

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MORE THAN A LITERARY DEVICE: LANGUAGE AS A
TOOL OF RESISTANCE IN MINORITY LITERATURE

by
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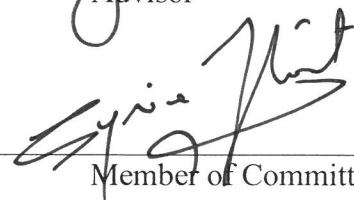
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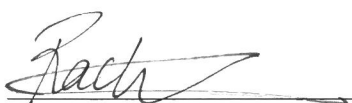
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Racha Mahmoud Chkair for Masters of Arts
Major: English Literature

Title: More Than a Literary Device: Language as a Tool of Resistance in Minority Literature

This thesis will focus on the novel, *The Color Purple*, (1982) by Alice Walker, two collection of poems, *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* (1996) and *Breaking Poems* (2008), by Suheir Hammad and the novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2015), by Marlon James. Walker and Hammad are from the African American and Arab American minority groups in the United States respectively, and James is of Jamaican origin; all three authors have had first-hand experience of oppression and resistance. This thesis will explore the use of language and expression in the aforementioned literary works in order to demonstrate the common characteristics in the way each author articulates political conflicts and social dilemmas. It is of no minor significance that the three works chosen for this purpose are of African and Arab American as well as Jamaican origin. Through the close reading of these texts this thesis will show that, Walker, Hammad and James, in using linguistic techniques specific to their respective ethnicities, are not only making an active choice to resist the dominant group through writing but, more importantly, that their deliberate use of language allows them to create, within their historical and political narratives, a clear and unified minority identity that is expressed in the voices of an entire population that had previously been silenced.

In Chapter 1, African American vernacular tradition, during a time in which solidarity among various marginalized groups in the United States began to take shape, will be contextualized through Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Analyzing the political implications behind her artistic expression further allows for the exploration of how Walker uses the African American vernacular as a linguistic tool and how language is a driving force that shapes her characters identities. Chapter 2 will examine Suheir Hammad's use of Arabic transliteration and how this practice politicizes the works in her poem collections *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* and *Breaking Poems*. Furthermore, Hammad's identification with other minority struggles around the world, and in particular, African American experience, expands the horizons of her work and globalizes her poetry as tool of resistance. Chapter 3 will examine Marlon James's linguistic style in *A Brief History of Seven Killings* and what that particular style conveys in terms of Jamaican political situation within the context of the novel. The chapter will also discuss the birth of Jamaican Creole and the effects of Western interference on language in Jamaica. Finally, in the concluding chapter, an overall view will be portrayed of the prose and verse included in this thesis, and moreover how the authors creation of historical and political narratives made their voices heard through their unified minority identities.

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INTRODUCTION

AS LONG AS THERE ARE WORDS ...

The umbrella term, “literature of resistance” covers numerous groups of the marginalized, that is, those who are relegated to a secondary position by a privileged authority. Barbara Harlow, in her foundational work in the field of postcolonial writing, *Resistance Literature* (1987), calls for a wider and more serious consideration for, what is in her opinion, the previously ignored “Third World texts”. The core point in *Resistance Literature* is that, ultimately, literature represents “an arena of struggle” (33), especially for the people who seek liberation from military forces from oppressive colonialism. Harlow continuously asserts that “the historical struggle against colonialism and imperialism of such resistance movements ... is waged at the same time over the historical and cultural record” (10). Moreover, “[r]esistance literature calls attention to itself, and to literature in general, as a political and politicized activity. The literature of resistance sees itself furthermore as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production” (28). Culture, being a key term in Harlow’s study and particularly important in the discussion of minority groups and their cultural formations, is the determining factor for resistance, since culture creates a sense of belonging among those who are alienated and forced to assume the position of outsiders who are not able to fully fit into the dominant culture. Moreover, language has an equally important role in building a foundation around which minority groups can identify. The general experience of being part of a minority group involves the

imposition of the language of the superior, colonizing power. Thomas Hylland Eriksen discusses the issue of linguistic hegemony, and how it ultimately affects different ethnic colonized groups in “Linguistic Hegemony and Minority Resistance” (1992). Eriksen asserts that, “[w]hen ... minority languages survive despite external pressure to surrender, such stubborn survival is an indication of the continued social relevance of minority identity” (315). Numerous minority languages and dialects within and outside the United States have either survived this struggle or continue to struggle for a linguistic identity. This thesis will observe these linguistic battles, specifically those that take place in literature and poetry, and in particular African American vernacular, Arabic transliteration, and Jamaican Creole.

In the history of literary and linguistic discourse, the dominant voice has always echoed a distinctly white supremacy imposed by colonization, imperialism and the white man’s privileged position in the world. Eriksen elaborates further on the theme of minorities and their claim for their own language, which is born out of the negligence of the dominant forces, asserting that “when minority languages or unofficial languages are neglected or systematically discriminated against by the state, there is every chance that the state may lose its legitimacy among the speakers of these languages” (315). Hence, the use of different stylistic techniques by minority authors and the adaptation of Standard English into one of their own – through the use of dialects, transliteration, vernacular or merging of languages – allows for the creation of an expressive, and widely accessible language that depicts history and shared experiences more accurately.

The literature of resistance, particularly that from the United States but also

outside its borders, encompasses works in which the themes revolve around racial discrimination against African Americans, Arab Americans, Native Americans and many other minority groups. This thesis will focus on the novel, *The Color Purple*, (1982) by Alice Walker, two collections of poems, *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1996) and *Breaking Poems* (2008), by Suheir Hammad and the novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2015), by Marlon James. Walker and Hammad are from the African American and Arab American minority groups in the United States respectively, and James is of Jamaican origin; all three authors have had first-hand experience of oppression and resistance. This thesis will explore the use of language and expression in the aforementioned literary works in order to demonstrate the common characteristics in the way each author articulates political conflicts and social dilemmas. It is of no minor significance that the three works chosen for this purpose are of African and Arab American as well as Jamaican origin. Through the close reading of these texts this thesis will show that, Walker, Hammad and James, in using linguistic techniques specific to their respective ethnicities, are not only making an active choice to resist the dominant group through writing but, more importantly, that their deliberate use of language allows them to create, within their historical and political narratives, a clear and unified minority identity that is expressed in the voices of an entire population that had previously been silenced.

In order to present a sufficiently diverse range of works and more thoroughly explore the linguistic, artistic and political implications in their narratives, the choice to use texts written in both prose and verse form is deliberate. Harlow states that the role “of poetry in the liberation struggle... has been a crucial one, both as a force for

mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness” (34). Resistance poetry replaces the literary and cultural traditions that are lost by minority groups because of the intervention of the dominant world, colonialism as well as other forms of political interference. In replacing lost and jaded traditions, a new unitary, yet ethnically specific, consciousness is built. Resistance poetry achieves this by challenging cultural and authoritarian imperialism and positions itself in this “arena of struggle”, by providing a means by which the powerless may communicate with the powerful. On the importance of poetry as a tool of resistance, Harlow quotes Elias Khoury’s article, “The World of Meanings in Palestinian Poetry,” where he writes:

Language is the very frame of steadfastness (sumud) ...
Language is the repository of the collective memory. It is the basic national value which must be preserved. The role of poetry is therefore a major one, not only because it is more powerful than other forms of writing as a means of political mobilization, but also because it sustains, within the popular memory, national continuity. (34)

Prose on the other hand, offers the reader a more thorough and explicit historical context. In contrasting resistance poetry and prose, Harlow provides remarkable insight in her assertion that prose narrative “provides a more developed historical analysis of the circumstances of economic, political and cultural domination and repression and through that analysis raises a systematic and concerted challenge to the imposed chronology of what Frederic Jameson has called ‘master narratives’” (78).

In Chapter 1, African American vernacular tradition, during a time in which solidarity among various marginalized groups in the United States began to take shape, will be contextualized through Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Analyzing the political implications behind her artistic expression further allows for the

exploration of how Walker uses the African American vernacular as a linguistic tool and how language is a driving force that shapes her characters identities. Chapter 2 will examine Suheir Hammad's use of Arabic transliteration and how this practice politicizes the works in her poem collections *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* and *Breaking Poems*. Furthermore, Hammad's identification with other minority struggles around the world, and in particular, African American experience, expands the horizons of her work and globalizes her poetry as tool of resistance. Chapter 3 will examine Marlon James's linguistic style in *A Brief History of Seven Killings* and what that particular style conveys in terms of Jamaican political situation within the context of the novel. The chapter will also discuss the birth of Jamaican Creole and the effects of Western interference on language in Jamaica. Finally, in the concluding chapter, an overall view will be portrayed of the prose and verse included in this thesis, and moreover how the authors creation of historical and political narratives made their voices heard through their unified minority identities.

In "‘This sweet/sweet music’: Jazz, Sam Cooke, and reading Arab American Literary Identities" (2015), Michelle Hartman, who writes widely about cultures of resistance with focus on the Arab American novel, asserts that, "[b]eing marked as different, alien and generally understood as non-white or outside the mainstream in the United States has prompted many Arab Americans to seek out and build links to other groups of color, including African Americans" (3). On August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, an 18-year-old unarmed African American man, was shot and killed by a police officer. The news of the killing roused the anger of people in Ferguson, who held protests in response, but heavy-handed police tactics, including rubber bullets and tear gas, were employed in an attempt to quell the uprising. When news of the protests and police response made international headlines,

the people of Gaza responded to the protesters in Ferguson. While the incident garnered expressions of solidarity from minority groups all over the world, the main focus was on the Palestinians from Gaza. They used social media platforms such as twitter, Facebook and others to communicate with the African American community in Ferguson, advising them about methods for protecting themselves from the exact same tear gas that was, and still is, being used against them by the Israeli Defense Forces. This kind of solidarity and identification with the African American struggle is apparent in politics, literature and the arts. The example mentioned above is, at the time of writing, the most recent gesture of solidarity and not exclusive to this single event; Malcolm X also drew parallels between racial oppression in the United States, white colonialism and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians in the 1960s.

Authors of minority literature have long tried to convey their struggles against oppression in their writing. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the theme of "minor literature," focusing mainly on Kafka and the Jews in Prague. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), they claim that, "[a] minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16). The three literary works that are highlighted in this thesis attest to this claim. As Deleuze and Guattari assert, they are considered minor literature that originates from a major language (16). Furthermore, their use of language, through vernacular, transliteration, dialects and merging between different languages is a construct that these minority groups use to break free from the major language, to create their own identity. Subsequently, by using this type of language they also convey political ideas and personal experiences. Deleuze and Guattari continue by asserting that, in Kafka's case, he marks the

“impasse” that bars the access to writing for the Jews and that turns their literature into something impossible – the impossibility of writing otherwise. “The impossibility of not writing as an author, because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, exists by means of literature” (16). In this case, literature functions as an outlet, used as a means of reaching out to the world and, especially, to the people who can identify with it. Literature becomes broader and more accessible for people within and outside these minority groups. Furthermore, a broad population gains access to literature written in a language that they themselves use.

For decades, minor literature was primarily written by the colonizers either in their own language, namely English, or in the language of the indigenous people they colonized, depriving the people of their own voices and identities. In the innovative work by Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), Gates explores the relationship between African and African American vernacular traditions and black literature, developing a new critical approach that is situated within these two traditions that allows the black voice to speak for itself. Gates argues that “[b]lack English vernacular ... is a healthy, living form of language, one which shows the signs of people developing their own grammar and one which manifests various linguistic signs of separate development” (i). Due to colonialism and the white man’s privileged position to speak for certain minorities, depriving them of their own voice stresses the importance of literature growing as an organic form, meaning from within the African American culture, allowing the minority to speak for itself, is crucial for a languages development. It also gives an accurate account of the experiences and struggles that this minority in particular went through, with no outside interference. It is worth mentioning that this exploitation of literature by the colonizers is not exclusive to the people of Africa, but

can be applied to all minor literature of people who have suffered oppression, colonization or who have been or are still, marginalized. Houston Baker, similarly to Gates, attempts to provide an adequate theoretical framework for African American literature. In his work *Blues, Ideology, and Afro American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1985), Baker works toward a definition of American vernacular literature, using the form and social implications of blues as a paradigm for both black culture and American culture at the vernacular level. In his discussion about the present and the past in the African American literary tradition, highlighting the two terms absence and dispossession, Baker observes that, “[f]ixity is a function of power. Those who maintain place, who decide what takes place and dictate what has taken place, are power brokers of the traditional” (202). Automatically, the multicultural people are considered as placeless, outsiders, alien and non – traditional in contrast to the fixed hegemony. Multiculturalism in America, as will be seen in this thesis, negotiates with other traditions; it employs and deploys discredited traditions, as in the African, Arab and Spanish American tradition, as part of a strategy of survival and resistance in the literary “arena of struggle”.

In *The Empire Writes Back* (2002), by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, a major theoretical account of a wide range of post-colonial texts and their relation to the larger issues of post-colonial cultures, the authors examine the powerful forces acting on language in the post- colonial text to subsequently show how these texts constitute a fundamental critique of Eurocentric notions of literature and language. Along the same lines as Ward, they assert that, “[d]uring the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial center is inevitably, of course, produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power. Thus the first texts produced in the colonies in the new language are frequently produced by

‘representatives’ of the imperial power; for example settlers, travellers and sightseers”

(4). To be able to grow and expand, the changes have to be ‘organic’, meaning that they must come from within a certain community and not from those outside it.

Deleuze and Guattari concur with Griffith, Tiffin and Ashcroft, claiming that “[o]nly the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature, and so on. Only in this way can literature really become a collective machine of expression and really be able to treat and develop its contents” (18). Literature that serves as a collective machine incorporates people into a central sphere rather than excluding them or pushing them out to the margins. Many people live under circumstances where they must use a language that is not their own, that they do not identify with, or that they know poorly, but it is a major language that they are forced to serve. This is a huge problem for minorities and minor literature; therefore, the only solution is for them to break away from their major language. Subsequently, they challenge the major language and follow their own revolutionary path. In the three literary works that will be analyzed, this kind of struggle, relating to either the vernacular they are using or to transliteration, becomes very evident. All three texts are written in a major language (English); furthermore, they implement a minor language as a construct within the major language. Using language in this way in minor literature elevates it from poverty and opens up avenues for new expressivity, flexibility and intensity.

As previously mentioned, the discussion and the historical and political context of minor literature is one of post colonialism. The term “post-colonial” is used in the context of this thesis to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process, from the moment of colonization to the present day. In the same line as Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, this thesis contends with the idea that “literatures [considered] as

post-colonial writing ... proceeds from the idea of race as major feature of economic and political discrimination” (19). This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. This imperial aggression plays out in many different ways; the main feature of imperial oppression, according to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, is the control over language. The state apparatus, also known as the imperial power, installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language and labels that version as the norm, pushing all other varieties that exist within a language to the margins and further labels them as impurities (7). The realization of the power of language becomes very evident: when the dominant power within a country controls language also means controlling the population, either granting them power or depriving them of self-agency and, furthermore, their identity. As Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin further elaborate, language functions as a medium through which the hierarchal structure power is maintained, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’ and ‘reality’ becomes established. Subsequently, the discussion surrounding post-colonial writing is, at large, a discussion about a process by which language, with its power, and literature, with its signification of authority, is extorted by the Europeans/white colonizer for their benefit (7). This however, does not bring something new to the discussion. Historically, language has been used as a tool of oppression. In fact, the only tools of intellection available for the colonized are the tools of the colonizer – the colonizer’s language, the colonizer’s educational system and the colonizer’s system of thought – the very things that alienate the colonized from themselves. It is also very apparent that the colonizing powers used it to their benefit.

Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin assert that “the crucial function of language as a

medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the center and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (37). This thesis will show that the seizure of the language of the center and the reappropriation of that language is a process that is prevalent within *The Color Purple*, *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black*, *Breaking Poems* and *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. In all four works, English is the language of the “center” that is subsequently transformed into a language of their own through dialect, transliteration and the use of vernacular, allowing for identification within their own minority groups. This transformative process is itself a political statement, a kind of linguistic distancing from the “white norm.”

Language is ‘a man’s whole world’ (18), Frantz Fanon points out in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), “expressed and implied by his language” (18); it is a way of thinking, of feeling, of being. Fanon cites the French poet Paul Valéry’s renowned statement that language is like “the god gone astray in the flesh” (18). The language of the colonized is the colonizer’s language, another man’s language, and must, by its very nature, be unfavorable to the colonized themselves and to their system of beliefs and values. Meaning, that the language used also affected the minor populations’ belief system, not only was their language alien to them, but it also alienated what they chose to believe in. One crucial question that needs to be answered is how then, does one communicate this “unfavorability” of the human condition in a language that itself dehumanizes one in the very act of communication? As this thesis will show through the analysis of the three aforementioned literary texts, expression relies on the creation of an organic language, a patois, from within the oppressed group by the members of that group. Furthermore, this allows for the creation of a sense of identity and, for others, a source of identification. The

Bakhtinian notions of “carnival” and “heteroglossia” are very applicable to minor literature and what they convey. Mikhail Bakhtin’s “Carnival” occurs during public celebrations, particularly in the plebian community. For Bakhtin, “Carnival” is the fusion of ritualized pageantry and a free state where people can say and do whatever they want without fear of punishment. In *Rabelais and his World* (1984), Bakhtin describes the marketplace setting where medieval festivities were held as follows:

This territory . . . was a peculiar second world within the official medieval order and was ruled by a special type of relationships, a free, familiar, marketplace relationship. Officially the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the marketplace a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of church, palace, courts, and institutions. It was also unlike the tongue of official literature or of the ruling classes – the aristocracy, the nobles, the high ranking clergy and the top burglars – though the elemental force of the folk idiom penetrated even these circles. (154)

It is a brief moment in which life escapes its official undulations and enacts utopian freedom. In a contemporary sense, one can regard carnival as expressive rather than theatrical. Since, the authors of minority literature express historical experiences of oppression and resistance, and furthermore, tend to be extremely social and political. It is an expression of direct contact between human beings rather than alienation, and also a complete refusal of societal roles. It brings people together in a festive manner. Bakhtin claims that the novel is the same as carnival, in the sense that authors allow the characters to express their thoughts and feelings in an open space with no rules governing what is right and wrong.

In her article “Bakhtin In African American Literary Theory”(1994), Dorothy Hale discusses Bakhtin and the notion of “voice” in cultural criticism. Focusing specifically on African American literature. In her discussion of the diversity of language according to Bakhtin, Hale states that:

[T]he visible form or body that language supposedly gives to ideology is in turn subordinated to a form within the language form, a form that is barely a form, the 'voice' in the language body that distinguishes one ideology from another. This concept of voice enables Bakhtin to postulate what has come to be regarded as one of his most important contributions to sociolinguistic theory: the notion that an apparently unitary language can actually contain diverse and even interpenetrating sociolinguistic points of view, and that a seemingly singular body of discourse, as restricted as an individual utterance, can contain multiple social identities. (12)

The unitary language that Bakhtin is proposing can be seen in any nation state. It is thus the carnival that creates the "voice", an open space where 'individual utterances' are allowed to take place. Subsequently, carnival also creates an open space for the authors of minor literature to openly express their identity; it is thus not merely limited to the author but extends to the narrator and the characters within the text. In his critical essay "Discourse in the Novel"(1941), Bakhtin, writing about the unitary language, claims that "[a] unitary language is not something given but is always in essence posited – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia"(489). According to Bakhtin, it is because of carnival that heteroglossia can arise. Heteroglossia refers to different types of speech within the same language between different social groups. The use of heteroglossia not only makes the text more understandable but also more appealing to a wider audience. In a quote from Bakhtin that Hale uses in her article, Bakhtin explains heteroglossia when put into context within the novel:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different

intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they-as it were- knowing about each other; it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. (14)

Through “carnival” and “heteroglossia”, the novelist becomes empowered, possessing two extraordinary capabilities to represent the self through the other. Bakhtin elaborates on the subject of representation asserting that, the novelist captures, without violating, the independence of the ‘other.’ In this case, the novelist acts as a medium between the ‘other’ and the audience, conveying a kind of truth about the ‘other’ and about the novelist him/herself, while also bringing to light the truth about different life experiences through language. After all, ideas and experiences expressed through language are located as outcomes of social and historical processes. That said, this does not mean that language defines the novelist or the minority group in any way, but rather that they transcend the language they use.

Bakhtin claims that, “[a] unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language” (Discourse in the Novel 489). English, as a unitary language contains many minor unitary languages within the bigger unitary language. Similarly, to Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that minor literature does not originate from a minor language, it is rather a minority construct within a major language. Bakhtin is claiming that the same goes for a unitary language and minor unitary languages within that language. Minor unitary languages are constructed by different minority groups that exist within that specific language. Furthermore, the minor unitary language creates its own style, based on the

“individuality of the speaking subject”(485). This individuality can be conveyed by narrator, character or author and creates a “style-generating factor transforming a phenomenon of language and linguistics into a stylistic unity”(485). Stylistic unity, in the case of the literary works that will be studied in this thesis, takes its form through the use of vernacular and transliteration by Hammad, Jones and Walker.

In *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (2014), Theri Pickens discusses cultural and literary material where different narratives emphasize embodied experiences by African Americans and Arab Americans as political and social subjects and objects. This emphasis is not limited to Arab and African Americans but can extend to minorities in general. Pickens focuses on the everyday embodied experiences such as touch, pain and death and how the authors mobilize these experiences to create social and political commentary. In contrast to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, Pickens argues that Arab American and African American narratives rely on these fragile experiences, rather than their strength or the strength that is inspired by those experiences, to create some sort of social and political critique. Pickens is outstandingly eloquent when it comes to Arab American and African American ‘otherness’ in the discourse of oppression and resistance. She states that “the raced and gendered body must be conscious of itself in terms of how others understand it as well as how it understands itself” (4). On the one hand, in order for the minorities to be able to be a strong force of resistance where their narratives and literatures are concerned, they have to be aware of their surroundings and, furthermore, have a strong sense of self. On the other hand, this can be a hard task for a minority group to take on alone. Therefore, they seek solidarity

with other minority groups, to create a stronger force. Pickens writes on the issue of solidarity, since she is actively pairing Black and Arab narratives. When doing that, she can forcefully question and challenge mainstream seduction of whiteness and maleness masquerading as normalcy (Pickens 9). This kind of pairing has to be strictly thematic, since the historical contexts of the different minorities differ significantly and pairing them in any other way would not be feasible. That said, pairing minority narratives allows one to trace methods of the articulation of experience through form, expression and art across a variety of authors and, more importantly, how that articulation of experience affects their respective enacting identities. In addition, one can also explore how different authors within different minorities single handedly use the same strategies when conveying problems that arise from political conflict linguistically.

Language, and its engagement with the semiotic question of how words maintain social and political meaning and who determines that meaning, especially when it comes to transliteration, is very controversial and widely discussed. Pickens, quoting Edward Said's collection of essays *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), remarks that the ability to prevent certain stories "from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (Said xiii). Pickens concurs with Said and continues along the thread that the domination of bodies goes hand in hand with the domination of discourse (20). This points at the political climate in the country that the literature originates from and the interplay between communal and personal agency. For minor literature, personal agency is very important for the single reason of being able to convey their

own experiences and struggles within that specific political climate that they operate under.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979), is a critique of the West's historical, cultural and political perceptions of the East. Said discusses the dichotomy between the West and East and explains the term Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'" (2). This style of thought of the West as the "Subject" and the East as the "Object" is still a deeply entrenched and distinctly Western view. It does not allow the East to represent itself; moreover, it prevents an essential and true understanding about the "other". In terms of major and minor literature, the notion of Orientalism makes evident that one side functions within the peripheries and the other at the margins. Both form an understanding about each other on their own terms, based on experiences, prejudice, racism, oppression and other factors. Said further claims that Orientalism "can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient. Dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"(3). The corporate institution described as the West, the dominant force, not only gains from exploiting the Orient, but they also become the subject while all the other minorities who do not fit in to the West become "others". The "otherness" affect the minorities in major ways: planting the feeling of not belonging, being different, and alienation. The notions of alienation and belonging have been widely debated over the years, heating up even more after Said's contribution to the conversation.

In *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014), focusing on the Arab American minority, Carol Fadda-Conrey concurs with Said and claims that the loss of identity that goes hand in hand with orientalism is a big problem for the different authors within the affected minority groups in the United States. It is thus a problem that minorities have acknowledged and are trying to break free from using a more accurate self-representation in a creative space that is very similar to Bakhtin's carnival.

Arab-American writers and critics (as well as activists, artists, and cultural workers) have been responding in their work to these rigid and limited readings of Arab bodies in the U.S. In doing so, they articulate a rising need among Arab-Americans for the transformative project of communal and individual self-representation, one that captures the complexity and heterogeneity of their communities. (Conrey 2)

These limited readings that Conrey refers to point back to Said's claim that Orientalism "expresses the strength of the west and the orient's weakness – as seen by the west." In addition, "such strength and such weakness are as intrinsic to orientalism as they are to any views that divides the world into large general divisions" (Said 45). The West sees itself as the stronger counterpart in relation to the Orient's weakness. Without that juxtaposition to the Orient, the West would not have a strong claim. According to Conrey, Arab American writers, like other minority authors, are breaking free from the "weak" label that is being forced upon them. They do that in their writing by "interweav[ing] a focus on gender with issues of race, religion, class, nationality, and political histories to create complex and antiessentialist transnational frameworks of knowledge"(10). This echoes Said's contention that the master of knowledge is per automatic the dominant force which scrutinizes the object or the

“other”, which, in this case, are the minority groups. The dominant force also creates its own knowledge of the object based on their understanding of it through their own voyages, books, and media. Said asserts that “to have such knowledge of [something] is to dominate it, to have authority over it” (32). Authors like Hammad, Walker and James amongst many others, are reclaiming that knowledge and reforming it. They make it their own through the use of their own statements of experiences and recounting a history that mirrors the real lives of the people living within these minorities. In this way knowledge and writing become more organic and provide a self-representation that points at all the hardship. Self-representation plays an essential role in minor literature/resistance literature. More importantly, that the self-representation is being presented from the inside, in order to assure an accurate and just conveyance of their struggles. When being represented by the right people through different stylistic choices in language, literature becomes a tool of strength that empowers the minorities rather than cripples them.

CHAPTER I

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is deeply rooted in the African American culture and can be traced back to the American slave trade, when Africans were forcibly brought to America. The languages that the slaves spoke varied; there was no single language that they all spoke. David Kennedy and Lizabeth Cohen contend in *The American Pageant* (2014), that “English [was] blended with several African languages, including Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa” (63), all of which were from tribes in present day Nigeria, which happened to be where most slaves were transported. It is important to note that there is more than one form of AAVE, depending on location and region of origin. In “What We Talk About When We Talk About Ebonics: Why Definitions Matter” (1997), Rosina Lippi-Green argues that AAVE is, “a variety of English ... which shows significant social and regional variation as is to be expected from any spoken language ... The language of African Americans living in the rural South is different from ... the [AAVE] spoken in urban centers in the South” (8). This specific language has a mainly oral tradition which shared a wide variety of characteristics of storytelling with forms such as epic narratives, music and so on. The oral tradition is not only deeply rooted in African American culture but also in African American literature. Gayl Jones is one of the most prominent African American writers who used the oral tradition, in several ways, to imbue the written word into that tradition as a template for most of her literary work. The twentieth century was a turning point in African American literature; the surfacing of an aesthetic strategy for the representation of African

American stories and histories was rising. Furthermore, the traditional portrayal of African Americans for a predominantly white audience was changing into a liberated characterization of the self with no need for justification. In her book *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature* (1991), where Jones traces the development of African American authors celebrating their own heritage and traditions, and how that in turn developed different distinctive literary forms, Jones claims that,

[i]n African American literary tradition ... during the Harlem Renaissance in 1920s, with its manifestos of artistic self assertion 'we intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame' ... [a] similar attitude and abandonment of literary double consciousness occurred: an applauding of African American modifications of the American language. (9)

Jones elaborates further on this point and asserts that the Harlem Renaissance, in particular this change in attitude, opened many doors and provided the foundation for African American writers to make use of their own folklore cognizant of its "complex linguistics, social, historical, intellectual and political functions" (9). Clearly, for Jones, literary technique is rarely detached from its political and social implications. Jones articulates this further when discussing the tension that existed between the oral and literary modes, highlighting Mark Twain as an example of linguistic complexity. It was expressed by critiques that "Twain amused only primitive persons ... [when, in fact, he] had used the materials in the American environment, registered them, recognized that the rich and varied American oral traditions could also be a base for style, range of content, literary procedures, and that they could be artistically developed and renewed" (10). Furthermore, for Jones, literary form, specifically the novel, is fundamentally and forcefully national, and illustrates how the European monopolization of acceptable forms of literary art stifled American writers (228). It is worth noting that, besides limitations of form, there are also more fundamental

considerations such as gender, race, economics, and access to literary society and markets that are very relevant to take into consideration in the shaping of black American literature. Jones focus lies in the dilemma of African American writers – how to write from their roots while at the same time retaining a universal voice, how to merge the fluidity of oral tradition with the needed structure of written language. This can be seen as a quest for the liberated voice, the quest to be self-authenticating. The voice that is free is the voice involved in the search for the self and the other but that ultimately is self-defining.

Alice Walker and Gayl Jones were not the first who wrote in the African American vernacular. The vernacular discourse of voice, and particularly voice as a way of appropriating and remaking meanings, leads this discussion to the writer whom Walker over and over again claimed as her “foremother”: Zora Neale Hurston. In *Race, Gender and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker* (1989), Elliot Butler-Evans explores the method in which the politics of race and gender determine the narrative structures of the writers mentioned in the title. After locating the nationalist, black aesthetic, and black feminist discourses in the writings of the three authors, Butler-Evans argues that there is a problematic tension between the racial and gender ideologies in the authors’ fictions in the 1970s. Butler-Evans writes that Walker views Hurston’s work as embodying “racial health; a sense of black people as complex, complete undiminished human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much...literature” (13). Hurston’s work has encouraged and opened many doors for other African American writers to express themselves through writing in different stylistic forms, which suited them as individuals and at the same time allowed them to step away from the mainstream way of writing, and to represent their heritage and traditions in an accurate manner through

their own voice and the voices of their minority. The question of why different authors such as Walker and others chose to write in this way and step out of the norm has been widely discussed. Butler-Evans quotes Larry Neal, a well-known scholar of African American theatre and a contributor to the Black Arts Movement of the 1960-70s. He argues that the main purpose behind the Black Aesthetics was essentially the destruction of what he refers to as “the white thing,” or the white ideas and their way of viewing the world (28). One can take issue with the belief that the main purpose was mainly about “the white thing.” When claiming that the core concern of the whole Black Aesthetics is mainly the white issue, one forgets the fundamental point, which is the black issue. Subsequently, Neal continues with the highly debated issue of authorship, where he asks the question, “Whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours [the oppressed] or the white oppressor?” Language as a creative expression conveys not only the written word and the experience behind the written word but of more significance is the fact that the particular language that is used becomes a part of the author’s political agenda. It also forces the reader to consider for whom the author is writing. For instance, if an African, Jamaican or Arab writer is writing in English, is he/she an African, Jamaican, Arab writer or an English writer? The more noble view is that these authors attempt to reach out to a wider audience and to make their voices heard. Realistically, they are forced in one way or another to enact their identities in order to be economically successful authors. Bonnie TuSmith affirms this notion in her article “The Englishes of Ethnic Folk: From Home Talkin’ to Testifyin’” (1996), claiming that “[i]n order to sell in North America, books must be written in English; how does one represent honestly authentically, and fully... a bilingual experience only in the alien language of the dominant social and economic class?” (43). This particular way of using language lacks power and motive, since one

can never get a full or even adequate understanding of another culture by translating it entirely into one's own terms.

Franz Fanon articulates this further in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. For Fanon, “to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (17). Walker balances the two, communicating the English language in her own way by utilizing language as an artist's tool, a method that is suitable for her minority, while conveying a very specific political point. Moreover, she sustains her identity as an African American woman writer. When giving herself permission to incorporate the African American spoken language into the very structure of narration, Walker as a writer is, in effect, freeing the American letters to realize its rich potential. In her book *Living by the Word* (1981), a collection of her works, essays, and the controversy that followed the publication of *The Color Purple*, Walker addresses the issue of language and specifically her use of language in *The Color Purple*. She asserts that it is “language more than anything that validates one's existence, and if the language we actually speak is denied us, then it is inevitable that the form we are permitted to assume historically will be one of caricature, reflecting someone else's literary and social fantasy” (58). In other words, one can claim that she is not only freeing American letters, but moreover, African American society as a whole. When adapting AAVE in her work, she is opening up doors for her characters to be authentic and act out their full identity, through her use of original language. With the accurate conveyance of language she lays claim on both societal and political language, reflecting the true African American literary and social speech. The difference in speech, or to differentiate oneself in speech, is ultimately another way to differentiate oneself from the society one exists in. Henry

Louis Gates articulates further on this topic in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (1989). He analyzes the signification in African American life and literature by analyzing the transmission and revision of various signifying figures i.e. the trickster. In addition, he discusses African American vernacular traditions and literature, and how the black voice speaks for itself through these mediums. On the topic of black speech, as Walker did previously, Gates articulates that, “the black vernacular has assumed the singular role as the black person’s ultimate sign of difference, a blackness of the tongue” (i). Language is not only social and political but also an essential part of one’s identity. This is a direct connection to Fanon’s assertion that “you are the way you speak” (53).

A. Your Skin, Your Hair, Your Teefs

The Color Purple, which is an epistolary novel, allows the reader to “eavesdrop” by way of letters written between Celie, the protagonist, and her sister, Nettie, which serve as a means for revealing insight into the characters and the plot of the novel. Walker’s experiment with the epistolary novel allows the silenced women to be heard in a double-voiced narrative. In addition, to this double-voiced narrative, Gates contends that this strategy adds to the protagonists search for her true self because “the double-voiced text... manifests itself as a literal representation creating herself by finding her voice, but finding this voice in the act of writing. The written representation of this voice is a rewriting of the speaking voice” (131).

The divisive characteristic of the letters written between Celie and Nettie is linguistic style. While Celie’s letters are written in the AAVE, her sister Nettie’s letters are written in Standard English. It is necessary to note, however, that Nettie’s letters evolve during the course of the novel. In her early letters, one can trace some rare non-standard linguistic features i.e. “left you all’s house,” “[h]e ain’t no good”

(127). Nettie uses this style when describing the altercation between herself and Albert, Celie's husband, which lead to her eviction from her sister's home. However, very quickly, as a result of education, which she obtains when she leaves America to do missionary work in Africa, Nettie's speech becomes increasingly Standard English, evident in her letters. Celie, on the other hand, although her letters get increasingly sophisticated in terms of sentence length, vocabulary and subject matter, sustains her own African American vernacular voice throughout the novel, whether she writes to Nettie or to God. When explaining her use of the African American vernacular, with Celie specifically, Walker contends that, "Celie speaks in the voice of and uses the language of my step-mother ... Celie is created out of language. In *The Color Purple* you see Celie because you see her voice. To suppress her voice and replace it with Standard English would be a complete murder of her [identity]" (*Living By the Word* 64). Celie represents not only a language but also a whole population and that population's history and ancestry. When Walker depicts Celie in the image of her stepmother, it becomes evident how personal Celie's story is for the author. Celie is a character who conveys family and memories. Furthermore, it is a strategy that Walkers uses to hold on to the African American history, to cherish and to value that tradition. Subsequently, Celie is the one character that the African American minority can identify with in terms of language and history. Articulating further on the topic of Celie's language, and why she uses this specific linguistic style, Walker reiterates that, "[o]ur language is suppressed because it reveals our cultures, cultures at variance with what the dominant white... culture perceives itself to be. To permit our language to be heard, and especially the words and speech of our old ones, is to expose the depth of the conflict between us and our oppressors"(63).

This statement highlights the political aspect of her linguistic strategy. It is a strategy that conveys the political situation in America and the racism inherent within it.

Through Celie, Walker liberates the African American vernacular and articulates its importance for the African American community and cultures. Moreover, Walker's employment of the African American vernacular manifests her concern about the black cultural heritage and also serves as a challenge to the superiority of the white people's language. Celie's speech is that of an insider, a member of the African American community embedded in African American culture. Nettie, on the other hand, because of her use of Standard speech, automatically demonstrates the diversity of African American English using the language of an educated white person, it is thus a language of a white person that a large part of the African American community have no desire to identify with. Walker's use of the African American vernacular affirms the claim that she considers AAVE equal to Standard English. Its function is affirmative as it gives ethnic identity to Celie, expressing her commitment to her community and culture, as opposed to Nettie, who applies the white culture of the outsider. At first, even her own sister has a hard time understanding Nettie, "trying to puzzle out words us don't know, it took a long time to read just the first two or three letters" (144). This particular instance in the novel conveys the difference in their language and proves just how much Nettie's language has evolved. According to Fanon, every "dialect is a way of thinking. And the fact that the ... Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" (25). Nettie demonstrates a state of dislocation, which is physical, since she leaves to Africa. In doing this, she creates a connection between Celie, herself and a world of black people beyond the rural south.

Walker's differentiation between the vernacular and Standard English reflects on the characters that are bearers of these voices. Celie's language is filled with idioms, often humorous and mostly conversational in style, which is interesting and amusing for the reader. Her speech is also filled with feelings and reflections about religion, love and other general life matters. On the other hand, Nettie's educated speech comes across as very formal with, for most part, no humor at all. Arguably, it is as if Nettie, through her newly acquired language, is prohibited from showing or expressing any real emotions. Her letters are more informative, and she serves as Walker's spokesperson, addressing issues like slavery, colonialism and racism.

When Celie opens her own store, her friend, Darlene, attempts to teach Celie to speak "properly," or in the language of white people: "US where most folks say WE, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amused" (218). Walker's political intention in the introduction of Celie's English lessons becomes evident, since Darlene, who is also an African American woman and speaks the same way as Celie, indicates other people's ideas about the African American vernacular having a lower status than Standard English. It is also worth mentioning that having Celie change her voice can very well be a strategy for managing people's expectations of her and who she is – i.e. simply one way of making life easier for herself, due to the white linguistic norm. The discriminatory conception of dialects is linked to the socio-economic situation of the minorities. Because they feel inferior to the majority as a whole entity, and language is necessarily included in that distinction. TuSmith states that, "people often assume that standard is the 'true' language not realizing that it, too, is a dialect. Many people think that dialects are substandard, even defective. Thus, the stigmatization of dialect users is attributable to standard speakers' attitudes toward those who speak the

nonstandard” (44). Celie’s dialect is considered to be substandard and defective in the eyes of her friends. Due to the white superiority, which the African American minority lived under, they automatically consider themselves and their language as inferior.

Walker, like TuSmith, does not change Celie’s language to Standard, but rather, she depicts how foreign it feels for Celie to try to change her speech. “I’m happy,” says Celie in a dialogue with Darlene, “[b]ut she say I feel more happier talking like she talk... Every time I say something the way I say it, she correct me until I say it some other way... Pretty soon I feel like I can’t think” (218). Despite the good intention behind her efforts to improve Celie’s language, Darlene is in effect shutting down Celie’s thought process. At first, Celie does not seem to understand that, in trying to change her language – a language that she is comfortable with and has used her whole life – she is simultaneously altering her identity. Celie’s later reaction, however, is one of resistance. “You sure this worth it? She say Yeah. Bring me a bunch of books. White folks all over them, talking about apples and dogs. What I care about dogs? I think. Darlene keep trying. Think how much better Shug feel with you educated, she say. She won’t be shame to take you anywhere”(218). Her unwillingness to change her speech demonstrates both how the familiarity of her own language gives her security and makes up her identity. Darlene’s purpose is revealed to be one of status. She wants Celie’s speech to be equal to the “White folks” speech, which is suggestive that that Standard English is a language of the educated whilst vernacular English that of the uneducated. Gates discusses Walker’s representation of Celie in her writing, stating that Celie, in her letters, writes herself into being (243). Ultimately, in *The Color Purple*, while Celie’s spelling is meant to reflect the character of spoken AAVE, it is not the same as speech, because in fact it is writing.

The fact that she's writing – and through most of the novel, writing to God – rather than say, praying to God, reflects Celie's methods of coming up with new ways of seeing, talking about, and relating to a God who affirms her identity.

The embedded political aspect of the dialogue between Celie and Darlene is one of a peculiar sort. Darlene, in her speech, that is interestingly similar to the protagonist's own speech, is trying to “whiten” the language of the protagonist with no indication of her doing the same to her own language, arguing that if Celie changes her language, people around her will not be ashamed of her. This statement indicates an inherent belief that her own language is low class, shameful and unrespectable in contrast to Standard English. Deleuze and Guattari, writing about minor literature and its political implications state that, “everything [in minor literature] is political ... its cramped space, forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (17). In alignment with this contention, Celie's concern and determination about maintaining her own language is one of a political nature. She challenges the white norm by stepping away from it and subsequently sustains her own culture and heritage.

B. God is White! Amen.

Celie's words, in the first forty-nine letters of the novel, are all addressed to God. God is Celie's comforting, silent auditor for whom she writes letters that remain unsent. For the duration of the first part of the novel, Celie seems to depend on God as her only reader and savior, a conceivable belief since all of her strife is caused by the people closest to her such as her father, husband, mother and others. Her peculiar relationship to God changes as the novel progresses. As Celie gets older, she begins to show distrust in God, and realizes that God has never actually helped her in life.

“What God do for me?” (193), she says to Shug. For Celie, all God has ever given her is a “lynched daddy”, “crazy mammy”, “a low down dog of a step pa” and “a sister [she] probably [wouldn’t] see again” (193). At this point in the novel, Celie is slowly getting stronger, more self-confident and becomes more outspoken as a woman. She is no longer a silent little girl who only writes to God, but a woman who essentially begins to question her life and circumstances, God included. She discovers that God is portrayed as white and male, a racist patriarchal figure who embodies the two sources of oppression she has dealt with her entire life – white, in terms of her language and identity and male, in terms of her stepfather and husband.

When Shug, in an attempt to understand Celie’s revelation, asks her what her God looks like, Celie responds, “he big and old and tall and gray bearded and white” (195). Shug tries to explain that Celie’s God, or the way she perceives him, is a white man’s construction, “that’s the one that’s in the white folks’ white bible” (195). Through this conversation, Walker conveys the alienation that the African American minority experienced in terms of their religious belief in, and relationship to, God. With the removal of conventional notion of the Christian faith, they are left with a religion and a God that they can no longer identify with. Shug expresses her frustration to Celie about the white “folks” claim to religion and God when she says, “how come the bible just like everything else they make, all about them doing one thing and another, and all the colored folks doing is gitting cursed?” (196). If the God and religion that they believe in belongs to the oppressor then God essentially becomes an oppressor himself. Shug, however, is determined not to accept God as white and male. “[W]hen I found out I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest” (196). She attempts to convince the protagonist to do the same, emphasizing that God is everywhere and “inside [everyone]” (196). In doing so, Shug deconstructs

the white patriarchal image of God and urges Celie to simply praise God by praising and appreciating the individuals in her social surroundings. In the novel's finale, Celie claims her freedom from linguistic and racist constraints by addressing her final letter to God: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God" (291). Celie's God transcends from being the conventional white male to becoming everything.

In *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Tradition* (1984), Houston A. Baker discusses the emergence of the vernacular tradition in America and connects it to different social and economic factors, in particular the reactions to the introduction of the steam locomotive and the railroad in nineteenth century America. Baker asserts that the shrill whistle of the train might have been an alerting call for the realization of new possibilities in art and classical traditions (11). In addition, these realizations were inspired by the locomotive's powerful drive and thrust, and furthermore, the sense of unrestricted mobility and unlimited freedom that it brought with it (11). Walker applies Baker's locomotive theory in her writing, specifically in *The Color Purple* by recognizing the possibility for unrestricted mobility and unlimited freedom through literature, and conveying her people's struggles to grant them freedom from the majority. Furthermore, she opens up opportunities for her characters to explore their own identity in a way that is disconnected from the normative ideas of what is acceptable and unacceptable. Celie's growth as a woman, her metamorphosis from a silent protagonist who speaks only to God and allows people to disrespect her to a powerful woman who stands up for herself and chooses her own path in life, makes her a character who embodies the very same strength and thrust of the locomotive. Like the locomotive, Celie becomes

free and unrestricted in her mobility. She unchains herself from the male figures who oppress her, including God.

Baker's association of a particular figure, which he terms "the locomotive container of blues" (14), to music, allows one to question if Walker, when writing *The Color Purple* in the same spirit as her foremother Zora Neale Hurston, would consider Hurston to be the "locomotive container of African American literature". The language (AAV) that Hurston's characters speak in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the political implications that the novel conveys and the fact that Walker admittedly pays tribute to Hurston with *The Color Purple* further supports that assumption. In her persistence in using the AAVE as a political statement, stressing the importance of the right of minorities to have their own expressive culture, and therefore their own language, Walker emphasizes the general necessity and her own personal desire for the vernacular to retain a place that is equal to Standard white English. Ethnic writers are often engaged in contestation of a dominant historical record, which has demeaned or vilified their culture, language, and their people. Minor literature usually begins with writing against history, and against the racism and ethnocentrism, which characterize it. With the depiction of their own history, experiences and making themselves heard, the burden of representation is usually forced upon them. Deborah Woo, when discussing minority authors and in particular the Chinese American minority, argues in "Maxine Hong Kingston: The Ethnic Writer and the Burden of Dual Authenticity", that "[e]thnic minority writers are saddled with a burden that mainstream writers rarely confront, the burden of being viewed narrowly as spokespersons for the 'ethnic' experience" (173). One can thus argue that when the range of authors increases within a minority and there becomes a wide diversity of voices, the burden might be lifted. In the course of the novel, Walker uses Nettie's

letters to Celie to articulate political and racial tribulations within and outside of America, such as the British colonial brutality towards the African tribes and villages. Through these letters, the reader is introduced to Olinka village, at first, uncolonized but subsequently, its tragic meeting with the ‘civilized world.’ “The whole territory, including the Olinka’s village, now belongs to a rubber manufacturer in England ... [And] since the Olinka’s no longer own their village, they must pay rent for it, and in order to use the water, which also no longer belongs to them, they must pay water tax” (170). After a collision with the dominant power, the crisis of identity is highlighted. In order for the Olinkas to avoid being subjected to denigration, oppression and in the worst case, extermination, they are forced to leave their village and seek a new place to live and establish a new identity by joining the Mbeles tribe.

Deleuze and Guattari define the term “deterritorialization” as describing the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings that is endemic to the postmodern world system. Moreover, they use this term specifically to locate alienation and exile in language and literature. Interpreting Deleuze and Guattari’s theory in her article “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse” (1987), Caren Kaplan writes, “we must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often the sites of racism, sexism and other damaging social practices. We were come to locate ourselves in terms of our specific histories and differences must be a place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and what can be made new” (35). Applied to *The Color Purple*, deterritorialization not only describes the struggles of the Olinka and Celie in terms of social, linguistic and religious alienation but can be applied to the struggle of the African American and indigenous African tribes as a whole.

In the concluding lines of the novel, Celie and her family gather at a fourth of July dinner, a holiday that they celebrate without regard to the historical significance of the date. Harpo, Celie's stepson articulates their alienation from the white community and the holiday when he says, "white people busy celebrating they independence from England July 4th, say Harpo, so most black folks don't have to work. Us can spend the day celebrating each other" (293). On one hand, this statement depicts the alienation between the majority and the minority races in America as the notion of what Independence Day to either group is completely different. While the white majority is celebrating the liberation of a nation, the African American community remains subjugated. On the other hand, strictly historically, as Jacqueline Jones argues in her article "Fact and Fiction in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" (1988), "Harpo is entitled to interpret Independence Day in terms of African-American nationalism; it is true that the festivities enabled first slaves and then their freed descendants to spend a day apart from whites, to rejoice in their separateness" (653). The simple fact that they are gathered to "celebrate each other," is not something that the characters take for granted. They reappropriate the concept of Independence Day into a holiday that they can enjoy with the people they love – a reprieve from work in the world of the white man, a place that they neither enjoy nor identify with. Walker's political and historical statement through Harpo's words is one of the most powerful lines in the entirety of *The Color Purple*. Not only does Celie eventually walk her own path, liberating herself through language and from normative notions of religion but so too do the other characters, and Walker leaves the reader with a glimpse that society as a whole is reaching a freedom that they have long yearned for. Drawing upon postcolonial and minority discourse theory, Wail Hassan claims that the West does not only project a sense of cultural and

civilizational identity, but more importantly, it projects an ideology of exceptionalism (9) in *Immigrant Narratives* (2011). The mere idea of the West as an autonomous and superior tradition unabashedly ignores the conception that other minorities and traditions could have had any effect on the historical victories of the superior power (9). Hassan's claim refutes the idea of a united nation with a united population. The alienation of minority groups necessarily leads to the formation of individual subcultures as a reactionary action. *The Color Purple* is a vivid panorama and an eloquent literary example of how cultures may intermingle or remain inapt and of how individuals or groups migrate towards the formation of one distinct cultural identity.

CHAPTER II

WRITING MYSELF OUT OF DAMAGE

Arab-American literature first appeared in the late 1800s, with the arrival of Arab immigrants from the Ottoman Empire to America where they settled in colonies in New York and Boston. According to Lisa Majaj in “Arab-American Literature: Origins and Development” (2008), the immigrants thought that they were there temporarily and assumed they would return home one day (2). While some of them may have returned, the majority stayed and created an Arab-American community in which they tried to assimilate into the American community whilst trying to sustain their own Arab identity (2). Many of the immigrants who arrived were great authors, poets and journalists in their homelands. Majaj claims that in the “1910s several literary societies and journals [came] into existence, and in the 1920s the literary organization Al Rabita al Qalamiyya (The Pen League) was established by Khalil Gibran, Amin Rihani and others” (3). The Pen League and its writers attempted to serve as a bridge between the West and the East: as an exchange of cultures, experiences, and life stories that aimed at bringing the two cultures closer to each other, but moreover, to create an understanding for and provide insight into the different cultures. However, their attempt to bridge worlds also created “an anxiety” for the Arab American writers, since they continuously had to live up to western standards. (3). Furthermore, Majaj claims that, “Arab-American literature of this period often reflected a strong need to prove oneself worthy in the U.S. context” (3), since the immigrants were well aware of their alienation from the majority.

In her insightful analysis of Arab-American writers and how the depictions

of their homelands play a crucial role in shaping cultural articulations, Carol Fadda Conrey conveys the difficulties that Arab-American authors and artists face in being torn between their Arab identity and their strong and complex attachment to the US landscape. In her discussion of those emerging Arab-American writers who began to publish in the late 1980s and in the 1990s Conrey asserts that “they differ from their literary predecessors in notable ways ... their works for the most part reflect on experiences of displacement, exile, and dispossession caused by the political shifts and military conflicts across the Arab world from the mid-twentieth to the early twenty-first century”(19). Suheir Hammad is one of these authors, an American-Palestinian poet whose work depicts the inner and outer struggles that the Arab-American community faces in contemporary America. Inner struggles in the sense that they occur within the US, and outer struggles meaning, in the same line as Conrey, “the political shifts and military conflicts across the Arab world.” Hammad focuses mainly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, more specifically, on the Palestinian struggle in this conflict – a struggle that she identifies with and that she highlights as a global problem. This chapter will provide an analysis of *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* (1996) and *Breaking Poems* (2008), two poem collections by Hammad. In *Breaking Poems*, the reader is bombarded with Hammad’s demonstrations of brokenness and piecing together of selves, and of languages, histories and geographies. *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* on the other hand, conveys the plight of her people, the Palestinians, as well as other minority groups in the region. This particular collection is about culture, conflict and consciousness, but more significant to this thesis, it is about Arab-American solidarity with the African-American community. Hammad expresses her gratitude to June Jordan, who she sees as her foremother; moreover June Jordan was one of the pioneers who articulated her

solidarity with the Palestinian people. In her poem “Moving Towards Home” (1982), composed shortly after the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut, Jordan writes, “I was born a Black woman/ and now/ I am become a Palestinian/ against the relentless laughter of evil/ It is time to make our way home.” Jordan lyrically explores the concept of being “born” into a particular identity, which later changes in the process of “becoming” someone else by way of a sense of solidarity instilled by inclusive convictions of morality and shared experiences and understanding of human struggle. While both Hammad’s collections are undoubtedly about solidarity between minority groups in America, more importantly they are a confession about the struggles that those same groups face in America – in particular, racism, sexism, and generally being considered as alien. Hammad exemplifies and embodies Jordan’s words in her own work, conveying solidarity with African-American struggles.

It is worth reiterating, as posed in the preceding chapter, the question of minority writers and the language that those writers use in their work: are they to be considered Arab, African, Jamaican writers or English writers when, despite having stylistically adapted the English language to serve their own purposes, they are ultimately still writing in English? One relevant and highly discussed question in this context is whether, to qualify, a work must be written by an Arab-American or whether works must be restricted to conveying Arab-American experiences. For Conrey, “writers should at least have an Arab background or heritage to qualify as Arab-American”(24). In following Conrey’s definition of the genre, this thesis asserts that Suheir Hammad’s work certainly falls under the category of Arab-American writers; she was born in the US, but is of Palestinian heritage.

In an interview with Hammad about her work and the reasons behind her use of strong political language, she explains that, “it is important for American readers

... to witness the way you deal with cooptation, taking back the meanings of words like occupation, liberation, terrorist, freedom fighter, and twisting them around and forcing people to see how it is on the other side” (Marcy Jane Knopf-Newman 75). Language, in this specific context, becomes a weapon, which authors use to forcefully convey to the outside world, and more specifically the white world, the struggles that minority groups deal with and have dealt with for a long time. This strategy is used not only to build bridges between the east and the west but, additionally, to bring awareness to the different political and military situations that people have to endure on a day-to-day basis. Barbara Harlow, in her impressive critical study *Resistance Literature* (1987), examines the literatures of contemporary Third World liberation movements while also challenging and adjusting conventional Western understanding of the third world through literature and politics. Writing about poetry and its significance in the category of resistance literature, she argues that, “[p]oetry is capable not only of serving as a means for the expression of personal identity or even nationalist sentiment. Poetry, as a part of the cultural institutions and historical existence of a people, is itself an arena of struggle” (33). Hammad is a participant in this “arena of struggle”, through her use of politically loaded words, transliteration and dialect which help to convey a wide range of stories and sounds that are a part of her Palestinian-American heritage, and moreover, the vibrant and diverse language of hip-hop. One can clearly characterize Hammad’s spoken word, which shares aesthetic structures with hip hop, as a kind of popular expression. In Brooklyn as well as in Palestine, hip hop can serve as a mode of transnational communication. In *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (2014), Alex Lubin examines the vital connections between African American political thought and the people and nations of the Middle East. Lubin argues that, “[i]n the

United States, hip hop is mainly produced by African Americans, while in Israel it originates from Palestinian ghettos” (166). This common connection between the two minorities in different parts of the world strengthens Hammad’s motive for using the hip hop beat as a way of conveying her Palestinian heritage.

In her poetry, Hammad negates and negotiates varying identities in order to engage with and connect the various struggles of people of color in America and in Palestine. For Hammad such identifications are facilitated through a global and globalized sense of self, coupled with collective self-love in which we identify ourselves with others in order to form a global alliance based on shared experiences, which will be demonstrated later in this chapter. Thus, by resituating her own alienation and difference within that of various marginalized groups and communities in the US and also in Palestine, Hammad’s poetry redefines individual identity as a cultural collective built upon a solidarity of shared marginalization in the face of the global oppressors, similar to the cultural institutions that Harlow mentions. In *Breaking Poems* and *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, Hammad merges American English and Arabic creating new meanings both visually and aurally. Through her use of transliteration, Hammad expresses herself fully linguistically, in both languages, which attaches a more powerful meaning to her words; moreover, it is a form that breaks the norms of writing. In *Breaking Poems*, Hammad chooses to leave Arabic words untranslated, consequently creating a break or rupture for the outside reader. To be able to follow her thoughts and to understand her poetry fully, the reader who has minimal or no knowledge of Arabic has to actively step outside the text to look up specific words. On the issue of transliteration in post-colonial literature and writings, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write that,

[t]he absence of translation has a particular kind of interpretive function. Cultural difference is not inherent in the text but is inserted

by such strategies. The post-colonial text, by developing specific ways of both constituting cultural distance and at the same time bridging it, indicates that it is the 'gap' rather than the experience (or at least the concept of a gap between experiences), which is created by language. The absence of explanation is, therefore, first a sign of distinctiveness, though it merely makes explicit the alterity which is implicit in the gloss. (64)

Not only does Hammad break out of the white norm but furthermore, she is conveying the cultural differences that exist between the majority and the different minority groups in America. When pointing to and highlighting the minorities' struggles and alienation she is bringing those issues to light and, more importantly, giving the people a voice.

Hammad's two poem collections differ slightly in form and style. *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, in which she incorporates translated Arabic words into her poems, conveys strong political implications.¹ In *Breaking Poems*, also greatly political in content, the transliterated words have no translation making the process of reading more complicated for the outside reader with no knowledge of Arabic. If both collections share similar themes of political resistance and convey the struggles of minority groups, how then does the political conveyance differ from one collection to the other based on the transliterated linguistic style? In answering this question, it is imperative to juxtapose both works with a focus on the linguistic strategy that Hammad uses in *Breaking Poems*.

Harlow explains the concept of resistance literature as "mainly writing within a specific historical context, a context which may be most immediately situated within the contemporary national liberalism struggles and resistance movements against Western imperialist domination of Africa, Central and South America, the Middle East and Far East" (4). Because of her use of political language and the prevalence of political themes in her work, for the purposes of this thesis, Hammad's poetry will be

¹ Each Arabic word she uses in the poems in this particular text is followed immediately by an English translation.

considered resistance literature. In many ways, through her literary work, Hammad situates herself within a resistance movement against Western imperialist domination in America and also in the Middle East.

A. Breaking Language, Born Anew

In the author's note of *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, Hammad asks herself the question, "Why do I write?" She answers, "'Cause I have to. 'Cause my voice, in all its dialects, has been silenced too long" (ix). Hammad, like many other minority writers, considers her contribution to the literary arena as part of an obligation to shed light on her community, or rather, communities, which have been silenced and neglected for a long time. Hammad asserts that, since borders are manmade, writing is a way for authors to break through literary borders in terms of a shared language that has been decided upon by the majority (x). For Hammad, borders cannot be respected unless the minorities have a say in their formations (x). Hammad transcends and moves beyond these manmade borders, undermining them through the diversity in her language and her voice. The art Hammad practices is free verse poetry in a style that is reminiscent of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop, which is an urban youth culture in the US that is also associated with rap music, has always been a mode of voicing the angst of the African-Americans in a predominantly white society.

In the poem "Silence," Hammad conveys the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its violent brutality. She writes, "palestine occupied/ freedom denied/ my people's genocide"(50). Hammad's strategic use of a lowercase "p" in "palestine" conveys the occupation, war and colonialism in her native country. Since the consonant "p" is absent in the Arabic language, and the correct pronunciation of the westernized word Palestine is in fact Falasteen in Arabic, Hammad's use of a lowercase "p" in this poem might symbolize an act of nationalism: the refusal to spell the word of her homeland

according to western rules, since the word in itself is not a correct representation of the country of her birth. She reveals the many intersecting injustices, inequalities and struggles that have marked Palestinian history thus far. Ever since the Israeli occupation, which deprived a large part of the Palestinian population of their identities, freedom and home, Palestinians do not have their own nation and are dominated by the occupying power. According to Majaj, Palestinian authors commonly try to “give voice to what was lost and what is yet to be created. And from these origins we shape our futures. In the absence of political repatriation, we create homelands of language, lyrical spaces in which we return, at last, to ourselves” (124). Giving voice through creative expression is very evident in Hammad’s mixture of Arabic and English, her word choices and the peculiar lack of any punctuation in her poetry. “Silence” continues, praising the Palestinian people and their resilience in the face of hardship. Hammad writes, “Wa men ma shaf bil ghorban² ya Beirut (And those who don’t see through the sieve)/ Aman ayoon Amreeciya (Are blinded by American eyes)” (51). The political implications behind Hammad’s words are very strong. She accuses the American media of not covering the Palestinian peoples’ devastation and, furthermore, blames America as a nation for the suffering of her people. In *Power, Conflict and Resistance in the Contemporary World: Social Movements, Networks and Hierarchies* (2010), Athina Karatzogianni and Andrew Robinson engage with the world-systems to interpret empirical cases of resistance and conflict. They assert that, “[b]y thinking differently, one can use thought or language as a war-machine, by being a foreigner in one’s own tongue (using language in a minoritarian way), in order to draw speech to oneself and bring something incomprehensible to the world” (18). Hammad uses her stylistic expressiveness in place of a war-machine, highlighting a regional conflict,

² “Ghorban” is taken directly from the book; I suspect that there has been a printing error, since the word that translates to “sieve” in Arabic would be “ghorbal.”

which not only affects the people living within its boundaries but also the Palestinians living in diaspora. In “Silence,” Hammad depicts the Palestinian need for escape and refuge and their search for freedom, whether it is inside or outside of Palestine: “so used to running/... /we palestinians are always running”(51). Here, as elsewhere, Hammad retains the use of the lowercase “p.”

In *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, the only poem in which Hammad uses capital letters is “Blood Stitched Time.” In this particular poem, the first word, “Our,” used in reference to the traditional Palestinian garment, the “kafiye,” is capitalized. This primarily conveys a sense of pride in this specific piece of clothing, one that is widely known to represent the Palestinian population and a symbol of their heritage and identity. Later in the poem, Hammad writes, “and now/ we’ve achieved Nobel/ world peace a noble and worthy cause/ we’ve thank youd thank youd thank youd/ those who’ve denied our humanity eternally/ and warmed our bitten hands with/ those of our murderers”(7). The capitalizing of the “n” in “Nobel” is obviously sarcastic as Hammad uses the lowercase “n” in the very next line, along with an explanation to why she does not consider it as a big event nor a big accomplishment. In her use of strong political words like “denied our humanity eternally” and “our murderers,” Hammad is clearly critiquing the West and Israel in this stanza, and indirectly the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), since Yasser Arafat ironically shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Shimon Perez and Yitzhak Rabin in 1994. Through her use of such language, Hammad essentially takes control of the political discourse in her texts.

Pickens asserts that Hammad’s strong claims about language:

engage with the semiotic question of how words maintain social and political meaning and who determines that meaning. As Edward Said has remarked, the ability to prevent certain stories ‘from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.’ In other words, one cannot have domination of bodies without domination of discourse ...

Hammad claims that the result is a language that remains ill equipped to describe, define, or discuss everyone's concerns. (20)

The diversity in Hammad's language then becomes a way for her to "describe, define and discuss" minority concerns. As previously mentioned, Hammad claims that she writes because she has to in order for her voice has to be heard. Through her voice, Hammad, in Edward Said's terms, empowers herself with the diversity of her language and dominates her own body, which results in domination of her own discourse. Moreover, Hammad is also inspiring others to do the same. Moving away from the limitations of Standard English and highlighting other dialects and languages, Hammad sets the example for how a writer can reach a wider audience while also conveying the struggles of minority groups with accuracy. In addition, because of her intentional use of Arabic, Hammad transcends racial boundaries to give a voice to those deprived of one. She attempts to reshape geography using a common thread: the shared experience of oppression. Subsequently, Hammad commits to completely deconstructing power relations in terms of race and ethnicity, gender and violence, which she ferociously unmask in her poetry. She uses the linguistic strategy of juxtaposing different notions, i.e. black and white, Palestine and Israel, and her use of syntax in the poems amongst others.

Hammad's construction of bridges among minority groups, and in particular the African American and Arab American minorities, can be seen as a literary gesture towards universal self-identification and is often connected to collective marginalization. Hammad demonstrates this by her contemplation of the diverse usage of the word black in the author's preface of *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* writing,

Black like the coal diamonds are birthed from
like the dark matter of the universe

like the Black September massacre of
Palestinians
the Arabic expression “to blacken your face”
meaning to shame.

Black like the opposite of white
the other
Indians in England, Africans in America,
Algerians in France and Palestinians in Israel
the shvartza labor of cleaning toilets and
picking garbage
Black like the genius of Stevie, Zora and Abdel-Haleem
relative purity
like the face of God
the face of your grandmother. (x)

The first stanza signifies the negative connotations of blackness, the transcendent blackness of the unknown and unfamiliar, the blackness of death “Black September”, and the blackness of shame. The second stanza places blackness in a racial context and connects the black minority with black struggles across the world, from Europe to Israel to the United States. In the final stanza, Hammad retrieves blackness through her depiction of blackness as something inspiring and associated with creation instead of death. Hammad’s second and third stanza about blackness as both connective and empowering are a significant theme in her writing, and serves as a bridge between the different minority groups. Hammad’s identification with African Americans, which touches on issues such as shared experiences, cultural fluency, political solidarity and styles of verbal performance, becomes apparent in her poem “Brown Bread Hero.” Hammad’s aversion to the smothering blandness that she associates with the dominant cultures’ ideology of whiteness takes her into the political and cultural terrain of liberating blackness. Hammad plays with words, depicting her own preferences and political opinions through words that symbolize something else. She writes, “no cheese please/ cheese is to the west/ the spice of the east/ why smother in cheese/ when I can enhance/ spice dance” (59). Contrasting the eating habits of the west and the east based on the color of the food is an excellent artistic articulation that contrasts

notions of minority cultures as rich and colorful with a bland and colorless white culture. Michelle Hartman draws attention to the issue of whiteness and identification between African Americans and Arab Americans in “‘This Sweet/Sweet Music’: Jazz, Sam Cooke, and Reading Arab American Literary Identities”, where she claims that “[w]hiteness is rejected as an option, and the ‘in-between’ status of Arab-Americans within the United States is shown to be explored most positively in relation to African Americans” (160). It is worth mentioning that this might be right for Hammad’s poetry, but it does not necessarily hold as a sociological reality for Arab Americans, broadly. While there are on the ground expressions of solidarity between Arab American and African American communities, there are also long histories of tension, and of some Arab Americans claiming a putative whiteness that is precisely about being unmarked, at least with respect to the public sphere. Hammad continues, “a brown bread hero/ brown born and bred/ white has never been/ my hero” (60). The social hegemony is broken as the linguistic monopoly is consciously reversed; words are for people, people are not for words. Through her linguistic style, Hammad attempts to flip the hierarchy by elevating people of color above white people while at the same time artistically expressing it as an issue of gastronomic taste. She politicizes this taste in the following lines: “vegetables of the brown earth/ between two layers of brown bread/ no flesh of creatures/ no white bread/ no salt/ no sauce” (60). Hammad expresses in the author’s note that she continuously challenges herself, and the entire societal norm with “words, labels and definitions” (ix). In this particular poem, her aforementioned challenge is evident. Hammad’s political purpose shines through the articulation of her preference for organic “vegetables” from “brown” soil as opposed to “flesh of creatures’ that is immediately followed by “white bread.” Hammad’s juxtaposition of brown earth and brown bread to white bread and flesh of

creatures portrays the former, the “brown” minority, as harmonious and organic and the latter, the “white,” as vicious and cannibalistic. Carefully, and very consciously, Hammad deconstructs the misconceptions and the stereotypes of the East in Western society in her poems in *Born Palestinian, Born Black*.

B. Break the Discourse

In *Breaking Poems*, published after *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, Hammad continues the vein of political poetry, but in this collection, various marginalized groups are referred to, such as Iraqis, American Indians, Blacks in South Africa, African Americans, Arab Americans and of course, Palestinians. One might argue that poems written before 1996 and poems written between 1996 and 2008 come from what are, in some ways, radically changed contexts—with respect to the increased policing of Arab American communities in the US, international Arab diaspora communities, the re-racialization of Arab Americans, and an intensified mediatization of conflict in the Arab Middle East. The notion of “break” might originate from some sort of rhetorical gesture by which the reader is told that everything has changed historically, considering the political changes and the War on Terror, when in fact as depicted in Hammad’s poetry nothing much has changed, but rather intensified. Hammad’s style is reminiscent of her earlier work. Her words are political and transliterated and her text void of punctuation and capital letters. The only difference (and one that is rather significant) between her first and second collection is that *Breaking Poems* neither includes translations of Arabic words nor a glossary of terms. Moreover, all thirty-eight poems in the collection include the word “break” in their titles, which can be interpreted as both the breaking of bodies as in violation, death, and injury and also the breaking of human spirit. In her first poem in the collection, titled “break,” she pays tribute to the marginalized:

(tel aviv) write your own damn poem
 build a grammar with something other than bones
 (gaza) a woman's hand cups bloodied sand bits scalp ooze
 to the camera and says this is my family
 (khan younis) yamaaaaaaaa
 yamaaaaa
 (new orleans) there is wading in this water
 (baghdad) the children watch from bodies roasting by roadsides. (13-5)

Whether it is because of war or natural disaster, the suffering of these marginalized groups brings the author to a break, or a breakdown. Furthermore, Hammad places Tel Aviv among the mentioned locations, while at the same time refusing to give voice to them, telling them instead to seek a voice that is not found at the expense of other people. This juxtaposition between the oppressed and the oppressor is conveyed throughout the entire collection. To uphold an accurate depiction of these minorities and their struggles, Hammad introduces a new language, a merging of different languages, dialects and a whole new stylistic approach to writing that reinforces that assertion that conventional language cannot capture the suffering that the systematic destruction of the lives of those in minority groups and acknowledges the difficulty in locating these conflicts within mainstream media. In Pickens' analysis of Hammad's poetry and her stylistic choice of the word "break," she contends:

Hammad's poetry creatively mines the limitations of the body to expose the way violence ruptures human experience. Many of the poems break words apart and sounds apart as a way to get through to meaning. She relies on puns and what Lennard Davis has termed the 'deaf moment of reading' in which readers must hear the words inside their heads rather than rely on sonic cues to determine meaning ... The 'deaf moment' defamiliarizes one's relationship to text because it privileges sight over sound. Hammad's collection likewise defamiliarizes one's relationship to the text, not only because it privileges sight over sounds but also because it requires one to engage sight to understand sound. (25)

In addition to Pickens' assertion that breaking words apart allows one to create meaning, one could also argue that Hammad deliberately breaks the rules of syntax and orthography to mirror the level of juxtaposition at the level of form.

The infusion of Arabic words into her texts is one of Hammad's signature attributes, and this is particularly so in *Breaking Poems*. Words like "ana" (I), "wa" (and), and "bas" (but/only)³ have replaced all of their English constituents. This is not merely a nostalgic citing of items reminiscent of the homeland as in, for example, *habibi*, *falafel*, *zaatar* and so on, which one finds quite frequently in Arab American literary works. Hammad's use of transliteration is a stylistic rendering of a hybrid identity that simultaneously feels privileged and guilty for finding refuge in the United States while her own people are dying or living under horrible circumstances in Palestine. Her guilt at this privilege appears through her depictions of her homeland, and her desire for belonging with them in their struggles. Through the conveyance of their struggles and hardships the reader gets to experience her sense of plight towards the Palestinian population and other minorities around the world. In her poem "break-vitalogy," Hammad clearly depicts this hybrid identity: "gaze me/ ana gaza (I am Gaza) / you can't see me/ ana blood wa memory/ .../ ana harb (I am war)/ heart/ ana har (I am heat)" (30). In these lines, Hammad is not only representing the Arab American woman in the US but also the Palestinian that she carries within her. In the context of the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian woman is simultaneously a woman while also being a representation of war, death, and injustice. According to Pickens, on the issue of transliteration and how the reader perceives it "[g]iven that all of the poems contain Arabic, which may be unfamiliar to some of her readers, the structures one can impose vary greatly depending on one's linguistic knowledge ... The mere act of doing so creates a rupture, forcing the reader to linguistically enact what had already been done to the people, countries and places she discusses" (26). The rupture that Pickens refers to is not only bringing awareness to and highlighting

³ My own translation: In cases where the word "bas" precedes "ana" (I), such as in *break (bas)* (*Breaking Poems* 20), the word "bas" is translated as "only."

important conflicts and struggles of minority groups, but it is also a rupture that forces the reader with a language barrier to actively seek the meaning of the words Hammad uses. The difficulties faced by minority groups are alien to the dominant and privileged group. Therefore, in this linguistic challenge of the privileged reader is a blatant political statement. The hybridity that minorities are forced to live with are articulated in Hammad's poetry – living in-between two cultures while struggling to adapting to both. Outside her text, the privileged reader, in being challenged to find meaning, re-enacts the struggle of those who are trying to form the hybrid identity.

The manifestation of Hammad's creation of an artistic self-expression is clearly depicted in her poem "break (word)." In the first and third lines, she writes, "we no longer know language/ ... / words are against us/ there is a math only subtracts" (19). These lines not only support the title of her collection title, but also serve as an overall interpretation of the collection itself. The necessity for creating a new, original, and diverse language becomes essential for the groups that are situated at the margins because "words are against" them. Hammad takes this notion one step further in the poem "break (embargo)," in which she depicts the sense of imprisonment that the individuals in minority groups feel, from Palestine to the other regions in the Middle East to individuals imprisoned by the US government, and from political prisoners behind bars to those imprisoned by imposed borders. "between us wall wara (after) wall wa ana (and I) I ain't jinn wa ana (magician and I) i/ ain't phoenix between us yama (mother) walls ya allah (oh God)" (54). Although Hammad maintains a strong voice in her empowered language, the reader glimpses the hopelessness that Hammad feels in being unable to do anything about the "wall wara wall." "I ain't jinn," she says. She is no magician. Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* that, "what can be said in one language cannot be

said in another, and the totality of what can and can't be said varies necessarily with each language and with the connections between these languages”(24). Hammad embodies this statement in her writing by incorporating multiple languages and dialects in her poetry. This technique prevents limitations to her expression. Moreover, she not only expands her vocabulary but also adds strength and power to her language through multiplicity. Deleuze and Guattari assert that, since every language fills a certain function for one material and another function for other materials, the result is that every function within a language becomes divided and, in turn, carries a range of centers of powers (24). Hammad's stylistic form then, results in a stronger language. The merging of different languages and dialects results in an empowerment both for the minorities that she is writing about, but also, empower the poems themselves. In her poem “break (me),” which is one of the final poems in the collection and consists of only one stanza, Hammad writes, “ana (I) my language always broken all/ ways lost ana my language wa (and)/ i miss my people” (51). Conclusively, the breaking of bodies and of spirits is inescapable, even for the author. Hammad identifies with the people in struggle when, in the collection's finale, she refers to herself and her own struggle. Subsequently, being a privileged woman in a white world is not enough for Hammad. She misses the places and the people that she can identify with. In the white world, she lives as an outsider, which is why, when her Palestinian identity shines through in her poetry, it is far brighter than the Arab-American hybrid identity, which she evidently continues to struggle with.

CHAPTER III

NOBODY HAVE TO TOUCH A MAN TO HURT A MAN

British colonialization of Jamaica in 1655 had a major impact on the country's inhabitants, culture and language. The British took over the island from the Spanish, who had controlled it since 1494, and who were largely responsible for wiping out the indigenous populations. In the same path as most colonial powers, the British took control over Jamaica's national language and turned it into an English-speaking country. The majority of the people who lived in Jamaica at the time were brought there from Africa as slaves and spoke a number of African dialects as their primary language, such as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Ga, Ewe, languages which originated mainly from Nigeria and Ghana. Since the British controlled African-Jamaican slave trade, they also controlled the language that the slaves could speak; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin assert that, "[i]n the Caribbean where slaves were deliberately separated from other members of their language group and, to minimize the possibility of rebellion, forced to use the language of the plantation owners. For the slaves, then, this was a language of division imposed to facilitate exploitation" (26). The idea behind this imposition of a common language, specifically the language of plantation owners, was to prevent the possibility of planned rebellion through a common ethnic language that was foreign to the plantation owners themselves. Due to pressures of the plantation economy, African dialects were mixed with the English language from varying classes and speech communities. Beverly Bryan, in "Jamaican Creole: In the Process of Becoming" (2004), articulates this issue further and claims that, due to the merging of these languages and dialects in the plantations, the "seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, [brought with them] a distinct language that bears some resemblance to its progenitors" (642). The strong reiterations of past experiences,

cultures inherited in Jamaica, socioeconomic differences as well as class ambitions can be seen in the literary work analyzed in this chapter, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James, (2015), are expressed in the privileging of the voice both in speech and in writing.

When reviewing the question of speech, speech patterns and how those ultimately affect a population's identity, specifically the Creole language, Marcyliena Morgan writes in "Language and the Social Construct of Identity in Creole Situation" (1994), that, "We talk in English but think in African. We actually speak English with an African accent," (130) stressing the importance of maintaining the African details within the new acquired, or forced upon, language. Not speaking perfect, or standardized English was considered by theorists like Marcyliena Morgan and others as an act of rebellion and sustenance of the fragments of one's identity. One can argue that minority languages like Jamaican Creole, due to their dominant colonial predecessors, are often labeled accordingly. Many names have been ascribed to the Jamaican language over the years, such as Patois; it is thus not set as an official name for the language, since patois can refer back to any language considered broken or degraded in the world. Other terms used to refer to "patois" are Jamaican Creole, Jamaican Patois and even Patwa. There have been numerous debates about different names for the language, and moreover, which one would be more appropriate, since all the names refer to something either historical, cultural or political. Jean T. Price discusses this issue thoroughly in "Similarities Between the Debates on Ebonics and Jamaican" (1997), where she asserts that she prefers to use the term Jamaican "because it moves towards settling the issue of the status of the language as the legitimate expression of the ethos of a people" (238). Price's label of Jamaican gives the language a name that represents it without any connections to the West. It stands

organically as a strong language that has been constructed and used by its own people. Price, including herself in the struggle of a previously colonized population, continues on the thread of language, identity and heritage stressing that, “We need to embrace an identity that is consistent with our unique heritage as opposed to the alien heritage we were miseducated and missocialized into embracing by colonialists and neocolonialists a heritage that always fit like the handed down or borrowed clothes” (240). Price’s nationalistic tone in both instances conveys the angst that the Jamaican population has felt, always living in-between two languages and two cultures. In order to be able to claim back one’s identity and heritage, one also has to step away from the dominant power that deprived them of it in the first place.

In Jamaica, like many other countries that have suffered from colonialism, the Jamaican population is either Anglo-phone or Franco-phone. Bryan argues that colonial powers and the context of domination affected how these languages were viewed upon; ultimately they were perceived as voices that were poor and from marginalized societies (646). Alicia Beckford Wassink, in her “Historic Low Prestige and Seeds of Change: Attitudes Toward Jamaican Creole” (1999), adds to Bryan’s argument, discussing the emergence of Jamaican Creole, and moreover the Jamaican populations attitudes toward their own language. Wassink argues that after Jamaica was colonized by the British, “English became the language of prestige and power in the island, reflecting the social status of its users, while the emergent of was regarded as the fragmented language of a fragmented people” (58). The language, along with fragmented English, slowly began to adopt its own set of rules, words and phrases. Furthermore, the development of the dialect of fragmented English became widespread and understood in Jamaica, creating an identity for its users. When clarifying syntax and phonology of Jamaican Creole and what features it includes,

Bryan articulates that there is “the unmarked verb; absence of subject-verb concord, [such as] *mi sick* (I am sick); serial verbs; *go see, come tell*; and the same form being used for some adjectives and verbs, *dem mad mi* (they made me mad). Other noteworthy syntactical features are pluralization using particle, *dem* (them) as *di man dem* for (the men)” (643). These are some important linguistic features to highlight, since they convey how the Jamaican Creole emerged through the contact of West African and European languages, and they will be made apparent in this chapter.

The historical context of Jamaica and its political attributes played a major role in the development of language. The status of Jamaican Creole, as mentioned above, has been low because of its connections to the middle and working class. Nadi Edwards writes in “States of Emergency: Reggae Representation of the Nation State” (1998), that reggae came to existence from the slums of Kingston, a time in which dispossession and alienation became thematic staples of popular music. Due to the spiritual worldview of the Rastafari movement, reggae was able to gather a strong arsenal to critique the social system (27). Furthermore, in the 1970s the growth of the Rastafari movement once again resulted in changes to language. Bryan asserts that the Rastafarian movement brought with it its own “[d]read talk, [that] at one time was the esoteric language of the poor and ‘downpressed’, who took, in particular, the Jamaican Creole and re-made it for their own purposes in poetry, song and social commerce” (649). Bryan takes this further, contending that the dread talk with its strong and creative use of word play intensely conveys the dialogic imperative of Jamaican Creole (649). In addition to the organic growth of dread talk, another supplement to Jamaican Creole was being highlighted, that of the dub poets. Joseph McLaren clarifies the emergence of dub poetry in “African Diaspora Vernacular Traditions and the Dilemma of Identity” (2009), claiming that, in Jamaica, “the

artistic expression of dub poets exemplifies a tendency to valorize Africanized English or ‘nation language’. The word dub refers to the ‘dubbing’ of words to musical accompaniment; dub poets ... often combine politically conscious lyrics and reggae instrumental background” (104). On the one hand, one can claim that the dub poets and the dread talk intentionally claimed the vernacular not only as a reactionary device, but also as a progressive, emancipating voice of the dispossessed. On the other hand, both “dubbing” and dread talk engaged in creating a national language, a language that its users could identify with. Slowly, both ‘dubbing’ and dread talk began to move away from the standard perception of being oppositional towards naturalization, mainly in middle and working class speech as an institutional part of society, and subsequent acceptance by many. The Rastafarian movement’s linguistic attributes became a strong cultural factor stressing a strong feeling of self-pride, mainly within the working class.

The poet Louise Bennet-Coverley was one of the most prominent and influential figures in Jamaican culture. Bennet also represents a generation of Caribbean writers born before independence from the British Empire. She used the vernacular as an intermediary, a means to decolonize language, and was also a nationalist devoted to correcting the colonial legacy of self-contempt, opening up doors for other writers and artists through her demonstration of Jamaican Creole as a medium for meaningful art. McLaren contends that, “[w]ith decolonization, creative writers have replaced the privilege given to Standard English with the vitality and ingenuity of vernacular expression” (104), a way to give the ethnic people an authentic voice that they did not have to enact nor was forced to use. This kind of liberation also brought with it a sense of pride, belonging and identification. This kind of Africanized English, as an authenticating literary voice, can moreover be traced to African American writings,

from the so-called black dialect in poetry and prose of Alice Walker, as previously conveyed in the first chapter of this thesis. Another widely considered figure within the field of Caribbean literature is Edward Kamau Brathwaite. He is considered to be one of the major voices for the rich and intricate examination of African and indigenous roots of people in the Caribbean. In his work *Middle Passages* (1992), Brathwaite explores Shakespeare's Caliban and Sycorax from *The Tempest* in a reversal of the power relations of language, conveying Caliban's actions as examples for the alterations of English. McLaren, elaborates on this further, claiming that the "transformation and Africanizing of English is symbolized in the actions of Caliban, on whom the language of Prospero is imposed. Caliban learns Prospero's language but, in cursing its origins, uses it as a weapon of resistance" (105). Caliban, like the people of the Caribbean, tried to take control over his own language through the construction his own identity and at the same time cutting the chords with the colonial domination, that was forced upon him by Prospero. This kind of resistance in speech and writing, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, is prevalent in many minority groups, allowing them to liberate themselves by creating their own voice and, moreover, to express their struggles in their own constructed language. Katherine Verhagen Rodis highlights Brathwaite's discussion about the importance of using one's own language when conveying one's life experiences in "Vernacular Literacy and Formal Analysis: Louise Bennett-Coverley's Jamaican English Verse" (2009). For instance, when writing about the significance of language, identification and Brathwaite's position, she claims that, "Brathwaite's contention is that, by using Standard English Jamaicans internalize British values and are more knowledgeable of British experience than of their own regional experience" (61). Stuart Hall gives an insight to one being knowledgeable about the British experience more than one's

ethnic one. Hall states in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (1997), that “[w]hen I first got to England in 1951, I looked out and there were Wordsworth's daffodils. Of course, what else would you expect to find? That's what I knew about. That is what trees and flowers meant. I didn't know the names of the flowers I'd just left behind in Jamaica” (103). The Jamaican educational system portrays the British experience, which leaves the student with a representation of their surrounding that is unfamiliar to them. To be able to maintain a sense of nationalism and a national language, one has to be true to oneself and use an expressive form that can accurately depict one's experiences. In *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, Marlon James illustrates Brathwaite's position on sustaining a national tone in one's writing and speech. The novel tells the story of Jamaica in the 1970s and early 80s, a time when the gun trade in Jamaica flourished. With the flooding of guns into the country, many CIA agents relocated to Jamaica, some of them to observe criminal activities and some to serve as an active part of it. James' novel brings to light the political influences during the 70s, when Jamaica was riven by dissent between two political factions: the socialist People's National Party (PNP) and the comparatively conservative Jamaica Labor Party (JLP). James brings together a variety of Jamaican and American accents through his wide range of characters; it is not always in polite conversation but to convey the most brutal and violent conflicts occurring in the country at the time.

On the topic of identity, ethnicity and language, Gloria Anzaldua discusses the struggles of the minorities and in particular the Mexican minority. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Anzaldua asserts that:

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself ... Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish, when I would rather speak

Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice.
(81)

James, through his narrative style, and linguistic expression is giving an ethnic voice to the variety of characters in the novel through his use of Jamaican Creole, Standard English and a mixture of the two. James attempts to step out of the colonial discourse, which had dominated the country for decades, to open up new opportunities for a true expression of people's life experiences while simultaneously acknowledging the growing American influence that began to get a firm grip on Jamaica and its inhabitants. In a sense, one can claim that liberation from the British colonial situation led them into an American one - not physically but mentally. Characters in James' novel dream of and fantasize about America. As will be discussed later in this chapter, some of those characters do indeed immigrate, which changes the novel's geography.

A. Run Run 'Cause Gunman Ah Come

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his widely known discussion about the novel, claimed that the novel is a genre of polyphony, incorporating and orchestrating several competing voices. Marlon James's novel makes Bakhtin's definition of polyphonic as consisting of "several competing voices" seem like an understatement. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* consists of 75 characters, all telling their own piece of the story. The diversity of voices and inputs, in terms of the characters' dialects, results in a novel that brings together a variety of Jamaican experiences and life stories. Moreover, each of James' characters speaks in distinct, yet sometimes shifting, voices and dialects depending on their background, education, origins, and life experiences. This blend of languages that James applies conveys the struggles of some characters and privilege for others, since language itself defines perceptions of status and worth.

In his work, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1992), Bakhtin depicts language as constantly changing a system of genres, dialects, and fragmented languages in battle with one another. Bakhtin claims that:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated - overpopulated- by the intentions of others. Expropriating I, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process... As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other... The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's "own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (294)

Through the incorporation of their ^{accents} and intentions, Jamaicans make the Jamaican Creole language their own. Even though the language might have traces of colonialism in it, the stylistic expressiveness, both in speech and in writing, is authentic for the Jamaicans because of the stress on the African details, dialects, accent and Caribbean music. The main event of *A History of Seven Killings* is the attempt to assassinate the character "the singer" – in real life, Bob Marley. This was due to the political situation in Jamaica at the moment during which, "the singer" supported a certain political party that was widely disputed. Because of the violent and turbulent situation in the country at the time, the novel consists of a wide range of characters, such as, gunmen/criminals, CIA agents, reporters and many other minor characters. James uses this diversity of characters to give an accurate account for the situation.

The juxtaposition between white and black is evident throughout James' novel. This juxtaposition is presented via character dialogues, observations, and

monologues, subsequently displaying emotions and thoughts about the other. Each chapter in the novel is named after the specific character that that particular chapter will be about. In a chapter titled “Demus”, after one of the gunmen tries to assassinate the singer, the reader is given insight into Demus’s thoughts as he considers how language is connected to status: “When he talk like a Jamaican he talk all coarse and evil. When he talk like a white man, he sounds like he reading a book with big word” (108). In this specific case, Demus is referring to a character named Josey Wales. Josey Wales, who is one of the gang leaders of the Copenhagen City gang, consistently shifts his language to suit the situation he is in and whom he is talking to. Wales thinks more in Standard English than his comrades but, often, when having a conversation with a white man, more specifically the CIA, he plays the role of an “ignorant naigger” (60) Wales manipulates the white characters with whom he interacts with language. He is very careful when speaking to his CIA contact, constantly using words like “sah” and phrases like “at least one *no problem, mon*, and vibrate the mon like this: mohhhhhnnnn ... just so he leave thinking he found the right man” (411). Wales takes control of the colonial language and uses it to his advantage by manipulating white characters into believing that he is less intelligent than he is, aided by the predominant assumption that Jamaican Creole, in contrast to Standard English, is for working class and marginalized people. Wales is, in fact, one of the most intelligent characters in the novel. In a conversation with Dr. Love, one of his associates, Dr. Love asks Wales, “Has Luis been feeding you the news?” (411), to which Wales responds, “No. The news has been feeding me the news” (411). Dr. Love assumes that the white man Luis must have been giving Wales the latest news, in a way that excludes the fact that Wales, as a Jamaican man, with his language,

would be capable to learn on his own, with no outside help, and in this particular case, no help from a white man.

Earlier in the novel, in a discussion of politics between a white American named Luis Johnson and Wales, Wales remarks, “Louis Johnson did try to tell me foreign policy in that low draw-out way that white people talk when they think you’re too stupid to understand” (165). This provides insight into Wales’s thoughts on language and makes apparent that he comprehends a language diversity that he does not share with all the characters in the novel. Since he prefers to leave the characters he interacts with in the dark, but at the same time making the reader aware of the truth. Using language, James confronts the existing racism, depicting through Wales’s thoughts how the white man assumes that he has to simplify the language he is using so that the black man will understand what he is talking about. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon discusses the relationship between the white man and the black man in the Antilles. Fanon claims that the white man would say, “I know the blacks. They must be spoken to kindly; talk to them about their country; it’s all in knowing how to talk to them”, meaning that one could not talk to a black man like talking to a white man. The differentiation and alienation of the black minority was very evident in language and behavior. Fanon further asserts that, “a white man addressing a negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child” (31). The leveling of the minorities by talking down on/to them was a tool of power that the colonizer used when communicating with the colonized. This tool of oppression belittled the colonized and made them feel as inferior for not having the same brain capacity as the colonizer.

Through his narrative strategies, James empowers certain characters in the novel, one of them being Josey Wales. One can claim that through his linguistic style

and the incorporation of so many voices into his work, James takes control over the narrative, opening up doors for the voices that he considers are worth hearing. In his conveyance of race and class, and the volatile relationship between the United States and Jamaica, James gives voice to his characters so that the reader may see the juxtapositions of colonizer and colonized in Jamaica of the 70s. For example, the *Rolling Stones* journalist, Alex Pierce, notes the differences in race and class upon his arrival to Jamaica to interview the singer, Bob Marley in real life.

You see black people all the time in the States, right, but you don't really see them, certainly not reading the news. You hear them on the radio all the time, but once the song is over, they vanish. They're on TV but only when somebody just acted like a jive turkey or somebody made them say dynamite! Jamaica's different. (59)

One can argue that James is conveying Pierce's foolishness with respect to race and class in both the United States and Jamaica. Alex Pierce is here being represented as a clueless white man who is exoticizing the Jamaican as other. On the one hand, one can claim that it is a certainty that the situation in Jamaica would be different than the United States, since the majority of the people are black, and therefore, they also are seen and heard more. On the other hand, it is important to note the significance of this quote, since it points towards the racism that was dominant in the United States during that specific time. Anzaldúa discusses the issue of marginalization, mainly from her own and her people's experiences, the Chicanas. She argues for the importance of language to the marginalized group and how language affects one's identity, asserting that, due to marginalization, "Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicano's need identify [themselves] as a distinct people ... For some of us, language is a homeland" (77). Due to racism and the need for a "homeland" that they could identify with and a language to use freely with no outer prejudice, almost every minority group created their own linguistic expression – either through vernacular,

transliteration, Jamaican Creole, or Chicano Spanish – to be able to convey their experiences and struggles that, moreover, could be a source of identity for them.

B. If My Life is Juss Fi Mi, Mi No Want It

One of the few female characters in *A History of Seven Killings* is Nina Burgess, who begins her journey as a self-deluding groupie but later becomes one of the more important characters in the novel. Burgess speaks Standard English throughout the novel in contrast to her sister, Kimmy, who speaks Jamaican Creole. In a conversation between the two sisters about race and discrimination, it becomes clear that Kimmy is the firm advocate for “Garveyism” and for the black people’s liberation from “downpression”(156), which she has learned from her boyfriend, Trent, in contrast to Nina, who does not care nor has the energy for that kind of thinking. Nina, who does not take her sister nor the black liberation movement seriously, claims that Kimmy is “learning from Ras Trent to take the words English people gave her as a tool of oppression and spit them back in their face” (156). Essentially, Kimmy and Trent are like Josey Wales, stepping out of the dominant discourse, creating their own rules for spoken language, and using the oppressor’s language as a tool against them. Nina, whose dream is to leave Jamaica and go to America and seek a better life, uses the language that is built upon her dream of leaving, which is, Standard English. Nina responds to her sister, and furthermore, to the whole Rastafarian linguistic movement, mockingly: “Rastaman don’t deal with negativity so oppression is now downpression even though there is no up in the word. Dedicate is livicate. I and I, well God knows what that means ... All a load of shit if you ask me” (156). Nina identifies more with Standard English than with Jamaican Creole. She is deeply skeptical of the political movement that have shaped post-

colonial Jamaica, which in turn impacts her personally as a citizen in the country. As the conversation progresses between Nina and her sister, the reader discovers that it is not only her national language that she refuses but her own identity as a black woman as well. As she becomes increasingly agitated with her sister's nationalistic talk, she retorts, "Where do you think you life going? All you black people running around like headless chicken and don't even know why you direction-less" (157). Nina's sense of hopelessness about the political and social situation in Jamaica is evident.

Nina's hybrid identity is also evident in this dialogue sequence, since she feels that she cannot identify with her own language and culture and, at the same time, she cannot identify with Western culture because she has never been to the West. She is thus trying to adopt that culture through her language. She is deliberately alienating herself from her own language and culture, and moreover, the Western one naturally sees her as an outsider. Anzaldua, in a discussion of herself and the Mexican people in her *"Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza"* (1987), argues that alienation "makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity- we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultures ... I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one" (85). Anzaldua draws attention to the invisible borders that exists between opposing groups such as men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals and numerous other dichotomous groups. Moreover, Anzaldua discusses the term borderlands, as a door opener for hybridity, when a person is neither this nor that. Furthermore, she gives voice to the growing population that cannot distinguish these invisible borders and who instead learned to be a part of both worlds and are expected to abide by both cultural norms. One can argue that Nina, in abstract terms, exists in some kind of borderland where she neither

feels like a Jamaican nor an American. Her hybrid identity creates conflicts with other characters such as her sisters and her parents. Nina's superior attitude towards her sister drives them further and further apart, at the end of their conversation, Kimmy, obviously upset with Nina's condescending attitude says, "[y]ou is a dutty little hypocrite" (160). Nina's arrogance regarding her sisters' life and relationship becomes unbearable for Kimmy, who knows that Nina, herself, has previously had a romantic relationship with a Rasta man, the singer.

Many other characters in *A Brief History of Seven Killings* share Nina's desire to leave Jamaica. Besides giving the characters an authentic voice that depicts their true identity and language as a tool of resistance towards the colonial power, James also conveys the hardships that the population faced in their own country, which leads them to desire and to romanticize the West. Demus, a "gunman" from the "Jungle," which is another name for the ghetto, shares the same desire as Nina to leave Jamaica and seek a better standard of living. He articulates that he "just want to bathe inside not outside and me want to see Statue of Liberty and me want Lee jeans and not idiot jeans that some thief sew on a Lee patch" (55). It is interesting to note that the "Statue of Liberty" is placed in the middle of Demus's confessional statement as a symbol of the material liberty that Demus wants to experience and achieve in his life. However, he quickly realizes that "[n]o that's not what me want" and instead expresses a desire "[t]o look 'pon America and don't go, but make America know me can go anytime me want. Because me tired of people ... looking at me like me is some animal" (55). Demus changes his mind from wanting to go to America, to not necessarily wanting to leave Jamaica. He desires the physical freedom to be able to move around and go wherever he wishes to go, even if he is aware that it is a utopian dream. More importantly, Demus wants people to see him as a free man, without his necessarily

being free. The status that he gained by the way people viewed him would grant him the status that he always desired. Subsequently, with status he would not be seen “as an animal”.

A Brief History of Seven Killings, gives insight into Kingston and the major ghettos within it i.e. “Copenhagen City” and “Eight Lanes”. James’s invented ghetto of Copenhagen city, where many of the novel’s murders and crimes are plotted and take place, is worth a moment’s consideration. Even if the ghetto’s name is an invention, it is thus reminiscent of real-world places within the urban mass of Kingston, such as Gaza city, Tel Aviv, and Angola, all areas that actually exist within Jamaica but also reference a wider world of conflict in which it participates. The invention of Copenhagen city is not only a connection to bigger struggles and conflicts around the world but connects to the inner struggles of Jamaica, since Copenhagen City is an actual war zone and one of the biggest slums in Kingston. James renders it vividly through the voice of the American journalist, Alex Pierce, who reveals that, “[z]ink in the Eight Lanes shines like nickel. Zinc in Jungle is riddled with bullet holes and rusted the color of Jamaican rural dirt ... Ghetto is a smell ... Old Spice, English Leather and Brut Cologne. The rawness of freshly slaughtered goat ... fermenting pee and aging shit running down the side of the road” (81). This depiction of Jamaica’s most run-down ghettos reveals that the novel is one of classical postcolonial fallout in Jamaica and elsewhere. It ultimately conveys America and Britain’s participation in that history, in terms of colonialism and other political inputs, and moreover, how these eventually affected, among other things, the socioeconomic situation in Jamaica.

CONCLUSION

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE, MY WORDS REFUSE TO MELT

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that there are three major characteristics of minor literature. The first characteristic is “deterritorialization” (16), which implies that a minority is placed at the margins in a society. Their writing becomes deterritorialized since they write in languages that are considered to be alien and foreign from the standard language of the majority, which have been constructed by minorities to serve as a means for identification. To demonstrate deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari give the example of African American usage of English. In both cases, they assert that this deterritorialization leads to the ongoing creolization of the English language in general, and also, to the increased merging of languages in the contemporary world. The second characteristic of minor literature is “that everything in them is political” (16). Concerns of the minority individual are confined to a cramped space and always connected to politics. Since, minority authors give voice to a whole minority group, one individual becomes connected to a collective and therefore, “the individual concern becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (16), which leads to the third characteristic – the implication that in minor literature “everything takes on a collective value” (17) and what authors write individually takes on a common enunciation. Through the minority author’s literary works, literature becomes positively charged with the role and function of a collective. Subsequently, it is “literature that produces an active solidarity ... and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this

situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and sensibility” (17).

Deleuze and Guattari’s three characteristics of minor literature, that minor literature is essentially political, collective and deterritorialized from the dominant white mainstream literature, leads literature to automatically act in the ‘arena of struggle’, a concept introduced by Barbara Harlow. Consequently, these three characterizations give minor literature an identity and space in which they can act out in an organic manner, due to the fact that they have been created from within a minority. This point in particular, is related to Bakhtin’s theory of ‘carnival’ in *Rabelais and His World*, in which life escapes its official undulations and enacts utopian freedom, and can be seen in the four literary works analyzed in the preceding chapters of this thesis. The authors break free from the societal norms and regulations in terms of literary discourse, and they enact a complete freedom in their linguistic styles, giving voice to their characters to freely and accurately convey their struggles and experiences.

As proved in this thesis, the occurrence of solidarity between different minority groups is very evident. However, a variety of minority groups tend to identify with the African American struggle more than that of others, which is likely to be a result of what might be considered “seniority” – a characteristic attributed to the long African American history of cruel enslavement and segregation and later an equally brutal struggle for civil rights. The commonality of fate is part of a shared narrative among minority groups, which provides a frame of reference for making sense of how race works and reinforces a sense of “we”, or shared collective identification among minority groups. The perception of a common fate is linked to the politicization of racial identity, because it reflects a shared story that encompasses

personal experiences and collective realities about how race works in the United States and around the world. This solidarity between the different minority groups and, in particular, between the minority groups discussed in this thesis, becomes transparent in their different literary works. Suheir Hammad, for example, clearly articulates her solidarity with the African American struggle, a struggle that she ultimately identifies with. Hammad argues that her inspiration and motivation for her poem collection *Born Palestinian, Born Black* originated from Gayl Jones's work "Moving Toward Home", in which Jones expresses solidarity with the people of Palestine.

Worth mentioning and comparing, are the conversations that occur between the sisters, Celie and Nettie in *The Color Purple*, and between Nina and Kimmy in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. Celie and Nettie converse through letters, therefore the reader encounters their use of language through their writing, which varies from sister to sister. Celie uses African American vernacular in almost all her letters to Nettie who, in turn, replies in Standard English. This is due to both Celie's and Nettie's experiences in life, Nettie leaves America to do missionary work in Africa, where she also receives an education. Celie, on the other hand never, leaves America and does not get a chance to pursue an education. Celie, in this case, presents the authentic tone of the African American vernacular, a language that she has inherited from her parents and that she speaks and writes for her entire life. Walker depicts Celie's linguistic expression as one of her ancestors, and therefore she represents the African American heritage. It is also a language that Celie takes pride in and refuses to either alter or change, because it is a language that she identifies with. Similarly, Kimmy, as conveyed in *A Brief History*, takes pride in her Jamaican Creole. In the conversation between Kimmy and her sister Nina, Kimmy is shown to believe that

Jamaican Creole is a language that is representative of the Jamaican population and that, moreover, can be used as a tool of resistance. Nettie and Nina, on the other hand, have in common their use of Standard English, but it is important to note that they use it for different reasons and that their circumstances as portrayed by the novel, are different from those of Kimmy and Nina. Nettie uses Standard English in her writing, which she learns through her pursuit of education and missionary work in Africa. Nina on the other hand, speaks Standard English as an act of defiance towards her own population, the Jamaicans whom she cannot identify with and mocks from time to time in the novel. Her condescending attitude towards her own people and their language consequently results in her consideration of Jamaican Creole to be lower in status in comparison to Standard English. Nina's use of Standard English is spurred by her dream of moving to America and climbing the societal ladder to a better life than the one that she has in Jamaica.

The three authors whose literary works have been explored in this thesis originate from three minority groups that carry with them a rich heritage and culture of music and musical performances that they incorporate and cherish in their own works. Jazz, blues, hip hop and reggae are all linked to a complex web of sensibilities and historical and cultural realities. In one way or another, popular culture and art are, in general, viewed by academics as taking part in minority-majority clashes. Music, as an art form other than language, has certainly been a part of a process of claiming and making identity and can also be considered a political form of expression. Butler-Evans quotes Toni Morrison on the topic of minority-majority clashes regarding music arguing that, "For a long time, the art form that was healing for Black people was music. That music is no longer exclusively ours; we don't have exclusive rights to it. Other people sing it and play it; it is the mode of contemporary music

everywhere” (7). By “other people”, Morrison means white people. Having been deprived of a venue for self-expression, African Americans had to find other outlets, which resulted in the novel. Walker, in *The Color Purple*, conveys the importance of both music and vernacular through the voice of Shug, who is a blues singer and through Celie’s African American vernacular. Through her linguistic strategy, Walker’s narrative portrays the rich and complex African American culture. Hammad articulates her passion for the Hip Hop tradition, and she continuously uses that tradition in her poetry – in particular *Breaking Poems* – following hip-hop’s musical beats and structure. Hammad’s participation in an urban hip-hop community during her formative years in Brooklyn influenced her later poetry. Using the hip-hop beat in her poetry strengthens the tone behind her words with their political implications; it also portrays the strong connections that she feels to the African American community. Hartman elaborates on this issue further claiming that, “Hammad ... makes powerful intertextual connections and references within her own work, weaving an intricate engagement with African American music and art within her poetic oeuvre” (159). Music also makes up a large part of James’s *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, mainly because the novel’s narrative revolves around the assassination attempt on Bob Marley, but also touches upon how reggae music and Western music affected the Jamaican population’s use of language, and on how music in turn affected the Jamaican Patois.

This thesis has shown how three minority authors, among many others, use language as a tool to resist the dominant group in their writing through the employment of various linguistic techniques. These linguistic strategies enable the creation of a creative and expressional language that represents their respective ethnicities and conveys the political and social struggles and hardships of their minorities in an

organic form. Moreover, they give voice to the powerless, a voice that is vibrant and conveys a reality that is worth being heard by the dominant group. Through this specific linguistic strategy, Walker, Hammad and James allow themselves to create, within their historical and political narratives, a clear and unified minority identity.

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