

**BLACK DIPLOMACIES: COLONIALISM, RACE AND THE POETICS OF  
MEDIATING ESTRANGEMENT**

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**Abstract:**

Drawing upon genealogical studies that conceptualize diplomacy as the *mediation of estrangement*, this dissertation engages various sites of African estrangement, multiple conceptions of the political and the mediation practices that accompany them. Beginning with an examination of missionary proselytism, proto-colonial humanitarianism and anti-colonial modes of sociality, the dissertation proceeds to engage the specters of colonial governance in the postcolony and uses these insights to problematize the monological conception of diplomacy as a professional practice. Accordingly, the dissertation maintains a critical stance with regard to the regimes of diplomatic/colonial recognition that privilege secularism, statecraft, propriety and racialized bodies and encourages an engagement with diplomatic bodies, sites and aesthetic practices that are often considered undiplomatic as a result of racial and colonial discourses. Through an exploration of the mediatory capacities of objects (and objectified persons), the dead and everyday encounters that illustrate that the ‘personal is diplomatic,’ the dissertation explores, and in some instances suggests the pursuit of ‘amateur diplomacies of everyday life’. It encourages as well, the experimentation with an ethics of encounter and forms of cultural translation or modalities of co-habitation and return that disturb or negotiate the inventions and negations of colonial pasts (and their specters in the present). The insights derived from the problematization and pluralization of *the diplomatic* in this dissertation are also used to engage in a critique of the new forms of violence and the diplomatic entanglements and sites of estrangement that emerge in the postcolony.

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## INTRODUCTION

Not Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message," but a new formula; "The medium is the maker" Poesis means 'making'. The poet is a maker. Usually, people once thought, the poet is the maker of beautiful lies. But "maker" also implies a performative force. The medium itself makes something happen.

— J .Hills Miller, *The Medium is the Maker*

## Poetics of Death and Estrangement

"When men die, they enter history. When statues die, they enter art. This botany of death is what we call culture." These are the opening lines to *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* ('Statues Also Die' 1953), an essay film about African statues (and bodies) by Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Ghislain Cloquet. Commissioned by *Présence Africaine*, *Les Statues* is concerned with the politics surrounding the expropriation, classification and exhibition/storage of African statues in European museums. As Alain Resnais puts it, the initial provocation for the documentary was the differential treatment accorded to statues from different parts of the world. As such, the documentary seeks to respond to a basic question; "*why the black African art is located in the Musée de l'Homme* (an ethnographic museum), *whereas the Greek or Egyptian is in the Louvre* (an art museum)?"

Filmed in European museums and supplemented with archival footage about colonial Africa, the film depicts the way statues lose meaning when taken out of their context or when they are cut off from their active environment (Diawara 1992: 22). Just like the statues put in European

museums as objects for European edification and cultivation of the self, the black bodies that the film treats have been transformed into machines; sites for the extraction of cheap labor and more recently entertainment. The montage technique that the film deploys when coupled with a compelling and well scripted voice-over raises useful questions about the alienation of the black man and provides a map of estrangement that shows how European aesthetics come to influence the form of African statues which are soon transformed into curio art due to the loss of their symbolic and spiritual value. By juxtaposing the displaced statues with shots of the black body in action, *Les Statues* offers a compelling critique of the ‘uses’ to which Europeans and Americans have put the black body; from the choreographed work of colonial laborers (‘Tarzan meets Ford’) to the pugilism of Sugar Ray Robinson and the theatrical athleticism of the Harlem Globetrotters.

Similarly, the editorial cut-aways that the film employs draw our attention to different ways of seeing/looking; from the complicit peering into glass cabinets where the African statues are exhibited to voyeuristic voyages into the African hinterland. As the documentary progresses, we are drawn into a more attentive and empathic mode of spectatorship that transforms the viewers from being complicit observers of African statues in European museums to ‘witnesses’ of the black body in pain as evinced by the violent police crackdown on striking workers. The estrangement exemplified by these scenes is well captured by the film’s voice over:

The subject is the black man cut off from his own culture and not in contact with ours. His work no longer has either spiritual or social consequences. It has no prospects; it leads to nothing but a derisory wage. In those countries of gift and barter, we introduced money. And so the blacks’ work is bought and his art degraded. Religious dance becomes

a spectacle. We pay the Negro to give us the amusing spectacle of his joy and enthusiasm. And in this way there appears alongside the Negro as slave, a second figure — Negro punch. (Jean Negron voice over, Quoted in Ukadike 1994:49)

The initial question that *Les Statues* raises about the politics and poetics of museum exhibitions (the difference between ethnographic and art museums and the nature of objects on display) exposes the racial and cultural partialities that inform the process of collection and display of worked objects. In posing this question, Resnais and Marker offer a critique of racist museum exhibition and cataloguing practices and provoke us to interrogate the mediatory capacities of collected objects and the forms of knowledge that make it possible or even desirable to collect ethnological or aesthetic objects from another place/culture. However, a more fundamental set of questions arises when one considers the multiple contexts within which African statues /masks and bodies are expropriated. That is, rather than offer a critique of the racialized forms of recognition and distribution that inform the ethnological/aesthetic divide made possible by museum cataloguing and arrangements, we are forced to ask; “why museums at all?”<sup>1</sup> And reflect, not only on the difference between the ethnographic museum and the art museum, but on the principle of recognition that underlines the insertion of African peoples and objects into predefined classificatory spaces based on a European model or standard. On the whole, the montage techniques and sequences used to interrogate museological ways of seeing and storage also acted as a compelling critique of colonialism. In an attempt to maintain colonial consensus, the French government banned the film and only allowed the release of an abridged version when it lifted the ban 10 years later (Diawara 1992:22, Pfaff 1984: 6).

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<sup>1</sup> See De Groof M., (2010) ‘Statues Also Die - But Their Death is not the Final Word,’ *Image & Narrative*, Vol 11, No 1 (2010) p.29-46

Perhaps one should read Resnais and Marker's *Les Statues* not just as a cinematic critique of colonialism and ethnological reason but also as an elaborate map of African/ black estrangement. Read this way, the genres of expressions, peoples and mediation practices that the film summons become sites of encounter that offers insights into how colonialism works through various institutions, discourses and method with far reaching effects for both the colonizer and the colonized. Most significantly, *Les Statues* multiplies the sites of the colonial and diplomatic 'production of man' by treating a number of sites and practices that constitute what Michel de Certeau calls a heterology — a discourse /science of the other. By treating the various sites that *Les Statues* engages as part of a colonial and diplomatic heterological frame, museums, colonial labor, sports, medical science, exploration, art, African traditions, bodies and objects become part of a 'diplomatic' or colonial world thus rendering them as sites for ethical inquiry (see de Certeau 1986).

Writing about the ethical implications of pursuing de Certeau's "heterological quest", William Barbieri (2002) notes that "Certeau's meditations on otherness, pieced together through works on such divergent topics as "religious experience, historiography, art, Latin American culture, and the politics of language" which collectively "sketch out a rudimentary framework for thinking about alterity" (Barbieri 2002:28). Barbieri then proceeds to lay out some elements of the heterological 'framework' of alterity that de Certeau treats, noting that it includes but is not limited to:

[...] (1) the otherness of God, as encountered, for example, in mysticism and addressed in theology ... (2) the otherness of alien cultures, the perception of which is bound up with the history of colonialism and drives the development of ethnography ; (3) the otherness within our own societies, which exists in constant tension with the dynamics of nation-building and which funds the writing of history; (4) the otherness within our own psyches ... which gives birth to the technique of psychoanalysis and (5) the otherness within our own bodies, which founds the discipline of medicine ... (Barbieri 2002:28).

Heeding the insights from de Certeau's heterological schema and aesthetic projects like the ones *Les Statues* exemplifies, my dissertation engages not only the registers of estrangement, but also the various practices, methods, rituals and agents involved in the mediation of estrangement. While there are many ways of reading or weaving together these practices, I foreground the concept of *the diplomatic* which I deploy to different sites and heterological formations. With the heterological 'frame' arising from racial and colonial recognition as the primary focus of my inquiry, I look at the forms of estrangement and mediation practices privileged by colonial and racial discourses in their attempt to invent, fix and legislate on what it means to be diplomatic. More specifically, the following chapters in my dissertation examine the relationship between diplomacy and colonial discourses and practices in Africa. Among other things, I explore the forms and modalities of relation to the 'self' by which individuals and collectivities in Africa and its diasporas come to recognize themselves as diplomatic/colonial subjects and the everyday practices and ethical dispositions derived from these regimes of recognition and encounters. Through an examination of missionary proselytism, proto-colonial humanitarianism, anti-colonial modes of sociality and the specters of colonial governance in the postcolony, I interrogate discourses on the body, tastes [culinary and aesthetic] sexuality and representational forms or codes of propriety and tact that uphold or disturb the dominant diplomatic imaginaries

in Africa complete with their conceptions of the diplomatic body, diplomatic immunity and diplomatic privileges that they invent or enact.

In thinking about the forms of estrangement characteristic of ‘black diplomacies’ and the mediations practices that arise therefrom, the work of Frantz Fanon (most notably his *Black Skin, White Masks* ) has been an indispensable ‘diplomatic guide’, a diagnostic device and a provocation to think or negotiate otherwise. Beginning with Fanon’s provocative exploration of the phobic fantasies and stereotypes that engender the material, embodied and psychic violence against the colonized/black man’s life (or ways of life), my dissertation examines different modes of mediating estrangement in colonial and postcolonial Africa and beyond. With attentiveness to both the macropolitics and micropolitics of race and colonialism, the following chapters provide a reading of diplomacy that ‘employs’ bodies, spaces, times, rituals and genres considered external to, if not anathema in modern diplomatic discourse. The objective here is to explore, and in some instances suggest an ethics of encounter, co-habitation and return that can be mobilized to negotiate the negations of the past (and their specters in the present) or the new forms of violence and estrangement that emerge in the postcolony.

### **On Diplomacy**

The relationship between diplomacy and the discourse of otherness that I pursue here is not new. In his *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*, James Der Derian (1987) looks at diplomacy as “an ensemble of practices, power struggles and truth contestations that develop into a dominant discourse of dealing with the other” (Der Derian 1987: 6). Based on his conception of diplomacy as a way of relating to otherness, Der Derian carries out a genealogical reading of

Western estrangement from the mytho-diplomacy of Hermes to modern diplomatic discourses that privilege technological forms of mediation. In so doing, he disrupts the accepted truth of diplomacy (as state practice) while simultaneously exposing its theoretical foundations in alienation and estrangement. According to Der Derian, what gives coherence to the different paradigms subsumed under the heading ‘diplomacy’, “is its function as a *mediator of estrangement* between human collectivities.” In keeping with the above conceptualization of diplomacy, Der Derian graphically makes the point that diplomacy, seen as a social practice, must be studied alongside *other social practices* (emphasis mine) of the everyday life of its bearers. Given that something is lost if it is *abstracted* from its social placements (Der Derian 1987:114).

Drawing upon Der Derian’s genealogy of western estrangement, Costas Constantinou notes that:

[...] by employing the terms *alienation* and *estrangement*, Der Derian suggests diplomacy as ‘an answer to the state of mind that has been historically constructed in different moments of consciousness and processes of knowing the world, a state where human subjectivity loses its reality by being compelled to derive existence out of objectification rather than an inner self...man becomes a means to an end that is not his own, thus the need of diplomacy to mediate the products of this alienated consciousness (from territorial states to different states of being)’ (Constantinou 1996:110).

Constantinou then proceeds to carry out a more adventurous treatment of diplomacy that opens a space for etymological, mythological, theological and artistic readings of diplomacy. Constantinou’s retrieval of the ‘concealed and forgotten meanings’ of diplomacy is significant for critical readings of diplomacy as it treats both the heterological (mediation of otherness) and

homological (mediation of sameness /constitution of wholes) dimension of the mediation of estrangement (Constantinou 2006). Not only does such a broad conception of estrangement enable him to relate ‘modern diplomacy’ to ‘Western metaphysical thought’, it also enables him to re-articulate a concept of diplomacy that exceeds the meanings and roles imposed by modern interpretations, rituals and conceptions of diplomacy (Constantinou 1996: 51-53, 103). His analysis of diplomacy proceeds, therefore, not on the basis of examining the behavior and ideas as foundational of state diplomats, but rather by exploring the forms of knowledgeable practices and language through which modern diplomacy and/as theory is formed (Constantinou 1996: 103). For example, Constantinou’s etymological readings of the language that underwrites and directs theory and diplomacy enables him to trace the “evolution of the word theory out of the ancient Greek word *theoria*, and the import of this link to such words as *theor*, *theoric* and *theoricon*”. Through a series of reversals and revisitations, Constantinou illustrates how the word *theoria* was used in ancient Greece to “designate ,among other things ,an old type of embassy, the solemn or sacred embassy sent to attend religious festivals and games ,discharge divine obligations of the polis and consult the oracle” (Constantinou 1996:51-53).Ultimately for Constantinou, this opening up of the meaning of theory suggests the rethinking of the diplomacy-theory link in a manner that problematizes the theory-practice distinction and puts forward the view of diplomacy as both theory and practice.

To render Der Derian’s and Constantinou’s critical diplomatic projects relevant to my readings of colonial and postcolonial diplomacies of everyday life, the following chapters seek to further problematize and pluralize our conceptions of *the diplomatic* by paying attention to colonial and postcolonial African forms of estrangement and mediation practices. In some instances, these



contextual readings act as polemicizations that expose the ‘Christian and Eurocentric myths and narrative sociabilities’ that pervade modern diplomatic history, theory and practices (diplomatic immunity, permanent representation and the institution of dean of the corps diplomatique) (Constantinou 2006: 352, Neumann 2011: 352). The polemicizations also reveal the numerous peoples, practices and stories that modern diplomatic historiography obscures as it narrates itself and the recognizable peoples, pasts and practices that it privileges.

The interrogation of Eurocentric and geopolitical diplomatic / colonial imaginaries proceeds by engaging the relationship between multiple sites of ‘the political’ and conceptions of ‘diplomatic life’. For example, through an engagement with cultural materials within an aesthetic comprehension, the chapters that follow present multiple sites for thinking or enacting the political and the forms of estrangement that accompany these processes. With a focus on the dynamics of racialized recognition, religious based modes of cultural translation and humanitarian imperatives, I engage multiple forms of mancraft which exceed, complement and sometimes disturb the poetic vision of the world derived from modern statecraft.<sup>2</sup>

As such, my dissertation looks at how conceptions of self, enmity based identities, bodies, passions, habits (protocols) and genres of expression are transformed or take on new meaning within the different cultural contexts of their reception and use. The theoretical and ethical insights derived from a reading of diverse cultural practices points towards a more politically inclined reading of the conditions under which Africans and other colonized peoples mediate estrangement (where estrangement includes not only alienation from other people and other

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Ashley notes that “modern statecraft is modern mancraft. It is an art of domesticating the meaning of man by constructing his problems, his dangers, his fears”. Given that I am interested in the forms of diplomacies that exceed statecraft, the forms of mancraft that I treat exceed those prescribed, sanctioned or invented in response to statecraft. For more on the relationship between statecraft and mancraft, see Ashley, R. K. (1989), ‘Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism and War’, in J. Der Derian and M. J. Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*. Massachusetts: Lexington

cultures but also from one's labor, the environment, and gods).<sup>3</sup> On the whole, such an extension of diplomatic ethics of encounter based on negotiation with people with incommensurate practices of identity beyond the normalized space for diplomatic engagement elevates the Self and Other to a realm that transforms hostile or potentially hostile relationships, histories and lives. At work here is a quotidian diplomacy that is explored in what Constantinou calls *Homo-diplomacy*: the employment of interpersonal relationships between human beings to arrive at a non-professional diplomacy of everyday life that makes sense of a lifeworld outside the space of nation- state discourses (see Constantinou 2006). While my readings of diplomacy go beyond the concern with 'the human', I engage various forms of homo-diplomatic counter-discourses as part of my polemical intervention given that rather than copy or reproduce dominant regimes of recognition, some homo-diplomatic formations have the capacity to virtualize and transgress our conception of 'Africanness,' humanity and with it diplomacy thus transforming the way 'we' mediate estrangement.

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<sup>3</sup> The term mediation as used in this dissertation refers to 'a method that makes social meanings possible'. As an instrument of meaning, mediation can take place across various social contexts, genres of expression, bodies and cultural practices. For different treatments of diplomacy as the mediation of estrangement, see Der Derian James, *On Diplomacy; A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*, (Basil Blackwell; New York 1987), Constantinou Costas *On the Way to Diplomacy*, (, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press; 1996), Constantinou Costas, 'On Homo-diplomacy' in *Space and Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 4, p.351-364 (2006) and Francois Debrix, 'Rituals of Mediation' in Francois Debrix and Cynthia Weber Eds. *Rituals of Mediation:International Politics and Social Meaning* (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 2003)ppxi

## **Amateur Diplomacies: A Note on Method and Chapter Partitions**

My analysis draws upon multiple diplomatic/colonial texts, cultural contexts, as well as aesthetic works and practices. In an attempt to write about colonialism, race and diplomacy in a manner that engages others/otherness (which, Peter Mason reminds us requires one to write otherwise),<sup>4</sup> I engage official diplomatic treatises, treaties, diplomatic handbooks, humanitarian reports, religious sermons, personal letters, cinema, museum exhibitions, novels, music, funerary rituals and cultural artifacts. Given the multiplicity of ‘diplomatic’ sites that I treat, there is no single identifiable method to this study. Instead, different chapters employ different methods depending on the problem at hand and the ethico-political dimensions of encounters that I seek to highlight. Collectively, these chapters can be read as my attempt to articulate the significance of *amateur* diplomacies of everyday life. A move that is of both ethico-political and methodological significance.

Chapter 1 sets up a core problematic for the dissertation. It does so by noting that diplomacies in Africa have ‘historically’ entailed a redemptive dimension that gains traction from the representation of Africa as a place devoid of meaningful practices or whose practices are in need of transformation. From early colonial and missionary work to contemporary Pan-African and humanitarian projects, diplomatic practices have been predicated on a *will-to-convert* the African or proceed with authority derived from the imperative to speak for or redeem Africans. With attentiveness to the poetics of cultural translation, the chapter examines the processes and practices through which ‘African’ peoples and modes of meaning-making are considered diplomatic or ‘undiplomatic’ and examines the different forms of recognition and representation

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<sup>4</sup> See Mason P., (1990), *Deconstructing America: Representation of the Other*, London; Routledge

that have dominated the discourse on diplomacy, Africa and diplomacy in/with Africans. Accordingly, the chapter explores the discourses, strategies and tactics through which abolitionists, evangelical missionaries, colonial administrators and Africans themselves invent Africa and Africanness as part of the attempt to mediate estrangement.

The *polemizations* in this chapter proceed through a series of juxtapositions that problematize and pluralize our conceptions of diplomacy (Arditi and Valentine, 1999). The map of estrangement and the mediation thereof that it charts begins with abolitionist and evangelical missionaries of the colonial era and can be traced to its present day forms where millennial capitalism transforms itself into some form of “life giving and life saving force as epitomized by self-help schemes and prosperity gospels” or the ways in which it also becomes the basis of delivering people from themselves or from the ‘evils’ in society as illustrated by the developmentalist and capacity building networks or the click, tag and wrist band purchasing activities of millennial humanitarian projects like Invisible Children’s *Kony 2012* (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002:786). The reading of the more moralistic and necropoetic relations that accompany the neoliberal message of freedom and self-realization through consumption, production and networking offers some insights on the transformation of diplomatic thought and everyday encounters in postcolonial Africa.

Noting the violence that accompanies cultural translation predicated upon rigid regimes of recognition, Chapter 2 attempts to carry out a ‘*Thick translation*’ of African objects and bodies (objects and objectified persons ) in European and American museums with an aim of retrieving their diplomatic significance which is often diminished by the race and colonialism mediated

“asymmetries in the global cultural and political economy” (Appiah 1999). As a mode of diplomatic reading/writing, thick translation seeks to locate a text in rich cultural and linguistic context and can be used to combat racism in the target culture by providing background information that facilitates a more ethical encounter with the other’s world. As I illustrate in my reading of the *Gifts & Blessings: the Textile Arts of Madagascar* exhibition, the exhibition of Saartje Bartmann’s dissected body at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris and Zimbabwe’s ZANU-PF’s rhetoric of ‘patriotic history’, the discourse on diplomatic recognition is most violent when it insists on non-contamination, non-contradiction and is not open to negotiation due to its fidelity to a script emerging from Eurocentric, colonial, national elite or nativist partialities. The chapter concludes by exploring the diplomatic significance of a translational ethic of *abusive fidelity* given its appreciation of ‘our’ postcolonial entanglements and the multi-layered and complex identities that emerge from colonial and postcolonial encounters (see Venuti 2003, Venuti 2002). Ultimately, the explorations in this chapter indicate that one can read an ethics of translation into diplomatic theory and practice so as to conceive of different conceptions of the diplomatic, sites of estrangement and rituals of mediation or ways of relating with others.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 I turn to 'aesthetics' (both as sensory experience and aesthetic experience as a mode of subjectivity) to raise questions about ethics and diplomacy. More specifically, chapter 3 examines a series of fictional and non-fictional reports on atrocity in order to interrogate the unproblematic production, circulation and reception of images of the ‘body in pain’ for humanitarian purposes or the cultivation of philanthropic subjects. Through a critical reading of these humanitarian reports, I look at how some humanitarian projects engage in a (moral) economy of images, narratives and bodies (in pain) that legitimize or launder capital,

reproduce state and colonial regimes of recognition and abject certain cultures while inventing a western philanthropic subject. Conceptually and methodologically, the critique of moralizing humanitarian projects in this chapter proceeds through an *ethological* reading of humanitarian diplomacies which invites us to consider how some of the ‘life-saving’ measures deployed in ‘spaces of death’ enhance the capacities of death machines or are in themselves imbued with the ‘forces of death’ ( see Deleuze 1988). In contrast to a humanitarian ethos based on *ethnological* readings of violence in other cultures, other spaces and other times that enable humanitarians to locate death in that ‘other space’, the *ethological* readings I provide in this chapter encourage a conceptualization of a broader ‘necrography’ and illustrates how bodies thought to be outside these death-worlds have connections and affects in common with those of death machines thus implicating them in the multiple life/death exchanges that take place in what humanitarian diplomacies mark as ‘ spaces of death.’

Heeding some insights from Ousmane Sembène’s novels and cinematic practice, Chapter 4 engages what I would provisionally call a cinematic diplomacy in Africa. In this chapter, I focus on cinematic *mancraft* and the diplomatic significance of everyday encounters from the excessive or uncounted parts of society that dominate Sembène’s artistic practice. Through a reading of Sembene’s novels; *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960), his films *Moolaadé* (2004) , *Emitai* (1971), *Ceddo* (1976) , *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987) and *Xala* (1975), this chapter explores African entanglements ,co-presences and practices of dissensus which it mines for their potential to interrupt how we think about diplomacy, economies (libidinal and political) and the idea of Africanness today. By contrasting Sembène’s cinematic work to colonial cinema projects like the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), the chapter presents cinematic

political/diplomatic thought as critical space with capacities to reconfigure the political and the diplomatic by disturbing the regimes of intelligibility that render certain people mute or invisible by fixing the possibilities of certain bodies. On the whole, the chapter draws upon Sembène's work to illustrate that the domains of politics, diplomacy and thought are by no means fixed. It also encourages an ethics of encounter that appreciates experimentation and negotiation in the constitution of diplomatic life.

Chapter 5 engages the everyday forms of personal diplomacy explored in the previous chapters and elaborates the ethical insights derived from aesthetic experiences of migrancy, cinema and cities. The chapter seeks to encourage an ethics of co-habitation by teasing out diplomacies and micropractices of everyday life in social contexts where racism 'determines' what a body can do. The chapter begins with a reading of Ousmane Sembène's novel *The Black Docker* (1956) and then proceeds to engage representations and disturbances of race-habits in D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991). Through these aesthetic practices, the chapter explores ways of thinking/ becoming that enable a new ethics and a different conception of diplomacy, the diplomatic encounter and the diplomatic body to emerge.

In terms of method, these three chapters can be read as some form of "philopoetic" intervention (Casarino 2002, Shapiro 2010, 23). According to Cesare Casarino's *Philopoesis: a Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*, a philopoetic discourse is:

[...] one that produces the different zones of indiscernibility between philosophy and literature. If philosophy is a production of concepts and literature is a production of affects, philopoesis is the production of interference between philosophy and literature...philopoesis is not merely the practice of such interference; rather it is itself

also an interference, it is itself the product of certain interferences between philosophy and literature (Casarino 2002:75).

As a method, philopoesis makes literature and philosophy question each other and by questioning each other they put the whole world into question (Casarino 2002:76). Rendered diplomatically, philopoesis has affinities with the *amateur* diplomacies of everyday life that I endorse given that “philopoesis loves potentialities.” Casarino captures the relationship between philopoesis, love and potentiality well under the heading “*Amor Potentia*” when he states that:

If philopoesis is the love of poesis—that is, of a making of words—it is above all the love of that which remains unmade in such a making, the love of words as unspent potentials...the love of potentiality is the only love that is worth that name, that is, the only love that might be able to revive a name by now so indentured to the commodity form that it can hardly sound more vital than the most lethal of clichés—and it goes without saying that that name has known other and more ancient indentures (Casarino 2002:79)

Yet, despite the vulgarization of diplomatic thought made possible by a recourse to a variety of mediation practices, creative practices and sites that are now presented as ‘new’ diplomacies or diplomatic ‘tracks’, there is always an urge to incorporate other practices, bodies and actors into existing modes of recognition or establish a new consensus in an attempt to restore the tranquility required for the realization of a ‘desirable’ diplomatic habitus and the habits that comport with it. These are recognition’s ‘*dangerous nuptials*’ that I am concerned with in my final chapter.

Thus, the final chapter in my dissertation acts as a form of ‘diplomatic recall’ that draws together the diplomatic messages and sites of estrangement treated in previous chapters under the general



theme ‘Return of the Oppressed’. By revisiting and sometimes withdrawing from the diplomatic claims made in the other chapters, the final chapter interrogates the forms of recognition and violence from the past that return to haunt the present. Heeding the insights from Fanon’s reading of the psychopathology of oppression, the chapter ‘analyzes postcolonial dictatorships, the dynamics of return/repatriation and resettlement of ex-slaves in Liberia, land reform and violence in Zimbabwe and xenophobia in South Africa in order to explore the possibilities of a diplomatically inflected ethics of return or co-habitation in light of the ‘histories’ of African estrangement.

In this sense, my writing on black diplomacies; colonialism, race and the poetics of mediating estrangement is both an ethico-political and methodological intervention. It opens up a space for a less rigid and more novel diplomatic world. A world that embraces movement, contingency and possibility in the meanings and practices of diplomacy, on one hand, and a more open notion of Africanness on the other. It locates various sites and cultures of *the diplomatic* through a reading of everyday and personal practices; from the psychoanalyst’s couch to the consumption induced generosities of the philanthropic couch potato; from the Hellenic mytho-diplomacies that embrace the heraldry of Hermes and his role as the patron and protector of travelers, thieves, poets, inventors and other roving diplomatic agents, to the veneration of the trickster god Eshu among Yoruba and diasporic African communities. The dissertation also opens a space for us to think about our approaches to knowledge and the constitution of possible selves and others and points to the problematic character and methodological or political poverty of dominant diplomatic discourses.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Diplomatic Polemicizations: Reflections on Cultural Translation, African Estrangement and Exclusion<sup>5</sup>**

Speaking rationally about Africa is not something that has ever come naturally...First the African human experience constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a negative interpretation. Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of human nature. Or when it is, its things and attributes are generally of lesser value, little importance and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for human kind.

- Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*

In a post-colonial context the problematic of *translation* becomes a significant site for raising questions of representation, power and historicity. The context is one of contesting and contested stories attempting to account for, to recount the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages.

- Tejaswini Niranjana- *Siting Translation*

#### **1.0 Diplomatic Translations**

One of the most interesting, and paradoxically most disturbing aspects of thinking about Africa in general and diplomacy in Africa in particular, is the encounter with narratives that emphasize the Otherness or timeless sameness of African peoples. In many cases, these narratives emanate from regimes of recognition that seek to establish a consensual diplomatic identity by excluding or trivializing certain aspects of the 'African' lived experience. Most broadly, these narratives and ethical dispositions present Africans as people or 'things' to be converted rather than

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<sup>5</sup> Most of the explorations in this chapter were developed as part of an earlier essay; Opondo S. O., (2010), 'Decolonizing Diplomacy: Reflections on African Estrangement and Exclusion' in Constantinou C.M and Der Derian J. Eds., *Sustainable Diplomacies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

conversed with – ‘things’ to be observed, spoken for or transformed rather than for example, heard or created in dialogue (Clifford 1986: 12).

Taking the above *will-to-convert* and the imperative to speak for or redeem Africans as a starting point for my exploration, I examine various discourses on diplomacy and Africanness by inter-articulating cases of colonial and post-colonial cultural translation, violence and recognition with their attendant mediation practices. The chapter attempts therefore, to pluralize the idea of *the diplomatic* by charting multiple (and often shifting) sites of African estrangement and mediation practices that arise from or are erased by missionary work, humanitarianism, colonial governance, geopolitical imaginaries, nativism and neo-colonial governance. Mediation practices that have been useful in carrying out the ‘poetic’ work of ‘inventing Africa’, ‘inventing tradition’ and ‘imagining community’ thus determining what it means to be African by prescribing the proper, acceptable or desirable ways of living with/in Africa (see Mudimbe 1988, Ranger & Hobsbawm 1983, Anderson 1983).

Primarily concerned with the processes and practices through which ‘African’ peoples and modes of meaning-making are considered diplomatic or ‘undiplomatic’, the polemicizations in this chapter engage forms of recognition and representation that have dominated the discourse on diplomacy, Africa and diplomacy in/with Africans (Arditi & Valentine 1999:1). The chapter also illustrates how people hitherto considered ‘undiplomatic’ negotiate or live out their ‘diplomatic’ lives. How they create spaces, appropriate times and re-invent themselves in order to partake of the provisions of various ‘diplomatic’ worlds.

## **1.1 Missionary Positions: Saving Africans, Redeeming Europeans**

Apart from armed violence, doubtless, the most telling European-African encounter involved the undertakings of Christian missionaries and humanitarian workers whose *will-to-convert* had an enduring impact on subsequent understandings of the African subject. While mainly couched in philanthropic and universalist terms, implicit in missionary work was a series of contradictions that rendered the intentions, methods and outcomes of missionary mediation practices more complex than the missionaries themselves would have liked to acknowledge.

For example, missionaries acted as informants for metropolitan European populations thus enabling conceptions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nationalism emanating from slavery and colonialism to enter metropolitan public discourse. Similarly, their engagement with and attempts to transform the African subject resulted in the imposition of culture specific values and representations that made it possible for European imperialism to increase in scope and depth. While the missionaries' desire to convert Africans was predicated upon assumptions of a shared humanity, missionary work was often characterized by the abjection of African alterity. Based on the notion that they knew the Africans (their weaknesses, capacities and needs), missionaries set out to translate/convert them in order to assimilate them into the 'familiar' world characterized the superiority of 'European' values and 'the absoluteness of Christianity. The fact that the "missionaries' objectives were co-extensive with their country's political and cultural perspectives on colonization, as well as the Christian view of their mission" meant that the missionary project always acted as mediator of European imperialism (Mudimbe 1988:47). That is, serving as agents of "political empire, representatives of civilization and envoys of God," missionaries engaged in cultural translation practices that supported and put into circulation an idea of the European man and a yet to be recognized African subject who could

not be the subject of diplomatic engagement until such a time when Africans were converted into something *recognizable*, yet *inferior* to the European standard (ibid).

Once underway, the missionary's mediatory role came to include a series of practices that sought to heroically rescue Africa from itself; from the obscurity and alienation that made it unrecognizable or external to Western 'diplomatic imagination' and the society of 'civilized states' and 'states of being' that it promulgated. Informed by the aforementioned sense of mission, European-African encounters were symbolized by, among other things, an obligation to explore, represent, redeem and translate the African other and the spaces of his/her occurrence into something recognizable, governable or acceptable to the European.

As a result of colonial and missionary conversion practices, many African societies found themselves enraptured by the transformations emerging from the installation of new representatives and discourses which were always internally congruent with some Western exigency or in the furtherance of some idea of African alterity or universal humanity (Said 1978: 62). For instance, the proselytizing practices of Methodist missionaries working among the Tswana in Southern Africa provided a set of common symbols that proved useful for the hierarchical articulation of relationships between the colonizers and the colonized. They also contributed to the promotion of Christian ideals and the establishment of new enmity-based identities complete with the moral, economic and spatial formations required to support them. The implications of such transformations are evident in the forms of diplomatic representations and governance that emerged during the post-conflict [*Defikane*] reconstruction at Thaba Nchu. Here, missionaries used their privileged position to insert themselves into the physical and

therefore political centre of a pre-existing Tswana socio-spatial logic which treated the “physical epicentre of Tswana community as the place of chiefly residence; its political and organizational focus” (Comaroff 1985: 24). Through missionary inversion/conversion of Tswana spatial formations, previously autonomous Barolong groups (the Seleka, Tshidi and Ratlou chiefdoms) were transformed into a confederation (of Christianized colonial subjects) dominated by Christian cultural and spatial logics thus making “the mission” the main site of representation and initial point of contact with ‘outsiders’ like the Boer Voortrekker parties in 1836 (Ibid).

Missionaries also aided the colonial project by introducing modes of thought and practices of the self that triggered a series of internal transformations among the Tswana. As the primary mediators of Tswana realities, missionary management of rituals and cultures gave them the right to represent the African by: interceding for him (with god), interpreting his language, plight and system of meanings (to other Europeans and Africans) and communicating ‘God’s message’, western ideals and ideologies to the unconverted. Accordingly, the Tswana were encouraged to abandon their ‘traditional’ conceptions of self, god, materiality and otherness in order to fit into the vision of the world that missionaries and colonial authorities crafted for them while metropolitan Western audiences were encouraged to think about subaltern groups in Europe and the totality of the population in its African colonies in terms of their equivalent and subordinate position to European nobility who were considered ‘diplomatic material’ (Thorne 1997:214).

The internalization of these hierarchy-privileging representational codes meant that both Africans and Europeans came to think about each other in terms of superiority and inferiority or as part of a humanity made possible by the assimilation of Africans into a pre-established set of European cultural values or *habitus*. In either case, “what was denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of the European self” (Todorov 1999: 42). At a minimum, such gestures promoted a conception of humanity that identifies culture specific values with values in general and by extension forms of recognition and representation that seek to erase or discipline alterity. They also invent ‘diplomatic spaces’ and populate them with a particular kind of subject while eliding or occluding the violences and “systems of power that regulate its practice” or the forms within which individuals are “able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as (diplomatic) subjects” (Foucault 1985: 4).

Put differently, attentiveness to past and present missionary practices point to the coeval emergence of the modern diplomatic subject in Europe, the raced/colonial/Christian *subject* in Africa and a variety of in-between subjectivities that have been excluded from that which is considered properly African or properly diplomatic. It also exposes the narrow conception of diplomacy and misplaced conception of the African that is mobilized when diplomatic institutions like the British Foreign Office explains its African interventions (colonial or otherwise) as a measure against some form of atrocity, lack or abnormality — be it the slave trade, African poverty, hunger, disease or civil war — “for this was all the British voter knew and cared about Africa” (Robinson et al 1968: 44).

## 1.2 Limited Sympathies

The violence inherent in such discourses on Africa is erased by the limited sympathies it elicits. It then re-enters the ‘public diplomatic domain’ through a series of ‘benevolent’ events and gestures that seek to address Africa’s most pressing problems by shifting Europe’s ethico-political and ontological commitments. Read with the appropriate discernment, pleas to attend to Africa’s problems like William Wilberforce’s 1789 abolition of slavery speech or Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa and more recently, visual media ventures like Invisible Children’s *Kony 2012* campaign, point not just to the resolution of the moral problems they allude to, but to the erasure of foundational violences by invoking new diplomatic, humanitarian, militaristic and colonial/slave subjectivities. With regard to the slave trade, Susan Thorne illustrates how the shift in the geographical locus of attempts to end the slave trade were always consistent with the shift in moral discourse about the Western subject and his/her place in the world. Accordingly, non-western peoples and spaces were incorporated into a moral cartography on slavery that rewrote their histories and prescribed futures consistent with Europe’s newfound moralities and sympathies. As Thorne puts it:

Antipathy to slavery remained prominent among evangelical concerns even after the slave trade was abolished in 1807 and slavery itself in 1834. By this time, however, the geographic focus and political signification of antislavery had shifted considerably, from a moralizing condemnation of European *demand* for slaves to work its plantations in the new world to Africa’s willingness to *supply*. The rationale for foreign missions shifted accordingly from atonement for European guilt to a mechanism through which Africans were lured to alternative forms of trade. The expansion of Christianity was increasingly promoted as an adjunct to the expansion of “legitimate” commerce, a means of “civilizing” the world’s “barbaric races”, now considered peculiarly susceptible to savage cruelties like slavery (Thorne 1997: 214).



Informed by readings of the slave trade effected by civilizational codes that were evidently prejudiced against the African, humanitarians, missionaries and the British Foreign Office sought to strike a blow against the slave trade on the East African coast by transforming their Arab allies like the Sultan of Zanzibar into the ‘Wilberforce of East Africa’ (Otte 2009). With its abolitionist moral credentials in hand and capitalist interests in mind, “Britain uniquely qualified itself to govern its African subjects” (Peterson 2010:6, 13). The desire to extend the newly found moral values to spaces beyond Europe required that the inhabitants of these spaces be transformed from ‘property’ into ‘subjects of the crown’. However, the prevailing regime of recognition coupled with a will-to-convert meant that the preferred diplomatic methods employed in the engagement with Africans were predicated upon: a) Weakening of the ‘barbarians’ by fomenting rivalry between them; b) Purchasing the friendship of frontier tribes and peoples through subsidies and flattery; c) Converting the heathen into Christian faith. As the genealogies of Western diplomacy indicate, such diplomatic methods had long ceased to be applied in inter-European encounters hence the need to inquire into the reasons for their unproblematic application to Africans.<sup>6</sup>

From the foregoing, it is evident that although philanthropic and missionary practices sometimes present a departure from official statist and slave discourses on diplomacy and Africaness, they tend to legitimize colonial foreign policy actions by contributing towards the construction of

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<sup>6</sup> The diplomatic schema presented above is characteristic of what diplomatic theorists like Harold Nicolson refer to as *Byzantine* Diplomacy, a diplomatic system that surrounded the universal empire of Byzantium and was a precursor to the ‘Old diplomacy’. It is important to note that the term *Byzantine* in itself expresses the Orientalism that informs works like Nicolson’s. See (Nicolson, 1968, p.10)

identities that make it possible for Europeans to engage each other and their racially defined intermediaries ‘diplomatically’ while seeking to eradicate or ‘whiten’ the aspects of African life that they considered unacceptable. This colonial and racially-inflected humanitarian discourse presents itself in depictions of the ‘missionary spirit’ as the characteristic feature of religion and the European standard of civilization as the basis of diplomatic recognition.

For instance, in a quest to uphold the missionary spirit and the will-to-convert that accompanies it, returnee missionaries sought to raise funds and recruit volunteers by producing and disseminating a voluminous body of propaganda representing the colonial encounter in a way that the Victorian religious public proved enormously receptive. Through private journals, letters and published accounts of their explorations in Africa, missionaries like David Livingstone and W.F.P Burton served as a key source of information and entertainment about the outside world, about the empire and about the possibilities of new ways of thinking about the European self in relation to the non-European other (Thorne 1997: 239).

As is expected, the impact of such foreign missionary *intelligence* on Victorian audiences was considerable given that alternative means of enlightenment, entertainment and even assembly were not widely available. The culturally specific and racially “normative model of personhood” presented in the missionary reports and dispatches was useful in the constitution of the European self as a moral subject with a responsibility to transform himself, the people one comes into contact with and the world (Shapiro 1999 a.:139). The shift in focus from a desire to convert the ‘heathen’ at home to the imperative to convert the ‘heathen’ world at large contributed to new ways of imagining and engaging otherness. As Edward Said reminds us, such renditions of

human subjectivity are produced by and productive of a western conception of the self or ‘style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction’ between European and non-European modes of meaning-making, civility, and value systems (Said 1978: 2).

The privilege of place that is given to the idea of ‘man’, philosophy and diplomacy predicated upon this European/non-European, Christian/non-Christian, human/animal, subject/object distinction depoliticizes the Manichaean regime of recognition that enabled the colonist to speak of the colonized in zoological terms and to treat him/her in an ‘inhuman’ manner (Fanon 2004: 7). However, it is important to note that the ultimate violence in such practices lies not in European denial of African humanity, philosophy and history (as the Negritude poets and Afrocentric philosophers would have us believe), but in the disavowal of a shared animality and a failure to question historicist, anthropocentric, theological and ‘techno-genetic’ assumptions that underline the production of diplomatic, historical and philosophical ‘man’. As I will illustrate in the chapters that follow, the reduction of diplomacy to statecraft, the past to history and the diplomatic encounter to an inter-human engagement has contributed to the silencing and trivializing of the violent forms of *mancraft* and *handicraft* that accompany the production of ‘diplomatic man’. On the whole, fixing the form and function of diplomatic subjects and objects forecloses the possibility of an ethically oriented and more open ‘diplomatic life.’

The transcendental relations between missionary and their local audiences contributed to colonial pedagogies and missionary proselytizing practices that sought to “transform the subject people who were judged inferior yet capable of conversion to a ‘higher’ level, albeit one judged unequal to that of their masters and teachers” (Beidelman 1982:4). The best illustration of this idea —

that some Africans can be translated into recognizable ‘officials’ by exposure to British and Christian tradition — is perhaps the famous school, King’s College, Budo. Built in 1906 on the Coronation Hill for the Buganda Aristocracy by Anglican missionaries, Budo in many ways “presented a physical and social site where colonial erasures and re-orderings made it possible for missionaries to subordinate the Buganda ruling class complete with its diplomatic apparatus to the British administrative offices, and the Buganda Monarchy to the imperial crown” (Ranger 1983:221).

The impact of transformative colonial processes that privileged one local group/culture over others is well captured in a petition by sixty-six signatories from the 1938 Mubende-Banyoro committee who placed a formal plea to the governor complaining about the negative effects of Buganda cultural hegemony in the colony. Citing the alienation and suffering experienced under Buganda cultural hegemony arising from British indirect rule, the Nyoro petitioners resorted to the language of slave trade abolitionist to address their colonial predicament. As Derek Peterson (2010) puts it:

Nyoro petitioners were ventriloquizing abolitionists’ voices. They were addressing the British governor with words and phrases that Wilberforce, Clarkson, and their colleagues first worked out. Nearly two hundred years after Maurice Morgan and other British abolitionists had conceptualized the British Empire as an assembly of subjects, united in their shared loyalty to the King, abolitionists in western Uganda were illuminating the unequal politics that indirect rule promoted...Like Wilberforce and the abolitionists of the eighteenth century, Bunyoro’s petitioners were extending the range of issues for which British people felt accountable (Peterson 2010:24).

Attentiveness to the complexities and tensions of colonial estrangement reveals how a monological conception of diplomacy disavows the numerous ‘colonial diplomacies’ that make colonial rule and resistance to colonial rule possible. For example, colonial historians often speak of ‘indirect rule’ in Uganda thus fashioning a theory of ‘Buganda sub-imperialism’ by looking at how the British colonial administrative machinery incorporated Baganda agent-chiefs upon whom it bestowed petty privileges’ (Mamdani 1984: 1048). While such a history of collaboration and complicity falls within the ambit of colonial relations, the elision of the diplomatic formations that accompany colonial rule contributes to some form of ‘distribution of colonial guilt’ on one hand and a sanitized idea of diplomacy on the other.

Like the use of abolitionist discourse to counter colonial oppression or some aspects of colonial rule, Christianity also served as a useful means of mediating estrangement. On first inspection, it would appear that the Christian subjectivities installed in Africa by missionaries would be the default means of mediating estrangement among the Christianized African population. However, many Africans in their deployment of Christian symbols invoke conceptions of social and political life that contest both European and ‘indigenous African’ religious orthodoxy. As Susan Thorne (2007) aptly puts it; “one might argue that the Christian faith was no more reducible to its missionary packaging than missions themselves were to the imperial contexts in which they operated.” That is, some missionaries ‘went native’ during their interactions with indigenous audiences. Similarly, the inability of missionaries to ‘control the reception of their message’ or ‘retain their monopoly over its conveyance’ made it possible for indigenous populations to appropriate Christian texts, messages and icons thus ‘rendering Christianity in many ways their own’ (Thorne 2007: 323).

Accordingly, postcolonial Christianity in Africa has served as a ‘determinant’ of diplomatic subjectivities with some of its practices being reminiscent of colonial *commandment*, missionary work and the various ‘African’ efforts to resist them. By inciting a series of counter-narratives against both ‘traditional’ versions of Christianity and Africanness, Christianity in the postcolony reminds us of the normative commitments and epistemological violences constitutive of the discourses at play during the missionary encounter. At a minimum, it provides an ambiguous counter-discourse that populates Africa with identities emblematic of the contradictory outcomes of missionary practices and the ideas/values that they privileged (Robins 1999:16).

Three recent examples of the varied outcomes of the appropriation of the missionary discourses to imagine Africanness, invent tradition and with it the ethics of co-habitation are worth revisiting. First, is the anti-homosexual sentiments expressed by church leaders and other groups who purport to represent the African people. At the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, representatives from Africa like Henry Orombi of Uganda anchored their arguments against homosexuality on the fact that the African bishops were “quoting what is in the Scriptures.” Orombi went on to remind the prelates from different parts of the world that; “the church in America and the church in England brought ‘us’ the Scriptures, and we are not reading anything different” (Niebuhr 1998).<sup>7</sup> As the new moral gate-keepers of the Anglican denomination, Orombi and the other Africa bishops maintain a fidelity to the missionary’s version of Christian morality and note that the call to tolerate homosexuality in Africa was contrary to what Christian colonizers had preached in Africa. As such, their resistance to

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<sup>7</sup> See G. Niebuhr, *Anglican Conference Takes Tough Line on Homosexuals*, N.Y. TIMES (Int'l Ed.), 6 Aug. 1998

homosexuality in the church was not based on a denial of the existence of same-sex relations among pre-colonial Africans. What they were against was the reversal of the moral ‘gains’ made by converted Africans who see the English bishops’ call to tolerate homosexuality as something contrary to the scriptures that they had now come to take as *their own*.

In Namibia, Alpheus Naruseb, the SWAPO Secretary for Information and Publicity presents a view similar to that of the African Bishops but transposes anxieties about homosexuality in Africa to the realm of civic life. According to Naruseb, homosexuality poses a threat to authentic Africanness and postcolonial political gains given that:

[...] most of the ardent supporters of these [sic] perverts are Europeans who imagine themselves to be the bulwark of civilization and enlightenment. They are not only appropriating foreign ideas in our society but also destroying the local culture by hiding behind the facade of the very democracy and human rights we have created. . . . the moral values of our nation . . . incorporate the fundamental principles of nature and should not be equated to the vile practices of homosexuals which has a backlash effect on our society.<sup>8</sup>

What we are seeing here is the replay of two forms of history, one nativist and the other colonial. One focusing on the practices of sexuality and the other on its regulation, but both pointing to the kinds of Africas that become possible as a result of colonial encounters. While the nativist claims that same-sex relations did not exist in Africa become untenable in light of genealogies that read

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<sup>8</sup> See Electronic Mail and Guardian, *Swapo Slams Gays: Swapo Vows To "Uproot" Homosexuality in Namibia*, (South Africa), 5 Feb. 1997, available on <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/news/97jan2/5feb-swapogay.html>>.

the story of Kabaka Mwanga (of the kingdom of Buganda), who in the 1880s contested British restrictions against his right to practice certain “corporeal intimacies” with page boys in his court as evidence of the existence of same–sex relations in Africa. The same story can be read against itself to illustrate how colonial encounters and contestations for power transformed African sexualities through colonial regulations and religious discourse that outlawed certain corporeal intimacies that were central to Mwanga’s sovereign authority and diplomatic summitry (See Hoad 2007).

Second and more disastrously, the spectral anxieties and catastrophic fears born out of missionary discourses bear evidence of the foundational violence and estrangement that accompanied the strict application of Christian epistemological and ontological categories in colonial Africa. In Rwanda for example, colonial discourses on African alterity like the *Himatic hypothesis* (propagated by colonial anthropologists like John Seligman, explorers like Hohn Hanning Speke and missionaries led by Father Leone Classe) played a key role in the politicization of indigeneity and the establishment of categories like ethnicity and race as salient features of African identity. The dynamics of such identity politics not only structured Rwanda’s political and cultural imaginary, but was also the governing motif of dominant state policies like the ‘Belgian reform’ of the 1920s to the mid 1930s (Mamdani 2002:16).

Under the *Himatic hypotheses*, a new diplomatic imaginary was installed where the Hutus were presented as *indigenous* Bantus and Tutsis as *alien* Hamites (a civilizing Caucasian influence in Negro Africa) thus leading to the differences between the Hutus and Tutsis to be *racialized* rather than *ethnicized*. It is this colonial/diplomatic construction of the Tutsi as a *non-native*



group and therefore the occupier of the *middle ground* between superior white *settler citizens* and inferior black *native subjects* (Hutu) that informed and reproduced the postcolonial enmity that contributed to the 1994 ‘Rwanda genocide’ (Ibid). According to Mahmood Mamdani, the genocide in Rwanda is better understood when one takes into consideration the ‘political world that colonialism set in motion’ while engaging the popular and subaltern character of the violence, the intimacy of the techniques used and social proximity of victims and killers (friends, neighbours, spouses etc). Mamdani goes on to state that:

[...] the Rwandan genocide needs to be understood as a natives’ genocide. It was a genocide by those who saw themselves as sons—and daughters—of the soil, and their mission as one of clearing the soil of a threatening *alien* presence. This was not an “ethnic” but a “racial” cleansing, not a violence against one who is seen as a neighbor but against one who is seen as a foreigner; not a violence that targets a transgression across a boundary into home but one that seeks to eliminate a foreign presence from home soil, literally and physically (Mamdani 2002:14)

Like the Rwandan case above, the spectre of missionary practices and colonial governance continues to gain traction in Northern Uganda where Joseph Kony, a former altar boy and self proclaimed spirit medium leads the Lord’s Resistance Army. Acting on the edicts of the Christian ‘holy spirit’ and a number of multinational *jok* (spirits) — Chinese, Congolese, Acholi, American among others — Kony wages a transnational/religious/ethnic war with the objective of liberating the Acholi [while victimizing them] and establishing a Ugandan theocracy based on the Biblical Ten Commandments. While the atrocities committed by Kony’s LRA are often thought of as examples of ‘African madness’ or an uncritical quest for power, it is worthwhile to note that the discourse that Kony deploys is infused with a theological and civilizing logic

reminiscent of colonial violence and Christian Missionary proselytizing in Africa. Much like the Christian missionaries who preceded him, Kony mobilizes various discourses on the self to pathologize everyday life practices (like bicycle riding) and employs a *mytho-diplomatic* imperative to transform, to change radically a space and its inhabitants in the name of faith (Christianity) and a nationalist call (a theocratic Uganda and a free Acholi).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Kony interrupts the secular geopolitical imaginary that dominates postcolonial Ugandan diplomacy through a variety of transgressive protocols which include repeatedly calling for, then skipping peace agreement meetings, and insisting on communicating with President Yoweri Museveni through the holy spirits and not through the telephone or Southern Sudanese human mediators. In so doing, Kony not only exposes the absurdities and complexities of nativist and Christian diplomatic thought, but also the violence of a postcolonial nation-state that resorts to military action in its attempt to establish a national consensus in its quest for recognition among other sovereign states.

Absurd as it may seem, it is against these spectres of colonialism that we are able to interrogate the kinds of Africa that become imaginable in the postcolonial era as well as the forms of diplomacy that are excluded or, become familiar and dominant as a result of the translation of African modes of meaning-making and appropriation of Western ideals. The multiple sites of estrangement and the mediation practices that accompany the invention and transformation of Africanness make it necessary for us to look at different ways of being in the world and call for a way of thinking about diplomacy that goes beyond professional, geopolitical and legal concerns.

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<sup>9</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe provides a similar reading on Belgian Catholic missionary activity in the Congo see. (Mudimbe, 1994, p.107)

At a secondary level, the pluralization of diplomacy effected through resistance, appropriation and transgression of established codes “anthropologizes the West” and shows “how exotic its constitution of reality has been” (Rabinow 1986:241). How the domains most taken for granted as universal [this includes diplomatic recognition and representation] are historically peculiar and linked to culturally specific social practices that transform social and political realities as they are exported or imposed on other peoples in other spaces (Ibid). Such a treatment of diplomacy recasts the diplomatic idiom as part of a heterological counter-tradition that attempts to “deconstruct western epistemology [and metaphysics] from within and critique it from the outside” (Godzich 1986: xvii). It also interrogates diplomacy’s cultural encounters due to its ability to illustrate “how ‘otherness’ is constituted, communicated and transformed and how this has been crucial in the formation of identities in Europe and beyond” (Hallam and Street 2000:1). On a different register, pluralizing diplomacy highlights the multiple African subjectivities that emerged together with, against or as a result of colonial, missionary and nation-statist structures of apprehension through an appreciation of the tactics and micropolitical practices deployed by excluded peoples.

By raising ethical questions and interrogating the ontological and historical suppositions that inform how modern diplomacy is practiced in Africa, we are able to see the limitations of the Western diplomatic discourses and the African subjectivities that they produce or seek to interpret (Mudimbe 1988:186). At a minimum, a pluralized conception of diplomacy promotes a willingness to “engage the other as other” and enables us to arrive at a non-professional diplomacy of everyday life that makes sense of a lifeworld outside the space of nation-state discourses and elevates the Self and Other to a realm that transforms hostile or potentially hostile

relationships and histories by promoting more creative ways of encountering otherness (Shapiro 2000:126, Constantinou 2006).

### **1.3 Eurocentric Constructions and Diplomatic Recognition**

To appreciate more fully the complexities of the various discourses that seek to dominate Africa's ethical, ontological and ultimately diplomatic problematics, we need to pay attention to the role that *Eurocentrism* plays in 'establishing' what it means to be African or diplomatic in the modern world. With its most compelling arguments being predicated on the foreclosure of the non-European Other, Eurocentrism projects the African as a subject living in conditions of pathological alterity. As such, Eurocentric regimes of diplomatic recognition produce an African person, a "place and an *idea* that is continuously described as an object apart from the world, or as a failed and incomplete example of something else" (Mbembe 2004: 348).

Generally, Eurocentrism emphasizes the existence of 'strange' yet knowable peoples/places that can only be 'recognized' as part of the diplomatic experience after their mediation practices are annihilated, located allochronically [in another time] or translated into a more familiar or intelligible and therefore manageable form (Fabian 1983: 155). That is, within Eurocentric discourses, 'African' modes of life are put in another time, associated with either earlier periods of individual life (childhood) or of human history (primitivism) thus legitimating the application of temporally coded diplomatic methods and pedagogical strategies that attempt to bring into or exclude Africa from the time of Euro-modernity complete with its sovereignty affiliations and cultural practices.

Not only does Eurocentrism legitimate the mission to civilize, colonize and use violence against African peoples, it also enables the development of completely internalist histories of the mediations of estrangement. In doing so, Eurocentrism effaces the violence and exclusions that Europeans used against non-European others like the Herero in German South-West Africa [now Namibia], who were almost annihilated during the 1904 Herero uprising. Taking the ‘respect for European treaties’ as the measure of humanity, the German General Lothar von Trotha, justified his genocidal practice against the Herero by stating that his decision was based on his “intimate knowledge of many African tribes...” which had convinced him of “the necessity that the Negro does not respect treaties but brute force” (Mamdani 2002: 11).

While the German government finally accepted responsibility and apologized for the Herero genocide in 2004, it ruled out reparations to relatives of the victims “arguing that it had given 500 million Euros to Namibia in the form of aid.” The regime of recognition that privileges “the victim state” over other victim communities or conceptions of victimhood reinforces the geopolitical map and the idea of diplomacy it privileges. As Girma Negash (2006) puts it in his study of political apology:

Note the apology to the Herero people arrived decades after German apologies to victims of the Holocaust and half a century after reparations to Jewish victims and survivors began. Overly emphasizing the performative acts of leaders undermines the extent to which victims, survivors, families of both and their human rights advocates engage in a protracted struggle for redress (Negash 2006:11).

The calls for reparations were intensified in September 2011 when 20 skulls belonging to members of the Herero and Nama groups were to be repatriated from the Charité Hospital where they have been stored at the Berlin Medical Historical Museum since being sent to Germany as “material with which to investigate and classify race.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough, the repatriation effort, which was considered part of the German-Namibia reconciliation involved forensic anthropological studies to determine who (age, tribe, disease profile etc) the skulls belonged to.

Trotha does not stand alone in such representations of Africa, a similar view, albeit one that infantilizes Africans is presented by Jan Smuts — the South African Premier and one of the framers of the League of Nations Charter. Like Trotha, Smuts saw the African as “a special type of human being...who has largely remained a child type, with a child psychology and outlook” (quoted in Mamdani 1996: 4). Accordingly, Smuts, an ardent supporter of the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality, was opposed to the application of the same principles to Africans as this would de-Africanize them and turn them into pseudo-Europeans by stripping them of their *childlike nature*.

There is nothing new about these arrogant depictions of Africans. G.W.F. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History* already developed an elaborate ethno-geographic schema that saw Africa

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<sup>10</sup> Knight, D., (2011), ‘There was Injustice’: Skulls of Colonial Victims Returned to Namibia, *Spiegel Online International* 09/27/2011 available on the web at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,788601,00.html>

Also see, *Daily Nation*, October 5, 2011, ‘Namibian Memorial Reignites Call for German Reparations,’ available on the web at: <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/africa/Namibian+memorial+reignites+call+for+German+reparations/-/1066/1248620/-/jdrju/-/index.html>

[proper] as “a land of childhood and savagery - a dark continent” whose inhabitants lack a concept of universality, historical consciousness and are arrested in immediacy due to their proximity to nature. According to Hegel, Africans (and other peoples from the frigid and torrid zones) are to be excluded from world (and diplomatic) history because they lack the requisite natural conditions for history-making.<sup>11</sup> Similar discourses on Africa have been rehearsed in more recent times with a more or less similar infantilizing, pathologizing and excluding effect. They continue to present Africa as a land of degenerate types or relics of the human race; a place where we can find examples of the beginnings and degeneration of diplomacy (not its innovations and development) among other anomalies and anachronisms. To further the infantilizing narrative, Eurocentrism populates Africa with ‘child-like people’ — adults whose capacities are to be built in European cultural values through missionary work, ‘cultural diplomacy’ and humanitarian initiatives while remaining silent on the foundational violence and ongoing exclusions that create the conditions of possibility for such practices.

Based on Eurocentric assumptions about the ‘essence of diplomatic culture’, modern diplomatic discourse proposes the application of a variety of grooming and conversion practices to inculcate desirable habits in the colonized/African subject as a means of ridding him/it of his degeneracy or bringing him (rarely is it a woman) up to par with pre-established European standards (Mbembe 2001:46). While often presented as acts of charity or moral duty, these very same Eurocentric acts make it possible for colonizers, missionaries and modern diplomats to establish a set of relations under which they “could, as with an animal, sympathize with the

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<sup>11</sup> Hegel’s reading of Africa leads him to conclude that it is a non-place, a region not worth studying in the context of world history. He also severs Egypt from Africa noting that it does not belong to the Africa spirit of what he calls ‘Africa proper’. See Hegel G.W.F., *The Philosophy of History* (1956)p. 93-95

African/colonized subject and even love him or her up to a point... while going to great lengths—never ruling out the employment of violence in an attempt to civilize him” (Ibid). In more extreme cases, the paternalistic point of view has been rehearsed by Afro-pessimists who advocate for the re-colonization of Africa as one way of finishing a civilizing and pacifying task that was left unfinished (Mamdani 1996:205).

While the objective and means of mobilizing Eurocentric discourse on Africa may vary, the premise remains the same. To present Africans as a people apart from the world and Africa as a ‘land of childhood’ that is simultaneously welcoming and unwelcoming; child-soldiers, pot-bellied starving children, newly converted or soon to be converted ‘children of god’, quasi-states and young nations — people to be thought for and spoken for by western philanthropists, Christian missionaries, anthropologists and *rogue ambassadors*. Like the Christian missionary practices of the past, present day Eurocentric discourses on Africa have to be read as part of a broader theory on Otherness predicated upon racial/colonial forms of recognition, sensing and making sense of the world that presupposes a prior division between the diplomatic and the non-diplomatic (Ranciere 2004:3). Distinctions that make it possible to speak of modern diplomacy as the product of a self-contained Europe or as part of a *Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (à la Der Derian), or to theorize diplomacy without [at least contrapuntally] paying attention to the metaphysics of absence, the violence, estrangement and exclusions that emerge together with, against or as a result of Europe’s encounter with Other cultures.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Achille Mbembe provides an elaborate reading on African metaphysics of absence arising from a history of exclusions and the various forms of self-stylization that take place in the postcolony. See Mbembe, A. (2002).



#### **1.4 Re-thinking Geopolitical Imaginaries**

Today, Eurocentric interpretations of the self, spatiality and temporality continue to dominate the African diplomatic imaginary through geopolitical interpretations that present the map of nation-states as the legitimate organizer of identities, enmities and antagonisms (Shapiro 1999b :57). It is this ambitious desire to over-code or erase ambiguous mediation practices and subjectivities that exist outside the nation-state that denies the possibilities for an ethics of encounter predicated on respect for alterity between peoples with incommensurate practices of identity.

While variations to this narrative exist, the nation-statist story is primarily concerned with discourses on the possibilities and necessities within the sovereign state as opposed to counteracting claims concerned with necessities and possibilities elsewhere (Walker 2006: 65). The ethical considerations underlining such a project presents the concept of diplomacy as a ‘dialogue between states’ and equates its practice with statecraft, foreign affairs, pursuit of national interest or negotiation by professional state agents according to established protocols. The political purchase of such a rendering of diplomacy is that it presents the story of diplomacy as having more to do with how nation-states or their official representatives relate to each other than how ‘we’ come to produce, negotiate and relate to multiple diplomatic identities and lives that demand mediation. Therefore, the strategic and interpretive practices emerging from this state-oriented regime of recognition try to normalize human subjectivity and act as a cover for ontological investments within which coloured bodies, other gods and ways of being-with-the other are excluded from the way we think about diplomacy.

As the evidence from Africa suggests, the types of cultural translation that accompany modern diplomacy reflect a colonial ideology that perpetuates racialized structures of domination,

apprehension and recognition. Operating under the pretext of an ‘original’ and therefore replicable conception of what it means to be human and political, the geopolitical imaginary conceals the racism, violence and theft that accompanies breakthroughs in diplomacy like the November 1884 Berlin conference — a statist project that ensured that the partition of Africa would take place in a manner that minimized intra-European warfare while justifying the application of brute force against Africans. Clearly, fidelity to the geopolitical imaginary translates to cartographic, aesthetic and linguistic representations that transform (and silence) Asante, Yoruba, Kikuyu and Tutsi peoples and spaces into members of Anglophone, Francophone or Lusophone colonies and later on, nation-states complete with mute postcolonial subaltern masses.

Read as force predicated upon strategy rather than ontology, European statecraft was considered legitimate ‘mancraft’ — a necessary violence required to end inter-ethnic violence, slavery and other forms of ‘savagery’ by assimilating, civilizing or governing ‘non-sovereign’ peoples and expropriating ‘empty spaces’. Its primary claim to legitimacy therefore, rests on the objectives of violence rather than on the considerations of the objects of violence – the ‘raw men’ – barbarians; whose voices have to be silenced. ‘Niggers’; who must turn white or vanish. Perpetual children; who need to be taught, converted and more recently, adopted. In short, people incapable or unworthy of ‘diplomatic’ courtesies, privileges and immunities.

The manifestation of this paternalistic/colonial logic is to be found in subsequent multilateral diplomatic ventures like the League of Nations. While the stated objectives of the League was to bring about world peace by establishing open, just and honourable relations among ‘nations’ thus

eradicating the possibilities of warfare, its colonial predicates made it impossible for its crafters to imagine a world devoid of some form of tutelage for non-European peoples who had been under German and Ottoman rule. The message in Article XXII of the Covenant of the League is ironic but reveals the diplomatic/colonial logic of that era. That is, Europe could imagine the *end of war* on a global scale but could not imagine *self-governance and freedom* for non-European peoples. Accordingly, the Mandate system (and later on the UN Trusteeship system) legitimized the transfer of certain societies from one regime of domination to another with the ‘degree of tutelage’ being dependent upon the ‘extent of political maturity of the territory concerned.’<sup>13</sup>

To begin to assess the political implications of thinking the diplomatic beyond prevailing forms of recognition, we must heed modern diplomatic thought’s intimate involvement with mediation practices, identities and cultural expressions that are elitist, Eurocentric and geophilosophical in a statist sense. Coupled with the above insights on the interplay of identity and recognition and their implication for diplomatic thought, we can attend to a few more diplomatic events which present us with a radicalized diplomacy. A diplomacy that questions or reveals its colonial, statist and elitist predicates thus opening a space for ‘us’ to engages other mediation practices while being attentive to various forms of estrangement. A diplomacy that provokes ‘us’ to think, to relinquish the habits and dogmatic images of thought installed in ‘us’ by what is often considered diplomatic common sense or good sense.

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<sup>13</sup> See Article XXII of the Covenant of the League of Nations available on the web at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp#art22](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22)

### **1.5 Diplomatic Baggage: Nativism, Neo-colonialism and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly**

In an attempt to overcome the violences of colonialism, nationalist, nativist and Pan-Africanist conceptions of Africanness were mobilized complete with their own diplomatic apparatus. While these diplomacies have a potential to bring about ‘newness’ in the way we think about Africa, they also call up colonial memories and reproduce its mechanisms in the postcolony. In order to highlight the complex and often contradictory character of diplomacy and everyday life in Africa, I want to turn to the July 1984 diplomatic crises surrounding the discovery of the bound, half naked and anaesthetized body of Umaru Dikko – the kidnapped Nigerian ex-minister for transport under the Shagari regime who, with the help of the Israeli Mossad was to be flown out of London under the guise of the diplomatic bag. While the Dikko affair has been the subject of many readings in diplomatic law, most of these readings have been concerned with the question of the inviolability and abuse of the diplomatic bag, thus overlooking the other forms of concealed exchange, silences, relations and violations that have taken place and continue taking place in Africa and in its relationship with the West.

Informed by nation-statist and legal concerns, diplomatic theorists and historians have read the Dikko Affair within the history of the diplomatic bag rather than the history of human relations in general. Such partial readings treat the affair as a violation of Article 27 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and Immunities of 1961, rather than as a spectre of a racially-coded traffic in human bodies and signs characteristic of European-African relations . In so doing, they fail to situate the Dikko Affair alongside *other social practices* that constitute everyday life and political relations in Nigeria thus *abstracting* the event from its social and economic placements. The focus on the abuse of the bag rather than what such abuses are symptomatic of contributes to a layer of silence about slavery and colonialism in the past and

neo-colonialism and prebendalism in the present (See Shaw 2003: 675-6; O'brien 2001:307 and Akinsanya 1985: 602-9). However, a broader reading of the *affair* is provided in Ashman and Tresscott's *Diplomatic Crime: Drugs, Killings, Thefts, Rapes Slavery and Other Outrageous Crimes* which situates the Dikko affair within the context of neo-colonial Nigeria-British and Nigerian-Israeli relations and explores a series of retaliatory moves like the September 18, 1984 arrest of British Businessman Graham Coveyduck (the son of a colonial era British police superintendent who had served in Nigeria) thus interrupting the purely legalistic readings of the event.

Treated in this way, the Dikko Affair raises more than legal questions about the diplomatic bag and becomes a useful site for raising ethical questions and revealing Africa's diplomatic baggage — the forms of estrangement, displacement and anxiety arising from its assimilation (forced or otherwise) into the modern diplomatic community (of states) and capitalist system of exchange. For example, through the Afrobeat music of Fela Kuti, we are invited to a nativist and Pan-African critique of colonial rationalities and the excesses of the neocolonial Nigerian dictatorship(s) which Dikko was a part of. Fela's interrogation of slave, colonial and postcolonial subjectivity in tracks like ITT- *International Thief Thief, Zombie, Expensive Shit*, and *Colomentality* point to the other diplomacies that exist together with and beneath official state diplomacies. The ethical questions he raises remind us of the complicity of western financial institutions and governments in corrupt practices that enable the likes of Dikko to loot the Nigerian public coffers. The implication of raising these ethical questions warrants elaboration here.

First, it highlights the ethical predicates and amnesia about the extent to which postcolonial comprador bourgeoisie capitalism relies on ‘unofficial’ and sometimes ‘unrecognized’ forms of exchange that operate outside the dominant conceptions of diplomacy. Second, it makes apparent the various forms of concealed exchange that contribute to the continuation of Europe’s ‘underdevelopment of Africa’ and the complicity of certain Africans in these processes. Finally, while Fela’s nativist critique of Western and postcolonial [Nigerian] elites betray his ontological commitments, it serves as a useful counter-discourse to colonial and postcolonial representations of Africa by highlighting how statist attempts to re-inscribe African humanity (through an appropriation of negritude, nativism, Pan-Africanism, nationalism ) into a system that had previously denied it fails to create something ontologically different.

As problematic as his discourse on African life may be, Fela supplies an exemplary departure from prevailing claims to truth in postcolonial Africa. His genre-bending, bodily practices and political proclamations offer critical insights into how death, sex, excretion and ingestion (politics of the belly), as well as the regime of the taboos surrounding them are tied to familiar ideas of sovereignty, the political and the subject (Bataille 1985:94-95, Bayart 1989). Through his performances (on and off-stage), Fela manages to bring into the same space the bodies that conform to officially prescribed diplomatic postures and those that seek to escape the subject positions that the state, ethnic groups, Euro-colonialism or religion prescribes for them. As such, the haptic, auditory and olfactory senses that he calls up interrupt the state’s scopic surveillance mechanisms and the haptic barriers that it puts in place.

On the whole, Fela’s transgressions tell us more about the workings of power, the body, and subjectivity in postcolonial Africa than official diplomatic discourse could ever do. For example

his music is marked by a clamour for human rights, a rethinking of African history and religion and a critique of Neo-colonial alienation thus directing our attention to “a world of competing worlds” as it multiplies the sites and forms of diplomatic encounter (Ranciere 2003:6). Similarly, the Afro-beat genre of music that he creates draws upon multiple cultures and sounds (jazz, funk, high-life and Yoruba folk music) in order to stage a plurivocal *yab* (satirical critique) of politicians and everyday elite practices in Africa. For instance, his deployment of abject and scatological imagery [*zombie*, *African Message*, *Expensive shit*, *Perambulator*, *Ye Ye De Smell*, *Yellow Fever*, *Colomentality*, *Coffin for head of state and Gentleman*] superimposes the surpluses of an excretory system upon statist, elitist and Eurocentric visions of the world, diplomatic habitus that they privilege and the idea of humanity that they promulgate.

By invoking everyday forms of abjection, Fela disturbs the perceptual coordinates of a diplomatic faecal habitus and history predicated upon statist and bourgeois notions of privacy, scientific observation, policing, deodorization, and euphemism.<sup>14</sup> A habitus produced by an ideal of ‘purity and danger’ and maintained by the systematic demarcation of inside/outside, public/private, human/animal, self /other such that exchanges and proclamations like Fela’s either go unnoticed or are received with a strong sense of disgust and embarrassment due to their deviation from modern/human edicts on propriety and cleanliness. By calling up bodies and bodily processes that had been disavowed or silenced, Fela creates a space for the interrogation of the *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* characteristic of Nigerian dictatorship and neocolonialism in the present and colonialism and the slaveship in the past.

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the constitution of the faecal habitus, see Weinberg, M. and Williams, C., (2004)

According to Achille Mbembe, such an aesthetics of vulgarity is useful as it mocks authority and subverts piety by playing on the system of signs left behind by colonial *commandment* and the postcolonial credo of power that derives from it. At a minimum, it points to the “mutual zombification of both the dominant and those apparently dominated” while mocking the ‘grooming practices’ that colonial *Commandment* uses to inculcate ‘civilized’ habits in the colonized subject (Mbembe 2001: 104). In so doing, a vulgar aesthetics presents us with an idea of the human and the diplomat that embraces rather than disavows the body and the forms of sensation associated with it thus disturbing the image of the human/diplomat based on purity and civilizational grandeur (Laporte 2000:15, 46).

Edified by Mbembe’s and Fela’s exploration of the [b]anality of power in Africa and its relation to colonial commandment and postcolonial governance, we can interrogate the forms of self that are invented in the very process of ‘humanity becoming-human’ as a result of the abjection of the animal, the dead and the ‘unclean.’ We are also able to “bring into question the technologies through which the biopolitical body is fabricated” and partitioned and its implication for diplomacies of everyday life in Africa (Athanasiou 2003:1127). Simply put, we can engage the map of estrangement and the multiple mediation practices through which Africa and Africans are invented and continue to re-invent themselves.

### **1.6 Decolonizing Diplomacies: Silence, Redemption, Ethics**

The above polemic on the shifting terrain of African estrangement is not aimed at a purification exercise that seeks to restore a primordial African conception of self, or to advocate for a return to an authentic and autonomous time of mediation of estrangement. It is, among other things, an



examination of the violent character of both past and present cultures of mediating estrangement (where estrangement includes not only alienation from other people and other cultures but also from one's labour, the environment, and gods) in order to mobilize a more ethico-politically inclined reading of diplomacy that engages multiple conceptions, sites and ways of living and relating to others (Der Derian 1987; Constantinou 2006).

By illustrating that diplomatic theory, history and/as practice as it stands today is for the most part the story of the European man; his triumphs, technologies of the self and methods of mediating otherness, the polemicizations above call for a more plurivocal idea of diplomacy that implicates excluded peoples and abjected practices in the 'making and unmaking of the world' (Scarry 1987). In an interesting critique of Europe's one sided history of civilizational grandeur, Jean Paul Sartre provides a reading of Europe's encounters with other cultures and peoples that implicated Europe in a history of violence and racist humanism (Sartre 1961 /2001:151). Such an interrogation of European subjectivity and with it the dominant idea of diplomacy , 'diplomatic man' and diplomatic community illustrates how Europe's foreclosure of the 'non-European' contributes to the impossibility of 'ethical' relation with those peoples, places or things that are jumped over in the constitution of the category diplomacy (see Spivak 1999:6).

The turn to ethics also exposes the violence characteristic of modern diplomatic relations while creating a space for a politics where we can speculate on the possibility of engaging the silenced or trivialized 'other' in a manner that interrupts familiar modes of meaning-making and self-scripting. Ethical considerations provide as well, a site where we can think of the diplomatic and the political as spaces of irreducible responsibility (Campbell 1988: p.ix). With an attentiveness to the ethico-political dimensions of the mediation of estrangement, we can critically engage official statist diplomatic practices, cultural diplomacy projects [that seek to work on 'the hearts

and minds' of the postcolonial Africans like Alliance Francaise, Goethe institute, British Council etc], the NGO networks and spin-off agencies through which Western sympathy and benevolence is extended to Africans [in the vocabulary of capacity building and community empowerment] and public diplomacy practices that thrive of the *thingification* of African peoples through a representation of diseased and deceased black bodies.

However, it is important to note that the recognition of the 'voicelessness' of subaltern classes is not a simple and straightforward matter. As I will illustrate in the sections on humanitarianism and the 'return of the oppressed' (Chapter 3 and 6 respectively), entities that seek to speak for the oppressed often appropriate their image based on a non-reflexive interpretation of the political contexts of those they 'speak for'. For example, a concern for the pain of distant others and proximate subaltern masses has contributed to the proliferation of public diplomacy efforts and global alliance networks which thrive on the dramatization of the plight of Africans and the promotion of elites who act as native informants or promoters of a disinterested representation of Africa. Agents of change who aim to save African subjects from themselves by creating new forms of estrangement and violence.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

To return to the LRA, the trope of the Christian Missionary saviour is a familiar one and has been explored in cinematic works like Marc Forster's biopic film *Machine Gun Preacher* (2011) and the US based Sentinel Group's documentary '*An Unconventional War*' (2005) which looks at how the Apostle Julius Oyet led prayer movement weakened Kony's Lord Resistance Army through 'spiritual warfare'. In '*An Unconventional War*', the conflict in Northern Uganda is

spiritualized and a church-state alliance established through the heroic collaboration of Apostle Julius Oyet and President Yoweri Museveni. As a result of this spiritual collaboration, ‘Operation Gideon’— a spiritual and full-scale UPDF military expedition into Northern Uganda — is launched and the political and spiritual liberation of the Acholi from Kony’s military forces and ‘demonic powers’ achieved. Based on the notion that the war against the LRA is a spiritual war, the documentary legitimizes the ‘forced’ movement of Acholi people into ‘internment camps (by the Ugandan army) where they can hear the gospel and be shielded from Islam.’<sup>15</sup>

A similar yet more extensive *redemptive dispositif* is enacted in the recent Invisible Children film ‘Kony 2012’. Told in part from the point of view of Jason Russell’s (and his son Gavin) technologically hyper-mediated world characterized by hope, certainty and unlimited possibility for change, Kony 2012 recounts Russell’s encounter with an African boy (Jacob) who is a victim of the Kony led Lord Resistance army’s murderous war in Northern Uganda and the surrounding central Africa countries. Unlike Russell’s hope filled world, Jacob, like most of the ‘night walkers’ in the film has lost hope in life and would ‘rather be killed’ as a result of his experience with Kony’s necropolitical forces. The subsequent humanitarian project/experiment, we are told, is as a result of Russell’s promise to Jacob; ‘we are going to do everything that we can to stop

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<sup>9</sup>See *New Apostolic Reform Watch*, Monitoring a Growing Dominionist Movement Joseph Kony’s Ugandan Victims Exploited in ‘Documentary’ About Spiritual Warfare , March 19, 2012, available on the web at <http://www.narwatch.com/2012/03/19/joseph-konys-ugandan-victims-exploited-in-documentary-about-spiritual-warfare/>

them'. A promise that is soon transformed into a program first for Russell and Invisible children and more recently, for all of 'us'.<sup>16</sup>

This desire to 'do something', the desire to save Jacob and all the other children like him brings together a transnational collective of 'storytellers, visionaries, humanitarians, artists, and entrepreneurs' who in the process of executing their 'diplomatic duties' also invent themselves as philanthropic diplomatic subjects. Thus organized, they carry out projects to 'promote peace and prosperity in post-conflict regions and protect communities currently affected by LRA violence'. At home in the US, Invisible Children also seeks to inspire America's youth to 'do more than just watch' as atrocities are committed and encourages them to 'unite' their voices and 'use the systems, influence, and resources of the United States to expedite an end to the conflict'.<sup>17</sup> It is with these objectives in mind that Invisible Children seeks to make Joseph Kony a household name and put pressure on US policy makers to ensure that the US does not pull out the 100 troops it sent to Uganda to hunt down Kony.

As the *Kony 2012* documentary goes viral on the internet, both the film and Invisible Children (the organization) emerge as a scene of disclosure on the complex set of relations and actors involved in the urge to save African children and infantilized Africans. The methods and interlocutors that Invisible Children's campaign privileges serves as a symptom, spectre and

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<sup>16</sup> For an extended treatment of the redemptive dispositif surrounding the Kony 2012 campaign, see Constantinou C.M and Opondo S.O 'Diplomacies of Redemption: Humanitarianism, Voyeurism and the Salvation of Africa' paper presented at the ECPR Workshop on "The Transformation of Foreign Policy and Diplomacy", University of Antwerp, Belgium 10 - 15 April 2012

<sup>17</sup> See Invisible Children Website : <http://www.invisiblechildren.com/>

schema of the *salvific* forces characteristic of the recent and not too recent history of diplomacies of redemption in East Africa.<sup>18</sup> For instance, Kony 2012 has been lauded by internet activists (slacktivists) as evidence of the power of social media to make real change in the lives of vulnerable others through mediation practices that illustrate our connectedness as human beings. With an emphasis on technological acumen and access, the documentary has also been presented as a revolutionary force that puts “squarely the responsibility of policing the planet’s bad actors on the global community and not on non-responsive governments.” Similarly there are those who see the massive response to the film, ‘whether positive or negative,’ as a success in “demonstrating the potential and the power of a politically roused electronic global village” (Brooks 2012).<sup>19</sup> One of Invisible Children’s primary supporters is the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Luis Moreno Ocampo who also appears as one of their interlocutors in the video and acts as key force in the pursuit of Kony. In an expression of his support for the ‘Kony 2012’ creators, Ocampo points out that “these are just a bunch of kids from California, they could be off surfing or whatever but they’re not...they’re giving a voice to people who before no-one knew about and no-one cared about and I salute them” (quoted in Holligan 2012).<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to Ocampo’s celebratory remarks, are a number of critical comments that take a more reflective and sometimes polemical stance with regard to the role of the West in Africa in general

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<sup>18</sup> On the Salvific significance of millennial capitalism and other forms of meaning making and exchange see Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, ( 2002 ). p.786

<sup>19</sup> Webster Brooks, The #Kony2012 Conundrum, Politics 365 available on the web at <http://politic365.com/2012/03/25/the-kony2012-conundrum/>

<sup>20</sup> Anna Holligan, Invisible Children's Kony campaign gets support of ICC prosecutor, BBC News, The Hague, March 8, 2012, available on the web at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17303179>

and philanthropic practices by Western NGOs in particular. Of significance have been the claims about Invisible Children's links to right wing American evangelical Christian groups whose activities in Uganda include support for homophobic and often violent legislation like the 2009 Anti-Homosexuality Bill (Kill the Gays Bill) introduced to the Ugandan parliament by the MP for Ndoorwa David Bahati. With initial support from American evangelical pastors like Scott Lively (author of the anti-gay text; *'7 Steps to Recruit-Proof Your Child'*) the relationship between the desire to save African souls and the transposition of Western discourses and cultural wars to African political space cannot be overlooked (Martin and Lively 2009).<sup>21</sup>

Similar relationships between American evangelicals and their African counterparts based on a desire to 'save African children' from 'sexual and political' predators (like Kony in the case of Invisible Children and Ugandan Gays in the case of evangelicals) are exhibited in the sermons and anti-homosexuality campaigns by Ugandan Pastor Martin Ssempe of the now viral YouTube video, *'Eat Da Poo Poo'*. Here, Ssempe equates homosexuality with acts like coprophagy, fisting and forceful recruitment of children into sexual acts and calls upon Ugandans, more so Christians in Uganda, to resist this 'Western force'.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Invisible Children's, invitation to US government involvement in the form of military intervention (to save Kony's child soldiers and abductees), the evangelical desire to 'secure the Uganda's children' sexually is played out against the backdrop of a 'Barack Obama Back Off' slogan. A resistance to the common

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Martin and Scott Lively, Interview, U.S. Evangelical Leaders Blamed For Uganda Anti-Gay Sentiment, NPR Interview on December 18, 2009, available on the web at : <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=121605529>

<sup>22</sup> *Eat Da Poo Poo*. YouTube 2010 Available on the web at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euXQbZDwV0w&feature=fvst> also see [Bruce Wilson](#), [Rick Warren Mentor Tied To Effort Behind Uganda's 'Kill the Gays' Bill](#), Huffington Post December 7, 2009 available on the web at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-wilson/rick-warren-mentor-tied-t\\_b\\_382480.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-wilson/rick-warren-mentor-tied-t_b_382480.html)

American foreign aid conditionality that ties the issuing of foreign aid to the protection of LGBT rights in Africa. In one of his animated sermons about the un-Africaness of homosexuality (usually backed by coprophagic images and clips from gay-porn), Ssempe asks “Barack Obama to explain to us, is this what he wants to bring to Africa as a human right? To eat the poo poo of our children?”

The significance of transnational relationships between American evangelical Christians and their African counterparts are not to be overlooked given that personalities like pastor Rick Warren of the *Purpose Driven Life* fame is one of the ‘culture makers’ that the Kony 2012 campaign targets. Interestingly enough, Warren has been working with the Museveni family and in 2008 launched a national ‘Purpose Driven Living’ program aimed at helping Uganda’s leaders to live ‘purposeful lives’ that will build up their nation making it the second East African country to adopt the nationwide program after Rwanda which did so in 2005 (Vu Rick 2008).<sup>23</sup>

Between Joseph Kony and the Lord Resistance Army’s millenarian violence and the mapping of a new form of technological and political engagement for Invisible Children’s millennial generation slacktivists, we witness new sites for the engagement with the pain of distant others and variations of the redemptive ethos (for they both seek to save the Acholi and in some way themselves). As a result of the narrative of the self and the image of the African other that it privileges, *Kony 2012* and Invisible Children has been read as a manifestation of the ‘White savior industrial complex’. That is, *Kony 2012* is seen as an extension of the work of western

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<sup>23</sup> Michelle A. Vu , ‘Rick Warren Launches 'Purpose Driven' Plan in Uganda’ *The Christian Post*, March 31, 2008| available on the web at : <http://www.christianpost.com/news/rick-warren-launches-purpose-driven-plan-in-uganda-31752/>

‘bridge characters’ like Angelina Jolie or George Clooney or the average Joe do-good Westerners in ‘tough to live places’ like those privileged in the writing of *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof.<sup>24</sup> Also noted are the film’s simplistic reading of the LRA conflict that neglects the history of violence in the region and the multiplicity of actors involved in it. Consequently, the Ugandan government, more so the UPDF is absolved of atrocities committed in Northern Uganda and presented as one of the key forces in the salvation of Acholi children. With the above set of diplomatic themes and problematics in mind, it becomes clear that diplomacy is a “social practice that must be studied alongside *other social practices* of the everyday life of its bearers” (Der Derian 1987).<sup>25</sup> The Humanitarianism-Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment network (H-MIME-NET) at play in the Kony 2012 documentary reveals the violence that underlines some attempts to cultivate philanthropic and humanitarian subjectivity while pointing to the numerous ways in which colonial commandment continues to be produced in the postcolony. This being the case, our readings of diplomacy need to engage the forms of identity and lives that support or are abjected from modern diplomatic formations which, even in their critical renditions sometimes preserve the west as subject and the western subject as the focus of diplomatic theorizing and edification – albeit in an altered form (Spivak 1992: 66).

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<sup>24</sup> See Teju Cole, The White Savior Industrial Complex, *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2012 available on the web at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/2/>

<sup>25</sup> While Der Derian’s genealogical reading of diplomacy enables us to think about diplomacy outside the statist, elitist, essentialist and positivist modes of thought that have dominated diplomatic studies, it effaces the history of violence, theft, genocide, policing, infantilization [what Aime Cesaire calls “thingification”] of non-western peoples that emerges and develops together with Western mediation of estrangement. By engaging MIME-NET’S intersection with various forms of philanthropic practices or redemptive discourses, I illustrate how this humanitarian virtuous war differs from the virtuous/virtual war predicated on military prosthetics and virtualization of weapons that is the focus of Der Derian, James (2001) *Virtuous War* essay.



Noting that a disciplinary critique of Euro-modernity/diplomacy produces a more slippery subject due to its failure to articulate an ethics of engagement with the silenced other or to interrogate the colonial ‘metaphysics of absence’ that accompanies modern diplomatic discourse, in the next chapter, I would like to summon a number of temporal embassies, an ethos of negotiation and ‘diplomatic objects’ that enable us to engage in ethico-political readings of diplomacy that give new meaning to ‘diplomatic life’ in Africa and beyond. Embassies, envoys and negotiation practices that encourage us to re-member different diplomatic bodies and practices while unlearning some of the received ‘truths’, responsibilities or ‘representational’ codes that fail to acknowledge the imperative of both place and position in the recovery and transmission of the stories of the oppressed, trivialized or ‘jumped over’ subject of the postcolony (Lyons, Franklin et al 2004: 201).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Meta-Diplomacies: Envoys, 'Objects' and the Spectres of Colonial Estrangement

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia; of a relatively small, western-style, western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the west they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa.

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House*

Tell me, what you think about translation, and I will tell you who you are.

- Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*

Do not liken your friendship to a stone: if it breaks, you cannot put it together again; but liken your friendship to silk, for if it frays, you can stitch it and mend it.

- Malagasy proverb

#### 2.0 The Gift of Duplicity: Fabricating Diplomacy between the Text and the Textile

In this chapter I engage various sites of estrangement and the ethics of encounter, translation and memorialization that inform them in order to articulate a concept of *the diplomatic* that is attentive to postcolonial entanglements and the multiplicity of everyday life in Southern Africa. Taking the *Gifts & Blessings: the Textile Arts of Madagascar* exhibition held at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art between April 14 and September 2 2002 as my

provocation, I treat the forms of *statecraft* and *handicraft* that underline diplomatic and colonial forms of *mancraft* in Africa. The diplomatic insights from the *Gifts and Blessings* exhibition are extended to my reading of the exhibition of Saartje Bartmann's dissected body at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and the diplomatic negotiations to retrieve her remains for dignified burial in South Africa. Attentive to the diplomatic potential of objects (textile from Madagascar) and persons (Bartmann's body), the concluding section of this chapter interrogates Zimbabwe's ZANU PF's rhetoric of 'patriotic history' by engaging the 'ambivalent agency of bones as both 'persons' and 'objects' (Fontein 2009).

On the whole, the chapter is an attempt to pluralize our conceptions of diplomacy while laying out the ambiguous character of postcolonial entanglements. By examining the diplomatic significance of the conditions under which certain African subjects, objects (and objectified persons) are included and recognized within diplomatic and museological spaces, the chapter departs from the conception of diplomacy as "the relatively narrow and applied body of knowledge pertaining to the right conduct of professional diplomats in their relations with one another and other servants of the states to which they are accredited" (see Der Derian 1987, Constantinou 1996, Constantinou 2006, Neumann 2011 and Sharp 2009). The memories, images and narratives that I engage in this chapter disturb the Eurocentricism, elitism and statist geophilosophy that underlines the monological conception of diplomacy as *statecraft* or a set of *skills*, norms and rituals peculiar to professional diplomats ( Sharp 2009:2, Nicolson 1950, Satow 1979. Kissinger 1994).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The conceptions of diplomacy as statecraft, professional practice and common sense is treated in detail in Sharp P., (2009:7). Also see Satow E., (1979) and Nicolson, H. (1950). For more on the conception of diplomacy as

Doubtless, attempts at ‘placing statecraft in a historical perspective’ or the theorizing of ‘diplomatic essences’ and ‘common sense’ has enabled diplomatic theorists and historians to look at practices of statecraft in non-Western texts like the Armana letters or the Arthaśāstra. However, fidelity to Eurocentric or disciplinary archives means that the engagement with mediation practices from other peoples, places and times is usually coded with value judgments and discourses that privilege an already formed idea of diplomacy. As a result of these translational equivalences, Kautilya’s political theorizing in the Arthaśāstra cannot be engaged on its own terms and is subjected to familiar European theorizations and historicist readings such that he is referred to as the ‘Indian Machiavelli’ even though his political text predates Machiavelli’s by over one thousand years (Gowen 1929). Similarly, texts like the Armana letters are incorporated into a preexisting idea of diplomacy and its disciplinary frames such that the 3,000 year old Egyptian correspondence is considered to be the ‘beginning of International Relations’ (Cowen and Westbrook 2000). While these extensions of diplomatic history and theory beyond the West may seem to open a space for multiple voices and pasts to emerge, they often silence and erase the complexity of diplomatic pasts given that they often present us with alternative (diplomatic) histories rather than alternatives to (diplomatic) history (Nandy 1995: 53).

In what follows, I draw inspiration from James Der Derian’s (1987) genealogical study of Western estrangement and Costas M. Constantinou’s (1996) re-reading and rewriting of the theme of diplomacy by relating it to *handicraft* — the crafts of the double hand, the process of

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foreign policy geared towards the securing of national interests see Kissinger (1994). For an elaborate treatment of diplomacy as a set of skills peculiar to the professional diplomat, see Satow (1979)

doubling. Like Constantinou and Der Derian, my reading of diplomacy seeks to interrogate modern diplomacy's 'claims of originality, truth, finality' and with it, the 'place of the other' (Constantinou 1996:84).<sup>27</sup>

Heeding the insights derived from their treatment of diplomacy as a '*mediator of estrangement* between human collectivities', I proceed to engage the multiplicity and undecideability of the concept diplomacy by looking at colonial and postcolonial objects and forms of estrangement experienced by [dehumanized/objectified] peoples and the multiple *embassies* that exist alongside or against, yet remain unrecognized within most treatments of diplomacy and diplomatic thought.<sup>28</sup>

Such a reading of diplomacy makes it possible for us to read as diplomatic and ultimately political a whole range of African mediation practices and forms of estrangement that are trivialized, erased or silenced by dominant regimes of recognition and intelligibility. It also invites us to engage an idea of *the diplomatic* that takes seriously the diplomacy-colonialism

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<sup>27</sup> Diplomacy has been associated with handwriting, archival work and paleography-occupations which until the seventeenth century were referred to as diplomatic business "*res diplomatica*". Drawing upon Heidegger's reflection on the 'craft of the hand', Constantinou engages diplomacy and its double and suggests that the "theme of diplomacy could be illustrated not only in statecraft but also in handicraft, that is, in the inscription, arrangement and authentication of diplomas...in the etymological thematics of diploma, therefore, the theme of diplomacy gets rewritten, reread and redefined." See Constantinou C.M., (1996).p 74-88

<sup>28</sup> See James Der Derian's *On Diplomacy* where he presents a genealogy that orders the narrative in terms of what he refers to as 'six interpenetrating paradigms to analyze the origins and transformations of diplomacy (These he notes are; mytho-diplomacy, proto-diplomacy, diplomacy, anti-diplomacy, neo-diplomacy, and techno-diplomacy)'. See Der Derian J., (1987)

nexus thus revealing the disavowal of ‘colonial diplomacies’ within official narratives of colonialism and dominant treatments of diplomacy. As I illustrate in the following sections, these diplomatic histories and historiographies usually speak of the micro-practices of colonialism and diplomacy as two distinct forms of knowledge or aesthetic projects. By eliding the complexities of colonial and diplomatic formations, they make it easy for one to proclaim a ‘new’ diplomacy at the moment of decolonization while remaining inattentive to the specters of colonialism that continue to haunt the postcolonial present (Mamdani 1984: 1048).

As I illustrated in the previous chapter, reading events like indirect rule in Uganda as colonial without considering their ‘diplomatic’ elements contributed to a moralized diplomatic history based on the idea that diplomacy in Africa begins with decolonization and Africa’s entry into the world of sovereign statehood. Such a conception of the diplomatic is informed by the assertion that nothing diplomatic takes place in the colonies given that the main character of diplomacy is the professionalization and institutionalization of relations. As such, there can be no diplomacy in the absence of centralized sovereign states, foreign policies, resident missions, modern forms of diplomatic discourse, verbal etiquette and other such paraphernalia (Watson 1982, Orwa 1994, Ndege 1979).<sup>29</sup> In short, diplomacy/politics is presented as that which occurs between states or state representatives. Elsewhere there might be relations of ‘faith, barbarisms, anarchies or the existential abyss,’ but not politics/diplomacy (Walker 1995:24). The extension of this mode of thought is that there is a standard and recognizable way of being diplomatic that is linked to official histories, writing practices and recognized philosophical orientations. Africans, in the all

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<sup>29</sup> The idea of diplomacy as a dialogue between states is theorized in Watson, A., (1982). A postcolonial version of the same idea of diplomacy as state practice is articulated by Orwa Katete ,(1994) while a more detailed treatment of postcolonial African diplomacy that ties it to both colonial and precolonial encounters between different groups is developed in Ndege (1979).

too familiar Hegelian formulation, have no history, no philosophy, and no civilization; therefore, they cannot be diplomatic or engaged in a ‘diplomatic’ manner unless they are translated into more familiar historical forms through processes that erase or subordinate their Africanness/ahistoricity/otherness (see Hegel 1994, Nandy 1995:44). True to the trope of, anachronistic space, civilizational absence and/or cultural degeneracy, African spaces, bodies, objects and mediation practices act as an alternative site for European self-knowledge and reassurance. Thus, it becomes increasingly important to engage the multiple mediation sites where humanity is invented, negated or negotiated’ not only with a view to pluralizing our conceptions of diplomacy, but also to reveal the different ways in which colonial formations are reproduced in the postcolonial present and their implications for everyday life in the postcolony.

## **2.1 Gifts and Blessings: Translation, Colonialism and Diplomatic Recognition**

To pursue, the ethico-political significance of relating the diplomatic *thing* to colonial *thingification*, we can consider the racial and colonial memories called up by the *Gifts & Blessings: the Textile Arts of Madagascar* exhibition.<sup>30</sup> Acting as a temporal embassy that brings together different times (or conceptions of time), the exhibition combines state diplomacy, museological knowledge, public exhibition of material culture and textual production to reveal how certain treatments of diplomatic objects and subjects enable colonial governance to emerge.

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<sup>30</sup> According to Césaire, the colonial encounter requires the reinvention of the colonized, the deliberate destruction of his/her past through discourses and practices that rob him/her of her subjectivity. For *Césaire*, colonization = thingification, The colonial process involves practices that dehumanized the colonized such that he/she is reduced to “an instrument of production” to serve the purpose of the colonizer. For more on thingification of colonized peoples, see Césaire (1972) .

Among the primary events that the exhibition and the collection of essays that accompanied it (*Objects as Envoys: Cloth, Imagery, and Diplomacy in Madagascar*) engages, is the 1886 gift exchange between Queen Ranavalona III of the Merina Kingdom and Grover Cleveland following his election to the US presidency. Attached to Queen Ranavalona III's congratulatory letter to the US president were a number of diplomatic gifts; two *Lamba akotofahana* (hand-woven silk textiles), a carved bone pin, a gold brooch, a silver chain and a small basket. As a reciprocal gesture of goodwill, President Cleveland sent an autographed photographic portrait of himself and his wife through John Campbell, the American consul in Madagascar who, in a letter dated November 4, 1887, went to great lengths to explain to the Merina court that this was 'a high honour and a favour seldom obtained from the President of this Great country' (Arnoldi 2002:103).

However, constrained by U.S. federal legislation prohibiting the 'reception' and 'personal use' of gifts from foreign rulers, President Cleveland, upon leaving office in 1889 transferred these gifts to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. Here, the 'diplomatic' significance of the gifts was minimized by a primary definition of the two textiles that shifted them from the category of luxury goods to be inserted into the system of 'international diplomatic gift exchange,' to that of ethnological type specimens representing the arts and industries of 'Madagascar' (Arnoldi 2002:102). In line with the relationship between museum coding, display and recognition of items and the peoples who present or are represented by them, the aforementioned coding practices led to the two silk textiles being listed in the museum catalogue as 'embroidered linen table clothes'. An erroneous classification based on the extension of 'familiar' western categories to aid in the understanding and managing of an unfamiliar



multivalent, multi-purpose item in a museum catalogue whose methodology requires a single index term to be assigned to each object (Arnoldi 2002:107).

Not only does the exhibition present a useful venue for thinking about the numerous representational sites and practices of knowledge, identity and truth production, the exhibition also acts as a meta-diplomatic ‘forum’ — a ‘place for confrontation, experimentation and debate’ on the meaning of diplomacy, Africanness and diplomacy in Africa (Lavine and Karp 1991: 3 ). Most significantly, the diplomatic encounters and memories that the exhibitions calls up make it possible for us to engage the processes through which Africans (and African objects) are presented as strange, yet knowable and ultimately manageable subjects while raising critical questions about the way diplomatic recognition is used to order, translate and partition different ways of sensing and making sense of the world.

Not only does the monological conception of the *diplomatic gift* at the Smithsonian empty both the *gift* [*Lamba akotofahana*] and the concept *diplomacy* of the varied histories, meanings, technologies [of the self] and genres of expression that constitute them. It also dislocates the act of Merina /Malagasy cloth making and ‘gift giving’ from its local meanings and contexts thus failing to relate this particular diplomatic gift to the broader state of diplomatic thought [Euro-American geopolitics, religious, colonial, elitist and racial concerns] on one hand and the complexity of elite and subaltern relations within Madagascar on the other.

Attentiveness to the racial, cultural and geopolitical biases characteristic of colonial relations make it difficult to disentangle the generous gestures by the US presidency and the Merina court

from the political and cultural forces that made them possible, the histories and sensibilities that they obscure, and the future diplomatic possibilities that they reveal or enable. For instance, the diplomatic gifts from the Merina Court and the multiple codes they enjoy reveal an awareness [on the part of the Malagasy] of France's colonial ambitions and Western civilizational discourses. Equipped with this knowledge of the Euro-American diplomatic imaginary, the Merina court had for a long time exchanged gifts with other European powers with the aim of emphasizing the high level of Merina 'civilization' by appealing to European aesthetic sensibilities and values (Fee 2002:67). Thus, the gifts from the queen were supposed to emphasize aesthetic sensibilities, values and 'manners' that enable the Merina court to tap into the discourse that presents diplomacy as a 'dialogue between states' and the Merina as a civilized society with the hope that the diplomatic norm of mutual recognition among sovereigns would prevent colonial incursions into Madagascar.

Evidently, the diplomatic gifts from the queen convey multiple meanings that exceed the official message of inter-national friendship that was used to code them. On one hand, the package can be read as a tactical move by the Merina court that draws on established regimes of recognition to resist French colonial advances by appealing to the United States to intervene or mediate in its favour. On the other hand, the gift was a strategic move that invented a diplomatic and governmental zone where the Merina court established and consolidated its position as the *recognized* and legitimate representative of the entire island and its inhabitants. The Malagasy/diplomatic subjectivity that emerged from these Merina repositionings conform to the modern geopolitical imaginary concerned with discourses on the possibilities and necessities within the sovereign state as opposed to counteracting claims concerned with necessities and

possibilities elsewhere (Walker 2006: 65). However, owing to a racialized regime of recognition that privileged ontology over strategy, France was able to colonize and govern Madagascar and its inhabitants in spite of Merina sovereign performance given that agreements with Africans were not considered to have a binding effect.

Between the exhibition's curatorial re-arrangements and the book's authorial/editorial collation, we are reminded of the multiple diplomatic meanings conveyed by the gift exchange, yet overlooked by museum coding and geopolitically-defined regimes of recognition. *From Gifts and Blessings* and *Objects as Envoys* it becomes apparent that the language of strategy, national interest and pragmatic instrumentalism that modern diplomacy is predicated upon is also an alibi for ontological investments within which other gods, bodies, objects, languages and ways of being-with-the-other are either excluded or translated to more familiar forms before being inserted into the dominant ways of thinking about diplomacy as second order subjects/objects.

## **2.2 The Gift of Pluralization**

By juxtaposing mediation practices from different times, places and traditions, the *Gifts and Blessings* exhibition pluralizes our conceptions of diplomacy and provokes us to look for objects, peoples and practices that the official diplomatic story and its colonial accomplice erases or overlooks. The exhibition's engagement with various modes of mediating estrangement illustrates how cloth giving creates and consolidates social and political relations between lovers, between the living and the dead [through *famadihana* shrouds used for reburial rituals], between subjects and the sovereign [through *Hasina* - a mystical force of primacy that bound and linked all beings in sacred stream] or between the sovereign and foreigners as a mark of enduring

friendship and connection to the Malagasy people ( Bloch 1986). While these meanings are alluded to in the 1886 diplomatic gift exchange, colonial trivialization of meanings and lives of the colonized made it impossible for the Merina court to have enduring friendship with the Western governments with which it exchanged diplomatic gifts.

On a different register, the pluralization of diplomacy through engagement with diplomacies that exist both inside and outside the exhibition's 'Queen's room' creates a space for encounter with the ambiguous vernacular mediation practices of Merina and non-Merina groups. As we move between the different rooms, the exhibition's enacts a 'poetics of space' that enables us to encounter different diplomatic subjects and objects. From contemporary and historical textile arts to the funerary room (where Merina and Northern Botsileo *Famadihana* shrouds and Southern Tandroy gifts of cloth to the dead are juxtaposed) and finally we move to the activity room where one encounters images and fragments of Madagascar's geography, animals, language and music (including the work of Tin Pan Alley poet/songwriter Andriamanantena Razafinkarefo – better known as Andy Razaf).<sup>31</sup>

Such an expanded diplomatic space provokes us to think about a diplomacy and diplomatic history of Madagascar that includes the mediation practices of marginalized groups and persons who do not fit into the Merina mediated idea of Malagasy diplomacy. By pointing to other times, peoples and exchanges, the exhibition illustrated how Madagascar, far from being 'a world apart', is more complex and caught up in world affairs than it is often thought to be. For

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<sup>31</sup> See *Gifts and Blessings*, Activity Room web page, Andy Razaf :From Madagascar to Tin Pan Alley <http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/malagasy/razaf.html>

example, a consideration of non-royal diplomatic engagements leads to an appreciation of the diplomatic practices by groups like the Karambola. In contrast to most Malagasy peoples who either identified as loyal 'royal followers' or, alternatively rejected symbols of monarchy, the Kerambola utilized ambivalence and mobility to subvert royal ritual, to benefit from royal power without being subjected to it and to relate to foreigners without necessarily being converted to their regime of recognition or seeking to convert the foreigners into something familiar (see Middleton 2000). Similar complex accounts of mediating estrangement are provided by diasporic groups (Bohra and Karana in Madagascar, Zarabs and Sinwa in Réunion and Mauritius) whose relations, based on friendship, family history, economic interests and political solidarity help to call up memories of the Indian ocean slave trade, religious persecutions, indentured labour that maps exchanges that do not fit into state sanctioned diplomatic histories (Vergès 2003:250).

As we engage the multiple forms of estrangement that arise from colonial and postcolonial relations, it becomes clear that colonialism makes the colonized 'self strange to itself' by instituting, institutionalizing and then proliferating or erasing sites of diplomatic recognition (Godzich 1987 :155-6). That is, in the process of creating a world of colonial states and subjected populations, colonialism also inculcates a colonial state of mind and state of being that demands new sites and ways of mediating estrangement.

In his *Prospero and Caliban: the Psychology of Colonization*, Octave Mannoni (1956/1990) provides a relevant albeit problematic theoretical circumvention of analyses of colonial and diplomatic relations that privilege statecraft, abstraction and civilizational discourses in Madagascar. Drawing upon theoretical insights from psychoanalysis, Mannoni renders colonial relations in terms of a pair of reciprocal neuroses; the 'dependency complex' (*Caliban Complex*)

for the colonized and an ‘inferiority complex’ (*Prospero Complex*) for the colonizer. Accordingly, he identifies multiple sites of contact and estrangement — the psyche, the family, the dead, dreams, nationalist narratives — which move colonial and diplomatic critique from a discourse that focuses on leaders and civilization abstraction to one that engages everyday mediation practices and forms of estrangement. According to Mannoni, we need to consider non-civilizational and non-elitist encounters given that:

Civilization is necessarily an abstraction, contact is made, not between abstractions, but between real, live human beings, and the closest contact usually occurs at the most undesirable level. When a native chief meets a European leader, the psychological impact is less than when native laborers work under the European foreman. The leaders are the refined specimen of the two cultures, but the value of their encounters is lost in the ceremonial niceties which appeal to what might be called the political imagination but do not help in bringing adjustments at the level of little everyday affairs where the real work of mutual adaptation must take place (Mannoni 1999:24).

While Mannoni’s analysis of colonial relations has been faulted by Fanon and others, the above critique of abstraction and civilizational discourses illustrates that colonial estrangement and mediation practices take place at the level of everyday life, the unconscious and collective encounters. In so doing, Mannoni points to everyday diplomatic possibilities and sites of colonial erasure or imposition of meaning that exist outside [both western and non-western] elite practices.<sup>32</sup> In short, Mannoni illustrates that the mediation of estrangement is both an internal and external process of self scripting. The psychoanalytic and materialist sites of estrangement

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<sup>32</sup> By departing from elite conceptions of diplomacy, Mannoni makes it possible for us to imagine subaltern diplomacies something akin to the work of Subaltern theorists/ historiographers like Ranajit Guha, (See Guha R., 2000 : 1-7)

that he engages go forth to illustrate that diplomacy is as much a dialogue between states as it is an encounter between states of mind, states of being and modes of becoming— an encounter between human beings and beings in general.

Not only does such a problematization and pluralization of diplomacy [as the mediation of estrangement] illustrate how “colonialist de-personalization alienates the idea of Man” that modern diplomacy draws upon, it also presents us with numerous times, spaces, objects and bodies that modern diplomacy tends to alienate as it narrates and reproduces itself through macropolitical narratives of the state, proprietary codes and IR based theoretical exegeses (Bhabha 1994:114). Therefore, the numerous possibilities for escape and capture in the postcolony that emerge from postcolonial and diplomatic criticism reveal the aporetic character of our colonial past and the ambiguous character of our postcolonial entanglements.

In their different ways, the above explorations illustrate that the mediation of estrangement is always already mediated. They provoke ‘us’ to pursue a more patient reading of postcolonial African diplomacies by carrying out a critique of the habits of mediation and maps of estrangement made possible by calling up the familiar notions of Africanness , the human, peace or the state as the determinants of diplomatic possibilities. With this in mind, the rethinking of diplomatic theory, or rather various versions of *the diplomatic*, becomes a practice where both the Other and the Self become strange, a site to be known or known anew (Constantinou 2006:352). A site that constantly disturbs our idea of *the diplomatic* ,history, theory ,practice and ultimately ‘ourselves’.

### **2.3 Homo-diplomacies: Colonialism as Diplomatic Mancraft**

In order to circumvent the colonial vision of the world and the concept of diplomacy that accompanies it, we can turn to a number of ‘non-professional, non-technical and experimental diplomacies’ that have collectively been referred to as *homo-diplomacies* — emissaries of humanity (see Constantinou 2006). Such a treatment of diplomacy takes seriously the human element of diplomacy as it is enacted in everyday and non-professional settings. Not only does a homo-diplomatic ethos extend the normalized spaces of diplomatic action by looking at how the ‘knowledge of the Self’ is a ‘more reflective means of dealing with and transforming relations with Others’, it also provides a means of engaging the ‘tensions and contradictions of empire’ by revealing and interrogating the discourses on humanity that reverse the homo-diplomatic ethics of encounter by abjecting and dominating the other as a means of constructing a self-assured and unambiguous idea of the self (Ibid).

Such a treatment of diplomacy effectively illustrates how diplomatic theory (as a technique of the self) is often translated into technologies of colonial governance and governmentality. To reveal the diplomatic co-presences that empire invents or erases from the official diplomatic archives that it privileges, we can attend to the different ways in which the colonized person’s theoretical voice is silenced and his/her body transformed into a machine-animal-man or some other object of pain, service or desire through discourses and practices that determined who, what and in what form one was to be recognized as human or as a diplomatic subject/object (Comaroff 1989:662).



According to Achille Mbembe, these practices of colonial *commandment* often translate and ‘domesticate’ the African by turning him/her into something familiar while his/her body ‘in its profanity,’ is incorporated into the world of colonial things (Mbembe 2001:46). While the simultaneous production of ‘diplomatic man’ and the colonial ‘thing’ takes various forms, it is for the most part predicated upon the imposition of European meanings and values on Africans and other colonized peoples through a refusal to negotiate with them or involvement in negotiations based on the colonizer’s terms. Ultimately, these discourses and practices seek to negate the claims to humanity or diplomatic viability of Africans. The resultant matrix of diplomatic normalities and exceptions are then used to map where and when the diplomatic norm could be suspended and by whom. That is, they establish a colonial regime of diplomatic recognition which also serves as regime of colonial governance and governmentality.

As the histories of European colonialism in Africa reveal, the colonial regimes of recognition meant that groups that were hitherto the subject of ‘foreign relations’ in a ‘diplomatic’ sense (complete with its protocols, privileges and immunities), became the subject of ‘domestic’ yet discriminatory colonial governance. However, it is important to note that colonial rhetoric on what it meant to be European, diplomatic, African or human was riddled with contradictions and constantly sought meanings on which to anchor the desire to know, reorganize and dominate the colonized. Not only did such colonial contradictions alter how one thought about the categories of the foreign and the domestic, friend and enemy, the culturally proper and the improper, they also transformed your everyday colonialist into some form of diplomatic subject complete with the sliding ‘credentials’ required for the colonial enterprise. Likewise, the category of the native was invented and the ‘diplomatic’ capacities of the colonized (their plenipotentiaries included)

erased, co-opted or trivialized thus making way for new diplomatic forms appropriate for the pursuit of colonial objectives.

As illustrated by the Malagasy case above, the organization, cultivation and design characteristic of the colonial experiences, whether successful or not, ‘have all tended to organize and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs’ (Mudimbe 1988:14-15). Through these colonial inventions of Africa, new forms of diplomatic recognition were developed to buttress and reproduce the colonial enterprise and its attendant archiving and reorganization practices. For example, religious missionary practices like Giovanni E. Romano’s mission to the Congo (1645 to 1654) exemplified a homo-diplomatic desire to promote the idea of a shared humanity by “overcoming Satan's presence in the African vigna della Christianita (field of Christianity)”.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the desire to know and secure the figure of the human through epistemologically oriented projects like Leopold II’s Geographical Conference of Brussels (1876) contributed to a quest for authoritative knowledge about the African which was conventionalized and then fixed as a factual basis for classification, theorization, organization and most important, managing the non-European other (Appadurai 1996:115, Ludden 1993:250).<sup>34</sup> These diplomatic discourses developed alongside the idea that Africa was the marker of “absolute otherness”—an Other that could be annihilated, converted or abused with impunity. Accordingly, Africans were accorded a lesser value based on strict notions of the relationship between the European ‘original’ [England, France, Portugal] and the colonial ‘copy’

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<sup>33</sup> For more on Romano’s mission to the Congo, see Mudimbe, V.Y, (1988), *The invention of Africa* p. 62-65

<sup>34</sup> The empiricist epistemology that works to produce authoritative knowledge about the European Self and the colonized other or its postcolonial version where maps, census and constitutions are used to produce ethnic groups and distribute privileges see Appadurai A., (1996: 115) and Ludden D., (1993: p250)

[Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone Africa] (Bassnett and Trivedi 1998:4).<sup>35</sup> There were also instances where the discourse on African otherness was erased in favor of a discourse on universal sameness, care or progress. Here, African subjects and objects were valued and evaluated based on their cultural and physiological deviation from the dominant European standard that they were seen to be part of albeit in a degenerate or incomplete form.<sup>36</sup> The racially and geopolitically coded regime of recognition that accrued from these colonial translation and interpretive practices determined who was privileged and immune in the colony, who was to be transformed and by what means. As illustrated by various genealogies of diplomacy, much like colonialism, diplomacy has deployed the mechanics of inscription, arrangement, archival work and authentication in order to craft, double and translate peoples, objects and meaning. Given its autopoietic and allopoietic capacities, diplomacy becomes a useful site for interrogating claims to truth, essence and originality as it generates identity/difference which it then regulates through regimes of recognition.

#### **2.4. Figuring the Diplomatic Body**

Whereas the macropolitical renditions of the mediation of estrangement in colonial Africa contributed to colonial state governance and institutionalized forms of diplomatic recognition that fixed what it meant to be a diplomatic subject, there were a number of non-geopolitical mediation practices in which individuals and collectivities encountered each other through affective exchanges that disturbed colonial policy frames and the idea of diplomacy it privileged.

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<sup>35</sup> For the value judgments about the equivalence between the original and the copy, see Bassnett S., and Trivedi H, (1998:4)

<sup>36</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari's elaborate treatment of faciality in the section 'Year Zero: Faciality' in Deleuze G., and Guattari F., (1987: 167-191)

Attentiveness to the more ambiguous and embodied idea of the diplomatic encounter, the ‘diplomatic body,’ and diplomatic subjectivity revamps the scope of colonial and diplomatic archival frames by engaging practices like sex, gastronomy, religious conversion and various sites of their enactment. Accordingly, language handbooks, housekeeping and conduct manuals, museum catalogues, travelogues, oathing practices, rumors and medical guides from the colonies come to share a space with ‘diplomatic’ manuals and dispatches, ‘classified state papers, court proceedings, and commission reports’ as the scope of colonial and diplomatic cultures is redefined and rethought (Stoller 2002: 100).

By invoking the embodied rather than abstract self, our conception of the ‘diplomatic body’ and the sites where diplomatic encounters take place is pluralized thus making it possible for us to raise questions about the racial and gendered aspects of modern diplomatic relations.<sup>37</sup> For instance, attentiveness to the *homo-diplomatic* significance of the female body enables us to stage a diplomatic encounter with embattled lives and the racialized, sexualized and colonized bodies like that of Saartje Bartmann (the so called Hottentot Venus) which are often abjected from dominant readings of diplomacy. Even though the body of the colonized subject plays a significant role in cultivating or consolidating dominant ideas of the diplomatic self by providing a point of reference for the definition of the human and the proper, the idea of the diplomatic body or the human diplomatic subject that circulates within IR discourse is only possible through the disavowal of colonial bodies, their pains and the desires they provoke.

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<sup>37</sup> Within the convention of diplomacy as a state practice, the diplomatic corps is that corporate body of diplomats from all states resident in at one post and serves the purpose of fostering diplomatic standards, lobbies for the defense of diplomatic privileges and immunities among other collective/professional interests See Berridge G.R., (2004)

## 2.5 Saartje Bartmann: Re-membering and Racing the Diplomatic Body

Between freak-show performance, scientific knowledge and museum exhibition, Saartje Bartmann's body/figure (more so her buttocks, hips and genitalia) served as a site for popular entertainment, 'diplomatic' ceremonial, confirmation of royal and imperial power and ultimately scientific inquiry into the hierarchies of man based on physiological and aesthetic differences. In line with the multiple mediatory roles she played, Bartmann reveals the colonialism-diplomacy inter-text through the 'unofficial' and experimental diplomacy of the everyday that she embodies.

At a minimum, Bartmann's body's circulation within multiple spaces reveals how colonial *homo-diplomatic* ventures pursued the 'knowledge and control of the Other' as a means of 'knowledge of the Self' (Constantinou 2006:352). The internal mediation and forms of sameness/otherness that accrue from parading Bartmann's body are worth mentioning. At one level, Bartmann's body was incorporated into an already elaborate idea of the diplomatic self predicated on popular European discourses on beauty. Such an aesthetico-anthropological discourse is well captured in the diplomatic standards set by the likes of the Princess of Zerbst (mother to the Empress Catherine of Russia) who advises Frederick the Great to 'choose as his ambassador to St.Petersburg a handsome young man with *good complexion*' (see Nicolson 1968). At the same time, the parading of Bartmann's body and the various discourses around it sheds light on the diplomatic significance of other African 'venus' figures who appeared as entertainment items in Duchess du Barry in 1829 Parisian ball and at a fair in Hyde Park on the Coronation Day of Queen Victoria in 1838. In such cases, the body of the colonized woman

acted as a site of popular entertainment, sovereign performance and racialized reassurance of the self through its presentation of different bodies as evidence of ‘hierarchies of man.’

Writing about the banality of figures like Bartmann within the colonial imaginary, Sadia Qureshi (2004) calls for the ‘contextualization and recapturing’ of Bartmann’s agency’ in order for us to have a more ‘legitimate basis for her cultural status’ as a representative of colonized peoples’ experiences. As Qureshi puts it:

In many ways, Sara Bartmann is not an unusual woman, despite all the attention she has inspired. Throughout her life, processes can be identified that contributed to her objectification, allowed her trade as a human commodity, underlay her exhibition as a curiosity, aroused scientific interest, and reified her as a museum artefact. None of these events is in itself exceptional in the sense that they occur only in her tale. Rather, a historicization of her collection and display embeds her within a range of related contexts (Qureshi 2004:249)

For Qureshi, the spatio-temporal dimensions of Bartmann’s exhibition are significant. For example, her exhibition in “Piccadilly relates her to the human curiosities upon display in the vicinity, from obese giants to emaciated dwarves” thus offering a glimpse into the conventions and discourses on the body of the Victorian era (ibid). Similarly, the historical period in which the exhibition took place was characterized by the presence of abolitionists in London thus complicating the discourses surrounding the popular reception of her exhibition. Finally, Qureshi provides a perspective on ‘the museological context’ of Bartmann’s display by highlighting the ‘artefactual’ significance of her body and its implications for diplomatic thought given that the

display takes place ‘within an ethnographic museum’ in which ‘ethnographic objects serve as tangible metonymic fragments of foreign cultures’ (Qureshi 2004:249).

In death, Bartmann’s body became the subject of General George Cuvier’s racialized scientific inquiry into her human status thus investing it with further diplomatic and colonial significance. That is, as an ‘excessive’ body, Bartmann’s remains were considered to specimen/model upon which scientific generalizations could be based thus providing a site where the knowledge of the non-European other reinforced prevailing notions of the European self. As recently as the early 1980s, Bartmann’s dissected genitalia, along with her skeleton and brain was still exhibited at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. As such, the museum acts as a colonial heterotopia where one could consume in an unproblematic manner the atrocities and desires of a colonial past without the guilt of having participated in the colonial process. However, a more critical reading presents the exhibition as a constant reminder of the violent *homo-diplomatic* venture and the colonial forces that made it possible to stage, cage and exhibit non-European others in the past and their continuation in the postcolonial present (see Gould 1985, Hobson 2003, Mitter 2000).<sup>38</sup>

In 1995, following the ANC’s victory and the formal end of apartheid in South Africa, Bartmann’s diplomatic plane of operation shifts again when the Griqua National Conference began raising the issue of the repatriation of her remains with president Nelson Mandela (Bredekamp 2006). The quest for the return of Bartmann’s remains to South Africa for a humane burial was also used to highlight the present position of indigenous peoples like the Griqua and Khoe-San, the material and spiritual violations that they suffered in the past, and

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<sup>38</sup> See Gould, S. J. (1985: pp. 291-305) Also see Hobson J., (2003), For the relationship between figure of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ and construction of beauty in the West, see Mitter P.,(2000: 35-50 )

“their need for recognition, constitutional accommodation and land restitution” in the post-apartheid era (Besten 2006:275). As a result of the GNC’s political claims, the repatriation of Bartmann’s remains became part of a diplomatic ‘dialogue between states’ characterized by the ‘charged political row between the French and South African governments’ and a summit diplomatic agenda involving a personal request from President Nelson Mandela to successive French presidents; first François Mitterand, and subsequently to Jacques Chirac.

Following Mandela’s request, the return of Bartmann’s remains became part of a multi-track diplomatic agenda characterized by petitions from the National Council of the Khoisan Consultative Conference (NKOK) and the unsuccessful negotiations between Professor Philip Tobias from the University of the Witwatersrand and Dr Henry de Lumley, the Director of the Museum of Man and the National Museum of Natural History in Paris (ibid). Citing the museum’s lack of legal powers to de-accession the remains, Bartmann’s case was turned over to the French parliament where case specific provisions for the de-accession were to be enacted. Interestingly enough, the French Senator Nicolas About included a French translation of Diana Ferrus’ (1998) poetic tribute to Sarah Bartmann in his January 22, 2002 submission to the French parliament to apply the Bio-ethics law to the Bartmann case (Bredenkamp 2006: 28).

It is claimed that Ferrus’ poetic intervention/mediation played a key role in the French government’s decision to change its position on the repatriation of Bartmann’s remains. Most significantly, the poem humanizes Bartmann and evokes a number of senses that her ‘public exhibition’ and concealed storage in Europe denied her. Unlike the historical reality of a woman enslaved and turned into a spectacle — an object of the knowing look and the ‘knowledgeable’



gaze — Ferrus’ poem “offers to take Sara Bartmann home” where she is free to roam the veld and partake of that which her position in Europe has denied her. As such, the poem’s persona has a relationship with Bartmann which is not based on objectification and public inscription. In contrast to popular treatments of Bartmann as a sight and site of desire or ‘positivist’ scientific investigation, Ferrus’ Bartmann is an affective being, one who, in an act of reciprocity, brings peace to her poetic interlocutor as she derives the same from her (see Gqola 2008):

I’ve come to take you home –  
home, remember the veld?  
the lush green grass beneath the big oak trees  
the air is cool there and the sun does not burn.  
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,  
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,  
the proteas stand in yellow and white  
and the water in the stream chuckle sing-songs  
as it hobbles along over little stones. I have come to wretch you away –  
away from the poking eyes  
of the man-made monster  
who lives in the dark  
with his clutches of imperialism  
who dissects your body bit by bit  
who likens your soul to that of Satan  
and declares himself the ultimate god! I have come to soothe your heavy heart  
[...] I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,  
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,  
the proteas stand in yellow and white –  
I have come to take you home  
where I will sing for you  
for you have brought me peace (Ferrus 1998/2010: 213-214).

It is important to note that the negotiation agenda and parties to the negotiation on Bartmann's repatriation were already mediated by histories, institutions and dispositions that made the politics of return a site of overlapping and sometimes conflicting meanings and discursive practices. This contestation is apparent when one pays attention to the scientific and aesthetic *dispositif* that enabled, perpetuated and was eventually involved in negotiations to retrieve Bartmann's remains from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Writing about the South African memory complex, Ciraj Rassool notes that some of the symbolism, institutions and personalities surrounding the repatriation of Bartmann "obscured wider legacies of gendered racial science in South Africa" (Rassool 2011: 3-4). Zeroing in on the mediatory role of Professor Philip Tobias, Rassool goes on to point out that:

It is indeed ironic that Phillip Tobias featured prominently in these processes, as the appointed negotiator, part of the Sara Bartmann reception committee as well as member of the Reference Group. The reference group itself was composed of a mix of academics, human rights and gender commission representatives, members of government and Khoesan representatives. Tobias had been a protégé of physical anthropologist and racial scientist Raymond Dart...building on Dart's legacy, Tobias was positioned as the director, mentor and facilitator of the South African field of palaeoanthropology, which continued to feed South Africa's need for a scientized modernity after apartheid...For Tobias – and for the discourse – palaeoanthropology and anatomical study were now the disciplines of the long-dead ancestors of South Africans, Africans and indeed, of all people, and were no longer framed by typology and the classification and comparison of the fossil record with the 'living fossils' of primitive races (ibid).

Upon repatriation, the political codings and diplomatic credentials of Bartmann's remains are multiplied through an Afro-centric historicist narrative and human rights discourse that inserted her into the "public rituals of the constitution of the post-apartheid nation," not only as "our great Foremother," who had experienced "the great and enduring disgraces of Western civilization" but also as a "human rights icon" adequate to the new political dispensation in South Africa ( Rassool 2011:6). In a speech given at Bartmann's funeral on 9 August 2002, Thabo Mbeki, the then South African president offers some useful homo-diplomatic reflections that raise useful questions about the forms of gendered and racial estrangement characteristic of colonial encounters and their reproduction in the postcolonial present (Qureshi 2004, Mbeki 2002).

According to Mbeki, the occasion of Bartmann's funeral 'can never be a solemn ceremony in which we bury her remains and bury the truth.' Not only does Bartmann's 'diplomatic funeral' act as a testament to "the particular place attributed to African women" by those who gave themselves the responsibility of a civilizing mission based on their conceptions of themselves as "man par excellence," the funeral also acts as an occasion to "summon the courage to speak the naked but healing truth" that speaks to the past and the present "with the knowledge that women have borne the brunt of the oppressive and exploitative system of colonial and apartheid domination" in the past and continue to carry "the burden of poverty" while being exposed to "unacceptable violence and abuse" today (see Mbeki 2002).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mbeki T. *Presidential Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann, 9 August 2002*, available on the web at <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2002/mbek0809.htm> For elaborate treatment of the diplomatic funeral see Berridge G.R., (2007), 'Diplomacy After Death: The Rise of the Working Funeral,' *Diplomacy & Statecraft* Vol. 4, Is. 2, 2007p. 217-234

Noting the significance of Bartmann's story for the post-apartheid reconciliation agenda, Mbeki went on to designate Sarah Bartmann's 'final resting place' at Hankey, Kouga Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province as a National Heritage Site. Mbeki's reason for moving for the creation of a National Heritage site are made explicit in his narration of Bartmann, South Africa and Africa's encounter with the West.

According to Mbeki:

The story of Sarah Bartmann is the story of the African people of our country in all their echelons. It is a story of the loss of our ancient freedom. It is a story of our dispossession of the land and the means that gave us an independent livelihood. It is a story of our reduction to the status of objects that could be owned, used and disposed of by others, who claimed for themselves a manifest destiny "to run the empire of the globe"...It is an account of how it came about that we ended up being defined as a people without a past, except a past of barbarism, who had no capacity to think, who had no culture, no value system to speak of, and nothing to contribute to human civilization - people with no names and no identity, who had to be defined by he who was "man par excellence", and described by another French thinker, Diderot, as "always vicious ... mostly inclined to lasciviousness, vengeance, theft and lies" (Mbeki 2002).

However, accorded such iconic value, Bartmann's body 'does not rest'. It continues to circulate as part of a public diplomatic discourse and ritual where the figure of Bartmann is mobilized for national and homo-diplomatic edification. The multiple uses of this 'diplomatic body' are well captured by the Republic of South Africa's Government Gazette No. 30987, of 25 April 2008. In this notice, the South African Heritage Resources declares that Bartmann's burial 'site has

spiritual, cultural, social, and historical significance' (SAHRA 2008). The SAHRA notice, much like Mbeki's burial speech, summons the "treatment of Sarah Bartmann during her life and after her death" to engage the question of "dispossession, sadness and loss of dignity, culture, community, language and life" and claims that these are the symptoms of the inhumanity of people. In both cases, the return and burial of Bartmann was seen as an opportunity to look to the atrocities of the past in order to imagine a different future for the South African nation and humanity as a whole. Thus, Bartmann's travelling body, in all its excessiveness becomes a "symbol to all South Africans and the world to strive towards recognizing past injustices to Khoi-San people, to women and vulnerable communities and to work towards building a nation that shows respect to human life, human rights and human dignity" (SAHRA 2008). More specifically, and in line with his fidelities to an African Renaissance and his Truth and Reconciliation prerogatives, Mbeki sees the story of Bartmann as a provocation to "eradicate the legacy of apartheid and colonialism in all its manifestations" so as to "build a truly non-racial society in which black and white shall be brother and sister" (Mbeki 2002) .A society where people "join in a determined and sustained effort to ensure respect for the dignity of the women of our country, gender equality and women's emancipation" (Ibid) .

## **2.6 Diplomatic Bones: Excavating Postcolonial Ambiguities**

'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.'

L. P. Hartley—*The Go-Between*

The diplomacy of death, objectification and public inscription articulated by the exhibition of Sartje Bartmann's 'remains' at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and the calls for justice during her funeral raises many interesting issues, but especially relevant here is the manner in which it

summons non-professional diplomacies in order to pluralize our conception of diplomatic bodies. The ethical questions raised by the ceremonial and poetic treatment of Bartmann's body point to a diplomacy that is concerned with more than geopolitical and legal issues. However, the efforts to rehumanize Bartmann point to a postcolonial aporia given that numerous invocations of Bartmann's image and name (in academic essays, documentary film, NGOs and art installations) point to the impossibility of privatization and retreat from public inscription for a figure whose abjection and objectification took the form of public spectacle. For instance, the appropriation of her image its instrumentalization through a national memorial complex forecloses the possibilities of mediation projects that assign alternative meanings and value to colonialism's dead.

As illustrated in the engagement with 'objects as envoys' in the case of the two *Lamba akotofahana* at the Smithsonian, an appreciation of the diplomatic significance of the bodies and lives that colonialism objectified and abjected helps us interrogate the ontological and 'historical' suppositions that inform modern diplomacy and its colonial correlates. However, it is equally important to engage the ethics of appropriation and translation that codes the summoning of the past in order to deal with the present. Rather than maintaining a moralistic fidelity to those Truths that do not allow the dead to acquire meanings that exceed the recognized regimes of intelligibility, it would be useful to engage the numerous ways in which these diplomatic 'recallings' can reveal colonial violence in the past and the pitfalls of national consciousness in the present.

If anything, the dead as mediators of estrangement and the summoning of the victims of colonial violence can act as an impetus for dis-identification with dominant conceptions of the self thus contributing to an ethically oriented critique of the present. A case in point is Zimbabwe's politics of heritage and commemoration which presents an interesting scene for the critique of both past and present forms of violence given that its attempts to revisit colonial violence often reveals the violence of the postcolonial state. In an elaborate reading of the "identification, reburial, ritual cleansing and memorialization of the human remains of the liberation war dead" within Zimbabwe and across its borders (Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, Angola and Tanzania), Joost Fontein explores the "ambivalent agency of bones as both *persons* and *objects*" and uses these insights to interrogate the relationship of bones to ZANU PF's rhetoric of "patriotic history" (Fontein 2009).

Fontein's engagement with the way bones mediate estrangement in Zimbabwe serves as an exemplar of the deprofessionalization of diplomacy through recourse to memory and mytho-diplomatic practices like the 'bringing home' mortuary rituals ( *umbuyiso* among the Ndebele and *kugadzira* or *kurova guva* among the Shona) where the "spirit of the deceased is brought back into the family home a year or more after death, through actual reburial of remains or merely the symbolic return of soil from graves" (Fontein 2009:14). Writing about the significance of *umbuyiso* ceremonies, Terence Ranger (2004) notes that the ritual was the "key testimony of a dignified death" and "forms the basis of Ndebele religion" (Ranger 2004:114). During the colonial era, it became a site of social contestation and cultural regeneration as the Christianized Ndebele left the missionary led churches (which prohibited *umbuyiso*) and joined Ethiopianist or other African independent churches that performed *umbuyiso* rites. By the 1950's, "Ndebele

tradition had become for nationalists a symbol of the African heritage as a whole and *umbuyiso* rites were carried out for well-known men, whether 'Ndebele' or not" (Ranger 2004:114).

Today, popular forms of the politics of the dead seek to go beyond the "objectifying" effects of professional practices (e.g. archaeology, forensic science and heritage management) as marginalized communities, kin and the dead themselves demand "for the restoration of sacred sites or for the return of human remains" (Fontein 2009:4). The 'plurivocality' and ambivalence of bones and the dead in general is highlighted by the way different bones are valued and evaluated and their implication for identities and the material conditions of existence of different groups (Fontein 2009:4). For instance, bones are used for material and identity fixing purposes through bone-mediated claims to "ancestral ties to land occupied and resettled in the context of recent land reform" which in many ways militates against the ZANUPF nationalist memory that uses the bones as evidence of liberation war veteran entitlement to land in postcolonial Zimbabwe (ibid).

But bones also tell a different story, one that confounds and politicizes the commemorative moment. For example, the difficulty in establishing who specific bones belonged to as a result of the burial of the dead in anonymous graves where "guerrillas, Rhodesian soldiers, and auxiliary government forces" were all mixed-up led to a moralizing discourse about 'good and bad bones' and the need to distinguish between 'heroic and fascist bones'(Fontein 2009:20). And most significantly, Fontein foregrounds the diplomatic possibilities of bones to do more than act as '*representations of the past*' given that they have what he calls an '*emotive materiality* as human



substance’ and an ‘*affective presence* as dead persons or spirits or subjects that continue to make demands on society’ (ibid).

The representative, emotive materiality and affective presence of bones in the postcolonial Zimbabwean context manifests itself in the resurfacing of ‘wrong bones’ that reveal the postcolonial state’s violence against its own people in the distant and not too distant past. As Fontein aptly puts it:

But in terms of the ‘wrong’ bones, much more problematic for the government has been the resurfacing of the bones of victims of the *gukurahundi* massacres in Matabeleland in the 1980s. These other ‘wrong’ bones could easily amount to a profound challenge to the ruling party’s efforts to present a particular and narrow version of the violent struggles that followed independence in 1980. Although the efforts ... in Matabeleland in the 1990s to promote the commemoration of other, silenced histories, were thwarted, the bones of the *gukurahundi* victims like those of the liberation war dead, keep on resurfacing from shallow individual and mass graves and abandoned mines in Matabeleland and across the country – confronting and challenging the efforts of the state to control representations of the past, and straining the precarious unity of former ZAPU and ZANU factions in ZANU PF (Fontein 2009:20).

At a minimum, Fontein’s treatment of mediative capacity of bones problematizes the postcolonial moment. It illustrates that what may appear to be a site for the contestation of colonial rationalities and sensibilities is a heterogeneous and contradictory site. A site of

simultaneous liberation and oppression that calls for a consideration of the multiplicity of ‘postcolonial’ conditions and with it postcolonial diplomacies.

## **2.7 Conclusion: Abusive Fidelities: Negotiation of the Negation**

In the guise of a conclusion, a few remarks are necessary, not by the way of apology or argumentation but for the sake of foregrounding the diplomatic through meta-statements that tease out an ethic appropriate to the above meta-diplomatic (ad)venture. First, the above explorations acknowledge the different ways in which imperial archives, exhibitions, colonial desires, violence and habits continue to mediate or haunt postcolonial diplomatic realities. As illustrated by Appiah’s statement in the epigraph above, the mediation of postcolonial realities is entangled with capitalism, colonial ruins, violence, privilege and desire. Thus, an additional challenge arises for the postcolonial diplomat/critic given that “ideologies of imperialism and critiques of imperialism” tend to “share the same historicist premises” even where their stated objectives are different (Young 2004:2).

Operating within this problematic space, the postcolonial diplomat/ theorist has to find a way of calling the place of the mediator into question while engaging both the promise of newness and colonial specters in the postcolony. These contradictions unfold against the backdrop of a discourse that has historically construed colonized populations as degenerate types and find their charge through current representations that seek to undo these myths while installing their own myths — sometimes violently.<sup>40</sup> How are we to proceed? What (dis)position, if any, is desirable for the postcolonial critic and/as diplomatic theorist?

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<sup>40</sup> For a similar interrogation of the position of the investigator/mediator, see Spivak Gayatri C., (1992:. 66 – 111)

While diplomatists have for a long time drawn their ethical insights from representational rituals of mediation like that articulated by Henry Wotton (1568-1639), the English diplomat and poet who encourages the diplomat to exercise an unquestioning fidelity to the homeland; ‘*an ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country*’, a different ethic, one predicated on an abusive fidelity to the homeland and the familiar is articulated by Wole Soyinka when he reminds us that ‘*criticism, like charity, starts at home.*’<sup>41</sup>

The ethic of critique of the present , ourselves and ‘our homes’ that Soyinka encourages pluralizes and problematizes ‘our’ lived experiences and supplies useful ways of reflecting on the postcolonial condition. Rather than present the question and object of diplomacy as already settled, and African identities and received moralities as perfect, it presents us with an idea of Africa that is to be subjected to constant evaluation (by Africans themselves). The diplomacy attuned to this mode of critique engages multiple mediation practices and sites of estrangement. It is a diplomacy that has more to do with how ‘we’ relate to beings in general than how we relate to human beings or how nation-states and their official representatives relate to each other (see Constantinou 1996).

Such a treatment of diplomacy undoes the disciplinary nuptials and forms of professionalization that tie diplomacy’s theorization and history to the discipline of IR. It allows us to venture into graves and museum cabinets to highlight the violence of practices that seek to abstract diplomatic subjects from their social, political and economic placements. Such an ethic encourages engagement with ‘un-stated’ diplomacies and unrecognized mediation practices.

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<sup>41</sup> Soyinka W. quoted in Gates H.L , (2008) The Future of Africa: Soyinka and Gates, *The Root*, October 23, 2008 available on the web at <http://www.theroot.com/views/future-africa-soyinka-and-gates>

Diplomacies that have been and continue to be jumped over, erased, or trivialized by forms of recognition whose roots lie in colonial and statist forms of knowledge and identification.

To the charge that I am making ‘everything’ potentially diplomatic, my response is a simple one; not quite, but why not? Hasn’t the pluralization of the sites of *the political* contributed to a richer engagement with practices, peoples and things that were previously considered apolitical? Didn’t the same happen with the opening up of *cultural* inquiry? The point of departure/ entry for the different diplomatic contexts that I treat above are twofold: first, diplomacy is inextricably tied to the ‘mediation of estrangement.’ Second, *the diplomatic* is produced by and reproduces the political. In short, diplomacy is that which contributes to the affirmation, disturbance, creation or extension of the political. If politics engages the ability to have intelligible ‘speech,’ diplomacy engages the terms and modes of proper, translational or coded speech. Where politics and the political is about friend/enemy distinctions, public/private and self/other partitions, or about dispositions towards strangers, the diplomatic either consolidates or disturbs these distinctions by calling up mediation practices that provoke co-habitation, reveal ‘our’ *intimate enemies* or the different ways in which we are *strangers to ourselves*.

Finally, the problematization of familiar (uncritical modes) of diplomatic and colonial recognition contributes to a more open and ambiguous conception of ‘postcolonial diplomacy’. One that builds on a conception of the postcolonial that thinks and takes seriously ‘*the diplomatic*’ which it places at the edge of , and in constant conversation with multiple and ever changing conceptions of ‘*the political*’. The circularity, deferral, tarrying and constructive ambiguity that such an exploration of diplomatic encounters privileges politicizes numerous sites by opening up to negotiation that which had been negated or marked as non-negotiable , unrecognizable or undiplomatic.

On the whole, the above re-negotiation of the meanings of ‘diplomacy’ by revisiting acts of negation is predicated on an appreciation of ‘the *necessity for continual negotiations*’ (Richelieu 1688/1961: 4).<sup>42</sup> By taking this ethic rather literally, we can interrogate the stasis, freezing and fixing of meanings that emerges from colonial and postcolonial refusal to negotiate or engage the other. Doubtless, endless deferral and negotiation has also been a means of keeping people in their ‘proper’ places by perpetually engaging them in non-transformative or non-pluralizing ways. However, a more open and ludic diplomacy is a politically productive exercise. It reveals the possibilities for escape, stasis, capture and return thus making it possible to think about an ethics of encounter and a diplomacy that engages ‘a people who are missing,’ or ‘a people who are yet to come’ (Deleuze 1989:130).

This is the complexity of the postcolonial condition that diplomacy and/as theory must engage—the complexity of a site where ‘we’ witness the pitfalls of national consciousness while at the same time having the nation as the site and means for self-determination from colonial rule. A site where diplomacy creates necropolitical spaces while at the same time calling up the dead in its attempt to open a space for more life affirming practices, truth, justice and reconciliation. In the postcolony, diplomacy becomes that which ‘one cannot not want’. It is at once a revolutionary force that enables dis-identification with colonial violence and governance and can become the enabler of the most tyrannical and static foreclosures of other ethico-political possibilities as illustrated by Zimbabwe’s post-independence state sponsored violence against white settlers, human rights activists and anyone who challenges Mugabe’s ZANU PF. Similarly, the recurrent

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<sup>42</sup> For more on diplomacy as continuous negotiation, see Richelieu, A.(1688/1961) , *Political Testament* , Madison: University of Wisconsin Press p. 94

xenophobic attacks on migrants in South Africa acts as a scene of revelation. A betrayal if you like, of the promise of co-habitation and different material conditions of existence for all. Here, 'there can be no simplistic, essentialist opposition between ideological miscognition and revolutionary truth' (Bhabha 1994:38). As Gayatri Spivak (1989) puts it:

It is only if we acknowledge the heterogeneous desire for that great rational abstraction - agency in a nation - that we post-colonials will be able to take a distance from it. It is here that the transgressor must persistently critique that transgressed space, which she cannot not want to inhabit, even if coded another way. We can sometimes be released from the claustrophobia of the post-Enlightenment bunker if we acknowledge that we also want to be snug in it. What is punishment is also nourishment. It is only then that we can sense that the spectacular promise of democracy - those rational abstractions coded as Human Rights - is desirable precisely because the abstractions can be used as alibis to deflect critique. In fact, it is only then that we can begin to suspect that the ethical -without which any hope for civil society or social justice must crumble, and which must therefore remain eminently desirable-bases itself upon what might be the lowest common denominator of being human, namely objectivity and susceptibility to universalization, and yet must code itself as the highest. Neither radical alterity nor universal ipseity is an unquestionable value (Spivak 1989:95).

Like the sites of memory above, postcolonial diplomatic sites and practices act as both an identification and dis-identification device. They enable us to *discover* different sites of estrangement in the postcolony and mine these sites for their numerous and often unacknowledged ethico-political possibilities while also harboring the capacity to *cover up* or silence the same possibilities. Thus, our theorizing of diplomacy should embrace a projectional form of interpretation that commits our analyses to ongoing discussion on postcolonial lives and

their complicity, resistance or entanglement with the “representational process” ( Shapiro 1988: 20). Rather than express a fidelity to an original — European, African or otherwise — *the diplomatic* becomes a site of encounter where the negotiation of the negation takes place. A site for the enactment of an ethic of “abusive fidelity” towards the past and the present. An ethic that Lawrence Venutti tells us ‘values experimentation and tampers with the ‘original by producing its own’ which it constantly interrogates (Venuti 2003: 252, Venuti 2002). Today, such an ethic would point to diplomacy’s entanglements with colonialism and with current discourses on human rights, democracy, development and nation-statism and call for a critical, yet engaged mode of theorizing postcolonial diplomacy as these are issues that one cannot simply take a distance from. From the above, we can conclude by stating that a critical diplomacy is always a reflexive/reflective ethico-political exercise. In a very Heideggerian fashion, it lays a duplicitous trap, always provoking us to tell our diplomatic interlocutors; ‘tell me what you think about *diplomacy* and I will tell you who you are.’

## CHAPTER 3

### **Diplomatic Dissensus: A Report on Humanitarianism, Moral Community and the Space of Death**

The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the *cliche*). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domains it traverses: being itself a Figure, it must have nothing of the nature of the represented object. [Violence] is not what one believes it to be, and depends less and less on what is represented.

- Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*

We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and the passions-*but we do not even know what a body can do*.

- Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*

#### **3.0 On Homo-Diplomacy**

In a remark that exemplifies one of the diplomatic traps of ‘his time’, Carl Schmitt notes that “as long as the state exists, there will always be in the world more than just one state” (Schmitt 1932/1996: 54). Drawing on his conception of *the political* as a series of friend/enemy distinctions, Schmitt goes on to state that the fact that we do not have a state which embraces the whole globe and all of humanity, “the political world” will always be a ‘pluriverse’ rather than a “universe” (ibid). As such, to invoke the concept of humanity would be an act of depoliticization given that “concept of humanity of humanity excludes the concept of the enemy, because the enemy does not cease to be a human being” (Schmitt 1996: 54). Schmitt’s theorization of the



political, the state and humanity is revealing especially in light of his later remark that “wars waged in the name of humanity” are actually political given that:

When a state fights its political enemies in the name of humanity, it is not a war for the sake of humanity, but a war wherein a particular state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its military opponent. At the expense of its opponent, it tries to identify itself with humanity in the same way as one can misuse peace; justice, progress, and civilization in order to claim these as one’s own and deny the same to the enemy. The concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion, and in its ethical-humanitarian form it is a specific vehicle of economic imperialism. Here one is reminded of a somewhat modified expression of Proudhon’s; whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat. To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity, and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity (Schmitt 1932/1996: 54).

Although Schmitt was writing in an era where diplomacy was mostly conceived of as a state practice with provisions for multilateralism in the form of the League of Nations, his critique of the turn to the human as the referent for diplomatic thought and the ‘imagination’ of community could not be more apposite. In this chapter, I engage the emerging diplomatic consensus about humanity and humanitarianism by looking at how the moralization of the figure of the human and the practical dispositions used to secure humanity contribute to a ‘new violent cartography’(see Shapiro 1997). By examining the unproblematic production, circulation and reception of images of the ‘body in pain’ for humanitarian purposes, I interrogate the sympathies and partialities that, contrary to their official claims, often reconfirm and protect forms of knowledge, regimes of recognition and policies that reproduce the familiar idea of diplomacy, abject Africanness while inventing a western philanthropic subject.

As a starting point for my ‘investigations’, I look at how modern diplomacy privileges the notion of the ‘diplomatic body’ and ‘report writing’ (or reporting in general) in order to institute and institutionalize itself and the cultural values it privileges. Drawing on the insights from the pluralization of diplomacy in Chapters 1 and 2, I engage a number of aesthetic vehicles and genres of expression that present ethical interruptions to the statist and humanitarian attempt to determine what counts as a diplomatic body/community, a diplomatic report and diplomatic life in general.<sup>43</sup>

Doubtless, the diffusion of more open and increasingly non-statist modes of mediating estrangement has contributed to a proliferation of diplomatic sites, media, bodies and functions which are characterized by the “increasing recognition of non-governmental organizations, civil society and people in general as diplomatic stakeholders” (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010:6). However, “the shift from national interest diplomacy to regional or global-interest diplomacy”, presents a different terrain and ethos for the deployment of diplomatic thought and supposedly new ways of thinking about or experiencing ‘diplomatic’ life which sometimes supply an alibi for moralistic quiescence and resignation to prevailing notions of community, humanity, propriety or sustainability.

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<sup>43</sup> Within the convention of diplomacy as a state practice, the diplomatic corps is that corporate body of diplomats from all states resident in at one post and serves the purpose of fostering diplomatic standards, lobbies for the defense of diplomatic privileges and immunities among other collective/professional interests See Berridge (2004)

For example, the affective discrepancy between the positive reception of ‘moving images’ of the African body in pain and the unsuccessful attempts to move the body in pain itself into these spaces of sympathy (through migration control) reveals how a concern for the pain of distant others is linked to the desire to legislate life and fix the possibilities and capacities of bodies. Like the colonial and statist diplomacies that preceded them, these ‘new’ diplomacies replace one form of moral certainty with another or reproduce established moral codes within new spaces thus limiting the possibilities for ethical encounter. This being the case, there is a need to ‘remain vigilant and critically reflexive about the discourse of sustainability, subalternity, humanitarianism, and other normatively loaded concepts’ characteristic of the new diplomacies (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010:6).

In an attempt to present a diplomacy that embraces both a critical and ethical disposition as the basis of mediating estrangement, Costas Constantinou (2006) coins the term *homo-diplomacy* which he uses to “explore a form of diplomacy that engages in heterology to revisit and rearticulate homology.” The human diplomacy that Constantinou engages is characterized by the ‘unofficial’ and experimental diplomacy of the everyday and has as its object the exploration of forms of mediating estrangement:

whose mission is not only the knowledge and control of the Other but fundamentally the knowledge of the Self – and crucially this knowledge of the Self as a more reflective means of dealing with and transforming relations with Others...within this context, homo-diplomacy would be about the mediation of sameness, internal mediation, as a condition for as well as a neglected aspect of the mediation of the estranged. In homo-diplomacy, not only the Other but the

Self become strange, a site to be known or known anew. Self becomes strange so as to creatively deal with alterity, overcoming the diplomatic fixation of clear and unambiguous identity, which renders mediation a one-dimensional external process (Constantinou 2006:352).

Doubtless, the above attempt to rethink the diplomatic and retrieve the homo-diplomatic through introspective negotiation, reverse accreditation, and gnostic discourse is fraught with hope and creative potential. It points to the possibilities for actively mediating the 'stranger within' as an effective means of mediating the 'stranger without' and departs from a 'human knowledge' that 'passes off as self-knowledge' based a 'moral self-righteousness' and certitude that empowers 'policies based on total truth and total evil' (Constantinou 2006: 362). However, the fluidity and experimentation advocated for by the homo-diplomatic sensibility articulated above is increasingly diminished by corresponding attempts to respond to violence, cruelty and death in the world through the production of a concept of humanity and diplomacy predicated on moral certainty, *ressentiment* and consensual community.

Nowhere is this production of a consensual moral humanity as the recognition and care for the vulnerabilities of any-subject-whatever clearer than in the responses to 'extreme' violence in Africa (Härting 2008: 61). Here, a 'growing planetary and humanitarianist consciousness' and human diplomacies of everyday life assign functions and representations to an elaborate network of individual experts, representatives of Non Governmental agencies and ethnic groups in a manner that seeks to transform violent contexts by creating a consensual whole that pins people down to their proper and morally sanctioned places. By making distinctions between 'spaces of life' and 'spaces of death,' such planetarian discourses and humanitarian moralities

draw upon “ a torrent of images of casual death and conflict” which are usually transmitted instantaneously from all over the African continent with far reaching implications for how people think about Africa, violence and the appropriate response to violence. According to Paul Gilroy (2001), these reports have ushered:

... nostalgia for the orderly world of colonial empires and threatened to make savagery something that occurs exclusively beyond the fortified borders of the new Europe. Through genocide in Rwanda and slaughter in Congo and Burundi, civil strife in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, corruption and violence in Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and Mozambique, government by terror has been associated once again with inhuman blackness reconstituted in the “half-devil, half-child” patterns favored by older colonial mentalities. Attempts to emphasize that many of the architects of mass killing in Rwanda and Bosnia were educated to the highest standards of the Western humanities have not achieved the same prominence. Placing some of them on trial for war crimes or for the genocidal activities involved in their crimes against humanity has raised difficult questions about the specificity and uniqueness of earlier mass killing and the central place of race-thinking that has recurrently been featured as a means to justify more recent episodes. (Gilroy 2001: 26)

Among the conditions of possibility for such a humanitarian morality and its corresponding distribution of the sensible, is an invocation of time (as emergency) and an uncritical commitment to capital or civilization mediated desire to save ‘other’ lives in other spaces. Not only does such a humanitarian concern for the pain of distant others present the human as the referent for political, ethical, aesthetic and diplomatic engagements, it also moralizes the position of the human by taking culture (modernity) to be the dividing line between those in favour of

peaceful civic existence and those inclined towards acts of terror/horror (Mamdani 2004, Fassin and Vasquez 2005).

To displace the silence, invisibility and moral certainty that an uncritical humanitarianist diplomacy privileges, the following explorations stage an encounter between moralizing human diplomacies and critical political perspectives that provoke a different kind of diplomatic thought. Taking the ‘spaces of death’ as a site for rethinking diplomatic and political life, I explore the political and ethical possibilities opened up by an aesthetic and *ethological* treatment of the interactions between the [Western] subjects of humanitarian diplomacies and the populations that inhabit the duly marked spaces of death.

Contrary to the certainty and sympathies articulated by a human diplomacy that embraces moralist and consensual modes of thinking and apprehending worlds in its response to atrocity, the explorations in this chapter reveal the fragility and ambiguity of human encounters and suggest an immanent and ethological appraisal of the manner in which bodies are composed and relate to each other. The explorations also engage diplomatic entanglements to illustrate the complex, aporetic and sometimes contradictory character of diplomatic life and mines various diplomatic apparatus for their ethical and aesthetic insights. Such a move invests bodies and relations with new ethical and political possibilities and seeks to politicize humanitarian action by multiplying the relations between bodies, the world where they live /die and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ for fitting in it.

To achieve such a critical perspective on the redistribution of the diplomatic and the humanitarianist world, I distinguish two kinds of homo-diplomatic formations: the moralizing/consensual homo-diplomacies ‘which do not disturb thought’ and the ethological/dissensual homo-diplomacies ‘which *force* us to think’ to seek out or stage encounters — to become otherwise.<sup>44</sup> While the former draws upon established and recognizable moral and consensual communities as they engage in introspective negotiation and respond to atrocity or mediate estrangement through the extension of already formed sympathies and identities, an ethically/ ethologically inclined diplomacy explores critical practices that can bring in something radically, and ontologically different to the diplomatic encounter by exploring new relationships between thought and the sensory world, between bodies and their environment, between bodies and the distribution of worlds (Rancière 2003: 7, Rancière 2004 b. : 3 , Deleuze 1994:139). At the core of such a critical treatment of diplomacy and humanitarian action/sentiment is a conception of politics as an event of *dissensus* rather than as the mere contestation or use of power and a dis-identification with a humanitarian common sense and the forms of diplomatic community and action it privileges (Rancière 2001).

### **3.1 On Cruelty: Mapping the Diplomatic Body Between Sensation and the Sensational**

To illustrate how humanitarian and diplomatic consensus based on a ‘normative model of personhood’ and sympathetic processes of social identification elide politics and initiate or

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<sup>44</sup> In making the distinction between the various forms of diplomatic engagements, I am edified by the distinction Deleuze makes between the object of ‘recognition’ and the object of ‘encounter.’ As Deleuze puts it, ‘something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter’. It is clear that an object of encounter is radically different from an object of recognition. For recognition, which is a staple of diplomatic engagements involves practices in which our knowledge, belief and values are reconfirmed and operates in the realm of a people who are already formed. In contrast, the object of encounter does not reconfirm our habits, our understandings, our values. It is a provocation to think, to live, to pose a problem as though we were the problem (see Deleuze 1994: 139).

perpetuate violent encounters, we can turn to a quasi-ethnographic short story which mobilizes much of the necessary thinking I want to enjoin. In many ways, Jorge Luis Borges' *Dr. Brodie's Report* (1970) is a subtle invitation to think about the relationship between moral sentiments, the banality of violent encounters and the identificatory logics of pain through which 'we' distribute functions and bodies in the world.

Borges' narrative proceeds through an ethnographic/autobiographical report written by a missionary who has just returned to Scotland. Having lived among the Yahoos for some time, Dr. Brodie is convinced that the Yahoo are 'a barbarous nation, whose utter lack of imagination' moves them to forms of cruelty that makes them impervious to Christianity and other forms of civilized relation. Among other things, Yahoo barbarity manifests itself in the tribe's "insensitivity to pain and pleasure, save for the relishment they get from raw and rancid meat and evil-smelling things" (Borges 1970: 115). Accordingly, Brodie is repulsed by the sociality that emerges from the Yahoos' pain mediated entertainment practices which involves cat fighting and participation in capital executions for those accused of offending the modesty of the queen. The Yahoo also have a license to kill, without retribution, anyone who recites a poem that stirs the members of the tribe (118).

To exemplify the way in which Yahoo and civilized forms of life differ from each other, Brodie's report attends to the interpersonal economies and exchange of sentiments central to Yahoo social and political life. For instance, Brodie discerns the enactment of a sense of communal cruelty through the sovereign practice of the mutilation of the Yahoo King who is born for the specific purpose of embodying sovereign wounds that simultaneously dull his



physical senses and enhance the faculties required to fulfil his otherwise fictitious function as the ruler of the tribe. As evinced by Brodie's account of the rigorous and cruel election process, the mystery of Yahoo sociality is predicated upon its deployment of pain as an identity-constituting function:

Each male born into the tribe is subjected to a painstaking examination; if he exhibits certain stigmata, the nature of which were not revealed to me, he is elevated to the rank of king of the Yahoos. So that the physical world may not lead him from the paths of wisdom, he is gelded on the spot, his eyes are burned, and his hands and feet are amputated. Thereafter he lives confined in a cavern called the castle ("*Qzr*"), into which only the four witch doctors and two slave women who attend to him and anoint him with dung are permitted entry. Should war arise, the witch doctors remove him from his cavern, display him to the tribe to excite their courage, bear him lifted onto their shoulders after the manner of a flag or a talisman, to the thick of the fight. In such cases, he dies almost immediately under the hail of stones flung at him by the Ape-men (113-114).

Based on the above accounts of cruelty, Brodie concludes that the Yahoos are a "barbarous nation, perhaps the most barbarous to be found upon the face of the earth." However, he deems it unjust to "overlook certain civilizational traits which redeem them." Through recourse to the familiar, the recognizable and therefore the 'good', Brodie draws a list of similarities between the Yahoos and Europeans and calls upon the latter to fulfil their moral 'obligation' of saving the Yahoo soul. For like other civilized societies, the Yahoo:

[...] have institutions of their own; they enjoy a king; they employ a language based on abstract concepts; they believe, like the Hebrews and the Greeks, in the divine nature of

poetry; and they surmise that the soul survives the death of the body. They also uphold the truth of punishments and rewards (119).

On the whole, Brodie's sensational report on Yahoo cruelty represents physical cruelty as a feature of a barbaric society that is yet to be fully 'humanized' (Asad 1996:1083). The 'idiopathic identification' that his report articulates is a manifestation of a European/Christian will-to-convert the non European Other.<sup>45</sup> Among other things, it suggests that the humanization of Yahoo society involves the identification of sites of 'sameness' which can be mobilized to erase pain mediated barbarities through conversion practices that save the Yahoo from their own barbarous cruelties. The uncritical mimicry and forms of recognition at play in Brodie's report present a human diplomacy that seeks to assimilate the other into an already formed and recognized Self. At a minimum, it equates *communication* with *communion* and *conversion* with *conversation* in its invention of a homo-diplomatic world. Brodie's desire to expand a recognized and morally coded sensorium to some new, as yet unknown or unimaginable site is not new. It reproduces and resonates with the moral discourses on the body and soul found in most missionary works and medieval cosmographies such as the Hereford *mappa mundi* (c. 1300) which were used to make sense of non European and non Christian others and the spaces that they occupied.

Within these geographical/moral imaginaries of the known and inhabited world, humanity was constructed and spatially policed through European/Christian imaginations about 'monstrous

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<sup>45</sup> See Kaja Silverman's (1996) examination of the relationship between empathy and different forms of identification. She identifies two main forms of empathic identification; idiopathic identification and heteropathic identification. Idiopathic identification takes a long trajectory of incorporation and involves seeing the other in the image of the self or the self in the image of other and leads to the annihilation of the other who is deprived of his/her specificity, unique existence and character.

races/bodies' like the *monopods* (a tribe whose members had only one leg and an enormous foot) and *cynocephali* (dog-headed men) who are situated outside the moral and geographical space of Christian morality and sympathy. Accordingly, the moral status of these races became a central concern for Europeans/Christians who considered the preservation of the integrity of the physical body and the establishment of a common Christian life as a moral imperative.

In St. Augustine of Hippo for example, we already see the seeds of the notion of the body as a person's own inalienable right taking shape (Bynum 1995: 95). While the letter written by Ratramnus — the ninth century monk from Corbie — in response to a question concerning the nature of the *Cynocephali* and the Christian duty towards them, points to the extension of fixed moralities, functions and codes to spaces and bodies hitherto considered external to the order of Christian moral sentiments. Like Dr. Brodie, Ratramnus identifies basic codes of decency and humanity within the 'monstrous races' which he then uses to justify his call for the conversion and more sympathetic treatment of the *Cynocephali*.<sup>46</sup> Encumbered by the ambiguous corporeality of dog-headed men, Ratramnus raises a number of questions, each geared towards establishing the moral certainty required to incorporate *Cynocephali* into the Christian moral and spiritual universe; were they to be treated as human given their concept of decency and the fact that they covered their genitalia? Do they deserve salvation, because, even though they cannot speak, they have a concept of *shame* as evinced by the fact that they wear clothes or the fact that they domesticate animals, grow crops, and live together in communities? (see Den Hartog 1996).

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<sup>46</sup> In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith illustrates how our approbation of the sentiments of another is based on mutual sympathies and the manner in which we judge of the propriety or impropriety of the affections of other men, by their concord or dissonance with our own. See Part I of Smith A, (2004).

The above codes provide a prelude to many of the notions of humanity that are mobilized to secure the limits of Christianity and Euro-civility by marking those who are to be converted or excluded from the moral community. However, the same codes can be read contrapuntally such that the moral statements Brodie makes regarding the relationship between Yahoo passions and partialities, between their ability to sense things in a certain way and their moral postures, rather than tell us more about the Yahoos, actually point to the partialities in Brodie's own 'constitution of reality' (Rabinow 1986: 241). That is, the shock effect, the horror or humour evoked by Borges/ Brodie's account of life among the Yahoos reveals how the domains he takes for granted as universal, are in fact, historically peculiar and linked to regimes of recognition, habits of thought and sensational *clichés* which are by no means fixed.

To appreciate the violence implicit in Brodie's approbation or disapproval of the sentiments of others, we need to heed the different ways in which he extends Christian/ European sympathies and partialities to the Yahoos in order to shore up the figural unity and integrity of man. For example, Brodie's recommendation that Europeans live up to their obligation of transforming/ saving Yahoo society can be read as part of a larger civilizational enterprise that seeks to produce a harmonized or consensual social whole (humanity, Christianity, civility). Similarly, his identification of desirable and non-desirable practices or the deployment of pain mediated moral discourses to determine what/who is properly human elides politics and contributes to the *subjection* rather than *subjectification* of non European worlds while taking for granted the conditions under which Europe becomes obliged to care for the non-European.

A similar humanitarianist distribution of spaces, functions and attributes is evident in a global context characterized by a shift from a biopolitics of the ‘population’ [Foucault’s main concern], to a biopolitics of humanity. With the human as the key referent for security, development and diplomacy, traditional sovereign affiliations and state boundaries become less significant as the world is partitioned between able and vulnerable bodies, between modern people and pre-modern people. Within such a time-based homo-diplomatic imaginary, modern people are considered the ‘makers of cultures’ appropriate to humanity and are its ‘masters’ while the pre-modern are seen as either those who are “lagging behind or have yet to embark on the road to modernity” or as the anti-modern (Mamdani 2004:18). Where pre-modernity and pain or violent death is presented as a marker of those lagging behind, human diplomacies “encourage relations based on philanthropy” and development , while the versions of pre-modernity that are seen to be *resistant* to modernity remain “productive of fear” and invite “pre-emptive police or military action” (Mamdani 2004: 18).

These development/security, horror/terror taxonomies are evident in attitudes towards Africans who are considered *incapable* of modernity and commit atrocities that are spatially confined given that Africans ‘victimize themselves’, while hardcore Islam is seen as *resistant* to modernity and commits atrocities that are more mobile and diffuse in nature given that ‘hardcore Muslims’ are “prone to taking others along with them to the world beyond” (Mamdani 2004: 19). In either case, cultural spaces become the basis on which secure-scapes, death-scapes and humanitarian maps of sympathy facilitate moral interventions appropriate for administering death or life by “collapsing ontology with geography” and morality with geographically situated human action (Jameson 1992:4).

Doubtless, the “material embodiment of compassion” and the “special attention given to suffering and its reduction” endows the instrumental/technological apparatus of “care of others living under severe duress or the danger of imminent death” with powers that call into question the authority of the sovereign to be the sole legitimate source of the decision to declare who should be abandoned, whose life can be forsaken and which exception is the proper one (Ophir 2003). While such a turn to humanitarianism displaces the monopoly of statist conceptions of diplomacy (and the diplomatic corps), the human and humanitarianist capital it produces establishes a moral consensus about the care for vulnerable others. The resulting humanitarian diplomacy connects spaces of death to existing spaces of sympathy while remaining silent about the conditions of possibility for these violences or reproduces some of the already recognized social identities and moralities.

It is important to note that the humanitarian process of mapping and transforming spaces of death is central to the ‘creation of meaning and consciousness’ through its valuation of humanity and violence (Taussig 1984: 468). Acting as a threshold for the thus formed consensual whole, these spaces are imbued with moral values that manifest themselves in the incongruous treatment of violence. That is, in an attempt to establish moral certainty, specific violences; terrorisms and wars on terror become morally acceptable or are coded as acts of strategic necessity while other forms of violence and the bodies that deploy them are pushed into the realm of horror given that the forms of ‘dismemberment’ of the body and the logics that underline them are said to “offend the ontological dignity that the human figure possesses” (Cavarero 2009: 8). Similarly, humanitarian intervention/ action is presented as a moral solution to wounds that are an affront to

humanity. To wounds that are a symptom of the “violence against the human qua human” (Cavarero 2009: 8). To wounds that are an outcome of a violence perpetrated by those who are yet to be fully human/humanized.

Such an uncritical idea of humanity, violence and the humanitarianist ethos is what informs a lot of homo-diplomatic introspection, compassion and popular accreditation. Operating on a plane that is already coded with moral certainties, a lot of humanitarian engagement with cultural ‘maps of death’ or pain, usually perpetuates the ideals and sympathies of the ‘civilized’ or ‘more capable’ members of the moral community. Simply put, the humanitarian policing of the forms visibility, audibility and movement (of images, capital and bodies) available within the ‘spaces of death’ and the consensual and moralist options that it readily supplies, sometimes feed into and reproduce rather than disturb recognized communities and diplomacies. Be they Christian, colonial, nation-statist or neo-liberal, the modes of identification and the forms of mediating estrangement that humanitarianism privileges often go unquestioned.

### **3.2 On Humanitarianism: Consensus, Sympathy and the ‘Spaces of Death’**

Although narrated as an ethnography of Yahoo cruelty, we can derive a more critical analytic by reading Brodie’s report as a commentary on inter-human interactions predicated upon an *idiopathic* mode of identification. That is, Brodie’s report is best read as an extension of already established sympathies that secure European/Christian moral sensibilities while seeking to transform or erase non-European ways of being in the world. Attentiveness to the *autobiographical* rather than the *ethnographic* elements of the report highlights the waves of sameness that Brodie seeks to spread as he appropriates a set of cultural/ human practices which

can be attributed to a civilization that he readily recognizes. Treated in this way, the report provides an appropriate context for thinking about the uncritical modes of introspection and negotiation that continue to support numerous accounts of atrocity and the sentiments and actions mobilized as part of a humanitarian response to ‘human’ cruelty.

From Brodie’s report, it is clear that the moral imperatives and identities that a moralizing humanitarianism articulates displaces politics as it maps global space and divides the world/humanity between those with a ‘responsibility to protect’ and those who are to be protected from themselves or their kin, educated and translated into more familiar forms. At first glance, such humanitarian gestures might seem like a move from ‘limited sympathies’ to an ‘extended generosity,’ given the geographical expanse and the diversity of the ‘peoples’ they engage.<sup>47</sup> However, when one looks at the partialities and the forms of sameness that humanitarianism articulates, then it becomes clear that the dominant forms of humanitarian action are in fact an extension or enlargement of ‘limited sympathies’— a globalization of the partialities and the forms of consensus required to sustain a culture specific idea of humanity and the world.

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<sup>47</sup> This is a play on Gilles Deleuze’s reading of David Hume’s statement that man is by nature partial rather than egotistical. For Hume, the problem of society is ‘no longer how to limit egotisms and the corresponding natural rights, but how to go beyond partialities, how to pass from a “limited sympathy” to an “extended generosity,”’ With some forms of humanitarianism, ‘we’ are presented with an illusion of ‘extended’ generosity while in reality, what happens is the extension of sympathy through the translation or erasure of otherness in order to create a coherent whole characterized by sameness. See Deleuze G.,(2005 : 47 )



Such an extension/enlargement of partialities is discernible in numerous accounts of atrocity and the reasons given for the different responses that are mobilized to address them. From the ‘fictional’ representation of colonial cruelty in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, to the numerous ‘factual’ reports on death and mutilation in postcolonial Africa, established moralities and consensus based regimes of intelligibility and legibility continue to police and depoliticize the humanitarian / diplomatic encounter. For the most part, humanitarian reportage approaches facticity as something the world simply confers rather than as something that emerges from the way subjects actively apprehend worlds (Shapiro 2006: x). Like the moralizing human diplomacies from which it derives much of its coherence and force, humanitarian action engages violence as an object of recognition and the political subject(s) of violence as a dysfunctional part of a consensual community. Something to be normalized through philanthropy or security. As it alleviates the pain of others and transforms the spaces of their occurrence, humanitarian diplomacy creates a world that is ‘filled with no more than an image of itself’, a world in which it ‘recognizes itself the more it recognizes things’ (Deleuze 1994:139).

To achieve a perspective on how a diplomacy that takes a moralized idea of man as its core referent works, we can consider how it produces waves of sameness which facilitate the superimposition of death/life on morally constituted spaces. We can also look at how a moralizing human diplomacy produces a moral geographic imaginary that codes bodies and spaces with moral values and then distributes the bodies in pre-coded spaces where the pain and suffering they experience is commensurate with their moral standing in relation to a pre-established standard.

For example, a ‘good Muslim/ bad Muslim’ dichotomy, that remains a familiar trope within modern cultural and geopolitical imaginaries is identifiable within the hierarchy of sins, pain and suffering that structures Dantes’s *Divine Comedy*. Here, a morality derived from a Christian/Western onto-theology is mapped onto bodies whose pain serves as evidence of the existence of a moral standard from which they have deviated. Within this moral schema, Mohammed , due to his “revolting sensuality and pretensions to theological eminence” is located in the eighth of the nine circles of hell and Dante has to pass through circles with people whose sins are of a lesser order before reaching him (Said 1979: 68-69). However, some Muslims like Saladin are confined to the first circle of the inferno with other virtuous heathens like Aristotle, Hector and Plato where they suffer a minimal (even honourable) punishment for not having had the benefits of Christian revelation (ibid).

Among other things, Dante’s inferno enacts a *mytho-diplomatic* mediation of estrangement concerned with the time-space of a Christian ‘afterlife’ where morally coded bodies are distributed within morally coded spaces. A similar onto-theological partitioning of the world is discernible in a diplomacy of the ‘here and now’ that privileges generic human life without interrogating the totalizing and moralizing logic that produces the kinds of life that become the subject of homo-diplomatic intervention. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the totalizing logic that codes and distributes bodies and spaces finds its force and modern articulation through what they call the *faciality machine*. A machine that uses the Christian standard, ‘white man face’ to compute normalities and moralities that place a limit on thought and ethical encounters by translating ‘formed contents of whatever kind into a single substance of expression’(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 178).

Like Dante's inferno and Brodie's report, the modern faciality machine also "seeks to encompass the whole society, the whole world within a 'whole' characterized by sameness and deviations from the same" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:181). Today, one of the dominant facializations is achieved through the use of moral sentiments to produce a recognizable and generic subject of universal humanity who responds to the distant horrors of ethnocidal violence or the threats of proximate and unpredictable terrorist attacks. This transcendental diplomatic project thinks about 'space and life in general within a human territory where the subject as universal humanity operates on the single spatial and temporal plane of capitalism', suffering, terror and horror which are seen as anomalies that can be corrected through increased security and philanthropy, rather than as violences intrinsic to statist and capitalist ways of organizing social and political life (Colebrook 2005: 204).

Ultimately, the production of universal humanity within a humanitarian world involves the constitution of oneself as a moralized point in a pain mediated humanity across one universal space and time. That is, as a diplomacy concerned with any-subject-whatever, humanitarian diplomacy is presented as a departure from the particularities and violences of premodern life — from its tribalisms, its affects and beliefs. However, a more critical analytic reveals that such humanitarian imaginaries are often a universalization of particularities. In short, they are the "submission to a law that one recognizes as one's own, and therefore as the law of all others" (ibid).

Indeed, the complex nature of such abstractions makes it difficult for one to simply distance oneself from the spaces that human diplomacy creates given that what humanitarianism presents

as emancipation is also a form of servitude, the forms of ‘punishment’ it deploys are also a ‘nourishment’ and its salvation is equally enslaving (Spivak 1989:95). The ‘heterogeneous desire’ that accompanies such formations demands that we mine these diplomacies for the moral alibis that deflect critique. For instance, human rights which have become that which ‘we cannot not want’ (Spivak 1989, Pierce and Rao 2006: 3), should be treated in a manner that exposes the waves of sameness that they propagate, the lives they save and the violent consensus that they establish. As Veena Das (2005) illustrates in her interrogation of the exceptionalist and humanistic “rhetoric of the world having changed after 9/11,” humanistic discourse and changing definitions of warfare are predicated on cultural and geographical assumptions that privilege the experience of North Americans as being unique. In a nutshell, Das notes that these new configurations of war and peace arise from assumptions that:

Forms of terrorism with which other countries, such as Sri Lanka, have lived with for more than thirty years, were relevant for those societies but not for humankind in general. The attack on the U.S, on the other hand, has been portrayed as nothing less than an attack on civilization itself. This imaginary of September 11th as having brought about a state of exception in which nothing less than a global civil war was at stake has now made domestic security the overarching discourse within which claims of human rights are framed. (Das 2005: 113)

Closely related to the aforementioned exceptionalism, is a presentist idea of time that upholds a version of sentimental humanity by effacing structural and foundational violences. Humanitarian presentism sees colonial discipline as an exceptional practice that took place in that other space where metropolitan norms of justice and civility were disregarded and chattel

slavery as a cruelty that took place in another time. With today's 'crises' as its main focus, a humanitarian ethos operates on the basis of thresholds of violence that distinguish between those who target and destroy specific lives in specific spaces [genocidaires] and those who target a specific space and destroy any life within it for its dramatic/strategic effect [terrorists]. These premodern violent subjects and their victims are treated within the ambit of culture and ontology while the humanitarian action deployed to save life wherever it is being forsaken is considered a moral or strategic practice whose biopolitical conceits as well as ontological predicates go unquestioned. Through these moral/ontological distinctions, humanitarianism as the protection of the rights of victims legitimizes the "right to humanitarian interference," or, as Žižek (2005) describes it, it is the "return to sender" of "the disused rights that had been sent to the 'rightless' who lack the capacity to effect them." Consequently, the human rights of 'Third World suffering victims' effectively means today, in the predominant discourse, "the right of Western powers themselves to intervene politically, economically, culturally and militarily in the Third World countries of their choice, in the name of defending human rights" (Žižek 2005: 128).

### **3.3 Writing the Congo: Diplomacy, Necropolitics and Morality**

Two important considerations derive from such attempts at appropriating vulnerable bodies and spaces of death to produce a "unified discourse with unambiguous moral predicates" (Shapiro 2001: 13). First, is a consideration of how once the premodern are presented as vulnerable, injured or under threat, certain interactions with moral entities allow thought to evade ambiguity and call for interventions that "displace politics with moral certainty" or deploy warfare as "a wholly strategically driven phenomenon" (Shapiro 1997: 44). The second issue has to do with how the privileging of [modern] recognizable and predefined consensual communities becomes

an integral dimension of cultural introspection and self-reinvention in a manner that forecloses other possibilities for politics, thought and ethical encounters.

Of the numerous narratives that subsume vulnerable lives and spaces of death within prevailing moralities and consensual communities, the correspondence between Joseph Conrad and British Consul Roger Casement is singularly important. In a letter dated 21 December 1903, Conrad offers a moral critique of the inconsistencies in the ‘European conscience’ that allows the atrocities committed by Leopold’s men in the wake of the rubber boom in the Congo Free State to persist. However, Conrad remains uncritical of the imperial power formations that provide the conditions of possibility for such cruelty and is more concerned with correcting the inconsistencies in Europe’s moral conscience. By addressing ‘a people which is presupposed already there,’ Conrad’s humanitarian effort aspires to the standard model — the established order — and does not pose questions or evoke voices that articulate the dissensus required for the problem in the Congo to change politically (see Deleuze 1989:217). Thus, the African lives that Conrad engages are depoliticized and jumped over as the concern with terror and cruelty in the Congo is primarily for purposes of the cultivation of a European morality and policing of a consensus based humanitarian ethos appropriate to its time. As Conrad puts it:

It is an extraordinary thing that the conscience of Europe which seventy years ago has put down the slave trade on humanitarian grounds tolerates the Congo State today. It is as if the moral clock had been put back many hours. And yet nowadays if I were to overwork my horse so as to destroy its happiness or physical wellbeing I should be hauled before a magistrate. It seems to me that the black man —say, of Upoto —is deserving of as much humanitarian regard as any

animal since he has nerves, feels pain, can be made physically miserable. But as a matter of fact his happiness and misery are much more complex than the misery or happiness of animals and deserving of greater regard. He shares with us the consciousness of the universe in which we live — no small burden ...the amenities of the 'middle passage' in the old days were as nothing to it. The slave trade has been abolished — and the Congo State exists to-day. This is very remarkable. What makes it more remarkable is this: the slave trade was an old established form of commercial activity; it was not: the monopoly of one small country established to the disadvantage of the rest of the civilized world in defiance of international treaties and in brazen disregard of humanitarian declarations. But the Congo State created yesterday is all that and yet it exists. This is very mysterious ... But as a matter of fact in the old days England had in her keeping the conscience of Europe. The initiative came from here. But now I suppose we are busy with other things; too much involved in great affairs to take up cudgels for humanity, decency and justice. But what about our commercial interests? These suffer greatly as Morel has very clearly demonstrated in his book. ...and the fact remains that in 1903, seventy five years or so after the abolition of the slave trade (because it was cruel) there exists in Africa a Congo State, created by the act of European powers where ruthless, systematic cruelty towards the blacks is the basis of administration, and bad faith towards all the other states the basis of commercial policy.<sup>48</sup>

Conrad's humanitarian certainty gains its rhetorical and policing force through a reciprocating yet distorted mimesis between itself and macabre forms of uncertainty that colonial violence infuses into European moral history. Rather than engage in a critique that disturbs the colonial order, the Congo reformers are shocked by the inconsistency between the mutilations in the

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<sup>48</sup> The correspondence between Conrad and Casement is quoted in Hawkins H., Joseph Conrad, Roger Casement, and the Congo Reform Movement *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 1. (1981 - 1982), pp. 65-80. p.69-70.

rubber plantations and the prevailing European moral order. For example, Conrad's correspondence with Casement expresses a discomfort with the heterochronicity and spectres of past atrocities that the Congo atrocities introduce to the present European humanitarian moralities and its implications for the establishment of coherent European morality. As such, the Congo, as a 'space of death,' is presented as colonialism's other space — a 'heterotopia of deviation' — where practices that deviate from the established morality/norm of 'optimization of life' take place (Foucault 1967/2008: 18). Rather than disturb the established moralities such that the 'Upoto man' — the 'part without a part' — can place a demand on the colonial world, Conrad's homo-diplomatic introspection and advocacy is geared towards the encouragement of a reformed Eurocentricism, a colonialism with a human face that does not replicate past atrocities but continues the domination of the non European by other means.

Having established themselves as a kind of moral police that ensures that the European moral standard is maintained, the Congo reformers are engaged in practices that launder colonial relations. For example, following his impressive report on the Congo, Roger Casement is commissioned to investigate the atrocities committed by the Peruvian Amazon Company during the rubber boom in the Putumayo area of Colombia. In part, the investigation was a response to the moral outrage among the British public after articles on 'A British Owned Congo' were published (See Hardenburg, 1912). Submitted to the head of the British Foreign Service, and published by the House of Commons on 13 July 1913, the 136-page *Putumayo Report* like Casement's previous investigation on atrocities in the Congo is said to have 'innoculated' British



diplomacy with a ‘moral toxin’ such that “historians will cherish these occasions as the only two in which British diplomacy rose above the commonplace” (Taussig 1984: 473).<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, Casement’s *Putumayo Report* provided an analysis of the banality of cruelty and cultures of terror in Putumayo and concludes that the main problem arose from a labour shortage within the debt peonage system and a slaughter of this precious labour which was ‘inconsistent with the pursuit of profit.’ While Casement’s report outlined the details of the atrocities in Putumayo and condemned the cruelty and terror, it accounts for the atrocities by pointing out their inconsistency with market logic. That is, Casement is critical of the station managers’ activities, for the large sums of money it cost the company, and the fact that the men “had lost all sight or sense of rubber-gathering” and had become “beasts of prey who lived upon the Indians and delighted in shedding their blood” (Taussig 1984: 478).

In an interesting reading of Casement’s *Putumayo Report*, Michael Taussig looks at the mediation of the culture of terror through narration, and the multiple narratives that pose a problem for writing against terror. Taussig’s attentiveness to the multiple registers of narrative fiction productive of terror and the attempts to represent and mitigate it illustrates how Casement’s report, by infusing “the rationality of business” into relations of terror sustains an illusory rationality, that obscures our understanding of the way “business can transform the use of terror from the means into an end in itself” (Taussig 1984: 470). Certainly, Taussig’s reading of the ways in which a report critical of cruelty and terror can still be implicated in the forms of

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<sup>49</sup> This is a comment by Edmund Morel quoted in Taussig M., (1984) p. 473.

narrative and fictional realities that produce the space of death in the first place offers useful insights. Among other things, it presents the space of death as a site constituted by multiple lines and forces, narratives and desires, segments and thresholds working to produce the complex forms of exchange and mediations that characterize this space.

In a similar fashion, postcolonial spaces of death and the humanitarianisms deployed in these spaces can be read as multiplicities that have been reduced to 'rigid segments and thresholds' through recourse to established moralities and prescriptive codes (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 143-4). To the extent that humanitarianism invokes generic suffering and the securing of any vulnerable human wherever, it maintains a mimetic relationship to the segments and thresholds produced by capitalism, nationalism, colonialism, racism and other 'necrographic' maps that are intricately intertwined with the production of 'man'.

For example, colonial , capitalist and nation-statist practices continue to legitimize themselves by invoking their humanitarian credentials and their capacity to *foster life* while overlooking the various ways in which they *disallow* life to the point of death or the way humanitarianism produces death-worlds through intervention or abandonment of suffering and vulnerable groups. While humanitarian action as the moral production of man is intimately connected to both necro-power and bio-power, the privileging of its capacity to make the pains of others visible / audible or its ability to cultivate philanthropic subjects leads to a moral discourse that disavows the connection between life-saving practices and the violent production of humanity (see Foucault 1990: 138).

### 3.4 Moral Alibi

Today, the ‘space of death’ continues to serve as the ‘other space’ for an elaborate network of homo-diplomatic emplacements [embassies, NGOs, art galleries, museums, cinemas, universities, homes etc] through which the humanitarian ethos is cultivated and rehearsed while global capital is humanized or laundered. To displace the disavowal of violence that makes it possible for one to take a moral position when attending to the vulnerabilities and pains of distant others, we need to heed ‘how bodies [human and non human] share affects and their capacity to affect each other’ (Deleuze 1988: 123). That is, contrary to the dominant regimes of recognition, identification and intelligibility that value bodies based on the functions and proper places that they occupy, an attentiveness to ethology helps re-think the diplomacies and possible forms of sociability open to us. Not only does it highlight the excisions, erasures and silences characteristic of a human diplomacy that assigns humanitarian sentiments a transcendental character, it also enables us to move from relations predicated on moralities to those that enact an ethics.

What is taken into consideration here is not the fact that humanitarian action takes place in the space of death, or that a human and non-statist diplomacy has been initiated, but how a body’s encounter with other bodies aids or harms it or how bodies [diplomatic or otherwise] are composed, recomposed, and decomposed by other bodies. As Gilles Deleuze puts it:

there are greater differences between a plow horse or draft horse and a racehorse than between an ox and a plow horse. This is because the racehorse and the plow horse do not have the same affects nor the same capacity for being affected; the plow horse has affects in common rather with the ox (Deleuze 1988: 125).

Such an ethological treatment of humanitarianism and homo-diplomacies in light of the forces at play and the affects and encounters with(in) spaces of death provides a different reading of *necropolitics* ( see Mbembe 2003). It invites us to go beyond looking at the ways in which ‘weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds,*’ or ‘*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*’ ( Emphasis in original, see Mbembe 2003:39). In so doing, an ethological reading of humanitarian diplomacies invites us to consider how some of the ‘life-saving’ measures deployed in spaces of death are in themselves imbued with ‘forces of death’. That is, ethology provides a broader ‘necrography’ and illustrates how bodies thought to be outside these death-worlds have connections and affects in common with those of death machines thus implicating them in the multiple life/death exchanges that take place in spaces of death.

In addition to interrupting the moralities and moral sentiments that encode how we apprehend and map death, an appreciation of ethology provokes ‘us’ to acknowledge the ‘bio-necro collaboration’ inherent in humanitarian action. At a minimum, ethology reveals how ‘biopower’s optimization of life also implicates it in death while illustrating how necropolitics is involved in forms of discrimination and a nonchalance towards death even as it pursues killing as a primary aim’ ( Puar 2007 :35). The necrography that emerges from such a reading of what bodies do or can do extends our concern with pain to things /practices beyond the immediate physical space of death and the specific time in which it occurs. Thus, homo-diplomatic practice is stripped of its moral certitude as it takes on multiple bodies, images, venues and rhythms through which worlds become available to selves and others. Such a

consideration of the organization of perceptual experience, consolidation of habits and composition of ethical dispositions provokes new thoughts, new diplomacies and an ethics that illustrates how moralities and habits allow or disallow life and death while mapping the connections, disconnections, flows and counter-flows that produce the spaces of death. In short, we become more aware of the work of death and cruelty in the production of a humanitarian consciousness and humanitarianism's reliance on the necrographic maps for the production of its own legitimacy and moral certainty.<sup>50</sup>

### **3.5 Diplomatic Dissensus: Aesthetic, Ethics, Politics**

There are, indeed, a number of reasons why humanitarian partialities persist. In part, they are a reflection, alibi and a product of the drives that characterize religious, racial, neo-liberal and nation-statist partialities and their constant attempts to 'educate man in his functions' (Nietzsche 2001). The force of such ordering and ranking of human drives and functions is realized when we look at how different partialities structure 'our' humanitarian conscience and the altruisms, bodies, media and identifications it privileges. For instance, while humanitarianism claims to be concerned with precarious human lives in general, the partialities that underline humanitarian action are revealed when one takes note of how nation-statist and sometimes racial frames of recognition determine how, when and where humanitarian action is carried out. A case in point is the evacuation of expatriates [and their dogs] that creates the homogeneous spaces required for

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<sup>50</sup> The reading of humanitarian certainty presented here is an extension/inversion of Appadurai's reading of certainty in ethnocidal violence. By looking at the role that humanitarian action plays in the creation of certainty about necrographic spaces and vice versa. For an elaborate treatment of ethnocide and certainty See Appadurai A, (1988)

the deployment of death and cruelty on a genocidal scale. Similar connections exist between the humanitarian concern for distant bodies in pain [or representations of the same] and the xenophobia induced immobility, censorship or unwillingness to open up living spaces or any-space-whatevers to those who manage to leave these spaces of death. The ‘immigration complex’ underlining a lot of humanitarian work allows for the uni-directional flow of bodies and a spatially limited zone of generosity (Balibar 1991: 21). That is, care for vulnerable others is based on their physical distance from the zones of sympathy and is rarely mobilized as the basis of an ethics of co-habitation once the migrant arrives at the gates.

Such a concealed consensual morality is not unique to macropolitical and policy oriented diplomatic practices. In the aesthetic realm, a consensual global morality is discernible in Terry George’s film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) where the specific context of the genocide in Rwanda is depoliticized through a narrative that appeals for established forms of global recognition as it narrates the Rwanda genocide. More specifically, the “film invites one to reject irrational tribalism and endorse the concept of the nation-state while ignoring a critique of the racialized and gendered political construction of ethnicities as an essentially modernist feature in Rwanda’s colonial and post-independence history of nation formation”(Harting 2008: 65). In this way, *Rwanda’s* narrative of genocide ‘discounts ethnic difference’ in favour of individual heroism and a ‘universalist interpellation’ of the human subject in a manner that echoes Holocaust narratives such as *Schindler’s List* thus making the genocide globally legible by drawing it into a readily recognizable genre of expressing pain and moral action (Harting 2008: 65).

Deriving its imperatives from established moral codes, *Hotel Rwanda* gets rid of politics by ousting the surplus subjects and replacing them with recognizable partners, spaces, social groups and so on. In this way, the moralization of humanitarian claims about a universal that corrects the violences of particularities, and a moral individual character that ‘acquires a new mode of being’ in the midst of atrocity presupposes and veils rather than disturbs the very particulars that it claims to overcome. *Hotel Rwanda*, like many humanitarian accounts of violence represents the atrocity of genocide but closes off the spaces of dissensus by transforming ethnic or other kinds of conflicts into problems that can be sorted out through recourse to a heroic individualism, a learned humanitarian expertise and the cultivation of a nation-statist citizenship that partakes of or activates the rights of man (Rancière 2004 a.).

A similar, albeit macropolitical closing off of the spaces of dissensus can be discerned in dominant representations of the Rwanda genocide, and an uncritical moral identification with the victims of violence that affords the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front] a ‘genocide credit’ that it uses to justify its military presence in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo while imposing a silence or veiling the violence deployed by forces that were victims of the 1994 genocide ( see Appadurai 1998, Chiwengo 2008, Malkki 1995 ). Through “the rhetoric and genre of human rights discourse along with political manipulation” the notion of the exceptionalism of the Rwandan genocide stifles the narratives of violence in the neighbouring Congo and enables only “certain narratives of pain and wounds to be narrated, heard, and arouse identification while others are silenced” (Chiwengo 2008: 80). For example, various genres of expression deployed in the services of human rights discourse and memorial narratives contribute to the “repression of the narratives of raped Congolese women which are frequently set off against the privileged

narratives about and by raped Rwandan Tutsi women”(Chiwengo 2008: 80). The same goes for the Hutu genocide in Congo, which, despite “proof of the existence of mass graves and scattered bones and the killings of Hutu returnees, remains stifled in the international media” which reads the genocide as having occurred in a specific space [Rwanda] at a specific time [April 1994], with specific perpetrators [Hutu genocidaires] and having been resolved through the re-installation of a ‘stable’ nation-state (Chiwengo 2008: 78-9).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

From the above, it is evident that response to the plight of ‘others’ is not always an unproblematic and straightforward issue. Given the conditions under which modern forms of estrangement and the dominant idea of ‘man’ is produced and cultivated, a response to the pain of others demands an ethics of encounter and co-habitation predicated on the dis-identification with homo-diplomatic practices predicated on moral certainty and limited sympathies. With the entanglements of global capital, ethnocidal violence, ‘quasi-statehood’ and humanitarian consciousness, the powers of life and death, it seems, rely on empathy or apathy predicated on a consensual practice that reduces the “way of life of a society, to its ethos —to the abode of a group and its lifestyle” (Rancière 2004 a:306). Like the aforementioned policing of the movement of bodies and their implication for engagement with the wound of the other, contemporary everyday diplomacies, technologies of visual representation and various narratives of pain also contribute to how ‘we’ sense and make sense of the pain of others. They can shorten, overlook or extend the public life of images of suffering through their modes of circulation, reception and interpretation. As Elizabeth Dauphinée puts it in her reflection on the politics of the body in pain, technologies of visual representation can “contain and delimit the



experience of pain by locating it so firmly in the distant and disconnected bodies of others such that our ability to engage is relegated to that of observation, which severely limits the possibility of making a response' (Dauphinée 2007:140).

Through such a partitioning of the sensible, humanitarian effort is invested with power over life and death as some wounds are empowered to speak while others are constrained. Accordingly, the landscape of humanity is transformed and the possibilities for ethical encounters reduced as the 'rights of man' becomes 'the rights of the victims' and the position of the victim becomes a moralized position (Rancière 2004a). With a focus on the victim and the philanthropist as the sites for the moral education of man, humanitarian action emerges as a site for a *ressentiment* based upholding of the rights of 'rightless others' and becomes a new right to 'humanitarian interference' by the duly formed philanthropic subjects (Rancière 2004a.: 297-298).

However, attentiveness to the ethics-aesthetics-politics relationship that obtains from modes of reading the body and its capacities to affect and be affected interrupts this vision of humanity and diplomacy. By calling up pasts, voices, affects and connections between bodies that have been erased or trivialized by colonial, religious and geopolitical imaginaries, an ethological treatment of humanitarianism illustrates how the consensual body has been constituted historically. It also exposes the various ways in which a moralizing homo-diplomacy reflects on the self and on encounters from a position where the people are already formed and functions distributed such that bodies fit their proper functions and destinations (Rancière 2008 : 12). Contrary to the certainty and unambiguous modes of reflection that characterize a moralizing human diplomacy, a critical homo-diplomatic practice points to ethical encounters that have been transformed

through the body's dis-identification with the sensory codes that dominant communities of sense promulgate (Rancière 2008: 4). That is, it presents a creative diplomacy predicated on an aesthetic community of dis-identified persons and enables a 'multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are 'equipped' for fitting it.' Such a critical diplomacy changes the 'cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible' (Rancière 2008:12). It is a creative diplomacy that engages multiple ways of doing and making the world thus directing our attention to 'a world of competing worlds' (Rancière 2003:6). By politicizing and problematizing rather than moralizing and seeking dissensus rather than a consensus, the diplomacy (human or otherwise) derived from a politics of aesthetics is a departure from the idiopathic identification and totalizing maps of sympathy that characterize modern humanitarianism. While it does not claim to offer 'final solutions' to the problem of violence, often doing the opposite by illustrating how problematic 'our' solutions are or how pervasive violence and consensus are in the world, a diplomacy attuned to dissensus and ethology invites ethical encounters. Its experimentation with multiple senses and affects, with encounters rather than recognition, becoming rather than being and with the multiple ways in which a 'being' can take another 'being' into its world, while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world is to be appreciated and actively sought out (Deleuze 1988:126).

## CHAPTER 4

### **Exploring Fugitive Realities: Appropriation, Falsification and Dissensus in the Art of Ousmane Sembène**

Cinema is our night school — *Ousmane Sembène*

#### **4.0 Imaging, Conversion, Excision**

In the Oxford *Encyclopedia of African Thought* (Irele and Jeyifo 2010), the entry on ‘African Cinema’ sits uneasily between entries on two other forms of ‘mancraft’— ‘Christianity (Churches, African)’ and ‘Circumcision.’ While this sequence of entries may be the result of an alphabetical collation deemed necessary for compiling an intelligible reference text, when read together, they offer politically pregnant revelations of the tensions, contradictions and aporias characteristic of African identities and by extension African thought. That is, by outlining different ideas or paths to ‘real’ or ‘ideal’ Africanness, these forms of mancraft also reveal how African cultural practices and identities are constituted, negotiated or erased and the forms of estrangement that accompany these processes.

For example, the tensions between religion, governance and the initiatory ‘cut’ played a key role in the colonial conception of time, progress and community as evinced by Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s treatment of Christianity and traditional African cultural practices in his novel *The River Between*. Through a fictional account of different forms of ‘being born again’, Ngugi engages the anxieties and forms of alienation infused into everyday life by Christianity’s will-to-convert on one hand and the adherence to Gikuyu ‘traditional’ rites of passage like circumcision on the other. By paying attention to the specificity of the colonial context, Ngugi problematizes

and politicizes these rituals of mediation thus provoking us to think about the complexity of African lives and identities.

In the postcolony, circumcision continues to figure within dominant discourses on the African self and sometimes serves as the basis of ‘mediating estrangement’ between groups. More specifically, male circumcision has become part of the phallocratic imagination of community and has been mobilized to determine politically and diplomatically viable voices and bodies or to maintain social/political distance between individuals and groups (Musila 2009). Similarly, female circumcision (often presented as Female Genital Mutilation) has become a part of a global human rights imaginary where genital excision is seen as a symptom of ‘Africa’s cultural lag’ and inability to comply with modernity’s cultural codes (Mamdani 2002). The numerous campaigns to abolish female circumcision by Africans and non-Africans alike have been backed by calls for external intervention in the form of policies, pedagogical strategies and creation of institutions to alleviate the pains caused by ‘anachronistic rituals’ that continue to make the African strange and estranged from humanity’s ‘progress.’ These moral discourses on humanity, the female body, sexuality and the African self are often predicated on the idea that the African does not engage in *meaningful acts* (Mbembe 2001: 3). Not only do they see the question of Africa as something already settled, the truth claims that they make often construe Africa as a pathological space in need of remedies and transformations by people, technologies or practices from another time or another place.

In contrast with the aforementioned desire to ‘fix’ what Africa is, or the desire to convert and transform the African based on the dictates of hegemonic projects like Euro-modernity,

Christianity and postcolonial nationalism, Ousmane Sembène offers a reading of African cultures that foregrounds the ambiguity and multiplicity of the African lived experiences. In his feature film *Moolaadé* ("magical protection") for example, Sembène politicizes his characters' fidelity to African tradition by engaging the question of female genital 'excision'. While he remains critical of the practice of female circumcision, Sembène does not engage in the totalizing and moralizing discourse that fails to appreciate the fact that African societies, like all other societies, "participate in a *complex* order, rich in unexpected turns, meanders, and changes of course" (Mbembe 2001: 8). On the contrary, he highlights the internal contradictions and paradoxes within African cultures in a manner that disturbs the "stereotypes of African womanhood as victims of irredeemable patriarchal cultures that hold them immobile and stripped of fundamental human rights" (Akudinobi 2006).

As illustrated by the main character, Collé's (Fatoumata Coulibaly) invocation of the inviolable tradition of Moolaadé in order to grant sanctuary to four prepubescent girls escaping the community's initiatory rites, useful spaces of flight, sanctuary and dissensus exist within certain African customary practices. The political significance of Collé's actions rests in her "transgressive fidelity" and creative use of tradition. As a woman acting in a patriarchal society, Collé turns to one part of tradition (the Moolaadé spell) in order to protect the girls from both the community's patriarchs and the *Salindana* sorority who conduct the community's dominant rite of passage in the form of purification rituals. The 'aesthetics of transgression' in *Moolaadé* challenges gender codes in general and goes further to disturb the notion of the unitary figure of the woman built on the idea that all women stand together in opposition to male domination (see Taussig 1993). That is, Collé's dis-identification with consensual womanhood in the service of a

different idea of womanhood is a provocation to pursue experiences and encounters that exist with but are impossible with dominant truths and identities. Here, Sembène presents the ambiguity of African tradition as politically significant by illustrating how it [tradition] acts as a mode of capture through violent and oppressive prescriptive codes while making provisions for flight and sanctuary from its own prescriptions. As such, traditional practices are presented as complex meaningful acts and sites of contested meaning that can be usefully engaged for different purposes and with varying outcomes depending on one's ethical disposition or political position.

Such a treatment of African traditional practices offers an ethico-political alternative to the modernization narrative characteristic of colonial instructional films which gain their moral force by dwelling on a perceived temporal and moral break between African tradition and European modernity. Perhaps most significantly, *Moolaadé* [both the film and the spell] disturbs the mode of thought that subscribes to an uncritical conception of African tradition by interrupting the 'evolutionary time' that presents the abandonment of African cultural practices as the solution to African problems based on a false opposition between tradition and modernity — where modernity is presented as the site of safety and realization of the promises of the fulfilled self.

To pursue the aesthetic, ethical and political significance of the relationship between cinematic works like *Moolaadé* and political thought, the explorations in this chapter treat some of the discourses and debates surrounding the political and diplomatic significance of African cinema more so, "engaged cinema". Far from presenting a hagiographic reading of Sembène's cinematic oeuvre, these explorations are best read as cinematic excursions into the aporetic character of

‘African’ cultural practices while emphasizing the importance of paying attention to the political context of their emergence, reproduction, reception and transformation. Beginning with a reading of colonial cinema as a form of *mancraft* based on colonial *commandment*, I proceed to engage the ‘cartography’ of estrangement and dissensus in Ousmane Sembène’s novels and films by paying attention to the ways in which Sembène’s art enacts or disturbs the truth claims that underline what Achille Mbembe calls ‘Afro-radicalist’ and ‘nativist’ narratives of African identity.

According to Mbembe, ‘Afro-radicalist’ and ‘nativist’ modes of self-scripting and narration draw upon the history of loss in their conception of the postcolonial African self and leave little room for other narratives or conceptions of self to emerge. Given the centrality of ‘Afro-radicalist’ and ‘nativist’ narration of Africanness, it is worth rehearsing Mbembe’s argument at length. As Mbembe aptly puts it:

The effort to determine the conditions under which the African subject could attain full selfhood, become self-conscious, and be answerable to no one else soon encountered historicist thinking in two forms that led it into a dead end. The first of these is what might be termed *Afro-radicalism*, with its baggage of instrumentalism and political opportunism. The second is the burden of the metaphysics of difference (*nativism*). The first current of thought—which liked to present itself as “democratic,” “radical,” and “progressive”—used Marxist and nationalist categories to develop an imaginaire of culture and politics in which a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse. The second current of thought developed out of an emphasis on the “native condition.” It promoted the idea of a unique African identity founded on membership of the black race. (Mbembe 2002 a: 240-241).

Mbembe goes on to illustrate how Afro-radicalist and nativist currents of thought offer limited readings of Africa due to their focus on the historical processes (slavery, colonization and apartheid) “through which the African self became alienated from itself (self-division) and the forms of estrangement that relegate him/her to the realm of objects such that he/she cannot recognize himself” (Mbembe 2002 a.: 241). His incredulity towards the narratives and discourse on Africa that nativism and Afro-radicalism privileges is based on their desire ‘not only to pronounce once and for all the “truth” on the issue of what Africa and Africans are (theory), but also to chart what might or should be the destiny of Africa and Africans in the world (praxis)’ (Mbembe 2002b: 629). The quest for African truths manifests itself through nativists’ concern with the loss of purity as a result of historical encounters and truth searching is enacted through “moments where an authentic African identity can be realized through the return to an ontological and mythical ‘Africanness’ in which the African subject might once again say ‘I’ and express him- or herself in his or her own name” (Mbembe 2002b: 629). Similarly, Afro-radicalists rely on a moral economy and quest for African truths that charts the world in terms of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ by dwelling on the traumas that Africans have endured and resorts to a revolutionary politics that seeks to “break away from imperialism and dependence” (Mbembe 2002b).

Heeding Mbembe’s critique of nativist and Afro-radicalist modes of African ‘self-writing’ and the numerous responses to his provocative essay, I want to illustrate how attentiveness to different loci of reception and one’s position in the world enables us to “reformulate Africinity as an open question — for the sake of creativity” (Diagne 2002, 623). Through an aesthetically-



oriented political gloss on Africanness /Africanity, I want to engage (and engage is the right term here) not only the limits to thought imposed by a focus on the kinds of African estrangement that nativists and Afro-radicalists privilege, but also the possibilities for reading these sites of estrangement differently and mining them for their political and ethical insights.

The engaged mode of filmmaking that Sembène is concerned with provides an exemplary aesthetic vehicle for thinking about and politicizing the question of African estrangement that Mbembe opens up. Doubtless, some of Sembène's films involve a mimetic representation of historical processes and privileges the image and idea of Africa that had been trivialized or erased by the slave trade, Islam, European colonialism and post-independence neo-colonialism (Landy 1984: 31). However, it is important to note that the encounters that Sembène stages between his cinematic subjects / novel characters does much more than advocate for the inclusion of African lives and perspectives within the space of recognized political action. Through contextualized engagements with forms of domination or dominant discourses on Africa and the micropolitical practices that disturb them , Sembène's art reveals the tensions and complexities of Africanness while presenting a form of politics that challenges not only the message conveyed by a colonial or neocolonial cinematic *dispositif* but the *dispositif* itself. Such a politically disposed cinematic practice has enabled Sembène to create images and tell stories that enabled experiences that had been trivialized and voices that had been silenced to acquire some depth and significance (Rancière 2004).Through these “polydiegetic” engagements, Sembène's cinematic practice expanded the domain of aesthetic, social and political inquiry not by adding a secondary narrative to the primary or established categories, but

by seeing what was considered secondary (in this case Africa) as being part of the primary terrain within which the social or the political is constituted and problematized (Said 1993: 32).<sup>51</sup> The ethico-political insights derived from such a treatment of cinema enable us to isolate multiple sites of estrangement and practices of mediating estrangement in Africa that present a more complex conception of diplomatic and political thought by being attentive to voices, practices and experiences that have been neglected in dominant constructions of what qualifies as a politically viable voice (Shapiro 2006: ix). On the whole, such a treatment of cinema disposes us towards a different way of mapping the political and the diplomatic and creates or revisits productive ways of thinking about Africaness. That is, Sembène's cinematic political thought and by extension cinematic diplomacy presents a useful counter-space where approaches to diplomacy, Africa, morality and subjectivity are rendered as multi-genre, as well as multi-ethnic fields of thinking (Shapiro 1999).

#### **4.1 On Engagement**

While African cinema has been useful in presenting a different story and image of Africa from that which was privileged by colonial cinema, some critics like Kenneth Harrow hold that African cinema, more so cinema engagé has a price to pay for following Sembène's ideologically driven cinema. Based on a reading of *Postcolonial African Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism*, Harrow privileges the 'postmodern' moment and uses its

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<sup>51</sup> I thank Michael J. Shapiro for drawing my attention to this crucial point. The concept polydiegetic as used here refers to an "assemblage of multiple narratives" see Shapiro M.J., HBO's Two Frontiers: *Deadwood* and *The Wire*, Paper delivered at the Western Political Science Association meeting, Portland, Oregon, March 22<sup>nd</sup> -24<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Also see , John Kraniauskas; see his analysis of *The Wire*, "Elasticity of demand," *Radical Philosophy* 154 (March/April, 2009), 32.

insights to carry out a critique of Sembène's cinema. According to Harrow, Sembène's cinema follows a basic narrative structure that does not allow for other narratives to emerge given that it:

...begin[s] with the presentation of a problem, usually involving a crisis that crystallizes around some opposition to the film's protagonist. This is usually followed by a false solution in which the prospects of the removal of the obstacle are shown to be inadequate. Eventually a true solution is found, with the issues related to the film's underlying rhetoric resolved and explicated. This is the threefold path to truth, so to speak: a trajectory at the end of which the audience is enjoined to see and appreciate the truth uncovered by Sembène and, ideally, motivated to act (Harrow 2007:1).

Underlining Harrow's critique of African cinema engagé in general and the historicism and narrative structure in Sembène's 'ideological' cinema in particular, is a suspicion of a cinema of categories rather than border figures. For example, Harrow is critical of Sembène's counter-historical projects in *Emitai* (1971), *Ceddo* (1976) and *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), given that his (Sembène's) recovery of jumped over stories does not question the very notion of history (Harrow 2007: 10). Noting that Sembène's cinema is based on dialectical motions, culturalism and economism that "must silence some figures, must occlude contrary or alternative perspectives that might have led somewhere other than where the director wishes to lead us," Harrow remains critical of the ideologically inclined and 'politically' engaged cinema for leading its audiences to the "lesser penalty to be paid for accepting the underlying system of values" (Harrow 2007: 1).

While Harrow's critique captures most elements of Sembène's general aesthetic, a closer reading of the characters and plotlines in most of Sembène's films and novels offer a 'politics of

aesthetics' that exceeds and is more complex than the one Harrow presents. Not only does Sembène's art respond to the dominant ways of organizing social life by presenting alternative images of Africa, it also creates disturbances, interruptions and refusals that enable other ways of sensing and making sense of the world to emerge.

The forms of dissensus that such a politics of heterogeneous senses enables is well captured in Sembène's novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1960/ 2003) where he maps the everyday lives and revolutionary experiences in the cities of Bamako, Thiès, and Dakar during a colonial era rail workers strike in the 1940s. The novel's primary narration hinges on the transformations in relations, subjectivity and sensibilities taking place within a colonial space characterized by machine mediated material conditions of existence, religious consensus and 'traditional' African values like filial piety and dominant masculinities. As the plot develops, the distributions of occupations and conventions of colonial worker-employer relations and traditional gender, generational and inter-ethnic relations are contested, negotiated and redefined due to the re-apportionment of spaces and times that accompany the call for equality at the workplace, in the home and by extension in the colony (Rancière 2004, 43).

In this sense, Sembène's novels and cinematic work enacts what Jacques Rancière calls a meta-politics of aesthetics that establishes a different 'sensory community'. That is, far from directing our attention to 'a specific single world,' the provocations in Sembène's works direct us to 'a world of competing worlds' (Rancière 2003: 6). As such, the forms of engagement that his films and novels articulate should be read together with the spaces, times, functions and apparatuses they disturb and those that they create. The multiplicity of senses and modes of making sense of

the world that emerges from such practices are politically and aesthetically significant given the “new relationships between thought and the sensory world, between bodies and their environment, between bodies and the distribution of worlds” that they enable (Rancière 2003,7).

#### **4.2 Artistic Dis-identifications**

The redistribution of spaces, times and sensations or reconstituting of identities in Sembène’s work is further politicized through his attentiveness to multiple ethical dispositions and the outcomes of ruptures with the dominant order. That is, at the centre of a lot of Sembène’s work is a problematization of mimetic political and diplomatic practices that disturb the distribution of functions, times and spaces by appropriating the modes of meaning making that previously acted as the means of legitimating colonial domination. In *God’s Bits of Wood*, Tiemoko, one of the striking rail workers is instrumental in forming such counter-spaces through the appropriation of the tools of colonial domination and consensus which he then uses to open a space of emancipation. By setting up a tribunal — a practice that was previously the preserve of the *toubabs* [Frenchmen] — Tiemoko converts a space that was previously used for the oppression of Africans into a space where the traditional African jurisprudential model, Islamic gender codes and colonial rationality are contested. The counter-space he creates enables women to congregate and speak before men, while challenging the established habits, policies and ethical dispositions that made it impossible for members of the community to voice their dissatisfaction with both the colonial administration and its African surrogates and accomplices.

By presenting the possibilities for escape and capture within the revolutionary process/practice, Sembène makes it apparent that the breaks from the dominant order and even the institutions of

the dominant order itself are best evaluated on the basis of their ability to break from the 'dominant logic' based on the affects they produce. Such a move makes it possible for us to raise critical questions with regard to a whole range of African mediation practices and forms of estrangement that seek to dislodge the police order established by colonial and postcolonial regimes by replicating the order itself. To put it otherwise, if Mbembe provides a creative opening for the idea of Africanness through a call for infinite analysis, Sembène's analytic and the accompanying aesthetic is predicated on an ethic of infinite engagement based on attentiveness to affects.

In short, Sembène's concept of the political resonates with that of Jacques Rancière who sees the political as 'the encounter between two heterogeneous processes' each contributing to the manner in which society is constituted, time and space distributed and occupations apportioned. As Rancière puts it, the political is predicated on processes of 'identification and subjectivization' where;

...the first process is that of governing, and it entails creating community consent, which relies on the distribution of shares and the hierarchy of places and functions. I shall call this process policy. The second process is that of equality. It consists of a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition. The proper name for this set of practices remains emancipation (Rancière 1992: 58).

Based on a similar conception of the political, Sembène's novel sought to provoke affects that enable people to negotiate life in public/private spaces while reconstituting themselves as

political subjects and politicizing the spaces that they occupy. Such a literary disturbance of the regimes that create consensual ideas of Africanness, femininity or humanity is compelling especially given the colonial context within which the novel is written.

However, convinced that the low levels of literacy in Africa provided him with a limited textual community, Sembène turned to cinema which he considered a more democratic and revolutionary medium.<sup>52</sup> Through cinema, Sembène continued to disturb Senegalese "official" history while creating stories and images that invent new subjects and ways of sensing and making sense of the world. In *Emitai* (1971), the heroic but little known actions of a young Diola woman named Aline Siteo Diatta provides the inspiration for a cinematic counter-memory that questions the popular colonial and postcolonial histories that presents De Gaulle as the liberator and healer of Senegalese wounds caused by the pro-Nazi Vichy regime of Maréchal Pétain. The "appropriation of African history" as a means of presenting "new stories about the African past" enables a plurality of historical and aesthetic encounters with the events and voices that have been silenced by colonial and postcolonial regimes of recognition (Gadjigo 2004: 41). As Sembène puts it, *Emitai* was meant to suggest that for "Africans there was no fundamental difference between the two regimes. We were always colonized subjects. Certainly, the methods have changed a little bit but the objectives were always supposed to maintain the French empire" (Hennebelle 1971/2008: 20).

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<sup>52</sup> For Sembène's reasons for turning to cinema, see his interview with Mamadou Niang (2000) 'Still the Fire in the Belly: The Confessions of Ousmane Sembène

From the African Film Festival's 2001 website, <http://www.africanfilmny.org/network/news/Fniang.html>. Reprinted by permission of Mamadou Niang.

A similar sense of dissensus is discernible in *Camp de Thiaroye* (1989). Through “storytelling ingenuity and character delineation” Sembène engages the history of WWII by recounting the participation and victimization of African soldiers who fought alongside the Europeans (Ukadike 1994: 294-5). Through the detailed story of the personal experiences of the *tirailleurs* we are invited to witness the different forms of exploitation and victimhood that lead up to the eventual massacre of a contingent of rebelling *tirailleurs* at the transit Camp de Thiaroye. Not only does the film present an interesting narrative of estrangement and abandonment through the eloquent senior Sergeant-Major Diatta, (Ibrahima Sane) who manages to impress the bigoted French officers with his taste for “great” classical music and literature (but is still discriminated against when it comes to questions of pay), the film also dramatizes the plight of the soldiers through the mute infantryman nicknamed Pays. As a former prisoner of war at the Buchenwald POW camp, Pays is traumatized by the similarities (barbed wire) between the POW camp and the transit camp. Through such juxtapositions, Sembène complicates the idea of victimhood by revealing the different ways in which African soldiers were accomplices, witnesses and victims of the war in general and the racial and colonial logics that governed the distribution of functions, bodies, pain and benefits that made the war possible.

While a lot of Sembène’s work is concerned with, and even seems to privilege ‘African traditions,’ and perspectives, it is worthwhile to note that his cinematic explorations reveal the dynamics of the invention of both the categories of ‘Africanness’ and ‘tradition’ while taking seriously the lived and material elements of these inventions ( Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Mudimbe 1988). That is, Sembène’s art, even where its biases are apparent, provokes one to ask



why and how certain political formations come to have a particular shape, how they are lived out in time and space and how these arrangements might be otherwise.

Through a mix of historical excursions, story-telling practices, satire, drama and revolutionary melodramas, his cinema questions the 'we' that political questions about Africa sometimes take for granted (Dean 2000: 3, Deleuze 1989 :222). Thus, films like *Ceddo* (1976) become more than a narrative on the resistant acts of the Ceddos "who defended their African identity against three hostile foreign influences (Islam, Catholicism and a trade in guns and alcohol for men and women who were to be sold as slaves)" (Berian 2004: 142). Sembène's attentiveness to African collective utterances in *Ceddo* provides a different narrative of the African past from that presented in academic discourses like Ali Mazrui's *The Africans: A triple Heritage* where 'the most serious form of decay in African society is deeply rooted in the institutions inherited from the Western world, rather than those bequeathed by Islam.' As Nwachukwu Ukadike notes in his reading of both Mazrui and Sembène, the view of Islam that Mazrui privileges contradicts the one expressed by Sembène in *Xala* (1974) and *Ceddo* (1976) where the violences of Islamic imperialism, Western imperialism and oppressive elements in African cultures come under critique (Ukadike 1994: 13-14). The macropolitical significance of Sembène's cinematic engagements are well captured by Samba Gadjigo who observes that ; "Sembène's imagining of an alternative past for Islam in Senegalese identity...creates a history counter to the official knowledge invented by politicians," led by Senghor and the Muslim community which constitutes a majority of the Senegalese population (Gadjigo 2004: 44). As such, "Ceddo invites viewers to think critically about the place of Islam in Senegalese society but also to reflect on its social, political and religious order" (ibid).

### 4.3 Colonial Cinema, Commandment and the 'Aesthetic Education' of the African

While African cinema offers multiple forms and opportunities for escape from practices and discourses that seek to establish an African truth and with it a consensual African identity, it is worth noting that the cinematographer and consumer of images of Africa often finds himself/herself 'before a people which, from the point of view of culture, is doubly colonized' (Deleuze 1989: 222). The estrangement and double colonization of the African with regard to cinematic recognition is articulated in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1986). Writing about the 'constellation of postulates' and 'propositions that slowly and subtly' shape one's view of the world and of the group to which one belongs, Frantz Fanon proposes a cinematic experiment for the colonial subject:

I recommend the following experiment to those who are unconvinced: Attend showings of a Tarzan film in the Antilles and in Europe. In the Antilles, the young Negro identifies himself *de facto* with Tarzan against the Negroes. This is much more difficult for him in a European theater, for the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the savages on the screen. It is a conclusive experience. The Negro learns that one is not black without problems. A documentary film on Africa produces similar reactions when it is shown in a French city and in Fort-de-France. I will go farther and say that Bushmen and Zulus arouse even more laughter among the young Antilleans. It would be interesting to show how in this instance the reactional exaggeration betrays a hint of recognition. In France a Negro who sees this documentary is virtually petrified. There he has no more hope of flight: He is at once Antillean, Bushman, and Zulu (Fanon 1986: 118).

Given the racialized regime of colonial cinema production, circulation and consumption, engaged African cineastes like Sembène and Mauritanian's Med Hondo strived to produce an aesthetic rupture within the world of cinema. Through an appropriation of cinematic technology, space and time, the filmmakers contributed to the proliferation of cinematic images of Africa as part of an ethico-political practice committed to the presentation of images and modes of thought that disturb the Tarzanistic representations of Africa. They also contested the quest for African 'Truths' as presented in Jean Rouch's *Cinéma vérité*. As Ousmane Sembène points out in an interview with François Pfaff, his interest in cinema emanates from a need to correct the distortions of Africa's historical experience with colonialism and European representations of Africa given that:

Before we started to make films, Europeans had shot films about the African continent. Most of the Africans we saw in those films were unable to set one foot in front of another by themselves. African landscapes were used as settings. Those films were based in European stories. (Pfaff 1984: 3)

The above views by Sembène and Fanon resonate with those of Gilles Deleuze (1989) who observes that the subjects of political cinema are often "colonized by stories that have come from elsewhere, but also from their own myths." These stories and images often turn colonized cinematic subjects into "impersonal entities at the service of the colonizer" (ibid).

In contrast, Sembène's cinema brings the forces of dis-identification to bear on questions of African identity and political/diplomatic thought. Through a constant interrogation of the consensual modes of identity formation, his cinema creates and then disturbs the different kinds

of people and artifices that he ‘invents’ (Deleuze 1989: 217) As I will illustrate in the following section, such inventions are political, not because they contest and overturn the colonial power formations, but because they create a space of collective utterance and insert people in those spaces where race and colonialism do not considered ‘peopled.’ In this way, Sembène’s cinema supplies a way of thinking and becoming that undoes the fixed identities of colonial cinema by speaking to “several peoples, an infinity of peoples, who remain to be united, or should not be united, in order for the problem to change” ( Deleuze 1989: 220).

For example, the desire to undo the representations of Africa arising from European cinema led Sembène and many African filmmakers of the immediate ‘post-independence’ era to engage in macropolitical processes through entities like the coalition of all African filmmakers, Federation Pan Africaine des Cineastes (FEPACI) which was accorded full political observer status at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Ukadike 1994:91). While such affiliations make cinema part of the continent’s pan-African diplomatic apparatus, engagement with micropolitical and transgressive practices of everyday life as evinced by some of Sembène’s work often disturbs the statist forms of cultural governance and uncritical modes of scripting pan-African identities. Thus, the ‘aesthetics of liberation’ espoused by filmmakers like Sembène does more than present a cinematic context that “questions the images of Africa” and received narrative structure of dominant cinema (Ukadike 1994 : 91, Gabriel 1982: 77). Through ‘self-critical’ constructs that “interpret the cultural jumble that covers Africa,” these films pluralize the cinematic stage while problematizing the image of Africa through a critical engagement with contexts where a multiplicity of interpretations, experiences and voices acts as an impetus for social change (Gabriel 1982: 77).

Among the implications of the liberatory aesthetics that underlines most of engaged African cinema projects is an encouragement to consider the temporal aspects of African subjectivity and the manner in which bodies, functions and institutions are temporalized in an attempt to construct and police African identities on the one hand and establish regimes of truth or distribution on the other. Attentiveness to multiple African times enables African cinema to recall the challenges posed by the foundational violence characteristic of colonial *thingification* and customary practices. It also problematizes the quest to right wrongs — past and present — and calls for a much more patient reading and reconsideration of how events of dissensus and the transformed sensations and the interruptions they instantiate work to render as political subjects the peoples and practices that had been muted, masked or erased by dominant forms of representation.

To fully appreciate the policing and emancipatory capacities of an idea of Africa mediated through cinematic time, it is important to engage in a critical reading of colonial projects like the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE). Such projects provide a useful venue for thinking about the role cinema plays in mediating African estrangement by illustrating the relationship between temporality, the cultivation of desirable conduct and the constitution of consensual African identities. Attentiveness to the policing imperatives of the BEKE cinema reveals how cinema was part of a colonial legal, academic and religious *dispositif* geared towards the production of Africans as colonial subjects.

Like Sembène who turned to cinema due to an attentiveness to ‘the politics of literature’, the BEKE cinema project was borne out of a concern for the illiteracy imposed estrangement between African groups and the limits it imposed on attempts at the cultivation of colonial habits among Africans. However, the colonial desire to bring Africans under a single ‘modern temporality’ characterized by colonial governance, consumption of western goods and cultural codes and production (through cheap labor) led J. Merle Davis, the Director of the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the International Missionary Council to set up a commission of enquiry on the effect of heavy copper belt industries on ‘native African life’ in the Belgian Congo and what was then known as Northern Rhodesia. In their report, *Modern Industry and the African* (1932), the Davis led commission pointed out that there was an “ever-widening gap between the outlooks and ways of life of the industrialized native living in the towns and those of the rural village”. Noting that “Bantu youth, and particularly Christian youth, who had undergone training in mission or government schools tend to live in a world that is quite alien and unintelligible to the elders of their villages,” the commission set out to find ways of ‘bridging the gap’ between the different parts of the native population by “explaining to older men and women the new world and the new ideas” which were rapidly advancing upon them (Notcutt and Latham 1937: 9).

Concerned that the high levels of illiteracy among the ‘natives’ would make it difficult to create a community of shared sentiments and ideas between the educated and uneducated Africans, the committee resorted to the ‘moving image’ which would serve as a suitable pedagogic device and effective supplement to ‘native’ recreational life (Notcutt and Latham 1937: 10). Based on their diagnostic of African intellectual and social life and their desire to disseminate ideas that would

mold African subjectivity, J. Merle Davis, George Chitty Latham, and Major Leslie Allen Notcutt attempted to implement the commission's recommendations through the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE) — a project which ran in East and Central Africa between 1935 and 1937. Through the collaborative efforts of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the British Colonial Office, several East African colonial governments, the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures and the British Film Institute, BEKE made and showed instructional films and legitimized its practice through claims that it was “making films in Africa, for the Africans and with Africans acting in them” (Notcutt and Latham 1937).

While BEKE instructional films like *Tropical Hookworm* (1936), *Veterinary Training of African Natives* (1936) and *African Peasant Farms - the Kingolwira Experiment* (1936), were created for an ‘African audience,’ and featured African actors, it is important to note that the forms of representations and the *evolutionary time* that these films deployed presented an idea of Africa and Africanness that trivialized the complexity of the experiences and meaning-making practices of the people it claimed to represent. Through simple plot lines and inter-titles, the BEKE films reproduced colonial pedagogical prerogatives based on preconceived notions about the comprehension capacities of their African audience. For example, the BEKE films emphasized a good enlightened/ backward African dichotomy and the plots were structured to advocate for African progress through images and narratives where the ‘good/enlightened’ African prevailed over the ‘backward’ African who was yet to learn the skills and values characteristic of modern colonial life. Through these moralistic and pedantic themes and representations, the cinematic apparatus acted as an extension of colonial governance and rationality by advocating for habits and values required for the colonial project to flourish. Not only did these films present the

European way of life as exemplary, they also presented settler colonialism in a positive light and urged colonial administrators to “civilize and uplift” Africans thus ‘giving Africans the impression that their cultures and traditions were inferior to those of Europeans’ (Pfaff 1984: 3; Ukadike 1994:31).

On the whole, colonial cinema ‘put in motion’ the camera’s optic based claims to truth that photography had already established in colonial Africa. Like photography before it, cinematic images were used to “assemble the myriad world economies into a single commodity culture” and provide a moral conception of Africaness. According to Anne McClintock, such images were part of the imperial apparatus given that they provide the ‘centralized system of cultural communication’ which:

[...] disseminates commodity capital and the truth of technological progress to a world audience ...Photography provided the cultural equivalent of a universal currency. Like money, photography promised from the outset to embody a universal language...addressing itself to all who possess vision and in characters alike understood in the course of civilization and the hut of the savage. Hailed as superseding the messy enigmas of language and as capable of communicating on a global scale through the universal faculty of vision, photography shifted the authority of universal knowledge from print language to spectacle. (McClintock 1995,123).

Thus, the camera, more so in its cinematic form, went hand in hand with the ‘temporalization’ of Africa where the camera’s claim to truth was used to further the claims of racial science based on its mechanical and therefore ‘objective’ or ‘factual’ knowledge about racial types (McClintock 1995: 124). Cinematic representations of the Tazarnistic kind were also used to locate Africans



allochronically [in another time of primitivism, infantilism, animality] thus legitimizing the modernization based activities geared towards helping Africans ‘catch up’ that BEKE exemplified (Fabian 1983: 155). In short, the cinematic and photographic visualization of Africa was considered synonymous with ‘knowing it’ and served as a pathway to managing it given the access to African truths that it provided. Truths that were considered to be in need of colonial remedy and transformation (Fabian 1983: 106).

By silencing certain voices or erasing aspects of the everyday lives of their African subjects/characters, the BEKE films acted as an aesthetic site whose moral and political significance for Africans could be summed thus; “they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented” (Marx 1852). As Notcutt and Latham (1937) put it, the purpose of the BEKE cinematic project was;

1. To help the adult African to understand and to adopt himself to the new conditions which are invading and threatening to overwhelm him.
2. To reinforce the ordinary methods of the classroom and the lecture hall.
3. To conserve what is best in African traditions and culture by representing these in their proper setting as stages in racial development and as an inheritance to be cherished with pride.
4. To provide recreation and entertainment. (Notcutt and Latham 1937, 28)

By bringing together “images, especially mechanically produced images” with the colonialism mediated “idea of the imagined community”, the BEKE films produced and reproduced “imaginaries” and archives of the idea of Africa that they privileged (Appadurai 1995: 31,

Mudimbe 1988). It is important to engage, not just the problematic of Africanness that they treat, but also their ability to *illuminate* the sites of political and cultural encounter that might not be considered political within conventional policy frames and practices. As illustrated by the objectives of the BEKE project, the production of a cinematic image of Africa was part and parcel of colonial governance, missionary proselytism and other forms of social imagination of Africanness. These modes of mediating estrangement between Africans with different dispositions and identity practices was based on a colonial point of view and contributed to the formation of colonial and racialized knowledge about Africa while producing the African as a subject of colonial governance and diplomatic recognition.

In many ways, the BEKE films were a manifestation of what Achille Mbembe refers to as colonial *Commandment* ( Mbembe 2001:, 27). That is, the BEKE cinematic representations laid out a standard of conduct and set of desirable habits, tastes and dispositions to be inculcated in the African through ‘grooming practices’, experimentation and violence where necessary. The ‘normative model of personhood’ arising from cinema mediated colonial commandment and cultivation of Africanness was not unique to British colonialism.<sup>53</sup> Like the British, French colonialists also engaged in cinematic projects as part of a colonial enterprise that had the construction, representation and domination of African subjects as one of its main objectives.

While the French had no policy for producing films that were especially intended for their

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the production of the normative model of personhood see Shapiro Michael J., *Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation and Gender* (New York: New York University Press, 1999.)p.139

subjects in Africa, laws like *Le Décret Laval* (the Laval Decree) (1934) were made to “control the content of films that were shot in Africa and to minimize the creative roles played by Africans in the making of films” (Diawara 1992: 22). As a result of such policing practices, films like Alain Resnais and Chris Marker’s *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (*Statues Also Die*, 1953) or anti-colonial films like *Afrique 50* (1950) were banned for presenting an image or idea of Africa that departed from the colonial ‘common sense’ dominated by a “Tarzanistic” image of Africa where ‘African characters are never developed or given a chance to express their feelings’ or thoughts (Ukadike 1994: 44).

There are numerous examples of the cinematic trivialization of African experience as a way of knowing or constructing an image of African. From the French documentary *La Croisière Noire* (*A Journey through Black Africa*, 1924) to British films like *Nionga* (1925), *Stampede* (1929), *King Solomon’s Mines* (1937) and instructional films like *Daybreak in Udi* (1949)) and *An African in London* (1941), multiple ways of sensing and making sense of the world in Africa were erased or considered residual or a nullity. Similarly, the idea of Africa as a dysfunctional site defined by the “lack” of modernity, authenticity, formality and order was reinforced through images and narratives that emphasized the distinction between Europeans and Africans or modern and ‘traditional’ forms of African sociality. Through these cinematic representations, Africa was presented as a site in need of radical transformation, policing and remedy. The temporal ‘serializations’ and spatial or cultural juxtapositions enabled by cinematic genres were used to advocate for progress, forms of etiquette and consumption that could only be achieved through colonial rule and an abandonment of ‘traditional’ forms of African life.

There were also cinematic attempts at capturing and representing African ‘Truths’ or penetrating the African mind and behavior as evinced by Jean Rouch’s ethno-fictional films. While Rouch’s experimental techniques and methods raised interesting questions for cinema, his quest for essential African Truths (which were to be found in the behaviors and ‘traditions’ of African societies) ties his cinematic work to the ethno-philosophical mode of thinking about Africa and Africans developed and popularized by the Belgian missionary, Placide Tempels in his *Bantu Philosophy* (1945/1959). For example, Rouch’s *cinéma vérité* (truthful cinema) has been criticized for emphasizing ‘how Europeans think’ on one hand and how ‘Africans behave’ on the other while remaining inattentive to the complexity of the contexts and African lives that he represents (Gabriel, 1982: 75). Commenting on the disparity between Rouch’s treatment of Africans and Europeans in his cinematic experiments, Teshome Gabriel states that Jean Rouch has;

[...] given the world an Africa that is content with understanding nature and coping with the strains of everyday life; but in none of his works is there an Africa that wants to change its predicament. This issue is extremely important when we consider that Rouch’s Africa was the same Africa that was waging a colonial war (Gabriel 1982: 76).

Gabriel’s emphasis on the context within which cinematic production, circulation and reception takes place and the ethical disposition of the cinematographer supplies some insights on the relationship between cinema as diplomatic apparatus and *the political*. Given that African filmmaking by Africans corresponded with the end of colonial rule, attentiveness to the context of African cinematic practice and the forms of political thought that accompany it becomes increasingly important. This is specifically so for the postcolonial cinematographer or critic whose attentiveness to otherness opens a space for a moralistic treatment of cinema characterized by iconophobia — a fundamental distrust and rejection of images, more so, Western produced images of Africa. However, a more ethically inclined and aesthetically attuned consideration of

the history of cinema in Africa and Africa in cinema leads to the embracing of cinematic technology while maintaining an incredulity towards certain styles, images, characterizations and narratives based on the positioning of characters in time and the political possibilities or truths that they enable ( Chow 2004 :673). Accordingly, African filmmakers have to contend with the fact that the cinematic image was an accomplice to colonial mediation practices and the quest for truth that contributed to the negative and fallacious representation and domination of Africa. They also have to acknowledge cinema's capacity to mobilize 'the powers of the false' to contest or disturb dominant truths and representations of Africanness (Deleuze 1989).

The tension between the consensual search for truth and dissensual *falsifications* makes cinema a relevant, yet ambiguous device for engaging what Achille Mbembe calls the "heretical spirit" that lies at "the heart of the encounter between Africa and the world." According to Mbembe, "this heretical spirit enables the subject to inhabit several worlds and to place him or herself on two sides of the image simultaneously." Like the cinematic image, the "heretical spirit operates by encasing the subject in the event, by splitting, dividing, multiplying, and converting things into their opposite (or their fake), and by the excessive theatricality accompanying all manifestations of life" (Mbembe 2002b: 639). Not only does it provide a way of responding to the manner in which Africa has been 'falsified in its contact with the world' as the nativists and the Afro-radicals contend, it also creates a space for interrogating 'the falsification to which Africa subjected the world, in its attempt to ingest it' (Ibid).

#### 4.4 Exploring Disjunctive Africas

Nowhere is the interplay between the heretical spirit and the specters of colonial *commandment* clearer than in the satirical film *Xala* (1975), whose Wolof title means ‘temporary impotence’. Here, Sembène maps the sexual and social impotence of the protagonist El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye which takes place against the backdrop of neocolonial political relations, overlapping and often disjunctive ideas of Africanness and a polygamous family drama. By engaging political and libidinal economies, as well as encounters and desires that occur below [besides and against] the level and gaze that comprehends politics as a quest for power or a set of policy-making and implementation practices, *Xala* summons a concept of the political that exceeds a macropolitical focus on state policy. It also presents contending ideas of Africa and their conditions of ‘possibility’ thus illustrating that the notion of Africanness and sites of political encounter are by no means fixed.

Like in the novel that the film is based upon, postcolonial political subjectivity is problematized through an exploration of the paradoxical capacities of the ‘powerless’, neocolonial social stratification and the impotence of the new post-independence African bourgeoisie. By means of this cinematic allegory, Sembène carries out a critique of the Truths of African independence and the different meanings that this ideal acquires in the postcolonial moment. *Xala’s* treatment of everyday encounters and desire in the postcolony highlights the material and “psychological dimensions” of the tensions between African traditions and African modernity while engaging the exclusions, anxieties and disappointments that accompany the ‘falsifications’ to which Africa subjects itself and the world, ‘in its attempt to ingest’ the world (Landy 1984: 32, Mbembe 2002 b). More specifically, *Xala* questions where and what political life is supposed to be on the

grounds of the disjunctive temporalities that animate everyday life and disrupt or challenge the neocolonial national elite's claim to monopoly over legitimate postcolonial Africanness. The film's staging of diverse forms of co-presence that are negated or abjected in the process of neocolonial identity-fixing raises useful questions about the different ideas of Africa and subject positions that populate this co-presence.<sup>54</sup> For example, Xala's emphasis on the contemporaneousness of African lives enables Sembène to present his "attack on double fetishism — the traditional fetishism of the marabouts and the contemporary fetishism of the commodity" (Adesokan 2011: 64). This play on time also works as a polemical device that politicizes the experiences that are trivialized and the voices silenced in dominant modes of organizing and articulating postcolonial African identities

The disjunctive Africas that Sembène treats warrant elaboration here. In the very first sequence of *Xala*, we witness the coming to power of an African-style clad indigenous petite bourgeoisie, who, backed by the masses proceed to eject the French colonialists and symbols of French rule (Marie Antoinette's bust) from Senegal's Chamber of Commerce. As the new members of the Chambers of Commerce occupy their offices, they summon the familiar revolutionary rhetoric of "African socialism," "Negritude," and "Pan-Africanism"—reminiscent of slogans promoted by African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, and Julius Nyerere (Mushengyezi 2004). However, these discourses are soon revealed to be empty clichés as the elite become estranged from the poor through corrupt practices and forms of consumption and conceptions of Africanness that reproduce colonial power formations or create new forms of domination. For

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<sup>54</sup> For more on co-presence see Bhabha, H. K., (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

example, the president of the Chamber of Commerce retains Dupont-Durand, a former member of the Chamber as his sidekick and accomplice in corrupt practices thus establishing a neocolonial relationship between the new elites and the agents of the colonial regime (Eyoh, 1998: 112).

As the narrative develops, we soon learn that El Hadji, due to his newly acquired wealth is on the verge of ‘acquiring’ a third wife. A memorable event, which, according to the president of the Chamber of Commerce is an indication of a resilient Africanity that should not be lost when one embraces modernity. However, the fantasy of progress, accumulation and consumption is interrupted when El Hadji’s attempt to consummate his marriage fails due to what we come to learn is the ‘xala’— a curse of temporary sexual impotence whose cause and cure remain a mystery. Much of the film is taken up in El hadji’s desire to ‘spend’ and the relentless search for a cure for his impotence. Not only does this double desire (consumption and consummation) lead him to marabouts who issue him with traditional ‘fetishes’ to cure his sexual impotence, it also contributes to his consumption based relationship to national institutions and the colonial metropole. The web of desire, appropriation and consumption that El hadji is involved in manifests itself in his fetishization and conspicuous consumption of European goods and cultural products on one hand and misappropriation of public funds to maintain his lavish lifestyle on the other. The resultant aesthetic distinction that El hadji and the other members of the Chamber craft for themselves has an identity-oriented instrumentality characterized by an ambiguous relationship to modernity and tradition and the constant abjection of the poor.



For instance, El hadji imports Evian mineral water from France for drinking, cleaning his Mercedes Benz, and refilling its radiator. The ontological predicates of El hadji's class mediated tastes and commitments are revealed by his disgust at beggars who sit outside his shop. Not only does he refer to the beggars as "human refuse", he also considers them a marker of the lack of "independence" proper and requests the chamber president to remove them from the city. A similar sentiment, albeit in a racialized form is expressed by one of El hadji's colleagues who complains that he no longer goes to Spain for vacation because "there are too many blacks". In many ways, El hadji's attempt to cultivate an image and idea of the postcolonial self through the abjection of bodies and practices considered to be 'out of place' is consistent with a larger developmentalist project of constructing a consensual and well-ordered African identity devoid of ambiguity.<sup>55</sup>

Like the valuation and spatial distribution of bodies and affects, language use acts as a marker of different forms of consciousness or political dispositions as evinced by El hadji's scolding of his revolutionary daughter (Rama) for replying in Wolof when he speaks to her in French. In a move reminiscent of Fanon's reflection on the relationship between language, recognition and world making, Sembène goes on to engage the politics of language which he relates to different forms/levels of consciousness. Thus, El hadji, as a result of acquiring a 'new' consciousness, which can be attributed to his rapid fall from grace, resorts to Wolof when he is called upon to address the members of the Chamber of Commerce who have convened a meeting to expel him.

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<sup>55</sup> see Kristeva, J. *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000 and Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. p4. Also see Douglas, M. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Boston: Routledge, 1966

However, he is told to speak in the official language (French) as the use of Wolof is “racist, sectarian and reactionary”.

While the disconnect between the world of African tradition and one of colonial and state mediated modernity dominates the linguistic valuations above, the “heretical” inhabiting of several worlds and the transactions or intercourse that tie these worlds together are revealed when El hadji is introduced to the marabout Serigne Mada who manages to cure his xala. However, as a result of his financial woes, and his expulsion from the Chamber for writing bad checks and financing his wedding to his third wife with funds meant for purchasing rice for the poor, El Hadji’s check to the marabout bounces, and the "xala" is reactivated. Sembène’s parody of capital flows between the mystical, the bureaucratic and the sexual in *Xala* offers a historical context for the interrogation of occult economies, witchcraft, commoditized sex and sexualized commodities in Africa (see Geschiere 1997, Comaroff & Comaroff 2000, Nyamjoh, 2005).

The critical insights derived from *Xala* owe as much to Sembène’s philosophical reinflection and politicization of the very act of cinematic engagement. With the postcolonial context as the scene of his cinematic interrogation of Africanness, Sembène’s critique of discourses on Africa and African experiences shifts from a focus on the colonizer’s production, recording and consumption of Africa to the manner in which previously colonized groups reproduce colonial rationalities and ideas of Africanness (while creating their own pattern of postcolonial production, recording and consumption of a ‘True Africa’ characterized by the exclusion and

oppression of other Africans).<sup>56</sup> The focus on colonial specters and the scene of betrayal — the polygamist who takes another wife and the postcolonial bourgeoisie’s abjection of the poor from the ideal of independence — enables Sembène to interrogate everyday political encounters and the notion of Africanness in a manner that goes well beyond the problematics of Afro-radicalism and nativism that Mbembe criticizes and the ideological formations that Harrow is suspicious of.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

If there is a promise and message that runs throughout Sembène’s art it is the ‘promise of both a new world of art and a new life for individuals and the community’ (Rancière 2002: 133). Based on the critique of both the manner in which Africa has been historically falsified by colonialists and Islamic imperialists and the current falsifications arising from traditional African practices and everyday forms of postcolonial sociality, Sembène provokes us to think critically about various truth claims and power formations in Africa. The crisis to truth that his cinematic

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<sup>56</sup> This reading of Sembène’s critique of the production of Africaness draws upon Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of the process of desiring-production which are “at once the production of production, the production of recording, and the production of consumption.” See Deleuze G and Guattari F., (2004), *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans.Hurley R, Seem M., and Lane H., London and New York :Continuum p.41

engagements instantiate contributes to modes of critique that politicize and interrogate everyday political encounters and identities in Africa. Even where the narrative is familiar, Sembène's cinema, as part of modern political cinema [where *the people are missing*] constantly stages encounters with silenced or trivialized stories thus presenting a different problem for thought and truth as it deposes the form of the truthful story (Deleuze 1989:130).

In a final scene reminiscent of Xala's opening sequence, a band of crippled beggars, who up until now have inhabited the streets invite themselves into El hadji's home. The beggars' transgressive occupation of El hadji's home and the voicing of their concerns is useful as the beggars in the film are "often seen but, except for the theme music that comments on their situation, they are not heard" (Gabriel 1982). We soon learn that Gorgui, one of the beggars that El hadji had robbed of his land and banished from the street is both the cause and cure his xala. In his address to El hadji, Gorgui reminds him that their story goes back a long time ago:

What I have become is your fault. You appropriated our inheritance. You falsified our names and we were expropriated. I was thrown in prison. I am of the Beye family. Now I will get my revenge. I arranged your xala....If you want to be a man, undress nude in front of everyone. We will spit on you.

The final sequence of the film portrays El hadji submitting to this ritual of humiliation as a means of regaining his virility. This scene due to its abjection has been the focus of various readings and interpretations of *Xala*. In a 1978 interview with Françoise Pfaff, Assane Seck, the then Senegalese Minister of Culture comments on the fact/fiction of Sembène's representation of Senegalese society by commenting on *Xala's* closing scene.

According to Seck:

In the last scene of *Xala*, people spit on El hadji. Well such a scene does not exist in reality. It cannot exist. One day, when I was minister of Foreign Affairs, Senegalese ambassadors gathered and we showed *Xala*. Sembène was with us. Our ambassadors were embarrassed when the film, with its army of beggars, was shown abroad. Sembène was asked where he had seen this. He answered: “it does not exist.” We asked him where he had seen people spitting as in the case in *Xala*. He answered the same thing. But, he countered, in Senegal, when something disgusts us deeply; we draw the spit from the depths of our throats and throw it sideways, far away. This is true. The idea is true but the fact that it is done to someone, as it occurs in *Xala*, is inaccurate...The act is symbolic... this is why some of our films are successful in Senegal and not abroad. There, they are not understood...Using images which do not exist in reality...can mislead people (Seck, quoted in Pfaff 1984: 47).

There is much in Seck’s analysis of *Xala*, particularly his critique of Sembène’s cinematic representation of Senegalese society and its role in the mediation of estrangement. In many ways, his commentary restates some of the diplomatic biases and conventions about how Africa should be represented based on a truthful or sanitized representation. Not only does Seck presuppose a given ‘image of Africa’ and a certain truth about it, he also endorses certain ways of thinking and moral positions which are then presented as the proper or legitimate ways of thinking or arriving at a truth about African experiences and African politics.

Through its falsifying narrative and images, Sembène’s art is meta-political in that it raises the questions of what counts as a political act or subject and goes further to use the numerous sites of the political to problematize Africanness and the forms of encounter productive of the lifeworlds from which various forms of thought emanate. The modes of play and engagement that his

cinema displays are well articulated in David Murphy's description of Sembène's trickster aesthetic:

If he has focused consistently on the social relations of Africa's distorted development, the sheer breadth of his aesthetic—the disorientating combination of African ritual and modes of speech with expressionist set-pieces, domestic naturalism, epic choreography, social satire, sexual comedy or farce—projects his work on to a broader, more universal canvas. The complexity of his films eschews surface slickness: narrative realism can be undercut by jarring moments of melo drama, flashbacks, non-professional acting; which yet contribute, as in Brecht, to an epic sense. There is no dogmatic closure in Sembène's work: elements of didacticism are undermined by the revelation of fresh complexities, endings are characteristically freeze frame, the final outcome still unsure. Contested relationships remain open—as in the trickster tales: Brer Rabbit's forerunner Leuk the Hare may get away this time; but that doesn't mean he's safe (Murphy 2002: 117).

That is, rather than approach African political and diplomatic thought as something that is already settled and only needs to be enacted or perfected, Sembène's cinema plays on time, characterization and themes in a manner that offers some useful counter-narratives, 'falsifications' and opportunities for flight from the discourses and practices that seek to fix what Africa is or can become. This trickster aesthetic and the fugitive realities it enables also contribute to the interrogation of the qualified representatives of 'African' peoples and experiences. Beyond making the case for different forms of African emancipation, Sembène's cinema, much like V.Y Mudimbe's reflections on the invention of Africa, problematizes Africaness by asking ; 'who is speaking about it? Who has the right and the credentials to produce it, describe it, comment upon it, or at least present opinions about it?' And for whom? (Mudimbe 1988; x).

## CHAPTER 5

### **Amorous Diplomacies of Everyday Life: Aesthetics, Race-habits and the Ethics of Encounter and Co-habitation**

We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and the passions- *but we do not even know what a body can do.*

- Gilles Deleuze - *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

- Franz Fanon –*Black Skin/White Masks*

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

#### **5.0 Migrancy and the Ethics of Co-habitation**

In his novel, *The Black Docker* (1956), Ousmane Sembène displays a keen awareness of the partialities, habits and the image of thought productive of race relations in post World War II Marseilles. With a focus on the trial of the Senegalese émigré docker/writer Diaw Falla who stands accused of the rape and murder of the French writer Ginette Tontisane, Sembène offers a glimpse into the racial-spatial order of the Mediterranean city, the institutions and discourses that organize social life in France and the material conditions of existence of minority groups. As the

trial proceeds, Sembène summons a number of testimonies and public discourses which yield insights into the manner in which anxieties about the black man's sexuality, literacy and migrancy are inserted into a legal *dispositif* that invokes the law, medicine, literacy and popular culture in order to fix the possibilities and necessities of race relations in colonial France.

For example, the newspapers, the French public and the prosecuting team, all rely on racialized testimonies like the results of a mental examination carried out by a professor from the *faculté de médecine* at the Sorbonne who holds that "Diaw, like all black men, is sexually obsessed with white women," and that a white woman's refusal to accede to his advances could quite naturally lead to violence. As such, the institutions and personalities that the court summons as witnesses in Diaw's trial only work to fix the already established elements that prefigure French social, intellectual and artistic life thus reducing the complex relations that existed between Diaw and Ginette Tontisane to a set of recognizable racial stereotypes. Among other things, these institutions solicit habitual conceptions of the abilities of the black body and are not convinced by Diaw's authorial claims or his account of the events leading to Ginette's death.

The limits to thought and ethical encounter arising from such a conception of black and white bodies, their functions and relations contributes to the popular belief among the French public that "the negro, in a frenzy of sexual passion, seized poor Ginette Tontisane and raped her, then banged her head against the edge of the table" thus killing her (Sembène 1987:10). However, based on Diaw's testimony (which he also presents in a letter to his uncle and therefore both inside and outside the recognized legal system), we are invited to a different reading of the conditions surrounding Ginette's death and authorial practices. From Diaw's testimony, we learn



that Ginette's accidental death occurs as he tries to retrieve evidence of his authorship of the award winning text — *The Last Voyage of the Slave Ship Sirius* — which Ginette had stolen and published under her own name. As such, it becomes clear that Diaw's real *crime*, contrary to the evidence presented in court, lies in breaching the established racial codes through his non-coercive sexual involvement with a white woman on one hand and his venturing into a literary tradition that was considered the exclusive domain of a certain class/race in French society on the other. However, the French legal system finds Diaw guilty of a series of crimes each reconfirming French society's need to distribute bodies and functions in a manner that maintains a mosaic of identities that require the black man to remain in his 'rightful' and racially coded place in the world. In their closing speech to the jury, the prosecution lays out a list of crimes for which Diaw is guilty:

Diaw Falla's crime holds our institutions up to ridicule. This monster claims to be the author of *The Slave Ship Sirius*! This insult to our literature is also an offence. The French literary world has suffered a terrible loss. Ginette Tontisane was one of our great writers. She fell like those who devoted their lives to the glory of France, carrying the torch of liberty and equality, like those who gave their lives to safeguard national independence [. . .]. We must make amends, not only to the victim, but to our literature and to our civilization (Sembène 1956/1987:34).

The equation of the individualized act of violence against Ginette's body to a violation of the ethos of the French body politic draws attention to the race-habits and raciological techniques that underlines both the macropolitics of policy and governance and the micropolitics of the individual (and collectivities) in colonial France. As the list of charges brought against Diaw illustrates, micropolitical factors operating "below the threshold of large legislative acts and

executive initiatives,” usually set the conditions of possibility for more visible actions like the legal cases and official discourses or state policies (Connolly 2002: 20 ). In an attempt to interrogate the diplomacies of everyday life that derive their moral and ethical force from both macropolitical and micropolitical practices, this chapter engages forms of estrangement and mediation practices in spaces characterized by race-habits and regimes of recognition that make it difficult for certain groups of people to cohabit by using racialized categories to fix what a body can do.

Heeding some insights from Frantz Fanon’s interrogation of race, class and sexual relations (*The Woman of Color and the White Man / The Man of Color and the White Woman*) and Gilles Deleuze’s experiments with cinema and/as philosophy, I explore the everyday closure of diplomatic encounters that renders certain ‘people’ or bodies undesirable , unwelcome or in more diplomatic terms, *personae non gratae*. Noting that a lot of the attempts to constitute national and racial identities and the moral panics and anxieties that they produce rely on notions of purity and danger or certainty and (cultural) pride, I turn to ethico-aesthetic readings of ‘amorous diplomacies’ and acts of transgression that interrupt racially coded partialities, habits and passions.

The turn to ‘personal diplomacies’ is not novel, the cannon of diplomatic theory has engaged themes like “boudoir diplomacy” which Sir Harold Nicolson refers to as “personal diplomacy at its most intoxicating” but limits itself to liaisons between officials or people of diplomatic significance (see Nicolson 1963 ). Similarly, events like the belated invocation of diplomatic immunity by Dominique Strauss-Kahn (former head of the IMF) in the civil case brought against

him by Nafissatou Diallo, the migrant hotel chamber maid who accused him of a sex attack at a New York hotel in May 2011 bear further witness to the fact that ‘the personal is diplomatic.’

In this chapter, I examine everyday forms of personal diplomacy through an enactment of the ethical insights derived from aesthetic practices like cinema. Through a consideration of ethico-aesthetic inflected encounters, I carry out a critique of the diplomatic imaginaries and conceptions of self that consider it ‘impossible’ for people from different ‘races’ to cohabit. The inter-articulation of aesthetics and ethics supplies as well, a disclosure of the artificiality of the category race (or the people) and provokes ‘us’ to think or engage modes of thought and relation that present a different problem for society, ‘the self,’ and the truth. Ways of thinking/ becoming that enable a new ethics and a different conception of diplomacy, the diplomatic encounter and the diplomatic body to emerge. At a minimum, I seek to illustrate how race, or racism to be more precise, stifles diplomatic thought. How racism acts as a way of creating order or introducing identities and ‘stability’ into the world and then using regimes of recognition to reaffirm and protect ‘our’ habitual ways of relating, ‘being’ and living/dying.

For instance, the disturbances occasioned by Diaw’s physical presence, sexual liaisons and authorial practices when located ‘historically’, are emblematic of the ‘break’ in European society instantiated by colonialism and the second World War. Commenting on this era in his *Cinema* books, Gilles Deleuze notes that the “post-war period [has] greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react in spaces which we no longer know how to describe” (Deleuze 1989: x). However, as the European city became ‘unfamiliar’ due to the re-orientation and emergence of ‘any-spaces-whatevers’— the deserted , disused or demolished yet inhabited

spaces — that Deleuze refers to, we also witness the intensification of recognizable ways of managing or reacting to the black body's presence in the city.<sup>57</sup> The banality of such habits is well illustrated by Frantz Fanon's oft cited experience of being hailed in the streets by a little boy; 'Look, a Negro!...Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' which, much like Diaw's trial, involves the summoning of the 'Negro threat' and the uncertainty or radical difference he/she embodies (Fanon 1967: 112-113). As the proceedings of Diaw's case illustrate, these racial anxieties and the categories invoked in an attempt to make sense of them often have an identity constituting function which in most cases, is coextensive with practices that police bodies, legislate on their relations and determine their distribution within city or national space.

Fanon's reaction to the hailing reveals a great deal about the world in which the racialized colonial/postcolonial subject finds himself in. For Fanon, the hailing initiates his move from the *automatic or habitual recognition* [where he identifies with 'White France'] to a more *attentive mode of recognition* that marks his complete dislocation and inability to "be abroad with the white man."<sup>58</sup> The alienation that arises from the racial regime that Fanon finds himself in contributes to his interrogation of the invention of the Jew and the 'Nigger' and the relations and

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<sup>57</sup> Drawing on Deleuze's use of Pascal Aude's concept, any space whatsoever, Jeffrey Bell notes that 'any space whatsoever' is a space such as a metro stop, a doctor's waiting room, or an airport terminal. It is an anonymous space people pass through, or it is what Deleuze might call a nomadic space, a point of transit between places of 'importance' see Bell, J.A., (1997) Thinking with Cinema: Deleuze and Film Theory *Film Philosophy*, vol. 1 no. 8, September, available on the web at <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol1-1997/n8bell>

<sup>58</sup> Here I draw on Deleuze's reading of Bergson who distinguishes two kinds of recognition. *Automatic or habitual recognition* that "works by extension: perception extends itself into the usual movements; the movements extend perception so as to draw useful effects." Habitual recognition involves the passing from one object to another but remaining within the same plane. The second mode of recognition, *attentive recognition* "is very different and abandons the extending of perception and returns to the object so as to emphasize certain contours and takes a few characteristics from it. Here we see the object remaining the same but passing through different planes." See Deleuze G. *Cinema 2: The Time Image* p.44

orders that bring the white European self into being (Fanon 1967:154-7). As Fanon illustrates in his analysis of the alienation of the black man, the epidermal schema, racialized recognition (socio-economic and sexual) and the psychopathology of oppression all contribute to reactive forces and identities that foreclose the possibility of racialized subjects becoming otherwise. Among other things, Fanon illustrates how racism is a lived experience that is intricately intertwined with the arrangements of capitalism, colonialism, statism and techniques of the self.

Today, the “reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a single political space” has contributed to an “immigration complex” where notions of cultural difference are used to mobilize race-habits while producing new sites of estrangement (Balibar 1991: 21). As Etienne Balibar puts it, this new ‘racism without races’ emphasizes the “insurmountability of cultural difference, the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers and the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions” (ibid). In many ways, Balibar’s conceptualization of “the racism without races” as an outcome of the postcolonial “immigration complex” resonates with what Deleuze and Guattari call *faciality*.

Unlike most theories of racism, *faciality* is non-dialectical. That is, *faciality* is not predicated on the notion of racial Others and has a propensity to totalize rather than to exclude (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:178). Deleuze and Guattari go on to illustrate how modern racism operates through the erasure of exteriority. The simple formula it presents works by totalizing such that ; “there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:178). As a product of *faciality*, modern racism operates on the logic of the *same*, the figure of the human and

“propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out (or been reduced to those who only allow themselves to be identified at a given degree of divergence).” Consequently, faciality / racism does not operate through the essential opposition marked by binary categories such as black/white or self/other. Instead, the *faciality* machine presents racial difference as a range of deviations from the dominant standard — the Christ, White-Man face. As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence-types, are racial: yellow man, black man, men in the second or third category...they must be Christianized, in other words, facialized. European racism as the white man's claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other: it is instead in primitive societies that the stranger is grasped as an "other." Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavours to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity (it's a Jew, it's an Arab, it's a Negro, it's a lunatic . . .) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 181).

The above partialities are apparent in the July 2005 letter to the Parramatta Sun, by Andrew Fraser, an Associate Professor of Law at Macquarie University in Australia. In this letter, Fraser raised his concerns about the migration and settlement of Sudanese refugees into Sydney's western suburbs (Parramatta-Blacktown) which arises in part, from what he sees as the “steady erosion of the distinctive national identity of Anglo-Australians”. For Fraser, the ‘erosions’ mean that Australia “can no longer remain the homeland of a particular people” and is instead becoming “a colony of the Third World.” Fraser is particularly concerned that the migration

trends are making it possible for “black Africans and Muslim Afghanis” to be “Aussies just like the descendants of the Anglo-Celtic pioneers who settled and built this country.” In a determinist conclusion to his short letter, he invokes a racist historical precedent noting that; “experience practically everywhere in the world tells us that an expanding black population is a sure-fire recipe for increases in crime, violence and a wide range of other social problems.”<sup>59</sup> Locating Fraser’s racial project within both “Eurocentric and ethnocentric” conceptions of race, Suvendrini Perera illustrates how Fraser’s “use of the term black,” manages to set the black person as the furthest point of a black-white racial continuum. That is, “although directed towards migrants from sub-Saharan Africa” the term black as used by Fraser “is also broad enough to encompass other groups by implication.” The resultant wave of sameness means that blackness can be seen as “as expandable to Aboriginal and Islander communities and others, including Lebanese-Australians” (Perera 2005). Accordingly, the quest for national and racial certainty (about whiteness) is transformed into a moral discourse where “some migrants are ‘blackened’ by being linked to crime, unemployment and welfare dependency whereas others may be ‘whitened’ by being associated with aspirational characteristics of self-development and hard work” (Ibid).

With the increasing frequency of these modes of social, sexual and economic production of race through the *facialization* of bodies, objects, landscapes and milieus, it becomes increasingly important for ‘us’ to think about sites of estrangement and diplomacies whose mediation practices and ‘mandates’ involve more than a negotiation with the other or with that external to

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<sup>59</sup> See Fraser A. The Path to National Suicide available on the web at <http://www.ironbarkresources.com/articles/fraser2005pathtonationalsuicide.htm>

the ‘self.’ That is, attentiveness to how whiteness or blackness is produced and works through discourses on *sameness*, our thinking on diplomacy should be directed towards forms of mediating estrangement concerned not only with the mediation of ‘otherness’ but also with the processes of the production and mediation of sameness. Accordingly, diplomacy and the diplomatic ethos becomes about the negotiation with that which is considered part of the self or an abjected part of the self.

In such a situation, the task of the diplomat, is to provoke the abandonment of the ‘self’ or an evacuation of the habits and forms of self associated with race thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:197). To treat critically the question of race and diplomacies of everyday life , it is necessary then, to engage the image of thought, the identities , emplacements and forms of recognition that produce racism , the (majoritarian) conventions that reinforce it and the creative moments of encounter that oblige us to think otherwise, to live — to become minor.

### **5.1 Empiricist Ethics: Reflections on *Diplomatic life*...**

At first sight, the quest for the abandonment of the habitual conceptions of self may seem untenable. However, when one considers what diplomats do, then we can get a clue as to what is at stake in the abandonment of the self. Even within the most conventional western and statist conceptions of diplomacy, diplomats (as honest men sent to lie abroad for the sake of their countries) often abandon the self in the interest of states, the codes of a guild or collegiums or some professional calling. An overview of core European courtesy / conduct books like Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *On Civility in Children* and prescriptive diplomatic texts like François de Callières’ *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes*, Sir Harold Nicolson’s *Diplomacy* and Sir Ernest Satow’s *Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, all in one way or another prescribe a way of moving from one form of ‘self’ to the diplomatic self. From being a regular citizen/subject or



bureaucrat to being the ideal subject representing the interests of the sovereign and having the privileges and immunities required to speak in his/her voice in an extraterritorial space where one becomes part of a new “diplomatic body”. In a reading of François De Callières (*On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes*), Maurice Keens-Soper outlines the core characteristics of the ideal diplomat which in many ways involves a cultivation of the diplomatic self characterized by moderation, civilised conduct, intelligence, prudence and most importantly, the diplomatic functions are mediated by “honest dealings and by reference to the ‘real’ interests of states” (Keens-Sopper 1973:499). To put it otherwise, these texts lay out an ‘art of existence’ through which “men [diplomats] set themselves rules of conduct and seek to transform themselves in their singular being and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (Foucault 1985:10-11). Jacques Lacan captures quite well the performative and representative element of the transformation of the ‘self’ characteristic of diplomacy when he poses the question:

What do diplomats do when they address one another? They simply exercise, in relation to one another, that function of being pure representatives and, above all, their own signification must not intervene. When diplomats are addressing one another, they are supposed to represent something whose signification, while constantly changing, is, beyond their own persons, France, Britain, etc. In the very exchange of views, each must record only what the other transmits in his pure function as signifier; he must not take into account what the other is, qua presence, as a man who is likable to a greater or lesser degree. Inter-psychology is an impurity in this exchange (Lacan 1977:220).

But the ‘self’ that the diplomat abandons in order to take up the representative role is often already mediated by the norms of the ‘social contract’, citizenship and nationalism and the forms of affiliation and the prerogatives that come with them ( Appadurai and Holston 1996: 187, Shapiro 2001 ). Another diplomatic trap is revealed when one heeds critiques like those by Carole Pateman (1988) which illustrate how the social contract, far from being a neutral starting point, is also a ‘sexual contract’ and in most cases as exemplified by Fraser and Diaw above, it

is also a racialized contract. Owing to this contractual capture, the diplomatic self (as expatriate) is always already a proprietary self. One owned by an Other or operating under the impression that they own themselves (rogue ambassadors) or are representatives of some higher good (goodwill ambassadors).

In order to get a better sense of what is at stake in associating the abandonment of ‘the self’ with *de-facialisation*, we may need to pay attention to Deleuze’s essays on ‘Immanence: A life...’ and his earlier engagement with the empiricism of David Hume.<sup>60</sup> In both essays, a Deleuzian-Humean reading of the concept of ‘a life...’ is presented in stark contrast to what John Locke called ‘the self’— a category that has come to dominate Western philosophy and social life. In an attempt to demonstrate the limit that the concept of ‘the self’ places on thought and relations, Deleuze (through Hume), reveals how ‘the self’, as conceptualized by Locke is associated with the categories of self-consciousness, memory and personal identity. It is neither, the ‘I’ nor the ‘Me.’ Rather, it is defined by individual ‘ownership’ (myself, yourself), and sameness over time (identity).<sup>61</sup> Thus, Locke and contractarian thought in general introduce the problem of “identity and diversity” into the Western philosophical conception of ‘ourselves’ that has come to dominate how ‘we’ apprehend the world and our place in it. This being the case, ‘the self’, rather than being seen as an artifice, is taken as a given. Through habit, ‘the self’ becomes a part of nature — *our* nature — and is taken as the basis of all sensations and relations (Rajchman 2005:12-13). As the basis of values, rights and humanity.

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<sup>60</sup> Both essays appear in Gilles Deleuze,(2005) *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*

<sup>61</sup> See John Rajchman, ‘Introduction’ in Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence* p.12-13

Addressing himself to the habits of thought that dominate Western philosophy, Deleuze suggests that Hume's opening up of the question of other ways of composing sensations other than those of the habits of the self is one of his (Hume's) main contributions to thought. Deleuze goes on to illustrate how Hume makes it possible for us to think of an empiricism concerned with what is singular yet 'in-human' in the composition of ourselves by putting the self into crisis. A move that enables 'us' to think about a life — a logic that unfolds in a manner different from that presented by a focus on 'the self' as the site of philosophy, diplomacy and politics. A life, in this sense, is predicated on the 'logic of impersonal individuation rather than personal individualization, of singularities rather than particularities. It can never be completely specified. It is always indefinite. In contrast to the self, it is always 'impersonal and yet singular,' and so requires a 'wilder' sort of empiricism (Rajchman 2005: 8-9). One that makes it possible for us to have a conception of society in which what we have in common is our singularities and not our individualities, a "society not as a contract but as an experiment with what in life is prior to both possessive individuals and traditional social wholes" (Rajchman 2005: 14-15).

In effect, Deleuze's treatment of 'partiality' as a central problem for thought is of diplomatic significance. Not only does it question the possessive element of diplomatic thought (the representational imperatives of an envoy who in speaking for 'sovereign' and therefore speaks for himself and all others under the same social contract), it also questions the social wholes (the state, nation, religion, race) that one claims to represent. The ethico-political and aesthetic force of such an interrogation of partialities can be appreciated when we examine how racialized partialities limit thought, sensation and ethical encounter by assigning the diplomatic 'self' fixed meanings, functions and attributes such that 'diplomacy' rather than being a space for going

beyond the limits of the self, becomes a site for the realization of and consolidation of limited sympathies predicated on a given Idea of man and human nature(s). As Deleuze puts it, Hume's statement that man is by nature partial rather than egotistical is more than a simple nuance:

rather, we should see it as a radical change in the practical way the problem of society is posed. The problem is no longer how to limit egotisms and the corresponding natural rights, but how to go beyond partialities, how to pass from a "limited sympathy" to an "extended generosity," how to stretch passions and give them an extension they do not have on their own .Society is thus seen no longer as a system of legal and contractual limitations but as institutional inventions (Deleuze 2005:47)

By presenting a different problem for society and by extension for the self, nature and truth, we can think of a new ethics and a different diplomacy or diplomatic body. At stake in such attempts to go beyond partialities and limited sympathies is an acknowledgement of the institutional inventions from which society emerges and their implications for our affective capacities. Seeing society as a series of institutional inventions provokes us to think about ways of militating against or disturbing the principles of identification and distribution that we use to organize the racialized self and the world (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 55). And it is by seeing society as an artifice that Deleuze encourages us to engage in experimentation with that which forces 'us' to think. That which 'runs through life, but is repugnant to thought' (ibid).

Given the limits to thought arising from the order of being, hierarchies, norms, habits and frames characteristic of racial signification and subjectification, experimentation enables us to create something new or to use the old in new ways such that it becomes indiscernible and strange to itself. In order for different relations to emerge, Deleuze encourages us to 'substitute the AND

for IS. A and B' — a crucial subtension of relations that “makes relations shoot beyond their terms and outside the set of their terms, and outside everything that could be determined as being. One, or whole” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 57).

Diplomatically speaking, such interruptions and conjunctions present ways of thinking and experiencing relations that undermine the stable categories, principles and forms of recognition those race-habits seek to establish through essentialisms, reifications and reductionism. Given that racialized recognition and representation operates through a principled form of measuring, naming, fixing and distributing attributes and functions; the White man IS. The black man IS — his hair, his skin, his dick size, his cranium, nose shape or eating habits — the disturbance of racialized relations and categories involves stepping out or disrupting the relations, protocols, rituals and attributes that are considered internal to the terms Negro, White man, Jew or Arab. Attributes that serve as the basis of policed relations where all ‘men’ are placed in ‘their proper positions’ within a linear scale of progression or hierarchical scale of being such that the denigrations and approbations of these categories are taken as a given and mobilized as the basis of mediating estrangement.

Deleuze’s play on punctuation and conjunctions is more than a linguistic ploy. It is of philosophical, diplomatic and ethical significance as it generates new concepts and relations by encouraging experimentation and (dis)connections that point towards a new acceptance.<sup>62</sup> The play on punctuation creates possibilities. It connects and cuts; it generates lines of flight and

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<sup>62</sup> For an elaborate treatment of the effect of the ‘AND’ see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* p.206-7

becomings by making unlikely juxtapositions, pauses and creating a space for conjunctions and potentialities to be actualized. As Deleuze puts it, the conjunction ‘AND’ is an “extra-being , an inter-being... it gives relations another direction, and puts to flight terms and sets the former and the latter on the line of flight which it actively creates” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 57).

When presented on the scene of diplomatic thinking and racial relations, the conjunction AND is the condition of possibility for a new relation or a new acceptance. Not only does the conjunction suggest a form of proximity between different entities, it also interrupts and reorients perception, action and affects by staging new encounters. For example, the oft cited Fanonian statement: ‘*The Negro IS not. Any more than the White man*’ is sent in different directions when the conjunction sets a new form of relation between hitherto incommensurate entities. Thus, the *negro becomes...AND so does the white man...*<sup>63</sup> The new relations and categories borne out of this ‘becoming’ make it possible for new encounters and forms of co-habitation to take place, it allows bodies to relate to each other in terms of their movements or becomings. In terms of their haecities rather than fixed identities.<sup>64</sup>

## 5.2 Race-habits and Shame

It is with cognizance of ‘the crisis of race and raciology’ in the world today and the racial pride and national grandeur that informs a lot of ‘diplomatic representations’ that we can approach the

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<sup>63</sup> Agamben provides an insight into the philosophy punctuation by looking at how the punctuation in the title of Deleuze’s essay, ‘Immanence:A life...’ must have been carefully considered. ‘Immanence:A Life...’, the use of the colon between ‘Immanence’ and ‘A Life’ as well as the final ellipsis carries out a decisive intention. The same can be said for the particle ‘AND’ that is characteristic of Deleuzian encounters see Agamben, G. (2003)‘ Absolute Immanence’

<sup>64</sup> I thank Michael J. Shapiro for drawing my attention to this crucial point.

diplomatic and philosophical significance of setting the aforementioned empiricist ethic in motion. For instance, Paul Gilroy in his attempt to “imagine political culture beyond the colour line” observes that raciology persists due to the difficulty of relinquishing the oppositional identities and privileged positions characteristic of racialized relations. In part, the difficulty arises from the fact that in racialized situations, the “beneficiaries of racial hierarchy do not want to give up their privileges” (Gilroy 2000: 12). Instead, they seek to maintain the identities and habits that they had forged for themselves under a racialized situation through narratives and representations that reinforce rather than undo racist regimes of truth.

Similarly, the people subordinated by ‘race-thinking’ do not depart from raciology. Instead, they often develop “elaborate, improvised constructions that have the primary function of absorbing and deflecting abuse” (ibid). Gilroy goes on to illustrate how these attempts to deflect abuse sometimes produce new race-habits as they go “beyond merely affording protection” for these groups but serve as a means of identification predicated on the inversion of “polarities, insult, brutality and contempt, which are unexpectedly turned into important sources of solidarity, joy and collective strength” (Gilroy 2000 : 12).

At the centre of Gilroy’s diagnostic of raciology is the persistence of race-habits predicated on the subordination of difference to identity, encounter to recognition and experimentation to habit. His imagination of community beyond the colour line involves an engagement with the racialized habits, identities and truth claims that curtail creative ways of relating, thinking and living even where race has been identified as a problem and the assumptions that inform it dismissed. For example, acting out of a desire to establish a racial, political and economically

separate domain for the Boers in Post-Apartheid South Africa, Eugene Terreblanche's paramilitary group, AWB (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) remained fiercely opposed to the end of apartheid. With the 'unashamed promotion of Afrikaner' nationalism as their objective, the AWB and other Boer nationalist groups invoked historical agreements like the *Sand River Convention* (1852), the *Bloemfontein convention* (1854) and even considered the International Court of Justice at the Hague as a possible venue for asserting their status as an indigenous White African group demanding for a separate *Volkstaat* (Boers' peoples state).<sup>65</sup>

With groupings like the AWB, the idea of a 'New' South Africa capable of "recognizing itself and being recognized as a truly *ethical community*" becomes untenable. Ethical relationships are further forestalled by "the collision between the persistent denial of white privilege on the one hand, and the impetus or the drive to assert a form of black nationalism or black identity predicated on the idea of victimhood on the other hand" (Mbembe 2007). This culture of 'mutual *ressentiment*' is expressed by the focus on loss of white privilege (represented by the figure of the poor White ) and Black South African commemoration of a history of struggle against White 'minority rule' predicated on inverted ideas of racial particularity which is then mobilized in a defensive manner thus providing "pride rather than shame and humiliation" (Gilroy 2000:12).

In both cases, the shame of apartheid is foreclosed thus making it impossible to relate differently or create a space for fellowship between people with incommensurate practices of 'identity'. As Sarah Nuttall (2009) reminds us, the mutual denial of racial and historical *entanglement*, makes it

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<sup>65</sup> See Smith J., (2008), The return of Eugene Terre'Blanche, IOL News, March 30 2008 available on the web at <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/the-return-of-eugene-terre-blanche-1.394663>



difficult for such groups to “begin to meet the challenges of the after apartheid”( Nuttall 2009, 11). To put it otherwise, attentiveness to racial entanglement enables us to experience the shame and violence of racialized partialities in the past by bringing together different spaces, times and subjectivities thus providing an impetus for new forms of diplomatic and civic life. For example, shame at the limits and inhibitions imposed by legal orders like the *Group Areas Act*, No 41 of 1950 that provided the legal basis for the physical/spatial separation of different races and the *Immorality Act* (1927) that prohibited sex between Whites and Blacks (and its amendment in 1950 to prohibit sex between whites and all non-whites) enables us to interrogate Apartheid’s anti-miscegenationist racial-spatial order and the codes of infra-humanity produced by black South African ultra-nationalism and popular xenophobia today.

While apartheid privileged a proprietary conception of self based on the epidermalization of difference and opportunities, the present macropolitical dispensation fixes the relationship between African (im)migrants and nationally defined autochthonous members of South African society. The latter are considered the legitimate ‘owners’ of the country and the benefits it has to offer and seek to make the most of both national liberation and neoliberal capitalism. Accordingly, the ( black migrant )*Makwerekwere* - meaning one with limited competence in the vernacular language required to engage in intercourse with autochthonous society cannot speak or work freely in the post-apartheid township for fear of being identified by their accents and being victimized for usurping scarce jobs, sexual partners or spreading AIDS.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Alien-Nation: Zombies*, p.789-90

The shame of apartheid is not unique. As I will illustrate in chapter 6, shame can be conditioned by limited sympathies such that the ‘powerful incentive toward philosophy’ and diplomacy that it promises is stifled (Deleuze 1995:173). For example, drawing on Primo Levi’s account of life in the lager, Deleuze provides some insights into the various ways in which the Nazi’s racism and Fascism have given us ‘a shame at being human’ by tainting ‘even the survivors of the camps’ who, if only to survive, ‘had to make compromises with it’(Deleuze 1995:172-3).

While Deleuze’s reading of Levi is compelling, it is important to note that the things that we are ashamed of betray our partialities and our habits more than ‘we’ [or Deleuze and Levi] would like to appreciate. That is, today, the Nazi concentration camp is approached with shame; there is a consensus that it is that which should never happen again. However, limited sympathies, partial memories of suffering and atrocity mean that the African training grounds where the methods applied in the camps were tested and perfected remain unmentioned and do not elicit similar responses. While the experiences of the Vagogo, the Herero and other colonized peoples illustrate that the atrocities in Europe were not a unique phenomenon, limited sympathies conditioned by racial, spatial and historical partialities meant that the idea of diplomacy and humanity remained unchanged given that ‘African’/ the black body’s affects, experiences and passions were trivialized or over-coded by dominant regimes of racialized or geopolitical recognition. It is precisely such partialities that Aimé Césaire has in mind when he makes connections between the disparate treatment accorded to violences that were deployed in a similar manner but upon racially differentiated bodies in another place/time. Commenting on the exceptional status accorded to Nazism and the Holocaust, Césaire notes that:

Before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples...it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he has applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa (Césaire 1972:14).

This is the shame of Auschwitz, apartheid, Gaza and other less known, yet not necessarily less intense racialized situations.

### **5.3 Cinematic Diplomacies: Moving Images, Moving Bodies and the Ethics of Encounter and Co-habitation**

The above forms of estrangement, entanglement and shame work to pluralize our conceptions of the diplomatic and present everyday life as a significant site for the mediation of estrangement, more so racialized estrangement. To illustrate the need for an appreciation of diplomacies of everyday life, I turn now to a cinematic engagement with bodies, times, lives and techniques [of the self] that provide an interesting map of modern estrangement in which the concept/practice of diplomacy can be deployed in order to think about the ethics of encounter and modes of co-habitation. As illustrated in the above treatment of Sembène's *Black Docker*, migrant spaces provide a potent site for the interrogation of modes of estrangement and encounter. They also have a pluralizing effect that influences how diplomacy and the question of race are to be re-thought today. Similarly, cinema acts as a site for the instantiation of multiple encounters with the potential to disturb race imbued realities and desires while also having the capacities to represent and reconfirm habitual identities and forms of recognition.

A telling illustration of how cinema and diasporic imaginaries can be invested with race-habits that limit diplomatic possibilities is to be found in D.W. Griffith's use of the indirect image of time in his 1915 silent film drama, *Birth of a Nation*. To assess the ethico-political implications of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, it is important to engage Deleuze's reading of how some aspects of montage work and extend these insights to our thinking on race and diplomacy. To begin with, we must heed how Griffith's cinematic composition involves a process of partitioning (of both cinematic space/time and the world) that determines the character of the whole by setting up continuities, cutting and creating false continuities that are then mobilized for purposes of racial representation of a 'people who are already formed.'

According to Deleuze, Griffith "conceived of the composition of the movement-images as an organization, an organism, a great organic unity" (Deleuze 1986: 30). As such, the political value of Griffith's composition is apparent in his production and attempt to preserve organic unity, be it the idea of the 'the nation' in his *Birth of a Nation* (1915) or a thousand years of the history of 'civilizations' in his *Intolerance* (1916). For Griffith:

[...]the organism is a unity in diversity, that is, a set of differentiated parts; there are men and women, rich and poor, town and country, North and South, interiors and exteriors etc. These parts are taken in binary relationships which constitute a *parallel alternate montage*, the image of one part succeeding another as part of a rhythm (Deleuze 1986: 30).

Alongside the binaries of the parallel montage, there also exists a *convergent or concurrent montage*. Here, parts act and react on each other in a manner that threatens the unity of the organic set while some parts act in a manner that defends or restores the unity of the organism. In

*Birth of a Nation*, Griffith uses the above forms of montage to illustrate how the American South had been right about black people and how the North has been right about preservation of the Union. Through a series of close-ups, the objective set is endowed with subjectivity such that Griffith effectively portrays the threat posed by the freed Negro who is portrayed as a lustful, arrogant and villainous person. Griffith's montage also invites us to witness how, 'the reconstruction which freed black people also endangered the most precious asset of the South, its White women'. Having presented the free black man as a threat to the purity of white women, the "heroic deeds of the Ku Klux Klan" become the legitimate means of defending and restoring the unity of the Nation as it vanquishes "the rapacious lust of the black man for pure white womanhood" (Ross 1996:11). Attentiveness to Griffith's subordination of time to movement furnishes us with some useful readings of both cinematic and social scenes. On the cinematic register, such subordination is achieved through the cinematic action-image which relates movement to a centre thus enabling Griffith to present a story of personal and collective triumph that fuels a nation's macro-desire by quelling the disturbances that call into question the 'regulative ideals that affirm and even celebrate a Euro-American ethnogenesis' and the monumental history predicated on the partialities and racial habits it privileges.<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* which mobilized the movement-image to articulate a racialized idea of white American ethno-genesis that stabilizes the progression of the nation's time complete with its racial Truths and sexual anxieties, Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991) presents a scene of dissensus by exploring the disturbance of racial and national identities

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<sup>67</sup> For more on Euro-American ethnogenesis See Shapiro, M.J (2012), 'A Continuing Violent Cartography' in Opondo S.O and Shapiro M. J., eds., *The New Violent Cartograph: Geo-analysis After the Aesthetic Turn*, London and New York : Routledge

through the drama surrounding the inter-racial romance between an émigré Indian/Ugandan woman, Mina (Sarita Choudhury) and an African-American carpet cleaner/businessman, Demetrius (Denzel Washington).

Set against the historical backdrop of the 1972 expulsion of Indians from Uganda by Idi Amin, *Mississippi Masala*, traces the experiences of the Loha family as they move from Uganda to England and finally settle in Greenwood Mississippi where they live and work in motels. Mina's father, Jay (Roshan Sheth), a Ugandan lawyer of Indian 'origin' decides to leave Uganda due to the disappointment he experiences after his 'black brother' Okello (Konga Mbandu) reiterates the all too familiar narrative that 'Africa is for Africans; black Africans' thus proclaiming Uganda's racialized nation-building discourse that identifies the Indian's socio-economic and sexual exclusiveness as a pathos in need of normalisation through the expulsion of Indians.

Through a deployment of cinematic time (mostly through Jay's flashbacks and epistolary voice overs that place him in Uganda and Mississippi simultaneously), *Mississippi Masala* maps the modes of spatialization, identification and intelligibility that are complicit in nation-state and racial identity formation and presents a number of shameful encounters that pose a different problem for thought.<sup>68</sup> For example, the racial anxiety initiated by Mina's and Demetrius' love

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<sup>68</sup> In General Idi Amin's Uganda, the relationship between citizenship and consanguinity led to a drive for trans-ethnic marriages within the country. Thus, one became a full citizen only through practices that involved blood coalescence with the original members of society or by marrying into the society. In theory, Amin took pride in contributing to the social integration of Uganda through official polygamy by taking wives from *Lugbara*, *Basoga*, *Langi* and *Buganda* tribes. It is on the basis of these ethnocentric tendencies that Idi Amin held that people who were not prepared to intermarry were not prepared to form a shared political community. As such, the sexual exclusiveness of the Asians[Indians] in Uganda was interpreted as an unwillingness to share political community with the black Ugandans hence their expulsion from Uganda in 1972. However, the economic determinants and justification for this expulsion should not be overlooked. see Mazrui A., (1975) *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*.

affair shows the fragmentary character of ‘coloured peoples’ in America, thus dispelling the conveniently invoked claim that ‘all people of colour should stick together’ in marking an ‘us’-‘them’ dichotomy in a white dominated America. However, through flash-backs, cuts and excursions into intimate spaces, Nair stages encounters between characters in a manner that resists a single biographical perspective or a national narrative. Not only does the film reveal the various forms of race-habits that exist as part of the minute texture of everyday life, it also presents a treatment of race and racism that is concerned with more than the official macropolitics of the city or the nation-state and the body politics of the epidermal schema. It is with such a representation and disturbance of the prevailing race-habits that *Mississippi Masala* is able to engage bodies that simultaneously invent and inhabit multiple worlds.

The multiple characters, times and narratives that *Mississippi Masala* treats invite us into a critical reading of the problematics of national co-presence and the forms of estrangement and mediation practices required to make migrant life possible. *Mississippi Masala* also treats the problematic of class and race as illustrated by a commercial orientation towards public life and its role in the fragmentation or consolidation of communities. For example, Anil (Ranjit Chowdry), the money minded and ‘Americanized’ motel owner only considers relations that are financially beneficial to him. His commoditization of relationships is at the core of his constant outbursts, that are connotative of the ‘expulsion’ of those who do not comply with the governing logic of a capitalist society or the American dream that he has been drawn to through his watching of the get-rich-quick television personality Dave Deldado. Two salvos against older members of the *émigré* community who advise against his materialism deserve mention; First, he reminds Jay that this is not Uganda where “money grows on trees”. In a different scene he

responds to his father's admonition of his overwhelming Americanness [read money mindedness] by telling him to "go back to India" if he cannot put up with the reality of a "money first" society. The simultaneous push-pull forces at play in the negotiation of a diasporic community's identity contribute to the declining cohesion of its social core and its assimilation of vernacular values thus opening up other sites for majoritarian identity formation.

Anil's outbursts and the business ethic underlining the motel business (the customer comes/cums first) ties the flows of bodies to a political economy characterized by flows of capital and interest. On the contrary, Mina 'invests' her energies in a libidinal economy characterized by a heterogeneous flow of desire that leads to a number of dis-identifications with the colour-based and class-based modes of social organization. Her encounter with Demetrius and her family members' negative response to the relationship reveals the violence that underlines the color based epidermal schema mobilized by the members of the Indian community to mediate interactions between the different ethnic groups but also within the Indian community itself where it is used to mark spaces, establish one's socio-economic status and police the possibilities for social and physical mobility.

The fluidity of the colour line is exemplified by Mina's remarks to her Mother (Sharmila Tagore), who would like to marry her off to a more affluent and light skinned Harry Patel (Ashok Lath) to ensure that Mina "sticks with her kind." In an off-hand comment, Mina tells her mother to face the fact that she "gotta darkie daughter". This same discourse is replayed in a gossip scene played by Mira Nair herself that highlights the 'common sense' among the Indian



community: “...you can be dark and have money, you can be fair and have no money, but you can’t be dark and have no money and expect to get Harry Patel!”

Through the interplay of cinematic time and motel space, Nair presents a site for the disturbance of the forms of fixity and partiality that engage a people who are already formed and their functions and possible relationships defined. In *Mississippi Masala*’s motels, we encounter different notions of private and public space, home / away, home/work, inside/outside or journey/destination and it is through motel space and cinematic time that *Masala* explores the forces of recognition and those of encounter. Here, the instability of South Asian-American and African-American alliances is played out thus revealing the myth of a coherent ‘people of colour’ collectivity that exists in solidarity against the Euro-American community.

Similarly, a careful manipulation of presence and absence in the film reveals the conditions under which different peoples are produced and how they become allied to each other. What we see in *Mississippi Masala*, then, is an attempt by both the African-American and the Indian émigré community to maintain a racialized homogeneity that enables them to disseminate their narratives and identity from one generation to next through endogamic practices and racialized ‘meritocracies’ that take the form of commercial specialisations and rituals that set bodies apart by marking ‘a peoples’ social territories, their professional competences, and the sanctioned rhythms and temporalities characteristic of their functions.

In many ways *Mississippi Masala* illustrates that race/racism is more than the working of an epidermal schema. Having experienced the race motivated resistance to his relationship with Mina, Demetrius offers a critique of colour based racism. His optic/haptic profile of the Indian

body reveals that it is 'equally' black or having a skin that is just a shade away from his own thus raising questions as to the basis of the discrimination. Similarly, his relationship with Mina transforms his relationship to motel space from being one of pure economic instrumentality to a space of intimate sexual and social intercourse. The racial tensions arising from their liaison which is considered a 'shameful relation,' reveals the unspoken shamefulness of everyday racism. By pointing to another time and space (Uganda) *Mississippi Masala* raises key ethical questions underlining Amin's expulsion of Indians from Uganda by juxtaposing a racialized political economy (flows of interest and capital ) with a libidinal economy (flows of desire) in order to present an experience of the body and the body politic as contestable fields of possibility. The intimate encounters that the film privileges highlights the different sites and ways in which a monological conception of 'self,' more so a racialized self, silences or erases difference as it [*Mississippi Masala*] encourages experimentation with practices that point to the possibility of becoming otherwise.

The periodic summoning of a White presence in *Mississippi Masala* adds a different dimension to the race-habits at play in Mississippi. By presenting the Euro-American community's criticisms of both African-American and Asian-American communities, Nair illustrates how non-white communities/bodies are graded in the US on the basis of their degree of deviation from the white standard. The extraordinary force of these race-habits becomes evident in a scene where two White shop clerks, in an expression of their irritation with the noise from an Asian wedding, make apparent their ignorance about the 'Indians' by expressing their desire for the 'Indians' to "go back to the reserves." However, the White Americans jump at the earliest opportunity to ally themselves with the Indians when the news of Mina and Demetrius' affair

becomes public knowledge. In a telephone conversation between a White American and an Indian, the former asks the latter if he is ‘having nigger troubles.’

These encounters present a race story that displays, but does not conform to the conventions of cinematic montage and modes of thought that seek to relate spaces and bodies to a central racial or national narrative. As such, *Mississippi Masala* contests ordinary and fixed conceptions of the ‘self’, home, community and belonging thus exposing the strategies that are used to fix boundaries and the habits that limit the possibilities of the flows of life, bodies and desires. Together with the different forms of boundary crossings explored in the film, Nair invites us to a world characterised by play, flight, circulation and love which she uses to pose ethical and political questions. Through its punctuation of relations, *Mississippi Masala* transforms common spaces and everyday encounters and highlights ways in which ‘people’ can become minor through everyday forms of dis-identification with racial codes and practices. In this way, Nair’s cinema becomes diplomatic and supplies an aesthetic and ethico-political impetus for thinking about race and raciology, not just as a value system, but as a limit to thought itself. To life.

<sup>69</sup>Such an ethico-aesthetic stance resonates with Deleuze’s take on ‘art, and especially cinematographic art,’ which he sees as having to take up the task ‘not of addressing a people,

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<sup>69</sup> Paola Marrati presents an elaborate reading of Deleuze’s call for a belief in the world. She looks at how this ‘new faith invest the world as it is,’ is not a justification for what is intolerable, but makes us believe that although the organic form of the link that attached us to the world is broken, the link itself is not broken, and other forms of it can still be invented. Belief here concerns our possibilities of life in this world, the only world we have. .. see Marrati Paola, *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy*, Hartz Alisa, Trans. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008) p.86

which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people' (Deleuze 1989:217).

Unlike racially peopled cinema like Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* where aesthetic practices define and imprint a fixed racial moral code, Nair's *Masala* offers an alternative ethico-political sensibility where people are invented in those spaces where race and colonialism do not considered to be 'peopled' or to be peopled by degenerate types. Such an invention creates the conditions of possibility for an encounter with the missing people. It is a provocation to experience their shame. The shame that emerges from the spreading of waves of sameness or the consolidation of the standard model be it a nation, a civilization or a race. These missing people, who sometimes are composite or excised beings are a minority and 'represent a subversive political force' that deviates from, rather than aspires to, the standard model (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:117).

On the whole, *Mississippi Masala* supplies a way of thinking and becoming that disturbs identity based race-habits and partialities. Rather than addressing itself to a people who already exist — whites, blacks, Indians, American, the French etc — it provides a means of constituting *a people yet to come* by producing utterances and relations that urge individuals and collectivities towards becoming otherwise. Towards the abandonment of habitual selves. The critical edge of the film is realized not through addressing a people who are already formed but through speaking to 'several peoples, an infinity of peoples, who remain to be united, or should not be united, in order for the problem [of race] to change' (Deleuze 1989:220).

## CHAPTER 6

### Return of the Oppressed: Recognition, Violence and the Mediation of Estrangement

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity.... Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.

William Connolly, *Identity\Difference* p. 64

Recognition is a sign of the celebration of monstrous nuptials, in which thought 'rediscovers' the State, rediscovers 'the Church' and rediscovers all the current values that it subtly presented in the pure form of an eternally blessed unspecified eternal object.

Gilles Deleuze-*Difference and Repetition* p. 136

#### 6.0 Diplomatic Recall

Within the conventions of state diplomacy, letters of recall are the “official documents presented by a new ambassador to a chief of state along with his credentials, which formally terminates that appointment of his predecessor and recalls him” (Freeman 326). Thus, letters of recall are usually read as a marker of a new beginning through the invocation of an end that ensures a continuation of relations. But state diplomacy is just but one among many forms of diplomacy. Its modes of recall and recollections being limited to the forms of recognition, narration and relation that it considers legitimate or necessary.

This concluding chapter is best read as a ‘recalling’ exercise. A revisiting of the messages and illustrations deployed in the previous chapters in order to interrogate the forms of recognition

and violence that return to haunt the present. Among other things, the recalling practice engages an ethics of return (of the oppressed) and instances of the psychopathology of oppression. In making these explorations my primary interlocutor and agent provocateur is Frantz Fanon, the diplomat of the African revolution and analyst of “the colonial/postcolonial condition”. Heeding some insights from Frantz Fanon’s recreation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, this chapter attends to the forms of violence underlining the quest for recognition by previously oppressed groups and looks at the possibilities of an ethics of return or co-habitation in light of the ‘histories’ of African estrangement.

### **6.1. Pitfalls of Recognition**

The demands for recognition, especially those made by oppressed and marginalized individuals and collectivities have greatly influenced the way we think/practice modern diplomacy. From the determinisms arising from the quest of ‘national self-determination’ to a static cartography predicated on the sanctity of inherited colonial boundaries, the lived experiences of people in contested territories like the Bakasi Penninsula (Nigeria/Cameroon), Ethiopia’s Ogaden region or Migingo Island (Kenya/ Uganda) have had to deal with boundaries, representations of sovereignty and subjectivities that arrive at their authoritative conclusions without interrogating the foundational violence that put in place these representational processes. Similarly, the exodus narratives and the invocation of the ‘right of return’ has contributed to ‘flight from diasporic space’ and legitimized violent settlement and a refusal to co-habit in what are considered ancestral or ‘holy lands’ as is the case with the occupation of Palestine and the ‘Liberian experiment.’

Among the distinctive markers of these recognition based claims, identities and communities, has been a politics of moralizing predicated on the assumption that being identified as the oppressed freed one from the possibility of being a future oppressor or where one is identified as such, past victimhood explains and exonerates you from the ethical demands of the present. The same, if in reverse, can be said about the presentism of philanthropic and humanitarian diplomacies that take current interventions as the basis for moral postures that erase, jump over or elide the foundational violence and entanglements that contribute to our problematic present.

If we take the case of what has been termed (sometimes erroneously) as Africanness and by extension, the quest for essential and recognizable African diplomacies, the implications of taking recognition and the moral line as the organizing principle for thought and diplomatic engagement become clear. Proceeding from a quest for recognition and the fixing of identity, a meta-discourse on Africanness; its essential characteristics, location and temporal contexts is inter-articulated with one on philosophy in order to prove the existence of an African philosophy that is distinct from, yet just as legitimate as Western philosophy. Presented in this way, the quest for recognition is credited with the broadening of both philosophy and the concept diplomacy by pointing to the existence of a human experience and legitimate knowledge outside the regimes of intelligibility that defined what was philosophical, human, sovereign and therefore diplomatic.

In a brief but politically pregnant recreation of the Hegelian master /slave dialectic, Frantz Fanon attends to some of the issues underlining the quest for recognition and its implications for inter-racial and colonial relations. Here, Fanon transposes the familiar Hegelian formulation to the

phenomenological experience of the oppressed black man, who, due to his blackness cannot achieve full recognition given that the reciprocity central to the recognition of the 'ex-slave' is curtailed by a consensus among white masters to "promote the machine-animal-men to the rank of men" (Fanon 1967:220). Taking the "French Negro" as an example of this crisis of recognition, Fanon illustrates how the abolition of slavery led to the re-appropriation of existing values given the lack of dissensus in the constitution of the new relations. That is, the 'free Negro' was ushered out of slavery into 'the lists' where his masters stood as an outcome of a new European morality where the "good white master" says to his friends, "Let's be nice to the niggers"(ibid). 'Let us recognize them as human, as self-determining nation-states, as societies capable of modern development.'

As such, the ex-slave became caught up in a world that was not his own. He was man of resentment and reaction. A mimic man. Given the lack of a break with the colonial or slave order of things, the "Liberty and Justice" that the freed Negro articulates will always be "white liberty and justice" (Fanon 1967:221). He does not create something ontologically different and reproduces the accepted codes. According to Fanon:

The Negro has not become a master. Where there are no longer slaves, there are no longer masters. The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitudes of the master. The white man is a master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. (Fanon 1967:219)

While still dialectical in its orientation, Fanon's conception of the master-slave relationship and especially his invoking of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and the affirmative and actional ethics it



stipulates; “man is a yes...yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity”, presents a crucial break from Hegelian recognition that is useful for the rethinking of the diplomatic encounter (Fanon 1967:222). Through recourse to the ethics of affirmation, Fanon’s thought initiates a number of reversals and disturbances. A transmutation of values that converts the negations that he treats into affirmations; into revelations of the entanglements and transferences that characterize our present. That is, the master-slave relationship that Fanon ‘treats’, rather than illustrate the perpetual slavery of the negro, opens up to forms of critique that illustrate the manner in which both master and slave are caught up in a slave logic, the logic of recognition which produces certain forms of estrangement and their corresponding mediation practices.

Edified by Fanon’s critique of conditions under which the African/black man’s liberation takes place, we can engage the ‘monstrous nuptials’ that tie diplomatic thought to the violences of statecraft, mancraft and practices like modernization based development and ‘peace-building’. At a minimum, such a move involves a departure from the preoccupation with a concept of diplomacy that always recognizes itself and the things and peoples it arranges. A disturbance of a diplomacy that requires the acquisition of unambiguous modes of intelligibility and identity through the denial of entanglements. A diplomacy that refuses to ‘recall’ and interrogate its own presuppositions.

In Zimbabwe for example, and mostly owing to the legacy of settler colonialism, the dominant notion of citizenship, and by extension recognized ‘diplomacy’, ‘is derived from discourses on the self that promote a version of Africanness that always defines itself in opposition to Europe and more recently whiteness in general. The realization of this Zimbabwean ideal is to be found

in a militant heterosexual masculinity, the promotion of racial/national sovereignty, the constitution of enemy others (inside and outside the state) and the ownership of property - the perfect manifestation of which is the land. Such a policing mechanism is aimed at consolidating Mugabe and ZANU-PF's hold on state power in Zimbabwe by capitalizing on the opportunities arising from the claims to autonomy, resistance and emancipation produced by constituting Zimbabwe's and therefore Africa's enemies — homosexuals, white settlers, journalists, the MDC, diplomats, human rights activists — who are associated with diverse forms of dispossession and are to be done away with in order to right the wrongs that Zimbabweans experienced in the past. The idea of Africa that the ZANU-PF privileges is based on a unique African identity that is beyond reproach and negotiation (Mbembe 2002: 240).

The lyrical transformation characteristic of the shift to the new Zimbabwean national anthem — *Blessed be the Land of Zimbabwe* — introduced in March 1994 to replace *God Bless Africa*, which had been the anthem since independence in 1980, provides some insights into the identities and practices privileged by the ZANU-PF's led forms of cultural governance. In this new dispensation, Zimbabwean identities are to be predicated upon spatializing practices primarily concerned with the question of Zimbabweanness rather than Africanness. An identity that re-enacts a history of violence where the kinds of selves to be recognized as legitimately Zimbabwean and the spaces and practices that they are to use to enact their uniquely Zimbabwean identity were based on the exclusion of those who are seen to have incommensurate practices of identity, modes of affiliation and possession.<sup>70</sup> The forms of representation emerging

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<sup>70</sup>Lyrics on Demand, *Zimbabwe National Anthem* [English] available on the web at: <http://www.lyricsondemand.com/miscellaneouslyrics/nationalanthemlyrics/zimbabwenationalanthemlyrics.html>

from such practices can be read as an attempt to reverse a colonial history that created the native (through inventing Rhodesia). By transforming the nation through practices that script the 'native' into national space, the versions of Zimbabweanness promoted by Mugabe seek to reverse colonial violence, acts of dispossession and practices of identity through recourse to a fixed idea of Africa and Africanness based on the epiphenomenon of landscape ( Darian-Smith 1999:71).

The first stanza of the anthem reads:

Oh lift high the banner, the flag of Zimbabwe  
The symbol of freedom proclaiming victory;  
We praise our *heroes'* sacrifice,  
And vow to keep our land from *foes*;  
And may the Almighty protect and bless our land.  
Oh lively Zimbabwe, so wondrously adorned  
With mountains, and rivers cascading, flowing free;  
May rain abound, and fertile fields;  
May we be fed, our labour blessed;  
And may the almighty protect and bless our land...

As indicated above, the national anthem scripts the land question into the Zimbabwean national imaginary such that possession of the land becomes an ontological rather than strategic issue. Therefore, the rationalities that govern the modes of acquiring, inhabiting and policing land are seen as determinants of the conditions under which the African subject attains "full selfhood and becomes self-conscious" (Mbembe 2002a.: 240). Following Fanon's diagnosis of the psychopathology of oppression with attentiveness to the material mediation of conceptions of self, we can better understand the conditions under which Mugabe emerges as a strong man in Zimbabwe and the forms of estrangement that lead the liberation war veterans and ZANU-PF

supporters to play on the *ressentiment* of black-white relations that the independence diplomatic negotiations at Lancaster and the second *Chimurenga* (1966-1980 liberation war) failed to resolve. In all these narratives of the self, we see how colonial/settler mediated dispossession contributed to a possessive or proprietary mode of African self writing that constituted a black morality, a black man's land and ultimately an authentic black man's personality to be realized through the possession of the land, exclusion of homosexuals and public condemnation of British values and political practices.

Mahmood Mamdani's reading of natives' violence of the kind being experienced in Zimbabwe is edifying. Drawing on Fanon's reflection on violence and colonial subjectivity, Mamdani illustrates how the native's violence is life affirming rather than life denying. It is a violence that calls up the memories of a violence forgotten or ignored. That is, the foundational violence of colonialism. According to Mamdani, what distinguishes native violence from the violence of the settler therefore, is that it is the violence of yesterday's victims who have turned around and decided to cast aside their victimhood and become masters of their own lives. In short, they who have only known the language of dispossession, violence and *thingification* violently assert their selfhood ( Mamdani 2002: 14). While the violence in Zimbabwe does not fit neatly into Mamdani's schema of native violence, his analysis offers some insights into the complexity of the postcolonial relations in settler colonies. As I will illustrate later on, the appropriation of the nativist identity and cause for various purposes produces casualties that exceed the 'settler' while producing its own settlers, albeit in another space. On the whole, revisiting these violent processes and events encourages negotiation and reflection on perspectives that engage the

conditions under which oppression-based or enmity-based identities emerge, the transformations they effect and the violences that they reproduce.

## **6.2 Diplomacy's Monstrous Nuptials: Postcolonial Grandeur and the Psychopathology of Oppression**

To pursue diplomacy's monstrous nuptials, Fanon's affirmative ethics, 'Man is a Yes', can be juxtaposed with a variety of sites of estrangement that eschew the contingency of identity production. What is at stake here is a mode of thinking diplomacy that illustrates how a recourse to an African identity or a law predicated on notions of a community's "historical and foundational consensus" configures the common world as a stable distribution of places and identities while silencing the lawmaking violence and law preserving violences central to the formation and maintenance of consensual 'diplomatic communities' (Benjamin 1978:299-300). Such a treatment of community supplies an ethico-political and aesthetic impetus for thinking critically about diplomatic communities and the identities that they privilege. It also imbues with difference those things which modern diplomacy presents as always enduring or subject to forms of recognition that make them emerge in the same form even if /when they return in a different time or place.

With such an ethic in mind, the violence characteristic of conceptions of community in Zimbabwe should provoke us to seek out other encounters that disrupt the "logic of identification which wants everybody to be in his or her place, with the occupation suited to his or her place and the name fitting that occupation" (Ranciere 2007:561). If we take the case of slave and colonial practices and the various responses to the partialities and violence underlining the idea /

ideal of humanity that they promulgate, then, we can attend to the specific and very limited diplomatic universe that they create, disseminate and conceal. That is, attentiveness to forms of estrangement that characterize colonial space and slave bodies reveals how this limited ethical frame of reference and its attendant regimes of recognition are extended, at least in the negative form, to postcolonial settings.

In Africa, a form of diplomatic recognition that presupposes a world of essences, neutral starting points and practical dispositions was central to discourses that presented the African as a being possessed by *slave life* [a form of death-in-life], *savage life* [just another form of *animal life*] or *native life* [a life confined in a given space, time and mode of thought] (Mbembe 2003:24). Thus, Africa's exclusion from the dominant regime of diplomatic recognition (which corresponds with recognition as chattel, animal or part of a landscape to be cultivated, partitioned and transferred at will ) afforded European populations certain rights, privileges and immunities while legitimating the deployment of violence as a means of enhancing productivity, ridding bodies of undesirable habits and spaces of undesirable bodies. In this way, diplomatic discourses of the colonial era legitimated or remained silent about necropolitical slave, colonial and civilizational practices that were systematically applied in the engagement with 'unrecognized' Africans and other colonized peoples.

From a diplomatic point of view, 'we' allow or disallow life based on a regime of recognition which coincides with the sympathies characteristic of a "homogenous empty time". Sympathies that present and preserve the idea of a straightforward progression of *diplomatic-time* devoid of interruption which is then used to mark the inside/outside of diplomatic history and community

by assigning each era its logic of recognition. The consensus that derives from these practices of recognition becomes the criteria for qualification and identification and serves as the basis for distinctions between civilized and uncivilized community, between the human and the non-human, the producers and consumers of culture and those imprisoned by culture; the former being on the 'right side of history', while the latter stand on the wrong side of history thus *outside* of the time of diplomacy, its sympathies, immunities and the idea of 'humanity' its privileges (see Benjamin 1968).

In Africa, modern 'diplomatic time' contributed to a concept 'diplomacy' confined to the interactions among states, Europeans and those societies that have been successfully translated into this regime of intelligibility/recognition. In contrast to the immunities and privileges characteristic of modern diplomatic recognition, the interactions taking place with those deemed to exist outside this pre-established 'diplomatic time-space' are treated differently. As result of these partialities, modern diplomatic discourse disavows the violences and conceptions of man that give it coherence and remains inattentive to the forms of estrangement and encounters that emerged together with or against its limited frame of reference.

It is in light of the quest for a homogenous diplomatic time complete with recognizable subjects, methods and spaces that we should treat declarations on the emergence of a new diplomacy or the premature eulogizing of diplomacy in discourses on the 'end' or death of diplomacy. For, implicit in these declarations is an urge to purity, a need to stabilize and police diplomacy's origins [and future], the technologies/techniques it deploys, the spaces it occupies and therefore the identities or practices that qualify to be recognized as diplomatic. It is in this way that

recognition configures a specific sense reality which is then used to “fix what is visible and what is not, what is given and what is not, what can be said about that given and what cannot” (Ranceire 2007:561. Even when deployed for emancipatory purposes, it reproduces within these ‘communities’ the violence and partialities required to maintain established habits and images of thought.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the colonies where the West’s colonial interlocutors were assigned a life outside that of recognized diplomatic time and philosophical thought as a result of their presumed ‘powerlessness’, savagery or ‘inability’ to think rationally. Drawing on this logic of identification and the postulates it implies, force was applied against those bodies and functions that were considered to have an existence external to that of the diplomatic world. For example, during the second Ashanti war of 1896, Robert Baden Powell (the founder of the Boy Scouts) , the commander of the advance British troops received an envoy offering unconditional surrender. Given Britain’s superior weaponry, the British troops tried to provoke confrontation by forcing the Ashanti King Prempeh and his mother “to crawl on all fours up to the British officers sitting on crates of biscuit tins” who were to receive their subjugation (Lindqvist 1996:53-54). The political significance of this event in the British public diplomatic imaginary is displayed by the wide circulation of drawings of Prempeh that were presented in the metropolitan illustrated press under different titles. In the *Illustrated London News* of February 26, 1896, the drawing of Prempeh’s humiliation appeared with the caption: “They crept up to him on all fours. The submission of King Prempeh.” Three days later, a different illustration appeared in the *Graphic* of February 29, 1896 as “The Submission of King Prempeh. The final Humiliation.”



In an elaborate reading of such diplomatic anti-protocols, Sven Lindqvist draws parallels between the submission of King Prempeh and Harlequin's description of how native chieftains crawled when approaching Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In order to illustrate how common place such humiliating practices were, Lindqvist provides a similar reading of Carl Peters' [the founder of the German East Africa colony] account of how he forced the Vagogo into submission by flogging the chieftain's son with a hippo whip before firing "into the heap" of Vagogo warriors who come to his rescue upon hearing his screams. When the Sultan sends a messenger asking for the conditions of peace, Peters' curt reply presents a clear colonialism-diplomacy link that was by now common in Africa: "Tell the Sultan I do not wish for peace with him. The Vagogo are liars and must be eliminated from the earth. But if the Sultan wishes to be a slave to the Germans, then he and his people may possibly be allowed to live" (Peters 1891 Quoted in Lindqvist 1996:50-51).<sup>71</sup> Sanction! Conditionality! Exception!— a common diplomatic idiom that persists in the West's engagement with Africans.

Thus, extermination or translation to slave or colonial subjectivity is presented as the conditions for peaceful existence. The partialities displayed by Powell and Peters are not unique to that era or to the form of whiteness that they articulate. These partialities, albeit transformed, have been incorporated by some African leaders, who, drawing on *ressentiment* or adulation for colonial precedents, consider the subjugation of the white man the ultimate demonstration of their humanity, their diplomatic status and realization of their sovereign destination. Informed by such

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<sup>71</sup> See Carl Peters *New Light on Dark Africa* (1891) Quoted in Lindqvist Sven, *Exterminate All the Brutes* . Joan Tate Trans. (New York: The New Press, 1996)p 50-51

partialities and desires, the Ugandan president Idi Amin Dada (Conqueror of the British Empire) sought to display his diplomatic might, through a performance reminiscent of King Prempeh's submission. His diplomatic drama involved an on-screen sovereignty performance for both the local and international communities by forcing British businessmen and diplomats to kneel before him and then making them carry him shoulder high on a litter.

To put Amin's anti-protocols in perspective, we can heed Frantz Fanon's diagnostic of the psychological alienation that contributes to such practices. According to Fanon, the quest for recognition displayed in practices such as Amin's can be attributed to a neurotic orientation that enslaves the "Negro to his inferiority" and "the white man to his superiority" (Fanon 1967:60). The extended demonstration of this formulation is that the man/woman of colour is constantly involved in a "bilateral process, an attempt to acquire – by internalizing them– assets that were originally prohibited." Fanon goes further to explain how the material and psychological elements of this form of estrangement is linked to a feeling of inferiority which steers this aspiration to "win admittance into the white world"( Fanon 1967:59-60). A desire to be part of a racialized consensus. To be recognized under the prevailing terms rather than a transformation of the terms of engagement.

Read with the appropriate discernment, Fanon's diagnostic of the colonial/black man's condition can help us have a better understanding of the conditions under which Idi Amin and other African leaders like Houphouët-Boigny and 'Emperor' Jean Bedel Bokasa to emerge as a mimic men. A symptom, not only of their alienation but of the forms of recognition that makes such forms of alienation possible and desirable in the first place. While Amin's quest for recognition

is geared towards the attenuation of European power, Bokasa offers a theatrical imitation of Napoleon's coronation process as a sign of his approbation of European might on one hand and evidence of his having achieved that same status on the other.

Again, Fanon supplies a useful reading of such tendencies by looking at how they form a 'fantasy intuition' which makes the black man seek to obtain revenge for the *imago* that had always possessed him. Working through the white man's institutions, the black man of *ressentiment* strives to make white men adopt a Negro attitude toward him (Fanon 1967:61). He seeks to prove that he is just as good, if not better than the white man. These "triumphs of the weak as the weak," or forms of *ressentiment* often contribute to regimes of recognition which reproduce or redeploy the forms of estrangement that they seek to overcome. As such, the racialized relations and anti-colonial logics that they privilege, even where they seem to contest African domination, remain inattentive to the micropolitics of survival and affective relations characteristic of everyday encounters in Africa and elsewhere. What drives diplomatic performances like those practiced by Amin, Boigny and Bokasa is a need to present readily recognizable identities, spaces and practices. African truths which are then used to mediate 'African estrangement.' Always jumping over the complexity of life and the practices of dis-identification or the dis-identified collectivities that inhabit 'African' space.

### **6.3 The Rites of Return**

It is with the impact of oppressive practices borne out of a history of oppression in mind that Edward Said provides a critical reading of the Exodus narrative in his essay, "*Michael Walzer's Exodus and Revolution: A Canaanite Reading.*" Here, Said points out the violence inherent in

*Exodus* which has as its foundation the vision of freedom for one people that is premised on the defeat and extermination of the other. The Canaanites, the current inhabitants of the “Promised Land’ who happen not to be *a part of* ‘the Chosen People’” (Said 1988:162). Attentive to the violence made possible by the exclusion of natives from the moral community, Said illustrates how the *Exodus* narrative has inspired Puritans in New England to slay Native Americans, Boers in South Africa to claim large swathes of land held by blacks and more recently, the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians, the present-day Canaanites of the Middle East (Said 1988:167).

In Africa, a variation of this narrative (*Exodus/ Right of Return*) has been deployed as part of a civilizing project geared towards the recognition and inclusion of Africans within a specific time-determined moral universe concomitant with a shift in Euro-American moral imaginary and African identities that emerge together with it. With the abolition of the slave trade and the emergence of judicial diplomacy (mixed commission courts) in places like Sierra Leone, government bureaucracies and human populations (and territories) were re-organized to reflect the new forms of recognition accorded to former slaves. In line with the shift in recognition, there was a change in nomenclature and moral considerations in various departments of the British Foreign Office. For example, the internal reorganization saw the establishment of a single Consular and Slave Trade Department which was then expanded (in 1879) and renamed the ‘Slave Trade and Sanitary Department.’ In addition to dealing with the slave trade, the new department had responsibility for handling correspondence relating to cattle plague, quarantine and pilgrims, thus bringing under its common management a bizarre amalgam of agricultural, humanitarian, religious and social issues (FCO 2007 :80-84).

Like the bureaucratic distribution of bodies and functions according to established regimes of recognition, African identities and diplomacies were subjected to a number of mimetic movements that sought to establish metropolitan consensus and tranquillity. In sum, these movements were part of a 'domestic drama' that evoked and sought to preserve a certain idea of whiteness by externalizing difference through colonial practices. Two related redistribution efforts suggest themselves as sites of colonial practice geared towards the maintenance of homogenous society and existing regimes of recognition. The first relates to the repatriation to Sierra Leone of London's indigent 'black' population (the black poor) which took place at the same time that the British Government was sending hundreds of its unwanted convicts to found a penal colony in Botany Bay. The second, which I will treat in more detail relates to the Liberian experiment by the American Colonization Society.

Like other attempts at the repatriation of free blacks to Africa in the nineteenth century, the Liberian experiment was conceived out of a concern for the possibility of co-habitation in the USA. This concern about the 'new community' manifested itself in the intensified humanitarian efforts by American philanthropists, a quest for rooted identities and equality (on the part of blacks) and the growing trepidation that white America held for a burgeoning population of free blacks (as illustrated by the anxieties in D.W Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*). In all these cases, black freedom and equality was considered 'un-American' and was therefore presented as something to be achieved in a space external to the Americas.

Even with the end of chattel slavery in the USA, the presence of 'free' black men and women was unconceivable in certain parts of the 'land of the free' where anxieties arose over attempts

to extend freedom and generosity to communities beyond the white American population. In order to maintain the homogeneity of the 'free community' in the USA and their habits of engagement with difference, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was formed to set up a black colony in Africa to resettle ex-slaves as a way of solving the US's race problems and as a reflection of the newly found morality. In an analysis of the impact of the expanding free black population on the American imaginary, Thomas Jefferson articulates the anxieties and habits of thought that cast the free black man as a threat to societal peace on one hand and white autonomy on the other. According to Jefferson, the "deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the whites" and the "recollections by the blacks" was bound to divide the USA and "produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race" (Jefferson 2002:175-6). A second threat that Jefferson foresees relates to "a revolution of the wheel of fortune" which might place the slave over the master (ibid).

Besides causing racial anxieties and moral panics among the 'white' American population, the 'formal' end of slavery generated a different set of racial idioms among the Blacks in the Americas who, in an attempt to free themselves from a history of violence, supported a return to the 'homeland' as the only way of regaining a sense of self that had been lost as a result of the displacement and violence experienced while in bondage. This return of the oppressed to a "homeland that is simply waiting there" was part of an unending search for roots on one hand, and an "angry, sometimes self-destructive" assertion of nationality and ethnicity on the other. It was an attempt to come to terms with the experience of abandonment and was characterized by a narrative where an alienated self seeks to be reconnected to a ground that constitutes its identity (Hall: 1997:38, Nandy 1995).

Equipped with this quest for a grounded identity, the American Colonization Society and its supporters (Black and White alike) engaged in a rendition of history that produced an imagined Africa that was merely there - homogenous, frozen in time, always ripe for external intervention; by people from another place /space or another time. Thus, Liberia, as an Afro-American colony emerged as a product of an isomorphic oppression that encrypted certain ideas of African history and subjectivity in American (both Euro and Afro-American)] psychic life with far reaching implications for the diplomatic and ethical alternatives that were imagined and pursued with regard to this place (See Nandy 1983:31).<sup>72</sup>

For instance, Liberia was imagined as a destination for the realization of an ideal type and diplomatically recognizable black man and was admitted into the international community as part of the League of Nations thus making it a mediator of the African experience as exemplified by its representation of the South West African (Namibia) case. Underlining such a quest for recognition and attached to the re-settlement plan, was a civilizational discourse based on the idea that 'civilized blacks' from the Americas could civilize and reform their African kin and attain an internationally recognized status denied to Blacks while in the Americas or in continental Africa. Such an idea of Africa was not unique to the Liberian situation, in making the case for a Sierra Leonean colony, Granville Sharpe dreamed of the colony as a Christian beacon attracting non-believers thus offering a reversal to the opinions held about the character of a free black settlement. Commenting on this particular set of issues, the Pan-Africanist Diplomat, Edward W. Blyden, a champion of the Liberian experiment justified the return to Africa by pointing out that:

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<sup>72</sup> According to Ashis Nandy isomorphic oppressions, are the products of histories of violence that create psychic deformations not only in the victims but also in the perpetrators. See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) p 31

The Negro in the United States, however well educated and however qualified for it, will never have the opportunity of appearing in a diplomatic character at a European court — a privilege which the Liberian has in spite of the political insignificance of the country.<sup>73</sup>

Central to Blyden's political discourse was a quest for recognition based on the re-inscription of African humanity and political subjectivity (through Black nationalism, nativism, Pan-Africanism, Afro-centricism etc) into a system that had previously denied or trivialized it.<sup>74</sup> However, in order to achieve the diplomatic ideal, Americo-Liberians, through the Masonic order and other exclusionary strategies sought to produce a 'new Negro' culture and personality recognizable on the international stage. Far from overturning American racial and Eurocentric ideals, the Liberian ruling class merely multiplied it. In effect, they put into circulation colonial and racialized hierarchies and violences reminiscent of European colonial experiences thus failing to create something ontologically different upon their return to Africa.

Read differently, the above statement by Blyden reveals the relationship between diplomatic recognition and colonial/racial discourse. It takes note of the conditions of possibility for a 'slave free' USA and links 'American freedoms' to the establishment of a racially homogeneous space

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<sup>73</sup> Blyden, Quoted in Mudimbe, V.Y, *The invention of Africa*.p104 For more biographical information on Blyden see, Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden :Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press 1967)

<sup>74</sup> Blyden inspires a Pan-Negro ideology predicated upon his reflections on the 'African personality.' In his writings as a [pedagogue](#) (*The West African University*, 1872), historian (*The Negro in Ancient History*, 1869; *West Africa before Europe*, 1905), traveler (*From West Africa to Palestine*, 1873), or sociologist (*African Life and Customs*, 1908, *The Jewish Question* 1898), he actively sought to present an alternative history or idea of the African personality.



— the whitening of society — which was to be achieved through the ‘exportation’ of racialized ideals and violence to Liberia. It also provides a context for the Americo-Liberians exclusion of the ‘indigenous’ groups — the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru etc — from positions of power for one hundred and thirty three years. A status that was maintained until the True Whig Party government was violently overthrown by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe in 1980. The tragedy — the Liberian civil war , a revolt against Americo-Liberian domination characterized by a crackdown on the Masonic order of Liberia and ‘beach parties’ where senior Americo-Liberian government officials were publicly executed on the beaches of Monrovia where their ‘ancestors’ had landed from or had been dispatched to the Americas.

#### **6.4 Recognizing / Re-organizing the ‘African Self’**

The logic of identification and classification articulated by Blyden is not without its successors and interlocutors. It has contributed to discussions on African diplomacies and philosophies predicated on a sort of *homo africanus* ontology which is presented as an explanation for, and its mastery serves as a solution to, the African problem however it is defined. Philosophically, such a discourse dominates the ethno-philosophy of the Belgian missionary, Placide Tempels who in his *Bantu Philosophy* (1945), supplies a vitalist reading of Luba ontology and goes forth to present a number of ways in which Western and Bantu concepts of individuality and ontology differ from each other. Tempels then uses these differences to develop a manual, a manifesto for the re-education of Europeans who need a better understanding of the realm of Bantu thought which he considers “indispensable for all who are called upon to live among native people” (Tempels 1959:17). For Tempels, such an understanding :

Concerns all colonials, especially those whose duty is to hold administrative or judicial office among African people; all those who are concerning themselves with a felicitous development of tribal law; in short, it concerns all who wish to civilize, educate and raise the Bantu. But, if it concerns all colonizers with good will, it concerns most particularly missionaries.

Tempels, like most of his European contemporaries, is concerned with the problem of the transformation and the management of the African. His main intervention lies, not in displacing the colonialism inspired managerial aspects of the encounter with Africans, but in displacing the ethno-political conceits that informed dominant treatments of African realities by missionaries, ethnologist and colonial administrators. Consequently, he is eager to understand the essential and unchangeable character that makes the “pagan, the uncivilized,” stable, while the *évolué*, the Christian unstable. Privileging the position of the ‘pagan’, Tempels attributes this discrepancy to the fact that “the pagan founds his life upon the traditional groundwork of his theodicy and his ontology, which include his whole mental life in their purview and supply him with a complete solution to the problem of living” (Tempels 1959:19). Unlike the ‘uncivilized’ negro, “the *évolué*, and often the Christian,” is presented as an alienated being. As one who has “never effected a reconciliation between his new way of life and his former native philosophy, which remains intact just below the surface (of his behaviour).” This lack of reconciliation within the Self is offered as an explanation for the dual character of the Negro who, even beneath the veneer of "civilization" remains always ready to break through” (ibid.).

While mainly consumed by Europeans, Tempels’ work has served as an inspiration for a limited number of African ethnologists /ethno-philosophers like Alexis Kagame (using Aristotelian

concepts) and John Mbiti (contrasting the African self with the Cartesian self), who have attempted to articulate an ‘authentic’ African thought. Through the privileging of the ‘untainted’ pasts or thought systems of certain groups, the ethno-philosophers look “systematically into different African ethnic groups in order to describe the implicit philosophy” which is identifiable through its resonances with a “Western philosophical grid” that makes ethno-philosophers *recognize* an “implicit, silent philosophy which could account for the behaviour and traditions of African societies” (Smith and Mudimbe 1991: 973). Such a fixation on the essential or authentic ‘African self’ opens up venues for engagement with theories that search for an ‘African mind’ like Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmel* (1965), or those that take the universality of the Oedipus complex as their starting point and proceed to look at/for the presence of Oedipus in Africa as found in the psychoanalytic theories of Octave Mannoni (*Caliban and Prospero*, 1948) and Wulf Sachs (*Black Hamlet*, 1937). The aesthetic dimensions of this mode of sensing and making sense of the African are to be found in Jean Rouch’s ethno-fiction and a more crude form in the BEKE films.

Today, some NGO led experiments in conflict transformation in Africa resort to multi-track diplomacies that privilege this notion of an ‘African self’ and traditional mediation practices in a manner that remains inattentive to the transformations in the society’s moral economy, material conditions of existence and the new forms of violence and estrangement its members experience.

It is within these attempts to define what is and what is not African that a given idea of the African Self and by extension an African diplomacy emerges. And it is in these attempts to present an anti-thesis to the colonial discourses on Africa and the ‘black race’ in general by

rejecting the theme of the 'barbarous negro' that we have further articulations of an essentialist African thought characterized by the need to inscribe Africa into the history of philosophy (a corrective to Hegel's exclusion). For example, as a response to the negative representation of the African self, *Negritude* presented an interesting and very useful (albeit problematic) space of encounter that brought together a number of poets, philosophers and activists from Africa and its diasporas most notable being Aime Cesaire, Leon Damas and Leopold Senghor. Within this literary/political space, the Negritude poets conjured a "Magical Negro culture" that sought to "rob the white man of a certain world." They called up the Negro world, one characterized by an essentialized Negro sensitivity, intuition, poetry and rhythm. One that affirms an African personality through a poetic discovery of blackness. One that makes the Negro recognizable such that he is "no longer a Zero" (Fanon 1967: 122-130).<sup>75</sup>

A similar attempt to attend to the exclusions occasioned by a Eurocentric history of philosophy and humanity is taken up by Afrocentric thinkers like Cheikh Anta Diop who present Egypt as the "cradle of thinking humanity – and thus the proof of the black African origins of that same humanity" (Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1993:9, Mudimbe 1983).<sup>76</sup> However, these 'radical alternatives' to the Hegelian exclusion of Africa from the history of philosophical humanity sometimes constitute a logical extension and affirmation of Western philosophy and use it as the measure of what constitutes thought. They enjoin African pasts to the dominant history of the mediation of Estrangement thus legitimizing the teleological line; Egypt-Greece-Europe...an

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<sup>75</sup> On Negritude and its implications, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 122-130

<sup>76</sup> See Jewsiewicki B., and Mudimbe, V. Y., (1993) 'Africans' Memories and Contemporary History of Africa *History and Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Beiheft 32: *History Making in Africa* (Dec., 1993), pp. 1-11 p.9 also see Mudimbe V. Y., (1983), 'African Philosophy as an Ideological Practice: The Case of French-Speaking Africa,' *African Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3/4 (Sep. - Dec.), pp. 133-154

obsession with origins, progress and homogenous diplomatic and philosophical time rather than a disturbance of the line of thought presented therein.

### **6.5. Postcolonial Refrains and the Pitfalls of National Consciousness**

Doubtless, the political proclamations coming out of the Negritude collective were useful in rethinking African subjectivity by staging a revolt against the negations of colonial and racial discourses (Mbembe 2002:254). Likewise, the formal end of colonial rule led to a first generation of African leaders who developed nationalist ideals based on Africanist ideological formulations which became the basis of mediating estrangement. For example Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism* (1964), Leopold Senghor's *Negritude* and Julius Nyerere's (African socialism) *Ujamaa* all attempt to script a national identity and deal with the challenges of sovereign statehood. The 'diplomatic milieu' in which they operated in was characterized by the hope and radical energies arising from recent developments like the 'Afro-Asian Bandung Conference' (1955) which Richard Wright reports about in his book *Colour Curtain* (1956). It was also characterized by colonial hang-ups and the challenges of regimes of recognition that had hitherto accepted necropolitical colonial practices, discourses on African otherness and humanist ideals that systematically denied certain attributes of humanity to Africans and other colonized peoples.

In the postcolony, these new identities, power formations and territorialities were constituted in an attempt to interrupt the regimes of intelligibility that enabled the exclusion of 'African life' from conceptions of humanity. From development and sovereignty; from the world of 'diplomacy'. However, the attempts to re-inscribe African humanity and thought [negritude, nativism, ethno-philosophy, Pan-Africanism, nationalism etc] into a system that had previously

denied it sometimes fail to create something ontologically different. Sometimes, they reproduce colonial sensibilities through practices that script the ‘native’ into national space or privilege a given idea of ‘man’ required to inhabit national space or secure recognition/ consensus on an international plane. In Tanzania, the attempt to make the “modern African man”, and by extension the “African nation”, manifested itself in moralizing campaigns and discourses on nakedness and its relationship to African identity. ‘Operation Dress-Up’ for example, was geared towards inducing the “Maasai community in Tanzania to abandon their traditional mode of dress and adopt modern clothing like the rest of post-colonial Tanzanians.” Concerned that Maasai withdrawal from what was by now considered “normal” attire was a reversal of the pace of progress occurring among other groups in the country, the campaign sought to make them catch-up. That is;

The dressing-up of the Maasai was seen as an imperative of nation-building; a disciplinary measure geared towards modernization, provision of equal opportunity and national integration...the Maasai were to be brought into the national time of “African socialism” by being dressed up in European clothes. The spatial character of this discordance of ideas of Africanness is expressed in the disciplinary practice set to prevent members of the nomadic Maasai community from entering the Arusha metropolis while “wearing limited skin clothing or loose blanket”, and the government’s threat of retribution if they clung to such ‘awkward clothing.’<sup>77</sup>

The policing of Africanness was not confined to the dressing up of the Maasai. Under the rubric of Africanness, “ethnic or modernist claims were also used to mark boundaries and legitimate violent practices in order to eradicate what was considered a cultural decadence ( African women dressed in ‘European’ miniskirts) or cultural retardation (Maasai nakedness)”( See Mazrui

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<sup>77</sup> See Opondo S.O., (2008) ‘Genre and the African City: The Politics and Poetics of Urban Rhythms’ in [Journal for Cultural Research](#), Volume 12 Issue 1 pages 59 – 79 p.64, For a more elaborate treatment of operation dress up, see Mazrui, Ali. A. ‘The Robes of Rebellion: Sex, Dress, and Politics in Africa’, *Encounter*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1970 pp. 19–30 and Schneider, L. ‘The Maasai’s New Clothes: A Developmentalist Modernity and Its Exclusions’, *Africa Today*, vol. 53, 2006, no. 1, pp. 101–129.

1970, Opondo 2008). Through such processes, the limits and possibilities of the postcolonial diplomatic self are established as national cultural governance becomes the basis for the production of a moral self that comes to stand in for and speak for what is African, diplomatic and diplomatic in Africa.

Even in their more radical formulations, some of these postcolonial diplomacies, owing to their colonial and nativist nuptials have been unable to imagine the complexity of political life beyond racial and colonial categories thus hindering the possibilities of new forms of thought or experimental encounters in/with Africa. Through recourse to a racialized Africa, "a certain way of thinking correctly, a certain style of political discourse, a certain ethics of the intellectual" is presented as the solution to African problems — philosophical, political or otherwise (Foucault 2000: xi). The effect, a *blackmail of Africaness* that constitutes (or is constituted) by a habit that haunts both the Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic writers who maintain a fidelity to modes of thought that reduce the complexity of life by calling readily recognizable and therefore identifiable categories which are then mobilized as the basis for moral and political action in Africa. For example, race has been used, in a rather reductive manner to make sense of the very complex set of relations that index the recurrence of war, underdevelopment and disease on the continent. Race is also summoned to stage a racialized solidarity at a macropolitical level which is used to contest the inferior status assigned to Africans. As Achille Mbembe (2002) appropriately puts it:

In dominant African narratives of the self, the deployment of race is foundational not only to difference in general, but also to the idea of the nation, since racial determinants are supposed to serve as the moral basis for political solidarity. In the history of being African, race is the moral subject and at the same time an immanent fact of consciousness...racialization of the (black) nation and the nationalization of the (black) race go hand in hand. Whether we look at negritude or the differing versions of Pan-Africanism, in these discourses the revolt is not against Africans' belonging to a distinct

race, but against the prejudice that assigns this race an inferior status (Mbembe 2002: 254).

Doubtless, the articulation of anti-colonial Africanness and a clamour for the recognition of the humanity of African people have led to increased ‘freedoms’ and transformed the material conditions of existence for millions of people who were previously subjected to colonial domination. They have interrupted the regimes of intelligibility that made of the native the prototype of the animal or a ‘thing’ to be altered at will. A subject who only existed in the ‘sphere of objects’ to be fashioned, named and known in the manner deemed appropriate to an all knowing, ‘all powerful’ and civilized Europe (Mbembe 2001:46).

However, the history of decolonization suggests that the decolonial event, its erotics, pragmatics and problematics perpetuate a colonial and racial rationality or sensibility that scripts the ‘native’ into national space as exemplified by Robert Mugabe’s articulation of Zimbabweanness. Mugabe’s anti-colonial logic based on the policing of Zimbabweanness and Africanness calls up the histories of violence in a manner that “does away with politics” in Zimbabwe by reducing it to “the exercise of, and struggle to possess, power” which is equated with the land and a very specific version of Africanness founded on membership to the black race and fidelity to official narratives of the self.<sup>78</sup>

However, the *common sense* recalling of peoples, times and spaces that had been trivialized or over-coded by the colonialism in the past and Robert Mugabe and other ZANU-PF enthusiasts in

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<sup>78</sup> See Thesis 1 of [Jacques Rancière](http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2514/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranci%C3%A9re.html), ‘Ten Theses on Politics’ in *Theory & Event* 5:3 | 2001 available on the web at [http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2514/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v005/5.3ranci%C3%A9re.html](http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2514/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranci%C3%A9re.html)



the present has contributed to a racialized concern for the pain of others. Accordingly, the recognized diplomatic attempt to address atrocities in Zimbabwe reproduce these racial partialities as only certain kind of pains make it to the diplomatic agenda or the memorialisation of pain and loss. That is, the narrative on violence in Zimbabwe has for the most part focused on the expulsion of white settlers /farmers, brutalities against human rights activists, journalists, homosexuals and (democratic) supporters of the MDC. This readily recognizable script (the staple of NGOs, African and Western governments) is used to criticize Mugabe's regime and justify the sanctions against Zimbabwe and is dismissed with ease by Mugabe and his supporters. However, the commonsense reading of violence is disturbed by the encouragement to *think* rather than *moralize* that emerges from counter-narratives and temporal redeployments like the novel *The Stone Virgins* (2002) where Yvonne Vera highlights the ethnically targeted campaign against 'Matabeleland' by Zimbabwe's 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade resulting in the massacre of 'fellow' black Zimbabweans in an attempt to rid the area of Ndebele dissidents. Through a treatment of instances of extreme, yet banal acts of violence (colonial and postcolonial) , Vera draws our attention to the internal strife that goes unattended to due to a fidelity to a national script and the identities it supplies on one hand and an International designation of what constitutes a moral or humanitarian problem on the other. Attentiveness to the counter-narrative that Vera presents complicates the idea of Zimbabweanness that both Mugabe and the international community privilege. It illustrates how the recognition of Zimbabwe as a predominantly bi-racial community and the focus on racialized forms of violence contributes to the trivializing or erasure of similarly intense if not more violent encounters with women and other people deemed to have incommensurate practices of identity.

The intricacies of such violence is presented in a series of choreographed scenes that implicate ‘the land’ (and the struggle for it) in the attack on two sisters ; Thenjiwe and Nonceba by Sibaso, a disillusioned Ndebele freedom fighter from the anti-colonial struggle (the second *Chimurenga*). In the absence of an ‘enemy’, Sibaso invents one and inflicts death, for this is all he can remember and knows how to do. By narrating and dramatizing the pain of the violated woman’s body, Vera invites us to experience the anti-colonial moment and its postcolonial remnants by multiplying the sites of estrangement thus revealing the intimate ,ambiguous and everyday violent encounters that demand not only the mediation of otherness but also of sameness.<sup>79</sup>

A similar scene with a more or less comaprable effect appears in an earlier novel, *Without a Name* (1994). Here, Vera deploys the rape of Mazvita by a freedom fighter to supply a critical reading of the violence effected and legitimized through a recourse to the tropes of the land and the privileging of war veteran bodies, national identities and their functions. In an illustration of this violent encounter, Vera voices Mazvita’s distaste for the land which she regards as a violent platform /pathway that is complicit in the violence applied to her body:

“... she hated the land pressed against her back as the man moved impatiently above her, into her, past her [...] she connected him only to the land [...] the land had allowed the man to grow from itself into her body” (Vera 1994:31).

At a minimum, Vera’s novels draw our attention to the spectral violences that return to haunt the postcolony and presents an experience of violent encounters that exceed the dominant readings

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<sup>79</sup>See Vera Yvonne, *The Stone Virgins* p.68-69. For more on Women’s time, see Kristeva, J. (1986) “Women’s Time” in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, Basil

of identity and violence in Zimbabwe. Vera's narration of women's pain and women's time multiple the venues of estrangement and highlights the violence behind the scripting of the land in the Zimbabwean national imaginary. Here, the deployment of violence in the name of the land becomes an ontological rather than a mere strategic issue. As Vera illustrates, reducing the struggle in Zimbabwe to a struggle over land *tout court* allows for the suspension of ethical relations in the present and in the process reproduces the very violence and forms of oppression that land reform or anti-colonial resistance set out to eliminate.

It is in light of the land-identity-freedom intertext that we should treat the difference in the diplomatic approaches employed by the West and Zimbabwe's African allies. For example, European diplomats and governments have expressed a failure or unwillingness to comprehend the symbolic and ontological significance of Zimbabwe's land reclamation program or the diplomatic options it supplies. They assign to the land a specific meaning (material production) and to the land problem a specific history of violent leadership (dictatorship rather than colonialism) thus encoding it and its inhabitants with a very specific significance and suggesting a limited range of solutions.

The discrepancies between those who treat the land in Zimbabwe as a strategic economic resource and those who see it as an ontological and identity constituting issue is evident in the different identities ascribed to the victims of Mugabe's land reclamation; '*white farmers*' or '*white settlers*'— each label calling up a different set of problems, history and diplomatic solutions. Unfortunately, these forms of recognition are used to mark the good and the evil, the oppressor and the oppressed thus limiting the diplomatic gaze to recognized forms of mediating

estrangement rather than disturbing the terms of this opposition. On the whole, the Zimbabwean situation raises useful ethical and political questions that provide some insights into the poverty of modes of thought that fail to situate diplomatic practices alongside the complex pasts and *social practices* that constitute the everyday life of its bearers (Der Derian 1987:86).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

As ‘we’ look at, or better still, celebrate the proliferation of diplomacies arising from the powers of the ‘wretched of the earth’ to reappropriate space, to control their own movement and speak in their own voice, we should also pay attention to the violence and reproduction of police orders that characterize the passage to the ‘new.’ As illustrated by Yvonne Vera’s novels, attempts to bring in the excluded other can sometimes extend established forms of estrangement and recognition to other times, people and events thus reproducing the violence it seeks to address. Heeding the insights from Vera’s interruption of dominant narratives on Zimbabwe, diplomacy and violence, we can appreciate the importance of thinking about diplomacy in places other than those prescribed by geopolitical and nativist regimes of recognition. Similarly, we are sensitized to the violence characteristic of a concept of diplomacy that presupposes a homogenous national existence as opposed to a more open and heterogenous diplomatic imaginary attuned to the new forms of estrangement or the spectres of the past that return to haunt the present.

Caught up in the frame of recognition, diplomatic practices become reactive and inattentive to emerging terrains of encounter. Even where it seems to present reversals or departures from dominant practices and attitudes, diplomatic recognition often reproduces the boundaries that determine how one apprehends the world. Recognition glosses over difference and overlooks

useful and creative forms of encounter as it polices what constitutes the diplomatic; “you do not exist until you are recognized, or are affirmed through a declaration that acknowledges the fact of your existence” (Jönsson and Hall 2005:123).<sup>80</sup> These reactive practices replace one diplomatic ceremony with another; always maintaining a habit of thought and an idea/ideal of man predicated on conformism and new forms of submission in which difference is appropriated and identities established within a diplomatic ‘whole’ that excludes the multiplicity that forces us to think.

In order to think a diplomacy that is attentive to multiplicity, it is instructive to summon practices, bodies and times that provide a more complex map of modern estrangement in which the concept/practice diplomacy can be deployed. Such a move provokes us to pluralize and proliferate our diplomacies and with it an ethics of encounter appropriate and adequate to the multiple contexts. If for this reason alone, attention to strategies of capture and flight that characterize the diplomacies, violences and Africas that emerge in the wake of the shifts in forms of sovereignty, meaning, politics, identity and community requires further attention.

While our conception of the sites of estrangement have been pluralized through the problematic of Postcolonial African diplomacies that seek to make the wretched of the earth powerful on one hand and those that focus on perpetual victimhood and hopelessness in Africa on the other, such narratives, rather than produce within diplomatic thought a movement capable of making the

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<sup>80</sup> Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall treat the difference between constitutive and declaratory theories of recognition in international law and its implication for politics, they note that : “legal scholars have debated the relative merits of the “constitutive theory” and “declaratory theory” of recognition. According to the constitutive theory, a state does not exist until it is recognized; recognition, in other words, has a constitutive effect. The declaratory theory, on the other hand, claims that recognition has no legal effects – it is merely an acknowledgment of facts.” See Jönsson Christer and Hall Martin, *Essence of Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005 )p. 123

mind to go beyond the given, sometimes fixates it on privileged ideas and objects. They may move diplomacy from being a statist or Eurocentric practice but do not present a diplomacy of everyday life attuned to the forms of estrangement and violence that take place in the new spaces mapped by ‘emancipation’ and its attendant sympathies. To fully appreciate the need for diplomacies of everyday life, it is useful to mine the ‘wretched of the earth’ or the counter-strategic action taken by the *Multitude* for the micro-fascisms, identities and architectures of enmity that reduce difference to identity thus subjecting it to dominant regimes of recognition.<sup>81</sup> To grasp the ethical and political significance of the kinds of diplomacies and diplomatic ethos that this dissertation is concerned with, I would like to ‘recall’ a site that I had treated earlier in order to reflect on how diplomacies of everyday life are curtailed by the sense of entitlement and

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<sup>81</sup> In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri provide an outline of the migration of sovereignty to a multi-layered global assemblage and present the counter-strategic action to be taken by the *Multitude*. Through an engagement with the philosophy of Deleuze, Marx among others, Hardt and Negri supply a number of ways in which the *Multitude* can outmanoeuvre [through affirmation, multiplicity, flight] the strategies of power operating at the different levels of sovereignty characteristic of global capitalism. While the details of their analysis of sovereignty and the transformative potential [and make up] of the *Multitude* remain contestable, it is important that we take cognizance of the topographical changes that they point to and appreciate the manner in which it provokes us to pluralize and proliferate our diplomacies and with it an ethics of encounter appropriate and adequate to these contexts. If for this reason alone, their treatment of the strategies of capture and flight that characterize the passage to *Empire* that emerges in the wake of the declining sovereignty of the modern nation-state requires further attention. See Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri. *Empire*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2002.)p. xii

denial of entanglement that accompanies “liberation in an age of neoliberalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002). Heeding Jean and John Comaroff’s (2002) insight that “capitalism at the millennium’ is invested with salvific force; with intense faith in its capacity, if rightly harnessed, wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered”, we can interrogate the new diplomacies that emerge with the notion of capital as redemptive force especially when the proprietary self is defined in national or racial terms (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002:786). In Africa, we can witness this reactive way of receiving the world in the moral panic that leads to the xenophobic attacks of unwanted African immigrants residing/working in post-apartheid South Africa. With the influx of black Zimbabwean and other migrant groups, xenophobes accuse the migrants of "robbing South Africans of jobs" and costing taxpayers billions of Rands , spreading AIDS, stealing wives/husbands while putting undue strain on the services of the rainbow nation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002:789-90).

What makes these acts of recognition dangerous is not the masses’ acceptance of the discourse on South Africaness operating at a macropolitical level that focuses on strategic and ‘technological questions of *raison d’État* (reason of state ); issues of development ,security and the like. What is more disturbing is the reproduction and circulation of ‘national identities’ and conceptions of humanity based on capital mediated and state reinforced ontological considerations, of *raison d’être* (reason of being) (Constantinou 1996:32).

The incorporation of these ontological considerations into the public diplomatic imaginary marks the immigrant as a different being- *makwerekwere* who are singled out for police checks and xenophobic attacks through similar profiling criteria where the language of legality or

illegality is always used alongside the recognition of their body as different. Among the criteria used to single them out include, physical appearance ; “hairstyle, type of clothing, and body posture ,dark complexion and the location of vaccination marks on the lower left forearm (a physical marker that allegedly identifies someone as a Mozambican) instead of the upper arm” (Murray 2003:454).

As I have illustrated through fictional and non-fictional accounts, today’s migrant spaces (like cities) provide a useful site of estrangement and encounter that requires further attention of both diplomatic and philosophical thought. For, implicit in the violence against the immigrant is the denial of ‘mutual entanglements’ that tie South African industry and liberation; the two things that the ‘new South Africa’ boasts of, to a history of migrant labour and South African migrancy (Nuttall 2004:737). For example, Thabo Mbeki’s ‘quiet diplomacy’ with Zimbabwe can be seen as an appreciation of the role Zimbabwe played during South Africa’s liberation struggle. A diplomatic stance that maintains Mugabe’s grip on power (thus contributing to the Zimbabwe refugee problem) and is pursued in line with a Pan-Africanist ideal of solidarity and providing African solutions to African problems . A more embodied memory of entanglement, albeit in reverse is called up in the use of the *Toyitoyi* dance during xenophobic attacks against Zimbabwean [among other] immigrants. The *Toyitoyi* itself tracing its roots to the anti-apartheid liberation movement training camps in Zimbabwe. In this sense, the bodies rhythms ‘recall’ that which the brain and national narratives confiscate. The dance learnt in the Zimbabwean bushes reminds us of a South African past characterized by migrancy that is today overcoded and erased by nationalist demands.



On the whole, the various maps of estrangement, entanglement and violence presented in this dissertation should be read, not as a summary presentation of Africa as a place of violent encounters. Quite to the contrary, it is a provocation to pursue a more patient reading of ‘new’ and ‘old’ ‘African’ diplomacies and provides a critique of the moralizing habits that impose a limit on diplomatic thought and ethical encounters. It is a critique of dominant habits of mediation that characterize our ethnic, national and humanitarian consciousness and tries to call up more intense diplomacies of everyday life that make apparent the different ways in which spheres of experience or sensibility relate to thought and the different forms in which violence and estrangement are reproduced through forms of recognition.

Like Fanon’s treatment of the pitfalls of national consciousness, these spectres of violence are an invitation to witness and create new forms of micropolitical practices that draw on reinvigorated forms of sociality and ethico-political considerations in the midst of violences that seek to cage diplomatic possibilities within specific national, professional, racial or ethnic communities ( see Fanon 2004: 97-145). Thus, attention to the return of the oppressed and the forms of being it privileges is an attempt to unhinge both Africanness and diplomacy from moralizing discourses that seek to fix and tie them down to their ‘proper places’. It is an exploration of a wilder and wider scope of life and enables people to counteract ‘global’ and ‘local’ efforts to "ghettoize" certain forms of mediating estrangement by “restricting their operations to clearly demarcated spaces of confinement” (Murray 2003:459).

In so far as thinking ‘*the diplomatic*’ is concerned, such moves disturb the unity and recognizable community that modern diplomacy draws upon or seeks to establish. They also raise the ethico-

political stakes of diplomatic thought by illustrating how recourse to the ‘recognizable’ (communities, sovereignty affiliations, methods or lives) elides and occludes the harm produced alongside it. Similarly, it calls for a more critical approach to the vulgarization of diplomatic thought and experience and illustrates how the extension of an ethics of encounter to include more than the recognized spaces or those who ‘qualify’ within dominant regimes of recognition does not only mean to ‘bring in’ those who had been excluded. It also involves going beyond our partialities. It is a disturbance, an interruption that provokes diplomacy, African or otherwise to escape recognition’s monstrous nuptials and the limits to thought and life that tie diplomacy to current values. In short, the task for diplomacy becomes, in the words of Gilles Deleuze: “how to pass from a “limited sympathy” to an “extended generosity,” how to stretch passions and give them an extension they do not have on their own” ( Deleuze 2005:47).

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