

Radical Sense  
Now Reader Volume 5



## **American Wedding**

**By Essex Hemphill**

In america,  
I place my ring  
on your cock  
where it belongs.  
No horsemen  
bearing terror,  
no soldiers of doom  
will swoop in  
and sweep us apart.  
They're too busy  
looting the land  
to watch us.  
They don't know  
we need each other  
critically.  
They expect us to call in sick,  
watch television all night,  
die by our own hands.  
They don't know  
we are becoming powerful.  
Every time we kiss  
we confirm the new world coming.

What the rose whispers  
before blooming  
I vow to you.  
I give you my heart,  
a safe house.  
I give you promises other than  
milk, honey, liberty.  
I assume you will always  
be a free man with a dream.  
In america,  
place your ring  
on my cock  
where it belongs.  
Long may we live  
to free this dream.

# BARGAINING WITH PATRIARCHY

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*This article argues that systematic comparative analyses of women's strategies and coping mechanisms lead to a more culturally and temporally grounded understanding of patriarchal systems than the unqualified, abstract notion of patriarchy encountered in contemporary feminist theory. Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints, which I identify as patriarchal bargains. Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression. Two systems of male dominance are contrasted: the sub-Saharan African pattern, in which the insecurities of polygyny are matched with areas of relative autonomy for women, and classic patriarchy, which is characteristic of South and East Asia as well as the Muslim Middle East. The article ends with an analysis of the conditions leading to the breakdown and transformation of patriarchal bargains and their implications for women's consciousness and struggles.*

Of all the concepts generated by contemporary feminist theory, patriarchy is probably the most overused and, in some respects, the most undertheorized. This state of affairs is not due to neglect, since there is a substantial volume of writing on the question, but rather to the specific conditions of development of contemporary feminist usages of the term. While radical feminists encouraged a very liberal usage, to apply to virtually any form or instance of male domination, socialist feminists have mainly restricted themselves to analyzing the relationships between patriarchy and class under capitalism. As a result, the term *patriarchy* often evokes an overly monolithic concep-

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tion of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders.

It is not my intention to provide a review of the theoretical debates around patriarchy (Barrett 1980; Beechey 1979; Delphy 1977; Eisenstein 1978; Hartmann 1981; McDonough and Harrison 1978; Mies 1986; Mitchell 1973; Young 1981). Instead, I would like to propose an important and relatively neglected point of entry for the identification of different forms of patriarchy through an analysis of women's strategies in dealing with them. I will argue that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I will term the *patriarchal bargain*<sup>1</sup> of any given society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity. These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression. Moreover, patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders.

By way of illustration, I will contrast two systems of male dominance, rendered ideal-typical for the purposes of discussing their implications for women. I use these ideal types as heuristic devices that have the potential of being expanded and fleshed out with systematic, comparative, empirical content, although this article makes no pretense at providing anything beyond a mere sketch of possible variations. The two types are based on examples from sub-Saharan Africa, on the one hand, and the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia on the other. My aim is to highlight a continuum ranging from less corporate forms of householding, involving the relative autonomy of mother-child units evidenced in sub-Saharan polygyny, to the more corporate male-headed entities prevalent in the regions identified by Caldwell (1978) as the "patriarchal belt." In the final section, I analyze the breakdown and transformation of patriarchal bargains and their relationship to women's consciousness and struggles.

#### AUTONOMY AND PROTEST: SOME EXAMPLES FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

I had one of my purest experiences of culture shock in the process of reviewing the literature on women in agricultural development

projects in sub-Saharan Africa (Kandiyoti 1985). Accustomed as I was to only one type of patriarchy (which I shall describe in some detail later, under the rubric of classic patriarchy), I was ill prepared for what I found. The literature was rife with instances of women's resistance to attempts to lower the value of their labor and, more important, women's refusal to allow the total appropriation of their production by their husbands. Let me give some examples.

Wherever new agricultural schemes provided men with inputs and credit, and the assumption was made that as heads of household they would have access to their wives' unremunerated labor, problems seemed to develop. In the Mwea irrigated rice settlement in Kenya, where women were deprived of access to their own plots, their lack of alternatives and their total lack of control over men's earnings made life so intolerable to them that wives commonly deserted their husbands (Hanger and Moris 1973). In Gambia, in yet another rice-growing scheme, the irrigated land and credit were made available to men only, even though it was the women who traditionally grew rice in tidal swamps, and there was a long-standing practice of men and women cultivating their own crops and controlling the produce. Women's customary duties with respect to labor allocation to common and individual plots protected them from demands by their husbands that they provide free labor on men's irrigated rice fields. Men had to pay their wives wages or lend them an irrigated plot to have access to their labor. In the rainy season, when women had the alternative of growing their own swamp rice, they created a labor bottleneck for the men, who simply had to wait for the days women did not go to their own fields (Dey 1981).

In Conti's (1979) account of a supervised smallholder settlement project in Upper Volta, again, the men were provided with land and credit, leaving the women no independent resource base and a very inadequate infrastructure to carry out their daily household chores. The result was vocal protest and refusal to cooperate. Roberts (forthcoming) similarly illustrates the strategies used by women to maximize their autonomy in the African context. Yoruba women in Nigeria, for instance, negotiate the terms of their farm-labor services to their husbands while they aim to devote more time and energy to the trading activities that will enable them to support themselves and ultimately give up such services. Hausa women, whose observance of Islamic seclusion reduces the demands husbands can make for their services, allocate their labor to trade, mainly the sale of ready-cooked foodstuffs.

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In short, the insecurities of African polygyny for women are matched by areas of relative autonomy that they clearly strive to maximize. Men's responsibility for their wives' support, while normative in some instances, is in actual fact relatively low. Typically, it is the woman who is primarily responsible for her own and her children's upkeep, including meeting the costs of their education, with variable degrees of assistance from her husband. Women have very little to gain and a lot to lose by becoming totally dependent on husbands, and hence they quite rightly resist projects that tilt the delicate balance they strive to maintain. In their protests, wives are safeguarding already existing spheres of autonomy.

Documentation of a genuine trade-off between women's autonomy and men's responsibility for their wives can be found in some historical examples. Mann (1985) suggests that despite the wifely dependence entailed by Christian marriage, Yoruba women in Lagos accepted it with enthusiasm because of the greater protection they thought they would receive. Conversely, men in contemporary Zambia resist the more modern ordinance marriage, as opposed to customary marriage, because it burdens them with greater obligations for their wives and children (Munachonga 1982). A form of conjugal union in which the partners may openly negotiate the exchange of sexual and labor services seems to lay the groundwork for more explicit forms of bargaining. Commenting on Ashanti marriage, Abu (1983, p. 156) singles out as its most striking feature "the separateness of spouses' resources and activities and the overtness of the bargaining element in the relationship." Polygyny and, in this case, the continuing obligations of both men and women to their own kin do not foster a notion of the family or household as a corporate entity.

Clearly, there are important variations in African kinship systems with respect to marriage forms, residence, descent, and inheritance rules (Guyer and Peters 1987). These variations are grounded in complete cultural and historical processes, including different modes of incorporation of African societies into the world economy (Mbilinyi 1982; Murray 1987; S. Young 1977). Nonetheless, it is within a broadly defined Afro-Caribbean pattern that we find some of the clearest instances of noncorporateness of the conjugal family both in ideology and practice, a fact that informs marital and marketplace strategies for women. Works on historical transformations (for example, Etienne and Leacock 1980) suggest that colonization eroded the material basis for women's relative autonomy (such as usufructary access to communal land or traditional craft production) without

offering attenuating modifications in either marketplace or marital options. The more contemporary development projects discussed above also tend to assume or impose a male-headed corporate family model, which curtails women's options without opening up other avenues to security and well-being. The women perceive these changes, especially if they occur abruptly, as infractions that constitute a breach of their existing accommodations with the male-dominated order. Consequently, they openly resist them.

#### **SUBSERVIENCE AND MANIPULATION: WOMEN UNDER CLASSIC PATRIARCHY**

These examples of women's open resistance stand in stark contrast to women's accommodations to the system I will call *classic patriarchy*. The clearest instance of classic patriarchy may be found in a geographical area that includes North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran), and South and East Asia (specifically, India and China).<sup>2</sup>

The key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household, which is also commonly associated with the reproduction of the peasantry in agrarian societies (E. Wolf 1966). Even though demographic and other constraints may have curtailed the numerical predominance of three-generational patrilocal households, there is little doubt that they represent a powerful cultural ideal. It is plausible that the emergence of the patriarchal extended family, which gives the senior man authority over everyone else, including younger men, is bound up in the incorporation and control of the family by the state (Ortner 1978), and in the transition from kin-based to tributary modes of surplus control (E. Wolf 1982). The implications of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex for women not only are remarkably uniform but also entail forms of control and subordination that cut across cultural and religious boundaries, such as those of Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam.

Under classic patriarchy, girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father. There, they are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law. The extent to which this represents a total break with their own kin group varies in relation to the degree of endogamy in marriage practices and different conceptions of honor. Among the Turks, there are lower rates of



endogamy, and a husband is principally responsible for a woman's honor. Among the Arabs, there is much greater mutuality among affines, and a women's natal family retains both an interest and a say in protecting their married daughter's honor (Meeker 1976). As a result, a Turkish woman's traditional position more closely resembles the status of the "stranger-bride" typical of prerevolutionary China than that of an Arab woman whose position in the patriarchal household may be somewhat attenuated by endogamy and recourse to her natal kin.

Whether the prevalent marriage payment is dowry or bride-price, in classic patriarchy, women do not normally have any claim on their father's patrimony. Their dowries do not qualify as a form of premortem inheritance since they are transferred directly to the bridegroom's kin and do not take the form of productive property, such as land (Agarwal 1987; Sharma 1980). In Muslim communities, for a woman to press for her inheritance rights would be tantamount to losing her brothers' favor, her only recourse in case of severe ill-treatment by her husband or divorce. The young bride enters her husband's household as an effectively dispossessed individual who can establish her place in the patriline only by producing male offspring.

The patrilineage totally appropriates both women's labor and progeny and renders their work and contribution to production invisible. Woman's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves. In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women. However, women have access to the only type of labor power they can control, and to old-age security, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance. Young women have an interest in circumventing and possibly evading their mother-in-law's control. There are culturally specific examples of how this struggle works to the detriment of the heterosexual bond (Boudhiba

1985; Johnson 1983; Mernissi 1975; M. Wolf 1972), but the overall pattern is quite similar.

The class or caste impact on classic patriarchy creates additional complications. Among the wealthier strata, the withdrawal of women from nondomestic work is frequently a mark of status institutionalized in various seclusion and exclusion practices, such as the *purdah* system and veiling. The institution of *purdah*, and other similar status markers, further reinforces women's subordination and their economic dependence on men. However, the observance of restrictive practices is such a crucial element in the reproduction of family status that women will resist breaking the rules, even if observing them produces economic hardship. They forego economically advantageous options, such as the trading activities engaged in by women in parts of Africa, for alternatives that are perceived as in keeping with their respectable and protected domestic roles, and so they become more exploitable. In her study of Indian lacemakers in Narsapur, Mies (1982, p. 13) comments:

Although domestication of women may be justified by the older forms of seclusion, it has definitely changed its character. The Kapu women are no longer *gosha*—women of a feudal warrior caste—but domesticated housewives and workers who produce for the world market. In the case of the lacemakers this ideology has become almost a material force. The whole system is built on the ideology that these women cannot work outside the house.

Thus, unlike women in sub-Saharan Africa who attempt to resist unfavorable labor relations in the household, women in areas of classic patriarchy often adhere as far and as long as they possibly can to rules that result in the unfailing devaluation of their labor. The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination. They would rather adopt interpersonal strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband. As M. Wolf's (1972) insightful discussion of the Chinese uterine family suggests, this strategy can even result in the aging male patriarch losing power to his wife. Even though these individual power tactics do little to alter the structurally unfavorable terms of the overall patriarchal script, women become experts in maximizing their own life chances.

Commenting on "female conservatism" in China, Johnson (1983, p. 21) remarks: "Ironically, women through their actions to resist passivity and total male control, became participants with vested

interests in the system that oppressed them." M. Wolf (1974) comments similarly on Chinese women's resistance to the 1950 Marriage Law, of which they were supposed to be the primary beneficiaries. She concludes, however, that despite their reluctance to totally transform the old family system, Chinese women will no longer be content with the limited security their manipulation of family relationships can provide.

In other areas of classic patriarchy, changes in material conditions have seriously undermined the normative order. As expressed succinctly by Cain et al. (1979, p. 410), the key to and the irony of this system reside in the fact that "male authority has a material base, while male responsibility is normatively controlled." Their study of a village in Bangladesh offers an excellent example of the strains placed by poverty on bonds of obligation between kin and, more specifically, on men's fulfillment of their normative obligations toward women. Almost a third of the widows in the villages were the heads of their own households, struggling to make a living through waged work. However, the labor-market segmentation created and bolstered by patriarchy meant that their options for work were extremely restricted, and they had to accept very low and uncertain wages.

Paradoxically, the risks and uncertainties that women are exposed to in classic patriarchy create a powerful incentive for higher fertility, which under conditions of deepening poverty will almost certainly fail to provide them with an economic shelter. Greeley (1983) also documents the growing dependence of landless households in Bangladesh on women's wage labor, including that of married women, and discusses the ways in which the stability of the patriarchal family is thereby undermined. Stacey's (1983) discussion of the crisis in the Chinese family before the revolution constitutes a classic account of the erosion of the material and ideological foundations of the traditional system. She goes on to explore how Confucian patriarchy was superseded by and transformed into new democratic and socialist forms. In the next section, I will analyze some of the implications of such processes of transformation.

#### **THE DEMISE OF PATRIARCHAL BARGAINS: RETREAT INTO CONSERVATISM OR RADICAL PROTEST?**

The material bases of classic patriarchy crumble under the impact of new market forces, capital penetration in rural areas (Kandiyoti 1984), or processes of chronic immiseration. While there is no single

path leading to the breakdown of this system, its consequences are fairly uniform. The domination of younger men by older men and the shelter of women in the domestic sphere were the hallmarks of a system in which men controlled some form of viable joint patrimony in land, animals, or commercial capital. Among the propertyless and the dispossessed, the necessity of every household member's contribution to survival turns men's economic protection of women into a myth.

The breakdown of classic patriarchy results in the earlier emancipation of younger men from their fathers and their earlier separation from the paternal household. While this process implies that women escape the control of mothers-in-law and head their own households at a much younger age, it also means that they themselves can no longer look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law. For the generation of women caught in between, this transformation may represent genuine personal tragedy, since they have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits. M. Wolf's (1975) statistics on suicide among women in China suggest a clear change in the trend since the 1930s, with a sharp increase in the suicide rates of women who are over 45, whereas previously the rates were highest among young women, especially new brides. She relates this change explicitly to the emancipation of sons and their new possibility of escaping familial control in the choice of their spouse, which robs the older woman of her power and respectability as mother-in-law.

Despite the obstacles that classic patriarchy puts in women's way, which may far outweigh any actual economic and emotional security, women often resist the process of transition because they see the old normative order slipping away from them without any empowering alternatives. In a broader discussion of women's interest, Molyneux (1985, p. 234) remarks:

This is not just because of "false consciousness" as is frequently supposed—although this can be a factor—but because such changes realized in a piecemeal fashion could threaten the short-term practical interests of some women, or entail a cost in the loss of forms of protection that are not then compensated for in some way.

Thus, when classic patriarchy enters a crisis, many women may continue to use all the pressure they can muster to make men live up to their obligations and will not, except under the most extreme pressure, compromise the basis for their claims by stepping out of line

and losing their respectability. Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain—protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety.

The response of many women who have to work for wages in this context may be an intensification of traditional modesty markers, such as veiling. Often, through no choice of their own, they are working outside their home and are thus “exposed”; they must now use every symbolic means at their disposal to signify that they continue to be worthy of protection. It is significant that Khomeini’s exhortations to keep women at home found enthusiastic support among many Iranian women despite the obvious elements of repression. The implicit promise of increased male responsibility restores the integrity of their original patriarchal bargain in an environment where the range of options available to women is extremely restricted. Younger women adopt the veil, Azari (1983, p. 68) suggests, because “the restriction imposed on them by an Islamic order was therefore a small price that had to be paid in exchange for the security, stability and presumed respect this order promised them.”

This analysis of female conservatism as a reaction to the breakdown of classic patriarchy does not by any means exhaust the range of possible responses available to women. It is merely intended to demonstrate the place of a particular strategy within the internal logic of a given system, parallels to which may be found in very different contexts, such as the industrialized societies of Western Europe and the United States. Historical and contemporary analyses of the transformation of the facts and ideologies of Western domesticity imply changes in patriarchal bargains. Gordon’s (1982) study of changing feminist attitudes to birth control in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries describes the strategy of voluntary motherhood as part of a broader calculus to improve women’s situation. Cott’s (1978) analysis of the ideology of passionlessness among Victorian women also indicates the strategic nature of women’s choices.

For the modern era, Ehrenreich (1983) provides an analysis of the breakdown of the white middle-class patriarchal bargain in the United States. She traces the progressive opting out of men from the breadwinner role starting in the 1950s, and suggests that women’s demands for greater autonomy came at a time when men’s conjugal responsibility was already much diminished and alternatives for men outside the conjugal union had gained considerable cultural legitimacy. Despite intense ideological mobilization, involving experts

such as doctors, counselors, and psychologists who tried to reinforce the idea of the responsible male breadwinner and the domesticated housewife, alternative trends started to emerge and to challenge the dominant normative order. Against this background, Ehrenreich evaluates the feminist and the antifeminist movements and says, "It is as if, facing the age-old insecurity of the family wage system, women chose opposite strategies: either to get out (figuratively speaking) and fight for equality of income and opportunity, or to stay home and attempt to bind men more tightly to them" (1983, p. 151). The familism of the antifeminist movement could therefore be interpreted as an attempt to reinstate an older patriarchal bargain, with feminists providing a convenient scapegoat on whom to blame current disaffection and alienation among men (Chafetz and Dworkin 1987). Indeed, Stacey (1987, p. 11) suggests that "feminism serves as a symbolic lightning rod for the widespread nostalgia and longing for lost intimacy and security that presently pervade social and political culture in the United States."

However, the forms of consciousness and struggle that emerge in times of rapid social change require sympathetic and open-minded examination, rather than hasty categorization. Thus Ginsburg (1984) evaluates antiabortion activism among women in the United States as strategic rather than necessarily reactionary. She points out that disengaging sexuality from reproduction and domesticity is perceived by many women as inimical to their best interests, since, among other things, it weakens the social pressure on men to take responsibility for the reproductive consequences of sexual activity. This concern and the general anxiety it expresses are by no means unfounded (English 1984) and speak to the current lack of viable alternatives for the emotional and material support of women with children. Similarly, Stacey (1987) identifies diverse forms of "postfeminist" consciousness of the postindustrial era. She suggests that a complex and often contradictory merging of depoliticized feminist attitudes to work and family and of personal strategies to enhance stability and intimacy in marriage are currently taking place.

At the ideological level, broken bargains seem to instigate a search for culprits, a hankering for the certainties of a more traditional order, or a more diffuse feeling that change might have gone either too far or badly wrong. Rosenfelt and Stacey's (1987) reflections on postfeminism and Stacey's (1986) discussion of conservative pro-family feminism, although they criticize the alarmist premises of neoconservative discourse, take some of the legitimate concerns it expresses seriously.

## CONCLUSION

Systematic analyses of women's strategies and coping mechanisms can help to capture the nature of patriarchal systems in their cultural, class-specific, and temporal concreteness and reveal how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt, and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities. Such analyses dissolve some of the artificial divisions apparent in theoretical discussions of the relationships among class, race, and gender, since participants' strategies are shaped by several levels of constraints. Women's strategies are always played out in the context of identifiable patriarchal bargains that act as implicit scripts that define, limit, and inflect their market and domestic options. The two ideal-typical systems of male dominance discussed in this article provide different baselines from which women negotiate and strategize, and each affects the forms and potentialities of their resistance and struggles. Patriarchal bargains do not merely inform women's rational choices but also shape the more unconscious aspects of their gendered subjectivity, since they permeate the context of their early socialization, as well as their adult cultural milieu (Kandiyoti 1987a, 1987b).

A focus on more narrowly defined patriarchal bargains, rather than on an unqualified notion of patriarchy, offers better prospects for the detailed analysis of processes of transformation. In her analysis of changes in sexual imagery and mores in Western societies, Janeway (1980) borrows Thomas Kuhn's (1970) terminology of scientific paradigms. She suggests, by analogy, that widely shared ideas and practices in the realm of sexuality may act as sexual paradigms, establishing the rules of normalcy at any given time, but also vulnerable to change when "existing rules fail to operate, when anomalies can no longer be evaded, when the real world of everyday experience challenges accepted causality" (1980, p. 582). However, sexual paradigms cannot be fully comprehended unless they are inscribed in the rules of more specifically defined patriarchal bargains, as Janeway herself demonstrates in her discussion of the connection between the ideal of female chastity in Western societies and the transmission of property to legitimate heirs before the advent of a generalized cash economy.

To stretch the Kuhnian analogy even further, patriarchal bargains can be shown to have a normal phase and a crisis phase, a concept that modifies our very interpretation of what is going on in the world. Thus, during the normal phase of classic patriarchy, there were large numbers of women who were in fact exposed to economic hardship

and insecurity. They were infertile and had to be divorced, or orphaned and without recourse to their own natal family, or unprotected because they had no surviving sons or—even worse—had “ungrateful” sons. However, they were merely considered “unlucky,” anomalies and accidental casualties of a system that made sense otherwise. It is only at the point of breakdown that every order reveals its systemic contradictions. The impact of contemporary socio-economic transformations upon marriage and divorce, on household formation, and on the gendered division of labor inevitably lead to a questioning of the fundamental, implicit assumptions behind arrangements between women and men.

However, new strategies and forms of consciousness do not simply emerge from the ruins of the old and smoothly produce a new consensus, but are created through personal and political struggles, which are often complex and contradictory (see Strathern 1987). The breakdown of a particular patriarchal system may, in the short run, generate instances of passive resistance among women that take the paradoxical form of bids for increased responsibility and control by men. A better understanding of the short- and medium-term strategies of women in different social locations could provide a corrective influence to ethnocentric or class-bound definitions of what constitutes a feminist consciousness.

## NOTES

1. Like all terms coined to convey a complex concept, the term *patriarchal bargain* represents a difficult compromise. It is intended to indicate the existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated. Some suggested alternatives were the terms *contract*, *deal*, or *scenario*; however, none of these fully captured the fluidity and tension implied by *bargain*. I am grateful to Cynthia Cockburn and Nels Johnson for pointing out that the term *bargain* commonly denotes a deal between more or less equal participants, so it does not accurately apply to my usage, which clearly indicates an asymmetrical exchange. However, women as a rule bargain from a weaker position.

2. I am excluding not only Southeast Asia but also the Northern Mediterranean, despite important similarities in the latter regarding codes of honor and the overall importance attached to the sexual purity of women, because I want to restrict myself to areas where the patrilocal-patrilineal complex is dominant. Thus societies with bilateral kinship systems, such as Greece, in which women do inherit and control property and receive dowries that constitute productive property, do not qualify despite important similarities in other ideological respects. This is not, however, to



suggest that an unqualified homogeneity of ideology and practice exists within the geographical boundaries indicated. For example, there are critical variations within the Indian subcontinent that have demonstrably different implications for women (Dyson and Moore 1983). Conversely, even in areas of bilateral kinship, there may be instances in which all the facets of classic patriarchy, namely, property, residence, and descent through the male line, may coalesce under specified circumstances (Denich 1974). What I am suggesting is that the most clear-cut and easily identifiable examples of classic patriarchy may be found within the boundaries indicated in the text.

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Dear Ol' Dirty Bastard: I too like it raw,  
I don't especially care for Duke Ellington  
at a birthday party. I care less and less  
about the shapes of shapes because forms  
change and nothing is more durable than feeling.  
My uncle used the money I gave him  
to buy a few vials of what looked like candy  
after the party where my grandma sang  
in an outfit that was obviously made  
for a West African king. My motto is  
*Never mistake what it is for what it looks like.*  
My generosity, for example, is mostly a form  
of vanity. A bandanna is a useful handkerchief,  
but a handkerchief is a useless-ass bandanna.  
This only looks like a footnote in my report  
concerning the party. *Trill* stands for what is  
*truly real* though it may be hidden by the houses  
just over the hills between us, by the hands  
on the bars between us. That picture  
of my grandmother with my uncle  
when he was a baby is not trill. What it is  
is the feeling felt seeing garbagemen drift  
along the predawn avenues, a sloppy slow rain  
taking its time to the coast. Milquetoast  
is not trill, nor is bouillabaisse. *Bakku-shan*  
is Japanese for a woman who is beautiful  
only when viewed from behind. Like I was saying,  
my motto is *Never mistake what it looks like  
for what it is* else you end up like that Negro  
Othello. (Was Othello a Negro?) Don't you lie  
about who you are sometimes and then realize  
the lie is true? You are blind to your power, Brother  
Bastard, like the king who wanders his kingdom  
searching for the king. And that's okay.  
No one will tell you you are the king.  
No one really wants a king anyway.

# *Far Away, From Home*

## *(The Comma Between)*

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When I first came to the United States from Vietnam in 1970, for several months I could not get a good sleep during the night. No matter how hard I tried to surrender to it, I repeatedly found myself lying still, eyes wide open in the dark, waiting. Waiting for what? Waiting, I thought, for dawn, so that I could finally fall asleep a few hours before starting my morning activities. During the daytime, sleep would often take me by surprise, and in between tasks I would catch myself napping, with remorse. But when night fell, and it was clearly time to rest and rightfully claim my due from the day of work, I again felt strangely uneasy. As the sounds of the world outside faded away, the night suddenly took on a threatening presence. Rather than finding peace and repose in the warmth of the bed, I was dreading what to me seemed like an endless moment of false cessation. So I waited, unable to figure out my uneasiness, until one night a distant shooting in the streets outside unexpectedly shed a light on the situation. I realized I was briefly home again.

### *Sleepless Silence*

What appeared most strikingly foreign to me then were these long, spacious American nights enveloped by uninterrupted silence. It was in this kind of silence that I experienced the keen feeling of being different—a stranger living in a strange land. The “normal” land at the time was a war-torn land, whose daily sound environment populated by the war machines did not simply stop after dark. Its rarefaction at night made it all the more terrifying, as it tended to take one by surprise during sleep time when one was at one’s most vulnerable. As the saying goes, “The enemy attacks by night.” This held true for people on both sides of the old north–south divide in Vietnam, but in the southern territories where I was then—I was born in Hanoi and grew up in Saigon—

the situation was particularly intense, for example, in 1968 and in the years after. The South faced intensive fighting, marked by the Tet Offensive, which saw a massive attack by Communist forces catch the city and its densely populated environs by surprise on New Year's Eve.

It was the time when we were surviving on plain rice and water, with 24-hour curfews, often with no electricity, nothing to barter for food and barely any sleep. As our house was located next to the national police quarter, we were inevitably living in wait for heavy, unpredictable mortar and rocket fire attacks, spending endless nights packed together in between sandbags in our small bathroom. Steep silence then usually signaled the imminence of an explosion. Whenever it appeared, the heart pounded in recognition, and we would stop dead in our activities—in the midst of conversation and even of quiet thinking. The whole body was an ear, and my ear, trained to the sounds of war, was always on the alert for that split second of silence before the blast of rockets, which would be followed by the crackle of small-arm fire or the wail of sirens and the shouts and cries of afflicted witnesses. That ear needed some time to adjust to the sounds and silences of peace.

Today, when I'm asked where home is for me, I am struck by how far away it is; and yet, home is nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine. Their land is my land, their country is my country. The source has been traveling and dwelling on hybrid ground. Home and abroad are sometimes intuitively determined according to the light of the sky on location, other times by the taste of native water, or by the smell of the environment, and other times yet, by the nature of the surrounding silence. Home then is not only in the eye, the tongue and the nose, but it is also, as in my case, acutely in the ear. It is said, for example, that writers or the diverse Diasporas around the world live in a double exile: away from their native land and away from their mother tongue. Displacement takes on many faces and is our very everyday dwelling. (But to say this is hardly to say anything foreign to this age of new technology where, with the spread of wireless devices, people of the mobile world spend their time more in airports, airplanes and in their cars than at home.)

Seven years after this first encounter with the American nighttime soundscape, I was to live the experience again, albeit very differently, in Senegal, where I lived and taught for three years at the National Conservatory of Music of Dakar while doing field research across West African countries. The experience of Africa was a catalyst in my own journey. There are many aspects of African cultures for which I felt deep affinities—including the legacies of French colonization, which both Vietnam and Senegal had undergone. But the one dimension of the culture that profoundly struck me during my first year there was again the language of silence. In other words, silence not as opposed to language, but as a choice not to verbalize, a will not to say, a necessary interval in an interaction—in brief, as a means of communication of its own. With many years spent in the States before going to Africa, I had almost forgotten and given up the importance of the role of silence in Asian communicative contexts, and had come to accept that silence could not be communicated unless it was a collective, timely produced silence. To my great delight and surprise, however, people there knew how to listen to my silences in all complexities and subtleties, and I learned that this mute language could be effectively shared. *In their silences, I returned home.*

Having lived, taught and done extensive work in more than one culture—Vietnamese, French, American, African and more recently, Japanese—I have always resisted the comfort of conventional categories. And my works are all sustained attempts to shift set boundaries—whether cultural, political or artistic. Even today, after two decades of relentless critical work on the politics of racially, sexually and professionally discriminatory practices, it still happens that when I'm invited to speak, I'm asked with great expectations to speak as a representative—of a culture, a people, a country, an ethnicity or a gender considered to be mine and my own. In other words, tell us about Vietnam, be woman, talk Asian, stay within the Third World. We all seem to know the dilemma of speaking within authorized boundaries, and yet the urge to orientalize the Oriental and to africanize the African continues to lurk behind many Westerners' well-intended attempts to promote better understanding of cultural difference.

This tendency to commodify diversity for faster consumption has at times thrown me into great distress, and for a long while, at least in the United States, whenever friendly editors of journals and anthologies asked me to contribute writing in the areas of race, ethnicity, class, gender and postcolonial theories, the only work I sent out for publication was poetry. Some academics and orthodox Marxists squirmed at the idea of publishing what to their eyes were only "love poems;" others accepted them willy-nilly; but others yet were simply elated. Besides constituting a no-more-of-the-same tactics on my part, such a gesture is also a way of signaling a different practice of poetry, the opposition of which is certainly not prose—for the poetic lies first and foremost in the ear that hears language—and the world—in its music and intervals.

Thanks to this ear, the one satisfactory way of dealing with this problem is to place it in the wider context of our troubled world. What, indeed, makes us endlessly return to the sources—those ancient, unknowable sources that keep inquiries alive and challenge every boundary set up for strategic or survival purposes? Where do we come from? Where do we go? What keeps us holding on to the thread of life, doing what we each do so earnestly in our daily existence? And what ear has suddenly caught on the whence and whither of life?

### *The Tea and the Tear*

Vietnam, a small country, a very big name; an exceptionally famed nation and yet a very little-known culture. Despite the new appeal of Vietnam, due to its more recent opening and its history of resistance, its people and their rich cultural legacies remain largely invisible. After decades of existing only through the horrors of war as electronically projected into TV owners' living rooms, Vietnam since the 1990s has been attracting a new wave of Western onlookers: veterans trying to heal in reconnecting with their past interactions with Vietnam and troops of tourists in search of the Indochine nostalgically portrayed in more recent mainstream films—lavishly set up and retouched with its colonial buildings, with its ethereal islands and lagoons and its melancholic sense of loss. The Vietnam fever overseas has been steadily on the rise the last two decades. Tourism is certainly one of Vietnam's burgeoning industries and during the year 2000, some 1.8 million tourists were reported to have poured into the country. Images of Vietnam's peaceful countryside, with its radiantly green rice paddies and its powder-



soft sand beaches, widely serve as a marketing tool for the film and tourist industries. Even the famous Cu Chi tunnels from which surprise attacks were launched against U.S. forces are now routinely part of the war-theme tour sites. With no resentment, local people happily oblige.

Many years ago I wrote that as a name, Vietnam was constantly evoked as an exemplary model of revolution: She was “a nostalgic cult object for those who, while admiring unconditionally the revolution, do not seem to take any genuine, sustained interest in the troubled reality of Vietnam in her social and cultural autonomy . . . The longer Vietnam is extolled as the unequal model of the struggle against Imperialism, the more convenient it is for the rest of the world to close their eyes on the harrowing difficulties the nation, governed by a large post-revolutionary bureaucracy, continues to face in trying to cope with the challenge of recovery.”<sup>1</sup> Today, things have changed for the better as Vietnam continues to attract new generations of visitors eager to see the country in a new light, and the government is quick to declare that Vietnam has become more than a name, “not just a war, but a country.” However, if Vietnam is definitely on display in many Western media and art exhibition venues, the vogue now is exclusively the rural idyll, the media-created untouched countryside or else the exotic stylish urban chic of Saigonese (local people have not quite gotten used to calling it Ho Chi Minh City), which provide the perfect contrast to the bloody, also media-created, dehumanizing images of Vietnam in the sixties and early seventies. As long as visitors indulge in “Namstalga,” everything is under control, for people can be distracted from the harsh realities of the government’s rule and the political tensions that afflict the country.

To share something of Vietnamese culture, let me relate a story I’ve often heard during my childhood—a well-known Vietnamese tale named after its two protagonists, *Truong Chi, My Nuong*. As with all tales, its content varies slightly with each storyteller, depending on where the teller sees the enchantment, the struggle and the moral in the story. In its translations, the tale has been given such titles as, “The Love Crystal” (by Pham Duy Khiem) or “Story of the Spellbinding Voice” (by Nguyen Xuan Hung) or as I myself would also like to call it, “The Tea and the Tear.”

The tale sketches the profile of a maiden (*My Nuong*) who, as the daughter of a powerful mandarin, grows up in seclusion behind the high walls of her father’s palace. She spends her time practicing arts deemed suitable to her rank and gender—such as embroidery, poetry and painting—and she sees the world outside as framed by the window of her room. The daily view that sustains her melancholic daydreaming is that of the river flowing below the palace and the reflections of the landscape in the water.

One drizzly afternoon, however, she is drawn to the window by the sound of a deep, melodious song that rises from the river. There she sees, gliding on the water, a boat and a fisherman pulling on his net whom she can hear singing, but whose features she cannot distinguish from afar. Day after day, she listens to the voice that comes to her in her solitude. One can’t really tell how and what exactly in the song, the music and the voice has made its way into her budding heart, but the story goes that on the day the voice suddenly stops, she catches herself waiting until late in the evening. Vainly she continues thereafter to wait for it at her window every afternoon, but nowhere

is the familiar silhouette of the fisherman and his boat to be seen. She goes on waiting until she falls severely ill. As she lets herself be wasted away, the best doctors are summoned, but none is able to determine the cause of her suffering. Her parents become more and more alarmed at her inexplicable illness, when suddenly she recovers. The voice has returned.

Informed by a servant, the father has the fisherman (Truong Chi) brought to his palace to sing in a room next to his daughter's. Upon her request, however, the mandarin agrees to let her see the man in person. Did he not know then where such a fatherly consent would lead? For, from the very first look, something unavoidably ends in the maiden's heart. The voice loses its charm and the spell is lifted. Some tellers would expand here on the repelling ugliness of the man, stressing the contrast between his fairy voice and his burnt, withered and deformed physical attributes caused by hard work outdoors. In any case, the young woman was said to be definitively cured of her illness, and soon, forgetting what fed her dreams, she returns to a normal life.

As for the poor fisherman who until then remains innocent of his music's power, it is his turn to receive the fatal blow at the sight of the maiden's appearance. He catches the sickness and, consumed by a love without hope, he pines away in silence. The man perishes in solitude, keeping the secret sealed with his death. Buried, his remains are exhumed a year after by his family, so they can be transferred to a final resting place. What they find then amidst the skeletal remains is an unusually translucent stone in place of his heart, which they faithfully hang, in his memory, on the bow of his boat.

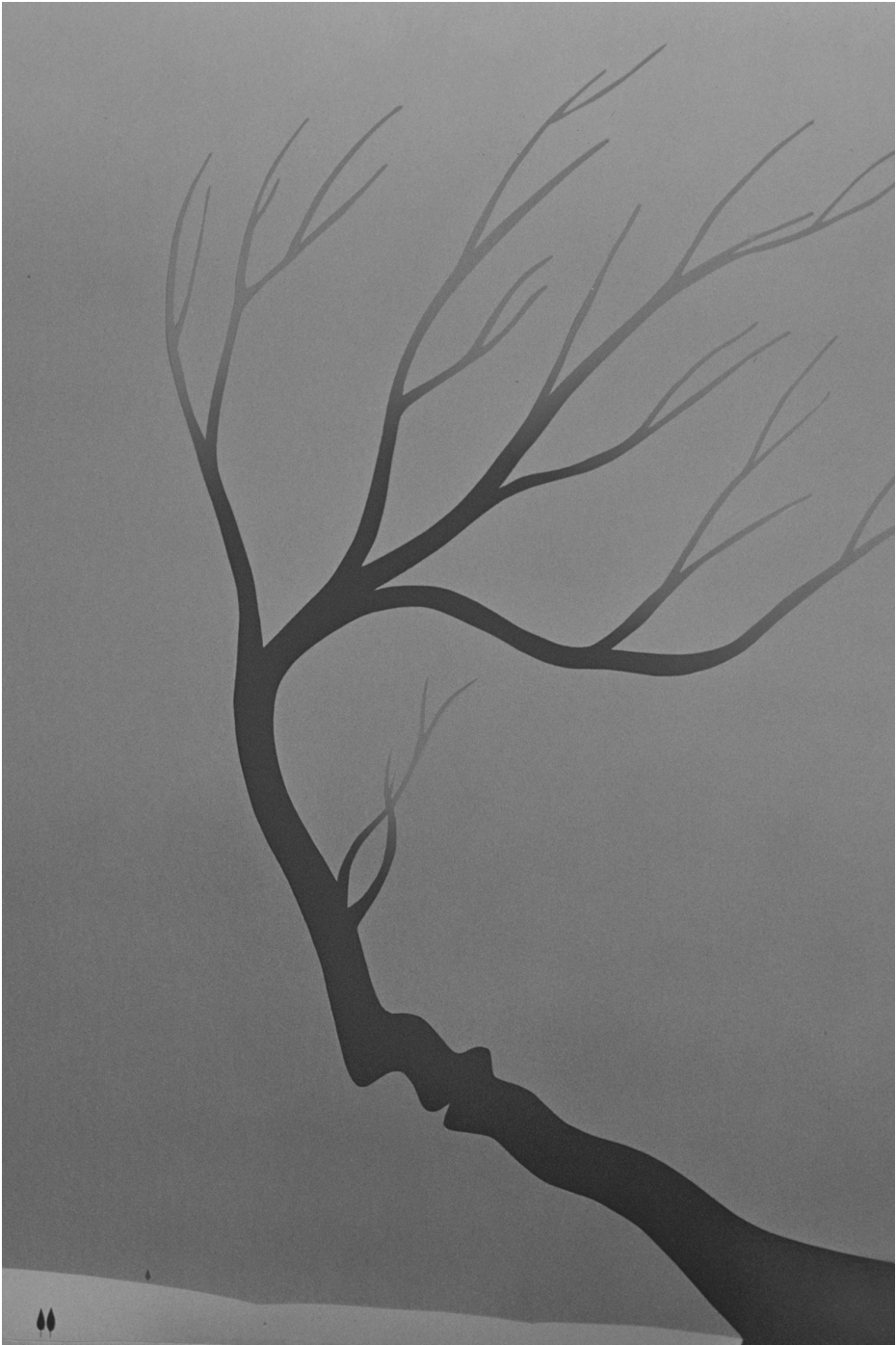
One day, as the mandarin is crossing the river, he sees with admiration the stone at the front of the boat shuttling between the two shores. He buys it and asks a jeweler to fashion it into a teacup. As things turn out, however, every time tea is poured into the cup, the image of a fisherman moving slowly around with his boat appears. The mandarin's daughter learns of the miracle and wants to see it for herself. She pours tea into the cup and the fisherman's image appears. Remembering, she cries. A teardrop falls on the cup and the latter disappears, dissolving into water.

So ends the tale of Truong Chi, My Nuong.

### ***The Debt of Love***

A story is told to invite talk around it. One can take it as a shallow piece of entertainment; or one can receive it as a profound gift traveling from teller to teller, handed down from generation to generation, repeatedly evoked in its moral truth and yet never depleted in its ability to instruct, to delight and to move. For me, this tale functions at least on three levels: as a cultural marker, a political pointer and an artistic quest. While remaining very specific to Vietnamese culture in its concerns and colorings, it can easily fare across cultural borders and struggles. One is reminded here of such classics in the West as, for example, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, or *Ulysses and the Sirens*—to mention just a few.

With the creative works of the disfranchised and of political prisoners around the world in mind, one can say that just as poetry cannot be reduced to being a mere art for the rich and idle, storytelling is not a luxury or a harmless pastime. It is, indeed, in the tale that one is said to encounter the genius of a people. Tales are collective



dreams that move and mold societies, revealing the actual fears, desires, aims and values by which communities are shaped. In Vietnam (like in other cultures), although some ancient tales are dotted here and there with details that speak of their hybrid origins—from India, Champa and China, for example—as an element of civilization thoroughly adapted to rural life, these tales remain loyal to the sensibility and the wisdom of the local people. No book, no substantial study on the history, culture and civilization of Vietnam written by Vietnamese can do without the body of tales, which constitute the core of a popular literature widely spread among all classes of its society.

The tales not only condense certain characteristics of the everyday person and the people's customs, they often also deal with complex social relations; with the fate of an individual; or else, with the faithful love between a worker figure (like a woodcutter, a fisherman, a hard-working mother or a Cinderella-type orphan) and a noble (like a princess, a lord or a scholar). They tell of the latent antagonisms between rich and poor in the heart of rural communities whose tranquil and timeless setting can be very deceptive. As with stories among oppressed and disfranchised groups around the world, the Vietnamese tale allows its tellers to allude to issues of poverty, social injustice and class conflict.

Tales often read like profound strategies of survival. In them, divergence and inequality, if not conflict, are often set within the framework of a patriarchal economy. The human condition and its dilemmas are featured in the fate of an individual who is likely to be poor, unfortunate, rejected or plainly stupid, but whose honesty and goodness usually lead to a rewarding ending. The world seems, at first sight, to be simplified into two categories of people: those whose power derives from material advantages and those whose force belongs to a different order—one that exceeds ordinary sight and is commonly termed “magical,” “shamanistic,” “supernatural,” “mystical,” or merely “superstitious.” This division, which dates back to the night of time, continues to prevail today, and it takes us little to see in these two kinds of people a proliferation of dualities, such as the divisions between North and South, the West and the Rest, conqueror and native, colonizer and colonized, state and non-state, science and art, culture and nature, materiality and spirituality, masculine and feminine, or more intimately, between inside and outside, self and other.

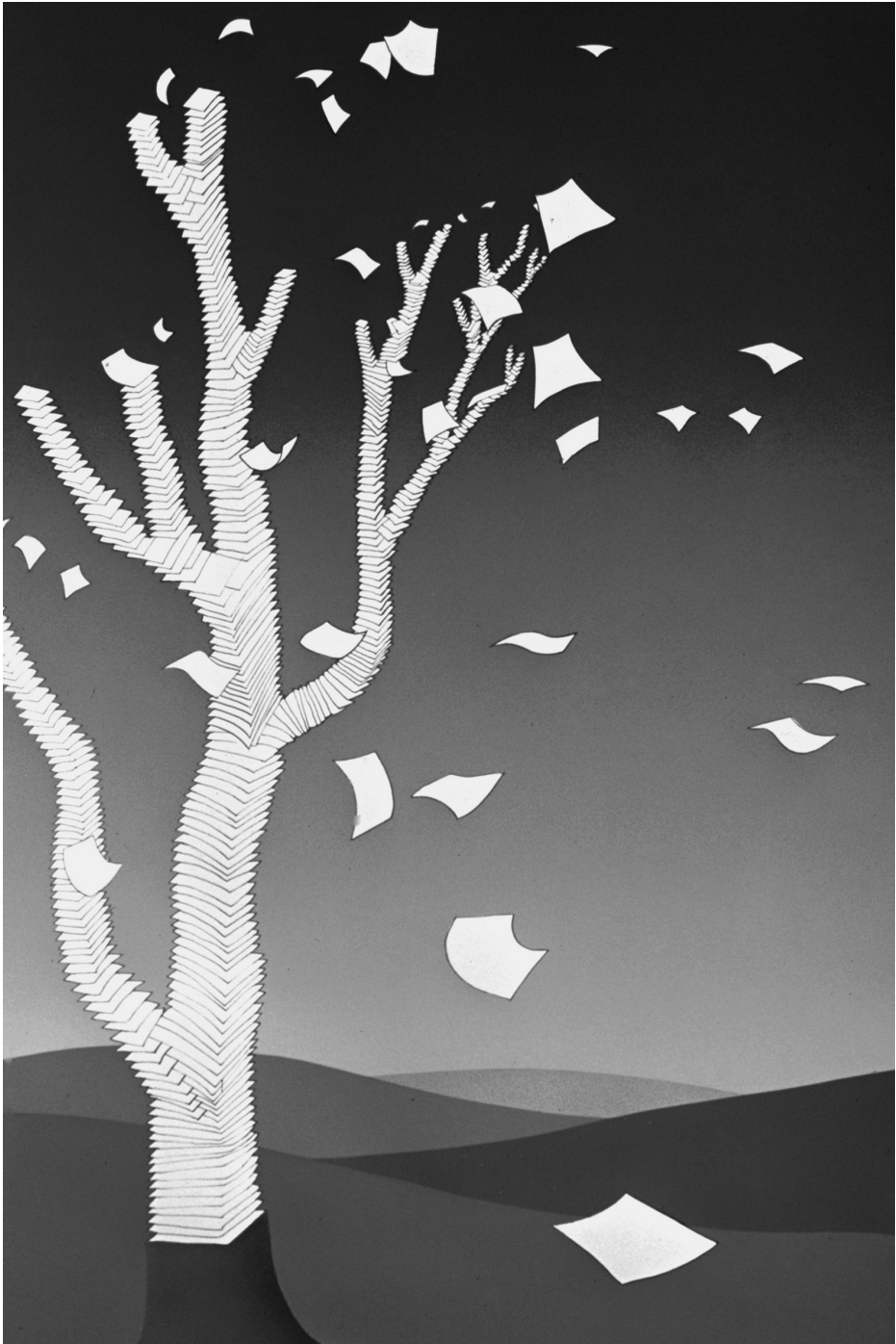
Hope is, however, always kept alive in the tale—hope, and not expectation, for it is through fairies, deities, and genies, or as in the case of the tale told earlier, through the forces that exceed the lifetime of an individual, that people who knew the lore of survival seek to solve difficult situations and social inequity. As Native American storytellers remind us, stories are what we have to fight off illness and death, they make medicines and are a healing art. Bringing the impossible within reach and making us realize with poignancy that *material reality is only one dimension of reality*, tales address our longing of a more equitable world built on our struggle as well as on our dreams, our aspirations and actions for peace. Needless to say, there are many other tales that are just as relevant, if not more adequate, for a discussion on Vietnamese culture and politics; especially those in which historical and mythical elements are tightly woven and the opposition between oppressors and victims more directly politicized. However, I would rather choose this tale of Tea and Tear, precisely because it is not a story of black and white, or of war and conflict, but a story of love.

By making such a choice, I am perhaps only following an old path, for the most famous work of Vietnamese literature, and the most widely remembered national poem of Vietnam is not an epic poem, but a love poem: *The Tale of Kieu*, written in the early nineteenth century, whose 3,254 verses are known by heart to all classes of people in Vietnam and cherished even among those who are illiterate. Today the younger generations of the Vietnamese Diaspora in the United States and in Europe invoke it as one of the very few treasures of their culture, which they wish to preserve. I myself have taken inspiration from it in two of my films, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* and *A Tale of Love*. The image of Kieu as a sacrificial woman in tears and as a model of feminine loyalty has been appropriated and accordingly adapted to innumerable official and non-official contexts. It stands both as a denunciation of corrupt feudalism and American imperialism, and as an allegory of the tragic fate of Vietnam under colonialism or else of the boat people whose silent exodus went on well after the war ended in 1975—to the embarrassment of the international community.

Why does such a patriarchal society like Vietnam identify the destiny of its country with the fate and deeds of a woman like Kieu? Perhaps, because Kieu is not merely Kieu to our eyes. We easily forget the woman in all women, and although Kieu personifies love, what many of us perceive through her, understandably enough, are the male author, Nguyen Du (1765–1820), and the questing of his official life. By an astute shift of gender, he lives on with the tale, lamenting the promiscuous political affiliations of his time. His own dilemma was that of having to survive the Tay-son revolution and to serve the Nguyen dynasty, while remaining in his heart faultlessly loyal to the Le dynasty (1427–1788), which the Tay-son had destroyed. Perhaps it's also because Kieu's passion-driven life is marked, despite her extreme beauty, sacrifice, and loyalty, by unremitting misfortunes: for her family's survival, she is forced to undergo intolerable injustices and to prostitute herself, thereby breaking her vows to her first love. Or perhaps it's because through Kieu's story, the worst imaginable and the very best of that which has been called "human" is vividly brought into the picture. And then perhaps, as it is widely perceived, it's because this unpredictable turn in her life (in one's life—as war victim, refugee, exile, émigré, prisoner of conscience, homeless, mourner, etc.) results both from social injustices and from an old debt that one carries on from one's previous lives. This is where the tale strikes a most sensitive chord in the Vietnamese psyche.

### *Man of Tea*

As I was often told in my childhood, by relatives and teachers, the much coveted land of Vietnam, marked by natural disasters, internal turbulence and foreign domination is not a gift that has fallen from the sky. For over four thousand years, our people have had to earn it with sweat and tears, acre by acre, carrying on a multiple struggle against the forces of nature—floods, droughts, typhoons year in year out for millennia—against civil conflicts and against foreign aggression. The country has long been the theater of wars and destructions: ten centuries of direct Chinese domination, from 111 BC to the tenth century; then, indirect domination until the end of the nineteenth century, followed by French occupation from the end of the nineteenth century to 1954; Japanese occupation alongside a French colonial administration from 1940 to 1945; and twenty years of



American involvement until 1975. The floods recurring in Vietnam have devastated many provinces in the South, wrecking at times half a million homes and affecting nearly three million people. Vietnam's unending suffering has been often related in terms of an ancient debt that she has not yet succeeded in paying off, even as of today, when one considers how poisoned her landscape has also come to be with the hellish legacy of Agent Orange and the millions of land mines scattered about the provinces, ready to go off.

In our tale of *The Love Crystal*, every detail seems to speak volumes for the debt it owes to a culture that has taken so much inspiration from the Chinese and yet has been resisting this so fiercely as to fall into the trap of defining its identity mainly in counteraction to everything thought to be Chinese. This love-hate relationship shows through the evocation of the mandarin system of ruling which Vietnam had inherited from China. The fisherman's love-at-first-sight is kept secret even as it leads to his death because as much as the created class gap makes it impossible for him to realize his dream in his lifetime, it also betrays the hidden aspiration of the disenfranchised to reach the status of the enfranchiser. And the mandarin's daughter, who awakens to love at the sound of his song is unreachable, for she is not of this world—or of the world of the manual labor class. Details such as the high walls of the palace that separate them and the fashioning of the poor man's heart into a teacup to gratify the aesthetic demand of the leisure class all seem at first to converge to emphasize the impossibility of their union.

The same may be said of the gender divide. The benevolence of the father figure only serves to naturalize better the sorry condition of women in the past and the present male-dominated society of Vietnam. Striking similarities can be drawn between the tale of *The Love Crystal* and the well-known contemporary novel *The Crystal Messenger* (1988) by Pham Thi Hoai, one of the two women in a small group of post-war writers that emerged in Vietnam in the late 1980s. Eloquent and cleverly evasive, these writers' works dare to depart from the stifling, controlled world of official narratives to offer fresh views of Vietnamese society. Hoai's novel manages, for example, through wit, humor and oblique imagery, to denounce family, Party and state in their officialized corruptions, ignorance and incompetence. Its narration presents a scathing commentary on modern society through the eyes of a woman not only trapped in the dwarf body of a young girl—she stopped growing up at the age of fourteen—but also trapped in the sixteen-square-meter room that constitutes the whole of her dwelling space. A woman's place is well defined, and as practices around the world show, despotic boundaries do not necessarily need to be material. Thus, it is through the magic rectangle of her window that the woman in the novel spends her time filtering the world outside, which she radically divides into two: that of *homo-A*, those who know how to love, and that of *homo-Z*, those who don't. Such a reduction of place, of mankind and, as she affirms, of her own body is not fortuitous; it is the fruit of many years of mental and physical exertion.

The author of this remarkable novel now lives in Germany. She, like the character of her novel, seems to abhor everything that smacks of romanticism, and yet it is worth noting that what lies at the core of the novel's worldview is love. And this radically modern view owes its lifeblood, whether consciously or not, to the body of Vietnamese folktales of which *The Love Crystal* is only an example. *The deeper and wider you go, the older the story.* Here one also touches on the heart of the tale itself: that which we are all bound

to face at the end of our journey—the debt of love or, simply, the Debt. Thanks to it, what is made unreachable through the divides of class and gender finds its own way out. Waiting in loyalty to the call of one's heart is what it takes to “win over” an impossible situation. In time, the dark secret of the fisherman, his buried love and fidelity have crystallized to become the primal material for the creation of a refined object of pleasure—an object whose unusual function is to hold both the tea and the image it persistently produces.

Image, man and cup all disappear with the contact of a single teardrop. As her heart melts, his crystallized heart dissolves. The irruption of the Debt into visibility, the resurrection of the man's appearance in the tea is followed by its return to water, to formlessness and to invisibility. Weeping relieves; the pair of love and loss that runs through the story in the dark light of suffering returns at the end of the tale, transformed and freed by the two waters: tea and tear. Tea as it is well known in Asia, was a medicine before it became a beverage. It is still the most popular medicine in China. Its healthy effects on the arteries, its ability to strengthen the immune system and its antibacterial, anti-cancer properties are known to Western sciences today. Similarly, the healing power of tears is an international leitmotif in literature and the media. Ho Chi Minh used to make a point of shedding a few tears when he appeared in public to speak to the people; it was largely those moving, wet speeches that endeared him so thoroughly to his audiences. Like Mao, he wrote poetry and was fully aware of the transformative power of songs, proverbs and folktales. In mythos, tears are at once a binder and a breaker. When cried by a true heart tears can break open a stone, they hold malefic forces at bay, they mend wounds, join souls and restore sight. In past and ongoing tales around the world, the shedding of tears continues to cause heartfelt reunions.

Tea is actually the very beverage that links the upper classes to the peasantry. Present in the most humble home and promoting well-being in simplicity and sobriety, it has been hailed by lovers and philosophers of tea as that which represents the true spirit of Asian democracy (Kazuko Okakura). In Japan where the art and ritual of tea was an intrinsic part of Zen ethics and aesthetics, people easily speak of a man “with no tea” or a man “with too much tea” inside in commenting on the lack or the excess of emotional subtleties in a person's character. Of great relevance, for example, is the importance given to a cup of tea in Buddhist lore. A Zen master's invitation to his student or to his visitor to “have a cup of tea” reaches deep and far in its immediate simplicity. As Zen master and activist Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, “You and the taste of tea are one . . . The tea is you, you are the tea . . . When one starts to distinguish [drinker and tea], the experience *disappears*.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the heart that hears the lone tear, hears the silent cry of the crowd.

Tears and other waters—rain, river, blood—as well as the art of waiting are inseparable in folklore and in love stories. They also play a creative, feature role in the national poem *The Tale of Kieu* and in Hoai's novel *The Crystal Messenger*; for without patience, tears and determination, none of these stories could find a peaceful ending. When asked about the current state of literature in Vietnam, one of the common answers encountered among writers is precisely: “We've gained permission to be sad! At least we can now weep without being gagged.” Waiting is an indispensable state in relationships. It is said the one who knows how to wait, knows how to keep the spirit simple and pure. As the tale tells us, the fisherman's heart turned into a gem—an unusually translucent



stone that immediately caught the eye of the mandarin himself. Some of the most beautiful and well-loved tales in Vietnam (Truyen Trau Cau, The Betel and the Areca Tree; Hon Vong Phu or The Mountain of Waiting, for example) deal directly with the question of debt in terms of waiting. In these, the person waiting and weeping in grief until death is usually turned into a stone or a mountain. As mentioned earlier in relation to the fisherman's unattainable love, *waiting while remaining loyal to the call of one's heart is what it takes to "win over" an impossible situation*. Such waiting is not passive; it has an active, dynamic quality to which Vietnam's history can easily attest. In the numerous examples it provides, waiting plays an important role in war strategies—the Battle of Dien Bien Phu with the French colonials is a famous example.

### *Children of Dragons and Immortals*

Two lines in the Kieu poem allude to the tale of *The Love Crystal*: “No tinh chua tra cho ai/ khoi tinh mang xuong tuyen-dai chua tan” (Till I've paid off my debt of love to him/ my heart will stay a crystal in the Country of the Golden Sources). In relation to these lines, a literary critic (Van Hac) also relates an old event reported in the *Annals of Love*: a young woman fell in love with a merchant who left one day and never returned. The woman fell sick waiting and died. When her remains were exhumed, relatives found in her womb something hard and unbreakable. Raising it against the light, they could see a human image inside. Later, the merchant came back to see it for himself. He was moved to tears and as his tears dropped on the hard object, it dissolved into blood. The difference between the event recorded and the tale told is fascinating. Not only is one struck by the change effected on the gender of the person who waits and dies in grief (the image of a woman longing and waiting until death for her man's return is much more common) and on the profession of the man (which is a far cry from our man on water or the man of tea), one is also baffled by the general sinister feeling left by the event, which for me, hardly compares to the uplifting character of the tale.

What makes all the difference is the one element missing in the event: the song. Through the fisherman's voice, it is the power of art that awakens a young heart to the joys and sorrows of loving and longing. Music—especially when performed freely, knowing not whose ear it will strike—is the gift that brings to life the dormant forces in the listener. Reciprocally, listening attentively without preconceived knowledge of the singer endows the song with a powerful existence. By wanting to see, the maiden betrays love and her impatient gaze dooms the man to lose his very power to heal and enchant. The Look cancels out the Voice. Only in his song does Orpheus retain Eurydice. His forbidden but irresistible gaze causes Eurydice to sink back to darkness and to be lost twice over. In Kafka's version, by essentially shutting off his ears to resist the call of the Sirens, Ulysses is bound to the confinement of sight, and sight only. He never knew what their songs sounded like nor could he truly tell, as Kafka pointed out, whether the Sirens did sing or not after all. It was, in the end, the Silence of the Sirens that Kafka heard through Homer's words. Similarities can also be drawn here between the tale and the Kieu poem or Hoai's novel, for what constitutes their enduring power is not so much the story as the creative use, in the poem's case, of a rhythm unique to Vietnamese folk songs, and in the novel's case, of a local street slang whose rich and unusual tone speaks its profound disregard for bigoted conventions.

With the song comes the desire to exceed its limits, for if the maiden did not break the pact of sight and sound with the fisherman, the best part of the story (and the story itself) would be lost. Reality would be confined merely to the material world of what is immediately visible and audible. The debt of love would have to be carried indefinitely on to the Country of the Golden Sources—that is, beyond our lifetime, into the world of immortals and of the departed—what the West calls Hell. It is not by chance that popular memory prefers the princely aura of a maiden and the cachet of a fisherman to that of a merchant. The pairing goes far back in time and in Vietnamese people's imagination. One can at first simply relate the choice of the fisherman to the fact that fishing, together with cultivating rice, is one of the main activities in Vietnam for the common man to earn his living. One can also place that choice in an international context of tale telling where the fisherman is an archetypal figure for a questing of the self that merges with the instinctual, unpredictable forces of nature. The love boat floats indefinitely on water; as soon as it careens into shore, the spell is gone and separation occurs.

For the Vietnamese, the pairing of the fisherman with the fairy-like maiden easily calls to mind the legend of our origins, according to which the Vietnamese people as known today are descendants of three generations of supernatural marriages. The first generation is traced back to Emperor De-Minh of China (grandson of Emperor Than-Nong—meaning “chief of agriculture”), who married an Immortal he met at the foot of Mountain Ngu Linh; the second generation to his son Kinh Duong Vuong, who wedded the daughter of a Dragon King; and the third to Vuong's son, our mythic father Lac Long Quan, King of Dragons, whose wife was Au Co, Daughter of Mountains and descendant of an Immortal. Our mythic mother Au Co gave birth through a pouch containing a hundred eggs, which, after hatching, became one hundred boys. Mythic Father agreed then with mythic Mother that since he was the son of dragons and she belonged to the family of fairies, they should divide the country into two, each ruling one half in mutual reliance—he leading fifty of their sons toward the sea, and she leading the fifty others toward the mountains. This was how Vietnam as a nation was said to have been founded, the home to both people from the flatlands and people from the highlands. (Although “immortal” and “fairy” are used interchangeably, immortal actually bears no supernatural connotation for, in Taoist terminology for example, the term refers to the enlightened sage whose spiritual training is carried out in the uninhabitable environment of mountains.) The vestiges from older times of our matriarchal society are also accounted for in the legend, as Fairy Mother was said to have established the rule of our earliest historical King Hung and given the historical name Van Lang to our country.

The legend is a unique attempt by our ancestors to inquire into the unknown sources of our four-million-year history and to create fables about a land whose mountains and rivers seem at times to relish unleashing their destructive forces upon the people. I was born third in a family of seven children. We are six girls and one boy, my brother being, very fortunately for him, the first and eldest child. We girls were the happy result of my mother's sustained but unsuccessful effort to repeat her first glorious birth; she used to be a zealous promoter of the infamous Vietnamese proverb that says “a hundred girls are not worth a single (teeny) penis.” When expressing pride for their peers, Vietnamese happily make use of the popular expression *Con Rồng Chau Tiên* (children

of Dragons, nephews of Fairies). One of the Vietnamese words for “country” or “nation” is *nuoc*, a word that, significantly enough, also means “water.” It is also worth noting that for people who consider themselves to be descendants of Dragons and Immortals, the term they use to designate “people” or “countrymen” is *dong-bao*, meaning “issued from the same pouch.” When addressing his audience, again, Ho Chi Minh never failed to invoke the power of this term: he usually started his speeches with a heartfelt, soul-stirring *Dong bao than men* (beloved blood brothers) rather than with the more distant and formal “*Kinh thua quy-vi dong bao*” (dear respected gentlemen and compatriots) of other Vietnamese presidents.

A small debt of love turns out to be a mountainous debt. At first, we may think it is the maiden who owes the fisherman, for he dies loving her without getting anything in return; later she succeeds in discharging the debt when she weeps over his crystallized love and is forgiven as the love cup dissolves. Then we may also think that the debt is mutual for, as the Voice of tradition might assert, all love encounters are predestined and when lovers come together, they are simply fulfilling a debt they have incurred in a previous life. As we go further, however, we may realize that the notion of debt, as with all notions, can be practiced in a shallow, passive way (“There’s nothing to do, for everything is meant to be that way”); or it can feed a dynamic awareness and practice that will profoundly change our lives. African writers see into this when they assess that the cavernous actions of colonialism did not simply affect the living; they desecrated the world below, violating the dead in their rest, and their noxious impact continues unavoidably to resonate with present and future generations. Expanding, through our small stories, our understanding of time is to realize the past is also the beginning of a future. This, for example, is what ecologists and activists have contributed when they contest the short-term solutions adopted by official leaderships around the world without much thought for the magnitude of their small actions in time—geological time, physiological time, time in which the millennium is but a blink.

### *The Century of Forgiveness?*

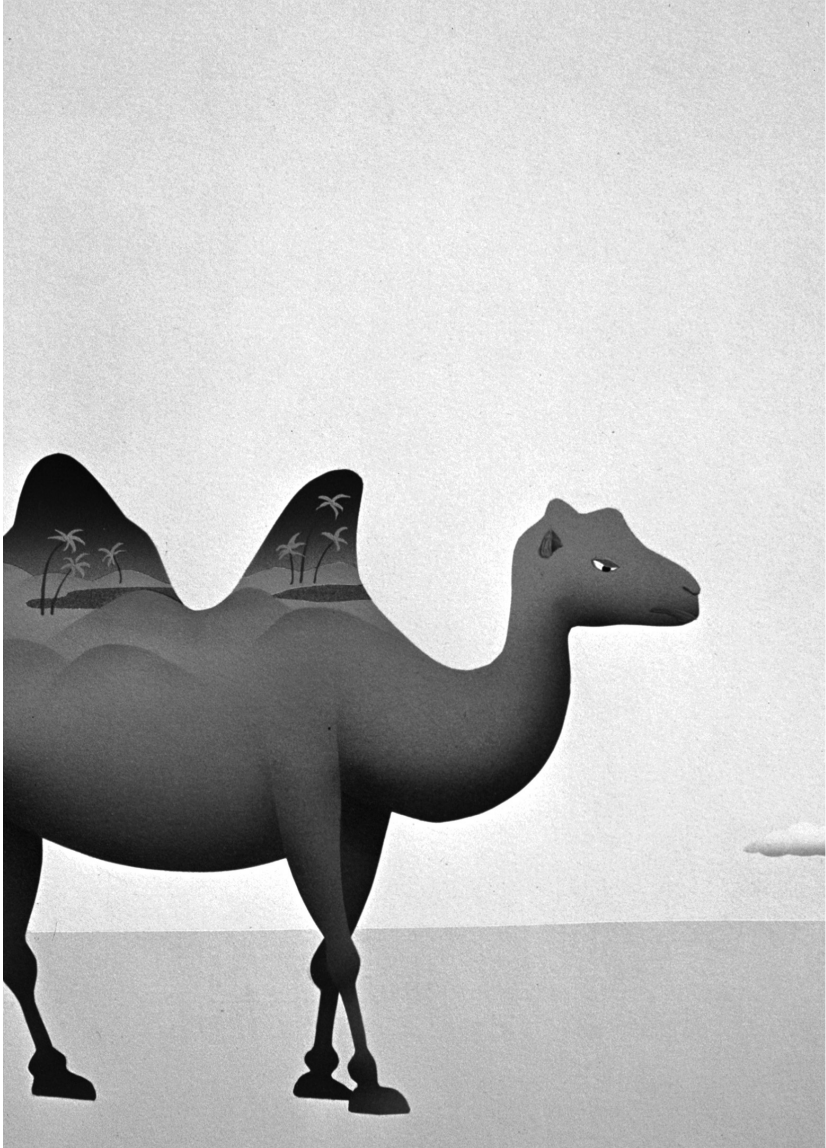
In the world of media, if AIDS is often linked up with Africa, drugs with South America, and terrorism with Islam, debt seems to be the fate of the Third World. National development policies are often directed to meet economic priorities without concern for the long-term effects on people and the environment. What is known as the debt crisis is in fact an old dance in the vicious circle of exploiter and exploited. Capital is borrowed by developing countries to finance ecologically destructive projects and to pay off their debts, these countries are cashing on natural resources for short-term export income. In other words, the debt has no limit. And in this era of globalization where failure and success bear the same name, borrowing money and getting into debt for life so as to have a home, a car or a computer of one’s own is certainly a normalized practice in the private as well as the public sector of American life. Those of us who are slow to make use of the power of “plastic” (credit cards) are told that we are highly in need of counseling. In fact, the two biggest economies in the world are also the two most impressive debtors. Japan and America are deeply caught in the debt trap and are faring on fragile ground. The survival issue is not a Third World issue; it is a global issue and an issue of globalization. With the call for a reduction in worldwide economic

activity—that is, in energy use and in overconsumption—it is hardly surprising that Vietnamese officials have been nervous about rapid development projects and that frustrations continue to determine much of the foreign investors' experience in Vietnam.

Tensions easily arise between those who expect Vietnam to abide by their standards of market "opening" and those who obsessively check and brake for fear of losing what they bitterly fought for. If the last two decades have seen Vietnam's economy expand, they have also witnessed uneven, stifling limits on media, artistic and economic activities—and with these, the pervasive problem of state corruption, which the guilty authorities, like those in China, attempt to solve by selecting a few sensational scapegoats. These were made to pay mercilessly for the unacknowledged, humongous debt that the government owed its people since the end of the war. The Tiananmen Square event in Beijing in 1989 and the turn of events in eastern and central Europe had haunted the old leadership. No wonder that an article in *The Economist* (July 29, 2000), complained about how the Vietnamese authorities had been treating its foreign investors the way most of us would react to our dentists: we know we have to open wide, but at the tiniest hint of discomfort, we react instinctually by clenching hard.

On the world map, demands for apologies and restitution for historical injustices have also grown widely over the past decades, to the irritation of many who feel that the current generation should not be made to accept and pay for a past they feel they are not responsible for. It is striking at first to recognize, through these reactions, how convincingly the same shallow logic continues to circulate and how strongly resistance can be built around such an issue as that of apology. For it is impossible, through the demands voiced, not to welcome the shift of consciousness in the struggle against social injustice. "Say Sorry," the sign simply reads. Fragile, absurd and seemingly derisive. Apparently the goal is not merely to obtain compensation, to appeal for a single group, or to serve any single pre-determined finality, but more importantly, to reclaim what may be called "post-human agency" in history by asking that the debt be acknowledged in its symbolic scope for the well-being of past, present and future generations. This accounted, for example, for the striking support that 250,000 concerned citizens showed in Sydney for Australia's Aboriginal people by massively participating in the May 28th 2000 walk of atonement. *The deeper and wider you go, the older the story.*

As human history substantiates, it sometimes takes a catastrophe, whether "natural" or man-made, to pull us together across endless security walls and boundaries. (And yet . . .) Our massive drive for destruction could then find itself mirrored by an equally immense capacity for forgiveness and hope. Reeducation camps, rehabilitation camps, concentration camps, annihilation and extermination camps: all the death camps in which forgiveness is said to have died once and for all. However, it is in the face-to-face with the impossible—the irreparable and the non-negotiable—that the possibility of forgiveness arises, and just when one feels one has reached the end of the road in making the last step, one finds oneself walking on, making the impossible step, turning aside, turning about, turning toward. One truly forgives only when one squarely faces the unforgivable. The grand gesture of public reconciliation and redemption has its strategic purpose, but it has little to do with forgiveness. For the debt of love knows no limit; what it requires exceeds all judicial logic and processes. After Japan had finally offered its apologies to Korea, a Japanese artist eagerly told me: "The twenty-first century may very well be the century of forgiveness."



Attend the missing referent:

The new way to spell ethics is M-O-D-A-L!

How does one trill?

Illuminate very well  
Very flatten.

Pendulous prompting  
Prompted titration  
Titration prompt begets  
Even titration of vision.

The new way to spell leaf is T-W-I-S-T!

How does one enunciate?

Sustain flattened crisp  
Framed deceit.

Padding forms circle  
Sugar pierced  
Disclosure no prompting  
Never touching.

The new way to spell condom is S-Y-M-B-O-L-I-C!

How does one arpeggiate?

Crumble feature  
Contact loss timbre.

Undone so actional  
Coordinates not withheld  
Vehicular imperative  
Uncongeal musically.

The new way to spell style is I-N-S-T-R-U-M-E-N-T-A-L!

43

How does one ascend?

Immersion submersion  
Pickled submersion sustains.

Incensed privacy upturned  
Line through held up  
Upturned cradled in service  
Blue sphere foregone.

The new way to spell fictive is P-R-I-V-A-T-E!

How does one make clear?

Grain metaphor  
not holding.

Caulked disjuncture  
Never dwindle sever mirror  
Munch unwanted  
Reflexive munch.

Bahaar Ahsan

# INTRODUCTION

## Locations of culture

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*.  
Martin Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking'

### BORDER LIVES: THE ART OF THE PRESENT

It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*. At the century's edge, we are less exercised by annihilation – the death of the author – or epiphany – the birth of the 'subject'. Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism. . .

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth.<sup>1</sup>

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innov-



## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

ative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?

The force of these questions is borne out by the 'language' of recent social crises sparked off by histories of cultural difference. Conflicts in South Central Los Angeles between Koreans, Mexican-Americans and African-Americans focus on the concept of 'disrespect' – a term forged on the borderlines of ethnic deprivation that is, at once, the sign of racialized violence and the symptom of social victimage. In the aftermath of the *The Satanic Verses* affair in Great Britain, Black and Irish feminists, despite their different constituencies, have made common cause against the 'racialization of religion' as the dominant discourse through which the State represents their conflicts and struggles, however secular or even 'sexual' they may be.

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority'. The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a 'received' tradition. The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress.

I wanted to make shapes or set up situations that are kind of

## INTRODUCTION

open... My work has a lot to do with a kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth, not making a claim to any specific or essential way of being.<sup>2</sup>

Thus writes Renée Green, the African-American artist. She reflects on the need to understand cultural difference as the production of minority identities that 'split' – are estranged unto themselves – in the act of being articulated into a collective body:

Multiculturalism doesn't reflect the complexity of the situation as I face it daily... It requires a person to step outside of him/herself to actually see what he/she is doing. I don't want to condemn well-meaning people and say (like those T-shirts you can buy on the street) 'It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand.' To me that's essentialising blackness.<sup>3</sup>

Political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective. Social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present.

Even then, it's still a struggle for power between various groups within ethnic groups about what's being said and who's saying what, who's representing who? What is a community anyway? What is a black community? What is a Latino community? I have trouble with thinking of all these things as monolithic fixed categories.<sup>4</sup>

If Renée Green's questions open up an interrogatory, interstitial space between the act of representation – who? what? where? – and the presence of community itself, then consider her own creative intervention within this in-between moment. Green's 'architectural' site-specific work, *Sites of Genealogy* (Out of Site, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York), displays and displaces the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed – Black/White, Self/Other. Green makes a metaphor of the museum building itself, rather than simply using the gallery space:

I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the

## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness.<sup>5</sup>

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that enters difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy:

I always went back and forth between racial designations and designations from physics or other symbolic designations. All these things blur in some way. . . . To develop a genealogy of the way colours and noncolours function is interesting to me.<sup>6</sup>

'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future, but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced. The imaginary of spatial distance – to live somehow beyond the border of our times – throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity. The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities. Unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogenous course of history, 'establishing a conception of the present as the "time of the now".'<sup>7</sup>

If the jargon of our times – postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the 'post' to indicate sequentiality – *after-feminism*; or polarity – *anti-modernism*. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. For instance, if the interest in postmodernism is limited to a celebration of the fragmentation of the 'grand narratives' of postenlightenment rationalism then, for all its intellectual excitement, it remains a profoundly parochial enterprise.

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also

## INTRODUCTION

the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond that I have drawn out. Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks. . . . The bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses.<sup>8</sup>

The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities – *as the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition. The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood.) This side of the psychosis of patriotic fervour, I like to think, there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities. Contemporary Sri Lankan theatre represents the deadly conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese through allegorical references to State brutality in South Africa and Latin America; the Anglo-Celtic canon of Australian literature and cinema is being rewritten from the perspective of Aboriginal political and cultural imperatives; the South African novels of Richard Rive, Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer, John Coetzee, are documents of a society divided by the effects of apartheid that enjoin the international intellectual community to meditate on the unequal, asymmetrical worlds that exist elsewhere; Salman Rushdie writes the fabulist historiography of post-Independence India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, only to remind us in *The Satanic Verses* that the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision; Toni Morrison's *Beloved* revives the past of slavery and its murderous rituals of possession and self-possession, in order to project a contemporary fable of a woman's history that is at the same time the narrative of an affective, historic memory of an emergent public sphere of men and women alike.

What is striking about the 'new' internationalism is that the move from the specific to the general, from the material to the metaphoric, is not a smooth passage of transition and transcendence. The 'middle passage' of contemporary culture, as with slavery itself, is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience. Inceas-

## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

ingly, 'national' cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities. The most significant effect of this process is not the proliferation of 'alternative histories of the excluded' producing, as some would have it, a pluralist anarchy. What my examples show is the changed basis for making international connections. The currency of critical comparativism, or aesthetic judgement, is no longer the sovereignty of the national culture conceived as Benedict Anderson proposes as an 'imagined community' rooted in a 'homogeneous empty time' of modernity and progress. The great connective narratives of capitalism and class drive the engines of social reproduction, but do not, in themselves, provide a foundational frame for those modes of cultural identification and political affect that form around issues of sexuality, race, feminism, the lifeworld of refugees or migrants, or the deathly social destiny of AIDS.

The testimony of my examples represents a radical revision in the concept of human community itself. What this geopolitical space may be, as a local or transnational reality, is being both interrogated and reinitiated. Feminism, in the 1990s, finds its solidarity as much in liberatory narratives as in the painful ethical position of a slavewoman, Morrison's Sethe, in *Beloved*, who is pushed to infanticide. The body politic can no longer contemplate the nation's health as simply a civic virtue; it must rethink the question of rights for the entire national, and international, community, from the AIDS perspective. The Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*; and the reason for this is made clear in the stammering, drunken words of Mr 'Whisky' Sisodia from *The Satanic Verses*: 'The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know what it means.'<sup>9</sup>

Postcoloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance. Beyond this, however, postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities – in the North and the South, urban and rural – constituted, if I may coin a phrase, 'otherwise than modernity'. Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate', and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity. Listen to Guillermo Gomez-Peña, the performance artist who lives, amongst other times and places, on the Mexico/US border:

## INTRODUCTION

hello America  
this is the voice of *Gran Vato Charollero*  
*broadcasting from the hot deserts of Nogales, Arizona*  
zona de libre cogercio  
2000 megahertz en todas direcciones  
  
you are celebrating Labor Day in Seattle  
while the Klan demonstrates  
against Mexicans in Georgia  
*ironia, 100% ironia*<sup>10</sup>

Being in the 'beyond', then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to *redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side.* In that sense, then, the *intervening space 'beyond'*, becomes a space of *intervention in the here and now.* To engage with such invention, and intervention, as Green and Gomez-Peña enact in their distinctive work, requires a sense of the new that resonates with the hybrid chicano aesthetic of '*rasquachismo*' as Tomas Ybarra-Frausto describes it:

the utilization of available resources for syncretism, juxtaposition, and integration. *Rasquachismo* is a sensibility attuned to mixtures and confluence . . . a delight in texture and sensuous surfaces . . . self-conscious manipulation of materials or iconography . . . the combination of found material and satiric wit . . . the manipulation of *rasquache* artifacts, code and sensibilities from both sides of the border.<sup>11</sup>

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. —

Pepon Osorio's *objets trouvés* of the Nuyorican (New York/Puerto Rican) community – the statistics of infant mortality, or the silent (and silenced) spread of AIDS in the Hispanic community – are elaborated into baroque allegories of social alienation. But it is not the high drama of birth and death that captures Osorio's spectacular imagination. He is the great celebrant of the migrant act of survival, using his mixed-media works to make a hybrid cultural space that forms contingently, disjunctively, in the inscription of signs of cultural memory and sites of political agency. *La Cama (The Bed)* turns the highly decorated four-

## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

poster into the primal scene of lost-and-found childhood memories, the memorial to a dead nanny Juana, the *mise-en-scène* of the eroticism of the 'emigrant' everyday. Survival, for Osorio, is working in the interstices of a range of practices: the 'space' of installation, the spectacle of the social statistic, the transitive time of the body in performance.

Finally, it is the photographic art of Alan Sekula that takes the borderline condition of cultural translation to its global limit in *Fish Story*, his photographic project on harbours: 'the harbour is the site in which material goods appear in bulk, in the very flux of exchange.'<sup>12</sup> The harbour and the stockmarket become the *paysage moralisé* of a containerized, computerized world of global trade. Yet, the non-synchronous time-space of transnational 'exchange', and exploitation, is embodied in a navigational allegory:

Things are more confused now. A scratchy recording of the Norwegian national anthem blares out from a loudspeaker at the Sailor's Home on the bluff above the channel. The container ship being greeted flies a Bahamian flag of convenience. It was built by Koreans working long hours in the giant shipyards of Ulsan. The underpaid and the understaffed crew could be Salvadorean or Filipino. Only the Captain hears a familiar melody.<sup>13</sup>

Norway's nationalist nostalgia cannot drown out the babel on the bluff. Transnational capitalism and the impoverishment of the Third World certainly create the chains of circumstance that incarcerate the Salvadorean or the Filipino/a. In their cultural passage, hither and thither, as migrant workers, part of the massive economic and political diaspora of the modern world, they embody the Benjaminian 'present': that moment blasted out of the continuum of history. Such conditions of cultural displacement and social discrimination – where political survivors become the best historical witnesses – are the grounds on which Frantz Fanon, the Martinican psychoanalyst and participant in the Algerian revolution, locates an agency of empowerment:

As soon as I *desire* I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my *negating activity* [my emphasis] insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world – that is a world of reciprocal recognitions.

I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.

In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.

## INTRODUCTION

And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate my cycle of freedom.<sup>14</sup>

Once more it is the desire for recognition, 'for somewhere else and for something else' that takes the experience of history *beyond* the instrumental hypothesis. Once again, it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence. And one last time, there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration. Fanon's desire for the recognition of cultural presence as 'negating activity' resonates with my breaking of the time-barrier of a culturally collusive 'present'.

### UNHOMELY LIVES: THE LITERATURE OF RECOGNITION

Fanon recognizes the crucial importance, for subordinated peoples, of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories. But he is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that 'roots' be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present. The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomoely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomoely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself with Henry James's Isabel Archer, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of 'incredulous terror'.<sup>15</sup> And it is at this point that the world first shrinks for Isabel and then expands enormously. As she struggles to survive the fathomless waters, the rushing torrents, James introduces us to the 'unhomoeliness' inherent in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.

Although the 'unhomoely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites. You have already heard the shrill alarm of the unhomoely in that moment when Isabel Archer realizes that her world



## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

has been reduced to one high, mean window, as her house of fiction becomes 'the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation'.<sup>16</sup> If you hear it thus at the Palazzo Roccanera in the late 1870s, then a little earlier in 1873 on the outskirts of Cincinnati, in mumbling houses like 124 Bluestone Road, you hear the undecipherable language of the black and angry dead; the voice of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, 'the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken'.<sup>17</sup> More than a quarter of a century later in 1905, Bengal is ablaze with the Swadeshi or Home Rule movement when 'home-made Bimala, the product of the confined space', as Tagore describes her in *The Home and the World*, is aroused by 'a running undertone of melody, low down in the bass ... the true manly note, the note of power'. Bimala is possessed and drawn forever from the zenana, the secluded women's quarters, as she crosses that fated verandah into the world of public affairs - 'over to another shore and the ferry had ceased to ply'.<sup>18</sup> Much closer to our own times in contemporary South Africa, Nadine Gordimer's heroine Aila in *My Son's Story* emanates a stilling atmosphere as she makes her diminished domesticity into the 'perfect cover for gun-running: suddenly the home turns into another world, and the narrator notices that 'It was as if everyone found that he had unnoticingly entered a strange house, and it was hers. . . .'<sup>19</sup>

The historical specificities and cultural diversities that inform each of these texts would make a global argument purely gestural; in any case, I shall only be dealing with Morrison and Gordimer in any detail. But the 'unhomely' does provide a 'non-continuist' problematic that dramatizes - in the figure of woman - the ambivalent structure of the civil State as it draws its rather paradoxical boundary between the private and the PUBLIC spheres. If, for Freud, the *unheimlich* is 'the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light,' then Hannah Arendt's description of the public and private realms is a profoundly unhomely one: 'it is the distinction between things that should be hidden and things that should be shown,' she writes, which through their inversion in the modern age 'discovers how rich and manifold the hidden can be under conditions of intimacy'.<sup>20</sup>

This logic of reversal, that turns on a disavowal, informs the profound revelations and reinscriptions of the unhomely moment. For what was 'hidden from sight' for Arendt, becomes in Carole Pateman's *The Disorder of Women* the 'ascriptive domestic sphere' that is *forgotten* in the theoretical distinctions of the private and public spheres of civil society. Such a forgetting - or disavowal - creates an uncertainty at the heart of the generalizing subject of civil society, compromising the 'individual' that is the support for its universalist aspiration. By making visible the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies

## INTRODUCTION

the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the difference of genders which does not neatly map on to the private and the public, but becomes disturbingly supplementary to them. This results in redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-is-the political; the world-in-the-home.

The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence. Beloved, the child murdered by her own mother, Sethe, is a daemonic, belated repetition of the violent history of black infant deaths, during slavery, in many parts of the South, less than a decade after the haunting of 124 Bluestone Road. (Between 1882 and 1895 from one-third to a half of the annual black mortality rate was accounted for by children under five years of age.) But the memory of Sethe's act of infanticide emerges through 'the holes - the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask ... the unnamed, the unmentioned. As we reconstruct the narrative of child murder through Sethe, the slave mother, who is herself the victim of social death, the very historical basis of our ethical judgement undergoes a radical revision. X

Such forms of social and psychic existence can best be represented in that tenuous survival of literary language itself; which allows memory to speak:

while knowing Speech can (be) at best, a shadow echoing  
the silent light, bear witness  
To the truth, it is not ...

W. H. Auden wrote those lines on the powers of *poesis* in *The Cave of Making*, aspiring to be, as he put it, 'a minor Atlantic Goethe.' And it is to an intriguing suggestion in Goethe's final 'Note on world literature' (1830) that I now turn to find a comparative method that would speak to the 'unhomely' condition of the modern world.

Goethe suggests that the possibility of a world literature arises from the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts. Nations

could not return to their settled and independent life again without noticing that they had learned many foreign ideas and ways, which they had unconsciously adopted; and come to feel here and there previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs."

Goethe's immediate reference is, of course, to the Napoleonic wars and his concept of 'the feeling of neighbourly relations' is profoundly Eurocentric, extending as far as England and France. However, as an Orientalist who read *Shakuntala* at seventeen years of age, and who

## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

writes in his autobiography of the 'unformed and overformed'<sup>24</sup> monkey god Hanuman, Goethe's speculations are open to another line of thought.

What of the more complex cultural situation where 'previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs' emerge from the imposition of 'foreign' ideas, cultural representations, and structures of power? Goethe suggests that the 'inner nature of the whole nation as well as the individual man works all unconsciously.'<sup>25</sup> When this is placed alongside his idea that the cultural life of the nation is 'unconsciously' lived, then there may be a sense in which world literature could be an emergent, prefigurative category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation may be established on the grounds of historical trauma. The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ zh their projections of 'otherness'

Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees - these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world literature. The centre of such a study would neither be the 'sovereignty' of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture, but a focus on those 'freak social and cultural displacements' that Morrison and Gordimer represent in their 'unhomely' fictions. Which leads us to ask: can the perplexity of the unhomely, intrapersonal world lead to an international theme?

If we are seeking a 'worlding' of literature, then perhaps it lies in a critical act that attempts to grasp the sleight of hand with which literature conjures with historical specificity, using the medium of psychic uncertainty, aesthetic distancing, or the obscure signs of the spirit-world, the sublime and the subliminal. As literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when *something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation*. This act of writing the world, of taking the measure of its dwelling, is magically caught in Morrison's description of her house of fiction - art as 'the fully realized presence of a haunting'<sup>26</sup> of history. Read as an image that describes the relation of art to social reality, my translation of Morrison's phrase becomes a statement on the political responsibility of the critic. For the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present. x

Our task remains, however, to show how historical agency is transformed through the signifying process; how the historical event is represented in a discourse that is *somehow beyond control*. This is in keeping with Hannah Arendt's suggestion that the author of social action may

## INTRODUCTION

be the initiator of its unique meaning, but as agent he or she cannot control its outcome. It is not simply what the house of fiction contains or 'controls' *as content*. What is just as important is the metaphoricality of the houses of racial memory that both Morrison and Gordimer construct - those subjects of the narrative that mutter or mumble like 124 Bluestone Road, or keep a still silence in a 'grey' Cape Town suburb,x,

Each of the houses in Gordimer's *My Son's Story* is invested with a specific secret or a conspiracy, an unhomely stirring. The house in the ghetto is the house of the collusiveness of the coloureds in their antagonistic relations to the blacks; the lying house is the house of Sonny's adultery; then there is the silent house of Aila's revolutionary camouflage; there is also the nocturnal house of Will, the narrator, writing of the narrative that charts the phoenix rising in his home, while the words must turn to ashes in his mouth. But each 'unhomely' house marks a deeper historical displacement. And that is the condition of being 'coloured' in South Africa, or as Will describes it, 'halfway between ... being not defined - and it was this lack of definition in itself that was never to be questioned, but observed like a taboo, something which no one, while following, could ever admit to'.<sup>27</sup>

This halfway house of racial and cultural origins bridges the 'in-between' diasporic origins of the coloured South African and turns it into the symbol for the disjunctive, displaced everyday life of the liberation struggle: 'like so many others of this kind, whose families are fragmented in the diaspora of exile, code names, underground activity, people for whom a real home and attachments are something for others who will come after.?"

Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an 'in-between' temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge, which like the coloured South African subject represents a hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive 'image' at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world.

Such a strange stillness is visible in the portrait of Aila. Her husband Sonny, now past his political prime, his affair with his white revolutionary lover in abeyance, makes his first prison visit to see his wife. The wardress stands back, the policeman fades, and Aila emerges as an unhomely presence, on the opposite side from her husband and son:

## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

but through the familiar beauty there was a vivid strangeness.... It was as if some chosen experience had seen in her, as a painter will in his subject, what she was, what was there to be discovered. In Lusaka, in secret, in prison - who knows where - she had sat for her hidden face. *They had to recognise her.*<sup>29</sup>

Through this painterly distance a vivid strangeness emerges; a partial or double 'self' is framed in a climactic political moment that is also a contingent historical event - 'some chosen experience ... who knows where ... or what there was to be discovered.?' They had to recognize her, but *what* do they recognize in her?

Words will not speak and the silence freezes into the images of apartheid: identity cards, police frame-ups, prison mug-shots, the grainy press pictures of terrorists. Of course, Aila is not judged, nor is she judgemental. Her revenge is much wiser and more complete. In her silence she becomes the unspoken 'totem' of the taboo of the coloured South African. She displays the unhomely world, 'the halfway between ... not defined' world of the coloured as the 'distorted place, and time in which they - all of them - Sonny, Aila, Hannah - lived'.<sup>31</sup> The silence that doggedly follows Aila's dwelling now turns into an image of the 'interstices', the in-between hybridity of the history of sexuality and race.

The necessity for what I've done - She placed the outer edge of each hand, fingers extended and close together, as a frame on either sides of the sheets of testimony in front of her. And she placed herself before him, to be judged by him."

Aila's hidden face, the outer edge of each hand, these small gestures through which she speaks describe another dimension of 'dwelling' in the social world. Aila as coloured woman defines a boundary that is at once inside and outside, the insider's outsideness. The stillness that surrounds her, the gaps in her story, her hesitation and passion that speak between the self and its acts - these are moments where the private and public touch in contingency. They do not simply transform the content of political ideas; the very 'place' from which the political is spoken - the public sphere itself, becomes an experience of liminality which questions, in Sonny's words, what it means to speak 'from the centre of life'."

The central political preoccupation of the novel - till Aila's emergence - focuses on the 'loss of absolutes', the meltdown of the cold war, the fear 'that if we can't offer the old socialist paradise in exchange for the capitalist hell here, we'll have turned traitor to our brothers.'" The lesson Aila teaches requires a movement away from a world conceived in binary terms, away from a notion of the people's aspirations sket-

## INTRODUCTION

ched in simple black and white. It also requires a shift of attention from the political as a pedagogical, ideological practice to politics as the stressed necessity of everyday life – politics as a performativity. Aila leads us to the unhomely world where, Gordimer writes, the banalities are enacted - the fuss over births, marriages, family affairs with their survival rituals of food and clothing." But it is precisely in these banalities that the unhomely stirs, as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not. Between the banal act of freedom and its historic denial rises the silence: 'Aila emanated a stilling atmosphere; the parting jabber stopped. It was as if everyone found he had unnoticingly entered a strange house, and it was hers; she stood there.'<sup>36</sup>

In Aila's stillness, its obscure necessity, we glimpse what Emmanuel Levinas has magically described as the twilight existence of the aesthetic image - art's image as 'the very event of obscuring, a descent into night, an invasion of the shadow'." The 'completion' of the aesthetic, the distancing of the world in the image, is precisely not a transcendental activity. The image - or the metaphoric, 'fictional' activity of discourse - makes visible 'an interruption of time by a movement going on on the hither side of time, in its interstices'." The complexity of this statement will become clearer when I remind you of the stillness of time through which Aila surreptitiously and subversively interrupts the ongoing presence of political activity, using her interstitial role, her domestic world to both 'obscure' her political role and to articulate it the better. Or, as *Beloved*, the continual eruption of 'undecipherable languages' of slave memory obscures the historical narrative of infanticide only, to articulate the unspoken: that ghostly discourse that enters the world of 124 'from the outside' in order to reveal the transitional world of the aftermath of slavery in the 1870s, its private and public faces, its historical past and its narrative present.

The aesthetic image discloses an ethical time of narration because, Levinas writes, 'the real world appears in the image as it were between parentheses.'<sup>39</sup> Like the outer edges of Aila's hands holding her enigmatic testimony, like 124 Bluestone Road which is a fully realized presence haunted by undecipherable languages, Levinas's parenthetical perspective is also an ethical view. It effects an 'externality of the inward' as the very enunciative position of the historical and narrative subject, 'introducing into the heart of subjectivity a radical and anarchical reference to the other which in fact constitutes the inwardness of the subject.'<sup>40</sup> Is it not uncanny that Levinas's metaphors for this unique 'obscurity' of the image should come from those Dickensian unhomely places - those dusty boarding schools, the pale light of London offices, the dark, dank second-hand clothes shops?

## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

X ↙ For Levinas the 'art-magic' of the contemporary novel lies in its way of 'seeing inwardness from the outside', and it is this ethical-aesthetic positioning that returns us, finally, to the community of the unhomely, to the famous opening lines of *Beloved*: '124 was spiteful. The women in the house knew it and so did the children.'

It is Toni Morrison who takes this ethical and aesthetic project of 'seeing inwardness from the outside' furthest or deepest - right into *Beloved*'s naming of her desire for identity: 'I want you to touch me on my inside part and call me my name.?' There is an obvious reason why a ghost should want to be so realized. What is more obscure - and to the point - is how such an inward and intimate desire would provide an 'inscape' of the memory of slavery. For Morrison, it is precisely the signification of the historical and discursive boundaries of slavery that are the issue.

Racial violence is invoked by historical dates - 1876, for instance - but Morrison is just a little hasty with the events 'in-themselves', as she rushes past 'the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, God's Ways, antislavery, manumission, skin voting'r" What has to be endured is the knowledge of doubt that comes from Sethe's eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life, her banishment in the unhomely world of 124 Bluestone Road, as the pariah of her postslavery community. What finally causes the thoughts of the women of 124 'unspeakable thoughts to be unspoken' is the understanding that the victims of violence are themselves 'signified upon': they are the victims of projected fears, anxieties and dominations that do not originate within the oppressed and will not fix them in the circle of pain. The stirring of emancipation comes with the knowledge that the racially supremacist belief 'that under every dark skin there was a jungle' was a belief that grew, spread, touched every perpetrator of the racist myth, turned them mad from their own untruths, and was then expelled from 124 Bluestone Road.

But before such an emancipation from the ideologies of the master, Morrison insists on the harrowing ethical repositioning of the slave mother, who must be the enunciatory site for seeing the inwardness of the slave world from the outside - when the 'outside' is the ghostly return of the child she murdered; the double of herself, for 'she is the laugh I am the laughter I see her face which is mine.'<sup>43</sup> What could be the ethics of child murder? What historical knowledge returns to Sethe, through the aesthetic distance or 'obscuring' of the event, in the phantom shape of her dead daughter *Beloved*?

In her fine account of forms of slave resistance in *Within the Plantation Household*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese considers murder, self-mutilation and infanticide to be the core psychological dynamic of all resistance. It is her view that 'these extreme forms captured the essence of the slave

## INTRODUCTION

woman's self-definition'." Again we see how this most tragic and intimate act of violence is performed in a struggle to push back the boundaries of the slave world. Unlike acts of confrontation against the master or the overseer which were resolved within the household context, infanticide was recognized as an act against the system and at least acknowledged the slave woman's legal standing in the public sphere. Infanticide was seen to be an act against the master's property - against his surplus profits - and perhaps that, Fox-Genovese concludes, 'led some of the more desperate to feel that, by killing an infant they loved, they would be in some way reclaiming it as their own'."

. Through the death and the return of Beloved, precisely such a reclamation takes place: the slave mother regaining through the presence of the child, the property of her own person. This knowledge comes as a kind of self-love that is also the love of the 'other': Eros and Agape together. It is an ethical love in the Levinasian sense in which the 'inwardness' of the subject is inhabited by the 'radical and anarchical reference to the other'. This knowledge is visible in those intriguing chapters" which lay over each other, where Sethe, Beloved and Denver perform a fugue-like ceremony of claiming and naming through intersecting and interstitial subjectivities: 'Beloved, she my daughter'; 'Beloved is my sister'; 'I am Beloved and she is mine.' The women speak in tongues, from a space 'in-between each other' which is a communal space. They explore an 'interpersonal' reality: a social reality that appears within the poetic image as if it were in parentheses - aesthetically distanced, held back, and yet historically framed. It is difficult to convey the rhythm and the improvisation of those chapters, but it is impossible not to see in them the healing of history, a community reclaimed in the making of a name. We can finally ask ourselves:

Who is Beloved?

Now we understand: she is the daughter that returns to Sethe so that her mind will be homeless no more.

Who is Beloved?

Now we may say: she is the sister that returns to Denver, and brings hope of her father's return, the fugitive who died in his escape.

Who is Beloved?

Now we know: she is the daughter made of murderous love who returns to love and hate and free herself. Her words are broken, like the lynched people with broken necks; disembodied, like the dead children who lost their ribbons. But there is no mistaking what her live words say as they rise from the dead despite their lost syntax and their fragmented presence.



## THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

My face is coming I have to have it I am looking for the  
join I am loving my face so much I want to join I am  
loving my face so much my dark face is close to me I want  
to join.<sup>47</sup>

## LOOKING FOR THE JOIN

To end, as I have done, with the nest of the phoenix, not its pyre is, in another way, to return to my beginning in the *beyond*. If Gordimer and Morrison describe the historical world, forcibly entering the house of art and fiction in order to invade, alarm, divide and dispossess, they also demonstrate the contemporary compulsion to move beyond; to turn the present into the 'post'; or, as I said earlier, to touch the future on its hither side. Aila's in-between identity and Beloved's double lives both affirm the borders of culture's insurgent and interstitial existence. In that sense, they take their stand with Renee Green's pathway between racial polarities; or Rushdie's migrant history of the English written in the margins of satanic verses; or Osorio's bed – *La Cama* – a place of dwelling, located between the unhomeliness of migrancy and the baroque belonging of the metropolitan, New York/Puerto-Rican artist.

When the public nature of the social event encounters the silence of the word it may lose its historical composure and closure. At this point we would do well to recall Walter Benjamin's insight on the disrupted dialectic of modernity: 'Ambiguity is the figurative appearance of the dialectic, the law of the dialectic at a standstill.'<sup>48</sup> For Benjamin that stillness is Utopia; for those who live, as I described it, 'otherwise' than modernity but not outside it, the Utopian moment is not the necessary horizon of hope. I have ended this argument with the woman framed – Gordimer's Aila – and the woman renamed – Morrison's Beloved – because in both their houses great world events erupted – slavery and apartheid – and their happening was turned, through that peculiar obscurity of art, into a second coming.

Although Morrison insistently repeats at the close of *Beloved*, 'This is not a story to pass on,' she does this only in order to engrave the event in the deepest resources of our amnesia, of our unconsciousness. When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival. To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalencies and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity: 'I am looking for the join . . . I want to join . . . I want to join.'



## ON DATING

i want mutual suspicion. an agreed upon distaste  
for optimism. for goals.

when we meet, i want a handshake.  
a smile, real & gentle, but wary. a shrewd eye

to eye. if a glint, so be it. but i'm neither asking  
nor gifting.

i gave the last of my polite laughs  
relationships ago. i like cats

for their earned intimacy, their requisite  
listening. the respect in learning

their themes without presumption. or else  
the claws, the teeth

when all along, buried under patience: the purr.  
the muzzle. the tender kneading.

(Gordon Mitchell Smith)

## 3.1

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### Echo; or, On Resonance

Auribus in vestris habito penetrabilis Echo.  
—Ausonio, *In Echo pictam*

Myth is full of female vocal creatures. Among them is the nymph Echo who, instead of singing, repeats the words of others. The repetition begins, however, with a certain temporal overlap, while the other is still speaking. The echo thus makes itself into a resonance according to a musical rhythm. As a pure voice that refracts another voice, Echo makes the musicality of language sing. The poet Ovid wisely places her alongside Narcissus. The eye and the voice, which so tormented Plato, thus encounter one another in the Latin fable. And as with Plato, in Ovid's text there is no shortage of mirroring effects or produced copies—Narcissus' reflected image, and Echo's reverberating voice. The story tells of their impossible reconciliation.

At the beginning of the story, according to Ovid's original version, Echo is a loquacious nymph; in fact, she is positively verbose, capable of entertaining people with long-winded discourses [*sermones*].<sup>1</sup> She is not just any conversationalist, therefore, but a young girl who has total command of the language, possessed of a typically feminine rhetorical talent. She is able to distract Juno with her chattering while the other nymphs bed Jupiter. Realizing that she has been tricked, the goddess takes her revenge. Echo is condemned to repeat the words of others, duplicating their sounds. Rendered incapable of taking the initiative in order to proffer discourses of her own, she becomes a vocal nymph who only echoes sounds. *Vocalis nymphæ, resonabilis Echo*, like a voice that functions as an acoustic mirror,

the young girl is transformed into an effect of resonance. She cannot speak first; but she cannot remain silent. She speaks *after*, she depends on others' discourses and becomes merely their echo. Moreover, only the last words that are uttered by her voice—which are superimposed on the words that the speaker is pronouncing—are heard. Thus separated from their context, they take on a different meaning. They are a forced and unintentional repetition, but they can appear like a response.

Narcissus, who enters the scene at this point, encounters Echo. Narcissus is young and beautiful, and the nymph falls in love with him. The occasion of their first—and last—encounter is in a wooded glade where Echo, hidden in the bushes, can only repeat his words. Believing that he is holding a conversation with a girl who does not want to show herself, the young boy invites her to join him. “Come here and let us meet [*huc coeamus*],” he says. And the voice of the nymph repeats, “Let us meet [*coeamus*].” Her response is naughty. For without the *huc, coeamus* alludes to coitus. The nymph goes on to make the situation worse by jumping out of the woods and throwing her arms around Narcissus. Scandalized by her ardor, the boy then declares that he would rather die than couple with her; and Echo, automatically, invites him to couple, or rather copulate, with her. The result is an unequivocal and definite refusal on the part of Narcissus. He would of course have refused her in any case, because he is capable of loving only himself. But Echo's story requires this cruel turn. For right after this unhappy episode, she in fact begins to physically wither away from her unrequited love. “She became wrinkled and wasted; all the freshness of her beauty withered into the air.” As if by a progressive dissolution, her body vanishes until “only her voice and her bones remain.” Soon after, her bones become stone. Disembodied, Echo finally becomes echo, the sound that the mountains send bouncing back, a pure voice of resonance without a body. Without a mouth, or throat, or saliva, without any human semblance or visible figure, the beautiful nymph is sublimated into a mineralization of the voice.

The myth is rich with symbolic references. Following the classical tradition, it confirms that the voice is feminine. Unlike the Muses or the Homeric Sirens, however, Echo's is not a singing or narrating voice, but rather a voice that results, like a mere residual material, from its subtraction from the semantic register of *logos*. Rather than repeating the words, Echo repeats their sounds. If these sounds, separated from the context of the sentence, come together to form words that still signify something (or

something else), then this is a matter for the listener, not the nymph. After Juno's curse—following the usual rule of feminine envy—Echo is no longer a *zoon logon echon*; she no longer possesses a *phone semantike*. She is instead pure *phone*, activated by an involuntary mechanism of resonance. Only because of Narcissus do Echo's responses form a dialogue. In this sense, in the economy of the patriarchal symbolic order, Echo is but the younger sister of the mute woman. Neither of them speaks; but the prohibition that denies them speech is different in each case. Women in general, it could be said, adapt themselves to a silence that conforms to a "natural" feminine inadequacy when it comes to *logos*. For Echo, on the other hand, it is a matter of revocalizing *logos* through a voice that is totally drained of its semantic component. The revocalization is thus a desemanticization. It falls to Narcissus to resemanticize the sounds that the nymph proffers. In the end, in his exemplary narcissism, Narcissus "dialogues" coherently only with himself, not with Echo. He dialogues with himself, he interprets himself, and he misunderstands himself. The whole, somewhat obscene game that Ovid plays is developed on the semantic level.

Echo is the designated victim of this game. Pure voice, restricted to repeating the words of others, she provides a sonorous substance to a semantic that is not organized according to her intentions. She vocalizes a meaning that not only depends on Narcissus' words, but on the language game that appears in Ovid's text. And this meaning is what allows her to suddenly throw her arms around Narcissus—the only act that is properly hers, spontaneous, out of the norm of repetition. By embracing Narcissus, the enamored Echo shows that she is still a singular body that expresses itself. It is precisely this initiative that provokes Narcissus' refusal, which brings her to wither away from love and lose her body. This process of withering has certain anatomical details; first, her flesh dries up, then her humors vanish, and then her bones turn to stone—not the stone of a statue, but rather stone in general: rocks, boulders, mountains. The nullifying of her body is thus the definitive dissolution of a uniqueness that, as echo, Echo's voice does not possess. Echo's voice is, in fact, not *her* voice; it does not possess an unmistakable timbre, and it does not signal a unique person. It simply obeys the physical phenomenon of the echo, repeating even the timbre of the other's voice. It is a mere acoustic resonance, a voice that returns, foreign, to the one who emitted it. The juxtaposition of Echo and Narcissus is therefore perfect. The absolute ego of Narcissus, for whom the other is nothing but "another himself," corresponds to the reduction of

the vocalic nymph to a mere sonorous reverberation of the other. The mechanism of repetition in the voice produces the annulment of uniqueness. The same mechanism of the eye produces in Narcissus an absolute duplication of himself. Lovesick for his own image, the beautiful boy dies, leaving the flower that bears his name. Echo instead lives on without a body and still functions as an acoustic mirror for the play of the voice that, from afar, returns through its own rhythmical extension.

As Ovid knows, there is something infantile in this game, which is played on mountain paths the world over. As a master of language and a devotee of the musicality of verse, Ovid constructs a text in which the sounds reverberated by Echo not only substantiate the meter, but reorganize the semantic register through the dialogue's equivocations. Beyond the entertaining construction of the dialogue, however, Echo remains pure voice, vocal resonance, not speech. As in the case of the infant who repeats the mother's words, stripping them of their meaning, Echo is an acoustic repetition, not intentioned toward meaning. Just as the myth recounts, her story alludes to a sort of regression to the mimetic vocalizations of infancy, to the so-called la-la language. Before Juno's intervention, the nymph not only spoke, but was capable of discourses that could entertain even the gods. As is typical of women, she was skilled in the semantic art of rhetoric—which makes her transformation into a pure vocal mechanism of resonance, in and of itself indifferent to the semantic, all the more significant. Through the fate of Echo, *logos* is stripped of language as a system of signification and is reduced to a pure vocalic. And yet this is not just any vocalic, but rather a vocalic that erases the semantic through repetition. Repetition—the very repetition that is the famous mechanism of the “performative,” through which meaning is stabilized and destabilized—here turns out to be a mechanism that produces the reverse effect. Echo's repetition is a babble that dissolves the semantic register entirely, leading the voice back to an infantile state that is not yet speech.

Literary modernism—especially those texts that employ experimental techniques in order to liberate language from the urgency of signification—intuits the power of this regression. Some texts by Samuel Beckett, for example, produce a linguistic flux that—through repetition and syntactic breaks, phonematic substitutions, and ambiguous resignifications—results in a babble where the semantic system, and the subject that should sustain this system, are dissolved.<sup>2</sup> Hélène Cixous' work is similar, and yet different, in this regard. Her work against the codes of the language of the Father is explicitly aimed at freeing the maternal, rhythmic voice of the

mother, which precedes and exceeds the system of logos. Cixous, like Kristeva, recuperates for the voice an originary scene of infancy as a link with the mother. The element of repetition in their texts is more than babble; it becomes resonance, music, and acoustic relation. If we transport Echo onto this scene—which is renewed wherever the semantic succumbs to the vocalic—then the Ovidian nymph ends up recuperating a different sense for her vocalic repetition, one that is no longer punitive or forced. For as Ovid himself no doubt knew, Echo is not so much a tragic figure of interdicted speech as she is a figure of a certain pleasure. This pleasure in vocal repetition is not even perceived as compulsive; rather, by evading the semantic, it rediscovers a time in which such pleasure was free from the very problem of this evasion. In other words, the echo that mobilizes the musical rhythm of language does not simply coincide with an infantile regression; it rediscovers, or remembers, the power of a voice that still resounds in logos. By devocalizing logos, metaphysics wants to immunize itself from this power. The privileging of *theoria* over speech, as Plato knew well, is first of all the erasure of the voice.

In the etymology of the Latin *vox*, the first meaning of *vocare* is “to call,” or “invoke.” Before making itself speech, the voice is an invocation that is addressed to the other and that entrusts itself to an ear that receives it. Its inaugural scene coincides with birth, where the infant, with her first breath, invokes a voice in response, appeals to an ear to receive her cry, convokes another voice. The intrauterine bond—which is already rhythmical, musical—is broken. The first cry thus invokes a new sonorous bond, as vitally important as the breath that sustains it. Existence hangs on a push of the lungs, which is at the same time an invocation of the other. The voice is always *for* the ear, it is always relational; but it is never as relational as it is in the first cry of the infant—an invoking life that unknowingly entrusts itself to a voice that responds. For at the beginning, in the cold and blindness of the first light, in the expulsion from the warmth of the uterine water—at the newborn’s emergence “in order to have what it did not have inside; air and breath, indispensable for phonation”—there is nothing but the sonorous bond of voice to voice.<sup>3</sup> This bond establishes the first communication of all communicability, and thus constitutes its prerequisite. There is nothing yet to be communicated, if not communication itself in its pure vocality. The voice first of all signifies itself, nothing other than the relationality of the vocalic, which is already implicit in the first invoking cry of the infant.



During the first crucial months of life, this vocalic relationality takes its time and its pleasure before handing itself over to the system of language. The maternal tongue is not only the language that we speak because we learned it from our mothers. It is also, before this, the wordless language of vocalizations that the mother exchanges with the infant. Whether she utters words with meaning, or indulges in nonsensical baby talk herself, the mother tongue touches the infant's ear with unmistakable tones and teaches the infant the mimetic cadences of the sonorous relation. This is an acoustic-vocal relation in which, importantly, what gets said is, as yet, nothing. There is not yet any signified in this voice—no reference through the linguistic sign to the noetic *presence* of an absent object. Materialized by the physicality of the vocal exchange, the only presence is the act of the relation. This relation often involves a “face to face,” a contiguity of the face, of touch, of odor. The indexes of uniqueness quickly add up and are soon recognizable to the infant. But only in the vocalic sphere does the relation take on the status of an active, spontaneous communication that the facial expressions sustain and reinforce. Symptomatically, even from a developmental point of view, the exchange of voices precedes the exchange of smiles. Invoked from the very first cry, the vocalic dialogue begins straight away.

Obviously, in this case, “dialogue” is not the right word. For there is no *logos* here, just as there is not yet any system of language. There is, however, a cadence of demand and response—or, better, a reciprocal invocation in which the voices convoke one another in turn. This cadence has its temporal rhythms, its communicative soundtrack, its la-la melody—it has a certain measure, if not yet a law. In the play of voices that invoke each other, the sequence of emissions configure a reciprocal dependence—not just the obvious dependence of the infant on the one who nourishes and cares for her, or the originary dependence of each existent on the woman who brought her into the world, but rather the dependence that is inscribed in the very relationality of invocation. It is configured as a resonance where the emission, although free, spontaneously follows the relational rhythm of repetition. This rhythm confirms that each voice, as it is *for* the ear, demands at the same time an ear that is *for* the voice. In the phenomenology of the maternal scene, the cadence of the vocal exchange shows in an evident way that this “for” alludes to the ear and the voice of the other. The invocation, *incipit* of a vocalic dialogue, implies at the same time the ear and the voice of the other—someone else who is here, in earshot. The invocation depends on this. The “sharing of voices” [*la*

*partage dex voix*], to use Nancy's phrase, is first of all a sharing that complies with the relationality of the voice. It is hardly surprising, in the maternal language of vocalizations and gurgles, that this sharing has a musical quality. Because it is modulated on the elementary structure of the echo, its form is a duet—a sonorous texture for two voices, which are structurally *for* the other.

This is the very music that Kristeva and Cixous speak of when they name the maternal figure as the sonorous, presemantic source of language. Because they rely on a psychoanalytic framework, however, their attention goes to the pleasure drive that is inscribed in this musicality, linked to the mouth as the center of oral pleasure. The *languelait* of the mother, voice and milk, is given to the ear and the mouth. The shadow of psychoanalysis thus ends up obscuring the relationality of the scene, sacrificing it to the originary bond [*fusionne originaria*] between mother and child. As a result, the phenomenon of vocalic uniqueness is once again effaced. Unlike the bond [*fusionne*] of mother and child, a relation carries with it the act of distinguishing oneself, constituting the uniqueness of each one through this distinction. In the case of the vocalizations and gurgles that the mother and the infant exchange, this uniqueness makes itself heard incontrovertibly as voice. The infant recognizes the mother's voice and sings a duet with her. Resonance, daughter of invocation, links the two voices in the form of a rhythmic bond. What makes the uniqueness of the two voices stand out, in fact, is this repetition, echo, and miming, because they duplicate the *same* sounds. The voice is always unique, but all the more so in the vocalic exercise of repetition. In fact, by challenging the economy of the same, uniqueness is here entrusted to nothing other than the singular voice. This does not mean that in this vocalic language mother and child are constituted as subjects. The phantasm of the *subject* is a fictitious entity generated by philosophy; it belongs to language as a system of signification; it comes from the devocalizing strategy of *theoria*. And yet this does not mean that there is no distinction between mother and infant. On the contrary, there is a process of self-distinction in the repetitive rhythm of the duet, in the reciprocal giving of uniqueness and relation, just like a song for two voices—communication, already regulated, of language whose rules are not semantic but acoustic. It is indeed a song, no longer intentioned toward speech, with which each invokes the other and communicates him- or herself in the interdependent form of the resonance. The uniqueness of the vocalic is inaugurated on a scene where, unlike what happens on the

scene of the “subject,” there are no dreams of autonomy or hierarchical principles. Free from the pretenses of Narcissus and from Ovid’s textual games, Echo comes to appear as the divinity who teaches an acoustic relationality, still linked to infantile pleasure, in which uniqueness makes itself heard as voice.



GOODBYE TO ALL THIS  
(WITH APOLOGIES—ON MANY LEVELS—TO R.  
MORGAN)  
1983

Goodbye, sisters, I've had it.

Goodbye, Pat, cow, cunt, silly bitch, whatever obscenity you are organizing for the right to call other woman this week, fare thee well. Enjoy. Keep writing articles for Bob Guccione on how to tie women up. Bet the money is fun too.

Goodbye, Ellen, baaad baaad Ellen, naughty girl, cheeky thing, sexy little devil. Goodbye to the Contradictions: good girl, bad girl, good Jew, bad Jew—how do you do it? It was all too deep, too radical, *too taboo* for conventional, conforming, ladylike, virginal me anyway. Have a good time lacerating Freud and Marx and enjoy the fantasy (use the perfume too, go all the way).

Goodbye, Amber, hot stuff, outlaw, Jesse James but oh so femme fatale, daring to be blond, daring to wear make-up (it takes the breath away, Amber, really it does, so Brave), keep fighting for the right to be femme, honey, take it all the way to the Pentagon, bring the military industrial complex to its knees.

Goodbye, Gayle. As you are already on your knees, just keep shuffling along. Reading Foucault really is kinky—chained or not, it brings a whole new dimension to masochism. Bow and scrape *except* when standing up for your lover's right to dress like a Nazi and then hang tough, kike. Being a woman and a Jew means double-your-pleasure (chew the gum too, go all the way).

Goodbye all you swastika-wielding dykettes, all you tough dangerous feminist leatherettes, all you sexy, nonmonogamous (it does take the breath away), pierced, whipped, bitten, fist-fucked and fist-fucking, wild wonderful

heretofore unimaginable feminist Girls. Keep the Jews in line and the cows dying. (Oh for the good old days of Lesbian-Feminist-Vegetarians for Jesus.)

Goodbye all you proud, pro-sex, liberated *Cosmo* intellectuals (*Village Voice* girls? *Mother Jones* eroticists?), fighting those oh so repressed (in fact dead) Victorians for the right to get laid, braving the scorn and censure of the nineteenth century, being nearly delinquent, letting boys do more than feel you up (is it true? do you really?). Keep organizing against repression—keep those men pumping away for freedom now (how many fucks does it take to screw in a lightbulb?). *And not being married.* Gosh.

Goodbye to all you cunts, my sisters, fighting for the right to be humiliated, for the right to walk the streets, for the right to be tied up and proud, for the right to be hurt, for the right to masturbate with rubber duckies, for the right to kiss ass, for the right to call blacks “niggers” and Jews “kikes,” for the right to use the swastika as a sex toy and the plantation as a game, for the right to be called “nigger” and “kike,” for the right to be what this society already says women, Jews, and blacks are. Brave. Smart. *Radical.* Goodbye to all this. Stay militant. Tie those knots *tight*. Watch the patriarchy crumble when confronted with your demands. That’s it! You want it to collapse laughing! Goodbye, winners, enjoy the victory. It’s nice to see girls get what they want. It’s astonishing to see girls want what they get. Goodbye comedians. Give the rapists, pornographers, and pimps a good laugh. An army of baaad girls cannot fail.

Goodbye to stupid feminist academics who romanticize prostitution and to stupid feminist magazine editors who romanticize pornography and fetishism and sadomasochism. And especially goodbye to stupid feminist writers who romanticize rituals of degradation and symbols of inferiority. Oh, and incidentally, goodbye to all you feminists who go to bars and concerts but won’t buy books. Goodbye to all this, all them, all you.

Goodbye Women’s movement, hello girls. Goodbye to the great women who have done really brave things but are quiet now. Goodbye to the great women who are not quiet now. Goodbye to the organizers—blessed be. Goodbye to poor Women Against Pornography, which committed the crime of trying to fight the pornography industry, misogyny, the buying and selling of women,

the use of women as objects—tried to stop all those good things—I mean all those baaad things—I mean all those *erotic* things. Goodbye Dorchen—you really are the *worst*: skinny, pretty, smart, employed, well-dressed, and still wanting what?—freedom? justice? equality? Still identifying with whom? Women? Still what? A feminist? Sister, it's a girls' movement now. Goodbye, Kathy the Incurable—come on, why shouldn't women be locked up in brothels and fucked and beaten until they die? *Moralist*. Goodbye, Robin. You had a dream. *Dummy*. You were supposed to have a fantasy. Goodbye Adrienne. The poems were supposed to be baaad, not good. Bye bye, Florence. Don't you know by now that children eat candy so as to be fucked by grown men? Goodbye all you born-again virgins, all you timid fragile creatures, all you conforming, ladylike Victorians with your puritanical aversions to suffering. Goodbye women. Goodbye to all this.

Goodbye to the silly women who went to jail fighting *Snuff* and goodbye to the fools who fought *Playboy* and *Hustler* and all the rest of it. Goodbye to all you Gidget-types breaking laws, risking beatings, organizing against criminal misogynists, picketing, demonstrating, marching, so you can stay chaste for and faithful to the beach-bum-who-is-really-going-to-be-a-doctor of your choice. There are easier ways, but goodbye to you naive rightwing humorless fanatics who won't use them. Goodbye, Linda, held captive, repeatedly beaten and raped, forced to make *Deep Throat*, forced to be fucked by a dog. The girls say it's just fantasy not violence. Goodbye to all them.

Goodbye to the dummies who thought sex could express reciprocity and equality and still be sexy. Goodbye to the dummies who thought this movement could change the world. Goodbye to those precious Madonna-types who shouted “Free Our Sisters Free Ourselves” in the streets and at rallies, at pimps and at police. Free Pat Free Ellen Free Gayle Free Amber Free Me. Goodbye to all this. Free the women. Give the girls what they want.

# ISRAEL

## *Whose Country Is It Anyway?*

It's mine. We can put the question to rest. Israel belongs to me. Or so I was raised to believe.

I've been planting trees there since I can remember. I have memories of my mother's breast—of hunger (she was sick and weak); of having my tonsils out when I was two and a half—of the fear and the wallpaper in the hospital; of infantile bad dreams; of early childhood abandonment; of planting trees in Israel. Understand: I've been planting trees in Israel since before I actually could recognize a real tree from life. In Camden where I grew up we had cement. I thought the huge and splendid telephone pole across the street from our brick row house was one—a tree; it just didn't have leaves. I wasn't deprived: the wires were awesome. If I think of "tree" now, I see that splintery dead piece of lumber stained an uneven brown with its wild black wires stretched out across the sky. I have to force myself to remember that a tree is frailer and greener, at least prototypically, at least in temperate zones. It takes an act of adult will to remember that a tree grows up into the sky, down into the ground, and a telephone pole, even a magnificent one, does not.

Israel, like Camden, didn't have any trees. We were cement; Israel was desert. They needed trees, we didn't. The logic was that we lived in the United States where there was an abundance of everything, even trees; in Israel there was nothing. So we had to get them trees. In synagogue we would be given folders: white paper, heavy, thick; blue ink, light, reminiscent of green but not green. White and blue were the colors of Israel. You opened the folder and inside there was a tree printed in light blue. The



tree was full, round, almost swollen, a great arc, lush, branches coming from branches, each branch growing clusters of leaves. In each cluster of leaves, we had to put a dime. We could use our own dimes from lunch money or allowances, but they only went so far; so we had to ask relatives, strangers, the policeman at the school crossing, the janitor at school—anyone who might spare a dime, because you had to fill your folder and then you had to start another one and fill that too. Each dime was inserted into a little slit in the folder right in the cluster of leaves so each branch ended up being weighed down with shining dimes. When you had enough dimes, the tree on the folder looked as if it was growing dimes. This meant you had collected enough money to plant a tree in Israel, your own tree. You put your name on the folder and in Israel they would plant your tree and put your name on it. You also put another name on the folder. You dedicated the tree to someone who had died. This tree is dedicated to the memory of. Jewish families were never short on dead people but in the years after my birth, after 1946, the dead overwhelmed the living. You touched the dead wherever you turned. You rubbed up against them; it didn't matter how young you were. Mass graves; bones; ash; ovens; numbers on forearms. If you were Jewish and alive, you were—well, almost—rare. You had a solitary feeling even as a child. Being alive felt wrong. Are you tired of hearing about it? Don't be tired of it in front of me. It was new then and I was a child. The adults wanted to keep us from becoming morbid, or anxious, or afraid, or different from other children. They told us and they didn't tell us. They told us and then they took it back. They whispered and let you overhear, then they denied it. Nothings wrong. You're safe here, in the United States. Being a Jew is, well, like being an Amerikan: the best. It was a great secret they tried to keep and tried to tell at the same time. They were adults—they still didn't believe it really. You were a child; you did.

My Hebrew school teachers were of two kinds: bright-eyed Jewish men from New Jersey, the suburbs mostly, and Philadelphia, a center of culture

—mediocre men, poor teachers, their aspirations more bourgeois than Talmudic; and survivors from ancient European ghettos by way of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen—multilingual, learned, spectral, walleyed. None, of course, could speak Hebrew. It was a dead language, like Latin. The new Israeli project of speaking Hebrew was regarded as an experiment that could only fail. English would be the language of Israel. It was only a matter of time. Israel was the size of New Jersey. Israel was a miracle, a great adventure, but it was also absolutely familiar.

The trick in dedicating your tree was to have an actual name to write on your folder and know who the person was to you. It was important to Amerikan Jews to seem normal and other people knew the names of their dead. We had too many dead to know their names; mass murder was erasure. Immigrants to the United States had left sisters, brothers, mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins behind, and they had been slaughtered. Where? When? It was all blank. My fathers parents were Russian immigrants. My mothers were Hungarian. My grandparents always refused to talk about Europe. “Garbage,” my fathers father said to me, “they’re all garbage.” He meant all Europeans. He had run away from Russia at fifteen—from the Czar. He had brothers and sisters, seven; I never could find out anything else. They were dead, from pogroms, the Russian Revolution, Nazis; they were gone. My grandparents on each side ran away for their own reasons and came here. They didn’t look back. Then there was this new genocide, new even to Jews, and they couldn’t look back. There was no recovering what had been lost, or who. There couldn’t be reconciliation with what couldn’t be faced. They were alive because they were here; the rest were dead because they were there: who could face that? As a child I observed that Christian children had lots of relatives unfamiliar to me, very old, with honorifics unknown to me— great-aunt, great-great-grandmother. Our family began with my grandparents. No one came before them; no one stood next to them. Its an incomprehensible and disquieting amnesia. There was Eve; then there is a harrowing blank space, a tunnel of time and

nothing with enormous murder; then there's us. We had whoever was in the room. Everyone who wasn't in the room was dead. All my mourning was for them—all my trees in the desert—but who were they? My ancestors aren't individual to me: I'm pulled into the mass grave for any sense of identity or sense of self. In the small world I lived in as a child, the consciousness was in three parts: (1) in Europe with those left behind, the dead, and how could one live with how they had died, even if why was old and familiar; (2) in the United States, the best of all possible worlds—being more-Amerikan-than-thou, more middle-class however poor and struggling, more suburban however urban in origins, more normal, more conventional, more conformist; and (3) in Israel, in the desert, with the Jews who had been ash and now were planting trees. I never planted a tree in Camden or anywhere else for that matter. All my trees are in Israel. I was taught that they had my name on them and that they were dedicated to the memory of my dead.

One day in Hebrew school I argued in front of the whole class with the principal; a teacher, a scholar, a survivor, he spoke seven languages and I don't know which camps he was in. In private, he would talk to me, answer my questions, unlike the others. I would see him shaking, alone; I'd ask why; he would say sometimes he couldn't speak, there were no words, he couldn't say words, even though he spoke seven languages; he would say he had seen things; he would say he couldn't sleep, he hadn't slept for nights or weeks. I knew he knew important things. I respected him. Usually I didn't respect my teachers. In front of the whole class, he told us that in life we had the obligation to be first a Jew, second an Amerikan, third a human being, a citizen of the world. I was outraged. I said it was the opposite. I said everyone was first a human being, a citizen of the world—otherwise there would never be peace, never an end to nationalist conflicts and racial persecutions. Maybe I was eleven. He said that Jews had been killed throughout history precisely because they thought the way I did, because they put being Jews last; because they didn't understand that one

was always first a Jew—in history, in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of God. I said it was the opposite: only when everyone was human first would Jews be safe. He said Jews like me had had the blood of other Jews on their hands throughout history; that had there been an Israel, Jews would not have been slaughtered throughout Europe; that the Jewish homeland was the only hope for Jewish freedom. I said that was why one had an obligation to be an American second, after being a human being, a citizen of the world: because only in a democracy without a state religion could religious minorities have rights or be safe or not be persecuted or discriminated against. I said that if there was a Jewish state, anyone who wasn't Jewish would be second-class by definition. I said we didn't have a right to do to other people what had been done to us. More than anyone, we knew the bitterness of religious persecution, the stigma that went with being a minority. We should be able to see in advance the inevitable consequences of having a state that put us first; because then others were second and third and fourth. A theocratic state, I said, could never be a fair state—and didn't Jews need a fair state? If Jews had had a fair state wouldn't Jews have been safe from slaughter? Israel could be a beginning: a fair state. But then it couldn't be a Jewish state. The blood of Jews, he said, would be on my hands. He walked out. I don't think he ever spoke to me again.

You might wonder if this story is apocryphal or how I remember it or how someone so young made such arguments. The last is simple: the beauty of a Jewish education is that you learn how to argue if you pay attention. I remember because I was so distressed by what he said to me: the blood of Jews will be on your hands. I remember because he meant what he said. Part of my education was in having teachers who had seen too much death to argue for the fun of it. I could see the blood on my hands if I was wrong; Jews would have nowhere; Jews would die. I could see that if I or anyone made it harder for Israel to exist, Jews might die. I knew that Israel had to succeed, had to work out. Every single adult Jew I knew wanted it, needed it: the distraught ones with the numbers on their arms; the immigrant ones

who had been here, not there; the cheerful more-American-than-thou ones who wanted ranch houses for themselves, an army for Israel. Israel was the answer to near extinction in a real world that had been demonstrably indifferent to the mass murder of the Jews. It was also the only way living Jews could survive having survived. Those who had been here, not there, by immigration or birth, would create another here, a different here, a purposeful sanctuary, not one stumbled on by random good luck. Those who were alive had to find a way to deal with the monumental guilt of not being dead: being the chosen this time for real. The building of Israel was a bridge over bones; a commitment to life against the suicidal pull of the past. How can I live with having lived? I will make a place for Jews to live.

I knew from my own urgent effort to try to understand racism— from the Nazis to the situation I lived in, hatred of black people in the United States, the existence of legal segregation in the South—that Israel was impossible: fundamentally wrong, organized to betray egalitarian aspirations—because it was built from the ground up on a racial definition of its desired citizen; because it was built from the ground up on exclusion, necessarily stigmatizing those who were not Jews. Social equality was impossible unless only Jews lived there. With hostile neighbors and a racial paradigm for the states identity, Israel had to become either a fortress or a tomb. I didn't think it made Jews safer. I did understand that it made Jews different: different from the pathetic creatures on the trains, the skeletons in the camps; different; indelibly different. It was a great relief—to me too—to be different from the Jews in the cattle cars. Different mattered. As long as it lasted, I would take it. And if Israel ended up being a tomb, a tomb was better than unmarked mass graves for millions all over Europe—different and better. I made my peace with different; which meant I made my peace with the State of Israel. I would not have the blood of Jews on my hands. I wouldn't help those who wanted Israel to be a place where more Jews died by saying what I thought about the implicit racism. It was shameful, really:

distance me, Lord, from those pitiful Jews; make me new. But it was real and even I at ten, eleven, twelve needed it.

You might notice that all of this had nothing to do with Palestinians. I didn't know there were any. Also, I haven't mentioned women. I knew they existed, formally speaking; Mrs. So-and-So was everywhere, of course—peculiar, all held in, reticent and dutiful in public. I never saw one I wanted to become. Nevertheless, adults kept threatening that one day I had to be one. Apparently it was destiny and also hard work; you were born one but you also had to become one. Either you mastered exceptionally difficult and obscure rules too numerous and onerous to reveal to a child, even a child studying Leviticus; or you made one mistake, the nature of which was never specified. But politically speaking, women didn't exist, and frankly, as human beings women didn't exist either. You could live your whole life among them and never know who they were.

I was taught about *fedayeen*: Arabs who crossed the border into Israel to kill Jews. In the years after Hitler, this was monstrous. Only someone devoid of any humanity, any conscience, any sense of decency or justice could kill Jews. They didn't live there; they came from somewhere else. They killed civilians by sneak attack; they didn't care whom they killed just so they killed Jews.

I realized only as a middle-aged adult that I was raised to have prejudice against Arabs and that the prejudice wasn't trivial. My parents were exceptionally conscious and conscientious about racism and religious bigotry—all the homegrown kinds—hatred of blacks or Catholics, for instance. Their pedagogy was very brave. They took a social stance against racism, for civil rights, that put them in opposition to many neighbors and members of our family. My mother put me in a car and showed me black poverty. However poor I thought we were, I was to remember that being

black in the United States made you poorer. I still remember a conversation with my father in which he told me he had racist feelings against blacks. I said that was impossible because he was for civil rights. He explained the kinds of feelings he had and why they were wrong. He also explained that as a teacher and then later a guidance counselor he worked with black children and he had to make sure his racist feelings didn't harm them. From my father I learned that having these feelings didn't justify them; that "good" people had bad feelings and that didn't make the feelings any less bad; that dealing with racism was a process, something a person tangled with actively. The feelings were wrong and a "good" person took responsibility for facing them down. I was also taught that just because you feel something doesn't make it true. My parents went out of their way to say "some Arabs," to emphasize that there were good and bad people in every group; but in fact my education in the Jewish community made that caveat fairly meaningless. Arabs were primitive, uncivilized, violent. (My parents would never have accepted such characterizations of blacks. ) Arabs hated and killed Jews. Really, I learned that Arabs were irredeemably evil. In all my travels through life, which were extensive, I never knew any Arabs: and ignorance is the best friend of prejudice.

In my mid-thirties I started reading books by Palestinians. These books made me understand that I was misinformed. I had had a fine enough position on the Palestinians—or perhaps I should say "the Palestinian question" to convey the right ring of condescension—once I knew they existed; long after I was eleven. Maybe twenty years ago, I knew they existed. I knew they were being wronged. I was for a two-state solution. Over the years, I learned about Israeli torture of Palestinian prisoners; I knew Jewish journalists who purposefully suppressed the information so as not to "hurt" the Jewish state. I knew the human rights of Palestinians in ordinary life were being violated. Like my daddy, on social issues, the policy questions, I was fine for my kind. These opinions put me into constant friction with the Jewish community, including my family, many

friends, and many Jewish feminists. As far as I know, from my own experience, the Jewish community has just recently—like last Tuesday—really faced the facts—the current facts. I will not argue about the twisted history, who did what to whom when. I will not argue about Zionism except to say that it is apparent that I am not a Zionist and never was. The argument is the same one I had with my Hebrew school principal; my position is the same—either we get a fair world or we keep getting killed. (I have also noticed, in the interim, that the Cambodians had Cambodia and it didn't help them much. Social sadism takes many forms. What can't be imagined happens. ) But there are social policy questions and then there is the racism that lives in individual hearts and minds as a prejudgment on a whole people. You believe the stereotypes; you believe the worst; you accept a caricature such that members of the group are comic or menacing, always contemptible. I don't believe that Amerikan Jews raised as I was are free of this prejudice. We were taught it as children and it has helped the Israeli government justify in our eyes what they have done to the Palestinians. We've been blinded, not just by our need for Israel or our loyalty to Jews but by a deep and real prejudice against Palestinians that amounts to race-hate.

The land wasn't empty, as I was taught: oh yes, there are a few nomadic tribes but they don't have homes in the normal sense—not like we do in New Jersey; there are just a few uneducated, primitive, dirty people there now who don't even want a state. There were people and there were even trees—trees destroyed by Israeli soldiers. The Palestinians are right when they say the Jews regarded them as nothing. I was taught they were nothing in the most literal sense. Taking the country and turning it into Israel, the Jewish state, was an imperialist act. Jews find any such statement incomprehensible. How could the near-dead, the nearly extinguished, a people who were ash have imperialized anyone, anything? Well, Israel is rare: Jews, nearly annihilated, took the land and forced a very hostile world to legitimize the theft. I think Amerikan Jews cannot face the fact that this is



one act—the one act—of imperialism, of conquest that we support. We helped; we're proud of it; here we stand. This is a contradiction of every idea we have about who we are and what being a Jew means. It is also true. We took a country from the people who lived there; we the dispossessed finally did it to someone else; we said, they're Arabs, let them go somewhere Arab. When Israelis say they want to be judged by the same standards applied to the rest of the world, not by a special standard for Jews, in part they mean that this is the way of the world. It may be a first for Jews, but everyone else has been doing it throughout recorded history. It is recorded history. I grew up in New Jersey, the size of Israel; not so long ago, it belonged to Indians. Because Amerikan Jews refuse to face precisely this one fact—we took the land—Amerikan Jews cannot afford to know or face Palestinians: initially, even that they existed.

As for the Palestinians, I can only imagine the humiliation of losing to, being conquered by, the weakest, most despised, most castrated people on the face of the earth. This is a feminist point about manhood.

When I was growing up, the only time I heard about equality of the sexes was when I was taught to love and have fidelity to the new State of Israel. This new state was being built on the premise that men and women were equal in all ways. According to my teachers, servility was inappropriate for the new Jew, male or female. In the new state, there was no strong or weak or more or less valuable according to sex. Everyone did the work: physical labor, menial labor, cooking—there was no, as we say now, sex-role stereotyping. Because everyone worked, everyone had an equal responsibility and an equal say. Especially, women were citizens, not mothers.

Strangely, this was the most foreign aspect of Israel. In New Jersey, we didn't have equality of the sexes. In New Jersey, no one thought about it or needed it or wanted it. We didn't have equality of the sexes in Hebrew

school. It didn't matter how smart or devout you were: if you were a girl, you weren't allowed to do anything important. You weren't allowed to want anything except marriage, even if you were a talented scholar. Equality of the sexes was something they were going to have in the desert with the trees; we couldn't send them any because we didn't have any. It was a new principle for a new land and it helped to make a new people; in New Jersey, we didn't have to be quite that new.

When I was growing up, Israel was also basically socialist. The kibbutzim, voluntary collectives, were egalitarian communities by design. The kibbutzim were going to replace the traditional nuclear family as the basic social unit in the new society. Children would be raised by the whole community—they wouldn't "belong" to their parents. The communal vision was the cornerstone of the new country.

Here, women were pretty invisible, and material greed, a desire for middle-class goods and status, animated the Jewish community. Israel really repudiated the values of Amerikan Jews—somehow the adults managed to venerate Israel while in their own lives transgressing every radical value the new state was espousing. But the influence on the children was probably very great. I don't think it is an accident that Jewish children my age grew up wanting to make communal living a reality or believing that it could be done; or that the girls did eventually determine, in such great numbers, to make equality of the sexes the dynamic basis of our political lives.

While women in the United States were living in a twilight world, appendages to men, housewives, still the strongest women I knew when I was a child worked for the establishment, well-being, and preservation of the State of Israel. It was perhaps the only socially sanctioned field of engagement. My Aunt Helen, for instance, the only unmarried, working woman I knew as a child, made Israel her life's cause. Not only did the strong women work for Israel, but women who weren't visibly strong—

who were conformist—showed some real backbone when they were active on behalf of Israel. The equality of the sexes may have had a resonance for them as adults that it couldn't have had for me as a child. Later, Golda Meir's long tenure as prime minister made it seem as if the promise of equality was being delivered on. She was new, all right; forged from the old, visibly so, but herself made new by an act of will; public, a leader of a country in crisis. My Aunt Helen and Golda Meir were a lot alike: not defined in terms of men; straightforward when other women were coy; tough; resourceful; formidable. The only formidable women I saw were associated with and committed to Israel, except for Anna Magnani. But that's another story.

Finally in 1988, at forty-two, on Thanksgiving, the day we celebrate having successfully taken this land from the Indians, I went to Israel for the first time. I went to a conference billed as the First International Jewish Feminist Conference. Its theme was the empowerment of Jewish women. Its sponsors were the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, and the Israel Women's Network, and it was being organized with a middle-class agenda by middle-class women, primarily Amerikan, who were themselves beholden to the male leadership of the sponsoring groups. So the conference looked to secular Israeli feminists organizing at the grassroots level—and so it was. Initially, the secular Israeli feminists intended to organize an alternate feminist conference to repudiate the establishment feminist conference, but they decided instead to have their own conference, one that included Palestinian women, the day after the establishment conference ended.

The establishment conference was designed not to alienate Orthodox Jewish women. As far as I could see, secular Jewish women, especially Israelis, were expendable. What the hell? They could be counted on to keep working—keep those battered womens shelters going, keep those rape crisis centers

open—without being invited into the hotel. They couldn't afford to come anyway. The wealthier excluded the poor and struggling; the timid (mainstream) excluded the grassroots (really mainstream but as socially invisible and despised as the women they represent and serve); the religious excluded the secular; Jewish excluded Palestinian; and, to a considerable degree, Americans, by virtue of their money and control of the agenda, excluded Israelis—feminists, you know, the ones who do the work in the country, on the ground. Lesbians were excluded until the last minute by not being specifically included; negotiations with those organizing what came to be called the post-conference put a lesbian on the program speaking as such, though under a pseudonym because she was Israeli and it was too dangerous for her to be known by her real name. War-and-peace issues were underplayed, even as the establishment conference was held in the occupied West Bank; even though many feminists—organizers and theorists—consider both militarism and masculinity feminist issues—intrinsically feminist, not attached to the agenda because of a particular political emergency.

I went because of grassroots Israeli feminists: the opportunity to meet with them in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem; to talk with those organizing against violence against women on all fronts; to learn more about the situation of women in Israel. I planned to stay on—if I had, I also would have spoken at and for the rape crisis center in Jerusalem. In Haifa, where both Phyllis Chesler and I spoke to a packed room (which included Palestinian women and some young Arab men) on child custody and pornography in the United States, women were angry about the establishment conference—its tepid feminist agenda, its exclusion of the poor and of Palestinian feminists. One woman, maybe in her sixties, with an accent from Eastern Europe, maybe Poland, finally stood up and said approximately the following: “Look, it's just another conference put on by the Americans like all the others. They have them like clockwork. They use innocents like these”—pointing to Phyllis and me—“who don't know any better.” Everyone laughed,

especially us. I hadn't been called an innocent in a long time, or been perceived as one either. But she was right. Israel brought me to my knees. Innocent was right. Here's what compromised my innocence, such as it was.

## 1 THE LAW OF RETURN

Jewish women attended the establishment conference from many countries, including Argentina, New Zealand, India, Brazil, Belgium, South Africa, and the United States. Each woman had more right to be there than any Palestinian woman born there, or whose mother was born there, or whose mother's mother was born there. I found this morally unbearable. My own visceral recognition was simple: I don't have a right to this right.

The Law of Return says that any Jew entering the country can immediately become a citizen; no Jew can be turned away. This law is the basis for the Jewish state, its basic principle of identity and purpose. Orthodox religious parties, with a hefty share of the vote in recent elections, wanted the definition of "Jewish" narrowed to exclude converts to Judaism not converted by Orthodox rabbis, according to Orthodox precepts. Women at the establishment conference were mobilized to demonstrate against this change in the Law of Return. The logic used to mobilize the women went as follows: "The Right is doing this. The Right is bad. Anything the Right wants is bad for women. Therefore, we, feminists, must oppose this change in the Law of Return." Fight the Right. In your heart you know the fight is for the sake of women, but don't tell anyone else: not Shamir, not the Orthodox rabbis, not the press; but especially not the Amerikan Jewish boys who are sponsoring your conference, who are in Israel right then and there to lobby Shamir and to keep an eye on the girls. Fight the Right. Find an issue important to Jewish men and show up as the women's auxiliary. Make them proud. And don't offend them or upset them by making them stand with you—if they want you there—for the rights of women.

Protesting the change in the Law of Return was presented at the establishment conference as “taking a first step” against the power of the Orthodox rabbis. Because the power of these men over the lives of Jewish women in Israel is already vast and malignant, “taking a first step” against them—without mentioning any of the ways in which they are already tyrants over women—wasn’t just inadequate; it was shameful. We needed to take a real step. In Israel, Jewish women are basically—in reality, in everyday life—governed by Old Testament law. So much for equality of the sexes. The Orthodox rabbis make most of the legal decisions that have a direct impact on the status of women and the quality of women’s lives. They have the final say on all issues of “personal status,” which feminists will recognize as the famous private sphere in which civilly subordinate women are traditionally imprisoned. The Orthodox rabbis decide questions of marriage, adultery, divorce, birth, death, legitimacy; what rape is; and whether abortion, battery, and rape in marriage are legal or illegal. At the protest, feminists did not mention women.

How did Israel get this way—how did these Orthodox rabbis get the power over women that they have? How do we dislodge them, get them off women? Why isn’t there a body of civil law superseding the power of religious law that gives women real, indisputable rights of equality and self-determination in this country that we all helped build? I’m forty-four; Israel is forty-two; how the hell did this happen? What are we going to do about it now? How did Jewish feminists manage not to “take a first step” until the end of 1988—and then not mention women? The first step didn’t amount to a feminist crawl.

## 2 THE CONDITION OF JEWISH WOMEN IN ISRAEL IS ABJECT

Where I live things aren’t too good for women. It’s not unlike Crystal Night all year long given the rape and battery statistics—which are a pale shadow of the truth—the incest, the pornography, the serial murders, the sheer

savagery of the violence against women. But Israel is shattering. Sisters: we have been building a country in which women are dog shit, something you scrape off the bottom of your shoe. We, the “Jewish feminists.” We who only push as far as the Jewish men here will allow. If feminism is serious, it fights sex hierarchy and male power and men don’t get to stand on top of you, singly or in clusters, for forever and a day. And you don’t help them build a country in which women’s status gets lower and lower as the men get bigger and bigger—the men there and the men here. From what I saw and heard and learned, we have helped to build a living hell for women, a nice Jewish hell. Isn’t it the same everywhere? Well, “everywhere” isn’t younger than I am; “everywhere” didn’t start out with the equality of the sexes as a premise. The low status of women in Israel is not unique but we are uniquely responsible for it. I felt disgraced by the way women are treated in Israel, disgraced and dishonored. I remembered my Hebrew school principal, the Holocaust survivor, who said I had to be a Jew first, an Amerikan second, and a citizen of the world, a human being last, or I would have the blood of Jews on my hands. I’ve kept quiet a long time about Israel so as not to have the blood of Jews on my hands. It turns out that I am a woman first, second, and last—they are the same; and I find I do have the blood of Jews on my hands—the blood of Jewish women in Israel.

### *Divorce and Battery*

In Israel, there are separate religious courts that are Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Jewish. Essentially, women from each group are subject to the authority of the most ancient systems of religious misogyny.

In 1953 a law was passed bringing all Jews under the jurisdiction of the religious courts for everything having to do with “personal status.” In the religious courts, women, along with children, the mentally deficient, the insane, and convicted criminals, cannot testify. A woman cannot be a

witness or, needless to say, a judge. A woman cannot sign a document. This could be an obstacle to equality.

Under Jewish law, the husband is the master; the woman belongs to him, what with being one of his ribs to begin with; her duty is to have children—preferably with plenty of physical pain; well, you remember the Old Testament. You’ve read the Book. You’ve seen the movie. What you haven’t done is live it. In Israel, Jewish women do.

The husband has the sole right to grant a divorce; it is an unimpeachable right. A woman has no such right and no recourse. She has to live with an adulterous husband until he throws her out (after which her prospects aren’t too good); if she commits adultery, he can just get rid of her (after which her prospects are worse). She has to live with a batterer until he’s done with her. If she leaves, she will be homeless, poor, stigmatized, displaced, an outcast, in internal exile in the Promised Land. If she leaves without formal permission from the religious courts, she can be judged a “rebellious wife,” an actual legal category of women in Israel without, of course, any male analogue. A rebellious wife will lose custody of her children and any rights to financial support. There are an estimated 10, 000 agunot—“chained women”—whose husbands will not grant them divorces. Some are prisoners; some are fugitives; none have basic rights of citizenship or personhood.

No one knows the extent of the battery. Sisterhood Is Global says that in 1978 there were approximately 60, 000 reported cases of wife-beating; only two men went to prison. In 1981 I talked with Marcia Freedman, a former member of the Israeli parliament and a founder of the first battered-women’s shelter in Israel, which I visited in Haifa. At that time, she thought wife-beating in Israel occurred with ten times the statistical frequency we had here. Recent hearings in parliament concluded that 100, 000 women were being beaten each year in their own homes.



Marcia Freedman was in Haifa when I was. I saw only some of what she and other feminists had accomplished in Israel and against what odds. There are now five shelters in Israel. The shelter in Haifa is a big building on a city street. It looks like the other buildings. The streets are full of men. The door is locked. Once inside, you climb up several flights of steps to come upon a great iron gate inside the building, a gate you might find in a maximum-security prison for men. It is locked all the time. It is the only real defense against battering men. Once the iron gate is unlocked, you see women and children; big, clean, bare common

rooms; small, immaculate rooms in which women and their children live; an office; a lounge; drawings by the children who live there—colorful, often violent; and on the top floor a school, the children Palestinian and Israeli, tiny, young, perfect, beautiful. This shelter is one of the few places in Israel where Arab and Jewish children are educated together. Their mothers live together. Behind the great iron bars, where women are voluntarily locked in to stay alive, there is a living model of Palestinian-Israeli cooperation: behind the iron bars that keep out the violent men—Jewish and Arab. Feminists have managed to get housing subsidies for women who have permission to live outside the marital home, but the process of qualifying can take as long as a year. The women who run the shelter try to relocate women fast—the space is needed for other women—but some women stay as long as a year. At night the women who run the shelter, by now professionals, go home; the battered women stay, the great iron gate their lone protection. I kept asking what if— what if he comes? The women can call the police; the police will come. The cop on the beat is nice. He stops by sometimes. Sometimes they give him a cup of coffee. But outside, not too long ago, a woman was beaten to death by the husband she was escaping. The women inside aren't armed; the shelter isn't armed; this in a country where the men are armed. There isn't any network of safe houses. The locations of the shelters are known. The women have to go out to find jobs and places to live. Well, women get beaten—and beaten to

death—here too, don't they? But the husband doesn't get so much active help from the state—not to mention the God of the Jews. And when a Jewish woman is given a divorce, she has to physically back out of her husband's presence in the court. It is an argument for being beaten to death.

A draft of Israel's newly proposed Fundamental Human Rights Law—a contemporary equivalent of our Bill of Rights—exempts marriage and divorce from all human rights guarantees.

### *Pornography*

You have to see it to believe it and even seeing it might not help. I've been sent it over the years by feminists in Israel—I had seen it—I didn't really believe it. Unlike in the United States, pornography is not an industry. You find it in mainstream magazines and advertising. It is mostly about the Holocaust. In it, Jewish women are sexualized as Holocaust victims for Jewish men to masturbate over. Well, would you believe it, even if you saw it?

Israeli women call it “Holocaust pornography.” The themes are fire, gas, trains, emaciation, death.

In the fashion layout, three women in swimsuits are posed as if they are looking at and moving away from two men on motorcycles. The motorcycles, black metal, are menacingly in the foreground moving toward the women. The women, fragile and defenseless in their near nudity, are in the background. Then the women, now dressed in scanty underwear, are shown running from the men, with emphasis on thighs, breasts thrust out, hips highlighted. Their faces look frightened and frenzied. The men are physically grabbing them. Then the women, now in new bathing suits, are sprawled on the ground, apparently dead, with parts of their bodies severed from them and scattered around as trains bear down on them. Even as you

see a severed arm, a severed leg, the trains coming toward them, the women are posed to accentuate the hips and place of entry into the vaginal area.

Or a man is pouring gasoline into a woman's face. Or she's posed next to a light fixture that looks like a shower head.

Or two women, ribs showing, in scanty underwear, are posed in front of a stone wall, prisonlike, with a fire extinguisher on one side of them and a blazing open oven on the other. Their body postures replicate the body postures of naked concentration camp inmates in documentary photographs.

Of course, there is also sadism without ethnicity, outside the trauma of history—you think Jewish men can't be regular good ol' boys? The cover of the magazine shows a naked woman spread out, legs open, with visual emphasis on her big breasts. Nails are driven through her breasts. Huge pliers are attached to one nipple. She is surrounded by hammers, pliers, saws. She has what passes for an orgasmic expression on her face. The woman is real. The tools are drawn. The caption reads: Sex in the Workshop.

The same magazine published all the visual violence described above. *Monitin* is a left-liberal slick monthly for the intelligentsia and upper class. It has high production and aesthetic values. Israel's most distinguished writers and intellectuals publish in it. Judith Antonelli in *The Jewish Advocate* reported that *Monitin* “contains the most sexually violent images. Photos abound of women sprawled out upside-down as if they have just been attacked.”

Or, in a magazine for women that is not unlike *Ladies' Home Journal*, there is a photograph of a woman tied to a chair with heavy rope. Her shirt is torn off her shoulders and upper chest but her arms are tied up against her so that only the fleshy part of the upper breasts is exposed. She is wearing pants—

they are wet. A man, fully dressed, standing next to her, is throwing beer in her face. In the United States, such photographs of women are found in bondage magazines.

For purists, there is an Israeli pornography magazine. The issue I saw had a front-page headline that read: ORGY AT YAD VASHEM. Yad Vashem is the memorial in Jerusalem to the victims of the Holocaust. Under the headline, there was a photograph of a man sexually entangled with several women.

What does this mean—other than that if you are a Jewish woman you don't run to Israel, you run from it?

I went to the Institute for the Study of Media and Family on Herzelia Street in Haifa: an organization built to fight violence against women. Working with the rape crisis center (and desperately fund-raising to stay alive), the institute analyzes the content of media violence against women; it exposes and fights the legitimacy pornography gets by being incorporated into the mainstream.

There is outrage on the part of women at the Holocaust pornography—a deep, ongoing shock; but little understanding. For me, too. Having seen it here, having tried to absorb it, then seeing stacks of it at the institute, I felt numb and upset. Here I had slides; in Israel I saw the whole magazines—the context in which the photographs were published. These really were mainstream venues for violent pornography, with a preponderance of Holocaust pornography. That made it worse: more real, more incomprehensible. A week later, I spoke in Tel Aviv about pornography to an audience that was primarily feminist. One feminist suggested I had a double standard: didn't all men do this, not just Israeli men? I said no: in the United States, Jewish men are not the consumers of Holocaust pornography; black men aren't the consumers of plantation pornography.

But now I'm not sure. Do I know that or have I just assumed it? Why do Israeli men like this? Why do they do it? They are the ones who do it; women aren't even tokens in the upper echelons of media, advertising, or publishing—nor are fugitive Nazis with new identities. I think feminists in Israel must make this “why” an essential question. Either the answer will tell us something new about the sexuality of men everywhere or it will tell us something special about the sexuality of men who go from victim to victimizer. How has the Holocaust been sexualized for Israeli men and what does this have to do with sexualized violence against women in Israel; what does it have to do with this great, dynamic pushing of women lower and lower? Are Jewish women going to be destroyed again by Nazis, this time with Israeli men as their surrogates? Is the sexuality of Israeli men shaped by the Holocaust? Does it make them come?

I don't know if Israeli men are different from other men by virtue of using the Holocaust against Jewish women, for sexual excitement. I do know that the use of Holocaust sex is unbearably traumatic for Jewish women, its place in the Israeli mainstream itself a form of sadism. I also know that as long as the Holocaust pornography exists, only male Jews are different from those pitiful creatures on the trains, in the camps. Jewish women are the same. How, then, does Israel save us?

### *All the Other Good Things*

Of course, Israel has all the other good things boys do to girls: rape, incest, prostitution. Sexual harassment in public places, on the streets, is pervasive, aggressive, and sexually explicit. Every woman I talked with who had come to Israel from some other place brought up her rage at being propositioned on the street, at bus stops, in taxis, by men who wanted to fuck and said so. The men were Jewish and Arab. At the same time, in Jerusalem, Orthodox men throw stones at women who don't have their arms covered. Palestinian boys who throw stones at Israeli soldiers are shot with bullets, rubber-

coated or not. Stone throwing at women by Orthodox men is considered trivial, not real assault. Somehow, it's their right. Well, what isn't?

In Tel Aviv before my lecture, I talked with an Israeli soldier, maybe nineteen, part of the occupying army in the West Bank. He was home for Sabbath. His mother, a feminist, generously opened her home to me. The mother and son were observant; the father was a secular liberal. I was with the best friend of the mother, who had organized the lecture. Both women were exceptionally gentle people, soft-spoken and giving. Earlier, I had participated with about 400 women in a vigil in Jerusalem against the occupation. For a year, feminists in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv had held a vigil each week called Women in Black, women in mourning for the duration of the occupation. The father and son were outraged by the demonstrations. The father argued that the demonstrations had nothing to do with feminism. The son argued that the occupation had nothing to do with feminism.

I asked the son about something that had been described to me: Israeli soldiers go into Palestinian villages and spread garbage, broken glass, rocks in the streets and make the women clean up the dangerous rubble bare-handed, without tools. I thought the son would deny it or say such a thing was an aberration. Instead, he argued that it had nothing to do with feminism. In arguing, he revealed that this kind of aggression is common; he had clearly seen it or done it many times. His mother's head sank; she didn't look up again until the end. What it had to do with feminism, I said, was that it happened to women. He said that was only because Arab men were cowards, they ran and hid. The women, he said, were strong; they weren't afraid, they stayed. What it had to do with feminism, I said, was that every woman's life, for a feminist, had the same high value. Feminism meant that the Arab woman's life was worth as much as his mothers. Suppose the soldiers came here now, I said, and made your mother go out

on the street, get down on her knees, and clean up broken glass with her bare hands?

I said feminism also had to do with him; what kind of man he was or was becoming, what hurting other people would do to him; how callous or sadistic it would make him. He said, with perfect understanding: you mean, it will be easier to rape?

He said the Arabs deserved being shot; they were throwing stones at Israeli soldiers; I wasn't there, I didn't know, and what did it have to do with feminism anyway? I said that Orthodox men were throwing stones at women in Jerusalem because the women's arms weren't covered down to the wrist. He said it was ridiculous to compare the two. I said the only difference I could see was that the women didn't carry rifles or have any right to shoot the men. He said it wasn't the same. I asked him to tell me what the difference was. Wasn't a stone a stone—for a woman too? Weren't we flesh; didn't we bleed; couldn't we be killed by a stone? Were Israeli soldiers really more fragile than women with bare arms? Okay, he said, you do have a right to shoot them; but then you have to stand trial the same way we do if we kill Arabs. I said they didn't have to stand trial. His mother raised her head to say there were rules, strict rules, for the soldiers, really there were, and she wasn't ashamed of her son. "We are not ashamed," she said, imploring her husband, who said nothing. "We are not ashamed of him."

I remember the heat of the Jerusalem sun. Hundreds of women dressed in black were massed on the sidewalks of a big public square in Jerusalem. Women in Black began in Jerusalem at the same time as the intifada, with seven women who held a silent vigil to show their resistance to the occupation. Now the hundreds of women who participate each week in three cities are met with sexual derision and sometimes stones. Because the

demonstrations are women-only, they are confrontational in two ways: these are Israelis who want peace with Palestinians; these are women who are standing on public ground. Women held signs in Hebrew, Arabic, and English saying: END THE OCCUPATION. An Arab vendor gave some of us, as many as he could reach, gifts of grapes and figs to help us fight the heat. Israeli men went by shouting insults—men called out insults from passing cars—the traffic was bumper to bumper, with the men trying to get home before Sabbath eve, when Jerusalem shuts down. There were also men with signs who screamed that the women were traitors and whores.

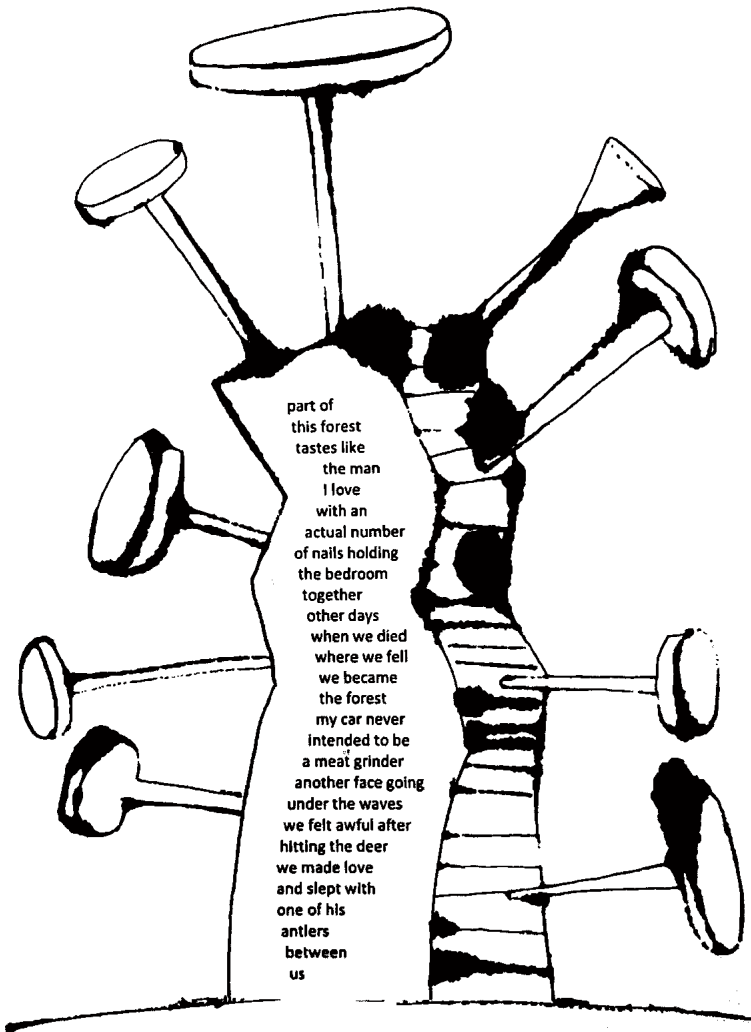
Along with most of the demonstrators, I had come from the post-conference organized by the grassroots, secular feminists. The post-conference was chaired by Nabila Espanioli, a Palestinian woman who spoke Hebrew, English, and Arabic. Palestinian women came out of the audience to give first-person testimony about what the occupation was doing to them. They especially spoke about the brutality of the Israeli soldiers. They talked about being humiliated, being forcibly detained, being trespassed on, being threatened. They spoke about themselves and about women. For Palestinian women, the occupation is a police state and the Israeli secret police are a constant danger; there is no “safe space.” I already knew that I had Palestinian blood on my hands. What I found out in Israel is that it isn’t any easier to wash off than Jewish blood—and that it is also female.

I had met Nabila my first night in Israel, in Haifa, at the home of an Israeli woman who gave a wonderful welcoming party. It was a warm, fragrant night. The small, beautiful apartment open to the night air was filled with women from Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa—feminists who fight for women, against violence. It was Sabbath eve and there was a simple feminist ceremony—a breaking of bread, one loaf, everyone together; secular words of peace and hope. And then I found myself talking with this Palestinian woman. She talked a mile a minute about pornography. It was her field of study and she knew it inside out, recognized herself in it, under it, violated

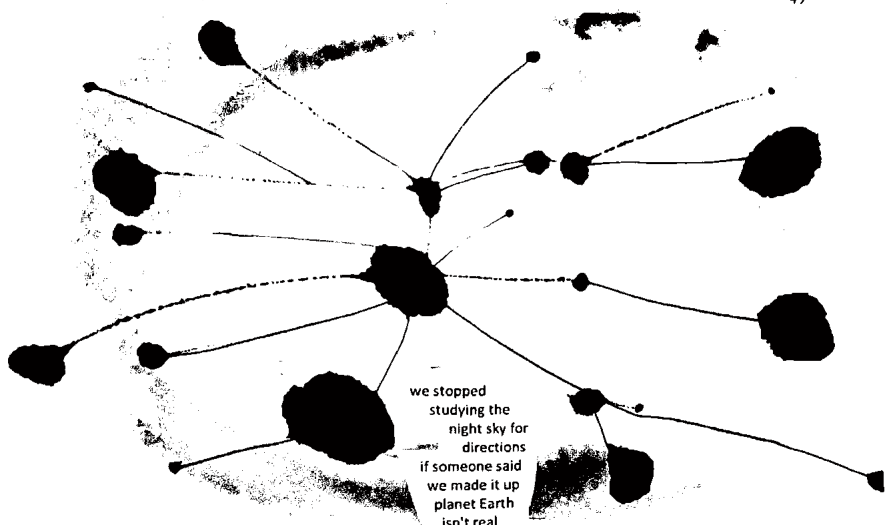


by it. She told me it was the focus of her resistance to both rape and sexualized racism. She, too, wanted freedom and it was in her way. I thought: with this between us, who can pull us apart? We see women with the same eyes.

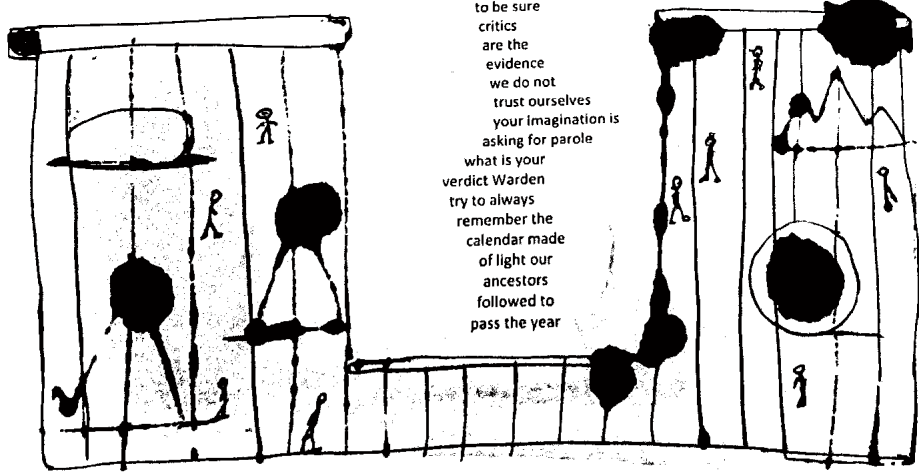
In Israel, there are the occupied and the occupied: Palestinians and women. In the Israel I saw, Palestinians will be freer sooner. I didn't find any of my trees.



part of  
this forest  
tastes like  
the man  
I love  
with an  
actual number  
of nails holding  
the bedroom  
together  
other days  
when we died  
where we fell  
we became  
the forest  
my car never  
intended to be  
a meat grinder  
another face going  
under the waves  
we felt awful after  
hitting the deer  
we made love  
and slept with  
one of his  
antlers  
between  
us



we stopped  
 studying the  
 night sky for  
 directions  
 if someone said  
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 planet Earth  
 isn't real  
 we would try  
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CAConrad

After I had finished hanging the curtains over the windows, I lay down on the bed. At that moment, a dog on the opposite hill began to howl incessantly. It was past midnight and I couldn't sleep, despite how thoroughly exhausted I was. I had spent the whole day arranging and cleaning the house; I dusted the furniture, swept the floor, and rewashed the bedsheets and towels and most of the dishes, even though, in principle, the house was clean before I began cleaning it so thoroughly; the landlord told me he'd brought in a woman especially. I'd started renting this house a few days earlier, right after getting my new job. On the whole, the house is good and the job is good and my colleagues are nice. But none of this was enough to help me overcome the anxiety and fear that the dog's endless howling awakened in me that night, not even a little. Regardless, I realized that when I woke up the next morning, I'd feel an overwhelming sense of satisfaction, its main source being the cleanness of the house, and perhaps the curtains hung over its windows. I had placed my table by the biggest window, where I would sit every morning and drink my coffee before going to my new job, and the neighbors and their three children would pass by and wave to me, all of which would imply that I lived a peaceful life, overlooking a back garden hidden from view.

The borders imposed between things here are many. One must pay attention to them, and navigate them, which ultimately protects everyone from perilous consequences. This grants a person a sense of serenity, despite everything else. There are some people who

navigate borders masterfully, who never trespass, but these people are few and I'm not one of them. As soon as I see a border, I either race toward it and leap over, or cross it stealthily, with a step. Neither of these two behaviors is conscious, or rooted in a premeditated desire to resist borders; it's more like sheer stupidity. To be quite honest, once I cross a border, I fall into a deep pit of anxiety. It's a matter, simply put, of clumsiness. Once I realized that I inevitably fail whenever I try to navigate borders, I decided to stay within the confines of my house as much as possible. And since this house has many windows, through which the neighbors and their children can easily see me and catch me trespassing borders even when I'm in my own house, I hung the curtains, although I'll inevitably forget to close them sometimes.

In any case, since I'm always alone when I'm in my house, I'll sit at my table, nowhere else, and that's all the outside world will see of me, to the extent that when a few days pass without me doing so, the neighbor's middle son will tell me he missed seeing me sitting at my table every morning, "working." Indeed, I justify my extended mornings sitting there by telling others that I'm "working." And I usually "work" before going to my new job, which will forever be "new" to me, since I don't know at what point my "new job" should simply become my "job." I often work until late at night, outlasting even the security guard, since I'm often late getting to the office to start my shift, because the dog on the opposite hill usually wakes me up at night, and I don't manage to fall back asleep until dawn, so I wake up late, then get to my new job late. And when none of this happens, I stay in my house until the last hours of morning, sitting at my table "working," but on what exactly?

On the whole, I realize that this might seem exaggerated, but this is due to the issue I previously mentioned, namely my inability to

identify borders, even very rational borders, which makes me overreact sometimes, or underreact at other times, unlike most people. For instance, when a military patrol stops the minibus I take to my new job, and the first thing that appears through the door is the barrel of the gun, I ask the soldier, while stuttering, most likely out of fear, to put it away when he's talking to me or asking to see my identity card. At which point the soldier starts mocking my stutter, and the passengers around me grumble because I'm overreacting; there's no need to make things so tense. The soldier isn't going to shoot at us, and even if he does, my intervention won't change the course of things; quite the opposite. Yes, I realize all that, just not in the moment, but rather hours, days, or even years later. That's one example. But this same behavior can be observed in various other situations, from undressing during a security inspection at a checkpoint, to asking an amateur vegetable seller sitting in Ramallah's vegetable market, which is otherwise closed on Fridays, about the price of some wilting lettuce, and being quoted three times the normal price of normal lettuce. Since I lack the ability to evaluate things rationally, situations like these have a severe impact on me; they shake and destabilize me to the point that I can no longer fathom what is permissible and what is not, and I end up trespassing even more borders, worse ones than before. Yet all my fear and anxiety and internal turmoil dissipates when this trespassing occurs within the confines of my solitude. Solitude is so forgiving of trespassed borders; it was only thanks to my time spent alone, sitting at my table in the mornings, "working" on something, that I was able to make my discovery.

By the way, I hope I didn't cause any awkwardness when I mentioned the incident with the soldier, or the checkpoint, or when I reveal that we are living under occupation here. Gunshots and

military vehicle sirens, and sometimes the sound of helicopters, warplanes, and shelling, the subsequent wail of ambulances; not only do these noises precede breaking news reports, but now they have to compete with the dog's barking, too. And the situation has been like this for such a long time that there aren't many people alive today who remember little details about what life was like before all this, like the detail about the wilting lettuce in an otherwise closed vegetable market, for example.

So, one morning when I was reading the newspaper, and happened across an article about a certain incident, it naturally wasn't the incident itself that began to haunt me. Incidents like that aren't out of the ordinary, or, let us say, they happen in contexts like this. In fact, they happen so often that I've never paid them much attention before. For instance, on another morning when it was raining, I woke up late, which meant I couldn't sit and "work" at my table in front of the big window; instead I had to go straight to my new job. When I arrived at my stop, and got off the minibus a bit before the clocktower, I found the street empty of people and cars, and I saw a military vehicle stopped in front of al-Bandi grocery. But since there was nothing out of the ordinary in that, I kept walking in the other direction, toward my new job. And when I arrived at the top of the street that leads to my office, a passerby, the only one I had encountered until that moment, pointed out that the area was under curfew, and the army was besieging a building nearby. Nothing struck me as unusual about this either, and I continued on my way. Then, there in the middle of the street, in front of the main entrance to the building where my office is, I glimpsed two soldiers. And by now I've learned my lesson, that I must remain calm and composed in situations like this, and so I waved at them, saying in a clear, confident voice that I worked in the building they were standing in

front of. At that, one of them bent his right knee to the ground and propped his left elbow on his other knee, aiming the barrel of his gun at me, and immediately I leapt behind a thorn acacia tree, using its prickly branches to shield myself from gunshots, which, in any event, never came. And while his action, by which I mean him pointing his gun at me, cannot be described as humane, it was enough for me to understand what he meant, and that I had to find another way to my new job. Up until this point, I had not found the situation to be unusual, or not so unusual that I should turn around and go back to my house. So I jumped over the walls and borders dividing the houses and buildings, and I do believe that jumping over borders is fully justifiable in a situation like this, is not it? Anyhow, I carried on in that fashion until I reached the back of the building where I work. And since only three of my colleagues had come to the office that morning, I got to work without anyone disturbing me, carrying out my responsibilities diligently, and very well, until a colleague came into my office and opened the window without my permission, and when I protested, he said the glass would shatter if he did not do so. The army had informed the residents in the area that it was going to bomb one of the neighboring buildings where three young men had barricaded themselves, which is exactly what happened a few minutes later. There was one window this colleague had forgotten to open, and the glass shattered the moment the building was bombed. Still, the result of him opening the window in my office was unbearable, since right after the explosion, which shook the office a great deal, a thick cloud of dust burst in, some of which landed on my papers and even on my hand, which was holding a pen, forcing me to stop working. I absolutely cannot stand dust, especially that kind, with its big grains that make a shuddersome sound when dusty papers rub against each other, or when one marks on them with a



pen. And so only after eliminating every last mote of dust from my office was I able to return to my papers. Here, some might think that my dedication to work reflects a desire to cling to life, or a love for life despite the occupation's attempts to destroy it, or the insistence that we have on this earth what makes life worth living. Well, I certainly cannot speak for anyone else, but in my case it's rather that I am unable to evaluate situations rationally, and I don't know what should or should not be done. All I can do without risking calamitous consequences is work at the office, or sit in my house at my table in front of the big window, which is how I ended up reading that particular article, where the specific thing that caught my attention was a detail related to the date of the incident it described. The incident took place on a morning that would coincide, exactly a quarter of a century later, with the morning of my birth. Of course, this may seem like pure narcissism, the fact that what drew me to the incident, what made it begin haunting me, was the presence of a detail that is really quite minor when compared to the incident's major details, which can only be described as tragic. It's completely plausible, though, for this type of narcissism to exist in someone. It's an innate tendency, one might say, toward a belief in the uniqueness of the self, toward regarding the life one leads so highly that one cannot but love life and everything about it. But since I do not love my life in particular, nor life in general, and at present any efforts on my part are solely channeled toward staying alive, I doubt that a diagnosis of narcissism would fully apply to me here. It's something else, something related more to that inability of mine to identify borders between things, and evaluate situations rationally and logically, which in many cases leads me to see the fly shit on a painting and not the painting itself, as the saying goes. And it is possible, at first glance, to mock this tendency, which could compel

someone, after the building next to their office at their new job is bombed, to be more concerned about the dust that was created by the bombing and that landed on their desk than about the killing of the three young men who had barricaded themselves inside, for instance. But despite this, there are some who consider this way of seeing, which is to say, focusing intently on the most minor details, like dust on the desk or fly shit on a painting, as the only way to arrive at the truth and definitive proof of its existence. There are even art historians who make these same claims. All right, they don't exactly claim to notice fly shit on a painting, but they do make a point of focusing on the least significant details, not the most significant ones, in order to determine, for example, whether a painting is an original or a copy. According to them, when art forgers imitate a painting, they pay attention to major, significant details, like the roundness of the subject's face or the position of the body, and these they reproduce precisely. However, they rarely pay attention to little details like earlobes or fingernails or toenails, which is why they ultimately fail to perfectly replicate the painting. Moreover, others claim, based on the same idea, that it is possible to reconstruct something's appearance, or an incident one has never witnessed, simply by noticing various little details which everyone else finds to be insignificant. It's the kind of thing that happens in old fables, like the tale where three brothers meet a man who has lost his camel, and immediately they describe the lost beast to him: it is a white camel, blind in one eye, carrying two skins on its saddle, one full of oil and the other of wine. You must have seen it, shouts the man. No, we have not seen it, they reply. But he does not believe them and accuses them of stealing his camel. So the four men are brought before the court, where the three brothers prove their innocence by revealing to the judge how they were able to describe

an animal they had never seen before, by noticing the smallest and simplest details, such as the camel's uneven tracks across the sand, a few drops of oil and wine that spilled from its load as it limped away, and a tuft of its shedding hair. As for the incident mentioned in the article, the fact that the specific detail that piqued my interest was the date on which it occurred was perhaps because there was nothing really unusual about the main details, especially when compared with what happens daily in a place dominated by the roar of occupation and ceaseless killing. And bombing that building is just one example. Even rape. That doesn't only happen during war, but also in everyday life. Rape, or murder, or sometimes both; I've never been preoccupied with incidents like these before. Even this incident in which, according to the article, several people were killed, only began to haunt me because of a detail about one of the victims. To a certain extent, the only unusual thing about this killing, which came as the final act of a gang rape, was that it happened on a morning that would coincide, exactly twenty-five years later, with the morning I was born. That is it. Furthermore, one cannot rule out the possibility of a connection between the two events, or the existence of a hidden link, as one sometimes finds with plants, for instance, like when a clutch of grass is pulled out by the roots, and you think you've got rid of it entirely, only for grass of the exact same species to grow back in the same spot a quarter of a century later. But, at the same time, I realize that my interest in this incident on the basis of a minor detail such as the date on which it occurred is a sign that I'll inevitably end up trespassing borders once again. So, every day since I learned about it, I try to convince myself to forget it entirely, and not do anything reckless. The date on which it occurred cannot be more than a coincidence. Besides, sometimes it's inevitable for the past to be forgotten, especially if the present is no less horrific; that

is, until I'm awoken at dawn one morning by the dog barking, followed by the wail of a strong wind. I rush to close all the windows until I get to the big window, through which I see how mercilessly the wind is pulling at the grasses and trees, shaking their branches in every direction, while the leaves tremble and writhe back and forth, nearly ripping off as the wind viciously toys with them. And the plants simply don't resist. They just surrender to the fact of their fragility, that the wind can do what it wishes with them, fooling around with their leaves, passing between their branches, penetrating their boughs, and all the while it carries the dog's frantic barking, tossing the sound in every direction. And again, a group of soldiers capture a girl, rape her, then kill her, twenty-five years to the day before I was born; this minor detail, which others might not give a second thought, will stay with me forever; in spite of myself and how hard I try to forget it, the truth of it will never stop chasing me, given how fragile I am, as weak as the trees out there past the windowpane. There may in fact be nothing more important than this little detail, if one wants to arrive at the complete truth, which, by leaving out the girl's story, the article does not reveal.

The dog's barking continues to echo in the air until the last hours of morning; sometimes the wind carries it closer to me, and sometimes further from me, until I have to leave for my new job. But before I do, I call the author of the article, an Israeli journalist, and try to pass myself off as a self-confident person. I introduce myself as a Palestinian researcher, while trying as hard as possible not to stutter, and explain the reason for my call. Neither the introduction nor the explanation thrills him. I ask if he would share with me the documents in his possession which relate to the incident. He replies that everything he has is there in the article. I add that, even so, I would like to look at them myself, and he says that if that's what I'd

like, I can go and look for them myself. Where? I ask him. In museums and archives of the Israeli military and Zionist movements from the period, and those specializing in the area where the incident occurred. And where are they? He replies, in a tone betraying that his patience has nearly expired, that they're in Tel Aviv and in the northwest Negev. Then I ask him if, as a Palestinian, I can enter these museums and archives? And he responds, before putting down the receiver, that he doesn't see what would prevent me. And I don't see what would prevent me either, except for my identity card. The site of the incident, and the museums and archives documenting it, are located outside Area C, according to the military's division of the country, and not only that, but they're quite far away, close to the border with Egypt, while the longest trip I can embark on with my green identity card, which shows I'm from Area A, is from my house to my new job. Legally, though, anyone from Area A can go to Area B, if there aren't exceptional political or military circumstances that prevent one from doing so. But nowadays, such exceptional circumstances are in fact the norm, and many people from Area A don't even consider going to Area B. In recent years, I haven't even gone as far as Qalandiya checkpoint, which separates Area A and Area B, so how can I even think of going to a place so far that it's almost in Area D? Even the people from Area B cannot do that, and probably also those from Area C, including people from Jerusalem, whose very existence constitutes a security threat if they utter a word of Arabic outside their areas. They're permitted, of course, to be in Area A, as are residents of Area B, who frequently visit it, and sometimes move there, despite the fact that it's tantamount to a prison now. At my new job, for instance, in addition to people, like me from Area A, many of my colleagues are from other Areas, all very nice people. One day at work, I confide in a colleague from Area

C, from Jerusalem, that I need to go to her Area, or perhaps a bit further, to take care of a personal matter; after all, it's not unusual for people from Area A to need to go to Area C for personal matters, and for people from Area C to need to go to Area A for personal matters. On hearing that, my colleague offers to lend me her blue identity card, since we're all brothers and sisters in the end, and we look similar too, at least in the eyes of the soldiers at the checkpoint. Besides, they don't closely inspect women in the first place, so they'll never notice the difference between me and the photo on her identity card. They hardly look at the people standing at the checkpoint anyway, given their contempt, and what's more, people typically look different from the photos on their identity cards, which could have been taken when they'd just turned sixteen. Honestly. Yes, I can easily use her identity card, do what I need to do and return it when we arrive at work at the beginning of next week. No rush at all. And she'll spend the weekend in Ramallah with friends. Of course, if I'm discovered, I'll say that I stole the identity card from her bag, so as not to implicate her. At any rate, I have to be cautious. And I'll certainly make every effort not to be reckless. So, on the afternoon of the last day of the working week, I stop by her office, borrow her identity card and head to a car rental company to rent a car with a yellow number plate, without which one cannot travel to areas beyond Area C. But as I'm about to sign the agreement it becomes clear that I need a credit card, which I don't have. And because I don't want to further burden that colleague, I call another colleague from my new job and ask for his help. He comes to the rental office right away and rents a car for me using his credit card, after listing me on the agreement as an additional driver, as the company employee advises us, and then I get the key. Really, my colleagues are so nice. And now I don't see any reason that would prevent me

from embarking on my mission to discover the complete truth about the incident, except that, as soon as I sit down behind the steering wheel of the little white car I've just rented, and turn the key to start the engine, what appears to be a spider begins spinning its threads around me, tightening them into something like a barrier, impenetrable if only because they're so fragile. It's the barrier of fear, fashioned from fear of the barrier. The checkpoint. I've often heard that today, Saturday, is the worst and most difficult day to cross through the Qalandiya checkpoint. Not only is everyone from Jerusalem coming to Ramallah, to buy fresh vegetables from the market there, or to take care of personal matters, but the soldiers are in a vindictive mood, resentful of everyone passing through the checkpoint, everyone who obliges them to work on what should be their weekend, Saturday, the day on which God Himself rested. In any case, Israeli museums and archives are all closed on Saturday for the same reason, which means that I cannot embark on my research immediately anyway. Not today, at least. So I drive the little white car back to my house, where I'll have the opportunity to reconsider my undertaking; maybe I'll finally stop chasing after these reckless ideas, with their inevitably perilous consequences, and rid myself of the conviction that I can uncover any details about the rape and murder as the girl experienced it, not relying only on what the soldiers who committed it disclosed, as the author of that article did. This type of investigation is completely beyond my ability. And the fact that the girl was killed twenty-five years to the day before I was born doesn't necessarily mean that her death belongs to me, or that it should extend into my life, or that it should be my duty to retell her story. As a matter of fact, I'm the last person who could do that, because of all my stuttering and stammering. In short, there's absolutely no point in my feeling responsible for her, feeling like

she's a nobody and will forever remain a nobody whose voice nobody will hear. Besides, people have to deal with enough misery in the world today; there's no reason to go searching for more and digging into the past. I should just forget the entire thing. But then, as soon as darkness spreads into every corner of the house, I'm racked by the dog's howling again; it robs me of sleep until the dawn hours, when I finally nod off, and then wake up late, quickly drink my coffee, grab all the maps I have in the house, and leave. At the far end of the backyard, I find the little white car waiting for me, rays of sunlight drenching the front windshield, and when I open the door and get in, a tender warmth like I haven't felt for a very long time embraces me, soothing my frightened, sleepless self. I start the engine, then head toward the entrance gate where I stop, waiting for the right moment to turn onto the street, as the sound of the right indicator pervades my pounding heartbeats. To the right, then. I haven't gone right, not even on foot, for years. I notice that some landmarks on either side of the road have remained the same since the last time I passed through the area, like the wheat mill in Kufer Aqab, and across from it Abu Aisha's butcher shop in Semiramis, then the row of dusty cypress trees that conceal the Qalandiya Vocational Training Center building, opposite the camp entrance. Many other features have changed, however, which makes the drive feel unfamiliar. There are far more speed bumps and potholes in the road now, which I try to avoid as best as I can, exactly as the cars in front of me are doing, and the cars behind me too, until I come to a halt a bit past the entrance to the Qalandiya camp, at the end of a line of cars waiting to cross the checkpoint. I immediately raise my gaze to the rearview mirror, trying to evade the fear that the sight of the checkpoint ahead will prompt, when I discover that I'm no longer last in the line of cars. There are at least seven cars behind me now, preventing me from



changing my mind and turning around. I take a deep breath and look to my left, where I see a car tire shop. And to my right, a big dump site. The dump site is new, and so is the Wall behind it. In the past, there was a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire here, which once let passersby see the runway at Qalandiya Airport as it extended toward the horizon. Now it is the Wall that extends to the horizon, covered by all sorts of graffiti including quotes from the Code of Hammurabi, a telephone number for a cooking gas cylinder vendor and a painting by Banksy. This is the first time I've seen the graffiti in real life, although I've seen them in newspapers and magazines before, sometimes with important people standing in front of them. By the time the line of cars moves forward a couple of meters, I've studied all the slogans and paintings on the Wall, where hardly any spot remains bare, and have fended off large numbers of children trying to sell me things I haven't any need for. The last one is a little girl with tousled hair, a brown face and mucus running from her nose, who is selling chewing gum. I open my bag, take out a tissue, and offer it to her, asking her to wipe her nose, and immediately she snatches it from my hand and disappears from sight. Then, even before fear can seize me, several children reappear, this time trying to sell me tissues. I ignore them by gazing at the view to my right; specifically, at the new dump site with its endless jumble of colors. Not much can be excavated and reused from the folds of this dump site. Indeed, what ends up here is the very essence of garbage; elsewhere, empty cans of food sit on balconies and stairways in houses, sprouting plants of various kinds, or sit on hobs with boiling water inside, while empty bottles line refrigerator shelves, filled with cold water to quench people's thirst in this intense heat. Leftover food is set before chickens or cows at the end of the day, then given to the dogs guarding them, until the cats finish it off. Newspaper

pages, after performing an additional role covering tables or floors, shielding the surfaces from overflowing plates of food, are eventually devoured in the ovens' fire, along with any cardboard boxes not used to store as many potatoes, onions, and garlic heads as they can, not to mention bottles of oil and pickled olives and other such pantry supplies. And, finally, plastic bags keep fulfilling their duty of holding all kinds of bits and pieces, until, in their final act, they're eventually used to hold garbage. Only two cars have crossed by the time the girl returns, and she chases away the children who stuck alongside the car in her absence, pulling me out of my dump site reverie. With a clean nose now, she picks up where she'd left off, begging me to buy chewing gum from her. I contemplate her face then her skinny body, and glimpse the edge of the tissue, which she's shoved into her little pants pocket. It appears that she plans to keep using it until there's not a clean spot left. I raise my eyes to her face, and repeat what I told her earlier, that I don't like chewing gum. But my words may as well be dust, and she keeps begging me to buy chewing gum from her. I respond that I'm more stubborn than she is, and that I won't buy any chewing gum from her no matter how hard she tries, but my words have no apparent effect; she keeps begging me to buy chewing gum from her, while shifting her gaze from my bag to my clothes, then to the inside of the car. Finally, I tell her that she should be in school, not selling chewing gum at the checkpoint. And only when she replies that it's the summer holiday am I sure she's not deaf or slow. Yes, that's right, I had forgotten. Then she goes back to begging me to buy chewing gum from her. I ask about her marks in school. Enthusiastically, she tells me they're good, before repeating her request that I buy chewing gum from her. I ask her what she does with the money she earns from selling chewing gum, if she gives it to her parents, for instance, and she says of

course not, she keeps it for herself. I ask how she's going to spend it. She tells me she's going to buy herself presents during the festivities, then goes back to begging me to buy chewing gum from her. I search for my wallet in my bag, take out a few coins, and offer them to the little girl, adding that I don't want any chewing gum. She takes the money, tosses two packs of chewing gum onto the passenger seat next to my bag and runs away. And only now do I realize that I've come quite close to the checkpoint, so close in fact that I can see a soldier examining somebody's papers, and a bolt of pain strikes my heart, then numbness spreads through my body, as the spider of fear crawls across my skin, slowly paralyzing me. I look around frantically, hoping to see the little girl, begging for her to come back, for her company to ease the fear that's sweeping through me, but she's vanished, so instead I fix my gaze on the people waiting to go through the checkpoint on foot, watching as they pass behind the narrow metal bars of the turnstiles one by one, while I try to take deep, slow breaths. These are the lucky ones, lucky enough to pass through the checkpoint, even if they're forced to stand and wait; they're allowed to move from one Area to another whenever they want, without needing to borrow an identity card from their nice colleague at their new job. Then I yawn. I'm completely exhausted, since I barely slept last night. I'm so tired of my reckless behavior and of the state I get myself into, the fear, anxiety, and agitation. It'll be a disaster if they discover what I'm doing, the consequences are so enormous I can hardly imagine them, but if what I'm doing isn't discovered, I will go straight back to my house, right after the checkpoint; yes, it's the only way to put an end to this state I'm in. I promise myself this then I yawn again, and in the middle of my yawning a soldier approaches the car. I watch my hand as it extends the blue identity card toward him. The two packs of chewing gum are

still sitting on the seat next to me. The brand is called “Must,” made by the Sinokrot company in al-Khalil. I turn my head, stare straight ahead, and see nothing. Then the soldier hits the roof of the car as if to wake me up. I’m alert. He gives me back the identity card and orders me to move. And I move. Forward. More. And more, since I’m afraid of turning around right away, or else the soldier and all the security forces at the checkpoint will notice me. But the road past the checkpoint is blocked by the Wall, as is the road to the left. As such, my only choice is to turn right, where there’s a narrow road stretching off into the distance, one I’ve never taken before, and I’m not sure if I should, but I let the car keep going, onto this road, where to the right is the Qalandiya Airport runway, running parallel to the road, and to the left is empty land, intersected here and there by narrow roads, and I don’t dare take any of them, but then I quickly regret the decision not to when another checkpoint appears in front of me. Damn! Fear crushes my heart, and I’m gripped by a strong desire to sleep. And just as I approach the checkpoint and slow down, I let out a powerful yawn, opening my mouth as wide as it can go. I rush to cover it with my hand, and the soldier waves back at me, gesturing for me not to stop, so I keep going, until I arrive at an intersection with several signs in Hebrew and Arabic and English, including one pointing to the left, toward “Jerusalem (al-Quds),” and one pointing to the right, toward “Tel Aviv — Yafo.” I turn right. After about a hundred meters, I pull over to the side of the road to catch my breath. My body is trembling. I try to calm down, but I cannot calm down; fear has settled into every part of my body, making it feel practically weightless. Oh, how pitiful I am. I don’t know where I am, and if I stay here for long it will start to look suspicious. I take the maps I brought with me out of my bag and spread them over the passenger seat and across the steering wheel. Among these maps are

those produced by centers for research and political studies, which show the borders of the four Areas, the path of the Wall, the construction of settlements, and checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza. Another map shows Palestine as it was until the year 1948, and another one, given to me by the rental car company and produced by the Israeli ministry of tourism, shows streets and residential areas according to the Israeli government. With shaking fingers, I try to determine my current location on that map. I haven't gone far.

Despite that, there is no going back now.

I take a deep breath. Well, no going back now, not after crossing so many borders, military ones, geographical ones, physical ones, psychological ones, mental ones. I look back at the Israeli map, searching for the first location I wish to head to. It's a medium-sized black dot, not far from where I am now, crowned with the word "Jaffa" written in small but thick English letters. There are a few military museums and archives there, where, as the author of the article had informed me, I can find basic information about the incident. I start trying to determine the best route there, relying on the various maps I have with me. While, in principle, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, in practice I cannot chart a course like that, not because the roads aren't straight but because, as several maps confirm, there are at least two checkpoints on the shortest route leading to Yafa. And neither the maps I have in my possession nor the ones I don't have indicate the locations of flying checkpoints, or are updated with the ongoing construction of the Wall, which continually leads to more road closures. In fact, it's been years since I've heard anyone mention the road that would take me on the shortest route; for instance, that they witnessed a traffic accident there, or that they bought a box of vegetables from a roadside vendor. It can't have dropped from conversation by chance.

Rather, it probably means that no one is able to travel on that road any longer. So if I want to continue with my investigation, and on the safest route possible, it's best to choose the longer but faster road, the one Israelis take to the coast. I start the engine and pull back onto the road, slowly, calmly, and cautiously. A few meters ahead and to the right is the road that once led to Ramallah through the village of Beitunia, which I had taken dozens of times en route to Yafa or Gaza. Now it is blocked, closed off. On its right I can see several eight-meter-high concrete slabs, exactly like the ones used to construct the Wall, and which I've seen around the Qalandiya checkpoint, but here they form what looks like a fortress. "Ofer Prison," the sign on the roadside indicates. I've heard a lot about this prison in recent years, but this is the first time I've seen it. It's relatively new, built in 2002, during the wave of invasions that took place in the spring of that year, when the army rounded up anyone over the age of sixteen and under fifty in public squares and brought them here. Among them was a colleague from my new job, who's very nice, originally from Rafah. One time at the office, he recalled the smell of freshly poured bitumen which shoved its way into his nose as he slept on the asphalt during the months of his detention. On the other side of the prison is a military base hiding behind a row of cypress trees. In the past one could glimpse tanks and military vehicles lurking inside massive hangars through the dusty cypress trunks, branches, and needles. At the intersection, I turn the car back in the direction of Jerusalem on Road 443; I have to turn right on Highway 50 after that, then another right on Highway 1 toward Yafa. I continue driving on Road 443, still on the alert, and before long I catch sight of another checkpoint ahead; my heartbeats echo in my skull, and something akin to a torn spiderweb dances in front of my eyes. I get closer to the checkpoint. I have to cross it. The soldiers

lined up around it do not seem concerned with stopping anyone, probably including me. I shouldn't slow down very much. I must trust that I'll get through. And I do! After the checkpoint, however, my confidence dissipates completely and I'm no longer sure where I am. I can't tell whether I've taken this road before, as I'd thought at first, or not. The road I'd been familiar with until a few years ago was narrow and winding, while this one is quite wide and straight. Walls five meters high have been erected on either side, and behind them are many new buildings, clustered in settlements that hadn't existed before or were hardly visible, while most of the Palestinian villages that used to be here have disappeared. I scan the area with eyes wide open, searching for any trace of these villages and their houses, which were freely scattered like rocks on the hills and were connected by narrow, meandering roads that slowed at the curves. But it's in vain. None of them can be seen any more. The further I drive, the more disoriented I become, until, off to the left, I see another road that has been closed. And at this point I realize that I've taken that road before, dozens of times; it's blocked off now by a mound of dirt and several massive concrete blocks, but it once led to al-Jib villages. I stop the car where the roads intersect, step down, and approach the heap of dirt and concrete blocking it, to be completely sure that it exists and cannot be moved, and that neither my car nor any other car can drive around it. It's pretty, the road to al-Jib, the way it leans left and right, crossing hills dotted with olive trees and little villages wrapped in quiet, to Beit Ikhsa. I go back to the car, open the Israeli map, and again study the route that Israelis usually take to the coast. So, after descending to the bottom of the valley on Highway 50, one must turn right onto Highway 1, and stay on it for a long time, without turning right or left. I examine the area along Highway 1, which, according to the map, appears to be

primarily populated by settlements. The only two visible Palestinian villages are Abu Ghosh and Ein Rafa. I go back and open the map, which depicts Palestine until 1948, and let my eyes wander over it, moving between the names of the many Palestinian villages that were destroyed after the expulsion of their inhabitants that year. I recognize several of them; some of my colleagues and acquaintances originate from there, from the villages of Lifta, al-Qastal, Ein Karem, al-Mallha, al-Jura, Abu Shusha, Siris, Innaba, Jimzu, and Dair Tarif. But the majority of the names are unfamiliar to me, to the extent that they invoke a feeling of estrangement. Khirbat al-Ammour, Bir Ma'in, al-Burj, Khirbat al-Buwayra, Beit Shanna, Salbit, al-Qubab, al-Kanisa, Kharrouba, Khirbat Zakariyya, Bariyya, Dair Abu Salama, Al-Na'ani, Jindas, Hadatha, Abu al-Fadl, Kislá, and many others. I look at the Israeli map again. A very large park called Canada Park now extends over the area where all these villages used to be. I fold the maps, start the engine, and set off toward Highway 50, and encountering no barriers this time, I turn onto the really long highway. And after continuing on it for a while, I start to descend the mountains of Jerusalem, heading, according to the signs, toward the Ben Shemen Interchange, whose original name may have been Beit Susin, named after a nearby village which appears on the map from 1948 and which no longer exists. All that is left, all that hasn't been destroyed, is a single house, and I catch a glimpse of it on my left, surrounded by cypress trees and with grass growing through the stones.

The car cuts through the landscape at high speed. The road is nearly perfectly straight, but even so, I keep glancing at the Israeli map unfurled across the seat next to me, fearing that I may get lost in the folds of a scene which fills me with a great feeling of alienation, seeing all the changes that have befallen it. It's been a long time since



I've passed through here, and wherever I look, all the changes constantly reassert the absence of anything Palestinian: the names of cities and villages on road signs, billboards written in Hebrew, new buildings, even vast fields abutting the horizon on my left and right. After a disappearance, that's when the fly returns to hover over the painting. Little details drift along the length of the road, furtively hinting at a presence. Clothes hung out to dry behind a gas station, the driver of a slow vehicle I overtake, a thorn acacia tree standing alone in the fields, an old mastic tree. A few shepherds with their livestock on a distant hill. I look back at the Israeli map for a moment, to check that I should take the Kibbutz Galuyot exit to the right, and a moment later it's announced by several giant signs, just as new high-rise buildings emerge from the horizon. From there, I'll turn left onto Salama Road, where I'll continue toward Yafa, or "Yafo," as the signs directing me there declare, until the horizon materializes as a blue line. The sea! There it is, in real life, after years of absence, years in which it was nothing more than pale blue on a map. And now the sea, not the signs, begins to lead me toward the city, and as I drive on this bleak road, passing factories and auto repair shops, I cannot resist glancing at its trembling blueness every few seconds, until I almost cause an accident. During a brief glance at its rippling surface under the midday sun, I realize suddenly, but too late, that I'm driving through a red light, into a four-way intersection where each road has three lanes, and that all the cars are jolting to a stop to let me go through. Damn! What did I just do! After I pass through the intersection, I pull over on the side of the road to catch my breath, and a numbness extends into every part of me, making me feel heavy. I'm so clumsy; this is exactly the kind of border I cannot trespass. I can't seem to calm down. But I can't stay here either; my car is still obstructing traffic. I turn back onto the

road, and my hands are trembling, they feel weightless now, while my feet barely manage to press the accelerator, the clutch, or the brake, and I make it to the end of the road, turn left, continue for a few meters, not much more, and arrive at my first destination, the Israel Defense Forces History Museum. When I arrive, I find that the parking lot is almost empty, which eases my anxiety, but also makes the task of deciding where to park the car a somewhat difficult endeavor. I'm not sure whether it's better to park in the shade, or as close to the entrance as possible, or in a visible spot to prevent the car from being broken into or stolen, or somewhere no one else wants to park, where it's less likely to be scratched, even a bit. When I finally park, after a not-so-insubstantial moment of hesitation, I put all the maps in my bag, as well as the shirt I'd taken off in the heat, and the two packs of chewing gum from the seat beside me, but not before opening one, taking two pieces of chewing gum, and tossing them into my mouth. Aside from coffee, I haven't had anything to eat or drink since this morning, so at the very least I'll absorb some sugar.

I get out of the car and walk calmly toward the museum entrance, then I cross the threshold into the lobby, heading straight for the ticket desk, when I discover a soldier standing there. He looks up at me with a smile. I walk over to him. He doesn't ask to see my nice colleague's identity card, so I leave it in my bag. I hand him the money for a ticket. And he takes it, gives me the ticket, and tells me I must leave my bag in a locker. That's all. His military uniform must be part of the exhibition. I remove my wallet, and a little notebook and pen so that I can take notes, since photography is prohibited inside, as he also informs me. But I don't have a camera with me anyway. I walk out of the lobby and into an open-air courtyard, which visitors must pass through to enter the sixteen exhibition

rooms, as indicated in the brochure which the soldier gave me along with my ticket. When I step into the courtyard, I'm instantly met by a sharp, blinding light reflected toward me by the white gravel covering the ground, which also makes a terrible ear-piercing sound as I walk across it. To be quite honest, I have no more tolerance for gravel than for dust. So I keep walking across the gravel, carefully, trying to keep the sound from growing, and through eyes half-closed against the glare I see silhouettes of several old military vehicles positioned around the courtyard, until eventually I realize that this is the sixteenth and final stop in the exhibition, according to the brochure, meant to be visited after all the rooms inside. I feel a wave of nervousness when I realize that I've wandered in the opposite direction to the route suggested by the museum, which might ruin the whole experience for me, so I immediately head to the first exhibition room. And as soon as my feet cross the threshold, leaving the sticky heat that weighed heavily on the courtyard behind me, shivers rise through my body, in response to the cold air being expelled toward me by the air conditioning. I use my hands, which are still holding my wallet and notebook, to cover my arms, trying to warm them up, since I left my long-sleeve shirt with my bag in the locker. But it's in vain. Shivers grip my body again as I wander through the room, which is completely empty of people, aside from a soldier on guard. I try hard to control my shivering, so as not to attract his attention while wandering leisurely in the room among the displays. In one, I find a map of the south and several telegrams sent between soldiers stationed there in the late forties, filled with heroic and encouraging phrases. But the shivering doesn't stop. I take a deep breath, then turn to look at the guard, who I find staring in my direction. I turn away nonchalantly and keep walking, on toward the second room. There, my shivering gradually fades when I

stop in front of a collection of photographs and propaganda films, a few of which, the labels indicate, were produced in the thirties and forties by pioneers of Zionist cinema. The films show Jewish European immigrants in Palestine, focusing on scenes of them engaged in agricultural work, and of cooperative life in the settlements. One film in particular gives me pause. It starts with a shot of a barren expanse, then abruptly a group of settlers in shorts and short-sleeve shirts enter the frame. They start constructing a tall tower and wooden huts, working until these are complete, and the film ends with the settlers gathered in front of the finished buildings, with joined hands, dancing in a circle. In order to watch it again, I rewind it to the beginning. The settlers break the circle, then go back to the huts they've just finished building, dismantle them, carry the pieces off in carts, and exit the frame. I fast-forward the tape. Then I rewind it. Again and again, I build settlements and dismantle them, until I realize that I shouldn't waste any more time here; I have to visit several other rooms and inspect their displays, and there is still a long trip ahead. I continue my tour until I reach the sixth room, where I end up spending more time than in the previous rooms. This display features wax soldiers wearing various kinds of military attire and accessories. According to the labels, most of the items were used during the forties. I notice that military uniforms from that period differ from military uniforms today. Contemporary ones are a dark olive-green, while the old ones were gray and came in two styles, long pants or shorts, each held up by a wide fabric webbing with a leather gun holster, small pouches for magazines, and a place to hang a water bottle. There are different kinds of webbing sets, too, some worn around the waist, others across the chest. The wax soldiers also wear kit bags on their backs and have caps on their heads, some large and others small. As for their boots, these very much resemble the

ones worn by soldiers today. In the middle of the room are huge glass cases, inside which are displayed various types of equipment and mess kits used at the time, including small rectangular tin bowls connected to a chain with a spoon, fork, and knife. There are other types of equipment too, such as shaving kits and bars of soap and so on. Next to all this is a little scale model of the tents used for soldiers' quarters, mess halls, and command meetings. I continue to the next rooms, which contain displays that don't deserve much attention, that is, until I reach the thirteenth room. The thirteenth room contains various models of small firearms that were used until the fifties. I circle them apprehensively, contemplating the different sizes and shapes, and the size of the bullets displayed alongside the guns in the glass cases, reading the accompanying explanations attentively, before pausing in front of a Tommy gun. The label explains that this is an example of a US-made submachine gun, developed in 1918 by John T. Thompson, thus the name "Tommy," and widely used during the Second World War by the Allied Powers, especially by noncommissioned officers and patrol commanders, and then in the War of 1948, and subsequently in the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and many others. This weapon excelled, the label adds, at hitting a target even at great distance, while also being effective in close combat. I make a sketch of it in my notebook. I've become bad at drawing. In the old days I used to be able to draw and reproduce shapes very precisely. Now, however, my lines are sharp, agitated, and unsteady, which distorts the weapon I've sketched so that it no longer really resembles the weapon used in the crime on the morning of August 13, 1949. Suddenly, a loud roar rises through the room, and I jump and start shivering again. I leave room thirteen and step into the courtyard before the air conditioner's chill extends over the entire room. In the courtyard, I stumble upon the military

vehicles used during that period, which I'd seen when I first entered, and am met by a thick wave of heat and blinding white light for a second time. Against this, the dark green shirt of the soldier on guard, whom I saw in the first room and who is now also wandering around the courtyard, soothes my eyes. But not my mental state. At the first sign of fear, I leave the courtyard, head to the lobby, retrieve my bag from the locker and walk to my little white car, which is still alone in the parking lot. Actually, there's no need for me to spend any more time in this city. Official museums like this really have no valuable information to offer me, not even small details that could help me retell the girl's story. I open my little notebook to study my distorted sketch of the Tommy gun, which looks more like a rotten piece of wood than a lethal weapon. I put the notebook in my bag, then pick up the Israeli map to determine my route to my next destination. I must get on Highway 4, which leads south, then, after Askalan and before Gaza, I'll turn left onto Road 34, then right at Sderot onto Road 232, and I'll continue on that until I reach my next destination. I toss the map onto the seat next to me, take the chewing gum from my mouth, drop it in the car ashtray, and depart.

There are other maps lying under the one I've tossed there, including ones that show Palestine as it was until 1948, but I don't open them this time. I'm acquainted with enough people who are originally from this area to have a sense of how many villages and cities there used to be between Yafa and Askalan, before they were wiped from the earth's face not long ago. Meanwhile, names of cities and settlements appear along the road, as do shapes of houses, fields, plants, streets, large signs, and people's faces; all of this accompanies me on my journey while rejecting me too, provoking an inexplicable feeling of anxiety, until I catch sight of a checkpoint where police are inspecting the identity cards of passengers on a white bus just

outside Rahat. There they are! And there is a policeman standing on the side of the road as well, ready to select a vehicle, stop it, and subject it to inspection. My heart beats faster at the base of my throat. I must turn my gaze away. I quickly glance at my bag, then plunge my right hand inside, searching for the packs of chewing gum, and when I find one I take out a piece, toss it into my mouth and begin chewing it, while letting my gaze hang on the ridgeline of the hills scattered on the left side of the road. I have to calm down. Although the car had been moving at ninety kilometers an hour, the closer it gets to the checkpoint, the more it slows down, nearly to a complete stop at the checkpoint itself; I swallow some saliva, still chewing the gum, and just as the car crosses the checkpoint it leaps back up to speed. I take a deep breath when the scene appears in the rearview mirror: the policemen busy examining the identity cards of passengers on the white bus, and another policeman standing nearby, considering the cars passing in front of him, still about to select one and stop it for inspection.

I continue sitting behind the wheel until exhaustion pounces on me again, and I lean my head back. There's much less traffic now, and I have come far enough south that the sandy white hills dotted with small stones have been replaced by hills of yellow sand that look soft to the touch. Scraggy, pale green plants grow on some of the hills, reminiscent of the wilting rotten lettuce the amateur vegetable vendor tried to sell me for three times the price of normal lettuce in Ramallah's closed vegetable market. I decide to stop the car by some fields to rest for a bit. I take the chewing gum from my mouth and deposit it in the ashtray, then close my eyes, hoping to nap in my seat for a few minutes. But I can't manage to fall asleep; I feel as if anxiety is lashing at me, keeping me awake. Eventually, when I've lost all hope of resting, I pick up the maps from the seat next to me. First, I

open the Israeli one and try to determine my position, relying on the number that appeared on the last sign I saw along the road. It seems I simply have to drive on a straight course, albeit a short one, and I'll soon reach my next destination, which appears on the map as a small black dot, practically the only one in a vast sea of yellow. Next, I pick up the map showing the country until 1948, but I snap it shut as horror rushes over me. Palestinian villages, which on the Israeli map appear to have been swallowed by a yellow sea, appear on this one by the dozen, their names practically leaping off the page. I start the engine back up and set off toward my target.

I see it from afar, in the heart of the yellow hills, and the narrow asphalt road stretches between me and my destination, where a row of flowers and slender dwarf palm trees leads toward several red brick houses. Nirim settlement. When I reach the barrier gate at the main entrance, I stop the car and remain inside, waiting for someone to come out and inspect me, but nothing of the sort happens. After a while, I drive closer to the metal gate and security booth, but I don't see anyone inside, so I get out of the car and head to the gate. The sun is very strong. I hold onto the bars of the gate, which are hot from the sun, then pull them back and open it myself. I get back in the car, drive through the gate, then get out, close it behind me, get back in the car, and drive slowly through the settlement. Before very long I arrive at what appears to be the old section; the place looks completely abandoned. To my right is a huge stable, and next to it a water tank on top of an old wooden tower, and to my left is a street, past which are several huts which look very similar to ones I saw in the film at the military museum in Yafa. This must be where the crime occurred. Maybe this hut is the one the platoon commander used as his quarters, and that older-looking one is where the girl was held and then raped by the rest of the soldiers. I get out of the car







You who remove me from my house  
are blind to your past  
which never leaves you,  
yet you're no mole  
to smell and sense what's being done  
to me now by you.

Now, dilatory, attritional so that the past  
is climate change and not a massacre,  
so that the present never ends.

But I'm closer to you than you are to yourself  
and this, my enemy friend,  
is the definition of distance.

Oh don't be indignant,  
watch the video, I'll send you the link  
in which you cleanse me item after limb  
thrown into the street to march where  
my catastrophe in the present  
is still not the size of your past:  
is this the wall

you throw your dice against?  
I'm speaking etymologically, I'm okay  
with the scales tipping your way,  
I'm not into that, I have a heart that rots,  
resists, and hopes, I have genes,  
like yours, that don't subscribe  
to the damage pyramid.

You who remove me from my house  
have also evicted my parents  
and their parents from theirs.

How is the view from my window?

How does my salt taste?

Shall I condemn myself a little  
for you to forgive yourself  
in my body? Oh how you love my body,  
my body, my house.

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## Memory and Forgetting

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### SPACE NEW AND OLD

New York, Nueva Leon, Nouvelle Orléans, Nova Lisboa, Nieuw Amsterdam. Already in the sixteenth century Europeans had begun the strange habit of naming remote places, first in the Americas and Africa, later in Asia, Australia, and Oceania, as 'new' versions of (thereby) 'old' toponyms in their lands of origin. Moreover, they retained the tradition even when such places passed to different imperial masters, so the Nouvelle Orléans calmly became New Orleans, and Nieuw Zeeland New Zealand.

It was not that, in general, the naming of political or religious sites as 'new' was in itself so new. In Southeast Asia, for example, one finds towns of reasonable antiquity whose names also include a term for novelty: Chiangmai (New City), Kota Bahru (New Town), Pekanbaru (New Market). But in these names 'new' invariably has the meaning of 'successor' to, or 'inheritor' of, something vanished. 'New' and 'old' are aligned diachronically, and the former appears always to invoke an ambiguous blessing from the dead. What is startling in the American namings of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is that 'new' and 'old' were understood synchronically, co-existing within homogeneous, empty time. Vizcaya is there *alongside* Nueva Vizcaya, New London *alongside* London: an idiom of sibling competition rather than of inheritance.

This new synchronic novelty could arise historically only when substantial groups of people were in a position to think of themselves as living lives *parallel* to those of other substantial groups of people – if never meeting, yet certainly proceeding along the same trajectory. Between 1500 and 1800 an accumulation of technological innovations in the fields of shipbuilding, navigation, horology and cartography, mediated through print-capitalism, was making this type of imagining possible.<sup>1</sup> It became conceivable to dwell on the Peruvian altiplano, on the pampas of Argentina, or by the harbours of 'New' England, and yet feel connected to certain regions or communities, thousands of miles away, in England or the Iberian peninsula. One could be fully aware of sharing a language and a religious faith (to varying degrees), customs and traditions, without any great expectation of ever meeting one's partners.<sup>2</sup>

For this sense of parallelism or simultaneity not merely to arise, but also to have vast political consequences, it was necessary that the distance between the parallel groups be large, and that the newer of them be substantial in size and permanently settled, as well as firmly subordinated to the older. These conditions were met in the Americas as they had never been before. In the first place, the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean and the utterly different geographical conditions existing on each side of it, made impossible the sort of gradual absorption of populations into larger politico-cultural units that transformed Las Españas into España and submerged Scotland into the United Kingdom. Secondly, as noted in Chapter 4, European migration to the Americas took place on an astonishing scale. By the

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1. The accumulation reached a frantic zenith in the 'international' (i.e., European) search for an accurate measure of longitude, amusingly recounted in Landes, *Revolution in Time*, chapter 9. In 1776, as the Thirteen Colonies declared their independence, the *Gentleman's Magazine* included this brief obituary for John Harrison: 'He was a most ingenious mechanic, and received the 20,000 pounds reward [from Westminster] for the discovery of the longitude [sic].'

2. The late spreading of this consciousness to Asia is deftly alluded to in the opening pages of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's great historical novel *Bumi Manusia* [Earth of Mankind]. The young nationalist hero muses that he was born on the same date as the future Queen Wilhelmina – 31 August 1880. 'But while my island was wrapped in the darkness of night, her country was bathed in sun; and if her country was embraced by night's blackness, my island glittered in the equatorial noon.' p. 4.

## MEMORY AND FORGETTING

end of the eighteenth century there were no less than 3,200,000 'whites' (including no more than 150,000 *peninsulares*) within the 16,900,000 population of the Western empire of the Spanish Bourbons.<sup>3</sup> The sheer size of this immigrant community, no less than its overwhelming military, economic and technological power vis-à-vis the indigenous populations, ensured that it maintained its own cultural coherence and local political ascendancy.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, the imperial metropole disposed of formidable bureaucratic and ideological apparatuses, which permitted them for many centuries to impose their will on the creoles. (When one thinks of the sheer logistical problems involved, the ability of London and Madrid to carry on long counter-revolutionary wars against rebel American colonists is quite impressive.)

The novelty of all these conditions is suggested by the contrast they afford with the great (and roughly contemporaneous) Chinese and Arab migrations into Southeast Asia and East Africa. These migrations were rarely 'planned' by any metropole, and even more rarely produced stable relations of subordination. In the Chinese case, the only dim parallel is the extraordinary series of voyages far across the Indian ocean which were led, early in the fifteenth century, by the brilliant eunuch admiral Cheng-ho. These daring enterprises, carried out at the orders of the Yung-lo Emperor, were intended to enforce a court monopoly of external trade with

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3. Needless to say, 'whiteness' was a legal category which had a distinctly tangential relationship to complex social realities. As the Liberator himself put it, '*We are the vile offspring of the predatory Spaniards who came to America to bleed her white and to breed with their victims. Later the illegitimate offspring of these unions joined with the offspring of slaves transported from Africa.*' Italics added. Lynch, *The Spanish-American Revolutions*, p. 249. One should beware of assuming anything 'eternally European' in this *criollismo*. Remembering all those devoutly Buddhist-Singhalese Da Souzas, those piously Catholic-Florinese Da Silvas, and those cynically Catholic-Manileño Sorianos who play unproblematic social, economic, and political roles in contemporary Ceylon, Indonesia, and the Philippines, helps one to recognize that, under the right circumstances, Europeans could be gently absorbed into non-European cultures.

4. Compare the fate of the huge African immigrant population. The brutal mechanisms of slavery ensured not merely its political-cultural fragmentation, but also very rapidly removed the possibility of imagining black communities in Venezuela and West Africa moving in parallel trajectory.

Southeast Asia and the regions further west, against the depredations of private Chinese merchants.<sup>5</sup> By mid-century the failure of the policy was clear; whereupon the Ming abandoned overseas adventures and did everything they could to prevent emigration from the Middle Kingdom. The fall of southern China to the Manchus in 1645 produced a substantial wave of refugees into Southeast Asia for whom any political ties with the new dynasty were unthinkable. Subsequent Ch'ing policy did not differ substantially from that of the later Ming. In 1712, for example, an edict of the K'ang-hsi Emperor prohibited all trade with Southeast Asia and declared that his government would 'request foreign governments to have those Chinese who have been abroad repatriated so that they may be executed.'<sup>6</sup> The last great wave of overseas migration took place in the nineteenth century as the dynasty disintegrated and a huge demand for unskilled Chinese labor opened up in colonial Southeast Asia and Siam. Since virtually all migrants were politically cut off from Peking, and were also illiterate people speaking mutually unintelligible languages, they were either more or less absorbed into local cultures or were decisively subordinated to the advancing Europeans.<sup>7</sup>

As for the Arabs, most of their migrations originated from the Hadramaut, never a real metropole in the era of the Ottoman and Mughal empires. Enterprising individuals might find ways to establish local principalities, such as the merchant who founded the kingdom of Pontianak in western Borneo in 1772; but he married locally, soon lost his 'Arabness' if not his Islam, and remained subordinated to the rising Dutch and English empires in Southeast Asia, not to any power in the Near East. In 1832 Sayyid Sa'id, lord of Muscat, established a powerful base on the East African coast and settled on the island of Zanzibar, which he made the centre of a flourishing clove-growing economy. But the British used military

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5. See O.W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History*, Appendix C.

6. Cited in G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, pp. 15-16.

7. Overseas Chinese communities loomed large enough to stimulate deep European paranoia up to the mid eighteenth century, when vicious anti-Chinese pogroms by Westerners finally ceased. Thereafter, this unlovely tradition was passed on to indigenous populations.

means to compel him to sever his ties with Muscat.<sup>8</sup> Thus neither Arabs nor Chinese, though they ventured overseas in very large numbers during more or less the same centuries as the Western Europeans, successfully established coherent, wealthy, selfconsciously creole communities subordinated to a great metropolitan core. Hence, the world never saw the rise of New Basras or New Wuhans.

The doubleness of the Americas and the reasons for it, sketched out above, help to explain why nationalism emerged first in the New World, not the Old.<sup>9</sup> They also illuminate two peculiar features of the revolutionary wars that raged in the New World between 1776 and 1825. On the one hand, none of the creole revolutionaries dreamed of keeping the empire intact but rearranging its internal distribution of power, *reversing* the previous relationship of subjection by transferring the metropole from a European to an American site.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the aim was not to have New London succeed, overthrow, or destroy Old London, but rather to safeguard their continuing parallelism. (How new this style of thought was can be inferred from the history of earlier empires in decline, where there was often a dream of *replacing* the old centre.) On the other hand, although these wars caused a great deal of suffering and were marked by much barbarity, in an odd way the stakes were rather low. Neither in North nor in South America did the creoles have to fear physical extermination or reduction to servitude, as did so many other peoples who got in the way of the juggernaut of European imperialism. They were after all 'whites,' Christians, and Spanish- or English-speakers; they were also the intermediaries necessary to the metropolises if the economic wealth of the Western empires was to continue under Europe's control. Hence, they were the one significant extra-

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8. See Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 3, pp. 233-5.

9. It is an astonishing sign of the depth of Eurocentrism that so many European scholars persist, in the face of all the evidence, in regarding nationalism as a European invention.

10. But note the ironic case of Brazil. In 1808, King João VI fled to Rio de Janeiro to escape Napoléon's armies. Though Wellington had expelled the French by 1811, the emigrant monarch, fearing republican unrest at home, stayed on in South America until 1822, so that between 1808 and 1822 Rio was the centre of a world empire stretching to Angola, Mozambique, Macao, and East Timor. But this empire was ruled by a European, not an American.



## IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

European group, subjected to Europe, that at the same time had no need to be desperately afraid of Europe. The revolutionary wars, bitter as they were, were still reassuring in that they were wars between kinsmen.<sup>11</sup> This family link ensured that, after a certain period of acrimony had passed, close cultural, and sometimes political and economic, ties could be reknit between the former metropolises and the new nations.

## TIME NEW AND OLD

If for the creoles of the New World the strange toponyms discussed above represented figuratively their emerging capacity to imagine themselves as communities *parallel and comparable* to those in Europe, extraordinary events in the last quarter of the eighteenth century gave this novelty, quite suddenly, a completely new meaning. The first of these events was certainly the Declaration of (the Thirteen Colonies') Independence in 1776, and the successful military defence of that declaration in the years following. This independence, and the fact that it was a *republican* independence, was felt to be something absolutely unprecedented, yet at the same time, once in existence, absolutely reasonable. Hence, when history made it possible, in 1811, for Venezuelan revolutionaries to draw up a constitution for the First Venezuelan Republic, they saw nothing slavish in borrowing verbatim from the Constitution of the United States of America.<sup>12</sup> For what the men in Philadelphia had written was in the Venezuelans' eyes not something North American, but rather something of universal truth and value. Shortly thereafter, in 1789, the explosion in the New World was *paralleled* in the Old by the volcanic outbreak of the French Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

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11. Doubtless this was what permitted the Liberator to exclaim at one point that a Negro, i.e. slave, revolt would be 'a thousand times worse than a Spanish invasion.' (See above, p. 49). A slave jacquerie, if successful, might mean the physical extermination of the creoles.

12. See Masur, *Bolívar*, p. 131.

13. The French Revolution was in turn *paralleled* in the New World by the outbreak of Toussaint L'Ouverture's insurrection in 1791, which by 1806 had resulted

## MEMORY AND FORGETTING

It is difficult today to recreate in the imagination a condition of life in which the nation was felt to be something utterly new. But so it was in that epoch. The Declaration of Independence of 1776 makes absolutely no reference to Christopher Columbus, Roanoke, or the Pilgrim Fathers, nor are the grounds put forward to justify independence in any way 'historical,' in the sense of highlighting the antiquity of the American people. Indeed, marvellously, the American nation is not even mentioned. A profound feeling that a radical break with the past was occurring – a 'blasting open of the continuum of history?' – spread rapidly. Nothing exemplifies this intuition better than the decision, taken by the Convention *Nationale* on 5 October 1793, to scrap the centuries-old Christian calendar and to inaugurate a new world-era with the Year One, starting from the abolition of the *ancien régime* and the proclamation of the Republic on 22 September 1792.<sup>14</sup> (No subsequent revolution has had quite this sublime confidence of novelty, not least because the French Revolution has always been seen as an ancestor.)

Out of this profound sense of newness came also *nuestra santa revolución*, the beautiful neologism created by José María Morelos y Pavón (proclaimer in 1813 of the Republic of Mexico), not long before his execution by the Spaniards.<sup>15</sup> Out of it too came San Martín's 1821 decree that '*in the future* the aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives; they are children and citizens of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians.'<sup>16</sup> This sentence does for 'Indians' and/or 'natives' what the Convention in Paris had done for the Christian calendar – it abolished the old time-dishonoured naming and inaugurated a completely new epoch. 'Peruvians' and 'Year One' thus mark rhetorically a profound rupture with the existing world.

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in Haiti's former slaves creating the second independent republic of the Western hemisphere.

14. The young Wordsworth was in France in 1791–1792, and later, in *The Prelude*, wrote these famous reminiscent lines:

Bliss was it in that *dawn* to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!

Italics added.

15. Lynch, *The Spanish-American Revolutions*, pp. 314–15.

16. As cited above in chapter 4.

Yet things could not long remain this way – for precisely the same reasons that had precipitated the sense of rupture in the first place. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Britain alone was manufacturing between 150,000 and 200,000 watches a year, many of them for export. Total European manufacture is likely to have then been close to 500,000 items annually.<sup>17</sup> Serially published newspapers were by then a familiar part of urban civilization. So was the novel, with its spectacular possibilities for the representation of simultaneous actions in homogeneous empty time.<sup>18</sup> The cosmic clocking which had made intelligible our synchronic transoceanic pairings was increasingly felt to entail a wholly intramundane, *serial* view of social causality; and this sense of the world was now speedily deepening its grip on Western imaginations. It is thus understandable that less than two decades after the Proclamation of Year One came the establishment of the first academic chairs in History – in 1810 at the University of Berlin, and in 1812 at Napoléon's Sorbonne. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century History had become formally constituted as a 'discipline,' with its own elaborate array of professional journals.<sup>19</sup> Very quickly the Year One made way for 1792 A.D., and the revolutionary ruptures of 1776 and 1789 came to be figured as embedded in the historical series and *thus as historical precedents and models*.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, for the members of what we might call 'second-generation' nationalist movements, those which developed in Europe

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17. Landes, *Revolution in Time*, pp. 230–31, 442–43.

18. See above, Chapter 2.

19. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, pp. 135–43, for a sophisticated discussion of this transformation.

20. But it was an A.D. with a difference. Before the rupture it still retained, however fragiley in enlightened quarters, a theological aura glowing from within its medieval Latin. Anno Domini recalled that irruption of eternity into mundane time which took place in Bethlehem. After the rupture, reduced monogrammatically to A.D., it joined an (English) vernacular B.C., Before Christ, that encompassed a serial cosmological history (to which the new science of geology was making signal contributions). We may judge how deep an abyss yawned between Anno Domini and A.D./B.C. by noting that neither the Buddhist nor the Islamic world, even today, imagines any epoch marked as 'Before the Gautama Buddha' or 'Before the Hegira.' Both make uneasy do with the alien monogram B.C.

between about 1815 to 1850, and also for the generation that inherited the independent national states of the Americas, it was no longer possible to 'recapture/The first fine careless rapture' of their revolutionary predecessors. For different reasons and with different consequences, the two groups thus began the process of reading nationalism *genealogically* – as the expression of an historical tradition of serial continuity.

In Europe, the new nationalisms almost immediately began to imagine themselves as 'awakening from sleep,' a trope wholly foreign to the Americas. Already in 1803 (as we have seen in Chapter 5) the young Greek nationalist Adamantios Korais was telling a sympathetic Parisian audience: 'For the first time the [Greek] nation surveys the hideous spectacle of its ignorance and trembles in measuring with the eye the distance separating it from its ancestors' glory.' Here is perfectly exemplified the transition from New Time to Old. 'For the first time' still echoes the ruptures of 1776 and 1789, but Korais's sweet eyes are turned, not ahead to San Martin's future, but back, in trembling, to ancestral glories. It would not take long for this exhilarating doubleness to fade, replaced by a modular, 'continuous' awakening from a chronologically gauged, A.D.-style slumber: a guaranteed return to an aboriginal essence.

Undoubtedly, many different elements contributed to the astonishing popularity of this trope.<sup>21</sup> For present purposes, I would mention only two. In the first place, the trope took into account the sense of parallelism out of which the American nationalisms had been born and which the success of the American nationalist revolutions had greatly reinforced in Europe. It seemed to explain why nationalist movements had bizarrely cropped up in the civilized Old World so obviously *later than in the barbarous New*.<sup>22</sup> Read as late awakening, even if an awakening stimulated from afar, it opened up an immense

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21. As late as 1951, the intelligent Indonesian socialist Lintong Mulia Sitorus could still write that: 'Till the end of the nineteenth century, the coloured peoples still slept soundly, while the whites were busily at work in every field.' *Sedjarah Pergerakan Kebangsaan Indonesia* [History of the Indonesian Nationalist Movement], p. 5.

22. One could perhaps say that these revolutions were, in European eyes, the first really important *political* events that had ever occurred across the Atlantic.

antiquity behind the epochal sleep. In the second place, the trope provided a crucial metaphorical link between the new European nationalisms and language. As observed earlier, the major states of nineteenth-century Europe were vast polyglot polities, of which the boundaries almost never coincided with language-communities. Most of their literate members had inherited from mediaeval times the habit of thinking of certain languages – if no longer Latin, then French, English, Spanish or German – as languages of civilization. Rich eighteenth-century Dutch burghers were proud to speak only French at home; German was the language of cultivation in much of the western Czarist empire, no less than in ‘Czech’ Bohemia. Until late in the eighteenth century no one thought of these languages as belonging to any territorially defined group. But soon thereafter, for reasons sketched out in Chapter 3, ‘uncivilized’ vernaculars began to function politically in the same way as the Atlantic Ocean had earlier done: i.e. to ‘separate’ subjected national communities off from ancient dynastic realms. And since in the vanguard of most European popular nationalist movements were literate people often *unaccustomed* to using these vernaculars, this anomaly needed explanation. None seemed better than ‘sleep,’ for it permitted those intelligentsias and bourgeoisies who were becoming conscious of themselves as Czechs, Hungarians, or Finns to figure their study of Czech, Magyar, or Finnish languages, folklores, and musics as ‘rediscovering’ something deep-down always known. (Furthermore, once one starts thinking about nationality in terms of continuity, few things seem as historically deep-rooted as languages, for which no dated origins can ever be given.)<sup>23</sup>

In the Americas the problem was differently posed. On the one hand, national independence had almost everywhere been internationally acknowledged by the 1830s. It had thus become an inheritance, and, *as an inheritance*, it was compelled to enter a genealogical series. Yet the developing European instrumentalities were not readily available. Language had never been an issue in the

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23. Still, historical depth is not infinite. At some point English vanishes into Norman French and Anglo-Saxon; French into Latin and ‘German’ Frankish; and so on. We shall see below how additional depth of field came to be achieved.

## MEMORY AND FORGETTING

American nationalist movements. As we have seen, it was precisely the sharing with the metropole of a common language (and common religion and common culture) that had made the first national imaginings possible. To be sure, there are some interesting cases where one detects a sort of 'European' thinking early at work. For example, Noah Webster's 1828 (i.e., 'second-generation') *American Dictionary of the English Language* was intended to give an official imprimatur to an American language whose lineage was distinct from that of English. In Paraguay, the eighteenth-century Jesuit tradition of using Guaraní made it possible for a radically non-Spanish 'native' language to become a *national* language, under the long, xenophobic dictatorship of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1814-1840). But, on the whole, any attempt to give historical depth to nationality via linguistic means faced insuperable obstacles. Virtually all the creoles were institutionally committed (via schools, print media, administrative habits, and so on) to European rather than indigenous American tongues. Any excessive emphasis on linguistic lineages threatened to blur precisely that 'memory of independence' which it was essential to retain.

The solution, eventually applicable in both New and Old Worlds, was found in History, or rather History emplotted in particular ways. We have observed the speed with which Chairs in History succeeded the Year One. As Hayden White remarks, it is no less striking that the five presiding geniuses of European historiography were all born within the quarter century following the Convention's rupturing of time: Ranke in 1795, Michelet in 1798, Tocqueville in 1805, and Marx and Burckhardt in 1818.<sup>24</sup> Of the five, it is perhaps natural that Michelet, self-appointed historian of the Revolution, most clearly exemplifies the national imagining being born, for he was the first selfconsciously to write *on behalf* of the dead.<sup>25</sup> The following passage is characteristic:

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24. *Metahistory*, p. 140. Hegel, born in 1770, was already in his late teens when the Revolution broke out, but his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* were only published in 1837, six years after his death.

25. White, *Metahistory*, p. 159.

Oui, chaque mort laisse un petit bien, sa mémoire, et demande qu'on la soigne. Pour celui qui n'a pas d'amis, il faut que le magistrat y supplée. Car la loi, la justice, est plus sûre que toutes nos tendresses oubliées, nos larmes si vite séchées. Cette magistrature, c'est l'Histoire. Et les morts sont, pour dire comme le Droit romain, ces *miserabiles personae* dont le magistrat doit se préoccuper. Jamais dans ma carrière je n'ai pas perdu de vue ce devoir de l'historien. J'ai donné à beaucoup de morts trop oubliés l'assistance dont moi-même j'aurai besoin. Je les ai exhumés pour une seconde vie... Ils vivent maintenant avec nous qui nous sentons leurs parents, leurs amis. Ainsi se fait une famille, une cité commune entre les vivants et les morts.<sup>26</sup>

Here and elsewhere Michelet made it clear that those whom he was exhuming were by no means a random assemblage of forgotten, anonymous dead. They were those whose sacrifices, throughout History, made possible the rupture of 1789 and the selfconscious appearance of the French nation, even when these sacrifices were not understood as such by the victims. In 1842, he noted of these dead: 'Il leur faut un Oedipe qui leur explique leur propre énigme dont ils n'ont pas eu le sens, qui leur apprenne ce que voulaient dire leurs paroles, leurs actes, qu'ils n'ont pas compris.'<sup>27</sup>

This formulation is probably unprecedented. Michelet not only claimed to speak on behalf of large numbers of anonymous dead people, but insisted, with poignant authority, that he could say what they 'really' meant and 'really' wanted, since they themselves 'did not understand.' From then on, the silence of the dead was no obstacle to the exhumation of their deepest desires.

In this vein, more and more 'second-generation' nationalists, in the Americas and elsewhere, learned to speak 'for' dead people with whom it was impossible or undesirable to establish a linguistic connection. This reversed ventriloquism helped to open the way for a selfconscious *indigenismo*, especially in the southern Americas. At the

26. Jules Michelet, *Oeuvres Complètes*, XXI, p. 268, in the preface to volume 2 ('Jusqu'au 18e Brumaire') of his uncompleted *Histoire du XIXe Siècle*. I owe the reference to *Metahistory*, but the translation White uses is unsatisfactory.

27. Cited in Roland Barthes, ed., *Michelet par lui-même*, p. 92. The volume of the *Oeuvres Complètes* containing this quotation has not yet been published.

edge: Mexicans speaking in Spanish 'for' pre-Columbian 'Indian' civilizations whose languages they do not understand.<sup>28</sup> How revolutionary this kind of exhumation was appears most clearly if we contrast it with the formulation of Fermín de Vargas, cited in chapter 2. For where Fermín still thought cheerfully of 'extinguishing' living Indians, many of his political grandchildren became obsessed with 'remembering,' indeed 'speaking for' them, perhaps precisely because they had, by then, so often been *extinguished*.

### THE REASSURANCE OF FRATRICIDE

It is striking that in Michelet's 'second generation' formulations the focus of attention is always the exhumation of people and events which stand in danger of oblivion.<sup>29</sup> He sees no need to think about 'forgetting.' But when, in 1882—more than a century after the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, and eight years after the death of Michelet himself—Renan published his *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, it was precisely the need for forgetting that preoccupied him. Reconsider, for example, the formulation cited earlier in chapter 1:<sup>30</sup>

Or, l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. . . . Tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle.

28. Conversely, in all Mexico there is only one statue of Hernán Cortés. This monument, tucked discreetly away in a niche of Mexico City, was only put up at the end of the 1970s, by the odious regime of José López Portillo.

29. Doubtless because for much of his life he suffered under restored or ersatz legitimacies. His commitment to 1789 and to France is movingly shown by his refusal to swear an oath of loyalty to Louis Napoléon. Abruptly dismissed from his post as National Archivist, he lived in near-poverty till his death in 1874—long enough, however, to witness the mountebank's fall and the restoration of republican institutions.

30. Renan was born in 1823, a quarter of a century after Michelet, and passed much of his youth under the cynically official-nationalist regime of Michelet's persecutor.



At first sight these two sentences may seem straightforward.<sup>31</sup> Yet a few moments reflection reveals how bizarre they actually are. One notices, for example, that Renan saw no reason to explain for his readers what either 'la Saint-Barthélemy' or 'les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle' meant. Yet who but 'Frenchmen,' as it were, would have at once understood that 'la Saint-Barthélemy' referred to the ferocious anti-Huguenot pogrom launched on 24 August 1572 by the Valois dynast Charles IX and his Florentine mother; or that 'les massacres du Midi' alluded to the extermination of the Albigensians across the broad zone between the Pyrenees and the Southern Alps, instigated by Innocent III, one of the guiltier in a long line of guilty popes? Nor did Renan find anything queer about assuming 'memories' in his readers' minds even though the events themselves occurred 300 and 600 years previously. One is also struck by the peremptory syntax of *doit avoir oublié* (not *doit oublier*) – 'obliged already to have forgotten' – which suggests, in the ominous tone of revenue-codes and military conscription laws, that 'already having forgotten' ancient tragedies is a prime contemporary civic duty. In effect, Renan's readers were being told to 'have already forgotten' what Renan's own words assumed that they naturally remembered!

How are we to make sense of this paradox? We may start by observing that the singular *French* noun 'la Saint-Barthélemy' occludes killers and killed – i.e., those Catholics and Protestants who played one local part in the vast unholy Holy War that raged across central and northern Europe in the sixteenth century, and who certainly did not think of themselves cozily together as 'Frenchmen.' Similarly, 'thirteenth-century massacres of the Midi' blurs unnamed victims and assassins behind the pure Frenchness of 'Midi.' No need to remind his readers that most of the murdered Albigensians spoke Provençal or Catalan, and that their murderers came from many parts of Western Europe. The effect of this tropology is to figure episodes in the colossal religious conflicts of mediaeval and early modern Europe as reassuringly fratricidal wars between – who else? – *fellow Frenchmen*. Since we can be confident that, left to themselves, the overwhelming majority of Renan's French contemporaries would

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31. I understood them so in 1983, alas.

never have heard of 'la Saint-Barthélemy' or 'les massacres du Midi,' we become aware of a systematic historiographical campaign, deployed by the state mainly through the state's school system, to 'remind' every young Frenchwoman and Frenchman of a series of antique slaughters which are now inscribed as 'family history.' Having to 'have already forgotten' tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be 'reminded' turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies. (It is instructive that Renan does *not* say that each French citizen is obliged to 'have already forgotten' the Paris Commune. In 1882 its memory was still real rather than mythic, and sufficiently painful to make it difficult to read under the sign of 'reassuring fratricide'.)

Needless to say, in all this there was, and is, nothing especially French. A vast pedagogical industry works ceaselessly to oblige young Americans to remember/forget the hostilities of 1861-65 as a great 'civil' war between 'brothers' rather than between - as they briefly were - two sovereign nation-states. (We can be sure, however, that if the Confederacy had succeeded in maintaining its independence, this 'civil war' would have been replaced in memory by something quite unbrotherly.) English history textbooks offer the diverting spectacle of a great Founding Father whom every schoolchild is taught to call William the Conqueror. The same child is not informed that William spoke no English, indeed could not have done so, since the English language did not exist in his epoch; nor is he or she told 'Conqueror of what?'. For the only intelligible modern answer would have to be 'Conqueror of the English,' which would turn the old Norman predator into a more successful precursor of Napoléon and Hitler. Hence 'the Conqueror' operates as the same kind of ellipsis as 'la Saint-Barthélemy,' to remind one of something which it is immediately obligatory to forget. Norman William and Saxon Harold thus meet on the battlefield of Hastings, if not as dancing partners, at least as brothers.

But it is surely too easy to attribute these reassuring ancient fratricides simply to the icy calculations of state functionaries. At another level they reflect a deep reshaping of the imagination of which the state was barely conscious, and over which it had, and still has, only enigmatic control. In the 1930s people of many nationalities



went to fight in the Iberian peninsula because they viewed it as the arena in which global historical forces and causes were at stake. When the long-lived Franco regime constructed the Valley of the Fallen, it restricted membership in the gloomy necropolis to those who, in its eyes, had died in the world-struggle against Bolshevism and atheism. But, at the state's margins, a 'memory' was already emerging of a 'Spanish' Civil War. Only after the crafty tyrant's death, and the subsequent, startlingly smooth transition to bourgeois democracy - in which it played a crucial role - did this 'memory' become official. In much the same way, the colossal class war that, from 1918 to 1920, raged between the Pamirs and the Vistula came to be remembered/forgotten in Soviet film and fiction as 'our' civil war, while the Soviet state, on the whole, held to an orthodox Marxist reading of the struggle.

In this regard the creole nationalisms of the Americas are especially instructive. For on the one hand, the American states were for many decades weak, effectively decentralized, and rather modest in their educational ambitions. On the other hand, the American societies, in which 'white' settlers were counterposed to 'black' slaves and half-extermiated 'natives,' were internally riven to a degree quite unmatched in Europe. Yet the imagining of that fraternity, without which the reassurance of fratricide can not be born, shows up remarkably early, and not without a curious authentic popularity. In the United States of America this paradox is particularly well exemplified.

In 1840, in the midst of a brutal eight-year war against the Seminoles of Florida (and as Michelet was summoning his Oedipus), James Fenimore Cooper published *The Pathfinder*, the fourth of his five, hugely popular, Leatherstocking Tales. Central to this novel (and to all but the first of its companions) is what Leslie Fiedler called the 'austere, almost inarticulate, but unquestioned love' binding the 'white' woodsman Natty Bumppo and the noble Delaware chieftain Chingachgook ('Chicago!').<sup>32</sup> Yet the Renanesque setting for their

32. See his *Love and Death in the American Novel*, p. 192. Fiedler read this relationship psychologically, and ahistorically, as an instance of American fiction's failure to deal with adult heterosexual love and its obsession with death, incest, and innocent homoeroticism. Rather than a national eroticism, it is, I suspect, an

## MEMORY AND FORGETTING

bloodbrotherhood is not the murderous 1830s but the last forgotten/remembered years of British imperial rule. Both men are figured as 'Americans,' fighting for survival – against the French, their 'native' allies (the 'devilish Mingos'), and treacherous agents of George III.

When, in 1851, Herman Melville depicted Ishmael and Queequeg cozily in bed together at the Spouter Inn ('there, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg'), the noble Polynesian savage was sardonically Americanized as follows:<sup>33</sup>

... certain it was that his head was phrenologically an excellent one. It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of George Washington's head, as seen in popular busts of him. It had the same long regularly graded retreating slope above the brows, which were likewise very projecting, like two long promontories thickly wooded on top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed.

It remained for Mark Twain to create in 1881, well after the 'Civil War' and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the first indelible image of black and white as American 'brothers': Jim and Huck companionably adrift on the wide Mississippi.<sup>34</sup> But the setting is a remembered/forgotten antebellum in which the black is still a slave.

These striking nineteenth-century imaginings of fraternity, emerging 'naturally' in a society fractured by the most violent racial, class and regional antagonisms, show as clearly as anything else that nationalism in the age of Michelet and Renan represented a new form of consciousness – a consciousness that arose when it was no longer possible to experience the nation as new, at the wave-top moment of rupture.

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erotized nationalism that is at work. Male-male bondings in a Protestant society which from the start rigidly prohibited miscegenation are paralleled by male-female 'holy loves' in the nationalist fiction of Latin America, where Catholicism permitted the growth of a large mestizo population. (It is telling that English has had to borrow 'mestizo' from Spanish.)

33. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, p. 71. How the author must have savoured the malignant final phrase!

34. It is agreeable to note that the publication of *Huckleberry Finn* preceded by only a few months Renan's evocation of 'la Saint-Barthélemy.'

## THE BIOGRAPHY OF NATIONS

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to 'remember' the consciousness of childhood. How many thousands of days passed between infancy and early adulthood vanish beyond direct recall! How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you. The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated. Against biology's demonstration that every single cell in a human body is replaced over seven years, the narratives of autobiography and biography flood print-capitalism's markets year by year.

These narratives, like the novels and newspapers discussed in Chapter 2, are set in homogeneous, empty time. Hence their frame is historical and their setting sociological. This is why so many autobiographies begin with the circumstances of parents and grandparents, for which the autobiographer can have only circumstantial, textual evidence; and why the biographer is at pains to record the calendrical, A.D. dates of two biographical events which his or her subject can never remember: birth-day and death-day. Nothing affords a sharper reminder of this narrative's modernity than the opening of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. For the Evangelist gives us an austere list of thirty males successively begetting one another, from the Patriarch Abraham down to Jesus Christ. (Only once is a woman mentioned, not because she is a begetter, but because she is a non-Jewish Moabite). No dates are given for any of Jesus's forebears, let alone sociological, cultural, physiological or political information about them. This narrative

## MEMORY AND FORGETTING

style (which also reflects the rupture-in-Bethlehem become memory) was entirely reasonable to the sainted genealogist because he did not conceive of Christ as an historical 'personality,' but only as the true Son of God.

As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity – product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century – engenders the need for a narrative of 'identity.' The task is set for Michelet's magistrate. Yet between narratives of person and nation there is a central difference of employment. In the secular story of the 'person' there is a beginning and an end. She emerges from parental genes and social circumstances onto a brief historical stage, there to play a role until her death. After that, nothing but the penumbra of lingering fame or influence. (Imagine how strange it would be, today, to end a life of Hitler by observing that on 30 April 1945 he proceeded straight to Hell). Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural.<sup>35</sup> Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography can not be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' – towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam. This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present. World War II begets World War I; out of Sedan comes Austerlitz; the ancestor of the Warsaw Uprising is the state of Israel.

Yet the deaths that structure the nation's biography are of a special kind. In all the 1,200 pages of Fernand Braudel's awesome *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* no mention is ever made of 'la Saint-Barthélemy,' though it occurred at almost exactly the midpoint of Felipe II's reign. For Braudel, the deaths that matter are those myriad anonymous events, which, aggregated and averaged into secular mortality rates, permit him to chart the slow-changing conditions of life for millions of anonymous human beings of whom the last question asked is their nationality.

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35. For such apocalypses the neologism 'genocide' was quite recently coined.

IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

From Braudel's remorselessly accumulating cemeteries, however, the nation's biography snatches, against the going mortality rate, exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts. But, to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own.'

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