We Need New Diasporas

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"For the first time, more blacks are coming to the United States from Africa than during the slave trade." So begins Sam Roberts, chronicling recent African migrations to the US, but suggestively framing the phenomenon by invoking the history of slavery ("More Africans"). Implying a possible redemption of the earlier coerced movement, it is as if the voluntary migration of Africans fulfills a providential destiny, with African subjects now inhabiting, and in doing so rejuvenating, the familiar story of coming to the US. Noting that one in three blacks in New York City is now foreign-born, Roberts suggests that this movement "is already redefining what it means to be African-American." In his follow-up essay from 2014, Roberts puts the figure of legal black African immigrants at one million between 2000 and 2010 ("Influx"). He then wonders what this will mean culturally as these new immigrants identify as African or African American, and how these changing demographics will shape questions of affirmative action, reparations for slavery, and intraracial conflicts based on ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences.

That Roberts situates the issue of new African immigrants within and against the frame of Atlantic slavery is not surprising, given that most models of diaspora have tended to prioritize a similar setting. From Paul Gilroy's focus on the memory of slavery for the descendants of a black Atlantic to frequent efforts to use Countee Cullen's plangent query, "what is Africa to me?," as the pivot for thinking diaspora in relation to racial heritage or memory, to journeys organized around roots and return narratives, diaspora

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has largely been understood in terms of the African American experience. But Taiye Selasi tells a very different story of the migration and circulation of Africans in the world, in which the history of Atlantic slavery finds no mention: "Starting in the 60's, the young, gifted and broke left Africa in pursuit of higher education and happiness abroad. . . . Some three decades later this scattered tribe of pharmacists, physicists, physicians (and the odd polygamist) has set up camp around the globe." As she continues, "somewhere between the 1988 release of *Coming to America* and the 2001 crowning of a Nigerian Miss World, the general image of young Africans in the West transmorphed from goofy to gorgeous" ("Bye-Bye Barbar" 529). Refusing to choose any one place as home or to see itinerancy as tragic or alienating—the figure Selasi terms the "Afropolitan"—insists on multiple ways of being African. Selasi accordingly emphasizes complexity and situatedness: "To 'be' Nigerian is to belong to a passionate nation; to 'be' Yoruba, to be heir to a spiritual depth; to 'be' American, to ascribe to a cultural breadth; to 'be' British, to pass customs quickly" (530).

Selasi, along with such writers as Chris Abani, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, Teju Cole, Dinaw Mengestu, and Binyavanga Wainaina, belongs to a generation that heralds an African literary renaissance while insisting that new migrations demand new conceptualizations of diaspora. Most of the prominent theories of diaspora over the past two decades have been galvanized by the aspirations and contradictions of the journeys of a W. E. B. Du Bois or a Richard Wright.[1] The new visibility of African writers is a welcome antidote to such tendencies. Yet to open up the script of diaspora itself, we still need more multifaceted histories and models of what such visibility entails or enables. For Selasi, her blackness must be marked as different from a more visible and normative African American one: "Until I got to high school, my world consisted of white people and *Nigerian* people. I simply didn't think in terms of white and black. In fact, it wasn't even white people and Nigerian people. It was Nigerian and *other*" ("From That Stranded" 158–59). Moreover, both her parents were disaffiliated from an African American identity: "My mother doesn't call herself black. My father has spent his entire life as a sort of conscientious objector to American culture" (159).

In moving away from the concerns of previous generations—anticolonial resistance, the clash of tradition and modernity, alienation and exile—the writers chronicling contemporary African migrations testify to something novel happening in the twenty-first century. They resist received notions of what constitutes African literature, even as they open up numerous critical possibilities for the

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study of diaspora, expanding previous geographies and weaving together race and class with location. By inviting the appreciation of varied histories and geographies of African migrations while rejecting a linear path toward immigrant assimilation in the US, their emphasis on the varied routes of migration that have generated the new diaspora helpfully counters the hegemony of any single genealogy of blackness.

Scholarly literature on the new diaspora emphasizes three key differences from earlier forms of migration: it is largely voluntary, rather than coerced; it is connected to globalization; and it results from the failure of the postcolonial state.[2] In literary terms, however, it is the second that resonates most fully with the writers from the new African diaspora. Critiques of the global African novel swiftly emerged, some lamenting the recourse to cosmopolitan privilege and wishing for a return to the utopian solidarities of the pan-African in a kind of Bandung nostalgia, others contending that these novels retrofit for neoliberal times a commonplace story of immigrant assimilation. Leftist critics are also dissatisfied that these global African novels are too readily comprehensible, making no aesthetic or philosophical demands on the reader. The editors of *n + 1* bemoan the rise of "world lite" literature, which prizes cosmopolitan ease over socialist principles, cultural hybridity over a concern with social justice. Nostalgic for difficult socialist novels from the 1960s—about the challenges of getting water in a remote village, or a railway strike—such critics dismiss the moment of the Afropolitan as a symptom of neoliberalism as the global turn leaves behind the Manichean framework of the postcolonial or the pan-African. For Tim Parks, these novels are banal and belated entrants into an already exhausted narrative. In contrast to such accounts are the celebratory ones, which read these fictions as yet another page in the story of US exceptionalism, transforming migration into a question of cultural assimilation alone.

Challenging such readings, I show how the literature of the new diaspora destabilizes national or ethnic categories, something that is now routine, just as it demands more complex scales of comparison and analysis sufficient to navigate local, regional, and global formations. Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007) refuses an opposition between cosmopolitan ease and immigrant trauma, providing more expansive and flexible frames to understand migrations not bound by the history of slavery. Even novels received either as echoing an immigrant story of assimilation or reinforcing a racialized narrative of poverty porn, like Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), forge a path beyond these binaries, insisting on the intertwined nature of race and class. Finally, Abani's *GraceLand* (2004) stages an uncertain relation to a

range of past histories—of colonialism, patriarchy, and slavery—along with a sharp look at the cacophony of a globalized Nigeria, charting distinctive diasporic itineraries as often through reading world literature as through actual travel. This kind of reading beyond the frame of Atlantic slavery to fathom contemporary experiences of trauma consequently enables a reckoning with the aftermath of colonialism, the dysfunction of the postcolonial state, and changing conditions of precarious labor in a neoliberal world. In moving away from well-worn frames of racial ancestry or heritage, such novels present fresh ways to conceive of race and racial formation in a global frame, as well as innovative forms of representing black humanity, agency, and futurity in the literature of migration and diaspora.

1. The African Immigrant in the Global Era

Precisely because such fictions depart from expected ways of narrating migration and alienation, most accounts of the new diaspora locate it as proof of the obsolescence of prior models—nationalist, black Atlantic, and Third Worldist alike. Often, the single story (to paraphrase Adichie's useful 2009 warning) that is told about the new diaspora is that of friction between African Americans and Africans. For many scholars trying to grasp how African Americans triangulate the new relations between Africans and Americans, the shift from earlier models of diaspora is complete as conflict replaces imagined solidarity. Louis Chude-Sokei's simplistic, somewhat nihilistic reading focuses on an "overall sense of brokenness or incommensurability, of perhaps failed expectations, intra-racial threat or cross-cultural competition," something he sees as "paradigmatic" of our moment (70). Time and again, the visibility of the African story is seen as somehow detracting from the African American one, as if the diaspora were some kind of zero-sum game, where only one community could assume center stage in a kind of Darwinian free-for-all. In other words, commentators fear that the newfound visibility of the African story somehow detracts from the African American one, as African immigrants become the US's latest model minority. Their entrepreneurship, habits of industry, and cultural values of hard work and discipline seem only to rebuke African Americans and blame them for their continuing subordination or malaise.[3] Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) has prompted the best examples of this kind of diasporic melancholy, insofar as African gain must mean African American loss. Even as the novel undermines US perceptions about Africa, it also chastises black and white Americans alike for their shared "American tribalisms" (187).

As one African American character observes, revealing a schism between African American and African immigrant relationships to the US, Ifemelu can write her blog, *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*, "because she's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about" (337).

In part, such one-dimensional readings arise because US cultural histories have usually treated immigration and slavery as two distinct stories, and their collision here presages a number of conflicts and challenges to expected ways of narrating both America and Africa. Most clearly, it signals a distinct shift in conceptions of diaspora imagined in terms of global solidarity or an "identity of passions," to use Ralph Ellison's resonant phrase (263). Any notion of diaspora as a shared identity or politics appears as merely anachronistic, a nostalgic or romantic remnant, as the dream of pan-African freedom seems broken. If once it was easy to assume some sense of commonality—no matter the real historical differences, at least as an aspiration in black transnationalist encounters—the discourse of the new diaspora announces the obsolescence of such freedom dreams as certain scenes recur: an African immigrant being mugged by an African American, an African being blamed for slavery by an African American, or being commended by a white American for a superior work ethic or lack of a victim mentality. The fear that new immigrants will take resources away from the descendants of slaves, as well as the specter of African blame for the slave trade, ensure conflict and competition as a substitute for shared notions of blackness.

For instance, Teju Cole's Nigerian-German protagonist Julius flinches at any attempt at connection in *Open City* (2011). Julius is equally puzzled by an elderly black veteran celebrating his achievements as a black doctor as he is traumatized after a violent attack from two young men who had earlier nodded to Julius in a "gesture of mutual respect based on our being young, black, male; based, in other words, on our being 'brothers'" (212).[4] Adichie further illuminates such conflicts even in ordinary social interactions in *Americanah*. A white woman expresses her appreciation for her Nigerian doctor and Ugandan student, who "didn't have all those issues" of the African American student in the class, to Ifemelu, the novel's assertive protagonist and a Nigerian student in the US. Ifemelu's response is clear: "Maybe when the African American's father was not allowed to vote because he was black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament or studying at Oxford" (207). Further pressed to explain, she continues: "I just think it's a simplistic comparison to make. You need to understand a bit more about history" (208). But earlier in the novel, such nuance escapes the four black

students as they debate the censorship of the "n" word during a screening of *Roots*. Quickly the conversation devolves into "if you all hadn't sold us, we wouldn't be talking about any of this" (170). Even the fact that the college has two black student associations—"African Americans go to the Black Student Union and Africans go to the African Students Association" (172)—testifies to the splintering of uniform notions of blackness, unmediated by place or ethnicity.

Rather than engage with these fraught dynamics of intimacy and estrangement, the response to these fictions of the so-called African literary renaissance has been to slot these as variants of the immigrant plot. Doing so disregards the specificity of each novel as any classification does, but, more importantly, also misses much of what is new about them. For instance, Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, rightly called "a great African novel, a great Washington novel and a great American novel," maps the change from earlier frames for thinking about migration and displacement to ones more apt for globalization (Nixon). Haunted by his guilt for his father's death during the Ethiopian Red Terror of 1977–1978, the protagonist, Sepha Stephanos, gives up the dreams of an immigrant life of reinvention in the US, choosing instead to open a store in a "poor, black, cheap, and sunk into a depression" Logan Circle (Mengestu 35), wanting nothing more than to "read quietly, and alone" (40). Refusing a recognizable narrative of immigrant hope, Sepha notes that "I did not come to America to find a better life. I came here running and screaming with the ghosts of an old one firmly attached to my back" (41). For Sepha, Washington, DC, layers onto Addis, resembling it "if not always in substance, then at least in form" (173), as a portrait of Frederick Douglass on a building reminds him of a picture of Haile Selassie on the walls of the Capitol, and the proximity of the White House suggests a promise for change that soon becomes a guarantee of disappointment. His uncle's letters to Presidents Carter and Reagan signal the war-torn refugee's naiveté as well as the heartbreaking losses of a generation of people "for whom nothing is left of their home country" (123).

The novel's plot turns on the arrival of a white woman, Judith, and her mixed-race daughter and their elaborate renovation of a "shining big house" in a poor and decaying neighborhood, an arrival that catalyzes Sepha out of his guilt-ridden despair even as it clarifies to him his in-between position in relation to his African American neighbors and Judith (209). While he is not one of "these people"—the white gentrifiers—he has also "never really been part of Logan Circle either" (189). Just as the novel provides both a subtle account of the economic dynamics of gentrification in DC and a nuanced look at the longing for home that characterizes the experiences of Ethiopian immigrants, it also delivers something else: a

way to think beyond the polarized framework of trauma on the one hand and cosmopolitanism on the other.

This becomes clear in Sepha's friendship with two other African immigrants—renamed "Ken the Kenyan" and "Joe from the Congo" (1). Joseph, a waiter, believes that "All of the marches in the world won't change anything anymore. We were at our best in the sixties. Africa was free. America was free. Everyone was marching to something" (220). He is forever working on a cycle of poems that would invoke Dante but must "tell the entire history of the Congo, from the rubber plantations to the first coup. Nothing can be left out" (170–71). For Joseph, Dante's *Inferno* provides the most perfect metaphor for an African's life (also providing the title of the novel), since Africans live "Hell everyday with only glimpses of heaven in between" (100). But as Kenneth, the engineer, mocks him, nothing fails to be a metaphor for Africa for him. In turn, Joseph accuses Kenneth of "being a perfect immigrant," "the perfect house nigger" (182), to which Kenneth responds: "Which one is it, Joseph? The perfect immigrant or the perfect slave? You can't have it both ways" (182). Indeed, the three friends inhabit neither role well, indicating the need for more elastic frames to understand these new experiences of displacement and their relation to a variety of histories.

Even readers who recognize the novelty of this story insist on resorting to inadequate generalizations. Caren Irr, for instance, views such "African migration fiction" as a conscious shift from "themes of cultural loss and traumatic history" popularized by Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), with a focus on "racial wounds" (50). Seeing Sepha as an immigrant melancholic, Irr reads the novel, somewhat confusingly, as "anti-ideological" but "pro-political" (53). But the novel can only be read in posttraumatic terms if the only traumatic template allowed to a black writer is that of slavery and its afterlife.[5] Historical traumas of postcolonial Africa rather than transatlantic slavery plague Sepha and his friends, and it is difficult to render the two analogous without some careful parsing of the differences.

With a 20-year-old map of Africa on the wall of Sepha's failing grocery store, the three friends play a grim game, resolutely testifying to the histories that brought them there: "Name a dictator and then guess the year and country. . . . No matter how many we name, there are always more, the names, dates, and years multiplying as fast as we can memorize them so that at times we wonder, half-jokingly, if perhaps we ourselves aren't somewhat responsible" (8). Even as they parody the dream of African freedom in this macabre game, their friendship also evokes a pan-African tradition, albeit in ambiguous fashion. The difference from earlier accounts of liberation focused on decolonization and nation-building is clear, as is the

anatomy of dictatorship on the continent. But in a friendship built on the recognition of these failed aspirations, the three African migrants poignantly neither break away from the traumatic past via repression, nor do they merely replicate the life of the homeland in exile. Nor do they embrace a liberal narrative of reinvention or remain stuck in melancholy. The horror of the dictator game they play should not hide its creativity—itself a form of reckoning with an ever-present history. To see this novel as a turn away from the model of trauma, as Irr does, is to miss many of these tensions, flattening the subtlety of the novel's representation of loss, and its navigation of the overlapping presence of the past in the present and the future.

At the same time, where Selasi emphasizes easy mobility, Mengestu's characters appear haunted, as ambivalent about the place they have left as they are about their present home, evoking not just the split identity or dual allegiance common to immigrant narratives, but an unease about navigating racial formations in a world shaped by an experience (of slavery) they do not share. The burden of the traumatic past and the dead-end future makes any mobility apart from endless, aimless loops around the circles of DC impossible. The circles of Dante's hell evoke the recursive patterns of immigrant lives, which neither accede to celebratory narratives of Afropolitanism nor embrace the possibilities of immigrant reinvention.

The difference of such an approach to migration emerges most sharply when contrasted to a paradigmatic diasporic novel like Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1993). Phillips begins the story of the "many-tongued chorus" of the diaspora with the primal moment of the sale of children into slavery by a mythicized African father, and concludes with the father listening to the voices of the survivors across "the far bank of the river" who are "a long way from home" (1, 235, 236). The father tells them: "There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return" (237). Phillips himself (a poster child for a transnational wandering that yields no certainties and only encounters ambiguities, fluid identities, and contested states) explores all the points of the Atlantic triangle that have formed him—Africa, Europe, and the Americas—ultimately to discover of each place: "I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place" (*A New World Order* 6). Even as he searches for "a plural notion of home" (304), he clearly situates the beginning of his journey in slavery: "All journeys have a beginning. Mine began on the west coast of Africa in a slave fortress" (305). Although his literal biography begins with his birth in St. Kitts, West Indies, and subsequent migration to Britain, for Phillips, the primal moment of origin of the diasporic subject remains the sale into slavery in Africa. He also imagines the end of his life with distinct reference to the history of slavery, asking that his ashes should be scattered "in

the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America" (304). Rather than display a comparable "high anxiety of belonging" located in an Atlantic world, the writers of the new diaspora chart other itineraries: some involve a return home, like Adichie's Ifemelu; others choose to grapple with the precarious existence of an immigrant life, like Bulawayo's Darling, with little room even to acknowledge feelings of alienation and hyphenation; and still others, like Abani's Elvis in *GraceLand*, are poised between two equally frightening worlds, with no resolution in sight.

2. Poverty Pornstar

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* similarly restages debates over the reception of African literature in a changed twenty-first-century landscape via 10-year-old Darling, who lives in a shanty-town called Paradise and dreams of escaping to the US. Darling's journey from Paradise to what she calls "Destroyed-Michigan," or Detroit, unfolds alongside the larger story of social and economic collapse in Zimbabwe, with forced displacement, hunger, unemployment, sexual violence, and the specter of AIDS dogging her steps and her friends'. Alternately lyrical and gothic, Bulawayo sprinkles the novel with dark humor, sarcasm, and tragic musings, illuminating the contradictions of life in her native Zimbabwe during the lost decade of the 2000s.

The response to the novel and to the prize-winning short story ("Hitting Budapest") that preceded it has been largely twofold. The first approach views it as a customary narrative of US immigration. Indeed, Bulawayo herself encourages this interpretation in the reading group guide included at the end of the novel, inviting the implied reader to see that "Darling is Zimbabwean, but it is my hope that she is also Mexican and Indian and British, that she is from anywhere else where people live and hope and dream and leave. I hope she speaks to you" (4). Inspired by what she calls "Africa and Africanness" as she may be, Bulawayo also shows that Zimbabwe's story is neither exceptional nor exorbitant, but allegorical of various kinds of contemporary migrations, all of which raise the question of belonging and being at home in evocative (though perhaps somewhat conventional) ways. Bulawayo imagines a transnational community of migrants—from Sri Lanka, Mexico, India, Sudan, Ethiopia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Niger—who all become friends of the Zimbabwean migrants, since "like us, they had left their homelands behind. . . . We had never seen their countries but we knew about everything in those pictures; we were not altogether strangers" (245).

The novel's occasional shift to the collective voice further emphasizes the desire to speak to a broad story of contemporary migration, where displacements often mean that "we were no longer people; we were now illegals" (244).

The second approach has centered on how Africa emerges in the twenty-first century in the Western media through the language of atrocity. Critics worry that novels like *We Need New Names* cement a racialized and neocolonial narrative of the dysfunction of the postcolony by parading well-worn tropes like children without the supervision of adults, doing warped things like staging a mock-abortion for their 11-year-old friend whose grandfather raped and impregnated her.[6] After all, Bulawayo races us through a veritable litany of what has come to be known as poverty porn, a depressingly familiar narrative of African atrocity—featuring rape, incest, hunger, suicide, and AIDS, but also absent or sadistic adults, along with children seemingly free of any authority or supervision, wise beyond their years, and all too accustomed to brutality, so much so that their childhood games involve throwing stones at a corpse, reenacting a brutal murder of a democracy activist, or trying to perform an abortion on a pregnant friend based on their memory of the TV show *ER*" As if this wasn't enough, when the novel shifts to the US, within a span of a few pages, it covers the threat of a school shooting by a disturbed child, the hanging of a second child bullied as a freak, an extended scene featuring three teenaged friends watching a variety of often violent pornography only to be brought up short by a video of circumcision, and a dispute among the friends over Ebonics and Nigerian 419 scams. There is little pause for reflection as the novel hurtles through these overcrowded scenarios at an unrelenting pace.

Reading this pace not as a challenge to credibility or a form of bad realism, but as symptomatic of the accelerated pace of life and the compressed attention span of contemporary consumers of culture, I propose that Bulawayo finds a way to write about trauma without satisfying voyeurism. Although some discussions, especially on literary blogs featuring Caine Prize–nominated stories, questioned the novel on these grounds, the sheer power of Darling's wry, world-weary, precocious, biting, and self-absorbed narrative voice suggests that *We Need New Names* invites us to complicate a reflex reading of this sort.[7] Bulawayo's characters, however disempowered, speak with an immediacy that removes them from a static or sentimentalized role of the victim. For instance, Darling and her friends play games like "Find Bin Laden" (290) and "Country-Game" (where "everybody wants to be certain countries," like "the U.S.A. and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece," but "nobody wants to be the rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia,

like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in—who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart" [51]). They also invent a brutal game about the murder of a democracy activist Bornfree, prompting the two BBC journalists to probe with a mixture of horror and voyeurism "what kind of game were you just playing" (146). Invoking the generation that was born free but that found itself without options, the name is, of course, grimly ironic. As the children mimic the violence of adults, miming an abortion, a break-in, or a murder, all historical events to which Bulawayo alludes acquire the raw intensity and limited attention span of child's play, indexing how much of African land and resources have become games for Western powers and how African leaders have continued the exploitation after decolonization.

We Need New Names interrupts itself at regular intervals with explicit critiques of various outsider figures: a privileged young woman visiting from London whose clean feet surprise the children or an NGO aid worker who responds to Darling's "thank you much" with a shocked silence, leading her to wonder "like maybe I just barked" (57). The children quickly realize that even though the aid workers "are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them" (56). The novel exposes the limits of their humanitarian stance, warning potential readers of the pitfalls of voyeuristic appreciation of suffering when it is divorced from larger social and historical contexts or from any meaningful attempt to engage the victim. Bulawayo satirizes the "NGO people" who come in a truck with random gifts but insist on taking pictures as a reward for their transaction: "they don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn't do it; they just take the pictures anyway, take and take" (54). The pregnant Chipo draws the most attention, leading Darling to comment on her newfound celebrity: "it's like she has become Paris Hilton, it's all just click-flash-flash-click" (55). Similarly, the young woman with a necklace of Africa in the opening chapter, who is well fed, clean, and safe, assumes that the children are enamored of her camera, and proceeds to photograph them: she doesn't realize that they are looking at the food in her hand instead. In their refusal to be fixed as objects of her photographic gaze, which in turn highlights her blindness to their actual needs, the children reveal the limits of an outsider's ability to empathize or even to really see what is in front of her eyes.

Moreover, the novel's structure itself—especially in terms of temporality—critiques the mechanics of relation between an outsider and insider or between the West and Africa. The shift to a collective voice, the way that the novel replicates the temporal impatience and optimism of a child (who gets bored easily, is always ready with a mean comment, is shocked quickly but astonishingly

resilient), and the way that one incident relates to the other not only departs from a conventional narrative of growth or development of a Bildungsroman, but intriguingly suggests that history is neither sequential nor reliable. The promised transformation or real change will not come, and the past cannot be left behind, as Darling keeps finding her friends appear in her imagination in the American mall, thus interrupting her present in spectral fashion, and realizes that they are always a phone or Skype call away. The sole voice speaking the language of antiracist resistance to "white vultures," that of Tshaka Zulu, can only emerge through his mental illness, a voice that Darling finds incomprehensible: "it's like listening to a skipping record" (274). The novel's sense of progress may itself be seen as a kind of skipping record, with omissions of moments that would be necessary for a novel with conventional realist claims. Darling's mother and father, for instance, sporadically fade and reappear, and readers never do learn how she migrates to the US. The novel's conclusion, especially, seems to loop back to the beginning—with a scene of the death of a dog under the wheels of a truck carrying bread—seemingly randomly, and is difficult to read symbolically as a resolution of the fictionalized events.

If the novel challenges rather than reinstates racialized narratives of African atrocity through such mechanisms of internalized critique, it also expands conventional accounts of US immigration. Bulawayo has said that "this image of a kid sitting on the remains of his bulldozed home—I just couldn't get him out of my head" inspired her novel. Starting in 2005, the government program Operation Murambatsvina ("Clear out Rubbish") destroyed entire neighborhoods in a few hours, leaving more than 300,000 people homeless. Although many critics have selectively either lauded the sections of the novel set in Zimbabwe or those in the US, Bulawayo insists that we read the two stories of internal displacement and external migration together. The novel shows the contrast between the two locations clearly: hyperinflation in Zimbabwe strips the currency of its meaning, while overdevelopment in the US means that no real suffering is possible (as Darling mocks the Occupy protestors and the anorexic daughter in the house she cleans). Unlike *Americanah*, interracial marriages are for green cards, not love, and there is no hope of any romance—white or black—that would rescue Darling from her financially precarious life.

Although critics have tried to read *We Need New Names* within the Afropolitan discourse, arguing that "Darling and her fellow displaced residents of Paradise [are] true Afropolitans" (Eze 117), the novel refuses to celebrate migration, centering poverty and economic vulnerability as key facets of the characters' lives. To be sure, its critique of the figure who leaves home is so powerful that even

Darling is not exempt from it. When Darling describes watching a BBC program about the suffering of the people to Chipo, her friend's response is brutal:

> You think watching on BBC means you know what is going on? No, you don't, my friend, it's the wound that knows the texture of the pain; it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering, so it's us who have a right to even say anything about that or anything about anybody. (287)

When Darling asserts a right to her country, Chipo continues: "You left it, Darling, my dear, you left the house burning and you have the guts to tell me, in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country?" (288).

Undercutting Darling's claim to the home she has left behind, Bulawayo further highlights uneven encounters over racialization in diaspora. Darling forms a kinship with other blacks in the US, befriending both an African American and a Nigerian girl. But friendly banter among the three teenaged girls quickly becomes a dispute with accusations of being unable to speak English (one girl speaks Ebonics), orchestrating 419 scams, or singing "tribal stuff" (222), showing how no appeal to diasporic unity will suffice. Bulawayo tells her readers that Darling's "story is my attempt to marry Zimbabwe with America, to tell a story rooted in both worlds. But even in fiction, this marriage is a difficult one" ("Reading Group Guide" 4). Neither narrative uses Atlantic slavery as a touchstone. Instead, Darling's story invites a rethinking of the diasporic paradigm altogether, away from the slave sublime, or from the question of heritage—the paradigm captured in Cullen's famous unresolved question I invoked earlier: what is Africa to me? By refusing to imagine diaspora solely as a conversation among Africans and African Americans, *We Need New Names* makes us reckon with class as a key factor in the lives of African immigrants to the US. Anytime a seeming cultural difference between the US and Zimbabwe crops up (how to discipline a spoiled child, for instance, or perceptions of beauty and body image), the novel invariably shifts to the economic realities of poverty, reminding us that Darling is busy "cleaning the toilets or bagging groceries" and is not likely to reach middle-class or legal immigrant status (253).

When compared to another Zimbabwean coming-of-age story, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the differences in historical moment become even clearer. If Tambu had to grow, physically and emotionally, further and further away from the homestead to escape the patriarchy of her home and of colonial missionary Christianity, and thus to learn to write her story along with that

of the four women in her life, Darling, who has already left behind her mother and been taken up by her aunt, cannot benefit from that upwardly mobile trajectory of the anticolonial era. Darling only finds in the US another kind of subordinated position in the economy of precarity. Moreover, while both novels link the personal development of the protagonist to historical change, Bulawayo makes little reference to historical dates or persons, with almost no mention of colonial rule at all. It is difficult to understand Darling's journey without reckoning with its complex relation to such predecessors as *Nervous Conditions* and its refusal to cohere as a Bildungsroman in favor of the "skipping record" of history, as if Bulawayo's novel were unaware of the possibility of co-optation. The author refuses sentiment and positions the reader as a voyeur and outsider, eliciting neither pity nor horror nor even easy empathy. Indeed, the novel itself may be seen as commenting on the empathetic abilities and limits of readers, as well as drawing attention to the conditions of production, circulation, and reception of African literature.

In proposing and rejecting various reading models, *We Need New Names* may easily be read as an allegory of interpretation. When Darling reads *Jane Eyre* (1847), the classic Bildungsroman of feminist self-consolidation, she says that "the long meandering sentences and everything just bored me and that Jane just kept irritating me with her stupid decisions and the whole lame story made me want to throw the book away" (228).[8] Indeed, all kinds of media compete with books—pornography on the Internet, T-shirts with Cornell University or Save Darfur on them, Morgan Freeman playing Nelson Mandela, and maps of Africa becoming either necklaces or ivory slabs—affording a steady commentary on how images of Africa circulate and are commodified. In evoking the internal rhythms of children talking to each other, or managing the puzzling demands of adults themselves at loss in a time of crisis, the novel sounds the refrain "even a tree knows" or "even a brick knows," indicating that there is no need for interpretation (54–55).

Bulawayo thus escapes both poverty porn and the immigrant story of reinvention, connecting Zimbabwe to the US by showing us vulnerability and precarity in each location, foregrounding inequality in the place of easy mobility, and asking for new names over new nations. In doing so, she helps underline the ways in which neither a focus on trauma nor the Afropolitan is adequate to the new African narrative. Neither do notions of an afterlife of slavery or Gilroy's idea of the "slave sublime" as the form for representing "living memory" seem appropriate (187). To fully reckon with such fictions, conceptions of diaspora drawn solely from the history and memory of slavery will need stretching and reshaping. To that end, I explicate the need for this dynamic through Abani's 2004 novel,

GraceLand, which showcases the critical possibilities opened up when we are attuned to the ethics of reading across time and place. In *GraceLand*, the local and the global intermesh with abandon, and a new worlding of African literature becomes possible.

3. Elvis Has Left Lagos

As a novel about the vivid fantasies of a 16-year-old child in Lagos living in a slum with his dejected and broken father, mourning the death of his beloved mother who named him Elvis after her favorite singer, and drawn into the informal economy of drug trafficking and the organ trade and threatened by the military government, *GraceLand* seems immediately relevant to this study. Because the novel ends with Elvis at the airport, seemingly set to escape Lagos for the US, *GraceLand* is often read as marking the shift in African literature from the national to the global. But reading it in relation to Atlantic slavery, as several recent scholars have done, underscores the problems with the hegemony of Atlantic frames of analysis. Veronica Hendrick sees the novel as connecting Atlantic slavery to its story through an emphasis on indebtedness, as a "system of financial and social debt . . . connects modern situations to the slave trade" (93). Characters assume the position of the slave trader, the local slave-trading middleman, and the human cargo. The Colonel, for example, is the trader, Redemption the local middleman, and Elvis the cargo; or the World Bank is the trader, the Colonel is the local leader, and the King is cargo (94). Such an ingenious formulation leads Hendrick to see the novel as condemning global cultural influences, like Elvis's love for Elvis Presley, and thus to theorize any nonnative interaction as a form of cultural invasion. Abani, in this way, putatively laments the loss of tradition and kinship structures of the parents' generation, in the wake of which such corruption proliferates. What this reading obscures is any sense of military rule as a modern phenomenon, while it also misses the critique of tradition that forms such a powerful part of *GraceLand*. Hendrick's interpretation also requires seeing slavery itself in a fully dehistoricized fashion. Similarly, Erin Fehskens reads Elvis as repeating the path of Jamaican maroons (slaves who fled the plantations and formed hinterland communities in the early eighteenth century), seeing him as "a kind of enslaved subject" (92). Like the maroons', Elvis's journey becomes one of resistance, and he emerges as a black Atlantic hero of the kind that Gilroy so influentially envisioned. Elvis appears in flight from an oppressive Nigerian masculinity, sensitized by his revulsion at becoming part of

the trade of human organs and bodies, and thus heroic in the forms of agency he displays.

But *GraceLand*, as many scholars have shown, clearly jettisons the binary of the West vs. Africa, or oppressor-oppressed, or even of resistance and subordination. Highlighting the ethics of survival in the slum of a megacity, Abani shows Lagos as a place deeply rooted in a local and global culture, cross-hatched by the diasporic but not subsumed by it, with few possibilities for heroism. Since its publication in 2004, scholars have appreciated Abani's precise evocation of Lagos as a megacity continually pollinated by global culture; situated the novel as part of the third generation of Nigerian literature, which tends to turn to the US; pondered the novel's ambivalent politics of gender and sexuality; and mined it for its representation of the exigencies of life in a slum.[9] American, Indian, and Yugoslavian films mingle here, as do novels from across the globe, making it difficult to separate Ellison or Baldwin from Dickens or Dostoevsky. Race appears both as indigenous and imported: what emerges most powerfully is the creative adaptation of foreign culture, not any form of brainwashing. For instance, when watching Hollywood Westerns, Elvis and his friends rename all the characters Actor or John Wayne.

GraceLand maps the historical transition from country to city as its characters move from Afikpo in the 1970s to Lagos in the 1980s, without recourse to stark contrasts, as both the global city and the rural space are equally steeped in mass culture. Indeed, Elvis's fantasy world acknowledges something of the texture of contemporary media-saturated desires and longings everywhere. In tune with Abani's claim that Nigeria is "the most Western black country in Africa" (just like Los Angeles is a "Third World City" [Timberg]), binaries of First and Third World, or Western and non-Western, do not suffice. Reading the brutal excesses of the military as repetitions of the slave master's whipping only conceals the analysis of modern forms of power, where technology, media, and aesthetics combine in producing death and terror. Hence, the colonel who photographs his corpses sometimes cuts off an arm or leg to capture a better image in his search for the beauty of death. Focusing on historical slavery as the interpretive frame further obscures forms of power based on oil, insofar as *GraceLand* documents the transformation of Nigeria into a modern petro-economy.

Readings focused on slavery also miss the critique of tradition that forms such a powerful part of the novel. The novel's concern with the process of inheritance of cultural traditions and genealogies emerges in its extensive use of epigraphs, detailing in an impassive, sonorous voice the ceremonies of the Igbo rituals featuring the Kola nut as the paternal inheritance, as well as recipes for dishes and healing concoctions suggesting a maternal inheritance. Placing

GraceLand within ethnographic expectations that have long dogged African literature helps us understand these functions. As Abani notes, the reader needs to go through the "irritating voice" of the ethnographer who thinks any single ritual can explain the culture to reach the more vivid and ambiguous story presented in the novel (Aycock 14). Both the epigraphs (reminiscent of Achebe) and Elvis's performances meet Joseph Slaughter's terms of a "parody of a parody" (11), and should be read as ironic comments on the appropriation of cultures, as well as a gentle mocking of readerly expectations about authentic Igbo ways of being. A 16-year-old Igbo boy dressing up in whiteface to look like Elvis Presley recalls a performer with little stability or normativity of race, gender, class, or sexuality, a white man who is himself performing a kind of musical and choreographic blackface.

The much-discussed ending similarly speaks neither to novelistic failure of imagination (as some have charged) nor to sociological reflection of the turn toward the US in third-generation Nigerian writers.[10] Even though Elvis is armed with a fake passport and new (and richly resonant) identity as Redemption, en route to the US he is guided more by his intimacy with "that scar, that pain, that shame, that degradation that no metaphor could contain" (320)—as Baldwin describes the lynching of a black man in *Going to Meet the Man*—and less by his earlier fantasies of becoming an entertainer. Immigration or cultural transnationalism is not presented as an alternative to the violence of the postcolony under military rule. Domestic and global economic systems are thoroughly interpenetrated, and both rely on keeping vulnerable people like Elvis marginalized. The novel thus demonstrates an alternative to the antagonism that a host of scholars imagine: African migration to the US must necessarily be detrimental to the ongoing quest for African American freedom, or African writers must decide whether to embrace the global or Afropolitan or to focus on social justice and trauma. *GraceLand* models a new kind of worlding of the African novel and a new kind of figure of the African writer.

A scene where, "with the air of ritual," Elvis methodically puts on his whiteface while admiring the image of a "white couple in evening dress dancing under a sky full of stars" and fantasizing about putting on makeup in public without abuse or threat (77), crystallizes the novel's richly ambiguous relation to concepts of race and diaspora. The makeup is clearly tied to both race and gender performance for Elvis, and the sponging of white talcum powder somehow softens his skin, making it more feminine and erotic, "smooth, like the silk of Aunt Felicia's stockings" (77). With blue eye makeup, deep red lips, and a wig, he feels transformed into "the real Elvis" (78), but as the fantasy fades and the makeup starts to sweat, he wonders "what if he

had been born white, or even just American?" Immediately he checks himself, noting that Redemption would call this "colonial mentality" (78). The novel thus preempts the usual allegorical reading—wanting to be white or American as a colonial hangover—and suggests its limitations as a meaningful frame for Elvis's fevered imaginative universe. The antagonism on which the allegorical reading turns, the colonizer versus colonized, has failed to carry emotional resonance for contemporary Nigerian teenagers like Elvis. There is no easy path to the language of that moment of decolonization for the novelist either—as that past language of resistance is placed under erasure in a sense, acknowledged as always already contaminated, co-opted, yet visible in its loss as an object of melancholy.

Moreover, by repeatedly recalling the protocols of circulation and reception, reading and interpretation, *GraceLand* allegorizes the literary relations of the contemporary world republic of letters instead of passively receiving forms from another time. The clearest sign of this is the novel's sustained intertextuality, liberally sprinkled as it is with references to and sometimes excerpts from fiction by Dickens, Achebe, Baldwin, Ellison, the Bible, and Onitsha market fiction like *Mabel the Sweet Honey That Poured Away* (1971). When Elvis buys *Mabel* from a bookseller who reminds him of Friar Tuck from Robin Hood, he carefully tucks it "between the Dostoevsky and the Baldwin" since he doesn't want to admit reading "low-class trash" (113, 112). The narrator first glosses such popular fiction as "pamphlets, written between 1910 and 1970 . . . produced on small presses in the eastern market town of Onitsha," and then describes them as "the Nigerian equivalent of dime drugstore pulp fiction crossed with pulp pop self-help books" (112). The excerpt from *Mabel* that follows focuses on a scene of seduction, presented in the flowery language of romance. Inserting such fiction between Dostoevsky and Baldwin democratizes a world republic of letters, decenters the prestige of the acknowledged masters, and helps us view them from the point of view of the periphery. The included excerpt relates to *GraceLand* itself and its cultural project as well, signaling Elvis's seamless ability to navigate high and low culture, expressive of Abani's vision of Lagos: as violent as it is beautiful. Even if the hierarchies of an unequal system of a world republic are not so easily dismantled—such that *Mabel* can democratize Dostoevsky but not the other way 'round—*GraceLand* itself as a self-reflexive participant in the system can and does proffer a reading challenge to world literature.

Elvis is thus best interpreted as an allegory of the figure of the postcolonial artist, constantly learning how to read the city, eclectic in taste, violated and under perpetual threat, yet curious and open to any number of escape routes. As an artist, he suffers more, is sensitive and vulnerable, and will not survive this world. We see him always reading the city—its geography, landscape, and people,

walking into a scene and immediately wondering how he would film it if he were a director, at a remove from the action he witnesses. Yet if he is an artist, rather than acting as a moral conscience of society, he is detached and exploratory. Elvis's characterization may lead us to see *GraceLand* as staging a series of debates about methods of reading—formalist, allegorical, or sociological, whereby Elvis would appear to be a formalist. When the King of the Beggars makes an impassioned speech at a rally about the evils of capitalism, Elvis notes that he can appreciate the form and the style, but the content doesn't move him: instead, he "was mesmerized by the richness of the King's voice. It was seductive, eliciting the listener's trust and he soon forgot his concerns and began to believe the king was right" (155). For Elvis, the history of struggle and anticolonial resistance only seems legible as formalism, insofar as form is the only way that he can appreciate the language of politics. Meanwhile, another character, Okon, espouses a species of naturalism, arguing, "we are who we are because we are who we were made" (312).

In reading *GraceLand* as a künstlerroman, it may seem that I have arrived upon a contradiction: an insistence on new forms, yet a return to old ones. But as Anthony Appiah has forcefully argued, formal experimentation in postcolonial fiction cannot be read as the same as its counterpart in the West. Paraphrasing him, we might say that Abani's künstlerroman is not the same as Joyce's. Doing so, however, would seem to proliferate and not resolve problems, since Abani's novel clearly draws upon global culture in its fullest possible reach, making a Yugoslavian film speak as vividly to Elvis as an Onitsha pamphlet. A singular moment of magic realism in the novel—Elvis's father's death, seemingly transforming him into his totem animal of a leopard—further complicates matters, recalling the longstanding association of postcolonial literature with the genre. One may also see the novel as merely an instance of bad realism, best instantiated in the seemingly authentic and detailed recipes that really would not yield the dish they promise.

To see the events of the novel as overwrought, melodramatic, or just too glossy would also not be wrong. But all these possible objections are already staged in the novel; after all, the presiding symbols here are Elvis Presley and a postcard of Las Vegas. In saying that the novel is a künstlerroman and Elvis the figure of the artist, what matters is that Abani is writing both within and against ethnographic expectations, expanding the possibilities associated with the form, conscripting it into his vision to track an incomplete modernity rather than linear development. Wrestling with the received form, rearranging time and space to foreground questions of transmission, nodes, networks, and slippages (somewhat like the highways of Lagos), allows this global novel to be at once tragic and

flippant, metafictional and realist. Elvis has been grappling throughout with how to become a man, an artist, an immigrant. But in the end, the novel, like Elvis, wants to become Redemption—to make love and poetry real, and to assert the value of life and art.

Seeing Elvis as the figure of an artist, a writer, and a reader helps resituate the ambivalence of the ending as an opening for more stories, recalling Ellison's injunction to the reader at the close of *Invisible Man* (1952), "at the lower frequencies I speak for you." The novel thus stages a series of reading lessons, posing questions of how readers arrive at legibility, whether they fall into the ethnographic trap set by the epigraphs or learn to read the intertexts or register the historical longing for a Messiah who never arrives. Toward the end, Abani writes: "Elvis traced patterns in the cracked and parched earth beneath his feet. There is a message in it all somewhere, he mused, a point to the chaos. But no matter how hard he tried, the meaning always seemed to be out there somewhere beyond reach, mocking him" (317).

4. Re-Forming Diaspora

New diaspora fictions are thus neither just anatomies of failure of the postcolony nor belated American immigrant narratives, nor "lite" global narratives, nor poverty porn. They are elegant excavations of how the past appears in the present, meditations on space and time, deliberations over the ways books, people, and authors circulate in a world republic of letters, unequal yet interconnected. Their self-reflexivity makes it difficult to capture their concerns with abstractions like diaspora, immigration, or globalization through recourse to ready oppositions. Older models of diaspora, from pan-African to black Atlantic ones, did often implement US hegemony as Africa continued to be narrated in terms that prioritized diasporic needs and assumptions. But now the new diaspora writes back and advances the conversation beyond pan-Africanism, Bandung humanism, Gilroy's black Atlantic, or Brent Edwards's practice of diaspora. Rather than framing the debate as a question of reception—what does the Western audience want?—we need to study the more complex ways of imagining past, present, and future, kinship and distance, history and memory in these narratives. To do so, we need to move away from the temptation to slot these fictions into preexisting plots and recognize the need for new forms. The fear that the new African narrative will displace or silence a more politically challenging African American one seems to be ill-founded and does justice to neither tradition.

Which is why I suggest that new diaspora fictions exact new and transformed frames, insofar as they unhook diaspora from slavery and take us beyond the assimilation mandated by the immigrant plot or the melancholy sounded by critics nostalgic for easier moments of opposition. The tendency to read these new fictions either as a sign of friction between new and old diasporas or as variants of a preexisting immigrant plot obscures the new forms of connection, critique, and optimism on display. The temporal imagination of the new diaspora as often rehearses as reverses the US immigrant plot, in which the past is to be left behind except as a memory and the US is the inevitable end of the journey. At the very least, they evince more complex and varied temporalities, other ways of processing narratives of historical trauma. In relation to pan-Africanism, for example, we often find not just antagonism, disavowal, or a requiem—a shift, yes, but perhaps not a break. We also find more uncertain, creative forms of connection being voiced, not just a single note of longing for earlier forms of solidarity. Baldwin, himself a diasporic figure, becomes the locus of such longings in both Abani's and Adichie's imagination. Moreover, as the temporal imaginaries of the new diaspora intersect with model minority formation, postracialism and color-blindness, and with the precarity of labor in the US, as they do in *We Need New Names*, they help move us away from a nation-centered frame and toward a differentiated and unequal one, often making possible a greater engagement with intertwined questions of race and class. Inviting us to resist the temptation to dismiss the long history of colonialism, resistance, and decolonization as a flat endless narrative of failure, these fictions diagnose instead why the older frames faded away, or how they persist and help shape newer imaginaries. To fully understand these new narratives, the postcolonial state and the US racial state must be read together, as must the histories of colonialism and slavery, to reckon with how the new diaspora relates to the old one, as an alternative to just announcing its supersession. Jettisoning the nation as a utopian horizon, showing that race is always about place, and that historical traumas can yield responses other than the sublime—what Adichie calls the "small redemptions of Lagos" (515)—these fictions shift diaspora into the realm of quotidian encounters and displacements, no less meaningful for being ubiquitous and ongoing, but still revealing the creativity such mobilities make possible.

Notes

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1. See Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (2010), pp. 59–103, 142–80.

2. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza provides extensive discussion of the two diasporas and their historical relation by seeing them as a series of flows and counterflows. See Zeleza, "Diaspora Dialogues: Engagements Between Africa and its Diasporas," *The New African Diaspora* (2009), edited by Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu, pp. 31–60. Okpewho distinguishes the older diaspora as precolonial and the new one as postcolonial. See Okpewho, "Introduction: Can We 'Go Home Again'?," *The New African Diaspora* (2009), edited by Okpewho and Nzegwu, pp. 3–30. There are frequent discussions in the media about the impact of new African migrations on affirmative action and reparations, as well as the fact that foreign black students might outnumber African Americans in universities. Nathan Hare, for instance, claims that "I have nothing against immigrants, but there are sociological realities we have to look at. . . . We are the ex-slaves and inhabitants of the slums. They are coming in without that" (qtd. in Okpewho 12).

3. Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld, the so-called Tiger Mom and her husband, situate Nigerians as the new model minority, showing how neoliberal forms of racism as competition structure such notions, reviving old racisms in the name of transcending them. See Chua and Rubenfeld, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* (2014).

4. The latter moment appears in Dave Eggers's *What Is the What*, and may be traced back further to Derek Walcott's "Blues," reminding us again that these questions have appeared in earlier historical moments as well, most notably in response to Caribbean migrants to the US. See Eggers, *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006), pp. 3–24. My thanks to Anthony Reed for the Walcott reference.

5. See Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), for an exploration of the afterlife of slavery as the crucible of contemporary black identity.

6. See Helon Habila's 2013 review of the novel "*We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo—Review," *The Guardian*, 20 June 2013. Bulawayo's funny response on a Facebook post about becoming a "poverty pornstar" provides the title to this section, and is discussed on the literary blog *Brittle Paper*. See Ainehi Edoro, "Caine Prizes and Poverty Pornstars—Bulawayo Takes Swipe at Habila," 2 Dec. 2013, web.

7. Several bloggers reviewed Bulwayo's "Hitting Budapest," which won the 2011 Caine Prize. See Aaron Bady, "Blogging the Caine Prize: 'Hitting Budapest,' by NoViolet Bulawayo," *Zunguzungu*, *Wordpress*, 3 June 2011.

8. See Gayatri Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 243–61.

9. See Susan Andrade, "Representing Slums and Home: Chris Abani's *GraceLand*," *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction* (2012), edited by David James, pp. 225–42; Adeleke Adeeko, "Power Shift: America in the New Nigerian Imagination," *The Global South*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008,

pp. 10–30; Sarah Harrison, "'Suspended City': Personal, Urban, and National Development in Chris Abani's *GraceLand*," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2012, pp. 95–114; and Matthew Omelsky, "Chris Abani and the Politics of Ambivalence, *Research in African Literatures*," vol. 42, no. 4, 2011, pp. 84–96.

10. Andrade (2012) critiques the novel's ending while Adeeko (2008) situates it as a turn toward the US in Nigerian writing.

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