The Biopolitics of Migration: Critical Becomings in the Contemporary African Novel

Dima Barakat Chami

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Anthony J. Carrigan.

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Abstract

Is it possible to be both a migrant and a human? Or, more cynically: is it possible for a migrant to become human? What role does literature have in mediating, contesting, or representing this relationship? Taking up questions that surround the categories of 'the human' and 'the migrant', this thesis bridges political theology and postcolonial studies in order to analyse and critique the ways in which contemporary discourses of Western modernity and biopolitics contribute to the production, and negation, of those categories. I argue that contemporary African literature is an especially productive site through which to explore this dialectic, because of Africa's long entangled history with the West; from the trans-Atlantic slave-trade through to neo-colonialism. Classical theories of biopolitics from Foucault, Agamben and Esposito which address the production of subjects and subjectivities formed through power exclude this history, thus excluding this racialised 'other' from those discursive productions of humanity. It is these discourses which we have inherited–by virtue of Western hegemony's imposition of a system of nation-states – that produce a discordance between 'the migrant' and 'the human'. Because the modern nation-state prescribes humanity on the basis of citizenship, this discordance thus translates into a legal split between the natural human (zoe) and the rights-bearing person (bios). The migrant is thus perennially caught in between the two. I build on Mbembe's work – who introduces the racial element to biopolitics – in order to argue that inherent to those hegemonic Western philosophies is both an epistemic and ontological lacuna with regards to African articulations of personhood and subjectivity. African literature thus operates from within this lacuna, to inaugurate alternative ways of being human, a process which I term critical-becoming. To become critical is to instantiate a form of life which occupies two valencies: it is both the process by which one leads a critical life, but it is also the process by which one develops a criticality. This enables a dynamic, non-linear 'becoming', as opposed to the prescribed development of a linear 'being'. Authors such as Chris Abani, Noviolet Bulawayo and Brian Chikwava each craft novels which take up this dialectic, both thematically as well as formally. This thesis will look at two Nigerian novels (*GraceLand* and *Becoming Abigail)* and two Zimbabwean novels (*We Need New Names* and *Harare North)* and will be structured thematically, according to the diegetic spaces of the characters, as well as formally, in order to map a trajectory of migration. Because literature is capable of holding together those entangled temporal realities, it is also able to place the romantic multiculturalism of 1980s postcolonial theory in tension with the bleak reality of our secular, biopolitical moment, while still opening up alternative cosmologies of the future.

Contents

Introduction

In an article which hits close to home, Adoabi Tricia Nwaubani writes for the BBC that '[e]ven the official route for Africans wishing to visit the West is paved with indignity.'[1] Nwaubani's article, entitled "Why Visa Rejections Do Not Halt Nigerian Migrants", speaks to the deeply violent border systems which condition our being in the world. As a migrant myself, constituted from within the violence of borders, I identify the visa as one site, a material reminder of its tiering of human life, of my continuous dehumanisation. Nwaubani witnesses the long lines at embassies, and humiliation at the hands of both immigration and security officers, noting that all the while 'African governments did not care when their people were being whipped into order at embassies right on their own soil'.[2] The embassy then, for all its means and purposes, is the sovereign arm of the state because its functions– grounded in law and policy– are deeply rooted in the biopolitical conditioning of human life.

A site of exclusion, in the Agambenian term, it is both where people are subject(ed) before the law, yet it is also where the law gets suspended: in order to bestow on you a legal right, you must first be stripped of any legal status. In this way, your rights as a citizen of Nigeria get suspended, while you are at the mercy of American or British immigration officers who 'whip [you] into order […] right on [your] own soil'. The process is peculiar in its ability to double as a metaphor of the paradox inherent to the dialectic between the nation-state and the citizen: the visa is a stark legal reminder that you are an unwanted and suspect alien, yet it is only by virtue of this reminder that you are able to grasp a keen understanding of your own humanity, even as ephemeral, and as alienated, as it is.

My thesis is at once concerned with this global biopolitical paradigm and the ways in which it dehumanises the racialised migrant, while also being committed to foregrounding literature's ability to contest, represent and enable alternative modes of being. There is an inextricable link between migration and humanity; indeed, the history of humanity could be said to be the history of migration. However, between migration being an intrinsic part of human existence, and migrants becoming disavowed from humanity, a historical leap – structured by biopolitics– has occurred in which both categories have been reproduced exclusively of one another.

This thesis looks to bridge political theology and postcolonial studies in order to analyse how biopolitics emerged as a system of governance which disproportionally

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[1] Adoabi Tricia Nwaubani,, "Why Visa Rejections Do Not Halt Nigerian Migrants", *BBC*, 2015
[2] Ibid., n.p.

rendered black life disposable. The black body has historically been central to early experimentations in biopolitics, and continues to be the target for this violence, through a diffuse set of modern processes. And yet, life continues to inscribe itself, despite its negation at the hands of governing bodies. I argue that contemporary African literature is an especially productive site through which to explore this dialectic, because of Africa's long entangled history with the West, from the Trans-Atlantic slave-trade through to neo-colonialism.

The chapters of the thesis each address a different component of those modern, biopolitical processes which are grounded in the abjection of the human, whether these are immigration control policies, humanitarian discourses, or human rights law, to name but a few. In order to explore how literature is able to persistently write the human into being against the grain of biopolitics, I appropriate Sylvia Wynter's terminology when she speaks of 'Re-enchanting the human of humanism',[3] to posit that the enchanting power of literature rests in its ability to both lament the impossibility of reading the subject outside of biopolitical reason, and its insistence on recovering the human despite this impossibility.

Inheritance: Enlightened Man and his Borders

What is at play, in Nwaubani's specific example, is an embodiment of the paradoxical duality which is at the crux of my argument: race becomes the code through which one *knows* what human being is, and also through which one *experiences* being; but precisely because this encounter occurs through the *negation* of human being. In other words, the 'other' than human, the would-be-migrant, the already-displaced-human, comes to encounter this 'code' upon realising it is written on the back of, and for, their exclusion from 'humanity'. This is the epistemological– *how one knows* – and ontological – *how one is* – lacuna that is at the heart of those normative Western discourses to which my thesis responds. It is therefore crucial to first explicate the historical link between migration, 'humanity' and governmentality, and the thesis's position within this history. The production of those categories is itself grounded in a paradoxical history; this is the history of Europe's invention of and hegemony over 'humanism'. It is, in a very large sense, due to the failures of history or, indeed, our failure to grasp this history, that we have arrived at the current unequal global order. Indeed, Wynter reminds us that 'We have lived the millennium of Man in the last five

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[3] David Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview With Svlvia Wynter", *Small Axe: A Carribean Journal Of Criticism*, 8 (2000).

hundred years',[4] and therefore the work of recovering an antecedent, 'original' human is not as simple as excavating this history. If such an origin exists, it has, at the least, been lost, and at the most, been continuously impeded by the imposition of this biopolitical regime under which we must all live. Today, Fortress Europe's perceived 'refugee crisis' is simply a border crisis: manufactured in part to stave off the arrival of Europe's historical remnants, migrants. The flow of capital and those who follow it, or those who are forced to follow it, did not reach its apex in the twenty-first century with the rise of 'economic migrants' from the Global South, but rather began with the Slave Trade and was cemented through Imperialism. The work of this thesis, then, is not specifically to rehistoricise Europe's invention of humanism, but rather to 're-enchant the human in humanism' against modernity's de-animation of the human.[5]

In her powerfully astute book *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom*,[6] Sarah Jane Cavernack reminds us that the invention of the Enlightenment's sovereign subject – Man – is concomitant with a trespassive history of exploration.[7] In vindicating Michel Foucault's statement that there is a 'fundamental agreement' between philosophy and anthropology, Cavernack argues that the consolidation of the rational European subject was only possible because of an 'anthropological-explorationist project that required man to 'step outside', diverge from […] his own fixed threshold'.[8] In this way, the project of humanism is inextricable from the project of colonialism: it is only through the discovery of the other that Europe encountered its sense of self. Achille Mbembe argues that this still prevalent theory of the self 'made the concept of reason one of the most important elements of both the project of modernity and of the topos of sovereignty'.[9] Reason then becomes the hallmark of the sovereign, precisely because it is defined and produced in contrast to its other, the 'uncivilised' native. Enlightenment philosophers advanced

> [H]umanism as self-determined, unaffected and teleological mobility [but] the
> bodies and minds that provided the anthropological and epistemological occasions

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[4] Scott, p.195

[5] There is not enough space in the scope of this thesis to analyse the break between the pre-modern, theological absolutism of Medieval Europe and its religious construction of the human, with the modern secular, politico-economical construction of the person. Sylvia Wynter discusses this process in depth in her interview with David Scott, "The Enchantment of Humanism".

[6] Sarah Jane Cervenak, *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial And Sexual Freedom*, 1st edn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

[7] Cavernack's work is predominantly based on kinesis as a philosophical prism of exploration. For an in depth study of Kinesis and the history of migration, see Thomas Nail *Being and Motion*.

[8] Cavernack, p. 7

[9] Ibid., p.13

[…] as well as the conditions of possibility of such exploration suffered the severe constraints of forced (im)mobilization.[10]

This forced immobilisation continues to underscore our contemporary moment. Empire reproduced around the globe the same political system which consolidated this hierarchal humanity.

It is these discourses which we have inherited–by virtue of Western hegemony's imposition of a system of nation-states – that produce a discordance between 'the migrant' and 'the human'. Because the modern nation-state prescribes humanity on the basis of citizenship, this discordance thus translates into a legal split between the natural human (zoe) and the rights-bearing person (bios). Human rights become a natural recourse through which to discuss this disparity between the person and the human because, as Talal Asad has remarked, 'there is no attempt to define 'the human' except tautologically in terms of the rights with which it is endowed'.[11] Similarly, in her famous critique of the nation-state in her essay "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man", Hannah Arendt very succinctly explicates this distinction:

If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declarations of such a general rights provided. Actually, the opposite is the case. It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow man[12]

This paradox on which the entire legal system rests is masked by the language of universality, human rights and the invocation of 'humanity'. Asad notes human rights' tendency to sentimentalise the world through the concept of 'the human family', while limiting its legal scope to the nation-state and its laws which legitimatises its subjects as citizens. As rights are grounded in forms of political normativity, they ultimately produce a 'normative notion of the human [which] must be based on certain hierarchies and exclusions'.[13] In a similar vein, Achille Mbembe very aptly states that

The gigantic inequality with regard to the right of circulation and the mobility of persons nowadays constitutes a transnational social relationship in and of itself. It is fuelled by an anthropological crisis of the category of 'the human person' as a

[10] Cavernack, p. 8.
[11] Talal Asad, "What Do Human Rights Do? An Anthropological Enquiry", *Theory \& Event* 4.4,(2000) n.p.
[12] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1951) p, 300.
[13] James Ingram, *Radical Cosmopolitics The Ethics and Politics of Democratoc Universalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) p. 69.

'universal' category. It is also at the roots of new, global forms of racialisation, in the name of security.[14]

It is precisely the category of the 'human person' which fuels the crisis of global inequality. The human and the person are not complementary of one another, rather they are exclusionary. It is therefore crucial to understand how it comes to be that a very large percentage of the population of the globe are denied their right to free movement, their right to humanity. This history is central to understanding that just as we inherit those normative political philosophies, we also inherit those continued forced immobilisations: the migrant becomes the limit of 'man'. Cavernack succinctly states that 'black movement is, more often than not, read as disruptive physicality, a philosophical problem to be solved as opposed to that which resolves philosophical problems'.[15]

This 'philosophical problem' of the mobile, black body is thus one we can trace back to a philosophy founded on white mobility. Such a lineage is central to this thesis – it comes to institute the foundation of the modern world. Modern philosophy and politics, the institutions of the nation-state, and the basis for the creation of the UN and its drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948: all are indebted, in one way or the other, to the Enlightenment. There is a periodisation here – one which falls outside the scope of this thesis – in which we can trace the development of the human from its inception in the theological, to the political, and currently the economic.[16] The inheritance of those philosophies and political systems has translated itself into a system of nation-states and citizens where the management of populations and borders continues to define this normative and exclusionary conception of the human. So while there is continuity, a linearity to the history which constitutes the human today, there is an urgent need to outline that for those who are Europe's 'other', this is rather a history of their normed abjection. This is why, as Mbembe has argued, it

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[14] Achille Mbembe, "Democracy As A Community Of Life", (*The Humanist Imperative In South Africa*, 1st edn, Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2011), p. 193.

[15] Cavernack, p. 5.

[16] Here is a helpful summary from Alain Supiot's *Homo Juridicus: On the Anthropological Function of the Law:* "'Our Western conception of the human being as an abstract universal, born free, endowed with reason, and equal among equals, won out only at the end of a long historical process which stretched from the development of Roman law to modern declarations of rights. It introduced the idea of a science founded on the Cartesian cogito and of a ius commune, governed no longer by reason of State but by the state of reason ('non ratione imperio, sed imperio rationis'). The ensuing period, which leads to our own, opens with the Enlightenment. It is characterised by the disappearance of God from the socio-political scene, which is why it is interpreted as a desertion of religion and a 'disenchantment of the world'. However, it could equally be interpreted as a triple re-enchantment: of science (which replaces religion as authorised truth on the scale of the universe); of the State (promoted to the status of omnipotent subject, living and supreme source of laws); and lastly of the human being, whose finality is henceforth found within himself, divorced from any reference to the divine. This process was accompanied by the rewriting of the human being's origins – from Hobbes and Rousseau to Rawls – and the founding of a Religion of Humanity, linked to scientific positivism and endowed with its Ten Commandments: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' Alain Supiot. *Homo Juridicus: On the Anthropological Function of the Law*, (Verso, 2007) pp. 28-32.

is crucial to read temporality as subjectivity. Because Africa is 'entangled' with the West, the very nature of African writing, and the work it achieves, is in and of itself a work of temporal ramifications. African literature re-traces the archive of African human ontology to both assert as well as narrate those life-forms which are erased through the biopolitical hegemony of Western imperialism.

Biopolitics: Between the Human and the Person

In his collective oeuvres, Michel Foucault takes up the task of such a periodisation: he analyses the shift in disciplinary power from the sixteenth century to the present. Foucault argues that the expression of sovereignty resided in the ability of the sovereign to dictate who must die, and who can live. Foucault is speaking from a selective Eurocentric perspective, where he situates this sovereignty in the figure of the monarch. However, the French Revolution marks the break between the pre-seventeenth century system of absolute power, and ushers in an ostensibly devolved, constitutional system of power. This separation of power is considered to be the precondition for political modernity. This is the moment central to the break between the theological Man and the political Man – the citizen. For Foucault, this is also the birth of biopolitics. He states:

> It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchise, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor.[17]

Biopolitics refers to a 'technology of power centred on life', in which life is managed, enhanced or eradicated. It is also the moment at which we can begin to talk about subjugation and subjectivity.

For Foucault, 'There are two meanings of the word subject […] and both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to'.[18] Foucault begins linking subject formation, as that which is only formed through power, with the biopolitical moment of modernity. It is through modernity's institutions that our concepts of personhood develop:

> We have entered a phase of juridical regression in comparison with the pre-seventeenth-century societies we are acquainted with; we should not be deceived by all the constitutions framed throughout the world since the French Revolution, the codes written and revised, a whole continual and clamorous legislative

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[17] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*. ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) p .266
[18] Michel Foucault, "Subject and Power"in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, (The University of Chicago Press, 1983) pp. 208-226 & p. 212.

activity: these were the forms that made an essentially normalising power acceptable[19]

In many ways, this is an accurate analysis of the birth of the nation-state and its biopolitical activities. The link between the two is often the masked language of human rights. The French Revolution births the *Droits de L'Homme et du Citoyen,* the first legalised endowment of the rights of the citizen. In this model, rights are bestowed by the state which is rigid and unchanging in its exercise of the law. Rather than conscripting the natural, corporeal human within the protection of the legal person, Roberto Esposito writes that, 'it's precisely the category of the person that produces and widens the gap between rights and man to begin with'.[20] The person, in other words, asserts the *separability of human life from itself* and perpetuates that violence it is meant to protect against: because it renders the natural human vulnerable. This splitting action is inherent to the structure of human rights, in so far as human rights continue to be prescribed by the state.

The *Droits de L'homme et du Citoyen* ultimately universalises this conception of human rights, and achieves two things: it squarely links the 'human person' with the white European man; and simultaneously normalises the exclusion of half the globe in its invocation of human rights. In a similar vein, the UDHR, the contemporary version of its predecessor, was drafted in 1948, when parts of the world were still under colonial rule. Tellingly, the word 'human' only appears in the title of the document; the articles of the UDHR all subsequently refer to the 'person' – that which is produced through an intricate web of legal and social structures. Since the act of migration is almost always preceded by an (unconscious) assertion of the right to have rights – the right to migrate, the right to claim asylum, the right to refuge, the right to seek sustenance and so on– the globalisation of human rights is thus the globalisation of biopolitics and governmentality. The complicity between rhetorics of human rights law and discourses of human development are firmly rooted in the biopolitical: these are all technologies for the enhancement of life, of the human person.[21] Human rights 'divide the human

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[19] Rabinow, p.266

[20] Roberto Esposito, Trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics*, 1st edn (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).p.114

[21] Pheng Cheah offers an alaysis of this postulation in his book *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Harvard University Press: Harvard, 2006). For Cheah, the ostensible relationship between cosmopolitanism and human rights is complementary, insofar as they function as a "globalisation of biopolitical technologies of governmentality." Cheah reads cosmopolitics as a deeply embedded material process of human (resource) development. If we read human rights as a biopolitical instrument for human development, Cheah notes that what 'produces humanity and all its capacities such as needs, interests, the capacity to labour and so on, are biotechnologies that have now become globalised". In this way, cosmopolitanism "[doesn't] begin with the human being who has rights, but with the production of fundamental human needs and capacities, which we subsequently understand in terms of rights that we can claim for ourselves". Using the example of migrant labor, Cheah notes international bodies such at the IMF and INGOs create the notion of an inter-connected world by functioning on an

being into two areas: a biological body and a site of legal imputation, the first being subjected to the discretionary control of the second';[22] an accurate description of the relationship which governs the West and the Rest.

Ultimately, Foucault's analysis of biopower is accurate in so far as it is Eurocentric. For much of the rest of the world, this shift in sovereignty from the 'right to kill' to 'the right to make live (and let die)' is not applicable. Judith Butler formulates this argument perfectly in her essay "Indefinite Detention": '*the historical time that we thought was past us turns out to structure the contemporary field with a persistence that gives the lie to history as chronology'.[23]* Butler is here rightly identifying that, for some, the biopolitical never ceased to be the thanapolitical. Butler, however, is writing specifically in the context of Guantamo, a space of legal imputation against black – and brown, and non-white– bodies for whom the suspension of the law is 'justifiable'. It is important to record however that race does inform Foucault's discussion of biopolitics: he identifies scientific racism as the site through which an affirmative biopolitics – a politics *of* life – mutates into a negative biopolitics – a politics *over* life. Foucault asks: 'how can a power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life[24] [?]'. The answer, in short, is that the logic of scientific racism is based on a biological rationale in which 'the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer'.[25] Race is then primarily 'a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die'.[26] While Foucault acknowledges that colonialism was rationalised by racism, he cites Nazism as the prime example of the emergence of a deathly, violent and racist biopower. Foucault's Eurocentric approach enables him to claim that while racism had already been in existence elsewhere, and for a long time, 'it is indeed the emergence of this biopower that inscribes it in the mechanism of the State, it is at this moment that racism is inscribed as the basic mechanism of power'.[27] Slavery, which preceded the Holocaust, does not figure as an example of this scientific racism; precisely because it was practiced across time and space and cannot be anchored to the

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international level and providing means of development. "If governmentality at the level of the nation-state produces civil society, then what the globalisation of biopolitical technologies produces is humanity.". Pheng Cheah, Interview with Pheng Cheah on cosmopolitanism, nationalism and human rights (Theory, Culture & Society, 2011)

[22] Esposito, p. 115.

[23] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 54.

[24] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76".*eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. Trans. David Macey, (New York: Picador, 2003).p. 254

[25] Ibid, p.255

[26] Ibid, p. 254

[27] Ibid, p. 254

European nation-state. So when Foucault discusses subject formation – and subjugation/objectification– as a process which occurs through power, in the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'the awareness of the topographical reinscription of imperialism does not inform his presuppositions […] [foreclosing] a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism'.[28] In other words, biopolitics in its current form is insufficient to account for all the ways in which the subjugation – and subject formation– of black lives operates.

In his seminal essay "Necropolitics",[29] Mbembe offers a theory of sovereignty which is attuned to those broader narratives of imperialism, thereby advancing a radically alternative reading of personhood. Starting with Foucault's theory of biopolitics, which describes a form of governmentality that deploys power over life, Mbembe traces how Foucault's theory was built on and developed by Agamben, whose theory of the state of exception addresses that which deprives life of power. Bridging both these concepts, Mbembe develops a theory of necropolitics, as that form of power which subjugates life to the power of death. Identifying modernity as the origin from which 'multiple concepts of sovereignty – and therefore of the biopolitical[30]' emerged, Mbembe locates a lacuna in our epistemology in which late-modern political criticism has disregarded this multiplicity of concepts, privileging normative theories of democracy, and therefore, of the subject. Mbembe distinguishes necropolitics from biopolitics by positing that '[t]he ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die[31]' This capacity to reason is 'tantamount to the exercises of freedom, a key element for individual autonomy'.[32] Herein lies the allure, 'the romance' of sovereignty: it is deployed in the service of maintaining an order of power, both societal and individual. This is the same romance which Europe has cultivated with its subjects. The hierarchisation of humanity is legitimated through imperial violence, because it is done in the name of a sovereignty based on reason. Modernity has fashioned society into a whole, made up by individuals, rather than community. The nation-state is thus formed in the image of an individual with absolute rights. The fiction of individual sovereignty – and its specific relationship with 'subject formation' – essentially enables modernity to maintain its hierarchal order of power.

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[28] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p.290-291
[29] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics (*Public Culture, Volume 15, Number 1, Winter 2003)
[30] Ibid., p.13
[31] Ibid., p. 11
[32] Ibid., p.11

Thus as a bridging analysis to biopolitics and the state of exception, necropolitics, which Mbembe reads as a marked condition of depoliticised life – or that life which is devoid of legal status– makes it possible to 'develop a reading of politics, sovereignty, and the subject different from the one we inherited from the philosophical discourse of modernity'.[33] By outlining some of the topographies of necropower, such as the plantation and the colony, Mbembe introduces the racial element to biopower, as that exceptional site where violence is repeatedly and sustainably enacted. The legacy of slavery, and the extension of colonialism into neo-colonialism, has maintained the political and legal hierarchy of the First and 'Third' worlds. This hierarchy is ultimately translated into a politics of dehumanisation which has bred a hierarchal humanity marked by militarised borders, crippling neoliberal economies, political violence and mass displacements. Being therefore 'other' to sovereignty, Mbembe ends his article by illuminating how necropolitics – a system of governmentality which is unbound by time or space – has bred into the racialised body the perennial condition of 'being in pain'. This condition, borne from being made vulnerable to political violence which results in civil as well as social death, enforces a new form of existence which he calls 'living death'. This is a form of life for which there is no appropriate niche within normative theories of biopolitics and sovereignty.

It is this exclusion which my thesis looks to address. Classical political theology has taken up the crisis of the 'human person' in its critiques, especially in its immanence to our current contemporary moment. Yet alternative, non-Eurocentric, articulations of personhood, the human, and subjectivity do not make their way into these discourses. Migration, especially, does not complicate the classical analysis of the 'human person'. Postcolonial studies has addressed this gap, in so far as it addresses the ways in which the entanglement between the Global South and the West necessarily produces new hybrid identities; analysing in turn the ways in which in these identities are conditional upon global economic, racial, social and political relations which structure the relation between the Global North and the Global South.

Postcolonial Studies has done much to liberate alternative epistemologies, histories and ontologies from the grasp of Imperialism. Subaltern Studies, for example, has undertaken the task of rewriting South Asian historiography in order to redress the exclusion of subaltern voices from their own histories. And, crucially, migration has always informed the theoretical and analytical framework of Postcolonial Studies, making it attuned to the irrevocable changes migration has wrought on the globe, and on

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[33] Ibid., p.14

the category of human. While it is not possible to undertake a comprehensive synthesis of the field in the space of this introduction,[34] a brief periodisation of the field would testify to its attunement to the development of global processes. Postcolonial Studies experienced a growth in the immediate afterlife of colonialism: this moment is reflected in the hopeful, romantic multiculturalism of the 1980s which hailed hybridity, multiculturalism and to some extent, cosmopolitanism, as the vanguards of a new emancipatory global order. Today, the field has seen a return to discourses of decolonisation, resistance, as well as responses to and representations of crises. However, between the romantic and the bleak, biopolitics has not, until recently, been inflected into Postcolonial Studies.

As biopolitics refers to a diffuse set of processes which condition life, it is always implicitly addressed, precisely as Postcolonial studies is by nature attuned to the processes of subjection and subjugation historically levied against the postcolony. However, biopolitics never explicitly occupies centre stage in the field. The analysis I am interested in however is addressed more in African American studies and Critical Race studies than it is in Postcolonial studies. Alexander Weheliye's book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*[35] for example deconstructs the theories of biopolitics and bare life as exclusionary of the African American and her history; positing in their stead his own theory of the ways in which the human is 'assembled' through race and the law. While theoretically helpful, and highly relevant, analyses of biopolitics within an African American context do not really map onto the specificities of the postcolony. Postcolonial studies has yet to see an in-depth, systematic study of how the human and the migrant come into being under this biopolitical modernity; it has yet to move away, *fully,* from analyses of identity towards analyses of personhood.

In a similar vein, African philosophy speaks of the 'historical swindle'[36] of 'universal' philosophy, which, of course, excludes Africa. Kwasi Wiredu makes the point that African histories and philosophy, and even African histories of philosophy, were predominantly oral. These resources were then neglected and suppressed under colonialism, and he warns us, even as we read his article "An Oral Philosophy of Personhood" that 'we must note immediately that we are encountering here the superimposition of a Western category of thought on African thought materials'.[37] Here

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[34] The thesis engages with postcolonial studies thoroughly throughout.
[35] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics And Black Feminist Theories Of The Human*, 1st edn (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2014).
[36] Olufemi Taiwo, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy", 1997.
[37] Kwasi Wiredu, "An Oral Philosophy Of Personhood: Comments On Philosophy And Orality", (*Research In African*

is the legacy of colonialism: state constitutions are now universal because of the imposition of nation-states as the primary category for the organisation of political life. Wiredu continues

> Take our political problems. It is impossible to reflect on the African political scene without developing the suspicion that we have not yet found the system of governance most suited to our culture. The question is: "May it not be that there is something in our traditional culture conducive to good governance that we are missing in our contemporary political efforts, which are often constrained by foreign pressure?[38]

In this way Wiredu introduces the communal, African category of the 'person' as a moral force which should underlign politics. Here Wiredu argues that art, proverbs, literature – *en brève*, those sites of expression which are not subjected to 'superimposition', will be the mediums through which African philosophy and thought gets passed on and inherited.

What might an African affirmation of personhood look like? In what ways would the human come into being, in an African context? In his article "The Idea of Borderless World",[39] Mbembe speaks of the African traditions of 'peoplehood, not nationhood' to signify the communal, complementary nature of life-forms. In contrast to the Western individualist model, the person and the human are complementary rather than exclusionary. In other words, the natural human is also at once the rights-bearing person, because those rights derive from community– a category for the organisation of human life which is always in flux, in motion, and which adapts to difference. Ubuntu, loosely translated as 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am', speaks to this philosophy; one in which the ontology of being is not 'forged' through the power of the law, but rather 'derives' from the community. In other words, the human comes into being through others, by having their humanity reflected back at them. Of course, while African communities have their exclusions as well, these are often of a social, and not legal nature. Humanity is thus not conditional upon judicial belonging but is derived from communal belonging.

This epistemological and ontological framework offers a radically different reading of the human to the hegemonic Western one. The human does not develop into an individual, whose sovereignty is autonomous, in tandem with the state. Rather, the

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Literatures, 40 2009), p. 9

[38] Ibid., p.10

[39] Achille Mbembe, "The Idea of a Borderless World"*, in *Africa Is a Country* (2008) <https://africasacountry.com/2018/11/the-idea-of-a-borderless-world/>

human becomes, through others, part of a community which shares a sovereign unity. African ontological structures include the cosmological as well as the secular: membership of the category of the human is not one which can be suspended on legal grounds. This is a system which is much more complex than the linear, secular biopolitical one. However, the imposition of this biopolitical regime creates an interstice as it were: those African life-forms become impeded under a necropolitical reality. African literature, which operates from within this interstice, is able to inaugurate those alternative ways of being human. It is at once able to represent this negation of the human, while also contesting it. It narrates a process which I term critical-becoming. To become critical is to instantiate a form of life which occupies two valencies: it is both the process by which one leads a life in crisis, but it is also the process by which one develops a criticality. This enables a dynamic, non-linear 'becoming', as opposed to the prescribed development of a linear 'being'.

Becoming critical is a process which is intricately linked with African philosophy. In *African philosophy through Ubuntu,*[40] Mogobe Ramose reminds us that 'African ontology and epistemology must be understood as two aspects of the one and same reality'.[41] The nature of African philosophy allows for this fluidity; African epistemologies and ontologies are by nature more creative, adaptive and dependant on complex systems of signification which include the secular as well as the cosmological. Similarly, the process of becoming is dependent on the emergence of a criticality: the novels explored all elucidate the ways in which inherited African epistemologies enable the becoming of the human *against* the restrictive and oppressive 'being' prescribed by the epistemes and ontology of the state. By reverse, ontological structures– the very act of becoming– enable the emergence of a criticality which is at odds with those of the state. In the novels, this interdependent relationship is embodied through acts of Ubuntu: the characters in the novel rely on one another to have their humanity reflected back at them. It is precisely through the interpersonal networks of others that the creativity of becoming-critical emerges. African philosophy is therefore vital to the ways in which the characters resist the de-animations of modernity and biopolitics. In turn, African literature is vital for the ways in which these philosophies are embodied. Emmanuel Eze has written on the duality involved with both inheriting traditions which have been lost or damaged on the one hand, while on the other, making recourse to those same traditions in order to enact transformation:

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[40] Ramose, Mogobe B. *African philosophy through Ubuntu.* 1st. edn (Harare: Mond Books Publishers.2005)
[41] Ramose, p.35

> On one level, the traditions which one writes about, or out of, are experienced by the [African] writer as alive. On another level, the writer knows that the tradition in question has been "damaged" and transformed in an irreversible manner. In fact the act of writing is itself both a mark of the time of deconstruction, transformation and renewal[42]

The novels then creatively write of and through those traditions which have been broken, in order to adopt critical stances with regards to the lives which they are expressing. Those lives then emerge creatively and flexibly: some characters are dancers, some are writers, some live by proverbs, some live proverbially. Becoming critical is therefore not solely concerned with recovering ulterior communities based on ulterior epistemologies and ontologies, but rather about using those inherited resources in order to form a new kind of community, in order to allow for those ontologies and epistemologies to enchant a new tradition of humanism.

Literature and Biopolitics

The relationship between literature and biopolitics has largely been a complementary one. Historians of the novel will be able to trace the rise of the novel form with the consolidation of the liberal, sovereign subject. In *Human Rights inc. The World Novel, Narrative Form and International Law,* Joseph Slaughter informs us that *Robinson Crusoe* was formative to the development of the UDHR's template 'person'. If literature can inflect itself into law, then it is only natural for law to be able to inflect itself into literature. In more recent years, the relationship between biopolitics and literature has taken a critical turn. Arne de Boever has written two monographs on biopolitics and the novel: *States Of Exception In The Contemporary Novel: Martel, Eugenides, Coetzee, Sebald*[43] and *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel.*[44] Both monographs are concerned, respectively, with the ways in which life becomes imbricated with power both when the law gets suspended, and when the law applies itself to fulfil its duty of care. Eric Santner's *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin Sebald,* advances the theory of creaturely life in order to account for the psychic dimensions of life under a state of exception. Angela Naimou's *Salvage Work: U.S. And Caribbean Literatures Amid The Debris Of Legal Personhood*[45] examines literary responses to the legal constructions of

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[42] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *On Reason: Rationality In A World Of Cultural Conflict And Racism*, 1st edn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p.192

[43] Arne De Boever, *States Of Exception In The Contemporary Novel: Martel, Eugenides, Coetzee, Sebald*, 1st edn (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

[44] Arne De Boever, *Narrative Care: Biopolitics And The Novel*, 1st edn (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[45] Angela Naimou, *Salvage Work: U.S. And Caribbean Literatures Amid The Debris Of Legal Personhood*, 1st edn

personhood in the Americas'. Her work traces the America's construct of legal personality from the slave trade towards the contemporary moment. Of all the works listed above, none address biopolitics within a postcolonial context, let alone an African one.

Only two major works in literary criticism address the biopolitical and the postcolonial: Stephen Morton's *States Of Emergency: Colonialism, Literature And Law*[46] and Michael Griffiths' *Biopolitics And Memory In Postcolonial Literature And Culture*.[47] Griffiths' volume contains essays which each explore how the aftermath of colonial governmentality has mapped itself onto the lives of postcolonial subjects, who memorialise a past which has not yet come to pass. Morton's book explores the ways in which literary and cultural texts have informed understandings of legal responses to states of emergencies in a broad postcolonial context. He looks to Ireland, India, South Africa, Kenya, Algeria and, notably, Palestine – a country still in the process of becoming a nation-state– in order to explore what a form of justice might look like, beyond the normative boundaries of the state and the law. The field of biopolitics and literature is therefore a growing one, however, an in-depth study of biopolitics and African literature remains to be written.

Tangentially, there is a link between human rights literature and biopolitics, although this is not surprising link. When biopolitics, which is concerned with the enhancement of human life, translated itself into the language of rights and responsibilities between the state and the citizen, this language was universalised, in part, due to literature. Therefore, when the subject experiences violence, when they have their sovereignty threatened, this threat is translated into the language of human rights abuses. The field of human rights and literature has therefore been an ever expanding one. Alexandra Shultheis Moore, Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer have written extensively on the relationships between human rights and literature. Moore's position is a more critical one; she reads human rights literature as a disruptive narrative within the paradigm of rights claims. At the level of form, Moore contends that the import of human rights claims to the periphery poses challenging 'problems of narrative temporalities required to tell both individual stories and complex social histories in the context of traumatic events marked as rights violations'[48]. Smith and Schaffer, on the

(New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

[46] Stephen Morton, *States Of Emergency: Colonialism, Literature And Law*, 1st edn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

[47] Michael R Griffiths, *Biopolitics And Memory In Postcolonial Literature And Culture*, 1st edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

[48] Elizabeth S. Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore. *Theoretical Perspectives On Human Rights And*

other hand, claim that 'human rights discourses, norms, and instruments depend upon the international commitment to narratability'[49] and posit that human rights literature, like the UDHR, bind 'an international community together in service to a more just future'.[50]

My position differs substantially from Smith, Schaffer and Moore's in various ways. In the first instance, I don't consider human rights as expressions of ideals, but rather as a technology of the biopolitical. Human rights validate the system of the nation-state, because it is through the nation-state that they can be validated in turn. Beyond their contentious history, human rights are always understood in economic terms: they are associated with discourses of development, progress and modernisation.

While ostensibly all positive concepts, they are ultimately exclusive because they place the onus on the individual. In this way, human rights claims will always necessarily position the individual in a position of vulnerability vis-a-vis the state. Instead, the novels this thesis defers to posit a communal concept of personhood, in which a more just future involves a reciprocal model of vulnerability, within a community, and not with a state power. Just as literature is able to consolidate the normed version of the human, I argue that it is also able to destabilise it, to open up the space for alternatives. If traditional Western literary forms were able to help produce a Western humanist tradition, then African literary forms are also able to recover an African humanist tradition. Herein lies the 're-enchantment' of African literature, it recovers, renews and transforms[51] a tradition which is not purely secular, mono temporal, or historically linear. Because literature is capable of holding together those entangled temporal realities, it is also able to place the romantic multiculturalism of 1980s postcolonial theory in tension with the bleak reality of our secular, biopolitical moment, while still opening up alternative cosmologies of the future.

Chapter outline

The thesis is structured both thematically as well as formally according to the diegetic spaces of the characters, in order to map a trajectory of migration. The logic behind this structure is a performative one: in attempting to 'map' a story of migration, this thesis is

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Literature. (New York, Routledge, 1st ed, 2012), p.11

[49] Kay Schaffer, and Sidonie Smith. *Human Rights And Narrated Lives*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1st ed, 2004), p.3

[50] Ibid., p.14

[51] Borrowed from Emmanuel Eze's quote: "On one level, the traditions which one writes about, or out of, are experienced by the [African] writer as alive. On another level, the writer knows that the tradition in question has been "damaged" and transformed in an irreversible manner. In fact the act of writing is itself both a mark of the time of deconstruction, transformation and renewal."

also mapping out a process of becoming – both processes entail forms of personhood which do not get foreclosed by narrative closure. The first two chapters cover, respectively, Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) and Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013): these are novels in which the protagonists are predominantly based in their home countries, who then migrate to America. The last two chapters cover Abani's *Becoming Abigail* (2006) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2004)*;* these are novels in which the protagonists have already (forcefully) migrated to England. The novels, arranged in this order, ostensibly pattern migration–they trace the movement of the protagonists from Africa to the West. However, what this arrangement will show, is that the thesis – and the novels– in fact pattern the dysfunctional teleology of 'human development', integral to the discourses of human rights and migration, normed through the logic of biopolitical modernity. They each document the ways in which life is rendered impossible by biopolitics, by the logic of development. They each suggest – as a side effect of this biopolitical development– an alternative, parallel critical becoming, and they each elucidate how this critical becoming produces new forms of personhood.

Individually, each novel ends with no ending; none provide any kind of narrative closure, none provide the emergence of an affirmative, developed and individuated subject. As a whole, the thesis concludes by affirming, on the one hand, that alternative, already existing and otherwise emerging ways of being human exist and are 'archived' through literature, while on the other hand, insisting that those critical-becomings are ultimately not salvageable unless the human becomes disaggregated from the citizen. This trajectory will be signalled by the title of the first chapter, "Becoming Human", and its undoing in the last chapter, titled "Unbecoming Human". In other words, the thesis defers to literature in order to explore and encounter the human in ways in which the rigidity of biopolitics and the law do not allow, firmly championing literature's ability to enable creative resistance to Western hegemony which seeks to categorise, limit and delineate.

In this way, the novels place their characters in that space between the migrant and the human. Chris Abani, for example, has stated that his work 'is all about exploring what is human about us. It's an attempt to map, to locate, to question if it's even possible to be human…If transformation can happen. It often means that I have to explore in-between worlds'.[52] This can be said for the works of Noviolet Bulawayo as well as Brian Chikwava, in that their novels collectively deal with the process of

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[52] 'A Reading By Chris Abani', *Blackbird*, 8 (2008). N.p
<http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v8n1/features/abani_c/reading_page.shtml>

becoming, the process in which their characters 'become' human, rather than narrating the lives of characters which are assumed to be human. As such, their work posits characters in the gap between the legal person who may claim rights, and the human subject in whom they are inherent and inalienable. They invoke what it means to be human– even as it disrupts the Enlightenment narratives of modernity and development upon which its conceptualisation is based.

The first chapter, titled "Becoming Human", analyses the disjunction between the normed, Western notion of human development — grounded in Enlightenment philosophy, legal personality and political modernity— with the alternative, resistant processes of becoming-critical. By placing the Western Bildungsroman in 'conversation' with the postcolonial one, the chapter explores, through Elvis the protagonist, the Bildungsroman's 'history' as it were, and its non-applicability, as a universal template of personhood development, in the postcolony. *GraceLand* maps a necropolitical society, and shows us the ways in which necroscapes are uninhabitable, and render life impossible. Because Elvis cannot 'fit' into the teleology of development and grow into a citizen, he cannot develop his personhood, and thus symbolises the corruption of the norms of human rights. With the help of his interpersonal network, who enable him to survive and eventually leave Lagos, Elvis migrates towards the end of the novel. The novel ends with Elvis being both physically as well as psychically caught in an interstice: the narrative teaches us that despite Elvis not being able to attain his personhood, he emerges instead as a human.

The second chapter analyses the humanitarian economies which sustain necroscapes. Darling grows up in a shantytown in Zimbabwe because she is a victim of Operation Murambatsvina, a violent programme of home demolitions carried out by the state. As an internally displaced 'person', life is rendered impossible for Darling, who has no choice but to migrate to the States. In some ways the novel picks up where *GraceLand* ends: Darling's move to the States brings the critique of the nation-state to the metropole. Darling's migration eventually forces her to abandon her hopes of citizenship, of becoming a 'real person' as she terms it. Despite the violence of biopolitics which would see her remain a perpetual outsider both to the categories of the state, and the categories of the human, Darling encounters likewise illegal migrants, and through them, she becomes-critical, that is, rather than developing her personhood through the state, she develops her humanity through her friends.

Chapter three follows Abigail, a Nigerian teenager, who slips through the cracks of the global order as she is trafficked into England by a family relative called Peter.

Abigail escapes Peter, only to fall into the hands of the state. Both Peter and the British State foreclose Abigail's development as a person, because they both inflict trauma on her. The chapter critiques how 'sympathetic' readings sustain biopolitics, by simply reproducing Abigail as a victim. I argue that the novella prevents Abigail from being read as a victim because she is co-constituted with Abani, who prevents the readers unfettered access to her full subjectivity. This chapter thus sees a move from becoming-critical to co-becoming: it foregrounds the common corporeal vulnerability which underlines our shared humanity. It is also the chapter which signals a move from the bleak, secular paradigm of biopolitics into a sacred, cosmological paradigm of redemption. Abigail's suicide towards the end of the novel signals her contradictory agency: through Igbo cosmology, she accepts her fate and sacrifices herself for Mary, her cousin. In this way, Abigail leaves behind a legacy different to the one the state would ascribe to her: that of a nameless, trafficked victim. Abigail's suicide ultimately hints at alternative lifescapes, beyond necropolitics.

The final chapter, which is on *Harare North,* synthesises the arguments made in all the previous chapters; this is to say the novel contains an aspect of each of the critiques made in the previous chapters, only to refute them. Whereas the previous chapters are all concerned with a recovery of the human, *Harare North* sees instead the dissolution of the human. The status of the novel's narrator is contestable: the narrative does not make clear whether the narrator is a person, or a dissociative voice, or 'an avenging spirit from Shona cosmology. Migration to the U.K exacerbates this ambivalence, and the novel does not provide us with the emergence of a subject, let alone a human. The narrator then signifies the epistemological and ontological lacuna which is at the heart of normative theories of the subject. By leaving the narration hanging, the novel teaches us that unless the human becomes disaggregated from the dominance of the citizen, we are ultimately, and perennially, caught in a state of alienation and stasis.

Chapter 1. Becoming Human: The Fiction of Bildung in Chris Abani's *GraceLand*

'Listen to dis story,' Caesar began.

'Oh, please, not another story. Why can't anyone in this place just give it to you straight?' 'Because de straight road is a liar.' (Abani, GraceLand 96)

In resonance with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*,[1] a preacher from Chris Abani's *GraceLand* claims that '[a] country often becomes what its inhabitants dream for it.'[2] Far from implying literal nation-building, Anderson's thesis argues that nations – as well as the communities that comprise them – are social constructs imagined through print-capitalism, where through acts of citizenship, such as reading and other forms of cultural engagement, there eventually materialises 'in the minds of each […] the image of their communion'.[3] Where Anderson's critique addresses how nationalism is produced and received, Western modernity's concern is with how nationalism is administered and sustained. The focus of my study becomes how this administration imagines, creates and affects the subjects of nationalism, in other words, the human-as-citizen. While law is the discourse and form of governmentality that most directly caters for and secludes citizenship, products of national culture, particularly the novel, 'powerfully shape who the citizenry is' while in its totality effacing 'particularities of race, national origin, locality, and embodiment […] within the political realm'.[4]

The literary genre of the Bildungsroman has been argued to be the form that most powerfully subscribes to this project due to its alignment with other discourses, such as human rights, whose rootedness in acts of nationalism espouse traditional modes of (national) belonging. This chapter explores the alliance between human rights and the project of modernity as tools of biopolitical subjection, and *GraceLand*'s critique of this project. I argue that by critiquing the logic of development as inherent to the project of modernity, *GraceLand* inaugurates instead the critical-becoming of a 'deep

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[1] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006).
[2] Chris Abani, *GraceLand* (New York: Picador, 2004), p.155. Further page references will appear in the main text.
[3] Anderson, p. 6.
[4] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*. 1st ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 2.

humanness'[5] – as inherent to the project of a 'humanism made to the measure of the world'.[6]

The traditional telos of the Bildungsroman is to sediment the authority of the nation-state through a development plot in which, via a series of crises, the individual's growth, maturation and socialisation propels her towards an acceptance of societal demands, and a subsequent internalisation of societal norms. This linear, progressivist narrative form conforms to the homogenous historical construction of nation and subject, enjoyed and advocated by the institutions of Western modernity, such as the school and the welfare state.

The narrative – usually concluding with marriage – sees the Bildungsheld completing the life-trajectory projected and sponsored by both human rights discourse and European institutions of modernisation. Franco Moretti perceives this subjection to be the Bildungsroman's contradiction: 'Only by curbing [youth's] intrinsically boundless dynamism, only by agreeing to betray to a certain extent its very essence, only thus, it seems, can modernity be represented. Only thus, we may add, can it be 'made human'.[7] In a sense, the political 'personality' of modernity must be transferred and transformed into its biological counterpart, the embodied 'person'.

Joseph Slaughter makes the case for the Bildungsroman genre in particular being complicit with the narrativisation of the transformation and growth of the human within the socio-economic and political institutions which endorse him/her as the subject of human rights. The traditional Bildungsroman and human rights discourse have in common the 'cooperative efforts to imagine, normalise, and realise what the Universal Declaration and early theorists of the novel call 'the free and full development of the human personality.''[8] As such, Slaughter calls the Bildungsroman and human rights 'mutually enabling fictions'[9] due to the way in which the Bildungsroman is 'exemplary in the degree to which its conventions overlap with the image of human personality development articulated by [international human rights] law'.[10]

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[5] Yogita Goyal, 'A Deep Humanness, A Deep Grace: Interview with Chris Abani', *Research in African Literatures*, 45 (2014), p. 237.

[6] This is a phrase coined by Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism.* It has since been used by philosophers and academics such as Sylvia Wynter, Paul Gilroy, and Frantz Fanon.

[7] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 6.

[8] Ibid., p.4.

[9] This much used term is adopted by Slaughter from Rita Felski's critique of Habermas' liberal public sphere 'Whose ideal of a free discursive space that equalises all participants […] engenders a sense of collective identity but is achieved only by obscuring actual material inequalities and political antagonisms among its participants' – *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989), p. 168.

[10] Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 4.

The link between law and literature was formative to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – 'the coming-of-age story of *homo economicus*'[11] provided the philosophical grounds for Article 29, which now reads: 'Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible'. An earlier iteration of the article read: 'Everyone has duties to the community which enables him freely to develop his personality'. Divergent readings of *Robinson Crusoe* – apparently the literary prototype of humanity – enabled a debate over the question of the individual and society which is taken up by Article 29, a question arguably still unresolved by Enlightenment philosophy. Between the two drafts of Article 29, multiple conversations occur simultaneously: the privileging of Western notions of selfhood, the differences between a libertarian and communitarian conception of selfhood, and the establishment of social debt as a constitutive component of the social contract between the nation and its subject – or more directly, the establishment of rights and responsibilities as the dictate of human rights law. The second formulation of the article is meant to mediate what was perceived as the libertarian 'excessive individualism' of the first; namely, it is intended to foreground the role of community in shaping the individual. Yet both readings of the individual and community omit Friday, Crusoe's 'subject'. For the legislators of the UDHR, Crusoe's 'community' was in effect those vestiges of Western civilisation – the books and tools of 'human industry'[12] which he finds in the shipwreck.

It is in this sense that Crusoe's debt to society is leveraged, for which he receives in turn the right to develop his sense of selfhood. This transactional foundation of human rights law comes to legislate our contemporary moment: a failure of reading, or indeed, a privilege of reading constitutes 'homo economicus' as the sovereign subject of human rights law, at the expense of the 'natural primitive', Friday. Human rights discourse is thus, at its core, a discourse on the 'enhancement of human capacities',[13] an instrumentalist formation of the self for which the capacity for individual and by extension national self-determination is a capacity to naturalise, and be naturalised by, the logic of biopolitics. This logic is encoded in the language of rights, which expresses concern for the right to the development of the 'human personality' as it manifests in society. In turn, literature encodes this logic when it idealises norms which enable this dialectic relationship. In other words, the development of Robinson Crusoe's

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[11] Ibid., p. 46.
[12] Ibid., p. 48.
[13] Peng Cheah, *What is a world?: on postcolonial literature as world literature* (Durham: Duke University Press), p. 224.

personality – at Friday's expense – represents the political personality of modernity because it is the latter which enables him, and not Friday, to emerge as the rational, sovereign person.

The Bildungsroman corresponds to this ideological operation by usually concluding with the maturation and acculturation of its protagonist within society, epitomising the sublimation of the relationship between the modern nation-state and its citizens. By espousing a utopic self-transformative journey which takes place in an imaginary egalitarian space, human rights champions and indeed requires an ethos of economic, and thus personal, development through which to justify its operation. Taking my cue from the extensive arguments made by scholars of human rights,[14] I read the latter as an ideological regime of governmentality rooted in contradictions and limitations whose purpose is deeply embedded in the material process of human and economic development. Pheng Cheah succinctly argues that the globalisation of human rights is the globalisation of governmentality. The rise of the bioeconomic man thereby coincides with the rise of the citizen: this formal relationship maps onto the formal relationship between history and literature.

In this sense, the Bildungsroman takes up the contradictions of a modernity which realises itself through a neoliberal world system of governance – both culturally and economically, and norms them through the process of internalisation. Franco Moretti addresses the problem of the contradictory nature of such a project:

> When we remember that the Bildungsroman – the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialisation – is also the most contradictory of modern symbolic forms, we realise that in our world socialisation itself consists first of all in the interiorization of a contradiction.[15]

Where the archetypal European Bildungsroman seeks to mask these contradictions which are inherent to society, I argue that the postcolonial Bildungsroman is subversive due to the manner in which it both inhabits and exposes those contradictions. Of course, the European Bildungsroman is a form which is more diverse than I have space to acknowledge here. While both the European and African Bildungsroman contain their contradictions, the difference between the two becomes a question of the degree to which they expose those contradictions. Earlier iterations of the African Bildungsroman, emerging in the wake of colonialism, resembled their European forebears much more than their contemporary versions. *GraceLand* is a highly critical

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[14] See Douzinas, Arendt, and Cheah.
[15] Moretti, p. 10.

Bildungsroman, exposing the contradictions of society to a such a high degree that it questions the very foundations of society itself. *GraceLand* situates itself in the gap between (hegemonic) history and its attendant literary forms, between the globalised bioeconomic man and the local human, not to bridge those divides, but to expose the spaces of historical, political and philosophical exclusion.

The dichotomy between those two literary forms resides in the distinction between a promotion and problematisation of modern socialisation. Where the European Bildungsroman narrativises the processes by which the human emerges as the citizen, the postcolonial anti-Bildungsroman narrates the redemption in being merely human. These processes find their correlate forms of subjectivity in the 'universal' Man, and the local human: the former emerges out of a web of socio-legal structures, while the latter is impeded by those same socio-legal structures. Put another way, the Bildungsroman can be said to *enable* the emergence of this universal man (the citizen) – by enabling a normalisation of the process of development – while *GraceLand* posits the redemption of the merely human by problematising the process of development and narrativising instead the process of becoming.

Understanding development as normalisation, but becoming as extremity, allows us to simultaneously critique those political categories which allow the human to become vulnerable to extremity in the first place. In her critique of human rights and citizenship, Hannah Arendt has claimed that '[t]he world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human'.[16] It is this sacredness which I argue *GraceLand* is reclaiming. When Abani states that for him, ''[h]umans in extreme situations, [serve] as metaphors that [offer] us the possibility of finding out the ways that we become who we are. And that really is becoming',[17] he is referring to those same humans whom Arendt centres in her criticism of human rights: the 'nothing but human', the naked human, devoid of the layers of political socialisation and status, the merely human for whom there is no appropriate place in the niche of the law. Rather than affirming the exclusion of this human from the socio-legal polis, the novel narrates, from this place of exclusion, the illogical, corrupted and contradictory nature of the socio-legal, thereby affirming the redemptive, sacred aspect of being human.

The relationship between literature and history, and therefore between man and citizen, is decisively different in the African context than it is in the Western European one. The European Bildungsroman is born during a period in which Europe is writing

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[16] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), p. 299.
[17] Abani in Goyal, p. 233.

its myths of cultural and racial superiority; 'like its European forebear,' writes Apollo Amoko, 'the emergence of the African Bildungsroman coincided with a period of radical transformation and social upheaval when, in the wake of colonialism, the traditional ways of being were seriously undermined, if not forever transformed'.[18] Early African Bildungsromane – such as Camara Leye's *L'Enfant Noir* (1953) – adopted the form much less critically than *GraceLand;* they reflected the optimism of the immediate post-independence era which sought both a renewal of a nation that was decimated by colonialism, as well as a revival of the African self, subjugated by colonialism. The first generation of African writers were, to some extent, concerned with the process of nation-building. This has led Fredric Jameson to claim – 'hyperbolically perhaps'[19]– that these were national allegories. However, the optimism of the 1950s and 1960s gets quelled as 'in territory after territory, leaders and ruling elites came to identify their own maintenance in power as being of greater importance than the broader social goods of democratisation, opportunity, and equality'.[20] The contradictions inherent in the Bildungsroman become particularly apparent and unresolvable in African novels once the prospect of decolonisation and development is rendered untenable by the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the IMF and the resultant neoliberalism of the 1980s.[21] Third-generation postcolonial writers then struggle with notions of development, as much as with nationhood. This ambivalence is mirrored in the level of criticality inherent in contemporary African Bildungsromane.

For this reason, those concepts which make up the *Bildungsroman* are not as pre-determined in the African context; the parameters of African history, of notions of selfhood and community, are, for various reasons, not as inflexible as their Western counterparts. The flexible, dynamic nature of African epistemologies enable the novel of Bildung to extricate itself from the logics of development, despite being produced in locales that are, in one orthodox perspective, developing nations. While postcolonial texts emerge from the same history of modernity that produced the nation state and, in this case specifically, remodelled it in Nigeria between the Berlin conference of 1884

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[18] Apollo Amoko, 'Autobiography and Bildungsroman in African Literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, ed. by F. Abiola Irele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 200.
[19] Ibid., p.195
[20] Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 1st edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.5
[21] John Saul proves a helpful overview of the neoliberalisation of the postcolonies: 'Fatefully the debt came due in the 1980s…The Western Keynesian consensus that had sanctioned the agricultural levies, the industrialization dream, the social services sensibility, and the activist state of the immediately post-independence decades–and lent money to support all this–was replaced by neo-liberalism. For Africa this meant the winding down of any remnant of the developmental state. The new driving premise was to be a withdrawal of the state from the economy and the removal of all barriers, including exchange controls, protective tarrifs and public ownership(and with such moves to be linked as well to massive service cutbacks), to the operation of global market forces' in John Saul, *Millenial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, 1st edn (Asmara: Africa Word Press, 2001), p. 23

and Indirect Rule of 1906, the work they undertake is not so much one of nation-building but of humanist reclamation. It is not the work of the African author to legitimise a modernity that was never their own, but to '[curate] the continent's humanity',[22] to borrow Abani's formulation. This work is not limited to national borders or, indeed, to temporal ones: it is firmly located within the entanglement of both; it is work which predates the advent of modernity and which enables a future. It is work which represents the multiplicity of community, rather than the hegemony of nation.

The problem of the Western nation-state rests in its tendency to systemise community as hegemony, whereas, in the periphery, this 'idea of communities that serve our own self-reflection is a strange idea'.[23] Indeed, Achille Mbembe reminds us that:

> we need first to remember that, throughout its history, European thought has tended to conceive of identity less in terms of mutual belonging (cobelonging) to a common world than in terms of a relation between similar beings – of being itself emerging and manifesting itself in its own state, or its own mirror.[24]

The Western nation-state politically organises social life into communities predicated on sameness: consequently, any cultural, legal, racial or social difference ultimately places the individual on the margins of society. Because the African nation-state is always already comprised of differently constituted political and social communities, it becomes a category for the organisation of human life which is always in flux, in motion, and which adapts to difference. These are 'communities that are fraught with dealing with negotiations[…]', where an 'inferential way of speaking and negotiating […] becomes the only way to hold complex and contradictory thoughts and emotions without any violence'[25] It is thus possible in the African context to espouse both forms of nationalism as well as communitarianism.[26] In this sense, difference does not place the individual on the margin of society, but rather it serves as a reflection of the community's humanity – both within and without the state.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu is crucial here to understanding this distinction. Ubuntu specifically enables the co-existence of difference as that which is in turn enabled and reflected by the community. There are, of course, forms of hegemony in both contexts – the nature of hegemony is non-contingent. In the Western sense,

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[22] Abani in Goyal, p. 231.
[23] Chris Abani, ''The Graceful Walk' By Chris Abani', Humanitiesnebraska.org, 2014
<http://humanitiesnebraska.org/transcription-of-chris-abanis-lecture/> [Accessed 28 January 2019].
[24] Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* p. 2.
[25] Chris Abani, ''The Graceful Walk"
[26] Achebe does this with his literature. Achebe's nationalism, for instance, doesn't map onto the nationalism of a nationalist European writer.

however, difference creates exclusion; in the African sense, difference becomes the hallmark for social inclusion.

To elucidate this point, I want to turn to a scene from Nigerian writer Helon Habila's novel *Measuring Time*[27] in which the protagonist Mamo witnesses and questions his community's staging and celebration of an annual play which rehearses the destruction and colonisation of their Nigerian village, Keti. Mitchum Huehls states that rather than celebrating the imposition of Western progress over local culture, the villagers are celebrating the play itself: 'its true referent is the process by which the ostensibly irreconcilable divide between the two is perpetually negotiated in village life, a negotiation that the play's improvisational treatment of village history performs'.[28] As an adult, Mamo then realises that 'the play […] was about their own survival. They were celebrating because they had the good sense to take whatever was good from another culture and add it to whatever was good in theirs […] this was their wisdom'.[29]

Because the play references the villagers' humanity, Huehls continues that 'artistic production here supersedes the paradox between particular and universal that dominates, and circumscribes, thinking about the human in human rights.'[30] What the villagers in Keti understand is that the human as such is not – and cannot be – the human of human rights. In other words, the human cannot either be 'local' or 'universal', but always both simultaneously. This is the lesson which African history teaches us, and this lesson is encoded in the proverbial languages of African peoples. It is this complex way of employing language and meaning which, applied in negotiations with the strict and rigid structures of discourse, marks the inferential, and thus subversive, nature of *GraceLand*. Abani informs us that 'in West African thought, all artists must themselves be in constant negotiations not only with ideas – and others' ideas – on a personal level, but also how this is renewed and negotiated so that ideas of the human themselves are always adapting.' This fluidity to 'negotiate the world through narrative, and to continue to extend narratives that continue to allow for this complexity to exist'[31] makes *GraceLand*'s charted trajectory decidedly non-Bildung, in the sense that it is not linear. It is important to note the specific history of the Western Bildungsroman form and its privileged ability to both function and be produced in comparably 'stable' nation-states which have not been subject to the ruptures of

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[27] Helon Habila, *Measuring Time* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).
[28] Mitchum Huehls, 'Referring to the Human In Contemporary Human Rights Literature', *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 58 (2012), 1-22 (p. 2).
[29] Habila, p. 381-81.
[30] Huehls, p. 2.
[31] 'Chris Abani: Global Igbo' *2015 Chicago Humanities Festival, Online video clip.*

colonialism. In contrast, because the contemporary African Bildungsroman exposes those contradictions inherited by the postcolonial state, it necessarily places its characters in those spaces of exclusions where they are neither legitimated by the discourses of the Bildungsroman and its intended subject, nor by pre-colonial heritages. We see those negotiations manifested through Elvis, the novel's Bildungsheld who exists in a world 'stripped of implicit moral centres'[32] and who must attempt to find his own with recourse to the Igbo proverbs passed down to him from his mother and grandmother, as well as the growth of a pragmatic and interpersonal network.

Lisa Lowe's position on the Bildungsroman is perhaps closest to the one I hold on *GraceLand*. With a focus on Asian immigrants in the US, Lowe identifies the spaces of exclusion created through a national culture which prohibits assimilations and integrations save at the cost of locality, or what she has termed 'unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment'. At odds with the institutions of national citizenship, these histories sustain the Asian American as a perpetual immigrant, a 'foreigner-within'.[33] She singles out the ideological operation of the Bildungsroman thus:

> The novel of formation has a special status among the works selected for a canon, for it elicits the reader's identification with the Bildung narrative of ethical formation, itself a narrative of the individual's relinquishing of a particularity and difference through identification with an idealised 'national' form of subjectivity.[34]

In this way, the Bildungsroman is complicit with the exclusionary rhetoric of human rights in that it charts the conditions in which conceptions of 'ethical' formations occur. While Lowe identifies these sites of exclusion as a critique of American negation and as potential spaces of new heroic multiculturalisms, she still operates within the binary frameworks set up and maintained by the institutions of human rights as endorsed by the nation. My contention with this approach is that multiplicity doesn't necessarily derail hegemony. To build on existing definitions and categories of being, only to chart multicultural assimilations still protects the inherently exclusionary nature of notions of citizenship, and thus only masks them as new and improved versions. *GraceLand* seeks to disrupt the static and normative categories of being and the epistemologies which enable them, both national and local:

> It is important to understand that in West African thought, character is not connected to morality. Your character is connected to the notion of composure.

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[32] Ibid, n.p.
[33] Lowe, p. 3.
[34] Ibid, p. 98.

> […] Composure leading to thought, [and] thinking will lead you to a place
> where choices are ethical, not moral. Morality is limited by place, by culture, by
> understanding but what is ethical transcends all of these things[35]

This notion of composure derives again from the complexity of inferential thinking and speaking, which produces meaning that is unbound by borders. In the sense that character is created out of meaning, and nothing exists outside of language, to think proverbially, or inferentially, becomes a way to think cosmologically. 'Proverbs', Abani writes,

> are elisions of stories, they reveal a complex way of life, a cosmological concept
> […] in the way that they are contextual. […] they must have enough transport,
> enough flexibility that if they're launched into the world even without context, if
> one is trained with inferential thinking one can understand what is being said.[36]

In this sense, *GraceLand* employs the educational trope of the Bildungsroman in an anti-Bildungsroman way because the lessons imparted on Elvis always refer to something other than the authority of the nation; more succinctly, they always impair a linear, progressivist and legitimate educational tradition so that Elvis is never on the journey to incorporation but rather to becoming.

    GraceLand thus suggests a category of being and becoming which is in opposition to the normed version bred through the discourses of human rights law; it narrates the lives of characters who are always in the process of *becoming human*, rather than narrating lives already assumed to be human. Because *GraceLand* deals with becomings and transformations, the novel can be categorised as a Bildungsroman; however, Abani problematises the relationship between the human subject and the nation-state, positing his characters in 'in-between worlds' where not only is their status as 'human' questioned, but so too is the role of the nation-state in constructing that status. Abani proposes to look at alternative discourses of the human, and thus underwrites the importance of a material human subjectivity and explores the implications this subjectivity has for the politics of human rights and its complicities with the Bildungsroman genre. As such, his work situates his characters in the gap between the legal person who may claim rights, and the human subject in whom they are inherent and inalienable. He invokes what it means to be human – even as it disrupts the Enlightenment narratives of modernity and development upon which its conceptualisation is based. *GraceLand* then elucidates the distinction between

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[35] 'Chris Abani: Global Igbo'.
[36] Chris Abani, 'The Graceful Walk'.

development and becoming by representing development as the trajectory of the individual who grows in sync with the state, and becoming as that of the individual who is at odds with the state.

The (Anti-)Bildungsroman: Failed Father Figures and Illegitimate Solidarities

GraceLand follows the story of Elvis, a migrant from the village of Afikpo, who moves to Maroko, a popular slum in Lagos. After his stint as an Elvis Presley impersonator fails to secure him a stable income, Elvis begins to search for 'proper' jobs, at the behest of his alcoholic and unemployed father, Sunday. After being fired from an exploitative construction site, Elvis 'stared at the city, half slum, half paradise. How could a place be so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time? […] It was as if people conspired with the city to weave a web of silence around its unsavoury parts' (7). In spite of the cruel absurdities of life in abject conditions, Elvis is still able to find a beauty in the sheer, teeming vitality of Lagos and, like most of its newcomers, seeks to eke a space of belonging for himself. However, with the loss of his dream to be a dancer, and no educational qualification to rely on, the rampant corruption and rule of nepotism in the mega-city make it unlikely that he will find stable or secure possibilities. Later in the novel, we are told Elvis 'realised the only way out of this life was Redemption' (189). The double-entendre is intentional: Redemption is an 'area boy' who is at home with the discrepancies of the city, who 'knew everyone, heard everything and could procure everything, for a price' (25).

With the death of his mother and the loss of his father to alcoholism, Elvis comes to view Redemption and Caesar Augustus Anynwu, known as the King of Beggars, as his role models, or more precisely, as family. This is an intentional move on Abani's part: traditional Bildungsromane often cast the state as an allegory of the family, or more precisely, the father figure, whereas the African variant of the genre 'marks the death of the father as a symbol of stable, unquestionable, traditional authority'.[37] This is unremarkable, given the link between biopolitics and literature. Foucault has stated that

> The art of government […] is concerned with […] how to introduce economy, that is, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family, […] how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family, into the management of the state'.[38]

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[37] Apollo Amoko, "Autobiography and Bildungsroman in African Literature", p. 200.
[38] Michel Foucault, 'On Governmentality', *Ideology and Consciousness*, 6, (1979), pp. 8-10.

By adopting the King of Beggars as a father figure, Elvis effectively displaces the state's adoption of him as its subject. The King quickly becomes a paternal figure to Elvis, encouraging him to think intellectually and critically about their society and its entrenched politics. On the other hand, Redemption, who despite being the same age as Elvis, is also presented as a father figure of sorts, encouraging Elvis to lead a 'practical' life where money can be made, albeit illegally.

It is worth noting the disparate perspectives which Redemption and the King hold in relation to selfhood and the conditions which produce them. While at the outset they might seem to inhabit two extremes – Redemption flippant with morality, and the King insisting on the possibility of morality, despite the corrupt state – they each exhibit characteristics which are at odds with their perceived personalities, and with their archetypal roles within the traditional Bildungsroman structure. The King is ostensibly a more moral, law-abiding character, and yet towards the conclusion of the narrative he works against the state when, in an act of revenge and personal vendetta, he attacks the Colonel.

The Colonel is the head of state security who also represents the sovereign arm of the state, as – in the Schmittian sense – it is he who decides on the exception. Redemption, on the other hand, is a more cynical character, who nevertheless works with the state, by trafficking drugs and humans for the Colonel. This flexibility – or perhaps adaptability – exacerbates Elvis' ambivalence who is divided between the two in his search for a father figure. The first time Elvis finds himself in the presence of both Redemption and the King together, he feels the hostility the two have for each other, and he must explain to Redemption that the King is also his friend. Redemption then sardonically informs him: 'You have strange friends […] Me, I like only regular guys like me' (95). Throughout the novel, Elvis is always at once wanting to become like Redemption and like the King, yet he ends up instead constantly being criticised and undermined by them.

The novel charts Elvis' negotiation of life in the city through his musings and interactions with Redemption and the King – through their eyes, the city and the promises it held let him down, while the idea of the West as an alternative is slowly beginning to fragment. As Elvis begins to come to terms with the fact that he cannot always understand the workings of the world, he also begins to understand this as a corollary of his inability to know his own degree of ethical agency in the dire situations in which he finds himself. Redemption takes Elvis under his wing and provides him with a livelihood of sorts. He offers Elvis the opportunity to partake in a series of illegal

jobs which he carries out for the Colonel. Elvis is propelled to an extra-legal life, which he resentfully carries out for the sake of satisfying the demands of his hopeful future, a life where norms are not a constant moral and legal battle. One example of the odd jobs Elvis takes on is escorting, a popular past-time where 'locals' solicit 'rich patrons, mostly Indians and Lebanese' who pay 'men and women to dance with them all night' (92). When Elvis naively asks, 'To just dance?', Redemption replies with a laugh and tells him, 'Well, dat is up to you':

> You are dere to keep dem entertained, no more, no less. […] You are disposable and dey will never care about you. Dey will go on to marry rich foreigners like demselves. […] De best you can hope for is to make a decent living while things last and maybe get in a good fuck or two – for which you must charge extra. (95)

Elvis accepts to be 'rented' by the rich patrons he 'entertains', and we see a motif that runs through the novel in which people are reduced to selling themselves in these ways. The sale is of their bodies on the open market of global capitalism, and this incident foreshadows an even more sinister selling of bodies: human trafficking is also rampant in the underbelly of global capitalism. Despite struggling with the moral corruption of the state, and the relatively flexible morality of his interpersonal network, Elvis finds himself briefly becoming implicated in this trafficking later in the novel. Redemption's advice is simple, even if it offends Elvis' sense of justice: 'You want to tell me thieving to feed yourself is same ting as murder? Everyting get degree' (224). When considering his position as Redemption's friend, he recalls a proverb recounted to him by his grandmother, Oye: 'If one finger is smeared with palm oil, it soon stains the other' (136). Though initially lost on Elvis, this idea of reciprocality, of mutual implication and the ways in which they enable our becoming through others, eventually dawns on him towards the end of the narrative.

Near the novel's conclusion, Elvis is homeless and residing under a bridge, where he's being sheltered by Okon, a man who protects child beggars in exchange for a cut of their earnings (and sexual favours). Although Elvis had been initially repulsed and referred to Okon as a scavenger, he eventually finds himself pragmatically resorting to the same, for which Redemption takes credit: 'I see dat I teach you well' (316). Redemption's sarcasm is born out of the knowledge that even though Elvis is a reluctant hustler, he still retains the value of moral critique in the hopes of becoming a moral human being. Redemption understands what Abani understands about character, but Elvis doesn't: he might be immoral, but he is not unethical. Okon weighs in with an update of how he has been surviving: he's sold his blood illegally to various hospitals

around Lagos, then moved on to scavenging body parts from the dead that littered the road, because the government has placed a fine both on 'illegal crossings', as well as the family members who want to be granted the right to pick up their deceased loved ones. When the demand began for live bodies however, Okon chose to protect them instead, even if at a price: 'Hustler? Survivor? Yes. But definitely not a murderer' (308). Redemption astutely explains to Elvis that 'dis world operate different way for different people' (242). While Okon and Redemption's livelihoods are illegal, their subversive reach extends beyond simply their actions; they produce – and share – knowledge which in and of itself is deemed illegal by the government. It is this notion of negotiating narratives, both epistemological as well as ontological, which unsettles what are perceived to be legitimate and moral ways of being. Regardless of their moral questionability, Elvis' network constitutes the true marker of his socialisation. In other words, it is through this interpersonal network – and not his schooling – that Elvis becomes critical.

The borders of the nation-as-home continue to be broken down the more its failures are made apparent to Elvis. By implying that the relinquishing of individuality in favour of identification with an idealised national form of subjectivity is an ethical norm, the Bildungsroman seconds human rights' ideology of the universal to the exclusion of the stateless. The postcolonial Bildungsroman, however subverted, still espouses what Slaughter argues to be the narrative impulse in the Bildungsroman:

> [A] central concern with the normative process of incorporation [is] its historic social function as the predominant formal literary technology in which social outsiders narrate affirmative claims for inclusion in a regime of rights and responsibilities.[39]

The problem of maturity realises itself in the struggle between an acceptance of one's reality and a rejection of it. This is made more complicated when the society/nation-state in question is in abeyance or in failure, which would generally lead to a problematisation of self-formation. When the King of Beggars takes Elvis to the cinema to show him an 'alternative world' to the one Redemption is leading him into, Elvis sneers as he realises the King has chosen a Yugoslavian 'Love Film' and proclaims that he only watches action films, to which the King responds 'Well consider dis a new education' (132). The experience indeed proves educational for Elvis, who tells the King that what he learnt is that 'People are important' (134). When he asks the King how this will be an alternative to Redemption's world, the King claims 'Rome was not

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[39] Slaughter, p. 27.

built on all roads, okay? […] Have Patience' (134). The King is directly referencing Elvis' education: neither straight as a road, nor indebted or contributive to the nation. Because the 'work of inventing [the Nigerian Nation] […] was never completed'[40] and is in a state of 'arrested decolonisation',[41] the education Elvis receives is decidedly about people, and not nation(s). In this way, *GraceLand*'s contribution to the Nigerian canon is decidedly anti-Bildung because it charts subaltern and sideways trajectories of progress, rather than linear and national ones. Abani's historicism and humanism come through in the King's voice: Abani has stated the only history he is concerned with is not 'history with a big H',[42] but the history of peoples; we may add that people is not concomitant with person with a capital P.

Becoming-Critical Beyond the Self-Sponsoring Bildungsroman

In his book *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, Jed Esty succinctly remarks that the protagonists of postcolonial Bildungsroman 'conspicuously do not grow up'[43] – if 'growth' means legitimation of and by the nation-state. The complications of those terms ultimately frustrate Slaughter's case for the Bildungsroman's enabling of and sponsorship by human rights. Slaughter uses Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*[44] as a case study for what he refers to as narrative self-sponsorship, where rather than the emergence of a self-sufficient, integrated sovereign subject, the novel traces the progress of a character who 'closely approximates the tautological form and hypothetical (or aspirational) character of human rights law […] in the hope of realising [a] human rights subject[t]'.[45]

Through his analysis, Slaughter concludes that 'the genre's traditional conclusive event of social, civil, and self-integration is perpetually postponed, so that the sovereign, undivided human personality remains a vanishing (plot) point beyond the frame of the text.'[46] There is an obvious opportunity here to extemporise on the link between narrative vanishing points and what Agamben understands as legal vanishing points – those spaces of 'exception and exclusion'[47] where humans can be killed with impunity. *Nervous Conditions* embodies this link: by narrating the novel from beyond

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[40] Adélékè Adéèkó, 'Power Shift: America in the New Nigerian Imagination', *The Global South*, 2 (2008) 10-30.
[41] Biodun Jeyifo, 'Nature Of Things: Arrested Decolonisation and Critical Theory', *Research in African Literatures*, Critical Theory and African Literature Vol. 21, (1990), pp. 33-48.
[42] Goyal, p. 234.
[43] Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), p. 2.
[44] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (London: Women's Press, 1988).
[45] Slaughter, p. 215.
[46] Ibid., p. 215.
[47] Minoli Salgado, 'Vanishing points/visible fictions: the textual politics of terror', *Textual Practice*, 27:2, (2013), pp. 207-223.

the vanishing plot point, Tambu elucidates how narrative and literary fiction provides a reclamation of those spaces of exclusions and writes herself back into being, demonstrating the ways in which literature can fill those 'gaps and elisions' in both our epistemologies and ontologies.

Tambu is a young ambitious Shona girl who struggles against Rhodesia's oppressive patriarchy and racist colonialism, only for a chance to be ineluctably subjected by them when she attends a government-sponsored mixed race school, to have 'the privilege of associating with the elite of that time'.[48] Harboring an envy of her cousin Nyasha, who had been to England and read English books, Tambu fights her way into her uncle's care where she 'was going to be developed in the way that Babamukuru saw fit, which in the language I understood at the time meant well'.[49] Babamukuru ostensibly represents the ultimate colonial subject: chosen by colonial administrators to attend school and subsequently university in England, he has ostensibly succeeded in developing his full personality and potential and now, as headmaster himself, administers the same interpellation. Having incorporated himself into the colonial regime of rights and responsibilities, Babamukuru does not struggle between being an 'object' or 'subject' of the establishment – a distinction made by either assimilating or resisting scripted colonial membership – privileged authority effaces the need to choose. Nyasha, on the other hand – in some ways ahead of Tambu in her becoming critical – suffers from anorexia, a manifestation of her stalled growth or, more accurately, her static liminality, which is representative of her inability to claim either Rhodesian/Shona or British culture as her own.

Through her observations of Nyasha, Tambu's own becoming begins to move in a different direction; she no longer grows blithely into her subjection, even though she performs the role of Bildungsheld – we are alerted to her resistance from beyond the plot proper: 'something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion'.[50] The conscious interchange of terms signals Tambu's deviation from colonial development to subversive expansion. Tambu is narrating the reversal of Agamben's vanishing point, and is positing instead the womanist notion of a reciprocally constellated community which, mainly comprising Nyasha, enables her becoming-critical. While in the traditional Bildungsroman, 'youth drives narrative momentum until adulthood arrives to fold

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[48] Dangarembga, p.178.
[49] Ibid., p. 62.
[50] Dangarembga., p. 204.

youth's dynamism into a conceit of uneventful middle age',[51] in the postcolonial version, Slaughter argues that Bildung becomes a journey towards disenchantment and 'the process of recognising the limits […] and sociohistorically contingent conditions of the idea and project [of] Bildung'.[52] By reading Tambu as a subject who remains within the structures of the nation, but still ultimately dissents, Slaughter argues that she does in fact perform the teleology of the Bildungsroman. In my reading however, Tambu also becomes-critical, and this criticality, this becoming, is not accounted for by Slaughter.

Slaughter is only able to read the Bildungsroman's (in)ability as it corresponds to the telos of human rights discourses, with an emphasis on development. In other words, Slaughter is only able to read whether Tambu develops or not – he does not account for her criticality, or the alternative growth and maturity that this engenders. He has noted that 'the corruption of the Bildungsroman form represents a corruption of the norms of human rights'.[53] Slaughter only allows for a corruption, but not a *subversion*, of the genre: this is evidenced by his reading of the postcolonial Bildungsroman remaining a tool for outsiders to narrate their rights to inclusion. For Slaughter, human rights and the corrupted Bildungsroman, as he puts it, remain 'mutually enabling fictions' – in the Foucauldian sense in which every formation is always mutually constitutive. Slaughter's note on the incompleteness of the dysfunctional Bildungsroman does not extend to its actual operation: it moves its subjects beyond the limits of institutional and human rights discourses of the state, and almost always charts critical becomings.

Elvis, on the other hand, is an internally displaced person who must live in a slum. Thus, as a stateless person, his growth cannot be allowed to hinder the authority of the nation-state – or, put more directly, Elvis cannot 'enable' the fiction of the Nigerian state, regardless of how dysfunctional it is. Although his growth might be characterised as incomplete, or stunted, according to the traditional discourses of human rights/development, as a postcolonial Bildungsheld, Elvis necessarily inaugurates alternative definitions of maturity and by extension, humanity. Elvis wrestles with many of the paradoxes inherent in the lessons he learns as he negotiates life both in Afikpo and Lagos as a marginalised subject. Many of his negotiations are centred around his concern in finding sense in the nonsensical, of making sense of a paradoxical modernity. The hindered development of Nigeria necessitates an equally hindered development process for Elvis; herein lies the contradictory Bildung motif that characterises *GraceLand*: the stark necessity to be extricated from logics of the state, set against the

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[51] Esty, p. 18.
[52] Slaughter, p. 216.
[53] Ibid, p. 29.

inability to thrive as a human outside the confines of citizenship. By suggesting alternative modes of being in the world, the subverted Bildungsroman undermines law's project of subjection, and presents instead the alienating consequences of such an impossible project.

Lowe argues that Bildung narratives are always complicated by the contradictions in a society. In other words, socialisation carries the trace of social *division* as well as social cohesion: 'Even those novels that can be said to conform more closely to the formal criteria of the Bildungsroman express a contradiction between the demand for a univocal developmental narrative and the historical specificities of radicalisation, ghettoisation, violence, and labor exploitation'.[54]

Elvis' narrative is situated in a specific historical moment: post-war Nigeria and its transition to a military regime.[55] This is also the moment of the structural adjustments of the 80s, which further entrenched neoliberal economic models and their attendant crises throughout the postcolonies. Although the European classical form of the Bildungsroman does not situate its protagonist in a post-conflict and military-ruled nation-state, *GraceLand* still abides by its basic characteristics, but only to dispel them.

This dichotomy is essentially demonstrated in Bildungsromane for the purpose of 'consigning the ideal of the egalitarian imaginary (e.g., democratic citizenship and equal opportunity) while exposing the disparities and paradoxes that emerge when that ideal is practiced in specific institutions and social relations'.[56] With no stable structure in which to operate, the conditions for human rights' materialisation or individual development are nil; subsequently, with no national structure to socialise into, Elvis finds himself on the margins of what still functions as the Nigerian state. When the home as a category for belonging and security is compromised, new homes and new securities are sought and this results in a reconfiguration of identity. Elvis' search for this sort of belonging is elucidated in his turn to literature, music, the arts, and interest in different cultures, which also double as forms of escapism. In many ways, it is because of the nature of Elvis's escapism that he figures as an unhomely cosmopolitan – what Alexander Hartwiger refers to as 'the transnational, transient populations whose inability to be at home in the world is their defining feature'.[57]

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[54] Lowe, p. 100.
[55] *GraceLand* is historically situated after the Biafran Civil war of 1967-1969/70 (The Afikpo interludes begin in 1970, in a period of transition just as the nation is attempting to reconcile the seceded parts from the majority) and right on the cusp of the military coup of 1983 (when the Lagos interludes end).
[56] Slaughter, p. 28.
[57] Alexander G. Hartwiger, 'Strangers In/To the World: The Unhomely in Chris Abani's *GraceLand'*, *Matatu Journal for African Culture and Society*, 45 (2014), p. 239.

The novel creates a space where an interstitial mode of being in the world exists, where there is a tug-and-pull between authoritative discourses (the pedagogical, 'identities sedimented through history')[58] and alternative narratives (the performative, 'loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification').[59] This distinction broadly maps onto the dialectic between representing and contesting the discordance between the human and the citizen which I discuss in the introduction. The African Bildungsroman form elucidates this contention perfectly as a narrative form which casts the nation-state and its subjects in direct opposition. This space in effect both represents Agamben's vanishing point, and transforms it. Its diegetic existence points to a necessary alternative system which would account for those who inhabit it.

Elvis' (dis)location within the state becomes his main identity marker which reproduces his status of non-belonging. As part of his maturation, Elvis comes to realise this, leading to his disavowal of Nigeria as home. Although Abani has stated that he is 'trying to move beyond political rhetoric to a place of ethical questioning'[60] he inevitably positions the characters of his works in struggles with the political limitations of their settings. Coming to terms with the discrepancies between his imaginary, would-be utopia and Lagos' reality, Elvis' maturation is almost complete towards the end of the novel, and no longer a child, he reaches the climax of the subverted, critical Bildungsroman: he becomes aware of the limits and conditions which govern his coming-of-age as an aspirational subject of human rights; in other words he becomes critical.

Elvis' ambition is dimmed by a disenchantment with both worlds, and this leaves him completely adrift in the global order – he becomes unmoored from any sort of loyalty, embodies the figure of the unhomely cosmopolitan, which becomes completely manifested at the end of the novel where he exists in both a psychological and physical interstice. Before Elvis is about to illegally migrate to the States, he pulls out his mother's journal which he kept with him at all times: 'It had never revealed his mother to him. Never helped him to understand her, or his life, or why anything had happened the way it had' (320). The journal here returns to haunt Elvis: because it could not reveal his mother to him, it also dashes his hopes of ever being able to find some form of belonging. As a stateless person, Elvis also both haunts the state's legitimation and is haunted by the absence of the state. It is in this sense that the unhomely cosmopolitan

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[58] From Julia Kristeva's 'Woman's Time', quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), p. 219.
[59] Ibid., p. 219
[60] Chris Abani, 'Chris Abani on the stories of Africa', 2007
<https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_abani_on_the_stories_of_africa> [Accessed 7 September 2019].

figures as the subject of the subversive Bildungsroman precisely because, Bhabha writes, 'the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence'.[61]

GraceLand: Structure and Form

'Nothing is ever resolved […] It just changes' (GraceLand, 320)

GraceLand is divided into two books, with a spatially and temporally staggered narrative: the chapters oscillate between Elvis' childhood in Afikpo and his present teenage years in Lagos. The first book consists of both Lagos and Afikpo interludes, while the second book consists of Lagos chapters only. For the first half of the novel, Elvis' struggle for a claim to life in Lagos is narrated more clearly because of its interruptions by confusing spatio-temporal scenes from his life in Afikpo. It would be easy to claim that the material fragmentation of the novel's plot mirrors Elvis' equally fragmented route to Bildung. However, writing more broadly in the context of *Song for Night,* Sam Durrant affirms that 'It is only from the perspective of a tradition in which subjectivity is individuated and monotemporal that such an aesthetics appears fragmented'.[62] Rather than a fragmentation, what the novel posits instead is interconnections – the character's ability to inhabit multiple temporal realities at once, precisely because the formation of self is always a multi-temporal (and mulitpersonal) process. Elvis' failed incorporation into his cultural heritage and traditions from Afikpo haunt his present attempts at incorporation in Lagos. Abani explains that his Afikpo interludes are usually signalled to the reader by the change in date (nine years earlier) and an entry on the sacred Igbo Kola Nut ceremony which

> [is] written in the voice of an ethnographer, who believes that if you can figure out this one ritual, you can understand the Igbo, the way that anthropologists do […] in *GraceLand* you begin each chapter with this sort of irritating voice in your head, and in order to get past it, you have to force a connection to the text […] and connect on a human level with Elvis.[63]

Abani is suggesting that an identification of political, cultural or national structures to which people belong (here, a pre-colonial Igbo ethnicity) does not necessitate the

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[61] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 15.

[62] Sam Durrant, 'Creaturely Mimesis: Life After Necropolitics in Chris Abani's Song for Night', *Research in African Literatures*, 49 (2019), 178-206 (p. 188).

[63] Aycock Amanda Aycock, 'An Interview with Chris Abani', *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 10.1, (2009), p. 4.

effective identification of the people themselves. Abani seems to be making this comment both to the reader and Elvis himself, as the diary entries on the kola nut ceremony always contain two opposing statements of information: one from the religious perspective of the Igbo, and one from the anthropological perspective of an ethnographer.

Abani is more directly undoing the traditional alliance between philosophy and anthropology which is inherent to the Western tradition of Enlightenment, modernity and progress. Further to this, the recipe entries include plants and other apothecaries from Igbo and Yoruba traditions and translations. Again, there is the suggestion that contradictions do not necessarily have to live in violence with one another, but rather that their emergence out of binary systems carry the potential for transformation. Abani has claimed before that he believes the Igbo and the Yoruba are the same people, due to their shared culture of inferential speaking and thinking. Elvis keeps this diary on him at all times in the hopes that it will reveal his mother – and by connection, deeper epiphanies to him. However, as is already established, Elvis is faced with disappointment because he realises that nobody can achieve belonging for him, and it is a state he must reach on his own.

Elvis is an avid reader. As the narrative progresses, it makes more references to the novels that Elvis reads; we begin to see the influence that literature has on forming his character. With his collection ranging from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* to Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, 'he read books for different reasons and had them everywhere he was: one in his backpack, which he called his on-the-road book, usually one that held an inspirational message for him; one by his bed; and one he kept tucked in the wall in the toilet…' (7). In the Bildungsroman tradition, Elvis is depicted as a curious, restless youth, constantly searching for meaning and knowledge. Slaughter notes this is a topos 'of the Bildungsroman that remains remarkably consistent from the eighteenth century to the present, from Germany to Ghana: a scene of reading, in which we read of the Bildungsheld's reading of other Bildungsromane'.[64]

Elvis begins to measure himself against the protagonists of the novels he reads, and to reconcile this with the reality of Lagos. As his main referent of value judgments, Elvis' conformity to the norms communicated by the novels are made evident when he tries to morally influence Redemption and others to uphold ethical lives which are, in his opinion, measurable against those he encounters in novels. Rebuked both then and when he fashions himself in the image of Elvis Presley, Elvis no longer feels at home

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[64] Slaughter, p. 31.

with the pervasive influence of American pop culture in his life. With no recourse to a sponsor or any kind of authority or norm – apart from the corrupt state – Elvis struggles to find a moral compass himself, and becomes somewhat aphasic. In the scenes where Elvis is challenged by Redemption or the King of Beggars after he has made some form of moral reproach, Elvis never has a response or justification for his beliefs: he is always silent or monosyllabic – 'Whatever' (316) – suggesting he either lacks a language in which to embody his ambivalence and struggles with the contradictions of society, or he is not yet susceptible to an inferential way of thinking and speaking about those contradictions.

For Elvis, novels serve both as a means of escape and a means for socialisation. This tension is manifested in a scene where Elvis must kill an eagle as an initiation into manhood. When he asks why he must kill the eagle, his Uncle responds: 'It is de first step into manhood for you. When you are older, de next step is to kill a goat, and den from dere we begin your manhood rites. Dis is de first step' (19). When Elvis is presented with a bow and arrow, he notices that there is a chick already impaled on the arrow, which was still alive and with blood running down its beak. When Elvis notices that it is still alive, Uncle Joseph responds: 'Of course it is. You just shot it.' Elvis stressed that he did not, and Sunday insists that he did. Elvis then asks if it was an eagle chick, to which Joseph responds: 'Elvis, you funny. No, it is chicken, eagle is too expensive' (19). At the outset, everything about the rite is confusing to Elvis, who even at a young age is able to see the discrepancies between the claims of the rite and the reality of the rite. When he avoids making eye-contact with the bird, his uncle chastises him and tells him to not turn way from death, to which Elvis protests: 'But it stinks'(19). Uncle Joseph replies 'So does life, boy. So does life' (19). After the ritual, Elvis is met by his older cousin Innocent, who was a child soldier in the civil war, and his friend Godfrey. When Elvis admits to them that he was afraid, Innocent responds: 'Dat's how dese things are. De trials of dis world things come as surprise, so you must have a warrior's heart to withstand dem. Dat's why your papa no tell you about today. You understand?' (22). Elvis does not, so Godfrey interjects 'Leave him. He is a child. Dere is time for such talk later.' They pass a bottle of Fanta to Elvis, as they drink beer, and as he watched them drink, 'Elvis felt like a man' (22). The irony of this incident rests on the contradictions inherent in the logic of the rite as a mode of socialisation. The killing of the chick is not what initiates Elvis into manhood, rather what simulates an equally symbolic form of integration is his inclusion in conversation with Innocent and Godfrey, and the social norm of sharing drinks.

It is a notable feature of the novel that Elvis is in a constant state of questioning throughout its course. This is not unusual; in fact, it is typical of a Bildungsroman. But what is unusual is that the successive crises that Elvis undergoes, though educative, do not cause the painful epiphanies of maturation. In other words, Elvis does not grow up, if by this term we mean accept the demands that society makes as the price of adult citizenship. Or, put another way, Elvis never truly internalises social norms as the basis of his own selfhood. As the eagle ceremony elucidated, the traditions of Elvis' society are already alienated from themselves; meaning Elvis cannot internalise them as his own. This is the very quality that Moretti singles out as the subjective moment (and operation) of a Bildungsroman. 'It is,' Moretti writes,

> necessary that, as a 'free individual,' not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as one's own. One must internalise them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter. This fusion is what we usually call 'consent' or 'legitimation'.[65]

The dimensions of the terms 'citizen' and 'free individual' must be examined, as they occur in a problematic milieu. The condition for 'internalisation' is the freedom to socialise and, most importantly, to be a free subject. Elvis is not characterised as either, and therefore cannot reach 'legitimation' – whatever that might mean, in a non-legitimising state. This predicament highlights the abyss between the human and the citizen at precisely the point where the subject should materialise: because Elvis is subject to an arbitrary, illegitimate and illegitimising power, he is rendered abject instead.

Illegitimate Sexuality: Traumatic Ambivalence as mediation of Being

> *'But he felt something else too, underneath the reflex to retch. Little snakes of sensation crawled all over his body' (GraceLand, 64)*

Elvis inhabits the dilemmas typical of the Bildungsheld as he struggles with moral questions and ethically compromised situations. Sexuality, however, complicates the gradualist, evolutionary narrative of the Bildungsroman by introducing a subjective singularity and a crisis of subjectivity. Elvis' encounters with sexuality manifest as a

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[65] Moretti, p. 27.

traumatic aspect of maturation, which is at odds with the structure of a Bildungsroman. Growing up in Afikpo which is a traditional and hyper-masculine community, all the while being surrounded by women, Elvis begins to adopt a more nuanced and fluid approach to gender politics.

This is evidenced when, while watching an action film with the boys, Elvis hesitantly thinks to himself that he 'loved Actor too, and thought he had the best role: part villain, part hero' (147). It is unclear whether Elvis begins exhibiting homosexuality as a child because he never gets the opportunity to fully develop and experience his sexuality. As a nine-year-old, Elvis spends time with his Aunt Felicia and her friends who prepare themselves for a weekend of parties, '[he] longed to try on their makeup and have his hair plaited'. Happy, proud and prancing about in heels and a mini dress, Elvis seeks to impress his approaching father, only for his youthful dabble into cross-dressing to end with him running 'straight into the first blow, which nearly took his head clean off' (61).

Elvis's interaction with what we know to be colonial remnants of Igbo hyper-masculinity becomes challenged as it only ever manifests violently. The novel represents this violence as another technology of subjection which comes about through the codification of the nation:

> [T]hings like transgender or sexual tropes, well represented in traditional Africa (in fact Shango priests can be said to practice a certain level of transvestism) have been elided in attempts to create essential African identities. Characters absent of [the] burdensome weight [of representing nation] help us understand who we are as people. I've said that African writers are the curators of the continent's humanity and I would like to see more of that humanity curated.[66]

Abani writes 'more' of this humanity into the novel by introducing sexuality into the narrative. Elvis is a character who experiments with make-up and cross-dressing, first as a child, and then in adolescence as a dancer. While Elvis's experiments are met with resistance and ridicule in the novel, they problematise the nation's rigid attitude to gender.

The novel is frank in its treatment of sex and it plays a central role in the narrative. Even as children, 'invariably the talk turned to sex' (196). Elvis' friends watch a pornographic movie; not understanding it, they proceed to tell the group what they saw: 'Titus, in hallowed silence, told of how a woman took a man's penis in her mouth and sucked out his soul while he yelled in pain'. One of the boys, Obed, then suggests

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[66] Abani in Goyal, p. 231.

that they experiment on each other. Elvis is intrigued by this idea and begins to experience a budding sexual curiosity: 'Elvis wasn't sure why, but this was something that he wanted to do, so he wasn't as vocal as the others in his protests' (196). The boys however protest because it is 'homo' and, therefore, taboo. Obed insists that it is normal to do this because he saw American men do it in some films:

- Was it John Wayne doing it?

- Or Actor?

- No. Dese were two men I do not know, but they were doing it and it must be all
    right because dey do it in de movies. (197)

While Obed is referencing a pornographic film, the boys' response comically informs us that the only films they watch are John Wayne films. American movies that have found their way into Afikpo demonstrate global capitalism's reach and its presupposing platform for (inter)national imagining and incorporation. The cultural norms of the movies are appropriated by the viewers: the boys treat western movies as a vital, legitimate body of value-judgments and system of references by which to set a standard. While these may clash with those of their cultures or societies, they nonetheless occupy a position of superiority in their influences. While attempting to not draw a stark dichotomy between western and nonwestern concepts of the normative, Abani invokes the naturally rebellious nature of teenagers who explore and experiment with sexuality. The recognition of this universal process makes the scene accessible to the reader, and vice versa. By performing the 'emancipatory' act of discovering sexuality, the boys are exercising their 'rights' to growth and maturation, in the universal sense at least, and are incorporating themselves into the international public sphere, where rights are imagined and accessed. The incorporation here is in the wider international public sphere, in which socialisation with the 'global' order takes precedence over socialisation with the state.

As the boys begin to experiment with touching one another and attempt to imitate the scene from the pornographic film, they are simultaneously acting against their society's norms, and 'growing' as they learn about their sexuality. In their inclination to satisfy their curiosity and their instinctive reaction to sexual arousal, the boys both dispel and comply with the purposes laid out by the Bildungsroman. The novel destabilises what we understand as Bildung through the incidents that mark Elvis' coming of age. As Elvis and the boys experiment with sexual acts on each other in an

abandoned church, they are caught by an unknown adult who walks in, causing them to flee. Elvis is caught by this adult who then forces him to perform oral sex on him and proceeds to rape him. In the aftermath, and still in shock, Elvis is found by his cousin Efua, who reveals that it was her father, Uncle Joseph, who had raped him, just as he had also raped her. This scene epitomises Elvis' inability to participate in the system which shapes social norms because he is limited by his forced disenfranchised status. As the cultural rules of society are violated through the acts of incest and rape, the moral system which should endorse Elvis as subject is in collapse, and thus familial culture could never have served as a balance of rules and norms to which he can comply. While the Bildungsroman's aim is 'to bridge the gap between exclusion and inclusion; [to] normalise the process and story form of enfranchisement',[67] *GraceLand*'s deep and uncomfortable explorations of the limits of exclusion render this project impossible.

Ultimately, humanity is not bestowed through the state's uncomplicated, linear teleology of development, but rather a working through of those deep, painful and complicated encounters from which we often think we cannot come back. Abani's work, often inflected with his own experience, is always attempting to work through those encounters. The disruptive but transformative moment is a traumatic experience for Elvis and, while non-normatively developmental, still represents as a turning point in his Bildung. While this event does not lead Elvis to develop, it does lead him to become-critical: he instead develops an awareness of the impossibility of being either straight or gay. Elvis and Efua grapple with those violations of their persons, and resort to one another for a reaffirmation of their humanities.

Abani chooses to deal with the question of sexual violence in a complicated, deeply humanist manner. For Abani, the focus is not on the violence itself, but on the recovery of the human despite that violence. When Elvis witnesses Uncle Joseph raping Efua, he undergoes what he perceives to be a deep crisis of his humanity:

> And though he wanted to rush in and scream at Uncle Joseph, push him off and
> beat him to a pulp, he watched instead, his breath coming in short, rapid bursts.
> And the saddest thing was that he knew Efua could see the lust in his eyes (65)

This incident instils in Elvis a deep shame, it unhinges his notion of ethics within himself: 'He wondered why he hadn't helped. Instead, he had just stood rooted to the spot, staring'(74). Through Efua, Elvis comes to recognise the disgrace he finds himself in, as he sees his reflection in her eyes. In a very extreme appropriation of the philosophy of Ubuntu, Elvis has his humanity reflected back at him by Efua. By

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[67] Slaughter, p. 157.

understanding their reciprocal, corporeal vulnerability, Efua consoles Elvis when he himself undergoes the same violence and, in so doing, absolves them both of any blame or shame. Those episodes of sexual violence from their childhoods in Afikpo set off a string of events which are also marked by sexual violence. The 'paternal' disciplining of the father becomes indistinguishable from the disciplining of the state: the novel is making a commentary on the nature and link between discipline and violation.

In the present moment in Lagos, Elvis is rounded up by the military after they disband the slum-dwellers' protest. He is taken to a prison, more adequately described as a space of exception, where he is tortured by Jerome, one of the Colonel's men:

> [H]e began rubbing a cool white paste all over Elvis' body. It felt good, soothing almost […] Still smiling, he took Elvis' penis in one hand and gently smoothed the paste over it, working it up and down. Elvis felt himself swell. Jerome laughed and massaged Elvis' penis faster and faster. It was not long before Elvis shuddered and shot semen all over his torturer's hand. Tears of shame streamed down Elvis' face. 'De thing is you dey stupid. You think say I dey rub you cream? You must be mad. Dis is chemical and it go burn like nothing you know and when I flog you, you go think say your skin dey burn. (295)

Elvis is subjected to the absolutist power of the state, a power which enacts itself through the violation of his autonomy. Jerome taunts him 'Are you a boy or a man? […] so you be homo?' (295). The state's attack is not only physical, but psychological as well: the slur 'homo' is meant to delegitimise alternative embodied existences which are anathema to the state's prescribed rigidity. However, Elvis' hold on his humanity is a deeply corporeal one: he thinks to himself that 'As long as he was in pain, he was still human' (294). In response to Jerome, Elvis is only capable of stuttering 'I…I…'(288), emblematic both of the erasure and decimation – but also of a stuttering articulation – of his personhood as a marked moment of biopolitical trauma. Sarah Harrison notes that 'his literal suspension at the hands of the military police renders the state's inimical effect on his personal development explicit. His 'tormentors' further work to undermine Elvis's tentative Bildung by challenging his maturity. They refer to him as a 'stupid boy' who is 'young and confused' (296), suggesting his lack of formation'.[68] Elvis' inability to identify himself in the face of such brutal and exceptionally blind force of power is telling of the trauma inflicted on him through both physical and sexual violence.

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[68] Sarah Harrison ''Suspended City': Personal, Urban, and National Development in Chris Abani's *GraceLand', Research in African Literatures* 43.2 (2012), pp. 95–114 (p. 109).

On his release from prison, Elvis stumbles towards the bridge under which Okon and the child beggars live, and takes his place among them. He immediately falls ill and is unconscious for days. Blessing, one of the child beggars who cares for him during his illness, makes sexual advances towards him and reveals her breasts to him, and still, 'he felt his lust swell […] despite himself'(311). Elvis turns her down, but is horrified to find that Okon does not make the same choice. When he expresses disgust and asks Okon, 'How could you?', Okon replies: 'No start your shit. We are who we are because we are who we were made. No forget' (312). While Okon's justification for sleeping with a child is that 'Different laws apply here' (312), Elvis' traumatic cycle of sexual violence instills in him an awareness of what is the traumatic functioning of the law. Coupled with the shame he feels, this awareness makes him incapable of understanding how Blessing or Efua could still care for him despite his lust for them. While Elvis attempts to grapple with the different degrees of the law and how they are mobilised – either by the state or by the state's subjects, he finds himself in an interstice in which he is haunted by the trauma of such legal ambivalence. Elvis hallucinates and potentially mistakes a random woman for Efua. Unable to address this haunting, he then rashly promises Blessing that if he migrates, he would send for her to join him in America. Even at a much younger age than he, Blessing smiles and tells Elvis he is a fool. In this exploration of the most bare element of human formation, the ever grey space of sexuality prevents Elvis from understanding who he is as a human, and contributes to his permanent state of ambivalence. Performing the failure of the Bildungsroman and the telos of human rights discourse, Elvis is able to become-critical and to remain 'a deeply human person who happens to be African living in this intersection of culture and place'.[69] His insistence on remaining ethical even in his inability to define how to be ethical suggests that while Elvis is a failed person, it does not make him a failed human.

Cosmopolitan Refugees? Stateless Non-Citizens and Biopolitical Resistance

The nation-state, as the legal dispenser of rights, is a site of contention and paradox for human rights discourse mainly due to its exclusionary practice of scripting citizenship. The human understood by human rights rhetoric is the natural human of the Enlightenment, who is born with inherent and inalienable rights. However, this human is at odds with the 'legal human', also known as the 'person', who may only claim these

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[69] Abani in Goyal, p. 230.

rights as the enfranchised citizen of a nation-state. In 'Citizenship, Alienation and Conflict in Nigeria',[70] William Idowu explores the pervasive nature of conflict in Nigeria and seeks to understand the relationship Nigeria has with issues of citizenship and an implied correlated alienation. Idowu begins with establishing key definitions and presents a taxonomy of the different order-level analyses of 'citizenship'. He contends that in the Nigerian context, citizenship does not figure as a notion that establishes 'a legal or constitutional conception of citizenship' in the liberal Western sense, because a democratic and legal system of governance is in 'abeyance or simply non-existent in Nigeria'.[71] Idowu quotes Olufemi Taiwo's crucial judgement that 'there are no citizens in Nigeria, only citizens of Nigeria'.[72] Idowu's argument however doesn't account for fact that the imperial imposition of this system of nation-states is a deeply unnatural and violent one at odds with African models of governance and community. Instead, Idowu argues that the social element of the problem of citizenship rests on the fact that citizenship is understood as tribal, religious and ethnic membership, and therefore take precedence over a national one. Ethnic nationalism 'has the potential to transcend other loyalties and obligations'[73] and percolates the Nigerian political system by creating 'ethnic competition' which tends to be heavily undergirded by a struggle for the monopoly over power. Those complications of citizenship can be better understood when we consider that at heart, the crisis of modernity in the postcolony rests on the opposition between the cosmological and the secular.

In *Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty,* Carl Schmitt famously proclaims that '[all] significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts, not only because of their historical development [but] because of their systematic structure'.[74] The nation-state is built in the image of a sovereign with absolute power. Igbo cosmology on the other hand is a constellation premised on the impossibility of absolutism of any kind. When colonialism supplanted this constellation in favour of its absolutist version, it also imposed an absolutist conception of sovereignty – and thus personhood – on communities for whom this was the equivalent of social death. What my reading of *GraceLand* then suggests is that the choice is not between different forms of citizenship which are available from within the state – whether tribal or national – but rather the lack of possibility of any form of

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[70] William Idowu, "Citizenship, Alienation and Conflict in Nigeria", *Africa Development* 24:1 (2004).
[71] Ibid., p. 32.
[72] Olufemi Taiwo, 'Of Citizens and Citizenship' *The Tempo*, 1996, p. 15.
[73] Idowu., p. 44.
[74] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 36.

citizenship which is not improvised and mobilised by the disenfranchised, and thus which has yet no name or category of definition.

Rita Nnodim argues that since Lagos is 'a site for the debate of political ideas, [contemporary Nigerian] novels show how notions of citizenship collapse under the general feel of disillusionment in the face of tyranny'.[75] I would argue rather that *GraceLand* espouses a 'third space of citizenship', an interstitial space between what Agamben has termed bare life, and what is the normed enfranchised political life, where, as Charles Lee puts it, there is 'agency that is not unidirectional, but is just as ambiguous and interstitial as sovereign power where […] alien subjects may be read as rewriting themselves as 'citizens' without directly taking the route of political life.'[76] As the novel narrates 'Operation clean the nation', a fictionalised account of Maroko's demolition by the Nigerian state in 1990, it represents the extreme and absolute means the government is willing to deploy in order to maintain its sovereignty. Elvis, and most of the characters in the novel, become internally displaced people (if they weren't already) – they are dispossessed by the state and rendered 'surplus', simply because 'there is no official scenario for the reincorporation of this surplus humanity into the global economy'.[77]

GraceLand narrates, represents and humanises the consequences of biopower by representing the fate of the demolition on each of the dwellers. Mobilising their disposable bodies as a site of resistance, the slum dwellers gather scraps from the city to resist the state's erasure of their existence. In the first moment in the novel where Elvis' father Sunday is animated out of his slump, he attempts to fight off the soldiers who are imminently about to bulldoze the makeshift homes in the slums. His resistance is a cosmological one: its inflection into the bleak, secular biopolitical reality is hinted at when Sunday assumes the form of his totem, a Jaguar. This is only confirmed as having happened when Elvis notices claw marks on the body of a dead soldier. When Elvis's father dies, through language, his body is united with the fabric of the city: 'he sprang…roared… fell in a slump…the bulldozer cracking his chest…as it went for his home' (287). The space for life and life itself become interdependent factors: it is both this expulsion from the political system and inclusion in the political realm which

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[75] Rita Nnodim, 'City, Identity And Dystopia: Writing Lagos In Contemporary Nigerian Novels', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 44 (2008), p. 330.

[76] Charles T Lee, 'Bare Life, Interstices, And The Third Space Of Citizenship', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 38:1 (2010), p. 59.

[77] Ashley Dawson, 'Surplus City: Structural Adjustment, Self-Fashioning, and Urban Insurrection in Chris Abani's *GraceLand*', *Interventions*, 11 (2009), p. 21.

renders this state of exception 'normal'. Agamben refers to this contention as 'the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rest(s).'[78]

When bare life 'dwells' in the city – 'the one place for both the organization of state power and emancipation from it'[79] – the boundaries and categories of being become blurred. Agamben identifies bare life as an obstacle to the notion of modern democracy because its very existence renders the difference between state power and democracy indistinguishable. It is state power which makes the human into its object, yet it is by state power that the human is turned into the legal person and subject of modern democracy. Thus the human of human rights remains prey to a 'predatory sovereignty'[80] which will always need to reproduce this static status to sustain itself because it is 'through the exclusion of the depoliticised form of life that the politicised norm can exist'.[81] So, in opposition the slum dwellers use their very lives, their bodies which have so far been a site of violent discipline and legal punity, as sites of resistance. It is not an appeal to a hegemonic humanity which 'saves' them, but rather a reclamation, a mobilisation of their historical disposability which they transform into a performance, and rearticulation of their subjectivity. So rather than a move from bare life to citizens, there is a cosmic move which often leads to death: both (contradictory) aspirations for forms of life where a deeper human dignity can may be attained. The slum dwellers are aware that they are nobodies to the state, but through this performance, they become symbolic to its historical narrative.

The demolition scene alludes to a greater narrative of disposable lives, one outside the narrative proper: in 1990, the real Maroko refugees who lived along Lagos' coastline were terrorised and evicted out of their communities by the state. They were then harboured by another slum called Makoko, which used to be a 'cosmopolitan'[82] 18th century fishing village on the shores of Lagos. After having subsumed the population of Maroko, Makoko eventually grew into one of the largest slums in south Nigeria. However, exactly 22 years after Maroko's demolition, Makoko faced the same fate: it was threatened with demolition in 2012. In the eviction notice which provided the inhabitants with only 72 hours grace period, the state sent a letter to the communities of

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[78] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) p. 9

[79] Ibid., 9

[80] Alexandra Schultheis Moore, *Vulnerability and Security in Human Rights Literature and Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 148.

[81] Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, 'The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer: Migration and Detention in Australia, Malaysia, and Thailand', *International Migration*, 42 (2004), p. 31.

[82] Tolu Ogunlesi, 'Inside Makoko: Danger and ingenuity in the world's biggest floating slum', *The Guardian*, 23 February 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/23/makoko-lagos-danger-ingenuity-floating-slum> [Accessed 26 September 2019].

Makoko in which they were accused of 'occupying and developing shanties and unwholesome structures on the water front without authority, thereby constituting environmental nuisance, security risks, impediments to economic and gainful utilization of the water front [sic] such as navigation, entertainment, recreation etc'.[83] The eviction notice is exemplary in its capacity to mask the impeding violence with the biopolitical language of care. The state's concerns over the 'security risks' is a short-lived explanation for the demolition, and it is instantly followed with the truth: an economic justification. The state feigns its true goals by first putting forward its consideration of the slum dwellers' well-being – who ostensibly live in the slums at great security risks – only to be able to produce at their expense, elsewhere, the wellbeing and rights of others to consume freely. Robert Neuwirth, who lives in and writes about informal settlements like Makoko around the world has claimed that 'the authorities in Lagos seem to approach city planning from an authoritarian point of view – as if their desire for development transcends everything'.[84] Biopolitical violence thus exists in tandem with agendas of development. Slums, effectively an opposite to the Foucauldian panopticon, are unapproved spaces of existence: they have neither the legitimation of the state nor, importantly, the market.

What is intended for development in lieu of Makoko is a private city called Eko Atlantic, which is being built to cater to the super rich in their bid to close themselves off from the poor and the rising ocean. Described as 'climate apartheid', Martin Lukacs writes that 'it's thus fitting for whom the first 15-story office tower in Eko Atlantic is being built: a British oil and gas trading company. The city proposing to head off environmental devastation will be populated by those most responsible for it in the first place.'[85] It is an artificial island emerging from the sea, being built out of sand dredged from the ocean floor. 'One bucket, one life' is a saying among the inhabitants of Makoko to sum up the danger of their livelihood:

> The dredgers […] descend a wooden ladder into the depths of the lagoon, armed with only a bucket and the will to live. The depths to which they go mean total submersion. Then they have to climb out with a sand-laden bucket that will be emptied on to the floor of a boat.[86]

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[83] Tunde Akingbade, 'As It Was for Maroko, So for Makoko: The Vast Shanty Town on Lagos Waters Goes Down', *The Guardian Nigeria*, 29 July 2012 <http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92971:as-it-was-for-maroko-so-for-makokothe-vast-shanty-town-on-lagos-waters-goes-down> [Accessed 26 September 2019].

[84] Ogunlesi, n.p.

[85] Martin Luckacs, 'New, privatized African city heralds climate apartheid', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/true-north/2014/jan/21/new-privatized-african-city-heralds-climate-apartheid> [Accessed 26 September 2019].

[86] Ogunlesi, n.p.

The denizens at whose expense Lagos is being built are omitted from the national discourse of development and progress yet are subjected to its agenda in the most brutal ways. However, because *GraceLand* charts an anti-developmental plot of personal and national growth, their presence is alluded to through the oppressive infrastructure of the city: 'Lagos was littered with sites like this one, because new high-rise apartment complexes and office blocks were going up seemingly overnight'. (27) Where Maroko once existed on the map of the nation, there now rests, similar to the planned Eko Atlantic, a segregated and affluent neighbourhood called Victoria Island. In this way, the novel intercedes, links, and salvages a shadow, non-linear history of the state's biopolitical victims. Redemption tells Elvis he likes Lagos because '[…] though dey hate us, de rich still have to look at us. Try as dey might, we don't go away' (137). Indeed, the novel itself ensures that they don't.

Beyond Agamben's state of exception and the territorialised location of bare life, interstitial spaces of life reveal the spectrum on which different forms of life materialise, negotiate, and produce their agency within the binary rigidity of sovereignty. Because the government's desire for development transcends direct human needs and costs, 'the urban poor are trapped in an informal and 'illegal' world – in slums that are not reflected on maps […] Officially, they do not exist.'[87] The ambivalence that arises out of this form of subjection must provide an equally legitimate form of subjectivity which exists in different, alternative and radical frameworks. As a response to the threat of Makoko's demolition, Kunlé Adeyemi, a Nigerian-born architect based in Amsterdam, has designed a floating school which is made from sustainable materials from the city and also functions as a community hall. 'Eko Atlantic is about fighting the water; [here in Makoko] we're saying – live in the water!'.[88] The school, tellingly, is not on Nigerian soil, but it is on the world map.[89] Today, it is a symbol of innovative education, rather than a grounded, traditional and unchangeable one. It is this improvisational character which defines the transformative potential of the slums, and what they represent: living outside rigid boundaries of state institutions. Just as the government cannot contain people, so too the discourses which make and unmake people into subjects and objects of the nation should not be contained.

In an article on the non-relation of the cosmopolitan and the refugee, Simon Gikandi has asked 'where do these people, the rejects of failed states, fit into our

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[87] United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*, (London: Earthscan Publicatoin, 2013), p. 6.
[88] Ogunlesi., n.p.
[89] A quick zoom over Lagos' coast in Google Maps will show the speckled dot, followed by its 'pinned' location.

fascination with identities constituted across boundaries?'.[90] The focus should rather be what those identities represent, what they enable and disable given that the institutions which must legitimate them mimic the discourse of human rights development, and hence cause exclusions. There is therefore an epistemological violence in speaking for people and humans. If adaptability, or rather, the privilege to be able to adapt to differing, challenging and unfamiliar circumstances, is the cosmopolitan's advantage in an increasingly globalised world, then why can it not also apply to the radically divergent conditions from which the cosmopolitan was initially supposed to manifest? If we cannot include the disenfranchised within our conceptualisations of cosmopolitans, then it necessarily remains the purview of the privileged.

It is often thought those rejects, expulsions and 'non-citizens' of failed states cannot be represented, save by a negating language of human rights, and are thus only ever alluded to through its rhetoric of 'free and full development'. The lack of nuance in our conceptions of human being then poses challenges for the work of becoming to transcend epistemic limitations. It is often thought that in failed states all legitimate forms of life cease to exist, but as my reading of *GraceLand* has shown, it is not so much that alternate forms of life cannot exist, but rather that they are masked and rendered illegitimate by this same masking language of biopolitics. Forms of life are constantly being negotiated and re-articulated, and what the absolutists' language of law effaces, literature vocalises, and represents. In his article 'Failed State Fiction', John Marx has noted that literary efforts tend to think of fiction as giving crisis a human face. I would rephrase Marx's formulation to note that literature humanises the resistance to state-sponsored crises. In this way, I want to argue that *GraceLand*, in its representation of interstitial life, is constantly finding new languages, and suggesting inferential ways of speaking and thinking of new forms of belonging which speak to the transformative potential of new conceptions of being human.

Illegal Economies: Pragmatism as Performance of Non-Citizenship(s)

> *'Elvis stared into the muddy puddles imagining, what life, if any, was trying to crawl its way out.' (GraceLand, 6)*

While the UDHR and the Bildungsroman depict a linear development of their subjects with that of their societies, we see a discrepant parallel in the Nigerian context. The

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[90] Simon Gikandi, 'Between Routes and Roots: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality', in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: Directions for the New Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 22-35 (p. 23).

more developed the higher classes seem to get through the economic growth of the 80s, the less developed the marginalised spaces of society become. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab comment on the paradox between the ideals of human rights and their practice, as rooted in their economical shortcomings:

> The ideology of modernisation and development that has attained universal status has come to be understood primarily in terms of economic development. The colonial experience of economic exploitation gave credence to the notion of human dignity as consisting in economic rights rather than civil or political rights.[91]

Vindicating the above, the United Nations' Development Programme's first Human Development report sketches the 'developmental' plan for Africa, which includes an 'improve[ment] of its human potentials'.

'The international community,' it reads, 'should earmark an overwhelming share of its concessional resources for Africa and display the understanding and patience needed to rebuild African economies and societies in an orderly and graduated way.'[92] Beyond the condescending nature of this report, the overlapping language of economic development and human rights unquestionably enables the globalisation of biopolitical governmentality. Elvis, who lives under this governance, fails to understand why Nigeria is still poor when it receives financial aid from America. The King of Beggars is aware that organisations such as the IMF adopt humanitarian and developmental projects in what they term 'failed states' in order to justify managing them. He explains this process to Elvis:

> De majority of our people are honest, hardworking people. But dey are at de mercy of dese army bastards and dose tief in the IMF, de World Bank, and de US . . . Let me tell you how de World Bank helps us. Say dey offer us a ten-million-dollar loan for creating potable and clean water supply to rural areas. If we accept, dis is how dey do us. First dey tell us dat we have to use de expertise of their consultants, so dey remove two million for salaries and expenses. Den dey tell us dat de consultants need equipment to work, like computer, jeeps, or bulldozers, and for hotel and so on, so dey take another two million. Den dey say we cannot build new boreholes but must service existing one, so dey take another two million to buy parts. All dis money, six million of it, never leave de US. Den dey

[91] Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab, 'Human Rights: A Western Construct with Limited Applicability', *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives*, 1st ed. (New York: Praeger, 1980), p.9.
[92] United Nations Development Progrramme, *Human Development Report 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 5.

use two million for de project, but is not enough, so dey abandon it, and den army

bosses take de remaining two million. Now we, you and I and all dese poor

people, owe de World Bank ten million dollars for nothing. Dey are all tiefs and I

despise dem our people and de World Bank people (280).

The failed Nigerian state continues to deteriorate the more autonomy it loses, and 'the insecurity [it] feels […] gets transferred to citizens like Elvis who must be convinced of the state's authority'.[93] As he steadily develops his own sense of criticality, it is Elvis' pragmatism rather than a national identity which develops.

Elvis is convinced to work for the Colonel and package some cocaine, despite his concerns over its illegality. In another rebuttal of his naïveté, Redemption responds, 'In dis country you can go to prison if some soldier does not like you. At least with dis you can make some money'(108). Again, Redemption's voice quashes Elvis' moral hesitance by imparting practical wisdom: he is aware of the necessity to constantly refashion himself in tandem with the demands of his circumstances. This negotiation, a fluidity which enables him to not just survive, like Elvis, but live, is what marks Redemption as an 'area boy 'I no talk say it is legal. But it is only a little illegal, you know? Like when something bend, but not too much'(108). This talk of degrees is followed, and perhaps elucidated, through an act of extreme violence: a suspected thief is stoned and burned alive by a mob. 'He must have molest a child,' claims a buka owner, who watches the scene unfold as she serves her customers. One of them responds 'If so, he for die by now. I think he is just common thief' (226). Vigilante justice is at once emancipatory for the denizens of Lagos, but equally as oppressive as legitimate sovereignty. 'Every day for de tief', breathes a man sitting across from them, to which the buka owner completes 'One day for the owner' (228). This Yoruba proverb, which is already canonised – as reflected by Teju Cole's 2015 novel of the same name – implies a collective resistance to the unremitting corruption the leaders of the nation continue to subjugate the country to.

As Elvis opens himself up to Maroko's community, he starts to perceive a redemptive quality in the way they negotiate life in Lagos. We get a sense of cohesion in the slums that is missed at the onset of the novel. Rather than being dismissive, Elvis begins to consider the way life is negotiated there. There is a certain order to the chaos which governs the underbelly of Lagos. 'The patronage system' – which Redemption seamlessly fits in and uses to sponsor Elvis – 'helps the megacity absorb the continual

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[93] Hartwiger, pp. 247-8.

influx of newcomers for whom the formal economy has no use'.[94] True to the cosmopolitan nature of the slums, the novel introduces what Vijay Prashad has termed the Global South's 'whirlwind of creative activity', understood as 'a world of protest. [Protest] against the theft of human dignity and rights, against the undermining of democratic institutions and the promises of modernity'.[95] If we understand the Global South as a 'world of protest' rather than a place of submission, we can recognise the agency of the slum through the agency of the slum-dwellers, and the different systems they set up to replace an absent and dysfunctional state. Because cosmopolitanisms always retain the requirement of citizenship, it is subjecting in the same way the Bildungsroman is as it retains its requirement of legitimation. While the slum dwellers will probably never get part of the teleology which charts a cosmopolitan's journey from the national to international, the already always excluded, the stateless, can enact their own version of cosmopolitanism because they were never subjects and retain that rebellious shred of agency. The shadow cosmopolitanism that *GraceLand* charts is one rooted in an awareness of the limitations of the world, and the ability to adapt, and protest.

Jagua Rigogo, a man with dreadlocks and a pet python called Merlin, is always at the ready with proverbs or stories regarding his 'cosmic mechanics', what are astral projections to 'different planes of existence or, within this one, to different countries'; Joshua, a wannabe British Gentleman, pretends to be a surveyor by strutting about and monitoring the slum in his three piece suits, bowler hats and taking elocution lessons (which he has taken up with an old Spaniard who never left Nigeria in the 20s, and so now speaks with a Spanish-accented English); Madam Caro[96], the owner of the kiosk-bar, sets up a functional system of credit to accommodate both her poor customers and suppliers (52); Freedom, an effeminate and possibly gay primary school teacher, lives up to his name in more ways than one: he joins the rebellion against the government's

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[94] George Packer, 'The Megacity: Decoding the chaos of Lagos', *The New Yorker*, November 13 2006 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/the-megacity> [Accessed 26 September 2019].

[95] Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South,* 2014, p. 9.

[96] In keeping with the notion of a literature that salvages and charts shadow cosmopolitanisms, here are a few pop culture references: Caro is a song made internationally popular by Nigerian 'area boy' Wizkid. Wizkid is from Surulere, a rough area of Lagos which translates from Yoruba to 'Patience is a virtue and has its rewards.' Surulere houses Ojuelegba, a notorious bus hub also made popular in songs by both Fela Kuti and Wizkid. Ojuelegba is where the King of Beggars lives (who himself is constantly telling Elvis to learn patience) – and its Yoruba translation is 'the whip owner's spot.' Yoruba pundits say that because of the location of the T junction which throws strangers to the area off balance, it is the place of worship of the trickster god, Esu-Elegbara. Esu is the messenger of the gods, because he brings meaning and integration to language. However, he is also the god of 'indeterminacy and uncertainty' – and, according to Louis Gates in his seminal book *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), he is the originator of literary theory – due to his use of language in mediating cross-roads and contradictions. These people, and the areas they live in, and how they live in them do not make it into the national discourse of the state, they are constantly erased in order to maintain the status quo, so it is worth noting that, apart from existing in *GraceLand*, they are made famous through the real victims and disenfranchised of the state.

demolition of Maroko – and he embodies the antonym of a proper national and developmental education curriculum (253); and Benji – a nepotist by craft, whose livelihood is the commissions he gets for connecting people with others who are seeking services or favours. The closest western equivalent of Benji's job would be perhaps a freelance headhunter; however, Benji's success rests on his immobility – a decidedly anti-progressivist attitude to career success – he'd become a permanent fixture in the bar and lives by the motto 'If you wait long enough, de world comes to you' (26).

Contra a biopolitical reading of cosmopolitanism as subjection, these misfits of the nation rebelliously demarcate their own humanity when, as part of the communal resistance to the demolition, they plan on forming various human shields to defend the entryways of the slum. Elvis, who accepts his being part of the community, joins them, but is worried they might be run over. On witnessing the long lines of bulldozers, he questions the government's determination to complete 'Operation Clean De Nation' by asking nobody in particular 'They wouldn't, would they?'(257). Madam Caro reassures everyone that despite their military backgrounds, the soldiers are 'still human', to which Sunday replies 'I'm not so sure' (257). Sunday's hesitance to count the soldiers as human is directly linked to their legal status, not only as citizens, but as the disciplining arm of the state apparatus.

When the government, in a theatrical performance of its power, or in its enactment of its sovereignty, razes Maroko to the ground, Elvis is knocked out in the ensuing protests. Harrison notes that 'Abani characterises the demolition of Maroko as a form of senseless civil conflict that further belies the unity of the Nigerian nation'.[97] In the aftermath of the demolition, the slum dwellers are rallied to a demonstration by the King of Beggars, and they march on the army. The state's oppression and inculcation of its subjects is twofold: the state is enacting itself as state apparatus, suppressing its subjects through violence. However, simultaneously, while trying to force its subjects into surrendering to its sovereignty, it abjects them further from the notion of state-as-home, ultimately delegitimising itself.

In *Who Sings the Nation-State?*,[98] Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak reflect on the dimensions of the performative discourses of the nation-state. Butler starts with asking thought-provoking questions:

We suppose that the state presupposes modes of juridicial belonging, but since the state can be precisely what expels and suspends modes of legal protection and

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[97] Harrison, p. 115.
[98] Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007).

obligation, it can also put us in quite a state. It can signify the source of non-belonging, even produce that non-belonging as a quasi-permanent state. What does it mean to be at once contained and dispossessed by the state? And what does it mean to be unconfined or discontinued from the state but given over to other forms of power that may or may not have state-like features?[99]

Butler muses that those who are suspended at the hands of states are 'without legal protection but in no way relegated to a 'bare life': this is a life steeped in power. And this reminds us, crucially, that power is not the same as law'.[100] Elvis is stateless in Lagos, and suspended in a state of non-belonging. It is in this moment of ambivalence where what Bhabha has termed the 'contest of narrative authority' occurs. Elvis has no role models with whom he hasn't become disenchanted. His mother's journal of Igbo recipes and anecdotes fail to provide him with the guidance he needs; his uncle has perverted the tradition and familial order so thoroughly that Elvis can claim neither belonging nor loyalty to either; Okon and Redemption have led a life of illegal hustling which has placed Elvis in constant moral battles with both himself and what he thinks to be stately norms and finally, after spending so much time with the King of Beggars, Elvis watches him betray his people when he jeopardises their stand-off with the state, killing the Colonel for personal revenge.

Conclusion: 'This is Redemption'

The novel's final scenes offer up resistance to the state's bleak hopelessness which threatens to engulf Elvis. The philosophy of Ubuntu saves Elvis when he asks Okon why he had helped him by giving him shelter under the bridge. Okon replies: 'Because nobody help me' (309). Elvis feels utterly ashamed, because Okon's answer implies that it is also through inaction that we come to recognise our humanity, or more succinctly, that a sort of innate empathetic will that recognises inaction as a harmful event drives the person to mimic an opposite response.

Elvis feels alone in his guilt and pain, until he locates a certain recognition with the lynched and castrated character from James Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man:* 'he knew that pain, that shame, that degradation that no metaphor could contain' (320). Like that character, Elvis experiences the pain of racism, homophobia and the violence which accompanies the blind hatred of those who have power over you. Both, in short, experience the violence of being at once 'contained yet dispossessed' by the state.

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[99] Ibid., pp. 4-6.
[100] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Redemption recognises Elvis' inability to come to terms with the manoeuvrings of Lagos, and the stark pragmatism required to understand and 'negotiate' the institutions which govern it. He hands Elvis his most cherished commodity: a passport which contains a forged American visa. At this point Elvis is undone, not by the torture he had suffered at the hands of the military or his dispossession by the state, but by those accumulated acts of kindness.[101] Elvis is humbled by the humanity he is shown throughout the novel by the people in his life, and it is the humanity of those people which ultimately enable him to reflect his own humanity back at them. In a double-entendre on Abani's part, Elvis notes 'the only way out of this life was Redemption' (189). It is Redemption who ultimately enables Elvis to leave this life behind and migrate to America – itself a place where redemption is not possible. The paradox of what constitutes redemption in Elvis's case maps onto the paradox which constitutes becoming-critical: at once grounded in conflict/crisis, yet still liberating. Ultimately, it is the people in his life, and not the state, who enable Elvis to become-critical.

Redemption tells Elvis that he cannot survive in Lagos, whereas he could 'Because dis na my home. I be area boy, alaye. I no go fit for States […] Sometimes you just hold something like dat for dream. For believe. No worry, I go find anoder thing!' (317). In a coincidental manner, by virtue of his namesake, Redemption literally vindicates Bruce Robbins' formulation of the 'coming-to-America'[102] novel pattern as a form of Redemption. For Robbins, the redemptive nature of the American novel lies in its 'worlding' of narratives; that is, its ability to transpose a world into another one. Robbins' reading of those narratives has been deemed a 'failure of reading' by Arne de Boever in his monograph *States of Exception in the Contemporary Novel*[103] – an evaluation with which I concur. Robbins argues that this worlding is justifiable regardless of what narratives those novels enshrine about the 'outside world': 'the more painful the history, the more the protagonist is justified in leaving her home behind and coming to America. America, despite all the nasty obstacles it puts in the way of the would-be immigrant, cannot equal the nastiness of such a history'.[104] When Elvis asks Redemption 'when did we start thinking of America as a life plan?', Okon responds

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[101] While similar to Butler's formulation on being undone by grief, this inverse – being undone by an act of kindness – is from Abani himself. Across various talks and interviews, Abani recounts an anecdote of his mother remaining composed while she fled Biafra, along with the children, all the way to the UK. Abani recounts that his mother had never shed a tear along their journey, but that she became overwhelmed and broke down in tears at an airport in Germany when a woman offered her some spare clothes and a few toys for the children to play with.
[102] Bruce Robbins, 'The worlding of the American novel', in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel,* ed. by Leonard Cassuto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1096-1106 (p. 1099).
[103] Arne de Boever, *States of Exception in the Contemporary Novel: Martel, Euginedes, Coetzee, Sebald* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).
[104] Ibid., p. 1099.

'when things spoil here. Don't blame me. I no spoil am'. Redemption informs Elvis this was the plan 'Even during your father's time we dey plan for abroad. Dat time it was London, now it is America' (318). What the immigration of outsiders to America accomplishes is, in my view, not a 'worlding' but an *unmaking* of the world.

Through their jobs for the Colonel, Redemption and Elvis discover the reach of America's ability to 'spoil' things in Nigeria. One particular scene which involves human trafficking opens Elvis' eyes to the transnationalism of the corrupt and violent flows of capital between Nigeria and the West. Just as *GraceLand* undoes the narrative of progress and development of the Bildungsroman, it also necessarily undoes the narrative of America-as-redemption – because the first endorses the second, these are arguably two sides of the same narrative. The fiction of America as being the 'land of the free', the fiction of the American Dream of self-determination, gets deconstructed when Elvis reads Baldwin as he leaves Lagos. America being the land of the lynched here means that Elvis' immigration does not figure as an act of self-determination, but rather of escape. The darkness of American history – and its implication in global structures of power – precedes the immigrant's arrival in the US. The unmaking of Nigerian life produces the immigrant destined never to make it on arrival in the US.[105]

Furthermore, a language of describing displacement and statelessness as a threat to human rights has arguably been abandoned in light of what Simon Gikandi calls 'narratives of global trade, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism'.[106] For Gikandi, 'a discourse of cosmopolitanism remains incomplete unless we read the redemptive narrative of being global in a contrapuntal relationship with the narrative of statelessness and, by reproduction, of locality where we least expect it – in the metropolis'.[107]

The reasoning behind Gikandi's argument rests on the glaring and continuous distinction between the postcolonial cosmopolitan elite and the refugee. Numerous factors contribute to the sustenance of this distinction, but for Gikandi it is refugees' wont to reproduce and demarcate spatial localities in a global sphere in which they do not belong. The fact that the stateless do not voluntarily chose to become global, yet are rootless by compulsion, makes Gikandi unwilling to identify them as cosmopolitans. Because they are 'signs of dislocated localities' Gikandi classifies the refugee 'as the mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism'.[108] The blindspot to both Robbins and Gikandi's

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[105] In his essay on Teju Cole's Open City, Sam Durrant reads the opening scene in which the birds crash into the Statue of Liberty as a manifestation of the refugee's impossibility of arrival into the US.
[106] Gikandi, p. 28.
[107] Ibid., p 26.
[108] Ibid, p. 23.

arguments rests on the fact that they are able to distinguish between 'locality' and 'globality'. The human, however, is perennially caught between the flow of the two. I would more accurately rephrase Gikandi to state that the refugee is the mote in the eye of the nation-state[109] (and its biopolitical discourses). By extension, I would also argue that the 'unworlding' of the migrant novel is synonymous with the 'unmaking' of the human.

Elvis is reluctant to accept Redemption's passport, insisting that he cannot because 'it's your passport, Redemption' (317) but also because he is both disenchanted and afraid of the unknown and the promise it might or might not hold. It is quite telling that Redemption identifies as an 'area boy' and not a Nigerian. This would suggest that, even though Redemption – whose form of belonging is 'rigorously non-nationalist' – has[110] skipped all the transitory growth steps set by the UDHR and the Bildungsroman genre, has led a completely extra-legal life, and has committed more than a few morally corrupt acts, he is still capable of espousing the single most articulated value of human rights: a shared recognition and dignity with his human other. Redemption and Elvis' presences as other within society challenges the authority that is pivotal to the nation-state – and by extension – the geopolitical discourses that enable and elucidate its claim to authority for performing itself as the main identity-marker and socialising structure of its subjects. Elvis reluctantly accepts the passport when Redemption insists that unlike him, he cannot survive life in Lagos. Despite his fear of the unknown, Elvis asserts he is 'still haunted by the spectre of the Colonel' (319); still haunted by the state. Elvis assumes Redemption's identity, prompting Redemption to quip[111] 'Elvis don leave de country!'(318) The novel's final scene sees Elvis being called to board his flight to the States, at which liminal point, beyond passport control and Nigeria's borders yet not quite in America, he responds: 'Yes. This is Redemption' (321).

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[109] This is a paraphrase of Homi Bhabha's formulation from 'DissemiNation: Nation and Narration'. Bhabha, somewhat romantically, argues that the migrant is the undoing of the nation-state. Gikandi's formulation here is a response to Bhabha. In his essay 'Open/Closed Cities: Cosmopolitan Melancholia and the Disavowal of Refugee Life', in *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities (2019),* Sam Durrant puts Bhabha in conversation with Gikandi, and analyses the implication of both their postulations.
[110] Butler & Spivak, p. 49.
[111] Redemption plays on the words of the pop-culture phrase 'Elvis has left the building!'

Chapter 2. 'Let's play the country game': Becoming-Critical in Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*

In the previous chapter, Elvis, after having struggled with the state's unbelonging of him, finally arrives at a crucial interstice: he steps over the threshold of passport control at the airport in Lagos, and is about to illegally migrate to America. The novel's resolution– or lack thereof – thus opens onto this spacial and historical paradigm from within which the alterity of the black, African migrant is constituted. This moment of transatlantic migration is underwritten by Elvis's identification with the lynched African American from James Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man.* The shared[1] disposability of both characters is rendered possible by their subjection to what Achille Mbembe calls the West's 'metaphysics of difference'[2]: the racist logic which enables the construction of the black African as 'other' than human. This construction of human subjectivity along racial boundaries also figures the expulsion of the black person from the West's construction of an essentialist, linear history which is founded on exclusive epistemologies. By finding an in-common existence[3] with those who have also, historically, been dehumanised, Elvis undoes this exclusionary history and signifies instead on the multiple durées[4] at the heart of the entanglement of Africa and the West. Rather than vindicate the racist epistemologies which classify (racial) difference as that which must be made separate to the norm, this in-common existence is grounded instead in the 'relation of similarities',[5] or the co-belonging to humanity. It is from within this space that *We Need New Names*[6] emerges. Narratives of migration, more than any other, are singularly placed in their ability to embody this entanglement, precisely because they are constituted from within it. The precarious placement of the migrant within the metropole both embodies and challenges those narratives of progress and stasis which structure both the relationship between America and Africa, as well as the individual and the state. As a novel form which is able to both locate and resist this production of otherness and dehumanisation, *We Need New Names* espouses what Josias

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[1] Where Baldwin's character is lynched and castrated, Elvis is emasculated throughout the novel as he struggles with his sexuality. Both, as it were, expelled from humanity.
[2] Achille Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', (*Public Culture*, 14, 1) pp. 239–273, p.240.
[3] Borrowing from Mbembe here. The chapter will explore this formulation more thoroughly.
[4] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. (London: University of California Press, 2001), p.14
[5] Ibid., p.144
[6] NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013). Page references will henceforth appear in the main text.

Tembo and Schalk Gerber formulate as a 'postcolonial universal ontology'[7], in order to figure the African migrant, not as an expulsion to normative humanity, but as its centre.[8]

In their essay 'Towards a Postcolonial Universal Ontology', Tembo and Gerber draw on Mbembe's work in order to rethink an African ontology outside the epistemologies of the West, both 'in the African context(s) and in relation to the rest of the world'.[9] Their definition of the postcolonial doubles to mean both the historical moment after colonialism, as well as the freedom to think beyond the violence of colonial ontology. By the same strain, they understand the universal 'in ontological terms as the in-common or co-belonging' of humanity. While qualifying the universal with the postcolonial might at first glance figure as an oxymoron, this qualification is intentional: it signals its distinction from the universalism of the Enlightenment which is prescriptive by way of the state. The philosophy of the Enlightenment presupposes a unifying, and universalising, continuous historical time which encompasses its projected modernism. The nation-state is the political value which administers this modernity, thereby bringing under its governance the subject of rights: the political person. Effectively, the Enlightenment universalised the citizen, to the detriment and exclusion of the human. The fallacious universalism of the Enlightenment therefore precludes particularities of community, entanglements of historical time and differences of ontology which are constituted externally to the European state. By way of emancipating the African subject from this denigrating 'universalism' which would cast them as particular in their nativity, irrationality and inhumanity, Tembo and Gerber reframe the particular as the universal, and figure the universal as the particular. In moving beyond essentialist notions of Africaneity, a postcolonial universal would entail both 'the theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of 'the stranger' as flesh and body […] common [to] human nature'.[10] Mbembe very clearly states that through '*Altruicide'* – defined as a racial politics of alterity – the West constructed in the figure of the Other 'a menacing object from which one must be protected or escape, or which must simply be destroyed if it cannot be subdued'.[11] The illogicality of the myth of the other resides first and foremost in the fact that we all share this world, and we all desire 'a fullness of humanity'. Moving beyond the Altruicide of the Western state, the

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[7] Josias Tembo and Schalk Gerber, "Toward a Postcolonial Universal Ontology", in *Handbook of African Philosophy of Difference,* ed. Imafidon E. (Springer, 2019)

[8] This expression of universalism from the perspective of the migrant is analogous to expressions of minoritarian cosmopolitanism, however I do not make this link because the universalism invoked here carries different connotations to cosmopolitanism.

[9] Ibid., n.p

[10] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony, p.2*

[11] Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* 2017, p.10

postcolonial universal ontology therefore qualifies the human, first and foremost, as the subject of universalism. This is achieved through a philosophy which argues for an imbrication of sameness and difference: an ontology which is postcolonial in nature yet universal in its reach.

In *The Life of the Mind,* Hannah Arendt makes a similar postulation when she writes: 'I am not only for others but for myself, and in this latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness'.[12] Similarly, Mbembe asserts 'there is no relation to oneself that does not also implicate the Other. The Other is at once difference and similarity, united'.[13] Withholding the promise of a post-racial society, the article concludes with a celebration of alterity as that which is not solely constitutive of the racialised and othered African, but as that which constitutes everybody. I employ this framework of the postcolonial universal in this chapter in order to explore the ways in which *We Need New Names* undoes the fiction – and thus violence – of the epistemologies and ontologies which construct the African subject.

While Tembo and Schalk's thesis works on an abstract level, the work which Bulawayo does, outside of the narrative proper, exemplifies, on a practical level, how the notion of the postcolonial universal could work. Bulawayo, who has had to leave Zimbabwe and emigrate to America, has found a community within which to enact this vision for a universalism centred outside the binaries of state. Bulawayo has worked in collaboration with groups such as CultureStrike, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, and the Asian American Writers' Workshop, to pen the Migrant Rights meets Racial Justice 'Until We Are All Free Declaration of Unity'.[14] The declaration, signed in solidarity by many personalities, including Teju Cole, is an expression of solidarity with 'the many who have been, and are fighting for black lives, migrant justice, and against the systematic criminalization of communities of color.'[15] This new, alternative articulation of what a critical, universal bill of rights could look like is rooted in an awareness of human suffering which is not solely situated and originating in the post-colonial historical reality. Additionally, it this framework which contextualises *Names.* While the ethos of this bill of rights is particular, it nonetheless makes a universal demand: it affirms the humanity of the migrant beyond – and despite – the nation-state.

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[12] Hannah Arendt. *The Life of the Mind: Thinking and Willing.* (New York: Harcourt. 1981) p.183
[13] Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p.178
[14] http://www.untilweareallfree.com/declaration-of-unity-english
[15] https://www.facebook.com/pg/NoViolet-Bulawayo-156991354376712/about/?ref=page_internal

Universality has so far, in philosophical as well as in political thought, been the preserve of Western modernity. In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,*[16] Dipesh Chakrabarty addresses the historical continuity and legacy of European Enlightenment thought in India, where it manifests as what he calls 'political modernity'. He explains:

> The phenomenon of 'political modernity'– namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise–is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe[17]

The nation-state is the political value which administers this modernity, in order to bring under its governance the subject of rights: the political person. Discourse is the philosophical value which in turn universalises this person, thus creating exclusive concepts of personhood. Literature is an indissociable technology of this political modernity. Without wanting to rehash the theoretical framework already set up in the previous chapter, I will summarise with this quote from Slaughter which restates that the '[…] formal intersections of the Bildungsroman and human rights [are] extensions of the Enlightenment project to modernise, normalise, and civilise (or, perhaps, civicise) the individual and society.'[18] This normative, personalising and transitionary narrative which 'expresses the modern self' both 'underwrote, and was in turned underpinned by'[19] the modern European nation-state. The hegemony of both European history and its attendant literary technologies then occlude the legitimacy of other forms selfhood and of narrative histories. Chakrabarty argues that:

> [T]hese other constructions of self and community, while documentable, will never enjoy the privilege of providing the meta-narratives or teleologies […] of our histories. This is partly because these narratives often themselves bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of [European] history.[20]

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[16] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought And Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[17] Ibid., p. 6.
[18] Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc…* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 5.
[19] Chakrabarty, p. 34.
[20] Chakrabarty, p. 37.

As a novel already constituted from within the entanglement of history and which casts its characters in a diegetic space which is "otherwise' than modernity, [but] not outside of it',[21] I argue that this is precisely what *We Need New Names* achieves: it bespeaks an alternative historical consciousness, entailing subject positions which challenge and undermine those advanced by European history. This challenge enables the articulation of an alternative universal, one which is postcolonial in nature.

Names is focalised through Darling, the ten-year-old protagonist, but her friends Stina, Chipo, Godknows and Bastard also occupy centre stage in the novel. The novel opens in the wake of state violence which sees the childrens' homes bulldozed by Robert Mugabe's paramilitary police, resulting in them having to live in a shantytown which is ironically called Paradise. In the backdrop of the narrative, instances of political upheavals like demonstrations, elections, and the land reform programme[22] further denote the deterioration of the Zimbabwean nation-state. These events periodically interrupt the childrens' lives, which they spend on the streets roaming the neighbouring districts, playing games and looking for guavas. Their trauma is then addressed by the make-believe games which they invent, enabling them to re-invent themselves as 'proper persons' who participate in the proper life of overseas countries such as Dubai, England, and America. Most prominent among those is the 'country game' – in which the victor gets to become a 'proper country'. Throughout the first half of the novel, Darling holds the dream of America particularly closely, because her aunt lives there and has promised to send for her. The goal of Bildung in the novel then is not for Darling to internalise the norms of her own society, but rather ostensibly to attain the position of the subject-citizen in America. Migration to America is, for Darling, the only way in which to 'become a person'. However, America makes a presence in Darling's life before she migrates; the cynicism of global humanitarianism ensures this. Through her encounters with INGOs, Darling begins to develop a criticality which allows her to extricate herself from the colonial logic which the postcolony inherits through its legacy of war and religion, a legacy that humanitarianism capitalises on. By linking the ideology of humanitarianism with development, and mapping these onto notions of human development, the novel dispels what Gayatri Spivak identifies as 'yesterday's

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[21] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture. (*New York: Routledge, 2012). p.26.
[22] The land-reform programme was introduced by Mugabe who sought to redistribute white-owned land to the Black Zimbabwean majority. The programme was implemented violently, with most of the white farmers being evicted forcefully.

imperialists, today's Development'[23] – those unifying models of world history which always 'insist on linking economical and cultural processes in lockstep'.[24]

In the novel, '"Africa' and "America" […] activate certain narratives that are also deconstructed in the novel as unstable fictions'.[25] Darling's criticality, and her becoming, is honed by her own unraveling of those fictions. The second half of the novel sees Darling grow into a teenager in Detroit, Michigan, where she lives with her aunt Fostalina. In Michigan, Darling encounters the extent to which those fictions have constructed her Africaneity as a category of being which is abject. It is through this encounter that Darling rejects the dominance of this hegemonic historical narrative which dehumanises her, and instead finds her place, like Elvis, within a wider, transnationally constituted universal to come, composed by what Mbembe calls 'multiple durées'.

The structure of the novel in fact narrates my argument: The break which signals Darling's migration is narrated in the third person: it is a one page chapter entitled 'How They Left' and it dislocates both Darling herself, but also the novel, from their Zimbabwean context, and relocates them both within the multiple durées of this entangled historical space. The break opens with the line 'look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves […] When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky'(145). This chapter sees Darling to America: it is thus at once an expression of her own particular experience, yet it addresses the collective and universalising experience of migration-as-loss. The novel is then resumed from Darling's point of view, where she narrates her own experiences of being a migrant in Michigan. However, a smaller chapter, entitled 'How They Lived', again interrupts Darling's story and in the third person plural it continues where it left off before at 'How They Left'. This break is longer than the previous one; it is now engaged in narrating a collective experience of how migrants cope with loss, the loss of self and the loss of traditions. The difference here is that the narration shifts from 'they' to 'we'. Darling takes her place within this universal history. 'How they Lived' responds to 'How they Left' with the line: 'What could we have done? What could anybody have done? […] We dropped our heads because we were no longer people; we were now illegals'(242). The two narrative

[23] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique Of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History Of The Vanishing Present*, 1st edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).p. 124.
[24] Joshua Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, And The Fiction Of Development*, 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).pp. 196-7
[25] M. Rocío Cobo-Piñero, 'Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013): Mobilities And The Afropolitan Picaresque', (*Journal Of Postcolonial Writing*, 55.4, 2019), p.472.

breaks render the horizon of the nation-state obsolete: they centre instead what Ato Quayson calls a 'metaphysical African community'.[26]

In *Strategic Transformations In Nigerian Writing, Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutola, Wole Soyinka nd Ben Okri*, Quayson argues that across the intellectual traditions of Africa, 'there has been a consistent attempt to shore up a viable sense of identity and selfhood in the face of the perceived ruptures that colonialism has wrought on the African Psyche'.[27] Quayson can here be put in conversation with Mbembe. In *Critique of Black Reason,* Mbembe states that the ruptures of colonialism (as well as slavery and apartheid) imposed on the Black subject an identity of alterity formulated through the alienating and violent discourse of race. This discourse then asserts in the Black person a 'separation from the self'[28] where 'in place of the being-connected-to-itself (*another name for tradition*) that might have shaped experience, one is constituted out of an alterity in which the self becomes unrecognisable to itself'(italics mine).[29] Where tradition, along with the self it is meant to sustain, become desecrated through the violence of racism, Quayson locates in a genealogy of African literature a recuperation of traditions which engender this metaphysical community that restores the self. The act of writing tradition as a way to 'rejoin an African ethos' thus becomes in itself a tradition of African writing. Quayson cites Abiola Irele's 'African Letters: The Making of a Tradition' where he affirms the importance of writing tradition:

> What matters is the *affective* stance that tradition determines and the imaginative projections and intellectual constructions that it conditions in the specific historical context of its thematisation within African discourse.[30]

As opposed to Western traditional discourse which constructs a homogenous and unifying historical model, the tradition of writing African traditions yield a multiplicity of histories – thus yielding a multiplicity of beings. In other words, the historical space of the postcolony no longer remains simply geographical, and therefore it cannot sediment the authority or space of the nation-state, nor can it as a corollary delineate the human-as-citizen.

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[26] Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations In Nigerian Writing, Orality And History In The Work Of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutola, Wole Soyinka And Ben Okri*, 1st edn (Oxford: Currey, 1997). p.77
[27] Ibid., p.9
[28] Note Mbembe is speaking in the context of racial violence and racist epistemologies. In the chapter I will argue that the biopolitical formation of the citizen/human which also asserts the separatability of the self from itself renders the black migrant *doubly* alienated from selfhood.
[29] Mbembe, *Critique*, p. 78.
[30] Abiola Irele, 'African Letters: the Making of a Tradition' (1995) p. 73 qtd in Quayson, p. 8.

Quayson makes an analogy to Said's *Orientalism,* which he describes as a formation of Western knowledge with a 'will-to-power'. He then classifies African literature within a 'will-to-identify'. The notion of a will-to-identify, he posits, yields a simultaneous concern with 'the African nation-state as the implicit horizon, the political unconscious of the literary enterprise as it were, as well as a concern with projecting a viable identity outwards into the global arena'.[31] The tension between a cultural, nationalist tradition and a non-essentialist, global one map onto what Mbembe describes as 'the desire of the Black Man to *know himself* (the moment of sovereignty) and *hold himself* in the world (the moment of autonomy)'.[32] In the work of Wole Soyinka, Quayson identifies both moments of sovereignty and autonomy: by seeking to reverse the exclusionary, violent and nativist colonial logic which alienates the African from himself, Soyinka 'transfers myths from their Yoruba context into a wider cultural, Africanist discourse'.[33] Soyinka defines his agenda in *Myth Literature and the African World* as 'the simultaneous act of eliciting from history, mythology and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension'.[34] There is therefore a philosophical, as well as literary, tradition of African writing, from Soyinka, Achebe and others, which seeks to 'recuperate a sense of self-worth for the African psyche'.[35]

Names joins this tradition as it builds on a wealth of inter-textual links to craft an alternative system of temporal and spatial locations, or points of identifications, for the stateless characters who otherwise cannot fit into any one single nation-state, be it Zimbabwe or America. The narrative is laced with indirect references to novels such as *Nervous Conditions, Things Fall Apart*, and even poems such as Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation'. This is done by signifying on the conditions in which those novels emerged, but also by incorporating those character's symptoms within the ones shared by the characters in *Names.* For instance, Aunt Fostalina, Darling's aunt who lives in America, suffers from anorexia. Like Nyasha, Aunt Fostalina's condition is symptomatic of her being caught between two cultures and being unable to belong to either. She thus acts as an augary for Darling – just as Nyasha did for Tambu: neither Tambu nor Darling find belonging in the course of their respective narratives. The entire novel itself addresses the consequences of 'things falling apart', both physically as well

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[31] Quayson, p. 17.
[32] Mbembe, *Critique,* p. 78.
[33] Quayson, p.76.
[34] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Preface, xi.
[35] Ibid., p. 17.

as socially, as lived by its characters. This reference is not unconscious: *Things Fall Apart* emerged as a response to the ruptures of colonialism. Building on that, *Names* is a response to the consequences of neo-colonialism as lived by its characters. In its reconfiguration of the historical time both in which the novel and its characters exists, the novel extends its critique to as far back as colonialism, the origin of modernity's complicity with agendas of development, and grounds it in the contemporary diasporic moment.

Darling interrupts – and is interrupted– by this intertextuality. The narrative itself becomes a symptom of this disruption both at the level of textual analysis but also at the level of materiality. This intrinsic system of signification accounts for both the lack of a mono temporality and spatiality: rather than the abjection that accompanies statelessness as an African, the characters improvise life on the margins, and it is this improvisation of their outsiderness which deviates from the colonial script. The novel is then espousing a 'politics of the similar' which is grounded on the premise of difference – it pushes back against the narrative of alterity which casts the African as other than human – outside of history, for whom there can be no relation of similarity. While focalised through Darling, the narrative both at once narrates her own particularities, while grounding them in her similarities with a non-national, non-essentialist, universal constellation of people. Here is the 'in-common', the notion of co-belonging which denotes a postcolonial universal ontology: it instantiates a radical resistance to the imposed 'metaphysics of difference' which would see the African caught in perpetuity and stasis within an fixed category of being– upheld by the violence of the postcolonial state. Therefore, both within the novel and without, this inter-textual constellation enables identification with humans rather than states. This ability to think beyond the state is what denotes, for Darling as well as her friends, their becoming-critical. Their criticality enables them to re-invent themselves, to locate their subjectivities within those multiple, interconnecting temporalities.

Literature as Catharsis

While primarily engaging with questions of identity and belonging via Darling's position as first an internally displaced person then as an illegal migrant, the novel situates itself in a long tradition of African writing which anachronistically speaks back to the asymmetries of the global order. The 'We' of *We Need New Names* alludes to a collective, which, lacking categorisation, has placed the novel in a system of cultural and political references which then in turn subject the novel to particular cultural and

political expectations. The novel then becomes subject to the scrutiny of questions of authenticity and the burden of representation which has plagued African literature. The latter is often assessed not in terms of its aesthetic content, but its political rhetoric and projected audience. In an almost perfectly ironic reification of Okey Ndibe's complaint that 'We […] spend so much time agonising over the question of whether we [are] writing for the West'.[36] Helon Habila has accused *Names* of attending to a 'checklist' of topics which satisfy the West's desire for African poverty porn

> Yes, it has fraudulent preachers and is partly set in a soul-crushing ghetto called Paradise, somewhere in Zimbabwe. Yes, there is a dead body hanging from a tree; there is Aids – the narrator's father is dying of it; there is political violence […] there are street children – from the ranks of whom the narrator, Darling, finally emerges and escapes to America and a better life. Did I mention that one of the children, 10- or 12-year-old Chipo, is pregnant after being raped by her grandfather?[37]

Skimming over the novel's setting, Habila's overly simplistic reading concludes that the novel 'performs Africa'. The idea of Africa-as-tragedy cannot be said to have been overstated: there is no shortage of evidence regarding the West's unquenchable thirst for black victims. However, Habila then questions whether the Caine prize can be partly blamed for promoting an aesthetic of suffering. This criticism has been echoed very loudly and has dogged Bulawayo's novel since its publication and subsequent nomination for the 2013 Man Booker Prize. The criticism is at the heart of a wider debate surrounding contemporary African writing, which is increasingly being accused of writing for the West.

Like other critics and reviewers, Isaac Ndlovu has made a recurrent staple of his article about the marketing politics of Bulawayo's novel and the themes surrounding the crises of representation regarding Africa, rather than the text itself. In what initially seems to be an article which holds promise, Ndlovu's 'Ambivalence of representation: African crises, migration and citizenship in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*'[38] seems insistent on attributing a 'West-appeasing' agenda to Bulawayo at the expense of the text's potential. His claim that 'the narrative's portrayal of abject

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[36] Taiye Selasi, 'Stop Pigeonholing African Writers', *The Guardian*, 2015, p. n.p <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/04/taiye-selasi-stop-pigeonholing-african-writers> [accessed 22 December 2016].

[37] Helon Habila, '*We Need New Names* By Noviolet Bulawayo - Book Review', The Guardian, 2016, n.p <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/20/need-new-names-bulawayo-review> [accessed 6 October 2016].

[38] Isaac Ndlovu, 'Ambivalence Of Representation: African Crises, Migration And Citizenship In Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*', *African Identities*, 14.2 (2015), 132-146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2015.1108838>

postcolonial nationhood should be understood in the context of the struggle for rare publication opportunities by the so-called new generation of African fictional writers who have recently received great literary acclaim in western Europe and America[39]' is closely followed by the justification that 'partly, Bulawayo adopts […] attitudes listed by Wanaina [in his seminal 'How to write about Africa'] to get published in western Europe and America where such African stereotypes are eagerly consumed.'[40] While completely missing the point of the novel, Ndlovu aligns his criticism with the consensus among critics that 'at the heart of the debate is therefore simple economics'.[41]

However, as opposed to the purely self-serving economic impetus behind publishing in the West that writers are accused of, I posit that the processes by which African writers need to migrate to the West and publish their stories are the same ones by which a cathartic[42] literature becomes necessary. In his review, Habila disparages the critical components of the novel as 'poverty porn' and maintains that its redeeming aspects are the scenes of Darling in America, partaking in normal, modern activities like exploring pornogpraphy with her friends. He turns a blind eye to the consequences of what it means to be marginalised in a host society – again, paddling the rhetoric of elite cosmopolitanism– or its equivalent romantic Afropolitanism – as the only way to be a 'post-nationalist' African migrant. In his vehement response to Habila's review of *Names,* Brian Bwesigye asserts the cathartic power of literature deemed 'poverty porn' by many African critics: 'What about the Africans who do not see themselves in the image of their positioning in the West? The Africans who are keen on dealing with home issues, those who look to literature to articulate their pain, as a form of catharsis? What about them?'.[43] Noviolet Bulawayo has stated that writing *Names* 'became about bearing witness, about sustaining ourselves'.[44]

Writing thus became a means of catharsis against both the arbitrary violence of the postcolony and the neoliberal, global economy which continues to apportion the world into asymmetric sites of humanity. For those who, like Bulawayo and Darling, are

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[39] Ibid., p.3
[40] Ibid., p.3
[41] Petina Gappah, "*The Granta Book Of The African Short Story* Review", *The Financial Times*, 2011, p. n.p <https://www.ft.com/content/e548b738-df98-11e0-845a-00144feabdc0> [accessed 6 October 2016].
[42] This is a term used throughout various interviews by Bulawayo herself: 'We have ways of looking at our destiny. I write what moves me.. When things were getting hectic, it became a matter of catharsis for me, of putting a face to it' (Angus Shaw, 'I Write What Moves Me, Says Booker Short-Listed Zimbabwe Author', *Business Day*, 2017, p. n.p <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/life/books/2013-09-24-i-write-what-moves-me-says-booker-short-listed-zimbabwe-author/>); 'The project became a form of catharsis for me.' (Sophy Kohler, 'AERODROME - Noviolet Bulawayo - Interview', Aerodrome.Co.Za, 2014 <http://aerodrome.co.za/outside-voice/>).
[43] Brian Bwesigye, 'Is Afropolitanism Africa's New Single Story?', (*Aster(IX) A Journal Of Literature, Art, Criticism*, 2013), n.p <http://asterixjournal.com/afropolitanism-africas-new-single-story-reading-helon-habilas-review-need-new-names-brian-bwesigye/>
[44] Kohler, n.p

caught in the cracks of these asymmetries, transforming this violence into a form of healing becomes the only means of survival possible. Writing then satisfies the need of this survival, of this healing, by enabling '[…] new identities, new ways of seeing things, new ways of being'.[45] While Ndlovu and Habila's critique of the marketing of poverty porn is an important one to level at art-forms – which are themselves always caught in a system of political and cultural production – its shortcoming is its tendency to, like the basic demand of said poverty-porn, efface and obscure the deep, structural and historical conditions for its demand in the first place. Thus, the burden of representation ineluctably undertaken by *Names* enables it to critique and even re-write, through its introduction of a multiplicity of voices, these systems which propagate a banal stereotype of Africa.

Names operates in a space beyond the opposition between materialist and textualist conditions of production: the creative promise of both the novel's material reality and its textual, diegetic engagement with the latter provides the basis from where my critique of the normative forms of cultural production and its corresponding ontological one intersects. These conditions attest to the processes by which a hegemonic conceptualisation of identity production is sedimented, and subsequently dismantles it through its critical form. The novel positions Darling in this interstice which enables her to look outside of the dominant regime of representation, and embody what Stuart Hall has termed as 'the positions of enunciation'[46] – that is, positions from which we may question how practices of representation implicate how we speak or write.

As such, we cannot decenter the novel's location from within the symbolic, historical narrative arc 'activated' by the intersections of postcolonial migration marked by rights abuses and humanitarian invasions marked as rights defence, precisely because of how those events implicate the subjects of these interventions. Both the administration and consequence of those narratives originate and rely on an implied depoliticisation which aims 'to construct in that depoliticised space an ahistorical, universal humanitarian subject.'[47] This 'universal humanitarian subject' is devoid of agency: constructed in the wake of – and on the back of – the already bare subject, whom the nation-state strips of their political status. Thus, the marriage of the political with the quotidian enables *Names* to, in turn, intervene in the re-politicisation and

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[45] Claire Vaye Watkins, 'Interview With Noviolet Bulawayo', *National Book Foundation*, 2013, p. n.p
<http://www.nationalbook.org/5under35_2013_bulawayo.html#.V_qqFrRN3zI> [accessed 6 October 2016].
[46] Ibid., p.222
[47] Liisa H. Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, And Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11.3, (1996), p.378

historicisation of both Darling herself and the specificity of the larger Zimbabwean context. By thinking through these constructions and attempting to represent, through Darling, the struggles of existing with(in) those narratives, the novel attends to the multiple vectors of subject-positions which– grounded in a postcolonial universal ontology– inform Darling's becoming-critical and resist this passivity constructed by humanitarian ideology which casts the victim as a being in stasis.

Humanitarianism and Its Other

The novel is set in the context of the political and economic crisis of 2005 which saw Zimbabwe plunge into inflation, state violence and eventual isolation through sanctions imposed by the Western World. At the height of the IMF's failed neoliberal agendas and resultant inflation, the government resorts to Operation Murambatsvina, a Shona word which loosely translates to 'Clear the Filth'.[48] Not unlike 'Operation Clean the Nation' which saw the fictionalised demolition of Maroko in *GraceLand,* the Murambatsvina saw upward of 200,000 homes and informal businesses across the country bulldozed, resulting in approximately 700,000 people being made destitute and homeless. The government unsurprisingly justified the demolitions by claiming to be getting rid of criminal activity and 'restoring order and sanity throughout the capital'.[49] However reports obtained from lawyers and local NGOs cite political motives as the excuses for the violence: the state rolled out the nationwide evictions as both retribution for the earlier March elections in which votes had come in for the opposition, and as a mass pre-emptive crack-down on potential uprisings in response to already existing food scarcity problems and a worsening economic situation.[50] The state's parodic version of democracy underlines the narrative: the government retaliates both physically through violence but also legally by rigging the elections. The state's desire for autonomy is manifested in the use of excessive force: by legitimising its use of violence, the state is seeking to legitimise itself. Despite its aggressive attempts to consolidate authority, the state alienates at least three generations of its population: those who lived under colonialism and for whom the promises of decolonisation never delivered (like Darling's grandmother Mother of Bones), their children – the freedom fighters

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[48] Human Rights Watch, *The Implementation Of Operation Murambatsvina* (Clear The Filth), 2005.
[49] Stated in an address on the Zimbabwean National Television, May 20,2005, cited in HRW report.
[50] Ibid., n.p

of the Second Chimurenga– and finally their own children – the Bornfree – Darling's generation, who inherit this dispossession.

This history of political instability and violence contextualises the premise within which 'poverty porn' emerges as a narrative staple of African histories. In response, this is also the context in which narratives of humanitarianism are able to 'construct' Africa. These narratives circulate in abundance and construct the notion of Africa as a dark continent; they also construct the notion of the native who is lacking in reason. However, what these narratives efface is that predominantly, this arbitrariness and illegitimacy of violence is a legacy of what was 'a distinctive feature of colonial sovereignty'[51] By extension, there is a deep link between the colonial logic of violence and the logic of development. In many ways, the violence of empire was justified with ideas of development that legitimised the project of political modernity we still live under today. As established in the last chapter, the postcolony inherits this logic of development at the national level, at the cost of the 'human development' of its citizens.

Internationally, development takes the guise of aid and humanitarianism. Development becomes institutionalised by global financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank who, 'encourage the demolition of systems of solidarity, while on the other hand they finance programmes to fight poverty, in the name of 'human development'.[52] Humanitarianism then both merges and emerges out of the logics of war and religion which belie empire's legacy into a political modernity founded on the ideology of development. Aid only becomes necessary in African countries to redress the ravages of war and conflict, but this is often done under the auspices of a religious claim – whether that religion be Christianity or humanism (itself a relic of the Judeo-Christian tradition).

Back in Paradise, the disintegration of Zimbabwe's apparatuses is evidenced by Darling's failures according to the structural demands of modernity: 'I don't go to school anymore because all the teachers left to teach over in South Africa and Botswana and Namibia […] where there's better money'(30-31). Darling does not participate in any of modernity's projected institutions of development – she does not attend school, she does not have a stable nuclear family, and her interpersonal relationships consist of other children who, like her, steal guavas for a living. With the state as a socialising

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[51] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* p. 26.
[52] Alain Supiot, *Homo Juridicus: On the Anthropological Function of the Law,* (Verso, 2006), p.180.

structure in abeyance, it is evident that Darling cannot and does not get to develop in the traditional sense. The obvious deviation/subversion from the project of human development doesn't serve, as most of the novel's critics would suggest, as a fetishisation of the poverty and shortcomings of Zimbabwe's reality, but rather as a critique of the imposing Western gaze, and its many blind spots with regard to non-Western modes of life.

However, despite this lack of a formal education, Darling evinces a criticality which is resistant to interpolation by modernity's imposed narratives. Rather than assuming modernity as its starting point, *Names* delves deep into the ruptured trajectory of a modernity which has its roots in colonialism. Darling never internalises the state's proposed modernity, which she understands as inherited colonial epistemologies. This is signaled to us from the beginning of the novel when Darling questions, and rejects, the practice of celebrating Easter: 'Jesus Christ died on this day, which is why I have to be out here washing with cold water like this' (19). Darling questions and critique those norms which make society rather than adopting them. Speaking directly to the inherited traditions of the postcolony, she continues:

> She [Mother of Bones] says it's the least we can do because we are all dirty sinners and we are the ones for whom Jesus Christ gave his life, but what I know is that I myself wasn't there when it all happened, so how can I be a sinner? (19)

Signifying on the origins of the colonial project in Africa, Darling's critique of Christianity's totalising narrative inevitably extends to the prominence of 'provincial Europe' in all its cultural, political and economic hegemony. Darling uses reason to dismiss Europe's claim to this same reason which would construct her as other-than human. She extricates herself, not simply from this colonial historical narrative, but from the theological traditions which structure it. In doing so, Darling also rejects the premise on which humanitarian aid would 'save' her – and Zimbabwe– from their perceived failures.

However, the deterioration of the nation-state goes hand-in-hand with the presence of extra-national organisations. INGOs are typically considered as non-national bodies of governmentality, in the sense that they work indiscriminate of location or political or national agenda. Yet they function as a replacement of the state: they share both the duties and functions of the state, both in terms of providing rights – or the illusion of it– and by their role in governing the communities in which they work. Through this governance – achieved by the development of communities, the building

of infrastructure or the provision of basic services– INGOs also expect to 'develop' the human subject, regardless of their own already existing autonomy and agency. In this way, INGOs implement a substitute regime of rights and responsibilities which, in true neoliberal fashion, commodifies both the rights they purport to provide and the 'suffering' African that those rights are meant for.

INGOs are a constant reminder that the inhabitants of Paradise are expected to perform their dependence on and gratefulness for, the West's humanitarianism. A charity arrives in the shantytown every month, with a lorry that contains goods such as food and toys. Darling claims that although it is hard not to rush towards it because they know it is loaded with gifts, they sit and wait, and smile quietly, just like Sis Betty, a charity employee – 'whose job is to explain [them] to the white people'(52) – instructed them to. Sis Betty instructs the children that if they cause a ruckus, the Western INGO workers act as unhappy as though they had 'committed a crime against humanity'(51). The critiques levelled at INGOs in the novel are not subtle. Once the children settle down, the photographs begin: 'They don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn't do it; they just take the pictures anyway, take and take. We don't complain because we know that after the picture-taking comes the giving of gifts' (52). The uneven disparity between the humanitarian industry's 'gifts' and their 'costs' are obvious when the children walk away with shirts that say 'Google' on them, while the INGO walks away with more recourse to a narrative that objectifies human beings for economic gain.

The photographer gets distracted by Chipo, who is pregnant, but then remembers what he is there for, and continues with the photographs. The INGO's priority in marketing suffering overwhelms any service they are meant to provide the community with. The humanitarian industry is here reduced to its most basic paradox: it necessarily has to objectify its subjects in order to sustain itself. By effacing those particularities of context and subjectivity, humanitarianism has to mask the histories of particular conflicts – often because these are most likely caused by western intervention in the first place – and construct masked and banal narratives of victimhood, usually embodied by the figure of the innocent African child. Redemption was right when he told Elvis not to worry about using his passport because 'Dose white people no go know de difference in de photo […] Elvis, take de passport.'

Fittingly, it is no coincidence that the two main works I wish to reference for their critiques of the systems which spawn and sustain poverty porn narratives also address the paradoxes inherent in human rights discourses and its attendant humanitarian aid

agenda. Makau Mutua's Savage-Victim-Saviour metaphor[53] as an imperial and historical mechanism for human rights is very aptly translatable in Teju Cole's essay on the contemporary White Saviour Industrial Complex.[54] Where Mutua identifies the Eurocentrism of the human rights corpus in its effacement of the various human rights movements and struggles predating the UN-led 1945 UDHR charter,[55] Cole identifies the myriad of unjust policies and infrastructural problems which underpin and necessitate aid programs. Both these constructs necessitate a victim – in this case, the African continent, as a 'backdrop for white fantasies of conquest and heroism'[56] – a savage, usually an African warlord or derelict non-Western authoritarian state, and a saviour: states and institutions with both superior resources and morality. Those saviours, in the name of human rights, always function under the pretense that all human persons are equal and enjoy inherent dignity and worth before the law, even as '[the UN] ratified power imbalances between the Third World and the dominant American and European powers, [giving] the latter the primary power to define and determine 'world peace' and 'stability'.[57]

In fact, this ratification of power imbalance is enshrined in the UN's humanitarian policy. At the UN General Assembly of 2000, then Secretary General Kofi Annan appealed to the international community to renew its commitment to produce principles and processes of humanitarian intervention based on international consensus. Annan asks:

> If humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica – to gross and systematic violations of human rights that affect every precept of our common humanity?[58]

In response, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty form in 2001, and publish their report, which is titled 'The Responsibility to Protect'. The commission begins by addressing the contentions surrounding state interventions in the name of humanitarian relief, and state that 'the language of past debates arguing for or against a 'right to intervene' by one state on the territory of another state is outdated and unhelpful. We prefer not to speak of a 'right to intervene' but of a 'responsibility to protect''.[59] The commission sidesteps the moral questionability of intervention, by

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[53] Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political And Cultural Critique*, 1st edn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002).
[54] Teju Cole, 'The White Saviour Industrial Complex', *The Atlantic*, 2012, n.p.
[55] Mutua, p.12
[56] Cole, n.p
[57] Mutua, p.13
[58] ICISS, The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, Background (Ottawa:International Development Research Centre, 2001), P. VII
[59] Ibid., para. 2.4.

reframing their language into one which is ostensibly less invasive in nature. This is, unironically, the language of rights for which the language of 'responsibility' is intrinsic. The commission sets the conditions which make 'protection' permissible. However, the report does not, of course, apply to the five permanent member states of the UNGA: 'the Commission does not permit the RTP doctrine to be applied to Western nations because intervening in one of the 'major powers' is likely to cause a larger conflict'.[60] The commission preempts its double standards, and clarifies its position in a footnote:

> The Commission recognises that this may cause the problem of double standards but it is 'the Commission's position here, as elsewhere […] [that] the reality that interventions may not be able to be mounted in every case where there is justification for doing so, is no reason for them not to be mounted in any case.

The commission's double standard rests, among other things, on the fact that for 'common humanity', it speaks of a responsibility to protect. However, in the case of Western countries, this responsibility becomes 'intervention'. In other words, the West has a right to defend its sovereignty, whereas 'common humanity' do not. The threat of a possible loss of sovereignty is to the West, as it was during Empire, unacceptable. It is not that equal treatment would entail a loss of sovereignty to different powers, but rather that it would entail sameness with those different powers.

Thus, apart from the obvious economic disparities between the West and the Rest, this humanitarian impetus is located in – and enabled by– a long history of Eurocentric rationalism where the moral imperatives and logic of the Enlightenment which dictate a responsibility to act in the world derives from an ethical urge ultimately translated into the social contract between the citizen and the state. This same rhetoric of responsibility was also adapted between the empire and the colony. The traditional mechanisms by which 'inferior peoples' were subordinated to the norm of Western salvation are also what drives the work of INGOs and their hosts today. Thus, while the language of human rights and humanitarian ethics conceal more than they reveal, it should not be forgotten that 'the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted at a time when most Third World Countries were still under colonial rule. To argue that human rights has a standing which is universal in character is to contradict historical reality'.[61]

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[60] Ibid., para 4.42.
[61] Adamantia Pollis, and Peter Schwab. 'Human Rights: A Western Construct With Limited Applicability'. Human Rights: Cultural And Ideological Perspectives.ed. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab. 1st ed. (New York: Praeger, 1980). p,4

The Western market for affect necessitates societies with appalling human rights narratives and humiliated children in order to reassure itself of its superiority in terms of morality, development and above all, a functioning and protective state. This narrative necessitates an Other to sustain it, most importantly it necessitates a performance of inferiority, bar its own involvement which established and continually contributed to its formation in the first place. In essence, 'the white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening'.[62] Darling takes it upon herself to reject that imposition; to resist that internalisation of power, with a historical reminder:

> If you're stealing something it's better if it's small and hideable or something you can eat quickly and be done with, like guavas. That way, people can't see you with the thing to be reminded that you are a shameless thief and that you stole from them, so I don't know what the white people were trying to do in the first place, stealing not just a tiny piece but a whole country. Who can ever forget something like that? (22)

Darling disrupts the narrative imposed by the superiority of Presence Européene[63] in the postcolony by signifying on the moral blindness inherent in the long colonial age: what drives its contemporary mode in the 21st century is not that changed. This criticality on Darling's behalf dismantles the binary discourse implemented by the White Saviour Complex, and especially the Savages-Victims-Saviour metaphor: the Victim is implicated by the Saviour and vice versa. Ultimately this dissension essentially eradicates, or less ideally, resists those constructed and polarising categories of being which would cast Darling as a victim.

The historical and complex process by which neo-imperial expansion in the postcolony has figured as development ultimately casts the peripheries in a perpetual cycle of unequal power-structure with the West. Thus, in its contemporary form, the West's model of a modernity-as-progress which prioritises the nation-state instead of the church encounters complications when relocated to the periphery. By singling out her own lack of integration within the historically sedimented narratives which shape her society, Darling is already alluding to the oppressive regime of rights and responsibilities which go hand in hand with a lot of the uncomfortable contentions

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[62] Cole, n.p

[63] Hall, p.109: 'Because Presence Européenne is about exclusion, imposition and expropriation, we are often tempted to locate that power as wholly external to us - an extrinsic force, whose influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin. What Frantz Fanon reminds us, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is how this power has become a constitutive element in our own identities.'

marking the postcolony today. The conflation of the narrative of development –both economical and personal– with that of rights simultaneously spawns a narrative in which those others on the margins of this political modernity become beneficiaries of Western altruism. Darling struggles against this polarising narrative: she is neither a subject of political modernity (so she does not get to be part of the teleology of development-as-progress), nor a citizen of the postcolony (in which she becomes a disenfranchised African to be pitied and saved by the West). Rather, she exists in the cracks of those system-narratives, in the multiple durées of the postcolonial universal ontology that is yet to become. Darling's coming-of-age –which I will refer to henceforth as her becoming-critical– entails the growth of a critical awareness which at once addresses her inability to become a member of society, and establishes her life as critical: Darling will never attain the position of the subject-citizen, neither in Zimbabwe nor in America. The recurrent and perhaps unconscious references to absent countries in the novel– the impossibility of belonging to a nation-state– gradually articulate Darling's alienation as she encounters her own criticality. This alienation is only magnified by the various foreign presences she encounters throughout her time in Paradise: they further complicate her sense of self by pointing to a symbolic lack within her society – and by extension – her life. Darling's growth and eventual migration ultimately turns this lack into abundance: she finds a means of belonging – and becoming– through the many others who, like her, have been alienated from themselves.

Becoming Darling

Darling and her friends are victims of the Murambatsvina and, like Elvis, they are dispossessed and forced to live in a shantytown called Paradise. The nation's narrated plot of both authority and autonomy is disrupted by Darling who filters in and out of this attempted national historical-time: she remembers the violence both retrospectively (for instance when she is Michigan) but also analeptically (she narrates the story of the post-election violence when one of her friends, Bornfree, is killed, in a chapter which precedes the actual scene when the adults of the community go to vote). In this way, there is no narratological momentum in the first part of the novel – it consists of chapters which are disparately joined together and narrate, from Darling's point of view, the seemingly banal everyday occurrences in the shantytown. While the demolition of her neighbourhood is only ever narrated retrospectively, and through a nightmare that she has, the fall

out of the extra-legal reality of state violence recurrently revisits Darling in the present.

In one scene, Darling and her friends are 'hitting Budapest' - one of the rich neighbourhoods around Paradise, and they stumble upon a gang of armed Zimbabweans who threaten and evict a white couple from their house, as they enact the state's land reform programme. The children hide and witness the scene unfold: waving an ax in the white man's face, the leader of the gang makes recourse to nationalist rhetoric both to legitimise the violence of his actions, and by extension, the state's: 'Somebody please tell this white man here that this is not fucking Rhodesia! [T]his is black-man country and the black man is in charge now. Africa for Africans!' (118). The thunderous applause which accompanies this outburst is followed by the group urinating on the house, before entering and ransacking it, leaving the white couple destitute and terrified. While this event brings home a relatively straightforward point, Shbo, one of Darling's friends, cries at this scene and remarks that even though the people are white, they are still people. The children are ignorant still to the politics of race, evidenced when Goodknows asks 'What exactly is an African?' (119). The state's populist nationalism fails both on the personal and national front: the question 'What is an African' is indeed a loaded one and foreshadows a crisis of selfhood – national and racial– that the children will encounter as they meet, for the first time, a white woman. Darling's earliest memories of her home are thus mired in a violent unbelonging perpetrated by the state, and this question of belonging comes back towards the end of the novel, when Darling is America and is feeling home sick. The politics of race – both as she encounters it in Zimbabwe and America– enable Darling to grasp the ways in which her notion of identity is sedimented in a shared history of dispossession. The novel depicts her struggle to 'become' all the while searching for both a place and a person to become.

Consequently, the promise of migration and a better life underlines the narrative: Darling's father, who is absent throughout her life and only appears once in the narrative, is in South Africa, like most of the men in Paradise, and the boys, Bastard and Godknows, hold the same hopes of migrating to South Africa as well. To get ahead in the group, Shbo mentions that she knows London, 'I ate some sweets from there once […] Uncle Vusa sent them when he first got there' (7). Darling then boasts that she will be 'living in America with Aunt Fostalina, eating real food and doing better things than

stealing', reasserting for good measure 'My aunt Fostalina, my America' (10-15). The idea of America, which is not particular to Darling, but rather is a trope also encountered in *GraceLand,* strongly intimates the way Darling is aware of her dispossession, but only in so far as she can reverse it by attaining part of the teleology projected by the system-narrative of human rights. For Darling, America is where her personhood can develop and eventually manifest as the subject-citizen of human rights.

The children's exchange of their future plans tellingly involves other countries, other forms of life. In an echo of Redemption's practicality, that one must hold the tokens of far away places 'for dream', Bastard dismisses Shbo's hopes of living in a big house in Budapest claiming 'She is going to do it in her dreams' (11). Bastard, the most outspoken member of the group, also calls Darling out on her American dreams, claiming that America, unlike South Africa, is a bad choice because it is both too far and has got terrorists: '[…] you have to be able to return from wherever you go'(14). The trope of return in migrant literature is employed both as a testament to the loss which is intrinsic to the migrant experience, and the subsequent unbelonging which becomes a quintessential marker of the migrant's identity. Darling claims that Bastard is jealous because, unlike her, he has nobody in America, 'Because Aunt Fostalina is not his aunt.' She continues to assert herself: 'Because he is Bastard and I am Darling' (15).[64]

In the many games that the children play, their most prominent one is the Country game, where they all choose a country to personify. Naturally, all fight to become the Western countries, because 'These are the country-countries […] Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo […] Somalia […] Iraq […] Sudan[…] who wants to be a terrible place of […] things falling apart?' (49). The void created by the state's disenfranchisement begins to be filled by desires of belonging which do not contain forms of national belonging. The children's game is a simulation of migration; their desires to leave behind their community in favour of other countries where things 'don't fall apart' is quickly taken apart as a fiction by Darling once she moves to America.

From the outset of the novel, the children are equipped with an awareness of their disenfranchisement and its dependence on the nation. They venture into richer neighbourhoods – which all carry the names of different cities – and steal guavas from the private gardens of the residents. On reaching one neighbourhood they've called Budapest, Darling remarks that 'This place is not like Paradise, it's like being in a different country altogether. A nice country where people who are not like us live. […] I

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[64] Again, reminiscent of Abigail in *Becoming Abigail,* who maps herself onto her skin. A repetitive motion of affirmation - whether bodily, or through walking, is a recurrent theme in narratives of dislocation.

keep expecting the clean streets to spit and tell us to go back where we came from'(4). Lack of economic opportunities coupled with state violence has resulted in Darling's destitution, and this has resulted in her internalisation of that knowledge, as a constitutive element of her perceived worth in the world. Beyond these tangible, identifiable areas of fracture by the state, Darling's alienation occupies deeper, tangential and psychic spheres. The desire to both know herself and hold herself in the world gets challenged when, for the first time, the children come face to face with a white woman, who happened to be standing outside her house. The children find the woman as bewildering as she finds them pitiable. She takes note of Chipo, who is traumatised by her pregnancy, and understands that it is a result of rape, whereas the children only comprehend Chipo's condition as an impediment to their playtime. They understand however that it is temporary, because 'a baby grows *outside* of the stomach, not inside. That's the whole reason they are born. So they grow into adults' (3).

The children are astute in that they understand that babies are meant to become inidviduated corporeal persons, who serve their place in society, as adults, which is a reflection of their collective desire. Tellingly, those projected desires never cast Paradise as the location; a fact made clearer when Darling quips 'I would wash my body everyday and comb my hair nicely to show I was a real person living in a real place' (8). When the woman asks the children how old they are, they speculate, and then admit that 'Stina we don't know because he has no birth certificate' (7). The stark dichotomy in their legal status, and thus worth in the world, is driven home for both parties who contemplate the condition of existing as an invisible alien to the official legal register of the state. The children watch the woman throw away her uneaten food, while she asks them to pose for a picture. Darling stares avidly, noticing 'her golden Africa necklace […] her smooth skin that doesn't even have a scar to show she is a living person […] her T-shirt that says Save Darfur' (9). While the novel is explicitly narrated from the perspective of Darling, her own insights provoke a gut-wrenching self-reflexivity in the reader which enables us to see Darling's perspective clearly as it is informed by our own. The western gaze is critiqued here not for its problematic implications, but for its dominance.

This white woman explains that she is from London but is visiting Zimbabwe because it is her 'father's country' (7). She represents, beyond a neocolonial Rhodesian past, the Western market for affect which dominates the narrative about Africa, as a place that needs to be documented and, eventually,

saved. This confrontation gets at the heart of the critical intervention the novel is trying to make: Darling's 'development' is hindered by the consequences of Zimbabwe's colonial past and its remnants in the form of the neo-colonial present; the options between having to assume either a fabricated and hollow subject position in the state or an abject position outside of it leaves a young Darling feeling frustrated. This instability means that her only recourse to selfhood is along the path of becoming. This interaction may further elucidate the juxtaposition I am trying to outline between development and becoming.

As Darling rightly notices, the white woman is a 'real person living in a real place' (8), a truth she will never need to prove to others, because her race and economic status does that for her. Therefore the woman's established and assumed sense of superiority enables her to ask the children to 'cheese' for a picture. Darling acknowledges the woman's privilege, who asks them to do something they had never heard of. However, she is unprepared to grant her the moral high ground. She refuses to cheese and explains that

> Dudu the bird [. . .] learned and sang a new song whose words she did not really know the meaning of and [. . .] was then caught, killed, and cooked for dinner because in the song she was actually begging people to kill and cook her (9).

This proverb, which Darling learnt from her grandmother, fills in the gaps in her formal education: unlike Elvis, those inherited epistemologies arm her with the skills required to negotiate the absurdity of modern life. In essence, proverbs assume the role of a collectively amassed education: their imparted criticality is not learned like traditional Western education, but rather is performed. This inheritance ties Darling to her own family's history rather than that of the state: critically, her education at the hands of her family and community is not state-sponsored, and therefore not uniform. This means while Darling misses out on gaining a standard, universal education and a degree which would enable her upward mobility, she gains instead the privilege of a wide-ranging, alternative worldview enriched through the histories of her grandmother and her grandmother's grandmother and those who came before. These epistemologies ultimately enable Darling to resist the imposition of inferiority on her when she moves to America.

The oddity of the woman throwing away her food provokes in them an angered bewilderment which they vocalise by shouting collectively, scaring the

white woman, who runs into her home. From the dominant gaze of the enfranchised person, a rabble of beggar children shouting incoherently and, intimidatingly, as a mobilised collective, is as odd as it is terrifying. While the white woman's fear and response is plausible to the reader, Darling disrupts the narrative of the western gaze as it is reflected in the gaze of the pooling eyes of black, innocent, hungry children – made conventional through 'poverty porn' and the large Western demand for humanitarian affect – by voicing her and her friends' contempt and indignation at the white woman's behaviour: 'We shout and we shout and we shout; we want to eat the thing she was eating, we want to hear our voices soar, we want our hunger to go away' (10). In this way, we are no longer privileged readers looking into the pitiable lives of the massed poor, but rather looking outwards into the superficial and neoliberal mobilisation of Western guilt and its appeasement.

The market for this appeasement, while booming in the Western world, is rarely explored or voiced subjectively from the perspective of its objects in the wider world. As a tool which supplements Western hegemony, 'photographs are the modern objects that consolidate an uneven discourse that dehumanises postcolonial subjects and insists on the moral superiority of the Northern subject'.[65] Darling encounters this objectification many times in the course of the novel, and it no longer surprises her when the white woman addresses one of the kids with her camera and demands '[Y]ou, look this way, no, I mean you, with the missing teeth, look at me'(9). For James Arnett, 'this art direction is a form of virtual violence that calls attention to the woman's undeniable privilege and aesthetically arranges the vicarious horror that she assumes she is capturing, implicating disfigurement as the condition of the Southern subject'.[66]

The lasting effects of the state's violence impart a very important lesson for Darling and her friends – whose generation, born after independence, are known as the 'Born Free' generation. After the adults in Paradise had voted in the March elections for Morgan Tsvangirai, the candidate of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), they would hold discussions of change in the evenings, all talking about their plans for the future:

The first thing I'll do is get a house where I'll stand up to my full height.

[…] I'll go and get my children from those ugly streets, you know, call

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[65] James Arnett, 'Taking Pictures: The Economy of Affect and Postcolonial Performativity In Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names'*, *Ariel: A Review Of International English Literature*, 47.3 (2016), p. 162

[66] Ibid., p. 161

back those who have gone abroad, tell them to come back home. Have my

family again, you know, like a human being, you know? (134-5)

The adults are soliciting a future in which the political horizon of the nation-state is not an impediment to their humanity.

The violence which followed those elections – the same violence which contextualises the novel – resulted in the mass demolitions of home as well as murders: Bornfree, one of the children's friends, gets killed by pro-government militias. As they witness the burial, Bastard, the de-facto leader of the gang, sheds tears that he quickly wants to hide from the other children. Godknows ask the group 'what happens when somebody dies?'(139). Stina tells the children what he knows: 'When people die because they are killed they become ghosts and roam the earth because they are not resting in peace'(139). Stina is referring to the Shona concept of Ngozi,[67] the spirit who either seeks retribution or revenge from the perpetrator of a murder. Godknows suggest that if Bornfree becomes a ghost he might be able to burn the ones who had killed him. However, Bastard interrupts him and shouts 'I am Bornfree. Kill me!' (140). Bastard's instinct is to reenact Bornfree's murder: the re-enactment, in which he fights with the others, enables him to seek revenge on Bonrfree's behalf. The children impersonating the militias start shouting taunts as they pretend to beat up Bastard, who is impersonating Bornfree: 'Why don't you scream for America and Britain to help you now? […] Here's your democracy, your human rights, eat it, eat eat eat!' (141). Unbeknownst to the children, they are filmed by cameramen from the BBC, who ask them incredulously 'What kind of game were you just playing?', to which Bastard poignantly responds, 'Can't you see this is for real?' (144). The novel teaches us that the children are engaging in a performance of healing: by performing Bornfree's murder, they are enabling Bornfree to identify his killers, therefore enabling his soul to transition peacefully. In this scene, African ontology and epistemology are closely linked: the children draw on their inherited epistemologies in order to ensure the ontological future of their friend.

After witnessing Bornfree's mother hug the raw earth which covers his grave, and then eventually running away while she wails, the children believe that through their performance, both Bornfree and his mother might be granted peace. This knowledge would also, as a direct result, provide them with a sense

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[67] Chapter four will explore the concept of Ngozi more fully.

of closure. The different ways in which epistemologies give meaning to life in the peripheries always re-inscribe the juxtaposition which marks the linearity of development/Bildung and the multiplicity/transformative promise of becoming-critical. The BBC cameraman's implication of tragedy and backwardness as the condition which marks the postcolony gets turned on its head in a later scene when Darling is in Michigan. Darling finds it bizarre that her cousin, TK, spends hours at a time in his room, and decides to go check what he is doing. She finds him on the Playstation, playing a violent game with 'bullets and bombs raining on the screen' (153). Perplexed, Darling asks TK what he is doing, to which he aggressively asks, 'Can't you see I'm playing a game?'. Darling asks back 'What kind of game do you play yourself?' (153).

In many ways, what Darling and her friends live by – even if they don't know it – is the philosophy of Ubuntu, a philosophy which states that the only way for one to be human is for their humanity to be reflected back at them by others. This concept of reciprocity is what drives them to perform Bornfree's murder, but also all the other games that they play: the children transform the violence meted out to them into transformative acts of humanness whereby they rely on one another to continuously re-inscribe the other's humanity in lieu of a state which should have done. On the other hand, TK, who has always played by himself and thus has never had his humanity reinscribed for him by others, voluntarily conscripts himself to the U.S army, where he dies in Iraq.[68]

Darling's becoming-critical occurs in step with her social-interactions rather within the social institutions of the state: her lack of a linear development in terms of growth means that her progression into adulthood occurs rather non-linearly. Whereas Elvis grows up with his father who he then eventually loses, Darling grows up without a father who she then kind of gains. Darling's father returns from South Africa, sick with AIDS, and bedridden. Darling doesn't tell her friends about his return because she both feels ashamed at his illness, but also because she is incapable of figuring his place in her life. When her friends force their way into her shack, they teach Darling how to face the loss of a father: 'We kneel around the bed, around Father […] I am careful not to look at anyone in the face because I don't want them to see the shame in my eyes, and I also

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[68] Of particular interest here is the poignant fact that TK goes on to serve the state, albeit in an illegal war, under the pretense that it is his responsibility as an American to protect the sovereignty of a nation which he believes has protected his own sovereignty in granting him citizenship. In other words, this guarantee of status is effectively what destroys TK at the end: in parallel irony, Darling and her friends who are disenfranchised and who have never received the protection of status from either state are the ones who find a deeper meaning of human rights and responsibilities.

don't want to see the laughter in theirs'(100-101). Darling's shame undoubtedly emanates from the social stigma attached to the Aids/HIV epidemic which broke out in South Africa between the 1970s and 1980s. The proximity between both nations which was highlighted, among other things, by the high level of migration, as the novel makes clear, meant that this stigma would have also been prevalent among many southern African nations and communities.

However, her shame also reflects a deeper fear: the reckoning that her father is, according to society's standards, no longer a human. Darling's painful descriptions of her father make her realise the depressing truth that such radical difference in being is both isolating and alienating and 'you are left with something nobody can recognise' (101). In complete silence, the children all watch Darling's father who is a 'bundle of bones'. They peer at 'the shrunken head […] at the face that is all points and edges from bones jutting out, the pinkish-reddish lips, the ugly sores, the skin sticking to the bone like somebody ironed it on, the hands and feet like claws'`(100). Bastard then picks up her father's hand and asks him how he is feeling, 'all careful and gentle like his words are made of feathers'. The children lean in to hear Darling's father, who is attempting to speak:

> [we] watch the thin lips move, the mouth struggling to mumble something and giving up because the words are stunning themselves on the carpet of sores around the inner lips, the tongue so swollen it fills the mouth. We watch him stop struggling to speak and I think about how it would feel to not be able to do a simple thing like open my mouth and speak, the voice drowning inside me. It's a terrifying feeling. (101)

Darling's attempt at empathy rather than sympathy is an exercise in thought which rejects the otherwise subjugating norm: the unconscious dehumanisation of vulnerable people, spearheaded via images of black emaciated bodies which engender only pity. This scene foreshadows Darling's inability to speak when she moves to America: disability and disfigurement is not a condition which marks the postcolony, rather it is a condition created for the continued oppression and 'othering' of the disenfranchised.

However, Darling's friends teach Darling to love, and mourn her father. They effectively teach her how, beyond alterity, we are all constituted by our raw humanness. Darling is overwhelmed and tearful, so the children's approach changes, and they begin singing:

> When Goodknows starts singing Jobho, Sbho joins in and we listen to them sing
> […] then we're all scratching our bodies and singing it because Jobho is a song

that leaves you with no choice but to scratch your body the way that sick man

Job did in the Bible […] Jobho makes you call out to heaven even though you

know God is occupied with better things and will not even look your way. Jobho

makes you point your forefinger to the sky and sing at the top of your voice […]

Stina reaches and takes Father's hand and starts moving it to the song, and

Bastard moves the other hand. I reach out and touch him too because I have

never really touched him ever since he came […] We all look at one another and

smile-sing because we are touching him, just touching him all over[.] (103)

With the help of her friends, Darling is able to both humanise her father and heal both of

them in the process. This improvisation of mourning signals an overcoming of the trope

of the missing father in the traditional Bildungsroman: Darling's father never gets

replaced by the state. In this sense, the structure of the Bildungsroman becomes even

less relevant, as the novel never explicitly identifies what the coming of age is from or

where it ends. The lack of temporality highlights this crucial factor: becoming-critical is

about human growth rather than the development of citizens. Arguably, the value of the

lesson imparted on Darling by her friends cannot be quantifiable in comparison to the

identifiable steps/achievements of growth as laid out by the Bildungsroman. What they

learned from Job's story in the Bible for example, was not the intended lesson of

patience and faith, but rather its human element: the narrative of loss and the submissive

acceptance of it is what is gleamed by the children, that this narrative must be

improvised and utilised for their own sense of healing. This collective act of becoming-

critical on the children's' part enable them to resist stasis and is grounded instead in a

temporality which is not singular or linear. Their becoming-critical consists of their

constant improvisation of life, a life that cannot pattern a narrative form.

The Universal Break: How They Leave and Live

The break in the novel which signals Darling's migration to America is a one-page

chapter entitled 'How They Left'. While this title refers indirectly to Darling leaving, it

also refers directly to the experiences of mass dislocation experienced both by the

victims of the Murambatsvina, while also signifying on the multiple experiences of all

the dispossession and loss which accompanies migrancy:

Look at them leave […] leaving their umbilical cords underneath the soil,[69]

leaving the bones of their ancestors in the earth, leaving everything that makes

them who they are, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. They will

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[69] This tradition, and concept of 'the soil' gets explore in depth in chapter 4.

never be the same again, because you just cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same. […]

How hard it was to get to America […] For the visas and passports, we begged, despaired, lied, grovelled, promised, charmed, bribed […] To send us off properly, our elders spilled tobacco on the dry earth to summon the spirits of the ancestors for our protection. Unlike in years gone, the spirits did not come dancing from the land beneath. They crawled. They stalled. How will these ones ever be whole in that Melika, as far away from the graves of the ancestors as it is? Do they not say it Is like a grave in that Melika, that going there is like burying yourself because your people may never see you again? Is not Melika also that wretched place where they took looted black sons and daughters, those many, many years ago? (146-241)

This section speaks to the loss of tradition, of being, that accompanies migration. It is also speaking specifically from the historical space of the transatlantic; the very one Elvis, and Darling, are about to undertake. As such, it speaks to Bulawayo herself, also a migrant. Bulawayo situates her writing within an acknowledgement of the complex and demanding nature of writing subjectivity and cultural translation in an age of dislocation and transnationality. From within – or because of– her transnationality, Bulawayo, acknowledges her debt to her culture, and through her name, she is tying herself firmly to the politics of place and language which make her who she is. Bulawayo was born Elizabeth Tshele, but decided to change her name to Noviolet Bulawayo in order to honour her mother, who was named Violet[70]

I grew up with a sense of something missing. I decided when I was at a certain age to honor her. 'No' in my language[Ndebele] means 'with.' Of course Bulawayo is my city, my hometown. And being in the US for about 13 years without being able to go home made me very homesick. So it was my way of staying connected.[71]

Bulawayo's own way of articulating the universal is by divorcing hers, and Darling's narrative from the subjecting and dominant categories of knowledge and representation forced on them by and within the discourses of power. In the novel's lead up to the climactic scene which signals Darling's migration, Bulawayo grounds the specificity of the Zimbabwean diaspora within the

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[70] A move which is reminiscent of the character Abigail from Chris Abani's novella *Becoming Abigail.* Abigail loses her mother, and is haunted throughout the narrative by her absence. The next chapter will be on *Becoming Abigail.*
[71] Noviolet Bulawayo, Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo: 'I like to write from the bone'. (http://www.dw.com/en/zimbabwean-author-noviolet-bulawayo-i-like-to-write-from-the-bone/a-18572543, 2015), n.p

struggle of women, and their children, as a way of honouring their struggle in passing down salvaged and precious tokens of belonging as resilience.

Just as Bulawayo herself has titled her own mother by adopting her name, she also titles all the other mothers – both in and out of the novel proper – through the novel's 'We' in *We Need New Names*. The women in the novel, dispossessed and stateless, live with this rupture, which is brought about by the state's failure in providing them with a right to rights and attendant self-determination. This rupture is passed down onto their children, who were 'here in Paradise with nothing. And they had nothing, except of course memories, their own, and those passed down by their mothers and mother's mothers. A nation's memory' (76). In a scene which foreshadows Darling's eventual experience of the same rupture experienced by her grandmother, mother, and aunt, Aunt Fostalina's direly predicts that 'One day all you'll have are [memories]' (149). Before Darling leaves to America, her mother takes her to the shantytown's local priest who performs a ritual of dropping tobacco and beer into the soil, and then wraps a little bone to a rainbow colored string around her waist. He tells her 'This is your weapon, it will fight off all evil in that America, never take it off, you hear?' (150). However, once in America, police dogs at the airport bark at Darling, and sniff her until an immigration officer finds the string and breaks it off.

When asked in an interview why Zimbabwe is never officially named as the setting in which the novel takes place, Bulawayo has stated that 'It's a story that can happen anywhere, so it was important to leave that sense of openness'.[72] Bulawayo is specifically resisting the dominant narrative which names violence as the distinct preserve of the postcolony. This multiplicity of representation is mirrored in the novel's narration of the migrant experience in 'How They Left'.

The change of designation in the chapter titles from 'How they Lived' to 'How They Left' suggests a link between the 'We' of *We Needs New Names*, 'they' from how they left, and the 'My' of Darling's My America. This history of collective displacement is Darling's personal history as well. Darling's personal history then becomes a part of this collective history. This is how literature creates history and interrupts hegemony. This is also the same process by which Darling can become-critical, the same process by which literature can inaugurate a constitution for the African 'self':

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[72] Kohler, n.p

> And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. […] And because we were illegal and afraid to be discovered we mostly kept to ourselves, stuck to our kind and shied away from those who were not like us. […] And when at work they asked for our papers, we scurried like startled hens and flocked to unwanted jobs, where we met the others, many others. […] When our children were born, we did not bury their umbilical cords under the earth to bind them to the land because we had no land to call ours. We convinced ourselves that we now belonged with our children, they grew and we had to squint to see ourselves in them. They did not speak our language […] We feared bringing up our own children like our parents had brought us up. […] There is no journey without a price […] When our children became young adults they did not ask for our approval to marry. At their weddings we did not spill beer and tobacco on the earth – we smiled. When we die, they will not put our plates and cups at our graves; they will not send us away with mphafa trees. We will leave for the land of the dead naked […] (237-250)

While this excerpt specifically refers to African traditional rites, and how the loss of those rites renders the African migrant 'naked', it also suggests a universal ethos which enacts itself not in the public sphere of the international system of nation-states, but rather in the cracks of its borders. Within the discombobulation of displacement and unhomeliness, displaced peoples signify on and identify a shared loss through which they find shreds of belonging. The novel's formal and diegetic position compensates for this: by rupturing the concept of an original state of belonging, the novel is capable of existing in more than one temporal space and thus provides a point of identification for those who have been left adrift and stateless.

The second section of the 'How they Lived' chapter moves from its specific African context, to a more global one. While still embodying a collective voice, the section also specifically refers to Darling's experience of working illegals in America, and all the people from across the globe who are in a similar situation:

> When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. We heard: exporting America, broken borders, war on the middle class, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. Otherswith names like myths […] Virgilio,

> Balamugunthan, Faheem, Abdulrahman, Aziz, Baako, Dae-Hyun,
> Ousmane […] The others spoke languages we did not know, worshipped
> different gods,ate what we would not dare touch. But like us, they had left
> their homelands behind. They flipped open their wallets to show us faded
> photographs of mothers whose faces bore the same crease of worry as our
> very own mothers, siblings bleak eyed with dreams unfulfilled like those
> of our own, fathers forlorn and defeated like ours. We had never seen their
> countries but we knew about everything in those pictures; we were not
> altogether strangers (242)

The collective and shared experience of displacement enables migrants to identify 'the different parts and histories of ourselves, to construct those points of identification, those positionalities we call in retrospect our 'cultural identities',[73] reinforcing the notion that identity is 'not an essence but a positioning'.[74] Crucially, this expression of similarity in difference, of particular alterity being reconstituted as sameness, posits the raw humanity of migrants as a substance which is, despite the particular violence of nation-states, irrefutable at the personal, and universal level. These two breaks in the novel open up the space of the multiple durées from within which a postcolonial universal ontology is possible. The expression of the postcolonial universal in the scene quoted above can be echoed in the opening chapters of Bhabha's chapter 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation'[75] in which he describes the 'that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering.' Bhabha describes what he calls the 'time of gathering'– a time he locates himself in, a time which I link to the universal:

> Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of
> 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or
> cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign
> tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the
> signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines;
> gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived
> retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.
> Also the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned;

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[73] Hall, p.237
[74] Ibid, p. 226
[75] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* pp.139-170

the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status – the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man. The gathering of clouds from which the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish asks 'where should the birds fly after the last sky?'

In the face of the erasure of Western universality – of history as well as the subject – the literary traditions of the postcolonial ensure the permanence and survival of this alternative universal, of an alternative epistemology, and an alternative ontology.

My America, America's Africa: Darling in DestroyedMichygen and Paradise in Darling

Darling is now in 'DestroyedMichygan' – a play on Detroit, Michigan– fulfilling what is initially (through her perspective) part of the teleology of human rights' narrative. She learns quickly that this progress goes hand in hand with a loss that, at first, she cannot vocalise. Darling draws our attention to the fact that in America, choice and personal freedom are illusions only. Prince, Aunt Fostalina's cousin, has fled from Zimbabwe and though ye is young, he 'now looks aged'. Prince has 'burn scars on his arms and back […] and the light in his eyes is gone' (155). Even though Darling tells Prince that he is free and can now choose to be what he wants, including getting his education, he still has a breakdown, talking to himself like 'the people in his head have really come out'. Darling perceives Prince's case to be, unlike hers, an extreme one: this is evident by his scars and visible trauma. Aunt Fostalina hugs him and sings him a lullaby to calm him down: 'Sobashiy' abafowethu Savuka sawela kwamany' amazwe Laph' okungazi khon' ubaba lomama S'landel' inkululeko' (159), which roughly translates as: 'We'll leave our brothers behind, get up and cross over to foreign lands. Lands neither baba nor mama know, in search of freedom'.[76] As Darling listens to the lullaby, she soon discovers that despite not being traumatised in the same way, she shares Prince's symptoms.

While she enjoys certain privileges that she did not in Zimbabwe, such as shelter in a proper house, food when she wants it, access to technology, and freedom from unstable and political violence, Darling is under no illusions that she has become 'a real person', like she envisioned during her time in Paradise.

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[76] Translated by Thando Njovane

Of the choices she suddenly has that she didn't before, Darling notes that her aunt

> [L]eaves me alone and does not force or beat me up like perhaps Mother or Mother of Bones would if I was not doing what they wanted me to. She always asks me if I want to do things–Do you feel like eating mac and cheese? Do you want to go to bed? Do you prefer this or that? Are you sure? – as if I have become a real person. (163-4)

What is presented as some degree of autonomy here is described in a somewhat offhand dismissal: Darling learns that the characteristics which she previously believed made someone 'a real person' in the traditional sense doesn't quite cut it for her. These new privileges she is accorded by virtue of being in a real house in America – such as dressing properly, being clean, and so on, essentially the things she noticed upon her first encounter with a real person, who was the white woman in Zimbabwe – do not provide her with a coherent and fulfilled sense of self. Darling travelled to America on a visit visa, which she ultimately overstays. Effectively an illegal migrant, Darling cannot return to Zimbabwe because she would no longer be able to return to America. The sacrifices that Aunt Fostalina made in order to procure the visa for Darling prevents her from going home.

The disparity between development and becoming-critical can be translated in this instance into the disparity between surviving and living: by living in America with access to all of her material needs being met (such as food, housing, mobile phones and so on), Darling fulfills human rights' conditions for the rhetoric that sustains the concept of human development: those include freedom from want and freedom of choice. This rhetoric assumes that these are things a person always already has, or always has a claim to. While Darling lacked all of those material comforts in Paradise, within the confines of her interpersonal networks she enjoyed the privileges of comfort in familiarity and a constant system of support in the form of her friends, who always reassuringly reinscribed her claim to humanity. In the absence of this network, Darling feels like she is surviving America rather than living in it, and this leaves her unable to articulate her own selfhood. At the most basic level, this expression – or lack thereof – is the first thing Darling realises that she misses:

> Because we were not in our country, we could not use our own languages, and so when we spoke our voices came out bruised. When we talked, our tongues thrashed madly in our mouths, staggered like

drunken men. Because we were not using our languages we said things

we did not mean; what we really wanted to say remained folded inside,

trapped. In America we did not always have the words (244).

Darling's migration propels the narrative one step further than *GraceLand*; her
critique of the American dream picks up where Elvis' pursuit of it ends with his
impending move. Her lack of words gives voice to what both herself and Elvis
did not previously have words for: that migration just affirms they are still
outside of modernity's circuit.

The implication for this witnessed failure of human rights', and
subsequently, development's teleology is an unending alienation – which leaves
becoming-critical as the only viable alternative to the path to true selfhood.
Development and integration were never an option– either in Zimbabwe or
America– because the tenets of development are inadequate to address the needs
of personal growth in the postcolony, and integration involves a relinquishing of
those aspects of identity which constitute selfhood. In other words, the process
of development would entail Darling giving up her own particularities in order
to no longer be different and conform to the normed version of the human.
Darling recognises that even the well-intentioned, progressive Americans who
celebrate difference only do it in so far as they are capable of asserting their own
separability from that difference. In their introduction to *Cosmopolitanism,*
Bhabha, Chakrabarty, Carol Breckenridge and Sheldon Pollock remind us that:

Cultural pluralism recognizes difference so long as the general category of the
people is still fundamentally understood within a national frame. Such
benevolence is often well intentioned, but it fails to acknowledge the critique of
modernity that minoritarian cosmopolitans embody in their historic witness to
the twentieth century[77]

This is unsurprising, considering the immigrant's presence within the metropole
is itself an embodied critique of Western historical practices. Darling's longing
for her friends and family, essentially a longing for feeling at home, dangerously
comes close to being translated as nostalgia for some form of national
belonging. Darling notes that 'There are times, though, that no matter how much
food I eat, I find the food does nothing for me, like I am hungry for my country
and nothing is going to fix that' (153). This initial longing for home gets

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[77] Breckenridge, Carol A, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Cosmopolitanism*, 1st edn
(Durham & London: Duke University Press Books, 2002), p.6

narrated in the first few months of Darling's move; those unsettling and new phases of her life in America act as a bridge to her life in Zimbabwe, and more specifically, renew her struggle with her Zimbabwean identity.

After Darling migrates to America, her Africanness is both exoticised and commodified. She is constantly expected to perform Africa, an expectation that she resents. While attending the wedding of her aunt's ex, a white woman corners Darling and, upon discovering she is African, asks her to say something in her language and gushes at how beautiful it is. After she asks Darling where she's from, she conflates Darling's Zimbabwean nationality with all of Africa and asks 'But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo? […] I mean, I can't even – I can't even process it. […] I was watching CNN last night and there was this little girl who was just – just too cute, she says.' (175-176) Assuming that either she or the woman had gotten the Congo confused with Zimbabwe, Darling refrains from speaking out loud because she realises that the white woman needs to make herself feel better by disclosing to an African how aware and invested she is in Africa – 'but what I can see in the woman's eyes is that it's serious and important and I'm supposed to know it, so in the end I say, Yes, it's terrible, what is happening in the Congo'.

The woman takes it upon herself to laud her niece too, who is 'going to Rwanda to help' (176). 'She's in the Peace Corps, you know, they are doing great things for Africa'. Darling doesn't know, but notices that the woman now looks much, much better, 'like the pain from earlier is going away' (176). When she continues, explaining that this same niece 'went to Khayelitsha in South Africa to teach at an orphanage, and let me tell you, we all donated – clothes and pens and medicines and crayons and candy for those poor African children [. . .]', Darling marvels at how 'she puts her hand over her heart and closes her eyes briefly, like maybe she's listening to the throb of her kindness' (176). The practice of conflating the multidimensional, complex and intrinsic particularities of conflicts and crises in the postcolony into a single saviour-complex story about Africa is ridiculed in the novel, and Bulawayo's use of Darling's subjectivity works to both critique and humiliate the West's economy of affect.

This sardonic stance differs from merely being a criticism, it constitutes Darling's becoming-critical as she embodies this value of critique: her critical position on the margins of the state enables an unmasking/critique of the failure of a system which, beyond having failed to account for her humanity, also fails

to truly humanise anyone. In a humbling remonstration at those who have been part of this industry, Darling stares at the woman and remembers and identifies herself, as a child, being subject to this woman and her niece's bleeding heart narcissism: 'Then I'm seeing myself in this woman's face, back there when we were in Paradise when the NGO people were taking our pictures' (176–77). Darling is no longer speaking from a subject position: she regains herself, in her full being, and no longer as a poor African or 'native' when she unmasks the fiction of 'the real (read: white) person' and sees it for what it really is.

However, Darling's retrospective moment is interrupted by a young child who throws a ball at her. He does it multiple times, ignoring the 'eye' that Darling gives him, because 'they [his parents] have not taught him anything about reading eyes' (182). After being hit by the ball multiple times, the last one hits darling right in the center of her face, at which point she loses her temper and gives the boy two slaps and two raps on his head with her knuckles. The wedding halls goes silent and everybody stares at Darling in shock. Tshaka Zulu, an eccentric old Zimbabwean who lives in a care home, breaks the silence with a laugh, reassuring the hall that 'This is just how we handle unruly children in our culture, it's nothing, you must relax, please' (183). In this moment, Darling finds an affinity with Tshaka Zulu, and they develop a close and important relationship. The room full of judging people finally impart to Darling the lesson that in America, it does not take a village to raise a child.[78] Instead, she finds her village in Tshaka Zulu. While initially Darling tried to assimilate in America by shedding her habits and acquiring new ones, it is made abundantly clear to her that she will always be marked as an outsider unless she loses her autonomy. Achille Mbembe says it better when he argues that

> The essence of the politics of assimilation consists in de-substantialising difference, at least for a category of natives thus co-opted into the space of modernity because they have been 'converted' and 'cultivated', that is, made suitable for citizenship and the enjoyment of civil rights. This involves a passage from custom into civil society, but by way of the civilizing mill of the colonial state[79]

Because difference is recognised in so far as it can also recognise the inequalities which mark them, Mbembe argues that the logic of (neo)colonial

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[78] A twist on the proverb of (unknown) African origin which states that 'It takes a village to raise a child'.
[79] Achille Mbembe, 'African Modes Of Self-Writing', *Identity, Culture And Politics*, 2.1 (2001), p. 9.

modernity justifies the exclusion of Africans from the sphere of both the human and the citizen because 'They have nothing to contribute to the work of the universal'.[80] By reversing the Western gaze and its excluding narrative, Darling is able to clearly identify the two identities constructed for and imposed on her. She rejects both and chooses to align herself with the collective experience of dislocation that disenfranchised peoples experience.

As an illegal immigrant, Darling is forced to do jobs 'unofficially', where she meets 'many others', who similarly get delegated to do manual labor such as cleaning, janitorial work, and other non-forward-facing jobs. When Elliot, a rich hotel owner, employs her to be his part-time housekeeper, she notices that 'it was like the damn United Nations there' (263), because most of his employees were postcolonial subjects. Elliott's sense of self is, like most of the Americans Darling encounters, embedded in a white-savior complex: his commodification of humanitarian causes blinds him to his insensitivity regarding people's histories. His disposition toward Africa even gets transferred onto his daughter Kate who is, at one point, wearing an 'Invisible Children T-shirt' (267).[81] Darling notices that 'He has traveled all over Africa but all he can ever tell you about the countries he has visited are the animals and parks he has seen'(269). In traditional colonial style, Elliot is an avid collector of African treasure, and when Darling spots an 'ivory slab the shape of the African map' (284) in his house, she steals it knowing that it meant nothing to him and so he would never notice its absence. Elliott, just like the woman at the wedding, lacks any self-awareness and we must rely on Darling's voice for their 'liberalism' to be challenged. Elliot asks Darling to teach him '[her] language because he says he and his brother are going to [Zimbabwe] so he can shoot an elephant' (268) to which Darling thinks: 'I don't know where my language comes in–like, does he want to ask the elephant if it wants to be killed or something?' (268). Darling's humorous and poignant responses to the dominant narrative that the global economy has made for her is necessary both on the national and personal front. By rejecting the narrative – and by extension, the identity– both the state and the West have decided she must belong to, Darling is carving out new spaces of belonging for herself which include neither.

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[80] Ibid., p.16

[81] Invisible Children was the name of an American charity set up by Jason Russell to help liberate child soldiers in Uganda under the rule of the guerrilla group the Lord's Resistance Army. The Youtube video entitled 'Kony2012' was a highly controversial video which very simplistically attempted to indict Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, as the villain that Ugandan children needed saving from. This saving would involve capitalism of course: the video ultimately called for action in the form donations that could be made through purchases such as Invisible Children wristbands and T-shirts. It went viral with more than 26million views in a week. (Polly Curtis and Tom McCarthy, 'Kony 2012: What's The Story?', *The Guardian*, 2012, p. n.p <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-what-s-the-story>)

By accusing Bulawayo of pandering to this same Western narrative which is driven and sustained, by, amongst many things, the production of African material cultural forms, critics do an injustice to both Darling (and all the dislocated and disenfranchised like her who experience the same struggle for belonging) and African literature. Asking African literature to ascribe to specific narratives, modes, or structures, is to limit its scope and disable its traditions. Precisely because the novel of migration is situated in a myriad of historical contexts at any given time, its narrative also necessarily activates the situatedness of its character within these myriad historical contexts at any simultaneous time. To expect or demand that this process ascribe to a monologic narrative is to efface the particularities of characters, history and subjectivity. In an op-ed on contemporary migrant fiction, Paul Sehgal has written 'This is the bitter paradox regarding the grousing about immigrant fiction: that a genre with such a wide sweep, with such a vantage point on the contingencies of human and cultural behaviour, can be derided for, of all things, narrowness'.[82]

Thus as a novel which is situated in what overtly seems like a binary borderland which is characterised by the political economy of the Global South vs. the Global North, *Names* reveals the ways in which those constructs– and the subjects they produce – are implicated by one another rather than distinct from one another. Darling encounters this liminality after her move to the United States where, upon encountering the system-narratives which she has both been objectified by and has in turn ineluctably sustained, she pronounces 'It's hard to explain, this feeling; it's like there's two of me'(210). Darling's malaise hits closer to home than perhaps she is able to articulate. She references the two selves she is perceptibly unable to identify as being one and the same. The tension between both components of Darling's selfhood –the place where her liminality is enacted, negotiated, and reworked– is in fact the space of her becoming-critical. I arrive at this conjunction by contextualising Darling's struggle for selfhood, and the processes which condition and characterise that struggle, both in Paradise and then in Michigan. There is always loss which accompanies a discontinuous development: the implicated neoliberal postcolonial state forecloses traditional development and produces disassociated and alienated subjects instead of the ideal subject-citizen. While development occurs in step with the state, what Darling undergoes - a becoming-critical - occurs out of step with the state; it is a critical distancing laced with both dispossession and unhomeliness, from within which emerges

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[82] Paul Sehgal, 'New Ways Of Being', *The New York Times*, 2016 <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/13/books/review/new-ways-of-being.html?_r=0> [accessed 6 October 2016].

an agential self, that is, a self not molded in the image of the state's project(ion). Darling's critical becoming then occupies two vectors: a conscious and articulated critique of society which her dispossession enables her to make, and a content of critique, wherein she is a living, breathing embodied critique of both the nation's project of development and its attendant narrative form.

Conclusion: 'there's [always] two of me'

Towards the end of the novel, Darling meets Tshaka Zulu. Tshaka was never able to find a way to 'translate across borders'.[83] He carries his past across and doesn't, or cannot, let himself metamorphose into his migrant self. Tshaka is unable to move beyond his grounding in and identification with a mythic (national) past, and he experiences a psychotic breakdown, and Darling is called so she can help translate Tshaka Zulu to the nurses. Darling finds him standing outside the care home, and upon spotting her, he hands her a real spear and asks her to '[…] Be armed, warrior, those white vultures […] must not be allowed to settle on this black land' (269) The audience gathered around the home are anxious, but Darling doesn't get a chance to translate what Tshaka has said, because she is transfixed watching him:

> [H]e is tilting his face towards the sky and uttering this terrible cry that is like nothing I have ever heard before […] In addition to wearing his dress, [he] has painted his body a bright red colour, and his head is all red and black and white feathers. Today, he is awesome […] which is maybe why I am also feeling this strange stirring inside me, this thing without a name that makes me want to clap my hands and jump and shout and just get crazy with it like I have swallowed electricity. (270)

Tshaka Zulu is 'performing Africa' in this scene, not to entertain and appease his Western audience, but rather to articulate the crises of history, culture and belonging as they intersect in migrancy. In essence, Tshaka is a reflection of Darling's symptoms: he embodies the struggle and impossibility of attaining a non-pathological subject position under the regime of the neo-colonial and neo-imperial postcolony. Because he was never allowed to get part of the distancing/critical alienation from the state which would have enabled him to become, Tshaka is caught between the cracks and must now lead a life where he is constantly dependent on and grateful for his American nurses, ineluctably

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[83] Noviolet Bulawayo, Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo: 'I like to write from the bone' (http://www.dw.com/en/zimbabwean-author-noviolet-bulawayo-i-like-to-write-from-the-bone/a-18572543, 2015), n.p

losing vital parts of his selfhood. When police turn up, he runs at them with his spear and it is not known what happens exactly, except for the fact that Tshaka dies – he is likely killed by the police.

The solidarity awakened in Darling when she watched Tshaka's war cry speaks loudly to her constant, perpetual desire for a home. For Darling, Tshaka Zulu is a reminder of both what she left behind and why she had to leave in the first place. His integrity and devotion to Zimbabwe is part of the reason why he refuses to adapt. However, this refusal is self-destructive: Tshaka's refusal to open up to change means that he is forever static and thus stuck in a destructive loop, and he becomes a symptom of Darling's inability to adapt as well. Bulawayo has stated in an interview that Tshaka Zulu 'project[s] what's coming for Darling'.[84] The encounter with Tshaka enables Darling to look into what could be her future, even as it propels her to the past: the moment that she is needed to translate Tshaka to the American nurses mirrors her own past in which she needed to be translated by Sis Betty to the INGO workers. This self-reflection interrupts Darling's youthful desires to both integrate in America and attain the subject position of human rights' teleology, while also struggling to retain a romanticised and essentialist identity rooted in an imaginary homeland. Even though Darling can clearly recognise that she is on the receiving end of the system's injustice, she is still outside of it. Her right to a right to self-determination pre-exists human rights claims, which are always already grounded in the premeditation of a sovereign, integrated and unified state-sponsored subject. In this way, she retains the value of critique which enables her to resist being co-opted as a victim into this regime of rights and responsibilities and its attendant system-narratives.

This criticality, and the acceptance of the distance which comes with it, is what constitutes her agency rather than her tragedy: Darling understands that full American integration would result in a loss on several fronts. This outcome is explored in the novel through other characters like Aunt Fostalina, who is anorexic, and Tshaka Zulu, who suffers a psychotic breakdown. However, she also understands that her subject position as an integrated US citizen would disable her ability at criticality and thus betray her agency. Being an illegal migrant here is then about making clear what has happened historically as a

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[84] Sophy Kohler, 'AERODROME - Noviolet Bulawayo - Interview', Aerodrome.co.za, 2014 <http://aerodrome.co.za/outside-voice/> n.p

political process – and the ensuing negotiations which undergo this process – rather than being about elucidating the political forms – so those would be the nation-state and its institutions – as they mask or unmask this discordance of living outside of unified, modern, historical time.

Darling feels homesick and notes that 'I'm busy thinking about home and I feel like I can't breathe from missing it' (284). This decisive moment in her interaction with home elucidates one of the key phases of becoming: acknowledging that your experiences of where you're born will always form a constitutive part of your identity, but never the constitutive whole. The telephone conversation she has with Chipo finally impresses upon Darling that to find a way to reconcile herself with herself, she must move beyond the myth of a national origin. In an apologetic tone, Darling finally admits that, but she still needs reassurance from someone back home that despite her relinquishing of an essentialised identity which is tied to space, she is still Darling. She calls home and gets Chipo on the line, but her melancholia gets translated as a condescension towards those that are left behind in Paradise:

> - I know it's bad, Chipo, I'm so sorry. It pains me to think about it. […]
>
> - What is so bad Why are you feeling pain? […]
>
> - What they have done to our country. All the suffering. […]
>
> - Well everywhere where people live, there is suffering […]
>
> But you are not the one suffering. You think watching on BBC means you know what is going on? No, you don't, my friend, it's the wound that knows the texture of the pain; it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering […] Just tell me one thing. What are you doing *not* in your country right now? Why did you run off to America, Darling Nonkulueko Nkala huh? […] You left it, Darling, my dear, you left the house burning and you have the guts to tell me, in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country? (285-286)

Darling's tradition of self-styling comes back to haunt her. Despite her new accent, Darling is never not haunted by her past, and neither was Tshaka Zulu. While she accepts her present, Tshaka doesn't. Their intertwining narrative represents the difficulties in the process of translating a mode of being which is outside the rigid limitations set by institutions which cater to Western demands for metanarratives, and the alternative ones which challenge that. Chipo places

Darling in a position where she is ultimately and aggressively faced with the problem of how one must carve out a way to belong. The dissension surrounding the novel's claim to authenticity ironically mirrors the dissension Darling faces both due to her migration and her family: America is constantly asking her for her Africanness, while her friends refute her claim to belong to Africa. On both counts, her subjectivity is being denied her.

Darling chooses to remain as true to herself as she is knowing and capable of, disassociated from either forms of belonging, but still critically aware and connected to the processes by which these forms of belonging are un/made. In this sense, she embodies a subjectivity which is grounded in the multiple differences, ruptures, identifications, and historical moments distinctive of the African migrant experience. Her becoming then entails a constant dialectical relationship between a recovery of the past, a mediation of the present, and the assertion of hopeful agency for the future

> There are two homes inside my head: home before Paradise, and home in Paradise; home one and two […] There are three homes inside Mother's and Aunt Fostalina's heads: home before independence […] Home after independence, when black people won the country. And then the home of things falling apart, which made Aunt Fostalina leave and come here […] There are four homes inside Mother of Bone's head: home before the white people came to steal the country, and a king ruled; home when the white people came to steal the country and then there was war; home when black people got our stolen country back after Independence; and then the home of now […] When somebody talks about home, you have to listen carefully so you know exactly which one the person is referring to. (191-192)

By counting all the homes she has been part of, and enunciating them, Darling is mapping herself as an assertion of her selfhood - she is ritualising a history which, as she witnessed firsthand, is being erased at the expense of a totalising and unifying narrative imposed on Africa by the West and the economy that drives it.

The novel concludes when TK's father bursts into Darling's room to inform her, in a slightly manic state, that Bin Laden has been killed by the US army. Darling then remembers when she was in Paradise, playing the country game with her friends as they tried to find bin Laden. As they come off a slight

hill, they spot Ncuncu – Bornfree's dog – running away from them. She gets hit by a Lobels bread truck and dies. The children go explore, and Darling notes that 'a lone paw [was] raised in a perfect high five […] One eye popped out [...] And the delicious, delicious smell of Lobels bread' (290). While the ending of the novel intimates at an immobilised return to Africa, it doesn't quite equate with Elvis' immobilisation on the threshold of passport control at the airport in Lagos. With the help of her friends, Darling has learnt to deal with the loss that comes with migration, and the necropolitics which forced her to migrate in the first place.

Throughout the course of the novel, Darling loses her Father, her friend Bornfree, and Tshaka Zulu. But her encounter with similarly dispossessed migrants in America enable her to articulate a new form of belonging and kinship. She formulates this belonging by eschewing the claims of citizenship which the promise of America ostensibly held, and articulates a newfound 'country' through the community of migrants: 'I think the reason they are my relatives now is […] the country has become a real family since we are in America, which is not our country' (161). Elvis, on the other hand, finds a sense of kinship with the lynched African American in Baldwin's short story. The symbolism of Ncuncu's death thus connects Elvis with Darling: both share a necropolitical awareness of the violence of the state. However, the juxtaposition of death with the smell of fresh Lobels bread hints both at the necropolitcal present, and the cosmological afterlife. This is an additional – in-common– historical space which both Elvis and Darling can eventually find a place in. Being able to hold on to those discordant yet interconnected experiences, while creating and being part of new histories is what enables Darling to become-critical.

Chapter 3. 'She is the meteor and I, her space': Lyricism, the unspeakable and biopolitical trauma in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*

'You and I are what I gain through disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know'.[1]

'So it seems that the desire to make art, to draw the limits of the body, to create a simulacrum has its roots in loss; or at least, the possibility of loss. The need to remember, to create (or re-create) a body out of loss, but also against loss, and against forgetting, is what drives the artist. This intervention in the world is repeated through time and culture and place, regardless of the truth of this or any other myth. It can be argued that the creative process is a ritual of remembrance'.[2]

Through the literary form of the Bildungsroman, the previous chapters of this thesis foreground a critique of the conditions which have led to the political, cultural and legal alienation of the human subject in the contemporary moment. What I show is that the complicity between the Bildungsroman and human rights narratives has enabled ideologies and technologies of development to contribute to an exclusive and hierarchical understanding of the human. Development's project, in tandem with the forces of modernity, is intricately linked with temporality: its narratological alliance requires both the diegetic and historical construct of a self-sustained and assured subject who grows *alongside* the nation-state. Thus, the space of modernity itself becomes a structured transition – it necessitates a beginning and an end, a teleology which satisfies its ideological drive.

In light of the seismic historical events of the last century, the conflicts of modernity have produced human right abuses, resulting in an upsurge of literature representing those abuses, often with a rights claim. Human rights literature which represents traumatic rights abuses often resorts to this teleological narrative tradition which privileges (narrative) closure as that which can most appropriately address trauma. However, this model fails to account for those literary forms which attend to precarious lives both subject to and otherwise outside of this cultural and political

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[1] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 49.
[2] Chris Abani, 'Painting a Body of Loss and Love in the Proximity of an Aesthetic.' *The Millions* <http://www.themillions.com/2013/11/painting-a-body-of-loss-and-lovein-the-proximity-of-an-aesthetic.html> [Accessed 7 September 2019]

modernity. As a corollary, those literary forms also fail to account for those life-forms which are excluded from the teleology of the human. If contemporary African literature is to approximate, and reclaim, the life-forms of those who have been excluded from humanity, then it cannot adopt those same hegemonic narratological traditions which both emerge from and produce this cultural and political modernity, itself premised on the exclusion of the African subject. Thus the fallacy of modernity's imagined, unified historical space produces a traumatic loss: both on the part of the alienated subject, and the alienating (bio)power. The human subject who must be written into being must also contend with being caught between what is a deconstructive ethics (as that which questions the law) and a normative ethics (as that which supports the law).

As a lyrical novella that deals with issues of personhood, rights, trauma and politics, Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*, in its radical reconfiguration of form and temporality, makes a critical interjection into the biopolitics of trauma. Both at the level of form and character, this interjection moves us beyond political rhetoric into a space of reciprocal vulnerability. Abigail's narrative does not progress in a linear direction nor does it provide the reader with any sense of closure at its end. What I want to suggest is, at the risk of leaning into trauma studies, this lack of teleology puts at the fore an unknowable and inaccessible character, thus suspending normative approaches to our ontological understanding of the human. By complicating both the transmission of and response to the alterity of the lives that it represents, *Becoming Abigail* stages a confrontation between a deconstructive ethics and the law. It advances a radical ethics of trauma which opposes liberal ethics as the latter seeks to bring under its comprehension the subject of biopolitical trauma. In opposition to the normative ethical position which understands the human as that which is both knowable, individual and in possession of inalienable rights in the eyes of the law, *Becoming Abigail* suggests that through grief and mourning – that is, through the processes which teach us that we are never just ourselves and always parts of an other – we are always engaging in acts of co-becoming. By understanding trauma as an act of dispossession from ourselves, a radical politics of recognition opens up a space in which we may recognise that we are all vulnerable to such dispossession, thus foregrounding an ethics of common corporeal vulnerability. *Becoming Abigail* posits a politics of vulnerability based on the notion of reciprocity in order to show, in opposition to the normative understanding of the human, how the human co-becomes through the other.

Becoming Abigail is a novella which attempts to vocalise the unspeakable in its exploration of love, and the consequences of its absence. Abigail, the narrative's 14-

year-old protagonist, becomes aware of herself through the grief she encounters at the loss of her mother, also named Abigail, who died during childbirth. The novella explicitly delves into Abigail's unusual mourning rituals as she attempts to come to terms with a grief that she is incapable of understanding, or managing, on her own. In this way, the novella speaks to the complicated ways in which trauma and mourning are both constitutive of our quotidian existence, but also an impediment to our ability to navigate the quotidian as individuals. Abigail's struggles become compounded when, after her father's suicide, she is taken to London against her will. Peter, who is married to Abigail's cousin Mary, orchestrates this move and attempts to traffic her as a sex slave. Abigail's narration of her past, which is interspersed with memories – both real and imagined – suggests that she had experienced sexual abuse on more than one occasion before Peter rapes her in London. While Abigail does escape – with Mary's help – and is handed over to the British state to be rehabilitated, she eventually commits suicide at the end of the novella. Despite the graphic violence which mars her short life, Abigail doesn't lose her ability to love; her only fulfilling relationship being with Derek, the social worker into whose care the state gives her over. Abigail understands the need to be recognised, or 'seen', as she puts it throughout the novella, precisely because that is the one thing that those perpetrating violence against her are incapable of doing. In this way, Abigail's ability to see others and recognise them for who they are is what makes her not a victim, but the agent of her own co-becoming.

A politics of recognition then occupies centre stage in the novella: at once concerned with 'seeing' Abigail, yet actively preventing unfettered access to her, the novella allows us instead to recognise the emergence of Abigail's agency, while preserving her alterity. In *Our Neighbours, Ourselves: Contemporary Reflections on Survival*,[3] Homi Bhabha has stated that 'the subject of recognition is the process by which "agency" emerges through the mediating structures of alterity that constitute social representation'.[4] I argue that Abani inhabits Abigail's voice through lyrical form, thereby necessarily inhibiting our access to her own subjectivity. The novella, though written in the first-person voice, is jointly authored with Abani himself who injects his own voice and subjectivity into Abigail's. This joint authorship seemingly takes the form of a journal being gathered retrospectively, enabling Abigail to gather her thoughts, inscribing herself into the pages of the novella. Throughout the novella, it is made evident that Abigail needs writing to live, to map herself out against her erasure

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[3] Homi K. Bhabha, *Our Neighbours, Ourselves Contemporary Reflections on Survival* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).
[4] Bhabha, p. 10.

both at the hand of the state, and her trauma. This gathering ultimately makes it possible for Abigail to commit suicide towards the end of the novella. The redemptive aspect of the novella rests in the fact that it memorialises Abigail's life.

The lyricism of the novella is thus critical to the emergence of Abigail's agency: it enables her co-becoming with Abani. The novella thus enables a move from the becoming-critical of the human towards the co-becoming of the human. This move then signals a move beyond biopolitics towards a recognition of the residual agency of the human.

Misreading Abigail: The Biopolitics of Compassion

Most of the critics writing on *Becoming Abigail* read the novella within normative critical frameworks: unable to move beyond the category of the state and the state-sanctioned 'human', they identify Abigail solely as a victim of insufficient policy and the barbarism of men. While Abigail is indignant at the state's erasure of her, this hasn't prevented critics reading Abigail's story through the same limited lens as the state. Laura Reinares, for example, reads Abigail firstly as a trafficked woman, and secondly as a migrant. By analysing the West's colonial past and its present uneven relations with postcolonial states, Reinares advances a criticism of migration policies, and posits that these contribute to a system of trafficking. Reinares rightly argues that the legacy of colonialism has resulted in the 'underdevelopment' of postcolonial states.[5] Failed economies, and a growing chasm between both the political and economic elites and the poor, have ensured that migration to the West has replaced the dreams of postcolonial subjects which decolonisation was supposed to deliver. The influx of migrants is thus a result of the West's colonial past: rather than being addressed, the overwhelming response has been militarisation of borders and the criminalisation of poor migrants from the Global South. Apart from a few token policies on asylum, Reinares posits that this solution to migration is 'the perfect recipe to keep trafficking growing'.[6] Additionally, this illegalisation of poor people has meant that 'political and legal responses to trafficking […] are by and large repressive and punitive, harming these vulnerable populations even further'.[7]

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[5] Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1973) is seminal on this issue.
[6] Laura Barberán Reinares, *Sex Trafficking In Postcolonial Literature: Transnational Narratives From Joyce To Bolaño*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015) p. 91.
[7] *Trafficking And Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives On Migration, Sex Work And Human Rights*, ed. by Kamala Kempadoo, Jyoti Senghara and Bandana Pattanaik, 1st ed. (Paradigm publishers, 2005). p, xxxv.

Abigail's rehabilitation by the state presents an ethical paradox for the legal policies which underpin the state's response to trafficking – and, by extension, brings into question the very moral foundations on which these policies have been made.[8] While Reinares is not wrong in her analysis of those global processes, she does not read Abigail in a way which challenges the state's categorisation of Abigail in these terms: 'Mother died during childbirth. Child probably abused by successive male relatives' (111). Those characteristics by which Abigail becomes identifiable to the state are also the ones by which she becomes identifiable to the critics: through this forged identity, Reinares reads Abigail's story simply as a critique of the state's policies on trafficking:

> One of the strongest merits of […] *Becoming Abigail* lies in [its] honest disclosure of the obstructive way in which the legal institutions work in destination countries, rendering trafficked women's exploitation invisible because of their 'illegal immigrant' status.[9]

Unable to move beyond a normative political reading – that is, beyond the organ of the state against which Abani is writing – Reinares doesn't read Abigail's story as one of personal transformation and ethical recognition but as one of tragic victimisation. As opposed to the meta-political reading which I want to advance, Reinares' political reading doesn't consider how this transformation might contribute to a new approach to law, ethics and politics.

Thus, Abigail remains unseen both within the novella and outside of it, even though the novella is a gift of space for Abigail to exist in, by exceeding the limit of language and policy which govern the lives of victimised postcolonial subjects.

That there is something deeply and structurally wrong with our systems, and that Abigail is definitely a victim of those systems, goes without saying. However, in resistance to this effacement of recognition, I want to suggest a different paradigmatic lens through which to read *Becoming Abigail*: not merely as a critique of the unjust systems which drive our contemporary moment, but rather a depiction of how, in the face of that injustice, through the small gestures of resistance or even mourning, life continues to re-inscribe itself, to re-inscribe ethical growth as the only means of transformation.

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[8] Reinares is not wrong: on the 7th of February 2018 in the House of Commons, Theresa May, current prime minister of the U.K, said in response to a question about a trafficked slave who was being deported by the Home office that 'As we know, the best possible solution to this, which we all want to ensure, is for people like her constituent not to be trafficked into the U.K the first place to work in these cannabis factories.' 'I Recognise That, As The Hon. Lady…: 7 Feb 2018: House Of Commons Debates', *Theyworkforyou*, 2018 <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2018-02-07a.1493.5> [Accessed 7 September, 2019]

[9] Reinares, p.121.

The counterargument to my position could simply be that such a reading is heavily ironic, given that Abigail commits suicide at the end of the novella. While this is true it is, again, simply too linear, or even binary, a reading of the novella. Abani has said that with his art he strives 'to dare ourselves to imagine, to conjure and then face all of our darkness and all of our light simultaneously[…] To stand in that liminal moment […] when the ambiguity of our nature reveals what we are capable of, on both sides'.[10] This critically redemptive, even affirmative, acknowledgement and recognition of the paradoxes inherent within human nature is a theme which runs across all of Abani's oeuvre; it is an explicit resistance to binaries. 'The intensity of that confrontation' he claims, is 'the only redemption that is possible'.[11] With *Becoming Abigail,* Abani attempts to invoke the dark with the light, the grotesque with the sublime, to create the confrontation within which co-becoming may take place. He posits a recognition of Abigail's beauty just as she self-mutilates, her humanity as she is turned into a dog, and the sheer convulsive strength of her life as she commits suicide.

Further to the critique of sex-trafficking as an approach to *Becoming Abigail*, critics have more recently taken a psychoanalytical approach to the novella. In her essay 'The Uncanny Sacrifice: Sex trafficking in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail'*, Susan Hall argues that because Abani has revealed his interest in psychoanalysis, the novella is permeated by psychoanalytic concepts. However, Hall then refers to Freud's theoretical framework as an authority through which to understand Abigail's trauma: 'I will focus on the Oedipus complex and on the ways in which Abigail's erotic experiences are linked to a psychic fantasy that arises in the nexus of her family relations'.[12] There is something unsettling about the trend in which critics relegate Abigail to normative frames of theorisation and understanding – this implies a distancing that the critic feels comfortable in assuming; a distance which contravenes the ethics of affirmative, redemptive reading which Abani is trying to foster. Unable to recognise Abigail's agency as her own, Hall attributes her intimate relationship with Derek to deep-seated psychoanalytic issues. Problematically, this distancing unfortunately *silences* Abigail further – it is a resistance to *seeing* her. This distancing relegates Abigail back to the space 'between patriarchy and imperialism'[13] where the figure of the third-world woman was constructed.

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[10] Abani, 'Ethics and Narrative: The Human and the Other.' *Witness* XXII (2009), p.169.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Susan Hall, 'The Uncanny Sacrifice: Sex Trafficking In Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail'*, in *Critique: Studies In Contemporary Fiction*, (56,2014), p. 44.
[13] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can The Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism And The Interpretation Of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 306.

To clarify my position, I turn to Spivak's seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in which she refers to the phenomenon of Suttee – the Hindu practice of a widow self-immolating upon her husband's funeral pyre – as a challenge to and deconstruction of the woman-in-imperialism as simple opposition between subject (law) and object-of-knowledge (repression). Instead, Spivak reads Suttee as a process which 'marks the place of disappearance with something other than silence and nonexistence, a violent aporia between subject and object status. For Spivak, 'Freud's use of women as a scapegoat is a reaction-formation to an initial and continuing desire to give the hysteric a voice, to transform her into the *subject* of hysteria […] The masculine imperialist ideological formation that shaped that desire into 'the daughter's seduction' is part of the same formation that constructs the monolithic 'third-word woman'.[14]

Abani's psychoanalytic position, however, mirrors Spivak's. Abani talks about the ways in which all of our 'selves' are built around ghosts:

So the body of becoming is often an absence made more present by its haunting, by the ectoplasmic residue. In my books, the dead return as text, as skin (diaries and maps), as inscriptions that act as the medium, the way to visit the ghostly places of self and yet return safely. So much of the ectoplasm of these ghosts is patriarchy and masculinity. My work asks if it is possible, if this absence, this malevolent place, can enfold and nurture and be reclaimed through prose and poetry, to turn into possibility. For me it's alchemy.[15]

For Abani, this alchemy, this draw to transformation, requires new interpretive models if it is to be made possible – for Abigail as much as ourselves. Abigail is only recognisable as a human when she is able to transform within this malevolent place, this ideological formation of patriarchy and imperialism, and reclaim it. Hence a reading of Abigail through inadequate frames – such as the psychoanalytical and political ones mentioned above – would only subject her further to the interpolation of the state, and its sponsored normative ethics and stereotypes.

At their core, those misreadings rob Abigail of agency, precisely because they ultimately cast her as a victim. Throughout the novella, Abigail actively resists that posture appeal which traditionally accompanies human rights literature –and which humanitarian compassion in general demands from its benefactors. She does not ask the reader to grant her her humanity, nor does she make any rights claims. Abigail simply reveals herself, in all her vulnerability, even when this is a 'self' which is not fully

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[14] Spivak, p. 296.
[15] Colm Tóibín, 'Chris Abani By Colm Tóibín', *Bomb Magazine*,96 (2006) n.p.

delineated, knowable. This is a 'deeper self, the one we keep too often hidden even from ourselves'.[16] The novella balances this dialectic through its use of lyricism, a literary tool which is capable of balancing the poetic with the narrative, of revealing an event while obscuring its effect. This revelation nonetheless engenders compassionate readings from critics: while those sentiments such as compassion, pity and sympathy are 'generous on the part of the reader, [they] obscure the deeper intent, the deeper possibility'[17] of narrative.

In *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History Of The Present,*[18] Didier Fassin singles out how the contemporary moment has seen a rise in what he calls 'a scientific literature of compassion.'[19] He argues that the problem with this position is that often compassion is 'a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity'.[20] For Fassin, this literature testifies to the way in which moral sentiments have configured modern politics. Speaking specifically within the context of humanitarianism, Fassin references research and other kinds of writing which have proliferated across disciplines 'on both sides of the Atlantic'[21] with issues of trauma, rights abuses, conflict and poverty as their focus:

> Humanitarian reason governs precarious lives: […] threatened and forgotten lives that humanitarian government brings into existence by protecting and revealing them. When compassion is exercised in the public space, it is therefore always directed from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker, the more fragile, the more vulnerable– those who can generally be constituted as victims of an overwhelming fate.[22]

Literature, and literary criticism, being such a public space, both espouse these compassionate tendencies as well as overwhelmingly being subject to those interpretive frames. Consequently, ethics and aesthetics become concerned with defining, locating and analysing those lives which are only defined 'not in the absence of a condition, but in relation to those who have power over them'.[23] Reading Abigail within the institutional frameworks which subject her to the power of patriarchy, colonialism, and trauma studies prevent her from existing as anything other than the object of humanitarian reason.

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[16] Abani, 'Ethics and Narrative'.
[17] Ibid., n.p
[18] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
[19] Fassin, p.5.
[20] Ibid., p.3.
[21] Fassin,p.3.
[22] Ibid., p.4.
[23] Ibid., p.4.

Throughout the novella, Abigail shows that not only does she have agency, but she deploys that agency through her ability to define herself. This self-creative aspect of Abigail's co-becoming illuminates how that is gained through the other: in other words, Abigail's co-becoming is possible because of her ability to constantly fashion and re-fashion herself through her encounters with others. Yet this reciprocal outlook on being is overlooked in favour of a top-to-bottom model which favours the static identities of benefactors and beneficiaries. These can be both of aid or compassion, or both. This trend in our approach to precarity leads Fassin to claim that 'Modern identity is indissociable from the conjunction of affects and values that regulate conducts and emotions towards others and define a respect for human life and dignity'.[24]

Hence literary forms which attempt to bridge the gap between human rights' utopian promises and modernity's alienating reality have as their focus the victim; the precarious human is often central to cosmopolitan literature. Precisely because of human rights' inadequate universalism, cosmopolitanism has had to intervene and encompass globality as an alternative framework through which to elicit identification with the cosmopolitan human family. As part of the human rights project, the literary genre of the Bildungsroman was scripted to elicit identification between the reader and the character, as well as the character and the state. Cosmopolitanism looks to elicit that same identification, but beyond national borders. By this same strain, those literary forms which address the precarious human subject arguably all fit under cosmopolitan literature in one way or the other as they engender sympathy from the reader and – whether consciously or otherwise – seek to form attachments between the subject and the reader based on identifications with this same common humanity. Like human rights discourse, cosmopolitanism's universalising tendency relies on universalising the figure of pathos – otherwise known as Hannah Arendt's 'human being in general', that is the 'frail human remnant [who has lost] whatever judicial purchase it once had'.[25] In this way, the sympathetic impulse of cosmopolitanism is directly linked to soliciting what is understood as the truly universal ethos of humanity, recognition, but which, in effect, only results in identification.

This impulse finds its justification in what Fassin underscores as modern identity's indissociable pull towards attributing value for human life and dignity. Similarly, Philip Dickinson also locates this impulse in 'The idea of the sympathetic

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[24] Ibid., p. 4.
[25] Lyndsey Stonebridge, ''That Which You Are Denying Us': Refugees, rights and writing in Arendt', in *The Future Of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary And Cultural Criticism*, 1st edn. (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 115.

imagination's […] potential generation of a cosmopolitical consciousness'.[26] This consciousness, or intuition, entails a misplaced emotional and ethical attunement to distant others; it produces within us a desire to identify commonalities, to render inclusion possible. However, my critique of this moral sentiment emanates from the critique I make through the distinction between recognition and identification. I understand recognition in the way that Judith Butler does: as a self-critical recognition of our own limits as subjects which comes about through realising how we are undone by one another.

The nature of those limits has two valencies: in the first instance, we are limited in our ability to wholly know ourselves but we gain this knowledge through our equally limited ability to wholly know the other; in the second instance, we are limited corporeally through this shared vulnerability. Encountering these limits posits an ethics of trauma, a deconstructive ethics which I juxtapose with the liberal and normative ethics of cosmopolitan sympathy, which is where its practice of identification emerges from. Misrecognising the other, or identifying the other, requires a binary between the self and other. Moving linearly along this binary creates the perception that the self, a separate and distinct entity, may grow and expand because of the other. Self-critical recognition posits instead that the self co-becomes through the other. In the novella, Abigail feels herself becoming through her encounter with Derek – she marks the moment they have sex by burning dots into her skin – which allows her to delineate herself from her mother. Derek doesn't understand Abigail's processes, and he doesn't recognise her at first when he traces the scars. However, he learns from Abigail that she is able to self-define because of their encounter. In this way, Derek learns to 'see' her. Abigail's corporeal vulnerability, which she shares with Derek, enables her to love him. Through her personal losses, Abigail shows us that we are always more than ourselves, and indeed she teaches Derek about her ability to keep loving.

This approach to reciprocity, which entails a more equal rapport between humans, is where I locate an ethics of recognition. This is a rapport based on an openness to learn from instances of non-comprehension, where the opacity of the other remains foreclosed, and where this foreclosure enables an ethical recognition of the other. This is opposed to what cosmopolitan discourses pass for recognition, which is in fact only identification – precisely because the frames they employ are, like Fassin has pointed out, from above to below, rather than reciprocal. The cosmopolitan sentiment has thus

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[26] Philip Dickinson, 'Feeling, Affect, Exposure: Ethical (In)Capacity, the Sympathetic Imagination, and J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 46.4, (2013), p.1.

led to a wide array of literary forms: these often manifest as testimonio literature, sentimental literature, trauma literature, the picaresque novel, child soldier narratives, holocaust literature, truth and reconciliation literature, humanitarian literature and ghost-written narratives. At their core, these narratives all have a human rights claim, with the victim – or the figure of pathos– as the central focus of their humanitarianism. Henceforth I will refer to these different forms as 'pathos literature'; these are victim narratives where the agency of the victim is structurally erased.

Novels such as Dave Eggers' *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*[27] and *Burned Alive: A Victim of the Law of Men* spring to mind. *What*[28] *is the What* is the fictional autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the 40,000 children made refugees and asylum seekers by the second Sudanese civil war from 1987-2005, known as the 'Lost Boys of Sudan'. The novel, though narrated in Valentino's voice, was written by Eggers himself. *Burned Alive*, meanwhile, is the story of Souad, a Palestinian woman who survives an honour killing and migrates to France with the aid of a Belgian social worker. The novel is also narrated in Souad's voice but was written by both the social worker and the translator. *Burned Alive*'s publishing house, Oh! Editions, is renowned for its impressive list of victim narratives.[29] Ghost-writing, a strong tradition for current pathos narratives, was popularised through the emergence of slave narratives, some of whom also had their stories written for them. The need to humanise the figure of pathos and to vocalise this humanity achieves two things through literary rhetoric: the writer, who shares the privileged space of the reader, must attach value to the subject's suffering; that is, the suffering must justify the writing of the story. Subsequently, this valorisation of suffering must bring us to heed our humanist tendencies: that we can sympathise with the subject and through this sympathy, acknowledge that we are indeed worthy of being part of the cosmopolitan human family, leaving behind the object of our sympathy, whose narrative objectification facilitates this emotional growth on our part. By aiming to bring us into the authentic experiences of the subject's trauma, these narratives rob subjects of their agency and need to be recognised critically, thus facilitating the identification of those victim-identities as we understand them through both legal discourse as well as human rights discourse. Valentino is a former child soldier, and Souad is an oppressed Middle Eastern woman. The ethical stakes at the core of their stories shape the aesthetic rhetoric

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[27] Dave Eggers, *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).
[28] Souad. *Burned Alive: A Victim of the Law of Men*, trans. by Judith Armbruster, (New York: Warner, 2004).
[29] Smith, S. and Watson, J. 'Witness or False Witness: Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-Formations, and the Ethic of Verification in First-Person Testimony', *Biography*, 35(4) (2012), pp. 590-626.

of the narrative. Both are saved by the grace of the Western world's dedication to upholding human rights and, crucially, the ethics and morals of democracy. Agency, or the freedom to be seen through a radically different frame, is stripped away through the metrics of cosmopolitan literary rhetoric. This sympathetic and thus biopolitical erasure ensures that those identities are understood primarily through the cultural stereotypes and legal discourses into which they are forced, and subsequently into the cultural and legal structures they become parts of. Those identities only become visible when voiced through the international circulation of pathos literature, and they become identifiable with the aid of the structures and categories of the state.

Reading sympathetically thus makes legible to us the biopolitically visible subject –the subject of humanitarian government – and, by extension, the object of cosmopolitan sympathy. Read through state-sponsored normative ethics, the unknowable, opaque human who exists outside of these structures remains unrecognised. Literary forms which are not linear in form or realist in content differ from the pathos novel as they make present not the assumed subjectivity of their characters but rather, as Spivak has so clearly argued with regard to the subaltern, the no-place from which they can(not) speak.[30] Literary forms which do not seek to conform to the strictures of traditional witnessing narratives – and thus do not construct normative subject-identities– employ both temporal and linguistic freedoms to create meaning which enable the ethical recognition of the radical alterity their subjects embody. Reading ethically requires a critical moving away from identity-based knowledge on the part of the reader, a criticality which recognises the opacity of the other as a point of departure which 'confers on the other the dignity of a 'person' […] that part of him that we can be sure we can never share'.[31] As a lyrical novella, *Becoming Abigail* thus addresses the ethics of representation: its form as well as its content problematises the transmission of the humanitarian story. Its many linguistic and formal tropes make it impossible to achieve the kind of authenticity the pathos novel requires, and ultimately the novella does not concern itself with realist representations: Abigail's opacity is maintained and the narration of her experiences never bring us fully into her psyche, but rather to the limits of our own.

Theorists of cosmopolitan literature overwhelmingly read pathos narratives as being engaged in world-making, or more simply, the process of collapsing the ideological, cultural and ethical walls which divide the 'human family'. Kwame

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[30] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'.
[31] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), p. 156.

Anthony Appiah understands cosmopolitanism as fostering 'habits of coexistence' which are made possible through the sympathetic imagination,[32] through 'the capacity to follow a narrative and conjure a world'.[33] More precisely, Appiah contends that 'what grounds our sharing' is 'the grasp of narrative logic that allows us to construct the world to which our imagination responds'.[34] Similarly, Martha Nussbaum argues that the practice of reading literature extends our sympathetic capacities, and thus our *cosmopolitan* tendencies. For Nussbaum, literature makes possible 'each person's access to every other'.[35] Like Appiah, Nussbaum champions literature's ability to make of us all 'world citizens'.[36] This is done through literature's ability to make visible to its reader 'the invisible people of their world–at least a beginning for social justice'.[37] Identification thus renders the victim visible, but remains blind to the human.

This presumption of 'access' is the marker of liberal ethics which supposes that the Other is identifiable, let alone accessible. Additionally contentious is the presumption of world (literary) citizenship as a possible membership for those invisible people whom Nussbaum mentions. Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism builds on its classical counterpart – inadequate for addressing the contemporary moment – a moment marred with legally reinforced national exclusions.[38] Dickinson contends that this sympathetic perspective engages 'in a work of civil *Bildung*'.[39] The ethical aspect of civil *Bildung* finds its corollary in its literary form: the *Bildungsroman* also advocated social justice through the benefits of citizenship. In following this teleological narrative (both ethical and literary), what Appiah and Nussbaum argue, from the perspective of liberal ethics, is for a model of reading where we may sympathetically identify with the other, whereby this identification also entails, through an extension of the self, a linear growth of the self.

The problem with this position is twofold and mirrored in Nussbaum's approach to literary engagement as an exercise in sympathetic engagement. Nussbaum claims that 'emotions [have] a complicated cognitive structure that is in part narrative in form,

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[32] Writing on J Coetzee's *Disgrace,* Philip Dickinson has attended to this notion of the sympathetic imagination, using David Lurie as a case in which to prove that the imagination is in fact, always limited in its sympathy. See Philip Dickinson, *Romanticism and Aesthetic Life in Postcolonial Writing*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2018).

[33] Anthony Appiah. 'Cosmopolitan Reading', in *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001) p. 224.

[34] Ibid., p. 223.

[35] Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997), pp. 89-90.

[36] Ibid., p. 52.

[37] Ibid., p. 94.

[38] Where Kant's cosmopolitan citizen of the world was meant to migrate across cities, the militarisation of borders and erection of 'Fortress Europe' make this concept woefully inapplicable in the contemporary moment.

[39] Dickinson, p. 2.

involving a story of our relation to cherished objects that extends over time'.[40] Thus, she believes, that in order to talk about emotions 'we will need to turn to texts that contain a narrative dimension, thus deepening and refining our grasp of ourselves as beings with a complicated temporal history'.[41] Nussbaum's adherence to linearity and narrative closure enable her to convincingly declare that 'a theoretical account of emotions is not only that: it has large consequences for the theory of practical reason, for *normative* ethics, and for the relationship between ethics and aesthetics'(italics mine).[42] Nussbaum's championing of narrative engagement and emotional development omit both the problems of temporality as well as the teleological narratives which emerge out of this tradition. Primarily, Nussbaum needs a bigger critique of form – one which acknowledges that different types of forms attend to different ways of being and, secondly, a more critical account of how one understands a self and how one constructs a corresponding object of value. The danger in this account of literary-generated-sympathy as a curator of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics lies in the flawed ways we understand both. A narrow understanding of aesthetics will result in a narrow, normative understanding of ethics, and vice-versa. Again, Nussbaum understands the self as that which may linearly develop through, or with, literary narrative. Additionally, this model configures literature in a utilitarian manner: literary representations of the Other, read with compassion, serve the reader's growth, ultimately turning that Other into the object of cosmopolitan sympathy. Thus in its championing of difference, cosmopolitan sympathy relies unequivocally on foreclosing different ways of being human, some of which can never truly be represented in literary forms, and thus foreclosing the possibility of recognition of difference. Sympathy creates a static, foreclosed other, rendering co-becoming impossible.

I want to make a distinction between recognition and identification – and I want to root this distinction in a critique of sympathy-as-biopolitics. The pathos novel embodies the contradictions within the cosmopolitan movement: it cannot conceive of a way to realistically and authentically represent its subject without objectifying them in the process. Witness narratives engage in creating 'certain kinds of victim identities[43]

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[40] Nussbaum, p. 2.
[41] Ibid., p. 2.
[42] Ibid., p. 3.
[43] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explore the mechanisms of this construction, they posit that features of first-person testimony must chronicle 'conditions of oppression, assemble histories of psychic degradation and bodily assault, register the aftereffects of survival and mourning, and commemorate victims who cannot give testimony.' Witness narratives check these five 'metrics of authenticity': they all share 'the 'you-are-there' sense of immediacy, the invocation of rights discourse, the affirmation of the duty to narrate a collective story, the normative shape of victim experience and identity, and lastly the ethno-documentation of cultural specificity.' Smith and Watson, pp. 592-4.

[which] gain cultural saliency'[44] as they circulate globally as 'transnational artefacts'.[45] This circulation ensures the construction of identities, or what we understand as precarious lives, are highly visible and thus identifiable.

The perception of authenticity which witness narratives favour, itself a fallacy, is directly linked to the soliciting of viable sympathy for narratives of suffering. Lyndsey Stonebridge writing on Arendt proves useful here as she reminds us that the figure of 'pathos'

> is as central to law as it is to theory: the United Nations' 1951 'Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees' defines a refugee not as a person who is entitled to rights that she has been denied, but as one who can demonstrate that she lives in fear for her life. Pathos, to some extent, has become a legal requirement for today's asylum seekers[46]

In this way, the biopolitical identification of the human other is intrinsically linked to the sympathetic identification of this same human other. This deployment of sympathy is accompanied with a desire to bring the subject under the biopolitical regime of care and compassion. Thus full disclosure from such narratives are also what drive its demand in the literary publishing sphere. The trope of authenticity, and thus the valorisation of realism, result in the objectification of the Other, easily identifiable but hardly recognisable. Anne Cubilié notes that 'approaches to collecting, analyzing, and performing testimony all rely on the 'knowability,' if not transparency, of what is being said: plain language conveying 'the truth' of horrific experience is one of the authenticating aspects of testimonial in whatever form'.[47] The flaw in cosmopolitanism and its attendant literary forms is its insistence on constructing a 'knowable' human, whose story must be both essential and true, which then essentialises this constructed identity.

In other words, cosmopolitan sympathy constructs a passive 'other' – easily identified by whichever injustice has been done to them. Arguably the ethos of cosmopolitan sympathy is not so far removed from the ethos of humanitarian discourse: in their thirst for distant narratives of suffering and attendant cosmopolitan-rescue impulses, their goal of producing human equality through identification with those

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[44] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Witness or False Witness: Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-Formations, and the Ethic of Verification in First-Person Testimony', *Biography*, 35.4, (2012), pp, 610-611.
[45] Wendy S Hersford, 'Documenting Violations: Rhetorical Witnessing and the Spectacle of Distant Suffering.' (*Biography* 27.1, Winter 2004). p,105.
[46] Stonebridge, p. 115.
[47] Anne Cubilié. *Women Witnessing Terror: Testimony and the Cultural Politics of Human Rights.* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005). p, 222.

suffering others end up depoliticising those 'others'. Thus when literature vocalises the precarity of lives which have been rendered apolitical, it becomes a political endeavour to return ethics to the practice of reading, rather than morality as a practise of self-indulgence.

In this sense, the readings of *Becoming Abigail* have been largely unfruitful as critique and at best complicit in further masking the claims that Abigail is making. Fassin asks what happens 'when we mobilise compassion rather than justice?'.[48] Compassion, while a generous sentiment, glosses over the ethics which are at stake: the critical aspect of cosmopolitan sympathy is either lost or fallible when it cannot address the complicity of that compassion in reproducing the conditions which enable the continued subjection of precarious lives.

Lyndsey Stonebridge's work on what she calls 'refugee style' proves helpful here. Stonebridge analyses the potential of 'critical lyricism'[49] – a form she associates with refugee writing, which always emerges with instances of the denial of national, civil and legal rights. Critical lyricism both questions as well as traces the relationship between literary and legal personhood. Stonebridge understands refugee writing as 'a critical mourning for the human in its decoupling of humanity and language'.[50] The linguistic turn of critical lyricism explores the struggle of inhabiting the 'political-legal paradox' of statelessness in writing. Unlike cosmopolitan discourse, the language of critical lyricism addresses the loss of language and expression which accompanies the refugee experience. The loss of language is not simply a denial of 'linguistic anchorage to nation and tradition'[51] but also, crucially, the loss of 'the naturalness of reactions […] the unaffected expression of feelings'.[52] In *Becoming Abigail,* we see this loss manifested both in its linguistic as well as formal choices; the opacity of the narrative, and of Abigail herself, gets mirrored in the inhibition of testimony and the emergence of an identifiable subject.

Critical lyricism demands a level of self-critical recognition on behalf of the reader. Faced with the impossibility of accessing the other – precisely because of the other's linguistic, political and legal alterity – the reader encounters both their own and the other's limits. This, in turn, prevents the manifestation of normative frames through which sympathetic reading may occur. Ananya Jahanara Kabir, writing in the context of

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[48] Fassin, p. 8.
[49] Stonebridge, p. 114.
[50] Ibid., p. 118.
[51] Ibid., p. 115.
[52] Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in *Jewish Writings* (New York: Stocken, 2007), p. 264.

Partition, describes what she calls 'Lyric Iterations' as utterances or lamentations which are un-assimilated into the teleology of narrative, yet 'exist alongside and seep into the Anglophone realms of the novel, juridical and constitutional discourse, and official pedagogy'.[53] Kabir argues that the transformative capacities of 'non-narrative, even non-linguistic, reparation may be the best way out of the 'silence versus testimony' binary'.[54] In this way, the critical aspect of lyricism makes explicit its non-complicity with the biopolitics of compassion. The encounter makes visible not the other but the attempted emergence of the human. We co-become through these attempts. Stonebridge quotes Paul de Man in saying that no good will come out of pathos, and the best we can hope for in language is 'to allow for non-comprehension'.[55]

This stance on sympathy is shared by Abani himself, whose philosophy largely complements *Becoming Abigail.* The novella thus invites us to accept Abigail's opacity rather than sympathise with her. The critical lyricism of *Becoming Abigail,* and its refusal to conscript a knowable, stable subject-identity, critically suggests that 'to claim rights is first of all to criticise the linguistic and political mystification upon which they rest'.[56] This disruption of the cosmopolitan world-making of sympathy and identification engenders critical questions: how is the relationship between ethics and aesthetics linked to our relationship with understanding and constructing the human? Subsequently, how is this understanding contributive to modern humanism and its blind spots? I will explicate my position by turning to Abani's philosophies which most adequately speak to the humanism I am trying to formulate.

Encountering Abigail: Transubstantiation and Co-Becoming

What is the position beyond cosmopolitan sympathy? And how can this position be represented – without that representation simply reproducing the object of sympathy – that is, the human 'other'? Abani's formal choices with *Becoming Abigail,* as well as the philosophy which supplemented those, advances an ethics of trauma: this enables us to read *Becoming Abigail* as redemption rather than political tragedy. Abani posits that instances of social injury and personal trauma are occasions for ethical growth. Abani's commitment to ethical transformation and redemption has led him to create an oeuvre which is dedicated to understanding how we share a common corporeal vulnerability and how we are in fact all co-constituted by one another. What I want to argue here is

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[53] Ananya J. Kabir. 'Affect, Body, Place: Trauma theory in the world' in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*. 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 64.
[54] Ibid., p. 65.
[55] Stonebridge, p. 118.
[56] Ibid, p. 115.

that Abani has written himself into Abigail and, because Abigail herself is co-constituted with Abani, that the novella is an ode to this common vulnerability.

This structure of co-constitution, as I will attempt to formulate, brings us beyond the problem of cosmopolitan sympathy because primarily, it is resistant to the idea of a self-contained and stable subject, and ultimately, it performs a criticality which resists the erasure of those modes of being which are biopolitically suppressed. In his article 'Ethics and Narrative: The Human and Other', Abani posits that we must 'at all costs avoid the sentimental' if we are to 'dare ourselves to imagine, to conjure and then face all of our darkness and all of our light simultaneously. To stand in that liminal moment when we have no solid ground beneath us, no clear firmament above, when the ambiguity of our nature reveals what we are capable of, on both sides'.[57] Abani's insistence on ambiguity – that is, the ambiguity of our natures as well as moral ambiguity – enables us to reveal ourselves in all our vulnerability, and encounter that vulnerability within the text. The intensity of that confrontation is 'the only redemption that is possible'. Abigail's story thus marks the distinction between a humanitarian and radical humanist style of redemption.

This model thus prevents an identity-based approach to the novella as, unlike cosmopolitan literature, it demands criticality on the part of the reader, a reciprocity. In his own words, Abani has said he 'wanted a narrative where it would be hard to connect to it any emotional and in some ways conceptual framework that had not itself been generated by the narrative'. In attempting to frame a narrative which does not rely on already existing interpretive models, Abani is attempting to find a language, as well as a space, which can accommodate the intensity of the confrontation demanded by ethical reading. Alexandra Moore considers *Becoming Abigail* to be a novella which '[theorises] its own conditions of being'[58] because its linguistic as well as formal choices cannot be interpreted by normative frames. In tandem with this narrative opacity, the content of the novella is intentionally resistant to an ethos of cosmopolitan sympathy as Abigail's co-constitution with Abani means her opacity is maintained throughout the novella. This is partly because Abani understands that 'so far, the only language we have of defining self does violence to another'[59] and by maintaining Abigail's unknowability, Abani circumvents the problem of constructing and representing a self. His turn to critical lyricism as a narrative form which address this

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[57] Abani, 'Ethics and Narrative', p. 169.
[58] Alexandra Schultheis Moore and Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, ''Let Us Begin With A Smaller Gesture': An Ethos of Human Rights and the Possibilities of Form in Chris Abani's *Song For Night* and *Becoming Abigail*', in *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature,* 45 (2014), p. 27.
[59] Abani, 'Ethics and Narrative', p. 169.

violence is a form of resistance which allows for the constant re-inscription of a recognisable, rather than identifiable, humanity.

In his attempt, or inability, to express the unspeakable, Abani laboured over Abigail for years in 'looking for the texture of Abigail's life'.[60] This texture becomes apparent in the novella through its various breaks in punctuation, temporal alternations, Igbo philosophy, Chinese poetry, interrupted internal monologues and unresolved moral ambiguities.

Abigail's personality is testament to this labour: Abani's attempts at remembering and recounting how he first encounters Abigail result in him suggesting that he could be lying.[61] Memorably, Abigail's attempts at remembering her mother also consists of making those memories up. Abani is haunted by Abigail just as Abigail is haunted by her mother. Despite this haunting, Abani never could be able to adequately represent Abigail's life. He describes his attempts at this representation as 'a deep betrayal'.[62] However, Abani has admitted that even through this approximation, what he has crafted is still a failure:

> When asked, I often say that I write to find my own humanity, that I am in a desperate battle to redeem myself, to make myself beautiful in the world. And yet in finding Abigail, I feel reluctant to claim my humanity, I feel undeserving. I feel awe in the face of her. She is the meteor and I, her space.[63]

Abani's metaphor here signals the two premises which substantiate my argument about co-becoming. That Abani needs to write to find his humanity is a conscious truth that tells us Abani understands we are always co-constituted by the Other. Abigail humbles Abani in her meteoric rupturing of his psyche. Abani has always been aware that Abigail existed, from glimpsing her across various news stories, to occupying his unconscious and his imagination, yet these encounters never resulted in closure; Abigail remains as unknowable to Abani now as she did when he first encountered her. This humility is key to undoing the dominating, patriarchal gaze which would otherwise betray and objectify Abigail by writing her story. Abani co-becoming with Abigail undoes the gaze, the frame which would relegate them both to their own separate selves, and thus makes it possible to write the novel in a non-phallocentric way. The novella is thus the result of this ambiguous encounter; the vocalising of the incomprehensible, the unspeakable.

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[60] Abani, 'Abigail and My Becoming', n.p.
[61] Ibid., n.p.
[62] Ibid., n.p.
[63] Ibid., n.p.

I argue that, contrary to the liberal ethics of cosmopolitan sympathy in which identification with the Other results in an *extension* of the self, the traumatic encounter with the Other results instead in the self being bisected, or ruptured, by the Other. This theory emerges out of the truth that we are never wholly knowable to ourselves, but we gain ourselves through the encounter with the other. Speaking of his encounter with Abigail, Abani explains that after he was drawn towards her, 'the transubstantiation began […] and now, much older, draws me still toward the unspeakable, the ineffable. The unspeakable name of God is hidden in the human body. This is law'.[64] Abigail begins to materialise, and continues to haunt Abani, until she becomes a work of literature. She takes on an imaginative, yet material form in his mind: I understand transubstantiation as the process by which Abani's metaphor for his encounter with Abigail becomes matter. Abigail materialises, but so too does Abani himself. In this way, they both co-become through the novella.

For Abani, this process of recognition began outside of the novella itself. For the better part of a decade, and in various ways, Abigail appeared to Abani. Abigail came to Abani first in the form of a newspaper story. The newspaper headlined the image of a Nigerian woman, beaten to a pulp by relatives who had ostensibly brought her over to London as a domestic maid, but were really trying to sell her into prostitution. In shoring up what can only be understood as postcolonial trauma, Abani talks of collective shame as his response to reading the newspaper article:

> [But I read that article] with a great deal of shame, because during the '80s there was a huge influx of Nigerian immigration to the UK–which makes sense given that Nigeria used to be a UK colony […] And so being a Nigerian in that kind of context, every time you read something negative that might have been true you sort of felt–at least I did–some sort of collective shame.[65]

This collectivity arises from a sense of complicity, and an understanding of the specific contexts through which this incident could have occurred. In this way, Abani is incapable of approaching the story solely with sympathy or pity. His response, or multiple responses, lay in his search for what he calls 'some deeper human syntax', a syntax he attempts to vocalise through *Becoming Abigail.* In a reiteration of Butler's humanism, Abani writes 'This is good: that all our responses – inadequate, confused, limiting and otherwise – are driven by an insatiable melancholy and maybe even *some*

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[64] Abani, 'Abigail and My Becoming', n.p.
[65] Chris Abani, 'In conversation with Chris Abani.' truthdig.com. n.p.

deeper human syntax we can only guess at – that we value the lives of others precisely because we know the limits of our own'.[66]

The difference between a cosmopolitan insatiable thirst for victim narratives and an ethical insatiable melancholy at the conditions which enable victimisation is one of the markers of difference between Abani's position and those of authors like Dave Eggers or Souad's translator. Abigail thus doesn't exist simply within the text as the fractured and traumatised victim of sex abuse; she is the product of Abani's haunting – or what he calls 'ectoplasmic residues'[67] – the ghosts which 'leave their vestigial traces' on the psyche. Apart from the expected sadness that would arise from being confronted by such a story, there is nonetheless an element of this shame which emerges out of the fact that migrant peoples constantly self-check their behaviour but also, intrinsic to that, their value as well, vis-a-vis their host nations and its citizens – this interiorisation of shame also arises from an interiorisation of inferiority. The experience of migrancy is a deeply violent one which Abani himself shares with the Nigerian woman.

It is then helpful to recall here that, as Sam Durrant paraphrases from Bhabha, an understanding of the trauma of modernity prepares us for an understanding of 'the doubly traumatic entrance of the postcolonial subject into a modernity that was never its own […]'.[68] In this way, the multiple layers of trauma experienced by postcolonial subjects, and specifically the migrant subject to this biopolitical modernity, manifest themselves in various ways and thus require multiple forms of vocalisation. The question which comes to bear is: how do those forms of vocalisation attend to the relationship between the expectations placed on migrant peoples and the socially acceptable ethos of assimilation,[69] without those forms themselves assimilating? In other words, what does the fluctuating, traumatic, unstable and ultimately opaque human experience contribute to the relationship between ethics and aesthetics? How does an understanding of this relationship resist sympathy as part of the biopolitical regime, and importantly, how would this join the critique of cosmopolitan sympathy to the biopolitical critique of the state?

The range of emotions which language cannot hold are understood by Abani as being constitutive of each of us. Unlike Nussbaum's cognitive model, these emotions

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[66] Chris Abani, 'Resisting the Anomie: Exile and the Romantic Self', in *Creativity in Exile*, ed. Michael Hanne (New York: Rodopi, 2004) pp. 29-30.
[67] Chris Abani, 'Abigail and My Becoming,' Truthdig.com. n.p.
[68] Sam Durrant 'Undoing sovereignty: towards a theory of critical mourning', in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 93.
[69] In the previous chapter, I touched on this issue with regards to Darling's struggles to assimilate in America. Achille Mbembe has an insightful take on this: generally speaking, the assimilation of postcolonial subjects in the West is often synonymous with 'civilising' the postcolonial subject – which is in and of itself a residue of colonial attitudes.

cannot linearly, if even cognitively, be represented. In this way, while the lyrical turn cannot completely detach itself from pathos, it is a critical pathos at work which enables the possibility of mourning and redemptive transformation rather than sympathy. Because critical lyricism is a form which traces as well as questions the relationship between literary and legal personhood, it allows for those who have been erased by the legal system to voice their mourning. In other words, it can be understood as a direct response to law's subjection of the human and to the human's bodily resistance to the law. What are the ways in which we are legible to the language of the humanities but not to the law? Agamben phrases it much better when he asks 'What is the *form of life [...]* that corresponds to the *form of law?*'[70]

The ambiguity of these questions manifests itself through the processes by which Abigail *becomes* Abigail. In an explicit representation of the convergence between law, trauma and their connection to the unspeakable, another story which further brought Abigail to Abani's unconscious was that of a young Moroccan woman who fell in love with the judge who presided over her immigration case. 'She was underage, and he was forced to retire,' Abani writes. '*The full nature of their relationship was not clear*. The girl tried to appeal his dismissal. Then she appealed the order keeping them apart […] Finally, with some misguided notion that if she were not around everything would go back to normal for him, she killed herself'(italics mine).[71]

The ethico-legal nature of this story brings into focus the moral ambiguity that is sedimented by biopolitics. Traces of this story find their way into the novella: through Derek's attempts at seeing Abigail, Abani attempts to humanise the Other at the end of the (ethical) spectrum. As *Becoming Abigail* will explore, the question of underage sex is not simply a question of law, but of ethics as well. How does law's universalising tendency subject others to perceptions of age and time? Subsequently, the trauma of biopolitics is similarly always ambiguous in nature: which instance of subjection is an instance too far? And which instance of appeal is a rejection too far? This dialectic between the law and its subjects' appeal to recognition elucidates the many ways in which biopolitics masks those aspects of being human which can only be legible to us if we read those appeals ethically. How is it that a representative of the law, an agent of a biopolitical institution, can so extremely bend the law in order to unjustly, immorally pursue love – arguably the most moral and just emotion? What are the factors that complicate this contradiction, the factors that make such a case legible to us but not the

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[70] Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1st ed. (California: Stanford University Press, 2017), p. 46
[71] Abani, 'Abigail and My Becoming', n.p.

law itself? This infinitely grey space of being ethically human is what drives Abani's art.

Abigail first appeared in a short story called 'Jazz Petals', where she was called Jasmine. She then became Abigail as the subject of a poem, before, two years later, becoming Abigail in *Becoming Abigail.* This temporal and conscious fragmentation involved in the burgeoning of a textured life is reflected in Abigail's fragmentation within the text of the novella itself. Beyond character, *Becoming Abigail* can be said to be fractured, as it shuttles unevenly between 'Then' and 'Now' chapters. The lack of temporality, and thus linearity – the whole diegesis take place in the space of a few hours – might suggest another mirroring of Abigail's, and Abani's, perceived fractured psyche. Yet here is where the radicalism of the text lies. The novella's history, the processes it underwent before turning into *Becoming Abigail,* makes apparent both Abigail and Abani's interwoven personal histories.

The lack of linearity means that this is achieved by the narration of the present moment. This temporal and diegetic instability attempts to capture the emotions and overwhelming immediacy of the lived experience, without delineating who speaks and who is being spoken to. In this attempt to recover 'some deeper human syntax' in the search for transformation, Abani challenges and breaks down the binaries by which we may understand agency or victimisation, the immoral and the moral, and lastly the grotesque and the unspeakable. In a way, his attempts at writing Abigail into being emerge in its critical lyricist form: taking on Stonebridge's definition of critical lyricism as a form which 'traces the relationship between literary and legal personhood', Abani grapples with recognising an other who is legally identifiable.

Abani recognises the limits of assuming somebody's psyche can ever truly be accessed. His solution, however, is not to abstain from writing but rather to write ethically: that is, to lay bare the ways in which those subjects of our melancholy or imagination are never objects in and of themselves, but part and parcel of our own consciousness. Abani's consciousness is interwoven into Abigail's consciousness, and in this way the novella makes no pretence that it provides us with unfettered access into Abigail's subjectivity. Abani does not attempt to mask this corporeality that he shares with Abigail, on the contrary, he openly expresses it: 'And regardless of my attempts, my body is all over this book. My soul is interwoven with Abigail's soul. My heart is her heart'.[72] Abigail has the power to humble her reader, and thus the magnitude of this confrontation in itself can, as it did with Abani himself, make one unwilling to claim

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[72] Abani, 'Painting a Body of Loss and Love in the Proximity of an Aesthetic', n.p.

their own humanity in the awe of hers. This form of pathos differs radically from that of cosmopolitan sympathy because it arises out of an ethos of shared loss, not misplaced identification. This space in which Abigail exists radically reworks the notion of the constituted subject and, consequently, the fractured and traumatised one. The fact that the novella itself attends to and even performs its own criticality gives weight to my analysis of how it suggests that we all gain ourselves through the other, through what Abani calls transubstantiation, a politics of recognition which places an ethics of trauma at its core.

Theorising Abigail: Co-constitution and Corporeal Vulnerability

As a novella which has at its core a protagonist who has suffered abuse at the hands of others and eventually commits suicide, the relational nature of the social transactions within the novella lead me to Judith Butler's seminal work on precarity and vulnerability, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.[73] At the core of her work, Butler is concerned with understanding how lives become disposable and ungrievable. In her essay 'Mourning, Violence, Politics', Butler builds on Hegel's politics of recognition to argue that through grief, and the following inevitable acknowledgment that we are always more than ourselves – 'beyond ourselves'[74] – we may understand the ways we are constituted through what she calls our 'common corporeal vulnerability'.[75] Butler chooses grief as a starting point to formulate her theory: 'grief contains the possibility of apprehending an order of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am', precisely because it proves how we are always 'beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own'.[76]

She suggests a model for humanism which takes as its cue the assumption that the human subject, in order to 'become', must be recognised by the other, that this recognition must come to terms with the fact that we are undone by one another. 'To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is,' she writes 'It is to solicit a *becoming*, to instigate a *transformation*, to petition the future always in relation to the Other'[77] (italics mine). Because political modernity insists on moulding the subject into an image of its own progress, however, the answers to Butler's questions – intricately linked with the processes of biopower – necessitate an understanding of how violence, and thus trauma, is always already

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[73] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers Of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006).
[74] Butler, p.28
[75] Butler, p. 42
[76] Ibid., p.28
[77] Butler, p.44

constitutive of our becoming. When power shifts from the public domain into the private, and sovereignty brings under its power the human, we must attend to the shift, or the relationship, between the politics of recognition and the power of biopolitics. The link between the two – that is, trauma – defines why the former is made necessary by the latter. Butler asks: 'From where might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered, if not from an apprehension of a common human vulnerability?'.[78]

By bringing Abani's philosophies into conversation with Butler's, it is easy to see how Abigail demonstrates a critical awareness lacked by most: her vulnerability endows her with the knowledge that others, namely her cousin Mary, could be as vulnerable as she is. Her agency is manifested yet again when she protects Mary by foregoing seeking her own justice from the state. Yet the ethics which prompt Abigail to act the way she does are largely misread, if acknowledged at all. Abigail's approach complicates the cosmopolitan approach which would seek to bring her under a regime of care and compassion. Abigail chooses to sacrifice herself to prevent Mary from suffering further trauma; her own experiences of violence enable her to look beyond herself. Evidently, what critics identify through emphasising her trauma and eventual suicide, rather than her many sacrifices. Abigail's ethical decisions force a shedding of our perceptions of value – which have been informed by normative ethics – and ultimately a shedding of those ethics in favour of co-learning new ones. This un-learning of our constitutive ethics would result in an ethical approach of learning and recognition vis-a-vis the other – it would attribute to the other the same amount of potential agency as we are in possession of, as it would allow for the other to present herself in the way she is able to. Crucially this approach would also resist the other's erasure which would normally occur through sympathetic reading practices. The bearing of this theoretical framework on *Becoming Abigail* emerges foremost from the fact that even though Abigail is traumatised by others in her life, it is her erasure by the state – ultimately the consolidation of biopolitical violence – which culminates in her suicide.

Butler's radical humanist model entails the surrender of the binary and individualist approach which enables the objectification of the other. Her theory emerges from the reality that suffering is a marked condition of every life, and not simply the preserve of bodies from the Global South. Butler understands our vulnerability to trauma as an inescapable aspect of life, while also theorising the measures by which we may reduce this exposure to trauma. Within this context, Pieter

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[78] Butler., p.28

Vermeulen foregrounds his critique of trauma studies within the context of biopolitics.[79] For Vermeulen, the link between trauma and its subjects lies in the discourses of biopolitics; that is, the way in which trauma is enacted and subsequently sustained. Vermeulen names biopolitics as '[t]he processes and apparatuses through which life itself has increasingly become a target of power'[80] and depends on apparatuses of governmentality to sustain itself. Citing Foucault, Vermeulen continues that 'Biopolitics and governmentality are dedicated to the care of life: they 'endeavour to administer, optimize, and multiply [life], subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations'.[81] This governing of care comes under the auspices of the humanitarian government of compassion. This insight ratifies Fassin's claim that '[h]umanitarian government is indeed a politics of precarious lives'.[82]

Because trauma is at the core of the pathos novel, and the latter encourages an approach which essentialises the traumatised subject, Vermeulen's position on trauma and biopolitics is helpful as a theoretical framework through which to establish how I understand both the ways in which trauma constitutes the subject, and how this formation in turn undoes the notion of the stable human with its identifiable borders. In this sense, Vermeulen's essay on the biopolitical dimension of trauma proves helpful in attempting to understand trauma's relation to modernity and how these violent forces underline our quotidian existence. Traditionally, trauma has been understood as a sudden and exceptional event which ruptures the constituted subject and leaves its trace, a wound whose healing may re-constitute the borders of the traumatised subject. Vermeulen points out however, that

> this notion all too easily assumes a solid and stable sense of self that is simply not available to many disenfranchised groups, and thus fails to account for the detrimental effects of the 'ongoing and sustained dynamics of social injury and deprivation'[83] that affects the lives of non-dominant groups suffering from social injuries such as racism, misogyny, homophobia and economic exploitation.[84]

In addition to the absence of the solid subject, there is also the issue of the territorialisation of those instances of social injury. In pointing out the limitations of Agamben's work on the state of exception, Vermeulen posits that the problem with the

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[79] Pieter Vermeulen, 'The Biopolitics Of Trauma', in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.142-3.
[80] Ibid, 42.
[81] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. (*Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). p. 137.
[82] Fassin, p. 4.
[83] Seth Moglen. 'On mourning social injury', in *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 10 (2005), p. 151.
[84] Vermeulen, p. 144.

example of the camp is that it delineates the space of violence. Rather than enact itself in grand performances (which is the avenue of sovereign power), the violence of biopower is insidious – as is the trauma it causes. Thus in its 'capillary power', 'Biopolitics […] also consists in a policing of trauma'.[85] Vermeulen points out a rather obvious yet overlooked insight into the connection between biopower and trauma: these were both processes that were consolidated in the late 18th-century, what is broadly understood as the advent of modernity.

Similarly, Fassin has written both on the rise of trauma and victimhood[86] as a highly significant marker of the contemporary moment, while maintaining that this phenomenon has in turn shaped the way we look at the world and the way we are in the world: moral sentiments, and thus humanitarian government, are in fact constitutive of a biopolitics of compassion. In essence, this means that value for human lives which are marked by traumatic experiences translates into the micromanagement for the betterment of those lives. Ultimately, all of life as we know it comes under the governance of biopolitical care. This critical approach to trauma undoes the Western modernist conception of the human: without the narrative teleology which assumes an original self and, after the traumatic event, a return to that original self, the human is indefinitely suspended in an ambiguous state of traumatic re-inscription. Just as the field of trauma studies has traditionally territorialised the space of trauma, the field of biopolitics has also forcibly constructed the figure of the human: the residue of this construction finds itself the traumatised victim of modernity – and the object of cosmopolitan sympathy.

In this way, Vermeulen singles out and undoes two premises which underpin the way cosmopolitan sympathy functions: the idea of the contained, stable knowable human, and the space they occupy. Cosmopolitan literature necessitates an identifiable human in an identifiable space in order for its sympathetic world-making to occur. The biopolitical turn makes those premises inviable: as I have hopefully shown through Abani, Butler and Vermeulen, I posit that we are at once unknowable to ourselves but equally vulnerable to the dispossessions of trauma. In this way, it is important to undo the passive and negating language which addresses victimhood, and in this sense Butler's radical humanism[87] provides a useful way to bridge Vermeulen's position on

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[85] Vermeulen, p. 143.
[86] Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
[87] I use the term 'radical humanism' to distinguish Butler's approach from liberal humanism. It is worth noting that Butler also does biopolitical theorist in *Psychic Life of Power* (Redwood: Sanford University Press, 1997).

biopolitical trauma and Abani's position on sentimentality and the ethics of representation.

Butler's radical humanism is here complementary: in instigating a recognition, or, in her words, '*soliciting a becoming'*, an understanding of shared vulnerability and co-constituted trauma indefinitely postpones the construction of the other, instead positing a space for possibility and redemptive transformation. Only in accepting this model for humanism can a new frame for the relationship between ethics and aesthetics emerge. Ethical recognition which comes about through co-constitution enables co-becoming: that is, the recognition that we become critically aware of our limits just because we understand that we are limited in our abilities to ever truly understand others, yet are undone by one another.

In this way, I reiterate that the model of co-constitution achieves three things: in the first instance, the agency Abigail has as a result of her co-constituted criticality undoes her status as the passive victim of abuse and thus resists her erasure by the biopolitical regime. Secondly, by drawing attention to his own consciousness, Abani both addresses the assumption that sympathy can ever offer us access to the psyche of the character and thus in turn addresses the ethics of representation: subalternity can never truly be represented, yet the solution is not to abstain from writing, but rather to write ethically, self-consciously. Lastly, this structure brings full circle my position on a recognition of vulnerability: because Abani has written himself into Abigail, she is never going to be fully understandable.

The novella opens up the possibility of true recognition, by foreclosing the transparency that would enable assumptions being made about Abigail and thus silencing her further. It is worth noting that for Abani, an ethics of recognition is based on conjuring a world, not of understanding, but of shared loss. Additionally, this acceptance insists on the incompleteness/unknowability of the human, rather than the cosmopolitan world-making of similarity and identification with a relational human other. In this way, the ethics of reading are intricately tied to the ethics of writing, in the sense that this co-constitution of the novella enables a co-constitution of the self. This brings us over the problem of how defining the self does both epistemological and ontological violence to the self: *Becoming Abigail* is an ode to the redemptive power of recognising our common corporeal vulnerability; it is an exercise in critical-becoming for us, as much as for Abigail herself.

Seeing Abigail: Reading criticality and mapping becoming

Becoming Abigail follows the life of Abigail Tansi, a young Nigerian woman who struggles to establish the borders of herself from those of her mother, also called Abigail, who died during childbirth. Abigail muses that 'The shape of that Abigail was so clearly marked, the limits traced out in the stories that filled the world around this Abigail, that it was hard to do anything but try to fill the hollowed-out shape' (46-7). Abigail is haunted throughout her life by the absent presence of her mother: she struggles to come to terms with herself and tries to step outside the haunting shadow of her mother's ghost. Because her father never learned to mourn, Abigail deals with this loss on her own, and grows up with the confusion of her grief. Her desire for her mother manifests a complex desire to become both her mother, but also herself. Abigail would trace the borders of her body to draw the limits of herself: 'At first it was a curiosity, a genuine wonder at the burgeoning of a self, a self that was still Abigail, yet still her.' (28) Starved of her mother, or this part of her she had always missed, Abigail would exchange chores for anecdotes, write them on pieces of paper and wear them under her clothes all day, 'Chaffing. Becoming. Becoming and chaffing, as though the friction from the paper would abrade any difference, smooth any signs of the joining' (36). Thus from a young age, Abigail's sense of self is incomplete without the written detritus of another – in this specific case, her mother's. After she finds that the papers, and the words written on them, dissolve in the shower, Abigail discovers the 'permanence of fire'. Vocalising her need, and even confused desire, to make those memories about her mother physical, Abigail starts inscribing them on herself with cigarette burns and hot needles in order to

> create memory, make it concrete, physical […] she traced their outlines on her skin with soft fingers, burning them in with the heat of her loss, tattooing them with a need as desperate as it was confused. She tried to talk to her father about this need to see herself, but he couldn't understand what she meant […] She couldn't be the ghost he wanted her to be (47).

From a young age, Abigail expresses the need to be 'seen'; a need, as we learn later on in the novella, to be loved and recognised as a human. Her father, incapable of coping with his grief, looks at Abigail in a longing manner – he looks for Abigail the mother, and there is a sexual inflection to his longing, which never get explicitly vocalised. Later in the novella, Abigail notices that Derek regards her with the look of men who want her to be something, someone, else.

Without her mother to reflect her humanity back at her, Abigail struggles to come to terms with her own humanity. Her grief takes on a performative nature and she begins unusual mourning rituals which she recognises as 'complex ways to be human' (38). While the lyricism allows for interiority into Abigail's mind, the critical aspect ensures we never get to read her full subjectivity. Abigail's unusual mourning rituals remain incomprehensible to us, but we recognise them for expressing her corporeal vulnerability. For Abigail, writing on her body becomes a form of self-inscription against the erasure she is subjected to. Her mourning rituals become the ways in which 'she was allowed to mourn. Heal […] even' (38).

Abani explores how Abigail attempts to turn her loss into transubstantiation. Taking his cue from Derrida's 'Memoirs of the Blind', he notes that we all have this desire to 'mark loss, to record memory physically […] to create memory is to turn away from the moment, to remove one's gaze from the trauma […] it is through this ritual, however tangentially or deeply obscure the lens, that we can even begin to bear witness to these histories, these shades of love and loss that we carry within us'.[88] Abani regularly shows his hand in Abigail's psyche as he describes his own process of transubstantiation and passes it for Abigail's. The novella is Abani's own ritual through which he records his memory physically: the memory of Abigail as she haunted him via various mediums. As Abani makes manifest his memories, he understands this ritual of writing as his own way of bearing witness to the shades of love and loss he felt during his encounters with Abigail. Similarly, Abigail records her own memories through her rituals of self-inscription and writing.

Even as she tries to draw the borders of herself, Abigail still needs to be seen and she tries to gain that recognition from the two men whom she loves in her lifetime: her father, and Derek – the social worker who she is given over to by the British state. Abigail's attempts at healing herself, at averting her selfhood manifest through rituals which neither the reader, nor her father, understand. In one scene, Abigail decapitates some of her dolls, and she kills birds, and dresses them in her mother's wedding dress. After a few confrontations with her father in which he rejects her attempts at mourning,[89] Abigail finally 'comes out to her father […] as a human being'[90] by dyeing her hair purple and forcing him to talk about her period. Her father lets her down and still does not 'see' her. He takes her to a psychiatrist – who is only interested in 'the really mad', and then to the village witch. The village witch dismisses Abigail as a

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[88] Abani,'Painting a Body of Loss and Love in the Proximity of an Aesthetic'. N.p
[89] Referring here to her decapitations of the dolls and killing of the birds.
[90] Abani, 'Abigail and My Becoming', n.p

young girl who is simply missing shiny things and prescribes her 'jewelry' so she can be anchored back to this reality (39). This experience of being misread paves the way for a lifetime of misreadings: by her father, Derek, the state, Peter – who tries to sell her into prostitution – and ultimately by the critics of this novella.

Through her relationship with Derek, Abigail begins to differentiate herself from her mother, precisely because her desire, her anchorage to her reality, is her own and not her mother's. Before Abigail and Derek have sex, Abigail becomes attached to Derek because of his attempts to understand her outside of the frame she is relegated to by the state. When Abigail refuses to answer the questions Derek asks her as her social worker, the first of those being 'where are you from?' (106), Derek remains by her side and chats idly to her about literature, while he watches her eat. Abigail is impressed at his behaviour because 'most people she knew never really looked at her' (106). However, despite them entering into an intimate relationship, Derek initially struggles with seeing her. When he watches her self-inscribe after sex with a hot needle, Abigail notes: 'She knew this look. This wasn't the look in the park. This was the familiar look of men wanting her to be something they wanted' (55). Like her father, Derek wishes that Abigail could be someone else: for the former, it is Abigail the mother, and for the latter, it is an Abigail who doesn't self-harm as a form of healing.

Abigail has to explain her scars to Derek to elucidate her own process of becoming: 'This one is you, this, me…Here…is my hunger, my need, mine, not my mother's. And here, and here and here and here, here, here, here, me, me, me. Don't you see?' (55). Derek doesn't see. Abigail cannot understand how he had failed to see her during sex, while she had seen him during every intimate interaction. Abigail lays down what she understands as 'seeing', how she understands love, when she is in the park with Derek. She had felt 'passion enveloping her, and she gave into the safety, the warmth, looking up into his eyes' (53). Abigail then muses to herself that the deepest joy is to be seen: 'This was love? To be seen? No turning away. No turning forward. Just there' (54). However, Derek's moment of identifying Abigail as a victim of trauma who self-harms quickly turns into an intimate encounter where he recognises her: 'And he traced her in that moment, the map of her, the skin of her world, as she emerged in pointillism. Emerging in parts of a whole. Each. Every. He wondered what form should he draw a line between each dot […] he held her. Held her and cried' (55-56). In both scenes, the novella hints at the burgeoning texture of Abigail's personhood, as something ephemeral which only emerges and solidifies through others.

In another instance of her co-constitution with Abani, Abigail's musings on being seen echo Abani's philosophy on love, making it unclear whose consciousness the novella gives us access to:

> What I mean by love is the act of seeing. Why is seeing an act of love? It is perhaps the only true act of love. Seeing slows the world down, bringing it into focus, even for a moment, the object/subject of sight, imbuing it with worth and value, while also actively resisting its erasure. But more than that, seeing requires not turning away from difficulty to the safety of comfort.[91]

Abani's language in his essay is almost identical in some parts to Abigail's language in the above section. Where Abani's co-constitution with Abigail enables them to co-become together, Abigail initially lacks this with Derek. This lack of reciprocity makes Abigail wonder 'How had he missed them when they made love?' (55). Given that Abigail felt herself, and not her mother, being found when she thought Derek saw her, 'Abigail was giving. For the first time, she wasn't taken. […] Abigail, this Abigail, only this Abigail, felt herself becoming, even in this moment of taking.' (54) Abigail's betrayal by Derek in this moment, effectively his ignorance of her moment of becoming, foreshadows the complete erasure she will eventually suffer at the hand of the state. Despite Derek's initial inability to see her, with him Abigail was still able to test the possibilities of her own becoming. Those possibilities get taken away from her when Derek gets arrested by the state: 'And now that she could not feel that gaze on her, she was more lost than ever.' (56)

Just as Abani's only way of resisting Abigail's erasure is by writing the novella, Abigail herself begins to write because she is not allowed to live. This connection is not missed as Abani begins to come into the text through Abigail's intellectual pursuits – at fourteen, her philosophy gives him away. For instance, Abigail muses that there is 'a quality of silence' (73) which she finds in mountains, specifically 'mountains that had kept their secrets for a millennia' (73), of which she was in awe. Abani does not attempt to mask the parallels between how he reads Abigail, and how Abigail reads a world she cannot inhabit. The critical lyricism of the novella however, allows him to weave into the narrative the elements of incomprehension when faced with the absurdities of life. Abigail is an avid reader of maps as she can pretend that she has some 'kind of dominion over a landscape' (73). This imagination manifests more and more in an attempt to voice the contradictions as well as the incomprehension that both Abani and

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[91] Chris Abani, 'Painting a Body of Loss and Love in the Proximity of an Aesthetic', *The Millions*, 25 November 2013 <http://www.themillions.com/2013/11/painting-a-body-of-loss-and-lovein-the-proximity-of-an-aesthetic.html> [Accessed 7 September 2019].

Abigail encounter on their road to critical-becoming. Abigail reads in *Reader's Digest* that 'all plane landings were controlled crashes. Like the way we live our lives' (65). This piece of wisdom then leads Abigail to read all of life through oxymorons: the pleasure of rain, for example, lay in the way 'it would threaten the world gently' (66), while the shape of her desire was 'To be a white bird […] To be. Yet not the bird. Or night. Or the air. Or the beating [of the bird's wings]'. (74)

Poignantly, Abigail's readings manifest as 'alchemy' – or as recognition of the relationship between objects, and the result, the possibilities, they produce. Not unlike Abani's intent with writing his co-constitution with Abigail. Like Abani, Abigail becomes her own cartographer; through her self-inscriptions, but also through her love for maps, she finds it possible to imagine the 'contours of her inner life'. Abigail reads maps avidly and admits that '[s]ometimes the alchemy of her stare transmuted the parchment into her mother's skin' (73). In a particular scene, Abigail studies a large map which she unfurls on the floor:

> The landmarks taking on a deeper significance. The Himalayas marking the slope of Abigail's forehead, spreading into the Gobi Desert. The hook of Africa became her nose. Australia her bottom lip. And the islands between India and Tasmania became the fragments of teeth bared in a smile. In true cubist form, the Americas were her eyes. (74)

Abigail reads the world solipsistically precisely because she can't see herself in it. Here the crux of her understanding of becoming is hinted at – she requires writing to live, to map out herself, 'For a way to hold it all' (81). And yet all Abigail gets to become is a 'cartographer of dreams. Of ghosts' (74). Abigail is here referring to dreams she has of her mother, as well as her mother's ghostliness. However, this doubling of language, which runs throughout the novella, also means Abigail is referring to herself: both literally and biopolitically, she is a ghost, because she is not legible in the normative way.

Even though Abigail is not seen by the state or, at first, by Derek, her self-awareness resists this erasure. Abigail's critical awareness of colonialism– and thus her history– is alluded to when she steps on the Greenwich line and marvels at how the world is not a connected, alchemic map, but a violent construct of empire. 'She stood on the line that cut the world into two time zones, feet inches apart, marvelling at how true to life it all was. That one could be only a small step away from another world, another time, and yet caught firmly in one or the other, or as in her case, trapped forever between two' (52). Abigail does not need to make those obvious references to

colonialism to delineate her agency to the reader. Despite being co-constituted with Abani, her own gendered and legally precarious existence-marked by sexual violence and migration-should register with the reader that Abigail's life is already always inscribed with agency – an agency born from a critical, and indeed historical awareness, of her global positionality. And yet the critical reception of the novella will unfailingly contain the argument that Abigail is aware of colonialism, because of the space she occupies on the Thames, where she chooses to end her life.

In her article 'Between Life and Death: Representing Trafficked Persons in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Justin Chadwick's *Stolen'*,[92] Pamela McCallum chooses to locate Abigail's agency not in the active decisions she makes in her life, but in the space she chooses to end it:

> […] Cleopatra's Needle embodies tensions which render it a space where an isolated and abused African girl can reclaim her voice. […] Seated on the back of a figuration of African power, the male Egyptian sphinx, Abigail is able to narrate a life shaped by the negative: the death of her mother, the trafficking, the abuse to break her for the sex trade, the loss of possibility–in a way that encourages Africa and its stories in the spaces of a European metropolis.

Where McCallum is wrongly attempting to attribute agency to Abigail because of the historical connotation of Cleopatra's Needle, Abigail's awareness of her history predates this decision to end her life at the Needle. In the paragraph below, she mentions her lighter complexion, referencing the violence of colonialism, and wonders how that history often carries on unacknowledged into the present. Abigail's awareness of this colonial history makes a demand of the reader: that she be similarly recognised and acknowledged.

Abigail's demands tightly link instances of historical and personal injury; she understands that one ensures the other:

> None of the men who had taken her in her short lifetime had seen her […] That her light complexion was a throwback from that time a Portuguese sailor had mistaken her great-grandmother's cries […] There was always a furtive shame to their nudity, and a need to be done quickly, to hide it, theirs and hers, behind clothes again. And this thing that was shameful about them, they put on her, into her, made hers. (28-9)

[92] Pamela McCallum, 'Between Life and Death: Representing Trafficked Persons in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Justin Chadwick's Stolen', *Mosaic: A Journal For The Interdisciplinary Study Of Literature*, 48 (2015), pp. 29-44.

In this way, Abigail speaking through her body is her own resistance to the passivity expected from her by the men that had abused her. Derek gives her *Fragments* by Ayi Kwei Armah, 'an African writer, to make her feel at home' (43). Ironically, his inscription in the book reads '*Gentle Abigail, this book will show you that even though you come from a dark ~~continent~~ place, you can escape your fate. Derek.*' (95). Where Derek might have acknowledged his own complicity in essentialising the narratives about precarious lives from Africa, he corrects it, or tries to, albeit in an ironic, perhaps apologetic way in his scratching out of the word 'continent'. However, this intentional placement of 'dark continent' is also Abani injecting his own criticism of how Africans are viewed: the colonial rhetoric of Africa as a dark continent is the same rhetoric which justified colonialism, and which now structures the uneven, unfair ways in which Africans are still treated in the West. This history is also critiqued and embodied by Abigail herself.

Abigail's ability to love Derek despite his mistakes emanate from the sheer fact that, despite his obvious gendered, socio-political and legal privileges, Derek is always making it clear to Abigail that he is learning from her, and that he attempts to see her. In other words, Derek gives up some of the privileges he enjoys in order to allow Abigail space: the space to become, to feel the borders of herself, to feel herself spread beyond the shackles she has been forced into for her entire life. Derek provides Abigail with a reciprocity she had never encountered in her life, he recognises the need to recognise her. Yet, where critics are comfortable with condemning Derek for his relationship with Abigail outright on moral grounds, they also literally, as well as figuratively, engage in violence against Abigail. In attempting to attribute agency to Abigail, McCallum claims:

> That Abigail is drawn to creativity and literature is also evident in her love of the traditional Chinese poetry of Emperor Wu of Han, Ayi Kwei Armah's
> *Fragments*, a novel about a man who has lived in the West returning to Africa.[93]

In a glaring misreading of Abigail, McCallum wrongly comments that Abigail loves to read Kwei Armah, even though it is Derek who gives the book to her. Abigail literally ponders why Derek would give her Kwei Armah's book instead of Chinese poetry, which is what she espoused love for. Where Abigail is wondering how she could, again, go so unseen, literary critics come to her defence by doing what Derek has done, except with no apology or self-awareness. When Abigail is looking over a map of the world, she realises she has no place in it, and this reminds her of 'a Chinese poet from a long

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[93] McCallum, p.39.

time ago who tried to live his entire life as a poem' (32). That redemption and transformation as a possibility lies in literary embodiment is another instance of Abani's voice coming through Abigail.

This possibility, however, requires a radical approach to reading, and a radical approach to how we understand the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, and ultimately how we can reimagine the relationship between literature and biopolitics. Just as Derek misreads Abigail, there is almost a wilful ignorance – rather than misreading – on behalf of the critics with regard to Abigail's claim to life. The insistence on reading Abigail's subjection – whether through her trafficking or her psyche – rather than her transformation, negates her attempts to become and forecloses the possibility of space.[94] It is difficult to posit whether the novella has a climax; if it does, it would be the moment Abigail, 'unable to stand it anymore […] screamed. Invoking the spirit of Abigail. And with her teeth tore off Peter's penis' (97). From wondering at the beginning of the novella 'how could she live up to the reputation of a woman who was known to confront wife beaters and explain to them, quietly and politely, that if they didn't change she would cut off their penises?' (44) to finally becoming that woman, Abigail undergoes a lot of transformation in the novella. But these are overlooked in light of her tragedies.

Abigail gets forced into prostitution by her cousin's husband, Peter, who brings her to the UK illegally on a forged passport. Abigail resists Peter's attempt at making a strange man 'Fuck her' (90) by biting him. This makes Peter retaliate by turning her into a dog because she had bitten 'like a dog' (90). Peter ties her to the doghouse outside and urinates on her. For the following weeks, Abigail, 'Without hands […] rooted around her skin with her nose. Feeling for the brandings, for the limits of herself' (93). When Mary, Peter's wife, wraps Abigail in a warm blanket to shield her from the cold, Abigail perceives her to be an angel, an angel 'wrapped around a girl slowly becoming a dog'(94).[95] Mary's compassion helps Abigail overcome her dehumanisation at the hands of Peter who, by raping Abigail, 'wrote his shame and anger in her'(97). Ultimately, it is 'The slime of it, [which] threatened to obliterate the tattoos that made her' (97) that galvanises Abigail into calling on the spirit of her mother Abigail, but also fighting to preserve the borders of herself. After she tears Peter's penis off, Abigail is set free by Mary, and is found by the police, numbly walking through the streets of

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[94] See McCallum, Hall, Deandrea, Barberan, Reinares and, to some extent, Dawson.

[95] Interesting connection of signification: Abani was inspired by a series of paintings by Spanish artist Paula Rego, who draws subversive paintings of women in bent positions. Additionally, the reference to the Medusa is not accidental – Medusa was also a highly complex and feminist icon who was misread by others for centuries. In Abigail, Abani is attempting to draw all of those connections.

London, clutching the bloody penis in her hand. What I want to suggest here is that, contrary to normative readings, Abigail's trauma, and thus her response to that, her self-inscriptions, become such an ingrained part of her burgeoning self that any attempt by someone else to write over her, to erase her, is what undoes her passivity and inscribes her agency. All of the various stages of Abigail's transformation – ghostly child, troubled teen, self-mutilator, trafficked teen, Dog Woman, gorgon, and on the list goes on as the narrative progresses – enable her to resist her erasure at the hand of stereotypes and modernity's political and literary traditions.

It is not surprising, then, that Abani has said Abigail's suicide is 'also playing on all of those nineteenth-century books from England that are set around the hysterical woman standing by the River Thames about to do something'.[96] The links of signification[97] leading up to Abigail's suicide call on us to decolonise the criteria by which we understand the lives of others. Abigail's subjection is complete when the only person who attempts to see her is taken away from her. The state, in its intent to safeguard what they assume is her rehabilitation–from victimised third-world woman to newly civilised Western subject – takes away the conditions in which the realisation of that supposed healing may flourish. When Abigail is 'rescued' and taken to the hospital, she is informed that legally she does not exist. 'She was a ghost.' (110). In the hospital which she describes as feeling more like 'a correctional facility' (111), Abigail is derisive of the state in her correct assumption that the entirety of her being – to the state – only further belies her existence. She muses that her file reads something like: 'Girl found with penis in hand? *Claims* to have bitten it off?' (105) (italics mine) Abigail is not so far off when the biopolitical regime, under the guise of biopolitical care, commits further violence to her autonomy. Derek reveals to her that his colleagues recommended 'psychiatric treatment in a confined facility' (111-2).

Eventually, it is Derek – who does attempt to see her, unlike the state – who gets confined in a facility. The legal 'being' she is finally awarded as a ward of the state comes, then, at the expense of her own becoming:

> They said they were doing this to protect her. That she didn't know what choice
> was. But she did. She who had been taken and taken and taken. And now the one
> time she took for herself, the one time she had choice in the matter, it was taken

[96] Ron Singer, 'An Interview with Poet and Fiction Writer Chris Abani,' *Poets and Writers*, June 1 (2006), n.p.
[97] I am also reminded here of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* – the cases of infanticide construed as agency and the haunting trauma mediated through memory, or as Morrison puts it, 'misremembering'.

away. Maybe, she thought, maybe some of us were just here to feed others.
(119)

Abigail's hostility towards the state is a direct corollary of the state's hostility towards her own autonomy. By denying her agency over her own life, the state is effectively subjecting Abigail to its violent care. The state's justification, now as it has historically always been, is grounded in the concept of 'reason': it and it alone is capable of deploying reason and logic to micromanage life for the betterment and enhancement of the colonial subject. This biopolitical logic both structured the relationship between Empire and its colonies, and today it structures the relationship between states and its subjects. Abigail's critique of the state therefore reaches deep into its foundations: she rightly identifies herself within the long line of generations of Africans who have 'fed' the British state.

Abigail appeals the state's decision, to no avail. Like the young woman who fell in love with the judge, those appeals had gone unheard, and the agency behind their claims dismissed. In the eyes of the state, Abigail and the young woman remain victims who were preyed upon. Yet, in an unquestionable show of her agency, when Abigail loses her patience with the case worker who refuses to hear her, she punches her. Precisely because she cannot be heard, Abigail forces the state to see her. Her use of physical force in this instance is an explicit refutation of the state's erasure of her personhood. And yet, even as Abigail establishes this personhood, even as she asserts it, it becomes ephemeral again:

> So much love is memory, she thought. She had loved him so completely and he her. But what are the limits of desire? Those were questions she had heard others discuss in these last few days. Discuss as if she was a mere ghost in their presence. Called this thing between Derek and her wrong. How could it be? (81)

We betray Abigail completely by judging her choices. The policies meant to protect her as a minor are obviously inadequate, yet the moral ambiguity of this situation makes it equally difficult to refrain from judgement. The relationship between Derek and Abigail brings to bear the ethical aspect of the law: the age of consent was implemented to protect minors, but its implementation here does not consider that Abigail was never a child, even though a childhood was 'the one thing Abigail had never really had, and yet truly needed' (119) Additionally, Abigail's relationship with Derek shone a light on those pieces of her which had been damaged by childhood trauma; the state's intervention prevents that relationship from being allowed to begin to heal those scars. Because of her love for Derek, Abigail is finally able to identify the borders of herself,

the shape of her own desires, and not her mother's. In this way, the novella asks us to question the ways in which the law simultaneously makes Abigail legible to us while further silencing and erasing her will and autonomy. It is this nature of the unspeakable which the critical lyric addresses.

To conclude, I want to muse on the possibilities of what a truly ethical reading practice – and thus the possibilities of a truly ethical humanism rooted in reciprocal vulnerability might look like. In exploring the possibilities of life after necropolitics, Samuel Durrant's reading of *Song for Night* situates the relevance of the lyric novel in its attempt – or even ability – to posit redemption as that which occurs beyond the current life; in other words, beyond our secular understanding of life. In my attempt to read Abigail's suicide outside of necropolitics, I turn to Durrant's take on the lyric novel to look to the possibilities of what agency lies beyond the corporeal subject:

> To call *Song for Night* a lyric novel is to mark the shift from an exterior third
> person narration to an interior first-person narration, the moment in which the
> performative, ritualistic modality of his lyric poetry passes over into his prose
> writing. The shift to a first-person narrative means that *Song for Night* enacts,
> rather than simply depicts, the spiritual vocation of his previous characters, and
> it is no coincidence that this is the first of his novels in which this spiritual
> vocation is unambiguously realised. It should be clear by now that Abani has
> found his own way of redefining mimesis, leaving behind the rational tradition
> in which art is a corrupt representation of reality and embracing the more
> dynamic understanding of art as transformative rite.[98]

While Durrant writes here about *Song for Night*, within a specifically animist framework, I would like to pick out some of those observations in their relation to my own regarding *Becoming Abigail*. An exclusively secular, biopolitical reading of *Becoming Abigail* betrays both Abigail herself and Abani's attempts at 'capturing the texture of her life' – precisely because this novella is not merely about representing social injustice, which would simply reproduce Abigail as a victim/object of our sympathy. *Becoming Abigail* joins this long tradition of African writing which defers to cosmology to transform and re-enchant the human against its de-animation, and secularisation, by biopolitical modernity.

Abani intimates at the necessity – indeed the redemptive *need* – for transformation, and he learns the process of ritual and its significance for transformation

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[98] Samuel Durrant. 'Life after Necropolitics: Spirit-Writing, Creaturely Mimesis and Auto-Ancestralisation in Chris Abani's Song for Night', *Research in African Literatures,* 48:3 (2018), p. 13.

through his interactions with the unspeakable. Abigail's attempts at 'coming out as a human' have so far all been vocalized through ritual. I want to draw attention to a story Abani tells during his Ted talk 'On humanity'. After the Biafran war, the women in Abani's village had memorised the names of every dead person, and they would sing these dirges made up of the names, and sing them while they planted rice, 'As though they were seeding the hearts of the dead into the rice.' During harvest time, they would sing joyful songs made up of the names of those who were born that year. At the next planting season, as they sang the dirges, they would move as many names of the dead as equaled the people that were born: 'In this way, these women enacted a lot of transformation. Beautiful transformation'. In many ways, Abigail's haunting of Abani lands her in his novella, his space, where 'she is the meteor, and I, her space'. This ritual performance of transformation cannot occur without haunting, yet the redemption itself is in the realm of the unspeakable: this is a realm for which we do not yet have a language.

Abigail's decision not to inform the state of Peter's whereabouts because 'the memory of Mary's eyes' (111) haunted her could perhaps transform what the state has deemed 'her terrible legacy' (111) into another's redemption. Defiantly, Abigail's Igbo philosophy – *Ije Ewa,* which translates into 'One's walk in this life' (111) – leads her to believe that the path is not always fixed or problematic; it is personality, and not destiny, which 'always sways the outcome of the game' (111). Referring back to Igbo notions of personality, personhood and the person enable Abigail to extricate herself from those Western variants which have been forced onto her. Abigail's recourse to Igbo cosmology, at the end of her life, signals the beginning of another life: her own individual life, the life of an alternate, liberating epistemology, and the life of a literary tradition which recovers all of these life-forms, against the erasure of this biopolitical modernity.

Through Abigail's suicide, Abani puts his novella in conversation with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in his exploration of tragedy, fatalism, and ethics. In reaching back to that foundational text of contemporary African literature, Abani is highlighting the limitations that Western hegemony has always placed on Africans' ability to fulfil their own personhood. While the Igbo believe that suicide is a sin against the Earth, '*nso ani*'[99], Okonkwo, that novel's protagonist, also commits suicide towards the end of the narrative. Alan Friesen suggests a reading of Okonkwo's suicide not as

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[99] Ukwu and Ikebedu quoted in Alan R Friesen, 'Okonkwo's Suicide as an Affirmative Act: Do Things Really Fall Apart?', *Postcolonial Text*, 2:4, (2006), p. 6.

tragedy but as an affirmative act of resistance against the encroaching colonisation of his village, arguing that it 'can be seen as his last attempt to remind the Igbo people of their culture and values in the face of impending colonisation'.[100] Whether or not this is a plausible reading of Okonkwo's suicide, there is a case to be made for the agential nature of suicide. Paul Rabinow reminds us that 'suicide–once a crime […] was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone […] had to right to exercise […] it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life'.[101] That Abigail and Okonkwo's fates are mirrored, that their final acts of becoming are both also acts of self-destruction, is no coincidence. African literature has always depicted its protagonists reaching for alternate methods and modes of self-fulfillment: in both those instances of suicide, we see both Okonkwo and Abigail preserving their own sovereignties against the violent sovereign imposition of the colonisers.

If we choose to read Okonkwo's suicide as sacrifice rather than tragedy, then we can contrast his selflessness with Abigail's. To contrast Okonkwo and Abigail's suicides as agential rather than subaltern, and without suggesting definitive parallels, I bring up the example given by Spivak of one Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri. Bhaduri committed suicide in her father's apartment in 1926, while menstruating. Bhaduri chose suicide to evade both the task of carrying out a political assassination, and losing the trust of her party. However, her menstruation, and not her suicide, was her only means of communicating the truth of her decision: because Bhaduri was on her period, she makes it undisputable for her suicide to be considered for anything other than what it was. Her suicide would have been overwhelmingly read as an attempt to get out of an illicit pregnancy. Utilising her body and her sex; two of the prominent things which are used in her own oppression by the patriarchy, Bhaduri effectively illustrates the place from which the subaltern cannot speak. However, with much more room to express themselves, both Abigail and Okonkwo realise, in their distinct ways, how the institutions which govern them are dysfunctional. Okonkwo believes that that those which govern the village do not function well enough to protect the Igbo's culture and values, while Abigail believes that those which would rehabilitate her and punish Peter are not radical enough, in the sense that they would protect neither herself nor Mary. In this way, Abigail's point of suicide, that is, her actions which lead up to that moment in the novella, suggests that her agency is undisputable.

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[100] Friesen, p. 1.
[101] Rabinow, p. 261.

Unlike Bhaduri, Abigail's vocalisation is made through various means. For instance, through her own narration, Abigail intersperses the narrative Abani is trying to write with fake memories and mourning rituals which for the most part, to borrow from De Man, allow for 'incomprehension' on behalf of the reader. Most notably, the unstable temporality of the novella also resists making it possible for the reader to assume full access to Abigail's subjectivity. The sequence of events is never linear and, towards the end of the novella, it becomes less spaced out, and more attentive to Abigail's focal point of view from her place on the Needle. Abigail also leaves a trail of legal appeals in her wake: those claims, not for rights, but the right to be seen, and the right to challenge the law, and to undo the posture-appeal position of the victim and instead inscribe Abigail's agency. The complex manner in which she contributes to her own story of co-becoming while maintaining her opacity suggests that Abigail, through Abani, is also writing her story and signaling to us from the end of the novella that suicide had been her intent all along.

Abigail understands that her final choices can have repercussions for Mary, who is likely also an illegal migrant in Britain. Abigail thus chooses to remain subject to the state's dismissal than give up Mary to the same fate. Similarly, Okonkwo chooses to subject himself to potential eternal damnation than give up his village and his culture to the British. That Abigail chooses to commit suicide by throwing herself into the river needn't constitute a morbid ending: Abigail's referral to Igbo philosophy flirts with the idea of a second chance, after death.

> A person who lived poor and was buried poor can, when a relative makes enough money, receive a second burial […] So even in death, the dead can get a chance to taste the wealth that eluded him in his previous incarnation, perhaps sweetening the deal for his next one (109).

Abigail then subscribes to a belief, however loosely interpreted, that we are beholden to one another in complex ways. In a way, Abani is able to write Abigail's choice against fatalism only because Achebe did it first with Okonkwo. That Achebe is a spectral agent in Abani's work is equally mirrored in how Abani figures as a spectral agent in Abigail's life. Those links make it evident, both to Abani and thus to Abigail, that just as others' actions have repercussions for our lives, ours will also have repercussions for theirs. Abigail's sacrifice for Mary is followed soon after by her sacrifice for Derek: she believes that by committing suicide, she could be making Derek's release possible. However incomprehensible, Abigail chooses to see the beauty in her decisions, in her undoing by others. This humanism which Abigail shares with Abani and Butler lead her

to conclude that 'You just opened your heart because you knew tomorrow there would be another shaft of light, another tree, and another rain of shadows. Each particular. Not the same as yesterday's. Not as beautiful as yesterday's. Only as beautiful as today's.' (109) In light of her decisions, she wonders why, when even the dead knew, 'these people [the state] know nothing of this [...] of the complexities of life [?]' (109). It is thus crucial to note that beyond her sacrifices for Mary and Derek, she is also deciding to not carry on living without him. That her ethical choice reflects her lack of options is tragic in itself, but we do owe Abigail more than the tragedy that life has dealt her; instead, we must believe in her ability to make that choice while respecting that this contradictory agency is agency nonetheless.

Chapter 4. Un-becoming Human: The Necropolitics of Alienation in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*

'Becoming subject therefore supposes upholding the work of death.'[1]

In *On the Postcolony,* Achille Mbembe asks: 'If one is not a human being, what is one?'[2] Mbembe's question here explicitly eschews a concern over defining the human, and directs us instead towards defining the void which is left in its wake. The doubled semantics of Mbembe's question structure my thesis: thus far, all of the preceding chapters have been concerned with the recovery of the human whereas this chapter is instead concerned with the *dissolution* of the human. This trajectory is a natural one because, like Mbembe's question discerns – as does the work of Agamben, Foucault and Arendt – questions of the human always, inevitably, lead us instead to questions around its undoing. There is, not coincidentally, a spectre which haunts political theology – the ever emerging spectre of the exception, the camp, the zones of indistinction:[3] those spaces in which, through repeated acts of political exceptionalism, the human is (un)locatable. The zombie thus emerges as the human's 'remainder':[4] bred through the intricacies of sovereign power and necropolitics, this is a form of life which has been, as Foucault puts it, '[disallowed] to the point of death',[5] yet which 'does not necessarily give way to nothingness'.[6] This chapter, then, is concerned with this unlocatable form of life, for which political theory has no distinctive epistemological or ontological framework; and which, in response to his own question, Mbembe has termed the 'living dead'.

Harare North[7] is a novel which experiments with the psyche of inhabiting a life under the power of death, or what it means to be the 'living dead'. As a novel which destabilises the concept of the subject to such an extent as to make it un-locatable – or, more specifically, ambiguously located within this epistemological lacuna – *Harare North* challenges normative philosophical and political discourses of sovereignty and of the subject in its exploration of the necropolitical. By integrating Shona cosmology as a

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[1] Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics' *Public Culture*, 15:1 (2003), p. 14.
[2] Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p.174.
[3] These are terms which have been coined by Agamben, who has written extensively on the state of exception and developed the concept of 'bare life' as that which is constituted by and in 'a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast' Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 109.
[4] Ibid., p. 205: 'So the body is destroyed. It does not necessarily give way to nothingness; it makes way for the remainder. Then, for this remainder, there opens a time after death'.
[5] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 138.
[6] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 205.
[7] Brian Chikwava, *Harare North* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009). Further references appear in the text.

'competing' framework through which to read the novel, the narrative complicates our Western understanding of power and death, and the social-legal structures and philosophical orders which uphold them. Rather than write the subject into being, the novel writes this lacuna into being, outlining the spaces from within which the black subject is alienated and omitted from discourses of the subject. In this way, *Harare North* elucidates how the notion of biopower in its current form is insufficient to account for all the ways in which the subjugation of black lives operates.

The novel's integration of Shona cosmology complicates the concept of liminality as we understand it politically. For the Shona, life and death are structured in a radically different manner so as to constitute a cycle rather than an opposition. Terrence Musanga explains that: 'Life is seen as an enduring reality that merely transforms from one form to the other. Death, on the other hand, is conceptualised as a liminal stage in the transformation of life from one stage to another'.[8] For the Shona, death constitutes a transition from the bodily to the spiritual: the dead come back as ancestors and spirits who guard the traditions, activities, ethics and well-being of the family they belong to. Those ancestors, or spirits, are referred to as the 'living-dead'[9] – the hyphenated form distinguishing the cosmological from Mbembe's political.

Ancestors occupy various roles in the Shona universe: primarily, they can be medium spirits who intercede with God, also known as Mwari, on behalf of the living. Mwari sits at the top of the cosmological hierarchy and does not intervene in human affairs. In this sense, the ancestors' spirits have active roles within the material, human world: they ensure that the cyclical order of the community is upheld. This is done through various rites but, for the purpose of this chapter, we will be looking at the concept of restorative and retributive justice more closely. The dead can come back as Ngozi, an avenging spirit who seeks to right the wrong that has been done to them, when restoration has not already occurred. Ancestors can also be reincarnated and come back as newborns. Death thus figures as a prolongation of life, and life itself is a continuation of death. The limits between life and death are therefore blurred, and there can be no 'waterproof separation between the world inhabited by the spirits, be it the ancestors and other spirits, and that inhabited by the living'.[10]

In this sense, the question of subjectivity and sovereignty as they pertain to the Shona offer up a radically different epistemological framework to the normative ones

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[8] Terrence Musanga, ''Ngozi' (Avenging Spirit), Zimbabwean Transnational Migration, and Restorative Justice in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009)', *Journal of Black Studies*, 48:8 (2017), p. 777.
[9] John Mbiti, *African religion and philosophy* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1990), p. 82.
[10] Mambo Ama Mazama, 'Afrocentricity and African Spirituality', *Journal of Black Studies*, 33 (2002), p. 221.

we inherit from modernity. Mambo Ama Mazama explains that 'people do not conceive of themselves as separated from the cosmos but as being completely integrated into a universe that is much larger than any of them and yet is centred around them'.[11] Selfhood is understood as being part of a cycle of transformation which involves other entities; rendering the possibility of individual sovereignty obsolete. In other words, in Shona cosmology the individual is not a separate entity which exercises its sovereignty independently of the community but, rather, part of a wider community which involves both the living as well as the dead, the unborn as well as the immaterial world of spirits. Nature also forms part of this community, as it facilitates this cycle of transformation by way of rituals. Therefore, there is a symbiotic relationship between the spiritual and the physical in Shona cosmology, where this symbiosis is navigated through the figure of the living person. The concept of the liminal in Shona cosmology differs substantially from the legal liminality of modernity. In this sense, *Harare North*'s recourse to Shona cosmology complicates the ontology of the narrator who potentially is not human at all, but rather an avenging spirit – Ngozi. This chapter forwards a formulation of the disjunction between the moral and philosophical discourses of Shona cosmology and Western modernity as they relate to the formation and theory of the 'self'. Where necropolitics operates by subjecting people to a form of existence which traps them between a material form of life and death, Shona cosmology operates by including people within a system whereby life is constantly renewed through the living-dead. The narrator of *Harare North* contends with both unsuccessfully.

At their core, both philosophies are concerned with the question of ontology; or, more directly, the question of membership within ontological structures. The disjunction between both philosophies ultimately relates to the following questions, aptly posed by Mbembe: 'What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?'.[12] Simply put, the necropolitical stratifies the order of power: the human body is subjected to death by the sovereign who controls life. The Shona, on the other hand, organise this order into a circle. Mazama reiterates that: '[t]he circle, which is the African spiritual symbol par excellence, takes on its full meaning as it stands for the constant renewal of Life through death and birth'.[13] The circle therefore undoes the hierarchy: death, life, and the human body are here all complementary. Mazama quotes a Bambara[14] saying

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[11] Ibid., p. 220.
[12] Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 12.
[13] Mazma, p. 221.
[14] Part of the Mandé ethnic group, indigenous to West Africa, in mostly what is today Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Senegal.

which reads: 'Life merges from divinity through birth and merges back into divinity through death, and through this cyclical transformation, we achieve immortality'.[15] The concept of immortality, which assumes that life is infinite, undoes the necropolitical precisely because the necropolitical instrumentalises life, as a finite resource, for its own gain. The necropolitical has been facilitated by the total dehumanisation of people who are deemed disposable, because they are – and can be – excluded from social and legal forms of membership, and thus personhood.

The Shona's ontological outlook, however, is more concerned with membership which Mbembe succinctly describes as 'peoplehood – not nationhood'.[16] This is a form of belonging based on 'a unity of being' which confers on all beings and things the shared, common 'energy of cosmic origin'.[17] Mazama explains that, 'this ontological unity is a very ancient feature of African cosmology'[18] and it has two implications: 'the principle of connectedness of all that is, based on a common essence; and the principle of harmony, based on the organic solidarity and complementarity of all forms'.[19] In essence, this ontological unity posits that all beings are endowed with membership to life itself, a membership that cannot be rescinded through political structures. This also means that there can be no hierarchy among humans and non-humans alike. Ultimately, the circle impedes the possibility for expressions of individual sovereignty. This outlook explains the cycle of transformation to which the Shona ascribe: that all of life is shared commonly through an equally shared belonging, where this belonging is underscored by 'the complementarity of all forms'.

The practical reality of the nation-state, however (that is, the reality that we must exist within it), effectively suspends any possibility of true membership: in its current form, the nation-state's belonging is manifest through exclusionary citizenship. In the first chapter, through the study of the Bildungsroman, I provided an overview of how legal membership in the nation state is premised on a system of rights and responsibilities. The citizen has certain responsibilities towards the state, for which she receives rights in return. Those rights are understood to be the state's responsibilities towards the citizen. The flaw in this system, I will reiterate, is that the nature of citizenship is exclusionary. It is also prescriptive: the development of the human into the citizen requires a process of interpellation. This interpellation is both the exercise of

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[15] Mazama, pp. 221-2.
[16] Achille Mbembe, 'The Idea of a Borderless World', in *Africa Is a Country* (2008) <https://africasacountry.com/2018/11/the-idea-of-a-borderless-world/>
[17] Mazama, p. 219
[18] Ibid., p. 219
[19] Ibid., p. 220

sovereignty and the subjection to sovereignty. Mbembe clarifies it thus: 'The romance of sovereignty […] rests on the belief that the subject is the master and the controlling author of his or her own meaning. Sovereignty is therefore defined as a twofold process of self-institution and self-limitation'.[20] The subject is driven by a desire to gain autonomy within a given social order: this 'self-institution' results in 'self-limitation' when the subject finds this autonomy by identifying with the existing [sovereign] order of the prescriptive and exclusionary nation-state.

Crucial to this development has been the condition of the temporal, that is, that linearity which underpins the teleology of the nation and the citizen, within their shared history. This is achieved by 'society's capacity for self-creation through recourse to institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary significations'.[21] The nation-state therefore deploys a predatory sovereignty which subjects its citizens to its order of power. Within this order, the circle is abolished: necropolitics necessarily abolishes ancestry, because it cannot accommodate a complementarity of forms of life. Nor can it accommodate for a non-linear organisation of life, as this would entail the expression of communal peoplehood, rather than its own self-limiting personhood. In his essay 'The Idea of a Borderless World',[22] Mbembe makes the comparison between modernity's 'nationhood' and African Cosmological 'peoplehood'. Mbembe uses the past tense, because his essay recognises that the possibility of peoplehood has long been abolished by necropolitics:

> And peoplehood – not nationhood – included not only the living, but also the dead, the unborn, humans and non-humans. Community was unthinkable without some kind of foundational debt, two principal forms of debt. There is a kind of debt that is expropriatory. Some of us are indebted to banks. But in these constellations, there is a different kind of debt that is constitutive of the very basis of the relation. And it is a kind of debt that encompasses not only the living, the now, but also those who came before and those who will come after us that we have obligations to – the chain of beings that includes, once again, not only humans but animals and what we call nature.[23]

The significance of those forms of community debt are explored in the novel, both through the rituals of burial, and the concept of Ngozi. The novel also explores the

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[20] Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 9.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Mbembe, 'The Idea of a Borderless World'.
[23] Ibid.

consequences of not meeting these debts – or, more directly, the consequences of being alienated from this community of peoplehood.

The narrator of *Harare North* is an asylum seeker in the UK, a status which is prescribed on the condition of exclusion from membership and belonging. The liminality born from this form of alienation is most acutely perceived through the figures of the asylum seeker and refugee, the default 'other' who is expelled from the nation-state. *Harare North* does not write the narrator into being from statelessness into citizen; in other words, *Harare North* does not offer us a normative reading of personhood. The premise of the narrative, in general terms, revolves around the narrator having to raise enough money in London in order to be able to return to Zimbabwe and resolve two responsibilities. The first is to the Zimbabwean state: the narrator is made to believe by Comrade Mhiripiri that he needs to pay off a bribe of $4,000 in order to evade a prison sentence. The second is to his mother: he needs to organise a burial rite – Umbuyiso – which would ensure she comes back as an ancestor and therefore maintains the intactness of the circle. Umbuyiso is the bringing home ceremony in Shona culture, and it is an integral component of the cycle of transformation: Umbuyiso returns the spirit of the deceased to the family, where it assumes the role of the living-dead. If this is not done, the circle is broken, the spirit finds no rest and is left wandering the wilderness. The narrator is therefore not after the teleology of human rights, which is expected of refugees and asylum seekers. Having to migrate to the UK has in fact prevented him from performing the rites and from fulfilling his responsibility to his mother. That he carries this burden throughout the novel ostensibly means that he ascribes instead to the Shona's ontological structures of peoplehood. Umbuyiso guarantees that the cycle of transformation within the community remains intact, thereby guaranteeing an ultimate place of belonging for his mother, and by extension, for himself within the circle.

His forced exile from Zimbabwe, however, underlines a forced necessity to also ascribe to modern forms of membership. The interruption of this cycle and its ontological significance by the state's own systematic cycle of violence means that the narrator, caught in between the legal categories of personhood, cannot access what Mbembe refers to as 'peoplehood'. This conundrum is the first, visible instance of liminality. However, the reach of the nation-state's exclusion is not limited to the moment of migration, but rather is experienced equally violently in Zimbabwe.

The narrator is a disenfranchised, urban dweller from the townships of Harare, who struggles to scrape together a living by being a shoe-shine. Like the majority of

Zimbabwe's youth, he is disillusioned with his life, which has been made devoid of purpose under a regime of state-imposed economic and social strife. As a result, the narrator joins the state's National Youth Service Programme,[24] disregarding the reality that it is the state itself which has orchestrated this socio-economic demise of the nation. His justification illustrates the necropolitical tendencies of the state: 'If you is back home leading rubbish life and ZANU-PF party offer you job in they youth movement to give you chance to change your life and put big purpose in your life, you don't just sniff at it' (17). While the goals of the youth service are '[t]o inculcate national values, ethos and ethics into the youths' and '[t]o improve youths involvement in nation-building', the programme's actual purpose is to extend the necropolitical regime by impeding social and political change for those outside of its party. The programme's core values include 'National Identity', which seeks to 'create a symbolic identity for the Zimbabwean youth', and crucially, the value of 'Unity and Oneness' whose holders will be 'Zimbabwean citizens who are wary of foreign influence and intervention in issues affecting their sovereign state'.[25] The programme ostensibly presents itself as being part of the struggle for sovereign autonomy in Zimbabwe's anticolonial resistance. In this sense, its recourse to a familiar Shona vernacular of values such as 'unity and oneness' is intentionally alluring. The programme is in reality a militant wing of Mugabe's ZANU-PF government: its raison d'être is reactionary to the emergence of opposition political parties, namely the popular Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Members of the youth programme, who are known as Green Bombers, carry out the state's dirty work of subjugating any resistance it encounters. Where Mugabe's regime emerged from the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe – a struggle marked by The First Chimurenga – it quickly escalated into a regime of violence and quasi-authoritarianism. This remains an ongoing phase in the nation's turbulent history, marked by events such as the Gukurahundi and Operation Murambatsvina.[26]

The legitimation of militias such as the Green Bombers serves to sustain the state's monopoly on 'legitimate' violence. Mbembe argues that, 'society's capacity for self-creation through recourse to institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary significations'[27] is the ultimate exercise of sovereignty. Mugabe has capitalised on the

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[24] Ministry of Youth Development and Employment Creation, Zimbabwe (https://web.archive.org/web/20080421130728/http://www.mydgec.gov.zw/nys.htm)
[25] Ibid.
[26] The Gukurahundi refers to the massacres of Ndebele civilians by the Zimbabwean National Army from the years 1983–1987 . The term Gukurahundi roughly translates to 'the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains'. Like 'Operation Murambatsvina' which translates into Operate Clean the Nation, both terms mark traumatic historical events of state violence against civilians.
[27] Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 9.

momentum of anti-colonial resistance in Africa to sediment his own control over Zimbabwe; in so doing, he has created a link between the ideological narrative of an ongoing socialist, pan-Africanist struggle with himself. Because the Green Bombers are formed in Mugabe's image, they also necessarily link their identity to his – and thus to his own, imagined version of Zimbabwe. The narrator's explanation – or indeed vindication – that, 'the Green Bombers is there to smoke them enemies of the state out of they corrugated-iron hovels and scatter them across the earth' (8) signals his own subscription to the state's fantasy of sovereignty. The narrator's ability to cast political rivals as enemies of the state resides in his identification with the state, or more directly, in his self-creation through the state. This enables him to imagine himself as a sovereign agent. This is made evident throughout the novel, with the narrator frequently referring to himself as a 'principled man' (65, 81, 83), distinguishing himself from others whom he considers mere 'civilians'. In his reading of sovereignty as 'self-discipline', Peter Bloom recasts disciplinary power as that force which enables in its subjects a deluded fantasy of ontological security – agent of the sovereign – which differentiates them as exceptional to the norm – civilians of the necropole. Bloom's analysis here is accurate:

> The identification with a powerful sovereign provides individuals with ontological security in the face of rather complex micro-processes of power and broader depersonalised forms of subjection associated with neoliberalism. […] individuals are affectively 'gripped' by sovereignty to account for the complexity and incoherence associated with the concrete and discursive operation of disciplinary power. The appeal of a sovereign fantasy lies in its promise of granting individuals a sense of 'sovereign' agency perceived to be lacking in their existence as 'agency-less' disciplinary subjects of neoliberalism. This desire produces diverse but complementary contemporary fantasies of sovereignty for producing and reinforcing the 'self-disciplined' neoliberal subject. Thus, paradoxically disciplinary power relies on an identification with and desire for sovereign control.[28]

The narrator's sense of superiority in relation to the other characters in the novel is affirmed by his belief that he has meaning to his life and, beyond all, a purpose which the others lack. The narrator's newfound purpose enables him to both navigate and survive the necropolis, while contributing to the upholding of Zimbabwe's sovereignty, by 'smoking out' the enemies of the state who would wish to impede the ongoing anti-

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[28] Peter Bloom, 'Cutting off the king's head: the self-discipline fantasy of neoliberal sovereignty', *New Formations,* 88, 2016, p. 8.

colonial struggle. The contradiction within this arrangement lies in the fact that where the narrator is able to express sovereignty as terminating the life of others, he is also the subject of sovereignty: his life is deemed disposable both by Mugabe and by the British state through its asylum process. This double-subjection to sovereignty leaves the narrator between two categories which underpin modern politics: the sovereign (citizen, political subject), and alien (disposable, bare life). This contradiction then places the narrator in an unending cycle of necropolitical alienation: he is alienated from himself, as well as from life, both because he is capable of killing and of being killed. This legacy of political violence ultimately breaks the ontological unity through which the Shona come into being in this world. The Youth Programme's goals and values by default violate those of the Shona in its call to enforce exclusions and perform national and political violence against its opponents. The very sinister value of a national identity which seeks to inculcate national values, ethics and ethos in youth ultimately translates into an inculcation of Mugabe's values, ethics and ethos, in youths who are tasked with building Mugabe's nation. The programme, as the novel elucidates unsparingly, indoctrinates youths into identifying with Mugabe, and crucially, forms them in Mugabe's image. This indoctrination by the state severs the narrator from his Shona mode of being. Throughout the novel, as the narrator is illegally 'stuck' in London, the irony is not lost on the reader that it is he himself who is 'scattered across the earth'.

The causes of this severing are multi-layered and far-reaching. Between falling victim to this predatory sovereignty – or more directly, becoming an object of the state's necropolitical agenda – and being alienated from the cyclical ontology of the Shona, our narrator becomes a zombie who inhabits a zone of indistinction. The narrator's self-professed identity is continuously framed through this superior, self-disciplined and individualist manner – a requirement of sovereign fantasy – achieved by the process of 'zombiefication' discussed by Mbembe in On the Postcolony. The consequences of this subjection are elaborated succinctly in Mazama's article when he claims that

> [W]hen we think of African selves, we cannot be satisfied with an individualistic approach but must understand that we are an organic part of a whole […] We certainly cannot think of reclaiming our lives outside of this ontological order if at the end of that reclamation process we are to be whole again.[29]

Mazama's contribution is crucial as I attempt to read the human from within this lacuna formed through the intricate web of normative political philosophy. The competing

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[29] Mazama, p. 222.

framework provided by Shona cosmology is in itself a reclamation process because it outlines the gaps within modernity's formation of personhood. To make those gaps visible is to enable and legitimise the potentialities for understanding the self differently, as a whole, or as an organic part of the whole – but not the whole signified by the frames of the nation-state. It would offer a different framework through which to understand the self, differently to how we understand the self normatively as 'subject to', or 'object of'. Unless the human is disaggregated from this normative political philosophy – which ultimately transcribes the human as/as not citizen – the resultant mode of being is that of the zombie – as a category of selfhood within modernity – inhabiting the zone of indistinction.

The argument of this chapter however is not to posit that literature necessarily reclaims the zombie, but rather that it represents it. In *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora,*[30] Michelle Wright poignantly concludes:

> Until all black peoples in the diaspora, regardless of their marginalised status, can find representation within a theory of the subject, we cannot attach too much importance to black subject formations that rely on and/or ignore the exclusions they perform.[31]

If the work of this thesis can be summarised in this light, it would argue for creating a theory of the black subject[32] from within the exclusions that are performed on them, and the exclusions they perform. However, this chapter will explore the limits of working with narrative as a tool of humanisation which enables this representation of the zombie. My previous chapters have sought to salvage and reclaim the human from its biopolitical residue, formed from within, and through, those forms of exclusion. Alienation, produced by exclusive citizenship and rights ideology, is the main trauma faced by the characters in the novels. Because the subject has historically been theorised from within dominant socio-political formations, the abject has only ever been theorised as its other. However, the centrality of this socio-political model ensures that the 'other' maintains this hegemony: it is the continual perpetuation of the other's exclusion which sustains the dominant order and, consequentially, the normative subject.

This contradiction is inherent to the values of classical liberal thought. Contradictorily, this binary thus creates a perennial state of alienation on the part of the

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[30] Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
[31] Ibid., p.231.
[32] Where I discuss the black subject here, using Michelle Wright's words, I then switch to discussing the migrant. This is because my area of study is specifically within migrant narratives from Nigeria and Zimbabwe. In the scope of this thesis, I refer to the black subject in the Diaspora to specifically mean the black migrant from Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

non-normative subject. In attempting to place the figure of the human migrant as its own theoretical centre, I have argued that narrative representations of becoming-critical and critical-becoming entail a process of humanisation unavailable from within those dominant orders. Conclusively, there is a clear relationship between becoming human and writing: writing retraces the archive of the human back from the residue of necropolitics. The literary forms inhabited by the migrant – and the specific ways in which they are inhabited – rewrite the philosophical and ontological structures which underpin the category of 'the human', thus rewriting the human itself. This rewriting ultimately contributes to a theory of the black subject. Undeniably, representation within a theory of the subject, as its own measure and in its own right, enables a form of redemption, or a reclamation, in the face of political exclusions.

However, *Harare North* ostensibly presents a problem to the argument traced throughout this thesis. Whereas all the previous narratives are concerned with a recovery of the self, *Harare North*, with its ontologically ambiguous narrator, differs significantly in its theoretical reach: it is concerned with the dissolution of the self. Unlike the other novels studied in this thesis, *Harare North* does not have a redemptive element to it. Formally, as well as contextually, the novel's instability poses an obstacle to my theory of becoming-critical. As a refugee narrative, the politics of ontology are already at hand. Refugees are always already excluded from the fields of normative humanity; and thus refugee narratives will often seek to restore that humanity by recourse to the teleology of human rights discourse. Additionally, the refugee is the nation-state's other: she is only ever represented from within this exclusion. In this way, the literary as the performative sphere of human rights – if we are to understand human rights as the work of endowing all humans with unconditional membership of that to which only a few have access – becomes even more of an urgent necessity. I argue that by attempting to archive the existence and modes of being of people who are stateless, the novel goes beyond simply re-stating that statelessness and points to another, unnameable or even unknowable mode of being. While each character is unique and thus there cannot be a uniform prototype of statelessness, the structures which underpin this existence is uniform. Extending my analysis of the politics of recognition and an ethos of shared common corporeal vulnerability from the previous chapter, I encounter an obstacle with *Harare North*: there is no subject, or human, or self, to be recognised. Additionally, the novel narrates how the protagonist is undone by others, rather than narrating how he becomes through others.

Harare North is narrated by an unnamed protagonist from Zimbabwe who arrives in the UK and 'mouth[s] the magic word – asylum – and flash[es] toothy grin of friendly African native' (4). The narrator is claiming asylum under the premise of being a victim of Mugabe's regime. This information is presented as a lie to the reader, because the narrator gives his loyalties away in the prologue when he spots Mugabe's face in a newspaper headline and instantly identifies him as His Excellency, an accolade he never stops using throughout the novel. We know the narrator is a Green Bomber, and this information instantly places him in a tenuous position: while the narrator is undoubtedly an interpolated victim of the state's disciplinary power, he is also a perpetrator who makes of others his own victims. The narrator does not care for asylum: we discover he is only in the UK to 'graft hard' and make enough money to pay off a bribe back in Zimbabwe and perform the Umbuyiso ceremony for his deceased mother.

The plot, however, is not driven by a succession of events which ultimately lead to the narrator's return to Zimbabwe to perform Umbuyiso; it is rather stalled by the question of who, or what, the narrator is. On the one hand, the narrator is indoctrinated as a Green Bomber, alienating himself from the Shona ontological order. Yet on the other, he narrates the novel through the belief system of the Shona. The narrator is thus split between two different worldviews. Among other elements in the novel, this interstitial position is explored through the narrator's relationship with his childhood friend Shingi. We are alerted to the narrator's dependence on Shingi from the outset of the novel, yet this dependence is hinted throughout as being of a more sinister nature than initially thought. The narrator leads a parasitic existence, leaching off of Shingi, and eventually 'becomes' Shingi towards the novel's ending. Both Shingi and the narrator are migrants and so lead a life on the margins of British society. Their marginality is increasingly exacerbated by necropolitics, which we know abolishes all notions of ancestry. The novel thus informs us that Shingi is totemless, and because we know that the narrator is inexplicably linked to Shingi, we can also assume that he is totemless as well. This severs the link to ancestry, and thus to the circle.

The disjunction between modernity and Shona cosmology comes to a head in London. Because both are thus unable to satisfy the cycle and become regenerated through the living-dead, via Umbuyiso, both are wandering an interstitial wilderness which renders them politically living dead, in the sense Mbembe intends. In this way, both the narrator and Shingi are materially absent from the narrative towards its end, whether we assume this from a political or Shona point of view. The crux of the novel hinges on whether the narrator and Shingi are indeed two separate people, or one and

the same, both voices from the same split personality with the narrator as Shingi's Ngozi. Because either of these scenarios is possible and, indeed, plausible, my position on this question is that the novel actively resists any such clarity as to the nature of the narrator.

The question of whether Shingi *is* the narrator hinges on whether we read personhood normatively or cosmologically. The ambiguity is intentional and suggests to us, from beyond the novel proper, that we are all rendered totemless by necropolitics, because we all live in a necropolitical world. We should thus be searching for what this ambiguity enables, or more directly, what this absence of self makes present.

Unbelonging as Unbecoming: Habitation and Burial Between Harare and *Harare North*

Where I've previously attempted to read the human through the literary, in the case of this chapter, I read the literary as writing the human out. *Harare North* vocalises the alienation lived by its anonymous narrator and creates a voice so dissociated that we are unable to recognise it either ontologically or stylistically. This obstacle to recognition is directly linked to both the necessity, but also impossibility, of producing a non-normative reading/theory of selfhood, considering that it is only from within normative states that theories of selfhood, and the human, have emerged. Our inability to conceive of other articulations of humanity and selfhood correlate with our inability to exist outside of the nation-state. Edward Said has vocalised this sentiment more accurately in his essay 'Reflections on Exile':

> Against this large impersonal setting, exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism. On the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first-hand; but to think of exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalise its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as 'good for us'.[33]

In following Said's critique of literature and exile, I am unwilling to romanticise the objectification of victims of necropolitics. To dignify such a romanticisation, even in literature, is to necessitate that it remains the visible exclusion to our norm. Therefore, to insist that there is a dignity to be found in the valorisation of a narrated form of life which by definition is only the 'other' to life as we understand it, is to remain within the

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[33] Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 174.

bounds of the form of law. Instead, I am arguing for a radical reconfiguration of the theory of the subject. Following on from the notion of the limits of narrative tool of humanisation, a humanisation which is reliant on a common corporeal vulnerability, I want to think about habitation. In attempting to think through the structures underpinning necropolitics, this thesis analyses those human responses to necropolitics within literature.

While contextually divergent, the three authors studied in this thesis are migrants from Nigeria and Zimbabwe. With Abani, the notion of ghostwriting has been explored in relation to *Becoming Abigail.* Yet arguably, *GraceLand* is also about Abani's relationship to Nigeria: the novel grants him this relationship to inhabiting Nigeria, via literature. Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* also archives her connection to Zimbabwe, while narrating her displacement and inscribing it within a history of displacement. Clearly, these novels are all preoccupied with both finding a language through which a true, non-alienated humanity can be articulated, while also crafting a non-alienating space for this humanity to be accommodated.

Not too dissimilarly, Chikwava has stated in an interview that he left Zimbabwe to write. Citing a general atmosphere of hostility towards the arts and the freedom of imagination, Chikwava is only able to form an idea for *Harare North* – and the narrator – after leaving Harare. Haunting returns here as a form of writing: it is the encounter with a former Ugandan soldier from Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army that prompts the inspiration for the narrator in *Harare North.* The ex LRA soldier 'was unchanged by the five years that had passed since he fled Uganda, and still missed Joseph Kony. He seemed pretty unreconstructed if not unreconstructable […] Soon after that encounter my novel crystallised quickly'.[34]

Chikwava was battling with the ability to imagine another form of being, outside the one forced on citizens of necropolitical states. What might a human look like without the shadow of sovereignty looming over her? This encounter with an ex-LRA soldier immediately instills in Chikwava the hope, but also the fear, that he would encounter Green Bombers under that same tree which the novel is based on. A large portion of the novel's plot occurs under the chestnut tree where Chikwava had these encounters. While the narrator of *Harare North* is loosely based on the ex-LRA soldier, the premise of the novel was largely formulated through various other encounters. Chikwava recounts meeting a well-qualified banker from Nigeria who threw everything

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[34] Brian Chikwava, 'Writing Pains', *African Writing: Many Literatures, One Voice*, 2018 <http://www.african-writing.com/seven/brianchikwava.htm> [Accessed 15 November 2018].

away in order to migrate to London and do something menial. 'They keep quiet about their troubles because back home it would be seen as an admission of failure. They say everything is okay and they are getting on when the story is quite different. *They are slowly dying inside*' (italics mine).[35] Exile, whether voluntary or not, always involves loss which can only ever be translated into/by a process of ontological transformation. The title of this chapter, 'the necropolitics of alienation' speaks to this transformation. Put simply, the exiled is transformed into the living dead by this process of alienation – both from the self and from any kind of belonging. Without a restorative epistemology of selfhood, outside the normative one which forms us into citizens, we are all vulnerable to this alienation.

In light of this reality, *Harare North* writes Chikwava's own haunting. Chikwava perceives a parallel between the incredulity of indoctrination within youth militias, and the indoctrination within a belief system such as that of the Shona. Both are frightening ideologies: they both involve identification with a larger system of hitherto unseen, or even unknowable, agents. In the novel, the narrator proclaims:

> You always know more than you believe in but always choose what you believe
> in over what you know because what you know can be so big that sometimes it is
> useless weapon, you cannot wield it proper and, when you try, it can get your
> head out of gear and stop you focusing. Soon you lose the game and end up dying
> beyond your means in Harare North, leaving behind debts and shabby clothes.
>
> I have hear all these kind of stories. (275)

Expulsion from both ideologies, and for both Chikwava and the narrator from belonging, leaves them precariously located within a void: herein lies the necessity of formulating an alternative theory of selfhood. Thus for Chikwava, himself in exile, skepticism of one is markedly linked to his skepticism of the other. In this way, the space of the novel doesn't enable living, but instead enables disintegration, and the idea of habitation gets problematised.

In an interview with Marius Kociejowski, Chikwava discusses his experiences of Shona cosmology. As a system of belief to which he does not ascribe, Chikwava's skepticism is at the least due to his 'modern' outlook, or at the most down to fear. Yet the novel's reluctance to absolutely validate this modern outlook comes through in its reliance on Shona epistemologies. Shingi, who might be suffering from a case of dissociative identity disorder (DID), is said to be followed by *mamhepo*, which roughly translates to 'bad winds' or 'evil air'. The narrator, who might be Shingi's dissociated voice, could

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[35] Marius Kociejowski, 'A Tree Grows in Brixton', *Wasafiri*, 26 (2011), p. 59.

potentially be Ngozi. Maimasundo, the elderly auntie figure, is said to be a spirit medium. In Shona cosmology, spirit mediums can communicate with the spirits of the deceased, establishing a link between family members and their ancestors. This is important when considering that it is ancestors who intercede with God on behalf of the living. While the narrator clearly believes in both the ideology of the Green Bombers and in Shona Cosmology, Chikwava remains sceptical of both. Chikwava recounts an anecdote wherein he witnesses his grandfather perform a ritual. Chikwava's grandfather was a *sangoma* and, as such, was the centre of the ritual:

> When you see it, it is frightening, but rather mystical at the same time. This gentle old man, who I had been so close to, suddenly became someone I didn't recognise. There was this scary look in his eyes, and then he continued to dance for a while longer until, in the middle of some song, something took over and began to possess him. At the centre of my grandparents' homestead there was an old tree that had been cut down years before and all that remained of it was a stump. He would run to that stump and sit there and the people would follow him and surround him again, by which point he had completely shifted into something else and, depending on which of his ancestors entered him, he would begin to talk in his or her voice. It was freaky. When I saw this, one of the female ancestors spoke through him in an old woman's voice. It is almost as if there was a psychological flip of some kind. Often I think about these things and, because I am sceptical to the point of cynicism I think, ''Okay, there must be some kind of trick here.'' Why I say this is because when an ancestral voice speaks through someone, people actually stop and listen and take it seriously. […] Traditionally, of course, one is supposed to respect one's elders but now I wonder if this old man wasn't tricking us with this sangoma thing. It is a gift in a way, the ability to just flip into some other character, but I doubt he could have been really possessed. I look back on him now and think to myself, 'So this old man had some tricks up his sleeve!'[36]

Chikwava professes that the modern world has given him certain tools which make his disbelief all the more palatable. Aware of the effects which the current political order has on its subjects, Chikwava is attuned to its consequences, such as mental health issues. What the Shona understand as *mamhepo*, for example, 'A modern psychoanalyst would probably describe […] as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder'.[37] Chikwava informs

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[36] Kociejowski, p. 57.
[37] Ibid., p. 56.

us that '[t]he concept of depression is not appreciated within Zimbabwean culture, in both Shona and Ndebele there is no word for 'depression''.[38] Chikwava's disbelief is mirrored in the novel's fabric: the novel itself disintegrates as it cannot determine whether the narrator is suffering from a mental illness or whether it is Ngozi. The 'Jazz numbers' (colloquial term for lies) spun by the narrator in the novel are the same 'Jazz numbers' spun to him by the Green Bombers: the 'Jazz numbers' of ideology and indoctrination permeate the novel. Thus approaching Shona cosmology as a form of ideology, Chikwava intimates that its interpolative reach wanes the farther one is from the community: 'Those avenging spirits will stop following you if you come here, re-imagine yourself and become a completely different animal, but as long as you remain within the Zimbabwean community and its culture, that is, inside its body of belief, then you are still within their reach'.[39]

In his essay 'Taking Animism Seriously, but Perhaps Not Too Seriously?',[40] Rane Willerslev addresses the 'double consciousness' of ideology in belief systems such as animism and totemism. Working specifically on the hunting practices and totemistic beliefs of the Siberian Yukaghirs, Willerslev argues that, upon completion of their ritualistic hunts, when the Yukaghirs laugh at the spirits of the dead bears (their totems), they are not disavowing their beliefs, but rather engaging in a 'self-sustaining game of cosmological reproduction'. Totemism establishes 'relations between human beings and animal species [which contribute to a culture's way] of knowing the world.' Within this 'worlding', totemism establishes relational systems towards ontological realities. While the Yukaghirs might believe they are engaging in illusions, this engagement nonetheless makes sense of the world and their own place within it. Willerslev's analysis of totemistic practices as ideology encapsulates what Slavoj Žižek and Terry Eagleton understand ideology's purpose to be: in an age of advanced capitalism, ideology might reveal its practices (interpellation) without losing its efficiency; it enables, in the highly cynical, a way of 'worlding' themselves, and attaining meaning. In a similar manner, Chikwava might not believe in Shona cosmology and its totemism, but he nonetheless finds in it alternative, vernacular ontologies with which to 'world' himself within an age of advanced neo-liberalism and its discontents.

This 'double-consciousness' perhaps provides a leeway into understanding Chikwava's simultaneous repudiation of Shona cosmology and reliance on it for his

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[38] Ibid., p. 57.
[39] Ibid., p. 56.
[40] Rane Willerslev. 'Taking animism seriously, but perhaps not too seriously?', *Religion and Society: Advances in Research,* 4 (2013), pp. 41-57.

exploration of meaning, selfhood and belonging. The narrator's namelessness within the novel is such an example, and it plays a role in linking Chikwava's haunting with his sense of alienation. Chikwava has stated that he decided not to name the narrator because he was a dissociated voice. Yet in Shona cosmology, '[a]n individual is not considered a human being until a name is bestowed'.[41] A newborn is not separated from the spiritual community and recognised as a human being until they are named in a naming ceremony. This is because 'Newborns are frequently thought of as ancestors who came back, not necessarily as physical entities but as spiritual personalities. The newborns are officially separated from their spiritual community and reintegrated into their living community during naming ceremonies, a week or so after their physical birth'.[42] It is perhaps a coincidence that the narrator, whose status is unknown, remains unnamed throughout the novel. However, it is also indicative that, in an attempt to critique the violent ideology of necropolitics which makes zombies out of its subjects, Chikwava has ultimately found a form of expression within the language of the Shona's vernacular ontologies. Even while not aligning himself with the latter, Chikwava, not unlike the narrator, finds himself liminally conversant with both.

Chikwava nonetheless espouses a fear of the beliefs of Shona culture and mythology. Professing that the culture does indeed feed into his art, in the same strain, he exclaims:

> Yes, but in a very scary way. Our culture and mythology are pretty terrifying. It scared me to see these things and to hear those stories. You also had these people who practised witchcraft and who could supposedly morph into owls, go and spy on people, and then fly back and float evil. There were a lot of owls back then and the moment it became dark and I saw them, I thought, 'My God, we are surrounded!'[43]

While the novel is not autobiographical, it is still redolent with Chikwava's own haunting. He concedes to Kociejowski that, despite not believing in spirit mediums, arguably he is one himself, in the sense that he is the medium through which all these contesting voices emerge. Chikwava's own alienation from Zimbabwe and the community in London comes through in his ability to write such an alienated protagonist. In an interview with Ranka Primorac, Chikwava describes how London is a hard city to live in, 'it's a difficult environment because it doesn't have any sense of

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[41] Sihawukele Ngubane. 'The socio-cultural and linguistic implications of Zulu names', *South African Journal of African Languages* 33, (2013), p. 168.
[42] Mazama, p. 220.
[43] Kociejowski, p. 57.

[over-arching] community, and that makes it quite bleak'.[44] There is scope here to read Chikwava's comment on London's lack of community with his previous comment on this very lack enabling a release from Ngozi. The former relegates you to a lonely, half-life on the margins of society, whereas the latter relegates you to a marginal place within the circle. The inability to contend with both is the main driver of the narrator's anguish within the novel. The narrator's obsession with returning to Zimbabwe and performing the Umbuyiso ceremony for his mother is not only meant to merely satisfy the demands of Shona cosmology, but also speaks to a deep desire for belonging, for a return to the 'soil'. This language of being a son of the soil, of returning to the soil, has been appropriated by the Army and the Green Bombers, in order to sediment their own claims to sovereignty. The narrator's deep desire for a return to the soil is therefore also simultaneously contrasted with a shallower, more conscious motivation to earn money and pay off the bribe. While the narrator finds out that he has been duped, and there is no bribe to pay off, he still believes that he should go back to perform the Umbuyiso ceremony – this form of belonging is tied to a much deeper form of ideology, and one which is much harder to unseat.

The narrator's sense of self, dissociated to such an extent that it is almost lost save for potentially unreal memories of his mother, can thus only hold on to what sense of self is remaining to him via his retention of his mother. Yet, his inability to perform Umbuiyso for his mother has further reaching consequences than her eternal wandering in the afterlife. The implications of not receiving a traditional burial are so far-reaching that the Zimbabwean community in London have set up their own self-funded organisations to ensure that everybody in the community is able to be sent home for burial. In 'Burial at home? Dealing with death in the Diaspora and Harare',[45] Beacon Mbiba analyses the trends in burial services in both the diaspora (Britain and South Africa) and in Harare. Building on an analysis of historical, political and socio-economic histories, Mbiba argues that trends in burials have changed drastically in recent years, as have their consequences. The tradition of choosing rural homes rather than urban spaces as the burial place is based on two reasons.

Overwhelmingly, the homestead occupies importance in religious thought. The idea of return is essential to the cyclical preservation of the family. The deceased is meant to return to the home and join the ancestors. However, Mbiba outlines that until

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44 Ranka Primorac, ''Making New Connections': Interview with Brian Chikwava', in *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*, 1st ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), p. 257.
45 Beacon Mbiba, 'Burial at home? Dealing with death in the diaspora and Harare', in *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 144-164.

1960, historically Harare was 'white'. Even with the eventual demographic move of Zimbabweans into urban spaces in the 1960s, residual distrust, or 'anti-urban outlook' dominated within African Zimbabwean communities to such an extent that urban burials were stigmatised, seen as failure on behalf of the deceased family, and resulting in the deceased being 'labeled derogatorily as mwidi or totemless'.[46] Mbiba concludes that '[t]he motivation for rural burial and for the formation of burial societies in Zimbabwe's towns was thus partly about avoiding the stigma of a pauper's burial.' Additionally, the state has put in place restrictive rules regarding burial rituals such as 'no rituals going on into the night or at dusk'. The state's role in curtailing people's rights to their rituals, to their own expression of being in the world, is another aspect of its necropolitical regime. Necropolitics' pursuit of discipline, and the violence it relies on, renders everybody totemless.

Disassociation as Alienation: Narrating the Lacuna

Harare North begins with its end: a one-page prologue vaguely informs us that Shingi is dying in London. The narrator claims that Shingi has now turned into a 'big headache' for him, and so their friendship is being 'finish[ed] off straight and square' (1). Without further clarity or closure regarding Shingi's fate, the prologue ends, and the novel's first chapter picks off from the moment the narrator lands in London. The form of the novel here matches the circle from Shona cosmology: life emerges from death and death is the continuation of life. The novel's cycle, however, is broken. It does not provide either Shingi, the narrator or Shingi-as-narrator with a conclusive ending/death. In other words, neither transform into spirits. Rather than transforming from one state to the other, both Shingi, who ends the novel in a coma following a knife attack, and the narrator, who becomes trapped inside his own head, disintegrate. They become trapped between life and death. The narrator's 'friendship' with Shingi, which dates back to their childhood in Zimbabwe, provides the crux of this chapter's analysis of theories of selfhood. Because the novel deals with this epistemological and ontological lacuna regarding selfhood, it remains unclear who the protagonist of the novel is, and in the interest of clarity, I will continue to refer to Shingi and the narrator as separate entities. While we are alerted to the narrator's dependance on Shingi from the outset of the novel, this dependance is hinted throughout as being of a more sinister nature than initially thought. Through the course of the novel, we discover that the narrator leads a parasitic existence, leeching primarily off Shingi, among others. The narrator's

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[46] Mbiba, p.150.

introduction to the reader begins in such a way as to both make Shingi a primary character, while also complicating his own ambiguity:

> Never mind that he manage to keep me well fed for sometime, but like many immigrant on whose face fate had drive one large peg and hang tall stories, Shingi had not only become poor breadwinner but he had now turn into big headache for me. When it become clear that our friendship is now big danger to my plan, me I find no reason to continue it, so I finish it off straight and square (1).

The narrator plans to secure $5,000, at whatever cost, in order to return to Zimbabwe and pay off a fine which he believes he has incurred for murdering a supporter of the MDC. This sum has been set by Comrade Mhiripiri, the commander of the Green Bombers 'breed of jackal boys' to which the narrator belonged. The narrator takes this information at face value, and flees to the UK, because Comrade Mhiripiri is a 'trustful man' (18).

We discover fairly quickly that the narrator is not reliable in the slightest: his account of affairs is tenuous at best, because his moral outlook has largely derived from his indoctrination within the Youth Programme. Additionally, his status vis-a-vis Shingi complicate the accuracy of his own version of events which lead up to the novel's conclusion. The narrator's memories of his past in Zimbabwe often interlink with events from Shingi's life in Zimbabwe. For example, the narrator's fixation on performing Umbuyiso for his mother is directly linked with his fixation on the loss of his mother: the novel is interspersed with memories and dreams of his past, when his mother was alive. Yet these sections are italicised, signalling a change in narrative voice. Because we also know that Shingi never knew his mother, it is plausible that the italicised sections are false memories which Shingi dreams up of his mother. The novel frequently makes references to Shingi being a totemless child, because he never knew his father either. Yet the narrator himself never mentions his own father. The novel intimates that being totemless makes you vulnerable to 'bad winds', or *mamhepo*. Shingi is often teased for being followed by *mamhepo*, and the narrator states in the beginning of the novel that his cousin's wife, Sekai, 'think that me I am *mamhepo* – the winds; them bad spirits' (21). These interlinking histories of broken ancestry and totems ultimately mean we cannot differentiate between the two. In the UK, the narrator steadily takes over Shingi's identity by using his passport in order to be allowed to work, and by impersonating him as he corresponds with Shingi's relatives when he is in a coma. The denouement of the novel then occurs when Shingi is stabbed and begins to lose his life in hospital. From the moment Shingi is in hospital, the narrator steadily

begins to lose his grasp over reality, becomes even more unstable as he descends into madness, and ultimately, gets a glimpse of his reflection in a puddle of water and sees Shingi staring back at him through his cracked glasses.

However, my inability to definitively assert the boundaries – or lack thereof – between Shingi and the narrator is, on the one hand, due in large part to temporally conflicting events which make it implausible to conflate the two as one; on the other, it is due to my reluctance to defer to normative readings of selfhood. In practical legal terms, the narrator is an asylum seeker who has not received refugee status yet, whereas Shingi has. The narrator claims:

> It doesn't matter that I am illegal; I have keep his passport because his asylum
> application get approved by the immigration people some while ago. His passport
> and National Insurance number come in handy now. His mobile phone too. (6)

For the narrator, this difference is more than a legal one, it is a social one. While he is aware of his status as an asylum seeker – which prohibits him from working legally – the narrator does not consider himself to be a migrant like Shingi or 'them immigrants they also have them asylum-seeker eyes; them eyes with the shine that come about only because of a reptile kind of life, that life surviving big mutilation in the big city and living inside them holes'(2). The narrator displays a critical awareness of the systemic and exploitative relationship between the British state and its migrants: 'Immigrant people's contribution to this country is equal to one Mars bar in every citizen's pocket every year' (24). While differentiating between the immigrants and citizens of the state, he still, in a misplaced sense of sovereign superiority, considers himself to be above the immigrants.

There is a large element of denial here on the part of the narrator. Namely, he is also surviving the mutilations of the city, and leading a 'reptile kind of life'. This is as true in London, where he experiences all of the exclusions enacted on asylum seekers, as it is in Zimbabwe, where necropolitics forces him into a subjugated existence. What the narrator is instead asserting is that he is not after the teleology that migration promises – that is the promise of migration's narrative which ends with belonging and citizenship. The narrator overtly ascribes to other forms of membership: he frequently describes himself as 'original native' and 'child of the soil'. While these nomenclatures are explicit references to Shona cosmology – because of the centrality of the soil in the cycle of transformation – they are doubly deployed there, to also reference the appropriation of Shona ideology by the Youth Programme. Chikwava writes his skepticism of both by rendering the narrative voice heavily ironic: there is

nothing principled or disciplined about the narrator, regardless of how often he reasserts that he is a 'principled man'. Chikwava has confirmed that 'In the whole book, there is in him a certain kind of denial of the way things are, and also a determination to continue and refuse to acknowledge that maybe he was wrong in the first place because he would have to repudiate the whole past, and he is not prepared to do that.'[47]

The narrator's inability to come to terms with his own past complicates how we read his present: cosmologically (so, against Chikwava's position), is the narrator a spirit? Or, normatively, in which we would assume that the narrator-as-Shingi is assuredly traumatised and has not been able to deal with this trauma, leading him to split off from himself and suffer a case of dissociative identity disorder. The narrator's liminality is a focal point of interest to literary critics who approach his ambiguity from various perspectives. A general synthesis of the literature reveals three broad camps: the linguistic approach (Tenday and Nyambi), the political approach (Siziba, Mccan) and the trauma approach (Gunning). Dave Gunning's article 'Dissociation, Spirit Possession, and the Languages of Trauma in Some Recent African-British Novels'[48] comes the closest to articulating the thesis which I am trying to formulate. Gunning rightly posits that 'trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life'.[49] However, African literature often employs different paradigms through which to address trauma. Without rehashing my critique of trauma studies and the question of identity from the previous chapter, I will instead only reiterate that Western epistemological frameworks of trauma studies are at odds with non-Western notions of selfhood and identity, which are often porous rather than constitutive.

In this same strain, Gunning argues that African literatures turn to other epistemological frameworks, such as those of spirit possession and traumatic dissasociation, not 'in order to replace the trauma paradigm with another explanatory model, but rather to demonstrate the instability of each interpretative framework'.[50] Specifically, Gunning looks at Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* and *Harare North*. Oyeyemi's novel deals with a case of spirit possession in which both the main character and her malignant spirit are indisputably separate entities. Gunning posits that both writers 'open up the fictional potential of divorcing the 'trauma aesthetic' from the

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[47] Primorac, pp. 258-9.
[48] Dave Gunning, 'Dissociation, Spirit Possession, and the Languages of Trauma in Some Recent African-British Novels', *Research in African Literature,* 46 (2015), pp. 119-132.
[49] Ibid., p.126.
[50] Ibid., p.127.

actual experience of trauma […] They are not positing an African experience as more authentic than Western models […] but drawing on their dual heritage to create narratives that refuse reduction to a single model of being'.[51] While Gunning's analysis rightly points to there being various epistemological frameworks which can intersect within transnational literatures, it doesn't extend to what this intersection does. The instability of an interpretive framework is directly linked to the instability of the episteme – formed within normative and, indeed, limited ontologies – upon which it is based. In other words, Gunning identifies the necessity for a complementarity of interpretive frameworks which adequately speak to notions of trauma and identity, but he doesn't identify why this necessity exists in the first place. I am here referring to the epistemological lacuna from within which a theory of selfhood – attentive to the complexities of race, politics and cosmology – is attempting to emerge. Interpretive frameworks are thus unstable, because they yet lack a language with which to speak.

Linguistically, the novel employs a mix of African colloquiums which Chikwava himself merged together to create the narrator's distinct language. There is a significant amount of Zimbabwean English, Nigerian Pidgin, and Caribbean Patois. The title *Harare North* is a Zimbabwean expression for London: due to its popularity amongst Zimbabwean migrants, London has earned its own point of reference in Zimbabwean English. On the other hand, Johannesburg is referred to as 'Harare South'. Critics read the colloquial use of language in the novel as subversive, or as a mark of the global parochialism of migrants as they become multicultural cosmopolitans. With direct reference to Achebe, Chikwava has stated that he strived to find a language which could 'carry the weight of the African experience'[52] and that this invented language was the only one which could achieve this. Far from being a romantic sign of resistance, Chikwava makes recourse to this amalgamation of colloquiums in order to vocalise the experience of subjugation and dislocation – living death – which can be a marked condition of those who migrate from the Global South. In this way, Chikwava is effectively signifying on the legacy of slavery, or, a transatlantic shared legacy of necropolitics. The narrator inherits this legacy and it is this legacy which narrates him into being. It is thus telling that this narration necessitated a hitherto non-existent language, spoken by a hitherto non-existent person. The novel is narrated in the first-person voice, which gives the reader the impression that they are inside 'the head' of the narrator. But the narrator's instability – both ontological and stylistic – problematises

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Primorac, ''Making New Connections'', p. 260.

recognition. It remains unclear throughout the novel who the 'I' is, both literarily and literally, and who the other is. So, when Chikwava professes that the narrator is nameless because he is a dissociated voice – while also maintaining that his language is an amalgamation which is meant to carry the weight of the experience of displacement – we can read this in a deeper sense than perhaps Achebe intended. The use of language becomes a recourse not only of linguistic expression, but also of ontology.

This shared legacy of necropolitics has, for obvious reasons, also impacted the political expression of the narrator. Imbedded within a critique of normative selfhood is a critique of normative politics. As the narrator himself demonstrates, Zimbabwe's history cannot be read independently of its legacy. Articles such as Gugulethu Siziba's 'Reading Zimbabwe's Structural and Political Violence Through the Trope of the Unnameable and Unnamed in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*' limit the scope of the novel: a reading of the novel as a political allegory is a reading which cannot move beyond the normative structures of the state. The narrator's cunning evaluation, and criticism, of London is deeply rooted in a criticism of empire's ongoing exploitation of the postcolonies.[53] The narrator frequently refers to 'Mars bars' as a euphemism for wealth, critiquing the exploited contributions of the immigrant workforce on which England relies: 'Immigrant people's contribution to this country is equal to one Mars bar in every citizen's pocket every year' (24). When the narrator arrives in London, he is reluctantly hosted by his cousin Paul and his wife Sekai. When they receive him with less than expected hospitality, he brands them 'lapsed African[s]' (5). His criticism of their behaviour is a corollary of his criticism of displacement, and how it makes people forget who they are: 'In foreign place, sometimes you see each each with different eyes for the first time and who you are and your place in the world suddenly becomes easy to see as any goat's tail' (127–28). The narrator displays a sharp understanding of the dysfunctional immigration system, and the ways in which it excludes and alienates people from one another:

> But that's how all them people from home behave when they is in Harare North;
> sometimes you talk to them on the phone asking if they don't mind if you come
> and live with them and they don't say 'no' because they don't want you to think
> that they is selfish. They always say 'OK, just get visa and come'. When they
> know that the visa is where everyone hit the wall because the British High

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[53] *We Need New Names* also makes a deep, historical and transnational critique of the conditions of the nation-state, specifically in relation to a critique on normative notions of selfhood. Zimbabwe's history cannot be disaggregated from the wider context of empire. Indeed, Mugabe's politics were informed by his exposure to anti-colonial and communist movements across the world.

> Commission don't just give visa to any native who think he can flag down jet plane, jump on it and fly off to Harare North, especially when they notice that people get them visitors' visa and then on landing in London they do this style of claiming asylum. So people is now getting that old consulate treatment: the person behind the counter window give you severe look and ask you to bring more of this and that and throw back your papers, and before you even gather them together he have call up the next person (6).

The narrator's criticism of the changes which unjust neoliberal and imperial immigration rules force on people is ironically lost on him. Sekai, who is fervently anti-Mugabe, sneers at the narrator's support of his Excellency, by informing him that the thugs from the Green bombers are planning on raising his mother's village to the ground.

> Mother's village area is now going to be take over by mining company that belong to commander of armed forces and villagers that don't want to move have been yelled that the army and Green Bombers is coming to move them […] But this is all propaganda because this story is in the *Zimbabwe Independent,* the newspaper that never like our government. What you believe is your best weapon, I know (89).

The narrator clearly sees the connection between Mugabe's terrorisation of his own citizens and colonial politics: 'This village, Mother's family have been there since 1974 when they was moved from fertile land in Mazoe because the land have been given as reward to some British Second World War veteran. Now they have to move again?' (74). However, he chooses to ignore these rumours as opposition propaganda. His focus shifts instead to the ills of empire. After witnessing first-hand the mistreatment of migrants in London, he ultimately claims 'Harare North is big con. We have already put many Mars bars inside people's pockets, and now look.' Londoners con immigrants, and immigrants also con immigrants.

 After resenting the 'funny air' in his cousin's house which makes him feel unwelcome, the narrator moves into a squat in Brixton, where Shingi already lives. Practically, it is not clear how Shingi could have invited the narrator to move into a house, if Shingi is indeed the narrator. Such inconsistent details make this theory impossible to hold up. However, upon arriving at the squat, the narrator describes it thus:

> It look like one heap of bricks that stand out from other houses because of its grey brick. That's the house where Shingi live. It have two top windows that have

red brick arch. That make the windows look like big sad eyes. Below them sad

eyes there is one large bay window that stick out like nose. When I look at the

nose, the eyes and black parapet wall this is Shingi straight and square. But you

don't tell anyone that they head look like house if you still want to be friends […]

So, Shingi live inside this head? (29)

The narrator anthropomorphises the squat and suggests that he is now moving into Shingi's head. The narrator gets invited to sleep in Shingi's bed: 'we can share my bed, Shingi say' (135) and the question of habitation thus gets raised again. The squat becomes the second location, after the chestnut tree, where most of the novel occurs. It also becomes the site where the ethics of community and selfhood are navigated. The narrator now shares the squat with Farayi, Tsitsi, Shingi, and Aleck. Aleck is in charge of running the house and collects rent from the other squatters. The narrator instantly develops a dislike of Aleck, despite the fact that he allowed him 'soft landing', letting him stay in the squat rent-free until he has secured a job. This information is another practical element which makes it implausible that Shingi and the narrator are one and the same: Shingi already has a job, he pays his rent, and he sustains the narrator by buying food for the both of them and lending him money. Aleck pretends to be a part-time shop clerk and, as the main breadwinner, he sets strict rules within the house about sharing and other practical issues. Ironically, the narrator, who is a killer, is very selective about the values of community and ethics: he believes in sharing above all, and frequently invites Farayi, Tsitsi and Shingi to share food and drink with him. When Aleck is found out to be a BBC – British Bottom Cleaner – the narrator as a disciplined man who developed interrogative skills from his time with the Green Bombers, hones in for his attack on Aleck, and exposes that he has been scamming the others. The squat is actually rent-free because it is abandoned, but Aleck had been making money off of them. Tensions rise in the squat, and Maimasundo, an older Zimbabwean woman, compounds these tensions when she reveals that Aleck is the father of Tsitsi's baby, and he has so far abandoned them both.

Maimasundo has been supporting Tsitsi, and also owns the salon in which Tsitsi finds women to rent her baby. The first time the narrator encounters Maimasundo, he feels uncomfortable, because it is reputed that she is a spirit medium. This encounter further complicates the status of the narrator:

Me I hang back because I don't know this funny woman. Farayi and Shingi make

the usual respectful greetings that you do with elderly person and shake hands.

She look absent-minded, or tired. But she is old spirit; she presence make

> everyone stand still and quiet and wait for she to talk. Now I creep in behind
> Shingi to see. I'm still hiding behind Shingi and suddenly I can't tell if
> MaiMusindo is staring at me or at Shingi. She tongue come out: 'I have hear
> about you from Tsitsi. Your people where they hail from?' (325)

The narrator is here 'creeping' behind Shingi, and even intimates that Maimasundo
might be staring at Shingi, or at him. Presumably this is because if she is indeed a spirit
medium, and he is a spirit, she would be able to see him. However, Maimasundo
addresses Shingi, and this opens him up to ridicule from the others, because of his
ancestry:

> "Chi . . . Chipinge," Shingi say with big football-size eyes
>
> "It's because of Shingi's Chipinge roots," Aleck say.
>
> Farayi start making fun of Shingi and saying that maybe MaiMusindo want to
> learn tricks from Shingi because people with Chipinge roots is supposed to have
> dangerous knowledge of sorcery and stuff, especially *mamhepo*, the avenging
> spirits.Farayi laugh all morning. Aleck now also jump into making fun of Shingi
> saying he have Mamhepo spirit pursuing him; Farayi is making joke but anyone
> can sniff sniff that Aleck really mean it. Shingi don't find it funny. Mamhepo; the
> winds someone can raise them against you and your family if you kill they
> innocent relative. That's what Aleck say as he pace about in our room with hands
> in his pockets (46-7).

Shingi has a stutter, which he developed as a child. He was bullied in school and was
then beaten up by a girl. His glasses get cracked, and this is how we identify Shingi's
reflection in the puddle, at the end of the novel. However, the narrator recounts how he
defended Shingi, always in return for favours such as food, or just their friendship.
Shingi has never expressed, nor would he be able to express, a deluded fiction of
sovereignty. His character, and past, simply do not match up. The narrator, on the other
hand, is overtly aggressive, and explicitly hints here that 'I possess him. I still possess
him' (175) making a direct reference to spirit possession. However, we know that the
narrator is not a reliable source of information. Exchanges like these ones complicate
the way in which subjectivity is structured in the novel. From a trauma studies point of
view, subjectivity is here straightforward: Shingi has never been able to cope with the
trauma of losing his parents, being bullied and teased for being totemless, subsequently
bricking somebody, going to prison and fleeing Zimbabwe, without facing up to his
own past. And so the narrator is his own dissociated voice. Yet, the narrator's own
account of events differs. If we read selfhood cosmologically, then dissociation is not

really possible, because Shona cosmology makes it explicit that the subject is never singular, but always part of others. If the subject is not singular, then how can they then be divided and possessed?

A holistic, Afrocentric reading of the novel enables what Mazama has called a process of reclamation of the African self. Terrence Musanga speaks to this reclamation in his article "'Ngozi' (Avenging Spirit), Zimbabwean Transnational Migration, and Restorative Justice in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009)' arguing that an understanding of the historical, political and cultural phenomenon of Zimbabwean transnational migration needs to be supplemented with a cosmological reading as well: 'I seek to complement these studies by examining Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and consider Zimbabwean transnational migration from an Afrocentric perspective that is accommodative of 'ngozi' in its analysis'.[54] The understanding here is that a purely normative political analysis fails to provide adequate grounds for a meta-political analysis. Without including cosmology in our approaches to transnational migration and the impact it has on the subject of that migration, we are simply reinforcing the binaries of the self and the other. This Afrocentric perspective indeed complements analysis, in that it invigorates the truth of the black subject as central to her own mode of being, and not as other to the norm. Reading the narrator through the lens of Ngozi ultimately suspends a reading of the narrator as an individual, but rather, recasts him as part of an organic community. Ngozi is an avenging spirit which seeks to right the wrongs committed by an individual against another. Often this wrong is murder, which we know the narrator has committed. To argue that the narrator's descent into madness is the working of Ngozi for his crimes as a Green Bomber is plausible enough, until we discover through one of the narrator's memories of Shingi, that Shingi himself has also harmed somebody. Musanga outlines that '[i]n the workings of the avenging spirit one immediately notes the issue of collective responsibility, which is a consequence of the communal ethic that characterised African communities and kinship structures'.[55] Shingi is described throughout the novel as the narrator's best friend; there are, however, significant overlaps in events which occurred in their past which his memories tenuously reveal. Because Ngozi is after restorative justice and seeks to restore peace and harmony between the individuals involved in the crime, their families, and the community in general, it turns vengeful in the event of a failure to appease it. This results in 'inexplicable sicknesses or eventual death or deaths of the person or persons

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[54] Musanga, p.776.
[55] Ibid., p.163.

who would have committed the "ngozi"'.[56] It is worth noting that it is Shingi, and not the narrator, who gets stabbed, and ends up in hospital.

As a character who has committed murder, and who is himself subject to forms of civic and political death, the values of restorative justice are lost on the narrator. However, he again embodies a contradiction on which the entire novel is based. Shingi informs the narrator that his relative, Chamu, has run into trouble, landing him in prison where he needs to be bailed out. The narrator is reluctant to provide this bail. He eventually gives in, but laments his decision:

> I squeeze £500 out of Sekai and six hours later £200 of it have been wired to Harare to save arse of stupid opposition party supporter. This is the same kind of person that the boys have spend long time trying to teach how to think and he still can't come to proper way of thinking. Punishment is the best forgiveness for traitor. Thats what comrade Mhiripiri say (106).

In a similar vein, the narrator betrays a deeper capacity for love in his relationship with Tsitsi. She rents her baby out to migrant women in the African community who are duping the system into landing council housing. However, ends don't always meet and Tsitsi struggles to care for her baby. The narrator, who has a fixation with mother figures, is naturally drawn to Tsitsi and describes a longing to comfort her and hug her. However, he is made to feel uncomfortable by her tears, because he 'don't know what to do with that.'(108) The narrator instead informs Tsitsi that '[a]ll that matter is that we love the baby […] And we don't want him to die of lack of food when he is here' (107). He hands Tsitsi £50 and informs her that 'I am uncle to the baby now' (108). The narrator becomes protective of Tsitsi and threatens to 'forgive'[57] Aleck when it is revealed that Alec is the father of Tsitsi's baby. However, things become complicated when Shingi develops a crush on Tsitsi, and the narrator both encourages him to make a move, while also sabotaging his attempts behind his back.

I thus advance a reading of Tsitsi as the symbol and embodiment of the circle: the narrator is, in various, inexplicable ways, drawn to her, but he ultimately betrays and alienates her. Tsitsi is a mother and therefore signifies the site through which the circle is enacted. However, this does not exclude the narrator/Shingi from sexualising her. This contradiction, emblematic of the Madonna/whore figure, inscribes the contradiction inherent within the narrator's state of being. At one point, the narrator dreams of his mother, but he sees Tsitsi's face instead. The narrator thus cannot be a

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[56] Ibid., p.779.
[57] In the ironic language of the militia, he is threatening to beat up or kill Aleck.

part of the cycle of birth (sexual) nor can he be part of the cycle of death (mother/ancestor). His misrecognition of Tsitsi as his mother forecasts his future (mis)recogntions: Comrade Mhiripiri under the chestnut tree, Shingi in the puddle of water. While these episodes can be construed as part of the narrator's/Shingi's DID, it could equally be construed as his own deep-seated trauma of alienation from 'the soil', which he is wont to insist on claiming. Because the soil here occupies two competing interpretations, however, – the nationalist one by the Green Bombers, and that of the Shona – the narrator's traumatic alienation is thus firmly located in the liminal space.

Differentiating himself from the likes of the immigrants who spend their time under the chestnut tree, the narrator explains:

> But me I really don't want to stay in Harare North too long; I don't want to have vex face all the time because of Sekai. I just want to get myself good graft very quick, work like animal and save heap of money and then bang, me I am on my way back home. Enough pound sterling to equal US$5,000 is all I have to make, then me I'm free man again (6).

While it is true that he has been lied to by the Comrade Mhirirpri, the narrator is solely preoccupied with his own freedom, and that of his mother. Musanga argues that this is a further damning indictment of Zimbabwe's legal system:

> Thus, the Zimbabwean legal justice system is depicted as largely corrupt as 'innocence' and absolution can be purchased on the altar of materialism. However, 'ngozi' has no respect for such 'formal' legalities as it transcends this conceptualization of crime and punishment'.[58]

Ultimately, this catches up with him. When Shingi is in hospital, the narrator becomes undone by this loss:

> I sleep. I wake up. Me I sleep. I see Shingi in one dream. I wake up. I sleep. This Shingi thing now sit tight inside me. […] Once on the bus me I squeeze into the corner and I see my face reflect on the window. It is clenched tight like old demon's. I look down on the floor: I am frightened I will see ghost of Shingi looking back (201).

He does eventually see the ghost of Shingi looking back at him. Where a diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder might satisfy the logical, modern reading, it still fails to account for the ethical implications of this encounter, in the larger context of the Shona's belief in cyclical transformations and restorative justice. The crux of the novel happens in one of the 'mental backstreets' in London, where Shingi is stabbed by a

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[58] Ibid,. p.783.

random person. The narrator can make out Shingi's form but considering the situation's gravity – both for the novel and the narrator himself – the narration of this moment is rather anticlimactic. The narrator only calls out to Shingi, and attempts to follow him, but Shingi disappears. Chikwava has stated that he came across the term 'mental backstreets' in *The Big Issue*, a magazine sold by the homeless in the UK as a way of making a living. In the magazine there was – 'some article talking about how the back streets can be 'mental' […] I wanted to link the real world and what is going on in his mind'.[59]

Precisely, this scene makes it difficult to tell whether it occurred in the narrator's mind, or in reality. Where the narrator is undone by Shingi's death, as far as we know, the narrator is an asylum seeker who already partially exists: because it is unclear whether he is an Ngozi, or a part of Shingi's split personality, or indeed just himself, this ontological instability in effect almost writes out the possibility of them being separate subjects. This ambiguity presents a question of ontology: each reading of the characters undeniably presents a reading of the subject's configuration within political and philosophical thought. In other words, if we read the narrator as Shingi's dissociated voice, this places the onus of our political critique on Shingi – that is, the figure of the refugee. If we read the narrator as the asylum seeker he presents himself to be, then our critique will naturally focus on the politics of the asylum seeker. If the narrator is Shingi's Ngozi, both characters are represented in a way so as they both cancel each other out within the framework of subject and self-formation.

While some critics make the case for diagnosis of DID, I believe this is insufficient in accounting for the ways that necropolitics intersect with alienation through the very specific figure of the African migrant. The novel informs us that Shingi is followed by *mamhepo* because he is totemless. If Shingi is indeed our narrator, it is irrelevant in this case as we can assume that regardless, the narrator, *and* Shingi, are totemless. Both their legal statuses will mean that they are already 'paupers', as Mbiba clarified in his article on burial. We can assume that both Shingi and the narrator will remain so due to lack of burial in their rural home in Zimbabwe. We can assume that the narrator, who is stuck in England with no means of return to Zimbabwe, will miss out on receiving a proper homestead burial in the future. The demolition of his mother's village, and his inability to perform *umbuyiso* for her, means that she will as well. In this way, the family's cyclical belonging to the land and to the life, cosmoligcally, is ruptured as the state ruptures the politics of burial. The narrator's liminality is thus

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[59] Primorac, p.259.

inscribed both through the state's violence, and through its own rupturing of the cosmology.

 In one of the final scenes of the novel, necropolitics completes its cycle: reminiscent of the squirrel which the narrator kills in the park to put out of its misery, he likens himself to *umgodoyi,*

> the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home. That's why *umgodoyi's* soul is tear from his body in rough way. That's what everyone want to do to me, me I know (226).

This scene is all the more a response to the necropolitical aspect of alienation when we consider that the narrator is carrying his suitcase on his head, in order to prevent being stoned. Throughout the novel, the narrator obsesses over the suitcase and is protective of it, because it contained the smell of his mother inside. The narrator carries his mother as a shield because, like Shingi, he did not have a father, and therefore it is assumed, but never confirmed, that he himself is totemless. This scene poignantly suggests that such utter alienation facilitates, and is facilitated by, necropolitics. It is interesting that for Chris Okonkwo, who reads the novel as a literary composition of jazz, the narrator's suitcase symbolises his subjection:

> Chikwava suggests that, should we construe *Harare North*'s narrator as an inspired, aspiring, or accomplished (Zimbabwean or Black Atlantic) artist or intellectual surviving in involuntary exile, his challenge all along may well have to do in part with that subjection – symbolized in the suitcase – that he totes to and obsessively protects in London. It is not just an indenturing possession and fixation. It is also dated, bequeathed, mass-produced, and depersonalizing. Reflecting the jazz principle of non-plagiaristic replication, this familial heritage, this past model of luggage, is implicitly controlling and not exactly the most suitable carriage for his complicated present life/journey.[60]

I read the suitcase along parallel, but not identical, lines. The suitcase is indeed the signifying link between Shona cosmology's living-death (his mother, and his belonging) and necropolitic's living dead (exile, migration, alienation, loneliness, death). I have argued that the narrator's only link to reality is his mother, evidenced towards the end when he reveals that the suitcase he had been carrying all along 'still have the smell of Mother inside'(228). My reading of the novel establishes that the narrator never really

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[60] Christopher Okonwo. 'Migration Blues in Jazz Styling: Spinning them Overlooked Jazz and Blues Numbers in Brian Chikwava's Fiction', *Research in African Literature,* 47 (2016), p. 167.

makes it into either camp; on the contrary, his liminality stretches across both planes – that is, our own world, and the world of the spirits. The suitcase then remains the focal symbol of that liminality. Before the ending of the novel, the suitcase breaks open, and what is left of his mother is ostensibly lost, when the narrator reveals that the suitcase, much like himself, is now 'full of nothing' (228).

It is worth noting that two other narratives about child-soldiers also revert to the trope of the Mother, as that redeeming link to the 'soil', or more directly, to 'belonging'. Zoë Wicomb writes that the narrator's mother serves a 'Tropological function through which the ethical is inscribed'.[61] This could be said for Agu's mother, as well, in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, or Lucky's mother in Chris Abani's *Song for Night*. In all three narratives, the narrators rhetorically plead with imaginary guardians of 'humanity' to be recognised as humans, because they are sons, and were once loved. This is reminiscent of the motto of the anti-slavery movement: 'Am I not also a brother?'

Necropolitcs, and not Shona cosmology, thus completes its cycle as the link to slavery and the plantation, mentioned in the introduction, figures again towards the end. Familial links are always points for humanitarian rhetoric. However, the narrator's suitcase breaks open, it is emptied, and we arrive at the novel's climax: the narrator loses his only link to a claim on humanity and belonging.

Static Cycles: The Zombie's Final Alienation

The lack of resolution towards the end of the novel is perhaps a commentary on the disproportionate link between mental health issues and migration. While discussing the narrator's dissociated voice, Chikwava has noted 'Whatever one chooses to call it – *mamhepo* or 'mental illness' – there's no escaping the fact that, of all immigrant groups in London, the highest incidence of people landing up on mental wards are African males.'[62] Race and legal status – mechanisms through which necropolitics has enforced onto the black body the perennial condition of 'being in pain'[63] – continue to mark the conditions of the black migrant's disenfranchisement. However, perhaps it is also a reflection of Chiwava's ambiguous connection to Shona cosmsology, which is overwhelmingly experimented with in the text. This constant condition of 'being in pain', or, the constant condition between 'Being' and 'Pain' is translated through the

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[61] Zoë Wicomb, "Heterotopia and Placelessness In Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*", in *The Globalization Of Space: Foucault And Heterotopia*, 1st edn (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 54.
[62] Kociejowski, p. 56.
[63] Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 15.

narrator's fate. The novel ends with the narrator wandering, half naked, through the 'mental backstreets' of London. He is dressed in Shingi's clothes, but whether he simply borrows Shingi's clothes, or he is Shingi, gets muddled when he sees a reflection of himself:

> Shingi's trousers is missing now, I am only in his underpants. Right in front of my feeties there is puddle of water that has form from the rain and street lamp is shining into it. I look down in the puddle; the crack that is screaming out of the corner of my glasses' left lens in all directions make things unclear; I can see Shingi looking straight back (229)

The narrative does not describe the narrator's appearance, although it does Shingi's: we know that Shingi wears glasses. However, because the narrator begins to spiral, there is no definite way of assuming it is indeed Shingi in the puddle. He continues on: 'You tell the right foot to go in the one direction and he is being traitor shoe-doctor and tell left foot to go in another direction. You stand there in them mental backstreets and one big battle rage even if you have no more ginger for it' (230). The narrator further loses an autonomy which we never find out whether he ever had. Materially, he no longer has agency either over his body, or his mind. This last scene formally brings the zone of indistinction to the reader: when the narrator repeatedly states he is 'not having ginger', he is expressing an exhaustion which ultimately gives way. The novel falls apart and the reader, as well as the narrator, are forced to settle for an unresolved ending, an ending which forces us to unlearn the ways in which we conceive of the condition of what Mbembe calls 'Being in Pain'.

This condition is keenly felt when, as the narrator begins to fall apart, so do his two worlds: the physical world of London, as well as the spiritual world of the ancestors. The narrator's current 'being' is one of pain, and his afterlife is one which may never 'be'. As the narrator struggles to gain control over his autonomy, he expresses a fear that 'Shingi is on his way back to life […] Shingi is now coming back' (229). The logic of the parasite is apt to here explain why Shingi's return is ostensibly killing the narrator. If the narrator is indeed Shingi's Ngozi, then his existence has been parasitic, and his aim has been to kill Shingi. Musanga informs us that the Shona have two sayings which explain the need, and manner, of recompensing Ngozi: 'mushonga wengozi kuripa' [the only way to deal with an avenging spirit is to restitute it] and 'mhosva muridzi wayo' [the accused person is the only solution to a crime].[64] The narrator is not capable of restitution, nor is he capable of resolving the crime he has

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[64] Musanga, p. 780.

committed, because he has fled Zimbabwe. If Shingi and the narrator are the same, then the reading of this scene would be that Shingi is pushing the narrator-as-*mamhepo* out and fighting to regain control of his body. However, this reading is complicated on two fronts: it would imply that Shingi then haunts the narrator. If the narrator is the vocalisation of Shingi's *mamhepo*, then how can Shingi haunt a spirit? Furthermore, if Shingi-as-narrator is *mamhepo*, then how could a spirit haunt a spirit? It is more plausible to then assume that Ngozi (the narrator) is here claiming the life of its host: Shingi. The disintegration of the novel is therefore not an account of the narrator's death, but of Shingi's. When Shingi the host dies, the parasite cannot continue to exist.

This moment of reckoning comes full circle when the narrator, who is running from Shingi, Paul and his uncle, realises his fate is sealed:

> […] maybe they is now chasing you with them big rocks in they hands wanting to punish you like you are *umgodoyi.* Forgiveness is the best kind of punishment.
>
> You don't know when or from which direction the rock of truth will come tearing through the air to smash your head and bring everything to one final end (229).

Ashleigh Harris explicates what is occurring in this scene very succinctly: 'The narrator's spiral towards homelessness is accompanied, then, by a narrative structure that spirals outwards – scattering the account that he gives of himself until even the personal pronoun 'I' is abandoned in his de-realisation of self'.[65] The narrator's dissolution of self towards the end of the novel is not specifically pertinent to a singular event of homelessness – in which he can no longer live in the shack in London – but rather to a deeper, existential form of homelessness: that which arises as a result of being disallowed from belonging to the discursivities of the human, of life, and of the exigencies of meaning in both.

The Shona universe materialises in London for the narrator in the worst manner possible: the wilderness roamed by the narrator's mother due to her inability to be brought back by Umbuyiso is signified on in this last scene. Because the narrator's mother cannot become a spirit, or living dead, this means that the narrator himself will also not be able to find his own place within the circle. The narrator then cannot escape an existence of living death, and is relegated to zombiefication, as Mbembe has formulated. Because the narrator has not been disaggregated from the citizen and has fallen prey to a 'predatory sovereignty', he remains a zombie – figuratively and literally. In a depressing final ending, both the narrator and his mother roam aimlessly the

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[65] Ashleigh Harris, 'Afropolitan Style and Unusable Global Spaces', in *Cosmopolitanisms*, 1st ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 249.

wilderness of the afterlife, as well as the wilderness of political bare life. Where their fates interlink, because of their shared connection to the soil, cosmologically, it is ironically the politics of the soil, which ultimately separate them forever. I am referring here both to the politics which result in migration to the West, but also the politics of Shona burial.

The agony of encountering this irony is represented after the scene when the narrator finds out that he has been lied to by Comrade Mhiripiri, and thus inadvertently forsaken his and his mother's chances of fulfilling the cycle of transformation. When he confronts 'The Master of Foxhounds', a fellow chestnut tree dweller whom he misrecognises for Mhiripiri, the narrator repeatedly asks him 'Now do you remember this son of the soil?' (180). In a self-reflective rhetorical sense, the narrator recognises his misappropriation of the importance of the soil to his notion of being. This recognition signals in him his own liminality:

> Mother, she lie heavy in my heart. The head swirl. The air inside our house turn and shift my head into sixth gear. From way beyond the blue hills inside my skull, back in my rural home, where Mother's bones lie scattered, trampled and broken by the JCB, where my grandmother used to go to the river to carry the water, come back and keep the fire burning, I now hear them voices tell me that I am still among the living. (178)

The narrator becomes beset by guilt over having abandoned his mother's grave for what he thought was his survival. In this paragraph, we see the first moment of recognition dawning: the possibility that his mother's grave has been desecrated due to the government's greed could actually be the truth. This recognition of his village's bulldozing undoubtedly sheds light on all the other lies he has been fed throughout his life. A recognition of all the loss suffered both by the narrator, and consequently through his actions, by his mother, highlight his desire, or perhaps even recognition, of death. The narrator has led a life subject to the power of death and is now caught in between life and death.

Throughout the novel, the narrator's only grounding in reality are his reliance on Mugabe's propaganda, a learned reality due to his indoctrination, and his hopes for unconditional and immortal belonging within the circle – an outlook which he inherits through his mother and grandmother. Neither of those provided him with any grounding in life itself. The narrator's view of the world, courtesy of his indoctrination through the Green Bombers, is completely skewed from reality. This is evident in his persistent denial that the government had bulldozed his village in search of riches. Towards the

end of the novel, however, the narrator finally voices a thought that the reader has had from the onset, recognising the possibility that perhaps he is not alive: 'I now hear them voices tell me that I am still among the living' (178). The novel ends with Death's ultimate mercy being denied to the narrator, as his asylum status, and what prompted it, enacts a violence which overrides the redemption offered by Shona cosmology.

Conclusion: Towards an *Espacement* of Migrant Life

'In other ways, we are all becoming migrants'[1]

At the time Hannah Arendt was writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,[2] the right of asylum – 'the only right that had ever figured as a symbol of the Rights of Man in the sphere of international relationships[3] ' – had not been formally codified as law, nor was it adopted by any state constitution. Asylum seekers, stateless people, refugees, and migrants – superfluous humanity – constituted a crisis for the sovereignty of European nation-states during the first half of the twentieth century. Arendt wrote that the nation-state's inability to extend rights and legal status to the stateless effectively meant that the latter were governed by a dangerous rule of 'arbitrary police decrees'[4] which – if extended to all citizens – would render the project of the modern nation-state (a transition from the feudal sovereign order into a devolved constitutional one based on the rule of law) obsolete and totalitarian. Despite frequent reminders from world leaders to the (then) League of Nations that 'its Refugee work must be liquidated with the utmost rapidity',[5] the (now) UN adopted, in 1951, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and in 1954, the Convention Relating to The Status of Stateless Persons. Unlike the UDHR, both conventions were legal documents which set out multilateral treaties on the rights of refugees and stateless people, as well as the responsibilities of nation-states towards those refugees and stateless people.[6] These conventions were each ratified by all 145 member states. Our post-war political order then ostensibly ushered in an age governed by the rule of international law which must guarantee if not the legal status of refugees then at the least the right of asylum.

And yet, our contemporary moment only evinces the futility of the law or, indeed, its complicity, in the guaranteed and ongoing dehumanisation of migrants. If the subject matter of this thesis appeared relevant when it was devised in 2015, it has only become more urgent at the time of its completion, in 2019. In the space of only four years, the world has seen a shift – again – towards global authoritarianism, signalled by the attack

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[1] Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p.1 .
[2] First published in 1951, but this was research and work she had done during the 1940's up until late 1950 (when she writes the Preface).
[3] Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.280.
[4] Ibid., p.290.
[5] Ibid, p.281.
[6] Important to note that initially, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees only applied to European refugees. Once extended to encompass refugees internationally, the convention makes clear that the duty to grant asylum rests on the discretion of nation-states, who must first and foremost protect their own sovereignty.

on both migrants and migrant life. Populist, racist and xenophobic discourses are centred on immigration, and political power is, once again, targeting the migrant. Imperial and nationalist rhetoric has paved the way for the rise of the far-right in Europe, altering its very geography. On the one hand, the European Union's judicial territory is shrinking due to Brexit, while on the other, its borders are being extended through extra-territorial detention camps along the coasts of North Africa and the Mediterranean.[7] In England, the Hostile Environment policy was devised by then-home secretary Theresa May, in order to render life 'intolerable' for illegal migrants. However, the policy has now been extended to British citizens: The Windrush Scandal saw the deportation of naturalised descendants of Caribbean migrants. Additionally, there has been a rise in the practice of denaturalisation – stripping citizens of citizenship – in the name of security.[8] On the other side of the Atlantic, detention camps are cropping up along southern borders of the USA: asylum seekers and refugees are criminalised, their children interred. Migrants are deemed 'illegal aliens'; this terminology has permeated public discourse where it is normed, an echo of WWII's language of 'enemy aliens'.[9] The government's violence even extends – in a return to classical sovereign power – towards its mainland: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids are sanctioned and carried out to violently remove those 'illegal aliens'. The rule of law is then not rendered obsolete, but is deployed to naturalise the inhumanity of the migrant. Arendt's political analysis applies today as it did 70 years ago.

The arbitrariness of sovereign violence thus threatens to turn the world into a necropolis. Random violence can no longer be considered a marked condition of the Global South; rather, it engulfs the globe. Robert Esposito writes:

> From the war of and against terrorism to mass migrations, from the politics of public health to those of demography; from measures of security to the unlimited extension of emergency legislation […] the body that experiences even more intensely the indistinction between power and life is no longer that of the individual, nor it is that sovereign body of nations, but that body of the world that is both torn and unified[10]

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[7] In his book *Lights in The Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe* (Picador, 2018), Daniel Trilling provides an account of how Europe's complex border systems function to deter the arrival of immigrants. These system, often illegal, include the expansion of fences, borders, surveillance, military guards and so on – outside of Europe itself.

[8] The case of Shemima Begum is perhaps the most visible, but research shows that the British State has been deploying this tactic against other Muslim citizens suspected of terrorism.

[9] Arendt, p.289.

[10] Roberto Esposito and Timothy C Campbell, *Bíos: Biopolitics And Philosophy*, 1st edn (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).PP. 7-11.

The splitting action that biopolitics commits against the body of the individual transmutes into a necropolitics which renders the body of the world finite, fragile and interdependent. The reciprocal imbrication of power and knowledge – the Western epistemological order – plays itself out on the body of the world, shaping not its universality, but its divisibility. In *The European Tribe*,[11] Caryl Phillips remarks that Europe is still held in the primitive grasp of tribalism, even as it derives its superiority over the world by levelling this same accusation against its perceived inferiors. This tribalism is not only harmful to migrants, but remains a cause of violence within Europe itself: 'Europeans squabble, they fight, they kill because of tribal affiliations'.[12] These tribal affiliations – the Western ontological order – foreclose belonging to others, to difference. This tribalism is itself a symptom of a feeling of placelessness; tribal affiliations mask feelings of alienation precisely because they enable a grasp towards a myth of national sovereignty. National sovereignty, which always seeks to protect itself from threats posed by the foreigner, ultimately produces what Arendt termed a new category of people for whom the loss of community resulted not only in their loss of rights, but also 'of a place in the world'.[13] The first two decades of the twenty-first century have witnessed the creation of more migrants than any other moment in history, leading Thomas Nail to argue that the 'twenty-first century is the century of the migrant'.[14] Nail has noted that the number of migrants recorded today stands at one billion, and 'each decade the global percentage of migrants and refugees grow'.[15] Nail argues that the migrant has so far been derivative to political theory, their movement constituting a problem to the stability of the state. When Arendt wrote in the aftermath of WWII that the stateless, specifically, comprised 'the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics',[16] today her proclamation holds true enough to extend to all migrants.

As politics continues to produce categories of persons who remain outside 'the pale of the law',[17] it becomes imperative to think personhood beyond legal borders. What might a theology of the migrant-as-human look like, beyond the qualifying violences of biopolitics? In what ways is a positioning of this humanity plausible, despite the persistence of necropolitics? This thesis has argued for a theology of the human from the perspective of the migrant, in order to posit the figure of the migrant as

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[11] Caryl Phillips, *The European Tribe*, 1st edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).
[12] Ibid., p.132.
[13] Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954,* p/73.
[14] Nail, p.1.
[15] Ibid., p.1.
[16] Arendt, *Origins,* p.277.
[17] Ibid., p.277.

central to political theory. In doing so, it has offered a critique of political theory which centres the state, and the citizen, as normed categories for the organisation of political life. It has gestured instead towards the flexible, transformative nature of communal personhood as that which opposes the stasis of the state. By focusing on contemporary African novels of migration, this thesis has attempted to show how the disavowal of the African migrant's personhood has been symptomatic of the West's epistemological and ontological order. I argue that African literature's ability to represent this disavowal does not simply constitute a critique of the West's hegemony, but also constitutes a body of becoming: the becoming-critical of the human migrant, the becoming of a tradition of humanism centred on the figure of the migrant, and the becoming of a world that is no longer torn by arbitrary borders, but can be unified by the ever more becoming-universal of migration.

The novels I have explored each elucidate the ways in which the African migrant becomes critical even as she is perpetually caught in between the historical violence of the West, and the arbitrary violence of the postcolony. The relationship between the two – what Mbembe calls 'entanglement'– has been a conditional one; furthermore, it is a relationship which is sustained through biopolitics. Western biopolitical reason governs the Global South by constituting and subjecting it both at the level of the national as well as the level of the individual. However, as the preceding chapters have argued, an African epistemological and ontological framework of personhood entails the communal and the cosmological, it is always constitutive of multiplicities, and thus resists the logic of biopolitics. This communal notion of personhood offers instead an account of the human which is anathema to the individualistic Western model normed through the politics of the nation-state. It threatens the composure of the citizen: migration adds another layer to this multiplicity, precisely because a migrant is that which is *always already* formed though entanglements. The visibility of the migrant, and of the stories of migration, are thus necessary for a critique of biopolitics. A biopolitical account of African selfhood therefore becomes an *undoing* of biopolitics itself. However, as chapter two attests, it is important not to give in to binaristic thinking – or discourses of nativism to borrow from Mbembe – because this simply reproduces the Western tribalist discourse which cast the African's existence only in opposition to the West. Mbembe's critique of the Négritude and pan-Africanist movements which sought to recover an identity for black peoples oppressed by the history of racism and colonialism rests on the paradox that their recovery relies on those same discourses of racial essentialism perpetuated by the West.

Preempting Mbembe, Édouard Glissant states in his seminal book *Poetics of Relation*[18] that:

> For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an 'opposite', for colonised peoples identity will be primarily 'opposed to' – that is, a limitation from the beginning[19]

Glissant's work, like Mbembe's to some extent, is concerned with moving beyond the limitations which have so far framed the postcolonial subject's being in the world. For both Glissant and Mbembe, the true potential of an emancipatory, decolonised future rests in the undoing of the West's hegemonic borders: geographical, individual, social, political. The moment of entanglement is therefore crucial for an understanding of how the individualistic logic of biopolitics can structure the tribalist logic of the nation-state, but it is also crucial for the appraisal of an epistemology which would free the world of such borders. The movement from this entanglement towards an emancipatory future – with the migrant-as-human occupying political centrality – is what Glissant defines as *espacement*. Glissant introduces the concept of *espacement* in the opening section of *Poetics.* This section, called 'Imaginary', is only three paragraphs, yet it contextualises the aim of the book. Glissant writes: 'thought in reality *spaces*[20] itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples […] which it then transforms […] Thought draws the imaginary of the past: a knowledge *becoming'(*italics mine*).*[21] To move from entanglement to *espacement* is therefore to move from the violent abyss of history, grounded in the exclusion of the African person, towards a body of the world which allows space for different, yet similar, forms-of-life to co-exist. *Espacement* essentially articulates epistemology spatially, enabling a consideration of the ways in which epistemology might lead to transformation at the level of both the world and the individual. The *espacement* of thought results therefore in the spacing of the world, in restituting place for those who have been rendered placeless by the limiting and violent epistemologies of the West. Glissant has stated it is crucial to return to the point of entanglement 'from which we were forcefully turned away' in order for a communal future to enact itself. This move, this reciprocal *espacement*, allows for an account of

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[18] Édouard Glissant and Betsy Wing, *Poetics Of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).
[19] Ibid.,, p.17.
[20] This is the english translation of the french 'espassement'.
[21] Glissant, *Poetics,* p.1

'power-in-spacing'[22] in which new epistemological and ontological orders would be attuned to what Spivak has termed the 'topographical reinscriptions of imperialism'.[23]

Glissant's notion of the 'archipelago-world', an alternative to the nation-state, offer us both epistemological and ontological articulations of what an *espacement* of migrant life would like. To see the world as archipelago is to see a world whose imaginary has changed, it is to see the world as a collection of 'small countries'[24] connected to one another, in which the citizen and the migrant, the Western and the Postcolonial, the person and the human, may share a conviviality whilst retaining their origins: that shared moment of entanglement. In the preface to the 2000 edition of *The European Tribe,* Phillips has stated that this century of migration offers the Western world an opportunity to move away from its tribalist, border thinking:

> Various and diverse people have now settled in a Europe that once reached out
> and claimed their world, and this in turn has presented Europe with a unique
> opportunity to embrace the possibilities which come with the ebb and flow of
> history.[25]

Espacement allows both for the world to become open to the ebb and flow of history, while simultaneously allowing for the historically oppressed to be 'born in to a world' which is no longer in the grasp of violent epistemologies. If I raise this thought of *espacement* belatedly, in the conclusion, it is because the novels I have analysed are still immersed in the process of becoming-critical; *espacement* becomes the culmination of this process.

What emerges in this attempt to think through life, power, forms of life, and forms of power as they are inscribed in the black body – and the body of the world – is a body of thought founded on interconnections. We see these interconnections amongst the works of scholars such Arendt, Glissant, Mbembe, Phillips and so on.[26] The scholarship emerging out of these different historical times and spaces all contain the traces of a similar message, a similar positioning towards the world. Glissant's notion of the 'archipelago-world' can be interlinked with Arendt's notion of the 'one-world'; similarly, the archipelago-world which allows for difference and similarity to exist in harmony maps onto Mbembe's vision for an episteme of the world freed from the continuous imposition of a 'metaphysics of difference' which sees alterity as

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[22] Spivak, p.290
[23] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern speak?', p.290
[24] Édouard Glissant, and Michael Dash, J. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays (*Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p.xx
[25] Caryl Phillips, *The European Tribe*, 1st edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), p.133.
[26] Glissant borrows the term espacement from Derrida, who has drawn himself from Arendt.
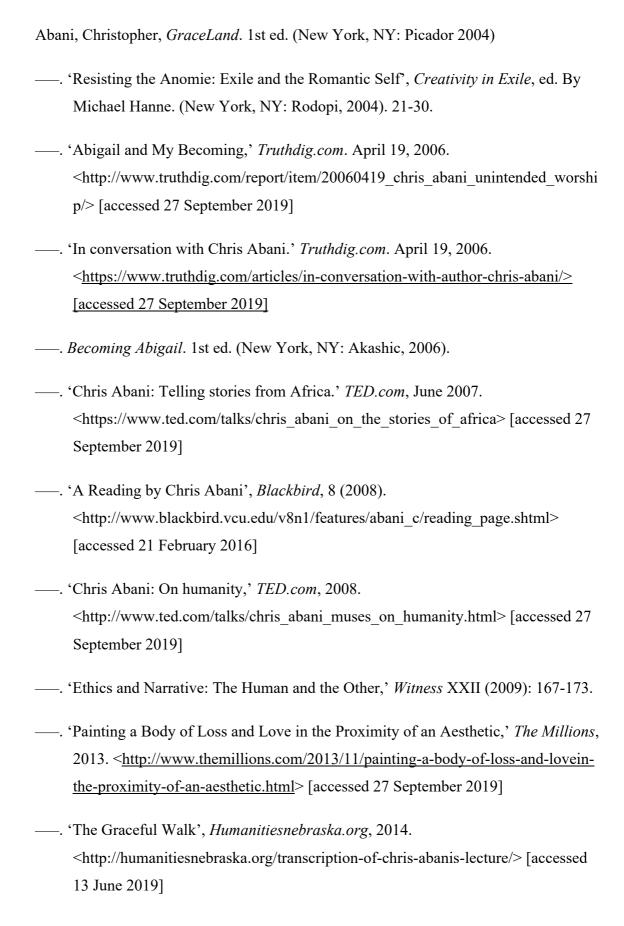
abnormality. This tendency towards 'archipelagic-thinking' speaks to a desire to think the world in connections rather than in differences.

Precisely because this world has yet to come, I argue that literature, and specifically postcolonial literatures of migration, articulate this vision, and provide us with a language with which to articulate it. This thesis has shown the ways in which novels which emerge out of the entanglement of history ultimately gesture towards an alternative historical epistemology, and an alternative ontology of the human. Those novels exist within a web of interconnecting histories, intertextualities and traditions. If we can think of the literary as archipelagic, then we might think of the ways in African literature's re-enchantment of humanism can inflect itself into the making of this archipelago-world.

Indeed, Africa has a lot to teach the West in its move beyond tribalism. The novel of migration comes to rewrite this analysis of power-in-spacing, an analysis attuned not simply to Africa, but to the West as well. The spacing of migrant life, the spacing of humanity, provides new epistemological and ontological frameworks through which to transform the world. Glissant's poetic language for a view of the world yet to come is expressed in his literature: 'On the slave ship we lost our languages, our gods, all familiar objects, songs, everything. We lost everything. All we had left was traces. That's why I believe that our literature is a literature of traces'.[27] If refugees are the vanguards of their people, as Arendt claimed in her essay 'We Refugees', this thesis postulates that the migrant is the vanguard of a humanity which is becoming itself.

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[27] Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation, film by Manthia Diawara, 2009.
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