

POLYPHONIC TEXTURE: SURVIVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY TRANSNATIONAL  
FICTION

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in English

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2022

## ABSTRACT

### POLYPHONIC TEXTURE: SURVIVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY TRANSNATIONAL FICTION

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022  
Under the Supervision of Professor Kumkum Sangari

In my dissertation I focus on survivance, a concept promoted by Gerald Vizenor in his 1999 book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* to contend that presence, active resistance, and the power of narratives surpass genocidal violence and assimilation of Native Americans. With an emphasis on contemporary transnational fiction, I argue that Vizenor's concept can be extended beyond its initial frame of reference. To this day, many regions of the world are afflicted by both old and contemporary mechanisms of war, colonialism, patriarchy and global capitalism. Our understanding of how scholars, writers, and artists in different locales are engaged against structural violence and the destruction of their economy and habitat can be furthered through the lens of survivance. Inspired by Vizenor, I ask other questions as well about how the themes and practices of survivance are informed by the (un)making of borders. How does survivance account for possible reconfigurations of temporalities and spatialities? How does the gendering of persons and places elicit different forms of survivance? Exploring the concept of survivance within a transnational framework, I argue that scholarship on transnational literature can be expanded by using survivance as an analytic tool, for it will let us articulate Vizenor's "active sense of

presence” in multiple ways. I believe that survivance can transcend its original literary context and speak to marginalized groups who seek to internalize a positive sense of agency.

I explore Vizenor’s concept of survivance as a “sense of presence in remembrance,” in post-colonial and historical narratives, particularly Deborah Miranda’s *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, which focuses on the stories of California Indians during the Missionization Project and Assia Djebar’s *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, which is centered on the French colonization of Algeria. My work addresses the ways in which a re-writing of history – through a multimodal form of survivance in memorialization – allows Miranda and Djebar to liberate the voices trapped in the official archives and to reconstruct the stories that have been erased from the dominant U.S. American memory culture and the French collective consciousness respectively. I also examine how Vizenor’s concepts of the “simulations of survivance” can counteract the “simulations of dominance” in the context of transnational migration. I discuss how migrants and refugees can unmake borders and create a new sense of presence through their right to opacity and an “imaginative recreation of reality” in Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* and Laila Lalami’s *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. Furthermore, my work explores what Vizenor calls “tropisms of survivance.” Inspired by Nathalie Sarraute’s imagistic concept of literary tropisms, Vizenor expands the creative energy of survivance into metaphors of natural motion, cues of presence, and gestures of subtle ironies. Specifically, I demonstrate how literary tropisms of survivance can play a role in transfiguring the devastation of wars, particularly World War I in Gerald Vizenor’s *Blue Ravens* and the Lebanese Civil War in Hoda Barakat’s *The Tiller of Waters*. Both authors choose war as their subject matter and seem to highlight the existential reality of chance in wartime, as well as its implications for human conduct and creativity. Additionally, in light of the fact that trickster stories are common in many oral traditions, in my dissertation I show that the trickster figure in Native American literature can be connected to the manipulative and astute disposition of

the character of Scheherazade, the female heroine and storyteller in *The Arabian Nights*. I look into the use of humor, wit, and verbal play in trickster stories as strategies of survivance in Hanan Al-Shaykh's retelling in *One Thousand and One Nights* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. I believe that Al-Shaykh's and King's stories of survivance can help create unlimited possibilities of mutability, creativity, and renewal in defiance of closure.

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To  
my family

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dear advisor and mentor, Professor Kumkum Sangari, for her dedicated support and guidance. I am indebted to her for providing me with valuable feedback and helpful suggestions in writing this dissertation from conception to completion. Professor Sangari has taught me a great deal about both research and life in general. Her patience, generosity, and care have sustained me for the duration of the project. I would also like to thank her for nominating me for the Tinsley Helton Dissertation Fellowship, which has given me a further boost to finish my dissertation.

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my other committee members, Professor Gregory Jay, Professor Michael Wilson, and Professor Anna Mansson McGinty for their constructive feedback. I thank Prof. Jay for his “Critical Race Theory” class, which has shaped my way of thinking as a scholar. I thank Prof. Wilson for his generous spirit to welcome and engage with my ideas. I thank Prof. Mansson McGinty for her empathetic sensitivity and much more. Needless to say, I am grateful to all the professors who taught me throughout my entire academic journey whether in Tunisia or the United States.

My heartfelt thanks are also due to Stefan Lorenz whose unwavering support, companionship, and great sense of humor have always helped me overcome many challenges.

I am appreciative of my friends’ support, particularly Ted Manolo, Dolly Burnham, Ae Hee Lee, and Siwar Masannat who made Milwaukee feel like a second home for me.

Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude to my family whose love and faith in me have constantly lifted my spirits and pulled me through difficult times. This work is lovingly dedicated to my parents Abdeljelil and Hedia, my siblings, and my adorable nephews.

## Introduction

In this dissertation, I explore the enactment and manifestations of survivance in contemporary transnational fiction. Survivance is a concept promoted by Anishinaabe writer and critic Gerald Vizenor after it appeared in his 1999 book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. From a critical and epistemological perspective, the term survivance resists any simple and vapid theorizing. As Vizenor puts it, “The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company” (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 1). In other words, Vizenor avers that, within the Native American context, the ethos of survivance is very distinctive, as it offers the Native peoples of North America a powerful tool to transvalue and dismantle deliberate misperceptions of Native “victimry.” Consequently, Native survivance, according to Vizenor, “is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent” (ibid.). I argue that Vizenor’s concept of survivance in which “presence” and the power of narratives surpasses both genocidal violence and assimilation can be extended beyond the Native American context. To Vizenor’s concept of survivance, I add questions of gendering and power.

As Vizenor contends in “Aesthetics of Survivance,” many scholars have adopted the word “survivance” without always providing a satisfactory genealogy. For instance, in his introduction to *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance*, Ernest Stromberg overlooks the “compound history” of the term. Vizenor writes, “Stromberg does not cite, consider, or even mention any other sources, expositions, or narratives on survivance. His rhetoric on survivance is derivative” (20). Clifford Geertz approaches survivance through the medium of a systematic binarism. In other words, Geertz’s survivance is the antithesis of death. This reductive conceptualization of survivance as simply another word for survival is refuted by

Vizenor. He acknowledges that survivance is indeed related to survival, but it means more than that. Karl Kroeber rightfully asserts that Vizenor's revival of the word survivance is imbued with empowering and agential traits. He writes, "[Vizenor] uses *survivance* to subordinate *survival*'s implications of escape from the catastrophe and marginal preservation; *survivance* subtly reduces the power of the destroyer... It offers natives modes of personal and social renewal attained through welcoming unpredictable cultural reorientations" (26).

Not only does Vizenor's own cross-fertilization of survivance articulate Native resistance and continuance, but it also signals the term's fluidity, as "survivance" is derived from French<sup>1</sup> and Vizenor provides several lexicographic definitions that do not circumscribe the use of the term, and thus expand its potentiality and applicability in other contexts ("Aesthetics of Survivance" 19). I contend that the concept of survivance can be more broadly applicable to non-Native Americans, and Vizenor informs my reading of all the novels discussed in these chapters. The significance of the concept offers an effective critical tool to understand how scholars, writers and artists in different regions – particularly those afflicted by old and/or contemporary mechanisms of war, colonialism, patriarchy and global capitalism – are engaged with the politics of survivance against structural violence and the destruction of their economy and habitat. The usage of survivance within *and* beyond the Native American framework is consequential, for it opens a broader avenue to explore the dialectic between institutional power and resistance, which is manifested within systems of representation. My goal is to trace possible reverberations, while highlighting affinities and differences within historical and contemporary perspectives, themes, and issues in a transnational context.

Working with the concept of survivance in transnational literary texts requires considering the question of including Native American literature within the framework of "the

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<sup>1</sup> Survivance is more common in the political discourses of Québec nationalism (Cook, 1971). Québec nationalism avers that the Québécois people, the descendants of French Canadian colonists, form a nation distinct from the rest of Canada, and to that extent it promotes the secession of Québec from

transnational.” America itself can be seen as a transnationality. Eric Cheyfitz, for instance, discusses how Native Americans consider themselves as an ensemble of sovereign nations within a nation. Second, while “the transnational” brings to mind the notion of crossing territorial and geographical borders outside the nation-state, the context for Indigenous Americans is quite peculiar, since coercive acts of forced migration – for example through the 1830 Indian Removal Act or the 1952 Urban Relocation Program – happened within the borders of the natives’ seized lands. In light of such violence, land and regional attachment acquires a monumental dimension in the lives and works of Native Americans. However, this impregnable and umbilical bond with the land does not necessarily limit the possibility of examining issues related to place, mobility and identity across, beyond and through Indigenous discourses. For instance, Chadwick Allen rethinks the notion of the “transnational” by offering a methodology that calls for a juxtaposition of histories, locales, cultures, etc., or what he refers to as a “trans-indigenous” approach. Allen not only foregrounds lateral Indigenous connections, but also asserts that readings and interpretations of Native American studies through a transnational lens should topple any hierarchical “Indigenous-settler (nation state) relations.” As Allen puts it, “Indigenous signs travel across generations, in other words, not to become enigmatic and dead, but rather to be (re)interpreted by readers who are multiply situated and multiply informed” (“A *Transnational* Native American Studies?” 2). Allen proposes a way of locating the “transnational” within Indigenous Studies that does not imply a “vertical binary” and a “relationship of asymmetrical power” particularly between Indigenous people and the “settler-invader” (3).

I argue that survivance can also be found in post-colonial situations in transnational novels. However, the framework of looking at Native American narratives is not identical to the framework of looking at transnational and post-colonial novels. These two different frameworks are evident in Jodi Byrd and Ania Loomba respectively. However, despite

differences and divergences in these histories, there are discernible overlaps and commonalities in their material situations and strategies of survivance in the U.S. and other countries. As far as American Indians are concerned, Cheyfitz's analysis of the legal and political positionality of Indigenous groups in U.S. America provides an interesting insight. In his article, "The (Post)Colonial Predicament of Native American Studies," Cheyfitz argues that it is necessary to deploy federal Indian law, "which perpetuates an ongoing colonialism for the 330 Indian tribes in the lower forty-eight states that come completely under its governance" in order to understand Native literatures in the U.S. (405). The lexicon of federal Indian law reflects an equivocal, colonizing disposition with regard to the legal and political status of Indian "nations" or "tribes" within the U.S. Constitution. Cheyfitz exposes the incongruity of subsuming Indian communities within a foreign European discourse that is based on notions of centralized governments and hierarchical social order, whereas for American Indians a system of kinship is closer to the ethos of those communities. Furthermore, Cheyfitz debunks Chief Justice Marshall's contradictory reasoning that denies considering the Cherokees for example (in the 1831 case of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*) as sovereign or foreign nation because they are, in his oxymoronic dictum, "domestic dependent nations." In this peculiar definition of the histories of sovereign Indian nations that began before European contact, the need to disentangle the nexus between the federal, state and tribal governments can only perpetuate ambiguous interpretations. Besides, the economies and health care systems of tribal communities, and the materiality of everyday life in the U.S. continue to reflect an ongoing condition of colonial dominance, thus calling into question any actual or immediate possibilities of post-coloniality.

Another issue is the dominance of gatekeepers in academia. How can we approach Indigenous America as post-colonial if native authors and scholars seem to be denied legitimate and equitable access to the world of scholarship and writing? Daniel Heath Justice

takes up the thread of the argument of academic gatekeeping and extends it to the specific context of Indigenous literatures in order to expose the direct implications of such ideological and intellectual censure on the cultural politics prevalent in North America. He inquires pertinently, “But what happens when an entire community is pathologized as having a lower degree of cultural achievement and is thus excluded from consideration of having any literature of merit at all?” (18). Accordingly, questions of Indigeneity pose challenges to post-colonial critique, especially Indigenous scholars and activists who argue for the unlikelihood of an actual state of post-coloniality on Native-American lands. On this point, Jodi Byrd writes, “For those within American Indian and indigenous studies, postcolonial theory has been especially verboten precisely because the ‘post-,’ even though its contradictory temporal meanings are often debated, represents a condition of futurity that has not yet been achieved as the United States continues to colonize and occupy indigenous homelands” (xxxii).

Furthermore, not only do the workings of global capitalism exacerbate ongoing world imbalances, but are also redolent of old waves of colonialism in recorded history, when invasions became a voracious “enterprise of rapine” (Djebar 45). However, a possibility to achieve a condition of futurity both discursively and juridically would require, among other things, a rejection of ‘institutionalized’ post-colonial studies, and instead an investment in post-colonial theory with “caution and qualifications.” As Ania Loomba puts it, “Postcolonial critique, however we interpret the term, can be meaningful only in conversation with scholarship and activism across the globe that strives to achieve a truly postcolonial world” (265). Consequently, the goal is not to vapidly apply a branded Euro-American post-colonial theory to, for example, Indian American epistemics, nor is it to disparage their proper axiological commitment and intellectual engagement.

If survivance is an active sense of presence, does this entail that the concept is anchored in a static place or does it take multiple, dynamic and gendered forms? Does

survivance facilitate or complicate the transcendence of territorial dividing lines and sociocultural boundaries? How are the themes and practices of survivance informed by the (un)making of borders? How does survivance account for possible reconfigurations of temporalities and spatialities? How does the gendering of persons and places elicit different forms of survivance? What is the nature of cross-border engagements? Are they sites of stagnation or productivity? Are they fluid or static, uplifting or crippling? These are the questions that I examine throughout my research project.

In my dissertation, I intend to expand the concept of survivance to multiple contexts in literary works that can be read through a transnational lens. Of course, I will need to offer some working definitions of “transnational literature.” In her preamble to the “International/Transnational/Global Feminisms: Texts and Concepts” class syllabus (in Spring 2017), Professor Sangari inquires into the possible definitions of the “transnational.” Questions such as, “Is transnationalism transgressive or conscripted, utopian or dystopian, crafted or contingent?” further underscore how volatile and evasive the “transnational” can be (1). Yet, transnational studies can be minimally defined as a literary and theoretical framework involving cross-border movements and violent interventions, which both conceal and reveal power structures within and across borders. Due to the growing global flow of bodies, labor, cultures and capital, critics will need to develop transnational understandings of contemporary cultural issues, recognizing the legacies of colonial and imperial power and inequality shaping them. My interest in transnational fiction allows me to investigate modes of resistance to intersectional inequalities, such as the institutionalization of ethnicization procedures, gender inequality and othering processes across various geo-political and -cultural loci. My project undermines the notion of difference that hinges on territoriality, and complicates questions of belonging. In other words, with the constant making and unmaking of borders through transnational migrations, exclusionary policies and practices intensify, and

the boundaries of citizenship become more defined. However, mobile subjects continue to renegotiate the border by challenging the limits of nation-centered narratives and developing different strategies of integration and adaptability. Accordingly, I am interested in exploring and demonstrating the potentials of the concept of survivance within a transnational framework, and argue that scholarship on transnational literature can be enriched by using survivance as an analytic tool, for it will let us articulate Vizenor's "active sense of presence" in multiple ways.

Applying survivance within a transnational framework offers an interesting intellectual challenge to explore the capaciousness of the concept in different contexts, periods, and literary forms. I hope to demonstrate how survivance, as an active mode of resistance for example, emerges within the matrices of centuries-long and countries-wide struggles, thus exposing the exercise of institutionalized power that consolidates mechanisms of hegemony and subordination, as well as creates zones of exclusion across time and space. Michel Foucault's description of power as that "enigmatic thing, (...) which is at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous" is pertinent here ("Intellectuals and Power" 213). This concept of power is particularly valid within transnational contexts, when the (un)settling of territory takes place. Yet, the dynamics of power and power relations, and the spatial and temporal dimensions of violence and injustice come into play to foreground what Foucault calls "plurality of resistances." The notion of multiplicity and heterogeneity of *resistances* is suggestive and will further allow me to examine the themes of survivance in multiple and gendered contexts. Accordingly, extending the concept of survivance beyond its initial frame of reference will help articulate how scholars and writers from different regions also strive to counteract and redress the consequences of structural violence and the implications of spatial and gendered relations of power in a global context of displacements and resettlements. Along those lines, using survivance as an analytic tool in contemporary

transnational literature allows us to examine the variegated processes of relocations constituted through different scales and scopes: whether forced or voluntary, internal or international, legal or illicit, individual or communal, etc. Themes related to transnational mobility, belonging, and home-building make survivance quite relevant in transnational novels.

Survivance is a driving force, a particular state of existence that entails a broadening of our worldviews and philosophies of life. What lend survivance its piquancy are its deft formulations and inventive manifestations to reverse the impositions of dominance and victimry. Survivance repudiates nurturing a sense of victimhood or living in flat denial or apathy in the face of the materiality and/or (in)visibility of violence. Rather, survivance acknowledges *and* transmutes the existence of structural brutalities. Throughout the chapters of my dissertation, violence runs as one of the key leitmotifs that bring to the fore the potentiality of survivance in telling stories and writing, the “dangerous, chance survivance.” As Vizenor points out, “Dangerous not specifically in the sense of life-threatening but dangerous in nature and *in language*” (“Head Water” 54). He continues, “Telling a story is as ‘dangerous’ as hunting – dangerous because your life depends on seeing and catching something. It’s dangerous because it’s an encounter with the unknown – something generally understood, but specifically unknown that may come together, alive or present in the telling or the hunting. To hunt, to tell stories, to write is dangerous. It’s also survivance” (ibid.). Survivance, then, is integral to the work of pursuing and capturing, addressing and undoing various forms of aggression, infringement of rights, and encroachment on liberties.

In my work, violence takes up multiple configurations and guises as well, ranging from direct to vicarious, instantaneous to gradual, physical to visceral, tangible to covert, private to public, local to translocal, and historical to contemporary, to name a few. Of course, all these forms should not be thought of in discrete terms, for violence emerges in complex

ways. In this regard, Johan Galtung's theory on violence and peace, and Rob Nixon's conceptualization of "slow violence" offer some critical insights. For example, Galtung makes a clear distinction between "individual" and "structural" violence. While in the former type the acts of violence "can be traced back to concrete persons as actors," in the latter "[t]here may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as *unequal life chances*" (171, emphasis added). It is this idea of "unequal life chances" that structural violence sets in motion that informs my reading of some narratives discussed in my dissertation (particularly in Chapter III where I focus on migration and refugee experiences).

Structural violence can also evolve and stretch out as a progressive and dilatory type of malignancy. This is what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence" and defines as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Nixon urges us to "engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (ibid.). As Thom Davies has pointed out, this form of slow violence "uses time as a provocation" (2). However, Davies questions the characteristic of "relative invisibility" that Nixon postulates in his theorization of violence's slow enactment through environmental catastrophes. "Instead of accepting Nixon's oft-cited definition of slow violence as 'out of sight' (...), we have to instead ask the question: 'out of sight to whom?'" (6). Although this theoretical conversation is grounded in specific research on environmental justice issues, I believe that applying these ideas to broader contexts through different narratives in transnational literature can be very productive in helping us think through and against old and modern-day systems of oppression. Indeed, the literary works discussed throughout my chapters are written by authors who either witnessed, lived or

experienced vicariously (through the remembrance of their ancestors' struggles, for example) the effects and consequences of local, regional, and/or transnational destructive forces of different paces.

As a large-scale and more direct form of violence, war is a pivotal theme in four of the novels that I discuss in my dissertation. Assia Djebar (Chapter II), Mohsin Hamid (Chapter III), Hoda Barakat, and Gerald Vizenor (both discussed in Chapter IV) depict the trials and tribulations faced by the people who experience war, as well as their spirit of resilience and survivance. Indeed, ranging from civil wars to international political conflicts, war brutalities are inherently dehumanizing. In war-torn countries, lives are permanently damaged, homes are destroyed, and communities are fragmented. The psychological scars remain indelible in the survivor's memory. Furthermore, experiences of war violence across history are at the root of major displacement and refugee crises around the world. Practices of violence can also mutate into other damaging forms within and/or across spatio-temporal borders. Some examples include the exacerbation of existing patterns of discrimination and gender-based violence, the ordeals of flight and exile, the experiences of deterritorialization, the prevalence of uneven geographies of opportunities, and the transgenerational transmission of trauma. As Vivienne Jabri puts it, "Just as the spatial terrain of violence can be global in reach, so too the temporal element of political violence transcends the immediacy of the battlefield" (1). Despite the crude realities of loss, destruction, and trauma associated with war, themes of survivance in transnational literature can offer a valuable insight into how war survivors reckon with the difficult transitory passages across times and/or places in order to go beyond survival and forge futures for themselves. Survivance novels are committed to countering the oversimplified perceptions of refugees and displaced migrants, who need to be humanized and not romanticized.

Focusing on the Native American context, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz discusses how violence is embedded within the oppressive system of settler colonialism, which “as an institution or system, requires violence or the threat of violence to attain its goals. People do not hand over their land, resources, children, and futures without a fight, and that fight is met with violence. In employing the force necessary to accomplish its expansionist goals, a colonizing regime institutionalizes violence” (8). Dunbar-Ortiz continues, “The notion that settler-indigenous conflict is an inevitable product of cultural differences and misunderstandings, or that violence was committed equally by the colonized and the colonizer, blurs the nature of the historical processes. Euro-American colonialism, an aspect of the capitalist economic globalization, had from its beginnings a genocidal tendency” (ibid.). Indeed, the history of North America is founded on genocidal violence, a form of brutality that subjugated the vast communities of Indigenous peoples, who “inhabited and thrived for millennia before they were displaced to fragmented reservations and economically decimated” (14). Surviving the substantial violence of colonial genocide does not eradicate settler colonialism, for Native peoples are still committed to fighting an ongoing system of power and domination. Violence, in this sense, is normalized, perpetuated, and remolded. To those for whom violence is far from being out of sight, the struggles continue to reverse – what Ann Laura Stoler has framed as – the “tangible effects of ruination” that were instigated by colonial pasts and are still maintained through the hegemony of imperial practices today (5). Therefore, the study of ongoing active processes of ruination can help unveil the mechanisms of political power and the dynamics of hegemony against Indigenous peoples in the U.S. through, for example, the proliferation of nuclear waste dumps and the exploitation of energy resources on sacred Native lands (but this is for now beyond the scope of my dissertation project).

In conjunction with an examination of the legacy of injustices against the Indigenous peoples of North America, I also address the institutionalization of violence in other geographic and historical contexts. For example, I look into the repercussions of violent conflicts during the Lebanese Civil War and WWI, the transgenerational memories of virulent colonial histories in Algeria, the enforcement of coercive measures to police migratory movements from global south to global north, and the noxious and repressive forces of interpersonal and state violence against women in different parts of the world. These concerns with different forms of violence on a transnational scale also highlight the dynamics of physical and metaphorical mobility as another key leitmotif throughout my work. Here, survivance comes into play to offer a more productive way of dealing with the following questions: How to grapple with local and global processes that impact individuals' choices of mobility, or lack thereof? How to address and respond to the emergence and persistence of geographical inequalities in life chances and livelihoods? How to visualize through narratives the transnational mobility of people, labor, and cultures in today's era of neoliberal globalization?

Chance is another recurrent theme in several novels examined in my chapters. The random play of chance is also intrinsic to Vizenor's conception of the world, and is reflected in his literary and critical works. The element of chance is manifested through events, outcomes, and associations (for example in Vizenor's *Blue Ravens*). Vizenor also connects chance to the dynamics and potentials of survivance. Since survivance is a counteraction to domination with its stereotypical representations and imposed structures, it entails a sense of enduring presence, a "discovery of self through action" (Vizenor, "Head Water" 54). Chance, then, comes into play to subvert containment and undermine fixity in new ways. The significance of chance in works that deal with questions of identity and mobility emanates from its capacity to act in opposition to notions of design and fate, and to reverse accounts of

causality, linear development, and rigid traditions. Furthermore, Vizenor extends the implications of chance to the instability of language. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, Vizenor accentuates "the chance and change of meaning, the mutability of language" ("Gossip Theory" 10). The play of chance through contradictions and ironies in deferred meanings enables a readerly deconstruction of dominant discourses (an idea I will explore mainly through trickster discourse in Chapter V). As Vizenor puts it, "The dominance of discovery, sway of social science narratives, power of archives, and authority of government documents created a simulated sense of the familiar, a final ethnographic vocabulary about natives, and the necessary deconstruction of the familiar was the course of irony" (ibid., 16).

Each chapter of my dissertation will focus mainly on two key texts by two authors, placing their work and contexts in dialogue with one another. Chapter II will articulate the themes of survivance in two post-colonial and historical narratives. Chapter III will discuss the concept of survivance within two novels that portray the refugee and migrant experiences. Chapter IV will explore survivance as an active sense of presence in two novels set in the context of wartime, specifically the Lebanese Civil War and WWI. Chapter V will examine the enactment of survivance in the recasting of the Scheherazade frame story alongside Native American trickster stories. Taken together, these texts postulate the idea that survivance is an affirmative act of "intervention on the dominant mythos" that creates the marginalized 'other' as a victim (Carter 419). Therefore, survivance stories, in Vizenor's terms, "are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" ("Aesthetics of Survivance" 1).

**Chapter II** looks at survivance in post-colonial and historical narratives, specifically Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) and Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2012). The historical backdrop for *Fantasia* is the French

colonization of Algeria, whereas for *Bad Indians*, it is the “Missionization Project” in California. The official records of history and ethnography obscure the truth about the atrocities committed during the French conquest of Algeria and the supposedly altruistic missionization era in California. Djebbar and Miranda construct a bridge between epistemology and historiography, as they both illuminate historical wrongs and strive to envision a historical reconstruction. Here, survivance comes into play, for the commitment of both authors to resurrect vanished voices leads into new ways of looking at past events. As Vizenor has affirmed that survivance is “greater than the right of a survivable name,” a visual reading of Djebbar and Miranda can show how both authors revisit the past to re-map boundaries and claim “the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate” (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 1). Djebbar and Miranda exhume the eclipsed historical facts. Through the agency of the powerful legacy of storytelling, both texts offer a compendium of testimonies of several witnesses whose personal and communal voices are mutually constitutive. Both authors revivify their ancestors’ posthumous survivance, while they also present an aesthetic of resistance indicative of a transgenerational commitment to survivance. In this regard, I find that Vizenor’s notion of “fourth person” quite relevant, as I will explain in the following paragraph.

In *Fugitive Poses* (1998), “Aesthetics of Survivance” (2008), and *Treaty Shirts* (2016), Vizenor relates the same insightful anecdote about the Anishinaabe Charles Aubid’s sworn testimony in a federal court more than sixty years ago to “convince the judge to restrain the government agents from regulating the wild rice harvest” (*Treaty Shirts* 109). Aubid, who was then in his late eighties, gave evidence by visual remembrance and “through translators that he was present as a young man with Old John Squirrel when federal agents declared that natives always had the right to decide the actual time to harvest wild rice in the autumn” (ibid.). However, the court considered Aubid’s story about Old John Squirrel as hearsay, and

thus was inadmissible as evidence in the case. With acerbic wit, Aubid pointed at the legal books on a courtroom table and, switching from Anishinaabemowin to English, “shouted that the books contained only the stories of dead white men. ‘Why should I believe what a white man says, when you don’t believe John Squirrel?’” (ibid.). The astute response was convincing enough that eventually the court ruled in Aubid and other Anishinaabe witnesses’ favor. What is peculiar about this anecdote, recounted in different variations in Vizenor’s work, is its testament to the power of visual memories in oral tradition to revisit the past, and by doing so living relatives create and acknowledge the presence and immediate proximity of their ancestors. As Vizenor puts it, “[Aubid’s] stories created the presence of Old John Squirrel in court, a sense that he was a fourth person, a visual presence in various perspectives, more than a second or third person in stories” (*Treaty Shirts* 109). This is what Vizenor refers to as “the storied presence of a fourth person,” which is a collective and ever-expanding perspective that connects ancestors to their descendants and creatively brings the past to the present through multiple stories, because “native stories were never the same from one scene to another in visual memory” (“Aesthetics” 2; *Treaty Shirts* 110). It is indeed this idea of the practice of survivance as a storied presence through visual memories that I will further explore throughout the chapter.

In addition to exposing a willful lacuna in conventional historiographical attempts to incorporate historically marginalized knowledges into established historical frameworks, Djebbar and Miranda use a multimodal form of survivance and remembrance. As vanguards of an imaginative rewriting of history, Djebbar and Miranda establish a connection between memory, place, body, language, and identity. I want to explore how they reconfigure gender relations and dynamics, and represent the gendering of space. Miranda uses language and visuality as a vehicle to channel her resistance against the mainstream tradition of uniform writing through the trans-generic nature of her work, which uses multiple genres such as

poetry, newspaper clippings and photographs. As for Djébar, the chapter will explore questions of language and translation, especially when she focuses on artistic representation and reductive translations by orientalist historians in the nineteenth century. With their polymodal qualities, Miranda's and Djébar's works form a chain of interconnected sequences. Each new sequence introduced sheds light on the previous section. Their texts testify to the audibility of "silence," or what is believed to be silent, as both authors center their female characters' ostensibly unheard voices or absent sense of agency. Their narratives speak louder than the forces which aim at circumscribing them. Furthermore, I wish to foreground through this chapter how the present is rooted in the past, but it is also informed by the materiality of everyday life and can offer routes to undergo profound transformations and shape more balanced futures.

The key texts of **Chapter III** of my dissertation concern survivance as the enactment of resistance and the unmaking of borders in refugee and migrant novels by Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid and Moroccan novelist Laila Lalami. Not far unlike the Americas, the countries of Pakistan and Morocco have witnessed times of violent social and political turbulence in the not too distant past. This reflects, for example, in the works of Hamid and Lalami, in which their protagonists, as we shall see in this chapter, experience displacement, rethink their identities, and construct new ways of thinking about the location and meaning of home. Their different forms of survivance come into play in order to foil the construction of the marginalized 'other' as a victim by dominant discourses, which present distorted perceptions of reality. Hamid's *Exit West: A Novel* (2017) is set in an unnamed country, whereas Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) follows the protagonists' lives in Morocco and Spain. Both texts trace the movements and distances traversed literally and figuratively by refugees and migrants, who are brought together through a shared experience of dislocation, resettlement, and mostly hope. Both narratives highlight the tropes of forced

mobility and deterritorialization, and their effects on those who live outside their nation-states, as well as those left behind at “home.” I will then complicate and query the location of home. Is the quest for home an etiological or teleological venture? Is the quest for home informed by a process of ontogeny or phylogeny within national and transnational settings?

Survivance is a “keen view” that recognizes and casts light upon the elusive and (in)visible operations of uneven power, but at the same time, I argue that it can also reclaim what Édouard Glissant referred to as “the right to opacity for everyone” (Vizenor, *Shadow Distance* 92; Glissant 194). Opacity here is to be understood as a countermeasure to universality and transparency as Western modes of knowledge and representation that take full accessibility for granted to swallow and consume the other’s difference. As Nicole Simek puts it, “The initial density that difference presents evaporates as the knower drills down into it” (366). Connecting opacity to the need for “stubborn shadows” and densities calls into mind Vizenor’s own conceptualization of shadow survivance. He writes, “We are shadows, silence, stones, stories, never that simulation of light in the distance” (“Shadow Survivance” 64). Shadow survivance resists the “light” of pure apprehension and cognizance that simulations of dominance carry along. Therefore, in Chapter III, cross-border engagements within Hamid’s novel in particular call for a rethinking of the nuances of opacity as migrants’ right to their own unknowability but also through “the idea of a stubborn density, of something layered, something partially penetrable but with a mind of its own” (Simek 372). With their fate in limbo, migrants and refugees can use opacity as a different form of resistance and survivance, but also their opacity should not be understood as a total rejection and a deterrent to reading and interpretation, for as Glissant points out, “The right to opacity would not establish autism; it would be the real foundation of Relation, in freedoms” (190). “Opacity,” writes Simek, “does not so much thwart interpretation as alter its course” (369). I will then explore how opacity can dismantle the stereotypes in dominant interpretations.

Furthermore, not only do Hamid's and Lalami's texts address gendered experiences of migration, homing, and belonging in local and transnational settings, but they also explore, though in different ways, the relationship between the female body and territory. Their female protagonists use mobility and re-configure sexuality to overcome the circumscription of their identities. The expelling forces in their countries, paradoxically, allow them to construct new, transgressive spaces for themselves through their border crossings. Their survivance is embodied in both their resistance and transformation; while Hamid's protagonist brokers her crossings between homosexuality and heterosexuality, Lalami's heroine, a previously religious conservative woman, crosses borders and boundaries by becoming a sex worker.

The key texts of **Chapter IV** depict survivance in wartime novels, specifically *The Tiller of Waters* (2001) by Lebanese novelist Hoda Barakat and *Blue Ravens* (2014) by Gerald Vizenor. In this chapter, I explore what Vizenor calls "tropisms of survivance." Inspired by Nathalie Sarraute's conceptualization of tropisms as internal movements of fleeting sensations that we all experience perceptively in reaction to external stimuli, Vizenor expands his reading of tropisms to imbue them with the vital and creative energy of survivance. As Sarraute uses words and images to attempt to pinpoint tropisms – those intimate, transient sensations that predetermine our expression of thoughts and actions – Vizenor also draws on the power of metaphorical expressions "to touch the mind and consciousness of the reader with a visionary image, a metaphor that is not a plot line representation or closure but rather the image teases the reader to imagine the scenes and stories" ("Native Nouveau Roman" 121). It is indeed this sense of openness and visionary motion – or what Vizenor calls "transmotion" – that prompts me to look into specific scenes of survivance that reveal the propagation of physical *and* metaphorical movements in Barakat's and Vizenor's novels.

While Sarraute focuses on tropisms as “the play of reactions and rapports”<sup>2</sup> between people in everyday life situations, I argue that tropisms of survivance can go beyond incidents of mundane existence and therefore they can play a significant role in transfiguring war experiences into stories of resistance, creativity, and imaginative consciousness.

Barakat sets her novel during the protracted civil war in ravaged Beirut and emphasizes questions of rupture, disruption of place, and ecological devastation. The indeterminacy of the narrative voice reflects the traumatic violence that characterizes war zones. Yet, the narrator Niquila uses the basement of his father’s cloth shop as an asylum, a space that provides shelter, but also stimulates his state of delirium. The novel offers a multilayered account of several contrapuntal stories that the narrator weaves, ranging from the history of fabric, his family saga, and mythological references to ethnographic records. “Survivance stories,” according to Vizenor, “create a sense of presence and situational sentiments of chance” (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 11). The survivance of Barakat’s narrator too seems to be contingent upon a blended sentiment of presence and chance. Barakat destabilizes boundaries, such as femininity/masculinity, animalistic/human distinction, sanity/hallucination, and remembrance/forgetfulness, as a strategy of survivance. Not only does Barakat narrate the transnational histories of linen, velvet, cotton and silk, but she also establishes a dichotomy between these fabrics and synthetic Diolen, which has consequences on cloth merchants, as well as on the arts of tailoring and sewing.

While cloth in Barakat’s novel becomes an instrument for mapping boundaries at the temporal, spatial and relational levels, blue ravens in paintings and visionary stories in Vizenor’s novel help to unmake borders. The novel follows the life journey of two Native American brothers, Basile and Aloysius, in and outside the White Earth Reservation. The

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<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on her lively “conversations” with Nathalie Sarraute, Simone Benmussa provides some insight on how tropisms come into being. Benmussa writes, “What matters is how a word is uttered by someone and what it provokes in another person; a silence and what it will release; a movement and what it reveals. The important thing is how these small instances, insignificant for the most part, will reverberate strongly and transform an atmosphere” (18, translation mine).

Beaulieu brothers always affirm their presence, transfiguring reality and blurring any demarcation lines through their constant acts of painting and writing wherever they go. *Blue Ravens* unmakes borders in several ways. These include the victory of the brothers' relatives over the brutal authority of federal agents to control their right to journalistic freedom on the White Earth Reservation and to prevent them from publishing their journal. As the court ruled in favor of Basile and Aloysius' relatives, the newspaper changed its content from local native stories to national and international news reports, thus turning White Earth into a "cosmopolitan community" (18). The novel also articulates Vizenor's sense of "situational sentiments of chance" on multiple occasions. For instance, the narrator Basile explains how he and his adopted brother Aloysius were born on the same day. He also emphasizes the "chance connection of soldiers and saints," as Aloysius, whose name connotes a legacy of being named after saints, was drafted to serve in WWI "at the very same age and in the same month three centuries later" after Saint Aloysius had envisioned his own death (9). *Blue Ravens* also explores how Native survivance is enacted and fostered within a transnational setting through the experiences of Basile and Aloysius later as WWI veterans and migrants. We come to see that these visionary artists practice survivance and "transmute the desolation of war with blue ravens and poetic scenes of a scary civilization and native liberty" (8).

In addition to discussing tricksterism in oral narratives from various countries, **Chapter V** examines the transmutable arts of trickery and humor as themes and practices of survivance in *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* (2011) by Lebanese author Hanan Al-Shaykh and *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) by Thomas King, an American-Canadian writer of Cherokee descent. The parallel that I draw here between Shahrazad, the witty storyteller who defied King Shahrayar's authority, and transformational trickster figures within the Native American tradition is unusual. Indeed, the Native American folklore trickster is usually brought into comparison with other male European counterparts:

Tales in which the lowly and apparently weak plays pranks and outwit the high and mighty have delighted young and old all over the world for centuries. Each culture usually focuses on one or two characters who turn up in a myriad of disguises and situations. In Germany, it is Till Eulenspiegel; in France they are Reynard the Fox and Gargantua and Pantagruel; in Greece, Karagöz; and in Turkey it's Nasr-eddin, the *hodja* (clown-priest), whose antics are passed on from generation to generation. (Erdoes and Ortiz xiii)

I then argue that Al-Shaykh's retelling of Shahrazadian stories of crafty trickster women can be read alongside subversive and liberating narratives about Coyote and other trickster figures in King's text. Both novels demonstrate serious playfulness with and resistance to unquestioning conformity, the urge to obtain definitive and categorizing knowledge, and the need for closure. Meaning making entails a process of what I have termed "trickster aerobatics," which calls for more flexibility to shifting perspectives, deliquescing boundary maintenance, and destabilizing hierarchies.

I explore how trickery functions as a practice of survivance through verbal irony, resistance, and humor to challenge and transform socialized norms that guide thinking and govern behavior through dominant power structures. As Vizenor points out, "The nature of survivance... is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihilism, and victimry" ("Aesthetics of Survivance" 1). Not only does Al-Shaykh's Scheherazade reconfigure gender relations, she also crafts intriguing stories about assertive women characters, who were rendered passive or silent in the classic *Arabian Nights*. I also look at how Al-Shaykh's revisioning of Shahrazadian narrative evinces physical and metaphorical crossings as a means to excoriate the "exoticization" of Eastern women. Al-Shaykh dismantles the power of

representation by reversing the gaze of “authority” in male-dominated societies: the observer becomes the observed and the subject turns into the object. Survivance also seems to acquire another dimension in King’s novel, as he uses a notion of duality that brings binaries together in an uncanny way, particularly in the plot that involves the four Native American elders, whose names are derived from biblical as well as American and English literary figures. Those four men are captives in a mental institution, and yet they have managed to escape thirty-seven times, each time bringing by chance a new disaster to the world. This time, they turn into peripatetic figures on their way to Canada; even as they invent different versions of creation stories and blur the demarcation lines, their gender changes and we learn that they can also *be* four strong Native women.

Thanks to its resistive, fluid, and seriously playful stance, survivance opens up new opportunities to confront and subvert dominant forms of power. Therefore, marginalized communities should not be considered as passive victims of political brutalities and structural forces. Instead survivance brings to the fore their sense of agency in demanding, enforcing, and responding to change in an increasingly capitalist global system. Authors of survivance novels can provide powerful and transformative story bridges that revise, rectify, and counteract dominant narratives that tend to reduce, consume, or negate the “other.” Perhaps it is valid to relate the vigor of survivance narratives on personal, philosophical, and political battlefields to Rob Nixon’s insistence on “imaginative writing” as a requisite for environmental activism. As Nixon puts it:

In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. Writing can challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts and bring into imaginative focus apprehensions that elude sensory corroboration. The narrative

imaginings of writer activists may thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen. (15)

I believe that the authors of survivance narratives are more attuned to detecting both the subtle and perceptible characters of violence through the activation of the full spectrum of senses, emotional intelligence, and visionary thinking.

Through my dissertation project, I hope to join conversations that range across the fields of Transnational Literature, Native American Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, Gender Studies and Modern Arabic Literature by expanding the concept of survivance and how it might be used through, beyond, and across Vizenor's application of the term within Native discourses. I hope to demonstrate that survivance can transcend its original literary context and speak to marginalized groups who seek to internalize a positive sense of agency. Survivance is personal, communal, philosophical, and political. Although Vizenor refrains from giving a specific definition of survivance, I believe that the following quote by Vizenor deserves to be relayed in its entirety because it insightfully captures the gist of this empowering and liberating concept of survivance:

I wanted a term that would have a broader meaning than survival – that is, as a conditional experience rather than a mere response to domination or victimization. “Survivance” is not just carrying this burden and surviving – showing that I’m a survivor of victimization, for example – but also inventing a world view. It’s an attitude of play – play in a very serious sense. Survivance is the end of domination in literature. It’s also a new kind of existentialism, a source of identity – not the French atheistic existentialism but tribal existentialism or spiritual existentialism (I’m a little hesitant using the word “spiritual” here because I have to qualify it too much, whereas saying “tribal” leaves it open). The discovery of self through action, through being present, is the part of existentialism I borrow from Jean-Paul Sartre, but when I add to

this the dream, the presence of previous experience, I get more mystical than Sartre and the others ever allowed. I argue that life is a chance. That I am here is a chance. This interview is a dangerous, chance survivance. The advantages to survivance are that it provides a way to accept this condition, reverse what's been imposed upon us – and play with that! (“Head Water” 54)

In this brief section, I want to clarify my usage of a few terms. First, I refer to those who adhere to survivance – the authors and their protagonists – as **“survivancers”** and not survivors, because the former denotes a movement still progressing in time (or an action still ongoing through time), whereas the latter implies that a status has already been achieved and somehow it is closed in time. The OED definition of the suffix “er” is also compelling, as it refers to someone or something that *performs* an action.

Second, although I use the terms “Native Americans,” “Natives,” “American Indians,” and “Indigenous peoples” interchangeably, I am fully aware of the conundrum around these terminologies and the disputed connotations each of those generalized terms raises. For example, Thomas Norton-Smith prefers the term “American Indians” to “Native Americans” because the latter suggests that “Indians are American citizens who just happen to be of native descent. However, unlike African or Asian Americans, who *are* American citizens of African or Asian descent, Indians are also proud citizens of *sovereign* Indian nations” (2). I personally treat this naming controversy with consideration and respect. I acknowledge native sovereignty and self-determination, and honor tribal nations’ *and* individuals’ different choices of self-identification. However, the literary and critical works I engage with in my chapters use different terms, and that makes it a bit challenging to remain consistent with one terminology throughout the entire dissertation.

**Storied Memories of Survivance in the Archives of the Conscious: Deborah Miranda's  
*Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* and Assia Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade***

Xulin: to return, reclaim, recover.

-- Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians*

Writing does not silence the voice, but awakens  
it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters.

-- Assia Djébar, *Fantasia*

In this chapter on Deborah Miranda's and Assia Djébar's writings, my focus will be on historical facts and visual memories to enact a genealogical investigation of survivance, and provide more accurate and vibrant archives. Miranda's and Djébar's "archives of the conscious" are different from the archival materials they investigate. I also address questions of ancestral languages, and examine mechanisms of silence and voicing in memorialization. I show how survivance can take up a multimodal form.

I explore the applicability of Vizenor's ethos and praxis of survivance as a "sense of presence in remembrance," in narratives informed by the ravages of colonial powers in two different locales: Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, which focuses on the stories of California Indians during the Missionization Project (1776-1836) and Assia Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, which is centered around the French colonization of Algeria (1830-1962). Although the histories of Native People of California and Algerians do not match, they both seem to have similar, comparable survivance strategies. My work addresses the ways in which the imaginative and multimodal work of 'memory-writing' – the vocalization of memory and survivance – allows Miranda and Djébar to liberate the voices trapped in the official archives and to reconstruct the stories that have been erased from the dominant U.S. American memory culture and the French collective consciousness respectively. As both authors excavate the submerged dimension of particularly female

experiences in colonial histories, I hope to trace possible reverberations of Indigenous epistemologies in the Algerian colonial past. While Djébar creates a genealogy of self-assertive Algerian women in the colonial history of her country by retaining the role of women storytellers, described as “the figurehead at the prow of memory” (*Fantasia* 177), Miranda advocates for a cultural regeneration of California Indian communities by honoring the legacy of her ancestors as “the story-bridge” and forming mosaics that “look at both the blessing and the genocide” (*Bad Indians* 196). Therefore, constructing a bridge between epistemology and historiography becomes an alternative for an understanding of the self and the community. As long as their stories continue to be remembered and shared, the names of Miranda’s and Djébar’s peoples will eternally be glorified, for survivance in Vizenor’s terms is “the heritable right of succession” (“Aesthetics” 1). My goal then is to demonstrate how a re-writing of history – through a multimodal form of survivance in memorialization – marks moral and political imperatives to redress the historical grievances of colonial pasts and reckon with their lingering legacies.

### **Survivance as Praxis of Decolonization and Resistance**

In this chapter, the lively consciousness and practices of survivance take us on an important journey to revisit the past in order to trace a way and course of action forward. The retrospective journey is indispensable to confronting the harms of colonization historically and to addressing the perpetuation of their effects in contemporary times. In this sense, survivance manifests itself through a multimodal form of remembrance and an active sense of presence, communicated through imaginative stories, as we shall see later in my close readings of Miranda’s and Djébar’s narratives. But in the beginning of the chapter I would like to show, in alignment with Vizenor’s thinking, how survivance can perform executive and political functions, thus offering an empowering perspective on how to unsettle colonial paradigms and – by dint of a native sense of “vital irony” – still maintain “law and order”

(“Aesthetics of Survivance” 7). “Survivance,” writes Vizenor, “is the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate and, in the course of international declarations of human rights, is a narrative estate of native survivance” (ibid., 1). Survivance then entails first an inheritance succession, a transfer of rights and obligations from one generation to another. It is a morally binding sense of duty that carries along its meanings the ancestors’ tribal values and legacy of endurance, their resistance and fight against invasion forces and colonial power. Second, within the specifically Native American context, survivance promotes the building of decolonized futures, as it indicates a “reversion of an estate,” a return to an earlier pre-invasion condition. On this point, Deborah Madsen rightly asserts that survivance “is a radical call to readiness for a decolonized, reverted estate in which original owners or custodians will reclaim possession of their Indigenous estate” (106). Third, native survivance sets a historical precedent that can inspire the history of human rights. As survivance takes on a powerful meaning legally, politically, and symbolically, it generates a different approach on how to perceive the lived conditions of tribal nations in the lands that are now part of the United States and its territories: instead of talking about a “post-colonial” relation between Indigenous peoples and U.S. American settlers, Vizenor suggests a relation of a *paracolonial* nature.

Although Vizenor does not provide a specific definition of the term “paracolonial” (an observation already pointed out by Chadwick Allen in *Blood Narrative* and reasserted by Kimberly Wieser in *Back to the Blanket*), I agree with Wieser that paracolonialism can be understood in light of survivance. She contends, “American Indian cultures, though colonized, assimilated, and miscegenated, exist alongside settler colonial cultures, and they maintain cultural distinctiveness and integrity despite colonialism, precisely because of the syncretic nature of traditionalism” (92). Wieser’s line of reasoning actually extends to an understanding of “Indian Country” not only as a geographical territory and “a region of the

mind” for America’s Indigenous peoples, but as a “zone” that brings together self-governing communities wherein *a balance* between tribal specificity and intertribal commonalties is celebrated, thus enhancing tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance. In this respect, it is important to disaggregate the all-encompassing term “Native Americans” in order to recognize and respect the similarities and differences of more than 570 federally recognized tribes/nations across the U.S., each with distinctive linguistic, cultural and ethnic features, as well as particular histories of colonization. As far as Vizenor is concerned, he used the term “paracolonial” to address the impositions of dominant cultural representations of tribal literatures, representations that downplay Native imagination and creativity. He refers, for example, to Andrew Wiget, who “bears the worst of colonial historicism in his interpretations of trickster figuration in tribal literature” (“Shadow Survivance” 76).<sup>3</sup> Wiget proclaims that the trickster’s behavior is “always scandalous” and that trickster stories “seemed... at worst a barbaric mystery” to Western readership. Accordingly, Vizenor argues that the “tone of his [Wiget’s] critical attention in *Native American Literature*, and the use of the words *scandalous* and *barbaric*, would prescribe a righteous paracolonial presence in tribal stories” (ibid., 77). Dominant paradigms nestle in “the paracolonial discoveries and representations of tribal literatures” (ibid.).

Since a post-colonial state does not reflect the realities of Native Americans in the U.S., Indigenous scholars continue to call out the undeniable existence of an ongoing condition/state of colonialism and imperialism. Chadwick Allen uses the term “*(post)colonial*” in this specific typography – attached and italicized – to denote a continuation in the process of colonization and therefore “to emphasize the irony of an often asserted post-colonial situation, such as the early decades after World War II, that is never quite one” (36). Allen argues that the persistent relationship between colonizing settlers and

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter V of my dissertation addresses specifically the dynamics of trickster consciousness and makes reference to the reductive interpretations of trickster figuration.

colonized Indigenous peoples in the U.S. “is manifested in different forms and in different public and private spheres: in reservation policies, in land rights legislation, in treaty violation claim settlements, in leasing agreements, in systems of blood quantum, in certification systems for indigenous art, in racial slurs, in the regulation of indigenous tourism and gaming operations, in sports team logos, and so on” (35-36). Yet, Native Americans remain committed to decolonization, which in Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird’s terms is “the meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands” (3). Survivance then is constitutive of Indigenous peoples’ decolonization endeavor and their sustained resolve to achieve psychological, cultural, and political freedom.

In what follows is a concrete example of how historically survivance has always animated Vizenor’s perception of the paracolonial government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the settler nation. In “Aesthetics of Survivance,” Vizenor honors the legacy of resistance and endurance, as manifested through the *Progress*, the first newspaper published on the White Earth Reservation in the late 1880s.<sup>4</sup> The editor Theodore Beaulieu and the publisher Augustus Beaulieu, distant relatives of Vizenor, were survivancers par excellence. Their commitment to enlighten their community members and defend their interests was channeled through their “radical political views” and active sense of presence.<sup>5</sup> In their first issue, on March 25, 1886, the Beaulieus advocated their vigorous policies to maintain tribal sovereignty:

*The main consideration of this advocacy will be the political interests, that is, in matters relative to us and to the Government of the United States. We shall not*

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<sup>4</sup> *Progress* newspaper played a significant role in shaping Vizenor’s *Blue Ravens*, which is one of the two main novels discussed in Chapter IV of my dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> The quote is from the website *Minnesota Digital Newspaper Hub*, where the *Progress* can also be accessed digitally: <https://www.mnhs.org/newspapers/hub/progress>

*antagonize the Government, not act, in the presentation of our views, in any way outside of written or moral law.*

*We intend that this journal shall be the mouth-piece of the community in making known abroad and at home what is for the best interests of the tribe (...)*

*We may be called upon at times to criticize individuals and laws, but we shall aim to do so in the spirit of kindness and justice. (qtd. in "Aesthetics" 6-7)*

It is plausible to argue that the ethos of this declaration actually reflects the parallel existence of two societies wherein native tribes still maintain their internal governmental powers, while the U.S. government is supposed to – and *should* – honor the trust responsibility and treaty obligations.

Indeed, the newspaper proprietors' resistive stance against federal dominance marked their tenacity to endure with wit and irony the impositions of colonial paradigms, which aimed to suppress freedom of the press on the reservation. The Beaulieus fiercely challenged the Bureau of Indian Affairs and particularly federal agents' whimsical arbitrariness to seize the press, an obsession that caused the nineteen-month suspension of the newspaper operations. However, after an investigation conducted by a U.S. Senate subcommittee, the newspaper resumed its work, for the "*court asserted and defended the right of any member of a tribe to print and publish a newspaper upon his reservation just as he might engage in any other lawful occupation, and without surveillance and restrictions*" (ibid., 10). The previous and following excerpts from the second issue attest to the Beaulieus' unabated energy to preserve native liberty and self-determination:

*We do not believe that any earthly power had the right to interfere with us as members of the Chippewa tribe, and at the White Earth Reservation, while peacefully pursuing the occupation we had chosen. We did not believe there existed a law which should prescribe for us the occupation we should follow. We knew of no law which*

*could compel us to become agriculturalists, professionals, “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” or per contra, could restrain us from engaging in these occupations. Therefore we respectfully declined obeying the mandate, at the same time reaching the conclusion that should we be restrained we should appeal to the courts for protection. (ibid., 9-10)*

The biblical reference suggests the tribe members’ total rejection of colonial subjugation and hence the regulation of their actions by law or at settlers’ whim. Yet, as survivancers, White Earth Nation – and by extension all other tribal communities in the U.S. – endure and tease the perversions of power with, in Vizenor’s terms, “tragic wisdom” and continue to bravely transcend the harms of colonization. Through its revolutionary vision, which is based on a sense of native integrity and communal responsibility, the newspaper bespoke survivance, as the Beaulieus pronounce:

*Now that we are once more at sea, fumigated and out of quarantine, and we issue from dry dock with prow and hull steel-clad tempered with truth and justice, and with our clearance registered, we once more box our compass, invite you all aboard, and we will clear port, set sails to favorable breezes, with the assurance that we will spare no pains in guiding you to a “higher” civilization. (ibid., 10)*

Such transformative consciousness to lead to a higher civilization is the pathway to sweeping changes. Along those lines, I believe that the inscription of the phrase “A Higher Civilization: The Maintenance of Law and Order” on the newspaper’s masthead<sup>6</sup> in every issue is a testament to *both* the paracolonial history of the United States and survivancers’ unrelenting fight against colonialism and imperialism.

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<sup>6</sup> Information provided on the website where the newspaper can be accessed digitally: <https://www.mnhs.org/newspapers/hub/progress>

Through the *Progress*'s legacy of resistance and agency, we can see how the historical and political overtones of survivance (referred to earlier in the beginning of this section) as the "heritable right of succession," the "reversion of an estate," and a historical precedent in the history of human rights are all encapsulated in the continuance and furtherance of decolonization efforts, no matter how subtle or glaring they may be. Survivance then is a mode of being and living, a course of action, and a commitment to preserve ancestors' legacy as a promise of futurity. Survivance sustains the journey through the transits of past, present, and future. Therefore, survivance fuels the energy to dig up and tease out official archives of history in order to liberate the voices trapped within them. The forgotten, the repressed, and the suppressed are all resurrected through stories of survivance as "memories in imagination," memories that activate and heighten the senses of survivancers – ancestors and descendants alike ("Shadow Survivance" 74).

The literatures of Indigenous North America and Algeria are deeply rooted in the history of colonialism and all its attendant ramifications, particularly exploitation of lands, people, and resources. Beginning with the late eighteenth century, California's native people, as one of the examples under scrutiny in this chapter, were robbed of their lands, cultures, and liberties. The official records of history and ethnography eclipse the truth about the dehumanizing 'Missionization Project' in California. Indeed, the hegemonic narrative that has been unscrupulously circulating is the altruism of Franciscan fathers to help civilize California Indians and turn them into good Christians and loyal Spanish subjects. Unsurprisingly, this claim for practice of benevolence leaves out the imprint of indigenous realities and expunges the facts about the conditions of coercion and oppression meted out to California Indians. However, in her book *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, Deborah Miranda brings her people's ostensibly unheard voices and absent sense of agency into the center of her narrative in order to substitute for the parochial and monolithic versions of colonialist and

imperialist storytelling. Read through an analogous lens, Assia Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* gives prominence to the mechanism of voicing the silenced past during Algeria's fight for independence. The Algerian novelist reproduces specifically Algerian women's stories of resistance, while she also reckons with the complexity of her own identity as an Algerian woman and a "wandering exile" (Djébar 115). Although Miranda's and Djébar's narratives explore histories of violence and erasure in two different geographical loci, they could still be united through a shared rallying point, which is that of a counter-hegemonic thrust. Both authors' aesthetics of restoration and survivance countervail the notions of absence and victimry, as Miranda and Djébar re-write history from their own standpoints. This is a type of historical revision that enables subjective and collective renewal, and this is done in contrast with the hegemony of the institutionalized records of the histories of colonialism and their discourses of power and processes of othering.

Acknowledging that there is no single definition, understanding or story of survivance entails an examination of the embeddedness of the concept of survivance in different regions, times and literary expressions. Being a "warrior of survivance" allows marginalized groups to explore the dynamics of resistance and envision new social realities to counterpoise pervasive, institutionalized power that consolidates mechanisms of hierarchy, hegemony and subordination. In "Intellectuals and Power," Michel Foucault describes power as that "enigmatic thing, (...) which is at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous" (213). He further adds, "Everywhere that power exists, it is being exercised. No one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other. It is often difficult to say who holds power in a precise sense, but it is easy to see who lacks power" (ibid.). Along those lines, in colonial histories, power relations between the colonizers and the colonized, and sometimes even *among* the colonized as well, are asymmetrical. Such lopsided power play necessitates

an examination of the heteroclit power schemata at the social, economic and political levels, for power is exercised from “innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (*The History of Sexuality* 96).

Foucault establishes a strong link between power and resistance, as the latter is an inevitable outcome in the networks of power relations. He avers that resistance lies in a position of interiority in relation to power. In other words, resistance is deployed *inside* power. Furthermore, the existence of power relationships depends on multiple and heterogeneous points of resistance, which are spread over time and space at varying degrees, and not on a “single locus of great Refusal.” These points of resistance:

[P]lay the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations...  
[They] are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is *a plurality of resistances*, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent” (ibid., emphasis added).

Foucault’s notion of “a plurality of resistances” serves my research interests in this chapter, since I explore the politics<sup>7</sup> of survivance in two different regions with their own intrinsic specificities, commonalities, and differences. Put differently, the heterogeneity within colonial histories, ideologies, and practices explains the existence of different types of colonialism that can still testify to a possible connection between them and the history of the capitalist world-system. However, there is no single definition that can encompass what colonialism means. Likewise, anticolonial and post-colonial reactions of resistance to different forms of power and mechanics of discrimination are equally diverse.

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<sup>7</sup> What I mean here by “politics” is the intention to explore the dialectic between institutional power and resistance, which is manifested within systems of representation such as language and culture.

Despite the existence of some shared features of colonial practices across the globe, an emphasis on the importance of contextualization and the specificities of locale would account for a better understanding of the nexus between the workings of global capitalism and the actual fragmentation and movements of people. Indeed, colonialism and capitalism are completely linked to each other, as their driving force is the making of profit. Considering Algeria and Indigenous North America as post-colonial and paracolonial locales respectively, it is helpful to examine the histories and types of colonialism that afflicted these lands in different time periods. Looking back into the history of Africa, between the 1870s and 1900, the continent witnessed a phenomenon of unabated rage known as the “Scramble for Africa.” African riches were the target of European powers, which used the ethos of a “civilizing mission” in order to legitimize their territorial acquisition. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, diplomatic and political contestations, along with commercial conflicts between Africans and Europeans, marked an era of upheaval. The Europeans’ imperialist schemes and politics of greed instigated strong African political and military resistance. Thus, the refusal to comply with authoritarian colonialist and imperialist forces has always been an essential element in the history of Africa and its perennial struggle to protect its lands, people and resources from exploitation. As far as Algeria is concerned, France invaded Algiers and imposed its rule in 1830. Indeed, classic colonialism was the evil that plagued the North-African country. As a more administrative type of colonialism, this form of dominance did not entail a massive flow of people from the “mother-country” to the colony, and was administered through various military, economic, and executive apparatuses that maneuvered within the colonized territory. Yet, Algerians did not succumb to the pressures of French occupation. One prominent figure of resistance in the Algerian struggle for independence is Abd al Quadir, considered as the first hero for his success to control two-thirds of Algeria by 1839. However, the year 1847 marked Abd al Quadir’s defeat by the French commander General Bugeaud, and subsequently

French brutalities on Algerian soil continued until Algeria achieved independence in 1962. It is worth mentioning that Algeria has always been known as the country of a million martyrs, in reference to the men and women who died in their fight for independence.

On the other hand, settler colonialism is the common method used in America. As a destructive practice, settler colonialism involves the use of a more direct and coercive contact with the natives, and with a very limited growth in power and wealth among the latter. Not only does this type of colonialism deprive native inhabitants of their lands and resources, but it also propels a cultural genocide. Besides, settler colonialism engenders complex racial and ethnic hierarchies, for it generates a cacophony of subject-positions, whereby the colonial discourse operates on a reservoir of stereotypes against natives to justify its illegitimacy, thus manipulating, obscuring, and distorting Indigenous peoples' histories and stories. If colonized peoples' labor is essential in classic colonialism, then land is the most important target in settler colonialism. The mania and rage for territory seizure informs the settler nation's erasure of prior history and/or its deliberate historical and social amnesia. Along similar lines, Patrick Wolfe accentuates how settler colonialism is premised on the logic of removal, which vindicates invasion as a perpetual means instead of an end, as an interminable developmental sequence in lieu of a denouement:

The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that... settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base – as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. (388)

## **Genealogies of Survivance: Miranda and Djebbar**

If marginalized peoples' memories of trauma and combats have been relegated to the margins by hegemonic discourses, then anticolonial and post-colonial writers find a rallying point in presenting their narratives as a form of "counter-memory," in Foucaultian terms. Indeed, Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended* provides a key insight into his theories of memory, genealogy and power. A counter-memory is a relational memory that positions itself in resistance to a dominant and institutionalized type of memory. Accordingly, the work of counter-memory subverts unitary discourses and their own hegemonic power-knowledge, which codes, colonizes, and disqualifies "subjugated knowledges." Furthermore, as a form of historical critique, Foucault's genealogy is the "coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics" (8). Consequently, I argue that the ethos of survivance as an active sense of presence in remembrance can be allied to Foucault's genealogical investigations, since the themes and practices of survivance also dismantle hierarchies, overturn norms, and counteract epistemic exclusions in official accounts of the past. Survivance narratives imply "resisting the 'omissions' and distortions of official histories, returning to lost voices and forgotten experiences, relating to the past from the perspective of the present in an alternative (out-of-the-mainstream way). And this is precisely what the Foucaultian notions of 'counter-history' and 'counter-memory' offer" (Medina 13-14). Therefore, taking up the role of historians, Miranda and Djebbar provide genealogical accounts of dispossession and resistance in their specific homelands, thus reanimating what Foucault calls the "insurrections of subjugated knowledges" (*Society* 9).

In his article "Towards a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance," José Medina argues cogently that Foucault's epistemological approach to memory and knowledges of the past is buttressed by pluralism. This sense of multiplicity characterizes the insurrections, as

well as the disqualified knowledges, thus “guaranteeing the constant *epistemic friction*” of those subjugated epistemologies (21). The empowering resistive stance of Foucaultian genealogies creates a space for those silenced and excluded voices to excavate and resurrect their memories, while maintaining epistemic frictions. Such a critical work of historiographical and epistemological contestation over hegemonic practices of remembering and forgetting constitutes what Medina terms a Foucaultian “guerilla pluralism.” Medina elucidates:

It is not a pluralism that tries to resolve conflicts and overcome struggles, but instead tries to provoke them and to re-energize them. It is a pluralism that aims not at the melioration of the cognitive and ethical lives of all, but rather, at the (epistemic and socio-political) *resistance* of some against the oppression of others. This is a pluralism that focuses on the gaps, discontinuities, tensions, and clashes among perspectives and discursive practices. (24)

Like rays of sunshine filtered through the interstices of arching trees, Miranda’s and Djébar’s genealogical investigations penetrate through the apertures of the formative barricades erected by *both* historical and contemporary references of dominance and exclusions. Within those interstices of absence and erasure lie Miranda’s and Djébar’s counter-histories of survivance. “[A]n attempt to transform a discursive practice deeply from the inside by resisting its silences and omissions requires ‘a return to the origin,’” argues Medina (16). “This critical *return* involves revisiting the texts that have come to be considered foundational, ‘the primary points of reference’ of the practice, and developing a new way of reading them, so as to train our eyes and ears to new meanings and voices” (ibid.).

In her book section entitled “A Few Corrections to My Daughter’s Coloring Book,” Deborah Miranda ‘returns to the origin,’ as she revisits the past events around the Carmel Mission in California and unmask the intentional lacunae of a foundational narrative

circulating as part of the ‘official’ archives in U.S. history. The historical myth around California’s missionization era is based on old and contemporary national propagandas of libel and falsification, which extend their reach into the educational system to further corroborate their ideological grip and hegemony over knowledges of the past, and particularly those related to California Indians. The passage that Miranda uses from her daughter’s coloring book includes a short descriptive paragraph with information on the history of Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo. The section provides a chronological framework for the past events, starting with the time the Spanish priest Junípero Serra had left San Diego in 1770 to establish his second mission in Monterey and its subsequent relocation to Carmel Valley, to the time period when the mission fell into ruin after secularization, and stretches until the time of the mission’s restoration to its present state.

At the level of content, Miranda rectifies the mistakes and signals the omissions inherent in this version of ‘official’ history that still obtrudes on children’s educational experience, and reflects U.S. America’s well-established commitment to historical amnesia. For instance, Miranda reminds the readers that this mission, which is lauded for its beautiful scenery, is actually built on “stolen land,” and while the paragraph uses the “passive voice to avoid saying enslaved Indians built it [the mission],” Miranda avers that those missionized Indians, whose labor force was exploited, were actually abandoned and left homeless when the church’s roof had collapsed in 1851. Furthermore, as the paragraph references the “complete restoration of a mission quadrangle” in the Carmel site, Miranda’s correction creates frictions to undo that historical oblivion, which continually disavows the truth that those missions were erected on human remains, by “paving over the Indian cemetery and creating multimillion-dollar houses in top of our bone” (21). Ironically enough, a child’s coloring book *decolors* and obscures the facts about California’s missionization, particularly

the Spanish Crown's policy of invasion and decimation,<sup>8</sup> the missionaries' doctrines of racism and dehumanization,<sup>9</sup> and the Spanish soldiers' noxious presence as carriers of diseases and "frequent rapists of Indian women" (ibid.). At the level of form, Miranda places this 'foundational' text in the center of the page, with a drawing of a mission bell on the top and an iconographic picture of the three main actors in California's Mission Mythology – a queen, a padre, and a soldier – at the bottom. But the most striking detail in this section layout is Miranda's corrective inscriptions, which dominate the page and circumscribe the main text, written in a small and hard-to-read font. The corrections start by several underlines within the original hegemonic paragraph that branch off in the vicinity to give ample space to Miranda to add her rectifying comments. Interestingly enough, not only does the visual representation of Miranda's corrections cross out the lies and the distortions, but also rightly gives the readers the impression that this foundational text is literally and figuratively, ocularly and morally, *scarred* for life.

I rely on Medina's definition of the critical and empowering potential of insurrectionary genealogical investigations:

[T]he engagement with past subjectivities is mutually transformative: we open ourselves up to interrogation by voices and perspectives hidden in our past, while at the same time we also cast them into a new light that they did not enjoy before the genealogical encounter. Through these critical transformations new connections are brought to light, new possibilities of resistance are activated, and new forms of solidarity become possible. Without losing sight of the specificity of local struggles, without subsuming them under grand movements of liberation, genealogical

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<sup>8</sup> As Miranda puts it in a terse statement, "California Indian population before missions: one million. Population after missions: twenty thousand or less" (21).

<sup>9</sup> The burden of the missionization project is encapsulated in Franciscan missionary Fermín Lasuén's racist words, "Here then we have the greatest problem of the missionary: how to transform a savage race such as these into a society that is human, Christian, civil, and industrious" (21).

investigations help us see the interconnections among historically situated forms of subjugation. Through insurrectionary genealogies we can become part of multiple communities of resistance – past, present, and future ones – which, without being unified, intersect and overlap in complex ways, creating friction of all sorts. (29)

Although Miranda's and Djébar's genealogical accounts disinter knowledges of the past that are historically situated, it is possible to trace a convergence of approaches in their retrospective ventures. Not unlike Miranda, Djébar also revives forgotten bodies of experiences and memories by returning to the 'primary points of reference' and unfolding new ways of reading and *writing over* them. Focusing on the traumas of Franco-Algerian encounters, which started with the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, Djébar returns to the French general Aimable Pélissier's report on his slaughter of an entire Algerian tribe by fumigation inside their caves in June 1845. The report containing lurid and "too realistic" description of the "Arabs' suffering" wreaked havoc, once it had arrived in Paris and was read during a parliamentary session: "insults from the opposition, embarrassment on the part of the government, fury of the warmongers, shame throughout Paris in which the seeds of the 1848 Revolution are germinating..." (75). Consequently, Djébar advances the notion of a layered or superimposed writing that returns to the hegemonic 'foundational' text, rescripts and revamps it for the purpose of endowing her own historiographical-epistemological composition with the character of survivance, thus forging a sense of presence over "absence, nihilism, and victimry" (Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance" 1). It is a form of inscription both *from within* and *onto* the palimpsest. As Djébar puts it, "Pélissier, speaking on behalf of this long drawn-out agony, on behalf of fifteen hundred corpses buried beneath El-Katara, with their flocks unceasingly bleating at death, hands me his report and I accept this palimpsest on which I now inscribe the charred passion of my ancestors" (79).

In conjunction with Pélissier's palimpsest, Djébar draws also on the writings of P. Christian, "a doctor who had roved between the French and Algerian camps during the 1837 to 1839 truce," and the chronicles of two eye-witnesses: a Spanish officer, fighting with the French army, whose account is published in the Spanish newspaper the *Heraldo* and an anonymous soldier, who "describes the tragedy in a letter to his family that Dr Christian publishes" (71). All those 'foundational' historical accounts, which were "engraved in letters of iron and steel on the precipitous crags of Nacmaria [Algerian town]," assist Djébar in her visual reminiscence throughout this genealogical investigation, as she tries to "piece together a picture of that night" and "imagine the details of this nocturnal tableau" (70-71). However, as incongruous as it may seem, Djébar is actually gripped by an urge to express gratitude to Pélissier for writing his report. Indeed, unlike his other fellow military leaders such as Cavaignac and Saint-Arnaud, who had also used similar strategies of fumigation in their fights against the Algerian resistance, Pélissier – "the barbarian" – is considered by Djébar as "the foremost chronicler of the first Algerian War! For he approaches the victims when they have barely ceased their final twitches – not of hatred – but of a frenzied death-wish... Pélissier, butcher-and-recorder, brandishes the torch of death which illuminates these martyrs" (78). Through his powerfully evocative and intimate descriptions of French brutality on Algerian soil, Pélissier resurrected the Ouled Riah tribe – children, women, men and their oxen – all the asphyxiated victims who had died inside those "subterranean depths," and Djébar is primed to conjure up her ancestors' storied memories of survivance.

In his articulations of the themes and practices of survivance, Vizenor asserts that survivance stories are "renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" ("Aesthetics" 1). Upon close reading the sequence of postmodifiers in Vizenor's previous statement, we notice that "dominance," "detractions," and "obtrusions" belong to a paradigmatic logic of unicentricity, which

characterizes hegemonic discourses and practices of exclusion. Unicentricity, as Carole Boyce Davies argues, “cannot imagine multiple and equal centers but instead has to operate with one constantly expanding center [...] and thus inevitably can become a colonialist project” (96). Therefore, marginalized communities need to decenter what Miranda calls the “one-dimensional, flat, and worst of all, untrue” origin stories in order to make space for their many other vibrant and rich stories of survivance (193).

Deborah Miranda tells the reader of the kind of story that has been circulating about her people. She writes, “Fourth graders, their parents, their teachers, tourists to the missions, even historians, often learn and perpetuate only one story about California Indians: conquest, subjugation, defeat, disappearance. Somehow, this story manages to get told without any real mention of the violence and violations that accompanied colonization” (193). The story of the missionization of California epitomizes the damaging attributes outlined in Vizenor’s aforementioned quote. The “Mission Fantasy Fairy Tale” reveals the malicious discrediting of California Indians (xix). Miranda repeatedly delineates some aspects of the workings of dominance that Vizenor referred to in his statement. As Miranda puts it, “All my life, I have heard only one story about California Indians: godless, dirty, stupid, primitive, ugly, passive, drunken, immoral, lazy, weak-willed people who *might* make good workers if properly trained and motivated. What kind of story is that to grow up with?” (xvi). In a similar vein, Assia Djebar depicts a facet of colonial dominance wherein “colonialists” use words as weapons to legitimize their usurpation. As Albert Memmi pointed out, there are two types of colonizers: the ones who refuse colonization by “either withdrawing physically from those [colonial] conditions or remaining to fight and change them,” and the ones who accept it (19). Not every colonizer turns into a colonialist. Colonialists embrace their role as usurpers, are ready to take the blame implied by that position, and continue to falsify history, rewrite laws, and extinguish certain memories. Indeed, the truth about the viciousness of France’s

colonization of Algeria was caught in the grip of a “veritable scribblomania” that infected the colonialists, who were consumed with a febrile haste to rush their chronicles into print (Djebar 44). Unsurprisingly, their version of the story of the “occupation drama” monopolized the market with an insatiable appetite for producing historical archives, devoid of the perspective of the besieged.

Reflecting on the colonialists’ writing and publishing frenzy that followed the capture of the city of Algiers, Djebar queries, “But what is the significance behind the urge of so many fighting men to relive in print this month of July 1830? Did their writings allow them to savour the seducer’s triumph, the rapist’s intoxication?” (45). She further adds, “These texts are distributed in the Paris of Louis-Philippe, far from Algerian soil, where the capitulation has fairly quickly legitimized all manner of expropriations: physical and symbolic usurpations! Their words thrown up by such a cataclysm are for me like a comet’s tail, flashing across the sky and leaving it forever riven” (ibid.). Dominant as they are, the French usurpers’ words are for Djebar akin to a comet’s tail: opulent, bright and splitting. In the following passage, Djebar puts into sharp relief the predatory lure of those words as well as their utility to eclipse the brutality of colonialism in the official records of history:

And words themselves become a decoration, flaunted by officers like the carnations they wear in their buttonholes; words will become their most effective weapons. Hordes of interpreters, geographers, ethnographers, linguists, botanists, diverse scholars and professional scribblers will swoop down on this new prey. The supererogatory protuberances of their publications will form a pyramid to hide the initial violence from view. (45)

## **When the Past Forecloses Futurity: the Myth of Discovery and the Possession of Human Remains**

In the following section, I focus on two incidents belonging to different historical, geographical and socio-political contexts, and yet they both urge us to constantly think and rethink about how we approach, address and reckon with the historical past in an endeavor to make sense of present realities and future possibilities. The first incident concerns the legacy of the Columbus myth in U.S. history, whereas the second examines how France's repatriation of Algerian skulls from the colonial era is a marker of ever-present tensions between the two countries.

On the pervasive and entrenched legacy of Columbus, the so-called "the inventor of the American Dream,"<sup>10</sup> Vizenor ingeniously writes:

Christopher Columbus discovered the eternal haven of simulations; he landed in resistance literature. He heard no solace in tribal memories, no honor in the curia. His adventures have been espied more than tragic wisdom and the ecstasies of the shamans, and he has been honored in the stories of children over the tribal communities that were enslaved and terminated in his name.

Columbus was denied beatification because of his avarice, conceit, and the malevolence of his discoveries; nonetheless, several centuries later his missions and eternal stare were uncovered anew and commemorated as entitlements in a constitutional democracy. ("Eternal Havens" 108)

The legacy of the Columbus myth in U.S. history vindicates a sense of entitlement, enshrined in a constitutional democracy, which continues to sustain reverently a romanticized origin story. The deeply ingrained colonial imprints in statues, federal holidays, social institutions, and media culture in the name of the 'discoverer of the New World' account for "a consensual

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<sup>10</sup> In *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor quotes this phrase, which was used by President Ronald Reagan (113).

national narrative” that fails to acknowledge the historical reality of imperial conquest and settler colonialism. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz puts it, “The main challenge for scholars in revising US history in the context of colonialism is not lack of information, nor is it one of methodology ... Rather, the source of the problems has been the refusal or inability of US historians to comprehend the nature of their own history, US history” (7). She adds, “The fundamental problem is the absence of the colonial framework” (ibid.).

The colonial founding of the United States has instilled in the consciousness of U.S. Americans a sense of moral and political legitimacy, which is inimical to the truths of Indigenous peoples’ histories and presence in their homelands. Accounts of history – that are devoid of “the slightest note of regret or tragedy” – lend great force to the irrefutable fact that the United States is indeed a settler colonial state (Dunbar-Ortiz 9). “The history of the United States,” Dunbar-Ortiz reminds us, “is a history of settler colonialism – the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft” (2). Apologists’ failure to accurately diagnose the etiology of Indigenous trauma and its continuing effects does not augur well towards the *necessity of properly naming and acknowledging*, instead of sugarcoating or evading, the central genocidal premise upon which the United States was founded. A commitment to this awareness might help overturn the dominant and fallacious historical narratives, ensconced particularly in the American collective imagination.

In remarks at the White House on July 4, 2020, the 45<sup>th</sup> U.S. president,<sup>11</sup> a bellicose and impenitent patriot to the core, delivered a provoking and ignorant speech. Poisoned and poisonous in essence, his words aimed at glorifying the regurgitated political creed of

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<sup>11</sup> The president referred to is Donald Trump. I took the liberty of intentionally omitting his name from the main body of my text in an attempt to decenter and relegate it to a secondary position as a footnote. In my view, this is a small, symbolic act – perhaps even a naïve attempt – to render him nameless and faceless in the dustbin of history.

‘American Exceptionalism’ and extolling a distorted account of the past, a version of *the* ‘History of America’ that is grounded on the usurpatory doctrines of discovery and terra nullius. The president’s political message was symptomatic of his disuniting ideologies and governance policies, which seemed to be gaining currency more and more among supporters of his ilk. With an unparalleled myopic and solipsistic frame of mind, he perpetuated the circulation of noxious stories of erasure concerning the Indigenous peoples of North America. Indulging in his incapability of *savoir-faire*, the U.S. president, in a dysarthric delivery, verbalized his jingoism:

We will never allow an angry mob to tear down our statues,<sup>12</sup> erase our history, indoctrinate our children, or trample on our freedoms. (Applause.) We will safeguard our values, traditions, customs, and beliefs. We will teach our children to cherish and adore their country so that they can build its future. Together, we will fight for the American Dream, and we will defend, protect, and preserve American way of life, which began in 1492 when Columbus discovered America. (Applause.)<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. president reinvigorated the dangerous resonance of the historical traumas perpetrated against the first inhabitants of this North-American continent, as he callously evoked not only past images, memories, and emotions, but also *continuing* settler policies, practices and narratives of domination and national chauvinism. Ironically enough, the toxicity of his words nestled, among other things, in his appeal for teaching future generations what he called “the American way of life,” which has its genesis in “the colonizing apocalypse that started in 1492 and continues today” (Heath Justice 5). The president proved

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<sup>12</sup> On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the unjust killing of George Floyd has sparked a global movement of protests to denounce police brutality and systemic racism. In the wake of these nationwide demonstrations in the U.S., statues commemorating figures like Christopher Columbus and Confederate leaders have been defaced and toppled.

<sup>13</sup> The transcript of Trump’s speech can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-2020-salute-america/>

to be one of the finest “heirs of Columbus.” Tacit or explicit, deliberate or unintentional distortions of history aid and abet the simulations of dominance as the absence of the real<sup>14</sup> and “the simulations of consumerism, reassured and tractable in the name of Christopher Columbus” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 119). The phrase “heirs of Columbus” is an allusion to Vizenor’s 1992 novel *The Heirs of Columbus*, the epitome of his satirical wit, wherein he takes the Columbus myth and gives it an ironic twist by resurrecting Columbus and bestowing upon him an Anishinaabe lineage.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, Jodi A. Byrd affirms that the U.S. empire, in our contemporary era, depends on the reproduction of portable and convenient ideas of ‘Indianness’ that “serve to facilitate, justify, and maintain Anglo-American hegemonic mastery over the significations of justice, democracy, law, and terror,” and thus the rendering ‘Indian’ of any objectors, “peoples and nations who stand in the way of U.S. military and economic desires” (xx). This sort of neurotic *idée fixe* bears the marks of the externalization of what Dunbar-Ortiz refers to as “an unconscious ‘manifest destiny,’ embedded in the minds of nearly everyone in the United States and around the world” (2). The continued inheritance of this transgenerational predisposition to U.S. white supremacy and “patriotic pathology” enhances the disavowal of genocide and conquest of indigenous lands and nations within the complacent and dissonant “settler narratives of multicultural liberal democracy” (xxxix).<sup>16</sup> Byrd argues that ‘Indianness’ functions as the transit – the perpetual motion – of U.S. Empire, and thus the propagation of empire occurs through the

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<sup>14</sup> In Chapter III, I explore Vizenor’s conceptualization of the simulations of dominance, which are counteracted by Native communities’ own simulations of survivance.

<sup>15</sup> For an insightful analysis of Vizenor’s revisionary novel, see Kimberly Blaeser’s “The Wordmaker” in *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*.

<sup>16</sup> Byrd avers that liberal multicultural settler colonialism engenders a “cacophony of moral claims,” as it evinces two incongruous narratives: one founded on the state of ‘exceptionalism’ with which the United States was founded, and the other reflects an ethos of provisional recognition and inclusivity of “those people othered and abjected from the nation-state’s origins” (xvii).

incessant activation of discourses of ‘Indianness,’ and not through frontiers. “In the process,” Byrd maintains, “U.S. empire discursively and juridically figures American Indian lives as ungrievable in a past tense lament that forecloses futurity” (xxxv). Before delving into how the foreclosure of futurity can be contested and counteracted through survivance stories and memories, I would like to reflect on the notion of ‘ungrievability.’

In Byrd’s view, the ‘Indian,’ a derealized ‘Other,’ is deemed ungrievable. The idea of ungrievability draws on Judith Butler’s articulation of a “derealization” process that pervaded the post-9/11 national rhetoric of grief, terrorism, and security. Byrd quotes Butler, “the derealization of the ‘Other’ ... means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral. The infinite paranoia that imagines the war against terrorism as a war without end will be one that justifies itself endlessly in relation to the spectral infinity of its enemy ...” (xviii). While Butler explores the dialectics of power, position, and un/grievability under contemporary conditions of war and specifically in the post-9/11 era, Byrd asserts that this same paranoid ideology, in which the ‘Other’ becomes unreal, has actually been in effect in the Americas since 1492. The ‘Other,’ in this case the ‘Indian,’ holds a menacing, liminal existence in the spectrum of possibility and unforeseeability. The contours of the existence of this newly created deviant are present, yet indefinable. Accordingly, a national discourse of angst and alertness, along with its politics of surveillance and security, is much needed to enact a condition, a lived reality of the derealization of the ‘Other,’ to sustain a state of defensiveness and readiness against a possible, vague, and amorphous enemy. Ironically enough, not only does this paranoia cause some sort of disconnection from reality, but it is also tainted by a sadist undertone since grief here is the requisite for a gratifying end result. In other words, the U.S. empire has to create the ‘Indians’ as threat so that it can derealize them, but also to justify and legitimize depriving them of the right to challenge this unwarranted imperial authority. All these elements contribute to the perception of the ‘Indian’ in the U.S.

as, in Byrd's terms, "the original enemy combatant who cannot be grieved" (xviii). Simply put, the losses *of* and *in* Indigenous lives are ungrievable.

Moving to post-colonial Algeria, the legacy of French colonialism continues to exacerbate the strained relations with France. For example, France's possession and repatriation of Algerian human remains is a disturbing issue. In this regard, the French have faced the choice to either attempt to heal or rather open the wounds of the past, the traumatic memories of its imperial conquest and colonial hegemony. During the first week of July 2020, at a time when Algeria celebrated its 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence from French colonial rule, numerous international news channels<sup>17</sup> reported France's return of the remains of 19<sup>th</sup> century Algerian anti-colonial fighters – also known as *fellagas*<sup>18</sup> – for ceremonial burial. The skulls of twenty-four of these fighters were finally returned, to their final resting place, after long decades of voyeuristic display in Le Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris, a historic institution dating back to 1793 and describing the main thrust of its mission as "steeped in history, yet at the heart of current affairs, and ... also working for the future."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the museum is unarguably "steeped in history," but in the case of those Algerian 'trophies,' the museum is saturated with a fixation on an insatiable, possessive account of history that allows France to commodify human remains. As far as the "collectors of

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<sup>17</sup> One of those main online news sources is ABC News: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-05/france-returns-remains-of-algerian-anti-colonial-fighters/12424380>

<sup>18</sup> Historically speaking, the term "fellaga" refers to groups of guerilla soldiers fighting against French colonialism in Algeria and Tunisia. In the national consciousness of both Algerians and Tunisians, the term evokes a strong sense of solidarity between the two neighboring countries, as they shared a similar cause: the struggle for independence from the same enemy. Although the literal meaning of the Arabic term "fellaga" is "those who blow up, explode" and thus connoting those who strive to "destroy colonialism," it is interesting to note how several French and English translations of the term have attached an additional pejorative meaning, which is that of "bandits."

<sup>19</sup> A link to the museum website can be found here: <https://www.mnhn.fr/en/about-museum/presentation>

culture”<sup>20</sup> are concerned, it seems to be a difficult task to renounce what they consider as their legitimate possessions. Otherwise why do they seem to lack a sincere urge to voluntarily relinquish their grip on what does not belong to them? Haven’t they had their fill yet of reaping the rich harvests and consuming the fruits of colonial violence and rapine?

If the repatriation of human remains – or what Andrew Gulliford calls “Bones of Contention” – does happen, it is usually after long battles and/or dilatory procedures (119). While the skulls represent the material history of human beings and the memory of violence, the detainment and retention of these remains is emblematic of the control exerted over the dead by the former colonial power. The recent ‘liberation’ of the Algerian skulls is concretized substantially because of Ali Farid Belkadi’s arduous journey to achieve this goal. Belkadi, an Algerian anthropologist, has lobbied hard for the execution of this return since he came across the skulls at the Paris museum in March 2011. Inspired by the Sophoclean Greek tragedy of *Antigone*,<sup>21</sup> Belkadi evokes in his book, *Le Sultan à la Mule Grise: La Résistance des Chorfas*, the feeling of distress prompted by the royal interdict against mortuary rituals whereby “les morts se retrouvent retenus chez les vivants” [“The dead are kept back by the living”] (13, translation mine). Generally speaking, and regardless of the specificity of historical contexts, any detention of human remains by ex-colonial powers can only submerge the blood-soaked bandages that cover the still open wounds caused by the historically destructive forces of colonialism, and therefore complicates the notion of making atonement for past and current outrages. As Dunbar-Ortiz puts it, “Those who seek history with an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation, may look around and observe that

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<sup>20</sup> In “The Wordmaker,” Blaeser discusses the issue of the battle over the bones and the resistance of the holders on the basis of the remains’ monetary value (97). Blaeser refers to Vizenor’s treatment of this theme in *The Heirs of Columbus*.

<sup>21</sup> In Sophocles’s play, Creon issues a royal edict to ban the burial of Polyneices, Antigone’s brother. Yet, undeterred by the baleful consequences of her act, the heroine defies her uncle for the sake of honoring her deceased brother.

such a conclusion is not visible, not even in utopian dreams of a better society” (2). At the Paris museum, or in Belkadi’s words “Les Cadavres dans le Placard” [“The Cadavers in the Cabinet”], human skulls collected from around the world are purportedly used for the advancement of craniological studies. “L’argumentaire culturel ambigu avancé pour le maintien de ces restes en MNHN de Paris, allègue de la nécessité de garder ces crânes, afin de permettre à la science d’approfondir l’étude des groupements humains pour la postérité. Ces restes mortuaires algériens n’ont jamais fait l’objet d’une quelconque étude scientifique, depuis leur entrée au MNHN de Paris, au milieu du XIX siècle” [“The ambiguous cultural rationale behind the retention of these remains at Le Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle de Paris calls for the necessity to keep those skulls, as they help progress scientific research in human grouping for posterity. These Algerian remains have never been the subject of any scientific study since their entry into the MNHN of Paris in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century”] (16-17). Furthermore, this alleged scientific argument is exacerbated by the display of the skulls as antique objects, an exhibit tainted by an aura of irreverence that the Algerian researcher had captured through the photographs he included in his book. Belkadi declares, “Des crânes . . . sont regroupés par milliers, par nationalité, dans des armoires métalliques . . . Ils sont entreposés pour la plupart dans des emballages *‘spécialement conçus afin d’éviter l’acidité des boîtes en carton ordinaires,’* . . . Nous laissons au lecteur le soin de juger de ces termes *boîtes en carton* qui rappellent tout de même des boîtes à chaussures (voir les photographies en annexes)” [“Thousands of skulls grouped together, by nationality, in metallic closets . . . Most of them are stored in containers *‘specifically designed to avoid the acidity of cardboard boxes,’* . . . We leave it to the reader to judge the use of these terms *cardboard boxes*, which are surely reminiscent of shoe boxes (see photos in annexes)”] (16).

Belkadi’s sustained moral stamina and diligent work and research prompted Algerian authorities to act, and thus propelled the French government into a volte-face, which was

made possible only in 2018, following Emmanuel Macron’s win in the French presidential election. Despite the two-year delay in bureaucratic procedures, the twenty-four skulls ultimately found their way back to Algeria. In a recent online interview<sup>22</sup> released in the wake of the repatriation of the remains, Belkadi expressed jubilation for the “denouement of this sinister issue” with the Paris museum. He remarks, “Il faut voir ce retour des crânes de nos martyrs comme une bonne fortune qui permettra de rédiger autrement, pour les futures générations, notre histoire nationale mise sous le boisseau par les clans” [“We must consider the return of our martyrs’ skulls as a positive prospect that would allow us to write differently, for future generations, our national history hidden by the clans under a bushel”]. The ethos of Belkadi’s research and activism is encapsulated in the motto he has adopted in his work, “Pour mémoire, contre l’oubli!” [“For memory, against oblivion!”]. Although it is particularly significant, the return of the Algerian remains counts as a small step towards the broader, ongoing memory work and continued activism to create the archives of the conscious as truer accounts of history by survivancers in post-colonial and anti-colonial settings.

### **Storied Memories of Survivance**

The back-to-back news of the U.S. president’s celebratory 4<sup>th</sup> of July speech and the repatriation of Algerian human remains call to mind the necessary ongoing task of revisiting the past and, in so doing, considering whose positionality is at work in the reading and writing of history. On this account, Vizenor, with the immense fecundity of his creativity and imagination, propounds what Kimberly Blaeser refers to as “an imaginative reevaluation of history and a fuller engagement with its shadow texts” (85). Referring to Vizenor’s empowering perception of history, Blaeser rightly asserts, “History, he believes, should be not

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<sup>22</sup> Belkadi, Ali Farid. Interview by Karim B. *Algérie Patriotique*, 8 July 2020, <https://www.algeriepatriotique.com/2020/07/08/interview-lanthropologue-ali-farid-belkadi-raconte-son-combat-pour-la-memoire/> Accessed 25 July 2020.

possessed but imagined. History should be, not an emblem or a tool of social and political power, but a vehicle of personal and communal empowerment. History should not enslave but liberate” (96). Therefore, in order to overturn the codification of history by dominant accounts, which aim to center one experience while they marginalize many others, “[w]e should read history with vigilance and active engagement as we try to ferret out the truth or falseness of the accounts” (98).

An imaginative and liberating reevaluation of history is possible, according to Vizenor, through a “narrative recreation.” To this end, Vizenor offers his readers a more dynamic and vibrant approach to historiography – or the writing of history – that uses the vigor of imaginative stories as its life force, and hence defies the rigidity and linearity of the ‘official’ accounts. As Blaeser points out, “The storytelling, the narrative method, allows him to imbue the facts with suggestion, implication, and possibility – with the shadows of history – thus invoking a fuller truth” (86). In light of this assertion, survivance narratives are rich, veracious accounts of history, embracing inventiveness and wit, ironies and paradoxes in order to expose and counteract “the documents of discoveries, cultural studies, and surveillance” (*Fugitive Poses* 16).

The construction of survivance narratives entails an abnegation of dominance and victimry. Survivance warriors and, by extension, storiers strive to subvert the kind of semantic exploitation produced by the normative discourses of power and exclusion. To this end, writers and scholars engaged with the politics of resistance and survival in anticolonial and post-colonial literatures undertake the indispensable work of exhuming their ancestors’ past memories of both struggles and resistance. It is imperative for them to recollect the imperial and colonial past and conjure up the names, the faces, and the spirit of survivance ingrained in their progenitors. Their works present a counter-discourse against authoritative forces in

response to historical effacement.<sup>23</sup> They give testimony of survivance, chronicling the ways in which they write about their struggle to resist hegemonic power despite the psychological and material abuse meted out to them. In addition to withstanding a traumatic colonial past that could still carry the weight of its legacy in contemporary societies, activists and scholars assert through their writings their cultural survivance and create a space for continued growth, thus evincing the potential power and “revolutionary action” vested in those conventionally regarded as powerless, impotent and silent in imperial situations. The power of stories to either rebuild or silence depends on the frame of reference. One story could actually expose various embedded stories in it. Stories could dovetail with each other and the habit of storytelling plays a significant role in preserving and reaffirming cultures that are considered “non-existent” within certain Indigenous contexts, for instance, because of the destruction of their languages (a point I will go back to later). This sense of agency through oral literacy and the documentation of these narratives by means of written literature can be approached as a survivance strategy. Deborah Miranda endorses the engagement in the practice of storytelling as a means of “education, as thought-experiment, as community action to right a wrong, as resistance to representation as victim” (29). Through the powerful legacy of storytelling and visual reminiscence, both Miranda and Djébar create multimodal stories, stories that summon up visual, vocal, acoustic, and haptic memories. Their epistemological reconfigurations of the past animate their intellectual and sensory experiences in which the vocalization of their memories becomes their compass rose, guiding and orienting them towards a return, a reclaim, and a recovery of their ancestors’ spirits and stories of survivance.

Indulging in her determined act to make the voices of the past heard, Miranda calls attention to one female character’s strong sense of resistance. Miranda writes a letter to Vicenta, a brave woman whose story serves as a rallying point to unite and empower Indian

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<sup>23</sup> Effacement here can be understood as an absence of accurate representation for autonomous subjects and/or an abundance of misrepresentation of autochthonous identities.

women. Actually, Miranda uses the literary device of the story within a story in order to excavate a chain of memories that connect many California Indian women altogether. Vicenta Gutierrez is a survivancer whose name is commemorated as a storied presence in Miranda's narrative. When she was a small girl, Vicenta was raped by Padre Real, who fled right after his contemptible deed. However, the power the priests had then did not deter the brave little girl from denouncing this sexual abuse, physically and symbolically, as Vicenta "went running to her house, saying the padre had grabbed her" (22). Equally significant, Vicenta's story of survivance has instilled a resistive consciousness in Isabel Meadoews, Miranda's relative, who is the one who fervently insisted, one hundred years after the rape incident, to pass on Vicenta's story to Harrington, who in his turn took field notes while working with Isabel and transmitted them to Miranda. Vicenta's story is a parable that empowers California Indian women not to assume a position of victimhood and instead to defy authoritative forces. Vicenta refused to remain silent, and her voicing mechanism encapsulates a form of defiance that has successfully initiated a legacy of a socio-political commitment and activism.

In the passage entitled "Neofito (Neophytes)," Miranda provides five entries that not only serve to define the term "neophytes" within the "altruistic" missionization context, but they also disclose the cruel perceptions and stereotypes that were deeply entrenched in the missionaries' religious conversion narrative. The Natives were perceived either in a state of childlike existence or as animal-like savages, devoid of any human characteristics. In fact, these definitions further enhance the rhetoric and practices of paternalism and racism leveled against Indigenous people. However, what is worthy of consideration here is that Miranda, in her last fifth entry, gives only her ancestors' names and ends the passage with "My ancestors." (18). My reading of this passage is that Miranda includes the names of her ancestors at the end and after a dense enumeration of disparaging neophyte attributes to subvert the authority of those false stereotypes. In other words, she contends that those who

were rendered invisible in colonialist and imperialist situations are actually people with names, origin and history. This passage, among others, is indicative of the ancestors' posthumous survivance, as Miranda affirms a sense of presence and resistance in remembrance.

In the example of California schools, the students are required to study the "Mission Unit" in their fourth grade and 'absorb' the Mission Mythology. As Miranda puts it, "Intense pressure is put upon students (and their parents) to create a 'Mission Project,' that glorifies the era and glosses over both Spanish and Mexican exploitation of Indians, as well as American enslavement of those same Indians during American rule" (xvii). This Mission Unit is, in Miranda's terms, "a lesson in imperialism, racism, and Manifest Destiny rather than actually educational or a jumping off point for critical thinking or accurate history" (ibid.). Since Miranda left California after kindergarten, she did not have to produce a Mission Project and thus participate in this shameful distortion of history. However, Miranda contends that the writing of this book is her "belated offering at that particular altar" (ibid.). The stories she tells serve to deconstruct the canonical work of the story of missionization in California. It is time for the "Mission Fantasy Fairy Tale" to be exterminated. Accordingly, Miranda rewrites history by giving prominence to her stories and the stories of her community. The conflation between the "I" and the "we" is a testament to California Indians' shared strong spirit of survivance encapsulated in Miranda's words, "I say 'we' because my efforts here are part of a much wider circle of California Indian peoples and allies talking back to mythology, protesting, making waves" (ibid.).

Assia Djebar, in her autobiographical novel *Fantasia*, depicts the colonized people's sense of agency in negotiating colonial relationships, while she also challenges and transforms conventional colonial constructions of history. Djebar creates a genealogy of self-assertive Algerian women in the colonial history of her country. In the passage entitled "The

Trance,” Djebbar evokes the memory of her maternal mother, “a lioness grown weak, impotent, *gasping for breath*” (143, emphasis added). However, in a technique of a reversal of expectations, the narrator surprises her readers – and probably even herself – by exposing how potent and influential actually her grandmother is. The detailed account of the trance scene, from beginning to end, holds the attention of both the readers and the real spectators, who become fully immersed in the matriarch’s power to voice and perform her protest while liberating the oppressed voices of the past. Djebbar makes the truth blatantly visible to the naked eye of the spectator-audience and the imagination of the reader. She shows how the grandmother, with first “her dramatic entrance, as always the consummate actress” and later through her trance surrender, has power to make the spectators engage and identify with her, as Djebbar asserts, “I felt I was following the dancer into some realm of frenzy” (145). The hypnotic singsong of the old women and the drumbeats serve as the impetus to release the torrent of cries dwelling in the matriarch’s throat. As the grandmother’s cries begin, “... all the voices of the past, imprisoned in her present existence, were now set free and leapt far away from her” (ibid.). The voices of the victims of colonialism cannot be suppressed. As in Miranda’s memoir, in *Fantasia* too there is also a conflation between individual and collective voices. Djebbar sheds light on how this extravagant ceremonial was the grandmother’s own way of protesting. “Cocooned in that primitive music,” Djebbar writes, “she drew her daily strength before our very eyes. The haughty woman’s voice and body gave me a glimpse of the source of all our sorrows: like half-obliterated signs which we spend the rest of our lives trying to decipher” (145). The trance becomes an empowering strategy and perhaps a healing technique for the grandmother, who transcribes the signs of the shared colonial predicament and transmits those signals to her spectators who, in their turn, spend the rest of their lives attempting to fully discern them.

Committed to resurrecting her vanished sisters through her writing, Djébar brings to life another defiant matriarch. Aunt Zohra, the mother of the Moujahidine, is more than eighty years old but her age does not deter her from defying the French army and resisting their use of electrical shock during interrogations. Equally significant, Lila Zohra instills a resistive consciousness in her adopted little girl and plants the seeds of subversion in her mind at an early age. She tells her to cry each time the French soldiers come to question her about what her mother does and where she goes. Crying here becomes a defense mechanism that encapsulates a form of resistance but also guarantees the survival of this little girl. Another scene that bears witness to the efficacy of crying as a powerful voicing mechanism with a subversive function is when the French soldiers come to arrest one Algerian woman's husband. The wife recounts how she indulges in an orchestrated stunt with her "comrades-in-arms" in order to exert pressure on the unwelcome intruders: "I started to cry and loosen my hair and lacerate my cheeks. All the women in the house did the same things, howling louder and louder: enough to deafen them all! Outside, their officer heard us crying. He came into the house and said, 'Let that man go!'" (207).

The notion of the transmission of values from one generation to another is further explored in the passage entitled "Whispers." Djébar accurately depicts how whispering becomes an emblem and practice of survivance that is passed on to the children by the matriarchs, thus forming a perpetual chain of memories. As Djébar puts it, "The matriarchs whisper to the children in the dark, to the children's children crouching on the straw mat, to the girls who will become matriarchs in turn, their time for child-bearing soon past (a mere parenthesis, from the age of fifteen to the age of thirty-five or forty)" (176). This mode of utterance becomes an empowering trope to preserve the stories of the marginalized against oblivion. The voicing mechanism of whispering is tantamount to the activity of storytelling. Both modes of agency help maintain the legacy, which "... will otherwise be lost – night after

night, wave upon wave, the whispers take up the tale, even before the child can understand, even before she finds her words of light, before she speaks in her turn and so that she will not speak alone...” (177).

Contrary to the invaders’ expectations, death and destruction have not brought about any signs of capitulation by the invaded. Rather, the colonizers’ abominable practices have only stiffened Algerians’ resolve to mobilize for retaliation. Djébar further textualizes this resistance when she refers to another ignominious chapter in the history of French colonialism. The reference is to the French commander in chief Saint Arnaud, who ignited and burnt a plethora of orchards in Algeria. However, the fires, according to Djébar, “are finally extinguished because the old lady talks today and I am preparing to transcribe her tale” (177). As I mentioned in the Introduction, this is the creative presence of what Vizenor calls a “fourth person” in stories. The old woman in Djébar’s story becomes a fourth person, “a persuasive image in a scene created from a visual memory of a situation” (*Treaty Shirts* 110). As Saint-Arnaud also participated in the writing of a history that unsurprisingly commemorated only the conquerors’ deeds and achievements, Djébar goes against Saint-Arnaud’s rhetorical maneuvers to question and undermine the French’s official archive, and revisits the violent events. Djébar expands the story in her visual memory and changes her date of birth to 1842:

I am forced to acknowledge a curious fact: the date of my birth is *eighteen hundred and forty-two*, the year when General Saint-Arnaud arrives to burn down the *zaouia* of the Beni Menacer, the tribe from which I am descended, and he goes into raptures over the orchards, the olive groves, ‘the finest in the whole of Algeria’, as he writes in a letter to his brother – orchards which have now disappeared. (217)

Although Djébar’s new date of birth is written in the context of language in her autobiography, in fact it can also be read as bringing in the fourth person. Just like Miranda,

Djebar makes a retrospective entry into the past by moving her own presence backwards to integrate her personal history with Algeria's history (Gracki). Through this retrospective journey, Djebar makes her voice heard, a voice that is contingent upon all the other voices of resistance that were savagely repressed by colonial schemes:

It is Saint-Arnaud's fire that lights my way out of the harem one hundred years later: because its glow still surrounds me I find the strength to speak. Before I catch the sound of my own voice I can hear the death-rattles, the moans of those immured in the Dahra mountains and the prisoners on the Island of Sainte Marguerite; they provide my orchestral accompaniment. They summon me, encouraging my faltering steps, so that at the given signal my solitary song takes off. (ibid.)

As she moves towards the end of her novel, Djebar includes a short section that she entitles "Tzarl-rit: (Finale)." This part is made up of two translations from Arabic to French for the word "tzal-rit" (of course, the French translations are, in turn, translated to English as *Fantasia* is translated from French into English by Dorothy S Blair). The first translation in French is taken from Beaussier's Arabic-French Dictionary, while the second one from Kazimirski's. What is worthy of consideration here is that both Beaussier, a 19<sup>th</sup> century French military interpreter in Algeria, and Kazimirski, a 19<sup>th</sup> century French Arabist, were orientalist figures who contributed in the writing and documentation of history. They both seemed to appropriate the word and ascribe a certain fixed meaning to it. Given the fact that I myself speak the Arabic language, I find it intriguing how both definitions are constructed in a univocal way, without taking into consideration that the word "tzarl-rit" could be read, and hence translated, equivocally, depending on the context. Indeed, the word means *both* "to utter a cry of joy while smacking the lips with hands (of women)" *and* "shout, vociferate (of some women when misfortunes befalls them)" (221). Therefore, the word does not have *only one* single meaning or the other.

In the following section “Pauline,” where she contests the singularity of perspective in her intertextual dictionary entries, Djébar brilliantly responds to the insular appropriation in the name of “preserving” a language. As both translations seem to release a single meaning, Djébar reclaims the term in a subtle way and inscribes a certain connotation to it that both lexicographers fail to capture. Indeed, Djébar pays homage in this section to the French woman whose “Christian name is Pauline” and who was among the group of prisoners brutally compelled to travel from France to Algeria. Pauline, “a forty-eight-year-old schoolteacher who ‘fights for her faith and her principles’” was considered a “dangerous agitator” in France. But four years after her arrival in Algeria, Pauline got sick and was brought back to France as she struggled with a fatal illness. Although she spent only a few months in a country that became her grave, Pauline seemed to have a more conscious awareness of Algerian women and the struggles they dealt with in a colonialist and patriarchal society. As a witness and an ethnographer throughout the four months of her Algerian travels, Pauline constantly wrote letters to her family and friends in the struggle. But one particular letter grabs the narrator’s attention. Djébar writes:

I re-read these letters sent from Algeria: one sentence catches my eye, lovingly inscribed, covering Pauline’s life: “In Kabylia,” Pauline writes in July 1852, “I have seen women treated as beasts of burden, and others odalisques in a rich man’s harem. I have slept at the side of the former on the bare ground, and beside the latter amid gold and silk...” (223)

Perhaps those “affectionate words from a woman, pregnant with the future” evinced the sense of accuracy and credibility that other works by male European ethnographers lacked. Most importantly, Pauline’s true words seemed to do more justice to Algerian women, and that explains why Djébar states, “they give off light before my eyes and finally set me free” (ibid.). Djébar then builds a strong female bonding that extends beyond national boundaries.

She consolidates the spirit of female solidarity, as the activist heroines in the novel such as Cherifa and Lila Zohra become Pauline's "true heirs," and thus all those Algerian women could pay tribute to Pauline "with that ancestral cry of triumph, the ululation of convulsive sisterhood!" (ibid.). That is a better, truer, and more empowering definition and translation for "tzarl-rit."

Eugène Fromentin, a 19<sup>th</sup> century French orientalist painter and writer, began his travels to Algeria in 1852, the same year when Pauline left "this country that has been crushed beneath the weight of twenty-two years of unrelenting war" (224). Described as an "elegant tourist" and "a peaceful aristocrat," Fromentin was enthralled by this exotic new setting but mostly by the intense light of North Africa that, according to him, made everything look grey. Unsurprisingly, it is this greyness that becomes emblematic of the muteness that he related to Algeria in his canvases. Djébar contends, "This consummate draughtsman, who excels in hunting scenes, portrays our ancestors surrounded by this soft glow and makes them seem the sad accomplices of his melancholy" (ibid.). Furthermore, in one of the fragments of his journal *Chronique de l'Absent*, Fromentin depicted the accidental tragic death of an Algerian woman named Haoua (Eve) at the hands of a lover she had previously rejected. "Oh, my friend, you have killed me!" were the last words that Haoua pronounced and that the French artist depicted in his writing as well. Accordingly, Fromentin participated in buttressing the French colonialist agenda that was predicated upon a suppression of the voices – mostly female voices – of those who were being relegated to the periphery. Djébar communicates her reprimand of Fromentin's disempowering and impotent depiction of Haoua, "The first Algerian heroine to make a brief appearance in a story written in French, the first to murmur a word in the margin, pretending not to realize she is trespassing..." (225).

The very last passage "Air on a Nay" testifies to Djébar's strong sense of agency to create powerful subaltern voices despite the debilitating omnipotence of colonialist historical

narratives. Fromentin – whom Djébar considers as a “second father” for assisting her in her visual and visionary reminiscence thanks to his graphic writings – described one sinister detail while he was leaving the oasis. On his way, “he picks up out of the dust the severed hand of an anonymous Algerian woman. He throws it down again in his path” (226). This detail then instigates Djébar to write back to Fromentin and to help that anonymous woman recuperate her mutinous voice. As Djébar succinctly puts it, “Later, I seize on this living hand, hand of mutilation and of memory, and I attempt to *bring it the qalam* [stylus]” (ibid.). Undaunted, she intervenes, even with a “nomad memory” and an “intermittent voice,” to re-write history from her own perspective. Djébar explains, “I intervene to greet the painter who has accompanied me throughout my wanderings like a second father figure. Eugène Fromentin offers me an unexpected hand – the hand of an unknown woman he was never able to draw” (226). Djébar strives to voice the silenced past (or bring it “the qalam”) and to overcome the barriers that have obstructed the voices of her Algerian sisters.

### **Questions of Ancestral Language and Authenticity**

In *Writing Home: Indigenous Narratives of Resistance*, Prof. Michael Wilson points out that, since the arrival of the first European settlers to America, the grand narratives of settler colonialism seek to eradicate physically, culturally and politically the presence of Indigenous communities through the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, social Darwinism, and progress from barbarism to civilization, among others. Prof. Wilson raises the problem of authenticity in representation of Native Americans:

Combined, this cultural ethos of America (ironically its vision of its best self) denies the possibility of tribal groups as contemporary and equal peoples, and instead requires that indigenous peoples be relegated to images of the past or of loss – for instance, the tragic mixed-blood figures in literature, sports mascots in popular culture, and place names on the landscape. Consequently, although

indigenous fiction displaying images of loss, tragedy and despair foregrounds the terrible effects of a history of colonialism, this literature does not serve to resist colonial discourse or destructive metanarratives. On the contrary, such fiction is well received because, as Fanon argues, cataloguing the ills of colonized peoples in “tragic and poetic style” only “serves to reassure the occupying power”. (xxi)

This problem of authenticity, which Fanon had addressed in *Black Martinique*, also comes up in *Bad Indians*. Deborah Miranda addresses the dilemmas of authenticity and inauthenticity by sharing her story and vision of being of mixed-ancestry. After giving space to the story of her parents’ marriage, Miranda weaves her own personal narrative that emanates from this miscegenation. Clearly, all the stories dovetail with each other. However, Miranda refuses to let anyone question her story as an Indian, especially when other Indians tend to downgrade her account on the basis of being a “half-breed: half California Indian, half white European” (134). She argues that not speaking the language of her ancestors does not negate her identity as an Indian or make her less Indian. Therefore, the very act of writing this book testifies to Miranda’s power to counteract the myopic fallacy or sophism that all California Indians were “extinct,” for the absence of language made their culture “non-existent.” As Miranda puts it, “... it’s been a tough road. Along the way, I’ve learned a lot about stories, their power to rebuild or silence” (xiv). Certainly, Miranda’s survivance story, along with the various stories imbedded in it, are stories that rebuild and give voice to a silenced past of violence and violation. Even in the aftermath of the destruction of a language, culture can still be preserved and reaffirmed by preserving the powerful legacy of storytelling. Miranda asserts that culture is lost only “... when we stop our retelling of the past, our imagining of our future, and the long, long task of inventing an identity every single second of our lives” (ibid.).

The emphasis on telling and retelling stories is paramount to compensate for the loss of ancestral language and thus it is integral to survivance. Miranda faces and exteriorizes the pains, the wounds, the damages, all the insidious effects of colonization. Acknowledging, not denying or escaping, the truth of their personal and communal predicaments is the way to come to terms with who they are, and that offers a possible route to build decolonized futures. Miranda's focus is on the importance of looking inward and forging healing intratribal and intertribal relationships, and that is half the battle. This point has also been addressed by other Native scholars, such as Kimberly Wiser, who believes in the importance of acknowledging tribal worldviews as "polycentric" while maintaining "tribally specific approaches." Wieser contends, "My relationships and friendships with people from other tribes, whether Blackfoot or Cree, Navajo or Anishinaabe, change me because they make visible the similarity between their colonial *wounds* and my own and those of my peoples, as they also do the similarities between our cultures and cultural strengths. My ancestry does not change, but *I* do, and therefore my thinking does as well" (90-91). Therefore, developing new ways to accept, heal, and advance together is grounded on tribal communities' dedication to make room for a new conception of unity that stems from a sense of *wholeness as mosaics*. As Miranda beautifully puts it:

We must think of ourselves as a mosaic, human being constructed of multiple sources of beauty, pieces that alone are merely incomplete but which, when set into a new design together, complement the shards around us, bring wholeness to the world and ourselves.

We think we are too broken to ever be whole again. But it's not true. We can be whole – just differently. (136)

With every colonizing venture, language serves as a powerful instrument that actualizes and perpetuates cultural oppression. The imposition of the colonizer's language is

built on a rationale of suppression and substitution of the colonized peoples' languages and cultures. This linguistic form of dominance is met by different reactions from colonized nations. Those responses vary in their degree of resistance and opposition to assimilationist forces. For example, Frantz Fanon explores the phenomenon of acculturation as the absorption of the indigenous population's languages and cultures by the colonizer's language. He takes as an example French language's infiltration into the social and cultural fabric of black Martinique. According to him, the assumption of white supremacy through France's reproduction of itself and the advancement of its civilization in the colony further intensifies the disparagement of their own local, native languages. The result of this negation of subjectivity is fragmentation, as he writes, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (17). Being then becomes fragmented, a sort of non-being that is accentuated by the colonized subject's internalization of an inferiority complex. Fanon asserts, "Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation" (18).

On the other hand, in opposition to Fanon's description of the socio-linguistic model of adaptation to the dominant culture in colonial contexts, Vizenor has a different view of the English language, the "mother tongue of paracolonialism." In the context of U.S. settler colonialism, English is a double-edged sword for many Indigenous peoples. Although it is impossible to undo the damages caused by the colonizers' dominant language in terms of loss and endangerment of native cultures, English is also a language that could carry the simulations of survivance. It is both crippling and empowering, as Vizenor argues, "The English language has been the linear tongue of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulations of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities; at the same time, this mother tongue of paracolonialism has

been a language of invincible imagination and liberation for many tribal people in the postindian world” (“Shadow Survivance” 105). English is a harrowing marker of colonial dominance and yet survivancers make use of it – almost in a *Calibanesque* tone<sup>24</sup> – as a medium for vital subversion and unrestrained creativity. English becomes the survivancers’ *forte*, not by forceful imposition as experienced in boarding schools, but by choice and conscious volition in their imaginative literary art. As Vizenor puts it, “English, that coercive language of federal boarding schools, has carried some of the best stories of endurance, the shadows of tribal survivance, and now that same language of dominance bears the creative literature of distinguished postindian authors in the cities” (ibid., 106).

In what follows I examine how Miranda offers a powerfully evocative account on her lifelong wrestle with her linguistic identity. In *Bad Indians*, she puts together three back-to-back subsections that follow the tumultuous journey of getting to grips with the restoration of the Esselen language, her lost mother tongue. Her undertaking is both onerous and rewarding, as it bears witness to her inner revolution. In the first subsection entitled “Intensive Spanish: A Language Acquisition / Resistance Journal,” Miranda shares her intimate reflections on (un)learning *and* revolting against Spanish during an intensive summer language program. She mentions in the heading that precedes her journal how she studied a foreign language to fulfill a graduate school requirement for her PhD and clarifies that her choice of Spanish was due to her little acquaintance with the language in high school and because she *heard* her father using it. Indeed, Miranda compiles daily notes over the span of one week, organizing them by day and the corresponding lesson in Spanish, for example “Monday: A Lesson in Endings,” “Wednesday: Names,” etc. Historically, Spanish functioned as another insidious tool of an oppressive and regulatory Missionization project, conducted by Spanish padres

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<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is a dramatization of the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and its attendant discursive practices – or what Vizenor calls the “word wars.” My reference here is to Caliban’s power to “write back” and contest Prospero’s authority, as he retorts, “You taught me language; and my profit on’t/Is, I know how to curse” (Act 1, Scene 2, p.40).

whose aim was to convert California Indians into devoted Christians and loyal Spanish citizens. In one of her journal entries, Miranda inquires about when exactly the Spanish language started colonizing the very intimacy of her ancestors' thoughts, dreams, and lovemaking. Miranda highlights how the replacement of an Esselen tongue entails a process of discordant translation wherein meaning is cruelly disrupted, tainted, and deranged. "But how do you conjugate the verb *ser* ('to be') when you have been declared extinct? How do you produce the formal *usted* when the priest teaching it rapes you?" (138). As she tries to capture her emotions in reaction to some of the lessons and rules in learning Spanish in her notebook, Miranda considers how a religious and cultural proselytization is also effectuated by the power of enforced naming. She recalls all the "Marías," her grandmothers and all the other missionized Indian girls, who must have endured the burden of a foisted estrangement from their old selves for being stripped of their Esselen names. "How can I pronounce those alien names written in Castellano script filling the black ledgers? They are only skeletons anyway, not the heart or flesh of a people. Will I ever know how they sounded coming out of an Esselen mouth – called by a grandparent, sister, lover, child, mother, river?" (ibid.).

Miranda's last two entries in her journal reveal how Spanish is a discursive site for recalcitrance and empowerment, an ambivalence that proves to be valuable not only in helping her understand her mental processes of self-division, but also in initiating a healing process to restore her mother tongue. In the penultimate entry of this section, Miranda succinctly reflects on the complementarity of oral tradition and the audibility of silence in preserving and transmitting her ancestors' memories and cultural heritage, a point that reminds me of Vizenor's notion of shadows as "the silence in heard stories, the silence that bears a referent of tribal memories and experience" ("Shadow Survivance" 72). Miranda affirms, "Silence is a long story, a complex art left to descendants of Native speakers. Ribbioned palm fronds hang absolutely still. A thousand tongues that don't move, yet exist

whole and fully formed” (ibid.). However, this assertion is immediately followed by her confession that she sometimes dreams in Spanish, a revelation that exacerbates her sense of betrayal to the inherited trust of reconstructing the ancestral language. Miranda describes the encroachment of Spanish on her dreams as follows, “My mouth moves in all the proper patterns: the rolling ‘r,’ delicate placement of tongue against teeth, subtle slip of consonants. But in the morning I taste a tide of blood, slick iron in my traitorous mouth” (139). Yet, I believe that this mental contamination does not deter Miranda from attempting to heal her tongue, for her last journal entry “Friday: *Vocabulario*” indicates her resistance to a lucid process of Spanish acquisition. She contends, “During the weekly quiz, I pause, my pencil hovering over the blanks that are waiting for me to fill them in with the sweat of my nightly memorization. Every time I learn a Spanish word I want to know the Esselen word it replaced” (ibid.). Therefore, Spanish language learning produces a form of generative erasure, as typographically illustrated in Miranda’s crossing out of the word “~~Acquisition~~” in the title of this subsection. This strikethrough evinces not only a change of thought, but also a corrective revision. With a touch of vital irony, Miranda contests the unnatural and discordant association of the languages of early colonization and contemporary paracolonialism with her Native ancestors’ language:

Between my teeth I clench the Unholy Trinity: English, Spanish, Esselen:

*Water. Agua. Asanax.*

*Bear. Oso. Koltala.*

*Earth. La tierra. Madsa-no.*

I laugh, and *la profesora* looks up from her desk, asks with her eyes if I need help. I shake my head, glance down again at the page of words to be translated. How can I shape a third language to describe a second language that destroyed the first language? This language: blade to slice my tongue. *Esta lengua: un beso como un*

*cuchillo*. It will take ten more years, but I will say it: *Nishwelel, nishkumal*: sever our bonds, tear the gags from our mouths. Remember us. (ibid.)

I personally read her laughter as a cathartic release to liberate the Esselen language from a state of prolonged and restrained dormancy. This epiphany will be unfolded in the following two subsections.

Entitled “Learning How to Fish: A Language Homecoming Journal,” the second subsection communicates how the journey of language recovery, just like memory writing, is also grounded in a multimodal form of survivance. This return to home – where ancestral language dwells, awaiting to be recovered and reclaimed – entails an activation and heightening of the returnees’ senses. Indeed, similar to the previous subsection, this part is also structured as daily entries in Miranda’s personal journal during the “Breath of Life” conference, a sort of preparatory program at UC Berkley, designed to equip “hungry” California Indians with the “tools and materials” needed to restore their tribal languages and thus “to learn how to fish” for themselves. Despite her commitment to decolonization, Miranda initially resisted participating in the conference and venturing into unexplored territories. She admits, “I know my monolingual brain is completely occupied by English; I can’t imagine taking decolonization to those deep dark places where Indigenous languages hide” (141). Her statement shows how settler-colonial violence through language has taken a heavy toll on her habits of thinking and feeling, thus regulating her “English-trained neural pathways” (143). However, Miranda fought this paracolonial imposition and managed to decolonize her mind with the help of her sister Louise whose full immersion in restoring the Esselen language provides a great source of encouragement and support.

The “Breath of Life” conference is a venue where two different narratives meet and grapple with each other. The first narrative belongs to the realm of academic and pedagogic discourse, which seems to freeze and ossify tribal languages and cultures into major

collections and “how-to-tours,” including “not just a general introduction to the materials, but hands-on instructions for using those materials to research a specific tribal language and/or culture. The Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology. Survey of California and Other Indian Languages. An archival information site at Doe Library. The Berkley Language Center. The Bancroft Library’s extensive collection of microfilms” (142). To this almost suffocating enumeration, Miranda writes, “If my brain doesn’t shrivel up first, then my feet will” (ibid.). Although the intentions of the conference organizers are good and stem from a noble aspiration to promote the recovery of lost tribal languages, it is an undeniable fact that the curatorial spaces weaken – if not infringe – the stimulation of the senses to embark on a therapeutic journey of creating “memories in imagination” (“Shadow Survivance” 74). Miranda illustrates this when she describes her visit to “Basket Storage,” a site wherein baskets made by their ancestors are retained and displayed like relics from the past, as if subject to some sort of scientific investigation:

Today we received special permission to view the baskets in Basket Storage. Going into the facility was like visiting our relatives in jail: sweet, bittersweet. We left purses, backpacks, food and drink outside. We donned plastic gloves. We entered a huge room full of white towers, inside of which are set deep drawers and shelving, covered with – oh, filled with – baskets made by the hands of our ancestors. (ibid.)

Actually, the dreary atmosphere evokes the museumization of Indigenous lives, thus denying a natural access to the ancestors’ stories of survivance and impeding the participants’ sense of sensory and extrasensory perception. The curatorial silence breaks the thread of memory. However, only a communicative act that involves a sense of touch, visual and auditory modalities, and verbal expression can offer a refreshing antidote to the exhibition of Native people’s tangible and intangible heritage in storehouses. As Miranda so eloquently puts it, “We could touch them (with gloves on), photograph them, talk to them, pray over them, sing

to them. We were allowed to bring in rattles and clappers. The shaking seeds like rain, elderberry claps like thunder, and voices of our little Breath of Life tribe were springs of life in the quiet climate-controlled room. It was a heartbreaking visit. We could not take them home” (142-143).

Miranda continues to open her heart to her readers about the personal and communal trip down the memory lane to come into contact and connect with her ancestors and their language. In another entry note, Miranda recalls how her relative Isabel Meadows *handed down* the observation made by her relative Fulgencio to H.P. Harrington about the exquisiteness and delectability of the Esselen language. Miranda revels in the recollection:

I like the idea that our language has flavor, texture, scent, yet can never be consumed. I tell Louise about Fulgencio’s comment; she tells everyone else, and we end that evening with great smacking of lips and satisfied rubbing of tummies. “Oh, *that’s* why they make those sounds, like they’re savoring each syllable!” Anyone looking at us from the outside would run in the other direction. (144)

The key takeaway from this episode is that the story/reflection about the Esselen language becomes a “memory in imagination,” thus enacting a sense of natural presence that cannot be captured by representation in academic discourse or translation. Besides, the sharing and transmission of this memory carries the legacy of survivance, as Vizenor contends, “The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates” (“Aesthetics” 11).

The other narrative that shines through the “Breath of Life” conference and seems to countervail the coldness of curatorial exhibitions and research tools belongs to the multimodal discourse of creativity. The participants’ presentation of individual projects is a collective experience of survivance, a healing ceremony, and a triumph. All California Indians in the conference were able to reclaim and live *through* and *by* their languages and cultures in the oasis of a shared and inspiring moment. As Miranda puts it:

Listening, watching, I realized that virtually every aspect of culture was presented: religion, music, oral and written literatures, linguistic play... don't try telling a Breath of Life participant that our cultures are dead. We have become Fishers of Words, but we practice a catch and release system: snag those little silver gems, then release them back out into the wider world as quickly and lovingly as possible. Let them go forth and multiply. Whatever allegory you want to use, the work of language recovery and renewal takes patience, near-obsessive persistence, and the generosity of many. (146)

The transition to more creative expressions in the Esselen language during the conference paves the way to the third and last subsection about Miranda's language homecoming journey. Her regenerative language recuperation is crowned by the writing of a hybrid poem in Esselen and English, entitled "Teheyapami Achiska / Giving Honor." The poem is composed of nine stanzas, and each stanza includes four lines: each first and third line of every stanza is written in Esselen, while the second and fourth lines are their translations in English. At the level of typography, what is interesting is that Miranda seems to give more prominence to Esselen by writing the translated English lines in italics, not the other way round, as if to corroborate that English *is* the foreign language. Dedicated to her sister Louise and the "Breath of Life" conference, Miranda's creative work is a heartfelt tribute to her recovered mother tongue. With a mutual sensory awareness, the Esselen language becomes an animate entity. Miranda and her mother tongue sustain and console one another. They fuse and become one:

Nishkuuh, niche lahake.

*My basket, carry me.*

Nishimila, niche lasapke.

*My ocean, bathe me.*

.....

Name cha'a nishkxatasaxno,

*I feel you in my head,*

nishxushuno, nishkeleno.

*my hands, my feet.*

Uxarat kai pire.

*We dance on the cliff of the world.*

Name cha'a nishchawisaxno,

*I feel you in my spine,*

nishxorksno, nishsixihano.

*my throat, my womb.*

Namesanaxkak opa, eni inamkak opa.

*You are a river, I am the rain. (147-148)*

Similar to Miranda, Assia Djébar's inquiry into her linguistic and cultural identity is also a double-edge weapon. Estranged from her mother tongue(s), the Arabic and Berber languages of her ancestors, Djébar finds an accidental love for French, an adventitious contact thrust upon her by her father at an early age. As a nonconformist, Djébar's father repudiated a purely post-colonial Algerian nationalism that was firmly embedded in an Islamic sentiment and a continuous tension between the Berber, Arabic, and French languages and cultures. With his unconventional thinking, the father stretches the borders of a cloistered upbringing for his daughter. The result, Djébar reveals, is an insoluble dilemma of internal displacement. Her writing in French is indeed the performance of an assault on a foreign language that paradoxically yields an inexorable conflict and opportunity *simultaneously*. Understandably, Djébar's relationship with French – the former colonizer's language – is marked by an

overflowing ambiguity and ambivalence. As Dorothy Blair points out in her Introduction to Djébar's *Fantasia*:

While Arabic is Assia Djébar's mother tongue, she calls French both her 'father tongue', since it was her schoolteacher father who introduced her to it and also her 'step-mother tongue', with which she maintains a love-hate relationship. She resents the fact that her early exposure to a French education made her a cultural, linguistic and, for a time a literal exile from the land of her origins; at the same time she appreciates that French has been the gateway to freedom, denied to many of her countrywomen. (xvii)

Djébar pours her senses into the writing of her Frenchness to translate her visceral distress. She formulates an experience that talks back, or matches against, another experience – a *dominant* one – which is told through the eyes of the colonizer, who is purportedly the only one qualified to speak of the colony (as I have shown earlier). Depicting Djébar's conflicting emotions, Blair adds:

She is clearly in love with the musicality of French, which she exploits in those passages of prose poetry printed in italics, and in which she makes the prose approximate to music, both structurally and sonically. At other times, in a conscious effort to escape from the shackles of writing in the 'enemy's language', she seems to be colonizing the language of the colonizers. She does violence to it, forcing it to give up its riches and defying it to hand over its hidden hoard, in compensation for the treasure looted from Algiers in 1830, and also to compensate her personally for being dispossessed of her Arabic heritage. (ibid.)

Feeding on her memories, Djébar reflects on two different apprenticeships during an early formative period in her life that brings together the Arabic and French languages. In fact, Djébar recalls how she attended concomitantly the Quranic school and the French school

in her village from the age of five until ten – or until she approached puberty, the visual cue that confined women's bodies and movements in the rural spaces of her native land, or as Djebbar puts it, "... the emergence of her woman's personality transformed her into an incarcerated body!" (183). As her father chose "light rather than darkness" and "the outdoors and the risk, instead of the prison of my peers," Djebbar finds herself following an unorthodox pathway, which comes with a heavy burden: the activation of a two-dimensional mindset. Indeed, Djebbar is torn between two worlds: the realm of French with its attendant musicality and sense of liberation, and the realm of Arabic with its associated physicality and sensuality. The learning of Quran through the writing of Arabic script is a multimodal experience in which the body serves as an integral part in the actualization of the learning process. The arm, hand, fingers, mouth, muscles of the larynx, breath, torso, and posture, all come into play with different rhythms and patterns in embodying the spirit and skills of learning both Arabic and Quran. Yet, this writing *by, on, and of* the female body – what Djebbar calls "the fourth language" – is severed as soon as that body borders on sexual maturity. "The venue left [for] these disenfranchised women," Nada Elia writes, "is the preverbal, physical expression, movements and sounds, 'dances and vociferations,' functioning outside the reach of any Symbolic discourse, and which, by virtue of this, can communicate the unsayable" (188).

For Djebbar, the tangle of all her tongues place her in "a dichotomy of location," for "in the conflict between these two worlds, lies an incipient vertigo" (184-185). What is left in her case is the "language of the enemy," which Djebbar disarms its force through her mastery and subversive play with a peculiarly complex syntax and an ornate and metaphorical usage. As Elia puts it, "And, just as an energetic body's movement will not be stilled by the *hijab*, Djebbar's use of French to revive these 'trances and vociferations' disarms that language, reducing it to the role of medium, rather than agent, or oppressor" (188). Yet, Djebbar continues to embrace her linguistic ambivalence, writing, "I know that every language is a

dark depository for piled-up corpses, refuse, sewage, but faced with the language of the former conqueror, which offers me its ornaments, its jewels, its flowers, I find they are the flowers of death – chrysanthemums on tombs!” (181). The above quote reflects French’s Janus-faced character that combines the loss of Djébar’s native language and her empowering appropriation of this foreign language. Perhaps, like Miranda, Djébar is teaching the reader to accept the inevitable discord between the tongues of the displaced, and thus to wrestle with and wallow in the complexity of the linguistic amalgam as that generates creativity and renewal from the womb of anguish.

The creative and transformative capacities of telling stories in the re-writing *and* righting of history help crystallize the themes and practices of survivance evident in “that sense of presence in remembrance, that trace of creation and natural reason in native stories” (*Fugitive Poses* 15). Indeed, Deborah Miranda’s *Bad Indians* and Assia Djébar’s *Fantasia*, two historical-epistemological narratives from different locales, both convey a strong sense of presence in remembrance. While being cognizant of the importance of contextualization in the analysis of historical-literary texts, I believe that drawing discernable connections between colonial narratives – albeit originating from diverse geo-political and cultural loci – helps to enrich our understanding of Indigenous epistemologies in relation to a North-African post-colonial thought and experience, and vice versa. The emergence and exploration of possible intellectual and visionary points of convergence could account for a sort of ‘trans-heteroholistic’ approach to Native American literature. In his essay “Towards a Heteroholistic Approach to Native American Literature,” Billy J. Stratton defines heteroholism as “a term created to denote the interplay between intellectual and spiritual or visionary ways of knowing that are anchored in specific spatial and temporal sites that distinguish Native worldviews and knowledge” (148). Such a composite worldview of Native American

scholarship can open up new avenues for readers of Indigenous literatures “to engage with and account for Indigenous knowledge and Native aesthetics in all of their richness, but most vitally, on their own terms.” Stratton further adds, “An interpretive approach enlivened by such a critical method encourages a deeper understanding of the unique contributions of Native stories, while acknowledging the complex histories that coalesce in the formation of tribal identities” (149). Not only do I endorse such an interactive and expansive overview, but I would also suggest a similar approach on a broader, transnational level to create a more inclusive and cross-fertilizing space for the expression of personal experiences and histories of diverse native populations, who share at least one commonality: the ethos and practice of survivance against various forms of dispossession.

Both Indigenous North America and Algeria have fought against the historical violence of colonialism and genocidal policies. Yet, colonial cartographies of silence and erasure “write the conquerors’ stories over the stories of the conquered” (Owens 213). Miranda and Djébar, as “worriers of survivance,” return to and reclaim their respective historical pasts, and *en route* they imagine, recreate and resurrect the voices, the stories, the lives of their brave progenitors. Inherent in their epistemological reconfigurations of the past are the complex and dynamic workings of their storied memories, which create foliage of transnational and transformational relationships. “The teller of stories,” Vizenor asserts, “is an artist, a person of wit and imagination, who relumes the diverse memories of the visual past into the experiences and metaphors of the present” (*The People Named the Chippewa* 7). Accordingly, in an endeavor to comprehend and reckon with epistemologies and ontologies of loss and grief in what Jodi Byrd calls “the distances and sutures of recognitions and belongings,” Miranda and Djébar create a space for “the more nourishing stories of significance” in their own narrative histories of survivance (Byrd xvii; Heath Justice 4).

**Migrants and Refugees: Simulations of Survivance in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and  
Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits***

We live in a world of borders. Territorial, political, juridical, and economic borders of all kinds quite literally define every aspect of social life in the twenty-first century.

-- Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border*

*L'émotion directe, un cri, un pleur, un rire, quelque chose de nomade, l'âme, le cœur des humains en perpétuel état de survivance, chez eux nulle part, partout chez eux / Direct emotion, a shout, a cry, a laugh, something nomadic, the soul, the heart of humans in a perpetual state of survivance, at home nowhere, everywhere at home.*

-- Colette Godard, *Le Monde* (1998) [my translation]

In this chapter, I look into gendered experiences of migration and uprooting, homing, and belonging. I then explore Vizenor's concept of "the simulations of survivance," and how they can counteract "simulations of dominance" in the context of transnational migration. I also discuss how migrants can unmake borders and create a new sense of presence through their right to opacity and an "imaginative recreation of reality."

With an unabating xenophobia, global anti-migrant rhetoric continues to shape a political ideology that restricts the movements of people around the world. Such an ideological framework of power and exclusion is considered by some scholars as a discriminatory system of "global apartheid" that accounts for "global trends in the distribution of wealth and rights according to place of birth, race, and ethnicity, where some groups face more movement restrictions and criminalization than others" (Ceciliano et al. 94). Governments and their agents of domination, through laws, policies, and state media to name a few, monitor and circumscribe migrants and refugees' movements, while forging national

and cultural identities grounded in the fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar. Besides, the Information Age we live in has brought forth a steady flow of transnational “migrant images” that propagate contested visions and narratives, thus connecting and disconnecting us based on our frames of reference. Varying from forced to voluntary, persecution-related to economically motivated, war-induced to triggered by natural disasters, migrations take various forms, routes, and meanings. Yet, as these migratory movements mark peoples’ legitimate demand for their right to move freely, they also exacerbate the implementation of mechanisms and practices of rejection and removal in the receiving nations. As such, my claim in this chapter is to explore how the creative energies and potentials of survivance come into play in a transnational framework to puncture the enclosure of mobile lives. Survivance works against dominant Western forms of representation, which require transparencies to grasp and reduce mobile subjects’ diverse experiences of de/re-territorialization. To this end, I focus specifically on Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* and Laila Lalami’s *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. These two narratives bring to the fore migrants and refugees’ lived experiences of dislocation and relocation, their rethinking of the meanings of home and belonging, and their recalibrations of survivance strategies in the geopolitics of conflict zones and crises of borders. Drawing on Vizenor’s metaphorical use of “shadow survivance” and Édouard Glissant’s “right to opacity,” I hope to demonstrate how survivance – as a practice of active resistance – allows migrants and refugees to elude and counteract normative and restrictive knowledges, which divide and hierarchize the world. Therefore, a revisioning of the relation between aesthetics and politics, as discussed by T. J. Demos in *The Migrant Image*, helps “situate migration as bearing transformative potential in the current neoliberal world of control, repression, and inequality” (246).

Written with brio and a remarkably candid style, Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* traces the movements and distances traversed literally and figuratively by the two protagonists Nadia and Saeed in a violence-ridden world, where refugees and migrants are brought together through a shared experience of dislocation, resettlement and mostly hope. The story is first set in an unnamed Islamic city that witnesses both the burgeoning of a romance between Nadia, an autonomous and self-assertive woman and Saeed, a family-oriented and reserved man, as well as the escalating violence of a civil war that has propelled people, including the protagonists themselves, to flee. Along those lines, in *Exit West* Hamid reconfigures the boundaries of the world and compresses time and space through the medium of "doors," black portals serving as the unique transit system for refugees and migrants. While Hamid accentuates the notion of the pressing and the transient in the refugee experience, his writing style is not abrupt especially when he uses long, breathless sentences that sometimes extend over the span of an entire page. He eloquently sets forth sentences cast in tones of promptitude and urgency that allow him to exquisitely capture the simultaneity between worldwide events in a way that seems to blur the boundaries of time zones. Indeed, the story of Nadia and Saeed is interspersed with eleven vignettes from different parts of the world that further underscore how the migration apocalypse is a ubiquitous transnational phenomenon with the agency of penetrable, yet precarious doors.

Unlike Hamid who starts and develops his storyline in a sequential and escalating approach, Lalami decides to begin her novel in medias res, a narrative technique that sets the readers right into the middle of the plot, which is here the illicit crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar from Tangier on an overloaded six-meter Zodiac inflatable, carrying thirty people, "men, women, and children, all with the anxious look of those whose destinies are in the hands of others – the captain, the coast guards, God" (2). Lalami grips the reader from the very first sentence, as she conveys the tensions and the fear experienced by those crossers

who would either make it to Tarifa or turn at any second into drowned bodies in the dark and menacing deeps. The fact that Lalami named this opening chapter “the trip,” and inserted the definite pronoun “the,” adds to the resolute and decisive character of this momentous event in the life of any clandestine border crosser. Sadly, and as expected, the boat, which is supposed to accommodate eight people, capsized about 250 meters away from its target destination. The novel, then, follows the life trajectories or the pre- and post-trip junctures of the main four protagonists, Faten, Murad, Halima and Aziz, who risked their lives in the quest for hope and other urgent demands.

As Mohsin Hamid’s and Laila Lalami’s novels are influenced by the historical contexts of their countries of origin, I devote the following section to tracing some of the socio-political conditions that served as formative influences in both authors’ intellectual development. I direct my attention at historical and contemporary migratory movements, as well as mechanisms of spatial control and/or violence that have regulated peoples’ sense of (im)mobility in both Pakistan and Morocco. Indeed, a brief historical overview is in order to better understand and respond to Hamid’s and Lalami’s aesthetic sensibilities and emotional precision in their literary works. However, given the centrality of Vizenor’s literary and critical influence on my work, I believe that it is equally important to address how the founding of the United States was realized through a vicious uprooting of Indigenous peoples and a territorial reconfiguration of exclusion. In the following section, I will look at contexts of migration and uprooting in the histories of the U.S., Pakistan, and Morocco.

### **Forced Migration and Uprooting in the U.S., Pakistan, and Morocco**

Indeed, experiences of dispossession, displacement and removal mark ignominious and tragic chapters in the history of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Prior to 1830, peace and integrity of autochthonous territories were more or less secured through negotiated pacts between American agents and representatives of Native tribes. However, American

settlers' greed to seize Indigenous lands was premised on a "close-meshed interaction between the laws, space, and violence" (Kreichauf 1). In 1830, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, enforcing the migration of Native American tribes from lands east to west of the Mississippi River.<sup>25</sup> Although the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Seminole and Choctaw tribes eventually signed treaties to give up their homes, the Cherokee nation's removal was the most atrocious one, not only for being imposed by coercion but mostly for instigating The Trail of Tears, one of the cruelest human rights abuses in U.S. history.<sup>26</sup> Such brutal tactics of forced removal continued to intensify the encroachment on Indigenous peoples' lives, rights, and territories, thus continuing to bring questions of place and placelessness to the fore. As Sara Ahmed et al. put it, "The founding of homelands and places of belonging can entail the displacement of others from their homes. It can also involve the spoliation of the homes of those who nevertheless remain 'in place', as is so evident in the migration of European settlers that has historically entailed the desecration of indigenous peoples' homelands" (6).

The forced geographical relocation of Native Americans was also intensified by an assimilationist agenda, which prescribed a unidirectional process of effacement and indoctrination, striving to strip Indigenous peoples of their traditional cultural identities. The goal was then to legitimize a 'civilizing' and paternalistic exercise of power. Consequently, in order to ensure a process of acculturation through the assimilationist project, education served as one of the best vehicles to attain that goal. The boarding school policy – or the enactment of cultural repression – started in 1860, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs decided to have

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<sup>25</sup> Information found in Mark Stewart's *The Indian Removal Act: Forced Relocation*.

<sup>26</sup> Native tribes gave up much of their lands and natural resources in exchange for trust obligations and duty of protection, promises that are "broken" by the U.S. federal government. For more information, see *Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*, the report of the 2018 briefing before the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

Native children educated in separate institutions. Indeed, families were often compelled to send their children to these schools, which implemented a military-like discipline, under the supervision of the government or Christian missionaries. In this regard, Dunbar-Ortiz asserts, “By the 1890s, although some military assaults on Indigenous communities and valiant Indigenous armed resistance continued, most of the surviving Indigenous *refugees* were confined to federal reservations, their children transported to distant boarding schools to unlearn their Indigenousness” (153; emphasis added). Dunbar-Ortiz’s choice of the word “refugees” is very significant, as it reflects Native communities’ sense of loss after the destruction of their homes. The culture of exile in boarding schools buttressed a mechanism of isolation and immobility as a means to effectuate Native children’s full absorption into the mainstream American culture. Furthermore, the aftermath of WWII also marked the beginning of another era of relocation of Native Americans from their lands and their migration to urban cities. In 1952, the federal government initiated the Urban Indian Relocation Program, whereby American politicians used the pretext of ‘freeing’ Native Americans from their reservations and urbanizing them so that they can find urban jobs and better their lives. Reservation dwellers were coerced to relocate and the Bureau of Indian Affairs provided little assistance for the *déraciné* natives, whose rural-to-urban migration further exacerbated their poverty.

Despite the various enactments of genocidal violence against Native Americans and the destruction of their habitats and economies, Indigenous peoples have drawn on their remarkable resourcefulness to dismantle the concocted narratives of native victimhood. The sense of alienation from their homelands – due to the enforced historical mobility by colonizing settlers – has served as an impetus to foreground their creative and enduring reconfiguring and reimagining of inhabitation. Homes are continuously being produced and reproduced through their bodies and agencies, which are informed by their communal sense

of belonging and umbilical attachment to land. Besides, against a backdrop of paracolonialism, Vizenor confronts and undermines the “simulations of dominance” in Western literature and movies that draw on “notions and misnomers that are read as the authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians” (“Postindian Warriors” 5-6). The dominant simulations of absence through the colonial invention of “Indianness” – or the forceful impositions of the unreal – are actually countered by Indigenous peoples’ own “simulations of survivance.” These consist of the creation of “a new sense of presence” through endurance, adaptability, and fluidity in survivancers’ stories. Survivance then is a counteraction to the colonialist erasure of sovereign Native presence and the repression of Indigenous cultures.

Not far unlike the Americas, the countries of Pakistan and Morocco have witnessed times of violent social and political turbulence in the not too distant past. As far as *Exit West* is concerned, Hamid weaves in the fabric of his novel passages and incidents of public violence that terrorized the people, the refugees-to-be, who live in an unnamed Muslim city. Although this anonymity is an open invitation to the reader to make what they will of this place, one can assume that this nameless city is modeled after Lahore, which has historically endured the perdurable and perilous India-Pakistan nexus. The European presence on the Indian subcontinent began with Vasco da Gama in late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Once a nautical route was discovered by the Portuguese, it subsequently enabled the French and the British to colonize India. In the wake of the expansion and consolidation of the British Empire through a strategy of “divide and conquer,” a powerful surge of nationalism was nevertheless proliferating especially among the Hindu-dominated opposition from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward. This period was also fraught with unbridled and separatist religious undertones, creating the schism between Muslims and Hindus. In light of this atmosphere of growing civil

unrest and virulent outbreaks, the British started to get enfeebled in the face of Indian resistance.

Great Britain lost its grip on most of its overseas territories after WWII. Yet, finally losing control over India in 1947 was not only imminent, but also concomitant with a traumatic partition whose trans-generational legacy of affliction and disjunction still lingers on to the present day. The same nationalist movements that led to India's independence also caused a division along ethnic and religious lines, forming two independent nations, a secular Hindu-majority India and a mostly Muslim Pakistan. Torture and violence cast a pall of terror over the millions of migrants crossing the newly created borders to escape religious persecution on both sides. However, even in the midst of Indo-Pakistani tensions,<sup>27</sup> the country of Pakistan went through additional internal division and discord. The geographical distance between East and West Pakistan was also reflected in the economic disparity, as well as the cultural and ethnic divergence between the two regions. With the growing military dominance and despotism in West Pakistan, the Bengalis in East Pakistan became more and more victims of violent attacks, since their allied Bengali nationalism was emerging as a revolutionary force that needed to be suppressed. These socio-cultural, economic and political conflicts were carried into the Liberation War, which culminated in the disaffiliation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan to finally establish the new autonomous nation of Bangladesh in 1971. Clearly, the Partition of British India created diasporas, thus forcing many South Asians to leave their homelands and go into exile either across the border or in different continents altogether. This notion of forced migration and refugee dispersal seems to provide an impetus for Hamid's novel *Exit West*.

The balkanization of the Indian subcontinent evinces paradoxically the centrality of questions related to mobility and de/territorialization despite the fortification of frontiers.

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on Indo-Pakistani relations, see *India and Pakistan: Continued Conflict or Cooperation?* by Stanley Wolpert.

These questions have bulked large not only in political and diplomatic relations, but also in transnational literature within and beyond the Indian subcontinent, wherein authors place migrants and refugees from all corners of the world at the epicenter of concern. Indeed, the entire world seems to have been undergoing, whether directly or indirectly, a series of both predictable and erratic socio-cultural and political changes whose attendant ramifications intensify the flux of social pariahs and exiles moving across several geographical loci. The peripatetic and/or settled nature of these movements serves to reconfigure the boundaries of the world and to foreground human volition to pursue hope for a better future. In view of this assertion, novelists such as Mohsin Hamid from Pakistan and Laila Lalami from Morocco use their literary creations to “map” hope and counteract despondency despite what Hamid refers to as the “reality of political depression all over the world” (“Points of No Return” *NYT* Podcast).

Mohsin Hamid, who was born in Pakistan in 1971 but has lived mainly between California, London and his homeland, considers himself as a “mongrelized, mixed hybrid person” (Dorsey). Therefore, he feels the need to span in his fiction that sense of syncretic identity through the trope of navigation, especially at a time when hybridized, mongrelized individuals feel that there is a kind of “shrinking space” for them because of this notion of “retreat into tribal identity” (ibid.). In his 2017 novel *Exit West*, Hamid brilliantly evinces how the migrant and refugee experiences provide a renewed understanding of time and space. The Pakistani author conceptualizes movement as a process of mongrelization aimed not only to shape new conceptions of subjectivity, but also to underscore the transience of human existence. As Hamid puts it, “... reasserting transience and finding in transience beauty and meaning and hope is very important, because resisting transience usually involves a lot of lies” (Onyebuchi). This notion of coming to terms with change and transience is deftly captured and examined in the novel wherein forms of both resistance and letting go acquire a

more self-transcending dimension in a world where migration, according to Hamid, becomes a fundamental condition of *every* human being.

The refugee's and the migrant's quest for self and 'home' is analogously addressed in Lalami's 2005 novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. The Moroccan author depicts her protagonists' personal dilemmas – intertwined with issues related to gender relations, class differences and familial dynamics – in stories that reflect the full gamut of Moroccan mentalities. While her academic pursuit follows a diasporic journey, Lalami is still strongly connected to her birth country. Her fiction is anchored in exposing the mundane, humdrum aspects of Moroccans' lives as well as the social problems they are confronted with on a regular basis, and which become endemic in a political climate that is still incapable of surmounting a vast range of interior developmental constraints. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, the 2006 Oregon Book Award finalist, Lalami fastidiously addresses the prevailing issue of illegal immigration and its encroachment on the lives of the less fortunate, who cling to a glimmer of hope even at the expense of their lives and self-(re)invention:

The news was relegated to the bottom of *Le Monde*'s online page – fifteen Moroccan immigrants had drowned while crossing the Straits of Gibraltar on a fishing boat. They had left Tangier on a summer night, trying to navigate the short distance – only ten miles – that separates their homeland from Spain, and from the rest of Europe, where they hoped to make a new life for themselves. The boat was overloaded and ill equipped to handle the strong Mediterranean currents, and it capsized a couple of miles away from the coast. There were no survivors.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, it was that 2001 *Le Monde* article that sparked Lalami's interest in the subject of illegal immigration, especially that incidents of clandestine crossings started to proliferate,

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<sup>28</sup> All quotes in this paragraph are taken from Laila Lalami's website.  
[https://lailalalami.com/hope-and-other-dangerous-pursuits/about/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1574879396.2294530868530273437500](https://lailalalami.com/hope-and-other-dangerous-pursuits/about/?doing_wp_cron=1574879396.2294530868530273437500)

and “[n]early every week in the summer of 2001 there was a report about arrests by the coast guards on either side of the Mediterranean,” declares Lalami. Since then, the Moroccan novelist was consumed with a moral imperative to inquire into the etiology of this phenomenon, which she mistakenly had thought of in the beginning as “an isolated incident, a blip, a bizarre turn of events,” but eventually she realized that illegal immigration is a veridical state of existence that is deeply entrenched in the social fabric of her country.

However, after conducting research on the subject of clandestine immigration, Lalami was reckoning with only the jejune and stoic aspect of a profusion of facts and figures, at the expense of a paucity of information on the real stories and personal attestations behind those illicit and perilous crossings. Indeed, as those who migrated were dubbed “harragas” in Moroccan Arabic, which literally means “those who burn,” Lalami grew more and more preoccupied with the driving force behind those hazardous acts of crossing – or this metaphorical pyromania that is taken to the depths of the oceans. As the novelist puts it, “Whether they were burning their papers, their lives, or their futures, I couldn’t tell. I wondered what could compel people to pay large sums of money in order to risk their lives for what would very likely be third-rate jobs.” As a result of these queries, Lalami decided to embark on an epistemic, fictional journey of understanding and empathy that would allow her to examine the phenomenology of illegal migration – in other words, the study of this phenomenon as a perceptual, lived experience with a special focus on the development of human consciousness. Her novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* accounts for a diagnostic comprehension of emigrants’ mindsets, which shape their decisions to strive for egress opportunities at any cost.

Very much like Hamid, who believes that every human being migrates in one way or another (an idea that I would come back to later in this chapter), Lalami also accentuates the likelihood of being in one of her characters’ shoes, had life dealt her different cards. “It would

seem that I have nothing in common with my characters,” avers Lalami, “but I could just as easily have been one of them, if the lottery of life had dealt me different numbers – if I had been poor, if I had not found a job.” In other words, Lalami underlines how the stories of “harragas” bear a certain degree of familiarity that is recognizable to many people, not only in Morocco, for one does not have to “look very hard or very far to find the kind of misfortune that drives people to desperate acts.” For instance, poverty, unemployment, regional economic disparity and gender inequality are some of the social issues that beset Moroccans, or to be more accurate, most of the African nations that were caught in the grip of European colonialism. Morocco is, indeed, an ethnically diverse country with a rich assortment of cultures and civilizations, as evidenced by the magnificent heritage of Berber tribes, the succession of multiple dynasties, and the direct intrusion of European powers from early 19<sup>th</sup> century until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup>

Under the aegis of competitive and acquisitive Western imperialist powers during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, collusive political schemes were put into effect to warrant and camouflage European infringement on the territorial integrity<sup>30</sup> of African lands. As far as Morocco is concerned, with the escalation of ruling tensions between Alaouite<sup>31</sup> sultans and local tribes, France and Spain seized the opportunity to give their geopolitical and economic interests a more concrete and intrusive form. Despite tribal rebellion, the internal instability of the North-African sultanate helped to catalyze the colonial states’ efforts to control Morocco, which was strategically bifurcated into French and, to a lesser extent, Spanish spheres of

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<sup>29</sup> For more information on the Moroccan history and constitutional reforms, see *A History of the Maghreb in the Islamic Period* by Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* by Michael M. Laskier, and *Universal Rights, Systemic Violations, and Cultural Relativism in Morocco* by Osire Glacier.

<sup>30</sup> It is more plausible to speak here of integrity instead of territorial unity, as in various African regions, there were already some tensions between autonomous Berber tribes and local rulers.

<sup>31</sup> The rule of the Alaouite dynasty started since 1666 and their endeavors to preserve independence succeeded until the intrusion of European influence around 1830.

influence. Much to Moroccans' dismay, the 1912 Treaty of Fez enabled France to formally establish its protectorate on Moroccan soil. Eventually, Morocco witnessed years of turbulent political turmoil<sup>32</sup> until Sultan Muhammad V succeeded in negotiating the decolonization process. Achieving its full independence in 1956, Morocco established its character as a constitutional monarchy, whose lopsided power structure<sup>33</sup> sowed the seeds of future social struggles.

After France ceded its protectorate over Morocco, the Spanish were more disinclined to give up Moroccan territories. Yet, Morocco managed to regain sovereignty over most of the Spanish-controlled areas except for Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves located on the Moroccan northern shores and overlooking the Alboran Sea, which stretches across the westernmost part of the Mediterranean Sea. Despite tighter border security in those two cities, Ceuta and Melilla have always attracted sub-Saharan and North African migrants to illegally cross by land in pursuance of their dreams and aspirations for better lives. Unfortunately, for most of those immigrants, their dreams and illusions are only shattered by the harsh reality of deportation. For many others, crossing successfully a barbed-wire border fence to make one's way into Ceuta, for instance, is usually conceived as a starting point for migrating to Spain, and by extension, for possibly having a wider access to Europe, the ultimate destination. The question is *how* to make it to the Iberian Peninsula regardless of the risk such hazardous movements entail. The answer nestles, unsurprisingly, in the dynamics of the criminal

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to the exploitation of its natural resources by European powers, Morocco also underwent Berber mutinies such as the 1912 Fez Riots and the War of the Rif (1920-1927).

<sup>33</sup> The power is in favor of the monarch. With independence, Mohammad V was cautious and moderate in his use of power. However, all his successors seemed to exert an absolute power that questions any effective role for the elected government (It is more like an absolute monarchy). Mohammad Hashas in his article "Moroccan Exceptionalism Examined: Constitutional Insights Pre- and Post- 2011" weighs up this notion of "exceptionalism" by reviewing three stages of constitutional reforms.

enterprise of migrant smuggling, which has no respect for the demarcation line between life and death or, at least, between safety and endangerment.

In most of the cities on the Mediterranean coast, not only do illegal border crossers place their fate at the hands of smugglers, but they also go through the burden of providing enough money to secure a spot on a small fishing vessel or an inflatable boat that more often than not is doomed to capsize. In Tangier<sup>34</sup> – fifty kilometers southwest of Ceuta – the profit-seeking smuggling business defiantly continues to operate and, thus, turning the city into one of the major human smuggling hubs in North Africa. The migrant smuggling networks in Tangier seem to outmaneuver Moroccan authorities' intensified crackdown on illegal crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar, the maritime vestibule that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, but also separates the African continent from the European one. This narrow channel between Morocco and Spain has become oftentimes a necropolis of drowned bodies that strived to navigate that short distance on an overloaded and ill-equipped boat incapable of beating against the powerful currents. Sadly, the number of survivors is, at best, diminutive. Laila Lalami gives such tragic incidents a fictional rendering in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, and offers the survivors a space to connect with their humanity. Notwithstanding the deterrence measures to dissuade migrants from illegal entry into Spain, the continuous illicit trans-border flows from Morocco evince the exigency of reexamining the dialectic between institutional power and resistance, and exploring migrants' determined pursuit of hope against hope to enact their various forms of survivance.

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<sup>34</sup> “It is this city, more than other minor points of migration along the north coast, that serves as the launching point for waves of would-be emigrants who pound, again and again, against the increasingly closed ‘gate’ to a now more fluid group of nations organised under the banner of the European Union” (Alami 143-144).

## The Simulations of Survivance in Migration

I start this section by elucidating Vizenor's conceptualization of first the simulations of dominance, which emanate from the false representations of tribal cultures, and second the simulations of survivance as the "heard and read stories that mediate and undermine the literature of dominance" ("Postindian Warriors" 12). Then, I will explore the deployment of simulations of dominance and their counteractions in migration literature. I argue that mobility, the right to opacity, and different experiences of belonging can be constitutive of the simulations of survivance in Hamid's and Lalami's novels. Mobile subjects recreate reality through their own stories of resistance and presence.

In *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, Vizenor creates a theoretical premise for survivance around the notion of "simulations," which he creatively borrowed from the French sociologist and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard. In one of his several epigraphs, Vizenor quotes Baudrillard, setting the tone for one of the main themes in his book, "To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence." Put differently, dissimulation, according to Baudrillard, is a matter of pretense that keeps the distinction between what is true and false, or real and imaginary, always intact and perspicuous. The difference, then, is only masked and concealed, and that entails a condition of presence. However, simulation endangers the distinction between the veridical and the fallacious, and such feigning corroborates the idea of absence as the lack of significant presence. Vizenor elucidates this concept of simulation through his critique of the 19<sup>th</sup> century dogma of Manifest Destiny<sup>35</sup> and its concomitant cultural legacy, from which he derived a productive neologism to lambast the various patterns of, what he calls, "manifest manners of domination" ("Postindian

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<sup>35</sup> Manifest Destiny is the 19<sup>th</sup> century doctrine by which white Americans vindicated the rationale behind consolidating the Christian mission with territorial expansion across the North American continent. This ideology was also used to "justify" the removal of the native populations.

Warriors” 4). Vizenor argues, “Manifest Destiny would cause the death of millions of tribal people from massacres, diseases, and the loneliness of reservations. Entire cultures have been terminated in the course of nationalism. These histories are now the simulations of dominance, and the causes of the conditions that have become manifest manners in literature” (ibid.). The simulations of manifest manners epitomize the *modi operandi* through which dominance measures are implemented to negate the real tribal presence. There is no veracity in the dominant scriptures of tribal representations. Instead, “manifest manners are the absence of the real in the ruins of tribal representations” (8).

The absence of the real, according to Vizenor, is clearly evidenced by the very nomenclature of “Indian.” This linguistic and ideological simulation serves as a testament to the representation of tribal people, but without referentiality. In other words, in the simulations of manifest manners, the model precedes and determines the real, thus creating a “hyperreal,” which is the fabrication of the “absolute fake” (9). The word “Indian” is indicative of the simulation of absence that has supplanted the real tribal names. “The Indian was an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation; the word has no referent in tribal languages or cultures” (11). However, to counteract such simulations of dominance and recreate the real, Vizenor “accepts” the Indian invention, “reverses” its imposition, and “plays with” it by creating a new sense of presence through his neologism *postindian* (“Head Water” 54). As Vizenor puts it, “The postindian warriors ensnare the contrivances with their own simulations of survivance,” which expose the absence of the real (“Postindian Warriors” 11).

Furthermore, Vizenor describes a Native sense of survivance as “the sensibilities of diplomatic, strategic resistance, and aesthetic irony” (“Native American Narratives” 223). Referring to 19<sup>th</sup> century Native heroes, Vizenor insists, “they were by visions, words and actions, the new warriors of survivance” (ibid., 237). It is, indeed, this vibrant force of being “warriors of survivance” through visions, words and actions that can be applicable to Hamid’s

and Lalami's survivancers *within and beyond* the migrant and/or refugee experiences. Along those lines, it is fertile and productive to expand the concept of survivance and articulate how it might be used across, beyond and through Vizenor's application of the term within Native discourses. In other words, survivance can transcend its original literary context and speak to marginalized groups who seek to internalize a positive sense of agency. In fact, Vizenor's distinguished allusive style of writing allows for the multifaceted readings and interpretations of his work, and that makes him stand apart as one of the most creative and subversive contemporary Native American authors. His writing challenges readerly expectations and defies the mere consumption of words. As Blaeser appositely puts it,

Vizenor immerses his own text in a network of literary, social, and critical subtexts that essentially encourage and enact a multilevel discourse, and he employs various recognizable rhetorical strategies to create an "open text." Through multiple forms of ambiguity and indeterminacy, for example, Vizenor strives to compensate for the inadequacies of written language by involving the active imagination of the reader in discovering the unwritten elements of his work. Through employment of metaphor he attempts to move the reader beyond the words to an experiential reality. (13)

Not only does Vizenor invite his readers to *produce* a non-exhaustive reservoir of meanings that account for different contexts, experiences and belief systems, but he also acknowledges the need to transcend the confines of a single, monistic view of language and reality. "Instead, he demands their [the reader's] involvement in the search for truth, for meaning; he demands their involvement in experience, in life. His writing sends out a call for imaginative recreation of our reality, and he delineates the role his reader must play to find the 'spaces between' his words" (Blaeser 12). This "imaginative recreation of reality" is emblematic of a conscious and generative exercise that is not aimed to create unreality, but to seek and present visions of

reality, which feel truer than those encapsulated in “accounts normally recognized as realistic or factual” (ibid.).

The motion that fuels the participatory aspect of Vizenor’s writing enables us to pursue numerous avenues for the sake of envisioning new possibilities, which would elicit different forms of survivance. Through her critical analysis of Vizenor’s prolific and multi-genre writing, Blaeser rightly contends, “Very little is resolved in the works of Vizenor. He refuses to grant his reader certain satisfactions in the text because they would close off other possibilities he deems more essential: the possibilities of reader participation and discovery, the possibility that the story has life beyond the page, the possibility of a new kind of ‘survivance’” (13). Creating a new sense of presence, imbued with possibilities, is both a demand and a requisite for survivancers. As far as Hamid and Lalami are concerned, at the personal level, they both theorize a concept of survivance that affects them as citizens, writers and activists, while their literary creations also embody their efforts at defining and enacting survivance as a human *and* humane condition. The “warriors of survivance,” then, who grapple with experiences of dislocation and regrounding are constantly engaged in building a sort of bridge between the noetic realm and their experiential realities, while developing physical, emotional and psychological tactics in order to counterbalance the drag forces that curb the animacy of those mobile subjects.

Going back to issues related to migration and refugee crisis, the simulated reality – as constructed through mass-media sensationalism and conservative political discourses – projects a dehumanizing representation of border crossers, who are easily and tragically dubbed by residents as “the others.” The simulations of the other are part of the dominant rhetoric and mythos that create essentializing images of migrants and refugees as powerless victims or potential criminals. Besides, the lurid details and macabre effects of the precarious transborder movements covered by mainstream media serve to regurgitate “a uniform (and

uninformed?) animalizing or objectifying *vue d'ensemble* that numbs intellectual and affective attention” (Abderrezak 467). Focusing on the Mediterranean border crossings, Hakim Abderrezak argues, “A plethora of mass media depictions and isolationist discourses from both shores of the Mediterranean have helped shape the public opinion that clandestines are economic opportunists or traitors. Public opinion thus fails to recognize clandestines’ wish to partake in the right to move freely across the White Sea of the Middle granted to them by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (*Ex-Centric Migrations* 21).

Treating migrants and refugees as sources for numerical statistics or as a failed, undifferentiated ensemble of victims, rather than as members of dynamic groups of survivancers, imperils the possibility of claiming a sense of common humanity and empathy. Such depictions in the simulations of dominance use words to replace rather than to represent reality. Presented as anonymous outlaws and space usurpers, illicit migrants and refugees are confined within a “plagued” system of signification. Perhaps, one can draw a parallel between Foucault’s analysis of the plague in a disease-stricken town and the simulations of dominance that perpetuate practices of surveillance and control. Charged with his theories on knowledge, discipline, and power, the description of plague in Foucault’s “Panopticism” marks a partitioning process of an “enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point... in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead – all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (495). This malign influence of the plague atmosphere imposes a disciplinary mechanism that sustains the criminalization of migratory laws. Accordingly, it is imperative to counter the mainstream victim frames and produce more real and liberating simulations of survivance through what Abderrezak calls “literary reporting,” which is described as “the conversion of flawed or neglected facts into *bio*-logical details” (467).

Indeed, Hamid and Lalami belong to this project of writing fiction that strives to authenticate reality, or at least fiction that gives us a vision of reality that feels truer wherein their protagonists reclaim both their humanity and subjectivity. We always read and hear about migration and refugee crisis, but very little do we know about those border crossers' adjustments, as well as their pasts and their identities. While Hamid removes the details of their risky journeys, since he equated the magic of the porous doors with the immediacy of the rectangles on our electronic devices that bring us closer and closer no matter how far apart we are, Lalami, on the other hand, does provide the uneasiness, consternation, and reality of *chance* that accompany the crossings. As hope for a better future is a pursuit performed all over the world, Hamid shows us how to accept transience and still find beauty and hope in the world, whereas Lalami teaches us how the gendering of migration elicit different forms of survivance. As survivancers, their protagonists are engaged, in various ways, in creating a strong sense of presence that ousts any representations of victimhood, effacement or stagnation. Blaeser writes:

Survivors actively engage themselves in the ongoing process of discovering and creating their own lives. Those who survive are those who continuously evolve. If stasis characterizes the victims, vitality and adaptability characterize the survivors. Vizenor's survivors adjust; they examine, question, shift, stretch, bend, change, grow, juggle, balance, and sometimes duck – for surviving doesn't necessarily mean winning. (63)

### **A New Sense of Presence: Mobility and the “Right to Opacity”**

Driven by peculiar social and political conjunctures offering little promise for the future, Hamid's and Lalami's protagonists pull out all the stops to imagine and create some radically optimistic future. These mobile subjects continue to engender, in Vizenor's terms, “a new sense of presence” that *emerges* in situations of emergency through multiple, fluid and

gendered configurations, as I will show in this chapter. Fenced off from the hopes for a better life in their countries of birth, the characters in both novels reckon with the limitations of their present conditions until they venture into the intricacies of transcending territorial dividing lines and crossing sociopolitical boundaries. Whether their endeavors are conducive to success – or the lack thereof – each character sets out to leave for greener pastures, and along the way comes to a self-understanding about the mendacious illusion of the notion of permanence. Nothing remains in stasis or quiescence. Engaged in a process of defiance against self-victimization, the refugees and migrants portrayed in this chapter strive to stem the tide of the annihilating forces of transparent representations, which confine and even threaten their existence, as well as their sense of agency. Consequently, a motion of opacity and notions of change and transformation lie at the heart of the transitory nature of their movements, thus complicating the location of home and its attendant quiddity. Worthy of further consideration here are the various implications of mobility on the relationship between their gendered bodies and territoriality. Accordingly, Vizenor's empowering concept of survivance will help thematize the protagonists' continuous practices of personal and social regeneration, which are informed by the (un)making of borders. Their different permutations of survivance will vary from the performance of new stories, the themes of transformation and transience to the negotiation between self-actualization and self-transcendence.

In alignment with the capacity and potential of literary and artistic expressions to recreate reality, Demos avers, "the deepest understanding of reality, particularly a traumatic one, necessitates an engagement with the fictional and conflictual aspects of images" (xxi). By foregrounding contemporary artists' endeavor to revamp conventional documentary images of migrants, Demos argues that the blurring between the real and the fictional offers alternatives to reckon with the competing images and interpretations of moving subjects along "globalization's system of images, wherein the representational link between sign and referent

has been severed and truth must be reinvented on the grounds of uncertainty” (ibid.). This element of uncertainty liberates mobile lives from being trapped within the limited and limiting, contained and containing, representations of visibility, transparency, and full comprehension by mainstream media and dominant forms of knowledge, which relegate migrants to images of victimry, impotence, and criminality. Furthermore, drawing on Glissant’s ideas, Demos underscores the “micropolitics of opacity” as an aesthetic and socio-political strategy of anti-revelation “in order to forge a politics of the image that ‘turns its back on power’ and retains the empowering capacity of subjects to exist beyond representation” (xx).

The aesthetic and political dimensions of Glissant’s “right to opacity” can be of great significance in migration literature that addresses the geopolitical crises of borders. Opacity opens up the transformative and generative potential to counteract the reductive inscriptions of neocolonial and imperialist discourses, which weigh up “others” – marginalized groups searching for a breath of air – on the basis of a pre-established dominant hierarchy of scaling. “If we examine the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought,” Glissant writes, “we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons, and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce” (189-190). The demand for opacity allows us to evade and nullify globalization’s forces of standardization and also to reconfigure our sense of relational identities as equally dualistic by accepting unintelligibility and impenetrability and finding them productive. As Glissant puts it, “Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge,

weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (190).

I argue that the literary valence of opacity can be connected with Vizenor’s ideas of shadow survivance. For Vizenor, shadows are “animate entities.”<sup>36</sup> He contends, “The intransitive motion of shadows, and the presence of shadows in the silence of names, is a source of remembrance and survivance hermeneutics” (“Epilogue” 171). Shadows are constantly changing and moving, thus eluding the simulations of dominance. The imposed construct of the “Indian” has no referent in tribal literatures, and as such, the motion of shadows is intransitivity to the referent, as Vizenor puts it, “The shadows and tribal experiences that are *heard* in stories, and variations on natural reason, are transformed in publications that are *seen* as cultural representations” (“Shadow Survivance” 69). The notion of shadow survivance evokes a parallel in the play between opacity and transience, as shadows elude and obstruct the passage of light, the light of transparent representations of the “other.” Shadow survivance, in a transnational framework, is a process of ongoing and active resistance in the entanglements of “crisis globalization,” which Demos defines as “an era of growing economic inequality, one facing the increasing influx of migrants and refugees into the North as they seek decent standards of living and escape from repressive regimes, widespread poverty, and zones of conflict. Yet they do so only to be met by increased security at European borders that exacerbates political and social inequality at international and regional levels” (xiii).

In the following section, I close read some passages of Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* to explore how his use of opacity, slippage, and gaps allows him to recreate reality and reimagine the world through different kinds of migration, while he confronts the forces of

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<sup>36</sup> It is important to note here that in the Anishinaabe language and culture, the classification between “animate” and “inanimate” is invalid for, as Lawrence Gross puts it, “The whole world *is* spiritualized. What this means is that there is nothing that is inanimate. All things are alive and acting alive” (102). Gross emphasizes, “It does a real disservice to the Anishinaabe people, to their worldview, and to their language to imply there is a whole class of beings in Anishinaabemowin that are dead or inert” (103).

“crisis globalization” and invites the readers to join in. Perhaps I can ask the same question Nicole Simek asked in her essay, “Can neoliberal deployments of transparency be countered by opacity, and if so, in what forms?” (“Stubborn Shadows” 363). I believe that Hamid’s distinctive narrative choice of black doors that bend the laws of physics can offer one possible affirmative response to the previous question, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

### ***Exit West: Placelessness and Unmaking Borders***

In Hamid’s *Exit West*, the protagonists Nadia and Saeed traverse distances at different levels throughout the entire novel. In terms of temporality, the couple navigates temporal frames of reference, as they move back and forth between planning for the future, recalling memories and foreshadowing eventualities. As for spatial distances, the two protagonists are constantly mobile subjects from their city of birth to Mykonos, London, California and ultimately back to their city of birth, experiencing the challenges and benefits of being “outsiders.” Psychologically speaking, Nadia and Saeed traverse distances, as they explore their own ontological expansion and discover personal terrains of growth and emotional maturity. Throughout their peripatetic passages, Nadia and Saeed establish new affinities, while certain bonds tighten and others loosen. In the beginning of the novel, Nadia and Saeed’s place of birth is described as “a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war” (3). However, as social unrest erupts and grows more and more brutal and calamitous, that initial sense of inclusion is actually countered by a repulsive centrifugal force. In fact, when denizens hear about the miracle doors, or the portals of possibility, they eagerly strive for a passage through them to an outer world. The city now is plagued by terror; violence is anchored everywhere, and Nadia and Saeed find themselves, under extraordinary circumstances, as unmarried lovers living in the same house, providing moral support for one another and particularly for Saeed’s father, whose wife was killed by a

ricochet bullet, as she was looking for her missing earring in her car, an incident that can only enhance the fragile and unforeseeable nature of their lives.

In her city of birth, Nadia, a fiercely independent and liberated woman, wears a black robe that covers her from head to toe and through which she sets her own boundaries between her sense of being and the surrounding reality that is dominated by phallogentric social and traditional conventions of a conservative society. Her robe, then, functions as a shield, an armor that protects her from the panoptic gaze of her patriarchal society, where a woman is dubbed a “whore,” simply for riding a motorcycle and refusing to reciprocate the coquetry of “a burly man at the red light of a deserted late-night intersection” (42). However, in the privacy of her apartment, Nadia is a subversive figure par excellence. Her insubordination, which is translated in her independent dwelling, sexual freedom, consumption of psychedelic mushrooms, and the like, foreshadows her resistance to any grounding forces that tend to make her grow roots in a particular location. Instead, she is eager to discover new routes for herself. Later in the novel, when Saeed inquisitively mentions to Nadia the futility of wearing her black robes since she does not need them after their first passage to Greece, she responds that “she had not needed to wear them even in their own city, when she lived alone, before the militants came, but she *chose to*, because *it sent a signal*, and *she still wished to send this signal*” (114; emphasis added). Her ability to make a purposeful choice is indicative of her sense of agency and resilience to adapt to her milieu in a way that only *she* can determine as convenient. Therefore, the opacity of her black robes suggests Nadia’s refusal to be “grasped” and possessed by a male sexualizing gaze back home and possibly by an invasive ethnographic gaze abroad. Opacity in this sense is freedom from any social and/or cultural expectations and therefore a politics of imperceptibility. Clearly, before exiting to the West, Nadia is already a feminist character who is carrying that freedom with her and thus she is open to change and transformation.

As Hamid deftly blurs the real and imaginary in his novel, the existence of the portals creates both transparent and opaque images of reality. The transparency stems from global leaders' realization of this universal "threat" and its tangible consequences, thus the need to construct and propagate migrant images of criminality and to revitalize strategies of identity politics. On the other hand, opacity is deployed in the elusive and mysterious aura that characterizes those doors. Indeed, as their city was increasingly in turmoil, Saeed and Nadia earnestly considered purchasing a ticket out of their crippled present condition and setting off into the wild blue yonder. The portal that was secured to them by the agent – the smuggler – was found in a dentist's office. Here is a description of their very first encounter with those passage doors, "... [Nadia] approached the door, and drawing close she was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end" (103). The antithesis through the juxtaposition of "beginning" and "end" accentuates the deliberate obliqueness around the possible outcomes of passing through this door. "It was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and like being born, and indeed Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it" (104). I would read the simultaneous experience of death and rebirth as a metaphor for the loss of their old lives in their violence-ridden city and the hope of new beginnings. What I also find interesting is that Hamid uses the verb "emerge" to describe most of the crossers' act of coming out from the darkness. "Saeed was emerging and Nadia crawled forward to give him space" (ibid.). The slow and laborious process of emerging from the black doors intensifies a sense of equivocality that countervails the immediacy and urgency that characterize times of emergency.

Saeed and Nadia's second passage from Mykonos to London epitomizes the most intense centripetal and centrifugal tensions in the novel. London witnesses a massive pouring

of migrants and refugees from Nigeria, Somalia, the borderlands between Myanmar and Thailand, et cetera. This unmanageable flow of people has exacerbated a strong nativist reaction that is emblematic of frenzied feelings of racism and xenophobia. For instance, the palace-like house, where Nadia and Saeed find themselves in after crossing through the door, is occupied by fifty squatters, who are sharing that habitat with the terrified residents of the house, who in their turn feel somehow “privileged” because they are still savoring being indoors, “for many [other residents] had spent many months without a proper roof over their heads” (131). This sort of forced deterritorialization of the natives from the nucleus of their homes and their city reconfigures power structures and enacts a reversal of power positions between the locals, here Londoners, and the “aliens,” the migrants and refugees who are considered as an exterior threat to that city’s order and sense of integrity. I presume it is plausible here to talk about a process of an alienation of the local and a localization of the alien. In other words, the locals feel estranged and deracinated because of the increasing domination of the migrants and refugees. Therefore, Hamid takes into account a different meaning of the of loss of home, as experienced by the locals. Furthermore, the spatial separation between Londoners and the migrants is eventually translated through an interplay between darkness and light, the lived and the imagined, freedom and conscription of movement, as the city landscape was divided into dark London and light London because of its electricity system:

From dark London, Saeed and Nadia wondered what life must be like in light London, where they imagined people dined in elegant restaurants and rode in shiny black cabs, or at least went to work in offices and shops and were free to journey about as they pleased. In dark London, rubbish accrued, uncollected, and underground stations were sealed. The trains kept running, skipping stops near Saeed and Nadia but felt as a

rumble beneath their feet and heard at a low, powerful frequency, almost subsonic, like thunder or the detonation of a massive, distant bomb. (146)

As migrants are still taking over houses and in their majority refusing to succumb to the pressure exerted by the surveillance of the police to compel them to surrender, scenes of nativist backlash and riots across different parts of London are getting increasingly violent. Nadia and Saeed even hear about a tightening cordon moving through London's boroughs with fewer doors to control new arrivals and send illegal residents to holding camps. However, in the midst of such a chaotic atmosphere *outside* occupied houses, it is interesting to notice how those insubordinate migrants are seeking to build a community *inside* them that could help restore some degree of order. Nigerians, who were the largest among the groups of the new residents, started to form an organized body of people with a particular focus on orchestrating the mundane, ordinary aspects of the residents' lives, as well as the rationing of food supplies in times of scarcity. It is like a self-governing community within the larger community of migrants. Nadia, whose interest in those council meetings is increasing over time, realizes that through this group of Nigerians, for example, one can only interrogate the ideology of a unified, essentialist cultural norm. As Hamid puts it, "[...] and she understood also that the Nigerians were in fact not all Nigerians, some were half Nigerians, or from places that bordered Nigeria, from families that spanned both sides of a border, and further that there was perhaps no such thing as a Nigerian, or certainly no one common thing, for different Nigerians spoke different tongue among themselves, and belonged to different religions" (148).

After the operations to clear the migrant ghetto have taken their toll particularly on the war refugees who are reliving the atrocities of the fled war zones, the endeavor to "reclaim Britain for Britain" subsides in an indiscernible way. The omniscient narrator and the readers as well are only left with a series of speculations in an attempt to fathom why the natives and

their forces stepped back from the brink. Perhaps the most plausible explanation that Hamid suggests is that the natives have come to realize that those doors, which are emblematic of porous and fluid borders, can never be closed, and that nationalist and chauvinist zeal through “the denial of coexistence would have required one party to cease to exist, and the extinguishing party too would have been transformed in the process, and too many native parents would not after have been able to look their children in the eye, to speak with head held high of what their generation had done” (166).

While the living and working conditions of the migrants are ameliorated, Nadia and Saeed’s romance is degenerating day by day. If love in a time of crisis used to be the kernel of their relationship that brings them together, now mutual estrangement reigns supreme. Saeed is feeling nostalgic and striving to connect with people from his country, both in the labor camp and online, whereas Nadia seems to be constantly on the move and eager to construct a new sense of presence. She seems to have no concerns about repudiating the ties with her city of birth. She keeps wearing her black robes, but, unlike Saeed, she has no interest in praying or speaking their native language. Eventually, the schism between them is even translated in their body language, reflecting an unbridgeable gap. When Saeed asks Nadia if she wants to go outside, “[s]he nodded without gazing at him, and each of them rose and sat with their back to the other, on opposite sides of the cot, and fumbled in the dimness with their feet for their work boots” (180). Accordingly, the dwindling of Nadia and Saeed’s love reaches its climax, when they make their last passage together through a door that takes them to Marin in a vain attempt to rekindle their dissolved romance. Perhaps the incident of the tiny drone, which crashes against the plastic flap serving as both door and window of their shanty and the burial of this defunct automaton, is symbolic of their serene severance and amicable separation. After all, transience is inevitable, and thus better to be accepted.

There is a fine line between transparency and opacity in the parallel border-crossing journeys of other migrants from Hamid's vignettes. While the first three stories I discuss bring to the fore mechanisms of (in)visibility, control, and surveillance in geopolitical crises of borders, the fourth vignette depicts a reverse, uncommon migratory movement from Global North to Global South. Set in the Sydney neighborhood of Surry Hills, the first interspersed story in the novel depicts the passage of a dark-skinned man, who *emerges* with difficulty from a dark closet doorway, "darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness – the heart of darkness," plausibly implying that this potential refugee is coming from Congo or at large anywhere from sub-Saharan Africa, given the description of the dire circumstances in which he grew up. "He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade, turn of a car, presence of microorganism in a handshake, a cough. He was aware that alone a person is almost nothing" (9). Clearly, the country this man fled is afflicted by frequent social perils such as armed conflicts, civil unrest and the Ebola epidemic to name a few, and that explains how he was all the more "aware of the fragility of his body" (ibid.). This bodily vulnerability is also portrayed in the way the refugee was "delivered" to this new place, as if he was reborn. "With a final push he was through, trembling and sliding to the floor like a newborn foal" (ibid.). The door, as an animate, anthropomorphic entity in this story, seems to have given birth to this migrant, offering him a new sense of presence that he would maintain a firm grip on. This physical and metaphorical rebirth would at least grant him the hope of a new life, a new beginning, especially that the man ultimately exited the *operating theatre* swiftly through the window without calling attention to himself. In fact, in the same *emergence* room, there was a "pale-skinned woman" sleeping the sleep of the just, nonchalant about the fragility of her body, for her home is not only guarded by an alarm when her husband is away on business, but also located in a neighborhood that has undergone gentrification. The latter connotes that this newly renovated

middle-class locality is safe, and thus new homeowners or occupants do not need to install alarms. However, with a fortunate stroke of serendipity, the alarm in that house was not active on that night, but most importantly, Hamid's doors seem to defy that sense of security assured by alarms or any other forms of surveillance. The refugee's practice of survivance is unavoidable.

As people continue to be on the move, some migrants find themselves exposed to different panoptic mechanisms of visibility and control that might limit their sense of mobility and confine them to a *cul-de-sac*. For instance, in the Tokyo district of Shinjuku, a drunk and possibly dangerous salaryman witnesses the moment subsequent to the crossing of two Filipina girls in their late teens, through a disused, black portal at the rear of the bar leading to a *cul-de-sac*, a dead end which might foreshadow the possible downfall of the new comers' journey or the imminent danger of being attacked by the young man, who is gripped by feelings of xenophobia particularly towards Filipinos. According to him, "They were in his territory. Not the first time this week that he had seen a group of Filipinos who seemed oddly clueless in his bit of town. He disliked Filipinos. They had their place, but they had to know their place" (31). It is hard to tell whether those two girls involuntarily ended up there or made a conscious decision to migrate and work in Japan, which is already known as a key destination for many Filipinas involved in the adult entertainment industry.<sup>37</sup> However, it is almost certain that the attentive observer might harm them since he followed them, "fingering the metal in his pocket as he went" (ibid.). Standing sentry, he seems to be prepared to act whenever he believes that a foreign body is trespassing on his "territory," *his* own public space.

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<sup>37</sup> For more insight on the correlation between human trafficking and sex industry in Japan, as well as Filipina migrant workers and their affective developments, see "Traffic in Women" by Kathleen Barry, and "Filipina Migrants in Rural Japan and their Professions of Love" by Lieba Faier.

The story of the Tamil family in Dubai is another relevant example indicative of the highly sophisticated practices of migration containment in one of the richest countries of the world. Upon their emergence from a black interior service door right in the heart of Jumeirah Beach Residence, the crossers – the parents and their two children – are instantly captured on several security cameras in the hallway, while the lip-reading software successfully identified their language as Tamil. Once outdoors, not only was the family dazzled by the sunlit brightness, but also overawed by the power of money and the extravagance of control and security measures engulfing them: expensive two-door automobiles, exterior surveillance devices, a quadcopter drone transmitting its feed to a central monitoring station, security vehicles, uniformed men, skydivers, sunbathers and tourists with their selfie-taking mobiles, etc. The presence of all these elements served as a catalyst to accentuate the family's sense of disorientation, as they were "at a loss to which direction to go" (91). Instead of looking like "a cohesive unit," they were rather "four disparate individuals, each behaving in a different way . . ." (92). Clearly, they are all joined in their feelings of insecurity and unbelonging to this unfamiliar environment, which they probably could never adjust to. Unsurprisingly, their lifespan in Dubai was fugacious. In a seemingly fatalistic fashion, it was only a matter of a minute until the family was "intercepted and led away" by two uniformed men, who seem to be on the prowl for any interlopers. The four migrants held hand and displayed no signs of resistance, as if in total acceptance of their fate, for it is evident that the journey would have unpredictable outcomes, but it is still worth pursuing.

Although the black doors are being discussed by world leaders as a "major global crisis" for their unabating capacity to deliquesce the physical and geographical borders of nations-states, these portals of opportunity also come as a sudden deliverance for some people, just like the dispirited accountant in Kentish Town. While he was on the brink of putting an end to his life by drowning in his bathtub, he discovered "the blackness of a door

where the bright entrance to his small but well-lit second bedroom had been” (130). Indeed, the blackness of the door perplexed and lured him to spontaneously embark on a retrospective journey and dwell in a feeling associated with children’s books. Consequently, and out of infantile curiosity, the accountant decided to “step through the door, just once, to see what was on the other side.” By slipping away, he crossed and decided to stay and live in Namibia with the empowering feeling of “something for a change.” The black door saved him from his own despair to kill himself. “With that he was gone, and his London was gone, and how long he remained in Namibia it was hard for anyone who formerly knew him to say” (131). Through this story, Hamid shows us that doors compress time and space, but also have adaptive regenerative capabilities, which are not exclusive only for refugees whose lives are constantly threatened by forces beyond their control. Along those lines, Hamid teaches the reader that accepting transience can also be accompanied by a feeling of empathy towards persons experiencing loss. The accountant, for instance, has led an unhappy life before realizing that migratory movements are inevitable and that life can be more *enjoyable* once one opens up to the boundless possibilities of the world. The inevitability of migration can have a temporal dimension, as in the story of the old woman in Palo Alto who had lived in the same house for her entire life, while her town was growing more and more unrecognizable because the world is in motion, and thus realized that “she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can’t help it. We are all migrants through time” (209).

### **Gender, Locality, and Belonging in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits***

In Lalami’s novel, each one of her four protagonists strives – in different ways – to countervail the simulations of dominance through the performance of new stories and the enactment of themes of transformation. As Ahmed Idrissi Alami puts it, Lalami “utilizes the novel as a vehicle through which she demonstrates how emigrants often come to redefine

themselves in light of systematic and socially-sanctioned processes of exclusion and rejection on both sides of the straits” (144). Examining the novel through a post-colonial lens, Alami asserts that ex-colonized subjects’ transnational mobility influences their cognitive and affective processes of identity reconstruction. Their border crossing ultimately complicates the meaning and location of home, as well as engenders the reexamination of the cross-cultural ambivalences in Hispano-Moroccan relations. Alami contends, “Exposure to the exploitative and hegemonic stereotyping and racial politics that the characters experience through crossing into the host country prompts a process of redefinition of identity generated by a resurgence of historical memory and development of a new sense of agency” (ibid.). For Alami, a revalorization of historical memory is coincidental with a reclaimed sense of post-colonial agency. Along those lines, Ania Loomba reminds us how the term “post-colonial” could be ambiguous, as both the “post” and the “colonial,” which form the term, could be read and interpreted within a multiplicity of meanings, discourses and subject-positions. Does the “post” in post-colonialism mark an aftermath in a temporal sense or an ideological sense? For instance, a country may be post-colonial in the sense that it is officially independent, but it could also be neo-colonial, as it remains dependent on the “mother country” economically and/or culturally. Therefore, it is more beneficial to approach postcolonialism “... not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more *flexibly* as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (32; emphasis added). Furthermore, even the “colonial” within the term “post-colonial” could be read equivocally. In Loomba’s terms, “Colonialism did not inscribe itself on a clean state, and it cannot therefore account for everything that exists in ‘postcolonial’ societies” (37). Colonialism, then, does not operate *only* through external forces from foreign hegemonic countries, for it could also be *replicated from within* the colonized country itself. Loomba reiterates Spivak’s suggestion “that the pre-colonial is always reworked by the history of colonialism, and is not

available to us in any pristine form that can be neatly separated from the history of colonialism” (38). Accordingly, a propensity to extol the pre-colonial past or native culture could be inimical to exploring existing social realities within the interlocking systems of oppression that are predicated upon race, sex and class to name a few. Therefore, the development and manifestation of an affirmative sense of agency on behalf of border crossers would require a growth in consciousness in order to overcome both internal and external borders within the place of departure and the place of arrival. As Brinda Mehta points out, “The women are forced to confront the hypermasculinity of patriarchy’s internal borders represented by failing familial and social systems, as well as the hyper-militarized external borders of immigration within which they suffer a coded discrimination as gendered objects” (126).

What is worthy of consideration when examining the creation processes of nations or community formations is the fact that anti-colonial nationalism could be imbued with exclusionary practices. Put differently, if a post-colonial nation-state *fervently* and *dogmatically* implements nationalist thought as its thrust and driving force, it can reproduce the autocratic and peremptory procedures of colonial rule. One of the most conspicuous apparatuses for the enactment of these exclusions is through the reinforcement of gendered and patriarchal systems in post-independence states. Questions related to women’s status, role and sexuality have always been part of convoluted topics within both colonialist and nationalist agendas. “Women are not just a symbolic space but real *targets* of colonialist and nationalist discourses. Their subjection and the appropriation of their labor is crucial to the workings of the colony or the nation” (Loomba 214). Along those lines, anti-colonial movements have different attitudes to women’s rights and activism in widely divergent contexts. Likewise, women respond differently to any attempts to confine their sense of agency. However, it is important to keep in consideration the diverse histories within post-

colonial feminist movements of different hues, “even as they confront the homogenizing challenges posed by a rampant and often brutal globalization” (229). In other words, post-colonial and transnational feminist scholars and activists feel committed to overcoming a sense of double alienation that stems not only from the repressive forces of post-colonial nation-states, but also from the quasi-colonial dynamics of globalization (or to be more accurate, the global operations of capitalism today). Therefore, there is a strong sense of exigency on behalf of post-colonial and transnational women to ensure a “radical retheorization” of gender and sexuality, along with other concerns such as class and ethnicity (ibid.).

In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, all the protagonists undergo a process of transformation in one way or another, but Faten’s metamorphosis, in Lalami’s terms, from “the fanatic” to “the odalisque” is quite peculiar. Born into a penurious family in Rabat, Faten’s childhood with her divorced mother was difficult, especially since her father abandoned them, abnegating his legal and parental duty of child support. Left destitute, the mother had no choice but send Faten to live with her aunt in Agadir, “until she [Faten] turned fourteen and her breasts grew into a D cup. The single man next door had started coming around on the silliest of excuses, asking to borrow a cup of sugar or a glass of oil. That was when Faten’s aunt decided it was time for her to go back to the capital” (134). Unshielded from the lascivious male gaze since her teens, Faten’s relationship with her body has become more and more intimate and introspective. Whether in Morocco or later in Spain, no man has the key to decipher the codes within the realm of her body. After moving back to live with her mother in the Douar Lhajja slum, Faten managed within a timeframe of six years “to graduate high school, go to college, find God, and join the Islamic Student Organization” (ibid.). Equipped with this newfound religious zeal and conservative consciousness, the neoteric devotee commits herself to a new mission, which consists of proselytizing her college

classmate Noura, her foil. Much to Noura's parents' distress, Faten's goal seems to have been accomplished.<sup>38</sup>

Noura's and Faten's social milieux are mutually incompatible. Yet, their paths crossed to further highlight the dissonance between secular Islam on the one hand and religious fundamentalism in the name of political Islam on the other. Noura comes from a bourgeois family that has never ceased to provide enough love, care and money for their "*enfant gâtée*." Educated at French private schools, Noura was preparing herself to leave Morocco in a few months to study economics in NYC, until her friendship bond with Faten tightened, and thus became more and more stifling particularly to her father Larbi, who considered the religious fanatic a threat to be eliminated at any cost. Noura, who now reads books by Egyptian dissident members of the Muslim Brotherhood, learns that "Americans hate us," wears the hijab "like half the city's female population," criticizes her parents' lavish lifestyle, switched to calling her father "Baba" instead of "Papa," and threatens her parents to disobey them if they are not "on the right path." Not only did Noura give up on her plans to study abroad, but she is also determined to become instead a schoolteacher in Morocco and help cleanse her country of the all-pervading forms of political corruption. Noura's decision has disconcerted Larbi, who suspects that his daughter and her friend might be aware of his "occasional" bribes in his office at the Moroccan Ministry of Education. As chance would have it, Noura was caught one day helping Faten cheat at the exams. While Noura was pardoned since the proctor is a good friend to her father, Faten was expelled, as she flunked her exams for the second year in a row. Despite his daughter's plea to help her friend, Larbi was intransigent that Faten was not to be granted any special treatment, a decision symptomatic of a system of educational triage in favor of corrupt and nepotistic practices.

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<sup>38</sup> It is interesting how the story of "the fanatic" before immigration is mediated. In fact, Faten's story is told from the perspective of Noura's family. Perhaps Lalami constructed this chapter in Faten's life as such to further accentuate the amplitude of the consequences of the fanatic's influence on Noura.

Without a diploma, Faten's chances of finding a job in Morocco are almost negligible. Furthermore, Lalami tells us:

She'd had the misfortune of making a derogatory comment about King Hassan within earshot of a snitch but had, rather miraculously, escaped arrest, thanks to a friendly tip. So when her imam suggested she leave the country, she had not argued with him. She had done as she was told. Except her imam wasn't there when the Spanish coast guard caught her and the other illegal immigrants, nor was he around when she had to fend for herself in Spain. (134-135)

An attempt to break the deadlock that permeates the paralyzing social and political state of affairs seems impracticable in light of the problems afflicting the Moroccan youth such as poverty, unemployment, gender and social disparities, and disdain for basic democratic principles. "Leaving becomes a conscious choice to control one's future instead of facing the rejection and invalidation resulting in an existential and state-sanctioned condition of homelessness at 'home.' The obsession to leave becomes a new and recurring geopolitical positioning for these immigrants, wherein home is located in a transiting positionality" (Mehta 120). The state of feeling homelessness at 'home' is further exacerbated by Faten's almost non-existent senses of familiarity and belonging grounded, for example, in a familial 'home.' This absence of an attachment to a well-defined domestic space seems to be channeled through Faten's psychological projection on her friend Noura, who has the luxury of having choices, as well as the freedom of mobility. Perhaps to counterbalance her homelessness at 'home,' Faten concentrates all her energy in orthodox Islamic proselytism. Therefore, the spatial dimension of power relations dictate a forced displacement on Faten, whose perceptions and experiences of home are continuously in the making. Home, then, is not necessarily a fixed entity that is firmly established in the place of departure or the place of origin.

Faten's migration is informed by a fear of persecution. Her imam at the underground mosque in Rabat seems to be another authoritative male figure, who urged her to leave and instilled in her the conviction that "extreme times sometimes demanded extreme measures" (147). Indeed, the unpredictability of extreme measures during and after the clandestine crossing entails a rethinking of one's identitarian quest and ontogenic transformations, which are informed by questions of body, place and home. Despite the sexual violence meted out to her at the border by the Spanish guard, who made her a deal and kept enacting his orientalist, priapic fantasies while constantly calling her "Fatma," now Faten turns into an émigré and manages to create a new sense of presence. While in Morocco, Faten was looking outside herself for validation of her self-worth through her fervid friendship with Noura, but over the years that followed her immigration she has started performing a new story with an independence of spirit. She carves out her own future where sex becomes work.

Within the realm of her current metamorphic condition, Faten has become tuned to the enactment of her clients' "odalisque dreams." Their simulations of dominance and sexual objectification of women are now part of a repertoire of erotic fantasies for which Faten has developed the necessary skills to tolerate in order to earn her living. The intelligibility of her newly created experiential reality seems to countervail her older perception and understanding of her embodied lived experience during her college days in Morocco. Now, looking back at the time when she was wearing the hijab and urging every woman to do the same, Faten admits her own "foolishness." She seems to recognize the relative nature of reality, and thus the existence of multiple versions of reality bound up with one's states of consciousness, as well as the possible changing grounds of familial dynamics, interpersonal relatedness and socio-political climates. Consciousness and reality can then be co-creations, and no single model or framework accounts for the variegated lived experiences of transborder movements. As Faten is still negotiating her transnational border crossing and reconstructing her

immigrant identity, her establishment of grounds of belonging is still in the making. “The main thing to survive this life here was to not think too much” Faten maintains (145). Indeed, her Valium-induced state of “non-thinking” is indicative of her attempt to renegotiate the temporal and spatial registers of belonging.

Faten’s negotiation of the borderland and her cross-border engagement is growing into a site of productivity, particularly when she refuses to conform to the imaginative odalisque perceptions of the orientalist view, best exemplified in Martin’s character. Martin was Faten’s favorite client. He was a young college student whose sexual potency seems to counterbalance his emasculated manhood within a dysfunctional family dynamics where the father, a powerful retired army lieutenant, “hated the immigrants” (138). Although Martin seems to be “different” from his father and the rest of the clients, he pervertedly paints Faten’s portrait as an odalisque figure and presents himself as a connoisseur of corporality where the female body is constantly sexualized, possessed, and othered. In fact, the word “odalisque” is derived from “oda,” which literally means a room or chamber. As stated by Thornton:

On entering the royal harem at an early age, girls, abducted from their native lands, would . . . be attached to one of these odas as novices . . . They thus took the name of odalisques. Since they were slaves, they were in the imagination of the Romantics, prisoners who dreamed of liberation . . . they were generally portrayed nude or lightly clothed . . . Odalisques were frequently depicted in recumbent positions and exquisitely formed. (64)

In Faten’s case, she is clearly not abducted from her native land. Yet, she is a ‘political refugee,’ a fact that might additionally stimulate Martin’s thirst for orientalist constructions of Moroccan women and life. Martin’s romantic imagination evokes an ethnocentric view on North African Muslim women, who are depicted as cultural artifacts within a colonialist

discourse. “Despite such positioning by Martin, or perhaps because of it, Faten finds a moment of self-possession that prompts her, perhaps for the first time since her arrival in Spain, to assert what power she can – the power to hold back her body despite the potential loss of income” (Alami 148). Put differently, Faten comes to realize that Martin is guilty of complicity in a hegemonic system that perceives Arab Muslim women as objects of desire and investigation, mere possession, and male’s property, which translates into social power and the right of exploitation. Faten feels the threat of losing her identity as a human being and a woman, if she accepts a position of subordination. Indeed, Martin’s “knowledge” of Faten’s country is limited to “Casablanca,” the embroidered dresses known as “Caftans,” and “the Qur’an” that he keeps in the glove box in his car. Accordingly, Lalami’s protagonist decides to take her leave from Martin, in spite of his offer to help her get her immigration papers and legalize her stay. “I think you should find yourself someone else next time,” Faten declares (150). In order to forge her sense of pride and selfhood, she needs to reject Eurocentric discrimination towards her “otherness.” In a symbolic act of what Daniela Flesler calls the “return of the Moor,” Faten’s rejection of Martin represents an assault on the sexual exploitation of the circulating bodies of Arab Muslim women in general and immigrant sex workers in particular. Growing in strength and consciousness, Faten asserts her position as a resistive subject, as Martin can never *own* her body. She sells sex, but still has full control over her body.

Faten’s rejection of Martin has also prompted a recalibration of her conflictual relationship with her roommate Betoul. In fact, within the macro-context of transnational border crossing, Lalami also addresses the micro-practices of two Arab immigrant women in the private sphere of their shared dwelling. Faten and Betoul have divergent labor experiences, while each holds a different migration status. Working as a nanny for a Spanish family, Betoul reproduces hegemonic forms of exclusion and social discrimination by

stigmatizing Faten for embodying unconventional gender norms. However, this lack of gender solidarity is reappraised after Faten's reconstruction of a sense of agency over her body. Lalami writes:

By the weekend, Faten decided to do something. She was going to cook a meal for Eid and so, rather than sleep, she spent the better part of her day at work in the kitchen . . . Now that Faten could buy anything she wanted, she didn't know how to make the dishes she'd craved as a teenager. The lamb came out too salty and the vegetables a little burned, but she hoped that Betoul wouldn't mind. (150)

This incident seems to trigger Faten's nostalgia for Eid al-Adha celebration, also known as the Islamic "Festival of the Sacrifice" whose significance *here and now* might serve as an emblem for the sex worker's renunciation of her old "odalisque" title. Indeed, when Betoul came back home from work, she inquires if Faten is working that evening. "'Not tonight,' Faten said. 'It's Eid.' Betoul looked as though she wanted to sleep rather than eat, but she said thanks, went to wash up, then sat at the table. Faten served her a generous portion of the lamb. Betoul had a taste. 'A bit salty, dear,' she said. Faten smiled, feeling grateful for the truth" (151). Faten's simulation of survivance seems to be generated in this new, budding sense of companionship. This culinary form of the preservation of cultural heritage brings out the potentials of material home-making in migration and its role in enabling multiple (future) identity reconfigurations. Faten's celebration of the Eid also entails her assertion of 'home' through a return to her 'Muslimness' and a retrieval of some lost part of her self. Perhaps one can assume that Faten's right to opacity emerged from the necessity of her public persona as a sex worker, which is to some extent a pose that can match only one of her multiple versions of reality. Faten preserves some degree of unintelligibility as a shield against the transparent and reductive representations of the 'other.'

Lalami shows us how conjugal homes are being reconfigured by transnational border crossing and overseas labor, thus complicating the affective and interpersonal dynamics of homecoming. Aziz, another illegal migrant, is an unemployed husband with a degree in automation from a trade school. His “carefully rehearsed fantasies” of the anticipated prosperity in Spain followed by his return to Morocco had sustained his dream and commitment to cross the Strait of Gibraltar (Lalami 152). Only his second attempt at crossing was successful. In fact, it was his family who provided for the costs of his passage: “savings from [his wife] Zohra’s meager salary at the factory, a loan from a cousin, and some money from a settlement his father had received when he was in a car accident two years earlier” (91-92). Zohra, indeed, has been a catalyst in nurturing Aziz’s transposed economic ambitions at the expense of the cultivation of a stable marital dyad. Any plans for materializing Zohra’s denied sense of motherhood are still held in abeyance, even after the relative improvement of her husband’s financial situation. In fact, Aziz’s transnational mobility has relocated ‘home,’ which now acquires a new meaning for him that does not conform to the past modalities of kinship and belonging. With the non-existence of a transplant shock, Aziz’s acclimatization into a novel environment has regrounded his home-making impulses. His attachment to the old family ‘home’ has been lost. Instead, he has reestablished a new sense of place outside of Morocco. Unsurprisingly, his visit to his old home evoked a mixture of feelings. These consisted of his inability to grieve his father’s death, his guilt for having cheated on Zohra in Spain, and his impatience to leave again. Clearly, Aziz’s actual experience of revisiting his old home has intense somatic and psychological effects, and his ability to ‘feel-at-home’ has no anchor in his place of origin anymore.

While the spatial, temporal, and affective dimensions of parenthood remain an unexplored territory, Lalami also emphasizes the fact that Aziz’s transborder movement feeds upon the immobility of other bodies. Specifically, his wife Zohra, who is ‘left behind’

physically and affectively, is deprived of her freedom of movement. The growing firmness of her interest in joining her husband abroad is countered with Aziz's apathy, when she asks at last, "when are you sending me the papers?" (174). The air of indeterminacy in his "I don't know" response is suggestive of a patriarchal discourse of imbalanced conjugal power relations and gendered spatialities. As Lalami puts it:

He couldn't imagine her with him in Madrid. She was used to the neighbor's kid pushing the door open and coming in. She was used to the outdoor market where she could haggle over everything. She was used to having her relatives drop in without notice. He couldn't think of her alone in an apartment, with no one to talk to, while he was at work. And he, too, had his own habits now. He closed his suitcase and lifted it off the bed. It felt lighter than when he had arrived. (175)

Gendered expectations of relations to place are inherent in hegemonic frameworks and practices of mobility where the masculine abled body is privileged. Such dominant systems create subject positions in which men are expected to be resilient and adaptable to change, whereas women are confined to a 'predetermined' condition of passivity and dependency. In Aziz's case, fixing his wife's body is the only way to guarantee the success of his individualistic transnational border crossing and egocentric spatial arrangement, unencumbered by the burden of 'making home' and 'feeling-at-home' in two different locations.

The project of home-making entails dynamic, ongoing processes of creation, recombination, and revision that are deeply informed by one's sense of place through time, as well as an understanding of the interplay between power and gender. According to Ahmed et al.:

Homing, then, depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted – in migration, displacement or colonization ...

[B]eing at home and the work of home-building is intimately bound up with the *idea* of home: the idea of a place (or places) in the past, and of *this* place in the future. Making home is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present. (9)

While a few migrants succeeded in crossing borders illegally such as Faten and Aziz, others were caught and deported back to their countries of origin. However, this expulsion is not to be reflexively equated with failure. For some, it might offer a unique opportunity to embark on a journey of self-discovery, leading to a regrouping of identities and a reconfiguration of the meanings of home. For instance, Lalami introduces us to the character of Halima, who after experiencing deportation along with her three young children, manages back home to undergo an internal migration that saves her from domestic disturbance and the total disintegration of her dysfunctional familial home. Indeed, Halima is constantly beaten up by her irresponsible, drunken husband, who displays a callous disregard for his parental and spousal obligations. He drinks the rent away, while Halima is the sole breadwinner for her children by taking janitorial jobs and selling broidery to make extra money. Although twenty-nine, Halima is subject to premature aging on account of all the burdens she carries by herself. The battered woman is determined to get a divorce, but she has little faith in the Moroccan judicial system to grant her custody, and hence her desperate attempt at crossing borders illicitly with her children. As Ahmed et al. put it, “Mobility can be foisted upon bodies through homelessness, exile and forced migration just as the purported comforts of the familial ‘home’ may be sites of alienation and violence (for women, children, queers)” (6). Feeling ‘homelessness at home,’ Halima eventually remakes home and establishes a new sense of domestic familiarity by relocating to a safer location of residence and founding a single-parent household. Her brave decision forces the emasculated husband to accept

divorce, and enables her to reaffirm her sense of financial autonomy and fulfillment through work.

Murad is another character whose voluntary transnational border crossing was a futile attempt, and yet the aftermath of this experience has served as an epiphany to help him reground his identitarian quest. Before the trip, Murad's discontent with home emanated mostly from his six year-long unemployment. As a *diplômé-chomeur* – an unemployed college graduate – Murad was working as a tour guide and relying on stories written by Paul Bowles to attract American tourists, who seemed to be interested in learning about Morocco mostly through the eyes of Western orientalist literary figures. In fact, as far as Murad is concerned, there is a discontinuity between his past and future. In other words, he was so consumed by his future fantasies of transborder material success in Spain to the point that his past is drifting away from him, a past equated with an ancestral home of oral stories once shared by his deceased father, but unfortunately now he can remember only in fragments. However, after his deportation, Murad finds a job in a gift shop, where he randomly interacts with tourists who apparently are still nostalgic for the era of Bowles, who according to them knew Morocco “better than the Moroccans themselves” (182). Interestingly enough, this particular new setting and the social relations it entails help stimulate Murad's restoration of his father's oral tales and the reconstruction of a national cultural identity through memory work. One more exchange with a tourist/Bowles fan was sufficient to trigger Murad's storytelling vocation. He is also unable to reconcile the fictional world of novels set in Tangier with the world he experienced everyday (176). This incongruity has marked a paradigm shift. With a growing sense of consciousness, he realizes the need to recreate an almost-forgotten ‘home’ of past memories and more ‘authentic’ stories about his homeland. Murad's aesthetics of restoration embolden him to affirm his own literary identity and preserve a transgenerational cultural patrimony.

To put *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* and *Exit West* in conversation through the characterization of Faten and Nadia, I argue that the former's fickleness throughout her transborder mobility is part of her survivance and process of transformation. The location of home, for her, seems to be embodied within the contours of her body and her right to use her body in whatever way she pleases. Similarly, Nadia in *Exit West* is performing her survivance through a rethinking of her own polymorphous sexuality, as well as her flexibility in thought and action. As the mobile subject is a viable agent of change, Nadia, as a queer migrant subject, uses mobility to resist the circumscription of her identity. The expelling force of the civil war in her city of birth has particularly allowed her to construct new, resistant spaces for herself throughout her border crossings. The expansion of her sexual identity through her ultimate act of "coming out of the closet" serves as a transgressive reaction to the conservative Islamic model of femininity. Clearly, Nadia is committed to overcoming and transcending any form of authority that tends to reinscribe patriarchal control. She is in favor of a complex interplay between the different determinants of the meaning of sexuality. In this sense, her "coming out" entails "a set of identificatory and practical crossings" between homosexuality and heterosexuality. The movement, then, between these categories become *fluid* rendering "the discreteness of each equally suspect" (Butler 310). Perhaps Nadia's acknowledgment of her lesbian identity has been contingent upon a process of self-understanding that oscillates between both homosexuality and heterosexuality. The navigation of her sexual identity operates through a continuum, rather than definitive categories, and a renegotiation of the transparent and the opaque.

In conclusion, I want to bring up the concept of ex-centric migrations, as developed by Hakim Abderrezak in his book *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music*. Abderrezak argues that since the 1990s

northward maritime crossings in the Mediterranean Sea are increasingly characterized by what he calls “ex-centricity.” With a special focus on North African countries, Abderrezak cogently argues that ex-centricity not only delineates the ex-centeredness of Maghrebi crossings – that is, the trajectory of these movements *beyond* the perimeters of what is purported to still be the center or *the* coveted destination – but also displays the eccentric character of these perilous passages. As Abderrezak explains, such border crossings gainsay “the common notion that emigrants from former European colonies migrate predominantly to the land of the ex-colonizer” (2). Notwithstanding the fact that labor, linguistic links and historical ties still connect France to its previous colonies, Maghrebians (Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians) are more and more riveted by the lure of other European countries such as Spain, Italy, and Germany. Such deviations displace the centrality of France as “a privileged destination.” Furthermore, according to Abderrezak:

[T]hese migrations exhibit an eccentricity not only in the direction of travel – this is, from north to south or north to east – but also in the methods migrants use to travel: by fishing boat, as stowaways in ferries, hidden in trucks, or even posthumously. These unauthorized passengers come from North and sub-Saharan Africa, from countries at war, places in peace, close shores such as those of Morocco and Tunisia, and faraway lands such as Libya, Senegal, Syria, Nigeria, and Asia. (3-4).<sup>39</sup>

Abderrezak also sheds light on another trend within the broad and diverse scope of migration that he refers to as “diverging migration” wherein “migrants strive to strip

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<sup>39</sup> To Abderrezak’s list of maritime migration methods, I would also add crossing on a sailboard. Oddly enough – or maybe the end justifies the means – on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, a young Tunisian sportsman named Hamza Ourassi successfully “burned” the distance of 70 km from Kelibia (Tunisia) to the Italian island Pantelleria in the hope of escaping his adverse socio-economic conditions. The talented windsurfer was intercepted and most likely faced deportation. Another interesting fact, though, is that Hamza documented his own illicit crossing through a Facebook story (with a video):

- <https://www.mosaiquefm.net/fr/actualite-social-tunisie/664677/il-parvient-a-rejoindre-l-italie-sur-une-planche-a-voile>
- <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2020/01/04/tunisie-un-jeune-rejoint-litalie-sur-une-planche-a-voile-video/>

themselves of the status of émigrés paradoxically by migrating again, elsewhere” (4). As far as Lalami’s and Hamid’s novels are concerned, it is plausible to read the former within a discourse of ex-centric migration, as Lalami’s protagonists target Spain as a point of arrival and not France, even though Spain played a more subordinate colonial role in the exercise of hegemony over Morocco. As for Hamid, a more complex phenomenon of migration seems to be at play. A process of diverging migration epitomizes the “tentacular human movements” that shaped Nadia’s and Saeed’s border crossings when they were effectuated jointly – that is, the two of them moving together between Mykonos, London and California (ibid). Besides, it is important to note that the dismantling of the status of “émigrés” is accomplished for reasons beyond their control, as Nadia and Saeed were initially refugees crossing through magical doors whose final destinations and their attendant social climates are unpredictable. However, with the end of the romance between Nadia and Saeed, *Exit West* propounds a gap in time of 50 years whereby the readers lack information on the nature and trajectory of the main protagonists’ subsequent movements, or lack thereof. We are only informed that half a century later, they meet again in their city of birth, which is no longer at war, and hence no contingency to be forced to leave. The calmness and insouciance in Saeed’s suggestion to take Nadia to see the deserts of Chile suggest the dissolution of the borders of nation-states. One wonders if the doors are still existent and/or operational.

**Tropisms of Survivance and Cross-Cultural Pollination in Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* and Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel***

In this chapter, I explore tropisms of survivance in contexts of war. I start by examining Nathalie Sarraute's concept of literary tropisms, then move to Vizenor's cross-fertilization of tropisms. I also address Vizenor's concept of "transmotion" through visionary stories and metaphors of visuality, weaving, time warp, mobility, and 'blued' presence.

Focusing on the dynamic and regenerative experiences of cultures that have survived the grimness of war and transmuted the state of desolation it engenders, this chapter lays out the innovative and visionary capacity of literary art to produce what Vizenor calls "*tropisms of survivance*." Vizenor describes these tropisms as "scenes of survivance with metaphors of natural motion, or the *tropisms* of visionary motion and experiences, and irony that would confront the tragic closure of cultures and engender a sense of native presence over historical absence" ("Native *Nouveau Roman*" 119). Inspired by Nathalie Sarraute's imagistic concept of literary tropisms, those "interior movements that precede and prepare our words and actions, at the limits of our consciousness," Vizenor expands the creative energy of survivance into metaphors of natural motion, cues of presence, and gestures of subtle ironies (*Tropisms* vi). Although Vizenor's aesthetic endeavor is contextualized, aiming to eviscerate and overturn static belief systems in popular literature and culture that persist in representing postindians as tragic victims, I contend that the character of survivance continues to open up the possibility of cross-cultural pollination. Specifically, I hope to demonstrate how literary tropisms of survivance can play a role in transfiguring the devastation of wars. Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens* and Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* are cases in point. Both authors choose war as their subject matter and seem to highlight the existential reality of chance in wartime, as well as its implications on human conduct and mostly creativity.

Despite the fact that both authors write from different historical and cultural backgrounds, Vizenor and Barakat tease the perversions of power with the consciousness of transmotion, and hence the protagonists of their aforementioned works confront the uncertainties of war, remap bounds, and create stories of survivance imbued with “a sense of presence and situational sentiments of chance” (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 11).

### **Nathalie Sarraute’s and Vizenor’s Tropisms**

Drawn to the power of words as a plastic medium that can allow us to convey those unfathomable moments at the origin of our behaviors, gestures and deeds, Russian-born French writer Nathalie Sarraute carved out a niche for herself in the literary world as an inventive and unconventional thinker. Endowed with a sentient prehension, Sarraute finds in the term “tropisms” a lifelong afflatus, a breath of life. Borrowed from biology, tropism is an umbrella term that refers to the bending movement and directional growth of a living organism under the influence of a particular stimulus, such as light, water, or gravity. There are indeed several types of tropisms, including phototropism (a movement in response to light), hydrotropism (in response to water concentrations), and gravitropism (in response to gravity). A tropism is considered positive when the organism moves towards the stimulus, and negative when it retracts from the source of stimulation. For instance, in botanical science, most plant sprouts display positive phototropism, while their roots move away from light, showing a dual reaction of negative phototropism and positive gravitropism. It is then the “instinctive, irresistible nature” of these movements that inspired Sarraute to find in the concept of tropisms a breeding ground for creativity and innovation, as well as an eponym for her 1939 book.

Comprised of twenty-four vignettes, *Tropisms* reveals Sarraute’s vision of grasping and amplifying the interior movements, the impulses and subtle details in ordinary life scenes of her unnamed characters. As Sarraute writes in the preface to *Tropisms*, “These movements

seemed to me to be veritable dramatic actions, hiding beneath the most commonplace conversations, the most everyday gestures, and constantly emerging up to the surface of the appearances that both conceal and reveal them.” Accordingly, for Sarraute, a focus on the dramatic situations that emerge from the constant play between tropisms takes primacy over an aspiration to flesh out the personality of the characters or to rely on the contrivance of plot to fully immerse the reader in her work. With her iconoclastic views, Sarraute distanced herself from the traditional forms of writing, which “seemed to have no access to what we experienced. If we enclosed that in characters, personalities, a plot, we were overlooking everything our senses were perceiving, which is what interested me,” she explained in an interview for *The Paris Review*. Sarraute’s dedication to explore those inner movements, “inherent in everybody” and constituting “the secret source of our existence,” lent impetus to a new literary and critical movement in France during the 1950s, known as *Nouveau Roman* [New Novel]. Besides Sarraute, avant-garde novelists such as Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Jean Ricardou diverged from the conventions of classical literary expression and challenged readerly expectations. The reader of the *Nouveau Roman* is then encouraged to actively participate in the meaning-making process.

The innovative and creative practices of the *Nouveau Roman*, and particularly Sarraute’s literary tropisms, have enkindled Vizenor’s artistic imagination to announce and celebrate the “native *nouveau roman*.” In Vizenor’s view, the oeuvres produced by many contemporary native and even non-native novelists and storiers bear the signs of *Nouveau Roman* French writers’ influence. Considering the Native American context, Vizenor asserts, “The creation of natural motion in literary metaphors and the ironic and necessary deconstruction of tragic themes and denouement plot lines were significant in the development of innovative native literature” (“Native *Nouveau Roman*” 119). This development lies at the heart of a native literary art and aesthetics of survivance.

For Sarraute, tropisms are experienced perceptively. Although they are triggered by external stimuli, tropisms develop in the realm of the human psyche. They might elude a particular physical or bodily reaction, but they mainly emerge and flow in the limits of our consciousness. They might reflect things that are palpable and visible like motion, gesture, and action, but they assume greater significance through metaphorical expressions that bring psychic processes to the fore. In this regard, Sarraute avers, “*il n’était possible de communiquer [les tropismes] au lecteur que par des images qui en donnent des équivalents et lui fassent éprouver des sensations analogues* [Communicating tropisms to the reader was possible only through images, which create equivalents and make the reader experience analogous sensations<sup>40</sup>] (*L’ère du soupçon* 8). Tropisms could be described as fleeting sensations, irresistible impulses, and spontaneous impressions. The metaphors – whereby these internal movements of attraction and repulsion are woven – seem to operate through the existence of what Sarraute calls “*les deux réalités*” [the two realities]. According to Sarraute, for literary art to be creative, writers need to move beyond the first sort of reality, which is intelligible, accessible, and widely consumed, “*une réalité qui a été déjà prospectée, étudiée, exprimée maintes et maintes fois dans des formes depuis longtemps utilisées et connues*” [a reality that has already been explored, studied, expressed over and over again in forms that have long been used and known] (“Les deux réalités” 72). Instead, the novelist should explore another indiscernible, yet deeper and more meaningful type of reality that seems to be obscured by the visible reality. As Sarraute puts it:

*Cet invisible que l’art rend visible, qu’est-ce que c’est? C’est quelque chose de très difficile à définir, quelque chose qui est fait d’éléments épars, que nous devinons, que nous pressentons très vaguement, d’éléments amorphes qui gisent, privés d’existence, perdus dans la masse infinie des possibilités, des virtualités, fondus en un magma,*

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<sup>40</sup> All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

*recouverts par la gangue du visible, du déjà connu, du déjà exprimé. Ces éléments l'artiste les dégage, les réunit, les construit en un modèle qui est l'œuvre même.* [What is this invisible that art makes visible? It is something very difficult to define, something made up of scattered elements that we guess, that we have a very vague sense of; amorphous elements which lie deprived of existence, lost in the infinite mass of possibilities and virtualities, melted into a magma, covered by the gangue of the visible, of the already known, of the already expressed. The artist extricates these elements, brings them together, and builds them into a model that is the work itself]. (ibid.)

This play of visibility/invisibility, stasis/fluidity, and liberation/confinement is at the heart of the development and flow of tropisms. The reality of the visible provides a vast array of external stimuli that could trigger an outburst of sensations and inner movements, unlocking the rich reserves of our memories and energies, our insights and intuitions. As Kevin C. O'Neill points out, "once the seed is planted by an external stimulus, the mind takes over, and internal, mental stimuli" start having an impact on the individual experiencing the tropism (679).

The artistic pursuit of a new reality, unknown and invisible, requires a valiant effort on the part of the writer who sows the seeds of tropisms in the reader's imagination. Therefore, Sarraute calls for a new and open form of writing through the prism of tropisms, a writing that throws off the shackles of conventions, mediates the transition from the visible to the invisible, from the exterior to the interior, and thus provides only "*parcelles de réalité*" [bits of reality] (*L'ère du soupçon* 139). Sarraute asserts:

*Ainsi, il y a dans la littérature un mouvement constant qui va du visible à l'invisible, du connu à l'inconnu, une constante transformation des formes. La réalité invisible devient une part de la réalité visible. Et, inversement, de nouvelles recherches*

*conduisent à la découverte de nouvelles réalités encore inconnues. Ce mouvement est si naturel, si nécessaire, si constant qu'on a pu dire qu'il est une lutte traditionnelle contre la tradition.* [Thus, there is in literature a constant movement which goes from the invisible to the visible, from the known to the unknown; a constant transformation of forms. The invisible reality becomes part of the visible reality. And, conversely, new research leads to the discovery of new, as yet unknown realities. This movement is so natural, so necessary, so constant that one could say it is a traditional struggle against tradition]. (ibid., 74)

It is probably this perpetual quest for openness, change and innovation that drew Vizenor towards the *nouveau roman* in general and Sarraute's tropisms in particular. In fact, Vizenor brings about the possibility of cross-fertilization between the *nouveau roman* and native literary art to anchor the presence of what he refers to as "visionary innovative *nouveau roman* native narratives" ("Native *Nouveau Roman*" 118). I think this assemblage of qualifiers to describe "native narratives" is part of Vizenor's efforts to trace the roots of an avant-garde narrative category of native literary art, which stands in stark contrast to the popular and commercial native literature. As Vizenor puts it, "This dramatic change of consciousness has already happened in native expressionistic art, but the appreciation of innovative native literary art, the native *nouveau roman*, has not been fully appreciated by commercial publishers in the United States or France. Native narratives of resistance and survivance have been published for more than three hundred years" (ibid., 121). He then adds, "Publishers and readers seem to be more interested in native novels that are simulations of 'authenticity' rather than visionary, creative, and innovative narratives" (ibid.). Unfortunately, the consumers of tragic and romantic themes such as native cultural victimry and historic absence are only content with the limitations of their sterile existence. Perhaps one can find an echo here with Sarraute's notion of a visible, surface reality that submerges the unexplored

reality of our inner energies and movements, lying in-between consciousness and the sub-conscious. It is no wonder that literary tropisms would provide a refreshing take on the visionary expressions of modern native literature. Correspondingly, Vizenor diversifies and enriches his understanding of tropisms by connecting them to the natural motion of survivance. “Native literary art,” argues Vizenor, “creates *tropisms* of survivance” (ibid., 120).

Vizenor continues to remind us that a free state of mind is non-conformist. He can make himself receptive of vivid impressions as communicated by various literary figures, including Sarraute herself, but he will always preserve that energizing degree of originality, of imagination with a difference. Indeed, Vizenor attributes to tropism a distinctive flavor that matches with his own visionary thinking. The phrase “tropisms of survivance” expresses a relationship between a part and a whole, where the former is “tropisms” and the latter indicates “survivance.” Tropisms, then, would be informed by Vizenor’s visions, themes, and practices of survivance. In this regard, his tropisms would still emerge in response to strong stimuli but in situations and circumstances that are different from Sarraute’s original context, the French bourgeois society. Although Sarraute does not ground her tropism scenes with elaborate characterization or well-developed plots (a characteristic that speaks to the universality and commonness of these widely experienced tropisms), the atmosphere surrounding her work seems to be infused with angst and docility. Sarraute’s unnamed characters seem to be offered, as she writes in *Tropism III*, “an existence that was at once despoiled and protected, an existence like a waiting room in a deserted suburban railway station, a bare, gray, lukewarm room, with a black stove in the middle and wooden benches along the wall.” John Sturrock, in his review of Sarraute’s *Oeuvres Complètes*,<sup>41</sup> argues that “No one, however coherent and assured a figure they may cut when they first appear in

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<sup>41</sup> Sturrock’s 1997 review is accessed online in *London Review of Books* vol. 19, no. 4.

[Sarraute's] books, will survive her attentions without serious damage, because their integrity is soon shown to be inauthentic, a false impression they give which, alas, the timid souls all around them are only too glad to go along with." Sturrock describes these timid souls to be passive, insecure, and longing to blend "indistinguishably with some group or other." Hapless, "they are condemned by Sarraute to a condition of incurable anxiety, because anxiety, though unwanted, is a sign of life, of humanity indeed." Sarraute's unnamed figures seem to be vulnerable, which is contrary to the spirit of survivance animating Vizenor's work. Survivancers may feel and experience anxiety in multiple ways, after all they are also humans, but they bravely renounce victimry.

Furthermore, in her endeavor to bring to the fore the intimacy of tropisms, the psyche's "barely detectable fluctuations into words, so as to make them apparent for once in all their comic, damaging, or simply lamentable ephemerality," Sarraute chooses her subject matter to be scenes of everyday life, mundane and uneventful episodes (Sturrock). The images and metaphors underlying her tropisms "turn around states and spaces of the minute, marginal, and disempowered: childhood, old age, shopping, domesticity, gossip" (Freed-Thall 136). Yet, Sarraute manages to capture the dramatic actions that emanate from these invisible tropisms by "flash[ing] her torch down into those unlit places of the self where we rearm for our intimate wars with one another" (Sturrock). I personally find Sturrock's trope of "intimate wars" quite telling here, not only because of the relevance of war as a theme in my chapter, but because Sarraute herself apparently felt reluctant to work tropisms into major, tragic events involving, for example, war conflict or criminal action. She explained in an interview with Simone Benmussa that such events happen within "well-known" and "entirely occupied" literary territories by classic and traditional authors who had preceded her, whereas within the realm of tropism, she used her "own tools" and did not "imitate any model" (113, translation mine). In other words, she felt comfortable and innovative within her own sphere of

creativity, by putting under a microscope of sorts the fleeting, internal impulses and psychic forces of ordinary people, and thus capturing their “intimate wars” at a small, microcosmic level, seemingly uninfluenced by large-scale events. Be that as it may, I believe that Vizenor’s imaginative formulation of “tropisms of survivance” – and by extension my attempt to explore the dynamic energy of these tropisms during wartime – would open up a fertile avenue of analysis that can still take into consideration Sarraute’s insight, but would also generate new enriching meanings and interpretations in Vizenor’s *Blue Ravens* and Barakat’s *The Tiller of Waters*.

### **Hoda Barakat’s and Gerald Vizenor’s Tapestries of Survivance**

In alignment with Vizenor’s reading of Nathalie Sarraute’s literary tropisms, my use of “tropisms of survivance” is based on a synergy between both authors. In other words, I use the vitality of tropisms as metaphors of natural motion to bring to the fore scenes of resistance and survivance in the texts under examination in this chapter. To Sarraute’s conception of tropisms as the almost semiconscious and latent to-ings and fro-ings of the psyche – that reveal the undercurrents running through our minds and present in all social contact and human interactions – I add Vizenor’s inventive theory of transmotion, which he defines as “an inspired evolution of natural motion, survivance, and memory over time, and a sense of visionary sovereignty (“Cosmototemic Art” 96). Therefore, in my analysis of Barakat’s and Vizenor’s novels, I pay special attention to images, as they enact tropisms and evince “an insinuation of interior motion and consciousness” (“Native *Nouveau Roman*” 121). Furthermore, inspired by Sarraute’s invitation to the readers to participate in the meaning-making of the text and to fill in the gaps, I take the liberty to interpret Barakat’s narrative with a deep engagement in human perception, by applying metaphors borrowed from neuroscience. In other words, tropisms allow me to access the inner world of Barakat’s protagonist and to explore his literal and metaphorical responses to various external (physical)

and internal (mental) stimuli. As for Vizenor, tropisms are communicated through visionary images. The psychological territory of tropisms reveals also the attractions and repulsions experienced by Vizenor's protagonists in reaction to the potency of their stimuli in different places. Therefore, both authors' analogous use of tropisms sets into motion psychic forces unknown and still to be discovered by their main characters whose distinct experiences yield different outcomes (as I will show later). Although in her conceptualization of tropisms, Sarraute focuses on amplifying the internal reactions – those intangible and involuntary movements – that people experience in ordinary daily situations, I argue that Barakat and Vizenor add another layer of complexity to these tropisms, as they grasp and enlarge their protagonists' interior movements of advances and retreats, in response to sensory stimuli, but within very specific social and historical contexts of the Lebanese Civil War and WWI.

In this chapter, I try to distinguish between trope and tropism. I use “trope” to indicate a recurrent theme in the novels. However, it is important to note that when one uses “tropisms” metaphorically, there seems to be a play between “trope” and “tropism.” In fact, the *OED* defines trope as “a word or phrase that is used in a way that is different from its usual meaning in order to create a particular mental image or effect.” In other words, “trope” refers to a *turn* of meaning from the literal to the non-literal sense. Interestingly enough, the word “trope” is derived from the Greek “*tropos*,” which means (turn, direction), while the word “tropism” finds its roots in Greek “*tropê*,” which means (turning). Accordingly, it seems plausible to claim that the word tropism in its metaphorical sense – or trope(ism) – can be related to the well-established literary vocabulary of the trope. In “Tropes and Things,” Lee Thayer establishes a direct connection between trope and tropism within communication studies, for example.

Emerging from the impact of vivid impressions, the inner movements traced in literary tropisms suggest a sense of presence animated with natural motion. Tropisms of survivance

then are a testament to growth over stagnation, presence over absence, and cognizance over stupor. In this chapter, I explore tropisms of survivance in two novels informed by the experiences of wars and situations of conflicts. Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* is set during the prolonged Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 until 1990, whereas in Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens* the events before and after the first World War (1914-1918) are backdrop. Despite the breadth of historical context, there is a commonality between both authors, as they deftly depict the complex "reflections" of wars on their protagonists' individual lives. Interestingly enough, the portrayal of wars in their novels is realized in a restrained and understated manner. For instance, when asked during an interview about the dearth of substantial display of bloodshot and violence in her novels, albeit having herself experienced war trauma, Barakat replies, "I have not many big things to tell about this... great events are not my field. What interests me is the little life of people who are not important – and the reflections of the larger process on the lives of marginalised people. Simple people can give an impression of life that is more crucial than an epic. For me, life is an epic."<sup>42</sup> Probably Sarraute's preoccupation with the "dramatic actions" and situations that arise from the invisible movements of tropisms can accord well with Barakat's interest in the intricate play of momenta, gathered or reversed, throughout the life of an ordinary person, let alone a character in a story directly experiencing the effects of the horrors of war.

Multiple are the causes and purposes of wars. Yet, they all seem to operate under the logic of destruction, the vicious cycle of brutality: which side can cause more damage to the other. Being a highly complex social phenomenon, war defies any simple interpretations. As an event of tragic magnitude, war has no respect for human dignity. Besides, the aftermath of war seems to weigh more heavily than its outbreak. As Vizenor puts it, "The war started with

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<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in his review of *Blue Ravens*, Billy J. Stratton avers that Vizenor's depictions of the war are "restrained but evocative," as "the narration of the combat spans only thirty-three pages" out of a total of 285 pages.

empires, horse parades, and manly military traditions and ended with havoc, constraint, enormous tanks and cannons, and new commune cultures of women without men” (*Blue Ravens* 138). Deaths, disabilities, destruction of natural habitats, and displacement, to name a few, are perceptible and tangible immediate effects of wars, whereas emotional and psychological traumas can linger on within the realm of an invisible reality, and if not identified and treated, they might fester. Indeed, war is a moral gangrene that haunts forever the memories of survivors, whether they are soldiers, civilians, or relatives of the dead.

Despite the imminence of violence and degeneration, the play of chance and probability is also an integral part of wars. For example, Carl von Clausewitz argues, “From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad, that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry” (qtd. in Paret 392). Accordingly, as “nonlinear dynamical systems,” wars cannot be isolated from chance and thus are “inherently unpredictable by analytical means” (Beyerchen 72, 90). Although looking at warfare through the lens of chance might make conflicts appear like “a game of cards,” Clausewitz asserts that war “is a serious means to a serious end, and all of its colorful resemblance to a game of chance, all the vicissitudes of passion, courage, imagination, and enthusiasm it includes are merely its special characteristics” (qtd. in Paret 392). The experience of war is then played out through an uncanny combination of the element of chance and a maelstrom of internal and external forces and influences.

On the other hand, the aftermath of wars involves an active process of ruination. Ann Laura Stoler provides a great insight on the importance of shifting analysis from “ruins” as vestiges of an imperial past to “ruination” as an ongoing mechanism that still conserves reconfigured imperial remains. Her focus is on “what remains blocking livelihoods and health,” “the aftershocks of imperial assault,” and “the social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things” (9). Stoler’s theoretical framework of ruination and her specific

reference to the effects residing in the “microecologies of matter and mind” is applicable to the dynamics of my chapter. First, the Lebanese Civil War and its aftermath bear the legacy of colonial ruination. Second, although the United States is still considered a settler-colonial society, *Blue Ravens* is set specifically against the backdrop of WWI and its aftermath, and this historical context also offers ample evidence of processes of ruination on the White Earth Reservation. Since I am focusing on the protagonists’ inner movements in reaction to different stimuli, I believe that Stoler’s interpretation – of how each sense of ruination (as an act, a condition, and a cause) “identifies different durations and moments of exposure to a range of violences and degradations that may be immediate or delayed, subcutaneous or visible, prolonged or instant, diffuse or direct” – can also be relevant to the exploration of tropisms of survivance during wartime (11).

### **Visual Perception and Visual Acuity**

In this section, I offer a brief synopsis of Barakat’s novel, and consider the significance of the city of Beirut as a stimulus of both attractive and repulsive forces. Specifically, I focus on how the characters navigate the tensions between visual perception (or what the sight of Beirut literally and metaphorically represents) and visual acuity (the sharpness of the characters’ interpretations). With an exquisite mix of visceral and cerebral appeals, Barakat brilliantly weaves the threads of her gripping novel that confronts the throbbing war drums of fatality with the pulse beats of life. Written in France and published in its original Arabic in 1998, *The Tiller of Waters* is a multilayered account of several contrapuntal stories narrated by Niqula Mitri, a textile merchant, who alternately loses and finds his bearings in the war-wrecked city of Beirut. Armed with his prowess in the realm of fabrics, a lifelong learning skill that his father instilled in him, Niqula tries to come to terms with his own existence in the vacuum of a ravaged town and grapples with the significance of his intergenerational, patrilineal knowledge and the sustainability of the ancestors’ legacy.

The novel begins with a flashback to the pre-Civil War era and specifically to the time before Niqula was born, when his parents and his father's Greek partner were traveling by ship from the Egyptian Alexandria to Greece. However, by sheer force of will, Niqula's mother successfully convinced her husband to reorient their destination and to instead settle down in Beirut, the land of her forefathers. This seemingly whimsical change of direction, which turns out to be an impactful life decision, reveals more about the wife's gesture of defiance against her father-in-law, who warned his son not to go back to the land of his ancestors, than her husband's uxorious nature. "I carried your father off to Beirut, a provocation to his father because he detested this city, though I could not keep your father away from fabrics as I had dreamed of doing," the mother tells her son Niqula, who never in his fifty years believed her changing version of the story as the *fons et origo* of his parents' decision to set up home in Beirut (8).

Situated on a peninsula at Lebanon's Mediterranean coastline, Beirut is depicted from the outset of the novel as an enticing city simultaneously repelling and attracting with its lure and magic. While it acted as a siren song to Niqula's parents, and thus foreshadowed their discrete downfalls, Beirut had served as a repulsive force for Niqula's paternal great-grandfather, who was compelled by necessity to move away from his native homeland and emigrate to Egypt. Partaker of a self-fulfilling prophecy, Niqula's great-grandparent firmly believed in the city's axiomatic, cyclic pattern, which has oscillated between destruction and restoration for centuries. "Created under the influence of Zuhā – Saturn, the forbidden star," Beirut turns almost into a forbidden city (29). Every time it regains stability and prosperity, the city is doomed to havoc once again, whether it be the series of wars and conquests after the Phoenician civilization faded, the Beirut earthquake of 551 AD under Byzantine rule, or the recurring plagues of the eighteenth-century during the reign of the Shihab dynasty. Summoning up his own father's words, Niqula's father relays to his son that "... Beirut's

existence would regain its vitality only after passing through colossal destruction and massive death. Beirut's soil is composed of layer upon layer of lives that have passed on" (32). Through this repeated sense of destruction, Beirut gives the impression of instability and evanescence. However, we learn eventually that Niqula's grandfather's deterministic beliefs actually stem from "his yearning and his love for this city, forbidden to him and so distant," because his own father's obstinacy barred him from return. The agony of this pendulum-like attraction-repulsion process is translated into the grandfather's fear that Beirut would betray his grandson Niqula, an apprehension that would be put to the test with the eruption of the Lebanese Civil War.

Before addressing the outburst of the civil war and its reverberations on Niqula, I want to discuss how the beginning of the novel already starts with a sense of disillusionment and deception that engulfs the Mitri family. From the very first scene, Beirut becomes synonymous with illusion, which will also foreshadow later the tension between evanescent and lasting memories. On board the ship that was meant to take them to Greece, Niqula's father Jirjis questions his wife's assertion that what her eye catches in the distance is actually the city of Beirut. "It's an illusion. It is only an illusion that you see..." Jirjis objects. "From such a distance, you cannot see what you claim to see. The sea is like the desert: it, too, has its own mirages. And we are still far from land" (1). Yet, hypnotized by the magic of what looked from afar like "a landscape of dreams," the pregnant wife succumbed to this optical pulling force and insisted on landing there. In a gesture of slavish devotion, her husband Jirjis was willing to do her bidding. Oddly, their unexpected resettlement in Beirut would eventually carry along a sense of unfulfillment and a miasma of dejection.

Disillusionment takes shape in different permutations for the Mitri couple, long before the beginning of the Civil War. As far as the wife is concerned, the shattering of her illusions in the city of Beirut inheres not only in the fated eclipse of her singing career, despite her

obsession with training her voice and priming herself for an unfulfilled “operatic debut,” but also in her continuous disappointment over the years in her son Niqula, who could never measure up to her expectations; being born a boy, a mediocre singer and unable to fill his father’s shoes in the fabric business. Her husband’s discontent, on the other hand, resulted from his growing despair over “the era of synthetic fabrics – the Age of Diolen,” which has deprived accomplished textile merchants of the delight in bringing their expertise and knowledge to bear. Consequently, left with “too much spare time in which to converse,” Jirjis becomes engrossed in the past and constantly takes trips down memory lane to commemorate his father’s good old days. As his son Niqula puts it:

In the last years of his life he summoned back his father’s words for hours at a time. It seemed as though he wanted to command his father’s presence in our conversations, to fetch my grandfather for his grandson in an era of such singular stinginess that it compelled one to dwell on the riches of the past. It seemed as though my father wanted to prod me to forget how miserable were the present fortunes of fabric by returning me to the prosperity of his absent father – the wealth of all that had surrounded him, and the wealth of his golden words, as it pleased my father to say when overcome by his yearning for that past. (8-9)

Jirjis’s escape from the harsh realities of his present life is a sort of self-inflicted blinding, which also seems to serve as a coping mechanism to come to grips with his wife’s affair with her Armenian singing teacher. Clearly, the relocation of Niqula’s parents to Beirut has become shrouded in an altered reality, and perhaps the Mitri couple’s shared sense of dissatisfaction with their present conditions could be interpreted as a somber presage of the sectarian conflicts that would later befall their city, which is, according to Jirjis, “no one’s country” (8).

An emphasis on the notion of visuality and the underlying psychology of sight prevails throughout the novel. For the sighted reader, the reliability of ocular testimony is called into question, as the war unfolds and the main character Niqula plunges into the depths of his consciousness in an attempt to reckon with his vast, ancestral knowledge about the histories of people, civilizations and fabrics, and to puzzle out the significance of the cultural politics of heritage in a transnational, global age. Indeed, a dualism between clear-sightedness and vision impairment is brought into play in the novel, and is best manifested through the character of Niqula, who according to his mother “sees nothing but what he wants to see... It is the habit of the blind” (6). Ironically, this metaphorical blindness will turn into an insightful sense of perception that helps Niqula come to terms with the state of physical and mental isolation at the ruins of an ancient city. After his parents passed away not having witnessed the escalation of the social and political conflicts into a civil war, Niqula’s solitary existence provides a fillip to the flourishing of visionary metaphors and models for knowledge. Unfettered by the laws of logic, Niqula’s imagination stimulates an active sense of presence wherein his thoughts and visions become the stimuli of his tropisms of survivance.

### **Tropes of Weaving and the Depths of Beirut**

In his reflection on Sarraute’s exploration of literary tropisms and metaphorical gestures, Vizenor avers that her goal is “to touch the mind and consciousness of the reader with a visionary image, a metaphor that is not a plot line representation or closure but rather the image teases the reader to imagine the scenes and stories” (“Native *Nouveau Roman*” 121). By the same token, Barakat also creates a sense of transmotion embedded in the movements of advances and retreats present in Niqula’s consciousness. Moving within and beyond the realms of possibility, she invites her readers to share the complexity of her literary metaphors and tropisms of survivance. To this end, the tropes of weaving and clothmaking, along with their underlying significance, lie at the heart of Barakat’s artistic pursuit, for “[t]he

techniques that go into clothmaking are in essence like the planning and construction of a city” (131). In other words, the political leader is “the artisan who crafts the social fabric” (ibid.). This equation of politics with clothmaking is suggestive of the degeneration of the Lebanese political scene with its warring factions, as well as the vanishing of the skilled artisanship of weaving and tailoring following the advent of the garment industry and its imposition of fashion, “the repetitive loss of memory” (40), or what Hanadi Al-Samman refers to as “the systematic erasure of cultural memory” (170). When the thread of leadership becomes entangled, the descent into a flare-up of hostilities is almost inevitable, especially with the emergence of religious fundamentalism as an aberrant and destructive phenomenon in Lebanon, along with the intensification of political and socio-economic disparities among various religious groups.<sup>43</sup>

Feeling susceptible to the vagaries of political change since the time of independence from the French colonial rule in 1943, Lebanese citizens are left to grapple with the demands of a modern, calamitous civilization that feeds on “[t]he persistent commodification of cultural history, the adulterated mixing of fact and fabrication: [which] all lead to the erasure of other ethnic groups’ imprint, to the impossibility of weaving their narratives in the national Lebanese fabric” (Al-Samman 170-171). Along these lines, Barakat criticizes the crass assumptions that history is pure and rejects the notion of cultural identity as a possessed property. Interviewed by Brian Whitaker, Barakat affirms, “You can never say ‘this is my culture and nobody else has had anything to do with its construction.’ You say that only when you are in deep decadence. When a culture is in deep decadence it wants to be pure: ‘What I have belongs to me and I never took anything from other cultures’ – it’s totally stupid”

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<sup>43</sup> In his 1976 journal article “The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation into the Causes,” Joseph Chamie provides an insightful analysis of the violent sectarian conflict in Lebanon in order to comprehend the nature and the root of one of the bloodiest wars in the twentieth century. Through his interwoven account of Lebanon’s past and modern history, Chamie attributes the outbreak of the war to several major causes including, “the difference in political ideology between the warring groups, the existence of sharp societal cleavages, and the prevalence of significant social, economic, and demographic differences among the various religious groups” (183).

(online access). Ironically enough, Barakat finds in the central metaphors of clothmaking and textile artisanship a reservoir of a rich and diverse Lebanese cultural history in order to address the marks of societal decadence, which are a concomitant of the changing face of contemporary commerce. With its voracious appetite for consumption and profit accumulation, this modern culture of “mass taste and *nouveauté*” pays no heed to the histories, origins and specificities of fabrics (142). Consequently, textiles merchants such as Jirjis, Niqula’s father, who was not a “mere trader in cloth,” are caught in the throes of a vanishing tradition, displaced by the pervasion of polyester fabrics and the emergence of a new era that dismisses courteous company and knowledge sharing. However, this gradual effacement of cultural memory and the attendant ignorance within the social fabric can still be counteracted, according to Jirjis, by the younger generations of cloth artisans, who should never “give in to forgetfulness,” as they still have “enough time left to learn what will come next, to let tomorrow play in [their] imaginations” (142). Perhaps the subtle irony in the recalled words of Niqula’s deceased father might strangely serve as a beacon of hope:

Nothing ends like that, utterly, in a puff of breeze, as it deteriorates. Didn’t the inventor of the atomic bomb that annihilated hundreds of thousands in a single instant also invent carbon-14, the most reliable method to know the age of things, and to date the memory of the earth’s insides? The clock in Hiroshima station, its hands suspended forever at 8:15 a.m.– isn’t that the image that to the inventor will always signal the departure of the train of memory? And the photographic image, and then television – didn’t human beings invent them when they realized that their faith had become shaky, diminished, and newly feeble?” (ibid.)

More than two years into the war, Niqula has already been consumed with a feeling of insouciance that has torpedied his energies and restrained him from inspecting his family shop in the souk, which by now would be either destroyed by fire or rifled like all the other

neighboring stores. Yet, the counterbalance to Niqula's indifference is only spurred by a series of chance events. After temporarily staying for the last two months with Hanoun, one of his mother's friends whose house is located in a relatively safer area, Niqula decides one day to check on his house. Unsurprisingly, he finds his home not only bare but also occupied by squatters. Almost insensate, Niqula accepts his new state of homelessness. As he puts it, "Yet again I found myself taken unawares by the hollowness I felt inside and by my refractory inability to react. As usual, I told myself, I would need time to take it all in" (18). As time is a key feature in any sensory experience, Niqula's reliance on the passage of time to comprehend his present condition indicates the fragility of conscious experiences, especially during life-threatening events. The suspended sense in his time perception can be interpreted as some sort of time dilation wherein dramatic situations and moments are experienced as if in slow motion. In a similar vein, Nathalie Sarraute describes how the everyday movements traced in tropisms "develop and pass through us very rapidly in the form of very sharp, brief sensations, without our perceiving clearly what they are" (xi). She further explains, "It was also necessary to make them break up and spread out in the consciousness of the reader the way a slow-motion film does. Time was no longer the time of real life, but of a hugely amplified present" (ibid.). Accordingly, Niqula's sense of being in a time warp would become a stimulus to reactivate his knowledge about fabrics and the cultural practices of weaving. As Kroeber says in a discussion of Vizenor's notions of presence and survivance, this time warp would also propel Niqula into "renewal and continuity into the future" (25).

Unencumbered by any safety concerns, Niqula ventures out into the almost deserted city of Beirut. After living an isolated existence, which took its toll on him, Niqula strolls around the streets of Beirut like an urban *flâneur* with an imperturbable eye, enjoying the "sunny, pleasant weather" (19). Barakat seems to use this trope of mobility and the natural motion of walking not only to defy and deconstruct the sense of destruction that accompanies

war, but also to remap the spatial contours of Beirut, a city that “has changed so much it is no longer recognizable” for her (Rakha interview). Indeed, there is a clear emphasis on anchoring the old names of certain streets and locations that have long vanished, as Niqla weaves through the narrow city alleys. Disoriented, Niqla gets lost in the city center, the site where the exposure to danger is now disguised in a morbid silence. Surprisingly, after a fortuitous combination of circumstances, Niqla finds himself in front of his shop, his new home where bolts of cloth turn out to be his joint protagonists in *The Tiller of Waters*. As readers, we also embark on a journey that stimulates our sentience and stirs our imagination. The novel prompts us to reconsider our own relationship with cloth. Fabrics are endowed with an allegorical distinctiveness that derives meaning from their stories, textures, susurrations and functions, and become an instrument for creating boundaries. Indeed, Niqla’s elation is indescribable when he discovers that the cheap fabrics such as nylon, polyester, and, acetate, all located on the ground floor, have been burned to ashes, whereas bolts of what his father used to call “true cloth” have remained intact in the lower level, now being a cradle of life.

Finding some new equilibrium, Niqla adopts a reasoned and creative approach to existence wherein cloths continue to act as a stimulus for his positive tropisms of survivance. After transforming the burnt-out ground floor space into a “charming verandah,” Niqla finds a sense of purpose in collecting and rearranging his plants, and furnishing his home. Not only do cloths have a profound, subliminal influence on his senses and memory reactivation, but they also sustain him and ensure his survivance both physically and spiritually. For instance, he could control the light and temperature of his home through his careful arrangement of his bolts of cloth. Barakat says, “fabric is the first and last shelter of the body” (Marie interview). Therefore, Niqla’s rekindled bond with cloths also brings to the fore the play of chance between life and death, both literally and metaphorically, when facing the precarity of

wartime. Ironically enough, Niqula's plight of living in a war zone has enabled him to craft his own fortified "palace" with cloths in the wreckage of his family store:

My house, I call it. My palace, I really should say. I live in a palace such as not even Harun al-Rashid enjoyed, if I am to judge by my reading and what I've always heard. Because, after I undid the ties and unrolled the tight bolts of cloth from their spools, I began to work my imagination. I let my desires guide me as I arranged and furnished my home, spurred on by an irresistible ecstasy. Every time I took down a bolt of fabric – these rare and precious pearls of mine – I spread it out on the floor and began to consider it from a distance, examining it from every angle... then I would take off all of my clothes and wrap myself in the length of fabric. I would spend an entire night shrouded in each one. I would breathe in its fragrance and hear its rustle from inside; I would press it against my skin, against every part of my body, to resuscitate my own intimate memories of that particular fabric in every detail. (35)

In his oasis of serenity in the midst of war-ridden Beirut, Niqula revives his knowledge of fabrics, which is now growing in his mind's eye rather than fading from his memory.

Beneath the polyphonic texture of Barakat's writing lies a thematic coherence closely knit through the metaphor of natural motion. Specifically, clothmaking is the narrative, motive force that distends across different geographical boundaries and historical frameworks. By interweaving the transnational histories of fabrics with mythological references and ethnographic records into Niqula's family saga, Barakat navigates through the significance of cloth as the central nexus to rethink the precepts of self and society. While she negotiates the ambiguities of modern social belonging in a country politically divided along religious and ethnic lines, Barakat overlays subtle irony over the horrors of war and the anxiety of uncertainty. Coalescing the concrete and the abstract, she destabilizes boundaries and vacillates between categories such as life/death, sanity/insanity,

remembrance/forgetfulness and substance/appearance. As she weaves back and forth through those borderlines, Barakat grasps the nuances of a Janus-faced psychological process, epitomized by Niqula's wavering psyche in the depths of Beirut's political turmoil. As Rakha puts it in his online article, "At the centre of [Barakat's] work lies almost always a paradox, an essential contradiction. Indeed, her unique brand of psychological thriller seems to thrive on just this kind of binary opposition: female author and male protagonist, European life and Lebanese fictional world" ("Two Authors and a Press").

This sense of ambivalence actually bears emotional and intellectual resonance in Barakat's own life journey since her childhood, as evidenced by her inconclusive endeavor to delineate the bounds of the "real world" and the world of fiction. In her acceptance speech on receiving the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature for *The Tiller of Waters*, Barakat asserts, "I knew that the book was the creation of the writer, and that it was not the real world. But this knowledge was no use to me since I did not find the world anywhere else. I became ambivalent, inhabiting the unstable borderlands. The books that I read changed me, and they raised me, like my family" (Rakha, "Two Authors and a Press").<sup>44</sup> She further adds, "Now, when I reread the fiction I write, I feel sometimes that my characters are more real than I am: guiding me to my true self more clearly than my social behavior in the real world" (ibid.). Writing then holds a therapeutic undertone that enables Barakat to access the paradoxes of her love-hate relationship with her native city and to "put a name on the neuralgic points" of this ambivalent connection; the Beirut that she needed to make peace with no longer exists.<sup>45</sup> The equivocal nature of Barakat's attachment to the city she was forced to leave because of the war has clearly served as a stimulus to a simultaneously perennial, negative and positive

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<sup>44</sup> Barakat's acceptance speech was published as a sidebar to Youssef Rakha's online article in *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*.

<sup>45</sup> In the interview by Elizabeth Marie, Barakat openly expresses her ambivalence towards Beirut, "I love and hate this city at the same time. I do not have an objective look – things are intertwined."

tropism, a boost to a creative energy fueled by necessary contradictions. *The Tiller of Waters* is then a testament to an exercise of introspective contemplation and social theory. Perhaps for Barakat, the novel's utmost reward rests on what Vizenor would call its "chance association" with Naguib Mahfouz (*Blue Ravens* 1). According to Barakat, the Egyptian literary luminary "forged for us the great way of doubt" (Rakha "Two Authors"). Having her name attached to Mahfouz's, Barakat feels not only a sense of achievement and pride, but also security in her "beautiful sojourn in the land of ambiguity." Barakat asserts:

The Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature award committee has chosen to honour me for my novel *Ploughing Water* [sic, referring to *The Tiller of Waters*]. What a strange concurrence of signs. *Ploughing Water*: small, marginal lives in the vacuum of devastated towns that we rebuild with expired fables and delusions in place of knowledge useful only in the perdition of these lives. (ibid.)

In Barakat's rendition of her visionary dwelling in "the land of ambiguity," ecological devastation is countervailed by the survivance of the soil. In *The Tiller of Waters*, the destruction caused by humans during wartime does not inhibit soil fertility. In other words, the environmental damage resulting from the destructive capacity of warfare seems to be neutralized by the paradoxical arability of abandoned and unploughed land. Curiously enough, Niqula is awed by the foliage and verdure surrounding him in the open air. "From where had all of this fertility come to the land: where had the asphalt gone?" Niqula inquires (25). As part of his quotidian practices of survivance, Niqula wanders around in the vicinity of his shop to collect plants and fruits for his own nourishment. In this newfound "Garden of Eden," the disruption of place is clearly offset by the resilience of a delicately balanced ecosystem in an attempt to "return sovereignty to the soil" (25). By reason of his constant mobility, Niqula redraws the lines of his city's multidimensional space, remapping its terrain, topography, and underground. Accordingly, the novel lends itself to a perpendicular reading

wherein Niqula's meandering along the streets and alleyways at the city's transverse plane superimposes his subterranean exploration, which runs deep through a vertical axis. Engaging in her unremitting play with the city's different layers, Barakat affirms, "The novel is like a puzzle but with various levels. It can be read horizontally and vertically" (Marie interview).

In light of Sarraute's interpretation – literary tropisms as inner movements prompted by sensory drives and experienced at the limits of our consciousness – Barakat also expands Niqula's sense perception and autonomic responses in relation to his mental mapping of the subterranean spatial environment, wherein pitch-darkness acts as a stimulus to his tropisms of survivance. In fact, after his stroll through the desolate city turned suddenly into a narrow escape from vicious dogs, Niqula finds himself plunging deeper and deeper into vaults and passages under the earth's surface. Passing through apertures, Niqula's fortuitous underground exploration seems to generate a metaphorical neuronal representation of this tenebrous underground world. "It was not pitch-dark there; or perhaps I had simply become accustomed to seeing in the dark, like a mole... In any case, the human brain does not acclimate well to pitch blackness and will not give in to it for any length of time; to compensate, it will invent its own images, and that is what it will see" (65). Endowed with this darkness-induced vision that transcends the normal limits to human perception, Niqula realizes that what he initially caught sight of in one lower-level chamber were not actually sarcophagi, but rather "upright stones, perhaps statues or small obelisks planted in the hard earth" (ibid.). Guided by "the magic of darkness," Niqula probes his surroundings like an ethnoarchaeologist, driven by curiosity and wonderment for discovering those artifacts, which mediate Beirut's various cultural and historical memories. These archeological remains serve as visual cues to activate his neurons, thus retrieving memories whereby Niqula acknowledges the multifaceted heritage encoded in his city's identity. In what follows, I use

the metaphor of “connectome,” as a map of neural connections.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Niqula’s underground exploration and adventure into the depth of his consciousness allows him to access a map of neuronal pathways and connections. This complex set of interactions within the connectome assists in enhancing his retrospective memory, which is now decoding the richness of Beirut’s ethnic and cultural fabric. In other words, Niqula’s subterranean and inward voyages simultaneously are key to discovering and unearthing his city’s multifarious heritage. “I went on, bewitched by my memory of my parental grandfather’s words. A city that does not advance in time but rather in accumulating layers, a city that will sink as deeply in the earth as its edifices tower high” (66). This chance realization drives Niqula to wonder, “How many cities lie beneath the city, papa... grandfather... how many cities lie there to be forgotten?” (ibid.).

Embarking on an exploratory journey into the heart of Beirut where the ancestral insight/wisdom of the past is accessed and confirmed in the present, Niqula navigates some sort of augmented reality. The natural motion characterizing the phantasmagoria of his dreamscapes functions as a visual sensor that detects his mental response to what he was seeing without truly seeing, and therefore imparts a new dimension to his worldview. As he descends through the layers of Beirut, Niqula experiences a moment of epiphany, a sudden revelation interspersed between blissful ignorance and blessed shortsightedness:

Grandfather, from whom I inherited the absurdity of wisdom, did you grow so passionately attached to cloth because it will not be here when the archaeologists excavate the traces of our disappearance? Was it because cloth is neither ceramic nor bone, metal nor stone, but just a bit of carbon and dust, like the traces of dust that the muscles of our hearts will leave behind? Because its weave will disappear as quickly

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<sup>46</sup> For more information on human connectome, see Olaf Sporns’s “What Is the Human Connectome?” in *Discovering the Human Connectome*, The MIT Press, 2012, pp. 25-38.

and easily as the life of cities like this one, though unlike them its patterns will not leave impresses in the earth's sediments, in the deposit of each successive layer, when the hurried diggers search for the residues of our passing. But it is all the same, grandfather, for God has blessed us with shortsightedness. And sometimes with opaque darkness. (66)

Despite natural and anthropogenic habitat disturbances, Beirut's soil has witnessed the succession of many Mediterranean civilizations. Accordingly, Niqula's excavation into the accumulated layers of Beirut seems to fertilize his own consciousness to explore and reappraise the inherited thread of legacy, wherein cloth has served as the only instrument to give his life shape and meaning. Although cloth is indicative of the Mitri family's ancestral artisanship, Niqula seems to realize that cloth does not survive and thus cannot be a tactile archeological remnant to be excavated. Yet, it is cloth that connects Niqula to who he is, encoding his thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.

While acquiring a certain degree of cognitive and emotive insight through his several underground excavations, Niqula undergoes a significant turnabout that underlies the fleetingness of his thought processes. Indeed, his recollections of his beloved Shamsa provide an impetus for coming to terms with the past. In other words, aided by the memories of his social and sexual intercourse with the Kurdish maid Shamsa, Niqula retrieves and reactivates his vast knowledge of fabrics. His renewed access to the memory of his knowledge, which he transmits to Shamsa, pertains to his ability to reprocess the psychological distress caused by the strict enforcement of his ancestors' legacy. Put differently, despite Niqula's focalization on preserving the guardianship of his family heritage, he grapples with the tension between freedom and control, the tension of acknowledging the legacy of transgenerational knowledge without being consumed by the burden of responsibility to counteract cultural amnesia. In fact, the reception of legacy has put a strain on Niqula for being the palladium of his father's

cause while he has no offspring to entrust with the same duty. Conjuring up his deceased father's presence before his eyes, Niqula inquires, "Why did we extend our hands to cling to the cord that binds us to the generations, only to find the rope becoming a viper? ... What benefit is there if I tell my version now? How can I find a lesson in it when I have no offspring to take that lesson in turn, since I am the very last of the line, the severed end of the viper's tail, still coiling in the dust in vain?" (143). This flood of stored emotions evinces Niqula's torment, which has only been exacerbated by the impact of the civil war on his mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, which thins the demarcation line between sanity and hallucination at times.

Niqula's recall of the patrilineal legacy almost equates with a traumatic memory that is paradoxically intensified by the fear of forgetting the essence of that very same remembrance: the binding commitment to the transgenerational knowledge of cloth, the embodiment of symbolic heritage in a city whose inhabitants still flounder in confusion about their "inability to process history's lessons, to distinguish between what is myth and what is history" (Al-Samman 176). Acting as a mnemonic trigger, fabric in Barakat's novel is the manifestation of an objectified cultural memory, assumed to remain immutable to the historical and ethno-cultural changes that Lebanon's modern social fabric has undergone. As Al-Samman puts it, "The Lebanese citizens' inability to go back to a cultural moment that predates colonial conquest, and the modern nation-state, where all the conflicting ethnic and religious groups lived harmoniously, is partially responsible for the civil war's eruption" (177). This sense of ineptitude to access a cultural memory of the past that would account for the integration of pluralistic experiences and identities can be seen as an emblem of the perduring frictions between several sectarian and ethnic groups in Lebanon. For Niqula's father, cloth becomes a totem of an essentialist discourse that forbids "repugnant combinations" and "mongrel blends," and by extension, is a direct opposition to Beirut's cultural mixing. For instance, in

one of his flashback scenes, Niqula remembers his father's impulse to correct and indoctrinate his wife to conserve "the essence of things:"

Do you know that to put certain things together was – and still is – forbidden in the holy books of the Jews? Do you know, for instance, that those scriptures forbade a man to till his field with an ox and a donkey yoked together to his plow? And that it was forbidden to wear cloth woven from two fibers of different origin? This is so not only to avoid bringing together what God has kept apart. More importantly, it is because to combine, in itself, is a venture of uncertain outcome. The experiment might fail, and leave behind loss and regret. Or it might succeed and yield a harmonious result that is positive, but its very success might produce danger as well, for it might make people arrogant. It might give them notions of being more powerful than they really are, leading them to corrupt the essence of things, of whatever their hands touch.

(40)

Niqula's flashbacks of his knowledge transfer to Shamsa, along with their intimate relationship formation, invoke a desensitization process to help him unlearn the anxieties surrounding the rigid preservation of a cultural memory, imbued with and formed by essentialism and insularity that reinforce sectarian divides.

### **The Kurdish Shamsa and the Amphora Girl**

In addition to exploring the tensions around the preservation of a symbolic institutionalized heritage, *The Tiller of Waters* is also a story about love and loss amidst war and destruction. However, before delving into Niqula's venture to recompose the fabric of his life and, by extension, to reframe Lebanon's national narrative, it is important to consider the significance of Barakat's notable choice to represent a member of the Kurdish community through Shamsa's character. When asked about the motive behind her representation of the Kurds in Lebanon, Barakat explains that the answer lies in the peculiarity of their position as

“the real strangers, the outsiders – the marginal. They were even more destitute than the poorest Lebanese, but they were tragically free, having no boundaries, no country. Despite everything, they have maintained a great dignity and pride” (Marie interview). Indeed, although they constitute one of the largest stateless ethnic groups in the world, with an estimated population of 25 to 30 million dispersed as ethnic minorities across Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, the Kurds evince a remarkable sense of psychological resilience and adaptation in the face of adversity and trauma (Arakon). Barakat’s description of the Kurds as “tragically free” reveals an oxymoron that indicates the Kurdish people’s qualified sense of freedom. They have some freedom of mobility, but they seem to be forever denied the right to set up a state of their own, to establish roots. Despite this dire reality of displacement, the Kurds remain independent, spiritually free. Their freedom does not hinge on territorial bounds.

Despite their cultural and linguistic diversity, the Kurdish people share a broad sense of national identity and ethnicity, accentuated by their lived experiences of multiple forms and degrees of oppression. The Kurdish presence in Lebanon “dates back to the arrival of the Ayyubids in the twelfth century A.D.” (Meho 59). Later a “large number of families were sent to Lebanon by the Ottomans, primarily to maintain order in various parts of the empire” (ibid). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century, the Kurds were subject to forced displacement; subsequently between the 1920s and 1960s they had to flee persecution in Turkey and Syria by moving to Lebanese territory as immigrants and refugees. Settling in mostly low-income areas in Beirut, the Kurds were confronted with various socio-economic and political problems that hindered their full integration into the social fabric of Lebanon. Unsurprisingly, the condition of the Kurdish community in Lebanon was only aggravated with the eruption of the civil war in a country where political power is already defined along ethno-religious demarcation lines. As Meho puts it:

Hoping to change their situation, [the Kurds] mistakenly entered the civil war, which further divided and impoverished them... [T]he Kurds have suffered at the hand of almost every major sectarian group in the country. The Christian Maronites denied them citizenship to avoid tilting the sectarian balance of the country towards Muslims. The Sunnis, influenced by several rival Arab ideologies such as Nasserism and Ba'thism, did not like the Kurds and made no effort to naturalize them. The Shi'ites considered the Kurds nothing but Sunni combatants or allies of the Druzes. (71-72)

Despite the discriminatory practices meted out to the Kurds in Lebanon on the basis of their unassimilated 'foreignness,' many Kurdish families have managed to adjust in their own ways, as they "seem to have acquired a dual life style, and have not given up their efforts to identify themselves as Kurdish as well as Lebanese. In other words, the Kurds in Lebanon have accepted the society in which they live as the home base, as the prime focus of allegiance, and as the place where personal ambitions are formed, achieved, and enjoyed" (Meho 82). Needless to say, the process of adaptation to a new and highly charged socio-political climate is quite complex for many members of the Kurdish minority, and can intensify an ambivalent sense of belonging to Lebanon and complicate their claim to its heterogeneous heritage. The vexed questions that persist are: do the Kurds identify themselves first and foremost as Lebanese, Kurdish, or both? Given their own internal ethno-linguistic divisions, how does the Kurdish minority take part in the writing of Lebanon's histories and cultural memories? These were also preoccupations for Deborah Miranda and Assia Djebar in the contexts of North America and Algeria. In Barakat's characterization of Shamsa, she not only lights up Niqula's "life, composed as it was of a very few windows, all of them so firmly closed," but also enacts hers and his tropisms of survivance in order to confront the tragic closure of minority and colonized cultures (42).

Seen in the light of Vizenor's formulation of tropisms of survivance as literary scenes informed by metaphors of natural motion to ensure the ironic destruction of tragic themes, Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters* constructs survivance as a statement of presence. I contend that Barakat also employs tropisms of survivance by enacting metaphors of creative motion and perceptual experiences in order to achieve the transformation of war destruction into a figurative assault on the perversions of power. As I have tried to demonstrate in previous sections, Beirut's subterranean passages, together with the basement of the Mitri family cloth shop, serve as a cradle for the articulation of tropisms through visionary images. Indeed, as Barakat endows Niqula with the ability to explore his psychological depths, she creates a sense of presence by imagistic tropisms and metaphorical associations. The latter come into play in another of Niqula's underground excursions wherein he stumbles across a girl in an amphora, a young woman buried in a jar below ground, whom he associates with his beloved Shamsa, "I saw a human form, short in stature, sitting cross-legged. The whole torso was leaning back against the half of the amphora that remained intact and was seemingly fixed in the wall's earthen surface" (46). Elaborating on the focal point of his visual field, Niqula goes on:

It was a girl. I could see her hair. I could see the gown she wore, for it reflected the faint light [...] The transparency of her delicate skin gave her the aspect of a skeleton, but with her hair and clothes intact, she had more the appearance of a young woman who had just been laid in her coffin.

I stayed in front of her on my knees, incapable of moving. I felt my eyes burning from the intensity of my stare [...] Why this figure reminded me of [Shamsa] I do not know, when there was not the slightest resemblance – neither in the figure, nor the length of her hair, nor... maybe it was because she sat cross-legged, as Shamsa had always done [...]. (46-47)

The unexpected encounter with the amphora girl enhances Niqula's potential to embrace change through memory retrieval and re-learning processes. In other words, the chance association of the amphora girl with Shamsa serves as a sensory stimulation to conjure up memories of Shamsa's presence, which will be maintained throughout the rest of the book, and reaffirm her significant role in enabling a dialogic interaction: she learns about fabrics from Niqula's recycled knowledge, and she teaches him about the history of the Kurds and Kurdish women's sense of agency. Here, Barakat opens up the space for Shamsa to unearth her buried narrative and by extension to claim the right to have it included as part of Beirut's history and cultural heritage. As Al-Samman puts it, "In our interview, Hoda Barakat indicated that she meant for the buried amphora girl to represent 'the girl who never reached womanhood, the city that did not become a country, the memory that did not materialize into a present, the place that we do not have the courage to face or to interact with, and the incomplete history that was not reconciled, digested, or woven, therefore leading always to conflicting myths'" (176). This mixture of suspension and unattainability of goals and standards underpins a legacy of essentialist beliefs of dominance, reflecting the deep divisions across ethnic and religious fault lines, for "the story of the buried feminine narrative... intertwines with the national narrative of destruction, dispossession, and domination" (168). Therefore, not only does the association of Shamsa with the buried amphora girl catalyze Niqula's growing questioning of a lapsed patrilineal value system – or a delusional knowledge that renders efforts to rebuild post-war Beirut nugatory – but it also prompts his exploration of the inward, psychological realities of human interactions.

The inward realities of human interactions are revealed in the intricate interweave of history, myth, ethnography, and knowledge sharing between Niqula and Shamsa. Shamsa, with her alacrity of spirit, is vicariously learning about fabrics. The knowledge is almost transcendental, moving in escalation, in spiritual ascension: unlocking doors of knowledge,

one level after the other, starting with linen, moving to velvet, then lace, until finally reaching silk. Meanwhile, Shamsa teaches Niqula about her family history, Kurdish women's sense of agency, as well as plants, such as the mandragora. In fact, there is an intricate play of boundary wavering with the mandragora plant, as it "oscillates between poison and elixir, between death and tempestuous pleasure, between manifest presence and concealed absence" (111). The sense of natural motion embodied in the mandragora might serve as a metaphor of constant change, of movement, and also of Niqula's inability to secure Shamsa in a fixed position. Indeed, earlier in the novel, Shamsa was described as having a plump body and this enabled her to transvalue her statelessness. However, after advancing in her knowledge of fabrics, Shamsa becomes very thin. This metamorphosis is emblematic of her unrestricted sense of freedom and refusal to be 'weighed down' by the burden of an essentialist form of national narrative and cultural heritage. Though neither Niqula nor Shamsa survived the war, the novel points towards a more positive way of reconstructing post-war Beirut.

While Al-Samman interprets Shamsa and Niqula's meaningful exchange across differences as an "ideological duel [that] reflects the challenges of memory recall, of historiography vis-à-vis the subject's gender and ethnicity" (173), I would argue that the duel is actually an opportunity for mutual growth, a scene of survivance for both characters: Shamsa, with her consciousness of transmotion, embodies a sense of historical presence that repudiates in Vizenor's terms "tragic victimry" or "the popular notions of terminal traditions and vanishing cultures," whereas Niqula will continue to question, to grapple with the tension around the preservation of a patrilineal tradition and cultural heritage ("Native Nouveau Roman" 119). Perhaps, Niqula will come closer to realize that cultural survivance implies the need to accept opposites, for "there is no knowledge... but that which stands firm on the pinnacle. There is no knowledge but that which can see the two opposite sides together, white and black, and simultaneously" (134). Such assertion could probably explain Niqula's lack of

fear by the end of the novel. Fear used to consume him before: fear of the unknown, fear of being killed, fear of starvation, fear of losing Shamsa, and fear of forgetting the transgenerational knowledge of cloth.

Although Niqula seems to have managed to conquer his fear by the end of the novel, his demise is irreversible. His practices of survivance helped to orient and direct him through the deserted streets of Beirut. Most importantly, his tropisms of survivance in the subterranean level of the city allowed him to delve into the depth of his psyche, thus reassessing his attachment to patrilineal traditions and legacy. Yet, Niqula dies at the end, just like Shamsa who vanished and disappeared from his mind after growing thinner and thinner. In fact, the novel seems to follow a cyclic pattern, as Niqula is driven towards the sea, the same place from which the novel started. We learn that Niqula has lost all sense of direction, a sudden change that stimulates his last tropism. Niqula looks for and follows the sea to derive a sense of guidance. “Then I saw a sea of empty chairs, arranged in lines that made up large squares, like block formations of infantry. In parallel lines, they all face the shore” (175). As he advances, Niqula notices enormous unlit theater lights, “Suddenly, one of the spotlights blazed. I raised my hands over my eyes to shield them from the intense light. It so dazzled me that I could not see for several long minutes” (ibid). Just like the opening of the novel, the final scene evinces a play on the notion of visibility: illusion, blindness, and clear-sightedness:

And when I discovered that there was no one to be seen in the rows of seats, I chose a seat for myself and sat down to wait for the concert.

From time to time my dazzled eyes register a calm layer of water submerging this entire paved expanse, so that I can see the sky and the resplendent September moon reflected in it. The sight makes me want to get up out of my chair and run in all directions. To till it well. (175)

Niquila's death calls attention to the fact that survivance is a phase for him, as it does not overcome mortality or occlude the transience of life.

### **Tropisms of Survivance in Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens***

In their introduction to *Native American Survivance, Memory, and Futurity: The Gerald Vizenor Continuum*, Birgit Däwes and Alexandra Hauke reflect on Vizenor's work as a narrative tapestry. They write, "In the interwoven threads of these complex formats of visual narrative, the fine threads of wool or silk disappear into the larger design, becoming invisible in a rich treasury of colors and symbolic emblems that visualize scenarios of origin, of historical power struggle, or of metaphysical interaction" (6). They assert that "Vizenor's textile texts are populated by reappearing characters... by humans and animals in what he calls 'totemic associations'... and by recurrent themes of the terminal creeds of colonialism, of resistance and postindian survivance, as well as by the colored shades of humor and irony" (ibid.). In line with Däwes and Hauke's observation, I aver that Vizenor, a *bel esprit*, crafts nature-inspired floating stitches on the translucent fabric of his art with a unique, painterly effect. Indeed, Vizenor's peculiar sense of aesthetic creation sensibly interlocks with his engagement in a spirited resistance to native absence and literary tragedy. In other words, his visionary thinking and writing offers an antidote to the poison of cultural dominance and romantic sentiments of victimry; he creates a counter-hegemonic and innovative literary art that he calls native *nouveau roman*. "Vizenor's art is translucent – its codes are pluralistic and polysemous, and the interwoven threads of the tapestry are *flickering, virtual, elusive, able to disappear and re-emerge in ever new readerly constellations* – but never without a political agenda" (ibid., emphasis added). Not only does Däwes and Hauke's textile metaphor fittingly evoke, in the spirit of Vizenor's chance associations, the general tenor of Hoda Barakat's *The Tiller of Waters*, which evolves around the metaphor of clothmaking, but it also paves the way for addressing Vizenor's work in connection with Nathalie Sarraute's literary tropisms,

those internal, reactive movements towards or away from specific stimuli, or “the virtual dramas latent in ephemeral flickers of feeling” (Minogue).

My focus in the second part of this chapter is to examine the manifestations of tropisms of survivance through Vizenor’s conceptualization of native cosmototemic art and transmotion in his novel *Blue Ravens*, a sensible combination of creative resistance, perspicacity and humanness. I argue that an interlock of artistic expression with a spirited sense of visionary motion provides the impetus for the cross-border movements of Aloysius and Basile, two Anishinaabe brothers who grew up on the White Earth Reservation. In addition to being “brothers by chance,” as Aloysius, a newborn abandoned at birth, was adopted and raised by Basile’s mother on the same day Basile was born, the protagonists are also native artists of liberty, and warriors of survivance. In a steadfast fraternal bond of union, Aloysius and Basile come to share a sense of presence, informed by their pursuit of art and adventure. As the narrator Basile informs us, “We were not the same, of course, natives and brothers are never the same, but we became intimate and loyal friends by experience and confidence. We were driven by the same intense curiosity, by a sense of empathy, wonder, the natural surprise of intuition, and always by the tender tease of our mother. She experienced the world through our adventures, and so she teased every scene, gesture, pose, and story” (4). As the brothers’ sphere of experiences widens, their ability to leave the reservation and establish new worlds in migration takes the stage. The experience of serving as soldiers in the American Expeditionary Forces in France, as well as their subsequent return to the White Earth Reservation, marked a watershed in their life journey. Although unnerved by the traumatic war memories, Aloysius and Basile return to France, where they regain vigor and find solace in the world of art, which constitutes their own revolution.

To counteract the lingering effects of cultural and political dominance on the reservation and to transmute the unbearable sentiments of desolation in the ruins of WWI, the

Beaulieu brothers find in art a stimulus to boost their creative energy and to practice survivance. The visionary scenes and cues of presence and survivance are embodied in Aloysius's paintings and Basile's native stories. Specifically, totemic blue ravens have served as the main source of inspiration for the two native artists from an early age. "The blue ravens were traces of visions and original abstract totems, the chance associations of native memories in the natural world" (1). As their fur-trade surname "Beaulieu," which literally translates in French as "a beautiful place," suggests, Aloysius and Basile transmute the legacy of colonialism and federal treaties into a memorable, visionary union of "ironic stories, necessary art, and [...] native liberty," thus creating and inhabiting brave new worlds of their own, worlds wherein native autonomy is fully acknowledged and celebrated (ibid.). By reason of their mobility between the reservation, the city of Minneapolis and various parts of France, the young artists embrace a sense of presence with the perceptions of natural motion, and continue their artistic practice in a floating world. For instance, while the White Earth Reservation turns into a cosmopolitan community by virtue of the international news reports published in their uncle's journal, the Café du Dôme, a renowned venue in Paris where intellectuals and artists gather, is transformed later into a "native commune" thanks to the brothers' presence and continuation of native stories. Indeed, Aloysius and Basile's practice of survivance is informed by the unmaking of borders and thus accounts for possible reconfigurations of spatialities and temporalities. The nature of their cross-border engagements varies from sites of stagnation to sites of productivity: at times those engagements are crippling but mostly liberating, and thus they yield not only processes of creative resistance, but also of growth and insightful/inventive interaction with fellow leading lights in the world of art and literature.

## **The White Earth Reservation: A Sense of Fugitive Presence**

In his essay “Cosmototemic Art: Natural Motion in Totemic and Visionary Art,” Vizenor declares, “Native survivance is contrary to cultural and political dominance. Survivance creates a sense of native presence and resistance to the sentiments of tragedy. The common suffix of the two words denotes a distinctive condition and action, and clearly the outcome is antithetical” (95). Indeed, survivance and dominance, two antagonistic forces, are constantly brought together. Vizenor’s writing uses this rhetorical device of antithesis to accentuate the contrast in the juxtaposed ideas and concepts within his paragraphs. For instance, in the following passage, the character of constitutional democracies is counterbalanced by the Constitution of the White Earth Nation and its protection of artistic liberty:

Dominant institutions have sanctioned the absence of natives in history, and publishers have promoted the bankable legacy of victimry. Constitutional democracies are about rights and property, security and governance, but not always about the ethos of survivance and artistic liberty.

The Constitution of the White Earth Nation provides that the ‘freedom of thought and conscience, academic, artistic irony, and literary expression, shall not be denied, violated or controverted by the government.’ Probably no other constitution in the world has specifically protected the rights of artistic practices and cultural sovereignty. (ibid.)

This antithetical mode is also invoked in Vizenor’s novel *Blue Ravens*, wherein practices of visionary resistance and artistic expression come into play to nullify the pervasive effects of institutionalized power, in and outside the White Earth Reservation.

Established by treaty on March 19, 1867, the White Earth Reservation, as depicted in Vizenor’s novel, is the crucible in which the Beaulieu brothers’ sense of spirited motion of

continental liberty is forged. As a citizen of the White Earth Nation himself, Vizenor invests his protagonists with a capacity for discerning both the insidious and crude effects of the legacy of colonialism from an early age, for “neither arcane colonial rules nor the historical trauma of genocide simply disappear with time, certainly not when conditions of life and consciousness perpetuate them” (Dunbar-Ortiz 217). Along those lines, Vizenor asserts that the Minnesota treaty “was not about peace but rather a declaration that removed natives from other familiar family settlements” (“Survivance and Liberty” 25). In the absence of “the moral imagination of a peace treaty,” native autonomy and self-determination might be curbed in the crevices of history and memory, in the breaches of “the federal treaties of power, removal, racial and cultural separation, and the exploitation of natural resources on treaty reservations” (ibid., 21). However, even though the reservation was a seedbed for autocratic federal policies, a sense of spirited resistance still reigned supreme in Native literature, which, as Vizenor reminds us, “has never been a newcomer in the course of resistance to dominance. Natives have resisted discovery and political tyranny for centuries, from the first stories of contact, the wily breach of trust in monotheistic empires, fascist cavalry soldiers, and the autocracy of federal agents, to the unbearable ironies of a constitutional democracy” (“Native *Nouveau Roman*” 130). He continues, “The storiers of resistance were visionary, wise, ironic, and tricky” (ibid.). The last statement accurately describes Aloysius and Basile, who are committed to carry on the ethos of presence and survivance, and to throw off the shackles of the ideology of dominance through bravery, humor, and vision.

The Beaulieu brothers are not schooled artists, but they are native visionary painter and writer, who find inspiration and a sense of union with Oscar Wilde’s sentiment that “art cannot be taught.” Rather, art can be “revealed” (31). Indeed, Aloysius’s main aesthetic creation of blue raven totems in “the timber ruins of the reservation” evinces the power of visual and visionary art to paint abstract scenes by inspiration and to convey emotions and

meanings that are not to be constricted by fixed, definite readings or interpretations. In fact, Aloysius refuses to paint “familiar representations of creatures” as that “would dishearten the natural inspiration of any artist who created a visionary sense of native presence” (3). This sense of artistic liberty is understandably incompatible with the brothers’ colorless and insipid learning experience at the government school. As the narrator tells us, “The [federal] agent never hired a native teacher. He always wore a black suit and the teachers were secured in layers of white muslin with creamy flowers. The classroom was unnatural, a drafty box of distractions, the pitch and duty of an awkward hem and haw civilization” (5). Such an unoriginal and unimaginative atmosphere is also underlined by federal agents’ unconcern in general to establish libraries on reservations, and make books available for many natives. Yet, to countervail this sense of scholastic sterility, Vizenor continues to create tropisms of visionary motion, flavored with a trace of subtle irony, as reflected in the Beaulieu brothers’ scenes of survivance in the Minneapolis Public Library. In the summer of 1909, or as the narrator Basile calls it “that summer of our migration” – a migration in the pursuit of seeing art, meeting with artists, and presenting Aloysius’s blue raven paintings – the fourteen-year old brothers visit the Minneapolis Public Library and feel “impressed that so many books were at hand, and touchable without permission. The books were not concealed, and instantly summoned for review. Books were federal prisoners at the government school” (40). Indeed, in their previous encounter, or lack thereof, with books, the latter were only held hostages at the mercy of federal policies of power and dominance, but here in this Carnegie library, which will forever bear the legacy of its founder, the Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, books are free. Being in close proximity to the books activates and enhances the brothers’ senses, thus triggering a tropism in memory and totemic transmutation. “In that curious hush and silence of the library the books were a native sense of presence, our presence, and the spirits of the books were revived by our casual touch. Every book waited in

silence to become a totem, a voice, and a new story” (36-37). In the spirit of reanimating these books, Aloysius has recourse to his visionary art to craft a painting of Carnegie, who “was portrayed as a stately blue raven with a bushy mane and great beak in the turret windows” (36). In that regard, “Carnegie was a new totem of literacy and sovereignty” (ibid.).

### **Blued Presence**

Although “born in a world of crucial missions,” Aloysius and Basile have created their “own era of Blue Ravens” on the reservation (3). Their distinctive epoch is marked by an outburst of inspiration that derives the cues of a sense of ‘blued’ presence from nature. As nature is considered the main provenance of memorable native experiences on the reservation, the color blue yields a synergy of aesthetic and conceptual profundity. Evocative of an indelible impression of existence, perdurable and eternal, blue is the color of visionary perception that creates symbolizing scenes of strong persistence in life and a resilient defiance. As the narrator puts it, “Native saints and secrets were blue, the blue of creation and visions of motion, not deprivation, the conceit of sacrifice, or the godly praise of black and tragic death. Blues were the origin of the earth and stories of creative energy. The mountains emerged from the blue sea and became that singular trace of blue creation and the hues of a sunrise” (14). Furthermore, the color blue has a curative property in native art and stories (64). Indeed, we learn from the outset of the novel that the Beaulieu brothers’ mother is an herbal healer, who “insisted that her son the artist use only natural paint colors. She provided the natural blue tints that my brother used to paint ravens. Blue was not a common native pigment, so the blue ravens were doubly distinctive” (7). The color blue is clearly very significant in conveying tropisms of survivance, because “[r]avens were blue in creation stories, and remained blue in the name of storiers. *Black ravens turned blue by visions and ingenuity*” (126, emphasis added). This ethos of blued presence finds aesthetic and intellectual resonance in the novel’s cosmopolitan aura, as evidenced by Vizenor’s chance association of

Aloysius with Russian-French artist Marc Chagall, who both deem ‘blue vision’ in cosmototemic art their *raison d’être*. As Basile points out:

Marc Chagall and my brother would be celebrated for their blue scenes and visionary portrayals. Chagall painted blue dreams, lovers, angels, violinists, donkeys, cities, and circus scenes. He was six years older than my brother, and they both created blue visionary creatures and communal scenes. Chagall declared his vision as an artist in Vitebsk on the Pale of Settlement in Imperial Russia. Aloysius created his glorious blue ravens about the same time on the Pale of White Earth in Minnesota. He painted blue ravens in new reservation scenes perched over the government school, the mission, hospital, cemetery, and icehouses. Many years later he blued the bloody and desolate battlefields of the First World War in France.

Chagall and my brother were the saints of blues. (1-2)

Blue graces, liberates, and heals. Blue abounds with life, indulges in the pleasures of ecstatic and explosive moments. Blue brings to light and exhilarates inner movements and tropistic energies. Blue is a remedy for broken and wounded spirits. Blue is the embodiment of powerful visions and transformative imagination. Blue is a declaration of presence and a commemoration of valor. Blue is the color of survivance. Chagall, Vizenor, and Aloysius feel, paint, and write the flux of blues. When Vizenor recalls Chagall’s impassioned plea to God for a numinous conversion “If You exist, make me blue... make me blue, fiery, lunar, hide me in the altar with the Torah! Do something God, for our sake, for mine,” the imagistic call is met with reverence (qtd. in “Native *Nouveau Roman*” 115). Vizenor honors the visionary artist and calls him “Blue Chagall.” He writes, “Blue Chagall was a metaphor of natural motion and apparently was not intended to represent sadness or desolation; rather, he meant to be dreamy, an artistic, visionary presence, ‘make me blue’” (ibid, 116). Either naturally, or by play of chance, Vizenor will make Blue Chagall’s and Blue Beaulieu brothers’ paths cross

later in the novel, when Aloysius and Basile settle down in Paris as veterans and established artists.

In the presence of the color blue, poetic and visionary scenes populate the pages of Vizenor's narrative. The encounter between the Beaulieu brothers and Japanese artist Yamada Baske at the Minneapolis School of Fine Arts engenders tropisms of visionary motion, chance, and reciprocity. However, before I discuss the significance of this serendipitous artistic connection, it is important to point out that the preliminary to this meeting also reveals another memorable tropism, which will forever flicker in the brothers' memory and consciousness. Indeed, after visiting the Minnesota Public Library, the fourteen-year-old Basile and Aloysius set to visit the Beard Art Galleries, whose front windows, they discovered, served to display the kind of commercial and mercenary strain of art that was "only selected to entice passengers on the streetcars" (43). The absence of visionary art, such as Aloysius's abstract blue raven scenes, can only be a "deceptive" experience for the young artists. For example, the portrait of three Irish settlers was an impediment to the boundless territory of visionary creativity. "The Irish settlers," Vizenor writes, "were aristocratic posers, haughty pedigree portrayals, plainly favored over natives and the poorly" (42). Yet, the brothers were unaware that their own "native" presence and the window reflection by the art gallery façade would trigger a Sarrautean-like tropism:<sup>47</sup>

Our faces were reflected in the gallery window, and at that very moment a yellow streetcar passed through the scene of our reflection, a throwback to abstraction and native stories. The muted aristocratic settlers mingled with passengers on the streetcar. That scene became the most distinctive story of our two days in the city. We

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<sup>47</sup> This particular scene by Vizenor brings to mind some examples from Sarraute's tropistic images in her book *Tropisms*. For example, in Tropism I, Sarraute lets flow a scene where "they," who seem to be a couple with their listless children, stop and look endlessly before the shop windows. Also, Tropism II includes among others the tropistic-trigger of mirror reflection.

told many versions of that story to our relatives. The Irish setters, native faces, and the slow motion of the streetcar that afternoon became a chance union of abstract creation.

The Beard Art Galleries became an abstract scene. (43)

As Sarraute reminds us that tropisms expand in our consciousness as if by effect of slow motion, the Beaulieu brothers' inner dreamscape is dilated in their mind's eye to create an abstraction, a sensible experience in the midst of a "sprawling" and "noisy" city. This visionary scene is actually accompanied by a sudden change of heart, prompting Aloysius to confidently foray into the gallery only to discover original art inside, including Yamada Baske's *Woman in the Garden*. Indeed, fifteen years later, when the two brothers meet with Blue Chagall in Paris and feel enchanted with his reflections on poetic, imaginative art, the gallery window scene slips through memory lane to be re-activated. As the narrator Basile recalls, "I reminisced about that critical moment fifteen years earlier when my brother had sensed the extent of various perspectives and dimensions of images reflected in the window of an art gallery in Minneapolis" (264).

The physical and metaphorical movements of repulsion and attraction, experienced outside and inside the art gallery in Minneapolis, were formed in a tropism that has served in itself as a trigger to another necessary tropism, whose swift unfolding would mark a sense of presence interlaced with the perceptions of natural motion, chance, and mutual recognition. The new tropism in question is stimulated by the urge to meet Yamada Baske, who happens to be teaching in the art school, "located on the same floor of the Minneapolis Public Library" (45). Once again, the elements of coincidence and fortuity color Aloysius and Basile's experiences. The moment of the brothers' arrival to Baske's studio was a visionary scene illuminated through the Japanese artist's "chance discussion" of the color blue, in its vitality and energy. "Baske told the student that the wash of blues was a natural trace of creation, a primal touch of ancient memories. The blues are a procession, he explained, and the turn of

blues must be essential, the epitome and trace of natural hues of color” (ibid.). Emboldened by the *blued* psychic forces of creation and motion, Aloysius placed some of his blue ravens on empty easels, thus piquing Baske’s curiosity. The artist approached and studied Aloysius’s pictures in admiration. “He moved from easel to easel, and then mounted more pictures to consider. He commented on the mastery of the blue hues, the subtle traces of motion, the natural stray of watercolor shadows, and the sense of presence in every scene of the ravens” (46). Aloysius’s work exhibits the glories of an inspiring autodidact whose zeal for an innovative, transformative native art commands attention and respect. In his vision, blue ravens were the new totems of native liberty, because “[n]o other totems were as secure as the blue raven, not even the traditional crane totem of our ancestors” (15). By transforming the studio into a creative space for critical sensitivity, humbleness, and generous sharing, Vizenor infuses the chancy meeting scene with a *blued* presence. Not only did Aloysius paint “a raven with wings widely spread over the studio easels, misty feathers tousled and astray, beak turned to the side, a blue raven bow of honor and courtesy,” but he also invited Baske to visit his relatives on the White Earth Reservation. This sentiment of openness and gratitude was respectfully acknowledged by Baske who “smiled, bowed, and accepted the invitation” (47). In his turn, Baske proffered a tin of rouge watercolor paint and suggested “a slight touch of rouge, a magical hue would enrich the subtle hues of blues and the ravens,” an aesthetic tinge that Aloysius accepted with a receptive mind and practiced in his art.

### **Bluing the Bloody War**

Survivance, through a sense of natural motion and bravery, is an act of sovereignty, a renunciation of the politics of containment on the reservation under the auspices of federal agencies, schools, and churches. These dominant institutions work to retrench natives’ freedom of mobility, and thus to set the seal on, what Philip Deloria has referred to as, “the colonial dream of fixity, control, visibility, productivity, and most importantly, docility” (26).

Ironically enough, this attitude of docility and conformity extended to the draft for First World War, “that wicked crusade,” which further exposed the racial fault lines of American politics under the 1917 Selective Service Act. The Act upheld the claim that tribal Indians are not considered citizens because they live on federal reservations, and thus “are not covered by the provisions” of the Act (95). Despite this crude reduction to “aliens,” natives rejected the possibility to claim a “passive” exemption of service, as “they were ready for the adventure of combat,” or more accurately, eager to escape the confinement of the reservation (ibid.). Aloysius, in this regard, was committed to evade the romantic sentiments of tragic victimry on two occasions: firstly, and unsurprisingly, by enlisting in the military along with his brother Basile, and secondly by his tricky conversion of reality through his art. Indeed, in a gesture of spirited defiance against the draft board, who refused to list him as a native artist instead of laborer, Aloysius implements a scene of survivance, a tropism of transmotion, by “[painting] a blue raven and in the talons the word ‘artist’ was boldly printed on a Registration Card” (ibid.).

In his essay “‘Nothing More Than the Chance of Remembrance:’ Gerald Vizenor and the Motion of Natural Reason in the Presence of War,” Billy Stratton asserts that “the visionary stories and cosmototemic art of Basile and Aloysius Beaulieu dance in word and image to create a new historical memory that bridges the divide between White Earth and World War I Europe” (135). While witnessing the horrors of the war, the Beaulieu brothers used the determined energy of their aesthetic creations to help them make sense of these traumatic experiences. The cornerstone of their experience in France during the war was their ability to make art out of destruction. In this sense, one can, paradoxically, think of the unspeakable atrocities of the war – through the smell, sound, sight, and feel of misery – as a provocative goad to transmute the raw material of these harrowing experiences into visionary stories and artistic creations. Amid the freshly created ruins, the “dead horses, bloated bodies,

and war debris,” the brothers’ tropisms of survivance squirm within their psyche until they materialize in Basile’s stories and Aloysius’s blue ravens. Art serves as a cathartic release to sustain the brothers throughout this gory expedition. Indeed, the narrator Basile draws on the power of his tropisms in memory and transmotion, which Vizenor defines as “an actual and visual image across, beyond, on the other side, or in another place, and with the native favor of presence” (“Native *Nouveau Roman*” 132). The power to envision new scenes and stories is an inherent practice of survivance in native traditions. In *Blue Ravens*, Vizenor affirms the vitality of the ice woman stories to cure diseases, stories that are always ridiculed by federal agents. For example, Misaabe and his five mongrels are natural healers on the White Earth Reservation, who “healed serious diseases of more natives than the hospital doctors” (64). The gift of healing calls for the ailing native’s visionary capacity to visualize scenes of the ice woman “and then melt the disease away with a song or story” (ibid.). Therefore, the ice woman stories were potent “sources of fear and caution. That very sense of fear in stories of the ice woman could be imagined as the power to heal a disease” (ibid.). Along those lines, as the specter of disease and death loomed within reach during wartime, Basile envisioned the German emperor, the Kaiser, as “the ice monster of war” and destruction, thus deriving the healing energy of transmotion as that “visual image... in another place” that suggests interior motion. “I created original stories about the ice monster, an obvious relative of the ice woman in the native stories of the Anishinaabe” (116). Basile adds, “Wars changed familiar native stories” (ibid.). The monsters and evils of war have the power to transform people, stories, and nature. Yet, the storiers of resistance and survivance convert the obvious and the visible by being “visionary, wise, ironic, and tricky” (“Native *Nouveau Roman*” 130).

Not only does Basile revere his brother Aloysius’s remarkable ingenuity and influence throughout their life journey and artistic pursuit, but he also honors the memory of three important figures who inspired and encouraged him to become a writer: their uncle Augustus,

their friend Odysseus the trader, and the old healer Misaabe. Indeed, Basile recalls Odysseus's insights and intuitions that great stories are best recounted in twenty-four parts, just like Homer's *The Odyssey*. Interestingly enough, Vizenor also created *Blue Ravens* in twenty-four chapters.<sup>48</sup> The influence of Homer's epic work seems to serve as an allegory of the brothers' visionary adventures and grand journeys as "cosmopolitan natives" and "citizens of the world." In fact, *The Odyssey* provided an impetus for creativity, as Basile made a habit of reading "at least one or two chapters, or books, each week in training and service in France" (103). By dint of his visionary transformation and active sense of presence, Basile's "literature of native memories and endurance in the war became *The Odyssey*" (ibid.).

There is no better way for the Beaulieu brothers to transmute the desolation of war than by continuing the creation of creative scenes of transformation and natural motion, which constitute "the most honorable sources of cultural memory" (*Blue Ravens* 272). As Stratton points out, "Vizenor is engaged in a literary and aesthetic effort to create alternatives to the tragic simulations of trauma and war" (141). Vizenor's offered "alternatives" derive strength from an inviolable attachment to nature. For Aloysius and Basile, a natural sense of presence resides in the veneration of the pulses and rhythms of nature. However, sadly, the ravages of wars desecrate forests, destroy animals' natural habitats and force them to escape. Despite this obstruction of "natural flight and the ordinary songs of the seasons," the war does not enfeeble the brothers' indissoluble bond with nature. For example, Aloysius can find a sense of endurance and solace through the power of recreation from destruction. Indeed, he uses chunks of wood shattered by artillery explosions to carve blue raven medals and peace pendants under the "bloody rage of war" (*Blue Ravens* 127). As the narrator Basile tells us, when his brother learnt that – among the six thousand soldiers of the Rainbow Division who died nearby – American poet Joyce Kilmer was one of the casualties and the "French honored

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<sup>48</sup> It is also a coincidence that Nathalie Sarraute also crafted her *Tropisms* in twenty-four sections.

him in death with the Croix de Guerre,” Aloysius “decided that a blue raven medal carved from any of the trees in the nearby forest would rightly honor the poet” (118). Not only does Aloysius’s creative gesture serve to honor and commemorate the soldiers and also relatives who died in the war, but it also reflects his commitment through this symbolic restorative act to repair the damage caused by the human race to the environment, to broken nature.

The Beaulieu brothers’ native missions as scouts are multi-sensory experiences par excellence. The interplay between the experience of darkness and rain in the forest, and the intermittence of bombardment triggers tropisms, creating scenes of survivance imbued with metaphors of natural motion. Although they were aware that the sergeant chose them for risky missions only because of his assurance of “stealth” in their blood,<sup>49</sup> “a native trait and natural sense of direction even on a dark and rainy night in a strange place,” the brothers always gave free reign to their strong feeling of trust in and oneness with nature (121). Venturing into the profound tenebrosity served to amplify Aloysius and Basile’s interior movements, which preceded and prepared their actions in the dark. Very much like the subterranean experience of Barakat’s Niqula in Beirut, the Beaulieu brothers were endowed with the ability to *see without the perception of light*. “Remarkably, we could sense the spirit of trees, but not by the ordinary light of sight” (122). They could “smell the enemy” and “tried to imitate the natural motion of the rain.” They could sense the presence of creatures and imagine their motion in the forest. While the outcome of their first mission was characterized by an enchanting fortuity – as two other native scouts who happened to be in the same part of the forest captured them – the brothers’ mission at the Vesle River by the end of the war was a triumph by dint of *blued* presence. Instead of using black charcoal on his face like Basile, “Blueblood” Aloysius painted his face in “wide bands of blue with black and rouge circles.” Basile

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<sup>49</sup> It is an undeniable fact that Native Americans’ military service during WWI, among others, was not devoid of the perpetuation of stereotypes. Natives were mainly selected as code-talkers, scouts and snipers, and were regarded as being warriors naturally by instinct.

described his brother's creation as "original, more aesthetic than menace, a comic mask" (129). Interestingly enough, other soldiers were inspired by this *blue* sense of presence and courage, and thus asked to have their faces painted as well for combat. However, the significance of Aloysius's "comic mask" is mostly revealed after this flow of tropisms:

Aloysius led the way through the forest muck in leaps and bounds with each burst of lightening and explosion to a secure natural mound in the center of huge cracked trees. Our strategy was to fall asleep there despite the weather and artillery, to become a native presence in the folly and deadly chaos of the war. My brother was a warrior beam with a mutable comic face in the rain and in every flash of lightening.

The artillery bombardment ended early in the morning. The trees around the mound emerged in the faint traces of light as black and splintered skeletons. We were native scouts in a nightmare, a curse of war duty to capture the enemy.

The war was surreal, faces, forests, and enemies.

In the passage above, Vizenor uses visionary metaphors to paint vivid images in the reader's mind, encouraging the release of their creative potential. Indeed, tropisms manifest themselves through a series of images, juxtaposed in an almost incongruous way, thus requiring a suspension of the real – or what Sarraute would refer to as moving beyond the surface reality of the visible to reach the invisible reality of interior motion. The lightning and explosion in this scene are brought together to stimulate Aloysius's sense of natural motion, thus balancing his rhythm with nature, his movements of leaps and bounds. Also, the image of trees emerging as skeletons enhances the macabre effect of the war. However, right after this scene, Aloysius and Basile manage to capture enemy soldiers thanks to Aloysius's "comic mask." As the narrator tells us, "Aloysius shouted a wild curse, and rushed the enemy. The Boche soldiers were stunned by the face paint and surrendered for fear of being scalped by a fierce native warrior" (131).

However, when the war ended, the brothers' return to the reservation was characterized by a lack of creativity, as they "returned to the ironic situation of the occupied on a federal reservation" (175). Not only did the experience of the war leave its mark on them, but it also accentuated their sense of estrangement from and unbelonging to "settled" territory. Aloysius and Basile did not see their realities reflected in the dominant narrative of "the deceit of national and cultural peace" (170). The narrator declares, "We were once soldiers, but never the patriots of a nostalgic culture of peace" (ibid.). The incongruity and irony of Native life on a reservation as part of a nation-state in a settler colonial framework can be elucidated by Mark Rifkin's notion of "settler structures of feeling." As Rifkin cogently argues, "Understanding settlement as a structure of feeling entails asking how emotions, sensations, and psychic life take part in the (ongoing) process of exerting non-Native authority over Indigenous peoples, governance, and territoriality" (342). To this end, Rifkin asks some pertinent questions:

How are the politics of settler rule lived in everyday ways? How do quotidian modes of feeling help naturalize non-Natives' sense of entitlement to (once) Indigenous lands and sense of ease in the territory claimed by the settler state? How does that feeling of connection to this place as citizens of the state actively efface ongoing histories of imperial expropriation and contribute to the continuing justification of the settler state's authority to superintend Native peoples? (ibid.)

With the persistence of harrowing war memories, leaving the reservation and embracing chance again was imperative for the Beaulieu artists. Indeed, Aloysius and Basile return to Paris where they "felt at home" by "travers[ing] the main streets of chance and poverty" (217). *Galerie Crémieux*, the art gallery owned by their friend Nathan, and Café du Dôme become their havens where they exhibit their new art, meet artists, and reunite with friends and mutilated soldiers. By exchanging trickster stories of "humor," "natural irony and

liberty,” the brothers and their friends transvalue the wounds of the war (284). Feeling empathy and respect for wounded soldiers, Aloysius and Basile build deeper human connections particularly with André and Henry, the masked veterans with disfigured faces. The novel ends on a cordial note, as “André and Henri removed their masks and slept overnight on the floor of the atelier, and with a secure sense of presence” (285).

While cloth, a cultural symbolic emblem in Hoda Barakat’s novel, acts as an instrument for mapping boundaries at the temporal, spatial, and relational levels, blue ravens in paintings and poetic scenes in Gerald Vizenor’s *Blue Ravens* help to unmake borders. In *The Tiller of Waters*, the ethos of survivance calls for the need to rethink the myopic attitude to cultural survivance, as exemplified by Niquila’s father, for “[t]he history of Beirut as a city defies essentialist national narratives of the dominance of one sect over another; rather, that history demonstrates the coexistence of all minorities and their right to claim the city as part of their heritage” (Al-Samman 171). However, throughout his venture into unlocking the meanings and emotions buried behind the perceivable world, Niquila participates in the actualization of his own visions and associations, thus acknowledging the multiple stories and interlacing strands of Beirut’s cultural fabric. Perhaps the futility of essentialist nationalism in Beirut could bring to mind Vizenor’s insight on the coexistence of multiple ways of knowing, telling and being within Native American experiences. As Vizenor puts it, “Cultural survivance is an obvious resistance to the pushy ideologies of nationalism [...]. The visionary and totemic stories of creation are instances of literary transmotion, and continuous variations of origin stories create a distinct sense of presence and survivance (“Native Transmotion” 37). Along those lines, in Vizenor’s novel, the continuation of totemic and visionary stories through an aesthetic of blue ravens serves to thwart cultural dominance and to defy notions of stasis and nihility. On the other hand, there are some commonalities between Barakat’s and

Vizenor's novels, as both of them are informed by wartime experiences and their protagonists are endowed with the consciousness of visionary transmotion. Since literary tropisms reveal and respond to intense affects, Niquila, as well as Aloysius and Basile, all grasp and enlarge what their senses are perceiving in reaction to external stimuli. Therefore, the reader is invited to embark on an emotional and aesthetic journey along with those survivancers: Niquila, through his metaphors of visual perception and gestures of natural motion that goes beyond the limitations of place and time, rediscovers the city of Beirut, whereas Aloysius and Basile remap bounds by way of their cosmototemic art, which bears transcendent traces of native sovereignty and continental liberty.

**Trickster Aerobatics and Humor in Al-Shaykh's *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water***

Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular  
oppression?

-- Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

My focus in this chapter is on transformational tricksters. I start by examining the transnational trajectories of tricksterism in some oral traditions and move to an exploration of fiction. Then, I look into the use of humor, wit, and verbal play in trickster stories as strategies of survivance, which may or may not end in comfortable resolution.

The novels examined in this chapter are *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* (2011) by Lebanese author Hanan Al-Shaykh and *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) by Thomas King, an American-Canadian writer of Cherokee descent. Together these texts look at survivance through the reworking of the original Scheherazade narrative alongside Native American trickster stories. The trickster figure in Native American literature can be connected to the manipulative and astute disposition of the character of Scheherazade, the female heroine and storyteller in *The One Thousand and One Nights*, commonly known in English as *The Arabian Nights*, a collection of ancient tales compiled from a wide range of Persian, Indian, Arabic and other oral tales dating back to the eighth century (Miquel). The frame story revolves around a king's decision to marry and kill a virgin every night after discovering the infidelity of his wife. Only Scheherazade survives through wit and trickery. The original story has been translated and rewritten by male and female novelists<sup>50</sup> from countries in Europe, Asia, America, and Africa (Malti-Douglas). As Scheherazade uses defiant trickery and humor

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<sup>50</sup> The original story of Scheherazade has been rewritten by novelists such as Leila Sebbar, John Barth, Nawal El Saadawi, Githa Hariharan, and A. S. Byatt, and discussed by Phillip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner, and other scholars.

to postpone her execution, King's Native trickster figures in *Green Grass, Running Water* are emblematic of the practice of survivance, which requires not only a physical resistance, but also an active and imaginative transformation through the channel of humorous storytelling. By focusing on trickster consciousness, or what I term "trickster aerobatics," I hope to demonstrate how Al-Shaykh's and King's stories of survivance can help create unlimited possibilities of mutability, creativity, and renewal in defiance of closure.

### **Transformational Tricksters**

In "Trickster Discourse in *Narrative Chance*: How Gerald Vizenor Helped Shape my Life in Academia," Allan J. Ryan reflects, as the title of his article suggests, on the formative role his guru, Gerald Vizenor has played. Unequivocally, Vizenor's visionary thinking and "sense of subversive play" have accentuated Ryan's engagement with trickster scholarship (22). At the 9<sup>th</sup> *Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts*, Vizenor's talk displayed his compound sense of tease, irony, and survivance. A master of verbal acrobatics and a trickster in blood, Vizenor "was in his element, at once erudite, ironic, droll, cerebral, charming, amusing and thoroughly entertaining" (28). Ryan continues:

In a telling question and answer session that followed, Gerald spoke of his fondness for "modified" tricksters, that is "transformational tricksters," or "compassionate tricksters," viewing them as profound and rich visionary figures in a story, and much more than simple conmen or deceivers. When asked about the word, "survivance," he said, "I wanted to have a word to say and write that had the power of 'dominance,' to challenge the notion of tragic victimry." (ibid.)

What better word can encapsulate the thrust of resistance, creativity, and transformation, all at once, in order to neutralize the imposed representations of victimry and the reductive constructs of Native American identities? "Survivance," both empowering and enthralling,

equips its adherers with the necessary verve to create subversive and liberating narratives of trickster consciousness.

The trickster is a tribal figure that thrives through the shimmers of imagination. “A peripatetic figure who in his wanderings has made the transition from traditional oral tales to contemporary written literature,” the trickster inhabits the realm of inexhaustible possibilities (Blaeser 136). Multifunctional shape-shifting and boundless ingenuity are second nature to the trickster, and therefore any attempt to contain the trickster in a consumable definition or theory can only be futile.<sup>51</sup> Not only does trickster figuration materialize in “animate and inanimate categories” such as animal, human, and natural material, but it can also be a thought, “the kind of thought that raises hope, that heals, that cures, that cannot be traced” (Vizenor, “Trickster Discourse” 70). The trickster is elasticity and fluidity in action. As Blaeser points out, “tricksters embody contradiction and ambiguity... Neither wholly good nor solely bad; neither completely wise nor only foolish; sometimes the wily perpetrator of tricks, sometimes the vice-ridden buffoon who falls victim to his own pride” (139). Yet, the trickster is adept at dealing with the “realities of human imperfections,” bringing balance to chaos with an abiding sense of humor, and never in a wistful or melancholic frame of mind. In Vizenor’s view, “tricksters are not moral or functional. Tricksters are not artifacts. Tricksters never prove culture or the absence of culture.” Instead, “Tricksters are ethereal. [They] only exist in a comic sense between two people who take pleasure in a language game and imagination, a noetic liberation of the mind. The trickster must represent imagination as the real, nothing more than that” (“Trickster Discourse” 70). Trickster consciousness is the enactment of the pleasures of language games.

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<sup>51</sup> Vizenor raises objections to scholars who impose social science theories to interpret the figure of trickster. For Vizenor’s criticism of Paul Radin’s and Victor Barnauw’s works on trickster, see “Trickster Discourse” (71). Also, in *Gerald Vizenor*, Kimberley Blaeser offers her insight on Vizenor’s sense of trickster dynamics, as he refutes Paul Radin’s and Carl Jung’s reductionist and static theories about the trickster (140-141).

Intrinsic to the practices of survivance, the transmutable art of trickery and mediation through humor takes center stage in imaginative trickster tales that defy tragic victimry. As an avid reader of Vizenor, I revel in his inviting words when he writes, “The trickster arises in imagination and the trickster lives nowhere else but in imagination. We must all have a trickster in the mind if we have any sense of play and imagination about literature” (“Trickster Discourse” 68). Indeed, inspired by Vizenor’s free spirit of imagination, I perceive all the reimagined “Scheherazades” in Hanan Al-Shaykh’s novel as trickster figures, employing their creative wiles to subvert and overturn a patriarchal system of male dominance and misogyny, wherein women are “constantly being accused of adultery and then murdered or beat up” (Gaitskill x). Emboldened by their cunning use of guile, most of Al-Shaykh’s female characters perform trickster maneuvers through their tales. With skill and *élan*, they narrate their survivance to redress the balance in what Al-Shaykh calls “a war between the two sexes” (Martin). Most importantly, through the agency of humor and subversive play, Al-Shaykh’s reworking of *The Arabian Nights* challenges dominant paradigms to drive social change, thus reifying the possibilities to humanize the world. Al-Shaykh and her Scheherazades can be deemed “transformational tricksters.”

In a similar vein, Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* evinces the liberating and humorous spirit of subversive wordplay and creative imagination. By dint of his serious playfulness, King creates transformational trickster figures that celebrate “cultural survivance” as “an obvious resistance to the pushy ideologies of nationalism, ethnographic simulations and models, and gossip theory” (“Native Transmotion” 37). The romantic doctrines of native victimry are brilliantly rescripted through a trickster discourse, animated by uproarious humor and ironic disruption of meaning and linguistic ideologies of dominance. Humor is used as a practice of survivance, as a necessary exercise of deconstruction for the sake of recreation, or as Eva Gruber contends, as a game plan not only of defiance but also

reevaluation and renegotiation, “reimaging Nativeness anew” (4). I argue then that both Al-Shaykh and King are engaged with practices of survivance through their use of what I call “trickster aerobatics.” A portmanteau of “aerial” and “acrobatics,” this blend accentuates the trickster’s aerial perspective, which denotes a sense of freedom, imagination, and depth, thus undergirding his/her acrobatic skills or feats of the mind. Trickster aerobatics replenishes the creative imagination of survivancers as a “source of healing energies” (Vizenor, “Trickster Discourse” 70).

### **Trickster Figures and Transnational Trajectories**

Before I delve into exploring the motifs and dynamics of trickster aerobatics specifically in Al-Shaykh’s and King’s novels, I think it is fruitful to devote a section that would highlight the stretch of trickster figures in a transnational frame of reference. I do not intend to chart an all-encompassing review, but to trace some of the literary reverberations of tricksterism within various traditions and contexts. I hope that the few examples I mention can bring to the fore some of the multiplex ties of intertextuality in oral folktales. Once again, my focus is on the transnational character of trickster figuration, which is usually expressed in a comic mode. So, I will start my discussion with a *coup d’œil* at the transnational trajectory of *One Thousand and One Nights* in order to picture the extent of the work’s worldwide popularity and influence. Indeed, this multisource collection of largely Middle Eastern folktales might possibly carry an influence from Indian and Persian traditions as well. Given the cross-cultural literary transfer processes at the heart of the transmission of the *Nights*, it is almost indisputable that a multiplicity of traditions would have entered Hanan Al-Shaykh’s – and as a matter of fact any other scholar’s – reading of this extensively traveled work. Then, after identifying elements of resonance within South Asian and also East Asian traditions, I expand the connection to trickster figures in Native American tradition.

Setting the stage for a deeper and more complex narrative structure, the main framing device in *The Nights* centers on the story of Shahrazad and king Shahrayar, the ruler of the Sassanid pre-Islamic Persian Empire (224-651 C.E.). The crowned head whose authority extends over “India and China” is devastated after discovering that his wife was committing adultery with one of her slaves. Resolved to take revenge, Shahrayar kills his wife and plunges into his plan to wreak vengeance on all women by marrying a virgin every night only to execute her in the morning before she disgraces his name. Only his vizier’s daughter, Shahrazad, is an exception to his brutal and misogynist rule. Against her father’s wishes, Shahrazad ventures out. Her counterplan consists of recounting every night a sensational tale, which seems to never end, as the brilliant *raconteuse* ends in mid-tale with a thoroughly entertaining and suspenseful cliffhanger. Eager to hear the ending, Shahrayar spares Shahrazad’s life until the following night, when an ending is completed only to start another incomplete story. Eventually, Shahrazad’s stratagem remains in force for, as the title suggests, one thousand and one nights. The device of refusing closure and never sating the king’s hunger for finalization saves Shahrazad’s life, but also serves to humanize/civilize Shahrayar, who ultimately rescinds his ruthless decision.

A cornucopia of diverse literary and artistic offerings, *One Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights* is rightfully deemed a cornerstone of world literature. However, due to the convoluted history of the various repertoires in this *omnium gatherum* of folktales, it is almost an unattainable goal to carry out a narrative mapping of the definite origins and sources of the stories narrated by Shahrazad. As often the case with oral literature, *The Nights* is multi-authored and widely traveled. With the shift from oral to written forms, the composite work lent itself to many variations since the emergence of its early-translated tales from

Indian and Persian origins into Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age.<sup>52</sup> Over the centuries, a series of recensions and interpolations furthered the expansion and circulation of this “vertiginously unstable text” across the world, but the renascence of the work emanates from its adoption into the Western literary tradition (Makdisi and Nussbaum 1). Specifically, Antoine Galland’s 1704 French translation marked a watershed in the transnational history of these travelling tales and stories. Galland’s twelve-volume *oeuvre* of *Les Mille et une Nuits*, translated from Arabic manuscripts dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century *but also* ‘constructed’ around Syrian narrator Hanna Diyab’s oral tales and performances,<sup>53</sup> “initiated a wave of translations and adaptations into all major European (and, subsequently, many other) languages that itself resulted in a vogue of fiction in the ‘Oriental style’ and inspired an endless number of imitations and re-creations not only in literature but also in the arts, music, dance, and architecture” (Marzolph ix). Fittingly, as Makdisi and Nussbaum have noted, the cross-cultural transmission of *The Nights* via an intricate global network is also informed by the changing nature of the political and cultural relationships between East and West, “*The Nights* may usefully be thought of as a palimpsest... because over the decades and indeed centuries it has been written, rewritten, and overwritten as the tides of imperial power – and the extent of Europe’s obsession with Eastern alterity – ebbed and flowed” (3).

If we put aside the ‘orientalist’ and exoticizing drive in the reassimilations of *The Nights* into the Western literary tradition, one can still appreciate and marvel at the amplitude

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<sup>52</sup> See André Miquel’s “*The Thousand and One Nights* in Arabic Literature and Society”; Robert Irwin’s “Political Thought in *The Thousand and One Nights*”; Heinz Grotzfeld’s “Creativity, Random Selection, and *pia fraus*”; Susanne Enderwitz’s “Shahrazad Is One of Us.”

<sup>53</sup> In his laborious endeavor to trace and reconstruct the history of *The Nights*, Iraqi-American scholar Muhsin Mahdi postulated that the oldest extant version of the Arabic text is a three-volume Syrian manuscript from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which also served as the basis for Galland’s French translation (Muhsin Mahdi, ed., *The Thousand and One Nights*, 3 vols, Brill, 1984-94). Yet, other *Nights* scholars continue to raise questions about the Syrian manuscript’s scholarly authoritativeness as the closest archetype. For more information, see Madeleine Dobie’s “Translation in the Contact Zone” (p. 37) and Robert Irwin’s *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (p. 58).

of meaning-making processes, lying within this sparkling work. Whether through *The Nights*' 'original' stories or its imaginative retellings by writers from all over the world,<sup>54</sup> the alchemy of new discoveries and possibilities is always alive. Perhaps the work's main claim to fame lies in its ability to generate captivating stories-within-a-story that cast a magic glow over its admirers: readers, listeners, and viewers alike. Besides, what adds to the work's popularity with a wide and heterogeneous audience is its synthesis of both language simplicity and profundity of teachings and messages. *The Nights* attests in fact to the power of storytelling as a pedagogic discourse and practice (and a communal enterprise). In fact, the entertainment value of *The Nights* stories is equated with the moral and therapeutic dimension of the book. As Dominique Jullien reminds us, "...since Shahryar is not a princely child in need of early 'edutainment,' but an adult psychopath in need of medical help, Scheherazade's stories, in addition to their political dimension, aim to heal the sick king: they are both educational and therapeutic" (281).

Considering the fact that *The Nights* is a multisource collection of popular folktales, it is suitable to read this widely traveled and transformed text through the lens of a palimpsest, thus discarding the hermetic and absolute confines of a single origin (or authorial identity). Such reading opens up the text to an interminable language game wherein meaning is always postponed through an endless chain of signification (an idea that I will discuss further later in my close readings of the novels). The openness of the form in *The Nights* is quite crucial as well, for this allows us to highlight the possible relationship of this text to other texts, or to identify intertextual practices of adopting and adapting signs from other texts. In light of the significance of trickery to subvert kings' power in both *The Nights*' frame and Shahrazad's embedded stories, I argue that exploring the stretch of trickster figures within a transnational

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<sup>54</sup> To cite a few examples, Gita Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (2011); Naguib Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* (1979); A. S. Byatt's *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* (1994).

framework can only enrich our perceptions and readings of *One Thousand and One Nights* corpus.

In a web of connections and associations, the sense of *espièglerie* and sophisticated wit, usually accompanied with subtle humor, runs through trickster figuration in different traditions and contexts. For example, ‘Birbaliana,’ a well-known cycle of anonymous Indian popular folktales, evinces the verve of tricksterism. Originally told in Hindi and Urdu, these medieval Indian stories depict the amusing and witty exchanges, ranging from anecdotes to jokes and riddles, between Akbar and Birbal. The former was a Mughal emperor who reigned in India from 1556 to 1605, while the latter was a minister in Akbar’s administration and one of his closest courtiers. Both historical figures shared a special bond, which made the nature of Birbal’s trickery quite peculiar as Akbar teased and challenged his advisor’s wit only to admire and appreciate it all the more. For more insight on the circulation of these tales, I turn to C. M. Naim, an American scholar of Indian origin whose areas of research focus on Urdu language and literature, as well as South-Asian studies. In his essay “Popular Jokes and Political History: The Case of Akbar, Birbal and Mulla Do-Piyaza,” Naim shares a few examples of Akbar-Birbal stories, some of which he heard as a child. The stories were orally told by “illiterate Muslim men and women,” but later Naim “found some of the same stories retold in textbooks and many more in cheap booklets sold on sidewalks” (1456). The popularity of these folktales extended beyond temporal boundaries since “... the first reference to Birbal as a famous wit occurs in *Ma’athir al-Umara*, an early 18<sup>th</sup> century biographical dictionary of the nobles at Mughal courts” (1459). Interestingly enough, Naim himself calls attention to a striking similarity between Birbaliana and *The Arabian Nights* when he refers to ‘challenge’ stories, also known as “*samasya purti*,” which consist of the interactive gap-filling within metrical compositions. In other words, emperor Akbar provides Birbal with a half-line of poetry and challenges him to complete the rest of the unfinished

composition and hence create a short poem. According to Naim, this challenge, which is a “fairly popular literary game in Sanskrit” and other languages, is resonant with a similar story in *The Nights* concerning the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rachid and the classical Arabic poet Abu Nuwas (1460-61).

Furthermore, C. M. Naim asserts that the Birbaliana stories “always ended with Birbal coming up with a witty rejoinder or explanation, thus turning some impossible situation to his own favour, often making a fool of his master, Akbar” (1456). The idea of turning an impossible situation or a crisis to one’s advantage resembles Shahrazad’s endeavor to trick Shahrayar and save herself and by extension all the other women, while persuading the king to become lenient instead of barbaric. Similarly, the second narrative within the main Shahrazad story depicts – as I will show later in this chapter – female trickster characters, who manage to transmute the limitations of their conditions while playing with and subverting social roles. The recourse to humor in some Shahrazadian stories proves to be more powerful than the tragic mode present in other stories, for the nexus between wit and comic elements – integral to trickster aerobatics – serves a moral function, which is that of poking fun at human fallibility for the sake of transformation and renewal. Along those lines, a connection between Akbar-Birbal stories and Shahrazadian tales can be established for, as Meenakshi Khanna argues, the Birbaliana stories also “poke fun at the human imperfections in the character of the king, and suggest a corrective to his behavior. This in fact, is a universal feature of folktales concerning kings and comic figures in diverse cultural traditions all over the world” (xv).

In continuation with the possible intertextual references vis-à-vis the multi-location presence of trans-regional and transnational trickster figures that circulate among various oral traditions, the 19<sup>th</sup> century North Indian qissa provides apt examples. The form of the qissa, which is a short *dastaan* (a story), accounts for both the diffusion and transformation of trans-

regional repertoires, as Prof. Kumkum Sangari elucidates, it “traversed ‘downwards’ from Persian to *dakhani* Urdu, from royal courts to bazaars, from persianized ‘elite’ to Fort William College publications and thence to the ‘popular’ – popular in terms of its mobility and multiple locations and in the sense of being preferred listening, watching, and reading” (247). Similar to Shahrazadian narratives, the popular story *Chhabili Bhatiyari: Sikandar Shah Badshah ke Shahzade Raman Shah ka Qissa* (1873) brings to the fore the wide circulation of the figure of the wily trickster woman. The multi-authored Chhabili qissa operates through the dynamics of class and caste hierarchies to expose the battle of wits or, to be more specific, the involvement of two women, the former lover against the eventual wife, in an emotional and even existential tug-of-war over Prince Raman, “son of the emperor, *badshah* of Dilli” (249).

Chhabili tries hard to prevent the prince’s imminent marriage so that she remains the only one in his heart, whereas Bichitra strives to ‘expel’ Chhabili out of the prince’s heart and to expunge her from his memory and life as the gateway to consummating their marriage. But the jealousy-driven battle is not fought on equal grounds: while Chhabili is at the bottom of class and caste ladder, her ‘rival’ Bichitra Kunwar is the daughter of the “*raja*, Mansingh.” Although both antagonists use their guile to trick the prince, Bichitra takes advantage of her power and privileged status to eventually win the day. Indeed, the impulse of exclusive possession motivates both women. However, unlike the more ‘hopeful’ endings in most of Shahrazad’s women trickster stories, the Chhabili qissa ends tragically with the eponymous heroine’s deplorable execution in public at the hands of her former lover, thus marking Bichitra’s victory and validating her sense of entitlement. The low-caste poor woman is not only denied access to upward mobility, but is also unwarrantedly stripped of her right to live and love. As Prof. Sangari points out:

Both women exercise an active agency, desire an exclusive attachment, ‘defend’ it in the face of competition; both practice deception and use similar strategies... These similarities, along with the style and verve of the story, the romantic-comic contexts it establishes for Chhabili’s ingenuity, make the closure uneasy, gratuitous – it exceeds narrative expectations. (253)

The motifs in this qissa such as gender and power dynamics, gender-based violence, women’s trickery through disguise and cross-dressing, and to a lesser extent, women against women plots,<sup>55</sup> are also recurrent themes in *The Nights*. However, while the resolution in Chhabili’s qissa is closed through a return to social harmony, in Al-Shaykh’s retelling of Shahrazadian narrative the resolution remains open-ended (as I will show later).

While I recognize that trickster figures are culturally specific, the purpose of my previous section has been to suggest some possible connections between different versions of the trickster, like Shahrazad, Birbal, and Chhabili, in various oral traditions, with the aim of opening up more dialogues along the lines of transnational literary and cultural exchanges. Besides, my argument takes its cue from Vizenor’s exploration of “[m]ultidirectional processes of cultural exchange and concerns beyond territorial borders,” as evidenced by the nature of his work, which is “exemplary in teasing out the tensions between the local and translocal dimensions of Native cultures as well as those between a politics of anti-colonial repudiation of dominant, non-Native, hegemonic forms and the embrace of strategies of appropriation” (Ganser 19). Indeed, the Native American tradition of tricksterism in oral and written expressions is sophisticated in its awareness of other traditions. A case in point is

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<sup>55</sup> There is one particular story in *The Nights* that Al-Shaykh included in her retelling and which reflects the theme of women scheming against other women to deceive and manipulate a man. In fact, the story entitled “The First Dervish” narrates the dervish Aziz’s misfortune for being tricked and used as a pawn in women’s power games. A jealous contest for control and revenge between Aziz’s beloved, the daughter of Alsawahi Aldawahi, and his manipulative wife led to the dervish’s penis severance. While the prince in Chhabili story accepts the course of events that resulted in his ex-lover’s humiliating defeat, the first dervish decides to roam the world in search of eternal truth after he plucked out his own eye.

Vizenor's cross-cultural engagement with the Chinese trickster figure, the Monkey King, known as Sun Wukong. Monkey King is one of the legendary characters in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. Originally assembled as a collection of traditional folk tales and published anonymously in full in 1592,<sup>56</sup> the novel is based on the actual pilgrim of a Buddhist monk of the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907 C.E.) in search for sacred Buddhist scriptures (*sutras*) from India. Mixing elements of action, humor, and spiritual enlightenment, the artistic rendition of this journey elaborates on the monk's adventures in the company of his disciples, while they overcome the perils of fantastical encounters along the way. One of the monk's disciples, the magically gifted Monkey King, allegorically represents the rebellious and liberated spirit against the oppressive Chinese bureaucracy and contradictions.

The allure of the Monkey King served as the inspiration behind Vizenor's 1987 novel *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, which traces the journey of Griever de Hocus, a "mixedblood tribal trickster" from the White Earth Reservation, who accepts a teaching position in Tianjin, China (34). With a mosaic perception of reality that is animated by polyvalence and fluidity, the trickster Griever invents a new worldview while he "bashed at habits and rules in an established historical context" ("Head Water" 53). In fact, drawing on what turned out to be a life-enhancing, personal experience as a visiting professor in China, Vizenor reveals how, in "one of those occasional strokes of insight," he perceived Monkey King as a trickster. This epiphany took place while he was seeing "a production of some of the scenes from the Monkey King opera" (ibid., 52). Despite the fact that Vizenor was already familiar with Arthur Waley's 1942 English translation of the Monkey King, which was

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<sup>56</sup> Although the novel has been generally attributed to the Ming dynasty novelist Wu Cheng'en, there is evidence that this authorial identity claim is not supported by some scholars. For example, Hao Ji sheds light on how Timothy Richard and Helen M. Hayes, who both provided earlier English translations of *Journey to the West* in 1913 and 1930 respectively, do not agree on the question of authorship. While Richard ascribed it to Qiu Chuji, Hayes is of the opinion that Wu Cheng'en is the author of the novel. For more information, see Hao Ji's article "A Comparative Study of Two Major English Translations of *The Journey to the West: Monkey* and *The Monkey and the Monk*" in *Journal of Chinese Humanities*, vol.2, no. 1, 2016, 77-97.

presented within the academic circle more as a “cultural document” that represents reality (a fact that Vizenor equates with the way anthropologists represent tribal stories), the real connection between trickster and Monkey King for him was established only when he saw that vibrant theatrical performance in China, which was more like “on-the-street stuff, a bit like puppet theater, not an elitist-Communist Party performance” (ibid.).

Reading Vizenor through the lens of cross-cultural variations and intertextual influences has inspired me with a sense of play and imagination that I hope to continue embracing in my expression of emotion and thought. One way for me to do that has been through my attempt in my dissertation project to bring together texts from different contexts that extend beyond temporal and geographical boundaries. As far as this chapter is concerned, I believe that weaving the stretch of different versions of trickster figures across time and space can allow us to establish connections, rethink new forms of liberated identities and to appreciate more the creative and generative ways of transfiguring distress into humor. Accordingly, I continue broadening my scope to include the popular Coyote trickster figure in Native American storytelling tradition.

Since Vizenor reminds us that the trickster is “a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination,” the notion of the definiteness of signs is then contested through a plurality of interpretations (“Trickster Discourse” in *Narrative Chance* 187). Mixed-ancestry author Thomas King, whose writing is permeated with a play of signifiers, “adheres to the comic strategies of the yarn or tall tale, a mode of storytelling grounded in a transgressive carnivalesque tradition” (Dvorak 12). King’s humorous storytelling is built on “blurring and deferral,” and thus on a play with closure (ibid., 13). *Green Grass, Running Water* is an eminent example. Furthermore, Coyote, in King’s novel, is accompanied by a cohort of other trickster figures (as I will show later in my close reading of the novel). Referring to King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*, Vizenor writes:

The Lone Ranger, Ahab, Ishmael, Hawkeye, Robinson Crusoe, Changing Woman, Ahdamn, Mary Rowlandson Henry Dawes, John Collier, Charlie Catlain, “Nasty” Bumpo, Coyote, and others come together with brand names in comic modernism *to hear* trickster stories about Moby-Jane and the Great Black Whale.

The stories count on one of the common representations of the trickster, that wild coyote with a coat of modernism; the cosmopolitan coyote is both unity and anarchy and reaches *to be heard*... (173, emphasis added)

The emphasis here is on “hearing” as an integral aspect to oral storytelling, which, according to Vizenor, “is usually a kind of free-floating signifier, or a collection of signifiers, depending on who’s present.” Therefore, “no story is the same” and the definiteness of closure is to be always resisted, played with, and transvalued (“Head Water” 53).

### **Trickster Aerobatics in Al-Shaykh’s Retelling of *One Thousand and One Nights***

Published in 2011, Hanan Al-Shaykh’s *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* has been catalogued by the Library of Congress as “a sparkling retelling of the beloved classic.” However, this notion of definiteness, uniqueness, and familiarity in “*the* beloved classic” fails to take into account, as discussed earlier, the complexity and enormous richness emanating from the history of multiple versions of this book, which is the fruit of centuries of creative cross-pollination, derivations and even forgeries.<sup>57</sup> From the passing and transcription of wonderful oral tales traversing Asia from the far East to the Southwest onto the Middle East to the numerous Western translations, the *One Thousand and One Nights* compilations complicate the outset and the state of singularity of *a* literary pièce de résistance – or *one* classic. As Mary Gaitskill puts it:

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<sup>57</sup> In his essay “Creativity, Random Selection, and *pia fraus*: Observations on Compilation and Transmission of the *Arabian Nights*,” Heinz Grotzfeld provides a survey of the mechanisms of compilation and transference of the *Nights* corpus. Grotzfeld highlights, among other things, the compilers’ endeavors to recreate complete sets of this multisource work. Their efforts result in a concoction of creative traces as well as conscious forgeries.

But how to refer to the “original”? The stories in *One Thousand and One Nights* were told orally for centuries, coming out of India and Persia in the sixth century, and carried by traders and travelers all over the world; they were first written in Arabic in 1450. Through subsequent translations, disparate versions became folded into each other, as minor characters become major players and events are transformed, revealing the original themes differently, yet faithfully. (xi)

Over the years, the mystical realm of these tales together with its attendant intricacies has continuously occupied former and contemporary cultural imaginaries around the world. Through various literary and artistic renderings, both western and non-Western audiences are gripped, but each group deploys their imaginative and interpretive skills differently. Oftentimes, occidental readership and scholarship ascribe an orientalist meaning to what is perceived as the sublime in these tales, thus perpetuating a vapid sense of an “exotic” East with its odalisques, flying carpets, and miraculous lamps. However, Lebanese author Al-Shaykh’s reimagining of the *One Thousand and One Nights* tales debunks such exoticization myths and edifies her Arab and non-Arab readers alike with a humanist approach that is imbued with “sparkling” trickery and humor.

The retelling of *One Thousand and One Nights* for Al-Shaykh was not only an intellectual endeavor and an artistic pursuit, but also a journey to get in touch with her inner self. In fact, Al-Shaykh’s interest in these tales of wonder went through two phases. The first phase was characterized by her childhood captivation with the radio dramatization of *Alf layla wa layla*, or *One Thousand and One Nights* in Arabic. As a child, the thrill of excitement and the sensory stimulation caused by the vibrant acoustic performances entranced Al-Shaykh. The lure of this lively world has enticed the young Al-Shaykh to lose no time and visit her classmate whom she heard has a few volumes of *Alf layla wa layla*. Much to her surprise, Al-Shaykh realized that the volumes were secure in a glass cabinet that only her friend’s father

has access to, for “he feared that if anyone finished the stories they would drop dead. Of course I didn’t know then, and neither did my friend, that the reason her father didn’t want any of the women of the house to read *Alf layla wa layla* was because of its explicit sexuality” (xvii). With the passage of time, Al-Shaykh’s absorption in *One Thousand and One Nights* has dissolved until “Shahrazad found her way” back to her, particularly when British director Tim Supple asked if Al-Shaykh was interested in adapting *Alf layla wa layla* stories for the theater. And here lies the coup de foudre and the beginning of the second phase! Through this fateful reunion, Al-Shaykh decided to read three editions, about 8000 pages, in Arabic (Fassler). Once again, Al-Shaykh was smitten, but this time with a shift from a child’s changing consciousness to an accomplished scholar’s sense of maturity and vision. This rekindled interest brought along crucial moments of insight, as Al-Shaykh discovered the real beauty and meaning of Shahrazadian power. She successfully selected and adapted nineteen enthralling stories for the stage and her book, as well as for imaginative readers, who are equally transported into “the sublime vividness of the numerous worlds of the One Thousand and One Nights” (Gaitskill xix).

In an interview with NPR, Hanan Al-Shaykh reflects on the changes in perception with regard to the figure of Shahrazad. Before embarking on a personal journey wherein she could unpack her own frame of reference, Al-Shaykh at some point strived to escape from Shahrazad and the world she evokes. Her disidentification grew more intense, specifically when she started publishing, for reviewers referred to her as “the new Scheherazade,” a clichéd appellation and association she repudiated. However, her preconceived beliefs and misjudgment were thrown into question and hence altered after perusing the One Thousand and One Nights stories and cultivating an affinity for the newfound heroine. Al Shaykh avers, “I fell in love with her because I thought she was the first feminist. Second, because she was a philosopher, an artist, a writer, and she was trying through literature to humanize the king and

men around her” (Martin). Therefore, in accordance with Vizenor’s insight on trickster discourse, Shahrazad is also “the kind of thought that raises hope, that heals, that cures;” she is a survivancer that “live[s] forever in imagination” by weaving endless tales that bolster creative human imagination relentlessly. She “liberate[s] the mind” and does so “in a language game” (“Trickster Discourse” 70). She can be identified then as an imaginative and transformative trickster.

The peculiarity of Al-Shaykh’s reimagining stems from her dedication to reveal women’s remarkable resourcefulness and flair in these forgotten ancient societies of *Alf layla wa layla*, a fact eclipsed by the widely consumed folk tales in popular cultures such as the voyages of Sindbad, the adventures of Aladdin, and the good fortune of Ali Baba. As Gaitskill puts it, “[Al-Shaykh] pays little attention to the famous voyages of Sindbad, and Ali Baba (who was apparently invented by the Western translator, Antoine Galland) doesn’t even get a mention” (xii). Instead, after setting the stage with the story of Shahrazad whose creative prowess enables her to keep at bay, and ultimately overturn, her imminent execution, Al-Shaykh uses a frame narrative technique to foreground a second narrative that revolves around Shahrazad’s “daughters.”<sup>58</sup> This frame story, which is ‘born’ in Shahrazad’s creative imagination, depicts witty and self-assertive women, who carry on with the legacy of Shahrazad’s trickster aerobatics. For instance, neither servants nor concubines, the “three ladies” with whom the second narrative emerges are free-spirited sisters who happen to host an unplanned *soirée* in their lavish home in the company of seven unexpected male guests: a porter, three dervishes, and three merchants, all arriving at the women’s doorstep in a fortuitous manner. This serendipitous encounter between the hosts and their guests proves to be the fulcrum of a wide exchange of extraordinary tales between both groups, as well as a gripping linguistic performance of identity disclosure. For example, the three merchants turn

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<sup>58</sup> The reference to Shahrazad’s daughters is also alluded to by Al-Shaykh herself, who in her dedication page inscribed the words, “For Shahrazad and her daughters.”

out to be the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, his Vizier Jaafar ibn Yahya, and the classical Arabic poet Abu Nuwas, all in disguise. Interestingly enough, although the exchange of stories and the knowledge-sharing activity takes place *à huis clos*, in an enclosed space, the extent and variety of the shared stories blur all geographical and temporal boundaries, and broaden the participants' horizons. Hence Sindbad the porter imagines himself teasing Sindbad the sailor about his adventures, "And I shall not stop until I have explained to him that in just one night I visited Basra, China, India and Persia – all without a ship!" (283).

By virtue of her wit and fertile imagination, Shahrazad replicates the same 'story within a story' technique throughout her embedded narrative as well, and hence she weaves more stories that not only "mirror her predicament" but also establish the Caliph al-Rashid as a "mirror image" of King Shahrayar. While the former is a more compassionate ruler, who "sometimes disguised himself at night as a poor man and walked about and around to bazaars and streets to see if the people were happy," the latter is rather a bloodthirsty avenger, who considers all women as degraded and disloyal after discovering his wife's adultery with her slaves (Fassler). Although most of the female characters in *One Thousand and One Nights* have suffered calamities at the hands of men, Shahrazad and her 'daughters' use the power of imaginative storytelling not only to convey their mastery of stratagems in a world ruled by men, but also to reveal "the humanist message hidden amid the violence" of this androcentric world of *Alf layla wa layla* (ibid.).

Embracing an ethos of survivance, the Lebanese author corroborates women's sense of presence over absence and passivity by first ridding Shahrazad of the expectation to conform to the rules of sexual politics in a patriarchal society. Al-Shaykh alters the traditional ending of Shahrazad's story, as her revisioning does not end with Shahrazad settling down and giving birth to three sons from the king Shahrayar. Rather, the retelling ends with a note of self-referentiality "in favor of a circular frame narrative," as one of the sisters in the frame

story, triggered by the rooster crow, starts to relate the story of “King Shahrayar and the brave and brilliant Shahrazad” (288). Furthermore, by intentionally bringing to the fore the undeveloped tale of the sisters, Al-Shaykh instills the Shahrazadian power of resistance and unfading imaginative trickery in her frame story heroines. As Gaitskill puts it, “The classic *Nights* features these ladies and their guests in passing, but Al-Shaykh returns to them again and again, rooting her stories in the mysterious underground of male-female relations” (xii). Indeed, Al-Shaykh uses Shahrazad’s story and the more prominent frame narrative to further explore the profundity of human experiences and particularly the complex interplay between men and women for the sake of transforming and humanizing the world through storytelling. Seventeen out of the nineteen tales evolve around the frame narrative, which is the engagement of the female hosts and the male guests in an exchange of stories and life experiences.

Throughout the frame narrative, the female hosts and their male guests are engaged in an exchange of didactic tales, which first started as a confrontation between the two sexes to expose each group’s failings but later turned into “less dark” discussions buttressing the prospects for peace and mutual understanding. Interviewed by Fassler, Al-Shaykh explains:

But you can feel in the stories a gradual change. At the beginning they are very brutal and dark, but they show us that adultery usually happens for a reason and that jealousy and violence typically bring misery to all concerned. With time, though, they become more about social values, adventures, they were less dark than when [Shahrazad] started, and concern higher questions. Who are we human beings? What do we do in life? What is our aim of living? How do we become better citizens? And the answer, so often, comes through telling important stories and listening closely to what others have learned.

Indeed, this fortuitous concourse of the sexes in the frame narrative serves as a breeding ground for the negotiation of positions and the cultivation of moral sense. Telling stories and sharing experiences becomes the key to bringing together masculine and feminine discourses. While the masculine discourse is marked by male commitment to logic and desire for truth, the feminine discourse thrives in its imaginative power, defiant trickery, and finesse. In fact, most of the tales narrated by the male guests center around the depiction of the “wiles of women,” whereas the female hosts use a trickster discourse, just like Shahrazad, to liberate the mind, renounce any sense of victimry, and reimagine the world. As Vizenor acknowledges in his personal interview with Kimberley Blaeser, trickster stories “work best ‘in places where there are severe contradictions and repressions’” (qtd in *Gerald Vizenor* 162). Survivancers then embrace their trickster consciousness by confronting repressions and adopting an attitude of subversive play in order to counter linguistic, cultural, and political ideologies of dominance. For Vizenor, survivance is not a mere reaction. Instead, it a counteraction to destabilize rationalized dominance and undo its damage. Since survivance is based on willed actions, it entails the invention of a “world view.” Here, trickster aerobatics can help fulfill this goal. Evidently, self-assertive trickery becomes a practice of survivance and a life force that grows with the resistance of Shahrazad and her daughters in patriarchal societies wherein possession is key to masculine discourse. The refusal of closure is the gateway to subvert the power of containment.

### **The Tales of “Dalila the Wily” and “The Woman and her Five Lovers”**

The vacillations between who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed among the frame narrative characters become a leitmotif throughout the book, bringing “the mischievous aspect alongside the expansive, revelatory and forgiving nature of the tales” (Gaitskill xii). However, Shahrazad and her daughters embrace the healing power of trickster consciousness by creating trickster stories that expand in the dimensions of imagination. Furthermore,

trickster consciousness is, in Vizenor's terms, "an ideal healing, because it disrupts the opposites and that creates the possibility for discourse that's communal and comic" (qtd in *Gerald Vizenor* 162). It is indeed this "comic and communal" element that I highlight in two particular tales within the frame narrative. For example, the story of "Dalila the Wily" is a manifestation of the natural pleasures of trickster aerobatics. The mischievous Dalila is an old poor woman whose story is a high-wire balancing act of comic wit with a safety net of liberation and transformation. But first, it is important to note who gets to tell Dalila's story. It is indeed one of the hosts' two elder sisters that stole the show from Abu Nuwas, who after having told a previous story that described the injustices a gullible man had suffered at the hands of a woman, the mildly inebriated poet was getting ready to continue declaiming his views through Dalila's story. However, much to everyone's surprise, one of the two elder sisters laid claim unexpectedly to the tale of Dalila the Wily, for her family "knew her so well" (197). Unfulfilled, Abu Nuwas whipped himself up into frenzy, "barking like a dog." Although his reaction was deliberately provocative since both elder sisters used to be bitches under a jinni's spell, the female storyteller in question paid no heed to the commotion caused by Abu Nuwas, or as the irritated Caliph called him "this infernal dog."

In her retelling, Al-Shaykh brilliantly accentuates the subversive play and whimsical sense of humor already present as a counterbalance to the themes of violence and oppression in many of the original tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The story of "Dalila the Wily," whom Al-Shaykh "adored," is a case in point (Fassler). Dalila, a widowed mother, endured with dignity the injustice inflicted on her and her children after the death of her husband, who used to be responsible for rearing carrier pigeons for the Caliph. Indeed, not only was Dalila deprived of her late husband's salary and the twice-a-day meals the family used to get, but also all her attempts to get a pension were rejected, thereby compelling her to toil hard as a maid for long years to eke out a living for her family. However, Dalila's

aerobatics skills and feats of the mind come at play as soon as she hears about the two men “who had come from Cairo to Baghdad and played confidence tricks and grew in influence until they found their way to the Caliph himself, who appointed them commanders of the right and left flanks of the district just outside the walls of the city” (198). The news of those two foreigners who managed to turn from conmen to commanders has goaded aged Dalila to revolt, for the two fraudsters, ironically enough, “were given money, food and above all respect, which in [her] opinion they did not deserve” (ibid.). Resolute and unswerving in her new commitment, Dalila vowed to take revenge for neglect and ill-treatment by “playing confidence tricks with great craftiness and deviousness in order to win her reputation in Baghdad and thereby claim the salary of her late husband. She swore that news of her feats would reach not only the Wali, but the Caliph himself ” (ibid.). Unlike the other two charlatans, Dalila’s goal is not social mobility, but fair recognition. Her subversive and sarcastic impulses would thrust her into a new social system, that of the city, and a new role as an exceptional “fraudster,” who will show everyone how she is “the only person able to milk an ant” (198).

Although Dalila’s intended act was not necessarily to entertain or convey humor as much as to deceive her potential “victims,” her mental sharpness and ability to work independently and effectively in every potentially hilarious communication situation she encounters is quite remarkable. The situations are funny and amusing, evoking a humorous response not only from the readers of and listeners to her story, but also from her dupes themselves. Dalila’s anarchic wit is an ever-replenished energy of liberation and transformation. She first disguises as a Sufi woman, wearing a veil that covers her eyes, which were like “two eagles... hunting constantly for prey” (199). Passing for a holy saint in a wealthy neighborhood, Dalila managed to trick Khatun, the wife of the Emir Shar al-Tariq, Prince Evil of the Road, a tyrannical man whose only obsession is to become a father.

Confronted with an ultimatum to either conceive or get replaced by another wife the following day, Khatun felt dejected, as she declares, “I weep because I don’t wish that flat-nosed mule, with his useless sperm like farting soap bubbles, to divorce me and rob me of all this wealth” (200). Eying Khatun’s jewelry, Dalila seizes the opportunity by promising to take the young woman to Sheikh Abu al-Hamalat, who would help fulfill her husband’s wish. Without a clear plan of action on how to strip the woman of her jewels, Dalila makes things up as she goes along; hence her remarkable ability to be quick-witted and alert. She leads her target to the merchants’ market and there tricks a young merchant that she is looking for a bridegroom for her daughter Khatun. Succumbing to the lure of being the first to see the girl naked, the young man, Master Hasan, accepts to marry the beautiful girl and brings a thousand dinars for the marriage contract. Unaware of Dalila’s tricks, the deluded couple, walking at a distance from each other, follows the old woman along to her next dupe, Hajj Muhammad, a dyer who has two rooms for rent. Dalila tricks the man that she, her daughter, and her son need to lodge with him until their mansion gets repaired from the damage caused by rat invasion.

Dalila’s intricate network of trickery goes on and on. After keeping Khatun in one room waiting to meet Sheikh Abu al-Hamalat, while Hasan was in another room eagerly waiting to see his bride-to-be naked, Dalila convinces Khatun to hand over her jewelry and clothes. She claims, “My son is one of the Sheikh’s helpers, but unfortunately he is an idiot, and he can’t differentiate between summer and winter, hot or cold, and so he remains half-naked all year round. He pulls the earrings of every beautiful woman who comes to see the Sheikh, tearing their earlobes, and then he cuts off their clothes with scissors” (203). To add more credibility to her story, Dalila continues, “I’m going to hang these on the Sheikh’s curtains, so that you earn an even higher blessing” (*ibid.*). As for Hasan, Dalila manages to swindle him out of his clothes, and his thousand dinars of course, by inciting him to refute the

rumor that he is a leper, otherwise her daughter would not marry him. While Khatun and Hasan are trapped half-naked in separate rooms, Dalila leaves the house, searching for a donkey to carry all the goods. To her advantage, she realizes that the dyer is not in his shop and finds a donkey owner passing by. Dalila pays and tricks the donkey owner to destroy the jars and vats in the shop of the dyer, who in her fanciful fabrication turns out to be her “bankrupt son” thrown in prison. Meanwhile, Dalila leaves with the donkey “so heavily laden that it nearly buckled beneath the weight” (206). Then, in a swift and humorous sequence of events, all of Dalila’s dupes finally meet and confront each other, arguing and rebuking. After a while, they all fathom how they have been tricked by this old woman, “who could trick a snake out of its pit” (210). Eventually, Dalila is caught by all the men she tricked: Hasan, the dyer, the donkey owner and a barber who was also deceived by her. She was taken to the Wali, who was throwing a party and busy entertaining his guests.

As her four captors were asked to wait by the door, Dalila manages once again to find a way by tricking one of the guards. “Son, I am a fraudster and I know the Wali will soon lock me in prison... But I am desperate to relieve myself, and I don’t know how to when these men are stuck to me like a nail sticks to the finger... If I could pee, I’d pee out of my mouth, but I just don’t think it’s going to be possible” (210-211). Much to her gulls’ dismay, Dalila successfully enters the harem and turns the situation upside down. She asks a slave to take her to the Wali’s wife, as she claims to be the slave broker’s wife. Since her husband is sick in her imaginary story, Dalila pretends to be in charge of bringing the four Mamlouk slaves for the Wali. As soon as she gets paid by the Wali’s wife who did not verify the validity of the old woman’s story, Dalila asks “the slave who’d helped her to let her out of the back door in case the slaves gave her trouble” (211). Ironically enough, the male captors turn into captives, while the witty captive is now free. Later that evening, surprised to hear about the slaves from his wife, the Wali still goes to claim their ownership, and hence the perplexity is demystified.

The four men, joined now by furious Prince Evil of the Road who is avenging his wife and blaming the Wali for allowing a woman like Dalila freedom to move around his city, are all seeking retribution:

But the Wali turned on them. “Yes, I should thank you four men, for it was you who helped that fraudster find her way into my home and con my wife out of 1,000 dinars. That little old woman has made a foul of my guards! Look, one of them is still waiting for her by the harem door.”

At this, the Emir Shar al-Tariq laughed so hard that his moustache nearly covered his nose and eyes. The barber began to laugh as well, then the dyer, Hasan, the donkey owner and the guards. Then the Wali laughed, his wife laughed and her maids and slaves laughed as they gathered at the windows. (212-213)

In the long run, the humor evoked throughout Dalila’s maneuvers and also reflected in the outcome of her deviant behavior within the social system ultimately reaches the targets that fell prey for her trickery. They all seem to realize how they were the butt of the humor.

In his influential work on the social functions of humor, William Martineau argues, “Humor is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties. The humorous communicative instance becomes a vehicle or social mechanism employed for interaction” (114). As far as Dalila’s tale is concerned, readers and listeners<sup>59</sup> find amusement instantly after every single humorous communicative instance, whereas for the characters within Dalila’s story, laughter is provoked in delay, in the aftermath of Dalila’s trickery. Accordingly, the dupes’ shared laughter functions as a means of communication that lightens up the atmosphere, while acknowledging Dalila’s power to transgress social norms. From a sociological standpoint, Martineau asserts that humor can be viewed as “a ‘lubricant’ and an ‘abrasive’ in social

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<sup>59</sup> The reference here concerns the readers of Al-Shaykh’s retelling and the listeners to both Shahrazad and the elder sister in the frame narrative, as they recount Dalila’s tale.

interaction – especially in such common everyday interaction that constitutes the basis of the social order and makes the routine flow of social life possible” (103). Using an analogy, Martineau explains:

[...] on the one hand, the interjection of the humorous serves as oil pumped from an oil can. Humor is intended to initiate social interaction and to keep the machinery of interaction operating freely and smoothly... On the other hand, but not mutually exclusive from the former, humor may serve as an abrasive. Rather than oiling the workings of social interaction, it constitutes a measure of sand. The consequence of such abrasive humor is interpersonal friction and a juncture in the communication process which may modify the character of the interaction. (ibid.)

Although the sharpness of Dalila’s wit through her words and actions is meant primarily to subvert social norms and in a way to poke fun at a social system that treated her unfairly, the consequences of her trickery engender a humorous effect that minimizes societal friction. The fact that the butts of the humor indulged in the pleasant experience of laughing together signals a loosening of the established rules and moral standards of social conduct. This idea is further elaborated when Dalila is finally so close at reaching her goal: meeting with the Caliph himself. Indeed, affirming her sense of agency, Dalila is now ready to be caught and to strike a bargain with the Wali “that she would return the stolen goods, including the donkey, on one condition: that they take her to the Caliph himself” (213). Once before the Caliph, Dalila “regaled him with her escapades” and explained why she played all those tricks. Amused by the story of “Dalila the Wily,” as he called her, the Caliph “gave the order that her husband’s salary be given to her every month” (ibid.).

In *The People Named the Chippewa*, Vizenor asserts that “[t]he trickster is comic in the sense that he does not reclaim idealistic ethics, but survives as a part of the natural world; he represents a spiritual balance in a comic drama rather than the romantic eliminations of

human contradictions and evil” (4). As far as Dalila is concerned, her adeptness at thinking on her feet makes her a formidable trickster in the creative imagination of Shahrazad and her fictitious “daughter” in the frame narrative. Dalila’s mental nimbleness and adroitness to move effectively across communication situations ensure her survivance in a “comic drama.” By playing out her sense of “wickedness,” she turns social norms upside down in order to expose and denounce the injustice imposed on her long years ago. Her trickery is a counterweight to power, forcing the Caliph to redress her grievances. Besides, the humorous aspect evoked in her tale serves a social “control function.” As Richard Stephenson points out:

The control functions of humor may be expressed in a wide variety of humor types. As a means of social control, humor may function to express approval or disapproval of social form and action, express common group sentiments, develop and perpetuate stereotypes, relieve awkward or tense situations, and express collective, *sub rosa* approbation of action not explicitly approved. (570)

This social control function of humor is manifested in the Caliph’s later reaction, as he privately acclaims Dalila’s subversive wit and trickery. The tale of “Dalila the Wily” ends with the Caliph’s recognition of the old woman’s keen intelligence in her efforts to renounce sentiments of tragedy and victimry:

And it was said that when the Caliph was on his own with Jaafar, he said to his Vizier, “Dalila the Wily may have lied, tricked and stolen, but I am greatly impressed by her courage, intelligence and wit.”

And then he laughed and laughed, especially when he recalled how Dalila had managed to trick none other than the wife of Emir Shar al-Tariq and the Wali’s wife. (213-214)

Shahrazad's trickster aerobatics continues to be infused with subversive play and comic discourse to inspire more stories of survivance. Having recourse to humor as a potent tool against oppression, Shahrazad creates worlds of unlimited possibilities whereby women wittily destabilize power structures and overthrow social constraints of a patriarchal culture. Indeed, the tale of "The Woman and Her Five Lovers" evinces the power of trickster consciousness through the use of trickery and humor in situations involving social stratification. The story revolves around a woman's determination to get her lover released from jail after being unjustly imprisoned. As she seeks the help of several officers of the state, making them believe that the prisoner is her "brother," she realizes how all those men, the Wali, the Qadi, the Vizier, and the King, are all primarily motivated by their lascivious intentions. They all attempt to extort sexual favors from the beautiful woman by abuse of their power and authority. However, the woman outsmarts them and employs her wiles to first get her lover released and second to strip the officers of their power. In fact, she tricks the men, one by one, by inviting them to her house the following day, each at a different time, in order to fulfill their sexual desires. Then, she heads to a carpenter and asks him to make her "a large cupboard with four compartments, one on top of the other. Each compartment must have a door which locks" (222). When the carpenter suggests not to get paid in exchange for sex, the woman welcomes the idea by asking him to make five instead of four compartments and to visit her the next day. Once the cupboard is prepared and brought home, the woman rushes to the market and buys four sets of men's gowns, necessary tools for the execution of her plan. At this point, Al-Shaykh's readers, Shahrazad's listener who is King Shahrayar, and the listeners to this tale being recounted by the other older sister in the frame narrative, are all eagerly awaiting the ending of this story.

The next day, the beautiful woman's guests arrived one by one at their specified times. When the first guest, the Qadi, has arrived, the woman convinced him to take off his clothes

and turban and to put on a more comfortable gown that supposedly she made for him. However, a few moments later, the next guest arrived knocking on the door. Much to the Qadi's alarm, the woman claimed that it must be her husband and offered to hide the Qadi in the cupboard until her husband leaves. In reality, she locked the Qadi in the bottom compartment and kept using the same wise tactic with all the other guests. As soon as she let the Wali in, she tricked him to first sign a note ordering the release of her "brother" and to second take off his clothes and put on a gown. Then, when the Vizier knocked at the woman's door, the Wali was led to hide in the second compartment on top of the Qadi. Eventually, the Vizier was hiding in the third compartment, the King in the fourth, and the carpenter was trapped by the woman in the fifth after she complained how the compartments are too narrow and asked him to see for himself. Once all five men were confined to the cupboard, the woman fled the city with her most valuable possessions and her released lover. Meanwhile:

As for the woman's five would-be lovers, they each kept very quiet, worried that they would be discovered, identified and disgraced. Finally, after three days had passed and the five men's bladders had nearly exploded, the carpenter could hold on no longer, and urinated over the King's head. Almost immediately the King urinated over the Vizier's head and the Vizier over the Wali's head, and the Wali over the Qadi's head. (226)

Drenched in urine, the men vented their rage and thus their identities were revealed one by one. The officers of the state felt more embarrassed, as a commoner, the carpenter, knows about their disgrace. Although all five men tried hard to force open the locks, their attempts were in vain. "The next day, the woman's neighbours, who had become suspicious when she had failed to appear for three days, forced the door of the house open and heard all the commotion and moaning coming from the cupboard" (227). By the agency of her subversive trickery, the woman managed to emasculate all five men. Her wit disrupts the

opposites, ridicules the extremes of the stratification system, and ironically induces an inversion of roles. The woman's lover is now free, while the lustful five men are "imprisoned." The humorous maneuvers and the ironic unfolding of the events of this tale attest to the woman's power to establish herself as a subject instead of an object of humor. Her production of subversive humor marks her participation in a comic linguistic game and hence her "assertion of control over language and meaning" – or in Susan Purdie's terms her "mastery of discourse" (Seham 193). Indeed, the tale ends with the gulls appreciating the humor of the situation and endorsing self-mockery:

He opened the Qadi's compartment first. And when he came out with his yellow gown and special hood, everyone burst into great and uproarious laughter, which continued and grew as each member of the court was released. And even the captives laughed and teased each other as they came out one by one, especially when the King couldn't find his robe and turban, and had to leave the woman's house as she had dressed him, in his cheap, purple robe. (228)

Clearly, the captives' communal laughter is an indication of the social control function of humor. Their expression of hilarity serves not only to release tension, but also to acknowledge the woman's wit. Therefore, this tale shows how trickster discourse allows for the "creation of *communitas*... where hierarchies are leveled, distinction dissolved, and roles reversed" (qtd. in Blaeser 146). The woman's trickery shakes up boundary maintenance and helps create a capacious space where the ability to laugh at oneself is endorsed.

### **Thomas King's Trickster Aerobatics in *Green Grass, Running Water***

The liberating and healing power of trickster aerobatics is creatively embedded in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. With considerable ingenuity and playfulness, King brilliantly creates new comic worlds wherein tricksters, "the wild ironies of survivance,

transformation, natural reason, and liberation in stories,” thrive through their boundless possibilities to recreate the world after destruction (Vizenor, “Shadow Survivance” 76). The novel offers a witty social commentary on relations between natives and whites, bringing to the fore the conversation/encounter between the indigenous oral tradition and the Western canonical written narratives. King’s visionary work is so evidently laden with subversive wordplay and comic intrigue, serving to deconstruct the dominant representations of Native identities, subvert the linearity of cause and effect narratives, and continuously secure a space for renewal/new beginnings. The humor that permeates the novel acts as a viable and vital source of energy to counteract Eurocentric “ideologies of separatism, dominance, and native victimry” (“Gossip Theory” 10).

In *Green Grass*, the plot is a marvelous concoction of narrative strands that intertwine to coalesce material and transcendent experiences. Indeed, King dexterously advances two main storylines. The first one follows the personal journeys of mainly five characters, First Nation Canadians, who move physically and metaphorically within and outside the Blackfoot reservation in the provinces of Alberta. Through these characters, King addresses a common theme in Native American literature: how to best navigate the demands of native and white cultures. Most of King’s characters are trying to come to terms with who they are, reconciling the tension between their native cultural identities and their lived experiences within a Eurocentric Canadian society. For example, the fictional character of Eli Stands Alone, who is an allusion to the Ojibwa-Cree constitutional maverick Elijah Harper, returns home to live in his deceased mother’s log cabin in Blossom, after living as a “white man” for long years in Toronto. Eli’s return to his homeland can be read as an allegory to Native people’s umbilical attachment to the land: they come from the land and they return to the land. Just like Elijah Harper whose historic defiance and opposition blocked Quebec from signing the Meech Lake Accord without First Nations consent in 1990, King’s Eli Stands Alone sabotages and

suspends the development of a nonoperational hydroelectric dam (Müller). Eli adamantly refuses to leave his ancestral land, which is situated in the way of the proposed spillway. By the end of the novel, as all the characters get reunited for the Sun Dance Ceremony, the dam bursts. Not only does this event cause a flood, but it also ushers in new beginnings, for the characters seem to find balance in their lives as the water starts running again.

The second storyline is quite visionary. It revolves around the recurrent and enigmatic disappearance of four Indian figures<sup>60</sup> from their mental facility in Florida. Although no one can determine how old those Indians are for they seem to have lived for eons, each time they vanish, a disaster occurs, such as the 1883 eruption of Krakatau and the Yellowstone fires of 1988. Indeed, their psychiatrist Dr. Hovaugh believes it is a “pattern.” Baffled by the reoccurrence of his patients’ inscrutable disappearance and reappearance, this time the doctor sets out to look for them with the help of his female assistant Babo. However, those four Indian figures are transformational tricksters. They are the incarnation of native liberty and imagination, thus their escape would forever defy Dr. Hovaugh’s demand for logic and reason within a Eurocentric masculine discourse. Besides, the Indians have made it their mission to “fix the world.” In King’s narrative, the Indians’ current destination is the fictional town of Blossom and the Blackfoot reservation in the Canadian provinces of Alberta. Clearly, the thrust of their new adventure is to influence the course of actions, rescript variables and reconstruct the first storyline in *Green Grass*, and that explains the enchanting intersection of both plots. As they carry out their border crossing between the U.S. and indigenous Canada, the four Indians take turn in recounting different versions of creation stories, while teasing each other and making room for another traditional trickster figure, Coyote, to be their companion. In fact, working in parallel with these narrative layers of storytelling are King’s

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<sup>60</sup> While I acknowledge that the word “Indian” is a misnomer and oppose its usage, I use it here in accordance with Thomas King’s denomination. Those four figures are referred to as “Indians” in the novel.

intertextual references and the omnipresent interjections between Coyote and omniscient narrator “I” throughout the sections of the novel, as they both seem to leap from one story to another. While Coyote adds vigor to the stories through his sense of playfulness and mischief, “I” tries to maintain some balancing order by reminding Coyote, for example, of when they should get back to another story or prompting Coyote to keep a low profile so that other human characters do not see him, as evidenced in the following passage:

“Wow!” says Coyote. “Omens and miracles. We haven’t had any of those yet.”

“Get your head down,” I says. “He’s going to see you.”

“Here I am,” says Coyote. “Here I am.” And that one dances around and jumps around and stands around. “Here I am,” says that standing-around Coyote.

“You are one silly Coyote,” I says. “No wonder this world is a mess.” (262)

Through this woven web of intersecting plotlines, Thomas King creatively displays what Vizenor would call “the tease and weave of ironic gestures” in protean native creation stories wherein humor potentiates trickster discourse of survivance and liberation (“Gossip Theory” 1). In *Green Grass*, the effective use of rhetorical and literary devices, such as situational irony, puns, and comic intertextuality, enhances the text’s engagement in trickster dynamics against the dominance of closure in Western modes of knowledge and power. However, through his aerobatics feats, King successfully synthesizes native and Euro-American cultures. While his juxtaposition of two cultural frames of reference is infused with humor, it also operates at two levels. First, King’s comic revisions of Christian beliefs and Western literary canon serves as a necessary act of subversion to deconstruct “the familiar” and “the conventional.” Immanent in trickster consciousness, humor functions then as a social satire to “overturn ideas, challenge the status quo, and upset the accepted structures of society...” (Blaeser 161). Therefore, the expression of humor within contemporary Indigenous writing might fulfill a conflict function. According to Stephenson:

The conflict function of humor is expressed largely by means of irony, satire, sarcasm, caricature, parody, burlesque, and the like. The particular adaptability of humor as a conflict weapon lies in the fact that humor may conceal malice and allow expression of aggression without the consequences of other overt behavior. In this capacity, analysis of humor is particularly revealing of tensions and attitudes which may not be expressed in any other form. Conflict humor not only functions to express aggression but serves to strengthen the morale of those who use it and to undermine the morale of those at whom it is aimed. (569)

From a comic vantage point within trickster discourse, King makes a witty rhetorical riposte, positing correctives to ethnocentric ideals and distorted conceptions of native identities. As Eva Gruber points out, “Instead of lecturing about ethnocentrism and the way it affects Native people, through trickster characters and dramatic irony [King’s] text imaginatively overthrows steadfast convictions, ideas of cause and effect, and ultimately also the hierarchies built on these assumptions” (“Expressing Humor” 109-110). However, King’s wit also operates on a second level: Not only does the humorous play provide a channel for more serious communication, but it also creates a space for renegotiation that supports the dismantling of stereotypes and respect for differences. In other words, the use of humor in *Green Grass* serves to open up possibilities for new interpretations and mutability.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida’s ideas of the chance and mutability of language as manifested in his concept of *différance*, Vizenor writes, “Ethnographic gossip theories about natives would surely demonstrate the instability of language and provide the potentiality for narrative irony” (“Gossip Theory” 10). Indeed, Derrida’s critical method of deconstruction accounts for the play of meanings and difference in language, thus undermining the assurance of fixity in any discourse. In accordance with Derrida’s conceptualization of the “differed” and “deferred” aspects of language, Vizenor overturns the steadiness of established,

hegemonic discourses that feed on reinforcing their built-in ideologies in which ethnic identities and stereotypes are reified as social constructs. Within the context of Native American cultures, the meanings and interpretations imposed by dominant Western epistemologies can only be contested as unstable conceptions, thus providing a fertile ground for, what Vizenor calls, “the ironic disruption of meaning” (11). King’s *Green Grass* is a compelling case in point, as the deconstructive process of meaning-disruption is innovatively carried out throughout the text. For example, right from the beginning of the novel, the readers learn progressively that God is one of Coyote’s dreams that got loose while Coyote was sleeping. Awakened by the noise coming from that “silly Dream” who now thinks, “it is in charge of the world,” Coyote calls for some quietness. Then, the first thing “that Dream” inquires about is Coyote’s identity, and asks if Coyote is someone important:

“I’m coyote,” says Coyote. “And I am very smart.”

I am very smart, too, says that Dream. I must be Coyote.

“No,” says Coyote. “You can’t be Coyote. But you can be a dog.” (2)

Once reassured that dogs are also smart, Coyote’s Dream whips itself into an ecstatic frenzy that culminates in mixed-up emotions and confusions:

I am god, says that Dog Dream.

“Isn’t that cute,” says Coyote. “That Dog Dream is a contrary. That Dog Dream has everything backward.”

But why am I a little god? shouts that god.

“Not so loud,” says Coyote. “You’re hurting my ears.”

I don’t want to be a little god, says that god. I want to be a big god!

“What a noise,” says Coyote. “This dog has no manners.”

*Big one!*

“Okay, okay,” says Coyote. “Just stop shouting.”

There, says that G O D. That's better.

Through this exchange between Coyote and G O D, King brings to the fore his ironic disruption of meaning by shaking and perturbing the foundations of traditional Christian ideologies. The contrariety depicted in Dog/god is delightfully appealing to Coyote, but also amusing to the visionary readers who can appreciate the text's invitation to reimagine native and white beliefs, and to accept the opposite of their expectations. Furthermore, King's stylistic choices in his text are ingenuous, as Coyote's dream undergoes a series of sobriquet conversion from "that Dream" and "that Dog Dream" to "that god" and "that G O D." In the latter instances, the familiar spelling of the "God" of monotheism with a capitalized "G" is obviously deconstructed for the sake of being reconstructed.

Producing an effect of defamiliarization, King continues to wittily rethink the Christian canon in conjunction with native creation stories. Indeed, his visionary aesthetic enacts a necessary re-visioning of the canon wherein expectations are subverted through narrative irony. This process of decanonization is a prerequisite for recreation, as it opens up closed and monologic myths to take in more visionary Native worldviews. For instance, King revisits a traditional biblical story and turns it around, infusing it with humor that is intrinsic to a native standpoint. In fact, King recounts the story of First Woman and "Ahdamn" who live in a garden where everything is "beautiful" and "boring" at the same time. One day, First Woman runs into a talking tree:

Pardon me, says that Tree, maybe you would like something to eat.

That would be nice, says First Woman, and all sorts of good things to eat fall out of that Tree. Apples fall out. Melons fall out. Bananas fall out. Hot dogs. Fry Bread, corn, potatoes. Pizza. Extra-crispy fried chicken.

Thank you, says First Woman, and she picks up all that food and brings it back to Ahdamn. (41)

However, First Woman finds Ahdamn busy “naming everything” around him. Ahdamn’s absorption in the denomination of animals and plants is actually an exercise in travesty. The Elk, the Bear, the Cedar Tree, and Old Coyote are labeled a microwave oven, a garage sale, a telephone book, and a cheeseburger respectively. Accordingly, this distortion of Ahdamn’s logical beliefs is met with a jocular response. The misnamed lightheartedly correct Ahdamn’s misapprehension with expressions like “Try again,” “You’re getting closer,” and “We got to get you some glasses” (ibid). By exposing Ahdamn’s linguistic fallacy in relation to other organisms in this natural habitat, King undermines anthropocentrism or any divine endowment of human primacy over nature. Ultimately, this creation story is suspended as soon as “that G O D” forays into this narrative in revolt against this self-contained ecosystem with First Woman, Ahdamn, the animals, the plants and all their relations, and all that food. Claiming ownership over the garden and its edibles, “that G O D” exclaims:

They can’t eat my stuff... And that one jumps into the garden.

Oh, Oh, says First Woman when she sees that G O D land in her garden. Just when we were getting things organized. (42)

The continuance of variant and visionary stories of creation in Native American literature is emblematic of a distinct sense of presence and survivance over “the manifest manners of monotheism and cultural dominance,” as Vizenor asserts, “Native creation stories, totemic visions, sacred objects, dreams, and nicknames are heard daily and remembered as transcendent traces of cultural survivance” (“Native Transmotion” 38). Indeed, *Green Grass* bears witness to the power of literary art to embrace native cultural survivance, for King desacralizes canonical mythology through scrutiny, inquisition, flexibility, chance, and free spirit. To this end, Diane Turbide asserts that when:

Christian myths get mangled in the retelling, the cumulative effect is not so much disrespectful as distancing. By portraying biblical stories from a native point of view,

King shows how illogical and foreign the natives found the Christian religion. And without resorting to polemics, he illustrates how white culture misinterpreted, ridiculed and even outlawed native beliefs. (43)

Therefore, at the heart of indigenous cultures and their oral traditions lie native creativity, as a celebration of “stories of liberation and survivance without the dominance of closure” (“Postindian Warriors” 14). The fluidity of native creation stories is imaginatively borne out by the four elders’ various accounts for the origins of the world in *Green Grass*. Deriving their names from Western literary figures, the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye alternate with different versions of creation story.

Although the four elderly figures emphasize the importance of the communal aspect of storytelling, they are also careful not to make mistakes with stories, as demonstrated in the following passage:

*“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep—”*

“Wait a minute,” said Robinson Crusoe.

“Yes?”

“That’s the wrong story,” said Ishmael. “That story comes later.”

“But it’s my turn,” said the Lone Ranger.

“But you have to get it right,” said Hawkeye.

“And,” said Robinson Crusoe, “you can’t tell it all by yourself.”

“Yes,” said Ishmael. “Remember what happened last time?”

“Everybody makes mistakes,” said the Lone Ranger.

“Best not to make them with stories.”

“Oh, okay,” said the Lone Ranger. (11)

Eventually, the four elders reach a consensus when they get the story right by interposing Cherokee words into their narrative:

“Gha!” said the Lone Ranger. “Higayv:ligé:i.”

“That’s better,” said Hawkeye. “Tsane:hlanv:hi.”

“Listen,” said Robinson Crusoe. “Hade:lohó:sgi.”

“It is beginning,” said Ishmael. “Dagvyá:dhv:dv:hni.”

“It is begun well,” said the Lone Ranger. “Tsada:hnó:nedí niga:v duyughodv: o:sdv.”

“Okay?”

“Okay.”

This act of combining native and white cultural heritages is subversive as much as it is regenerative. As Eva Gruber puts it, “Subverting (Western) reason, (mono)logic, hierarchy, and above all fixed interpretations, the novel comically challenges its readers to creatively reimagine familiar and new as well as Native and Western stories in a web-like discourse” (“Expressing Humor” 84). Obviously, this web-like discourse contests the dominance of the “Author-God” and avows that the “text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning... but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 146).

Vizenor contends that the sources of trickster consciousness are comic and never tragic, for “melancholy is cultural boredom, and the tragic is causal, the closure of natural reason” (“Postindian Warriors” 14). Accordingly, the dominance of closure, as manifested in the misrepresentations of native identities and cultures, can be counteracted through trickster hermeneutics, which he defines as “the interpretation of simulations in the literature of survivance, the ironies of descent and racialism, transmutation, third gender, and themes of transformation in oral tribal stories and written narratives” (ibid., 15). Indeed, the foregoing characteristics that Vizenor highlights within the hermeneutic force of trickster discourse

prevail in King's *Green Grass*. Focusing on the plotline of the elders' escape from their mental institution, King invests the narrative with ironies and humor that accentuate the pleasures of trickster stories and transformations of the wondrous. In fact, the four elderly escapees, who are transformational tricksters, are a source of wonder. While Sergeant Cereno who is investigating the elders' disappearance believes they are four men named as Mr. Red, Mr. White, Mr. Black, and Mr. Blue, *as indicated in the file*, the psychiatric nurse Babo Jones corrects him that the Indians are actually women and have different names. Endowed with exceptional ingenuity, Babo is a witty Black woman, whose droll disposition helps to enliven her verbal communication, particularly with men who fail to look beyond the scope of their insular White values and ideologies.

The exchange between the detective and Babo is quite funny, especially when the latter naturally keeps evading Cereno's questions and answering on her own terms:

"Hey, I'll bet you watch those cop shows. Am I right?"

"Ms. Jones, I'm sure you can see that this is a serious matter. What can you tell me about the escapees?"

"Well, they were old. No crime in that. They didn't hurt anyone. And they were women, not men."

"Women?"

"That's right. We used to talk, you know, life, kids, fixing the world. Stuff like that. We'd trade stories too, the Indians and me. That's what I could do, you know, tell you one of the stories they told me."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure, there was a great one, all about how things got started, about how the world was made..."

"No. Are you *sure* they were women? You must be mistaken.

“Pretty hard mistake to make. How about that story?”

“The files say the Indians were men.”

“Suit yourself,” said Babo. (55-56)

Furthermore, Babo is the only human who seems to perceive the various “tricks” or the signs that would indicate the four tricksters’ interventions to fix the world. For example, when accompanying Dr. Hovaugh to Canada in search for the missing elders, Babo could see the light in the sky that was growing stronger and brighter. Unlike her, Dr. Hovaugh had to shield his eyes against the glare and used a pair of binoculars to be able to look into the distance. While Babo was excited if the light was an omen or something of the sort, the doctor-explorer relied on his dogmatic conception of truth, by suggesting to lend his assistant a book that captured how, in ancient times, what primitive and superstitious people had believed to be omens were actually miracles. Very much like Sergeant Cereno, Dr. Hovaugh can only abide by the conventions of hegemonic discourses of established truths and enclosed inscriptions, thus lacking the power to give free reign to their imagination. Therefore, after using the binoculars, the doctor was unable to explain what he saw, whereas Babo, looking through the lenses at the light, remarked, “isn’t that the trick” (262).

Such an inspired moment occurs several times in the novel. One of them is when Babo watches on television a John Wayne Western movie whose conventional Hollywoodian ending has been fixed by the tricksters, for here the Indians have won the battle against the white soldiers. The “trick” that Babo perceives consists of the presence of Hawkeye, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and the Lone Ranger in the movie itself, “smiling and laughing and waving their lances as the rest of the Indians flashed across the river to where the soldiers lay cowering behind some logs” (246). Another instance comes towards the end of the novel when Babo and the doctor see three cars, including hers and Dr. Hovaugh’s, floating on the lake just before the dam burst. Once again, the doctor uses binoculars to try to make sense of

this inexplicable spectacle. While the doctor remained puzzled, Babo seemed to recognize the tricksters' possible connection with this event, "Babo leaned around Dr. Hovaugh and watched the cars sail along. 'Well, isn't that the trick,' she said. 'Isn't that just the trick'" (447). Indeed, in their mission to fix the world, the tricksters have caused, among other things, the sailing of these cars, a Nissan, a Pinto, and a Karmann-Ghia, all allusions to Christopher Columbus's sailing ships, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. With the help of Coyote, whose dancing and singing have caused an earthquake, "the dam gave way, and the water and the cars tumbled over the edge of the world," to begin life anew (454). As Patricia Linton puts it, "Trickster interventions fix the world by disturbing the linearity of cause and effect, by floating back to already lived and already told tales to introduce the quotient of chaos that makes it possible to start anew" (232).

Babo's presence in the novel is very significant. To my mind, the kind of trickster energy she evinces by being able to *perceive* the signs or the "tricks" might be suggestive of a bigger framework, which is that of Black and Indigenous solidarity against settler-colonial power, systemic racism, and dominant ideologies. Perhaps that is an expression of King's concern for justice by bringing together different experiences, which still share the same goal: dismantling white supremacy. In *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Glen Sean Coulthard defines a settler-colonial relationship as one "characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power – in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power – has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority" (7). Survivance through trickster agency in collective efforts and actions is a rallying point for the struggle against structured dispossession. The following passage exhibits Babo's ingenuity to resist discursive power and revoke the pervasiveness of

stereotypes. Asked by Dr. Hovaugh if her ancestors were slaves, Babo outsmarts her employer by cleverly correcting him and counteracting his gross overgeneralizations and stereotypes. In doing so, she asserts a strong sense of agency for herself and her people:

“Your ancestors were slaves, were they not?” said Dr. Hovaugh.

“Nope,” said Babo. “But some of my folks were enslaved.”

“Ah,” said Dr. Hovaugh.

“There’s a difference,” said Babo.

“Of course,” said Dr. Hovaugh.

“All sorts of slaves in the world,” said Babo.

“Of course,” said Dr. Hovaugh.

“Drugs, television, junk food, religion, cars, sex, power, cigarettes, money—”

“Yes,” said Dr. Hovaugh. “I see what you mean.”

“... fashion, jobs, designer kitchens, politics—” (348)

Thomas King continues to highlight the pleasures of language games through his intertextual play. Operating within the comic mode of trickster discourse, King brings to the fore the workings of race, gender, and sexual orientation in a humorous reimagining of canonical Western literary works from a native point of view. For example, Changing Woman, a central figure in traditional Navajo creation myth, is introduced to the story around Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. After being invited by Captain Ahab to work as “an able-bodied sea-man” aboard his ship, Changing Woman encounters Ishmael who insists on calling her Queegueq to fulfill an urgent need, as the book he is holding “has a Queegueq in it, and this story is supposed to have a Queegueq...” (218). However, Changing Woman is outraged to learn that this ship chases and kills whales because, as Ahab explains, “This is a Christian world, you know. We only kill things that are useful or things we don’t like” (219). Accordingly, King’s playful revisioning comes from his twist by transforming the “great male

white whale” Moby-Dick into Moby-Jane, the “Great Black Whale.” While Changing Woman and the crewmen see the whale as black and female, Ahab is adamant that this whale should be Moby-Dick, the opposite of what everybody perceives. Even Coyote, who is commenting on this story, is referring to the authority of the book, wherein the whale *is* Moby-Dick, “the great white whale who destroys the *Pequod*” (220). Correcting Coyote, the narrator “I” responds, “You haven’t been reading your history... It’s English colonists who destroy the Pequots” (ibid.).

Another interesting feature in King’s rethinking of this story is his inclusion of a lesbian-like relationship to dismantle the social construction of difference that upholds patriarchal and heteronormative systems. Challenging logocentric and phallocentric production of knowledge, King establishes a strong, intimate bond between Changing Woman and Moby-Jane. After punching “a large hole in [the ship’s] bottom” causing the *Pequod* to sink, Moby-Jane offers to take on her back Changing Woman to a place that is “very warm” and “very wet,” such as Florida. Gladly accepting the invitation and welcoming the destination, “Changing Woman presses herself against that whale’s soft skin and she can feel those waves rock back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth... It is marvelous fun, all right, that swimming and rolling and diving and sliding and spraying, and Changing Woman is beginning to enjoy being wet all the time” (248). Once again, King’s witty retelling of the Western canon liberates the human mind and produces vibrant stories of survivance. As Eva Gruber rightly notes:

The humorous use of intertextuality in contemporary Native writing, as King’s text demonstrates, builds on its capacity to recontextualize, represent, and reimagine Euro-American *and* Native cultural texts from a new vantage point, in the process destabilizing and deconstructing established hierarchies and habitual patterns of reading and interpretation. It not only transforms preexisting representation, but also

inherently undercuts the possibility of definite readings in general. Through the humor arising from the incongruity between a text's original presentation and its altered representation within a contemporary Native text, earlier readings are thrown into doubt and new perspectives can be freely adopted. ("Expressing Humor" 84)

In Al-Shaykh's and King's novels, survivancers act as transformational tricksters, who transfigure the signified inherent in interlocking systems of dominance. Various are the manifestations of marginality within different contexts in literature and society. While Al-Shaykh highlights women's survivance through defiant trickery in male-dominated spaces, King celebrates Native cultural survivance through his comic revisions of Western canonical narratives. Furthermore, while King cleverly overthrows the circumscription of native identities by challenging the logic of Western curatorial doctrines and static beliefs, or what Vizenor would call "terminal creeds," Al-Shaykh subverts patriarchal gender norms in Arab societies by creating bold, crafty and self-assertive women whose stories can offer an "enlightened alternative to brutality" (Fassler). The common thread between Al-Shaykh and King is their use of wit and humor to create trickster stories, which would account for the reconciliation of opposites. Besides, both novels follow a similar cyclical structure. As Gruber points out, "... through its cyclical structure [*Green Grass, Running Water*] forgoes closure by offering boundless possibilities of revision, and through its various tellers demonstrate that 'story' is a communal undertaking" (105). Similarly, *One Thousand and One Nights* highlights the communal and didactic nature of storytelling through the exchange of tales between men and women, thus rethinking the power dynamics between the two groups. Through these novels of survivance, trickster discourse shines through as "the engagement in a communal sense of ideas, and meaning, and touch, and imagination" (Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse" 69). Ultimately, in Vizenor's terms, "The most active readers become obverse tricksters" (*The Trickster of Liberty* x).

The refusal of closure in both novels is integral to survivance. It is a kind of trickster form that is imbued with resistance, playfulness, deferral and interruption of meaning, situation inversion, perspective shift and transformation. Contrastingly, closure means possession, singular interpretation, and immured representation. As Ganser points out:

Vizenor's trickster hermeneutics refuses logocentrism and the focus on rationality and closure that has been at the center of Western (and hence colonial) thought, and it views the playful re-negotiation of tradition and the intended use of contradiction as tools for overcoming what he calls "victimry": the prison-house of simulation-*indians* as the dominant cultural script through which the first settlers of America are still perceived in the U.S. and beyond, and with which they have always had to come to terms in order to create "survivance," Vizenor's term for a cultural presence that exceeds mere survival and endurance. (24)

Survivance, as one of Vizenor's "semantic games," proves to be an effective countermeasure against the debilitating and oppressive systems of representation. Therefore, my claim in this chapter has been to demonstrate how trickster aerobatics – the syncretism of trickery, humor, and a play with closure – opens up possibilities for reorientation to confront and destabilize dominant ideologies from new vantage points. The trickster's skillful 'flying' feats and maneuvers find significance in a type of humor that shakes up boundary maintenance and reanimates prospects for justice.

## Conclusion

Writing a conclusion for my dissertation makes me feel a little uneasy. Perhaps this feeling stems from my association of the word with notions of termination, closure, and thus lack of continuity and further development. However, for the sake of abiding by the conventional academic guidelines, I will use this textual space as a valuable opportunity to briefly reflect on my work, to clarify some of the choices I made throughout my project, and to acknowledge some possibilities for continuous research.

My goal for this dissertation has been to put the transnational in its broad scope *together with* Vizenor's concept of survivance, which is context-specific to Native American studies. I believe that transnational literary texts can expand and diversify our understanding of the proactive nature of survivance, and in return survivance can alter, challenge and/or broaden our comprehension of topics like decolonization, migration, war, gender, and identity as explored in transnational writing. My engagement in this project was motivated by my interest in building connections that span a wide variety of historical contexts across different geographies. I drew inspiration from Engseng Ho's words, "I find it very claustrophobic to be stuck in a small place... You do not just do transnationalism or globalization, because it is the rage today. You do it if you have a phenomenon which actually goes across these geographies over time" (161). Indeed, the "phenomenon" that has gripped me is the occurrence of some features, themes, and practices of survivance in the main texts that I intentionally selected for my chapters. Yet, I do not claim that my expansion of Vizenor's concept is generalizable. Rather, I acknowledge that despite the divergences and heterogeneities of historical contexts, one can still discern some commonalities in the authors' treatment of survivance in the face of adversity.

All eight main authors I focused on in my chapters (have) led a transnational life in different ways. All of them are linguistically hybrid and mobile subjects. Their cultural

formations are characterized by complexity, multifacetedness, and fluidity. Therefore, exploring survivance through a transnational lens offers a dynamic approach to study literature in a way that is not grounded in nation-centered narratives and that does not adopt a divisive form of identity politics. In doing so, we as a society manage to recognize our equal and shared humanity, as we challenge our own prejudices, privileges, and interpretations of *difference*. To this end, Paula Rothenberg argues that the meanings and values ascribed to the notion of difference create and perpetuate stratified social systems that use power and privilege as their basic foundation and as an emblem of inequality. She writes, “It is not difference itself that leads to subordination, but the interpretation of difference. It is the assigning of a value to a particular difference in a way that discredits an individual or group to the advantage of another that transforms mere difference into deficiency” (8). Therefore, I believe that a commitment to survivance as a process of active resistance and presence, as a continuation of generative storytelling, and as a politics of empowerment, to name a few, can occur within a transnational context of social justice. Survivance, in my view, acknowledges and respects differences across cultural and national borders, while it opens up an avenue for understanding and empathy through human connection.

I believe in affinity as a conscious choice of bonding. I believe in the work of alliance building, as we decenter ourselves to become, in Richa Nagar’s words, “radically vulnerable” (221). Indeed, life for me is a constant reality check as I put myself in someone else’s shoes. Even though I am neither a refugee nor a war survivor, neither biologically a Native American nor a black person living in the U.S., as a native of North Africa, I am capable of identifying with other marginalized groups to carefully learn and respectfully write about their struggles. In my dissertation, I share an affinity not only with the authors, but also with their characters and the people like them. Despite the various social markers that differentiate us and dictate hierarchical systems, I believe that we should all live with a sense of duty and

social responsibility to be agents of social change. Allied behavior at both individual and collective levels becomes an ethical code such that our conscious efforts remain genuine, consistent and conspicuous.

Leading a transnational life in the U.S., as a woman from a developing country, has greatly shaped my perception of identity as pluralistic and thus far from being a single entity. Furthermore, I believe in the potential of transnational feminism to provide a valuable insight into the study of gender systems, power relations, and the social life of women in transnational spaces. Using a transnational feminist lens helps reformulate the intersectional nexus of analysis in understanding gender and the subject-position of women whose positionalities are informed by differences based on nationality, ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality. Marginalized women, in particular, have different understandings of their agency, and their intellectual and political activism. Yet, they share a common ground through their resilience to negotiate meanings between resisting and accommodating the dominant ideologies of gender hierarchy within national and transnational settings. Here, a transnational feminist approach can empower women's practices of survivance in a world where the mechanisms of power emerge in various disguises.

By way of conclusion, I hope that throughout my dissertation I have succeeded to engage in a type of "organic writing," which Gloria Anzaldúa describes as a writing that is issued from the entrails; it is a visceral, expository writing that never fails to pleasantly surprise its producer, by deviating from the expected, planned, and conventional. It is a powerfully evocative writing that embraces life and humanity, eulogizing "what most links us with life, the sensation of the body, the images seen by the eye, the expansion of the psyche in tranquility: moments of high intensity, its movement, sounds, thoughts. *Even though we go hungry we are not impoverished of experiences*" ("Speaking in Tongues" 170-171). This kind of writing becomes a vehicle for survivance and a life-affirming experience. Once again, I

find inspiration in Anzaldúa's intellectual activism when she encourages border-dwellers to develop a new consciousness that tolerates contradictions, transcends divisions, breaks down paradigms, and creates new value systems ("*La conciencia de la mestiza*"). I hope that my research has laid the foundations for the application of survivance in a transnational framework. I hope that survivancers continue to confront the forces of oppression through a "spirit of revolutionary eternal optimism" (Singh 324). Despite the prevalence of uneven geographies of possibilities, hope springs eternal as adversity breeds creativity and fosters an unrelenting commitment to social justice, expressed in various forms of art.

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**Education**

- 2015-2022                      Doctor of Philosophy in English**
- Specialization: Literature and Cultural Theory
  - Institution: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- 2010-2013                      Master of Arts in Linguistics, Literature and Civilization in English**
- Specialization: Literary Studies
  - Institution: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Tunis
- 2006-2010                      Bachelor of Arts in English**
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**Honors**

- Spring 2022              Tinsley Helton Dissertation Fellowship**
- 2015-2016              Chancellor's Graduate Student Award**
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**Work Experience**

- Sept 2021-Jan 2022              College Composition Instructor**
- Institution: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM)
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Teaching ENGLISH 100 and EAP ENGLISH 102
- July 2021                      Lecturer**
- Institution: English Language Academy at UWM
  - Duties:  
Teaching Writing to International Students (Intensive English Program)
- Sept 2020-May 2021              Project Assistantship (supervised by Prof. Kumkum Sangari)**
- Institution: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Aug 2015-May 2020              College Composition Instructor**
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**Jul 2014-Mar 2015      Freelance International Translator**

- Institution: Tolkegruppen, H. C. Andersens Boulevard 47, 1553 Copenhagen V, Denmark
- Duties:  
Translating official documents from/into Arabic, French and/or English

**Sept 2014              Instructor of English during the Communication Week Program**

- Institution: L'Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs de Tunis
- Duties:  
Teaching English and helping Engineering students improve their communication skills

**Aug 2013-May 2014      Instructor of Arabic Language through the Fulbright FLTA Program**

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- Duties:
  - Teaching ARA 101 (Elementary Arabic I), ARA 102 (Elementary Arabic II) and ARA 201 (Intermediate Arabic I)
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**2010-2013              EFL and French Private Tutor**

- Duties:  
Teaching English and French to secondary school students

**Research**

**PhD Dissertation**

- Title: Polyphonic Texture: Survivance in Contemporary Transnational Fiction
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**MA Thesis**

- Title: "A Phoenix Rising over a Wall of Flames:" Subversion, Resistance, and Survival in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*
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## **BA Thesis**

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## **Conferences**

- "Re-writing/Righting History in Africa," (Re)membering Africa: Women's Narratives on the Continent and Beyond, March 2019, Houston, TX
- Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy: Decentralization by Participation, May 14-17, 2015, Université de Carthage, Tunisia
- Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) Conference, Dec 11-14, 2013, Washington, DC

## **Presentations**

- **Professional Growth Forum**
- Title: Siting Resistance in the Writing Classroom: Strategies for Student and Teacher Empowerment
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- Institution: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM)
- **Presentation in Teaching College Composition**
- Title: Contrapuntal Tunes/Polyphony in the Composition Classroom: an Approach to Renegotiate the Contact Zone
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- **Presentation in Literature**
- Title: Memorialization and Nationalism: Strategies of Resistance and Survival in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*
- Date: 2011
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- **Presentation in Civilization (American History)**
- Title: Church-State Debate: Discussing the Case of Mildred Rosario
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## **Guest Speaker to Professors' Classes**

- "The Tunisian Revolution and the Role of Social Media" at Prof. Vandana Pednekar-Magal's class of Global Communication, Fall 2013, Grand Valley State University
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