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Dis/ruptures of Home and Citizenship: Memory, Migration and the Production of Translocalities in Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*

Sakiru Adebayo
Independent Scholar

Abstract: *Following the Ethiopian Revolution – or Red Terror – of the 1970s, many Ethiopians fled to several parts of the world. The majority became refugees and exiles in the United States which resulted in the formation of official and non-official 'Little Ethiopias' in different parts of the country. Dinaw Mengestu's novel,* Children of the Revolution*, explores the experiences and lives of Ethiopian – and by extension, African – immigrants in Washington DC. The novel is particularly insightful in investigating the entangled travels of people, place, memory and home. It portrays how Ethiopians install their memory of home – and the home of their memory – in a migratory setting and how that leads to the production of a translocal connection between Addis Ababa and Washington DC. However, I argue that inhabiting the translocal does not necessarily translate as being in a safe space. I examine how, despite their visible presence, the African migrants in the novel constitute an absent community because of their lack of political voice. I also investigate how, despite their peripherality in the American nation-space, the migrant subjects write themselves into America's past and present while holding tenaciously onto their painful pasts in Africa. In essence, I argue that these involuntary migrants perform several forms of non-normative citizenship which, in turn, challenges rigid understandings of home, belonging and nationhood.*

Keywords: memory, migration, home, Ethiopia, United States

1. Involuntary Migrants

Born in 1978 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Dinaw Mengestu's family migrated to the United States in 1980 because of the communist revolution that threatened to implode the country (Ethiopia). Hence, as a child (of an) immigrant in the US, Mengestu seems preoccupied with questions of home, memory, unwilful migration and family lineage which all come out very strongly in all his novels – *All Our Names, How to Read the Air*, *Children of the Revolution.* For example, *All Our Names* is a tale of an involuntary migration to America from a 'revolutionising' African country. The anonymous narrator leaves Ethiopia, his home country, to Uganda and then to a 'silently racist' Midwestern American community where his affair with a white lady exposes him to the tenacity of racism in America. On the other hand, *How to Read the Air* is about Jonas Woldermarian who was born

CONTACT SAKIRU ADEBAYO ✉ adebayosakiru8@gmail.com

in the US to refugee parents from Ethiopia. To make sense of his problematic adult life, Jonas needs to sift through the generational and familial stories that preceded him.

Taking a cue from the title, *Children of the Revolution* refers to 'children' like Mengestu himself, born during and after the Ethiopian revolution, and, by extension, other revolutions that swept across Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. It revolves around the life of Sepha as an exile in the US and is situated within a broader context of the lives of Ethiopians who fled to the US during the Revolution that began with the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974 and the communist rule of Mengistu Haile Mariam. After seventeen years in the US, Sepha is unable to integrate and is still burdened by the traumatic memory of his father's brutal death in the hand of communist soldiers as well as his own abrupt emigration from Ethiopia. Sepha runs a grocery store in Logan Circle, a neighbourhood that is going through a vicious, racialised gentrification. Judith, a white, middle-class, American woman moves into the house next to the apartment where Sepha lives. Sepha bonds with Judith's biracial daughter and also quietly hopes that a romantic affair could transpire between him and Judith. This hope is soon dashed after Judith is forced to leave Logan Circle because it gradually dawns on her that she is not particularly welcome in the predominantly black community in Logan Circle.

However, Sepha finds friendship and camaraderie in Kenneth from Kenya and Joseph from Zaire, two friends who share similar stories of involuntary migration.[1] This trio of immigrant friends is trapped in some sort of existential dilemma where their painful memories of home collapsing combine with the pain stemming from their marginalisation from the American public life. Although the novel offers an illuminating depiction of these characters' griefs as undesirable migrant subjects,[2] in this paper I am more interested in the depiction of the Ethiopian community in Washington DC and the instances – and dynamics – of travelling cultures within this discourse of migration. The Ethiopian community in the novel attempts to re-create the home of their memory and their memory of home within the American nation-space. Notwithstanding their visible presence, they remain an absent community in America because of their lack of political voice. I investigate how, despite their peripherality, the migrant subjects in the novel suture themselves into America's past and present while still holding tenaciously on to their painful pasts in Africa. In view of this, the question of memory becomes a crucial conceptual concern in this paper. I explore how the novel portrays the memories of migration and the migration of memories among the African immigrants in America.

2. America as a Migratory Setting

Washington DC, where the novel is set, was the most common destination for many Ethiopians during and after the communist revolution. In fact, statistics show that Washington DC is the only city outside Africa with the highest concentration of Ethiopian migrants and that Ethiopians constitute the second

largest black population after African Americans in this area (Chacko, 2010). Some parts of the neighbourhoods in DC (like Shaw and Alexandria) are commonly and unofficially known as 'Little Ethiopia'. In addition to the Ethiopian restaurants, boutiques and coffee shops that flood these areas, there is a bilingual (English and Amharic) Ethiopian newspaper (ZEthiopia) company based in Washington DC. 'Little Ethiopia' (which can also be found in Los Angeles and some other parts of the US) is not the only cultural and (micro)national enclave in America. There are other enclaves such as Chinatown, Little Japan, Little Egypt, Little Kosovo (New Jersey), Koreatown, Yoruba town (South Carolina) and other older, multicultural cities which share a similar history of migration such as Little Italy, New Britain (Connecticut), Dutch Town, German Town, New Madrid (Missouri) and New Amsterdam now known as New York City. These (micro)national enclaves, in turn, render America as a "postnational network of diasporas" (Appadurai 1996, 171). Hence, on a broad scale, America – popularly and controversially labelled as a nation of immigrants – is the migratory setting in *Children of the Revolution*. [3]

By conceiving of America as a migratory setting, *Children of the Revolution* shifts our perspective from the idea of "migration as a movement from place to place" to the idea of "migration as installing movement within places" (Rotas and Aydemir 2008, 5). In view of this, the novel portrays America as having the potential to become a fertile site of entangled histories, transnational identities and multidirectional memories. Also, in the novel, the American city, Washington DC, becomes the site of transnational urbanism and a translocal space where migrants like Sepha settle in, turning it into a place "intricately shot-through with other places, memories and imaginations" (Rotas and Aydemir, 2008, 7). In one of Sepha's strolls through the city, he spots America's promise of multiracial and multicultural conviviality [4] in a school ad campaign that showcases four students with different racial backgrounds. He then comments that "the liberal idea of America is at its best in advertising" (*COTR*, 98). What Sepha does here is to subtly yet perceptively critique America's haste to amplify her cultural pluralism when, in practice, many immigrants struggle to maintain a balance between their cultural and traumatic memory of home as well as their present experiences in America. As a result of this struggle, the Ethiopian migrants in the novel become 'inbetweeners' who make America their home but also bring Ethiopia into its streets (see Abani 2007). The narrator reveals how these migrants endeavour to keep their culture intact in America especially through Ethiopian wedding, funeral, dress and food. For instance, in the second chapter of the novel, Sepha describes how, to the stares and cheers of many, he wore an Ethiopian garment for an Ethiopian wedding in Washington DC. This performance of culture contributes to the establishment of a functioning Ethiopian diasporic community in America. This community in fact rises above the pejorative label of an 'immigrant' and its regular image of permanent rupture, abandonment of old patterns of life and the painful learning of new culture and language (see Handlin 1973). It becomes a community of *transmigrants*

who live in a world shaped by interconnections between their society of origin and their host nation. These transmigrants develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them to two or more nation-states. They use the term 'home' for their society of origin, even when they clearly have also made a home in their country of settlement (see Basch et al. 1994).

Sepha's uncle who was one of the first Ethiopians to arrive in America as a result of the communist revolution performs his transmigrant subjectivity in the letters he wrote to the presidents Carter, Reagan and other US government officials, requesting their intervention in the Ethiopian War. These letters reveal how Sepha's uncle negotiates his political and civil transnationalism. The letters reverberate with a tone of patriotic sentiments of a "concerned and active US citizen" relaying a heartfelt message to his government (*COTR*, 121). At the same time, the letters constitute the way in which Sepha's uncle performs long distance nationalism as an Ethiopian in diaspora. Therefore, contrary to Arjun Appadurai's (1996, 172) position that immigrants in translocal communities in the US are doubly loyal to their nations of origin and thus ambivalent about their loyalties to America, Sepha's uncle writes as an immigrant who is part of America's civil society and whose loyalty is not in question. He is nevertheless still committed to Ethiopia – in fact he chooses to remain a permanent resident even when he is legally qualified for American citizenship (*COTR*,122).

Far from being ambivalent about his loyalty to America, Sepha's uncle exudes some traits of what Mukoma wa Ngugi describes as "rooted transnationalism" (2018, 92).[5] His actions provoke thoughts on the meaning of patriotism and loyalty in the age of extraterritoriality and prosthetic nationalism.[6] As Appadurai (1996) argues, patriotism is an unstable sentiment that thrives only at the level of the nation-state and it could become plural, serial, contextual and mobile. In view of this, there is a need to revisit the implication, significance and even relevance of words such as 'patriotism' and 'loyalty' in discourses around (trans)nationality. In a sense, Sepha's uncle's patriotism is plural; he is loyal to both America and Ethiopia. He refers to Ethiopia as his "home country" although he admits that nothing is left for him there (*COTR*, 124). This position provokes a question: what do involuntary migrants really mean when they talk about 'home country?' The reference to 'home' in that phrase implies more than national descent, it points to an affective attachment to a place of origin. This attachment, on the one hand, becomes a little puzzling because – in Sepha's uncle's case – the 'home country' is also a source and site of disillusionment. On the other hand, it is this same affective attachment that the Ethiopian immigrants – as a collective – in the novel strive to re-enact and re-install in their new abode in America. Consider, for example, how the transporting of home and locality is given expression in the following lines where Sepha describes the Ethiopian neighbourhood where his uncle lives:

> There are twenty-eight floors to the building, and of those twenty-eight floors, at least twenty-six are occupied by other Ethiopians who, like my uncle, moved here sometime after the revolution and found to their surprise that they would never leave. Within this

> building, there is an entire world made up of old lives and relationships transported perfectly intact from Ethiopia. To call the building insular is to miss the point entirely. Living here is as close to living back home as one can get, which is precisely why I moved out after two years and precisely why my uncle never left…the older women still travel from apartment to apartment dressed in slippers and white blankets that they keep wrapped around their heads, just as if they were still walking through the crowded streets of Addis (*COTR*, 115).

This neighbourhood illustrates the idea that place, in and of itself, is mobile and that in a migratory setting, "movement is installed within place" (Rotas and Aydemir 2008, 5). These Ethiopian migrants that Sepha describes transform their burden of (no) return into building a familial and communal life that connects them to their place of origin, Ethiopia. [7] The neighbourhood therefore forges a translocal connection between Addis Ababa and Washington DC. In other words, even when they are in Washington DC, they can also be said to be in Addis Ababa because of the way they have managed to create connections between the two settings. This resonates with Appadurai's position that locality is contextual and relational rather than scalar or spatial, "it has a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts" (1996, 45). Hence, the translocal shift from Addis to DC proves that geography is not only a matter of map but also a lived reality, one that is always shrinking and expanding (see Attridge 2017). Sepha's warning against reading this Ethiopian neighbourhood as insular speaks to the broader practice of immigrant profiling which usually propels wilful blindness to the numerous ways in which immigrants add to the cultural currency of their host nation.

3. Memory and Relationality in a Translocal Space

The emplacement of Addis Ababa in Washington DC by these Ethiopian migrants is made possible by the work of memory. That is, memory and imagination are central to the production of translocalities. Julia Creet (2011) argues that memory provides continuity – and connection to the original place of dislocation– for displaced individuals and social identities. In *Children of the Revolution*, the Ethiopian migrants 'install' the Ethiopia of their memory, and their memories of Ethiopia, in America. The implication, therefore, is that as people and places move, memories also follow suit. In view of this, Sepha tells of how his memory of Addis Ababa overlaps with his experiences in Washington DC and how time is "temporarily suspended" in the process (*COTR*, 92). However, these memories (in translocal spaces), as the novel shows, are not mere abstractions, they are deeply felt, touched and seen by their bearers.

It is important to note that after some time, the immigrant's cultural memories (of home) will not remain undiluted because of the quotidian transnational and transcultural exchanges that would have transpired. In light of this, Alex Rotas and Murat Aydemir maintain that

> the memories that immigrants bring with them not only reflect the homeland, but are also inflected by the priorities and circumstances of the new country of habitation. Hence, these memories are, in fact, "acts of imagining" that produce cultural identifications that cannot be reduced to either place. At the same time, these actively imagined and reimagined memories become part of the place where they take place, enhancing and transforming it (2008, 57).

As a matter of fact, the Ethiopian community in the novel does not particularly romanticise the memory of home – and the home in their memory – although they hold rather tenaciously onto it; they give room for inflections, imaginations and improvisations in the making of a new home. Furthermore, the translocal negotiations between Addis Ababa and Washington DC in the novel point to an 'intertextuality of settings' which Mengestu explores with a view to underscore the interconnectedness of the human world in a divided society (see Wicomb 2005).[8] The memories of Ethiopia entangled with the memories and experiences of the present in America suggest a kind of relational remembering 'that connects diverse cultural memories' and advances the claim that "the other is co-constitutive when it comes to the making of our own memory and identity" (Erll 2018, 5). Hence, for Joseph, the violence that erupts in Logan Circle because of the displacement caused by racialised gentrification is not very distant from the violence that caused his displacement from Congo. As someone who has had a first-hand experience of violence and displacement, Joseph remarks: "[E]verything is connected […] they are not just accidents. That's the way these things begin" (*COTR*, 224). Moreover, for Sepha, the displacement of families in the violent gentrification is symbolic of an American empire that is as disappointing as the empire that Haile Selassie created in Ethiopia from which he has fled (see Abani, 2008). The narrator's constant paralleling of Ethiopia's failed revolution with the fraught American lives and city in the novel serves to demythologise America's infallibility. In fact, we learn that Sepha actually moved to Logan Circle because he "secretly loved the circle for what it had become: proof that wealth and power were not immutable and America was not always greater after all" (*COTR*, 16).

Through the observant eyes of the narrator, Sepha, we see how Logan Circle is going through a racialised gentrification in which many African Americans are displaced as middle-class white Americans move in. Frank Thomas, a long-time resident of Logan Circle, is an African American and one of America's *exile within* whose lives remain disposable by the virtue of their race and class.[9] He is forcefully displaced from his apartment and becomes homeless due to gentrification. To save his situation, he sets Judith's expensive house ablaze with the vain hope that Judith would be threatened to leave for another neighbourhood. Unfortunately, he is caught and jailed but Sepha who knows him from a distance and shares with him the experience of displacement remarks: "[W]e could have passed for brothers" (*COTR*, 225). This statement could simply be read as a form of transnational black solidarity but beyond that, Mengestu draws attention to the possibility of a planetary humanism in a translocal

American city.[10] Sepha's experience of exile enables him to empathise with Frank and in that relationality and cognitive empathy, we realise that experiences of displacement – intra-national or trans-national – follow a similar psychic logic. By extension, there are other instances of one world in relation[11] in the novel such as when Joseph, Sepha and Kenneth sing T.Rex's (an English rock band) song titled "Children of the Revolution". That these three African immigrant friends are singing the song appeared like a misplaced enthusiasm at first because the English rock band did not have them in mind when they wrote the song, but the lyrics of the song actually resonated with them because they are also 'children of the revolution' in their respective historical and national contexts. Hence *Children of the Revolution,* as a song and the title of the novel, speaks to a relationality of experiences that unfolds in the translocal cityspace of Washington DC.

3. Memory, Migration and Alternative Practices of Belonging

Arguably, the translocal and transnational impetus in *Children of the Revolution* is what informs Rob Nixon's (2007) statement that the novel is a great African novel, a great Washington novel and a great American Novel. It is an African novel not only because the author was born in Ethiopia or simply because most of the characters are Africans but because Africa's violent pasts maintain a constant – albeit spectral – presence in the conversations among the main characters, especially Sepha, Joseph and Kenneth. It is a Washington novel precisely because it zeros in on the everyday life of African immigrants in the city, especially what the city means to the narrator himself. As a result, readers do not only get a glimpse of America's disposition towards undesirable immigrants, they also bear witness to the complex interplay of race relations in the American capital. Last but not least, the novel is an American novel not merely because Mengestu holds an American passport but because of the insightful way it forges connections with America's social, political and historical trajectories through the observant eyes of an immigrant who has lived there for seventeen years.

So far, I have been concerned with how migrants' memories of home influence the formation of translocal spaces in migratory settings and how that process enhances relationality of identities and experiences. But Dorothy Drivers (2017) cautions that to inhabit the translocal is not necessarily to be in a safe place. In the case of Sepha, the translocal "constantly transfers location to dislocation, reminding (him) of the impossibility of ever making final sense of the world and ourselves" (Driver 2017, 67). This reinforces the notion that the transgression of national borders is not always a rapturous experience. In *Children of the Revolution,* Sepha, Joseph and Kenneth continuously struggle to negotiate their feeling of (migrant) disempowerment and sense of placelessness within the American national discourse. America may appear accommodating enough to have taken them in, but it nevertheless makes efforts to wipe out their migrant subjectivity; it is content with keeping them in their place as the invisible and silent population.

It is important, at this juncture, to make clear the fact that Sepha and his friends seem more invested in the struggle for belonging rather than citizenship. This, I argue, is because belonging evokes an affective connection, an emotional attachment and a substantive structure of feeling which one may have for a country without necessarily having the normative credentials of citizenship. In this continuous and, sometimes unconscious, struggle for belonging in the American civil society, Sepha becomes very conversant with Washington DC to the extent that he lectures American citizens and tourists on its history and life. He tells the American couple who shops at his store that General Logan is a "hero to us all" (*COTR*, 72). Joseph also follows America's politics so keenly that he knows all the "names and faces" of American politicians in the city (*COTR*, 168). Sepha's act of space claiming and Joseph's political awareness can thus be interpreted as alternative practices of urban belonging that disrupt Westphalian framings of nationhood.

In addition, Sepha develops the habit of strolling through the city of Washington DC and, at times, spends time reflecting by the statute of General Logan, an American civil war hero in whom Logan Circle was named after. Kathy Ann-Tan (2015) interprets Sepha's reflections – on his immigrant life – at the foot of General Logan's statute in America's national capital as a form of resistant cosmopolitanism from below. However, in my view, it is misleading to frame Sepha and his friends as cosmopolitan, not least in Kwame Appiah's (2006) use of the term, nor in the vocabulary of Afropolitanism in the writings of Achille Mbembe (2007) or Taiye Selasi (2005). In fact, as Simon Gikandi argues, refugees and coerced migrants are the "mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism" (2010, 27). Therefore, in view of Gikandi's critique of cosmopolitanism, I contend that Sepha and his friends are underprivileged and vulnerable transnational subjects who are continuously striving, against all odds, for survival, wavering between a traumatic past and present in America.

Memory is not only important in the formation of translocalities in migratory settings, it is also said to be central to the processes of inclusion or exclusion of migrants in national narratives and belonging. For example, in an argument that ensued between Sepha and Mrs Davis about the ongoing gentrification in Logan Circle, Sepha maintains the position that "America is a free country and people can live where they like" (*COTR*, 55). Mrs Davis's response to Sepha was not only withering but also exclusionary in the way she invoked the past. She says to Sepha: "[W]hat do you know about free countries? You didn't even know what that was till you came here last week, and now you're telling me people can live where they like" (*COTR*, 55). Here, Mrs Davis, as an African American, indirectly invokes black people's history and memory of struggle for emancipation in America – a history that Sepha plays no part in. It is this same historical memory (especially the memory of the 1968 riot in Washington DC, after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jnr) that many African Americans invoked in their rejection of the proposal to rename some neighbourhoods in Washington as Little Ethiopia in 2005 (see Lee 2018).

The paradox therefore is that while America demands that migrants like Sepha put their traumatic pasts behind them, it also marginalises them from its national memory narrative. However, Sepha and his friends finds several ways of interpolating themselves in American memory discourses. For instance, Joseph memorises the Gettysburg address on the Lincoln Memorial (*COTR,* 47) while Sepha develops the habit of standing in front of the Washington Monument in fearful awe (*COTR,* 46). Sepha also invests in reading America's literature and history in such a way that he confidently engages in a conversation with Judith, a professor of American history, about "America's repudiation of history and its antipathy towards anything that resembled the past" (*COTR,* 56). These acts of positioning themselves in America's iconic sites of memory become Sepha's and Joseph's attempt at forging an affective connection with America and a way of putting on its memory prosthetically (Landsberg 2004). These acts also constitute a performance of memory citizenship even if that performance remains a monologic rather than a dialogic one. [12]

At the same time, because of their absence from the national memory of their host community, Sepha and his friends become memory makers themselves. This migrant memory-making move produces some form of migrant solidarity that their host nation may never understand (see Glynn and Kleist, 2012). In other words, Sepha and his two Africa friends, Joseph of Zaire and Kenneth the Kenyan, create their own memories of home (Africa) in their migratory setting, America. They produce an African transnational memory in a migratory setting which, along with the recurring trope of maps, points to the need to reckon with the changing notions of nations and boundaries in our globalizing world. The novel therefore challenges nationalistic structures of memory by creating an African community of remembrance that insurgently inscribes itself within the national narrative of America.

Furthermore, the transnational and traumatic histories of African revolutions that keep surfacing in the novel begin with an attraction to the map of Africa in Sepha's store. As Adrienne Reich (1984) points out that a place on the map is a place in history, the presence of the map of Africa in the store serves to evoke the histories of Africa and their authenticity in a diasporic space that constantly demands the effacement and dismissal of such histories. It is important to note that the African transnational remembering in the novel transcends the nationalities of the three immigrant friends, they remember across countries and regions of Africa. However, despite the commonly shared history, they remain attached to their individual countries and are conscious of the peculiarities of each country's history. On the other hand, much to Mengestu's credit, the emphasis on the peculiarities of each migrant's home country may also serve as a critique of the warped perception of Africa as a country within the American imaginary. Extending these views, Mengestu stages migrant subjects to play out their 'minor transnationalism', one that allows for a 'relational discourse' among them. [13]

4. Conclusion

In essence, *Children of the Revolution* is particularly insightful with regard to the issue of the entanglement of peoples, places, memories, times and cultures in an era of accelerating globalization and mass migration. It depicts how movement shapes memory in both individual, collective and national contexts, how the idea of home is neither fixed, static nor monolithic, and how the notion of belonging is complicated in migratory contexts. Given that migration invariably creates migratory settings, America in the novel becomes a space where the migrants create, negotiate and alter several forms of transnationalism and hyphenated identities. As this essay has attempted to show, the Ethiopian migrants in *Children of the Revolution* attempt to create a translocal community in which Addis Ababa and Washington DC intersect. In spite of this, they experience displacement from the American national life. America's rhetorical multiculturalism, it turns out, perpetuates anti-immigrant sentiments which eventually reinforces the monologic character of its national memory. As a response to this strategic and coordinated exclusion from America's national memory discourse, the involuntary migrants in Mengestu's novel defiantly write themselves into the American nation-space and perform several forms of citizenship that could aptly be described as non-normative, if not altogether subversive.

Notes

[1] Scholars seem to have varying opinions on the meaning of voluntary and involuntary migration but my understanding of the terms, which undergirds my analysis, tilts towards Rachel Cassidy's (2004) explanation that migrant typologies are often determined by the degree of choice involved in the decision to leave one's home country. These typologies are also measured by the circumstances, desires and motivations that impel one's movement. Therefore, my use of involuntary migration denotes migrants who found themselves on the move because of circumstances beyond their control (war, persecution, environmental disaster, political violence, economic hardship). In view of this, I regard Sepha and his African friends, Joseph and Kenneth, as involuntary migrants in America.

[2] From my reading of the text and my own personal experience as an immigrant, I have come to the realization that host countries usually conceive of immigrants in two ways: desirable and undesirable immigrants. Desirable immigrants have skills and come from wealthy – one could say First World – countries. They constitute an "asset" to their host country and, in many cases, are not even regarded as immigrants but expatriates. On the other hand, undesirable immigrants are often seen as a liability to their host country. They usually do not have skills and are often from war-torn countries. They are regarded as immigrants in a pejorative sense.

[3] The slogan, "America: a nation of immigrants" was popularized by JF Kennedy's book (1964) of the same title. However, the term had appeared earlier in 1874 in *The Daily State Journal of Alexandria* where, in a bid to encourage European immigrant, it stated: "we are a nation of immigrants and immigrants' children".

[4] In his book *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*, Paul Gilroy invokes the notion of 'conviviality' to describe a model of cohabitation and interaction that, in his words, have made "multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" (2004,12).

[5] Drawing from Kwame Appiah's idea of rooted cosmopolitanism, Mukoma wa Ngugi *The*

Rise of the African Novel (2018) describes a state in which a transnational subject identifies with a root, an ancestral home but equally identifies with other place(s).

[6] Appadurai (1996) uses the term *prosthetic nationalism* to explain the ways in which diasporas are changing in the light of new forms of electronic mediations. With regard to the Indian diaspora in the US, he notes how they influence national decision in India through electronic media and how, in that process, political communications become delocalized. He writes: "[T]he riots that shook many Indian cities after December 1992 can no longer be viewed in isolation from the electronic mobilization of the Indian diaspora, whose members can now be involved directly in those developments in India through electronic means. This is certainly not a matter of long-distance nationalism of the sort that Benedict Anderson has recently bemoaned (1994). It is part and parcel of the new and often conflicting relations among neighbourhoods, translocal allegiances and the logic of the nation-state" (Appadurai 1996, 209).

[7] By 'burden of (no) return', I am referring to how the discourse of return is very complicated for these immigrants. For instance, Sepha arrived in America thinking that he would return after a while (when the war was over in Ethiopia) but after seventeen years in America, he says: "[T]there is a simple and startling power to that phrase: going back home. There is an implied contradiction, a sense of moving forward and backward at the same time […] how long did it take for me to understand that I was never going to return to Ethiopia again? It seems as if there should have been a particular moment when the knowledge settled in" (*COTR,* 175).

[8] Zoe Wicomb (2005) applies the literary concept of intertextuality (relationship between texts) to physical spaces. That is, just as texts are shaped by one another, places can also be interconnected, especially in the perspective of the people that navigate them.

[9] While Sepha is an exile from Ethiopia, Frank is an exile within America, the only country he calls home. He is exiled/excluded within the American system by the virtue of his race and class. For more on *exile within*, see Michelle Fine (2018).

[10] In *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (2004), Paul Gilroy also talks about a planetary humanism founded on the essence of humanness which provides the basis for global solidarity between human beings, eliminating the enlightenment tradition based on race, destined to divide the human – a planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other.

[11] One world in relation is a reference to Edouard Glissant's (2009) vision of the world as explained in his 'theory of relation' and 'worldmentality' which broadly point to the bonds that unite humankind as one; the associative connection between human experiences..

[12] Michal Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz suggest that performances of memory can function as "acts of citizenship"(2011, 7) Their use of 'acts of citizenship' owes to the political theorist, Engin Isin, who maintains that acts of citizenship are deeds that take place regardless of legal citizenship which usually comes with civil responsibilities such as voting and paying taxes. In other words, act of citizenship is the performance of citizenship outside the boundaries of normative practices that formal citizens undertake..

[13] Shu-mei Shih and Francoise Lionnet (2005) put forward the concept of minor transnationalism in order to move beyond the limitations of postcolonial theory, global and ethnic studies. They note that transnational studies often capitalize the interaction between minor culture and mainstream society, overlooking the lateral or vertical relationship among minority groups. They argue that minor transnationalism pays attention to the interactions and exchanges among minority groups in a transnational/multicultural setting. This eventually gives legitimacy to minority subjects and produces new possibilities.

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