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The Open Boat

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Bard College

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The Open Boat

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
Of Bard College

By

Nanda Fogle

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2019

For Us

Acknowledgments

This senior project is the most arduous academic work I have ever produced, and without a doubt, I would have been unable to accomplish this feat without the help and support of some special people in my life.

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Introduction

For a good part of my adolescence, I struggled with my racial identity and finding my place in the world. When I was little, many black people would joke around and call me “white girl.” Some still do. They called me “white girl” because I have light-skin, my hair is a different texture from that of other black girls, and I “talk white.” I always knew that they were only joking because I knew, myself, that I was black. Growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood I always felt different. It was not because I was necessarily treated differently, nor was it because I received negative treatment. I could sense that I simply was not like the other kids. I know that what I was sensing was our different levels of privilege. At the time, however, I did not give this much thought because, everyone, for the most part, was nice to me, and I was able to fit in.

It was not until high school that I began to feel alone. I felt isolated because I could not seem to find “my people.” I was a floater, able to participate in multiple different groups, but I was not entirely myself in any of them. I wanted a group where I could be my whole self, and it took me a few years to find it. I felt like I could not be myself with the black kids because I acted too white. I talked “white,” proper, and it was just noticeable enough to make it slightly uncomfortable for me. This made me just want to listen rather than speak. I could not be myself with the white kids because I was too black. Sometimes I would slip up and use the n-word around them and that created a palpable tension at times. When I did find my group they were not a bunch of people that hung out together. They were just individuals that I felt accepted me as I was.

These people are also who helped me to discover what it meant for me to be myself. I was constantly defining myself, experimenting with that definition, redefining it, and then repeating that process over and over again. Stereotypically high school is when people define themselves and college is when they experiment with that definition and see where their boundaries are. I was doing all of that all at once. I was at the point where I had defined myself as a black girl and was experimenting with what it meant for *me* to be black, which I had realized is different for everyone. I am not the kind of black girl that goes to rallies, nor am I much of an activist, which I know because I have tried. I am not the kind of black girl that only makes long-lasting relationships with other black people. I do not see it as a betrayal of my people to have a white best friend. I am not the kind of black girl that constantly says “nigga” but I am not scared, uncomfortable, or ashamed to say it. I am the type of black girl that wears her hair natural because I like how it looks. I am the kind of black girl that talks “white” but I will use slang when I feel like it. Some people see that as code switching, and maybe it is, but either way, I see it as a form of effective communication. I do not talk “white” only around white people, I talk that way if the situation I am in calls for it. Even still, I am not really choosing to talk that way, I just do. I am the type of black girl that steps, not because I feel like it connects me to my roots, though I appreciate that it does, but simply because I like it.

It took me a while to realize that the kind of black girl I am is decided by me, myself, and I, and furthermore, I can never change the fact that I am black. I am not an activist and that is okay. In fact, since there are white activists activism is not fundamentally a characteristic of blackness. I am black and I wear my natural hair. Some individuals braid their hair, others perm it, and some wear a weave. Natural hair is just another option. The only thing fundamental

about being black, in my opinion, is that I did not choose it and I cannot change it. My black card has been mine since birth and no one can take it from me even if I tried to hand it off on a silver platter.

It took me so long to realize what it meant to be black because I was constantly faced with a certain level of conformity. I felt like I had to be a certain way or else I would not be recognized as black. Identity is already a difficult thing to come to terms with without it being doubted by those around you. I felt like people expected me to act a certain way, have particular opinions, talk a certain way, wear my hair in a certain way, etc, and when I strayed from their expectations they thought I was different. There is nothing wrong with being different but it is confusing when you are not trying to be, but have it pointed out to you anyway. I would always think, “What can I do so that I am less different?” When my differences were obvious to me, I always felt as if I was straying from blackness. I know that I was only straying from certain particulars in favor of my own. It was not until I tuned out all of the expectations on how I was supposed to act and think, that I was able to just accept myself as I was. I realized that my blackness is a part of me and the way I behaved would not change that. That being said, there are still behaviors that are frowned upon within the black community, in which performing them does not rid one of his/her/their blackness, but ostracizes them from the rest of their black peers.

As stated earlier I was going through this journey of identity in high school. I was still in class, learning five days a week. Through many of the literature, seminar, and philosophy books I read, I was able to expand not only my definition of blackness, but also theories on what it meant to be human and theories of the mind and soul, to name but a few. I continued to explore theories such as these during my time at college.

In my Introduction to Philosophy class, I sought a universal theory of humanity, that could explain how we can all be different but still share that fundamental quality, our humanity. Looking back, I feel like the way that I learned philosophy put me on this quest for a universal. In that class, I read the philosophers that every first-year student reads, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, etc. Their work aimed at breaking down preconceived notions of ideas that we just accept because we have been socialized into a community that takes them for a fact, as well as the discovery/discussion of universal principles. Much of the philosophy that I did in high school centered around the idea of the universal. Because I am part of a marginalized group in America, I was interested in what is universal in humans. There are so many differences amongst us but I figured there had to be something fundamental, something within our nature that connected us all, and if I could find that, then I could work from there to help make the world a more tolerant and accepting place for people like me.

In this quest for a totalizing theory of humanity, I came across many theories that anointed the possession of reason as being the marker of humanity. This never sat right with me because it disregarded the body. There is no conceivable way that I would have turned out to be the person I am, with the ideals that I have, given my rationality alone. My body also played a role. The way I see the world is heavily influenced by the fact that I am a black girl, an aspect of my identity entirely determined by my body. I was also reading work by writers, including *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois, a black American. I noticed how he described ways of being in a very different manner than the white writers I had read, who wrote as if what they claimed would be true for them no matter their race, background, and ethnicity. Du Bois's writing reflected how he was more in tune with the state of the world around him and his role in

it as determined by him being a black man. Du Bois's "double consciousness" theory made it very clear to me that the world perceived from the point of view of a black individual is drastically different than that from the perspective of a white one. It was almost as if they were living in two entirely different worlds. In a way they were, because black people have to exist in two worlds: the one of white folk and the one behind the veil that the white folks could not see through. Du Bois really helped me to understand why it was so difficult for me to figure out who I was and how I fit in the world. My existence is merely one that requires that I live in two worlds. This project, however, is not about Du Bois.

Frantz Fanon is another writer I read in high school. Fanon was born on July 20, 1925, in Fort-de-France, Martinique, a French territory in the Caribbean. His father was black and his mother half French. Growing up, he studied European and French world views at the Lycee Schoelcher until it closed down due to a change in the French government, caused by Germany defeating and occupying it at the beginning of World War II. Although the school was in Martinique, and not France, it was still controlled by the French government. When the school opened up again, Fanon studied under Aime Cesaire, a poet who asserted black identity under his concept of Negritude. Under him, Fanon not only studied black writers and felt connected to his African roots, but his self-perception drastically changed. However, Fanon was more than a scholar. He participated in WWII, where he experienced racism in the army. He joined the Free French forces in 1943 and served in Morocco and Algeria in 1944-5. In 1946, he studied psychiatry, and applied his knowledge to understanding his own experience as a "Europeanized West Indian." He then became the head psychiatrist of the psychiatry department in a hospital in Algeria and joined the Algerian liberation movement fighting against French rule in 1954. Fanon

also wrote a number of books, including *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). He died from leukemia on December 6, 1941, ironically in America, where he was to get treatment. (“Fanon”).

Although I had heard of *Black Skin, White Masks*, it was *The Wretched of the Earth* that I read in high school. I went to a fairly diverse school, but I could still count on one hand how many people of color were in that class with me, a count that would go down if I counted only the black students. The only part of the book I remember vividly, since it feels like we read that section countless times, is his chapter “On Violence”. In this chapter Fanon describes the colonial situation and makes the argument that violence is the only solution for the colonized to rid themselves of the colonizers invading their country, and liberate themselves from the inferiority complex they gained from internalizing the views of the colonizers. I remember constantly debating with other students on Fanon’s meaning. Is violence necessary for the colonial situation, as he describes it? Did he really mean physical violence, or was it figurative? What are the potential consequences of violence for the colonized peoples?

At first, I believed that violence would only cause greater problems for the colonized subjects. Then one day, I remember thinking, “What if I have been trained to be so against violence? What if I am colonized in America in such a subtle way that I cannot even recognize it because it is ingrained in my upbringing?” I re-evaluated my stance on violence and came to the conclusion that it should be avoided if possible and if beneficial, but sometimes avoiding it is either not possible or disadvantageous. In the colonial situation, it was the case that violence could have been avoided, but it would have been at the expense of the colonized and for the benefit of the colonizers. From that day on, I argued for the use of violence in the colonial

context and all situations like it because violence is not inherently bad, and sometimes it is a more than valid option, at times the only one worth participating in.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* was written so that people could understand the colonial situation, all people. For colonists and their descendants, their role in colonization is forever in their history. Fanon's book makes sure that they are not only looking at the situation through the lens of the colonists, who claimed to be acting out of the goodness of their hearts, but also from the perspective of the people most affected, the colonized subjects. He is writing from the perspective of the colonized, for he himself was a colonial subject. For them, his book breaks down what they might be feeling, the history behind their situation, which they may not be aware of since the colonists control their education, and provides them with the tools to mend their own broken hearts and minds. Fanon has made sure that everyone knows the ways in which the colonized have been afflicted, how colonization has affected the world, and how it is that we are where we are today.

In my first year at Bard College, I took Introduction to Caribbean Philosophy where, along with re-reading Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, I was introduced to the poet Édouard Glissant. Like Fanon, Glissant was born in Martinique, but in Le Lamentin on September 21, 1928, and the two studied together under Aimé Césaire. Whereas Fanon went on to study psychiatry, Glissant studied philosophy and ethnology. From a young age, Glissant was politically involved. Be it campaigning for Martinique's independence, organizing Césaire's campaign for French parliament, supporting the French Liberation movement, or founding the Front Antillo-Guyanais to campaign for independence for all French overseas departments, not only Martinique, with Paul Nègre. As an educator, he founded the Institut Martiniquais d'Études

and created the journal *Acoma* in order to lessen the French emphasis in education and culture on the island of Martinique by providing them with something more reflective of their lives. He also worked as a professor at Louisiana State University and City University of New York and taught graduate classes in Paris. Glissant died February 3, 2011, in Paris, France. (“Glissant”).

Both Glissant and Fanon were heavily influenced by their experience growing under colonial rule. Fanon focused on explaining the situation and providing the means to change it, meanwhile Glissant discussed how it was to exist in that situation, the feeling of existing in the margins. It was from this feeling that he developed his view of “tout-monde,” in which the world is a network of interacting communities that are constantly changing as a result of their interaction with each other. From this viewpoint, every community has a chance of having its voice be heard.

In that particular philosophy class, I read his book *Poetics of Relation*, where he discusses his theory of Relation, derived from his view of “tout-monde,” and lays out the means of realizing his theory. However, he is a poet, and in many ways, his book is one of poetry; it is a work of opacity that performs its own argument. Thus, it would be an understatement to say that he did not leave a clear set of instructions behind, though it becomes apparent why this is impossible after gaining a firmer grasp on what Relation is.

In his book, Glissant calls for “creolization”, a mixing of cultures, but not in the sense that cultures are relinquishing certain practices that make them distinct so that they can blend, but rather what is achieved when differences communicate and interact without any form of domination. This kind of coexistence requires opacity so that no culture is lost and each can maintain what distinguishes it from all the rest. It also requires a level of openness so that the

participating parties accept that their interaction with the Other changes them and are willing to allow those changes to manifest in their practices. It is how to attain this coexistence that Glissant explains, in seemingly the most opaque way possible. Cultures coexisting in such a manner is not just a matter of people accepting different practices, but of people accepting different ways of being human, accepting that there is no appropriate way to be a human being. This is further complicated by the colonial situation, in which there is an intrinsic system of ranking. In order for creolization to exist, the cultures cannot be ranked because there can be no domination, and they must recognize their role in Relation, granting the Other the right to opacity.

Opacity is the act of staying particular. This allows cultures to be distinct so that they do not blend together and lose their integrity. Transparency is its opposite, very closely linked with universalization, and it is the act of becoming less particular. Transparency allows cultures to “understand” each other. However, by becoming transparent there is no cultural understanding since it is not the culture in its entirety that is being portrayed but rather a pale imitation that only goes surface deep. The culture being gazed upon as if it was transparent is not granted the right to opacity under the guise of cultural understanding. It was after obtaining this knowledge that I thought back on my views as a high school student and laughed at so far off the mark I was. I was trying to find a totalizing theory of humanity in an attempt to uplift my people, but I was really only working in the framework that kept them oppressed. It was also from this idea of opacity that I realized Glissant was not writing for the benefit of a single community, not even all of the oppressed communities, but for everyone, oppressors and oppressed alike. Transparency threatens the extinction of culture, which impoverishes everyone.

In class, we had many discussions on creolization, an act that many of us thought we understood until we encountered it in Glissant's work. We saw it as a secondary option to the violence Fanon presented us with, and many of us considered it to be the least effective out of the two options. It seemed that we understood creolization to be a mixing of cultures, but being that we were discussing the mixture of an oppressive culture with culture being oppressed we did not understand how this would help. We believed that in practice, the oppressed culture would simply be adopting the oppressor's practices, which gives the oppressors more power. However, this interpretation did not fit in with the rest of the text and I had a feeling we were misinterpreting, but it was not until reading it again for this project that I properly understood creolization, as Glissant defines it.

A year later, in a philosophy class entitled "Skillful Coping/Robust Realism," I was introduced to the work of Hubert Dreyfus. Dreyfus was born on October 15, 1929, in Terre Haute, Indiana. His success on the debate team at Wiley High School in his hometown paved his way to Harvard, where he got his bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. in philosophy from 1951-1964. Originally he was going to major in physics but transferred to the philosophy department after hearing a lecture by C. I. Lewis. He went on to become a professor at Brandeis University and then the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he was introduced to theories of artificial intelligence, of which he was extremely skeptical. In 1968 he became an associate philosophy professor at University of Berkeley, where he taught classes up to December 3, 2016. Dreyfus died from cancer on April 22, 2017. ("Dreyfus").

Dreyfus focused more on the individual scale, going into detail on how individuals can complicate identity by inhabiting multiple worlds. In this context, a world is a total system of

practices, equipment, and roles, that gives meaning to an understanding of being, and a practice is a structure, which skills allow us to participate in. The structure is a particular way of organizing the world in such a way that the activities are intelligible to us. The practices we participate in orient us to our world, the things and people around us. The role we play, and the status that comes with it, give us an identity, and this identity gives us reasons and motivations for acting.

Although Dreyfus focused on the individual, his theory of robust realism, or a plurality of unranked worlds, stuck out to me. This theory is a rubric to ensure that we have an optimal grip on reality, which one attains by unifying all of the contradicting aspects of their identity. This unification is realized in adopting a plurality of unranked worlds. Dreyfus, like Glissant, values unification over universalization and understands the distinction between the two. The crucial difference is that unification allows for each perspective to remain unique and intact while working in tandem with each other, whereas universalizing causes one to be pushed aside, one to be consumed by the other, or for both to be radically transformed. He understands the significance of a perspective being lost in combining it to form an objective concept.

The achievement of plural worlds requires that they be unranked and, obviously, that there be more than one. There must be many worlds because if there is only one option, choosing it does not hold much significance. They must be unranked to resolve the issue of leveling. If the worlds are ranked, there is the implication that there is an ideal in mind, or a thing that a world ought to strive for in order to be considered the best. That being the case, the meanings of the worlds are leveled and the uniqueness of each is lost in the ranking. Practices are so important

because they are the embodiment of a specific world. By finding practices meaningful, it is likely that the world in which those practices have meaning is also significant.

I immediately saw how plural worlds are similar to Glissant's theory of Relation. Adopting a plurality of worlds requires tolerance, allowing full commitment to every practice even if it one contradicts another from another world. Commitment is necessary so that one is fully present in that world. In Glissant's terms, each "world," as Dreyfus uses it, is granted the right to opacity, so that the practices of one world are not denied due to the practices of another. Similarly, each culture needs to be granted the right to opacity as required by Relation, each allowed to practice their very different practices. Just as worlds will contradict each other, confusing the identity of the individual, cultures will often be in conflict, complicating the realization of creolization. Another way in which the two are similar is that ranking has no place in either. In Relation all cultures are equal and all worlds are equal in a plurality of worlds. Equal, however, is not equivalent to leveled. The worlds are equal in the sense that, objectively, the practices of one are not better than the practices of another, but when participating in one world its practices are greater than those of another because they are suited to that world.

This project is an attempt to disclose Glissant's work in *Poetics of Relation* and imagine a world in which Relation is realized. It is important for all to understand what Glissant is saying because the subject matter affects everyone. However, *Poetics of Relation* is a work that performs its own argument, a work of opacity. Therefore, not everyone who picks up the book will be able to understand what they are reading. Even those that can understand must re-read the text again and again. I would like to say that it is easier to understand if one is familiar with the feeling of living on the margins, but this may not be the case. It might be a more circular logic.

In order to understand the poetics of Relation, one must understand Relation, but in order to understand Relation, one must understand the poetics, and so on. It might be that one must imagine Relation in order to understand it. It might be the case that no one will ever truly understand Glissant's version of Relation, but through the poetics, we can imagine our own. It is important that we do.

The Wretched of the Earth helps in explaining colonization, an event that has largely affected the entire world. The colonial situation put in place a system of ranking that made it so that Relation functioning in the background was not enough. Before this event, Relation could function in the background, helping new cultures to emerge and old ones to transform. After colonization, the situation of the world, in terms of cultural interaction, stifled difference. This stifling made it so that it was difficult for new cultures to emerge, only permitting them to sprout through the cracks and only because it is impossible to halt creation without halting the world. Colonization did not stop the world. The stifling effect also controlled the transformation of pre-existing cultures, putting all of them on the same track so that no newness could emerge there either.

The effects of colonization have made it so that Relation needed to be brought to our awareness. *Poetics of Relation* works to do just that. The problem is that not enough people are aware. As we wait for people to attain awareness on their own, we will be doing more damage, stifling more occurrences of newness. Even if everyone in the world reads Glissant's book, it would not be enough. There needs to be some work that functions as a sort of prerequisite, allowing some light to shine through. This in no way would make *Poetics of Relation*

transparent, but rather would permit participation in a way that allows the text to retain its opacity.

In my experience, Dreyfus's work served as that prerequisite. Although I read *Poetics of Relation* before I ever became acquainted with Dreyfus's work, many of the things I had read in that Introduction to Caribbean Philosophy course began to make more sense to me after reading various works by Dreyfus in the Skillful Coping/Robust Realism course. Dreyfus's plural world theory is much easier to understand than Glissant's theory of Relation, but they are quite similar. They function on two very different scales, the former on an individual scale and the later on a totality of the world scale, but they play the same role, kind of. Relation is always functioning, whether we are aware of it or not, but a plurality of worlds is something one must adopt and actively participate, but only at times because once adopting that reality it too begins to function in the background. They have similar needs: an unranked set, be it of worlds or cultures, and the right to opacity for cultures in Relation and the need for tolerance in plural worlds allowing for full commitment. The two theories use different language, discuss different things, but somehow, can still be put together because they share the same ideology- one of unification without universalization.

In the first chapter of this project, I will lay out what the problem is: that cultures have been denied the right to opacity and have formed around a totalitarian root. Culture and its role in our lives is laid out by Dreyfus. I also use Dreyfus to explain cultural practices, specifically, how the opacity of them is what makes cultures opaque to each other. This combined with a search for a totalizing theory of humanity lead to a refutation of the right to opacity. I use Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, to explain the colonial situation and how colonization imposed

conformity, aiding and abetting the problem, as well as putting in place a world-wide system of ranking. In explaining the colonial situation, I will also use Fanon to explain the solution to the colonial situation, violence, and how this violent struggle for nationhood produces culture. This needs to happen so that we understand what went wrong, what allowed the problem to persist. This project is not about overcoming colonization, but it is about what happens in a world that has colonization as part of its history. I will discuss Glissant's definition of the totalitarian root from *Poetics of Relation* and explain the states of exile and errantry that the colonized subject underwent. Throughout the chapter, the entire project even, the work of the three authors will be in conversation, influencing each other. A term from one might pop up as I discuss the theory of another, as it should.

In the second chapter of this project, I will attempt to convey what Relation is, explaining how it opposes totalitarianism. I will also point to creolization, giving its meaning as Glissant expresses it, as being what most closely approaches Relation. I will explain how colonization served as a setback, in which Relation was either forgotten or ignored, or ignored and then forgotten, but not made irrelevant because that is not possible. I will explain the importance of opacity and the role of errantry and exile. I will explain why the totalitarian root needs to be exchanged for the rhizome. Lastly, I will explain how Dreyfus's theory of a plurality of unranked worlds, or pluralistic robust realism, relates to Glissant's theory of Relation. Overall, this project is not meant to end, but rather serve as a beginning.

Chapter 1

A Denial

In the past, cultural interactions were initiated under various circumstances: trade, exploration, land disputes, etc. Cultures did not dominate each other; at times, the people from one dominated the people of another but it was not a cultural sort of domination. The dominated people were not forced to give up their cultural practices, but rather their form of government, or their form of communal life. Then, something changed. The domination being enacted became cultural. In his book *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant states:

Since the beginning of this century the shrinking of unexplored regions on the map of the world has made minds less infatuated with adventure, or less sensitive to its beauty, inclining more toward a concern for the truth of human beings. Understanding cultures then became more gratifying than discovering new lands. Western ethnography was structured on the basis of this need (Glissant 26).

As opposed to exploring lands, and founding cultural interaction on that basis, cultures, especially those in the West, initiated engagement on the basis of seeking to find a coherent human nature. What these truth seekers found instead showed that through the practices of everyday people, each culture seemed to portray a different truth of human beings, and these truths could not all fit harmoniously together. They encountered people who vastly differed from them in all kinds of ways: in what they valued, what they wore, what they eat, how they made community decisions, etc.

In their quest for the truth of human beings, the truth seekers, the majority of whom eventually became colonists, were searching for a fixed definition, a unified definition they could fully grasp. They were searching for an a priori truth, what would be true independent of experience. However, it is safe to assume that the truth seekers embarked on this pursuit being

certain of their own humanity. When the truth seekers encountered the Other, who differed so greatly from them, it was the humanity of the Other that they questioned. The Other consists of every other existing culture, and what is considered to be “other” changes depending on perspective. The practices they engaged in were so foreign and incomprehensible to the truth seekers that the truth seekers figured that the Other was disconnected from their humanity and living barbaric, animalistic lives. The truth they were seeking was supposed to be removed from experience but instead ended up being dependent on it. The truth seekers truly became colonists when they denied the Other their humanity and then used that as justification for cultural domination. The colonists felt that the Other’s “lack of” humanity not only gave them the right to control them, to control how they lived, but also that it obligated them to change it, as shown with the construction of schools and churches so that the Other could be educated in the ways of being “civilized humans,” ones in possession of their humanity.

The truth seekers were no longer truth seekers. They moved away from the pursuit of the truth of human beings, one that encompasses all expressions of it, and asserted their own humanism as truth. Maybe it seemed that in asserting their truth they were establishing the Truth, but they were really just denying the existence of other truths. It was as if their way of life was threatened by the existence of other ways of being human; as if their acceptance of the Other’s humanism was somehow a denial of their own. This idea that difference is threatening is dangerous. It allows one to care less if something different from one ceases to exist, if cultures that are opaque to one cease to exist. Not only does it grant a lack of caring, but it also promotes the notion that universalization ought to be what one strives for. This idea is a threat to the multiplicity of culture.

According to Glissant, “[b]efore being perceived as the thing urging us into community, culture calls to mind what it is that divides us from all otherness” (Glissant 161). Culture thus unites a community and separates it from others, and this separation is based on the fact that the way one behaves is different within each culture. In *All Things Shining*, Hubert L. Dreyfus explains how it is that culture governs everyday behavior:

The way of life of a culture is not an explicit set of beliefs held by the people living in it. It is much deeper than that. A person brought up in a culture learns its way of life the way he learns to speak in the language and with the accent of his family and peers. But a way of life is much broader than this. It involves a sense for how it is appropriate and inappropriate to act in each of the social situations one normally encounters; a familiarity with how to make sense of things and of how to act in the everyday world; and most general of all, a style, such as aggressive or nurturing, that governs the actions of the people in the culture although they are not normally aware of it. We can think of it as a cultural commitment that, to govern people’s behavior, must remain in the background, unnoticed but pervasive and real (Dreyfus 14).

The significance of the way of life as determined by culture is laid out beautifully here by Dreyfus. He aptly explains that a way of life is something one is socialized into that allows one to make sense of one’s world and determines the standards for action. For example, the practices of the truth seekers were not fit to orient them to the world of the Other. Furthermore, the truth seekers deemed the practices of the Other as inappropriate according to their own way of life.

It is important to note that a way of life is a cultural commitment. Cultural commitments are not explicitly made because one does not choose to commit to a specific culture. One is born into a culture and thus it is not something one chooses, but rather something one embodies. It is considered a commitment because participation within the culture gives one a role, an identity of belonging to that culture. In *Background Practices*, Dreyfus explains that this identity gives one reasons and motivations for acting, and participating in the practices of that culture fortifies that

identity (Dreyfus 8). By continuing to participate, a person is committing to the culture. This commitment is not born out of a consciously made choice but rather is continued because it has significance to one by being the source of an aspect of one's identity. One does not have to choose to be apart of the culture that one is socialized into and that provides one with motivations and standards for action. These motivations and standards operate in the background; they facilitate one's participation in cultural practices without raising awareness that one is acting in a particular way that specifically fits that culture.

There arises a threat to these cultural commitments, and thus cultural integrity, when cultures are not allowed to be deviant. When intolerance is at work, one way of life is threatened by another to the point of extinction. Coexisting cultures must preserve their own cultural integrity, and perpetuate the meaning of their cultural practices, which they achieve by keeping those practices relevant. Practices are kept relevant as long as people participate in it; once people stop participating in that practice, it becomes irrelevant and usually meaningless as well. According to Dreyfus, a practice is a structure, which skills allow one to participate in. The structure is a particular way of organizing the world in such a way that activities are intelligible to us. The structure of a practice is embodied in the people possessing the skills to perform the actions of the practice; it is grounded in the existence of the necessary equipment; it involves an element of social recognition. The element of social recognition is marked by the shared language, the status one takes upon oneself when participating in it; furthermore, in participating in a practice, you are joining with others in a common task (Dreyfus 6, 7).

Whereas practices allow one to understand certain actions and situations, background practices allow one to understand the world in general. One is socialized into background

practices; they are shared. It is these practices that allow one to comprehend what an object is, a person, what is real. It is this understanding that determines standards of action, what is correct, and what is intelligible. From this one directs one's action towards people, things, and situations. The structure of background practices is the same as that of a regular practice, but the goals are communally shared. Background practices make cultures comprehensible, defining what it means to be a human being (Dreyfus 9).

Understanding of being is unstable because it is grounded in unfixed practices; they are variable. This is how so many different cultures can exist, by each having their own background practices and possessing different understandings of being. Each culture also has its own practices that make the culture itself intelligible to the people participating in it. Within these cultural practices, the shared language is the language that is spoken by the people within it, as opposed to a specific subset of it. The status is one of belonging to that culture. The equipment is the food, clothing, jewelry, tools, etc, used by that culture. Cultural practices are also learned skills, such as cooking.

People acquire the necessary skills to participate in a practice by learning from others. In this, there is the idea that there is a proper and improper performance, the difference between which is learned when learning the skills (Dreyfus 7). This makes practices subject to the normative order, in the sense that practices can be ranked on a scale of good to bad, or proper to improper. The normative order also extends outside of practices, affecting cultures. Cultures are ranked according to whether their practices are deemed proper or improper. However, given that the standard of proper performance is dependent on how one learns a practice, what is improper amongst one culture is proper in another. Thus, the ranking is rather arbitrary. There is another

ranking amongst cultures in which, rather than having their individual practices and values ranked and determining the rank of the culture from there, a culture's ranking is dependent on its possession of a hierarchical arrangement of practices. In this form of ranking, there exists the belief that performing in one cultural practice is more valuable than performing in another. One example is that being a warrior is more valuable within a culture than being a scholar. Not all cultures possess this kind of ranking and not possessing a hierarchical arrangement of this sort makes a culture Ranking is not inevitable due to the normative order but it is made possible by it.

Within the system of ranking, it appears to be acceptable for "lesser" cultures to be consigned to oblivion because they are not seen as necessary. A culture, however, is indispensable to the people belonging to it and crucial to other cultures. According to Glissant, each culture finds its identity not only within itself but also within the Other (Glissant 18). This implies that with each occurrence of contact, in which there is an exchange with the Other, a culture has a better understanding of itself. This exchange is not monetary or material; it is a cultural exchange. Through this exchange, cultures move and change: "It is at their undefinable limits, through 'precipitate contact,' that cultures move" (Glissant 163). Cultural interaction is the initiator of cultural alterations.

Glissant states, "We agree that the extinction of any language at all impoverishes everyone," and this is a statement one ought to agree with (Glissant 95). Each language brings out a different aspect of the situation in the way that each expresses meaning in different ways. The loss of a language could be the loss of a perspective. Furthermore, language is undeniably linked to culture, each having either its own language or its own language variation. The loss of a

language could indicate the loss of a culture, or it could signal an assimilation, in which the culture is not entirely lost but has lost an elemental feature that made it opaque to all others.

With the loss of one culture, all miss the chance to better understand themselves and go through some change that would be a result of their interaction with the lost culture. It is, in part, from a cultural exchange that cultures change and develop. Secondly, they all lose a piece in the puzzle that is the world, for it is quite an impossible task to attain an understanding of the world with only a single culture as one's basis. Lastly, through every loss, each cross-cultural interaction becomes more intolerant. The standards for action, how one ought to live and what is appropriate, become a fixed idea. The stabilization of a concept such as this one, which is not meant to be immutable, makes it harder for cultures that do not "fit the mold" to thrive and flourish. Every loss help to facilitate more loss.

Colonization served to reinforce the universal model and it created a situation in which cultures were unable to thrive because they were not granted the right to opacity. Colonization is the action, or process, of settling in an area and establishing control over the indigenous people already present. When a colonizing force establishes control, it replaces the indigenous religions, education systems, and modes of thought, among other things, with its own. Colonization is not just a means of controlling the profits and the land of the indigenous peoples, but also the people themselves, controlling what they do, how they do it, and even why they do it. The colonial situation nullifies cultural significance and creates an environment in which no culture can thrive other than that of the colonizers. Any meaning to be found in the practices of the colonized is diminished to nothing because it is lesser than that derived from the practices of the colonizers.

An inherent aspect of colonization is imposed conformity. The colonizing nation imposes its practices, intelligibility, and hierarchical system of ranking as the only worthy ones, the only meaningful ones, and deems all others as unworthy and meaningless, any meaning found in them to be lies. This being the case, their way of acting, their cultural practices, are set as the norm. The colonized cultures are expected to conform to that norm or else risk not being recognized as a culture at all. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon expresses how the colonizers did not recognize individual African nations because they did not see a culture in any of them to distinguish them from each other: “Colonialism, little troubled by nuances, has always claimed that the ‘nigger’ was a savage, not an Angolan or a Nigerian, but a ‘nigger’” (Fanon 150). The colonizers denied them of both their culture and their nationhood, which are linked according to Fanon, because they did not behave as the colonizers did.

Conformity is not inherently a bad thing. Within cultures, people constantly conform to societal norms. This conformity makes them recognizable to others participating in that culture, through which they share that aspect of their identity. Across cultures, conformity does not serve in making a culture recognizable to people from other cultures; it only causes the conforming culture to lose its opacity, effectively restricting it. It is through conformity that cultural practices become obsolete. A culture’s practices are what distinguish it from other cultures. Conformity entails a lack of distinction, and so the distinguishing, opaque practices cease to be performed, becoming obsolete. Furthermore, the cultures imposing this cultural conformity do not feel the loss of cultures as they should, and thus do nothing to help prevent those other cultures from being totally lost.

In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon reports that in African nations colonizers spread the rumor that all their traditions were evil and that their leaders had never been holy or royal. In some cases, the people began to lose the meaning in their practices. By preaching that the practices of the colonized were lesser, the colonizers had established a system of ranking in which the colonizing nation was always prioritized. This incentivized the colonized to adopt practices that only had meaning in that they could make them part of the number one. This has the effect of leveling the cultures of colonized nations. They all share the status of “not number one.”

According to Fanon, the first way the colonizers attempted to maintain control in the land of the colonized was by telling them that their nation was severely underdeveloped and needed major reforms to address their socio-economic problems (Fanon 146). Furthermore, they aimed to convince the colonized that before colonialism they had been living barbaric lives and that, were they to leave, they would revert to their savage ways (Fanon 149). The colonists portrayed colonized society as representing an absence of values, in fact, as being an enemy of values, absolute evil: “Values are, in fact, irreversibly poisoned and infected as soon as they come in contact with the colonized. The customs of the colonized, their traditions, their myths, especially their myths, are the very mark of this indigence and innate depravity” (Fanon 7). By categorizing the way of life of the colonized as being an enemy of values, it negated the idea that they even possessed values at all. The colonizers had a system of values and rankings that the colonized did not, and they used their possession of the system to hold themselves above the colonized.

The system of ranking the colonizers employed was necessary in order for colonization to continue to exist in those lands, and for the colonizers to justify their place as superiors in a land

that is foreign to them, which they properly ought to have no right to govern. The colonized were judged based on their development and on their system of values, or their culture, for without values there can be no culture. Through their advanced devices, and their rational thinking, which they did not see the colonized as having attained, the colonists ranked themselves above the colonized under the category of development. Through their denial of any culture being possessed by the colonized, the colonists ranked themselves above the colonized under the category of values. This system of ranking was imposed and maintained by the colonists, and it was they who decided where one falls in the ranking. This system, once put in place to rank cultures, increases intolerance and makes acceptable the loss of “lesser” cultures, and possibly even accelerates the process.

Fortunately for the colonized, the colonizers are incapable of maintaining the lie that they were there to help those supposed under-developed, cultureless nations because the colonizers could never truly provide the colonized with the material conditions that would allow them to overlook the fact that they were being ruled by a foreign people and relinquishing their meaningful practices. The colonized intellectual, once coming to the realization that he had been told a lie, worked to debunk the idea that his people had no culture prior to colonialism. He worked hard to debunk this lie because he felt that he was losing himself. He showed this to be a lie by studying the history of all African nations and unveiling old customs and traditions that predate colonization and prove that there was an African culture that had never died. This quest into the past affected the psychology of the colonized intellectual. Since the colonized intellectual had internalized the claims of the colonizers, that his way of life before colonization

had been barbaric and evil, by finding a magnificent culture that he could claim, he was able to redeem himself in his own eyes (Fanon 147-8).

The culture that the colonized intellectual claimed is not his national culture but rather a continental one. This is because colonization was not limited to nations. The colonizers did not recognize the different nations and their various cultures, therefore, they did not believe any culture to hold sway over any of them. The culture of colonized was not granted the right to opacity to the extent that his culture was not recognized at all. It would have been a different matter had the colonizers accepted that the colonizers had cultures that were merely incomprehensible to outsiders; instead, the unintelligibility of the practices of the colonized for the colonizers made it so they were denied a culture altogether. And so, since the colonizers refused to admit the colonized possessed any culture, the colonized intellectual responded by presenting a culture that was continental in scale. He took practices from various nations and mixed them together (Fanon 150).

Fanon claims that this attempt to push for an African culture, or a Negro culture, proved futile because the colonized intellectual eventually realized that every culture is national, each having fundamentally different problems (Fanon 154). It is the problems each nation faces that determine the culture that arises, for it is “the struggle for nationhood that unlocks culture and opens the doors of creation” (Fanon 177). The assertion of culture does not produce a nation, but the struggle against occupying forces does (Fanon 159). Through making themselves distinct during this struggle, asserting what they are in order to make clear what they are not, what is worth fighting for and the reasons they value those things, the fighting peoples produce and establish their culture. A liberated nation is necessary for that culture to flourish. Fanon states,

“National culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong” (Fanon 168). The struggle for nationhood informs that thought process. In the fight for nationhood, the colonized intellectual moved from writing with the colonizer as his audience to writing with his people as his audience, thus rather than imitating the colonizer’s literature he made an effort in particularizing, from which he produced “combat literature,” called such “because it informs the national consciousness, gives it shape and contours, and opens up new, unlimited horizons” (Fanon 173). Through combat literature, or national literature, the colonized intellectual disclosed the nation that the colonized were struggling to bring into existence.

National liberation is decolonization. Decolonization “sets out to change the order of the world” (Fanon 2). It is an absolute substitution of power. Through this process, the colonized take the place of the colonists but do not wish to become colonists themselves (Fanon 16). In Fanon’s words, “It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men” (Fanon 2). It liberates the colonized and gives them the ability and opportunity to establish a new way of life, to reinvent themselves.

Decolonization begins once the colonized are reminded of their humanity and commit themselves to ensuring that it is recognized through any, and every, means, including violence. When decolonization was on the brink, when the people were about to spring into violence, it was the political leaders who were supposed to pacify them (Fanon 22, 24). The tension that built right before the people erupted was felt by all: it was in the way the colonized regarded each other compared with how they regarded the colonists. With their fellow nationalists, they were

open and transparent, but with the colonists, they were opaque and indecipherable (Fanon 14). The colonists were aware that a process of change was beginning. Silence fell when they approached. They were looked upon with hostility by the colonized. The nationalist parties called for more meetings, and the colonists moved to display their military might. In reacting to the hostility with a show of force, the colonists only heightened the aggression felt by the colonized. Violence erupts when a gun goes off on its own because everyone's nerves are on edge, and they're a bit more trigger-happy (Fanon 31, 32).

According to Fanon, decolonization is always a violent process. Violence is necessary because colonialism is "naked violence," and it only yields when faced with greater violence (Fanon 23). It is the method that had been used on them and the colonized learned from that and employed that method:

The existence of an armed struggle is indicative that the people are determined to put their faith only in violent methods. The very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves with force. In fact the colonist has always shown them the path they should follow to liberation. The argument chosen by the colonized was conveyed to them by the colonist, and by an ironic twist of fate it is now the colonized who state that it is the colonizer who only understands the language of force. The colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time does it ever endeavor to cover up this nature of things (Fanon 42).

Violence is used to remove the colonial powers, but it also unifies the colonized and mobilizes them towards the same goal. It is "a cleansing force". It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex" (Fanon 50, 51). The Western values imposed upon them are rendered irrelevant when faced with the "real life struggle in which the people are engaged" (Fanon 11). By using force,

the colonized are able to take back control of their land, which is a necessity for their culture, which was stifled under colonial rule, to grow and flourish.

This violence was always there, teeming beneath the surface. It was established by the colonists, in the force they used as a way to control the colonized (Fanon 2). Every colonized person, who was determined to take their place of power, felt the presence of this violence. The colonized subject felt the presence of violence because the identity imposed upon him is teeming with it. The colonists proclaimed that the colonized subject only understood violence and so his identity, an invention of the colonists, embodies it. At first, the colonized redirected that violence and channeled it through other mediums. The colonized subject begins by directing his anger at his fellow man. Fanon claims that this allowed him to pretend colonialism never existed and everything was as it was, a time when he only defended his personality and not his culture (Fanon 17).

Decolonization began when the colonized aimed their violence towards the colonist and the goal of kicking them out and taking their place. According to Fanon, there was no room for peaceful coexistence. Decolonization must be a complete substitution. The colonists were never going to grant the colonized their right to opacity and so the colonized had to create the situation where they could reclaim it themselves, a situation not under the rule of the colonists. Glissant agrees with this use of force (Glissant 19). The colonized subject needed to create a situation for himself that allotted his culture the right to opacity so that it could flourish and thrive. Glissant often mentions the Creole language, which formed within the colonial situation in such a way that the colonized had a language that the French colonists could not understand because it was a confusion of French itself mixed with remnants from uprooted African languages (Glissant 97).

The formation of this language is an example of the colonized becoming more opaque to the colonists as a way of asserting their cultural identity. Glissant, however, does not forget that this Creole language is fragile and under risk of collapse at any time (Glissant 93).

Decolonization does not end when the colonists go back to their countries of origin. Glissant claims that decolonization will only be truly finished once the colonized form an identity that is not limited to being in opposition with the other (Glissant 17). When the physical situation of colonization is over, its effects on the colonized subject's identity still remain. The colonized were forced into a long and painful quest, searching for an identity that was opposed to the colonial power, but it needed to be formed around more than opposition if it was to persist when colonization ended.

Since the colonized did not destroy the system of ranking put in place under colonial rule, they built their nation within the framework the colonists had established (Fanon 35). In his book, *Poetics of Relation*. Glissant expresses this same sentiment: "Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power—the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root—rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other" (Glissant 14). Colonizing nations possessed this totalitarian root and the colonized adopted it. It is the totalitarian root that does not accept difference, that calls for universalization and transparency. The colonists declared their root to be the strongest, and all other roots were compared to it. They assigned value to those roots, the greater value being those that were most similar to their own. A culture formed around this kind of root is unable to extend its identity through a relationship with the Other and only seeks to take over everything around it, making everything more like itself.

Roots develop through nationhood and settlement, but during nation building, the people are not yet settled. In the colonial situation, the colonized people were not without a nation, but, rather, they did not have access to its controls (Glissant 19); therefore, they were not in a state of exile, a term Glissant coins, which is a state of rootlessness (Glissant 11). Exile occurs when the individual is separated or cut off from the root. During the process of decolonization, however, the liberated people did not simply return to their pre-colonial nations but rather rebuilt their nations, during which time they were in a state of exile because they were not yet settled.

This process of nation building also includes rebuilding their cultural identity, during which time, instead of forming around a totalitarian root, mimicking the colonizers, the liberated people should have entered into a state of errantry, which is also a state of rootlessness (Glissant 18). When errant, the individual strives to understand the world, knowing he never will, and accepts difference without generalizing, which is totalitarian in the way that it promotes one set of ideas and tries to make that set into the model that all others are supposed to follow (Glissant 20). When errant the colonized could have found a new kind of root to form around rather than perpetuating that of the colonizers.

With the existence of totalitarian roots and the system of ranking established by the colonists, the multiplicity of cultures is in danger. As long as a system of ranking is in place, especially one that holds a specific kind of culture as the ideal, cultures are not granted their right to opacity. A system of ranking will remain in place, or continue to be established, as long as cultures form around a totalitarian root. As long as cultures are not granted the right to opacity, new cultures will emerge in the cracks and transformations will occur at a glacial pace. An

explosion of culture and a constant flow of exchange and change allowing cultures to move would be more beneficial to all, but this is impossible until cultures are granted the right to opacity, until the world-wide system of ranking functioning in the background is destroyed and totalitarian roots are abolished.

Chapter 2

Shining in Their Opacity

Glissant begins *Poetics of Relation* by disclosing an aspect of the experience of Africans on slave ships that is rarely considered. When one thinks of what that experience might be, one thinks of their physical experience: being in a dark, damp space that is unfit to contain so many people, this being an understatement, swarming with filth and disease and enclosing the living, dying, and the dead. One, also, might think of their emotional state: frightened about what their future would entail from that point on, confused about what was happening to them and why, angry at the people who put them in that position, sad about the loss of their family, home and friends. Glissant makes different observations, in which he does not cheapen the horror of the events, but rather goes in a direction that is not often ventured.

Glissant talks about the boat with Africans in its belly: “the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out” (Glissant 6). It is an adept description of their situation. They were in a state of exile, of forced rootlessness. When on that boat, they lost all connection with the world they knew, and in doing so lost themselves. Their individual identities were reduced to nothing. The boat for them was a nonworld, in which there are no practices, nothing to help orient them to their new world, nothing to help them form a new identity. By contemporary philosophy, identity is linked to practices, which converge in a myriad of ways to form worlds; one orients oneself in the world through its practices, which give one a role that becomes a factor of one’s identity. As a nonworld, the belly of the boat is a “womb abyss,” that expels like wombs tend to do, in which there is only the unknown. The experience of exile, of the loss of identity in that nonworld, is suffered alone, but they “share in the unknown,”

becoming a community of sorts (Glissant 6). The feature of this abyss that links it to the unknown is absence: the absence of a world, of an identity, of a sense of place.

There is another abyss that Glissant talks of, but no one comes out of this one. It is the bottom of the ocean, to which some slaves sunk as a result of being thrown overboard as a way to lighten the load when the slave ships were being chased. This abyss, like the boat, was conjoined to the unknown, functioning as a new beginning without end, for the ocean is only ever a beginning, one that is restored with every wave crashing against the shore (Glissant 6). There is no possible future from this abyss.

The third abyss, which parallels that of the ocean, is the projected image of what they left behind, what is never to be regained, and what from then on can only exist in memory or imagination. This projected image, too, is part of the unknown on the grounds that it is not a fixed image; memory and imagination are fickle, allowing the image to present in a variety of ways. Consequently, it cannot be said that this image is known, hence it is linked to the unknown.

Glissant claims that the experience of the abyss, specifically the unconscious memory of it, permitted the populations that formed to generate a sail, constructed from the metamorphoses of those experiences: “the panic of the new land, the haunting of the former land, finally the alliance with the imposed land” (Glissant 7). These experiences were linked by the unknown, which allowed the one to morph into the next. They used this sail to rise up on the new land, rather than return to the former (Glissant 7).

This experience of going to the abyss grants one knowledge of what Glissant calls “the Whole,” in particular, knowledge of Relation within the Whole: “Thus, the absolute unknown,

projected by the abyss and bearing into eternity the womb abyss and the infinite abyss, in the end became knowledge” (Glissant 8). Each abyss, the womb abyss of the boat and the infinite abyss of the ocean and projected image, is connected to the unknown, and through the unknown, are linked together, allowing the unknown to project from one to the other. The shared aspect of the unknown, present amongst the womb abyss and infinite abyss, as well as among those in the belly of the slave ships, becomes knowledge of Relation on the basis that Relation is made up of shared knowledge. After being expelled from the abyss and weaving that sail, which transitions them out of a state of exile and allows them to explore and establish new roots, this knowledge permits them to live Relation and clear the way for it. By living Relation, “We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone” (Glissant 9). From the experience of sharing in the unknown, those in the belly of the slave ships recognize that they are not individuals alone, but part of a crowd. They then act accordingly, not cutting themselves off from the Other but rather joining with them in Relation, setting an example for the rest to come.

The first thing one must understand about Relation is that it is constantly evolving and has no end; it is newness (Glissant 177). Relation can be thought of as totality in motion; totality consisting of all the elements and forms of expression of humanity (Glissant 94). Relation is thus the motion of all the elements and forms of expression; “what the world makes and expresses of itself.” It is “a product that in turn produces” (Glissant 160). Therefore, when speaking of Relation, it is not a matter of considering a relationship between elements, but rather the entire system of their involvement, totality.

The totality in which Relation functions is not totalitarian, “not imposed a priori, not fixed as an absolute” (Glissant 134). Totality is open and evolving, though at a much slower rate than Relation, hence its definition cannot be approached. The idea of totality, however, “is an obstacle to totality” (Glissant 192). The idea is fixed and approachable, verging on the totalitarian, which is fixed and possesses a definition that can be approached (Glissant 171). In Relation, it is not towards the absolute that every work aims, for that would be totalitarian (Glissant 35). Nor is it the case that the whole, the totality, is “the finality of its parts” (Glissant 192). Such a concept implies that totality possesses an end, which again verges on the totalitarian, for ends are approachable.

Relation opposes totalitarianism (Glissant 19), which seeks out the absolute towards which all else would strive, and in so doing, produces intolerances. Furthermore, it is monolingual in its intent. Relation, on the other hand, is a system that frees one from the absolute’s intolerances (Glissant 27) and is spoken multilingually (Glissant 19). Within Relation, all languages are spoken because each brings out a different element of totality. Furthermore, no language is allowed to be dominant, for that domination would be totalitarian in intention and bring about intolerance. Relation is able to rid one of intolerance because it functions on the basis that “the Other is within us and affects how we evolve as well as the bulk of our conceptions and the development of our sensibility” (Glissant 27). It is important to note that the “thought of the Other” does not permit this influence. This “thought” can reside within one without causing an effect, without causing a change within oneself. The “the other of Thought,” on the other hand, does allow the Other to be an influencer by changing one’s thought, causing one to act and change (Glissant 154). Intolerance of the Other is not possible in a system that

accepts that the Other is both an influencer and within one, and therefore, not possible within Relation.

Through Relation, forms of humanity diversify “according to infinite strings of models infinitely brought into contact and relayed” (Glissant 160). In this context, “forms of humanity” are cultures. Through every contact amongst cultures, Relation is produced, and in turn produces more newness, more forms of humanity, more cultures. It is important to note that within Relation all cultures are equal; it could not be otherwise. If cultures were unequal, there would be a value, a ranking, to each exchange and change that would limit the metamorphosis commenced by each interaction.

Relation functions both within the internal relationship, cultures being affected by their own components, and the external relationship, cultures affecting each other, and these two relationships often affect each other; the internal relationship being altered by the external and vice versa (Glissant 169). Relation not only consists of these relationships but also “some marvelous accident that might suddenly occur apart from any relationship, the known unknown, in which chance would be the magnet” (Glissant 171). Relation is more than just the interaction of cultures; it also encompasses the changes in cultures that can only be attributed to chance, for chance is part of totality. The change that culture undergoes as a result of a chance event affects how it functions within Relation.

The elements that enter Relation are never prime elements that could be separated or reduced. If this were the case, Relation itself could be broken down (Glissant 172). Nonprime elements cannot be reduced, but they can either be approached or imagined. The nonprime elements that enter Relation are only those that are imagined. If the elements that entered

Relation could be approached, Relation itself would be approachable. Relation cannot be approached because that would limit its totality, and such a limitation would turn it towards the totalitarian which it opposes. The nonprime elements that enter Relation are cultures; it is not possible to break a culture down to its most basic parts without losing an important feature essential to its understanding (Glissant 169-171). Glissant states, “The thing that makes the understanding of every culture limitless is precisely the thing that allows us to imagine, without approaching it, the infinite interaction of cultures” (Glissant 172, 173). There is a limitless understanding of each culture because each is irreducible, its understanding is infinite, and because of this quality, the interaction of cultures is infinite as well.

The contact of cultures serves as the source of Relation, every confluence adding to this synthesis-genesis system. The “*échos-monde*” is formed by every individual and every community so that they can “cope with or express confluences” (Glissant 93), and it allows them “to sense and cite the cultures of peoples” (Glissant 94) within those confluences. The globality of these confluences organizes the “*chaos-monde*,” the aesthetics of which is that of the universe cleared of a priori values. This aesthetics “is totality’s act and its fluidity, totality’s reflection and agent in motion” (Glissant 94). Relation is totality in motion, making it “the *chaos-monde* relating (to itself)” (Glissant 94). This is not a closed circle, in which there is no change and the thing being related remains constant because every interaction brings a newness to be related.

Glissant does not clearly state what Relation is because its definition can only ever be imagined (Glissant 171). A definition makes something fixed, makes it approachable. This is not possible with Relation. Though Glissant does mention that analyzing its components, the internal

and external relationships, the cultures, etc, helps one to better understand the nonprime elements of totality and allows one to imagine better (Glissant 170).

Given that Relation can never be approached, because its totality is infinite, it cannot be “proved.” There are no adequate examples that could be used as evidence because any example can only represent one aspect, or area, of Relation, and can never encompass its totality; therefore, any example presented as evidence would give a false level of importance to that perspective as well a misleading perception of the relationships within Relation. Furthermore, any analysis or description of Relation only adds to it, and thus can not serve as a tool to prove it. Although it can not be approached and proved, Relation can be imagined (Glissant 174). Through imagination, Relation’s totality can be envisioned in its entirety, for the realm of imagination is open and limitless; imagining Relation thus allows it to remain open.

This imaginary realm is accessed through a poetics, a type of poetry (Glissant 154). This poetry is a device that conveys poetic knowledge in a way one can comprehend. Poetic knowledge is the sort that never becomes obsolete or antiquated (Glissant 81). Knowledge of Relation is a poetic knowledge because the nonexistence of Relation is impossible, thus the necessity for knowledge concerning Relation will always exist. There are many types of poetics; the type that grants access to the imaginary realm of Relation is the poetics of Relation.

The poetics of Relation attempts to convey knowledge of Relation. There is no assumption of a stable ideology since the knowledge being conveyed, of Relation, is forever incomplete. It is “latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible” (Glissant 32). The poetics of Relation is latent in the sense that it is not yet “developed,” but this is because it is constantly developing. The result of this perpetual state of

in-development is the openness of this poetics; it expands as Relation proliferates with no goal in sight. Since it follows Relation, which functions on the basis of interaction, this poetics attempts to connect with whatever Relation comes in contact with. Like Relation, it is multilingual in the sense that it is spoken in all languages and does not allow anyone language to become dominant. The only way for a poetics to come close to imparting knowledge on such a thing like Relation is to mimic its behavior. Relation is latent, open, directly in contact with everything possible, and multilingual, and so the poetics of Relation must be or try to be, as well.

Prior to Relation, there existed a series of trajectories of poetic thought. Poetic thought has no aim or intention, but it still travels, connecting to and extending itself through the world and other thoughts. The projection of these trajectories was initiated by the threat of domination. These trajectories connect the world, making it a whole that is comprised of peripheries and a Center, which functions as the locus of cultural power. The first projects from the Center to the peripheries. Those in the center wrote and thought about those living on the peripheries.

The second projects from the peripheries to the Center. The poets who were born, or lived, in the peripheries imagined the Center, attempting to assimilate in order to partake in the power that influenced their culture. The actions of Fanon's colonized intellectual, before he begins to participate in the struggle for liberation, are a prime example of this trajectory: "the colonized intellectual proves he has assimilated the colonizer's culture. His works correspond point by point with those of his metropolitan counterparts. The inspiration is European and his works can be easily linked to a well-defined trend in metropolitan literature" (Fanon 159). His work is an attempt to mimic the Center.

This mimicry of metropolitan literature undergoes a metamorphosis, however, once the colonized intellectual begins to purposefully engage in the struggle for liberation: “the colonized intellectual, after having tried to lose himself among the people, with the people, will rouse the people. Instead of letting the people’s lethargy prevail, he turns into a galvanizer of the people. Combat literature, revolutionary literature, national literature emerges” (Fanon 159). The colonized intellectual stops upholding the Center as the focus of cultural power; his combat literature works to make a center of his periphery. The trajectory, that went from the margins to the Center, turns into one that goes from periphery to periphery, turning each one into a center. With each periphery as a center, each possesses its own hub of cultural power. This power is not centralized in any location, such as lying within the culturally and geographically distant Center. The Center is destroyed. This circular trajectory, not leading or stemming from the Center, abolishes the previous straightforward model, those trajectories that go between the Center and the margins in both directions. At some point after this circular trajectory was established, “By itself and in itself Relation exploded like a network inscribed within the totality of the world” (Glissant 29). The circular trajectory that allowed each periphery to be realized as a center is exactly the process that needed to happen in order for Relation to emerge.

Relation existed when colonization took place; however, colonization refuted the notion that the Other is a valuable and significant influencer and fabricated the belief that there is no value in an exchange. Colonization went further than this in disrupting Relation: it attempted to expel the perception that one understands oneself as part and as crowd. According to Fanon, the colonists taught the colonized intellectual that the individual is preeminent and paramount and that they lived in “a society of individuals where each is locked in his subjectivity, where wealth

lies in thought” (Fanon 11). The colonized intellectual, however, realized that those teachings were false through their participation in the struggle: “Involvement in the organization of the struggle will already introduce him to a different vocabulary. ‘Brother,’ ‘sister,’ ‘comrade’ [...]” (Fanon 11). He was able to dispel the notion of a society of individuals, each standing as his own tower, in favor of the idea of a community, allowing him to recognize himself as part and as crowd.

Colonization served as a relapse, during which the Center reemerged, and it is not the first relapse Relation has suffered, for the Center reappears in every instance that an empire arises, and for each of these occurrences, barring the first, Relation already existed and was ignored, allowing the domination of the empire to keep from collapse, which would have happened had Relation been recalled. Colonization is merely the most recent of these relapses. Possibly in this instance, more than in any other, the denial of opacity was explicit; assimilation was not an option, but a command.

The right to opacity, according to Glissant, “would be the real foundation of Relation, in freedoms” (Glissant 190). This is not merely a right to difference, but to irreducible particulars that outsiders are incapable of comprehending. Relation is a never-ending system of exchange and change, synthesis and genesis. Only particulars have something to exchange and initiate change within the Other. By this same logic, distancings, separations, distinctions are both necessary to and dependent on Relation (Glissant 157). By denying opacity, dominant cultures are essentially attempting to interrupt Relation, albeit unintentionally, by demanding transparency and calling for universality. Such an interruption, luckily, is impossible; there will always be an exchange and change, a synthesis and genesis. The result, thus, is not an

interruption of Relation but a decline in its activity; rather than producing an explosion of culture, it is only able to help cultures, newness, spring from the cracks.

If opacity was permitted, Relation could produce that explosion, particularity would be promoted as opposed to universality, and it would not be necessary for the Other to conform:

I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to “make” him in my image (Glissant 193).

Dominant cultures, especially those in the West, deny opacity to others and yet keep it for themselves, maintaining a distance that permits them to uphold a position of power. During colonization, the colonists did not seek to be one and the same with the colonizers, but over time the notion of a universal solidarity developed in order to continue to advocate for transparency and universalization. It is a common misconception, perpetuated by Western philosophy, that in order to have a valuable exchange with the other and to build with him, one must be able to understand him completely, that they must be transparent to each other. However, in Relation, transparency hinders the exchange and comprehending the other is not necessary; it is opacity that facilitates exchange, and it is the recognition that the other is just as opaque to him as he is to the other that helps foster solidarity. The one and the other exist as part and as crowd, with the parts recognizing each other as parts but not discerning more than this.

In order for Relation to function efficiently again, everyone must be made aware of it; it is no longer enough for cultures to be aware of it unconsciously. The way to do this is to imagine it. According to Glissant, “imagination changes mentalities” (Glissant 183). The change is a gradual process but a necessary one for metamorphoses to occur in and amongst cultures.

However, as long as a culture possesses a totalitarian root, its people can not imagine Relation; the thing they imagine leads to the totalitarian rather than to totality because the totalitarian root will cause them to misjudge the significance of particular cultures, especially their own (Glissant 171). It is not necessary for every individual to imagine Relation. That is not what is meant here by “its people.” It is not the individual people but the culture as a whole that must be able to accept its place within Relation, and accept the effects Relation will help produce within it, and in so doing will be able to imagine it.

These cultures possessing a totalitarian root, are actors in Relation but they cannot participate. Every culture is an active relay in Relation, acting within it whether they want to or not: “A particular culture can pretend to function off on the sidelines [...], but it nonetheless plays a part—because things could not be otherwise—as an active relay of Relation” (Glissant 176, 177). Playing a part is not optional; with regards to Relation, it is the only way things could be. Totalitarian cultures are not self-sidelined, but they do not consent to Relation, secluding themselves. Glissant provides an example of such a culture: “The racist Boers of South Africa are in seclusion there. [...], and they are unable to consent to the approaches of Relation” (Glissant 201). This inability to consent only makes it so they can not participate, but they are still active relays in Relation. Although they do not allow for a change to occur within them from an exchange with the Other, their action still enters into Relation, allowing the Other, that recognizes Relation, to change from the exchange. They are actors but not participants. The totalitarian root has put them on a trajectory of dominance, it is one-tracked and linear, and the culture can not participate in Relation, cannot “give-on-and-with,” benefiting from exchange and

change until they disengage from that trajectory and accept the global dynamic (Glissant 33). It is the act of giving-on-and-with that makes a culture a participant in Relation.

In discussing the relation between the totalitarian and Relation, Glissant states:

The totalitarian is introduced into relation on the basis of some nonprime element (violence, for example, or race) whose definition is overdetermined but knowledge of which, nonetheless, has limits. This totalitarian relation is, in turn, approachable, but its definition cannot be imagined. Because one cannot imagine a relation—open—among elements the knowledge of which has boundaries. Totality, on the other hand, like Relation, is not approached, but its definition is imaginable (Glissant 171).

The totalitarian does not enter Relation, but rather relation, the difference being that the latter is approachable and the former not. The knowledge of the totalitarian has limits, it can be approached. Relation only partakes of what cannot be approached, what is limitless; therefore, the totalitarian is not a part of Relation. The elements working in Relation are nonprime elements that can only be imagined, whereas the elements that enter relation are nonprime elements that can be approached, and are thus unable to be imagined. The totalitarian can enter relation because it is a nonprime element, but it cannot enter Relation because it is the kind that cannot be imagined. Therefore, even cultures possessing a totalitarian root are elements of Relation because they are nonprime elements that cannot be approached. Although their root is totalitarian, the understanding of these cultures remains limitless, for the understanding is not limited by the root. Any contact made through their intolerances, however, will result in violence (Glissant 144). The totalitarian root must be abolished in favor of the rhizome.

Cultures possessing a totalitarian root must abolish it, replacing it with the rhizome, a root system, a notion established by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The rhizome has no dominating roots, is anticonformist, and each root is extended through another. For Glissant,

“Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (Glissant 11). Relation can be seen as a rhizomatic root system that spans the entire world. If “root” is taken to be identity, then a culture formed around a rhizome possesses multiple identities that are augmented through a relationship with the Other.

The idea of the rhizome is very similar to Dreyfus’s theory of a plurality of unranked worlds, in which one equally embraces a multitude of worlds that each brings out a new perspective on being human. The worlds, as perceived through robust realism, are unranked, that way no one perspective is dominant. Each world is equal, but not leveled. When one is participating in a world, that world shines, but the perspective that comes from it is not more valuable than that coming from any other world. Within a plurality of unranked worlds, every perspective comes together, not combining, but each adding to and being affected by the other. It would then seem that in forming around the rhizome, a culture is adopting a plurality of unranked... cultures, in which it is ways of being human that come together to inform each other. In *Retrieving Realism*, Dreyfus expands on the theory of a plurality of unranked worlds, calling it “*pluralistic robust realism*”:

That is, there may be (1) multiple ways of interrogating reality (that’s the ‘plural’ part), which nevertheless (2) reveal truths independent of us, that is, truths that require us to revise and adjust our thinking to grasp them (and that’s the robust realist part), and where (3) all attempts fail to bring the different ways of interrogating reality into a single mode of questioning that yields a unified picture or theory (so they stay plural) (Dreyfus 154).

Pluralistic robust realism maintains the notion that each world discloses a different reality while highlighting that these different realities need not be unified, and furthermore, that such

unification may be impossible. Yet it is what makes this unification impossible that requires one to readjust one's thinking in order to accept each individual perspective.

Relation and pluralistic robust realism are similar on a number of accounts. For one, both are open. Relation is a product that produces, one of the things being produced being Relation itself. Its definition is limitless. Likewise, pluralistic robust realism is constantly growing, taking in new perspectives; there is no fixed set of worlds. Secondly, there is no place for ranking in either of them. If ranking functioned in Relation, it would lead to the totalitarian rather than to totality by establishing an absolute value. If ranking functioned in pluralistic robust realism, perspectives could be unified, at the risk of losing truths, in favor of the most valuable, in whatever way that is determined. Thirdly, both perform the action of helping one to not feel lost in the world. It is a tendency to strive to unite varying perspectives, which serves as "the basic way we have of assuring ourselves that we have an optimal grip on everyday reality" (Dreyfus 156). Relation grants one with the understanding of existing as part and as crowd, staving off the feeling of lostness that comes with loneliness and highlighting the shared community. Pluralistic robust realism allows one to develop an optimal grip within each world, negating the need for them to be unified to attain it.

The transition from a totalitarian root to the rhizome requires exile and/or "errantry". Both are states of rootlessness, the former most often forced and the latter usually chosen. Exile can diminish one's sense of identity, much like it did with the Africans on the slave ships, and its experience is incommunicable. The experience of exile on the slave ships was that unshareable suffering. Errantry, on the other hand, can strengthen identity. This is possible because when

errant, one strives to understand the totality of the world, knowing one never will, and in so doing comes to realize that identity exists not only in the root but also Relation.

The experience of errantry is communicable, as well, through the imaginary (Glissant 20). When learning the poetics of Relation one becomes errant because one attempts to learn about Relation, a totality that can never be fully encompassed. Given the description of an errant person, it is clear that learning the poetics of Relation puts one into a state of errantry. A culture possessing a totalitarian root is unlikely to skip to the errant state because it does not seek to understand the world's totality, but rather to control it. More likely than not, such a culture must first be exiled, losing its sense of identity, and from there become errant, seeking the world's totality as a way to re-establish an identity. The ways in which this exile could occur are infinite. Also, it is possible that it does not become errant from this state of exile. It is also possible that the new identity is formed around another totalitarian root. Whatever the outcome, it shall serve as a relay in Relation.

Glissant provides one example of an event that approaches Relation as close as possible: creolization in the Caribbean. Creolization opens a new dimension, from the encounter of different cultures, where there exist a limitless meeting and synthesis; it diffracts, spreading each product of synthesis in a way that does not scatter or mutually dilute them. It is similar to Relation in the sense that "Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures" (Glissant 34). According to Glissant, its most obvious symbol is the Creole language, "the result of both the uprooting of African languages and the deviance of French provincial idioms" (Glissant 97). Creole is always open, only being fixed "according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as define" (Glissant

34). Given that the imaginary is open, the way that the system of variable anchors the Creole language does not detract from the openness of the language. The anchor itself is not even fixed.

Awareness of Relation is the first step, which ideally leads to every culture having and expressing their right to opacity, but this does not guarantee that there will be an explosion of culture, that from every interaction there will be an exchange and change on behalf of all involved. Imagining Relation helps to ensure that the Other is allowed to act as an influencer by changing mentalities; however, this is not enough. Glissant, too, recognizes this: “we must not just imagine totality as we earlier suggested nor simply approach Relation through a displacement of thought; we must also involve this imaginary in the place we live, even if errantry is a part of it” (Glissant 196). The imaginary must be allowed to manifest itself in cultural practices, in the granting of change, in the emergence of newness, be it practices, worlds, languages, cultures, etc. This emergence of newness may require errantry, it may require that one seeks to understand totality, continuing to learn the poetics of Relation as it continuously develops. Glissant claims, “Not knowing this totality is not a weakness. Not wanting to know it certainly is” (Glissant 154). It is not enough to seek to understand totality once and never again. Totality changes and one must strive to understand each new totality. It is acceptable if one never understands as long as one continues to try and involve the imaginary of Relation in the place one lives, living Relation. The moment when one stops seeking to understand Relation is the moment that the totalitarian gains strength, and when the idea of totality begins to settle and become fixed.

Imaginings

The writer sits at her desk, pen in hand, patiently waiting for it to move. She knows that when she writes it is not her that produces the movement, but rather the words that need to be written; they propel forth and the pen glides across the page. When she tries to move the pen herself she finds that she becomes lost in the details and the pen remains immobile.

As she waits, she imagines. The subjects of her imaginations cannot be expressed, even by her, because she does not fixate on any of them. Her imagination is open, elements flowing in and out at will. Some of these elements are reducible, able to be broken down without losing an important feature of its understanding, others are irreducible and cannot be broken down in this way. Some of these elements can be defined, others cannot. All of these pass through the realm of her imagination. She feels her hand begin to move and looks down, focusing on what she wrote. Her hand immediately stops and there is only one word written on the page: *Relation*. She thinks on this word, wondering what it could mean. She wills her imagination to give her more, but this proves futile. She puts the pen down and goes to bed.

As she sleeps, she dreams of a boat that sails off into the great abyss of the unknown. The unknown is a dark void, but it is not feared by the inhabitants of the boat; they bask in it. As the boat disappears from view, many more follow, all forging into and basking in the unknown. She realizes that the first boat was not alone, but part of a crowd, that together shared in the experience of the unknown without fear. She wakes up from her dream, having forgotten about *Relation*, and writes about the boats. She paints a picture with her words of one great big boat,

spanning the limitlessness of the ocean, but if one looks closer, they can see that this big boat is actually constructed of much smaller vessels, connecting in an infinite number of ways to the larger one. Upon each inspection, a new boat is seen, a new connection discerned, and the big boat seems to transform, to morph into something new but still recognizable. She puts her pen down and goes to bed.

That night she dreams of people rooted to the ground, incapable of movement. These people grow upwards, becoming tall and imposing. Surrounding them are a different kind of people. They are also rooted but their roots lie over the earth, connecting to other roots to create a root system. These people are able to move along this root system. Their growth is outward, maneuvering around those imposing people, overlapping or going beneath other roots. The unmoving people are angry; they do not understand why those other people are moving and growing outwardly in their strange way. They see it as an unfit way to live, and so they seek to destroy their root system so that they cannot move so. In so doing, those once moving people are incapable of growing. They try growing upwards but there simply is not enough room; the unmoving people are not willing to share the space.

The writer awakens, covered in sweat, knowing that she had dreamed something horrific. She begins to retell the story of these two groups of people but gets stuck. She wants the moving people to find a way to regrow their roots and restore their ability to move. She wants the unmoving people to cease their imposing ways, but she does not want to erase the people. The problem is she does not know how. Her every attempt does not produce the change she wants for these people. So many outcomes lie on the pages on her desk. She picks up another seemingly blank page, intending to make another attempt. She picks up her pen ready to write and sees that

the page is not blank. On it is written one word: *Relation*. She immediately senses that this word is the key that unlocks the answers she needs, and yet she does not know how.

Little by little, I feed her imagination, for it exists in my own imaginary realm, and my imaginings are its food. I read Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Hubert Dreyfus, and as the Poetics of Relation unfolds for me, the writer dreams. She eventually comes to realize that her dreams are connected. The inhabitants of the boat being the people that moved along a root system, continuously growing outward, expanding the boat. I feed her ideas of opacity and plurality, errantry and exile, worlds and totality, the struggle for liberation. She finds that she has found a way to change the roots of those imposing rooted people: they fall but their roots, which grew up and over everything, begin to grow out, giving-on-and-with those possessing different roots. They all share a root system, but having different points of origin, they all retain their opacity.

Slowly, very slowly, she comes to the realization that she had written her own name: *Relation*. She produces the interactivity of her imagination and it, in turn, produces her. She had forgotten her name with the majority of the rest of the world over the course of colonization, yet it remained with her, incapable of nonexistence. And now it has been recovered to the benefit of us all.

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