city and its inhabitants of the sense of mourning that is crucial to processing and apprehending loss. Without addressing the cause of “terror” itself, they advocate replacing lost structures as Kim remarks: “[i]f you slow down construction the terrorists have won” (270). Butler critiques this sudden switch from mourning to retaliation in the aftermath of 9/11. As opposed to the prevalent view that “grief is privatizing” and “depoliticizing” in returning “us to a solitary situation,” she argues that public display of grief, instead, facilitates “a sense of political community of a complex order” by foregrounding our “fundamental dependency” that can generate “ethical responsibility.”⁶¹⁸ The novel depicts the absence of such a relational vision in a racially demarcated world whilst, at the same time, trying to chart a complex, connected order via its narrative form.

Indeed, the shift from the colonial Sajjad-Burtons hierarchy to the imperialist Raza-Kim dynamic represents the persistence of a colonial epistemological and political world order. The “tale of generations” that Harry weaves valorises the colonial narrative of linearity and progress, and separates his British past from his American self: whereas “James Burton watched with dismay the collapse of Empire,” Harry Burton himself was actively “working for the collapse of Communism,” whilst,

⁶¹⁸ Butler, *Precarious* 20-3, 140.

being a “structural” engineer, “Kim Burton only wanted to know how to build, one edifice at a time, the construction process being all that mattered.” Harry’s American liberalism concludes that “[o]f all of them . . . she alone could be counted on to engage with the world without doing any harm” (174). His narrative of progress, however, bypasses a sense of the capitalist globalisation steering the very “construction process” (174). Kim and Harry’s First World parochialism cannot recognise the transition from active destruction to construction as part of the shift in colonial *modus operandi* embedded in the globalisation discourse. Kim’s view signifies American imperialism’s fortitude to continue building to counter the other’s desire to destroy instead of seeking to understand the motivation for destruction as well as realising co-implication in any possible tragedy.

Once again, Hiroko represents Shamsie’s ethical paradigm of relationality in her border consciousness that departs from Kim’s insularity. Indeed, the novel links religious fundamentalism to fundamentalist nationalism in being informed by a flawed logic that baffles Hiroko: “She felt about people who believed in the morality of their nations exactly as she felt about those who believed in religion: it was baffling, it seemed to defy all reason” (329). Hiroko’s beyond-borders view is shaped by her traumatic past that allows her to identify interconnections in seemingly disparate stories through their convergence on pain, injury, and loss; for example, on seeing the notices for missing people on the New York City walls, she is reminded of post-bomb Nagasaki: “In moments such as these it seemed entirely wrong to feel oneself living in a different history to the people of this city” (272-276). This border consciousness is contrasted with the “First World” myopia of Kim; because Kim views “terror” in terms of her own loss only, she projects the same on Hiroko who is enraged by Kim’s “blindness”: “Is that why? That’s why Nagasaki was such a

monstrous crime? Because it happened to me?” (294). Hiroko’s conviction about the conception of a peaceful world by realising mutual implication and complicity in each other’s histories of bliss and loss is completely lost on Kim.

Whereas in colonial India, the native Other Sajjad posed a sexual threat, in the post-9/11 neocolonial world, Raza and Abdullah represent those multiply disadvantaged “Third Country Nationals” who also happen to be Muslims. Whereas for the Soviet War, America needed “Muslim” recruits from across the world to wage *Jihad* against infidels, for the later Afghan war, Steve cautions Harry to steer clear of Muslims: “stop recruiting them from Pakistan and Bangladesh . . . [other nationals are fine] so long as they’re not Muslim” (280). Despite being one of the many protégés of the Cold War alliance, Abdullah is merely a “suspected terrorist” in America, deserted by the US in the rubble of post-war Afghanistan. Similarly, Raza’s presence near Harry at the time of his death is “sufficient evidence in [Steve’s] world” to convict him of the murder (305). His national and religious affiliations eclipse all other connections and evidence: “That nothing in the world could possibly show him to be Harry Burton’s murderer seemed to barely to matter in the face of all that could be done to his life before that conclusion. If anyone even bothered with a conclusion. He had never felt so sharply the powerlessness of being merely Pakistani” (307). In being “just another Pakistani who the Americans had turned against after extracting all that was useful from him,” Raza shares the fate of Afghans who had suffered irreparable loss (307). Indeed, his flight from Afghanistan to Canada allows interesting parallels with the “blowback” phenomenon. The tunnel that Harry had constructed for emergency escape from any potential Afghan threat is used by Raza to run away from the Americans and the money that Harry “kept on to buy Afghan loyalty” is used by Raza to fund his escape (306). This scenario is even reminiscent of the use of

American finances, training, and route by Bin Laden against America; indeed, the tunnels through which Bin Laden fled Afghanistan after 9/11 were constructed by the U.S. for the Mujahedeen during the Soviet War. Thus, the colonial power dynamics are reworked in American imperialism except for one constant; hierarchies determined by self-other, Western-non-Western, and civilised-barbarian binaries.

In linking colonialism to neocolonialism, the text also conjures the history of American slavery through passing allusions. When Sajjad briefs Harry on the history of the Karachi coastline “along the slave route,” distinguishing it from “your” slave route, Harry’s response signifies the disavowal of such historical baggage: “I wouldn’t call it my slave route” (160). It is the same disremembrance that has allowed his complicity in the Soviet-Afghan war with impunity as he is unable to recognise the persistence of colonial practices in new forms by linking American imperialism to his colonial ancestry. Indeed, Shamsie further extends this parallel by evoking a contemporary Middle Passage of sorts (via illegal immigration practices) in Raza’s voyage across the Atlantic to escape the CIA: cramped below the deck, the “hopelessness” and “resignation” of the bodies with “no space between [them],” “the bodies which groaned in pain,” the pitch black “darkness,” the “stench of vomit” and excrement, the Afghan boy “crying for his mother,” his “dead weight on Raza’s chest,” and the entire “dead piece of human cargo” evoke earlier fugitives and slave ships (336-7). Significantly, after Raza emerges from the experience, he realises that he “will never be the same again,” that he would “want never to be the same again” (338). Raza’s “mere helplessness of being Pakistani” is contrasted to the privilege that Kim Burton’s nationality affords her: “how she’d always taken for granted her ability to enter and exit nations at will” (340), thus divulging the imbalanced distribution of the perks of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. However, despite being able to

physically traverse borders conveniently, Kim, unlike Hiroko, cannot navigate spiritual, cultural, and emotional and psychic borders critical in establishing human relationality.

Kim's encounter with Abdullah captures the present "First World" demarcation of a self-other binary, a legacy of the colonial construction of self through the other that both Said and Morrison address in their criticism. Its contemporary version is marked by "an amorphous racism" that abounds in the post-9/11 world, "rationalized by the claim of 'self-defense'" against the threatening Other.⁶¹⁹ Even an "otherwise humane" Kim is susceptible to the myth that Butler describes:

Various terror alerts that go out over the media authorize and heighten racial hysteria in which fear is directed anywhere and nowhere, in which individuals are asked to be on guard but not told what to be on guard against; so everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror.⁶²⁰

To Kim the "sight of a dark-haired man doing something with his shoes" means someone "detonating a bomb," and the sound of "precise and measured" footsteps brings the "image of a bearded man with a Kalashnikov" (276, 320). The signifiers of Abdullah's theophoric name, his long beard, and his Afghan nationality, similarly, override her judgement. Whereas Hiroko finds in Abdullah "a man who understood lost homelands and the impossibility of return" (313) just as Sajjad and she did, Kim perceives in him a lurking threat. During her drive with Abdullah, the profusion of

⁶¹⁹ Butler, *Precarious* 39.

⁶²⁰ Butler, *Precarious* 39.

flags that shield the city “in a patriotically capitalistic gesture” contextualise their discourse and heighten Kim’s sense of patriotism against an Afghan fugitive Muslim Other (342). The communication that follows is infused with a deep-seated distrust that builds up as the conversation picks up. Although Kim tries to “establish common ground” between them initially, she is unable to relate to Abdullah’s loss or his worldview (345).

Shamsie portrays the structure of capitalist globalisation in the anecdote of the night of 9/11 when Abdullah and his friends drive by “a big pile of blue and pink toy animals,” each of his friends taking “armloads” of them, softer than anything they had ever touched, to send to their children (343). Although globalisation has shrunk physical distances, the extremity of the level of inequality between the “First” and the “Third” world is reflected in opposite worldviews; whilst the pile stimulates “reverential” gestures from the passers-by and gives them a sense of “unity,” it inspires a desire to loot in these deprived men some of whom, significantly, have ex-Mujahedeen links. The toy episode betrays the fiction of globalisation: whilst free trade, interchange of commodities, and mass media have bridged gaps between countries, the structural division of rich and poor has intensified rather than being curtailed because of globalisation’s consolidation of First-Third World economic boundaries. Thus, Kim’s elite consciousness, like those of the passers-by, finds “the image grotesque,” owing to a “misguided American empathy – cluster bomb the Afghans but for God’s sake don’t drive over the pink bunny rabbits!” (343). The rigid self-other divide that characterised the Burtons-Sajjad relationship is echoed in Kim and Abdullah’s strained discourse in the car. Kim’s First World prerogative baulks at any mutual identification of pain or loss, which Abdullah attributes to her ignorance of the realities of war in her preoccupation with 9/11: “countries like yours they

always fight wars, but always somewhere else. The disease always happens somewhere else. It's why you fight more wars than anyone else; because you understand war least of all." (344). Abdullah's attempt at reciprocation through identifying mutual complicity miscarries as Kim's discomfort at his statement erodes the last vestiges of trust. The moment he invokes the ill-advised American foreign policy, he is reduced to an object of suspicion: "That he was an Afghan didn't make him a liar or a terrorist, of course not; but wasn't it just absurd – condescending almost – to assume that because an Afghan he couldn't be a liar or a terrorist?" Kim concludes (345).

Building on the Hegelian notion of "the struggle for recognition" in a mutual bond that precludes the notion of our "separate identities," Butler argues that the request for recognition does not ask the other to see us as we are "constituted prior to the encounter itself" but as we are "constituted by virtue of the address," a discursive reciprocation without which we cannot be.⁶²¹ Just as *Incidents*'s constitutive rhetoric does not simply require recognition but is mediated by "constructive apostrophe" aimed at performatively bringing into being a new subject position, for Butler, the request for recognition is "to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation."⁶²² The conversation between Kim and Abdullah is marked by an absence of a self-other connection because Abdullah's call for recognition flounders in Kim's rejection of his "address." Abdullah's address solicits recognition outside the preconceived self-other binary; however, Kim struggles to break free from the epistemological and ontological structures constituted prior to their discursive encounter. The question is

⁶²¹ Butler, *Precarious* 44.

⁶²² Butler, *Precarious* 44.

why the address fails in the Kim-Abdullah interaction whilst it succeeds in the Hiroko-Abdullah encounter? I will explore this distinction via Spivak and Butler.

Spivak argues that the “ethical” is “an interruption of the epistemological, which is the attempt to construct the other as object of knowledge.” Drawing on Martin Luther King Jr.’s exhortation to “speak for those who have been designated as our enemies,” Spivak argues that in order to understand the motivation behind our adversaries’ actions, we need to imagine them as humans “rather than simply an enemy to be psyched out.”⁶²³ For Spivak “to respond means to resonate with the other, contemplate the possibility of complicity,” and to “detranscendentaliz[e] the radically other.”⁶²⁴ Likewise, Butler attributes this lack of identification with the other to mass representation in two principle ways: “effacement through occlusion” or “effacement through representation itself.” On the one hand, the “face” is represented as the epitome of evil (the faces of Osama Bin Laden, Yasser Arafat, Saddam Hussein) or the symbol of triumph, like the bare faces of Afghan girl survivors. On the other hand, certain faces, lives, and deaths remain “unrepresentable.”⁶²⁵ Both these modes of representation alienate us from the other’s loss and rationalise violence. For Butler a disruption of the dominant media representations of the other is the way to effect a “derealization” of the other and to understand the precariousness of life which binds us all.

However, this view becomes complicated in the textual scenario. Whilst Steve and Kim both recognise the other as human (Raza and Abdullah respectively), Steve

⁶²³ Spivak, “Terror” 101.

⁶²⁴ Spivak, “Terror” 87, 93.

⁶²⁵ Butler, *Precarious* 141, 147.

does not recognise this humanity on the same grounds as his own, something which rationalises his qualification of others as inherently evil. Kim, meanwhile, recognises the other as equally human and even struggles to “establish common ground” with Abdullah, yet the request for recognition, the identificatory call miscarries. Despite the fact that Kim has neither completely capitulated to mass representation of the Other nor lacks an understanding of loss given her father’s death in the war, the relational connection does not materialise in this encounter. I would argue that the address fails because Kim, like the younger Raza, lacks the historical consciousness that Hiroko, Elizabeth, and Sajjad have, and that Harry and Raza come to gain subsequently. Whilst Hiroko had kept her past from the younger Raza to protect him, Harry advises Raza not to tell Kim “what kind of man her father really was,” owing to his participation in, and view of, wars (284). It is a lack of knowledge of and exposure to the other’s narrative of suffering and being, in relation to ours, that precludes recognition. The text’s alternative vision illustrates that the recognition of our mutual constitution in love, pain, loss, grief, and joy is contingent on our conversance with the narratives of others. It is through the continual narration and renarration of our stories in a transnational context that we can create a collective historical consciousness of oppression, struggle, resistance, and agency. This “reinterpretive preservation” of history can facilitate “transformative identification” across borders to reconstruct both self and other within a relational ontology.

Whereas Hiroko’s positionality allows her to identify with Abdullah’s loss, Kim’s implication in the post-9/11 racial politics and her lack of historical consciousness, particularly the trajectory of her own colonial history, make her perceive him as a threatening other, thus foreclosing the possibility of “common ground” despite respective personal losses and shared public histories. Kim views her

loss in isolation from Abdullah's. Although Abdullah's definition of "martyr" is similar to the American military's heroic notion of self-defence, it enrages Kim as the victim is her father: "But it was just one Afghan with a gun who never stopped to think of Harry Burton as anything but an infidel invader whose death opened up a path to Paradise." In her reminiscence of her personal loss, she factors out hundreds of thousands of lives that were lost to save American lives over the historical span of the novel. The beard on his "face," the name he carries, the national and religious affiliations he evokes, and unfamiliarity with his history alienate him from Kim, thus arresting the discourse between them as they agree to "not speak anymore" (347).

However, as soon as he meets Raza and looks into his "eyes," Abdullah speaks his heart out regarding Kim's judgement: she said "heaven is an abomination because my brother is in it. My brother died winning their Cold War. Now they say he makes heaven an abomination" (352). This epitomises the double meaning that heaven and martyrdom carry in the colonialist rhetoric; whilst the Afghans fought both Soviets and Americans following the same doctrine of *Jihad*, the ideology was rationalised by the U.S. so long as the perpetrators were their allies, and the victims were not U.S. citizens. The fact that neither Abdullah nor Raza is a terrorist and that Kim is doubly deceived in her judgement underscores her blind complicity in the pervasive religion-based racism of the twenty-first century. The irony is that Kim's inability to relate to Abdullah leads to an infliction of violence on her own relations, on Raza and Hiroko who are important to her sense of self. Once again, public narrative subsumes the personal, and Raza "could only try to convey, in that final instant before they dragged him away – in the dip of his head, the sorrow of his smile – that he still saw the spider as well as its shadow" (357). Throughout the novel there are two parallel strands to the relationship between the three generations of the Weiss-

Burtons and Tanaka-Ashrafs: whereas the Qur'anic story of the spider, that weaved a protective web for Muhammad and his friends against their stalkers, is invoked recurrently to tie the characters in an intricate web, the colonial trajectory constantly impedes that personal journey of love and connection. Thus, when Kim testifies to Raza's identity as Abdullah, Raza is reminded of "the spider" and "its shadow": "Two families, two versions of the spider dance. The Ashraf-Tanakas, the Weiss-Burtons – . . . each other's spiders" fail to weave a mutually protective net (350, 355).

Hiroko's marginality gives her double consciousness, the lack of which blinds Kim to the suffering of most non-white lives. Whereas Kim rationalises her implication in the "amorphous racism" that the Patriot Act has engendered:⁶²⁶ "I trusted my training. . . . If you suspect a threat you can't just ignore it" (360), Hiroko is horrified at Kim's complacency that reminds her of the perpetrators of the concentration camps and the atomic bomb as the ending of the novel comes full circle to the Second World War:

When Konrad first heard of the concentration camps he said you have to deny people their humanity in order to decimate them. You don't. . . . You just have to put them in a little corner of the big picture. In the big picture of the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead? Acceptable, that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one Afghan? Expendable. Maybe he's guilty, maybe not. Why risk it? Kim, you are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you,

⁶²⁶ Butler, *Precarious* 39.

I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb. (362)

Hiroko puts into perspective Kim's conduct by juxtaposing Kim's "training" with her own historical consciousness as the text addresses the non-recognition and expendability of certain lives that justify their elimination for lives that matter. Whilst Kim's "First World" prerogative impedes the discernment of vulnerability in "the face of the Other," the novel's reinterpetive preservation of histories in a transnational context confronts its readers with these other faces. The text's address demands a revised recognition of the other and an acknowledgement of our mutual constitution in a profoundly interwoven relational realm. Just as *Beloved* depicts how black subjectivity was fabricated to create the new American man and to justify slavery and racism, *Burnt Shadows* reflects the growth of that repository of threatening others via the figures of the communist other, the Muslim other, and so on to perpetuate violent imperialism.⁶²⁷ Whereas *Beloved*'s ending brings hopes of regeneration, *Burnt Shadows* closes with the image of "dark birds" and "burnt feathers" that disrupt personal ties and separate Kim and Hiroko, the "First" and "Third World" women (362). The closing image of the novel replaces the story of the spider with the trope of shadows that estrange people; the inability to recognise faces arrests discourse as well, so that the "silence that followed was the silence of intimates who find themselves strangers" (362). Given the recurrent failed addresses in the historical accounts, the reader is urged to reciprocate the text's address.

⁶²⁷ There is no question about the threat that militant Islamist terrorist groups pose to the world; however, it is also indispensable to recognise the Western world's complicity in the construction of extremist Islamic ideology in order to arrest further proliferation of extremism. See Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2016) and Seumas Milne, "Now the Truth Emerges: How the US Fuelled the Rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq," *The Guardian* The Guardian, 3 June 2015. Web. 30 Dec. 2015.

Unlike a conventional frame narrative, which circles back after the culmination of the embedded narrative, *Burnt Shadows* does not return to Guantánamo or its nameless inmate. After a passage through multiple interwoven historical narratives that provide an alternate perspective, the open ending invites the readers to (re)view and (re)write the present narrative in linking it to both the past and the future in order to halt the chain of disremembered traumatic histories. The network of historical events debunks the myth of 9/11 as an isolated, unprecedented occurrence, and interrogates the origins of terror. Do slavery and colonialism qualify as terror? How is the terror instigated by the Cold War different from the terror of 9/11? Have those other forms of terror been recompensed over time? Is 9/11 the ground zero or does the axis lie elsewhere? How are Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghuraib, and the Patriot Act different from the mechanisms that were a part of Empire and slavery? Shamsie's text underscores that despite our entanglement in an overarching global context, our nationalist subject positions grounded in speciously isolated histories blind us to our communality. By linking various embedded narratives to the initial frame story, the novel creates a liminal space for readers to revisit their traumatic losses alongside those of the other in a shared context; to suspend their circumscribed nationalist and cosmopolitan visions; and to frame a borderless sensibility that can dismantle centre-periphery binaries for an interdependent sociality.

5. Reclaiming Feminist Struggle

Together, *Burnt Shadows*, *Incidents*, *Cracking India*, and *Beloved* foreground the convergence of the histories of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism in a global context, thus creating an interface for relational identities and coalition. This collective consciousness of feminist struggle is particularly crucial in the face of the

“culturally imperialist exploitation of feminism” that re-enacts, in Loomba’s words, colonialism’s “civilizing mission” of “rescuing native women from oppressive patriarchal domination.”⁶²⁸ Butler likewise observes that the “narrative function” of the Western media as well as some literature propagates this agenda by championing “the suddenly bared faces of young Afghan women as the celebration of the human.” The “triumphalist photos” of Afghan women blazoned on the media during the post-9/11 Afghan and Iraq wars signify a gesture of empowerment and gratitude to American soldiers. The American viewer thus imbibes the face as “a symbol of successfully exported American cultural progress” that rationalises violence whilst, simultaneously, concealing suffering, pain, and loss—in short, displacing the face in the Levinasian sense.⁶²⁹ Moreover, as Spivak observes, whereas “the emancipation of women by the US is celebrated over and over again,” no one seems to remember that these “women are emerging from where they were before the Taliban sent them underground,” thus eluding colonial complicity and responsibility.⁶³⁰

Spivak’s observation is particularly relevant in the Pakistani context. As part of the so-called Islamisation of the country, one of the most controversial pieces of legislation of the Zia regime was the implementation of the Hudood Ordinances, which replaced secular laws with controversial “Islamic” jurisdiction in grave violation of civil liberties and human rights.⁶³¹ One of the most draconian laws was

⁶²⁸ Loomba 169, 171.

⁶²⁹ Butler, *Precarious* 142-3.

⁶³⁰ Spivak, “Terror” 85.

⁶³¹ For an overview, see Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani, *The Hudood Ordinances: A Divine Sanction?* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003).

the “*Zina* Ordinance,”⁶³² according to which the “law of evidence in all sexual crimes required either self-confession or the testimony of four upright (*salah*) Muslim males.” If a rape victim failed to produce four witnesses to the act itself, she was to be stoned to death for adultery.⁶³³ Thus, Shamsie poses, although “America spoke eloquently of the Afghan people’s right to freedom and self-determination,” why did it “decide . . . it was an internal matter when Zia’s government cracked down on pro-democracy protestors in Pakistan” and exercised grave violations of human rights, comparable to those committed by the Taliban. Shamsie recapitulates that she “grew up in Pakistan with two Americas . . . the America of Martin Luther King and the America that “cozied up to Pakistan’s military dictator . . . because it served its own interests in Afghanistan.”⁶³⁴

This recurrent back-and-forth reversal of colonial ideologies can be encapsulated, in the current world, in the aura surrounding the figure of Malala⁶³⁵ who has become the personification of U.S., British, and Pakistani military triumph, following the “war on terror.” Osama Bin Laden’s demise and Malala’s rise are, at times, portrayed as the avenging of 9/11 and the liberation of women respectively. The limitation of representational practices, outlined by Butler via Levinas, is evident in this case; Levinas asserts that any attempt at “capturing” the human through an

⁶³² Zina means “adultery.”

⁶³³ Talbot 275-6. He further records, “The conviction of the blind servant girl Safia Bibi in these circumstances was particularly notorious. She was sentenced to fifteen lashes after becoming pregnant following a multiple rape, while the perpetrators, unlike the victim, went unpunished because of lack of evidence.” Talbot 275-6.

⁶³⁴ Shamsie, “Storytellers” n.p.

⁶³⁵ My discussion is a critique of Malala’s co-option and representation by the Western world as opposed to a critique of the person of Malala.

image effects “some loss of the human.”⁶³⁶ Identification is undergirded by an irreducible difference that is perpetually reintroduced in each identification in order to be overcome. Otherwise, as Jacqueline Rose observes, “identification collapses into identity,” declaring the former’s death.⁶³⁷ Malala has come to stand for the “blessings” of the “war on terror” whereas Bin Laden is “evil” incarnate. The “impossible overcoming” of “difference” in either case has political implications: in personifying terror, Bin Laden’s face masks American links to terror, and in symbolising liberation and empowerment, Malala’s face erases the faces, voices, and sufferings of thousands of civilian women and children. Likewise, Malala’s emancipatory narrative serves to displace Pakistani military’s own connections to terrorist groups. Thus, as Butler cautions, we need to probe the “scenes of pain and grief” which emancipatory images “cover over and derealize” in promoting a “peculiar brand of feminism.”⁶³⁸ Whereas the media was strewn with Malala’s bruised face at the hospital, after the Taliban attack on her, in order to demonise the enemy, thousands of civilian women and child victims of the military violence did not make it to the screens.⁶³⁹ As Butler aptly puts it, “we accept deaths caused by military means with a shrug or with self-righteousness or with clear vindictiveness. . . . There are no obituaries for the war casualties . . . and there cannot be. If there were to be an

⁶³⁶ Butler, *Precarious* 145.

⁶³⁷ Quoted in Butler, *Precarious* 145.

⁶³⁸ Butler, *Precarious* 143.

⁶³⁹ A stark example, among others, is that of Nabila Rahman, a girl from Northern Pakistan whose family were wounded and killed by CIA-operated drone attacks, and who travelled to the U.S. with her father and brother to seek justice; however, whereas Malala received the Nobel Prize, Nabila failed to procure a “welcoming greeting in Washington DC.” See Murtaza Hussein, “Malala and Nabila: Worlds Apart,” *Aljazeera AJMN*, 1 Nov. 2013. Web 30 Dec. 2015.

obituary, there would have had to have been a life . . . a life that qualifies for recognition.”⁶⁴⁰

Whilst the “First World” has unanimously scrambled to claim ownership of a successful narrative of the “war on terror,” Malala’s story actually fits closely within the colonial matrix of the civilised white man’s mission to free the vulnerable brown woman from the brutal brown man. Indeed, Malala might be said to have become a simulacrum, an amalgam of images in a hyperreal Western world that idealises her as a fighter against the Taliban at the expense of the neglect of other lives not worth recognition. In her 2013 interview with Shamsie for *The Guardian*, Malala concedes, “The real Malala is gone somewhere, and I can’t find her.”⁶⁴¹ Indeed, public appearances by Malala are overshadowed by three warring patriarchal forces that attempt to assert their masculine power through her: the Taliban whose honour she doomed, the Western world and the Pakistani military whose honour she salvaged, and the father whose dream she effectuated. In a revised globalised patriarchal structure, Malala is a pawn, subject to a different kind of structural invisibility. The cover of Malala’s recent book, co-authored with Christina Lamb, has a portrait of Malala looking up to her father whose outsized image is towering over her and smiling to the camera, just as the documentary *He Named Me Malala* foregrounds her father’s consummation of his ambition through his daughter. Towards the end of her interview with Malala, Shamsie alludes to this phenomenon in her observation that when she exited the room, Malala was surrounded by “a group made up mostly of

⁶⁴⁰ Butler, *Precarious* 33-34.

⁶⁴¹ Kamila Shamsie, “Malala Yousafzai: The G2 Interview,” *The Guardian* The Guardian, 7 Oct. 2013. Web. 30 Dec. 2015.

men . . . sitting silently, stoically, being talked at.”⁶⁴² No wonder, then, it is moments like these that led Spivak to “throw up [her] hands” and declare that the subaltern cannot speak;⁶⁴³ entangled in the convoluted mesh of patriarchal, nationalist, and colonialist discourses, Malala’s voice is barely audible.

Indeed, Malala shares with the fictional Hiroko and Sethe the status of a curiosity, the fetishised colonial other; just as schoolteacher and his nephews represent the white horror and bewilderment at Sethe’s violent action without taking into account the atrocities that left infanticide the only option for an enslaved woman, the bomb-stricken Hiroko is also “such an object of curiosity” for the American army doctors at Tokyo hospital (62), who nevertheless justify the bomb in terms underpinned by supremacist thinking. Likewise, Malala is a contemporary object of fascination; the hype around this “vulnerable” girl’s resistance against the “barbaric” Taliban screens off the historical conditions that created a world in which a child was endangered on account of her desire for an education.

The exigency to develop this broader historical consciousness drives *Burnt Shadows*’s transnational historical imaginary that situates private histories of bliss and loss, connection and vulnerability within colossal public tragedies. Whilst Morrison and Sidhwa rewrite the history of American Slavery and Partition respectively in order to address the implications of a “national amnesia,” Shamsie deals with a global amnesia by foregrounding the interdependence of all these texts, contexts, histories,

⁶⁴² Shamsie, “The G2 Interview” n.p.

⁶⁴³ In interview with Howard Winant, Spivak explains her momentary “despair” that led to the “rhetorical” statement, “The Subaltern cannot speak.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Howard Winant, “Gayatri Spivak on the Politics of the Subaltern: Interview with Howard Winant,” *Socialist Review* 20.3 (1990): 89.

and resistant struggles. Debunking the colonial myths of nationalism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism, the text's non-restrictive, relational ethical paradigm endorses a mutually constitutive shared human reality, productive of transformative identifications with "the face of the Other" to reciprocate their "address." Mutual recognition and discourse are, however, contingent on an exposure to each other's stories, which requires a narration and re-narration of our histories that confront us with the other in a way that we cannot pre-empt. By retracing the forgotten spatio-temporal dimensions of colonial history that reverberate in the neocolonial present world, the novel attempts such an encounter with the other to contest transnational structures of power and reimagine a coexistent future.

Conclusion

As part of the strategy to counter persistent imperialism, Said proposes a “global, contrapuntal analysis” on a “complex and uneven topography”⁶⁴⁴ in order to create “new maps, new and far less stable identities, new types of connections.”⁶⁴⁵ Bhabha endorses this transculturality, in the terrain of world literature, to establish “non-consensual terms of affiliation,” based on “historical trauma” and “transnational histories of migrants, the colonised, or political refugees,” so as to “translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity.”⁶⁴⁶ Feminism, more than any other movement, needs this transnational reintegration of repressed narratives, especially given the neocolonial challenge, in order to, as Grewal and Kaplan put it, “address the concerns of women around the world in the historicised particularity of their relationship to multiple patriarchies as well as to international economic hegemonies.”⁶⁴⁷

This process requires a reimagination of individual and collective identities and histories as profoundly relational in which “difference” is reconceived in its radical form, not as reification but as a source of relation. By refracting Weir and Butler’s theorisations on relationality through a comparative intertextual reading of African-American and Pakistani women’s counter-hegemonic discourses, this thesis

⁶⁴⁴ Said, *Culture* 386.

⁶⁴⁵ Edward Said, “Figures, Configurations, Transformations,” *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*, ed. Anna Rutherford (Sydney: Dangaroo P, 1992) 16.

⁶⁴⁶ Bhabha, *Location* 244.

⁶⁴⁷ Grewal and Kaplan 17.

has tried to conceive such a model of interdependence. Whilst both Weir and Butler urge a reconceptualisation of community via recognition of our mutual connections and shared vulnerability so as to form alliances, their conceptions of the “knowing” or “unknowing” subject, who can execute this, are problematic. Using Butler’s notion of revised representational practices to address the erasure of “the face” in the Levinasian sense alongside Weir’s insight on “transformative identification” and “reinterpretive preservation” in the context of women’s counter-narratives, I have tried to develop a feminist conception of identities, agency, and coalition that is anchored in recognising vulnerability and consolidating connections through sharing stories, (re)narrating histories, and (re)presenting discourses in a relational framework.

Women’s counter-narratives allow us to reconceive the subject in a linguistic and material social matrix based in both power relations and meaningful connections that are constitutive of the subject, yet allow an ongoing reconstitution in its encounter with the Other/other.⁶⁴⁸ I have argued that narrating and re-narrating narratives is the field in which the subject develops the requisite historical and transnational consciousness to facilitate transformative identifications across experiences and histories. This ethical encounter with the other, within a relational framework, confronts us with “difference” in its radical form, as a constitutive element of self; “difference” here is not threatening but rather productive of a self-other identificatory relationship that can underpin the apprehension of mutuality. This, in turn, can enable

⁶⁴⁸ Although my intention has not been to reconcile materialist and linguistic approaches to identity, this project does attempt to account for the significance of both discursive and ontological dimensions of identity in a relational framework.

alliances that “eschew the trap of prescribed local/national/identity boundaries”⁶⁴⁹ and conceive “an ethical, relational model of identity as a historical, dialogical process of making meaning”⁶⁵⁰ in a profoundly interdependent reality. The contribution of this thesis is thus twofold: it newly brings together the arenas of African-American and Pakistani women’s counter-narratives that renegotiate identities and histories through ontological narrativity; in doing so, it also attempts to imagine an anti-imperialist transnational feminist political paradigm that conceives identities and coalition within a relational social ontology.

Each text explored in this study is engaged in (re)claiming histories and (re)defining identities through a dialogic process between self and other, author and reader, narrator and narratee, or individual and community. Each literary narrative thus not only challenges the received hegemonic narratives and identities but also presents an alternative political paradigm that anchors identities, agency, and coalition in meaningful connections and shared precariousness. In doing so, these texts transcend the binary logic of resistance through subjectivation by reconceiving identities as products of multiple contesting relations, enmeshed in both “diverse relations of power and diverse relations of meaning, love, and solidarity”.⁶⁵¹ Although my textual analyses are situated in the broader framework of relationality via the work of Weir and Butler, I have also brought my readings of individual texts into dialogue with specific theories of identity in order to foreground this dual aspect of women’s

⁶⁴⁹ Davies 15.

⁶⁵⁰ Weir, *Identities* 78.

⁶⁵¹ Weir, *Identities* 3.

counter-narratives, their resistance to hegemonic structures and their narrativisation of alternative paradigms.

For instance, I have read Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation against the grain in order to contextualise *Incidents*'s disidentification with and rejection of antebellum narratives vis-à-vis enslaved women. At the same time, I have also analysed Jacobs's text through constitutive rhetoric in exploring its alternative model of identities and agency, based in a consubstantial relation between the narrator and narratee, the individual and community, that displaces the dominant model of American individualism. This communal paradigm extends to *Beloved* which has been examined via Bhabha's pedagogical-performative model as a contestation of the pedagogical U.S. national and historical consciousness that erased black identities and history. Through Kristevan intertextuality then, I have read the text's alternative paradigm that creates an author-reader-text transposition to probe the regenerative potential of the repressed past in order to perform alternative identities. This dialogic process, between the past and the present, the individual and the community, is anchored in meaningful connections as opposed to pedagogical narratives.

In extending *Beloved*'s processual communal paradigm beyond its narrative boundary, I placed it alongside *Cracking India*'s critique of the nationalist pedagogy. Drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection, my third chapter explored Sidhwa's text's critique of the woman-nation dyad in the state discourse of Partition and its implications for interpersonal relationships in the ensuing massacre. Through a critical approach to Kristeva's ethics of alterity and Spivak's notion of the subaltern, I examined the novel's counter-narrative which foregrounds the Subcontinent's syncretic historical tradition, repressed in the nationalist narrative, in order to

challenge the insular Partition ideology and proffer a dialogic notion of identities and agency. Finally, I have analysed the contemporary instatement of this parochial Partition ideology in a cross-cultural context in my consideration of *Burnt Shadows*. Whilst I have revisited both imperial and resistant nationalisms, neoliberal globalisation, and restrictive notions of cosmopolitanism to foreground the text's resistance to these hegemonic structures in the post-9/11 world, I have, too, explored the text's alternative ethics through Levinasian notion of "the face of the Other" based in a non-restrictive transnational paradigm.

Whilst each text challenges particular imperial hegemonies, together they foreground a collective struggle against the spatio-temporal continuities of racism and colonialism in the contemporary era. Whilst *Incidents* rewrites a woman's experience of slavery to challenge the dominant nineteenth-century narrative of race and gender, *Beloved* and *Cracking India* rewrite the history of Partition and American slavery to address specific "national amnesias" and their contemporary implications. *Burnt Shadows*'s transnational canvas underscores the interrelationships of all these texts, contexts, histories, and resistant struggles in order to foreground a global amnesia, painfully manifest in the present-day post-9/11 world. Indeed, the concluding image of *Burnt Shadows*, with Hiroko looking out of the window ruminating on Kim's betrayal, reflects the urgency for "First" and "Third" world women to recognise their shared constitution in a profoundly interconnected reality in order to contest the network of multiple patriarchies and to reach out to each other for mutual survival and freedom.

In addition, I have drawn on African-American and postcolonial theoretical concepts across my comparative study to create a constructive dialogue between the

two critical and theoretical arenas; for instance, whilst I have used postcolonial concepts of mimicry and ambivalence to analyse *Incidents*'s subversive appropriation of the sentimental genre, I have also referred to African-American signifyin(g) practice and double-consciousness to explore Sidhwa's formulation of voice in her revisionist narrative. Likewise, whilst I have read *Beloved* through a pedagogic-performative paradigm of colonial-nationalist narrative, I have revisited all these concepts, within my broader sense of counter-discourse, in my analysis of the expansive *Burnt Shadows*.

Given my project's focus on identity and counter-narrative in a transnational context, women's literary texts are productive sites for exploring these questions as they are invested in a reimaginative practice. Indeed, autobiography and fiction prove rich mediums for reimagining personal and national histories as narrative is conducive to (re)conceiving the self in relation to the other and the community within the nexus of the past, the present, and the future. This ontological and relational dimension of narrative is crucial to this project's argument since reinterpretive preservation can facilitate transformative cross-cultural identification for coalitional politics. Indeed, bringing literary texts into dialogue with history and theory, as attempted in this thesis, provides a platform for their mutual interactions and contestations. Literary text is thus seen, in this project, as a dialogic site for theory and practice, so that the tense encounter between the text and the theory provides critical insights for political praxis.

My choice of a focus on African-American and postcolonial Pakistani examples owes to the sparse extant comparative scholarship as well as the confluences between the two fields, especially given the convergence of the intersecting histories of racism and colonialism in our neocolonial world. On a

personal level, my positionality as a Third World woman in a “post-colony,” controlled by multiple internal and external patriarchies, furnished me with a double-consciousness that questions those academic narratives that foreground incommensurable difference to the detriment of our profound relationality and fundamental interdependence. As opposed to reifying, erasing, or evading difference, this project has thus tried to confront it by probing its radical potential for connection. At the same time though, this study also recognises the susceptibility of identity politics to parochialism, which explains its shift away from narrow identity categories towards a relational paradigm that situates individual and collective identities in a broader transnational view. Relationality does not so much provide a new identity category than foreground our always-already given constitution in fundamental corporeal and social relations that we cannot deny or escape. We all carry traces of each other; confronting and recognising them is a difficult yet worthwhile exercise.

My particular texts were chosen on account of their imaginative historicised rendition of the imperialist oppression of women, their articulation of women’s counter-narratives, and their depiction of the colonial-to-neocolonial transition in modernity. Although the progression from Jacobs to Shamsie tells a powerful narrative of women’s resistance amidst the interwoven histories of racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism, this is not a linear but a circular narrative that cuts across various texts, contexts, and discourses to underscore their interrelations. Another dimension of these texts, significant to this project’s argument, is their depiction of a dialogic interaction between the private and the public, the personal and the political, the subjective and the historicist. Where the authors recall individual memory, they connect it to the collective; when drawing on personal histories, they

relate them to the political. In each case, this dynamic underscores simultaneity and interdependence in a broader cross-cultural milieu.

Although Barak Obama's election to the office of President was hailed as "a symbol of [the] true 'post'-ness of race," "black suffering,"⁶⁵² and unnecessary global wars, the deceptiveness of this "post" is as evident as that of other "posts" in contemporary discourse. The completion of Obama's two tenures has brought home the realisation that we are neither in a post-race nor a postcolonial world; racism, misogyny, and chauvinism have intensified in the current U.S. election campaign whilst conflicts, interventions, and wars persist outside the nation's boundary. Nonetheless, this neocolonial condition, Bhabha argues, itself "enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance." He urges us "to dwell 'in the beyond'" in order to "be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*." Thus, the "intervening space 'beyond', becomes a space of intervention in the here and now."⁶⁵³ Bringing together women's counter-narratives in a transnational context creates that intervening, relational space in which we can rewrite the narratives of our histories in the hope of transforming the histories of our feminist narratives to be.

⁶⁵² Subramanian 5.

⁶⁵³ Bhabha, *Location* 9-10.

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