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## **The Unbearable Postcoloniality of Non-Being: Specters of History and the Scars They Trace**

The mention of “scars” in the title of this essay is perhaps most immediately inspired by a specific plotline Zakes Mda’s critically acclaimed novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000). One of the protagonists in the novel bears scars on his back that were inherited across generations from an ancestor who had received a brutal flogging during a conflict between two factions that formed within the amaXhosa community during the early colonial period. The novel itself is set across temporalities, dealing with the long and complex histories of the colonization and subjugation of the various indigenous groups in region and the lasting impression left by the Xhosa cattle killings 1856–1857. The mass cattle sacrifices were prompted by the visions of the prophetess Nongqawuse. She foresaw that the ancestors would rise from the dead to fight the colonizer upon the sacrifice of the land’s cattle. Needless to say, the dead did not rise, and the cattle killings led to a debilitating famine. However, Mda’s presentation of such complex histories in a plurivocal and pluritemporal narrative is focalized through the lives of characters living in contemporary times and how these past events continue to haunt their present realities.

Besides the famine that claimed many lives, the event caused a historical rift among the amaXhosa people – those who believed in Nongqawuse’s prophecies and those who did not. The fact that this event has been kept alive

in popular memory through various oral and performative traditions bears testimony to its enduring historical significance. The novel introduces the longstanding rift between the Believers and the Unbelievers living in Qolorha at the very start of the novel through the character of Bhonco, who inherits the scars from such violent history of the conflict. He inherits the scars of a flogging his ancestor received at the hands of the Believers. However, also introduced fairly early on in the plot is the colonial conflict that culminates in the beheading of Bhonco's and Zim's common ancestor, Xikixa. While the two shared a common ancestor, they were also on opposite sides of the conflict introduced at the start of the narrative – Bhonco was an Unbeliever while Zim a Believer. The terms are understood to designate those who adopted the faith of the colonizers, thereby becoming “Believers” and those who continued to put faith in indigenous systems of belief even after the catastrophe caused by Nongqawuse prophecies were derided as “Unbelievers”.

The past; in the context of Mda's narrative, is a complex entity in and of itself. It is not entirely a character in a metafictional sense, neither is it an embodied presence, as we shall later see in the case of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). It does, however, exert its presence on the lives and sometimes even the bodies of characters. For characters such as Camagu, who represents a common trope in postcolonial fiction; that of the “returning native”, his crisis lies in an impossibility for a relationship to the history of his nation on account of his absence from it. He is not at ease upon his return to the native land. He is not greeted by familiar faces or old friends. He cannot find a job in South Africa, because he hasn't been able to forge strategic associations that would aid him in the process of settling into a new life in his native land. He is in every sense an outsider to the reality of his own country. Moreover, the fact that he has no associations in Qolorha or an active stake in the history that intersperses his own narrative there, confirms his exilic status. He returns to South Africa in 1994, leaving his job in New York, to vote in the historic elections that would result in Nelson Mandela's presidency, with a romantic desire to contribute to the development of “his” country and people (Mda: 29). However, he is constantly plagued by the fact that he did not know the “freedom dance” (29). Frustrated by the constant reinforcement of his outsiderhood, he even contemplates returning to his exilic life abroad (31). There was no place for him here.

He would never, as he had hoped, find himself in the land that he so desperately wished to call his own. Especially when set in contrast with a character such as John Dalton his alienation becomes all the more apparent. John Dalton has lived his entire life in Qolorha and is a part of the land's history, even though his ancestors came from a foreign land:

“The Afrikaner is more reliable than you chaps. He belongs to the soil. He is of Africa. Even if he is not happy about the present situation he will not go anywhere. He cannot go anywhere.”, he bursts out during a conversation about the state of affairs in Qolorha.

(Mda: 139)

He understands more comprehensively than Camagu ever could the history and the people of Qolorha. Therefore, Camagu's story seems to fall short of the usual *bildungsroman* of the returning native, but rather often seems to suggest the struggles of an exile who was never native to begin with.

There are two levels of reality within the narrative of *The Heart of Redness*. There is the present inhabited by characters such as Camagu, Ximia, Qukezwa, John Dalton, Bhonco, Zim, NoPetticoat, and etc. Such a level comprises events in the lives of these characters and forms the immediate storyline of the novel. However, superimposed upon this immediate diegetic level, is the metadiegetic retelling of the history of events leading up to the present divide between the Believers and Unbelievers. With the introduction of Camagu, the narrative is focused primarily through him. He hears an enchanting songstress as he passes by a wake while escaping the loud nightlife of Johannesburg. He accosts her and discovers that she's from Qolorha. Camagu arrives in Qolorha, almost on a whim, in search of NomaRussia – the enchanting songstress. From the moment of his arrival he gets drawn into life in the small seaside town. Through his association with John Dalton, his attempts at forming a relationship with Ximia – Bhonco's daughter, and his liaisons with Qukezwa – Zim's daughter, he soon gets embroiled in the historical conflict between the Believers and Unbelievers, which gets exacerbated by the prospect of Qolorha becoming home to a tourist gambling resort. He is constantly put in situations wherein his outsiderhood gets reinforced, but also where he is forced to prove his neutrality. However, his exilic status does not undermine his stake in the future of the inhabitants

of Qolorha, as evidenced by his starting of a cooperative society that provides employment for women of the town.

Camagu is set up in the midst of various characters who serve as foils to him in various ways, thereby exteriorizing the conflict of his vantage point with the further conflicting viewpoints of the various inhabitants of Qolorha. One example that almost immediately stands out in this regard is the moment when he sees a brown snake in his bed (98). The moment is crucial for it triggers something in Camagu that we haven't encountered before; an affirmation of his belonging. As started earlier he does not have the advantage of a return to the familiar. For Camagu the familiar has to be constructed as a result of his exilic position. The visitation from the *Majola* – the brown snake that is the totem of his people, becomes a crucial moment in his 'quest for relevance'. It is in this moment that Camagu is seen claiming his seemingly lost heritage, even so such a moment of apparent reclaiming is haunted by a sense of outsiderhood. As the narrator tells us: "They did not expect a man with such great education, a man who lived in the lands of the white people for thirty years, to have such respect for the customs of his people. He indeed is a man worth of their respect" (99).

His next moment of reintegration comes in the form of his interactions with Qukezwa. Ximia and Qukezwa present the externalized conflict of tradition and modernity within which we could locate Camagu's exilic position. Ximia who hates all things native and Qukezwa who is willing to stand trial for trying to rehabilitate the land of her ancestors from the onslaught of foreign plants. Such as positioning is made very clear towards the end of the novel. The narrative finds Camagu caught between multiple forces that are trying to shape his life in Qolorha. On one hand he is settling into patterns of domesticity with Qukezwa, the woman he has expressed a desire to wed and father her 'immaculately conceived' child Hietsi.<sup>1</sup> He is reintroduced to NomaRussia the woman whose enchanting song drew him to Qolorha in the first place, only now she was a shadow of her former self and was awaiting a most painful death from a disease she believes to have been brought on by a curse Qukezwa's mother commissioned on her. He also finds himself lamenting the fact that Ximia left

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<sup>1</sup> Qukezwa is discovered being pregnant, but the grandmothers of the town examine her and certify that she is a virgin. However, most people in the town believe the child was Camagu's (Mda: 190).

without as much as even bidding him a proper farewell (262). However, the fact that he distances himself from Ximia and chooses instead to worry about Zim's illness and Qukezwa's frustration at her father's unwillingness to pass, gives some indication of an assimilation into his new-found place in Qolorha (262).

In many senses, Camagu is the ideal subject for an exploration of postcoloniality. For the "western" reader, he facilitates an entry point into the unfamiliar through the comforts of a familiar vantage point. His postcoloniality, in many ways, is what one might describe as being typologically Saidian. As Edward Said reflects on the condition of exile vis-à-vis a sense of belonging within "affirmations of nationalism": "Do nationalism and exile have any intrinsic attributes? Are they simply two conflicting varieties of paranoia?" (Said: 140). He goes on to expand on such questions, arguing that they never point towards possibilities for certainty in straightforward answers. He states:

Because exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or restored people. The crucial thing is that a state of exile free from this triumphant ideology – designed to reassemble an exile's broken history into a new whole – virtually unbearable and virtually impossible in today's world. Look at the fate of the Jews, the Palestinians and the Armenians.

(Said: 140–141)

Camagu in *The Heart of Redness*, represents a similar unbearable impossibility for the reassembling of such an estranged national self, but unlike; or so one might assume, his exile is experienced through – to quote in part the title Aime Cesaire's poetic reflections, "[...] a return the native land." In such a sense, he probably comes closer to Fanon's ideas regarding a crisis of the colonial native intellectual. He directly addresses such a figure in works such as *Black Skin, White Masks* or *The Wretched of the Earth*. The colonized subject, by virtue of being assimilated into a culture that defines him as a "negation", inhabits what he describes in his introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks* as a "zone of non-Being" (Fanon, 2008: xii). In order for there to be any genuine or meaningful self-knowledge, Fanon argues, the subject inhabiting such a zone must first be extricated from it (xii) The subject Fanon is addressing through his

work becomes clearer as we move through the first chapter wherein, he discusses the ramifications of colonial knowledge systems on the assimilating colonized subject. The fallacy inherent within such a process is that his assimilation will never be complete. As Fanon suggests, he will at best always be a noble savage; his speech always resonating a primordial “divine” cooing or gurgling, and the contempt he constantly feels for himself stemming from being unable to ever fully conceal his black skin underneath white masks (4). In later works such as *The Wretched of the Earth*, while discussing the figure of the “native intellectual”, Fanon goes on to state:

Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.

(Fanon, 2001: 169)

It is such a process of exile through assimilation that Camagu’s character represents. A reassembling of such a fractured selfhood; of which the subject is often not entirely cognizant, is further made impossible by the “emptying” that Fanon alludes to in the above cited passage. Having been emptied of all that is “native” the native intellectual, while filled with good intentions for his native country and peoples, is incapable of sharing any real common ground with them. As a result of having left South Africa at a young age, studying and working abroad, where too he faced alienation of a different nature, when Camagu returns “home”, he returns “a stranger in his own country” (Mda: 29).

However, Camagu’s exilic existence and his anxieties of re-assimilation into the citizenry of his own native country only form a part of Mda’s rich and complex narrative. As suggested earlier, his character is constantly interrogated by the non-exilic experiential lives of the people he encounters in Qolorha. While he struggles with the overwhelming unfamiliarity of a national history that passed him by during his absence from the native land, characters such as Bhonco or Zim embody a history that is over a century old. Bhonco in particular, as we are told, inherited like generations before him the scars that his ancestor had received as a result of being whipped by the Believers. The scars were far

from a passive reminder of a fraught past, they were alive and responsive to the present, as we later find out they start to burn and itch whenever Bhonco was upset at something the Believers did:

Bhonco's scars were playing up again. Whenever he is upset by the Believers the scars itch. And when that happens he is blinded even to the beautiful things that make him weep. He is blinded by anger. He needs NoPetticoat by his side. She has a way of soothing him, and scratching the scars gently, almost caressing them, until he is lulled to sleep, And in his sleep he joins his forefathers wandering on the mountain, digging out roots to feed their children and lamenting the folly of belief.

(Mda: 114)

A less nuanced reading of such a moment in Mda's novel, where physical and seemingly sentient scars are inherited across generations, might apply the blanket descriptor of magic realism to such a literary trope. It is not the descriptor itself, or what it represents in a context of literary fiction, that one is claiming lacks nuance. Rather, it is an assumption that the descriptor itself may be now indiscriminately applied to all that lies outside of the hermeneutic realms of a "Western" or more specifically a historically Euro-American understanding of what constitutes "realism"; historical or otherwise, is what one might argue is lacking in nuance. More importantly, the assumption that descriptors such as "magic realism", regardless of contexts of production and reception, hermeneutically yield a common truth; in the specific case of postcoloniality, seems a touch absurd.

At this point I would want to trace a brief history of a convention of usage that often tends to tie magic realism as an aesthetic in the representational arts to experiences of postcoloniality – one that parallels, in my understanding, the use of such aesthetic approaches in the literary arts as well. So, the text often recognized as an early manifesto of sorts for magic realism as a literary genre was the prologue that Swiss born Cuban novelist, essayist and ethnomusicologist, Alejo Carpentier wrote to his first majorly successful novel *The Kingdom of this World*. Here Carpentier explains why artists and writers of his generation, emerging from the political and socio-cultural contexts in Latin American countries around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, naturally gravitated towards artistic expressions such as surrealism. However, he also distinguishes that

such an aesthetic in the hands of Latin American artists was distinct from the “manufactured marvelous” within European surrealism.<sup>2</sup> After having escaped Gerardo Machado y Morales’ dictatorship in 1927, Carpentier lived and worked in France for several years, before eventually returning to Cuba in 1959 after Castro’s revolution. In 1943 he would travel Haiti, a trip that would give him both the material and setting for *The Kingdom of this World*, his novel detailing a history of the Haitian revolution. In the aforementioned prologue, Carpentier writes: “I found the marvelous real with every step. But I also realized that the presence and vitality of the marvelous real was not a privilege unique to Haiti but the patrimony of all the Americas, where we have not yet established an inventory of our cosmogonies”. He states that during his time in Haiti, he observed that the “marvelous” was reality. It is nothing short of marvelous that a people were striving for freedom and dignity in lands they had inhabited for generations. Carpentier concludes with the reflection: “What, after all, is the history of all the Americas but a chronicle of the marvelous real?”

In his Nobel lecture, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, too echoes a similar sentiment. Beginning with invocations to the “Age of Exploration”, the Columbian Nobel laureate alludes to the fantastical accounts of “passages through our southern lands of America”.<sup>3</sup> The quest for Eldorado, Garcia Marques subtly reminds us was what prompted explorations not only into the southern lands of America, but across the world. He mentions Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s expedition in Northern Mexico that lasted eight years. The expedition party comprising six hundred men set out on a deluded quest for the fountain of youth and at the end of eight years only five of the original six hundred returned. The reality of such a historical situation, especially when viewed from a contemporary vantage point, is no doubt absurd. Such a madness, Garcia Marquez contends, was in no way mitigated following Latin American countries gaining independence from Spanish colonial rule. The “solitude” of Latin American cultures, that he constantly emphasizes in his speech, and it becomes very acutely apparent, is not an existential one; at least not in the sense that Western/European cultures speak of existential loneliness. This solitude, peculiar to Latin American cultures or nationalities post Spanish colonization,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://instruct.uwo.ca/english/785a/Prologue.html>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1982/marquez/lecture/>.

he argues is one that is and continues to be historically engendered. Therefore, one may even argue, that everything depicted in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not necessarily fantastical or magical, but the machinations of history in the imaginary town of Macondo that have been rendered unintelligible to the “outside” world by virtue of its complete isolation. It does not exist outside of history, rather it exists in disremembrance.

Therefore, while the scars on Bhonco’s back that itch and burn whenever there is conflict between the Believers and Unbelievers, or the lively ghosts that periodically visit the inhabitants of Macondo, might seem fantastical or magical, they are in fact indicators of a cyclicity of history that the stranded subject experiences. Gayatri Chakravory Spivak famously remarked that, “we are made by the forces of people moving about the world” (Spivak: 3). Such a statement is conventionally understood as indicating moving or shifting subjects and subjecthoods. This is especially true of the tropes of exile within Western or Euro-American postcolonial frames. However, even within such realities, and particularly so in contexts located otherwise than, such forces tend to be inscribed upon experiential realities that are for the most part stationary. What a text such as *The Heart of Redness* lays out through its narrative, is in large part the question of such locationally grounded subjectivities. Camagu’s story is just one part of the larger narrative, and while the narrative is in parts focalized through his character, he is not by any means the most prominent protagonist. Towards the end when the village of Qolorha is battling the forces of neo-colonial capitalist “progress”, it is not Camagu but John Dalton who saves the day and secures government protection for the land. As we read Dalton’s thoughts towards the end of the novel, he was able to “win his people back”, from the “clutches of the overeager stranger from the city of Johannesburg” (Mda: 270). The narrative almost purposefully prevents Camagu’s story from enjoying centrality within its emplotment. Unlike, for example, in novels such as Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, wherein the figure of the “returning native” is central to the narrative, while the “natives” all play supporting roles, Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* focuses more on the experiential lives of “native” subjects and subjectivities. It is precisely such a focus that allows for a richer and fuller exploration into an early colonial history that continued to haunt the lives of the people in the coastal village of Qolorha. Dalton winning back

“his people” towards the end of the story then, becomes all the more poignant, when one considers the fact that it was Dalton’s forefathers who had killed Xikixa; Zim’s and Bhonco’s shared ancestor. The repeated counterpointing between the lives of Dalton and Camagu certainly points towards a plurality within the postcolonial condition itself, but its immediate historical significance is perhaps much deeper. Both their characters towards the end of the novel represent a hope and a plea that was most urgent in post-Apartheid South Africa – a future where all the various nationalities and ethnicities inhabiting the land would cooperate with one another, living and prospering in harmony. Thereby breaking the old cyclicalities of historical conflict and internal strife.

The breaking of such cyclicalities; especially of historical trauma within experiential realms that are, as Kwok Pui-lan suggests, contrary to the grand narratives of voyage and exploration posited by scholars such as Paul Gilroy, in as much as such experiences of movement are in a past that has been forcibly and intentionally distanced and disremembered (Pui-lan: 46). Such restrictions in movement are also often contextualized within gendered experiences of history.

As his images of travel and movement from place to place may reflect a more masculinist script, I want to propose another trope to signify the diasporic imagination. It is the image of the storyteller who selects pieces, fragments, and legends from her cultural and historical memory to weave together tales that are passed from generation to generation. These tales are refashioned and retold in each generation, with new materials added, to face new circumstances and to reinvent the identity of a people.

(Pui-lan: 46)

In such an exploration into the diasporic cultural and experiential imaginaries, Pui-lan suggests that each of the various and varied ethnic and cultural diasporas within the United States could possibly learn from one another’s experiences, as they all in their own unique ways share a common experience of being “outsiders within” (49).

Another context wherein such an experience is perhaps most endemic, but continues to be hermeneutically inexhaustible by dominant trends in postcolonial criticism and theory, is what Toni Morrison describes in her 1990 William E. Massey Lectures, later collected in a volume titled *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, as the “Africanist presence” in America (Morrison,

1993: 6). She described the presence of black peoples on American soil, and therefore by extension in American socio-cultural and political discourse, as an “unsettled and unsettling population” (6). The question then, that one is confronted with is, how does one address such a population and their solitude, in being at once unsettled and unsettling. What language and linguistic categories or lexicon does one invoke or enlist in addressing an otherness that is as radical as it is proximal? Moreover, how does one acknowledge one’s own complicity in the very processes that have rendered such groups of peoples marginal; “outsiders within”, and more importantly how does one do so without oneself being driven into abjection. Such is the crisis posed, Morrison would go on to argue, by the “Africanist presence” in America. It becomes, she states: “a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom.” (7). In later works such as, *The Origin of Others* (2017), Morrison would go on to unequivocally state that all collective selfhoods are inscribed upon collectivities of otherness, and in the case of an American nationhood, blackness was the most proximal otherness upon which such a free national collectivity could be inscribed (Morrison, 2017: 19–20). “Once blackness is accepted as socially, politically, and medically defined, how does that definition affect black people?”, Morrison asks (58). In many ways Morrison’s question echoes one that DuBois astutely posed about the project of the Reconstruction following the American Civil War; he asked of his fellow black folk: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (DuBois: 6). What was the place of now emancipated slaves, outside a system of enslavement that defined both their presence and existence on the soil of a nation for the span of nearly a century? In such a sense DuBois’ observation is chillingly accurate. Was not the Reconstruction no more than an attempt to find a solution to the problem of such an “unsettled and unsettling” population outside of an ontology that was forcibly imposed on them? Was it no more than a crisis in finding a place for entire generations of a forcibly displaced peoples within a new “Order of Things”, of if we are to translate the French title to Foucault’s 1966 book more literally, to find a name for the thing?

In his 2007 book, *Confluences: Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, John Cullen Gruesser laments that despite the “formidable similarities between postcolonial and African American literary

criticism”, very little within academic literary discourses have accounted for such resonances (Gruesser: 2). He also acknowledges that there has been a general resistance to postcolonial theory and theoretical approaches within African American literary criticism and conversely postcolonial criticism has approached what Morrison has called the “Africanist presence” in America at best tentatively (2). I do not disagree with Gruesser’s claim that such a dialogue could be fruitful, however, I do wonder what the nature of such a dialogue might be. While Gruesser’s approach is sound in as much as it seeks points of contacts and correspondences between postcoloniality in general and the specific nature of the African American predicament, however, as Pui-lan explains, such reports of factuality do not necessarily hermeneutically exhaust the experiential lives that they circumscribe. Gruesser acknowledges Gilroy’s work in positing the “Black Atlantic” as a possible conduit between postcolonial and African American experientialities, however, contrary to what he suggests, the question is not always of breaking down the boundaries between disciplines or fields of study, rather it is one of how one might ethically and functionally approach a possibility of dialogue across and between two or more positions of marginality (5).

It is not that such dialogues are not possible, neither is one suggesting that they would not be fruitful, however, in order for them to happen one must not dwell on the similarities alone, but equally account for and honor the differences. One could for example think of Satya P. Mohanty’s 1993 essay titled, “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On ‘Beloved’ and the Post-colonial Condition.” Before further unpacking Mohanty’s reading, it becomes important to also emphasize that Toni Morrison *Beloved* is challenging read for a variety of reasons and seemingly lends itself to a variety of theoretical lenses. Readers often cite the nonlinearity of the novel’s emplotment, the density of the language and the seeming absence of action that usually moves the plot of a narrative along. Structurally and even formulaically speaking, one might argue that the author gives us an epic in the form of a “postmodern” novel. The tale begins *in-medias-res*, and we move backwards and forwards till the entire narrative action comes to fruition and completion. The novel is not about the famous “Child-Murder” that is often thought of as having inspired Morrison in its writing. In fact, as Morrison explains, the story is not about

the act of murder at all, but rather the “feeling of that moment”; a moment where a mother killed her child. In several interviews, she recalls being asked by friends and colleagues; who assumedly had finished reading the novel, where exactly in the novel had she depicted the murder itself. Morrison recalls responding by going through the novel herself and realizing that “event” itself was so buried in the language of the prose, that one could easily lose sight of it. Also, the “event” itself loomed so large in the entirety of the narrative itself that it did not need to actually be depicted. We know fairly early on in the story that it happened and that everything happening in the narrative present is shadowed by the event of that murder in the past. However, yet again the novel is not about the event itself. If we closely examine Morrison’s own reflections on her process towards the writing of this novel, we will see it was the figure of Margaret Garner in history rather than her actions that fascinated the author. The novel then seeks to imagine what history leaves out or has no access to. What happened to Garner and her remaining children after history lost her trace in New Orleans? More importantly, how did she cope if at all, with a life in the shadow of having taken the life of her own child? Morrison remarks in her preface to the novel, that Garner was sanely unrepentant, did she continue to see things the same way or did the horrors of her own actions eventually catch-up with her (Morrison, 2004: xvii)?

Morrison’s novel does not offer any direct responses to such questions. However, one cannot entirely disagree that these questions supply the *rohstoffe* to the author’s imagination and her fascination with Garner as a historical figure. The most striking aspect, of course, being a mother’s unrepentance over the killing of her own child. The story inspired Thomas Satterwhite Nobel’s famous 1867 painting *The Modern Medea*. Such a comparison between Garner and the figure of Medea was more recently revived in Steven Weisenburger’s 1999 historical biography; *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South*. However, Weisenburger does not flesh out such a comparison through own his work, rather he uses the title to invoke the popular perceptions of Garner at the time of her trial; as indicated by the title of Nobel’s painting. In speaking at a gathering in Kentucky later televised by C-Span, Weisenburger echoes sentiments very similar to those that inspired Mark Reinhardt’s more recent historical study on Garner’s life and trial, *Who Speaks for Margaret*

*Garner*.<sup>4</sup> He acknowledges in his speech the importance a work such as Morrison's holds in the popular imagination and also directly admits having been inspired by *Beloved* to undertake the biographical project that resulted in his book. Like Reinhardt, Weisenburger also insists on foregrounding the factual history behind the Margaret Garner story. Being himself a professor of English Literature, he recognizes the affective power of a work such as *Beloved*, but also notes that literary representations often lead the reader from the particular to the general, and in his estimation Garner's story is not one that can be "generalized". Here is where I would choose to both agree and disagree with Weisenburger's positions on the matter. I am in complete agreement with the position that Garner's story is unique and not the story of every "Slave Mother". I also agree with the position that one cannot generalize anything based on Garner's story. After all we do not have a base in factual historical data to substantiate such a generalization. We do not have reports of other "fugitive slaves" killing their children to prevent them from being "reclaimed" into slavery, neither do we have historical data indicating a rise in the rates of infanticide among fugitive slave mothers. So, no, one cannot generalize the experience embodied by Garner.

I would argue that it is precisely such an un-generalizability that keeps Garner's story alive in our minds. Her seeming unrepentance as Morrison points out, even more than her actions, is what captivates our imaginations, however it is also the very same that makes her, in Emmanuel Levinas' terms, "absolutely Other" (Levinas: 39). We share neither context nor code with her and she is in every sense of the term beyond our grasp. And while authors such as Reinhardt or Weisenburger strive to give us the facts of her story, they cannot explain or make Garner understandable to us. Once again, I emphasize the uniqueness of Garner's story, but the question is not regarding the inherent un-generalizability of her situation, but rather how we when faced with her story. Morrison tries to imagine a life for Garner through the protagonist in her novel (Morrison, 2004: xvii). Sethe is not Margaret Garner, however, being inspired by the inscrutability of Garner's character, her story too is at times hermeneutically unyielding. Returning to my earlier statement, *Beloved* is a challenging work because, while it builds on familiar hermeneutic frames,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.c-span.org/video/?115380-1/modern-medea&desktop=>.

it also defies and undoes them. It has been read as a “neo-slave narrative”, a “postmodern postcolonial” novel, as “historiographic metafiction” and the list goes on. All the frames of reference usually applied to a work such as *Beloved* are, no doubt, arguably legitimate, but they do not explain every facet of the narrative. As an illustration of this argument, I will present a detailed reading of Satya P. Mohanty’s analysis of *Beloved* in his essay. I will also use the text itself as a counterpoint to the Mohanty’s historiographical and postcolonial reading of Morrison’s work.

Mohanty’s 1993 essay explores the epistemological basis for a cultural identity through a reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. The relational axes; defined at the start of the, upon which such an exploration is based are detailed as: “personal experience” vis-à-vis “public meanings” and/or “subjective choices” vis-à-vis “objective social location” (Mohanty: 42). Mohanty goes on to argue that a work such as *Beloved* is “in fact directly concerned with the relationships among personal experience, social meanings and cultural identities” (42). Based upon such a relationality he advances the claim that “‘personal experience’ itself is socially and ‘theoretically’ constructed, and it is precisely in this *mediated* was that it yields knowledge” (45). Through an epistemology of cultural identity based on his own critiques of a “postmodern” position that interrogates the possibilities and veracities of knowledge itself, Mohanty creates a theoretical *mise en scène* to unpack a work such as *Beloved* in terms of its foundations in a “Postcolonial Identity and Moral Epistemology” (55).

These complexities are at the heart of Toni Morrison’s postcolonial cultural project in her remarkable novel *Beloved*. Central to the novel is a vision of continuity between experience and identity, a vision only partly articulated in the juxtaposing of the dedication (“Sixty Million and more”), with its claim to establish kinship with the unnamed and unremembered who perished in the infamous Middle Passage, together with the epigraph’s audacious appropriations of God’s voice from Hosea, quoted by Paul in Romans, chapter 9: ‘I will call them my people/ which were not my people; / and her beloved/ which was not beloved.

(Mohanty: 55)

It is possible to argue that Mohanty’s reading functions more on an understanding of the individual’s experiences in history, as indicated by the relationality he proposes at the start of his study between “subjective choices”

and “objective social location”. One could make such an argument based on the ways in which Morrison’s narrative structure literarizes history. Mohanty’s analysis places the “claim to a community” at the center of *Beloved*’s narrative, and community is sought in an “imaginative expansion” of oneself or more particularly, “one’s capacity to experience” (55).

History is directly invoked in the very start of the narrative; as we are gradually drawn into the “spite” of 124, Bluestone Road (Morrison, 2004: 3). Other vignettes also begin to populate the chronotope that surrounds the “spiteful” house and its inhabitants. We are told that by 1873, Sethe and her daughter Denver were the only victims of the house; the grandmother Baby Suggs was dead and the two boys Howard and Buglar had each run away once the house had committed “what was for them the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time” (3). The state of affairs inside the house is, however, also contextualized with regard to the goings-on in the outside world. We are told, for example that the house didn’t always have a number and that the city of Cincinnati did not always stretch as far as Bluestone Road, or that Ohio itself had only been a state a little over seventy years when the two boys had fled the “lively spite the house felt for them” (3). One could speculate why the year 1873 is of significance to Morrison’s narrative. Is the author invoking something in particular? The mention of the year locates the story within a crucial period in the history of the United States; the era of the Reconstruction – more specifically towards the end of the Reconstruction. Five years hence, The Compromise of 1877 following President Hayes’ controversial election in 1876, would effectively end the Reconstruction with the withdrawal of Federal troops from all Southern states. There is perhaps, another reason why 1873 is an important year in the context of the novel’s narrative. On the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1873; Easter Sunday, there ensued a chain of events surrounding the Grant Parish courthouse in Colfax, Louisiana, resulting in arguably one of the bloodiest race massacres in the South with a death toll recorded at over a hundred and fifty black men killed at the hands of white Southern Democrats. In the history of the postbellum American South, the Colfax Massacre continues to symbolize the grave failure and the flawed basis of the Reconstruction’s endeavors. I do not wish to belabor this history very much further, however, one could see the events in Colfax and the major preceding race riots of 1871

in Meridian, Mississippi, as being directly retaliatory to the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment. However, the riots at Meridian and the massacres at Colfax were not the only instances of major violence during the Reconstruction. Staring with the Memphis Riots of May 1866, the Reconstruction was marked by several instances; sometimes multiple major instances a year; of pogromatic racial violence across the United States.

I emphasize these facts in particular, because it is this very blood-soaked history that forms a context to the “claim to a community” that Mohanty identifies as central to the narrative of *Beloved*. To reiterate DuBois’ question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (DuBois: 6). The question truly embodies the predicament of black peoples in the United States following the proclamation of Emancipation and particularly following the end of the Civil War. This was the one question that singularly summed up in DuBois’ mind the fate of black peoples during the Reconstruction. It is no accident that the emergence of organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan coincided exactly with the end of the Civil War. Until Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, black peoples were firmly ensconced within the system and structure of slavery: a system that if we recall the conflict at the heart of Garner trial, did not view blacks as people let alone as citizens with rights. The emancipated slave did not really have a place in American society or the country’s citizenry (DuBois: 21). The Reconstruction; the historical era in which Morrison sets her novel, therefore was a period marked by efforts to reconstruct and restructure the society and citizenry of the United States of America in order to accommodate black peoples; or as DuBois explains, to find a solution to the “Negro Problem” (12). And while none of this history directly enters the narrative of *Beloved*, it continues to loom in the background. The problematic “claim to community” that forms an immediate context for the lives of Sethe and Denver, as the sole-survivors of the spite of 124, is also equally informed by the spiteful past that was inscribed onto the lives of all black peoples in postbellum America.

While I do not disagree with the fact that the desire for community manifests as a narrative drive in the novel, however, unlike Mohanty I do not recognize such a desire in Sethe, at least not on an epistemic level. Prior to Paul D’s arrival at 124, we see Sethe as a predominantly solitary figure. We later learn that any connection Sethe had to community was through Baby Suggs,

and that such a connection started to gradually wane through Baby Suggs' prolonged illness. After her demise, Sethe and Denver lived more or less in complete isolation. The unbearable solitude is perhaps felt most intensely by Denver. When Paul D first arrived at 124, we see a shy and awkward, but more importantly an intensely lonely Denver (Morrison, 2004: 14). She had lost her grandmother, her brothers had abandoned them, all she had left was her mother, and losing her mother's attention even for a moment made her anxious. When she sees how engrossed Sethe was in her conversation with Paul D, Denver secretly hoped that the ghost of her dead infant sister would make its presence felt (15). However, though trepidatious, Denver still feels a mixed sense of excitement at the arrival of a visitor, she innocently asks Paul D to stay the night; especially after she learns that he knew her father. When Sethe responds by rearing up to strike her for suggesting such a thing, Denver bursts into tears. She cries all the tears she had pent up since the death of her grandmother and their abandonment by Howard and Buglar: "I can't no more. I can't no more... I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either." (17).

It is true that the survivor of slavery must "begin by facing the immediate more directly", in order for a community to be built in commiseration with fellow-survivors of similar ordeals. It is equally true that such communities of commiseration can only be achieved through the "labor of trusting", however, the narrative Morrison weaves around the character of Sethe, in particular, constantly foregrounds the impossibilities of commiserations and trust (Mohanty: 56). How can one undertake the labor of trusting when one has never known trust? Therefore, when Mohanty addresses the "cognitive task" of "rememory", one could make the argument that what makes "rememory" distinct from remembrance is, in fact, the impossibility of a cognitive function. "Rememory" is alive. The subject, in this case Sethe, who "rememories" cannot place a distance between the experiences of trauma and the memories of them. In purely psychological terms, both Sethe and Paul D show symptoms of post-traumatic stress, a condition that manifests in survivors of traumatic experiences as an inability, even with time, to place a cognitive distance between their present realities and their traumatic past. When the "rememory" of a past

trauma is triggered, it is as though they relive the experience; in other words, the experience of the trauma has not naturally passed from an experiential level to a cognitive level. The subject, therefore, resorts to suppressing any memory of the experience, rather than confronting or processing it, because any such confrontation would be all-consumingly painful and debilitating. This explains why Sethe would much rather live in the lively spite of a “baby’s venom”, rather than confronting the circumstances that led her to take the life of her “already crawling” child.

The novel abounds in instances of such inabilities that the characters face in confronting or acknowledging their pasts. The only memories Sethe and Paul D share are those of their time in Sweet Home, and for Paul D in particular everything that happened to him after Sweet Home – though vividly etched in his mind, are private thoughts; experiences he cannot bring himself to share and keeps locked up in his “tobacco tin” heart. For Sethe on the other hand the years following her escape from Sweet Home seem to exist in an almost somnambulistic daze. After the first time the two have sex, “they lay side by side resentful of one another and the skylight above them” (Mohanty: 24). Paul D’s had fantasized a long time ago, like all the other men in Sweet Home had, of being with Sethe before she picked Halle for her husband (13). Now that he had finally had sex with her, he came to realize that the consummation of his desires had come too late, his fantasies had centered around a young Sethe, and now when had looked at her laying beside him, he was almost repulsed by her aged and sagging breasts; the same breasts he had held in his hands a short while ago, “as though they were the most expensive part of himself” (25). His youthful imagination of Sethe did not align with the woman he had just lain with. He could not seem to relate to her or her scars. She had called the scars on her back a tree and he had tenderly examined and caressed them; now they seemed like a “revolting clump” (25). His mind immediately shifts from the Sethe’s scars and the unfulfilled dreams of his youthful desires, wandering back to memories of Sweet Home. Sethe for her own part lays beside him feeling a different sort of resentment; the kind that came from a deprivation of not having any dreams of her own at all (25). This moment is very telling of the relationship the two characters share in the narrative present of the novel. It is also equally telling of the nature of any kinship or kindredness Paul D and Sethe

could possibly share. Therefore, the synthesis in their perspectives that ultimately points to a, “new knowledge as well as a new way of knowing”, as Mohanty proposes, does hold, however, it does not come at this moment in the narrative, but rather only at the very end of the novel (58). It is true that they both recall synchronous moments in their shared past, but their memories run parallel to one another, while not really converging. Sethe remembers her “marriage” and how Mrs. Garner had laughed at her naïve idea of wanting a wedding ceremony to commemorate her union with Halle (Morrison, 2004: 31). Meanwhile, Paul D recalls how he and the other Pauls watched the ripples in the cornfields as Sethe and Halle made love, and how later they had cooked and eaten the cobs from the broken stalks (32). The memories though synchronous, form a sort of polyphony, rather than a harmony.

Following this, Sethe and Paul D seem to settle into an awkward domesticity, punctuated intermittently by memories of Sweet Home. Unable to bear her feeling of isolation any more, she flat-out asks Paul D on the third day since his arrival, how long he thought he was “going to hang around” (Morrison, 2004: 52)? Paul D was deeply hurt by Denver’s remark, while Sethe was somewhat perplexed by her daughter’s behavior. In an attempt to comfort him, Sethe tries to apologize on Denver’s behalf; to which Paul D responded by stating that she could not apologize on anyone’s behalf and that Denver was grown enough to apologize for herself (54). Sethe becomes immediately defensive and Paul D is surprised by the ferocity with which she defends her maternal right to both chastise and protect Denver (54). He reflects:

Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you’d have a little love left for the next one.

(Morrison, 2004: 54)

However, recognizing the intensity of Sethe’s emotions; without entirely understanding them, and feeling like it was not his place, Paul D decides it was best to leave the matter be. Feeling a sense of remorse, Sethe suggests that Paul D, Denver and she go to the carnival in town the following day. This is perhaps the only moment of traditional familial normalcy in the entire novel.

The three walked through the fair holding hands, but we soon realize their happiness; albeit forced, was not to last. Their outing is plagued by the smell of “doomed roses”. Paul D was the first to notice the stench of the dying roses along the lumberyard fence, and the lingering smell of death that heralds the re-return of the supernatural in the narrative (Morrison, 2004: 57). The other townsfolk; Sethe and Denver included, either do not seem to notice the smell or seemed to have grown used to it – only Paul D keeps trying to draw attention to the odor almost wondering if he was the only one smelling it (57). This only further seems to emphasize his sense of not-belonging – the same feeling that Sethe had sought to placate by suggesting a day at the carnival.

When they return from the carnival, Sethe, Denver and Paul D are met with the arrival of a strange woman. She had walked out of the river fully dressed, nobody knew where she had come from, and she ends up seeking refuge at 124 (Morrison, 2004: 60–61). Beloved’s arrival marks the start of the central dramatic action in the novel. The formulaic “gothic” omens that precede her arrival on the scene; like the smell of cloying dying roses and the disappearance of the dog “Hereboy”, all suggest something uncanny about her presence. Sethe feels an unnatural and uncontrollable pressure in her bladder causing her to urinate ‘endlessly’ (61). She is reminded of when she had been in labor with Denver and her water had broken while she was on the run after having escaped Sweet Home. The metaphors of birth foreshadow the strange predicament that Beloved’s arrival represents in the narrative. As the story progresses, the other characters in the novel start to negotiate the feeling that Beloved was in fact Sethe’s dead daughter: the ghost Paul D had temporarily expelled from the house now returned to haunt 124 in corporeal form. Beloved’s presence in the narrative of the eponymous novel operates on at least three levels. On a literal level she is an actual person, probably living with the lasting psychological effects of some prolonged trauma. In the imagination and belief of Denver and later Sethe, she is their kin, returned from the dead, while furthermore, on a narratorial or diegetic level her presence facilitates the work of “rememory”. Eventually Beloved’s presence and her later exorcism, will facilitate the “cognitive” task that Mohanty emphasizes in his study – the future possibility of a passage from “rememory” to remembrance. However, such a passage does not present a “new knowledge”, if we think of knowledge as the process of learning

something previously unknown (Mohanty: 61). The narrative revolves around the disremembered rather than the forgotten; the disremembered who must be re-remembered.

What makes such a journey of re-remembering fraught and painful, is the fact that disremembering unlike forgetting is not a natural process: it is the active suppression of a painful past. All characters, in one way or another, struggle with disremembrance – whether that be Sethe’s suppression of the memories of her mother or the events following her escape from Sweet Home, or the memories and feelings Paul D locks tightly shut in his “tobacco-tin- heart”, or Denver’s struggles with disremembering that her mother had killed her sister and tried to kill her as well. Beloved becomes the instrument of “rememory” for the women in 124, however, her presence becomes too much for Paul D, who is eventually forced out of the house by her. After she recovers from whatever it was that ailed her when she emerged from the river, Beloved becomes obsessed with Sethe; never wanting to lose sight of her (Morrison, 2004: 68). She was fascinated by Sethe, but most so with her stories, and while the stories about her past were painful to recount, Sethe still obliged and even found herself wanting to share her stories with Beloved (68). She shared stories from her past she had not even shared with Denver or Paul D; stories that she and Baby Suggs tacitly had decided were “unspeakable” (68). Beloved asks Sethe about her “diamonds”, reminding her of a pair of crystal earrings that had been given to her by Mrs. Garner as a wedding present (71). Surprised by the story she had never heard, Denver asked Sethe where the earrings were now, and Sethe falls silent after saying: “Gone... Long Gone.” (71). Beloved later enquires about Sethe’s mother. This too was a story Denver had not heard. The details of this story were patchier than the one about her crystal earrings. Sethe recalls that her mother had once shown her where she had been branded and told Sethe that she was the only one remaining with that brand, should something happen to her and her face become unrecognizable Sethe could tell it was her by looking for the mark branded into her skin (72). We find out that Sethe’s mother had been hanged; possibly lynched, and the only stories she had were from a wet nurse named Nan who had “only one good hand”, which is probably why she took care of the children while the other women worked (73). Nan told young Sethe how her mother and she had both been at sea together and had been

raped repeatedly by white crewmen (74). Sethe's mother had thrown all her children from the rapes over-board without even naming them; Sethe was the only one she kept (74). Sethe also remembers that Nan and her mother spoke the same language; a language she remembers once having understood but has no recollection of meaning in (74).

This is one of the most powerful statements the novel makes regarding the precarity of identification faced by black peoples in and after slavery. One could parallel this instance with a similar idea voiced by Léopold Sédar Senghor in his famous poem, "Prayer to Masks", where the persona in the poem is confronted by the mask of his "panther-headed ancestor" and can only greet it in silence. He has lost the language in which he could have greeted his ancestor but has also found empowerment in the language of the colonizer to articulate his predicament. Unlike the colonially assimilated French poet of the Négritude movement, who would go on to become the first president of independent Senegal, Sethe has no language for her experiences. It is here that one might pose an intervention in conventional postcolonial readings of works such as *Beloved*. Slavery, one might make the argument, though a product of the colonial enterprise, its victims never really were recognized by the colonial system itself. People of the "Black Diaspora", especially in places like the United States, left behind in the wake of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, were never subjects of the European colonial powers that caused their initial displacement. Therefore, their postcoloniality is perforce different from the colonized subject who would later go on to claim sovereignty through the varied processes of "decolonization". One simply cannot theorize the two in similar ways or approach them through corollary hermeneutic frames. The "cognitive task" of a "postcolonial identity" would look very different in contexts such as the Reconstruction in America. Sethe, a former fugitive slave living in Reconstruction America, represents the disremembered victims of colonization. I am not proposing a comparative victimology; or even a competitive one at that, of the colonized in the Mainland versus the enslaved in the Diaspora. I am, however, arguing that the "burden of memory", to borrow from the title and spirit of Wole Soyinka's book: *The Burden of Memory and the Muse Forgiveness*, experienced in the two cases are starkly different, as is the experience of remembrance itself. In the case of the women in 124 Bluestone Road, the burden of memory returns to

haunt them as a physical corporeal entity. The muse of forgiveness comes in the form of the community of women who gather to exorcise Beloved from the house and Sethe's life. However, the claim to community is as much a claim from and of the community, and it is an act of necessity rather a cognition or a recognition of identity; individual, collective or otherwise.

What I am proposing in placing the readings of these two novels, Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Morrison's *Beloved*, is then perhaps a response to questions posed by scholars such as Gruesser in his book *Confluences: Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, regarding the potential for a fruitful dialogue between postcolonial and African American literary criticism. In a broader sense, I am perhaps addressing a larger question regarding the possibilities of intercultural dialogues across both geo-political and experiential localities designated as the "Global South". By placing these seemingly disparate novels and the vastly different realities that they respectively address, I have sought to draw attention to the hermeneutic incommensurabilities that more conventional or traditional approaches within postcolonial criticism often struggle to address. I do not seek to undermine or diminish the value of aesthetic approaches such as magic realism or historiographic metafiction. One cannot deny the deep resonances between the our modernities, postmodernities, colonialities and postcolonialities. However, we cannot also deny that, while such theoretical and hermeneutic lenses help us both represent and understand our histories of colonization and their continuing impacts in our everyday lives, our struggles with postcoloniality and decolonization are in many ways locationally determined. Both *Bhonco* and *Sethe* bear the scars of history, but the actual events of the scarring are incomparable. Similarly, both are haunted by a past, and while both hauntings can causally be traced back to the European colonial enterprise, the degrees of separation are too unique to be ignored. At the end of the day, we are all haunted by specters of a past, but we share little more than the fact of a haunting. Even within realities wherein we assume uniformity on account of a shared historical experience, upon closer examination, we will encounter remarkable pluralities. When the women of the community living around 124 Bluestone Road gather to exorcise Beloved from Sethe's home, we see each coming armed with something different: "Some brought what they could and what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung

around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others bought Christian faith – as shield and sword. They had no idea what they would do once they got there” (Morrison, 2004: 303). And when they did get there and beheld the sight of Beloved standing there on the porch outside 124; pregnant, naked, glistening in the afternoon sun and smiling, they were each reminded of something from their past that they did not want to remember (309). Even when they are able to rescue Sethe from the “devil-child”, Beloved’s smile and her now empty outstretched hand, seemed to demand an unspeakable response to an unspoken question. As Morrison concludes in the epilogue to the novel, she must again be disremembered in order for life as we know it to go on: “Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss. Beloved” (324).

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## The Unbearable Postcoloniality of Non-Being: Specters of History and the Scars They Trace

### Summary

This paper is as much an engagement with postcolonial criticism and theory as it is an exploration into both an aesthetics and a hermeneutics of the postcolonial condition. The two texts, Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, could not be seemingly more disparate. However, despite such vast differences in locationality, one might upon closer examination discern similar aesthetic devices in the narrativization of historical events. The preponderance of motifs such as scars and hauntings; both in many ways signifiers of embodied traumatic pasts, lead one to entertain possibilities for comparison. Such comparisons are often made easier when one considers colonization as a shared event in the histories of the two contexts; ethnic conflict in colonial South Africa and slavery in America. While one is not completely foreclosing the possibilities of a fruitful dialogue across the two contexts, there are a variety of ethical underpinnings to such a potential intercultural exchanges – an ethics of comparison that accounts for not just the perceived structural or aesthetic similarities, but equally honors the experiential differences across and within two or more positions of marginality. It is precisely such an aesthetics and ethics that this study attempts to demonstrate in addressing questions of comparability and the intersecting theoretical and hermeneutic lenses available to comparatists, especially in the study of literatures located otherwise than dominant Euro-American positionalities.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, postcolonial theory and criticism, African studies, South Africa, African American studies, ethics of comparison

**Słowa kluczowe:** literatura porównawcza, teoria i krytyka postkolonialna, studia afrykańskie, Afryka Południowa, studia afrykańsko-amerykańskie, etyka porównania