Negotiating Liminality and Articulating Imagination: History, Self and Language. A comparative study of Indian Fiction in English and African Fiction in French

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Certified that the Thesis entitled

Negotiating Liminality and Articulating Imagination: History, Self and Language. A comparative study of Indian Fiction in English and African Fiction in French, submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, Professor, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University. And that neither this thesis nor any part of this has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

Countersigned by

Candidate

Dated

Supervisor

Dated

For my parents

who are no more in this world…

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Introduction

Relocating the Present

Beginning is not only a kind of action; it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, a consciousness.

Edward W. Said

If beginning is a new consciousness, it involves a choice: where and when to begin?[1] However difficult this choice may be, one has to begin somewhere and sometime. Although the choice is subjective, this subjectivity emanates from specific space and time designating a location. This is crucial to a cultural critique, because it must necessarily take cognizance of its own situatedness and negotiate it with all its possible realization. If criticism is its own time reflected in thoughts, it has to both interpret and appeal to the world at large. When thinking is invested in figuring out the present, theoretical consciousness does engage critically with certain conceptions of the historical and the political.[2] The humanities in the academia, it is believed, bequeath to generations of humans a repository of these conceptions, a collective understanding of what it means to be in this world of space-time events. But this understanding is not one; there are conflicting normative visions.

What characterizes compellingly various disciplines in the humanities in our times is the epistemology of plurality. The changing configurations of political, social and cultural landscapes across the globe promise to change our perspectives. Monolithic and megalomaniac ‘Eurocentrism’, the old discourse of European superiority constructed on the terrain of empire formation in the colonies has already been severely challenged by a powerful differentiated archive of anti-colonialist critiques. European domination, at least in the political sense, being over, it seems to be high time to take stock of its civilizational aftermath. A very particular historical condition has emerged in the formally decolonized societies, and it deserves close scrutiny in terms of both continuities and discontinuities. In contemporary postcolonialism, theoretical engagement with issues of politics, culture and space has been closely intermeshed with discourses, varying in tones, of ‘alterity’. The binary of the European self and the non-European other, circulated and normalized by master narratives of Enlightenment modernity, is being negotiated differently through diverse locational (both spatial and temporal) practices. The search has been for alternative organizing principles, the current state of literary studies being a case in point.It is in this broad context of intellectual discussions that our present study can be put into place.

The present thesis is a comparative study of two non-European literary practices which have come up in the ex-colonial world. One is what is commonly known as Indian Writing in English (hereafter cited as IWE) which obviously has immediate concerns for us since we belong to that particular geo-political space called ‘India’. The other is African Writing in French (hereafter cited as AWF) which engages our attention through our academic affiliation to French and Francophone studies. It is regrettable that IWE and AWF have rarely been studied in conjunction with each other although both have been shaped by similar historical experiences, experiences of colonization and its aftermath. But does this mere juxtaposition of these two new literary traditions on that score constitute the terms of comparison? Are we not homogenizing historical experiences of human beings in two different parts of the world? Is not the choice so unreflexive a projection of our own subjectivity that our project itself finally becomes theoretically untenable?

We wish to argue that our own ‘subjectivity’ / ‘location’ is grounded in space and time which are ours and which define our intellectual cognates. And when these cognates look for a new alignment— bringing together IWE and AWF in our case –, each interpretation becomes a new historical consciousness, a new phenomenon in that it creates a new object of study, pushing off prevalent significations. In a way more sensitive to our own context and more responsive to our contemporary ‘globality’ – systems of presentation, historical conditions and intellectual practice –, this act of critical reading seeks to re-explore the intellectual relations of the literary practices we have chosen for our study and bring to surface new frames of intelligibility in which the life of writing itself is re-negotiated in and as history, and history made to emerge as larger issues for our times. What are or might be those issues? Very briefly: signification, narrative, representation and identity. Or else, history, self and language.

We cannot help recognizing that there are socio-political and literary imaginations shaping the political and the literary all over the world today that escape or exceed our normative understandings of the ethics and the aesthetics. What is important to note about these new formations in many parts of the world is that they do not conform to any theoretical version of a global subject. These literary mobilizations / formations act out of ‘their’ sense of making sense of the world but their understanding is fragmented, contextual and always shifting. They act out of ‘their’ sense of ethics and aesthetics, with different cultural assumptions and different constituencies of readers, the specific problematic they set out and the world they seek to illumine. No canon is followed; nor are they under any kind of tutelage to academia. Much of this development has taken place beyond the so-called West (for instance, in our case, Indian Writing in English and African Writing in French), where ethical and aesthetic imaginations are mobilized and articulated in various different ways.

This leaves us, the theory and our theoretical consciousness in a critical situation, where these developments by themselves do not give us any universal, normative horizon by which to judge them. When we feel called upon to make judgments about the world, we have no so-called academically recognized alternatives to the originally European, universal principles. However, theorization should not lose confidence. It seems to us that today’s disjuncture between theory and the world is not a mere repetition of the old problem of reality failing to measure up to our *ideal* categories of thought and so rehearsing a politics, corresponding to its time, that will catch up to our *ideal* vision. Theoretical consciousness has to wrestle with what today exceeds the grasp of the Western thinking grids.

This non-commensurability calls for critical attention, for it is by acknowledging the *murkiness* of global heterogeneous cultural imaginations today that we may configure a now so plural as not to be exhausted by any single definition. But far from making this either the foundation of an irrationalism or the justification of a condemnation of the venture of scientific knowledge, my point is to convert it *positively* into the basis of the thinking on the *limits* of theoretical knowledge. And it is aptly here that the concept of 'negotiating liminality' (used in the title of the thesis) receives its force and significance. It is this primary critical impulse which has made us feel called upon to take up the present comparative study.

So, literary comparativism has to negotiate a slippery terrain of cultural heterogeneity, where slippage of meaning emerges in forms and with concerns that are quite distinct from the metropolitan variants. We need to be more sensitive to history and the structuring force of context and locality, but at the same time not lose sight of the fact that the site of the local is not an autonomous zone of action, rather it is problematically inscribed within the changing configurations of the global. The very process of constructing a new comparative space is a difficult negotiation of the dynamics of this relation.

Hence, I shall be focusing on the following points: new literary formations and need for theoretical revision; disjuncture between theory and reality and thinking of a limit; how to theorize this limit; conceptualizing a comparative space in this light.

Finally, we would like to propose a general plan of the scheme of study undertaken.

The first section will dwell upon the comparatist frameworks available to us for such writing and their conceptual limits, their scope, both in terms of methodology and content. It would explain how our own thesis, with its specific outlines, scope, analytic framework etc., intervenes here. This section also elaborates a concept of liminality, its connection with the dynamics of alternative modernities and various articulations of identities and culture.

The second section would discuss how we articulate various connections between identity and culture so as to understand the processes that seek to transform their interrelations. It would also address the specific demands of the work chosen, explaining why they are chosen for comparison and elaborating what they seek to express and in turn how they are themselves intervention / articulation of cultural practices of post-colonial societies.

The concluding section would focus on projections, findings and implications of this work for cultural analysis.

Section I

Theory, Positions

Chapter 1

Refiguring Literary Comparativism

> *The level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is capable of a crisis in its basic concepts.*
>
> Martin Heidegger

Our sense of the present, the sense of a disjuncture between theory and reality, pushes us back to another beginning, that of literary comparativism as a discursive formation at the site of institutional academics and makes imperative for us to figure out, at this moment, the comparatist frameworks available to us for new literary formations such as IWE and AWF, their scope and conceptual limits, both in terms of methodology and content. It behooves every discipline to come back, whenever there is a crisis, to its initial set of concepts and assumptions, the definition of its domain, limits of its field of experience as it is projected in and through practice. It really makes sense when Charles Bernheimer, in a critical appraisal, describes literary comparativism as 'anxiogenic': it is born out of anxieties.[1] However, it is not always the same anxiety that has guided the disciplinary move in comparative literature across time. Anxiety has changed and shaped the concerns and priorities of the discipline.

Epistemological issues of comparison

There are two fundamental questions that have been nagging literary comparativism. First, what is supposed to be compared to what and, of course, how? This is, in fact, a primordial question that has been vexing the practitioners since the inception of the discipline. Debates are on even now and no single self-contained answer has been possible. If we look at closely, this relates to the analytic framework and methodology followed or to be followed in the disciplinary pursuits, that is, if we are allowed to say, the epistemological assumptions underlying comparativism in literary studies. Second, if we compare literatures, what would we achieve out of this? What else would we achieve that cannot be derived from the study of a single literature? This question relates to the theoretical and practical implications of a comparative study in literature, which could rationalize and substantiate the raison d'être, that is, the ontological presuppositions behind comparativism in literature.

These two anxieties are interrelated. The ontology is conditioned by the epistemology insofar as the analytic framework determines what way, through the study of specific issues, the discipline comes into being and thrives. It would be better to be recalled here that no literature is by itself comparative. It is only our study of literature - so from a certain perspective - that is such. It is scholars who engage in this activity, activity of comparing. This means that the space for comparison is not already given as self-evident before us. The comparative space has to be *created* through our critical understanding, reading and interpretive strategy. In other words, comparativism is not intrinsic to the texts we read or the literatures we study. Paradoxically, the specific framing of our critical reading would reveal a comparative space.

> […] no one is a comparatist once and for all, but comparative literature comes into and out of scholarship and careers according to the questions being addressed and the pressures on literary studies at a given time.[2]

Since what is at stake is forging a comparative space, the latter is in constant unrest, undergoing reinvention in every generation, every age or, rather, in principle, every time a scholar initiates a new research project. Part of the condition of a comparatist is this productive anxiety, to come to terms with what Ulrich Weisstein once called the 'permanent' crisis in the field.[3] Precisely, it is in this sense, the comparatist has to negotiate, from within, the conceptual limits of the mercurial disciplinary space.

Conceptualizing a comparative space has been, till now, methodologically approached by two broad frames of reference: one is what we may call 'Identity of difference' and the other 'Difference of identity'. Many of the territorial skirmishes besetting literary comparativism emerge out of the conflicting positions these frames evince. Conflicts are because, deeply embedded consciously or unconsciously in tortuous trajectories of history, these positions, more often than not, betray a sense of critical self-retrieval. Very little tolerance being allowed, each of these frames was made to look so rigid that no fruitful reconciliation seemed possible.

In view of the diffuse character of the historical origins, absence of central definitive concepts and uncertainties about the objectives, methods and consequences, comparative literature has always, even today, been considered as a body of uncertain discourses that are held on the margins of mainstream literary studies. I am not talking about comparativism in general - a perspective to which we appeal while exploring a text - that is as old as literature itself. But I am here concerned with the formation of a certain critical discourse constituting a discipline, whose entire history has been characteristically marked by the periodic return to the question of identity and that of difference in various ways, with varied terms of reference and other exigencies.

From where does literary comparativism beget these conceptual frames? Comparative Literature has primarily a western provenance. So the emergence and elaboration of these frames are linked to the manner in which the discourse of and on comparativism in literary studies was constituted in the West along with other related branches of knowledge and have persisted alongside. This discourse appeared in the midst of a certain history which is European or Western and has always had problematic relationship with the different realms of knowledge and discourse that preceded it. It is a discourse which is amorphous and fluid, deep down interrogative but has a dignity of its own. Ever since it made its appearance, it presents itself as being the critical conscience of what is thought and said about literature and, concurrently, being the vigilant keeper of a new and superior knowledge about it, different and better than the rest. It is considered a better form of critical reflection and knowledge because of its pluralistic epistemological orientation - relational methodology, interdisciplinary approach and inclusivist ideology - which allows it, against the monolithic self-referential closure of mainstream single literature study, to move across literatures, cultures, languages, other areas of creative and imaginative expression and disciplines, thus yielding a wider frame of intelligibility. It is this sense of 'across', enshrined in comparative thinking, which holds within itself infinite cognitive possibilities and promises.

But sadly even after more than a century of comparativist scholarship, these are yet to be fully realized. Reasons: epistemological dilemma, methodological pitfalls and ideologically bound historical processes.

Comparison forms a conventional part of the literary critic's analytic as well as evaluative process. While discussing a work, critics, even today, frequently appeal to other works in the same or another language.[4] This kind of procedural comparison has always been there. It is worth insisting that my objective is to analyze how comparison gained an institutional status through an extension of a conventional procedure with the aim of achieving an enhanced awareness of literature in general. This disciplinary institutionalization in the shape of comparative literature has its own historical dynamics, projected by a regime of discursive and critical practices, themselves conditioned by intentions and biases. The central problematic of the discipline has indeed revolved around the term 'comparison'. What do we actually mean by 'comparing' when we take up a comparative study in literature? Do we assign any specific significance which is not given in the pure meaning of the term? Emphasis on the pure meaning of the term is less useful than a demand for a clearer enunciation of a new meaning, which, when presented in context, unravels different layers of a critical discourse, each having different critical assumptions in a network of multiple affiliations and disjunctions among them and makes visible those ideological processes that seek to ‘naturalize’ meaning in cultural production.

Comparability of objects and methodologies being in the heart of the debate on comparativism in general, universality and singularity (or rather differential uniqueness) become extreme and opposing pulls which tend to define the very scope of the activity of comparing with substantially divergent consequences. Universalism reveals itself through theorization, either taking cognizance of cognitive universals or seeking to illuminate, by means of structural invariables, phenomena which are apparently dissimilar and seemingly unique or even offering a diachronic global representation of events. Within every comparatist still now resides deep down, as Pierre Laurette says, the dream of classical rationalism and universalist metaphysics.[5] Rationalism proposes the model of universal language which is thought to be capable of measuring everything in the world universally by dint of a cognitive faculty to move across freely from one domain of objects to another. Viewed thus, formulation of the general from the specific is the condition of valid knowledge - a knowledge which brings together and then dissolves, by some generalizing principles, apparently disparate but inexhaustibly varied objects or events into an elevated, well organized whole. This is what has constituted, notably under the aegis of the model of the subject of science (theoretical reason), the basis of so called universalism: a unitary experience of being in the world − be it scientific experience, historical and political or even aesthetic experience; a unitary model of the subject that founds this unique experience.

In terms of reasoning and understanding in comparative thinking, the issue of epistemological unity has to do with the relations between global intelligibility and local intelligibility, between identity and non-identity or otherness: to understand every single event in its immediate context on the one hand and to bring together multiple contexts into a more encompassing structure so as to forge specific tools of intelligibility (metalanguage, models, structures, representations, functions, typology, periodization) which allow us to mediate between the general and the particular. This is what has opened onto two parallel perspectives. One is what assumes that the internal/formal structures are adequate to define the historical development of specific events; the other hypothesizes that the former can be described by the latter. Both are extreme extrapolations not without wider implications: hypostatization of the logico-transcendental attended by reductionist cognition of the world in the first case while that of the empirical with infinite differences of multiple worlds in a morass of absolute relativism in the second. What is there is a constant redefinition of the theoretical apparatus, subject to spatio-temporal frames of reference; an incessant search for more and more clarifying, if not all encompassing, theories and methods. The epistemological foundation, and the dilemma as well, of comparativism is located in the duality of the empirico-transcendental. The systemic necessity of an act of comparison presumes continuity between these two instantiations, which lies in going beyond the empirical into abstraction, in the conversion of diverse realities into a reality reinstated in an order either logically or historically. It is this continuity which has given to the pursuit of ‘taming’ the unmanageable a sense of meta-physical security, a feeling of holding onto a centre, believed to be the ultimate guarantor of rationality and truth.

Literary comparativism in history

What has been this centre identified with in the history of literary comparativism? Here I shall recapitulate some of the key moments, although not unknown to learned minds, which would propel my critical narration toward analytic and conceptual concerns.

One of such key moments can be situated in the eighteenth century Europe where, from the older traditions of humanist education, there was comparison all around even as there was no disciplinary notion of comparative literature. What could be called, following Genette, transtextual critical practice was in place while studying the Renaissance or seventeenth century literature. Literary comparativism, though not disciplined, was in the aesthetic awareness of textual polyvalence, polyphoneous layers of a text, uniqueness of a text in its articulation in a network of multiple connections and in its own pluralistic interweavings.

But the plurality thus envisaged was Eurocentric, the constant reference being Greco-Roman-Judaic-Christian cultural heritage. This is what made the literary scholarship of the eighteenth century view the literatures of Europe - ancient and modern - as a single literature. The dissolution of textual plurality into unity through imagination of a European mind - European origins, common cultural heritage - is a significant turning point. This position which is also a denationalizing move is peculiar in its formation with its dual contradictory focal points, both being pressed by the urgency to go beyond the national. But the intent is not the same. On the one hand, the perception of pluralistic formation of a text and the need to embrace it: what is national is constituted at the same time what lies beyond the national ; on the other hand, the felt necessity of seizing upon the unity - turned - into - universality: what lies beyond the national is absorbed into a supra-national whole. This hesitation / ambivalence marks the beginning of a view considering the literatures of Europe in its fundamental unity, and comparativism appears in this context of a sense of universality of letters with the objective of making that fundamental unity visible.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the notion of unity was a constant reference, although it implied, at a practical level, predominantly European unity, vigourously reinforced by the idea of language families, subsequently followed by the vision of mankind being a close knit family and the search for universals irrespective of geopolitical spaces and identities. Literature tended increasingly to be regarded as a universal phenomenon, universality lying in the form of expression in language, in any language, and in the human experience. At the same time, the process of consolidation of nation-states and national languages produced the archives of national literatures. This is what made the rise of comparative literature inevitable. E.R. Curtius has summed up the situation:

> Thus Europe is dismembered into geographical fragments. By the current division into Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern Period, it is also dismembered into chronological fragments.[6]

Literary comparativism was essentially a move toward a search for unity in the fragmented world. The concept of ‘European literature’ being a product of ‘European mind’ having its foundation in the values of classical culture significantly shaped the intent and methodology of studying literature. We can recall here what Churton Collins said about the relation of classics to English studies:

> The key to the peculiarities of Gray is to be found in Pindar and Horace. The key to the peculiarities of Dryden and Pope is to be found - and to be found only - in the Roman poets. There is much in the very essence of Spencer’s poetry, there is much in the essence of Wordsworth’s poetry, which must be absolutely without meaning to readers ignorant of the Platonic dialogues. Apart from the Greek and Roman classics, the greater portion of Lord Tennyson’s best work is from a critical point of view, intelligible. The best commentary on Shakespeare is Sophocles as the best commentary on Burke is Cicero.[7]

Matthew Arnold echoed the same view when he said:

> Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures.[8]

These remarks are symptomatic of an internal dilemma. On the one hand, what Collin and Arnold advocate is that literature is to be studied not in isolation but in connections. On the other hand, they seem to suggest that this network of connections is historically woven around a centre, a centre which is European. At another level, this emphasizes a centristic approach which makes way for homologous concepts such as origin, source, essence, transcendentality and identity. It is interesting to note here first, the notion of 'centricity' − more precisely, Eurocentricity − which secured for itself a certain place in literary comparativism and second, the leap from the national into European and then finally into universal. Both of these implications need to be more closely examined.

In this situation, what is interesting to note is how the terms 'comparative' and 'national' were problematically associated with each other in a relationship of both complementarity and opposition. Complementarity arises from the urgency to define the national self in literature with respect to another through comparative methodology. Opposition lies in the imperative to transcend the narrowly defined national boundaries with a commitment to trans-national verities. This is how literary comparativism presupposed the existence of at least two national instances of something called literature, which can form the basis for comparison. Walter Cohen has described it as a symptom of differentiation and specialization, constitution of ostensibly coherent political entities, cultural entities and discursive spaces, seeking simultaneously to establish larger units/categories of meaning (inter-nation, Europe, international, world/universal). The search for wider meaning was directed toward two different directions: inter-nationality and supra-nationality.[9]

The conception of literary comparativism as the history of international and cross-cultural literary relations goes back to Philarètes Chasles who, in his inaugural lecture at the Athénée in 1835, made a vision-statement:

> Let us calculate the influence of thought upon thought, the manner in which the people are mutually changed, what each of them has given, and what each of them has received; let us calculate also the effect of this perpetual exchange upon the individual nationalities: how, for example, the long-isolated northern spirit finally allowed itself to be penetrated by the spirit of the south; what the magnetic attraction was of France for England and England for France; how each division of Europe has at one time dominated its sister states at another time submitted to them; what has been the influence of theological Germany, artistic Italy, energetic France. Catholic Spain, Protestant England; how the warm shades of the south have become mixed with the profound analysis of Shakespeare; how the Roman and the Italian spirit have embellished and adorned the Catholic faith of Milton; and finally, the attraction, the sympathies, the constant vibration of all these living, loving, exalted, melancholy and reflected thoughts - some spontaneously and others because of study - all submitting to influences which they accept like gifts and all in turn emitting new unforeseeable influences in the future![10]

This statement of Chasles is interesting from the point of view of the early formation of critical discourse of literary comparativism in Europe. The comparative space he envisaged was based on influence, national spirit and reciprocity of relations; all of these motifs would give a certain orientation to comparative studies. But there is a striking ambivalence when in the same lecture he said: “France is the most sensitive of all countries […] what is Europe to the world, France is to Europe.”[11]

Relations between literatures are a historically given process. In the vicissitudes of evolution, cultures come into contact through such mediating factors as travels, military invasion, colonization and others. However, the entanglement with the question of national culture formation gave an awkward turn to the issue. Baldensperger put into place the concept of ‘dependency’ and observed that a contact in reality makes way for dependency.[12] This is an untenable position. It denies liberty of imagination and agency of creativity to a writer who is then reduced to a mere taker of facts. A mechanistic conception of writing without its dynamics and complexities emerges from a comparative space grounded on the positivistic dictates of causality. Moreover, under the compulsions of the formation of a national culture, the search for an identity, cultural roots and an identifiable collective past to take refuge in involved a hierarchical order of cultures and literatures where, in the implied oppositional binary, the self is glorified to the detriment of an ‘other’. The possibility of a dialogue becomes a far outcry.

Inter-nationality was what comparative studies, especially influence studies, by Jean-Jacques Ampère, Abel Villemain, Joseph Texte, Fernand Baldensperger, Fernand Bruntière, Paul Hazard and Paul Van Tieghem from the latter part of the nineteenth century till the first half of the twentieth century were based on. The comparative space that emerged from these studies was founded on the preeminence of national literatures and patterns of influences and connections between them. The approach was positivist, scientific and evolutionary methodologies. This kind of comparative study took a rigorous but rigid shape in Van Tieghem.[13] Though he extended the temporal scope of comparative literature to include various links that connect modern literatures, he suggested binary study - the study of two authors or texts from two different literary systems - as the only valid approach to literary comparativism as opposed to general or universal. What this Tieghemian ‘binary study’ suggests is that the comparative space has essentially to be constructed on the principle of linguistic distinction (distinction of two national languages, English and French for example). Tieghem’s perception was severely restricted by the world around him that was very much different from the one we inhabit today. Territorial spread of languages beyond the putative national borders and literatures emerging out of that historical condition were almost inconceivable for him.[14]

Later, as a corrective to this position, René Etiemble, in his call to rise above all parochialism and move beyond the scope of positivistic framework, advocated embracing humanity at large and urged that comparativism should strive for a methodological integration of historical inquiry and aesthetic criticism.[15]

Much of Etiemble’s position was informed by René Wellek’s reaction against the signs of crisis in comparative literature which he identified as positivism which formulates a mechanistic conception of origin and influence and chauvinism, an unwarranted desire to valorize one’s own language literature.[16] Wellek's contention was premised on the conception of *intrinsic* - as opposed to *extrinsic* - study of literature which he considered an autonomous symbolic structure with significance and value. So the comparative study he envisaged designs a space independent of linguistic, ethnic, political and ethical boundaries believed to be the source of vexed and aberrant issues of history, a space that is at the same time founded on a consciousness of a fundamental unity of all literary creation and experience. Engagement with various literary assemblages/categories and processes - texts, forms, genres, themes, movements or any other historical configurations - would bring about, it was believed, a true aesthetic understanding of what constitutes literature in its indivisibility beyond the bounds of space and time, in its essence. This aesthetic turn coupled with the ideology of unity, which constituted the basis of supra-nationality and dominated the early formative years of what we know today as American school of comparativism, would see the emergence of different forms of analogy/ affinity/ parallel studies. In attempting to break away from the European tradition of comparativism, Wellek neutralized the historical effects into textual aesthetics and that is why he and his followers - Henry Remak, Harry Levin, Alridge Owen, François Jost and others - preferred to stay away from the vexed issues of history and politics. This position was quite different from European approaches in its basic premise and priorities. Literary comparativism evolved in Europe in response to the historical imperatives of nationalistic fervour, whereas American thinking on literary comparativism took on board a task with supra-national concerns in reaction to worst excesses of chauvinist nationalism. History repeated itself but differently, with different theoretical orientations and consequences.

This particular strand in comparativist perspective, although a projection of a shattered and dismembered soul in the aftermath of the Second World War, can be traced back to the early comparatists such as Charles Mills Gayley, Arthur Marsh and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett. All of them proposed a non-nationalistic model of comparativism. Their approach was non-generic but not ahistorical although the very idea of history was somewhat different. Arthur Marsh, who taught comparative literature at Harvard in the 1890s, observed that the scope of the subject:

> To examine […] *the phenomena of literature as a whole*, to compare them, to group them, to classify them, to enquire into the causes of them, to determine the results of them - this is the true task of comparative literature.[17]

Marsh's contemporary Posnett's idea of comparativism, based on the principles of social and individual evolution of man, was a resolutely historical engagement which consisted in, very much in the Hegelian vein, 'retracing the steps man has taken individually and collectively in reaching the highest social life'.[18] Gayley, who offered comparative literature at Berkeley in the 1890s, envisioned a comparative space which, like a melting pot, would dissolve all national and linguistic slants of single literatures so as to forge something new and all encompassing, which the study of literature ought to be, in general, based on, referring constantly to a network of related fields of experience within the organic structure called Culture.[19]

In this version of comparativism, the objective was not to define the contours of national literature and hence, document on sources and origins in order that the cultural basis of national consciousness be established. The task was defined in terms of a great moral need to trace the evolutionary achievements of human creativity through space and time so that transnational truths believed to be produced by great literature could be studied. But what started with a belief in transnational dynamics of human creativity later turned into ahistorical formalism in the critical climate conditioned by New Criticism. Literature came to be identified with a collection of chosen texts considered to be containing certain core humanizing values - values which were defined in absolute terms and not relativized as the very question of conditions of production and possible reception of a text was consciously brushed aside. The object of study was reduced to the text, and only the text, divorced from context thought to be provoking vexed issues of history, politics and culture. Going beyond the national was a moral imperative felt by intellectual minds driven by good sense, following soaring ambitions of nationalism and consequent territorial skirmishes leading to two disastrous World Wars killing millions of brethren of the humankind. It was a search for a neutral space-time, which would provide solace and refuge from disturbing historical spatio-temporal frames difficult to cope with. François Jost made this claim:

> [Comparative Literature] represents more than an academic discipline. It is an overall view of literature, of the world of letters, a humanistic ecology, a literary Weltanschaung, a vision of the cultural universe, inclusive and comprehensive.[20]

Or, Wellek and Warren proclaimed: “Literature is one, as art and humanity are one.”[21]

It is in this sense, it may be said, that literary comparativism creates a space where all literatures can be harmoniously accommodated, where cultural differences are presumably shed off by readers reading ‘masterworks of masterminds’ in a close emotional encounter with them for the sake of a greater unity revealing itself on a much higher plane of realization. Disenchanted, disengaged and disinherited, man is believed to be united with man. This conceptual scheme relegates the literary to a specific function of the human mind. So literature is. But what is wrong is the assumption that mingles space-and-time-bound writers and readers actively participating in the literary event into a single human mind realizing itself everywhere every time under the same conditions with no variables whatsoever. Thus totally disincarnated and disembodied, they are defined absolutely in their resemblances to one another, and not in their differences. Neither individual nor social, they come to dwell in a strangely abstracted timeless and spaceless realm outside the event itself.

This projection of apparent neutrality through willing suspension of history and politics is a projection of a kind of universal cosmopolitanism. Although believed to be aiming at a quest of larger units of meaning, it indeed restricted conceptually the very scope of literary comparativism because of its implicit linkages with the ideology of liberal humanism and the world-vision that attends it. This has already been evident in the way literary comparativism, confronted with the historical task of defining the contours of an emerging discipline, responded to historical challenges posed by issues of culture and politics − nationalism, imperialism, racialism, internationalism, multiculturalism − in a rapidly changing world where ideas of culture, language, nation, history and identity were constantly in a process of transformation.

What is at stake here is the function of literature as a cultural practice: what is that we do when we do literature? Not that the assumptions are always overtly stated. They remain invisible but pervasive, so pervasive that, unconscious about the pitfalls, are regarded as *natural* frames of intelligibility without us being blissfully unaware of their possible linkages with the value-biases of various centres of power in the social life at large.

The very first thing to note is the belief that great literature transcends the temporal limitations of the age in which it is produced, and this transcendence is made possible by its potential embodiment of what is constant in human nature.[22] By this logic, the literary text precludes any elaborate process of situating it within a context − historical, socio-political, literary-cultural or (auto-) biographical. Indeed, literariness resides in this detachment from external aberrations and yet, out of the residuum left over, the capacity to contain its own meaning within itself on the basis of its unity of verbal patterning. The question here is not the patterned unity being unimportant but rather the glossing over of the process that made a particular verbal patterning possible; this is what 'neutralizes' the pragmatic effectiveness into a pure abstraction.

The belief that human nature is essentially unchanging − and so, same emotions are played out in same situations over and again throughout human history! − makes the individual (subject) antecedent to or transcend the interplay of forces of history and society, experience/ culture and language. Hence the purpose of literature is essentially the enhancement of human life and those values related to the constantives of human nature. This position is indicative of the bourgeois humanist pretence of political disinterestedness and legitimization of its political investment in disguise in the production of major/dominant knowledge under the pretext of a spurious claim to universality which is itself historically conditioned and so contingent. This has thus isolated a domain called 'aesthetics' over and above the social and institutionalized it, through certain practices of criticism, as a specific form of knowledge and experience. What is assumed then is that a literary work purveys, in and through its micro-cosmos, truths which are in consonance with those of the macro-cosmos. Aesthetic perfection in this very particular sense became the guarantee of universal truth and morality.

The point here is not to deny any entity to aesthetics/art but to emphasize its socio-cultural formation − art as a symbolic structure but as a form of cultural discourse as well. What becomes imperative is to critically examine the internal dynamics of what Pierre Bourdieu called 'literary field' in its relation to the process of cultural production, social space, symbolic power and reorganization of the imaginary within discursive formations.[23]

This position can be ascribed to a complex network of variety of interrelated factors – rise of print capitalism, crisis of religion, emergence of nation-states and globalizing spread of imperialism – ushering in surrounding material transformations in Europe. A coherent field called 'literary' within the social in the network of cultural production, comes into being in post-Reformation Europe in one of the temporal divisions, famously known under the aegis of Western literary historiography as the Romantic period. The 'literary' was contracted to creative and/ or imaginative writing within a radical reorganization (naming, classification, demarcation and distribution) of discursive formation of the West. There was a reconstitution of the social space in relation to the dynamics of cultural production. The separation of the imaginative within the social and its institutionalization takes on a significance that invites attention. The imaginative thus institutionalized by the establishment of criticism in the name of 'literary', asserted its authority in the process of cultural production − the authority which was underwritten by certain premises, assumptions, priorities and conceptual grids. The privilege accorded by the Romantics to the 'imaginative' in this social space, conditioned by utilitarian values of early industrial capitalism, constitutes a sub-space where lost values were thought to be recovered and celebrated. The literary work, as an embodiment of an organic unity through its verbally patterned equilibrium, comes to be endowed with deep social, political and also philosophical implications. Literature becomes an alternative ideology which was believed to be potentially charged with the power to transform human life and society. Politically radical though it may seem, this move to 'spatialize' the 'literary' was underscored by an emphasis on the autonomy of the 'imaginative' which decisively detaches it from the sphere of disturbing material realities. And in its deliberate avoidance of the present, the 'literary' became finally divorced from history, from the history of its own formation, from the very conditions of its possibility. Having no proper space in the dynamics of social movements, which only could perhaps have transformed industrial capitalism into a just society, it was caught up in an impotent nostalgia for the old organic past which was, be it whatsoever, a far cry from being a potentially transformative force. This very alienation of art or, especially, literature from historical and material practices, finds an interesting ally with bourgeois ideology which the romantic imagination intended to subvert. This resulted in an assumption that there is an unchanging object called art, an isolatable experience called aesthetic. Literature was turned inwardly and was defined as a self-interested, self-reflexive pursuit. This is concurrent with the principle of *disinterestedness* − a sort of cardinal principle in philosophical Modernity formulated in Kantian aesthetics and vigorously followed by the likes of Hegel, Schiller, Coleridge, Croce and others − which says that the aesthetic is the result of the perception of something not as a means but as an end in itself. The aesthetic experience was gloriously removed from any sordid social purpose, disengaged from the historical processes, material practices, social relations and ideological articulations, briefly, the very process in which it is produced.[24]

This form of neutral position, scholars have argued, is an ideological overgrowth of capitalist mode of ordering of the world. It is opposed to referential critical acts which presuppose contextual mediations – economic, social, political, cultural or aesthetic and are responsive to these forces. It turns out to be highly selective in respect of what it considers that context to be. Its position on the nature of man's moral, psychological and social being becomes evident in its scarcely concealed assumptions involving matters such as taste and sensibility and its habit of articulating these as if they were objective and unchanging human qualities unaffected by historical and economic pressures. This model of the study of literature acquires, through the mediation of literary criticism, positive prescriptive force in respect of morality, politics, culture, transmitted at large and unquestioned throughout by a system of education. It is specially worth mentioning here that his de-politicizing of the sensibility through the work of ideology of aesthetics, disseminated by the system of education, was very much implicated in the colonialist process where several euro-centric notions and values were passed on to the imaginaries of the subject-races in the colony.

Critical endeavours were requisitioned to locate, in what was considered great works, the moral riches of bourgeois culture and to communicate them to the masses, be it on the indigenous soil or elsewhere in the colonies. This would orient individual reading in a certain direction closely related in the scope of the 'literary' as charted out. Reading is an essentially individualist, solitary and contemplative act but individual reading, guided as it were, to situate itself in a frame of intelligibility as constant reference would curb any disruptive tendency of resistance against the hegemonic forces. The labour of the artist as that of the critic was carefully confined to the realm of the aesthetic thus conceived. The 'ideal' reader of this tradition is essentially passive, engaged in honing her critical apparatus to be worthy receiver of the work. The 'ideal' reader, like the writer, belongs to a small intellectual or rather imaginative elite. This 'sensitive' group was to carry the burden of 'preserving' the quintessence of culture. The act of reading then becomes a cultural investment. What is important to note here is not just the aesthetic elitism and the consequent notion of 'high' culture that is perpetuated but the fact that such a bias (its emphasis on 'preservation of quintessence') makes for a present-past relation, rather than a present-future one. Art was conceived as something that maintains stability and ensures continuity – the continuity of capitalist mode of production, the continuity of bourgeois mode of conceptualizing the world and the continuity of imperialist hegemony in the colonies − or else, briefly, Eurocentric norm of ‘worlding’ the world.

The ‘worlding’ is a process of conflicting ideologies and a struggle for contesting meanings which raises certain ethical issues.

Historical developments all over the world and concomitant developments in critical/cultural theory to make our imaginations of the world from democratic to more democratic bring about displacements over time in epistemological problems and renders universalist postures, at least in the sense they existed, not only unacceptable but historically contingent. Methodological, theoretical and epistemological issues are considered polymorphous and fragmented even as they contain multiple points of contact between various fields of knowledge. The dying out of old comparative literature and the need for revision and reconceptualizing a new comparative space may be located in this shifting terrain of the humanities.

Conceptualizing a new comparative space

Nowadays India and Africa or more generally the decolonized worlds constitute a significant space to understand historical, social and cultural phenomena *differently*, and it is on the basis of this understanding, literary comparativism is being reconceptualized. This is what demands a rethinking of the approach. This also means that the study of a new emerging literature has not only become a privileged space for observation of the relations such as literature and society, literature and history, literature and politics, literature and identity, literature and language but the very notion of literature has become the object of renewed discussion. The study of literature has become the study of our times apprehended in the problematic construction of an imaginary situated at the intersection of multiple communities and cultures. How to conceptualize a comparative space in this context?

In "Of Other Spaces" Foucault writes:

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space …We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network.[25]

What is at issue here is space as an epoch, not an episteme; space is an object of experience, description, perception, embracement, but not a modality for the formal production of knowledge. To describe that spatial comparison, Foucault develops the concept of "heterotopia". In contrast to utopia he defines "heterotopia" as

> Real places...which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, and the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.[26]

The heterotopia can include diverse instances as boats, cemeteries, libraries, colonies, Oriental carpets, prisons, and museums. Thus it is a site that can be constructed as an “elsewhere” that produces the effect of dislocating one’s fundamental sense of fully inhabiting a single space. It is a parcel of the world that brings the totality of the world into apprehension and destabilizes its unity. This experiential and representational emphasis of spatial heterotopia can provide us new ideas about the function of comparison. Heterotopia thus described as “fragments of a great number of possible orders [that] sparkle in a single dimension” does not figure incommensurability. The status of the “hetero” indicating heterogeneity has shifted markedly from that which exceeds and confounds the ordering function of comparison for knowledge to that which on the contrary generates relationality. Thus the status of the “topos” indicating place has undergone a marked materialisation designating actually existing common ground underlying disparate spaces.

This Foucauldean analysis offers a historicization of space and outlines a framework for considering not as static backdrop to social meaning but as a dynamic constituent of it. I am interested here in exploring how this idea might illuminate the status of space as an epistemic ground for comparison in the realm of knowledge. The space of comparison, inclusive by virtue of its transversal extensiveness would make all cultures appear coeval. So comparability in the form of a space of comparison remains without discrimination.

When James Clifford proposes a comparison between Alexander von Humboldt’s view of the “new world” and that of an indentured Asian labourer, he observes that although there is no ground of equivalence between the two there is at least a basis for comparison.[27] Humboldt being a canonical travel writer, produced enormously influential knowledge, predominantly scientific and aesthetic, whereas the Asian labourer's view of the new world is derived from displacement. He also maintains that these two types of knowledge could potentially complement or critique each other. What Clifford reveals here is the problematic of incommensurability in comparison. What I would suggest here is that this incommensurability can be a ground for comparison without being a basis of equivalence.

The heterotopia of the postcolonial condition is precisely one in which the apprehensions of the world's totality is intrinsically mediated through incommensurability. Perhaps the most eloquent elaboration of the ramification of the imbrications of space and incommensurability in a postcolonial framework can be found in the work of Martinican writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant.[28] He argues that although for a long time the concurrent powers asserted their cultures as a unified and a universal expression for the whole world, the increasing presence of the other views, other voices and other visions challenges fundamentally that unicity. Glissant postulates that we exist, we think, we write in the presence of all the cultures in the world, without possessing them in a single concept. This is the state of the world in "Relation", where comparison is no longer bound to commensuration.[29] Thus, comparison becomes not a method but a space where it signifies inclusiveness and a non hierarchical transversality, where the equivalences do not unify but relate to each other incommensurably.

Chapter 2

Imagination and Liminality

We would like to discuss our methodology through a few qualifications regarding the key-words which figure in the title of the thesis.

Imagination

If literary comparativism has to be reconceptualized, it has to address the ideological issues emanating from the inequality of power relations across cultures and societies. The preceding decades have put on the agenda of contemporary critical discourse (such as Postcolonial Studies, Cultural Studies, Gender Studies) the need to resist hegemonic forces that legitimate and circulate homogenized — sometimes called universalized— world views. In this context, ethical issues regarding representation have assumed urgency. Some of the assumptions held as sacred by literary comparativism regarding texts and canons have been severely challenged in successive waves of theories and new formulations have taken place regarding the literary, the role of the reader and literary history. A study of works and canons informed by a linear approach to literary influences has been progressively replaced by an awareness of the complexities of polyvalence about the constitutive nature in the production of literary texts. The premises such as literary texts as sites of cultural heritage, values and qualities or the constitution of universal literary history have become increasingly problematic.

In remapping the field and redefining the methodology, literary comparativism has to recognize that categories such as text, reader, tradition and practices are sets of relationships and not absolute entities with fixed essences. The nature of these relationships will vary from culture to culture, from time to time.[1]What is at stake is the constitution of the categories in different ways in different collectivities.

Textual production is a fluid interactive site. Discourses are forms of being in the world and hence articulate socially situated and culturally constructed identities. The literary cannot be segregated from this subliminal layer of the social where language as discourse embodies identities, attitudes, assumptions and worldviews. But as there is a process of “normalization” in every society, in constructing the normative, discourses marginalize certain experiences or subjects as the other. This ‘othering’ of the other, processes the binaries — the universal and the local, the univocal and the pluralistic — in the historically determined socio-cultural conditions. Literary comparativism needs to make them visible and resist these hegemonic tendencies inherent in these conceptual frames.

What is important here is that by emphasizing the social in the construction of the literary, the very idea of literature is demystified. The idea of the individual appears to be at the centre of the European/Western literary tradition.[2] But there are cultures where this may not be true in all societies and cultures, where the collective ways of seeing, the world-views have a bearing on the material world we inhabit. Literary imagination cannot be conceived in individual terms only. What is the role of imagination in the constitution of the subject? The imagination or rather the 'imaginary' is certain relationship between consciousness and the material world of objects.[3] And there is no consciousness without image-making. It is this constitutive role of imagination that deserves attention. It is in this constructive sense that this term has been used in recent critical discourse.[4] Issues of representation, language, memory, experience, self and desire are inherent in probing the nature of the relation between subject formation and collective experience. All formalist schools of criticism attribute all imaginative functions to individual acts of creativity. The manner in which literary forms/texts emerge and function as a site of legitimizing creative acts of sublimation or subversion has drawn critical attention and a larger participatory space of inter-subjective communication can be located in society.

Literature becomes the site where the (social) imaginary manifests itself. The production and reception of literary texts has to be revived in order to see how the 'imaginary' informs them. That is to move away from an individual-centered view of literature towards collectivity-centered view of literature.

Liminality

Modern discussion of liminality begins with Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* where the liminal moments mark the interstitial stage in the three-step process of ritual initiation (separation, margin or linen and reaggregation).[5] For Van Gennep, liminality is a phase, a fleeting ephemeral moment destined for supersession. After Gennep, more recently, Victor Turner has expanded Gennep's concept by adding a synchronic dimension to the concept.[6] According to Turner, liminality should be looked upon not only as a transition between states but as a state in itself, for there exist groups or social categories for which the liminal moment turns into a permanent condition. Turner, in effect, supplements Gennep's temporal, processual view of liminality with a spatial one. While for Genepp the liminality is always a threshold, for Turner, it can also be a place of habitation.

I have employed this concept in a sense which is allied to both Gennep's and Turner's. Although I will be speaking of liminal moments, liminality appears here predominantly as a position (not as a transitional phase) as well as a process.

The term designates the spatial relationship between a culture and its periphery. The liminal entity, whatever its nature (an individual, a group , an event or a text) is the one that in a given situation takes up position of eccentricity/ex-centricity, one that occupies the periphery with respect to certain contextually determined centre (because of the shifting or even reversible character of the centre-periphery assignation).Defined in this way, liminality is less a *concept* than a *structure*, if we understand structure as a relation between two terms that is subject to multiple transformations.

Now by defining the liminal in the abstract way, I would like to draw attention to the *convertibility* of the term/notion. Not only is liminality an umbrella term, a kind of master trope that subsumes diverse phenomena; these phenomena imbricate to such an extent that it is difficult to discuss any of them in isolation. As Turner has pointed out, liminality is "a semantic molecule into many components." My preference of the term "liminality" over "marginality" lies precisely in the former's semantic range, expanse and associations. Liminality links with the marginal, but also with its transgression. This also makes the point that it is not possible to investigate liminality without relating/connecting it to a host of related//connected ideas. All these connections emerge from concrete textual juxtapositions. They appear as my arguments unfold.

The common points which I discover is a *position* which the texts occupy with respect to history, self and language (their literary representations)—a position of eccentricity with respect to established patterns and norms.

However, I should say that I did not start writing the present thesis with the notion of convertibility finally in tow; but rather, as I moved through the stages of writing, from one text to another, from one topic to another, I realized that the increasingly apparent and increasingly disconcerting heterogeneity of my corpus and materials emerged from my subject's many disguises. Diversity was then converted in principle of connectedness.

The liminal structure behaves like a phase insofar as its peripheral components do not abide in the margins. They occupy the periphery only transitorily while maintaining the centre under constant siege. In this respect all my conversions and metastasis aggressively repudiate stasis/immobility. To put it otherwise, all the texts I have analyzed are thus constituted by a productive tension between restraint and mobility, order and disorder.

Thus, my thesis has two different but converging orders — substantive and methodological. Substantively, I will be mapping the conversions of the liminal in a heterogeneous body of texts (in English/French). Methodologically, I am interested in the questions that such an exercise can pose about the limits of critical endeavour.

Indian-ness/African-ness

First of all, these terms appeared and were defined in a certain way at a certain point of colonial history. They point to certain 'figures of imagination', determined by a structure of domination-subordination. It is in this structure that 'Indian-ness' / 'African-ness' was a site of essential 'lack', relentlessly represented by the colonial system of power and knowledge as the negative image, an impoverished 'other' of Western Enlightenment Rationality.

The second version of 'Indian-ness' / 'African-ness', problematically related to the first one, began to surface in the process of reaction and resistance against colonial domination. In a differentiated projection, it was discursively constructed as a site of 'plenitude', which guided anti-colonial (pan-) nationalism (Indian nationalism, the Negritude movement for instance). This awakening of anti-colonial consciousness engendered a sense of belonging to a forged collectivity, having a shared identity – not only by going back to the roots but also by partaking in the coming into being of a ‘modern’ nation (-state).

The third version of ‘Indian-ness’ / ‘African-ness, related to remapping of geo-political spaces after dismantling of political hegemony of European rule, refers to the production of ‘modern’ archives of ‘national’ culture, dubiously conditioned by myths of essentialized tradition and universalist narratives of modernity.

Now, how do these different versions of ‘Indian-ness’ / ‘African-ness’ provide a basis for our comparison? What we wish to argue is that both underscore the centrality of colonial relations in culture formations; both represent analogous modes of imagining communities in which identities are re-constructed. ‘Indian-ness’ and ‘African-ness’ viewed thus become analogous categories of conceptualizations about identity, but we should not forget to concede that this forged sense of unity is a mask of an amalgamation, of diversity and heterogeneity. Black Africa, though not a nation-state in the political sense, represents as much a composite cultural fabric as India, a nation-state. We wish to place here a very simple but pertinent observation: in spite of various local inflections, the new literatures such as IWE and AWF are believed to be guided, much like the ‘Mind of Europe’, by the ‘Mind of India / Africa’. This is evident from the way the rubrics IWE and AWF are reified, disseminated as ‘ideal’ categories in literary historiography and accepted as such equally by readers, critics, teachers and students. This uncritical acceptance is hardly interrogated in a self-reflexive fashion. This is where these categories need to be problematized within the dynamics of the historical project of modernity.

What became the dominant form of modernity had its defining feature in the Cartesian intervention in the history of philosophy and its inner connection with the historical development of European rationality. This then was taken to be the basis of universal history. Whatever was found to be out of intellectual alignment with this form got pushed into the background. The surrounding material transformations – growth of capitalism and globalising spread of imperialism – became decisive in this form getting entrenched. The story of ‘mankind’ was finally posited in the overlapping narratives of ‘Reason’, ‘Modernity’ and ‘History’. The question of identity was ceremonially lodged into the narratives of nation-ness, statehood and citizenship.

The features of the European philosophical vision that went into the background — difference and plurality and the theoretical and practical implications that attend them — can now be conceived as the different trajectories of Modernity, unembodied in ‘history’ and can now be resurrected as projects of recovery. This is what constitutes the basis of ‘alternative modernities’, so much talked about in the non-western world in the context of new culture formations. This is the result of modernity being conditioned more by its consequences. It is here that we will seek a new internal connection which is becoming a universal feature of becoming ‘modern’ in our societies, the process of *individuation*, the point of multiple birth of values, concerns and social preferences. This allows for new emergent possibilities. Contemporary IWE and AWF can be described as expressions of these new emergent possibilities.

In the actualization of these emergent possibilities, the generation of new identities needs to be re-examined. Indeed, identity is not something given, stable and definitively acquired; it is subject to the continuous *play* of history, culture and power. If we are agreed to admit that culture is an expression of the historic present, the NOW, the past as it is remade in the present, in terms of a projected future, identity can be conceived as a constantly renewed complex process: it is this process by which we are positioned and position ourselves, within the narratives of the past in relation to different questions arising out of a space-time of subject-formation, necessarily determined by colonialism, imperialism, developmentalism and experimentation with bourgeois democracy and other forms of nation-statehood in its intersections with categories of class, linguistic region, caste , gender, community. This space-time, whose boundaries are constantly re-sited in relation to a network of connections and disjunctions, contradictions and overdeterminations of ideological positions, is what we wish to call *liminality*. Any writer belonging to IWE / AWF has to negotiate this 'liminality' in his/her own way since the fertile tension produced by 'being positioned' and 'positioning' within that liminality not only informs poetic imagination but also necessarily conditions its articulations. This notion of 'liminality' will allow us, we believe, to historicize IWE / AWF and interrogate them in productive ways.

This conceptual / analytic framework, in which our proposed project 'Negotiating Liminality and Articulating Imagination' re-inscribes problematically IWE / AWF, calls for a reconsideration of certain methodological aspects.

No literature develops ex-nihilo. Images, themes, forms, assumptions, attitudes and discursive modes are determined and given direction to, by the socio-cultural forces that shape the world in which the writer lives and to which he / she responds. In our case, the relation between the literary work and the historical situation from which it arises is definitely more complex. We have tried to understand this complexity by reconceptualising and reappropriating the notion of 'liminality'. IWE and AWF are primarily phenomena that arise as a result of the European (British / French) presence in India / Africa. It is possible – as we have earlier demonstrated, although very briefly – to regard the entire scope of these two new literary traditions as a working out of the problems and urgencies that result from the colonial encounter. The 'modernised' cultures in these two parts of the world have grown, and of course continue to grow, against the stunting background of European Imperialism which has transformed the cultural texture of these worlds. IWE / AWF provide us particularly fertile ground for inquiry as they embody, perhaps more closely than the regional language literatures, both complex cultural hold of imperialism and the various forms of struggle against it for the writer-intellectual. Most obviously, it manifests itself in the linguistic medium these writers choose for their creative endeavour and the problems that arise on that score. But the central concerns are the compulsions of a national culture, the tensions and the contradictions at play in a post-colonial culture, the grip these factors have on the writer's world and the particular status IWE / AWF has within such configurations. This approach brings severely into question the old idea of the autotelic nature of literary text and the notion of artistic purity uncontaminated by the politics of its production and reception.

It is here that we make a distinction between what can be described as the dual beginnings of these new literary formations. The history in one sense is well known; it is a chronological development which dates back to what we might regard as the very first works written by Indians / Africans in English / French. The other beginning is a critical and a political one that dates back to the period when the polemics of criticism surfaced and the recognition of these new literary traditions as a valid area of scholarship was contested. Many ideological battles were fought; undampened critics laid down what they considered the central concerns of these new formations; and in pitched debates over the legitimacy of these areas of study, questions about the study of literature in India / Africa were asked in a new post-independence climate. The whole set of old critical assumptions were called into question.

These literatures have been studied mostly as an auxiliary to mainstream English / French literature. In other words, we have been using ideas, norms and values – in brief, an ideology – developed by those who were once the colonial masters, to read works that have emerged in the erstwhile colonies. Very rarely has IWE / AWF been studied in the context of its own history and its own culture or from points of view that foreground socio-cultural concerns. The approach we are adopting would draw selectively on critical insights from a range of positions in contemporary cultural theory. This will enable us to read the texts we have chosen, in their own terms and compel every one of us involved in the discipline, to rethink the limitations of the Eurocentric / universalist aesthetic norms. In brief, our project is directed towards an exercise of 'reterritoralization' of peripheral knowledge.

This 'reterritoralization' has profound implications for comparatism as critical perspective of literary study. Highly hierarchised in its orientation, European comparatism has never included non-European literatures in the field of study it has designated for itself. It was essentially marked by the desire to conserve the subject of the West or the West as the subject. The result has been reductionist: dissolution of plurality into a forced unity. In striking contrast to this tendency – we may call it 'identity of difference' – what we wish to adopt is what we may call 'difference of identity'. 'Liminality' as we have earlier tried to define it, is irreducible to any fundamental and essential unity. To link IWE / AWF to a common centre – since they use the same language (English / French) –, to a centre of authority, which would be by hypothesis the 'mother literature' would be to negate their difference, their specificity and their identity. Rather what we observe in these new forms of writing is the intrusion of an 'other' which is transforming itself through assertion of difference and construction of pluralistic identities. Our 'liminality' is that space-time of transformations and renewals, which revolutionize cultural landscapes continuously and make new identities, emerge in relation to Modernity.

If our project is directed towards a 'reterritorialization' of peripheral knowledges, the relationship between the new formations (literary and / or cultural) and the emerging disciplinary anxieties of Comparative Literature inevitably calls for a rethinking of what it means to do theory 'here and now'. It is in this vein that we endeavour to re-examine the conditions of possibility of new frames of intelligibility within the comparatist framework.

Instead of an apparently random discussion of many texts from many contexts, we will ground our discussion around a limited number of selected texts such as *The Shadow Lines* (Amitav Ghosh, 1988), *English August: An Indian Story* (Upamanyu Chatterjee, 1988), *Monnè, outrages et défis* (Ahmadou Kourouma, 1991), *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (Sony Labou Tansi, 1985). These texts embody the assumptions, the anxieties and priorities which will, we believe, help us better work out the central problematic of our project. When we were dealing with these writers of significance, there is a certain sense in which each of them is limited to historical position but also another in which each of them breaks out of and even, to a certain extent, transforms those limits. In brief, each of them negotiates ‘liminality’ in his own way and articulates his imagination.

Section II

Texts, Readings

Chapter 3

The Archaeology of Silence

Amitav Ghosh's second novel *The Shadow Lines*[1] is as much a text of articulated words as of silence:

> Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a silence that I am destined to lose - have already lost - for even after all these years I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silence of a ruthless state - nothing like that: no barbed wire, no check-points to tell me where its boundaries lie. I know nothing of this silence except that it lies outside the reach of my intelligence, beyond words - that is why this silence must win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are not words.

> The enemy of silence is speech, but there can be no speech without words, and there can be no words without meanings - so it follows inexorably, in the manner of syllogisms, that when we try to speak of events of which we do not know the meaning, we must lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world […] Where there is no meaning, there is banality, and that is what this silence consists in, that is why it cannot be defeated - because it is the silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality.[2]

The textual space contained in the novel is such that what is spoken gestures toward what is left unspoken and what is unspoken is struggling to find expressive adequacy at the surface level. Ghosh himself has said that the novel is not in the objective dispassionate reporting of some events; it is essentially in the meaning of such events thus depicted - meaning which lies in that silence. It is commonplace that language breaks silence but there are times when silence can give fresh lease of life to language. *The Shadow Lines* has done it. For Ghosh, it was indeed an ethical urgency.

Imagining "little histories"

The most profound silence surrounds the death of Tridib, the narrator's mentor who is killed in a communal violence in Dhaka. To articulate this is to narrativize it in a meaningful structure of causal connections where he has come to terms with his own self to understand the meaning of that silence. This has not been an easy project for the narrator. As he discovers progressively, it is not simply going back to a past tinted with shades of nostalgia, a self-exploration in isolation; it is the realization as well as articulation of a fundamental difficulty embedded in the larger narrative of the constitution of a nation-state, albeit, that of Indian Modernity. The private is inescapably enmeshed in the public and the public furtively slips into the private.

Tridib is at the centre of things and the narrator accepts his influence on his formation. Tridib, he feels, has given him 'worlds to travel in and … eyes to see them with'.[3] He also learnt from him how to use imagination with precision. What he could see in his imagination 'was infinitely more detailed and more precise'.[4] He did not forget either his advice that if he did not try it, he would never be able to be free of other people's imagination and invention. What is sad is that the narrator's assiduous cultivation of this art of 'imagining with precision' notwithstanding, he fails to grasp the reality he is faced with when Tridib becomes a victim of violence. It was only much later that he discovers the bits and pieces that would connect him to the cause of Tridib's death. It was Robi and finally May Price who recount the violent incident of communal frenzy. The silence preceding and following the revelation is a moving statement on the actualization of internal violence. This process of 'knowing' is a traumatic experience for him not only because his own position is destabilized but also throws certain corroborative notions of Modernity such as nationalism, secularism and freedom into disarray.

The Shadow Lines focuses on the story of an unnamed 'I' narrator's family in Dhaka and Calcutta, the Duttachaudhuris of Bengal and its connection with an English family, the Prices of London, spanning three generations. The narrative has a vast scope. It begins during the colonial times of the Raj, passes through the post-Independence creation of three nations out of one and ends in the beginning of the eighties. It has significant events of public life as background and weaves them into different moments of private lives striving constantly to discover their meaning in the process in which public upheavals − nationalist movement in India, Blitz in wartime London, post-war political formations in Europe, civil strife in post-partition Dhaka and riot in Calcutta − are mirrored in private torments. Dispersals of the private within such a broad scope of the public are brought together to cohere with each other by the consciousness of a singular narrative voice of an I-narrator.

At the personal level of the narrator in relation to other characters, the vast expanse of events is organized around three major nodal time frames. The first nodal point is constituted by Tridib's journey to London with his parents in 1939 during the outbreak of the Second World War thirteen years before the narrator's birth. His reference to this is based on his knowledge of those days which comes to him mainly through Tridib's accounts. The second nodal point is situated in / around 1964 with the eruption of a cycle of riots in India and Pakistan in which Tridib is killed by a mob near his mother's native home in Dhaka. The details of this phase of the narrative are communicated to the narrator years later by Tridib's brother Robi and his girlfriend May Price. Much of what is narrated is not completely the narrator's direct experience; rather the experience of the narrator's uncle Tridib is gradually linked with the narrator's own experiences as it is through Tridib, his mentor, that he experiences much of his life in his boyhood days. In the third nodal point of the narrative, these experiences become refreshed in new lights when years later he himself goes to

London for higher studies and meets the Prices, his uncle Robi and his cousin Ila. It is there that the narrator not only looks back into his childhood which had a formative influence of Tridib's stories but also his childhood, resurrecting from the past, projects itself onto the present of his adult personality. The narrator reviews, at this stage, his experiences from the perspective of cumulative knowledge and is thus endowed with a sense of inhabiting simultaneously both past and present. This is how − and this is not surprising − he gets to know the various accounts of Tridib's death in Dhaka riot from Robi and particularly from May Price who were witnesses to that terrifying violence. The novel becomes thus a *bildungsroman* focusing on the narrator's growing up, not so much in years as in mature understanding; it is all about 'knowing'.[5] But knowing what? That the mystery of silence that shrouded Tridib's death for so many years was revealed to the narrator at the end of the novel makes it amply clear that the narrator's understanding is not just about the discovery of the specificities of Tridib' tragic end. The lapse of time involved in the process has this tragedy (being) inextricably linked in the narrator's memory and his growing up with disastrous political developments in England and the subcontinent. This is what allows the narrator fundamentally to make sense of the tragedy. It is in this sense that the entire narrative becomes a search for meaning, meaning of what constitutes his self in a space where the individual citizen and the nation are inescapably intertwined.

But this quest of meaning is constantly slipping out. In the process, the homo-intradiegetic narrator who is actively participating in the proceedings matures from childhood innocence to adulthood experience. This growing up has been articulated by the narrator himself through his various different experiences with Tridib, Thamma, Ila, Robi, May and many others. Uncovering the silence over Tridib's death and discovering his own being through growing up are two simultaneous and overlapping processes. Both of them are in the larger context of historical emergence.[6] Individual and History are problematically related to each other. As the narrator grows up, he experiences a sense of gradual discomfort with a world pathetically fragmented, he wishes for a sensitivity doing away with borders.

In this sense, *The Shadow Lines* proposes a radical revision of the status of history as an objective record of the past by bringing into focus the relation of the individual to his/her past. By highlighting what is happening in the lives of people, Ghosh is 'doing history' but in a certain different way.[7] He has chosen family at the heart of this history.[8] The narrative weaves the events recorded as official history at a macro level with the incidents in the private lives of the individuals at the micro level in such a way that the causality of the former dissolves into emotional responses contained in the mundane happenings of the latter.[9]

The reality experienced in the daily lives is different from the ones that History creates. Thamma obsessed with the idea of national freedom and boundaries expects quite naturally a visible border between India and Bangladesh. When she does not find any, she is surprised and disappointed. She says:

> But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in

> Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then - partition and all the killing and everything - if there isn't something in between?[10]

She is disappointed because the reality she witnesses around does not fit into the framework of the history she has known. Similarly, Ila aspires to liberation from what she thinks is the bondage of Indian culture and lifestyle to which she prefers to live in England. Both Thamma and Ila are conditioned in their mindset by the notions of nationality and freedom which are ideological constructs of the discourses of canonical history which is politically motivated, thus submerging the individual perceptions of reality as less important or even invalid.

Canonical history is considered to be the basis of objective truth supposedly recorded in a chronologically and causally linked order of events. This is what Ashis Nandy calls imperialist Western history.[11] Like Nandy, Ghosh prioritizes another form of history – apocryphal history – whereby a given historical event is considered from multiple perspectives and this multiplicity, very often conflicting, destabilizes, from within, the authoritative version of official national history which ignores the individual pasts in its records. The narrator who experienced as a little boy the riots in 1964 in Calcutta is shocked to learn that his friends do not know anything about the events. Seventeen years later, they still talk about the China War of 1962 and Pakistan War of 1965. But they have no knowledge of the riots that took place in parts of the subcontinent. The narrator who actually witnessed the terrible incidents and lived with that memory in silence fail to convince his friends about the authenticity of his own personal experience even as their understanding is very much conditioned by the dominant national history.

> All riots are terrible, Malik said. But it must have been a local thing. Terrible or not, it's hardly comparable to a war.[12]

This opposition between riot and war, local and national defines a certain discriminating taxonomical procedure that produces archival knowledge of history. That the fragment of the past which is very much part of his being and which he has internalized within himself has no 'historical' importance unnerves the narrator. He says:

> I was determined now that I would not let my past vanish without trace;
> I was determined to persuade them of its importance.[13]

He is even told by his friend that if there is no archival reference to it, it would be assumed that the whole incident was imagined, and so was his own self! The narrator finds volumes on national freedom movement, Indo-Pak War and so on but, to his surprise, no significant document at all on the riot that he remembers vividly corroborating his memory and experience. Even after a lot of searching, he discovers the riot mentioned insignificantly or casually in the national dailies as compared to cricket matches making headlines. A week later, it was reported that normalcy had been restored. Everything else was forgotten, and no mention of it was ever made in any archival material or anywhere else.

> By the end of January 6, 1964 the riots have faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of 'responsible opinion', vanished, without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence.[14]

This absence, this silence is significant in that it constitutes national imagination whose self-imaging constructs certain collective identities by repressing those elements that might threaten the internal cohesion of the narrative of nation(-state) which is itself produced by epistemic coherence conceived in the larger narratives of History. In this sense, History shapes narratives that condition people into thinking and also believing the reality of its own making. Every other form of reality, say experiential reality, however valuable, is dismissed as fictive, repressed and finally excluded from H/history.

This is where *The Shadow Lines* intervenes by critiquing the categories of modern knowledge and seeks to transgress them through fictional representation, an imaginative rejoinder by recovering those 'small' fragments that are either silenced or lost. The novel shows how identity is shaped by experience. The narrator may not be able free himself from the terrifying/traumatic memory of Tridib's death in communal violence; he is forced to believe that he is living in a free country. *The Shadow Lines* raises certain ambivalent issues and attempts to subvert/ destabilize them. It is history which defines, creates and also eliminates borders, very often invisible, mark the transition from youth to maturity, from the past to the present and mark identities in relation to space and time, delimiting the coordinates of the experiences of individuals. Thus geo-political borders at times lead to cultural differences, giving vent to hatred and even violence.[15] The loss of a saint's relic in Kashmir triggers off communal frenzy in both India and Pakistan. If history has created and named nations, it has also conditioned people into viewing each other differently and with feelings of antagonism. This is a feeling of mutual fear and hatred, of the self and the other. Monolithic history does not recognize the local or individual. It defines nations and cultures in terms of totalities but history, mediated through allegorical fiction creates a discursive practice which has in itself, as Slemon puts it, the possibility of transformation.[16]

In a first person narrative like in *The Shadow Lines*, the narrative voice represents an alternative historical consciousness. The I-narrator is deployed as an optic through which one can see various paradigms of ideology and their constructs. In this sense, the narrator is a character and a historian at the same time, so object and subject simultaneously.[17] Ghosh endeavours to uncover silence recreating a past by taking recourse to subjective history in his fiction. In consonance with argument developed by Hayden White, it can be said that to understand what the silence was about, it is necessary to impose a narrative upon it.[18]

With the objective of destabilizing totalized histories of nationhood and national discourses, Ghosh uses a narrative technique which does not really adhere to social realism. A classic realist text has a clearly identifiable plot, a sequential chronology, rounded and fully developed characters, a plausible world of make-believe where the reader is implicitly asked to willingly suspend her disbelief in order to participate in the pleasure of the text. In *The Shadow*

Lines, the narrative emerges through uncertain and often contradictory memories of different characters and cuts across different times and spaces in an attempt to subvert the linear plot structure, characteristic of realism. Every time a memory or a personal narrative is recounted, it is questioned by the interlocutors. All narratives thus go through a process of validation or invalidation. This functions to unsettle the totalizing narratives of national historiography. *The Shadow Lines* eschews a chronologically sequential narrative for a temporally disjunct but coherent narrative characterized by absences, gaps and silences. Occasionally, the narrative is anecdotal, replete with parallel and minor scenes, repetitions, looping, digressions: all these can be characterized as an unconventional plot-structure. Indeed, it can be argued that by deviating from a straightforwardly realistic technique, Ghosh is interrogating the process of narrativizing a national identity which very often involves imposing a linear structure of development and progress. The mode of narration works through discontinuities and disruptions which prove effective in highlighting the thematic concern for painstaking recovery of fearful suppressed memories in order to cut through the seamless narrative of national identity.

The urge to deviate from the strict norms of social realist novels is reflected in the very use of time in the novel. On the one hand, the events are presented with minute temporal specificities; on the other hand, the chronological order of presentation is thoroughly jumbled up. Ghosh's narrative principle constructs a fictional world where he envisages a merging of past and present experiences leading to discovering the meaning of silence. The narrator introduces all remembered incidents with specific time-makers and at the same time, the narrative's solid grounding in a definite time frame is baffled by the narrator’s method of recounting memories non-linear apparently random manner. In both the parts of the novel, the narrative is structured by a pattern of oscillating, sometimes sweeping, time-shifts. Such a pattern (of time-shifts) renders the position of the narrator very different from the one in the realist novel which helps the reader along the journey through the novel by reporting and explaining every detail. Instead what we find here is effects created and meanings made and conveyed through events intricately juxtaposed. Here the narrator selects, arranges events and elements of his story in such a way that one incident in the present brings into focus another in the past, producing desired effects and projecting valorized attitudes and positions. While, indeed, the narration proceeds from privileged point of view of the mature narrator. The latter has suddenly, in an epiphanic moment, the revelation of Tridib’s death while going through the documents at Tinmurti Library at Delhi. With the silence thus unveiled and demystified, it becomes ethically imperative for the narrator to create a narrative space for that silence which can tell its own story in its own language, completely unhindered. This form of narrative cannot participate in the ideology of social realism.

It should be recalled here that all theories of social realism, however sophisticated, rest on the assumption that reality is more or less stable and easily accessible to the neutral prose of a dispassionate reporter. But language is never neutral and such linguistic transparency is questionable. When eloquence fails to organize social experience, silence has to speak from behind the veil to shock the naturalized effect of transparent eloquence.

The non-realistic mode of the novel is specially seen in the fact that out of forty (one) years of long time span of its actions (1939-1979), only thirty one days are narrated in detail. The events that take place on those days are depicted repeatedly while, others, large in number, go completely unmentioned. We can identify these basic time-frames in the novel, each of which is slipping into the others: the War years (1939-40) when Tridib and his family are with the Prices in London; the early 1960s when the narrator is a child and loses his uncle Tridib; the late 70s when the narrator is a student in London and he is with Ila, Robi, Nick and May. John Mee has observed that these frames are not just times *about which* stories are told; they are times *from which* stories are narrated.[19] What is important to note here is that the kind of temporal slippage that is disorienting as it tends to happen all on a sudden, with a surprise, unannounced and unforeseen. The narrative does not just move from a fixed point in the present to an event in the past to be narrated and the reader is often baffled by the time maze because of the difficulty of distinguishing between the time of the narration of a particular episode and the time of the narrative. It is not made clear precisely when and where the story that the reader is being told is narrated from. As the temporal, and also the spatial, coordinates, merges into one another, everyone has a right to tell her stories — the stories or we may call “little histories” that challenge constantly from their location the over-arching meta-narratives in a process of “mise-en-abyme”. The temporal locations in which they are told become blurred. As Jon Mee has put it, “subjectivity seems an uncertain place in which to base those histories.”[20] Thus the whole narrative becomes a sea of temporality where the constant waves of micro-stories appear as a flux through the imaginative working of memory which links and re-narrates them in various possible ways, in various possibilities of their reciprocal connections, although making it difficult to identify the beginning and end of each of the stories and of the narrative as a whole as well.

Ghosh juxtaposes pairs of events mainly from three nodal time-frames and make the memory shuttle between them. Intricate juxtapositions of the memories of multiple narrators about the same events and experiences develop different levels of chronological time simultaneously and more than one line of action occur at widely distant points of time and space, each reflecting the other like a mirror-image.

It is very interesting to note that the narrator's mentor Tridib, a student of archaeology, believes in the importance of imagining with precision to reconstruct the past in the process of understanding the present. It is also significant that the narrator himself should be a historian, who does not only study the past but also narrates it. The historian is as much a story-teller as the fictionalist. Both tell stories, shape their narratives, impose a narrativized form on the formless, chaotic wilderness of events, experiences and emotions and thus by selecting, omitting and expanding on their material, discover meaning. It is through these stories that one (re)constructs one's life.

> Everyone lives in a story, he says, my grandmother, my father, *his* father, Lenin, Einstein, and lots of other names I hadn't heard of; they all lived in stories, because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose.[21]

If *The Shadow Lines* is considered to be a *bildungsroman*, all stories are framed within the narrative of the narrator's coming of age/growing up. In 1939-40, Tridib spent a year at London at Mrs. Price's 44 Livington Road house with his parents. In 1960-61, he narrates his detailed memories of those times to his nephew, the narrator in Calcutta. In 1978-79, the adult narrator himself goes on a trip to London and lives out the memories he had imbibed from his uncle. This is where their experiences overlap with and cut across with each other.

Among the three nodal time-frames, the 1960s become the middle ground where the narrator as a child learns the ways of seeing through Tridib's stories of 1939-40 and test them out in 1978-79. This is how the narrator internalizes the epistemology ofTridib's lessons and, when he grown up, uses it to see and record the world around him, which has equally constituted him. While the narrator, following Tridib's precepts, engages himself in imagining with precision, having a host of memories internalized from others, he eschews the traditional linear order of narration in favour of a more fluid and complex treatment of time with constant cross-references and movements back and forth over the chronological span of the entire narrative. In this constant shuffling of sequence and space — in Gérard Genette's term 'anachronic' and 'achronic', not one event after another but one event next to another — what emerges is a medley of voices which constantly undermine and resist the hegemony of a master discourse of history as a gradual progression.[22] Each moment is a hubbub that contains the past, the present and also the future. As the narrative filtered through the consciousness of the narrator who relives experiences of space and time as he retells them, different frames of time collapse and different geographical spaces coalesce in his imagination. The Batholomew's Atlas, the narrator's guide to the world in his childhood days, loses gradually its authority. *The Shadow Lines* become at once, more than the borders on the maps, that liminal zone where people and events are at the same time separated and linked together — family bonds and social relationships, nations and communities, reality and imagination.

In spite of the novel being narrated in the first person, there is a dual temporality in the point of view, that of the child 'I', that of the narrator as a child and the narrator as an adult. People and events encountered in childhood are once again brought back into focus and juxtaposed (achronized according to Genette) with experiences of adulthood (third nodal point in the narrative) even as the narrator as an adult reviews them from the perspective of cumulative knowledge. This dual temporality criss-crossing the narrative voice, endows the narrative with a sense of inhabiting both past and present simultaneously.

The narrative voice is characterized by memory and its resources. Events — past or present — are narrated from memory rather than direct occurrences. In this process, the narrator is constantly engaged in the imaginative renewal of times and places, events and people. The pressure of the repeated question "Do(n't) you remember?" shapes the narrator's search for connections for the recovery of lost information or repressed experiences for the details of traumatic silence that has receded into the archives of public and private memory. Memory here works as family histories, themselves embedded in larger public contexts, remembered and restructured in a search for meaning in larger social and historical contexts. It is thus as remembering and understanding that the narrative takes shape. The very quest of meaning of silence requires this remembering generating its non-mimetic, non-linear form.

Story-telling proceeds basically in two ways: first, through splitting up of narrative sequences into fragments placed at widely separated points in time and space; second, through underlining of the *identity* of parallel situations widely separated in time and space. These two devices, concomitant and interdependent, convey a sense of difficulty, disquieting discomfort while making sense of time and space.

The quest of silence leads to the discovery of internal contradictions at play in a postcolonial condition. *The Shadow Lines* makes them visible by problematizing the positions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism/globalization. This is evident from how Thamma and Ila's middle class desires for national or cosmopolitan belonging are belied by the realities of violence and representation of material and psychological objection. Ghosh does not seem to offer an easy solution to the different kinds of violence. Instead, what he insists on is the need to critique the limitations of both nationalism and cosmopolitanism which restrict the very sense of homeliness. If the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* renders the fragility of borders between nations as they figure in maps and are policed by the state machinery, Ghosh does not opt for an easy cosmopolitanism produced by the process of globalization. As Kavita Daiya argues, Ghosh suggests that "communities are transnational through the work of historical memory."[23] And it is this space that links them "across borders through its desires and discourses of material and emotional belonging."[24] Ghosh's narrator acknowledges it initially. But when he starts researching newspaper accounts of a communal riot in Calcutta in 1962-64, he comes to another understanding:

> […] sitting in the air-conditioned calm of an exclusive library that I began on my strangest journey:; a voyage into a land

> outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events.[25]

What he is referring to here is the simultaneous outlook of communal violence across national borders (India/East Pakistan; Calcutta/Dhaka). Beyond the logic of territorial politics, an “indivisible sanity binds people to each other independently of their governments.”[26] The narrator discovers that the rhetoric of differential newness (nationhood) dissolves ironically into the unity (that it seeks to efface) in violence.

> Violence becomes both sign and testimony of the shared identity of events, memories and communities on both sides of the borders.”[27]

> They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other […][28]

> What had they felt I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet undiscovered irony - the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four—thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to

> be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free — our looking-glass border.[29]

Memory, more precisely historical memory, transcends boundaries of nation-states and unites people even in acts of corporal violence. The continuity of community is thus revealed through ethno-religious violence. The cities of Calcutta and Dhaka, separated as they are by the logic and rhetoric of nation-state, transcend, though tragically, to be united through a shared historical and cultural memory. Freedom from this memory becomes almost impossible for Robi and Ila as well as for the narrator. Robi's remark is significant in this regard:

> You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people — in Assam, the north-east Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura — people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police you will find somewhere behind it all, that single word; everyone's doing it to be free. When I was running a district I used to look at those pictures and wonder sometimes what I would do if it were happening in my area. I know what I'd have to do; I'd have to go out and make speeches to my policemen, saying: You have to be firm, you have to do your duty. You have to kill whole villages if necessary — we have nothing against the people, it's the terrorists we want to get, but we have to be willing to pay a price

> for our unity and freedom. And when I went back home, I would find an anonymous note waiting for me, saying: We're going to get you, nothing personal, we have to kill you for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed on a mirror. And then I think to myself why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory?[30]

The politics of freedom of ethno-religious nationalism is what is challenged here by the power of memory thought to be constituting the basis of a community. Thus Ghosh's position in the novel is neither the uncritical assertion of postcolonial nationalism, nor the celebration of cosmopolitan hybridity of transnational global migration.

The use of memory as a narrative device reveals transnational space which is not quite national nor quite global. This space although riddled with violence in home, in domestic sphere, in private lives, is elided by History and needs to be recovered. To uncover this silence is to retell the small narratives emerging from that (liminal) space that may put forward in the public sphere certain questions about the making of post-national modernity/alternative modernities and identities. *The Shadow Lines* explores, through the narratives of belonging and dislocation of home and migrancy, the necessity of giving voice to those suppressed memories that threaten the tidy narratives of history.

It is from this implied ethical urgency to speak through silence, the narrator is putting pressure on others — friends and relatives — to look back to their memories, to search through their personal archives. This pressure very often disturbs the opaque silences that conceal cunningly the most disruptive memories, the uneven edges of so called public sanity and sanctity. Their exclusion from the grand narrative of the nation's history is essential to the production of knowledge about national identity.[31] Against this compulsion to forget which becomes the site of unacknowledged fears and trauma, the fear of oneself and others as well, Ghosh gestures toward an ethical obligation to remember by positing a narrative space where these memories can be resurrected and complexities involved in the process of identity formation can be redeemed with much greater sensitivity to various spatial and temporal nuances — affiliations and disjunctions.

Narrativizing the self

The journey of the protagonist is emboldened by the thematic of travel which constitutes a major trope at various levels of narrative construction. It is at the same time literal imaginary and metaphorical. Travel in the novel is not just about going away to some concrete places; it also depicts the ability to be imaginatively transported to various spacious and temporal locations by listening spell-bound to stories by Tridib and others and virtually appropriating those experiences as his own.

The recurring use of mirror image in the novel brings into light situations which reflect each other. 'Going' and 'coming' in the context of the narrative can be seen as mirror images despite differences between them.

The two key phrases ‘going away’ and ‘coming home’ are used in the novel to distinguish its two parts with an ostensible intention of structuring it. They describe the trajectory usually followed by children travel-fiction. Following the conventions of generic properties of these stories the child-adventurer undertakes a journey away from home and the reader while following him through is regaled with incredible experiences in unfamiliar situations and is finally made comfortable by the return ultimately to the protective fold of his home. The adventure is at first an attempt to escape the strict regimentation and moral discomfort of his immediate environment. A brush with the outside world makes him aware of the insecurities of life outside and of the comforts inside back home.

This sense of comfort / discomfort security / insecurity related to inside / outside opposition has been significantly worked out at a much more complex level in *The Shadow Lines* because it becomes the mark of one’s being and existence. Going away and coming home – this division of topois which generically conditions the narrative experience in a children travel-fiction is rendered highly problematic in *The Shadow Lines*. It fact the seeming polarization collapses in the very process of narrative unfolding of human experiences, so much so that eventually the principles underlining the two-fold structure of the novel get ironically destabilized and refer to each other as mirror image at a very crucial moment of interrogation in the narrative.

The narrator recounts humorously the incidents of his grandmother’s preparations for her journey to Dhaka, the place of her birth, from Calcutta where she has been living with her son and his family. She remembers nostalgically the childhood days before the partition of Bengal when she could come home to Dhaka from wherever she was without having to fill up forms as she is now required to do. But now coming home to Dhaka has become going home to Dhaka not because she is separated by distance, not because she is settled in Calcutta after her marriage, but because Dhaka is now bound by frontiers of nationality. It is here that the grand mother has a sense of discomfort and this radically changes the meaning of her journey to Dhaka. Though in mind she is coming home, in physical reality she is going to.

There is a lot of movement from or to places either literally or in imagination with the characters moving from one place to another the narrative travels across spaces and times from 1981 back to 1964 to 1940s and beyond. Because of this, the events recounted do not coalesce into a sequential whole. It is difficult to identify a fixed centre connecting the two major parts of the narrative. The main storyline is interrupted on several occasions by a number of other small episodes, all these being held together by the voice of the narrator.

A major image portrays reality but is also, at the same time, away from reality. Thus going away is a take off from reality which imaginatively turns to Tridib, Robi, May, Nick and Ila. It describes people and events in England and also allows the narrator to imaginatively recreate people, places and events. Coming home turns to Thamma and May. It allows some kind of introspection be it in Calcutta or in London.

The first section of the novel examines the movement of the characters away from a point of fixity which has been the family or more precisely, the joint family system in the Indian context which effaces, to some degree, the individual self of the members but at the same time, sustains them and gives them a sense of belonging. The narrator's cousin Ila's moving away from such a centrality is a major case in point. Ila's ancestral family has lived in a small middle-class world of gentle decorum and well-defined values where all worked hard at whatever they did: his grandmother at a school, mistressing, him at his homework, his mother at her housekeeping, his father at his job as junior executive in a company. For the urban middle-class what was important was to be educated to hold a secured professional position and to follow a certain pattern of life. It was a world in which one was not supposed to waste time as Thamma says, "Time was like a toothbrush: it went mouldy, if it was not used."[32] It was essential for everyone to have a clear idea of one's home and one's nation with a clear cut borderline. As a child the narrator had to hard earn whatever little freedom and privileges he enjoyed. With a different kind of grooming Ila finds this world constrictive, she wants freedom, freedom from this middle class orthodoxy. She therefore moves out in search of the kind of freedom she wants and finds it in her lifestyle in London. Ila thinks, "freedom means liberty from the restrictive customs that delimits the individual's activities in India."[33] The Grand Hotel episode points to the conflictual turns that she takes She wants to do and in fact she thinks she is absolutely free to do whatever she wants whenever and wherever. But Robi's cultured grooming does not allow him to accept such behaviour: she can do whatever she likes but in London; in Calcutta, she has to follow a certain code of conduct. While Ila has contempt for middle-class living in Calcutta, Thamma has equal contempt for Ila's living in London.

> It is not freedom she wants… she wants to be left alone to do whatever she pleases; that's all that any whore would want. She

> will find it easily enough over there; that is what those places have to offer. But that is not what means to be free.[34]

On the contrary, Ila's conviction is that:

> Nothing really important ever happens where you are… well of course, there are famines and riots and disasters… but those are local things after all — not like revolution or anti—fascist war, nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that's really remembered.[35]

The narrator can sense Ila's sense of pity for the "pettiness of lives like mine lived out in the silence of voiceless events in a backward world."[36] Ila's mindset is symptomatic of a section of the Indian young generation who is contemptuous of whatever happening in their country and think that the West is a haven of freedom. But this is a pure illusion and Ila realizes it soon although she does not admit it to herself that she is not really free in England. The Prices and their close circle of friends may have accepted her but her experience of racial prejudice as a young school-going girl speaks voluminously of the kind of freedom she actually has. Even Nick with whom she is in love and whom she marries was ashamed once of being seen with an Indian by his friends. Ila's disappointment is due to her inability to grasp the dynamics of cultural interface particularly at a global level, which, while extending the horizon of personal experience, throws one away from a centrality giving a feeling of homelessness in a place which one believes to be one's potential home.

The section coming home is marked by grandmother's search for a point of fixity. If Ila goes away from home, grandmother travels to a home which is no more her home. Dhaka was an ancestral home of Thamma and her sister Maya Debi. It was there that they were born and grew up. After marriage they travel with their families — Maya Debi with her husband on his postings abroad and Thamma with her husband to Burma. After her husband's death, Thamma came to Calcutta and settled there. Although she has been living there for years, she still thinks that Dhaka is her 'home'. In her perception, coming and going have been defined in relation to this 'home'.

Thamma grew up in a big joint-family with everyone living and eating together. After the death of her grandfather the ancestral house was partitioned because of the conflict between her father and her uncle. Even in the present, Thamma remembers her house with nostalgia. The comfort of the house in which she lives now in Calcutta cannot make her forget those days. That house has become 'home' for her because it has grown over barriers both physically and in term of relationships.

> It was a very old house, it had evolved slowly growing like a honeycomb with every generation of Boses adding layers and extensions until it was like a huge, lopsided step-pyramid, inhabited by so many branches of the family that even the most knowledgeable amongst them have become little confused about their relationships.[37]

When she was left widowed and without any savings, she started working — and for the first time in her life — as a school mistress in Calcutta. In twenty seven years of her service, she did not have any time to go back to Dhaka except twice only to check whether the rooms the two sisters had inherited were intact and then came Partition and Independence. Dhaka became the capital of another nation called East Pakistan. There was no question of going back after that.

After her retirement, one evening she met an acquaintance of her Dhaka days who told her that her cousin, one of Jyathamoshai's sons, is now living in Calcutta. She came to know from the cousin's wife that Jhathamoshai is 90 years old and he is still living in their old house in Dhaka which has been occupied by Muslim refugees from Bihar in India and that the old man is being looked after by one such family. The grandmother decided to bring Jyathamoshai back to Calcutta and she got this opportunity when her sister Mayadebi invites her to Dhaka where her husband is now posted.

But 'going back' — of course, in Thamma's perception 'coming home' — to Dhaka was not a very happy experience. What she did not realize is that Dhaka is no longer the place she had known earlier. The political development in the subcontinent made Dhaka an alien space for Thamma and many others like her, Dhaka now remained her place of birth only on passport and disembarkation card. She was struggling to understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality. Political vocabulary had suddenly changed the meaning of 'home' which she was familiar with and has associated till that moment with Dhaka. Not only times have changed the city, it really becomes difficult to recognize that old Dhaka. However, she is slightly relieved when she sees their old house which is no longer the same. She discovers, to her dismay, that it was crumbling, that in what was once a beautiful garden, there is now an automobile workshop and large number of families were living there. The idyllic vision of ‘home’ that she had cherished over so many years, faced with the darkest of reality, is now shattered. This is a moment of painful revelation where she is forced to feel homeless.

It is again a tragic irony that for Jyathamoshai Calcutta is now as much a foreign city as Dhaka is for Thamma. He stubbornly refuses to leave the place even when he has been told about the communal violence in Dhaka as he has a different grasp of reality; the geographical borders have become tenuous because of the political upheaval in the subcontinent. This is evident from what he tells his sons when they begin to move out of Dhaka.

> Once you start moving you never stop. I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to?[38]

What is suggested here is a constant shift in the meaning of ‘going’ and ‘coming’ as redefined in accordance with the changing scenario geo-political entities. What is lost in this constant historical and political flux, is a sense of fixity. And this process of dispersal renders the meaning of reality itself contingent.

Travelling, in this novel, in not just between two geographical locations or between two time frames in history, it is a constant shift from one experience to another both in terms of space and time, thus attempting to erase the borders between two people’s experiences in disparate geographical locations and at discrete historical junctures. While doing this, the narrative creates an internal necessity to cross the borders between real and imaginary experience. One can refer to the scene in which the narrator and Ila play ‘house’ and give away many of their emotions of love, hate, fear and persecution. The ambiguity in the meanings of ‘going’ and ‘coming’ that the narrator teases his grandmother about, becomes for him not only an equivocation that he enjoys playing with but also has to negotiate and come to terms with as he grows up through experiences. Given his temperament and his grooming under the influence of his mentor Tridib, who used to make him travel imaginatively across space and time, he realizes the emotional entanglement particularly that of Thamma, involved in these two verbs of movement (going/coming).

The dramatic representation of this bewilderment which can be attributed to the political force of nationalism demands a very different kind of fictional mode in which the narrative technique does away with the conventional chronological presentation of events which is so characteristic of social realism and collapses the categories of the past and the present. In this sense, travel becomes a trope passing through space and time into situations which resonate one another thus dispensing with the very notion of border.

The narrator’s association with his uncle Tridib is significant. The latter is an archetypal figure of inspiration in children’s fiction who leads the child through the maze of fantastic but insightful stories that cannot be judged by normal middle-class common sense. Such alternate mentors appeal to children much more than their parents and teachers. Bengali children’s fiction is replete with recurrent insistence of this kind of child protagonist’s adulation for such an unconventional uncle, who despite his ‘bhadrolok’ bengali background, does not really follow the dictates of genteel decorum discretion and discipline. The child protagonist often associates with such an uncle, not restrained by his ‘bhadrolok’ preoccupations, with rules and regulations, academic and professional success and worldly wisdom.

The Shadow Lines follows the stereotypical trajectory of a lot of children stories written in Bengali which are about the child protagonist’s reluctance to adjust within a system in which he/she sees himself/herself. In such stories, an unsystematic, though valid, critique of the system emerges from the feeling of dissatisfaction and unfulfilment expressed by the child character. Often the child protagonist experiments with fantasies from the established order of his primary and secondary environment, thus escaping with the help of an external human agency in the form of an ‘uncle’. Yet the mode of escape offered by these tempters who inspire the child to an alternative way of life contain within themselves something illusory. Despite the child’s refusal to be restricted by the parameters of strict regimentation there is an inability to break free of it. The adult point of view of these stories considers any kind of childhood rebellion as potentially dangerous and therefore does not allow it beyond a certain limit. This means that the child’s critical energies are ultimately reassimilated within the middle-class world view of such fiction.

Coming back to *The Shadow Lines*, the relationship between the narrator and Tridib owes much to a standard fictional representation which binds a growing boy with an uncle-like person who has opted out of the mainstream yet whose intuitive response to the world around attracts the narrator to him. It is this character, uncle Tridib, that he tries to identify with. In the beginning of the novel, the unnamed narrator superimposes the child Tridib's identity on his own. Tridib went to England when he was eight and the narrator thinks that he was eight too when Tridib had first talked to him about his journey.

Examples of this kind of projection of mirror-images are far too numerous to be cited here. I wish to argue that this is what makes the novel a very complex variation of children's fiction and retains the crux of the internal logic of these stories. The uncle-like mentor-character captures the imagination of the child primarily because of his being located on the margins of mainstream lifestyle. And it is this particular attribute which entices the child away from his complacent insularity of home and other accepted environments. Taking to other locals beyond the humdrum reality of quotidian existence with a transgressive energy blended with critical impulse — this is what Tridib does to his nephew. This is a very significant aspect.

Like many of his counterparts in Bengali children stories, Tridib, although a repository of all kinds of knowledge, lives on the periphery of the system. Unlike his two brothers who are professionally successful and established in life, he is not interested to work for a living and does not complain of spending his adult life in a shanty room on the terrace of his ancestral home. The world he opens up to the narrator beyond normal middle-class life is a response to the world on the basis of his rich accumulation of stories from real life as well as his knowledge of archaeology, geography, anthropology, sociology and history. The imaginary space he opens out for the narrator as a child gives him a heightened sense of awareness of the world. The narrator first experiences the world through Tridib's eyes and then, as an adult through first-hand experiences in and around the spaces and times in which

Tridib lived. For instance, when he is in England, he reconstructs Tridib's encounter by going about the city like a live map giving preference to the places that were important to Tridib. The narrator undertakes imaginative and real journey into unknown places through Tridib's stories. It is these experiences and views which constitute much of the 'travel' in the novel.

Although *The Shadow Lines* takes a certain forming principle of the narrative from children stories in Bengali, it is not a children's story. The uncle-mentor is not absorbed back into the system to accommodate a happy ending that conveniently suppresses the question raised in course of the narravtive. The tragic death of Tridib rather reinforces much more these issues. In fact the narrator is left alone to cope with the world with a haunting memory which torments his consciousness with a number of unanswered questions.

One of the many things which the narrator inherited from Tridib is his persistent questioning of everything from trivial family assumptions to political decisions. Between the experiences of going and coming, the narrator starts interrogating the lines that his world is made up of the demarcations within so many areas of human experience and understanding which he construes as illusions. This sensitivity helps him negotiate all the borders between times and places, between people and their national affiliations, between innocence and experience, between reality and imagination/fantasy. He is amazed to discover that an incident in Srinagar in Kashmir in India has stirred not only Kolkata within the national borders but also across it, a very distant small city in East Pakistan.

The demarcation between India and Pakistan in geopolitical terms leading to a reordering of the distinction between 'going' and 'coming' is thin for the most affected victims of the Partition, like Thamma in the novel. She is a critic of nationalism but she fails to understand the modern device between the nation-states in her immediate context. There are contemporary historians who view that nationalism merely invents nations where they do not exist.[39] Borders between nations are equally thin for the narrator as well but his position is that of the privileged socio-economic class for whom the world is small and it has shrunk to a cross-cultural cosmopolitan yet complex heterogeneity which can nevertheless be conceptualized as a single entity.

In this regard the end of the novel is very significant. The narrator is coming back home to Calcutta after his study but on the other hand, he is coming home in a very different sense. On the previous night that he spends in May's home in London he not only gets an insight into the mystery surrounding the significant event of Tridib's death but also an experience of intimate physical relationship with her.

The chronological division that normally distinguishes a remembered past from an actual present is done away with as the narrator narrates his tale. The narrative of the novel does not follow a linear sequence of time but keeps shifting between the past and the present resulting in an imaginative renewal of times, places, events and people through the recuperation of stories from the family archives. The past reverberating within the present gives meaning to it and posits a cyclical notion of time. And within this cycle, the personal upheaval in the life of the narrator is juxtaposed against the public turmoil within the nation-state.

He seeks to conquer the impenetrable spaces that lie between people by living through their experiences, thus justifying his credibility as a narrator. The novel recounts May's experiences, for instance, through a letter that Tridib wrote to her about the bombed out cinema hall or through Robi's and May's accounts of the events leading to Tridib's death. All this is recovered through the narratorial voice. While the narrator disregards the principles of division, the narrative potentially collapses categories between a certain reality and imaginative exploration of other realities that appear to be out of reach. It is an equally exciting imaginative experience for the narrator to transcend the hierarchy of the social class. While his mother, with a middle-class upbringing desperately wants to stick to her class-position after the dislocation that she suffered during the partition, he does not seem to be satisfied with his position as a child within a middle-class family. He is far more interested in wishfully participating in what is going on in the Mayadebi branch of the family as it did better than his family both financially and socially. These relatives like Ila and her mother offer narratives that transport him to places like Colombo and Cairo. Although most of the extraordinary experiences are recovered through the street corner stories of Tridib, but Tridib cannot presume to be the voice of authenticity that is attributed to the success of the class yet has the narrator clung to him.

The narrator is equally curious about those relatives who could not make it like those boys, for instance, the Dhakuria branch of Jyathamoshai's family. They don't seem to be conscious of or troubled by class differences suggested by the sordid ambiance of their living quarters in Dhakuria. The socio-economic disparity between the two families is prefigured in Thamma's sarcastic rejoinder to the maid who comes to show them the way to the place and introduces herself as Mrinmoyi, for she was always savagely cutting with maid servants who had names which struck as being pretentious for their station. Intolerant of the lines between the nations at least with respect to her own situation, Thamma here appears to be the upholder of the divides between the classes. The narrator realizes that all it would take was a couple of failed examinations to get sucked into the landscape to which Mrinmoyi introduces them. He also ironically realizes it to be that sludge which gave our genteel decorum its fine edge of frenzy. However, in course of this episode, it is the narrator’s father who becomes afraid of using his security by reestablishing the familial connections with such kinds of relatives who live within virtual slum and getting his son’s decent upbringing thoroughly spoilt. Although the narrator’s privileging of the upper- class experience in foreign locals as a way of life that opens out the world at large, to him is mostly the concern of the novel, is latently uninhibited response to relatives who are lowered down in the social ladder, prompted by his Thamma’s excitement at meeting them after so long and his mother’s human concern after actually being told about the problems they face is suggested, although not developed in the course of the novel. But what we notice here is that the desire to cross the borders between people, times, spaces, classes and nations.

It is not a matter of arbitrary structuring that the scenes that question the lines of hatred between nations are in the second part of the novel. These scenes help the narrator to come home to perceive and recognize certain truths about the world. Some kind of coming to terms with the reality around him takes place in three episodes of the novel. First, when Thamma questions the rationale behind meaningless bloodshed, violence and trauma caused by the Partition of India and Pakistan though it did not create an actual border which is concretely visible from a plane. Secondly, a relatively unimportant character though, Jyathamoshai challenges anybody who would engage him on the issue of the home. Third, when the narrator communicates with himself and starts interrogating the very principle of division between countries.

> There had never been a moment in the four thousand year old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines.[40]

All these scenes are indeed different stages in the process of the narrator being progressively aware of the significant realities of the world around him and deeply felt experiential constituents of the novel. This is what makes it a *bildungsroman*. In travel-literature, the adventurer-traveller always returns home. Even in the kind of children fiction that take the child protagonist through a real or imaginary escapade out of his/her limited regulated environment, the child usually returns to the safe fold of home. But *The Shadow Lines* is not a children story although at the end, coming back home to India is indicated. It is not that literal meaning which is suggested. It is much more than that in the larger context of the narrative of the subcontinent.

In *The Shadow Lines,* silence in history is narrativized and linked to the rediscovery of the self. The novel is thus the articulation of a fundamental difficulty embedded in the larger narrative of Indian modernity. The private is inescapably enmeshed in the public and the public furtively slips into the private. This is where I have argued that Ghosh has deviated from a straightforwardly realistic technique and is interrogating the process of narrativizing a national identity which very often involves imposing linear structure of development. The mode of narration followed in this novel works through discontinuities and disruptions which prove effective in highlighting the thematic concern for painstaking recovery of fearful suppressed memories in order to cut through the seamless narrative of national identity. This is where the textual reality of the novel involves several generic forms (*bildungsroman*, travel narrative, Bengali children stories, memory novel, self writing). Thus the novel explores the issues of post-national modernity and cultural practices.

Chapter 4

The Aesthetics of Lying

The prologue to Ahmadou Kourouma's novel *Monnè, outrages et défis*[1] reads as follows:

> Un jour le Centenaire demande au Blanc comment s'entendait en français le mot *monnè*.
>
> « Outrages, défis, mépris, injures, humiliations, colère rageuse, tous ces mots à la fois sans qu'aucun le traduise véritablement », répondit le Toubab qui ajouta : « En vérité, il n'y a pas chez nous, Européens, une parole rendant totalement le *monnè* malinké. »
>
> Parce que leur langage ne possédait pas le mot, le Centenaire en conclut que les Français ne connaissaient pas les *monnew*. Et l'existence d'un peuple, nazaréens de surcroît, qui n'avait pas vécu et ne connaissaient pas tous les outrages, défis et mépris dont lui et son peuple pâtissaient tant, resta pour lui, toute la vie,

> un émerveillement, les sources et les motifs de graves méditations.
>
> [One day, the centenarian Patriarch asked the white man how the word *monnè* was known in French.
>
> "Outrage, defiance, scorn, insult, raging anger, all of these words at once, although none of them could really translate it", replied the White master, who added: "To tell the truth, we Europeans don't have a word which is exactly the same as *monnè* in Malinké."
>
> Because their language had no word for it, the centenarian Patriarch concluded that the French had no experience of *monnew*. And the existence of a people, who were moreover white Christians, and had neither lived through nor known all the outrages, offensives and scorns that he and his people had been enduring so much, remained for him, all his life, a marvel, a source and reason for serious reflection.]

This hypothesized scene in the form of an inaugural inscription dramatically poses central concerns.

First, the problem of knowledge. When the centenarian king learns that no such word as *monnè* exists in French, he concludes that the French have never experienced *monnew*. Where and when there is no experience, there is no word, as the very need of naming an experience necessitates the creation of a word. The existence of a word is contingent upon an experience. Experience is the precondition of lexis or, in general, language. On the other hand, where and when there is no word, there is no experience, as the latter is cognized as0when it is verbalized. The very cognition is contingent upon words. Language is the constitutive/ constituting element of knowledge.[2]

Although the king's understanding is premised on this complementarity, there is more to it. Through systematically marked binary oppositions such as White/ white master/ Europeans/ Christians/ French and Malinké / people of Malinké community, the very notion of complementarity finds itself troubled by a historical push that has been given to the issue of knowledge. As *monnè* is not part of the French vocabulary − or of any European language, the French/ Europeans cannot understand the meaning of that word and the purport of the experience conveyed by the word as well. On the contrary, the very existence of this word in Malinké makes it sufficiently clear that the word with all its nuances of meaning is not only part and parcel of the experience of that community but also points to a certain continuity, recurrence, circularity and, more importantly, the inevitability of the experience that is *monnew*. The lexical limitation of French has been ironically reversed with a subtle sense of history to the detriment of the Malinké people who become an impoverished 'other' of the European Self. Africans are naturally condemned to *monnew*, insurmountable and so defining a limit to African consciousness.[3] The king is driven to self-reflexively ponder over the limit of this African consciousness.

But this is also the critical self awareness of an author who looks back introspectively at himself. Interrogating the burden of *monnew* cannot but be delving into the history which, by provoking a cleavage of consciousness, enables such self-awareness. But how to articulate that interrogation?

Second, the problem of enunciation. How to (re)construct the historical experience of *monnew* in a language (here, it is French) which does not have a word corresponding to the totality of that experience? This is not a simple problem of adequacy of the word and the world. The issue here at stake is that of the problem in the very process of construction of knowledge.

If a particular language does not have a word to express a specific experience in all its moral and affective import, it means that there is a silence in the language on that particular experience. This would imply exclusion of that experience from the constitution of knowledge. The how is the constitution of the knowledge of *monnew* possible? The question is crucial and assumes a special significance for a writing subject, being African in origin, formed through western education and finally, writing in French, a European language. His reformation from a pre-capitalist subject into a bourgeois individual through an access to the Western archive should, in principle mean that s/he is a fully formed self capable, in the global political economy of knowledge, of occupying the position of producer as well as consumer.[4] The illusion engendered by the mastery of French, language which provided access to the archives and enabled his participation − whatever that be − in the global economy of knowledge, is shattered because of the 'silence' mentioned above. The tool of representation, once believed to be conferring sovereignty, pushes the writing subject to ridiculous fragility, where s/he finds him-/her betrayed by the tool itself. This is a traumatic situation. The trauma is not because s/he is imaged 'differently', which did not validate his/her participation in the legitimate sphere of knowledge production; it is because of the realization of loss of language within language, because of the tragic discovery that s/he cannot, even though access to archive now within his/her reach, produce knowledge −or I would rather say liberating knowledge −as the representational apparatus does not allow him/her enough enabling enunciatory possibilities. There seems to be an aporia in the assumption that mere possession of a dominant language − in the present case, French or it can be more generally any hegemonic European language in a (post)colonial situation − does in itself empower subjecthood. Language collaborates with those alienating forces which severely restricts agency. This is what defines the limit of words.

The limit of consciousness and the limit of words: these two are the central concerns which may guide our reflection in the following discussion where I would like to examine how Ahmadou Kourouma tackles these two issues while engaging with history in his novel. Kourouma's vision of history filters through the trajectory of the characters presented, structural devices used and narrative voices.

History and fiction

Monnè is organized around two genres: traditional epic belonging to African oral traditions and historical novel in the western model. It is to be noted that both these forms are articulated on the reproduction of the past and based on the reconstruction of the meaning of history. In conventional terms, history is a simple representation of facts. This representation presupposes a certain perspective. This is what renders facts problematic in relation to the very process of representation which makes facts available to us as 'facts' and in a particular way. It is within this framework that the relation between history and fiction has become the object of critical debates. Indeed the very question of imagining history is related to that very process of representation which presupposes an act of narration. Recent influential scholarly reviews make us aware that history is nothing but a series of narratives. A naive acceptance of these terms may be guided by common sense which hardly evokes surprise because, that history is a kind of narrative is self evident. But, strikingly enough, however simple it may sound, it is a serious challenge to the positivistic conception of history which believes in the authority of facts and takes it for granted. On a closer examination is observed that if history is a subset of narrative, the criterion of historicity is problematized, if not totally discarded. It has been recognized that history is not less fictive and that fiction is not less real. So rather than the content it is the form, a particular way of colligating events, which deserves attention. Fact and fiction, truth and imagination, reality and fantasy the borderline between these dyads becomes uncertain.

Historical fiction is one of the genres which is perceived for long to offer elucidations of the ways in which reality gets transformed into fiction. This genre has been understood traditionally as a form of imaginative writing that uses recognizable historical figures and events and is set in a period of time recognizably historical.[5] Whereas avowed fictionality tends to place this mode of writing in direct opposition to empirical history, its real-life provenance seems to link it directly with a certain type of historical discourse. This is, of course, paradoxical. The implications of this paradox can be understood when this genre is placed in the political context of specific reading communities. The very idea of conceiving a category called historical fiction might be objected to by recent theories of cultural materialism and neo-historicism. Their focus on the historicity of texts and the textuality of history impel them to consider all texts as historical and fictional at the same time. These questions are raised to reflect upon the literary problematic of distribution of genre and to relate it to the African context. *Monnè* is a fiction aspiring to be history straddling the intermediate zone of the interrelated discourses of fiction and history.

Monnew is not a new theme in Kourouma's writing. His maiden novel *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968) was ostensibly animated by this thematic concern which was voiced in similar radical fashion and based on the experience of disillusionment of the fallen world of post-independence Africa. In *Monnè*, his second novel, the time frame is largely expanded to include a period extending from the second half of the nineteenth century till the end of the first half of the twentieth century. It takes its reader round from the inaugural moment of French conquest in the late nineteenth century, indicated by the defeat of Samory at the hands of Faidherbe's army through consolidation of French colonial rule, the turmoil of the two Wars right up to the political developments in the former Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) on the eve of political independence. These are hard facts which constitute the historical points of reference for the novel that details the African experience as henceforth dependent on an external will and purpose, which emanates from the colonial metropolis. The new history of the region is not so much obliterated but subsumed within the history of France, with all its vagaries and vicissitudes.[6] This extended chronicle of colonial imposition in its full historical span seeks to impress readers with the circularity, recurrence and permanence of the experience that is *monnew*.

The nature of events unfolding the experience of *monnew* makes Kourouma's novel primarily a narrative of dispossession caused by the upheavals of colonial history. The fictional kingdom of Soba is depicted as a society in disarray, when its centenarian monarch Djigui Keita sinks, in his progressive and painful decline, from a state of megalomaniac vigorous authority into physical and moral decay. This process of degeneration is traced broadly in three phases: pre-colonial, colonial and the eve of decolonization, and the beginning of post-colonial. History in this novel serves as a background. If the novel is constructed on the model of historical fiction, the chronology of events in the history of West Africa has been broadly respected. The spread of French colonization along with the defeats of African kingdoms has been recounted following the Bourkinabé historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo's accounts.[7] But at the same time, temporal indications are very few: the War of 1914-18, to the colonial exposition in 1931, the second World War, the trouble caused by Hamalists, the Pétainist period, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain – the political party founded by Houphouet-Boigny in 1946, the electoral campaigns and battles and various political equations and fall-outs. In this sense, all this is there in the novel to support the fiction on a historical context of reality and the reflection of the author on a problematic, not unknown to the readers. Thus the novel follows largely a linear, chronological movement, although not stopping the narrative to have recourse to frequent flashbacks, such as the anecdote of prediction of the first messenger which pushes it back to 12th century with a reference to the emperor, Soumaro Kanté and also to El Hadji Omar Tal in 1864.

This hoary past, though largely mythical, remains in the background of Soba in the 19th & 20th centuries. This background adds to the depth of temporal dimension and reminds the readers that Africa is not a continent without history, *tabula rasa,* contrary to the colonialist historiographies' dominant views. The colonialist intervention is not conceived as a beginning of history but as a violent rupture with the past, that was causing a profound sense of dislocation including dislocation of time. Although linear time, that is, historical time, as conceived by the Western historiography, is revealed through the overall construction of the novel at the surface level (macro-structure), temporality, the details of the micro-structure is much more complicated. The narrative unfolds less as a simple linear plotting of events than as a cluster of significant episodes, each of which is related, as in the folktale tradition to a proverb or aphorism which serves as its motif and whose meaning it illustrates. These proverbs and aphorisms which reproduce the Malanké usage are employed textually as headings for the novel's chapters and foreground its narrative development. Let us take some examples here. The title of the first chapter "Un homme façonné avec de la bonne argile, franc, charitable et matineux" [A man well shaped, candid, generous and early riser] introduces the principal character of the novel and portrays him in a very positive way as in a traditional heroic epic. In the same way, the title of the last chapter of the novel, we have, "Nous avons prié pour que la terre lui soit légère mais nous nous sommes interdit de lui dire adieu" [We prayed so that the earth treat him softly but we were not allowed to bid him adieu] describes the death of the protagonist following the tone of the classical end of the epic. The title of the fourth chapter of the first part: "Chaque fois que les mots changent de sens et les choses de symboles, les Diabaté retournent reapprendre l'histoire et les nouveaux noms des hommes, des animaux et des choses" [Each time words change meanings and things their symbols, the griots Diabaté return to the land to learn history afresh and the new names of men, of animals and of things] takes up the central problematic of the novel. The trauma of dislocation, particularly that of the semiotic universe which gives meaning to collective life, is summed up in this title. What is foregrounded here is a very fundamental epistemological crisis provoked by the rigorous process of colonial imposition, the difficulty of being in the world. Some of the titles are also based on collective wisdom but recontextualized "Les hommes sont limités, ils ne réussissent pas des oeuvres infinies" [Men are limited in capacity, they are not capable of performing tasks of infinite dimension][8] implies that the colonial conquest has caused a radical dislocation of life and the values which the Africans have to painfully negotiate.

Certain forms of titles suggest the author's predilection for concrete images collected ingeniously from the surroundings of the Sahelian region he inhabits. We can observe a strong presence of space (the sun, the moon, river, stream, fire), of animals (elephant, vulture), human activity (tears, cry, laughter), God (prayer, soul). All this represents a universe, a kind of cosmogony, a *habitus* which projects a vision opposed to Western realities. [9,10,11]

The representation of Soba, the site of colonial imposition, is as much historical as it is mythical. Mythic space and historical space, mythic time and historical time animate each other in this construction. One might refer to the observation of Levi-Strauss who makes a distinction between what he calls "reversible" and "non reversible" temporalities.[12] Non reversible time manifests in the novel in topical references such as date, characters, place. Moreover, another factor which contributes to the non reversibility of time is the topographic identifiability of Soba in a certain region of West Africa by recurrent mentions of Mandinke as spatial indicator or of Malinké referring to a particular linguistic community.[13] But this non reversible time slides subtly into reversible time when the geographical boundaries so mapped dissolve themselves into the boundaries of the novel's imaginative topography. This shift takes place in the novel when the chronicle of Soba merges with the subjective histories of the denizens of the land. At that level, conventional divisions of time are blurred: absence of dates or very little of them, the calculations of which do not refer to an established calendar but are associated with the lived experiences of the characters.[14]

In this context, we should consider the various discursive and literary formations that go into the production of a particular literary text. We should also consider the nature, status and definition of literature for a given community. From this perspective, the literature of the Sahel area encompasses both oral and written literary systems. Both undeniably reproduced cultural codes. These postulates offer us the epistemological option of examining the functioning of a particular work and its reception.

Within the framework of culturalist criticism, many critics have advocated the need for an intertextual approach based on orality for the study of modern African narratives.[15] In changing societies like in Africa, the intertextual logic that connects the two modes of literary expression is very often than not linked to the particular location that conditions the creative impulse. What is implicitly suggested here is to reformulate the very dialectics of orality and writing. On the one hand, we have to reconsider the potential hegemony of the metropolitan written system of expression and on the other hand, the potential discursive agency of indigenous oral system of expression in the face of violent aggressions of the former.

In this novel, the forms of orality serve as the vehicle of historical consciousness. I would like to suggest here that the principle of reciprocity between history and fiction operates not only in African oral tradition but also in modern African literature. It has assumed significance for contemporary African life and expression on a much broader front than is suggested by the simple thematic association of this literature with the colonial experience. The point I wish to make here is that, there is continuity of form and function between the oral tradition and modern African imaginative expression. And this continuity is founded on the African writer's conception of literature as testimony. It has been argued that novel as a form of imaginative expression and also a reorganization of the imaginary conditioned by the modality of writing and associated with the Western concept of Bourgeois individualism is foreign to Africa. This "foreignness" of the novel notwithstanding, we should remember the art of narrative elaborated within the framework of orality, has always been and remains an essential mode of cultural production in Africa. In fact, in African societies there are several forms of oral expression. Minor forms like folktales & moral fables offered a comprehensive frame of normative reference for the moral life in pre-colonial African societies whereas the extended forms of oral expression such as praise poems, myths and particularly epics functioned as principal vectors of historical consciousness where a common past was commemorated to celebrate the collective compact in the present.

Kourouma's novel reproduces in a certain manner the modalities of epic enunciation. Secondly, Monnè stages as well the agents and acting roles and the narrative dynamics of the epic. In this way, we can see that how the effects of meaning are conditioned by generic horizons and the historical contexts of recontextualization. Two factors become important in this regard. On the one hand, there is the present context of the creation and conception of each genre; on the other, the history of these same contexts. The epic features of *Monnè* do not have the same significance as the traditional dynastic epics. The socio-cultural situation of the modern reader leads him/her to assign the epic to the category of verbal fiction although it was received as historical account as a narration of truthful facts. The imaginative expression reorganized in the form of a novel, travels across intergeneric fields where the novelist can play with the effects of chronological and cultural distance.[16]

In the African context, the epic is a collective discourse whose total significance is focused on a central character to whom the values of the collectivity are attributed.[17] In the Mandé world, the action of the king ensures these requirements. The epic constructs his biography around historically significant moments. These moments correspond to periods when people are conscious of being engaged historically in an enterprise that can reorient their destiny. The story of King Djigui of Saba in *Monnè* corresponds to these definitions. The principal character lives in the first part of the narrative with the epic heroes of the 9th century such as Samory, Babemba, Albouri, etc. The historical frame of reference as indicated by the temporalities of Kings grounds these commonalities very effectively. Djigui appears thus, pre-determined by the facts of history and by his socio-political status to act out the roles of a hero of a dynastic epic. The narrative dynamics of the epic is expressed in a plot of predestination which produces the exemplary biography of the hero king.

Epic enunciation in Monnè is constructed from both the elements of historical enunciations and those of oral communication. History always seeks to get itself authentificated for the information it provides. Similarly, the emaciation of a historical narrative must proceed from a legitimate speaker for the authentification of the information. In the epic, the griot-historian is the master of the world who does this.[18] It should be noted here that the textual and the discursive space in the novel is mainly constituted by the consonance between the thematic and structural levels in which the forms of orality serve as the vehicle of historical consciousness. The theme dislocation unfolds progressively as through the constant opposition between the character of griot as the traditional social cultural agent and that of the interpreter who emerges as the new social and political agent. The reflections of these two bring into light the epistemological crisis due to the traumatic experiences of colonization and symbolize the struggle for the re-appropriation of the meaning of the world in the process of transition towards Modernity.

But, more significantly, the figure of griot as the organic bearer of collective memory, an agent of dissemination of historical knowledge functions as a structural principle of enunciation in the novel. This is what is evident from the preeminence accorded to the narrative voice of the collective first person plural. This voice addresses to the community as a whole and echoes its aspirations, anxieties and interrogations. Thus it becomes much like the griot, the witness to the movement of history. Moreover, the textual device establishes an equivalence of functions between that of the griot in the tradition and that of the writer in the modern context.[19] Set against the collective voice however is that of the omniscient narrator, typical of a realist kind of novel. This narrator distances himself somewhat from the events he is narrating and gives his judgments. For example:

> La vérité était que rien n'avait été renouvelé dans le Mandingue depuis des siècles. […] Le legs était un monde suranné que des griots archaïques disaient avec des mots obsolètes.[20]
> [The truth was that nothing had developed in the Manding since ages. [...] The legacy was an outdated world which the old griots used to describe with obsolete words.]
> Depuis des siècles, les gens de Soba et leurs rois vivaient dans un monde clos à l'abri de toute idée et croyance nouvelles. […] C'était une société arrêtée […] C'était une société castée et esclavagiste […][21]
> [Since centuries, the people of Soba and their kings used to live in a closed world immune to new ideas and beliefs. [...] It was a stagnated society [...] It was a society riddled with caste discrimination and slavery ...]

There is also the occasional eruption into the narrative stream of the first person singular which is the voice of the king Djigui in his moments of introspection and self awareness.

The narrator's presence in this medley of events becomes problematic. Sometimes he appears contemporary to the events he recounts but those events span over one hundred years and thus would imply a fantastic duration of life. Some other times, he seems posterior to the events, although having a sound knowledge of what happened and with judgments not always compatible with those of old times. This simultaneity and distantiation render the frontiers between past, present and future uncertain, fluid and redundant and contradict the Western linearity by another temporality.[22]

Hero and anti-hero

Monnè tells explicitly the exploits of the king Djigui. All the historical events take place through his vision which organizes the world which is destabilized following his failure or death. Djigui has all the qualities of an epic hero. His status, his fortune, his science (magic or esoterism) place him among the best of Mandingue men. He is not only the most beautiful and the strongest, but also the greatest and the most intelligent in Mandingue. The people's vision (through the use of the pronoun 'we') gives one the impression of a unique being. The pre-colonial phase is presented mainly through the legendary figure of Djigui:

> Nous fumes fiers de le voir se former, s'épanouir, s'endurcir ; il grandit et se répandit. Tout le Mandingue parla de lui, et à force de le dire, il devint ineffable et multiple ; il acquit la force de réaliser tant de choses prodigieuses.[23]
>
> [We were proud to see him develop, flourish and harden; he grew and spread out. All the Mandé community talked about him, and

> the sheer force of words made him ineffable and multifarious; he acquired the power to achieve so many prodigious feats.]

And also in the organic unity of the African universe:

> Certes, ce n’était pas le Bonheur pour tout le monde, mais cela semblait transparent pour chacun, donc logique ; chacun croyait comprendre, savait attribuer un nom à chaque chose, croyait donc posséder le monde, le maîtriser.[24]
> [Certainly, it was not the reign of happiness for everybody. But everything seemed clear to everyone, therefore logical; all thought themselves to understand, had given a word to everything, and thus believed themselves to grasp the world, to master it.]

Thus Djigui and his society are located in the realm of political and mythical power.

The stable situation endured for many centuries and this static world was governed by shared belief in the life of various priests and holy men. But this state of achieved coherence slips into one of an unsettling contingency in which the process of apprehension of the world has been rendered highly problematic by the violent invasion by the colonizer and the disorientation it provokes. The whole system of symbolic references that sustained and gave meaning to collective life is dislocated. This leads to a fundamental epistemological crisis. Reconfiguration of the world in this constant flux of change, if it is necessary, is hardly possible, because the very relation between customary words and the grasp of reality they enable is disturbed. Words have lost their apparent referentiality and have become empty signifiers without any signified.

This rigorous nature of colonial imposition which involves not only exactions but also radical reordering of life and values is depicted in the second phase. The arrival of "Fadarba and his Nazaras" is announced by a messenger dressed in red from head to toe, as has been predicted by a twelfth century soothsayer.[25] When Samory, a more powerful king, invites him to join him in the battle against the foreign invaders, after a moment of initial hesitation, he accepts - or rather submits to - to be a vassal of Samory, who adopts a new guerilla strategy, which consists of simply moving away with the population of his kingdom. But Djigui does not want to raze his own city to the ground; he does not want to flee his homeland in fear; he decides to confront the Nazaras and is even ready to die. His decision is based on the assumption that the magic inherited from his ancestors and the protective power of Allah and a wall in the form of fortification would be sufficient to repel the intruders. Soba is protected on three sides by the most gigantic wall (called *tata*) in all the region of Mande, and the Kouroufi hills to the north are mined with gris-gris. But contrary to his expectations, Feadarba's men ignore the fortifications, cross the Kouroufi hills, indifferent to the gris-gris which has no meaning to them and so, no power over them.

So, the French are in Soba. They ask Djigui to surrender. He swears allegiances to the new rulers of the territory. Indeed his submission is based on a monumental error of translation. Djigui defies, in a crude language, the French captain and asks him to go beyond the hill and then try from there to conquer his village. He is convinced that they have accepted his challenge to meet in battle with due respect to the laws of chivalry. But Moussa Soumaré, the interpreter who came with the French troops and happens to be a Soumaré, a jesting brother of the Keita, does not translate a single word of Djigui's reckless challenge and instead, renders his words in a way that simply invites the French troops to make themselves at home in the Kouroufi hills. Happy, the captain shakes hands with the king.

In this process, the role of the interpreter becomes significant. Since the inception of colonialism, the most important figure at this conjuncture of history is neither the new colonial ruler nor the old conquered king but their mediator, the interpreter, who deliberately manipulates the situation. Indeed, shameless collaboration can be located in his (mis-) interpretive speech that radically modifies the serious, elevated speech of the king and the griot and replaces it by "the language of the world of experience, the language of insult and jest made legal, the language of demystification."[26] The interpreter's intervention proves thus to be felicitous: he saves the king, he saves his people, but all that, at the cost of honour and dignity. The king had to swallow defeat and is destined to live through, sometimes with expectations, sometimes with reluctance, sometimes with bitterness, all that it attends. The language of honour is displaced by the language of defeat.

Language is one of the many ways in which colonialism manifests its power. It is through language that the world is represented. In a colonial situation, this tool of representation has been developed and deployed by the imperialist West as part of its machinery of control and domination. But this is insidious, because very often it is not perceived as a tool of conquest.

As Johannes Fabian has observed, one of the 'preconditions for establishing regimes of colonial power' was communication with the colonized, and control of that communication was an imperative for the exercise of colonial authority.[27] This is not simply appropriation of verbal mode of expression of the conquered, but this control extends to the very modes of thought and perception that give a sense of living to the people inhabiting a particular society. What Ngugi Wa Thiong'O calls the colonization of the mental inverse/ mind implies a domination and control of the semiotic: oppression in the very forms of reasoning, signifying and symbolic exchange of culture − oppression by the apparatus of narrative.[28]

The character of the interpreter Soumaré has a historical reality, attached to his personality in that he functions as a power broker. The way he transforms the king's discourse and moulds the situation infusing his own perspective is not only indicative of his complicity with power, but also of the staging of complicity and compromise defining the new language of social and political life. It also points as much to the disruption of modes of thinking and transformation of world-views as to the restructuring − and it is more subtle −of the indigenous language (here, it is Malinké) which also contributed to the creation of new ways of perceiving the world. The process of delimiting and defining a language (an indigenous language) in its most pervasive sense was not entirely a colonial enterprise, which exercised colonial coercion to superimpose a new cultural idiom on a passive culture. Rather this cultural contact was riddled with tension, and indeed, mediated by at least two frames of reference; it was necessarily a dialectical process, although power was not evenly balanced on each side of this participatory relationship. Such a colonial process, as it is depicted in *Monnè*, operates within a socio-cultural matrix which is itself, at least partially, constructed by the colonial power. So, the apparent 'complicity' of the interpreter Soumaré could be understood as much within the new social configurations as in the structures of power and knowledge that created those formations. This is the dialectics of defeat. They constantly endeavour to construct, even through Malinké, another narrative — would we say narrative of Modernity? — displacing the old one, and make the king and his people appropriate the former through the dialectics of defeat, till it becomes part of the realities of life. In the overall symbolics of the novel, the character of Soumaré assumes a deeper significance which strikes at the foundations of the mental universe of the colonized Africans in general, this indicating more fundamentally a veritable epistemological crisis. This is what has been summarily registered in the reflection of the king's principal griot, Djéliba:

> Apprendre les nouvelles vérités. L'infini qui est au ciel a change de paroles ; le Mandingue ne sera plus la terre des preux. Je suis un griot, donc homme de la parole. Chaque fois que les mots changent de sens et les choses de symboles, je retourne à la terre qui m'a vu naître pour tout recommencer : réapprendre l'histoire et les nouveaux noms des hommes, des animaux et des choses.[29]
> [To learn new truths. The Infinite in heaven has changed words. The land of the Malinké will no longer be the abode of heroes. I am a griot, hence a man of words. Each time words change meanings and things their symbols, I returned to the land where I

> was born to begin anew, to learn history afresh and the new names of men, of animals and of things.]

With the coming of a new era, the king and his subjects are introduced to the new order by the interpreter.

> Je traduis les paroles d’un Blanc, d’un Toubab. Quand un toubab s’exprime, nous, Nègres, on se tait, se décoiffe, se déchausse et écoute. Cela doit être su comme les sourates de la prière, bien connu comme les perles de fesses de la préférée.[30]
>
> [I translate the words of a White man. When a White man speaks, we, the Negroes, keep shut, take our hats and shoes off and listen to him. This should be learnt as the verses of a prayer and known as the pearls of the buttocks of your beloved.]

So, words no longer belong to them, to their community. They are controlled by the new power. Djigui Keita, king of a conquered people, is progressively deprived by the reality of power and reduced to just a witness, along with his court and subjects of the “pacification” of the territory, process which replaces the overtly aggressive military by a more subtle and penetrating civil administration, geared to discipline the civic life teaching new values and norms of social and cultural civility, to the new subjects.

As the words of the White Master must not be left naked like a slave, Diabaté, the griot redresses Soumaré’s simple translation in appropriate rhetorical forms but in the way “prestations” becomes “pratati” which takes its place in Malinké's new vocabulary and will develop as a necessary corollary to *monnew*. Homilies of obedience, hard work and of the value of money are presented through traditional proverbs.

> Comme le besoin d'évoluer n'a jamais résidé dans la tête du Noir, il faut l'amener à vouloir la civilisation, à rechercher l'argent plus que le gibier, plus que l'amitié et la fraternité, plus que les femmes et les enfants, plus que le pardon d'Allah.[31]
> [As the need to evolve has never occurred to the Black people, it is necessary to bring them to like civilization and to make to look more for money than prey, friendship, fraternity, women, children and the forgiveness of Allah.]

The power of African words articulated in a compelling rhythm of an African voice (the interpreter's) is used to ensnare the people. When the same words are rearticulated by Djigui, by his majestic griot the Djéliba and other members of the court with its intricate everyday poetry, the power of African word is raised to a height of magnificence only to end up conveying an ironically reversed sense of decay and decadence through moments of tragic revelation and recognition. Words are emptied of their traditional signified and taken as signifiers to invest them with new values and meaning. Colonial domination is not really in the suppression of an indigenous language in favour of a dominant metropolitan one. But its working is more intricate in that it recasts the idioms of the indigenous language. If old values are perverted, it is not from above, but from below, when, as we see in *Monnè*, old familiar Malinké words are reworked out into modernity and rendered unfamiliar. One becomes a stranger, an alienated self within one's own language.[32]

And from that point, the people of Soba are introduced into the rigours of the colonial system: how colonial power first intimidated then through abuse and violence, and then inducted them progressively into the French economic system by creating new needs and manipulating desires.

As the story of the French conquest unfolds, the kingdom of Soba becomes a tragic farcical mirror of French history, reflects the vicissitudes of the French nation in its European destiny.[33] The positive results of civilization take the form of forced labour for the masses and the promise of a train for the glory of the king. The colonial governors shift and change in echo with political upheavals in metropolitan France. Thus the history of France and the history of Soba are now irrevocably different but irrevocably shared. The history of Africa is also the history of the West and informs its psychic and politico-economic itinerary.

When it was felt that the king's collaboration was necessary for the smooth functioning of the 'indigenat', he was lured and seduced by the railways project. Until the arrival of the French, his greatness was attributed to his royal descent, his slaves and his numerous voiceless wives. With the new colonial regime, his greatness is now contingent upon the construction of railways which he wants to go through his village and more particularly, a station to be built beside his palace to facilitate his easy commutation. Here, one fetishism is replaced by another, but the symbolic function does not change. The construction of railways would contribute to progress and development and thus ensure the perenniality of the King's power. The project literally bleeds his whole country, but scarifies made are not meant for his sole protection, for the individual destiny but for the destiny of the dynasty, for the destiny of the collectivity. The question of railways participates in this process of perenniality of power. On the one hand, the desire of the king to save his dynasty by the recourse to a fetish, an age-old belief of the community; on the other hand, given the failure of the old fetish in the face of new colonial adversary, the conviction that the destiny – both individual and collective – can be improved through recourse to a better fetish provided by the conqueror.

Djigui's problem is precisely here: his surrender to traditional belief rather to modernity. Imperialist capital regenerates itself in an unexpected way in the static, primitive, traditionalist community redressing modernity in the guise of an 'invented' tradition, although keeping its effective power of transformation in place. The notion of 'progress' with all its attendants such as 'civility', 'culture', 'development' is reinscribed as a new fetish and redefines itself as such. The social and economic transformation as necessitated by imperialist capitalism does not always work through the vocabulary of 'western modernity; modernization *re-uses* the indigenous material for its thriving in different other, often ignored, forms and thus lends itself credibility. It reshapes the symbolic and also imaginary world of a colonized society. The earlier sense of defeat is absorbed into a sense of honour, because the sense of defeat cannot be allowed to continue as it contains the potential of opposition and revolt. This has been evident in the turn-about of the king when he asks the singers and griots to stop singing the songs of *monnew*.[34] A very strange sense of 'conquest by honour', and not by arms, dawns upon him and he feels that he has been vindicated and his prayers and sacrifices have propitiated the Almighty Allah.

But, indeed, he fails to understand the real meaning and underlying larger implications of this newly fashioned language of honour beyond its surface level. He fails to see through it another, deeper, sense of deception and defeat. This becomes clear when the king is persuaded to send his people to the battlefield. New sacrifices are made in the form of masses being employed in the construction of railways and other so called ‘developmental’ projects, and also sent to Europe to be killed on the battlefields.

When the First World War breaks out in Europe, the interpreter Soumaré announces to the people of Soba that the nasty Allamas have attacked France and intend to make the French suffer *monnew*. He has to explain that the word “allama” (in French ‘Allemands’ in English ‘Germans’) does not have the meaning of the corresponding Malinké word which means: ‘saved only by Allah’. The power-that-be has always invented a discourse appropriate to the situation in order to lead the people to sacrificial alter. After the War, the maimed and lamed survivors return from Europe singing *La Marseillaise* (French national anthem), proud to have contributed to the glory of France, injured in solitary operations rather than in forced labour and showing off their ability to speak French which is not understood by the French natives:

> C’est plus tard que nous saurions que c’était là un charabia à eux, que les natifs de France n’entendaient pas.[35]
>
> [Later we found out that what they spoke was a kind of charabia which the French Natives did not understand].

The people of Soba thus continued to be ruthlessly exploited. The dream of the railways turns out to be a vain promise because the very project is suspended somewhere in the distance. Torn between the suffering of his people and the endless demands of the white colonial administration, Djigui now begins to realize the meaning of 'honour' attributed to him and sadly discovers, to his despair, only disgrace and hardships caused by his failure to assess the situation that trapped him into shameless collaboration . The king is not in a position to refuse and to contain him, he is rewarded by the French authorities for his cooperation (read collaboration) by inviting him to be their guest at a colonial exhibition in Paris.

The dream of the king that he had been driven out from the capital leads him to take recourse to fetishism. He started making arrangements for sacrifices. But scarifies are considered necessary not for glory but toward off solitude, suffering and death, to contain the needs that cause uprising, to stop desertions of all sorts from all places, to moralize the spouses of the displaced, to inspire the white.[36]

The king is made aware of the second German attack and how this would adversely affect the Railways project. So the argument was that the Negroes should again rise up to the occasion to defend France, to preserve civilization. Djigui is asked to again mobilize his people to send them on the front. But this time, the response level is low. France is defeated, and Djigui is accused of non-cooperation. He lives through the Second World War more and more passively as a spectator of the offensive underside of the political changes and new political struggles that take place as a result of the Pétainist 'renewal'. When the French, in turn, collaborate with the Nazi invaders, the old commander leaves and a new Vichy commander, Bernier comes to Soba. He imposes even more stringent demands which were nearly impossible to fulfill.

> Pour le Renouveau, ils doivent fournir du charbon, des peaux, des ivoires, du sisal, de l'or, du caoutchouc, des cornes, du soja, beaucoup d'enfants pour les écoles et le scoutisme, des maladies pour les dispensaires et l'institut des grandes endémies, des femmes en attente pour les maternités, des hommes et des femmes pour les chantiers et plantations, et des homes sains et courageux pour l'armée coloniale qui pourchassera et châtiera les Nègres qui ne suivront pas les sages paroles du Maréchal.[37]
>
> [For the Renouveau / Renewal they have to supply coal, animal skin, ivory, sisal, gold, rubber, horn, soy bean, lots of children for the schools and scout troops, lots of sick people for the dispensaries and the institute of epidemic diseases, lots of expectant / pregnant women for the maternity wards, men and women for factories and plantations and brave men for the colonial army which will furnish the Negroes who will not follow the wise instructions of the Maréchal.]

Maréchal Pétain who joins hands with Hitler installs a reign of terror in France. As a result, in the colony as in Soba, villages crumble into rubble and people turn into zombies. Centenarian, Djigui loses authority over his kingdom, incapable of fulfilling his royal obligations and is shunted aside by the colonial administration. Béma, son of Djigui's youngest wife, Moussokoro, usurps power in Soba. Djigui is ousted because he could not supply enough men to the French army in its fight against the Germans. The defeat of France was alleged to be caused because of Djigui's incapability and non-cooperation. As the colonization enters its final phase, the vainglory of the vanquished chief gives way to *monnè fi* (dense *monnè*) and *monnè bobelli* (unavengeable *monnè*) of old age.

At this stage, a new battle is on the cards. We have seen how the interpreter becomes the key figure of the new age. His manipulative strategy, which we have noticed on several occasions, is indicative of a new battle to be fought now within the Malinké community. It is not between the French and the Malinké/African, nor between Faidherbe and Samory, but between the ironizing interpreter and the adherents of the competing Islamic order represented by a second interloper in the Soba community, the Hamalist marabout from the north. The rise of the marabout and his influence corresponds to gradual marginalization of the griot. It represents less an authentic conversion than a futile diversion from the harsh realities introduced into African history by the successor of Faidherbe. The tension between the spiritual world of the marabout and the realpolitik of the interpreter creates a space where the concept of word and its truth / lies are dramatically represented.

Djigui takes recourse to this marabout Yacouba to regain his power and performs sacrifices and prayers. When the king sees that the railway project is not certain, he falls back upon the old fetishism. But Béma, the new chief thinks that he is a danger to 'peace' established by the French. Yacouba is from a clan that contradicted the colonial law and order, power and authority; hence, he deserves to be expelled. Finally, he is arrested by the colonial administration.

Djigui considers this is as the greatest *monnew* of his life, because now it is the question of his survival. He is immune to all other fatal causes; only *monnew* can cause his death. And to save him, the agent of *monnew* has to be presented before him. But the problem is complicated in this case, because the perpetrators of monnew are the colonial officer and his own son, Bèma. But who can bring the white commander and how? It is hardly possible because he belongs to a race that is the master of the Negroes and caused Samory's downfall. And according to religious beliefs and tradition, the conqueror cannot kneel down before the conquered. Also, sacrifices and magical feats prove to be inefficient in the fight against the White. Djigui understood it and said that the White is impure and cannot be bitten. And, Béma cannot be bitten either because he is his own child. So finally Djigui decides to register protest against the French *monnew* by sending a delegation to the French governor.

Every Friday, from Faidherbe's time, the kind has led his griots, sicarios and courtesans from the Bolloda (the royal court) to the Kefi (the seat of colonial administration) to drink the Dégué of allegiance. But the magnificent pageant of the royal court on horseback is replaced by the pathetic marches of a few dozen geezers, revolting against the colonial rule, and against their own past. It is here that the official griot of the king, the djéli, recreates the official history of the Keita dynasty, Keitas being the descendants of Soundiata. The griot Diabaté gives the name 'Boribana' to their resistance, although he is aware of the difference between this revolt and the vigorous military resistance (Boribana) of Samory Touré forty years earlier. What matters here is not this difference of character but the final recognition of this *Boribana*, this insurgence. More so, because this resistance never got a place in the official

French version of Soba's history. On the contrary, a small band of desperate peasants, fleeing drought, starvation, conscription and other devastations, unwittingly cross over into English territory where they are welcomed as valiant citizens rallying to General De Gaulle's 1940 call to arms. And this became part of the French history. This is another example of appropriation of African history into French one.

De Gaulle comes to power, and Djigui is reinstated in power. But his greatest moral support Djéliba dies. Djigui's relation with Béma becomes strained. The new commander Héraud is appointed after Liberation. He pays tribute to Djigui and his people on behalf of De Gaulle and gives a moving speech where reference is made to the rally mentioned earlier.

> Le combat des Noirs contre le défaitisme à jamais grandira l'Afrique, pays de bravoure, de dignité; votre participation à la libération de l'homme, à l'anéantissement de la barbarie et du fascisme ne sera jamais oubliée. Le Blanc parla, se perdit dans de longs développements politico-historiques. Il parla, trop et vite, avec des néologismes: fascisme, pétainisme, gaullisme, marxisme, capitalisme, le monde libre …Des mots intraduisibles que l'interprète a introduits en malinké, que le griot a répétés et commentés sans connaître le sens.[38]
>
> [The struggle of Black people against defeatism will forever glorify Africa, land of bravery and dignity. Your participation in the liberation of man, in the annihilation of Barbary and fascism will never be forgotten. The White man talked on and on, getting

> lost in lengthy politico-historical developments. He talked too much and too fast, using kinds of neologism like fascism, Pétainism, Gaullism, Marxism, capitalism, free world … all these untranslatable words that the interpreter has introduced into Malinké, that the griot repeated and commented without understanding their meaning.]

He narrates what has happened during the World War. But Djigui cannot understand. He does not understand the difference between Pétainist and Gaullist colonizers. When the griot represents the story, keywords get distorted/ deformed. When the White man (the commandant) says “liberté”, the interpreter says “gnibaité”, which, in griot’s words, becomes “nabata” which means in local Malinké “come and pick up momma.” The king wonders why De Gaulle would suddenly want to provide everyone with porters for their old moms.

One thing becomes clear. The pass law has been abandoned and very soon, forced labour would be abolished, and *monnè* would be put to an end. But then again, the king and his subjects fall into another trap, that of a new discourse, new discourse of politics, which does not help them anyway out of their untenable condition.

A new era of politics begins. What does it mean to the people of Soba? They do not have to give their sweat and blood in forced labour; they will give it freely, because niggers have to show their concern for freedom. They no longer die on the battlefields but they are shot down at home by tirailleurs deployed to suppress the so called ‘communist’ insurrections. Court intrigues are transformed into narratives of political struggles that mirror ideological conflicts in Europe.

Djigui is now concerned with new politics. He has to send one député (member of the Assemblé constituante de Paris). The fight between Djigui's two sons – Kélétigui and Béma comes to the forefront. Béma, the usurper, develops a modern political machinery using traditional rhetoric, lowdown swindles and the force of arms against his own father Djigui and other rivals such as Marian, supporter of Leftism and Touboug who is allied with Houphouët-Boigny.

Touboug, an Akan, came to Soba years before as school-master. He had once tried to give French lessons to the king and his court but the experiment was disastrous. A single French sentence like "Le chat voit bien même la nuit" [Cats can see well even at night] became "Zan ba biè na nogo" in Malinké which literally means "the vagina of Zan's momma sticky sauce", and Djigui concluded the French was a shameful language unfit for a faithful Muslim and great chief. This version of facts is however contested. As they say, the king understood clearly the difference between French and Malinké but he deliberately chose not to speak French for strategic reasons, keeping the interpreter as a buffer between himself and the colonial power.

In the final stage of the novel, we are introduced to the beginnings of the political development of modern African state. This is not only a time of struggle against colonialism but this is also a time that splits internally society, community and family. Djigui's family is divided under new political pressure: he and his son, Kélétigui are the members of RDA (Rassemblement démocratique africain) whereas Béma joins the French camp. Although Djigui becomes reconciled with Béma, he refuses to support him in the territory's first parliamentary elections. As a result, Béma is defeated by Touboug, an RDA militant and advocate of suppressing forced labour. Héraud is removed and Leport is appointed the new commander.

Aided by the French colonists, Bema takes revenge under the cover of description that he himself instigates to afflict the territory. In the wake of subsequent elections, he forms PREP (le Parti de la reconciliation pour l'émancipation et le progrès) and wins over RDA, which is accused of being a communist front organization. Allies are not unanimous regarding distillation of power. France joins America, participates in the ideology of free world. So Soba was proscribed, RDA banned, because of its alleged stand against liberalism and religion. Taking advantage of his father's illiteracy, Beme tricks the old man into signing a resignation from the RDA, a resignation that is translated into a denial, disavowal of his son Keletigui, his brother and a rival to power.

Djigui comes to know about his son's betrayal. He appears to be a broken man, a patriarch laden with a very heavy burden that he no longer wants to carry. He decides to give up his position and retreat to Joukor, the village of his ancestors. It signals the end of his regime, of his life and also the end of the Keita. He rides on his horse Sogbê that does not obey him for the first time. He attempts to kill it but himself collapses and dies, under the French rule in *monnè*. As usual in Mande culture, the king's death is announced by gunshots that are interpreted by the colonial power and Bema as the beginning of a riot. They call the capital for help alleging that they have been attacked by the communists. Some hours later, the village is cleared.

Thus, the novel is a compendium of all problems that Africa faced and still faces; colonialism and neocolonialism, complicity of the local rulers with the former masters, oppression, injustice, and oppression of women.

What we notice here is that in his total failure, Djigui is left alone to his destiny in complex social conditions. Thus, he stands out and becomes close to the tragic anti-hero of the modern novel.[39]

Postcolonial allegory and parody

Now it is in this oscillation between the epic and the novel that effects of meaning are to be found. The textual reality of the novel becomes a space when different generic forms and divergent discourses intersect one another and generates a new experience of reading.[40]

In *Monné* the process of constitution of the text in its discursive aspect is characterized by the emergence of two types of historical narratives. The first is the epic such as is received by its audience as true speech. The epic of Djigui for the explicit listeners, who are both the subjects and the target-audience, is an historical account that is as edifying as the traditional epic. The ancient conception of history prevails here and the plausibility of these stories depends on and is defined with respect to a common ideological and rhetorical code shared by the sender and the receiver assuring the legibility of the message by implicit or explicit references to a system of institutionalized values serving as real.[41]

Objective history is deciphered by the modern reader whose knowledge provides the unspoken subtext. *Monnè*, for him, would be a faithful chronicle of colonial era. Here the effects of the realist novel and objective historical narrative would converge. *Monnè* thus uses two parallel historical discourses, one being the negation of the other. The negation is an ironic reversal which produces parodic effects.[42] Spatio-temporal referenciation place Djigui potentially within the framework of the epic and the discourse of the griot Djeliba mediates this make-believe. But as the narrative unfolds, he is gradually stripped off epico-heroic qualities as it has been already observed in the discourse of the novel. The epic action projects the heroic character into a spatio-temporal itinerary where he emerges as the conqueror of the world. This epic dynamism is absent in *Monnè* which is, on contrary, heavily static. Djigui does not act. He is in incessant agitation suffering passively the consequences due to the action, especially of colonial power. Thus Monnè alludes to the crisis caused by colonization and represents a world of doom. This is what can justify an allegorical reading where the past of the epic world speaks for the present, the contemporary historical and political realities of Africa.[43] As a consequence, what the modern reader receives is an incredible parody of the epic.

Kourouma observes: "L'épopée glorifie, le roman doute."[44] [The epic glorifies, the novel interrogates.] The shift from the epic world to the world of the novel is achieved towards the end of the novel by through narrative instances. The first one is after the death of Djigui, when the collective narrative voice announces in a pointifical tone: "Après Djigui, notre pays a cessé d'être ce qu'il était."[45] [After Djigui, our country ceased to be what it was.] The second instance is just at the end when the same collective narrative voice makes observations about the postcolonial society in an absolutely desolate tone:

La Négritie et la vie continuèrent après ce monde, ces hommes. Nous attendaient le long de notre dur chemin : les indépendances politiques, le parti unique, l'homme charismatique, le père de la nation , les *proninciamientos* dérisoires , la révolution ; puis les autres mythes : la lutte pour l'unité nationale, pour le développement, le socialisme, la paix, l'autosuffisance alimentaire et les indépendances économiques : et aussi le combat contre la sècheresse, la famine, la guerre à la corruption, au tribalisme, au népotisme, à la délinquance, à l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, salmigondis de slogan qui à force d'être galvaudés nous ont rendu sceptiques, pelés, demi-sourds, demi-aveugles, aphones, bref, plus nègres que nous ne l'étions avant et avec eux.[46]

[Negritia, life continued after this world, these men. Awaited us, along our hard road: political independence, the single party, the charismatic leader, the Father of the Nation the laughable *pronunciamentos,* the revolution; and all the other myths besides: a struggle for national unity, development, socialism, peace, self-sufficiency of food and economic independence; and also the battle against draught, famine, corruption, tribalism, nepotism, delinquency, exploitation of men by men, hodgepodge of slogans which have rendered us sceptic, naked, half-deaf, half-blind, voiceless, in short more Negroes than we were before and with them.]

This sudden shift of narrative frame brings about a shift of space (from Soba to Africa), a shift of time (from mythical past to historical present, from colonial era to postcolonial times), a shift of agents (from inhabitants of Soba to Nigritia). This shows the continuity of suffering and reinforces the theme of *monnew.* Moreover, the use of personal pronoun 'we' is neither a simple linguistic mechanism nor a group of disparate individuals merged into a community. This implies a collective experience of a community, which the author himself shares. What is at issue here is a certain collectivized subjectivity which is distinct by its own trajectory of experience, specific in time. For Kourouma this is the African subjectivity which is not essentialized but profoundly historicized: a subjectivity which is problematized with an acute sense of history. It is this introspection – introspection of an unrealized past on the one hand and the void of the present on the other – which attributes to Kourouma's novel a testimonial, allegorical character.[47] In *Monnè* history is not a theme. It represents the substance upon which the African literary imagination is called upon to work. The events in Soba are a fictional reconstruction of contemporary Africa. Kourouma's novel thus presents introspective reflections on African history in its ruptures, tensions, dilemmas and contradictions. Through a certain form of fiction, which is based on the association of the historical vision it embodies with the forms of an indigenous orality felt as a necessary dimension of the mode of expression of this vision. This association creates a new harmony of consciousness animated by an ethical urgency to meditate upon the irony of history and motivates the author in his creative endeavours to engage himself in the dialectics of orality/textuality in relation to the emergence of an alternative African modernity.

It may be worth noting here that the parodic energies in *Monnè* which are unleashed from the orality / textuality dichotomy have larger implications for the very process of African imaginative expression at the level of politics of culture. Against the greater pull toward homogenization of reality as in certain versions of Négritude literature, it is the inherent tension arising out of a desire to be African (because writing takes place in French) which articulates the African imagination. Faced with the pressures of global marketplace, this anxiety of African-ness is not an expression of a national identity, nor a recovery of an essentialized identity, nor even simply going ‘black and white’; it is to complicate the issues of identity and representation in a terrain of conflicting contours and shifting relations where several assumptions about language, history and narrative mode are severely challenged.[48]

The entry of the colonial/postcolonial subject into modernity, albeit into the Euro-American archive, without scripted text, marks the beginning of a particular form of alienation, the tyranny of destructive silence being thrust upon him.[49,50] Confronted with the silence generated by the oppressive design of metropolitan modes of expression, the postcolonial author either retreats further into abyss of silence, or gets assimilated to metropolitan system of expression, or adopts a form of discursive agency, which, in the margins of modernity, defies the silence caused by the colonial/neo-colonial event.[51] When a secure sense of being-in-history is lost, a new sense of belonging in the world is forged, in other words, imagined. Kourouma’s novel is exemplary in that it explores the possibility of expressive freedom through narrative reconstruction of Africa and discerns, for African imagination, as Abiola Irele thinks, a principle of transcendence in history.[52]

Chapter 5

The Language of Alienation

The story of *English, August* is that of a young IAS officer, Agastya Sen, posted in Madna, a small provincial town for a year's training in administration. He has an elitist background, the only son of a Governor and educated in a convent school of Darjeeling. Agastya is known as Ogu to his old-fashioned relatives, August to his westernized friends and Mr. Sen to his colleagues. During his stay at school, he was also called 'English' for his ardent wish to be an Anglo-Indian with a name like Alan or Keith and to speak in their accent. Exposed only to metropolitan life in Calcutta and Delhi and to people for whom success is defined in materialistic measures, he feels totally lost in the provincial setting of Madna. A thoroughly urbanized person encounters the provincial India in strange circumstances of professional binding. The unfamiliarity of Madna, though very much part of India, makes his experience neither exciting nor educative. Passing trends and letters received from friends accentuate his feeling of boredom, loss and nostalgia. His acute sense of being lost makes him escape into the private world of his room where music, marijuana and masturbation help him relive his past. He tries to negotiate with his metropolitan sensibilities, the complex realities of life in a backward town. And this negotiation is painful, pathetic, humorous and ridiculous at the same time. A dislocated self indeed!

There is a latent malaise in the background as long as his mind is preoccupied with mundane pleasures of metropolitan life of Calcutta and Delhi. Frivolous luxuries afforded by these cities have obviously conditioned his mind to just one way of life. His background has been a powerful alienating force which has left a sense of displacement. Nissim Ezekiel observes:

> It is Agastya's Darjeeling school that establishes his alienation of which he remains conscious virtually through this Indian story.[1]

Agastya has no special devouring interest and very little ambition in life. Megalopolitan cities offered him the luxury of anonymity. But in Madna he cannot remain anonymous. By virtue of being an IAS officer, he becomes the focus of attention. This demands a reorientation of his perception. In the absence of familiar diversions, his mind now starts paying attention to little things he never experienced:

> Outside the Indian hinterland rushed by. Hundreds of kilometers of a familiar yet unknown landscape, seen countless times through train windows, but never experienced - his life till then had been profoundly urban. Shabby stations of small towns where the train didn't stop. The towns that looked nice from a train window in curious patient eyes and weather beaten bicycles

> at a level-crossing, muddy children and buffalo at a waterhole. To him, these places had been, at best, names out of newspapers, where floods and caste wars occurred, and entire Harijan families were murdered, where some Prime minister took his helicopter just after a calamity or just before the elections. Now he looked out at this remote world and felt a little unsure, he was going to spend months in a dot in this hinterland.[2]

He realized that in Calcutta and Delhi, his mind was much more busy with trivia. There his mind was just too cluttered up for him to notice anything. Now he became aware of himself, his physical needs, his confused mind and even things like food and sleep which he had taken for granted earlier, now acquire an overwhelming significance.

> Food became very important in Madna, and he was soon to encourage and concentrate on his stomach pangs. For hunger was evidence of one's good health, and thinking about eating itself gave him something to do. It made him calculate which houses in Madna he could attack for lunches and dinners, and if complied to it, Vasant's garbage, then the menu for it. A very few days in the district, and he was sick, even scared, of abstract thought — the problem of food gave him something concrete for cogitation.[3]

> In Madna he could never take sleep for granted. He would repeat the activities of the afternoon, thinking that for more than twenty

> years he had always slept well, except for one or two nights when excitement has kept him awake, like the night before the class picnic when he was seven, when he'd roamed around the house all night, overwrought because he'd be wearing his new jeans for the picnic. But in Madna, he seemed to have appalled sleep. When he finally dropped off, it was out of a weariness even with despair.[4]

This disparity between the two worlds creates a profound sense of dislocation:

> Anchorlessness- that was to be one of his chaotic concerns in that uncertain year; battling a sense of waste was to be another. Other fodder too in the farrago of his mind, self-pity in an uncongenial clime, the incertitude of his reactions to Madna, his job and his inability to relate to it – other abstractions too, his niche in the world, his future, the elusive mocking nature of happiness, the possibility of its attainment.[5]

Agastya's realization of his own self becomes important when he confronts the other. Till that moment he was not aware of his own self. This confrontation constitutes the crux of the novel.

Dislocation of the self

This dislocation can be argued to be symptomatic of the Macaulay effect. During the colonial rule, the literary presence of English in India served the purpose of the imperial ruling class. The consequence of the emphasis on English as a glorious literature produced by the great civilization was that the Indians were initiated into the colonial space of English which they hoped to help them integrate into that space. But contrary to much what was expected, this is what produced the predicament of the dislocated self; predicament resulting in alienation and anguish.

The concept of the dislocated self in Chatterjee's novel is central to the colonial disruption of the urban educated Indian personality in terms of multiple splits: split between man and his environment, between man and his inner being. Behind the split is the rupture that occurred in the psyche of the English educated Indian urban youth — an urban westernized English educated person. This process of internalization, on the one hand, devalued, in the perception of the new westernized Indian, the grandeur of nativity and on the other, did not provide a sustainable substitute for the devalued old structure of values. The consequence was that, it was mired in the quagmire of challenges and failures. One of the consequences of the colonial encounter was the collapse of certainties. These certainties have been that the world was comprehensible and things were on the whole getting better, because at the foundational level, these were linked to the grand project of enlightenment modernity. The conviction was infinite progress in man's material achievements and the spread of rationality. Reason was believed to be formed by the natural progress of civilization. Kant’s “What is Enlightenment” explains the salient message for the project of modernity that depended on the autonomy of reason and self.[6] But the experiences of the holocaust shattered confidence in nationality and resulted in destabilization of the western man’s consciousness. With this moral confusion, the conceptual foundation of western modernity (its universalist position on rationality and morality) was rigorously interrogated.

The confusion was in fact a serious rupture at the level of consciousness caused by the pathologies generated by modernity. This a disenchanted world marked by moral ambivalence collapse of consensual human values, individual’s crisis of identity and a pervasive sense of guilt. In short, an incoherent world. This is a form of rootless unhappiness. The very lack of coherence resulted in the emergence of a personality split at the inner level wing to the loss of anchorage of certainties regarding the present and the future.

Agastya’s personality can be linked to the consequences of the encounter between the British colonization and the Indian society. So it is not out of place here to undertake a mapping of the colonized mind. The colonialist desire is driven by the conviction that it was the moral obligation of the Europeans constituted by reason-driven progress to enlighten the vast humanity which remained, according to the western measure of human progress, unenlightened.

One of the consequences of this is the process of assimilation of values and perceptions and consequently inability to connect with the stream of cultural sustenances. This condition renders the self deprived of emotional sustenance and lonely. And solitude brings frustration and despair. This self is fashioned in unheroic mould of moral passivity and self-centredness.

English, August is a novel which depicts Indian kitsch in all its forms: relics of the British empire like the district bureaucracy and the language it speaks; temples, the monsoon, Gandhi, savants; the enduring contours of underdevelopment and more. This novel can be read at two levels. At one level it is a commentary on Indian bureaucracy: corruption, highhandedness, inefficiency, oppressive routine, utter indifference of the administration to the eradication of economic underdevelopment and social evils; acute class-consciousness and hierarchy; little snobberies and petty jealousies of the so-called public servants.

But at another level, deeper and more sensitive, it is the portrayal of the predicament of the western educated modern youth. There is a profound sense of dislocation, through which the protagonist journeys. This journey is pathetic, humorous and ridiculous. This is a journey from rootlessness to failed maturity, a struggle to come to terms with oneself. This dislocation is the absence of any meaningful communication with the society at large. In this sense, Agastya represents the broader and deeper perspective of the age.*Agastya considers himself misplaced and does not enjoy the role he has earned by virtue of his academic credentials. He finds happiness neither in the collectorate nor in the circuit house, neither among his colleagues nor when he is alone. He does not seem to fit in that world. Opting for the IAS does not offer him any meaningful context of self-realization. His acute sense of dislocation is produced by his awareness of colonial legacy on the one hand and the collision of two mutually opposed worlds within him. He is visibly irritated but that does not allow him to make positive protest. He does understand that is much that is amiss in the bureaucratic system he has joined but he has no willingness to change what is not desirable. Another illustrative example is his reaction after learning about the Monthly Revenue Officers' meeting. His first reaction is how to skip it. The only course open to him was to pretend sickness. Many such examples can be found in the text.

Narrative of banality and Realism

On the dawn of independence in 1947, there was a debate as to whether the colonial bureaucratic apparatus called ICS should be replaced by a central civil service. In spite of the demand for a decentralized bureaucracy from certain political quarters, Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Deputy Prime Minister argued for a uniform administrative structure which would neutralize sectarian provincial forces and ensure national unity. So, ratified in Article 312 of the Indian constitution the IAS was in place. Although Patel's vision was a clean and service-oriented committed bureaucracy independent of local, communal and political bias, it became, in course of time, notorious for corruption, red-tapism, inefficiency and insensitivity. An Indian Government report, published in 2008 has observed:

> For the common man [in India], bureaucracy denotes routine and repetitive procedures, paper-work and delays. This, despite the fact that the Government and bureaucracy exist to facilitate the citizens in the rightful pursuit of their legal activities. Rigidities of the system, over-centralization of powers, highly hierarchical. ...functioning with a large number of intermediary levels,

> delaying [the] finalization of any decision, divorce of authority from accountability and the tendency towards micro-management, have led to a structure in which form is more important than substance and procedures are valued over end-results and outcomes.[7]

Chatterjee's novel is structured around this experience which marks the narrative's organizing principle of feeling. Let us take a few examples from the novel. Whenever Agastya enters a government building, his eyes are drawn to people waiting patiently in queue outside:

> On the left [he could see] the old and shabby office buildings that had ignored all the decades of an undramatic history. The flags, patient in the heat… The people who waited for government to be kind to them, in white dhoti, kurta and napkin.[8]

Then there are the government employees themselves, many of whom, if posted away from home, are simply biding their time until they are transferred to a congenial place. And, of course, like everybody else, Agastya is waiting, sitting through interminable meetings, staring blankly up at the ceiling, reading his Marcus Aurelius and killing time until his year of training is over .As the days pass by, Agastya gradually sinks into a state of debilitating apathy and indifference:

> When he woke up he hardly heard the sounds of the morning. On some afternoons he could not leave the bed even to roll a smoke.[9]

Sometimes he lies in bed contemplating suicide. In this extreme state of lethargy, nothing seems to him carrying meaning and significance. This lack of sustaining meaning is also Agastya's narrative. He is terribly bored, lacking in motivation to do something positive. The whole narrative is caught up in a vicious circle of endless repetition.

Peter Brooks' remark is noteworthy here. According to him, all narratives are driven by an internal energy. It is this energy that links beginning and end across the middle creating a field of force. This energy, Brooks argues, is ultimately generated by a "dynamic of desire, i.e., the desire to wrest beginnings and ends from the uninterrupted flow of middles, from temporality itself; the search for that significant closure that would illuminate the sense of an existence, the meaning of life."[10]

In *English, August*, there is this problem of will and desire. The protagonist is incapable of investing himself in or engaging himself with the world with sustained will and desire. The middle becomes not a field of force but a field of static repetitions where lack of motivation to move forward checks the progression of the narrative to achieve the closure and to discharge meaning. Indeed, at various points of time, the narrative comes to a halt where no way out seems possible. Let us take this instance which describes Agastya's return to Madna after a brief trip to Delhi:

> He unpacked slowly. He put back on the shelf the *Gita*, Marcus Orelus and his diary. He had hardly remembered them on his holiday… he trimmed his beard slowly, with care. The hazards seem to have multiplied greatly in his absence. The late-afternoon sun touched the cassettes on the table. He browsed through his diary. Now he has nothing to record. He picked up the *Madna District Gazetteer* from beside his canvas shoes on the bottom shelf. He read a paragraph or two but the words didn't register. He then lay down to watch the ceiling.[11]

These sentences are framed around some micro-occurrences that inform about the daily dreams of Agastya. But what is ironical is that this apparent linearity marked by juxtaposition of sentences/occurrences gradually slips into vicious circularity. This circularity is the loss of a signified because it impedes the teleological march of the narrative towards a desirable ending where the final meaning could be discharged.

During the course of the novel, whatever Agastya does, he does repeatedly, ritually. So there is nothing there to tell except this repetition which drains out the narrative's energy to such an extent that its *narratability* comes under threat. Each narrative time unit is filled with a content and this supposedly 'new' content is always everywhere the same. Here are a few examples of iterative account of Agastya's daily chores:

> On most days the [official] jeep came for him between eleven and twelve. [...] The driver of the jeep… was usually unable to

> differentiate one district office from another. So, for almost an hour on some of the [good] days, he would drive Agastya around the town, just trying to locate an office.[12]

> [During the afternoon] he could doze a little,… daydream, fantasize, think of his past, reorganize it, try to force out of it a pattern, masturbate without joy, sometimes smoke some marijuana, read a little Marcus Aurelius, or just lie down and think of the sun shrivelling up the world outside.[13]

> On most nights that he didn't eat with the collector, dinner was early, at about eight, because Vasant liked to sleep early.[14]

> In Madna [Agastya] could never take sleep for granted. He would repeat the activities of the afternoon, thinking that for more than twenty years he had always slept well except for one or two nights when excitement had kept him awake… But in Madna he seemed to have appalled sleep. When he finally dropped off, it was out of a weariness even with despair.[15]

So, what is irrevocably threatened is the 'narratability', not just the narrative's kinetic energy. The narrative reaches a position where nothing new, nothing different can be narrated, because the narrative itself collapses into iterative state.

> Under the circumstances, […] to narrate one day is to narrate everyday, and to narrate everyday is to narrate the same day innumerable times, for there is no way of distinguishing between these quotidian episodes, no flashes of significance or uniqueness that will allow us to identify one day as being antecedent or subsequent to any other day.[16]

According to Gérard Genette, a *singulative* narrative is the one "where the singularness of the narrative statement corresponds to the singularness of the narrated event."[17] An *iterative* narrative is the one "where a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event."[18] As opposed to the iterative narrative being incorporated into the singulative as background or description (as in the traditional novel), the iterative dimension is constantly and consistently foregrounded and at times privileged over the singulative and the singulative is embedded anecdotically in the iterative. This is what severely challenges the progression or, put it in other words, does not allow the narrative dynamics to move beyond the world of "always", "everyday", "usually". This is how the dilatory qualities of the bureaucratic system furtively slips into the narrative structure of *English, August*. Like the protagonist Agastya, the novel loses its energy not only to continue but to conclude, that is to say, to achieve what Brooks calls "a final plenitude meaning."[19] This failure to move forward ultimately leads to interminability in the narrative where the significance in retrospective characteristic of a traditional narrative closure is never achieved. According to Roland Barthes, every narrative has its own dilatory area with delays and stoppages through which the reader has to reach the end.[20] In *English, August*, this dilatory space is strategically extended indefinitely so that the final discharge of meaning is perpetually deferred. At various moments, Agastya himself realizes this threat of interminability. He cites often very the following line from the *Bhagavat Gita*: "[...] many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the man who lacks determination."[21] He also describes his life as being characterized by "movement without purpose, an endless ebb and flow, from one world to another."[22] Much like the narrative, his struggles to impose order and patterns of meaning onto this existence, he finally recognizes the futility of his efforts for mastering the chaos around him. His personal narrative is thus getting enmeshed in the larger narrative of Indian bureaucracy.

We know that the threat of linear interminability will not be realized because the novel has a finite dimension but its suspension of teleology exemplifies "a whole social sphere that seems to run on a principle of purposiveness without purpose."[23] Written in a realist vein and so given its generic conditions Chatterjee's narrative conveys the reality of bureaucratic existence — interminable meetings, unnecessarily complicated and repetitive procedures, it inevitably reduces its own readability although it is essential to maintain the reader's interest during its diachronic unfolding. Chatterjee accommodates these conflicting generic imperatives by ensuring the minimal condition of "merely interesting".[24]

The threat of interminability generates the threat of nonmeaning, the threat that the narrative will fail to deliver the end outcome, coherence and significance expected of a fictional discourse. Meaning is connected with the consummation of a process. It is bound up with termination.[25] The meaning of any given factor cannot be assessed until the whole process is past. In other words, it is primarily through endings, both anticipated and realized, that we understand beginnings and middles and finally try to derive plenitude of meaning.

Agastya's struggle to derive some kind of meaning from the life he lives in the provinces — an order that would make all the disconnected trivialities and absurdities of his experiences somehow cohere. It is not surprising that this discrepancy between meaning and experience makes him contemplate ending his life.

> Sometimes, he would lie in bed and remember Prashant, his school friend who had been perfectly ordinary and likable, but who had opted out, one June afternoon, five years ago, by stepping into the path of a truck, to be minced into the melting tar of the VIP Road, leaving behind only a note saying he was sorry.[26]

For Agastya, suicide represents the ultimate release and the deepest renunciation of what one feels. What he is hoping to achieve here is a total quiescence that would end interminability and give retrospective significance to what has happened before. In this respect, he cites Marcus Aurelius "O, the consolation of being able to thrust aside and cast into oblivion, every tiresome and intrusive impression, and in a trice be utterly at peace."[27]

But even this kind of cessation requires too much effort and so, the narrative continues without any sense of purpose, direction and urgency.

When the novel arrives at the ending, it would hardly be considered as an ending at all. It doesn't provide "the complex of narrative summations that would match … the external termination of discourse with its internal closure."[28] In other words, there is no resolution at the end.

In the final moment of the novel, the proairetic is projected beyond the novel's spatial and temporal frame. It concludes by an external prolepsis, by making a statement on an event that will take place only after the discourse itself is concluded. The novel's final sentence reads as follows: "He watched the passing hinterland and looked forward to meeting his father."[29]

This instance of deferral problematizes the traditional form of Bildungsroman where the protagonist eventually manages to find a place for himself in the world by reconciling the competing imperatives of self and society. This failed maturity does not allow the narrative a capacity for initiating change pushing it to the threat of circularity and eternal recurrence.

But the novel's active pursuit of "nonmeaning" is only partially achieved. The descriptions of Agastya's daily routine, however inconsequential they may be, they still produce a secondary layer of meaning representing the thematic of banality itself.[30] The novel creates "a world in which we are bored but never quite bored enough to leave (or to stop reading), a world in which meaning recedes but never quite disappears, a world in which the end terminates but never quite closes."[31]

Apparently a realist novel, *English, August* destabilizes from within its own governing principles by resisting closure diminishing the proairotic and suspending meaning. A realist novel is predicated upon an overarching significance and a final discharge of meaning. The narrative of Agastya, (dis)located in the bureaucracy and consequently suffering boredom complicates the aesthetic impulses of literary realism by bringing them into crisis. A commitment to verisimilitude demands the representation of reality through the epic precept of objectivity. But this, when done, refuses to feel the world with significance.

Language of dislocation

In this collision, every kind of language fails, inadequate to the concentric contours of Agastya's experience. This incongruity which constitutes the crux of the central problematic of the novel, the protagonist's cultural alienation from contemporary small-town India is posed in the following passage:

> Dr. Prem Krishen of Meerut University has written a book on E.M. Foster, India's darling English man — most of us seem to be so *grateful* that he wrote that novel about India. Dr. Prem Krishen holds a Ph.D on Jane Austen from Meerut University. Have you ever been to Meerut? A vile place, but comfortably Indian. What is Jane Austen doing in Meerut?"… "Why is some Jat teenager in Meerut reading Jane Austen? Why does a place like Meerut have a course in English at all? Only because the Prem Krishens of the country need a place where they can teach this rubbish?"… "That's why education is a real challenge. And in the years to come as a bureaucrat you'll be in a position to do something about these things, things that matter.[32]

Although Amitava Kumar observes this as “narrow and futile debates about the relevance of English in the Indian context”, he acknowledges Chatterjee’s “refreshing language, the “boisterous, blasphemous mixing of words and world views to lampoon the hollow pieties of post-Independence India.”[33] Where does this newness of the satirical wit lead to? I would argue here that Chatterjee’s perusal of the metropolitan man’s encounter with the ‘inner’ India, although thematically effected as ‘nonmeaning’, the meaning is achieved at the linguistic level. Formal Hindi and standardized Indian public School English constitute a metropolitan national subjectivity that enacts violence on both the self and the other through a process of ‘othering’. As against the linguistic and cultural alienation which is at the centre of administrative chaos and political inertia, Chatterjee formulates a language of the body which privileges a space of migration between the disjunctive worlds of the alienated metropolitan subject, displaced in small-town Madna.

Agastya, named after the great sage, Agastya Muni is labelled “August” at the elite boarding school in Darjeeling. The Tibetan local students scornfully referred to him as “hey English” because of the accented English he speaks with his Anglo-Indian friends. Having a mixed origin - part Bengali part Goanese in ethnicity, Agastya/August is constantly reminded of the absurdity of the cultural and linguistic worlds that collide in him. His Pultukaku tells him: “You are an absurd combination, a boarding-school-English-literature education and an obscure name from Hindu myth.”[34] Converted by his English education, Agastya finds it impossible to fit into the rural and small-town India removed far away from the metropoles. Born in the Coca-Cola generation Agastya is less concerned over issues of vernacular preference than about the status of the English which is the cause of his alienation in small-town Madna. He is represents Madna in the following manner:

> Glimpses of Madna *en route:* cigarette-and-paan dhabas, disreputable food stalls, both lit by fierce kerosene lamps, cattle and clanging rickshaws on the road and the rich sound of trucks in slush from the overflowing drain; he felt as though he was living someone else's life.[35]

He describes himself as a fallen Adam "and spends most of his days in Madna in a small darkened room masturbating and smoking marijuana with occasional interactions with his colleagues, his servant and other dislocated souls such as himself (the corporate Dhrubo, or the T-shirt and Calvin Klein-loving Bhatia. If we read carefully the ironical subtitle of the novel "An Indian story", what we observe is that Agastya's narrative is not a typical Indian story, since the typical story narrates migrations to the global North.[36] Agastya's migration is centripetal moving to the under developed parts of the inner India. Imprisoned in his cosmopolitan sensibility, he sees bizarre discordant existence in Madna as existentially absurd and hyperbolically incongruous:

> Madna and Delhi seem two extreme points of an unreal existence: the only palpable thing was the rhythm of the beast beneath him, a wonder, that could link such disparate worlds together.[37]

Agastya escapes to the body avoiding human contact and longing for "one place, any place, with no consciousness in his mind of any other."[38] Lying on his bed, Agastya reflects:

> He could even make do with Madna, if his mind would not bourgeon with the images of Delhi or of Calcutta, what's with Meera in the Lake Gardens, long chats about life and books and sex, and her hesitant revelation of her virginity; and beyond that Singapore, where everything was ordered, and Illinois, with its infinite varieties of ham. It was convulsing, the agony of worlds in his head.[39]

In these positions every kind of language fails; every kind of language proves to be inadequate to the hybrid contours of Agastya's postcolonial experience. His language turns burlesque. Here is an example. He converts a serious Dryden text into a lascivious fantasy:

> Tell her [a new female teacher who exposes to *Absalom and Achitophel*], Yes, my lovely bitch, when my hands are full with your fat buttocks, my mouth on each breast, I shall give you lust-gnaws between your absalom and achitopel.[40]

The burlesque energies of Agastya's language are used for several ends. Firstly, for Agastya, the collision of worlds creates not an alienation but irony and incongruity. Secondly, this irony also satirizes the languages of the Indian interior. Thirdly, that is also harnessed to a masturbating laughing languorous body – "the beast underneath" – which becomes his only link between the colliding worlds and hence it becomes the material basis of Agastya's linguistic idiom, a space between conflicting vernacular and English tongues. The intuition of the body twists the use of English. It could be argued that the body is posited as the only stable reality one really owns in this space of colliding worlds. The notations of the body are also hybrid mixing English and Hindi, Bengali and English, Urdu and American. The first page of the novel records the "amazing mix, the English we speak" in Agastya's self-conscious use of the term "hazaar fucked". The Americanism "fucked" combined with "hazaar" becomes his linguistic recourse to a violently discordant world in which he fails miserably to place himself meaningfully.

The body is not simply a bridge between conflicting linguistic and cultural worlds but also a site where epistemological violence is felt and fought. A communication of and through the body, I would argue, becomes resistance to incongruities due to Agastya's migrant self entrapped in disjunctive worlds. As against any officialese (standardized English and national vernacular Hindi) that has no relevance in the "inner" India, he searches for a socially enabling idiom for living in the remote town of Madna. In this sense, Chatterjee's use of a boisterous carnivalesque linguistic register radically poses a phenomenological grounding for linguistic praxis.

Chapter 6

The Poetics of Resistance

The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez[1] by Sony Labou Tansi is one of the most influential novels in francophone African literature. Lorsa Lopez kills his wife, Estina Benta out of fury for her alleged adulterous relationship with a man. Although this murder takes place in front of everybody, nobody intervenes and nobody raises a voice of protest. Moreover, the police of Nsanga-Norda, the new capital of the region, comes to take notice of this crime only after forty six days.[2] Estina Bronzario, the central character of the novel and the symbol of resistance, who fights for the honour of that person, protests against the delay of justice.

This powerful narrative based on a real life incident which the author witnessed[3], brings into focus the opposition between the western thought and a counter discourse which the author proposes as a response to it. I would like to analyze here the discursive space of the novel in which the modalities of resistance are worked out through the ideological counter-discourse. In this context, we would try to understand the meaning of resistance and the significance of ideological discourse and counter-discourse from the postcolonial perspective. The analysis would be based on the logic of discourses in the text, be it masculinist or feminist. It would be thus possible to evaluate the importance of ideological counter-discourse in the postcolonial context through the parody of feminist discourse.

Meaning of 'Resistance'

'Resistance' means refusal to accept something and stopping it from happening. In the postcolonial perspective, the postcolonial subject 'resists', in this sense, the oppressive power structure. Homi Bhabha thinks that 'resistance':

> is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the science of cultural difference and reimplicate them…[4]

Viewed from this angle 'resistance' is the disagreement with a particular version of reality presented as a proven ideology. Thus, it becomes an act of contesting the functional mechanism of ideology. If a culture forms the identity of a group or an individual, the identity is the resultant of education which allows him/her to live in his/her environment. To put it otherwise, the act of living includes managing reality and the culture fashions this management. If ideology aims to manage the reality and functions as the basis of power and structure, Ania Loomba's observation deserves attention:

> Ideology does not, as it is often assumed, refer to political ideals alone. It includes all our 'mental frameworks', our beliefs, concepts and ways of expression, our relationship to the world. It is one of the most complex and elusive terms in social thought and the object of continuing debates.[5]

Ideology is conditioned by the logic of power which pervades the domain of culture. As Guilbert has pointed out, the ideological discourse is the one which is founded by itself and seeks to pervade all the domains of society.[6]

In the colonial and postcolonial contexts, the ideological discourse is a dominating one imposing itself on the society through diffusion of ideals on which it is founded. In this sense, the ideological discourse does not tolerate any other discourse which threatens to destabilize it. As opposed to the ideological discourse, which is hegemonic in nature, the ideological counter-discourse is the way a particular group of individual responds to it. Within this conceptual framework, we would endeavour to understand the meaning of 'feminist resistance' in *Seven Solitudes* and its implications at the textual level.

Feminist resistance

In the large body of fiction regarded as representative of the African canon, one can observe distinct male bias in the representation of women. Only recently women authors are being accorded the status they deserve in the African literary scenario. This is because feminist critics have begun to redefine all the ways we deal with literature so as to do justice to women's concerns and values. Judith Fetterley emphasizes the need that women read the male oriented literature so as to become resisting readers.[7] Women have been represented either as idealized projection of men's desires (the Mother African trope that is prevalent in most African male writing) or as demonic projections of men's sexual resentments (the malignant witch, the prostitute, the destructive sensual temptress).[8] While many feminist critics had denounced the literature written by men of its depiction of women as marginal, docile and subservient to men's desires, interests and needs, I would argue here that Sony Labou Tansi has been able to rise above the sexual prejudices of his time to understand the cultural processes that have shaped the characters of women and forced upon them a negative social role.[9]

In *Seven Solitudes*, Sony Labou places a female character at the centre of his narrative in order to critique a corrupt male-dominated society. This itself is a radical move since women are portrayed by the author not only to critique the post colonial state but as possible sources of social transformation in society.

The portrayal of Estina Bronzario shows us the difficulties encountered by male or female in the post colonial society. She doesn't fit easily in the image of the African women found in most canonical writings since through her action she goes against the ‘Mother Africa’ trope.[10] This trope, Stratton argues, “operates against the interest of women excluding them implicitly if not explicitly from authorship and citizenship. It is because of this exclusion there has been a significant move within feminism towards seeking better representations of women in fiction. In a predominantly male-produced fictional works, if the author is the subject-artist, the woman is an aesthetic object representing the repository of the author’s values, meaning and vision. The image that is inherent in this kind of work is that of mother, sister, prostitute, witch etc. This is because women are defined in relation to men rather than in her truest self. Whether canonized as a mother or stigmatized as a prostitute, her experiences are trivialized.[11]

Sony Labou attempts to deconstruct this scenario through the character of Estina Bronzario who is devoid of sons but is still able to command a lot of respect from both the men and women in society. She is a woman who refuses to accept gender limitations:

> Not only does Estina Bronzario issue decrees, such as the strike against sexual relations, she envisages a new type of woman whose role begins with replacing men.[12]

As compared to Achebe’s Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah* who represents a conservative male view, Estina Bronzario has a radical vision and also radical in her action. She challenges both the authorities and the men in the text. The way she defines the laws of the state, gains respect and awe amongst the inhabitants of Valancia. She is assertive and refuses to be assigned a particular role in society which is considered fit for a woman because for her "women are also men".[13] She is also able to transform the most hard-nosed men through her goodness. Sarngata Nola, who had said that he would free all the prostitutes by marrying them, changed his attitude when his relationship with Estina Bronzario became one of mutual respect. He is seen emerging from the water hand in hand with her.

Her ability to organize and unify women gave her a lot of power in Valancia. In fact, through her character Sony Labou chose how power can be redistributed between men and women. Estina Bronzario is respected for her unbending honour and integrity. "I was born in honour and in honour I shall die," she reprimands the government notary.[14] The people of the coast have their honour to afford, unlike the "meat-eaters" of Nsanga-Norda. When the men of Valancia suffered from the effects of the sex strike she organizes, they beg gods "to summon [her] to his holy paradise" but Carlanzo Mana and Sarngata Nola respect her strength and determination. Indeed, she symbolizes "the dignity and courage of the people of the coast. All the towns of the Coast, and even Nsanga-Norda, had a Plazia do Bronzio".[15] She is raised to almost mythical stature as she crosses the bayou like a giantess, gazing back at her daughter, Valancia. With the allegorical significance of the water – the sea, the lake, the old harbour, she is identified with the natural universe - sea, sky and rock. Although Estina Bronzario is compared with nature, Sony Labou is not resorting to the kind of patriarchy which compares women with nature and men with culture. In the universe of Sony Labou, the natural world is associated with mysterious power that can have a positive influence on people. Even the male characters like Sarngata Nola are affected by nature in a positive way.

Estina Bronzario knows that she is to be murdered one day. She prophesies her future death by saying that one day, the mayor will be waiting for the police to come and investigate the crime of her killing as in the case of Estina Benta. However she does not want to compromise. She humiliates Narthez Coma mercilessly. Her granddaughter complains about her hard nature, while the epileptic younger daughter of Elmano Zola shouts out, “to hell with all that rubbish about honour and dignity”.[16] Before Estina Bronzario dies she quietly ends the sex embargo. Machedo Palma has had a vision of her after her murder, in which she invites him to know that “hate is over”.[17]

By portraying male characters as the sources of evil forces of destruction operation and exploitation, Sony Labou is not resorting to a manichean allegory of gender because he does not just turn gender divides around. He only criticizes those male characters in positions of power because it is that power which corrupts them. The darker side of human nature which is vulnerable to the corruption of human values and in the destruction of human spirit and body is found in various figures like the mayor and the civil servant Carlanzo Mana. For Sony Labou no representative of authoritarian power can hold on to positive values for long. In relation to the men invested with power in a male-dominated society, women as subordinates are required to develop certain psychological characteristics that please the dominating authority.[18] This means that women are not always in a position to challenge the male authority. In *Seven Solitudes,* patriarchal authority generates resistance. This resistance is embodied in characters who insist on honour and dignity and is not marked by any kind of violent rebellion. What we find here in the novel is that the protagonist or antagonist is marked by strength and conviction. This implies that there is a need for redefining the way in which people think in society. Estina’s non-conformism to conventional wisdom brings her the wrath of males in society: “Make her die. She’s stopping us from reconstituting the first flesh of man”.[19] Although in his portrayal of Estina Bronzario, Sony Labou endeavours to debunk the myth about women’s subordination to men, he is still using the language of patriarchy in a different way. The fact that Estina Bronzario’s women as well as Estina Bronzario herself were to do the cooking seems to suggest that women will still do what is expected of them. But what is important here is that he has tried to debunk the false assumptions about motherhood as a natural endowment of women.

Female writers have long recognized the need for the creation of a new language for women who are taught in the process of being socialized to internalize the reigning ideology, i.e. the conscious and unconscious presuppositions about male superiority and thus to derogate their own sex. Sony Labou’s protagonist can be seen as the vehicle of transformation because the author completely rejects the patriarchal world of his novel. The universe of *Seven Solitudes* is depicted as completely absurd and illogical where none of the values expressed by the male characters could be accepted. Indeed, the novel argues for a new way of thinking, envisions a new life-world, an alternative way of life. By using a non-realist mode of fictional representation, Sony Labou is able to represent women’s concerns better than any other African canonical writers. Through magic realism he is able to counter the tendency towards the romantic presentation of gender found in many writers.[20] His narrative style is apt to present a woman protagonist who is able to be both a disruptive and cohesive force in the society. Estina Bronzario is firmly situated in a specific women community, having a special relationship with other women. It is from this community that she launches attack on a male dominated society.

Katherine Frank observes that in African societies, barrenness is the worst affliction that a woman can endure.[21] To lack reproductive power deprives her of her identity and reason for living. Women are believed to have a natural innate propensity for motherhood. Estina Bronzario is a compelling example of the opposite of this belief. This is illustrated by her reluctance to fetch the triplets of her daughter when their mother died. Bronzario is characterized by strength and conviction, and this has been epitomized by her reading the women into a sex strike in revolt against the men when Lorsa Lopez kills his wife Estina Benta, in a feat of jealousy. Moreover, her defence of the women is not attached to the sexual – generative force, but to an enduring sense of justice.[22] In this regard, men bow down before her in defence, in contrast to the familiar scenario in male-produced literature where women are down on knee before the men:

> Nogmede came and knelt before Estina Bronzario, in exactly the same spot where Fr Bona had knelt, and begged her to leave poor Nertez Coma in peace; he'd been nibbled quite enough already by destiny.[23]

Sony Labou uses the notion of psychological double to project the contesting male voices in the society. On the one hand, there are those who see women as instruments of reproduction:

> A bloody mess which has lost us the opportunity to make children...She’s stopping us from doing your will. She’s stopping us from people in the earth from Gihon to the Pishon...[24]

And, on the other, there are those who view women as equals, the voice of whom is insinuated by Fr Bona:

> Gentlemen, I’m on Estina Bronzario’s site and so, too, is God. The vagina isn’t an instrument for your pleasure or bagpipes for your spit. It isn’t a depository for lice or a passage for squalid transactions.[25]

In such a phallocentric society, the female sexual organ cannot escape the male’s need to control it through language. The male characters like Sarngata Nola use patriarchal language to define women as a way of justifying their attitudes. He expresses his views on the female reproductive organ as a way of defending his attitude towards the group of women to accompany him:

> The vagina, Estina Bronzario, isn’t a come-rag. It isn’t a fly whisk. It isn’t moonshine. It’s the wheel of God in flesh and water.[26]

He is attaching a religious value to women while objectifying them.

The degrading portrayal of women is due to the fact that men see themselves as the Self and women as the Other. Bobozo Inga's position is an example of this male psychology:

> I beg you, Estina Bronzario, call off the strike. I'm getting old. I must leave a child on this shitting earth, and if you don't call off your strike before they kill you...[27]

The fact that Estina Bronzario tries to assert her individuality in a society where social roles are rigidly stratified is not well received by the patriarchs in the society. Such behaviour is viewed as out of tune with what is expected of women. Even when Estina Bronzario is seen as an extraordinary woman, this is a vindication of the attempts to silence her. What Sony Labou does in this novel is to restore stature and voice to women who were silenced. Estina Bronzario is a voice of the honour. So her murder can be viewed as an attempt by men to silence her. Bronzario's conception is that men and women need to join hands so that a new conception of life can emerge and a new beginning can occur. Her dignified status as a woman runs parallel to the figure of Sarngata Nola. For the latter, the most important thing is life and not one's principles. Estina on the other hand gets her strength from her principles. She is portrayed as a woman who lives her life. She is able to win over Sarngata Nola because of her association with nature. Nature through the symbol of water has magical qualities that give Estina Bronzario strength. Nature is able to work its miracle through her body.

What distinguishes Sony Labou Tansi from the canonical writing is that there is no feminisation of Africa in his work. Political potency in his writing is not linked to male sexual potency. His struggle is at the level of narrative where the act of writing itself becomes a weapon against gendered notion of writing.

The Language of the grotesque

To achieve this kind of writing Sony Labou Tansi uses the grotesque as a subversive tool because it challenges the received ways of seeing the world. *Seven Solitudes* is a kind of fable that sits to tell the story of a world that has lost all sense of proportion. The world it portrays cannot be rendered through conventional narrative strategies. Ngugi wa Thiong'o remarks:

> How does a writer, a novelist shock his readers by telling them that those [heads of state who collaborate with imperialist power] and neo-slaves when they themselves, the neo-slaves are openly announcing the fact on the rooftops? How do you shock your readers by pointing out that these are mass-murderers, looters, robbers, thieves, when they the perpetrators of these anti-people crimes and not even attempting to hide the fact? When in some cases they are actually and proudly celebrating their massacre of children and the theft and robbery of the nation? How do you satirize their utterances and claims when their own words beat all fictional exaggerations?[28]

This is why in *Seven Solitudes,* the author has abandoned the aesthetics of so called social realism altogether. Realism is not considered equal to the task at hand because it can only document a world that has gone awry. In the foreword of the novel, the author says that his intention is “to make reality say what it would not have been able to say by itself or, at least what it might too easily have left unsaid.”

Sony Labou uses various types of humour, from irony and incongruity to satire. He thinks that this is the only way to write as he says in his foreword to *La vie et demie*:

> I aspire to the vital laughter...It is insulting to speak of despair to humankind. Humankind has to live. And its life, the kind of freedom I am showing it. To live one’s life and not to die. That is possible. Let us dare.[29]

Although humour has a different effect from tragedy, there is a kind of laughter that straddles the edge of pathos. Sony Labou is able to treat a series of events as both comic and tragic by showing how one contends the other. To place something comic next to something tragic is to bring together two things that appear incompatible because both are mutually exclusive. To combine them is to add to the meaning of each. There is a strange dualism at the centre of *Seven Solitudes* as a result of the incongruities that turn realities absurd and pitiful. The universe portrayed is full of torture, madness and jovial celebrations.

The opening scene of the novel makes a statement on the erosion of the autonomy of the African state by the international community. It also highlights the influence of the international community on policy-making in African states. From the beginning the situation has a comic effect. The “pineapple incident” is a brilliant satire of the fragile egos of the leaders worldwide. Because of a perceived insult, America will not import the country’s pine apples.

> We haven’t sold our pineapples that year because our President had insulted America at the Sixteenth Paris Conference and the price of raw materials. Out of revenge, the Americans refused to eat our pineapples, and the French had supported them by refusing to eat them out of modesty, the Belgians because they understood, the Russians out of timidity, the Germans out of simple bloody-mindedness, the South Africans by intuition, the Japanese out of honour...anyway, for one reason or another, the whole world refused to eat our pineapples.[30]

The narrator’s apparently matter-of-fact tone negates the absurdity. However the situation is a very serious treatment of the western world’s relationship with Africa. At one level, this humorous presentation suggests that the West is not very serious about African countries but the fact that the whole incident was brought about because of disagreement over the price of raw materials shows how little control African countries have over their own resources. This scene offers a perfect example of western exploitation of Africa. The powerlessness of the African state is depicted by the humorous and absurd action taken by the local authorities to counter what had happened. All they can do is to take revenge against a handful of foreign residents in the country.

> Instead of giving in the authorities passed a law requiring overseas residents to eat impossible quantities of pineapples, morning, noon and night, that is three kilos per head per day![31]

This incident is profoundly comic and pathetic. It is the first of the many incongruities to be noticed in the novel. The evils of the colonial inheritance are invoked by Lorsa Lopez as he murders his wife Estina Benta and blames it on the whites, who have mined everything up. The mayor and his true copy the judge complement their unreliable salaries by selling land which supposed to belong to “the people” , that is to say to the authorities.

Incongruity is also present in the death of Estina Benta. The end of Estina Benta is horrible, cruel and unnecessarily bitter. Although the murder doesn’t last a matter of seconds, it is prolonged in the narrative. The whole community is aware of the crime. Yet nobody comes to the rescue. The situation is made worse by the fact that the police are not in a hurry to come and investigate.

> The poor woman called for help, and we heard her voice, nearly drowned by her husband’s bellowing, as in the days when she sang at the conservatoire: Help me! He’s killing me![32]

The tragedy is shocking because it is caused by a powerful and unreasonable force. Her husband kills her because he believes she has given him lice. After killing her Lorsa Lopez cries blaming the community for letting him commit the murder: “What a disaster! What wickedness! How could they let me commit this crime?”[33] The insistent incongruities that which create and accompany the madness of Lorsa Lopez are in fact intrinsic to the texture of the whole novel. Although the texts brings us into contact with horror, it attempts remove our fear because the narrative underscores it with humour. By laughing at the authority, the victim reduces it and undermines its power. This comic in the narrative takes us out of the field of authority of the evolved portrait. It is worth noting here what Mikhail Bakhtin said about laughter in his analysis of Rabelais.

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides,... Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically.[34]

Seven Solitudes is a text where laughter has been used as a means of contradicting the established authority. The fantasy created by the narrative refuses to comply with the rules of the real world. This can be observed in the sequence of events as Lorsa Lopez goes about killing his wife. The graphic description of the murder removes the narrative out of the sphere of conventional practices of realism. Lorsa Lopez is not presented as a real person, but rather as a buffoon whose behaviour is farcical. The whole sequence is described in a language that suggests a heinous will with little psychological depth. Lorsa Lopez is shown as devoid of any ability to think.

> He cut her up, slit open her thorax, hacked her bones, tore out her breasts, threw away her womb, and took out "your wickedness and everything you kept there to enable you to play such a lousy trick on me. Now you'll pay. You wanted to play cunt. You wanted to play the slut. I'll give you fucking slut."
>
> He went into the pigsty, wiping his forehead with his shirt, red with spurts of blood and flashes and of meat.
>
> Came back with meat hooks, hung her right thigh on a palaver tree... He fetched all the tools from the pigsty: meat, hooks, picks, forks, felling axe, machetes...millstone. He finished off his crime with the pickaxe.[35]

Although Lorsa Lopez exhibits a lot of active behaviour, he is shown to be at the mercy of his passions in his frenzied attack on his wife. It is only after the action that he regrets what he has done. In this instance the act of killing does not confer any power to the perpetrator. Rather the narrative presents the struggle between real and surreal between authority and laughter, and this undermines the authority of the perpetrator. The mayor arrives but only to comply in a matter-of-fact way that he only objects the way in which Estina Benta was killed without being affected at all by the murder.

Sometimes the humour in the novel is sinister. The marriage between Nogmede and the Beauty of Beauties is treated as a grotesque farce. When

Zarcanio Nala rejects Nogmede at the altar, he cannot make out what is happening. His fantastic appearance as he dies reflects the confusion in his mind. His physical appearance is of a vision of a world gone mad. When he is rejected by a woman who claimed to love him in abusive language, he is celebrating his marriage:

> Celebrating his marriage to shame and humiliation. He remained in that position for months, until one day Fartamio Andra came and anointed him with oils of the theosophist, Larkansa Coma, because he was beginning to stink and maggots were coming out of his mouth, his ears and his nostrils.[36]

This is a magical realist representation of the grotesque, fantastical and sinister. It is a particular region of the bordering on the fantastic and absurd. The disintegration of Nogmede indicates the agony suffered by the person who is betrayed. The depiction of the scene is crude. The comedy in death of Nogmede does not give way to laughter but sadness. This recurring and vivid stress on the incongruous and fantastic is the very heart of the novel. All the characters suffer some form of crude indignity in the course of the novel.

According to Bakhtin, the carnival feast unites space, time and the body.[37] Such a feast is prepared by Estina Bronzario to celebrate Valancia’s “second phony centenary” although it has been banned by the authorities. Huge pots of fragrant foods simmer for days,

> [....] giving off their tantalizing smells and offering glimpses of onion and garlic and vegetables from Nsanga-Norda swimming on the surface... Strings of sausages, heaps of barbecued lamb, mountains of grilled meat, basins of soup, bright-coloured sauces, *mandella* sauces, picket sauces, *lantanni* sauces, azanio sauces, nuts *Hélène,* laws of the Coast, fine monkey sands, ruptured livers, bronze milks, gigantic gateau the size of a fisherman's hut, *misalas* with herbs... The whole of the bayou quarter was permeated with the smell of cooking and wine.[38]

The carnival is presented as a 'second life' sustained by common people. It is a culture that directly opposes the 'official' culture. Estina Bronzario carried out the celebrations against the will of the authorities. This feast is typical of carnival culture. The common people in the novel are shown to have a distinct and separate existence from the authorities. Figures like the mayor do not take part in the festivities. They are always opposed to what is going on. The conflict between the authorities and the common people is reflected in the animosity between Valancia and Nsanga-Norda. The capital was moved from Valancia because the authorities were at odds with the residents. The celebrations during the carnival show that the authorities can never rule completely. It is a manifestation of the collective determination to contain the authority of the community, and Estina Bronzario shows the way. In this rigour carnival can be seen as a popular festive form that is able to actualize a desire for a free and more abundant way of life. The celebration by the women, lead by Estina Bronzario is a way of dealing with the brutal killing of Estina Benta.

In carnival festivities the material world is presented in exaggerated terms, which is an element of the grotesque. Bristol points out that:

> The basic principle of grotesque or carnival realism is to present everything socially and spiritually exalted on the spiritual, bodily level. This includes cursing, abusive and irreverent speech symbolic and actual thrashing, and images of inversion and downward movement.[39]

In Seven Solitudes a sense of a grotesque world is created by the narrative strategy which points to the inability of the language to communicate anything. This has been pointed out by one of the characters Fartamio Andra when she says: “a mystery is the best explanation in the world”. Indeed, the novel presents a non-explanatory kind of history of the coastal town of Valancia where its own language is adequate to itself. On the one hand, the novel articulates an anxiety which is the result of the difficulty explaining a post colonial world, too chaotic to be rendered through undisturbed realism. On the other hand, the novel is able to resort to the powers of the imagination as a way of resisting ‘an oppressive regime’. Sony Labou Tansi himself says in the foreword:

> [...] that there should be another centre of the world, that there should be other reasons for naming things, other ways of breathing... because to be a poet nowadays is to want to ensure, with all one’s strength, with all one’s body and with all one’s

> soul, that, in the face of guns, in the face of money (which in its turn becomes a gun), and above all in the face of received wisdom (upon which we poets have the authority to piss), no aspect of human reality is swept into the silence of history.

Seven Solitudes has created that 'another centre of the world' through an aesthetic mobilization of the language of the narrative and redefined a new meaning of resistance at the level of writing.

Conclusion

This investigation began with the study of liminality in literature in the works of the authors belonging to diverse cultural and literary traditions within a comparatist framework. To offer any kind of conclusive resolution to this study would only trivialize issues and questions that are fundamentally political but can only be addressed within an aesthetic framework, because, as Fredric Jameson has noted, aesthetic addresses individual experience and does not try to conceptualize the real in an abstract way.[1]

My analysis has been primarily concerned with the politics and poetics of liminality with reference to three major issues: history, self and language. While analyzing the texts, I did not consider these issues as discrete temporalities: rather they have been treated in a network of affiliations in relation to one another. These questions are so complex that I can only hope to have set forth some of the boundaries within which further explorations in creative aesthetic practice can be continued. I can recall here one of the prominent francophone thinkers Édouard Glissant who advocates multiplicity and diversity as radical critiques of totality. Glissant has thus outlined the task of the postcolonial intellectual: it is to give shape to a non essentialist aesthetics connected to the articulation of a reality that emphasizes the relational patterns over autonomous zones, interconnectedness over independence, isomorphic analogies over unifying totalities: briefly it is to elaborate the "aesthetics of a non-universalizing form of Diversity [esthétique…du Divers non universalisant]."[2] Such an aesthetics is potentially liberating and enabling because it creates a space where the mimetic illusions of Western representational systems are interrogated and destabilized. In that space, differences are not effaced and the ethnocentric self does not assert itself by selectively defining an 'other'to be assimilated. Rather, specificities are preserved and allowed to come into play engendering a new conception of relational patterns, a new collective identity that does not at all invoke an authentic origin but forms the basis for a continuous process: the transformation of polarities into multifarious units sharing a common goal and vision. The creative tensions at work in the social space that acknowledges the values of difference and diversity are analogous to the ones that I have shown to exist in the narrative texts that I have studied. This is how I have endeavoured through my study to constitute a 'textual neighbourhood'where each of the texts is brought into implicit dialogue with the others and constitutes different ways of talking about the same thing on a personal, cultural, literary, or textual level. And this dialogue is a continuous process directed towards the future.

How then is it possible to conclude? Frantz Fanon titles the last chapter of *Black Skin, White Mask* 'By way of conclusion'.[3]Following his approachI would like to offer a few final remarks concerning the reading itinerary I adopted in my study.

We have based our analyses on some select texts such as *The Shadow Lines* (Amitav Ghosh, 1988), *English August: An Indian Story* (Upamanyu Chatterjee, 1988), *Monnè, outrages et défis* (Ahmadou Kourouma, 1991), *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (Sony Labou Tansi, 1985).

These particular texts represent the assumptions, the anxieties and the priorities, which in our view, have helped us better understand the central problematic of our project. When dealing with writers of significance, there is a certain sense in which each of them is limited to historical position but also another in which each of them breaks out of and even, to a certain extent, transforms those limits. In brief, each of them negotiates 'liminality' in his own way and articulates his imagination.

Indeed, as we study the texts and compare the way these writers represent personal experience and social reality, we have been able to make a substantial sense of the cultural texture of our world today. Reading literature becomes then a means of understanding ourselves and grasping the cultural dynamics of the social and political situation we inhabit. This reading implies critiquing the centrality of the colonial / imperial relations in the formation of non-European/-Western modern literary realities and understanding the resurgence of alternative political and literary modernities.

In *The Shadow Lines,* I have examined Amitav Ghosh's engagement with history and tried to demonstrate how his novel amends the status of history as an objective record of the past by bringing into focus the relation of the individual to his or her past. This is where his novel intervenes by critiquing the categories of modern knowledge and seeks to transgress them by a fictional representation and imaginative rejoinder by recovering those 'small' fragments that are silenced or lost. Ghosh endeavours to uncover this silence by recreating a past through subjective history in his fiction.

I have showed that how this silence in history is narrativized and linked to the rediscovery of the self. The novel is thus the articulation of a fundamental difficulty embedded in the larger narrative of Indian modernity. The private is inescapably enmeshed in the public and the public furtively slips into the private. This is where I have argued that Ghosh has deviated from a straightforwardly realistic technique and is interrogating the process of narrativizing a national identity which very often involves imposing linear structure of development. The mode of narration followed in this novel works through discontinuities and disruptions which prove effective in highlighting the thematic concern for painstaking recovery of fearful suppressed memories in order to cut through the seamless narrative of national identity. This is where the textual reality of the novel involves several generic forms (*bildungsroman*, travel narrative, Bengali children stories, memory novel, self writing). Thus the novel explores the issues of post-national modernity and cultural practices.

I have examined the history-narrative nexus in Ahmadou Kourouma's novel *Monnè, outrages et défis* to analyze how history has been articulated through fictional narrative. While analyzing the telling of the story of material and moral degeneration of the African society, I have discussed the complex relationship between the generic status of the text and the phenomena of intertextuality. I have demonstrated that the textual reality of the novel becomes a space where different generic forms (the epic and the novel) and divergent discourses intersect one another and generate a new experience of reading where the past speaks for the present, the contemporary historical realities of Africa.

While elaborating what Kourouma's novel *Monnè, outrages et défis* (1991) seeks to express and how it articulates cultural practices of a post-colonial society, I tried to explore the foundations of the orality/textuality dichotomy within the different modes of African imaginative expression and the unexpected triumphs that have emerged from this long and disruptive dialectic.

Against the greater pull towards homogenization of reality as in certain versions of Négritude literature, it is the inherent tension arising out of a desire to be 'African' (because writing takes place in French) which articulates the African imagination. Faced with the pressures of global marketplace, this anxiety of "African-ness" is not an expression of a national identity, nor a recovery of an essentialized identity, nor even simply going 'black and white'; it is to complicate the issues of identity and representation in a terrain of conflicting contours and shifting relations where several assumptions about language, history and narrative mode are challenged.

The entry of the colonial/post-colonial subject into modernity, albeit into the Euro-American archive, without scripted text, marks the beginning of a particular form of alienation, the tyranny of destructive silence being thrust upon him. Confronted with the silence generated by the oppressive design of metropolitan modes of expression, the postcolonial author either retreats further into the abyss of silence caused by the colonial/neo-colonial event. Kourouma's novel is exemplary in that it explores the possibility of expressive freedom through narrative reconstruction of African experience and discerns, for African imagination, a principle of transcendence in history.

In Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August,* I tried to examine the protagonist's profound sense of dislocation, being placed as a trainee IAS officer in a small town in India. The protagonist himself being from a western educated family confronts the other India. This confrontation constitutes the crux of the novel.

This is a novel which depicts Indian kitsch in all its forms: relics of the British Empire like the district bureaucracy and the language it speaks; temples, the monsoon, Gandhi, savants; the enduring contours of underdevelopment and more. This novel can be read at two levels. At one level, this novel is a commentary on the Indian bureaucracy: corruption, high-handedness, inefficiency, oppressive routine, utter indifference of the administration to the eradication of economic underdevelopment and social evils; acute class consciousness and hierarchy; little snobberies and petty jealousies of the so called public servants.

But at another level, deeper and more sensitive, it is the portrayal of the predicament of the western educated modern youth. There is a profound sense of dislocation, through which the protagonist journeys. This journey is pathetic, humorous and ridiculous. This is a journey from rootlessness to failed maturity, a struggle to come to terms with oneself. This dislocation is the absence of any meaningful communication with the society at large.

I have also examined how the narrative texture and the use of language take care of this opposition of meaning and non-meaning. Here I examined how the narrative texture and use of language take care of the thematic opposition between meaning and non-meaning. At the thematic level, this opposition is produced by the bureaucratic procedures of the Indian Administrative Service and the protagonist-bureaucracy interface. The English-educated protagonist Agastya Sen is thrown into a world where he cannot connect himself with anyone and anybody at a meaningful level of relationship. This failure leaks into the narrative structure of the novel. What is interesting to note here is that the extreme passivity of the IAS as described in the novel furtively seeps into the very process of narrativization where the narrative itself, like its protagonist, is trying to make different events cohere but facing in the process the renewed threat of circularity and eternal recurrence. In this collision, every kind of language fails, inadequate to the concentric contours of Agastya's experience. The burlesque capacities of Agastya's language create irony and incongruity.

In *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* by Sony Labou Tansi, I have tried to figure out the transgressive energies in his works in order to relate them to liminality. In this novel Sony Labou Tansi redefines the idiom of feminist resistance as a response to postcolonial power structure.

What we have observed is that all these authors engage intensely with history. But, at the same time, one must remember thatthey are not simply rewriting history but writing also 'literature'. This is to say that they participate in an entire system of contingent conventions, including techniques such as imaginative reconstruction, layered heteroglossia, artistic license and irony. Wolfgang Iser identifies two approaches as the dominant trends associated with the analysis of literature: on the one hand there is an attempt to grasp what is literary about it; on the other hand there is the view of it as the representation of the society.[4] Both of these methodologies have severe limitations. According to Iser, the first method takes literature and hypostatizes it, that it makes it into a separate, distinct object somehow divorced from the mind and historical situation of the author. The second method reduces literature to the status of a document. I introduce this dichotomy not because I intend to enter the debate but, rather because I think both forms of investigation imply that the texts I have chosen for study *do* something, rather than just *mean* something. They are engaged in a performative discursive act. They ‘do’ history, which is not to say that they merely ‘tell’ the history of postcolonial societies but that they participate in a kind of historiography, that is to borrow a phrase from Edward Said, both frankly revisionist and intellectually insurrectionary.[5] They should not be read *as* history, but they should be read as *doing* history. I intend to emphasize this difference because the objective is to evaluate to what degree their imaginative interventions into historiography dramatize the potential to shape reality through the discursive potentials of language. This is where these texts have a positive ethical valency with liminality. The liminal can be a place of potential threat and promise. It can offer enabling discursive possibilities, containing simultaneously both central and marginal positions. It is this expansive and creative flexibility of the liminal which is significant since it transcends or transgresses the obsessive limits of the marginal.

This transcendence postulates a new form of humanism which recognizes the plurality in human understanding which articulates the very concept and practice of alternative modernities. While the thesis takes us to new explorations in textual and generic dynamics in post-colonial contexts, our central finding is with relation to liminality and imagination. What the authors achieve by negotiating liminality through imagination, is a humanism that is truly both worldly and historical, a humanism that is eloquently articulated in Edward Said’s last book *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* – to be human is to have a “catholicity of vision”.[6] It is a matter of being able to see and understand humanistic practice as an integral part of the world and not as nostalgic retrospection. Eurocentrism blocks such a prospect because its misleadingly skewed historiography, the parochialism of its universalism, its attempt to impose a uniformly directed theory of progress all end up reducing, rather than expanding, the possibility of catholic inclusiveness. This catholic inclusiveness is what constitutes the ground for a new comparative space in contemporary postcoloniality and has the potential for transforming the horizon of academic and intellectual curiosity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Introduction

[1] Edward W. Said's *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Columbia University Press, 1985). Said writes about the imagination and action as well as the constraints on freedom and invention that come from human intention and method of its fulfillment.

[2] Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Where is the Now?", *Critical Inquiry*, vol. no. 30.2, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Chapter 1

[1] Bernheimer, Charles (Ed.). *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturism,* John Hopkins UP, Baltimore/London, 1995, p. 1.

[2] Greene, Roland. "Their Generation", *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturism.* Ed. Charles Berhheimer, John Hopkins UP, Baltimore/London, 1995, p. 153.

[3] Weisstein, Ulrich. *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction.*Trans. William Riggan, India UP, Bloomington, 1973.

[4] Fowler, Roger. Ed. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms.* Routledge, London and New York, 1987/2005, p. 34.

[5] Laurette, Pierre. "Universalité et comparabilité." *Théorie littéraire*. Éd. Marc Angenot, Jean Bessière, Douwe Fokkema, Eva Kushner, PUF, 1989, p. 52.

[6] Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.*Trans. W. Trask, Princeton UP, Princeton, 1991.

[7] Churton Collins quoted in *Comparative Literature*. Ed. Nagendra, Delhi UP, 1977 p. 9.

[8] Arnold, Mathew. "On the Modern Element in Literature", Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Oxford, 14 November 1857.

[9] Cohen, Walter. "The Concept of World Literature*". Comparative Literature East and West: Traditions and Trends.* Ed. Cornelia N. Moore and Raymond A. Moody, College of Languages Linguistics and Literature, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1989, pp. 3-10.

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[10] Cours de M. Philarète Chasles à l'Athénée. Séance d'ouverture, 17 janvier, 1835. English version in H. J. Schulz and P. H. Rhein (Ed.), *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1973, pp. 13-39.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Baldensperger, Fernard. "La littérature comparée : le mot et la chose". *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, vol. no. 1, 1921.

[13] Van Tieghem, Paul. *La littérature comparée,* Paris, Colin, 1951.

[14] Susan Bassnet has made a similar observation in her book *Comparitive Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, p. 30.

[15] Etiemble, René. *Comparaison n'est pas raison : La crise de la littérature comparée,* Gallimard, Paris, 1963.

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[17] Marsh, Arthur. "The Comparative Study of Literature." *PMLA,* vol. no. 2, 1896, pp. 151-170.

[18] Posnett, Hutcheson Macaulay. "The Science of Comparative Literature". *The Contemporary Review*, vol. no. 79, 1901, pp. 855-872. Reprinted in H. J. Schulz and P. H. Rhein (Ed.), *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1973, p.197.

[19] Gayley, Charles Mills. "What is Comparative Literature?". *The Atlantic Monthly,* vol. no. 92, 1903, pp. 56-68. Reprinted in H. J. Schulz and P. H. Rhein (Ed.), *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1973.

[20] Jost, François. *Introduction to Comparative Literature.* Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1974, pp. 29-30.

[21] Wellek, René and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*, Jonathon Cape, London, 1949.

[22] We can recall here the Enlightenment debate about human nature.

[23] Bourdieu, Pierre. "Le champ littéraire". *Acte de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. no. 89, 1991, pp. 3-46.

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[24] This process of literary formation has been discussed in detail by Terry Eagleton in his book *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, pp. 1-46).

[25] Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." Trans. Ian McLeod. *Diacritics*, vol. no. 16, 1986, p. 22.

[26] Ibid., p. 24.

[27] Clifford, James. "Travelling Cultures". *Cultural Studies.* Ed. Larry Grossberg, Carry Nelson and Paula Treicher, Routledge, NY, 1992, pp. 96-112.

[28] Glissant, Édouard. *L'Intention poétique*. Seuil, Paris, 1969.

[29] The concept of 'relation' has been discussed by Glissant in his celebrated book *Poétique de la Relation* (Gallimard, Paris, 1990). Trans. Betsy Wing. Univeristy of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1997.

Chapter 2

[1] It has been increasingly shown that literary forms are embedded in collective histories and ideological structures. It appears to be that 'contextualization and historicization' have become the watch words of the most influential approaches to literature. The new mode and this new mood of reading are trying to take into account factors like history, culture, politics, location, gender, class, race, caste, suggesting that a literary work cannot be explained as an unmediated reflection of these factors. Charles Bernheimer in his foreword to *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturism,* (John Hopkins UP, Baltimore/London, 1995) has discussed these recent trends in critical literary scholarship.

[2] This has been discussed by Harold Bloom (*The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Riverhead Books, NY, 1994) and David Damroch (*How to Read World Literature?*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009).

[3] Jean-Paul Sartre makes a similar point in his book *L'Imaginaire. Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination* (Gallimard, 1986).

[4] The terms such as 'imagined communities', 'social imaginary', 'white mythologies', 'imagining history', 'imagining desire' are a few examples.

[5] Gennep, Arnold van. *Rites of Passage*. Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, Chicago UP, Chicago, 1960.

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[6] The social anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of liminality, which drew upon the writings of Van Gennep, initiated widespread usage of the concept both in and outside the field of anthropology. These ideas about liminality emerge through works such as *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Cornell UP, Ithaca and London, 1967), *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago, 1969), *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* (Cornell UP, Ithaca and London, 1974).

Chapter 3

[1] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995.

[2] Ibid., p. 218.

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

[4] Ibid., p. 29.

[5] James, Louis. "Shadow Lines: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh."*Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Novy Kapadia, Asia Book Club, New Delhi, 2001, p. 117.

[6] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "The Bildunsroman and its Siginificance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)". Speech Genres and Other Essays. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1992, pp. 22-23.
What Bakhtin calls 'the novel of human emergence' shows 'man in the process of becoming.'

[7] This notion of 'doing history' is different from 'writing history'. 'Doing history' means to participate in a kind of historiography which is revisionist. I have taken this idea from R. John Williams' article "Doing History: Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*,, Subaltern Studies, and the Postcolonial Trajectory of Silence"(*Research in African Literatures*, vol. no. 37.4, 2006,, pp. 161-176.)

[8] In a correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty on the latter's book *Provincializing Europe,* (Radical History Review, no. 83,, 2002, pp. 146-172*)* Amitav Ghosh explains his choice to write 'little histories' through the story of a family

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[9] The historian Dipesh Chakrobarty makes a similar point in his book *Habitations of Modernity Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 115-137 and 138-148.)

[10] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 151.

[11] Nandy, Ashish. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism,* OUP, Delhi, 1983, pp. 55-56.

[12] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 221.

[13] Ibid., p. 221.

[14] Ibid., p. 230.

[15] Amartya Sen in his book *Identity and Violence* (Penguin UK, 2007) makes a similar observation regarding the formation of identity.

[16] Stephen Slemon has observed that post-colonial writers often use allegory to move beyond a

> deterministic view of history by revising, reappropriating or reinterpreting it as a concept, and in doing so articulating new codes of recognition within which acts of resistance, those unrealized intentions and those reordering of consciousness that 'history' has rendered silent or invisible can be recognized as shaping forces in a culture's tradition.

(Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. XXIII/1, 1988, p.159)

[17] Mondal, Anshuman. *Amitav Ghosh*, Viva Books, 2011, pp. 85-129.

[18] In his book, *Deconstructing History* (Routledge, London, 1997) Alun Munslow discusses this argument by Hayden White in chapter 8.

[19] Mee, Jon. "The Burthen of the Mystery: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*". *Amitav Ghosh: A Crtical Companion.* Ed. Tabish Khair, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, p. 93.

[20] Ibid., p. 92.

[21] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 182.

[22] Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Trans. Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, NY, 1980.

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[23] Daiya, Kavita. “No Home But in Memory: Migrant Bodies and Belongings, Globalization and Nationalism in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*”. *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Brinda Bose, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2005, p. 51.

[24] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

[25] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 219.

[26] Ibid., p. 225.

[27] Daiya, Kavita. “No Home But in Memory: Migrant Bodies and Belongings, Globalization and Nationalism in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*”. *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Brinda Bose, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2005, p. 51.

[28] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 228.

[29] Ibid., p. 228.

[30] Ibid., pp. 246-247.

[31] Mondal, Anshuman. *Amitav Ghosh*, Viva Books, 2011, p. 10.

[32] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 4.

[33] Ibid., p. 89.

[34] Ibid., p. 89.

[35] Ibid., p. 104.

[36] Ibid., pp. 104-105.

[37] Ibid., p. 122.

[38] Ibid., p. 215.

[39] Gellner, Ernest. Thought and Change, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1964, p. 169.

[40] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, OUP, 1995, p. 233.

Chapter 4

[1] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris, 1990.

In further references, this novel will be referred to as *Monnè.* All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

[2] Matilal, Bimal Krishna. *The Word and the World,* OUP, Calcutta, pp.39 and 133.

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[3] This is a kind of metonymic transfer which remains implied in the context, especially by the use of the word 'Europeans' which is defined in opposition to 'Africans'. This constructed 'homogeneity' (be it for Europeans or for Africans) is very much a familiar motif in colonial discourse. The European self defines itself in radical contrast to an Other, here in this case the African Other. This is what V.Y. Mudimbé called the 'paradigm of difference' which constructed the very 'idea of Africa'. This is a primeval difference, and it is through this prism that Europeans refracted images of the 'Other' and of themselves.

Interestingly, on the African side, this African-ness has become not only a site of appropriation, but also of resistance, mobilization and agency. Indeed, in *Monnè*, Malinké, Black, Nigritia - all operating in the same semantic field – become problematically inscribed within that site.

[4] I have taken this point from Madhava Prasad's article "On the Question of a Theory of (Third) World Literature" in *Social Text,* vol. no., 31/32, 1992.

[5] Georg Lukacs (*The Historical Novel*, Merlin, London, 1974), Alessandro Manzoni (*On the Historical Novel*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1984), David Cowart (*History and Contemporary Novel*, Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale, 1989) are some of the works which provide theoretical perspectives on historical fiction. The objective here is not to explain in detail the characteristics and the function of this genre but to relate to a fundamental definition to situate our discussion within an analytical framework.

[6] Irele, Abiola. *African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*, OUP, NY, 2001, pp. 105.

[7] Ki-Zerb, Joseph, *Histoire de L'Afrique Noire*, Hatier, 1978.

[8] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris,1990.

[9] Madeleine Borgomano talks about this Sahelian cosmogony in her book *Ahmadou Kourouma. Le guerrier griot* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1998, p. 130-131).

[10] I have taken this concept of *habitus* from Pierre Bourdieux who explains it in his book *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Éd. de Minuit, Paris, 1979, 1982). According to him *habitus* is the way the social impregnates the subject (an individual and/or collective consciousness) in the form of an infra-reflexive system of cognitive dispositions. This system of dispositions, within

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which is incorporated the social history of the subject, engenders all the practices of knowledge, perception, representation and judgement. These dispositions are formed by the past instances and at the same time constitute the practices in the present conditioning the world-view.

[11] In his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton UP, 2000), the historian Deepesh Chakraborty argues against the cultural monologism implied in the Western history (prevalence of Europe over other non-Western societies) and vigorously defends the validity of parallel and coeval temporalities (European and non-European). This implies the diverse possibilities of being human. The cosmogonic vision of Kourouma illustrates this point.

[12] Claude Levi-Strauss distinguishes these two types of time in *Anthropologie structurale* (Vol I, Plon, Paris, 1958, pp.231-233.).

[13] Kourouma himself has affirmed: "Soba signifie grande ville. J'ai passé une partie de mon enfance dans Korhogo [une ville au nord de la Côte d'Ivoire située dans la région sahélienne] ; j'ai souvent pensé à cette ville en décrivant Soba. » [Soba signifies large town. I spent a part of my childhood in Korhogo (a town in the North of Ivory Coast in the Sahel region) (Interview with Bernard Magnier, *Notre Librairie, Dix ans de littératures*, 1980-1990, N^o 103, 1990, p. 94.)

[14] For example: « Pendant huit soleils et soirs j'ai voyagé… » [During eight Suns (days) and evenings I travelled...] (*Monnè*, p. 19)

Or « Vendredi, Djigui trouva le commandant inquiet » [Friday Djigui found the commander worried] (Ibid, p. 111). More examples can be found in the text.

[15] For example, Locha Mateso, in his book, *La littérature africaine et sa critique* (Karthala, Paris,1986) advocates this approach. Another critic is Jacques Chevrier who also makes a similar point in his article "Les littératures africaines dans le champ de la recherche comparatiste" (*Précis de Littérature Comparée,*ed. Pierre Bruel et Yvres Chevrel,PUF, Paris,1989, p. 215-241.)

[16] Mikhail Bakhtin is of the opinion that epic distance separates the epic world from the contemporary reality which is the object of representation of the novel.

(Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, p. 13)

[17] Seydou, Christiane. "Épopée et identité: exemples arficains". Journal des africanistes, vol. no. 58.8, 1988, p.8.

[18] For example, in *Soundjata* (Tamsir Djibril Niane, Présence africaine, 1960), Djéli Kuyaté evokes the Kéita lineage since the origin of the Malinkés.

[19] Kourouma himself has said in an interview: "*Monnè*, *outrages et défis* est une épopée […] c'est le domaine du griot [..] J'emprunte la technique du griot." [*Monnè outrages et défis* is an epic […] this is the domain of the griot [..] I borrowed the technique of the griot.] (Jean Ouédraogo, *Maryse Condé et Ahmadou Kourouma, Griots de l'indicible,* Peter Lang, 2004,129)

[20] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris, 1990, p.16.

[21] Ibid., p.20.

[22] This temporalization, that is to say re-absorb the historical time into the matrix of myth and magic opens up the possibility beyond the positivist linearity conditioned by the notion of progress called rational/secular/modern. Kumkum Samgari, while analyzing the works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie (in "The politics of the Possible", *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse,* Ed. Abdul Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd, OUP, NY, 1990, pp.230-231), discusses this conception of time "poised in a liminal space, which, having broken out of the binary opposition between circular and linear gives a third space and a different time the chance to emerge." He notes also that this "absence of a single linear time need not be read as the absence of a historical consciousness but rather as the operation of a different kind of historical consciousness."

[23] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris, 1990, p.17.

[24] Ibid., p.20.

[25] French Commandant, Faidherbe and his troops are referred to here.

[26] Harrow, Kenneth W. "Monnè, outrage et défis: Translating, Interpreting Truth and Lies – Travelling along the Möbius Strip." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. no. 22.2, 1991, pp. 225-230.

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[27] Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object.* Columbia UP, 1983.

[28] Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1994.

[29] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris, 1990, p.41.

[30] Ibid., p.54.

[31] Ibid., p.58.

[32] This striking example of linguistic migration is noteworthy. The word 'pratati' did not exist in Malinké before colonization. It is derived from the distorted African pronunciation of the French word 'prestation' which corresponds to colonial experience and signifies, in the specific historical context, the obligation to render service to colonial masters. In the process of transfer, 'prestation' becomes 'pratati' preserving the signified of the former and get linked to rapacious exploitation of the Africans. Witness of historical tension, this word gets incorporated in the Malinké lexis and becomes corollary to *monnew*.

[33] Poller, Nidra. "An Authentic Kourouma", *Research in African Literatures,* vol. no. 22.2, 1991, pp. 235-243.

[34] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris, 1990, p.77.

[35] Ibid., p.86.

[36] Ibid., p.94.

[37] Ibid., p.114.

[38] Ibid., p.217.

[39] Joana Sullivan (Redefining the Novel in Africa, *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 37, No.4, 2006, 177-188) proposes a typology of heroes in African novels: the tale hero, the epic hero, the tragic hero and the comic anti-hero. The tale hero harmonizes with the society after a brief conflict. The epic hero seeks to change the society critiquing its weaknesses and supplying new alternatives. The tragic hero represents a modified epic hero, more human, more recognizably one of us, someone who wants to assert an individual view point yet fears a consequential stigma of social outcast. There is the comic anti-hero, the underprivileged commoner, whose adventures and trials bring the society to

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task for its failures. It would be very difficult to fit Djigui into one of these categories. Indeed, he shows certain qualities mentioned in each of these categories.

[40] This is what Jauss called aesthetic distance which is produced by a horizontal change when a new kind of writing appears during the literary process. This type of writing contains subversive energies. This is true of Kourouma's *Monnè.*

[41] Hamon, Philippe. Un Discours contraint, *Littérature et Réalité*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, 129.

[42] According to Linda Hutcheon (*Theory of Parody*, NY/London, Methuen, 1985, p. 6), parody "is a form of imitation but imitation characterized by ironic inversion."

[43] We can note here the observation of Lilyan Kesteloot:

> The rationality of the Mandé royal narratives is rigorous, and their effect is always active as they diffuse models of power that continue to govern the perceptions of peoples and presidents in the twentieth-century republics emerging in areas previously dominated by the ancient emires of the Sudan. Perhaps democratic states cannot endure in Africa as long as there is no change in the notion of power and in the notion of the sacred. Or should we say sacred power?

(Power and Its Portrayals in Royal Mandé Narratives, *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.22/1, 1991, p. 25)

[44] *Le Serpent à plumes*, No. 8, 1993, 159.

[45] Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Seuil, Paris, 1990, p.281.

[46] Ibid., p.287.

[47] To understand the importance of allegory used by Kourouma, we can note here what Stephen Slemon has observed regarding the postcolonial allegory:

> The point I have been making is that post-colonial allegorical writing is engaged in a process of destabilizing and transforming our fixed ideas of history, and this process demonstrates, I think, the inadequacy of the critical position that perceives allegory as a mode of writing that is limited in scope and mechanically

> determined by the historical or literary "pretext" upon which it is based. In the kind of allegory I have been describing, it is fiction that determines the way we read history, history that is contingent upon fiction, and not the other way around. Post-colonial allegorical texts would thus offer support to the critical enterprise of rehabilitating allegory as a viable mode for writing creative fiction.

(Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. XXIII/1, 1988, pp. 164-165)

[48] Manthia Diawara (Canonizing Soundiata in Mande Literature: Toward a Sociology of Narrative Elements, *Social Text*, No, 31/32, 1992, p. 154-168) gives a similar argument.

[49] Since the eighties, we witness the emergence of novels characterized by disillusion caused by political, economic and social crises. *Monnè* was published in 1990. For more details about Afro-pessimism, Lilyan Kesteloot's book *Histoire de la littérature négro-africaine* (Éd. Karthala, Paris, 2001, p. 251-302) can be referred to.

[50] Osha, Sanya. *West Africa Review* (online), 2003.

[51] Harry Garuba has demonstrated (Explorations in Animist Materialism : Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society, *Public Culture* 15/2, p. 261-285) how the constant reference to traditional resources (more generally, 'to orality') and their contextualized reutilization are redefining, as against the Weberian rationalization, the alternative modernity in the African context and creating new ways/voices of discursive agency in literary and artistic creations.

[52] Irele, Abiola. *African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*, OUP, NY, 2001, pp. 113-114.

Chapter 5

[1] Ezekiel, Nissim. *Indian Post,* 21 August, 1988.

[2] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 pp.4-5.

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[3] Ibid., p.65.

[4] Ibid., pp.73-74.

[5] Ibid., pp.24-25.

[6] Kant, Immanuel. “What is Enlightenemnt?”. *Kant’s Political Writings* Ed. Hans Reiss. Trans. H. Nisbet, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1970.

[7] Government of India. “Report of the Sixth Central Pay Commission”, Press Information Bureau, 2008 (March), p.365.

[8] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.45.

[9] Ibid., p.134.

[10] Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative,* Harvard UP, Cambridge, 1992, p.140.

[11] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 pp.178-179.

[12] Ibid., p.68, p.70.

[13] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[14] Ibid., p.73.

[15] Ibid., pp.73-74.

[16] Scott, Bede. “Reading the Uninteresting: Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English August: An Indian Story”.* Contemporary Literature, vol. no. 53.3, 2012, p. 500.

[17] Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Trans. Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, NY, 1980, p.114.

[18] Ibid., p.116.

[19] Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative,* Harvard UP, Cambridge, 1992, p.314.

[20] Barthes, Roland. *S/Z.* Trans. Richard Miller, Hill, NY, 1974, pp.75-76.

[21] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.135.

[22] Ibid., p.278.

[23] Miller, D.A. “Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and *Bleak House*.” *Charles Dickens*. Ed. Harold Bloom, Chelsea, NY, 2006, p.141.

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[24] Ngai, Sianne. “Merely Interesting.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. no. 34.4, 2008, p.791.

[25] Turner, Victor. “The Anthropology of Performance.” *The Anthropology of Performance,* PAJ, NY, 1988, p.97.

[26] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.135.

[27] Ibid., p.135.

[28] Miller, D.A. “Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and *Bleak House*.” *Charles Dickens*. Ed. Harold Bloom, Chelsea, NY, 2006, p.144.

[29] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.288.

[30] Roland Barthes in his essay “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives.” (*Image-Music-Text.* Trans. Stephen Heath*,* Noonday, NY, 1977, p.89.) observes that everything in a narrative signifies, even an irretrievably insignificant detail which would end up with precisely the meaning of absurdity.

[31] Scott, Bede. “Reading the Uninteresting: Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English August: An Indian Story”.* Contemporary Literature, vol. no. 53.3, 2012, p.513.

[32] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.170.

[33] Kumar, Amitava. “Jane Austen in Meerut India.” *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*. Ed. Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva, Temple UP, Philadelphia, pp.315-336.

[34] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.129.

[35] Ibid., p.5.

[36] The Indian novel in English in the eighties was dominated by the diasporic characters who migrate to the global North. In this rigour, Agastya’s migration to the rural India is significant in so far as the problematic of the novel is concerned.

[37] Chatterjee, Upamanyu. English, August: *An Indian Story,* Penguin India, 1988 p.177.

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[38] Ibid., p.177.

[39] Ibid., p.177.

[40] Ibid., p.14.

Chapter 6

[1] Tansi, Sony Labou. *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez,* Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1985.

For subsequent references, I will be using the translated version of the book: *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995. This book will be referred to as *Seven Solitudes* in all the references that follow.

[2] In the novel, in a single country two capital towns have been mentioned: Valancia, the old capital and Nsanga-Norda, the new capital.

[3] The author witnessed a dead body surrounded by a crowd near a hospital in Brazzaville, where his wife was working.

[4] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.110.

[5] Loomba, Ania. Colonialism/Postcolonialism, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 25.

[6] Gilbert, Thierry. *Le discours idéologique ou La Force de l'évidence,* Harmattan, 2007, p. 104.

[7] Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader*: *A Feminist Approach to American Fiction,* Indiana UP,, Bloomington, 1978.

[8] Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender,* Routledge, London, 1994, p.44.

[9] A lot of displeasure has been expressed about the unsatisfactory portrayal of the women in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart.* According to the feminist scholars while most of the men in this novel are complex characters, women are either ideals of motherhood or representatives of the values of the society. None are well developed individuals with a 'self' of their own.

[10] Florence Stratton (*Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender,* Routledge, London, 1994, p.39.) traces the root of the 'Mother Africa' trope in the way Senghor conceptualized the Negritude movement. In the works of Senghor, the idealization of motherhood is a recurring motif. His poem 'La Femme noire' [Black Woman] provides a good example in this rigour.

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[11] Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender,* Routledge, London, 1994, p.41.

[12] Harrow, Kenneth. *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition,* Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1994, p.329.

[13] Tansi, Sony Labou. *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995, p. 34.

[14] Ibid., p.3.

[15] Ibid., p.63.

[16] Ibid., p.66.

[17] Ibid., p.110.

[18] Okin, Susan Moller. *Women in Western Political Thought,* Princeton UP, NJ, 1979, p.154.

[19] Tansi, Sony Labou. *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995, p. 44.

[20] We can recall here the what Sissie says in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*:

> Above all, we have to have our secret language. We must create this language. It is high time we did. We are too old people not to. We can. We must.

[21] Frank, Katherine. 'Women without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa'. *African Literature Today*, vol. no. 15, 1987.

[22] Harrow, Kenneth. *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition,* Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1994, p.333.

[23] Tansi, Sony Labou. *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995, p. 73.

[24] Ibid., p. 44.

[25] Ibid., p. 44.

[26] Ibid., p. 38.

[27] Ibid., p. 68.

[28] Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1994, p. 80.

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[29] Ngate, James. *Francophone African Fiction: Reading a Literary Tradition,* Africa World Press, NJ, 1988, p. 132.

[30] Tansi, Sony Labou. *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995, p. 1.

[31] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[32] Ibid., p. 11.

[33] Ibid., p. 17.

[34] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky, MIT Press, Massachusetts,, 1968, p. 128.

[35] Tansi, Sony Labou. *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995, p. 12.

[36] Ibid., p. 92.

[37] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky, MIT Press, Massachusetts,, 1968, p. 281.

[38] Tansi, Sony Labou. *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez.* Trans. Clive Wake, Heinemann, 1995, p. 6.

[39] Bristol, Michael D. *Carnival and the Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, Methuen, NY, 1985, p. 22.

Conclusion

[1] Jameson, Fredric. “Cognitive Mapping”. Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1988, pp. 347-357.

[2] Glissant, Édouard. Le Discours antillais, Seuil, Paris, 1981, p. 465.

[3] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Richard Philcox, Grove Press, NY, 1967.

[4] Iser, Wolfgang. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology,* Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1993.

[5] Said, Edward. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Foreword. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, vol. no. 5.

[6] Said, Edward. *Humanism and Democratic Criticism.* Columbia UP, NY, 2004, p. 27.

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