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**"Location, location, location, the realtors say. Geography is destiny, respond the historians."**

**Towards a Poetic of *Tout-monde* in Migrant Fiction**

Modern-day wars are no longer fought on the battlefields but on the terrains of culture. This paraphrased quote often attributed to James P. Carse perfectly echoes Samuel Huntington's popular contention that "the great divisions among humankind and the primary source of conflict in the new world will be primarily cultural." Therefore, one of the frequently raised questions in humanities and social sciences today is what is the role of writers, linguists, intellectuals, literary theorists, and philosophers in a globalized world that is inexorably tormented and haunted by clashes of civilizations, xenophobia, the rise of populism, and ultranationalist ideologies with their polarizing discourse and exclusionary rhetoric? This is where Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" (1969) proves to be more than ever indispensable and timely. In this essay, Foucault underscores the role of writers as public intellectuals and figures in the cultural and intellectual sphere. Foucault's main argument seems to be that writers as agents of cultural productions and social critique should be approached as being the outcome of historical and ideological repositioning and discourse. That is to say, unlike the old tendency to approach writers as objective and socially apathetic and alienated categories, writers should be examined in terms of their place / voice within the discursive formations and power dynamics of their societies. He rightly asserts that "The author's function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society."

Foucault's idea of the author as a public intellectual who is invested and profoundly rooted in his society is reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci's notion of the *organic intellectual*. The Italian Marxist thinker Gramsci makes a clear-cut distinction between traditional intellectuals who serve mainly the dominant ideology, and organic intellectuals who are operating at the grassroots level and are more geared towards the struggles and daily experiences of minorities and marginalized

categories. Gramsci rightly maintains that intellectuals, including writers, philosophers, and literary theorists, play a vital role in sustaining and altering what he calls "modes of thinking and behavior of the masses" (14). For Gramsci, intellectuals are "purveyors of consciousness" (14).

Both Foucault and Gramsci believed in the transcendental power of intellectuals as public figures in not only channeling and voicing the interests of minoritized and subaltern categories, but more importantly in challenging and undermining the prevailing power dynamics, and deconstructing the mainstream narratives and ideologies.

It is here indeed where the role of aesthetics can be envisaged to challenge mainstream discourse and nationalist ideologies. The concept of '*Geopolitics of Aesthetics*' (Jameson 1992, Rancière, 2004, Shapiro 2009, Bleiker and Hutchison 2009) seems to be quite intriguing and correlates with Foucault and Gramsci's idea of the role of organic intellectuals. This concept simply designates the complex and dialectic intersection between geopolitics and poetics. That is to say, the political dynamics and mainstream ideologies as well as socio-cultural imperatives of a particular geographical space influence the production, dissemination, and reception of aesthetic expressions, and cultural productions, like literature, music, cinema, and visual art. In other words, the Geopolitics of Aesthetics aims at investigating how artistic productions serve the dominant metanarratives or subvert mainstream ideology and therefore act as a medium of resistance and dissent.

While the migration crisis becomes a catchword in the West and elsewhere, one can argue that immigrants are the first scapegoats and victims of the rise of ultranationalist ideologies and Othering rhetoric in the metropolitan center. It is in this context that I would like to argue that the nation is no longer narration, and that literature particularly migrant fiction as an esthetic and cultural production serves as the catalyst for subverting mainstream nationalist ideologies. In his discussion of the power of literature, the Palestinian American critic Edward Said argues that literature and principally *minority* literature is 'the raw material of politics'. He affirms,

The one place in which there's been some interesting and innovative work done in Arab intellectual life is in literary production generally, which never finds its way into studies of the Middle East. You're dealing with the raw material of Politics... You can deal with a novelist as a kind of witness to something. 52

What Edward Said articulates here is the creative promises of fiction not only in terms of aesthetics but more importantly in its power to critically navigate issues and plant the seeds for

new ethics that were otherwise invisible, what Cyrus Patell calls Aesthetic transcendence (23). The figure of the migrant wandering in the metropolitan center has therefore a symbolic role in undermining power structures that are predicated upon exclusionary rhetoric. Breckenridge rightly asserts that ‘Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community. (*Breckenridge et al.* 6). In the same vein, Homi Bhabha argues that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world literature” (12). Indeed, what migrant writers aspire to in their transcendental aesthetics is the re-imagining of the world of trans-nation, beyond the nation-states. That said, theorists of Diaspora refer to migrant fiction using different concepts for instance; Jasbir Jain refers to it as a 'split narrative (83) insofar as the diasporic writers engage in the politic of narrating split lives, allegiances, and homelands. Besides, it is called literature produced "beyond home". It may bear the epithet of a 'hybrid literature'(Salhi and Richard Netton 3) as well. It is also labeled literature of the third space since it records the life of subjects caught in the third space or the position of in-betweenness and liminality( Jasbir 83). Yet, perhaps the best definition of diasporic literature has been provided by Mari Peepre who considers that diasporic literature is,

[A]bout the loneliness and alienation of the displaced person, the struggle to survive in the harsh circumstances, the battle to retain their heritage culture while adjusting to the strange, new host culture, and the search for tradition and roots by the partially acculturated second and third generation. Most of these works are loosely autobiographical, and mark a passage from the silence of the immigrant ghettos to the often outspoken self-examination of other partially hybridized, third-generation, host-migrant writers. (80)

However, the most interesting remark is the ideological and cultural implications of diasporic writings. As Ashcroft upholds "Diasporic writing is one of the most interesting and strategic ways in which diaspora might disrupt the binary of local and global and problematize national, racial, and ethnic formulations of identity. (218). Similarly, the drastic promise of literary works for the Caribbean literary critic Edward Glissant is the reinforcement and propagation of a *Tout-monde paradigm* especially what he calls the exploded novel or what I will call the Glissantian novel. For Glissant, the power of the literary lies in the ability of writers to enmesh the particular with the universal in a fragmentary, nonlinear, and rootless manner and therefore allow readers not only to interpret texts but also to 'experience' fragmentation, ambiguity, and multiplicity. He argues that literature "forms the framework between the density of place and the multiplicity of

the diverse, between what is said here and what is heard over there” (Treaties in the whole-World 112). In his Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity, Glissant defines his understanding of the current novel as follows,

I think it is a novel, but a novel that has burst apart. You know, we've all had enough of the old route of novels that begin in one place, then follow set movements, and end up in a sort of rhetorical preordained destiny. What is exciting about the novel today is that it can go off in all directions: it travels all over the world. I don't see how a novel whose title is *Tout-monde* [Whole-World] could be linear and conventional as novels were at the start of this century. (87)

Glissant treasures the fragmentary and the rhizomatic nature of novels and its potentiality to spiral in all directions which I argue is a defining characteristic of migrant Fiction. It is no longer the understanding of Nation as narration for one thing that Glissant advocates are that national literature in the past has been predicated upon narrating the nation-state and simultaneously displaying a politic of exclusion and clear-cut boundaries. However, for Glissant contemporary literature of the *Tout-monde* transcend the nation-state poetics and attempts to articulate rhizomatic directionalities that are "relation and not exclusion” (43)

Emerged in the context of Brexit, the Trump election, the civil war in Syria, and the crisis of refugees in the West, Mohsin Hamid’s novel *Exit West* (2007) is a prototype of the exploded novel that seeks to foresee a tout-monde paradigm and rethink ethics and politics of nationalism and the repercussions of the refugee crisis in the West. As a nomad writer himself who was born in Pakistan and spent the rest of his life between London, New York, and California, Hamid mobilizes his fiction to articulate the sense of transnationalism and ‘rhizomatic directionalities’ that come to define our liquid modernity. Known particularly for his much-appraised novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid seeks to depict the fluidity of transnational identities and the tensions between the desire to belong to a nation-state, and the intricate reality of transnational experiences. Set in a war-torn Middle Eastern country, perhaps Syria, and while focusing on the experiences of migrants fleeing conflict and seeking refuge in other countries, Hamid destabilizes traditional notions of borders, nationalism, and the role of the nation-state in the face of global migration. His use of magical realism, namely the portrayal of magical doors as portals to different locations around the world, serves as a metaphor for constant mobility and the ceaseless transcendence of physical boundaries.

The novel depicts the life of Saeed and Nadia, a couple exhibiting divergent personalities, who fell in love amidst wartime and craved connection during chaos in an unnamed Middle-Eastern city 'swollen by refugees. The ongoing war not only jeopardizes their relationship but their lives, therefore as the war escalates the prospect of leaving became a pressing concern. Instead of narrating the uncertain journey and the often-dangerous route of crossing borders towards a safer destination, Hamid uses magical doors located in the city and around the world that transport refugees and asylum seekers towards a safe harbor away from what he calls the "death trap of a country". Saeed and Nadia were among thousands of those who crossed those doors arriving in refugee camps in Greece, then London, and ending up in California. As they navigate their new life in the West, their love begins to crumble away and the couple in the narrator's terms, started to lose "their ability to find a rhythm together". Both Saeed and Nadia seem to have changed from within through their mobility to new places that are seemingly both comforting and unwelcoming.

What is intriguing about this novel is the way Hamid mobilizes his narrative as a social and political commentary not only to generate empathy to help us grasp the anxieties of our current world, but also to spark critical discussions and reflections on how immigrants are fleeing their countries, trying to find a place where they feel they can exist, and how their humanity is lost in the process of crossing borders.

While in their home country, these would-be refugees from the global south suffer from the unspeakable violence and unjustifiable civil war that threatens to tear the country apart just in the name of politics, ideology, and religion. The irony for Hamid Mohsin is that in this civil war, both aggressive parties claim to be righteous. "Saeed prayed for peace and Saeed's father prayed for Saeed and the preacher in his sermon urged all the congregants to pray for the righteous to emerge victorious in the war but carefully refrained from specifying on which side of the conflict he thought the righteous to be". On the other hand, these refugees while they are fleeing their home countries, suffer from the evils of ultra-nationalism, and are constantly attacked by government forces who are trying to confine immigrants in impoverished ghettos, or by nativist right-wing Neo-Nazi mobs who are playing identity politics card, seeking to wipe out and stigmatize refugees as dangerous foreigners. According to Mohsin, as immigrants continue to cross borders, rich countries are increasingly building more walls and fences to strengthen their borders. Borders for Hamid, amidst this global crisis of mobility and dislocation, occupy a central

position in nation-state building, in the sense that in his own words “Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory”. This underscores the fact that national borders are losing their significance in the face of globalization and the increasing interconnectedness that we are witnessing today.

Torn between nativists' mobs attempting to ‘*Reclaim Britain for Britain*’ and the thought of an unthinkable return to their homeland, Saeed and Nadia sought to adapt to the new life and establish transnational connections. Nadia’s feeling of acceptance within a Nigerian community and its council helped her gain a sense of belonging within a community that transcends national boundaries. On the other hand, Saeed's discomfort and uncertainty in the new environment, particularly being a minority among other immigrants, reveals his rootedness in tribal dynamics and preference to hang out with immigrants from his homeland. “Saeed began to spend more time there, drawn by the familiar languages and accents and the familiar smell of the cooking”.

Saeed’s uneasiness among other minoritized immigrants led him to propose to move to another house/ community that is inhabited by people from his country, to which Nadia responded negatively,

“To be among our own kind,” Saeed answered.

“What makes them our kind?”

“They’re from our country.”

"From the country, we used to be from."

“Yes.” Saeed tried not to sound annoyed.

“We’ve left that place.”

“That doesn’t mean we have no connection.” 103

This dialogue beautifully captures a fascinating example of the tension between Saeed’s allegiance to his national identity and Nadia’s transnational and cosmopolitan spirit. Saeed emphasizes that despite physically moving abroad, individuals keep a strong attachment to and affinity for their homeland. Their connection to their country, according to Saeed, extends beyond physical presence and is grounded on shared experiences, culture, and tradition. However, Nadia undermines this assumption by pointing out that they have left their own nation.

Hamid Mohsin delineates the nation as a person with various personalities and compared it to a soup where individuals dissolve.

Reading the news at that time one was tempted to conclude that the nation was like a person with multiple personalities, some insisting on union and some on disintegration, and that this person with multiple personalities was furthermore a person whose skin appeared to be dissolving as they swam in a soup full of other people whose skins were likewise dissolving. Even Britain was not immune from this phenomenon some said Britain had already split, like a

man whose head had been chopped off and yet still stood, and others said Britain was an island, and islands endure, even if the people who come to them change, and so it had been for millennia, and so it would be for millennia more.

This passage accentuates the complexities and uncertainty of national identity in an era of fast societal change. It captures the incongruities between unity and disintegration, as well as the interaction between historical continuity and changing demographics within a country. It alludes to cosmopolitanism by emphasizing the diversity of people whose skins are dissolving in the metaphorical soup. The nation according to Hamid, is therefore becoming increasingly diverse, with people from various backgrounds and cultures inhabiting its borders. The cosmopolitan and pluralistic character of the nation problematizes nationalism and the idea of a homogeneous national identity, as it recognizes the fluidity and dynamic intermixing of different cultural and ethnic identities. The dissolution of skins and the blending of identities can be interpreted as a critique of rigid and exclusionary forms of nationalism that seek to define a nation based on narrow criteria such as ethnicity or culture.

Finally, through his novel and as an organic intellectual who is versed in the concerns of humanity, Hamid offers an alternative way out to nationalism which is based on Glissant's concept of *tout-monde*. It is based on reinventing and rethinking the ethics of global connections and identities, stressing the inherent connectivity and interdependence of many cultures and peoples around the world. By emphasizing the dynamic and ever-changing nature of human connections and by mobilizing characters who negotiate global spaces, migration, and cultural hybridity, Hamid challenges the notion of fixed and exclusive national identities and offers a cosmopolitan view of humanity beyond national lines.

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