

Poetics of the Native

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Edited by

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With an Introduction by Brenda Flanagan

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INTRODUCTION

BRENDA FLANAGAN

“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”.

—Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

To choose an attitude toward interpretation—and therefore toward language—these days is to choose more than just an attitude: it is to choose a politics of reading, it is to choose an ethics of reading.

—Alice Jardine, “Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts”

If we grant the value of Gayatri Spivak’s assertion that any discussion of a politics of reading must begin with an attempt to formulate “a working notion of ideology,” the contributors to this volume of essays, *Poetics of the Native*, have claimed their space in that most contested arena of literary analysis. Coming into print 10 years after what the media called the Arab Spring and what I prefer to view as the North African Uprising, during which the rest of the world paid attention--after years of inattention—to the enflamed consciousness of Tunisians against the politics of repression, the essayists in this volume venture outside of Africa and beyond the Mediterranean to examine and interrogate texts written by authors of African, Indian, and European descent in styles that mainly abrogate adherence to formulaic practices.

Take, for example, Minakshi Carien’s *The Manifesto of the Born* in which we are presented with a pictorial collage of the writer’s journey to Pointe Fouillole, on the French Caribbean island, Guadeloupe, to trace the journey made by thousands of Indian women who were brought to Guadeloupe as indentured laborers in the 1850s. Describing herself as an Indo-Guadeloupean Hindu woman, Carien presents a pictorial diary and an accompanying Manifesto which recoups the image of the Indian indentured female from one bound by servitude and oppression to that of “the warrior woman, the *Shakti* woman, the action woman” who is no longer confined to being only

a mother or a spouse, but a woman who acts, who fights, a woman who takes the goddesses she adores, representative of the figure of the warrior woman, as a role model.

Carien's contribution decolonizes the power of European theoretical models so fervently followed by other academic essayists, and in so doing, she liberates her narrative from the strictures of colonization. Here is the New World writing from a place in North Africa that is seeking to unchain itself from the politics of repression.

In his book, *The Narrative of Liberation*, Taylor reminds us that "Cultural traditions provide meaningful patterns through which members of a community can understand themselves and their world." Comprehending those cultural traditions that are retained in the Caribbean and among the first peoples of America as they appear in works of fiction necessitates an understanding of the people and their histories, not just of subjugation and survival, but of new birth. The essayists in this volume clearly understand this mandate. They enter the clearing with knowledge of Islam and Hinduism that give the texts they interpret what Edouard Glissant would call a "Rooted Errantry."

Here, Africa and India in the Caribbean, and the native people of America are centered on the stage on which the writers' gaze is no longer clouded, and the colonized "Other" is released from the imperial impositions of barbarity or primitivism.

In her essay, "Images of Native Americans in Colonial American Literature," Ana Kocic Stankovic examines Amerigo Vespucci's accounts of his travels in the New World as recorded in his *Letters*. She challenges Vespucci's definitions of Native American women as promiscuous exhibitors of behavior unbecoming of ladies. The "ladies" with whom he contrasts Native American women are of course the "Western European ideal of a woman as pious and decent." Such depictions of Native American women were replicated in writings by other European writers and cemented in the consciousness of readers, so much so, Stankovic reminds us, that they were translated into markers of cultural and moral inferiority.

The unmasking of the imperial gaze for the evil that it was continues in Ana Fernandez's "The Savage who Became Civilized" in which she examines Voltaire's philosophic opposition to the European construct of the native as savage. Voltaire, she reminds us "was convinced that there was in Europe, a lot to improve and correct." Essays such as this and Hanen Baroumi's

“From Native Myths and Voices to Strange and Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Natives and Monsters in Ahmad Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad*” offer New World readings of Old and New World texts, and are, therefore, true representations of the decolonization of imperial power over formerly colonized voices.

In another example of restraint-free analysis, Bootheina Majoul examines various texts by Salman Rushdie and Amin Maalouf for evidence of the writers’ deconstruction of their own selves through their usages of non-native languages, and in “Mining the Sacred Law of Hospitality: Terrorism and what does Being Native Mean Today,” Maximiliano Korstanje explores the world since 9/11 in which new and false configurations of the “Other” “open the doors to xenophobic discourses and narratives which mine democracy from within.” Korstanje’s essay subscribes, then, to Voltaire’s implication that those who ill-define others need to apply correctives to themselves.

Emancipation is certainly this Volume’s project, as another of its essays, “Interrogating the Native’s Otherness in *Willow Trees don’t Weep*,” illuminates the ways in which the novelist, British Jordanian Fadia Faqir, might, at first glance, appear to be disrupting prevailing notions of Arabs, but ultimately fails as it adheres too closely to Neo-Orientalist perceptions.

Yosra Amraoui journeys, like Minakshi Carien, to the Caribbean, this time to the fictional island of Santabella where the 20th century descendants of formerly enslaved Africans stage an Islamic inspired uprising against a despotic regime.

Amraoui’s interrogation of Brenda Flanagan’s *Allah in the Islands* provides an example of how a different result can come from encounters between an exemplar of the Old World and resident “natives” of the new. Islam, an Old World religion, is brought to Santabellans, not by outsiders, but by a member of the New World, a man called Haji. To Haji, Islam offers the foundational basis upon which Santabellans can construct a new and fair society, one for which Tunisians, in their real Jasmine Revolution were, one could argue, agitating. Intentionality, though, is rabid grounds for suspicion among the very people Haji hopes to free, and, as Amraoui notes, the revolution fails because Haji relies, in part, on systems of the old order, such as the country’s military, to aid the cause. We understand then, that in their attempts to free themselves from colonial impositions, the native will sometimes stumble, but will continue to rise.

This volume of essays reminds us of that continuing struggle and is, therefore, a most worthy contribution to that growing body of analyses of World Literature, Caribbean or Cultural Studies that call attention to the existence of new works which posit fresh renditions of the meaning of post-colonialism.

PART I:

POLITICS OF (NOT) BEING A NATIVE

CHAPTER 1

SALMAN RUSHDIE AND AMIN MAALOUF: ON NOT BEING A NATIVE

BOOTHEINA MAJOUL

“Si je suis fait d’argile,
La terre entière est mon pays
Et toutes les créatures sont mes proches”.
(Al-Andalusi qtd in *Le Naufrage des Civilisations*, 93)

“We are all close relatives”. (Mouloud Feroun)
“Too many roots”. (*Quichotte*, 28)

This paper reads through Rushdie’s and Maalouf’s texts in an attempt to deconstruct the very notion of being native. Both writers incarnate the voice of the hyphenated intellectual who becomes heard from an elsewhere. Their texts use native/non-native languages and speak to/with “the other” rather than speaking for the self/the othered self. They freed themselves from any ethnographic entrapment and, through their assimilated selves, they consider themselves natives of their own ‘imaginary homelands’: their texts, their stories. They thus deconstruct and dismantle their native selves/other selves within the self. Their cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, multilingualism allowed them to become transnational translators of their own culture; they then created new selves out of this richness, rather than being entrapped within dispossessed dislocated native selves.

Their multiple origins, multiple tongues and multiplex experiences allowed them to rely on ‘genes of the soul’ to transport their readers into the cobweb of their narratives where fabricated history, fallacious origins, identity malaise and the danger of being native are exposed, re-examined and questioned.

The Native, the Authentic

“Did I not say that the word identity was a ‘false friend’?” (*On Identity*, 28)

The native is the indigenous, the autochthonous; the word suggests ethnographic tribes and spaces of belonging and thus stands for separate realms. The term invites to closure and denotes exclusion, for being native stands for being born in a specific place and implies belonging there geographically. Maps suggest frontiers and limited spaces; they have an exclusionary function: you are either in or out. This puts non-natives out of the sphere of preserved traditions and creates a sense of closed tribalism. It might also entail denigration and marginalization of those who are classified as non-natives.

The non-native is a stranger, the Other who does not belong to the authentic native, the *pure souche*.

The Native, the Primitive

“Claiming to protect authenticity against the threat of progress, the settler defined and pinned the native” (Mamdani, 30)

The very meaning of being native changes its trajectory when the appellation ‘native’ enters “a racist naming game” (Mamdani, 32) and establishes a hierarchy in societies to denote the binary opposition between “the ‘progressive’ West and the ‘stationary’ non-West” (Mamdani, 16). When the word ‘native’ goes in that direction, it recalls the “civilizing” mission of the Western colonizer who invaded the land of the native to save the savages from their primitiveness. In fact, “This was no longer just divide and rule. It was define and rule” (Mamdani, 42). And the very act of defining subjugates the natives and deprives them not only from their authentic identity but also from their freedom to decide who they really are. They thus become natives in an ‘imaginary homeland’, a land that no longer belongs to them.

In this context of discussing nativism and problems of definitions, Salman Rushdie ironically asks: “Can it be possible...that human beings are capable of discovering their nobility in their savagery?” (*Shame*, 254)

Other Geographies of the Native

“The native was said to represent a triumph of geography over time”
(Mamdani, 14)

Beyond any binary opposition, in his article “This People which is Not One” Bruno Bosteels attempts a sociological and anthropological classification of people as such: “nation, state, or civil society but also races, masses, and classes, as well as a whole slew of other terms more typically associated with the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and so-called group or mass psychology, such as horde, tribe, clan, pack, crowd, commune, or community” (2). This plethora of classifications intensifies the conflict of being and belonging among groups and allows dialogue over the very notion of the native to occur.

In their works, Rushdie and Maalouf celebrate their identities by placing themselves in the middle of the riddle: they originate from countries that were colonized, they write with their non-native language; they live in a state of liminality and belong to the land of their exile. Both face the problem of definition when it comes to their homelands. They are non-natives in the land of former colonizers; they use their pen to denounce both the primitivism and retardation of their homelands as well as the arrogance of those who once claimed they had a civilizing mission on their territories.

Intellectual Genealogy of Two Natives, yet Non-Natives

“Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 15)

Both the British writer of Indian origin Salman Rushdie and the Lebanese-born French Amin Maalouf examined the notion of uprootedness and hybridity in their works. They wrote about their origins, colonialism, and immigration in their texts in an attempt to assimilate their state of in-betweenness and dissimulate the scars of their dislocation. Their cosmopolitanism allowed them to reflect on constructed myths and narrated and inherited “archipelago of stories” (*Theorizing Native Studies*, 31).

Both writers speak and write like natives, a native language that is not theirs; they use it not as a master’s tool but as their own to write about the ailments of the world. Edward Said insists on the importance of the language in shaping our being and becoming by asserting that: “Everyone lives life in a

given language; everyone's experiences therefore are had, absorbed, and recalled in that language" (*Out of Place*, 11).

Both writers experienced rejection from their homelands and other lands because of their views. They lived in many places where they thought it might be home; but continued wandering in quest for freedom, for liberating themselves from the boundaries of closed and fixed definitions. Both are Liberals and advocate openness to the world; as Appiah puts it: "liberals value people over collectivities" ("Cosmopolitan Patriots", 620). He adds: "At the heart of the liberal picture of humanity is the idea of the equal dignity of all persons" ("Cosmopolitan Patriots", 621) beyond any hereditary concern in terms of race, origin or belonging.

Rushdie's 'Imaginary Homelands': On Translated Men and Bastards of History

"I, too, am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation" (*Shame*, 29)

Rushdie intrudes into his own fiction to narrate facts and express his views about being a hyphenated intellectual:

I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown. (*Shame*, 85)

Rushdie's characters speak out his own discontent from being a dislocated 'mohajir'. He expresses in his fiction his rejection of being born across and ending up belonging nowhere. In *Shame*, he tries to understand what it really means being native and rooted in one place:

I am comparing gravity with belonging. Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never been angrier than I was on the day my father told me he had sold my childhood home in Bombay. But neither is understood. We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places. (86)

According to him, roots create a sense of gravity, balance and reassuring belonging. And it happens that one decides to take “anti-gravity pills” (*Shame*, 86) and leave his birthplace to migrate, “to fly and to flee” (*Shame*, 86) towards an elsewhere in quest for freedom, for a different space or context. These people who “come unstuck from their native land”, “are called migrants” (*Shame*, 86). Rushdie does not regret the departure but rather its drawbacks:

And what's the worst thing? It is the emptiness of one's luggage. I'm speaking of invisible suitcases, not the physical, perhaps cardboard, variety containing a few meaning-drained mementoes: we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time. (*Shame*, 86-87)

He blames those who leave their homeland behind and travel with ‘empty luggage’ denigrating their origins and deciding to enter the vortex of forgetting to build new ‘imaginary homelands’ that could exist only in their imagination. As his narrator in *Shame* puts it:

As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. And to come back to the ‘roots’ idea, I should say that I haven't managed to shake myself free of it completely. (87-88)

Dealing with one's roots outside the sphere of fixed preconceived definitions is a hard mission for the cosmopolitan Rushdie. Just like Maalouf's, his texts are experimental; he tries to empty himself in his writings in an attempt to assimilate his identity of a hyphenated intellectual, born in-between and torn between two or more homelands. He argues:

To be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definitions. What does it mean to be ‘Indian’ outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to Western ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? These questions are all a single, existential question: How are we to live in the world?” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 17-18)

Lost within his imaginary universes, and aware of his “amnesiac nation” (*Midnight's Children*, 460) and of the fallacious nature of roots and origins,

Rushdie denounces fabricated history and resorts to satire to deconstruct the very notion of the native and nullify its signification; he thus declares us to be “bastards of history”:

Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history. Perhaps we all are, black and brown and white, leaking into one another, as a character of mine once said, like flavours when you cook. (*Imaginary Homelands*, 394)

Maalouf: Treacherous Identities and the Danger of Being Native

(Be)longing

Just like Rushdie, Maalouf refuses to be torn between his birthplace, Lebanon, and his homeland, France. He explains: “What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself?” (*In the Name of Identity*, 1).

He spent the first 27 years of his life in Lebanon where he spoke Arabic and read translated texts in Arabic; then he spent 22 years in France and since then has been writing and publishing in French but refusing to be described as half Lebanese and half French. He argues: “So am I half French half Lebanese? Of course not. Identity can’t be compartmentalized. You can’t divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven’t got several identities: I’ve got just one, made up of many components in a mixture that is unique to me, just as other people’s identity is unique to them as individuals” (*In the Name of Identity*, 2). He asserts that we might belong to what he calls “fundamental truth” or “essence” (*In the Name of Identity*, 2) but he insists on the importance of individual life experiences and how they shape the way we are and what we might become.

(Id)entity

While trying to recollect fragments of the self and reconcile with his triune belonging (Lebanon, Egypt, France), Maalouf also examines how groups or entities store within themselves the hidden pleasure of belonging and of being an authentic version of their ethnic affiliation. Throughout his writing journey, he dissected what he calls “treacherous” words that have the power

to entrap you within their several meanings; he asserts: "Identity is one of those false friends" (*In the Name of Identity*, 9). He considers that the notion of belonging or the fact of defining the origin of oneself might lead to fundamentalism. He argues "I want to try to understand why so many people commit crimes nowadays in the name of religious, ethnic, national or some other kind of identity" (*In the Name of Identity*, 9). What Maalouf tries to understand and show is that thinking in terms of being native to one place and belonging to a specific socio-cultural context might lead to denigrating those who do not belong to that closed circle. This closure could become dangerous and could create an identity malaise for both opposing sides: natives and non-natives. Here lies the danger of being native: when the very notion of it leads to excluding the other who comes from an elsewhere, who is not native.

The Text, the Womb

"Once upon a time there was a plot of a land" (*Shame*, 133)

The text is the womb where the writer belongs and the sole safe space; it is the receptacle of his longing for belonging. It encapsulates the imaginary and transfigures itself into a womb, a depository of an ingurgitated past and regurgitated hopes. The text is the site where the two writers belong, where they could not be outsiders, and where they could declare their legitimacy.

The two writers' texts are haunted/loaded with past memories and inherited stored stories; they stand for a refuge for every wounded dislocated community. Indeed, stories reassure us, empower us, and allow us to have a past, to belong, to survive, and to have a history.

For Rushdie and Maalouf, the text transmutes into 'heterotopia' in the Foucauldian sense; a kind of virtual space mirroring the pains and pleasures of hyphenated writers who become thus natives in a nowhere-land, beyond space, borders and geography.

Native *Destinerrance*

"we are a little bit of everything, right? Jewslim Christians. Patchwork types" (*Two Years*, 34)

We are contaminated by our very origins; we inherit native traits but we are shaped by our experiences, and our identity transfigures through time and space.

Race, origins, identities, and traditions are only socio-cultural constructs that people inhabiting a specific land decide to live by, fix and share. These constructs of the native allow what Derrida calls ‘undecidability’ to occur; when we remove the very definition of being native, we pave the way for multiple possibilities of being and belonging to emerge.

Indeed, when the native is defined, this deforms many truths rather than provides one, and limits many possibilities of being and belonging. The native must never be one: he must never reach any shore, but always be in a state of what Derrida calls ‘destinerrance’.

On Cosmopolitanism: “Genes of the Soul”¹

“The city and the frontier are incompatible worlds”. (*Shame*, 144)

“The land might belong to the landowner but the garden belonged to the gardener. This was the power of the horticultural art. *Il faut cultiver son jardin*”. (*Two Years*, 35)

“I” becomes the ‘eye’ of blame of the intellectual responsible of erasing geographies of exclusion, and of liberating the minds from any ethnographic entrapment and parasitic constructed myths. The cosmopolitan scholar has “the power to enter and transform and even improve the real world” (*Quichotte*, 32) through his/her words.

Rushdie invites his readers to “immigreat” (*Quichotte*, 49) and grow through the nomadic experience of reading his texts, and Maalouf warns the world about the upcoming danger of ‘the wreck of civilizations’² if we do not read back into history and listen to the helpless voices of our past miseries.

Cosmopolitanism does not stand for deracination but rather for rootedness, insemination and openness to diversity and assimilation of the many belongings. Appiah remembers his father’s claim: “Remember that you are citizens of the world” (“Cosmopolitan Patriots”, 618) and sheds light on the nomad nature of the cosmopolitan who does not forget about his origins and is “attached to a home of his own” (“Cosmopolitan Patriots”, 618).

¹ Maalouf, *On Identity* p 10.

² Adopted from Maalouf’s translated title *Le naufrage des civilisations*.

According to the cosmopolitan scholar: “The cosmopolitan ideal-take your roots with you-is one in which people are free to choose the local forms of human life within which they will live” (“Cosmopolitan Patriots”, 622).

Post Nativism: Cosmopolitanism and Transnational Humanism

“In a single *polis* there is no wisdom” (Appiah, 639)

Rushdie and Maalouf aim to break the notion of the delimited space of belonging, transcend the boundaries of affiliations, and ‘kill’ the myth of being native, getting out of the vortex of classifications into *pure souche*, authentic versus savage; because there is no such thing outside the limitations of a performative discourse and of the language. There are only free thinkers and autonomous citizens of the world.

In the same context, Appiah appeals to an ethical universe; he rejects any essentialist either-or theory; he calls for a post nativist attitude, against any form of problematic consideration of being and belonging. According to him, we are all contaminated by each other, and we are all creating a new form of transnational humanism by believing in assimilation/dissemination of identities. Indeed, advocating interrelatedness, heterogeneity and cultural homogenization, would lead to a world improving in the human sense. He proclaims a message of peace aiming at paving the way to the possibility of inhabiting and cohabiting ‘homelands’ as ‘cosmopolitan patriots’. He explains: “We cosmopolitans can be patriots, loving our homelands (not only the states where we were born but the states where we grew up and the states where we live); our loyalty to humankind so vast, so abstract, a unity does not deprive us of the capacity to care for lives nearer by” (227).

Once a “cosmopolitan patriot”, one is free from fixed strict definitions, language becomes just a tool, and roots, origins, or any forms of allegiances convert into mere myths. Indeed, “Our roots are in ourselves and in each other. In our bodies and minds we preserve our identity. Because of this we can move, we can go out and conquer the world” (*Quichotte*, 69).

In Rushdie’s and Maalouf’s ‘imaginary homelands’, there is a prosperous heterotopia, a virtual construct of deformed dreams, “a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea” (Foucault, 27), “where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain”³, where you can take your roots with

³ Vaclav Havel (Retrieved from:

<https://www.aps.org/units/fps/newsletters/1995/october/coect95.html>)

you and plant seeds of new selves within the self in your new homeland. Would that be (im)possible?

“Liberty; equality; fraternity. I recommend them highly” (*Shame*, 251).

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CHAPTER 2

ON NATIVES AND THE PRISM
OF AN UNKNOWN RELIGION:
HISTORY AND AFFECT
IN BRENDA FLANAGAN'S
ALLAH IN THE ISLANDS

YOSRA AMRAOUI

“Being there, being inside the place, being inside the head, being inside the center of the people’s lives, will allow the researcher to do justice to what the practitioner means, feels, and says. The researcher is thus able to recognize what is being said as truth and important when it is said. Cataloguing of religious and spiritual practices will then have authenticity, as it will be the subject’s real experience with the Divine. Recognition of false gods will come easily as well to the researcher, for he/she will, in time and with acceptance of the people’s voice, be able to tell when someone is not speaking from the heart and is merely giving lip service to a particular teaching or divination.”

—Althea Prince¹

My understanding of natives’ acceptance of Islam—or of their lack thereof—in the Caribbean region would have remained shallow had I not read Brenda Flanagan’s *Allah in the Islands*. This novel, written by a native of Trinidad and Tobago, sheds light on a Caribbean island’s encounter with Islam in a way that makes the reader feel she was “there, [...] inside the place, [...] inside the head [and] inside the center of the people’s lives” as indicated in the above opening quote. By providing a multiple-narrator account, Flanagan—at times omnipresent—gives her readers access to the

¹ This quote is taken from Althea Prince’s article entitled “How shall we Sing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land? Constructing the Divine in Caribbean Contexts,” published *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean* edited by Patrick Taylor.

happenings of the period under study, 1990 that is, from a socio-cultural ethnic perspective which, interestingly enough, gives access to affect, not just history. So, in anticipation of comments that might argue against trying to make sense of the past through fiction, I would like to corroborate my endeavour with the following quote by Hayden White

Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another. We cannot easily distinguish between them on formal grounds unless we approach them with specific preconceptions about the kinds of truths that each is supposed to deal in. But the aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of “reality”. (White, *Tropics* 122)

White also asserts that “history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation” (Ibid.). It is in this respect, and in line with White’s way of challenging contemporary Western and global thinkers’ views on the interconnectedness between Literature and History, that I study Brenda Flanagan’s text as a narrative that is capable of transmitting an experience similar to the one actually lived by the natives of Trinidad and Tobago in 1990.

The word Caribbean is hereby used interchangeably with the word native. Realizing that the term Caribbean is described as a “figment of the imagination” (2) by Ralph Premdas in his article “Ethnicity and Identity in the Caribbean: Decentering a Myth” (1996), the term itself does not refer to a unified geographical region due to the fact that the Caribbean is composed of a number of sovereign and unsovereign states. Premdas postulates that “It is not only an imaginary region but one that is arbitrarily appointed to its designation. It will be difficult to pinpoint precisely where this Caribbean place is, for no country carries the name Caribbean either separately or in hyphenated form” (2). According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the word goes back to 1750 in reference to the way indigenous people of the West Indies and the South American mainland call themselves, “Caribs” that is. The region today contains nine sub-regions: Bahamian, Bermuda, Eastern Caribbean, Florida, Greater Antilles, the Gulf of Mexico, Southern Caribbean, Southwestern Caribbean, and Western Caribbean.² It is also said to contain 30 countries.³ Since Trinidad and Tobago is considered as one of the Caribbean region’s territories, it is therefore relevant to use the term

² From the World Resources Institute, accessed in <https://www.wri.org/resources/maps/caribbean-sub-regions>

³ According to the Caribbean Atlas, accessed in <http://www.caribbean-atlas.com/en/the-caribbean-in-brief/the-caribbean-islands/>

“Caribbean” as a description for the natives of the country. Why Trinidad and Tobago *per se*? It is the country in which Jamaat Al-Muslimeen tried to overthrow the government in power in July 1990. And even though Brenda Flanagan created a fictional island she named Santabella, in which she reproduced similar historical events to those that took place in Trinidad and Tobago in 1990, there is room to believe that Santabella is a simulacrum of Trinidad and Tobago. Flanagan probably wrote this novel to give her readers access to affect not just history. It is our understanding of affect that will determine where everything went wrong for the real as well as for the fictional characters in that particular experience.

The purpose behind this study differs from that of any politico-socio-cultural study of the Caribbean people’s reception of Islam in a number of ways. To begin with, historical information that a researcher could be looking for about Islam in the Caribbean exists in a plethora of scholarly sources namely published in the Jamestown Foundation’s *Terrorism Monitor* such as Chris Zambelli’s 2006 and 2009 articles respectively entitled “Jamaat Al-Muslimeen on Trial in Trinidad and Tobago” and “Jamaat Al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago”. Another relevant and more recent study would be that of Cynthia Mahabir, entitled “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat Al-Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” published in the *British Journal of Criminology* in 2013. Reports on the coup attempted by the Black Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago who called themselves Jamaat Al-Muslimeen (JAM) in July 1990 to overthrow the government are also available in print and broadcast media. Yet the people’s affective experience during those times can only be accessed through testimonial memorabilia and literature whence my interest in Brenda Flanagan’s novel. Therefore, the present article contributes to a better understanding of the intersection between affect and history to grasp what Hayden White labels as the “Practical Past,” a past that looks at history for presentist ends. One of these ends is understanding the dynamics of ethnic or racial rejection of Islam in non-Muslim settings.

Interest in affect was marked by Spinozist and Deleuzean thinking before it has developed into an interest in the history of the concept with the works of William Reddy and Barbara Rosenwein. Other scholars, mainly political theorists such as Brian Massumi and William Connolly, defined and explored affect in a number of ways trying to distinguish between affect and emotion, the former being physical, pre-personal and corporeal unlike the latter which is personal, conscious and social according to the critique

compiled by Ruth Leys.⁴ The latter believes that such a distinction does not stand out due to the inadequacy of interpreting the psychological experiments object of the hypotheses advanced by some affect theorists. The way these scholars view the distinction between emotions and affects is as relevant to the present paper as the definition of each concept is.

What is at stake in *Allah in the Islands* is situated at a point of intersection between emotions and affects. Affect theorists, such as Brian Massumi, Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman believe that “Affects must be viewed as independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs” (Leys 437). Before giving a taste of the emotions accompanying the ideologized acts of the Islamist rebels attempting the coup at the end of her novel, Flanagan manages to transmit what these theorists believe to be a series of “processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning” (Leys 437). Viewed from this Spinozist angle, affect—being the ability to affect—is, therefore, “pre-conscious,” “pre-subjective,” and “outside consciousness”. Ruth Leys criticizes this “Basic Emotions Paradigm” and argues that affect is not separated from emotions. Brian Massumi, one of the most renowned contemporary Affect theorists, argues that affect is “qualified intensity” (Massumi 88). When this intensity escapes, it has a moment of capture; that moment of captured escape is what is called emotion. Therefore, emotions are the apparent side of affect, they are expressed by our bodies and are therefore “narratively de-localized” (85). According to Massumi, “when this escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations” (Massumi 97), which explains why Brenda Flanagan’s text does not vilify any of the conflicting parties involved in her narrative. Emotions, in this light, are the most intense capture which, once escaped, can be perceived and narrated. Although affect is thought by Massumi to be the “inassimilable” (88), Flanagan underpins it by providing her readers with insights on pre-emotion dynamics through figural realism and a multi-perspective plot.

However, Massumi believes that affect cannot take a narrative form like emotions do as it is “unqualified,” “not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique” (88). But there are also grounds to believe that affect is emotionally motivated and independent from ideology. Such is the case of what is known as “Islamic Fundamentalism,” a phrase that, in my view,

⁴ In her article “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” Leys provides an extensive commentary on the diversified literature review she compiled on affect and emotions.

has wrongfully existed because it is often attributed to the religion and not to its politically-ideologized adepts. While Santabella was in dire need of a youth-motivated revolution to eradicate corruption, and at a time when the necessary hands were united for the purpose, the citizens' attention was distracted by the rise of Islam in the island and by the fact that these necessary hands were Muslim disregarding the fact that they are also native hands. This affective distraction produced a form of skepticism that was fuelled by rumours resulting in the capture of the most intense escape of fear.

Understanding basic emotions, especially fear, may help us not only get a grip over the prism the Islamic Daawa⁵ had over the natives of the Caribbean, but also understand how the latter reacted to those of their kin who converted to Islam. This understanding is crucial in assessing the politico-socio-cultural effects Islam has when introduced to a new environment and the way human beings divide over religion and blame it on the latter notwithstanding the role ethnicity plays in this dynamics. Throughout this study of Flanagan's *Allah in the Islands*, it is possible to elucidate the affective errors committed by the Caribbean converts and the common stereotypical judgements that caused a fracture in the community and led a potential economic anti-corruption revolution into disarray.

As previously mentioned, *Allah in the Islands* is a series of first-person accounts with some narrated by an omnipresent narrator. By providing such a multiple perspective, the author tries to give agency to all the characters despite their differences of opinion and creed. Flanagan relives with them every single moment, sheds tears with them, falls in love with them, sings with them, thinks out loud with them and makes the reader hear it and see it all in order to experience the islanders' inner torment. "We are all Santabellans"⁶ as novelist Edwidge Danticat reflects upon reading this novel.⁷

This story is about survival as much as it is about deception. By writing *Allah in the Islands* (2009), Brenda Flanagan gives a suite to her prize-winning novel *You Alone are Dancing*, published originally in 1990. This novel tells us the story of Beatrice Salandy, a young Santabellan who was accused of stealing thousands of dollars from the government and of killing

⁵ *Daawa* is an Arabic word meaning "the call". It is similar to missionary actions attempting to spread the religion.

⁶ In reference to the fictional island of Santabella in which the novel is set.

⁷ Danticat's comment figures on the cover of the novel's 2009 edition.

a Chinese doctor who raped her. One can only admire Beatrice, the heroine, for her bravery and resilience to trauma as she tries to overcome the tragic loss of her son, the break-up with the love of her life, Sonny, who immigrates to the U.S., and the death of her much cherished mentor Tante Vivian. Yet Beatrice still finds the courage to use all the money she has got to pay all land leases pertaining to her fellow citizens in an act of bravery, and to survive the court trial. In *You Alone are Dancing*, women are left to their fate and to their resilience mechanisms facing the sweeping corruption affecting all institutions.

Allah in the Islands opens with the good news of Beatrice Salandy's acquittal as the judges did not find enough proof to convict her of murder and theft. All the witnesses had already testified in her favor, denying having seen or known anything that would convict her. The day of Beatrice's verdict is a day of celebration and unity, one that would later prove to be fragile to religious differences among the native inhabitants of the island. In fact, the themes of this novel are numerous as Flanagan addresses all the issues that the natives of the Caribbean region face, such as governmental, political and police corruption, poverty, gender roles, education, collective memory, diversity, media ownership, music, drugs, environmental issues, capitalism, immigration, brain drain, spirituality, identity, belongingness, and representation of women. But above all, she writes to report what happened in 1990 from a multiple perspective that tries to convey the inner feelings and thoughts of her native characters.

Allah in the Islands starts and ends with a first-person narrative by Abdul, the right-hand man of the Muslim charismatic native leader Haji whose voice sounds to be the voice of faith, the unquestioning voice of a man who found in Islam and the Islamic community on the island a refuge from the government's negligence and corruption, from the gangs dealing in drugs and from his failed marriage. Abdul's truthfulness to his principles shows in many instances such as: "I pray a long time about the things I do for the Haji, and Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent, all praises be upon him offer me the guidance that it was my faith that was leading me, not Haji. He's a man, a messenger; Allah is the one, as the Qur'an say, who will bring me to account for what I do" (Flanagan 59). In another instance, he shows his confidence in his faith and pride in his own culture when he says: "I follow my faith, regardless of everything that happen, but my faith doesn't mean that I can't enjoy our culture. As a Caribbean man, I was a big follower of Bob Marley's music" (73). Abdul stays true to himself and to Haji until the end. It is him who describes Haji's disappointment and reports his leader's remorse by the end of the novel.

Although Haji's rearmament endeavours and plans to overthrow the government are unquestionably radical, if not a form of violent extremism, the reader is not presented with a radical picture of Islam and this is probably due to the multi-perspectivity that Flanagan uses to democratize agency among her characters. This is also, most probably, due to a belief that this coup was planned for patriotic, non religious, anti-corruption purposes and that Islam has nothing to do with it all. In addition, the novel's multi-perspectivity facilitates the understanding of the characters' released emotions better than a fully-omnipresent perspective does. The fact that every chapter is written from the perspective of a first-person narrator gives leeway to Flanagan to unveil her characters' considerably ambivalent and mixed reactions about the spread of Islam among Black natives.

The people of Santabella do not seem to have issues with Islam *per se* as there are Indian Muslims who have lived there for a long time. It is the fact that their native Black brethren endorse Islam that seems to be problematic to them. Yet, at times, these natives are in admiration of what Haji and the Muslim community do for the people of the island; at others, they are afraid and skeptical about their intentions. In the words of Miss Ann, one of the most skeptical characters who shows antagonism to the idea of Blacks "turning Muslims," "Islam is a religion for Indian people. What Black people want with that?" (49) she ascertains. Another native woman of Santabella, Jestina, sounds less critical of Islam in the islands as she participates in Friday prayers and gatherings and listens to the pre-prayer sermons with the Muslims. She seems to accept the fact that Blacks could practise Islam, but she does not hide her confusion as she admits: "I give up. Everything so mixed up. Black people calling their self Muslim. What else coming?" (98).

It is worth noting that Haji converted to Islam when he was in America to finish his studies. Usually, young fellows like him would rather stay in the U.S., a common dream that most native youth share; but "He had come home to help his people; to get them to see that their lives had been stifled by the powers in Santabella who kept them ignorant" in the words of the omnipresent Flanagan in reference to the Catholic Church (41). The fact that Haji returned as a Muslim to his native country made him an outsider, a doubtful figure in the eyes of the local media and the government who accused him of following the American Black Muslims movement. Haji had to explain to reporters that he did not belong to that movement and that the only common thing between him and the "Nation of Islam"—as the movement was called in the 1960s in the U.S.—was faith. But how can one expect Santabellans to understand Islam when the U.S. media are equally

disturbed by the Black Muslims movement themselves? The leader of the movement, Elijah Mohammed, also known as the mentor of Malcom X, is not decently represented by the American mainstream media. The following is an example of the way *The New York Times* described the movement in 1964

Officially, the Black Muslims preach nonviolence and honor the law. Many outsiders, however, feel that there is the threat of violence implicit in the fanatical preaching of race hatred, in the rigid discipline maintained by members, and in the 'secret army—the black-clad Fruit of Islam—well-drilled units schooled in the use of firearms. But experts describe the movement's posture as one of "contained aggressiveness," largely because of the concepts of its charismatic leader, Elijah Muhammad.⁸

The speeches of Elijah Muhammad are compiled and stored on the web⁹ and upon reading them, considering the context and the situation of Blacks in America in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the words of the spokesman sound infuriated against the situation of Blacks and the mistreatment they endure in America. These speeches, accused of making a case for Black Supremacy, do make the fittest response against White Supremacy arguments that used to consider Black men and women as sub-citizens. Accusations of secret militarization of the movement are common whenever religion is brought to the fore in a political debate; therefore, governmental reactions against its adepts and leaders are naturally planned to transform the leader into a suspect and propagandize the movement in the worst ways possible. As to Haji, despite his claims of having "nothing to do with Elijah Mohammed and the Black Muslims in America" (41)—being separatists—he went down a similar track, not of separatism but of attempting to overthrow the government.

The good and charitable deeds of the Haji, upon his return from the U.S., were suspicious to his fellow citizens

He had begun feeding the poor. In his mother's backyard, he'd built a large earthen oven and twice a week, he kneaded flour with his own hands. The warm loaves he took into the city to feed the vagrants of the sidewalks. With his own money, it was said, he bought milk for babies; schoolbooks for poor children; uniforms and shoes for those who could not afford the high prices

⁸ "The Black Muslims". *The New York Times*, March 22, 1964. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/03/22/archives/feud-within-the-black-muslims-elijah-muhammad-leader-of-the.html>.

⁹ Accessible at

<http://web.archive.org/web/20071009204007/http://www.seventhfam.com/>

in the stores in town. He gathered about him young men who, so rumour claimed, were ready to die, if necessary, at his side. Many of them he had saved from lives dependent on cocaine which, he claimed, was being imported into the country under the closed eyes of top police officials. (42)

At the onset, these strategies mimic those used by potential extremist/fundamentalist groups who first try to win sympathy through social activism and charity. This strategy is that of propaganda in which the movement's advocates claim they have humanitarian goals and start acting like they do in order to manipulate the people they hope to control, attract them to the movement and expand their scope of influence and action. As is clear from the quote above, Haji started single-handedly feeding the poor and the needy of his country until men started to follow him inciting more and more natives to join, not for religious but charitable aims. Abdul admits "If we couldn't make fellars like Yusuf¹⁰ into *disciplined soldiers*, the *cause* in trouble" (emphasis added 59). This particular description of fellow activists as "disciplined soldiers" announces Haji's intention to militarize "the movement". By using the word "the cause," Flanagan anchors suspicion in the readers' minds. With all the mis-representational signifying practices targeting Islam and Muslims, such a piece of information can only cause more skepticism about the real intentions of the native Muslims of the islands.

Despite Haji's claims that he has no other intention than serving his people and native country, Flanagan continues to hint at the "cause," which is not just charitable. She does this first through describing the impact of rumours on the careful observers of this new Muslim community. Miss Ann confides to Beatrice: "I hear he has a lot of guns, girl. Guns to overthrow the government. Besides, what we Black people want with that Muslim thing? That's for Indians" (49). And despite Beatrice's critical responses to such rumours assuring that the police "raid his property twice already. They find any guns? Not one" (Ibid.), Miss Ann insists that being suspicious of "these Muslims" is all "common sense" (Ibid.). There were several rumours about Haji's secret trips to Cuba and to the Middle East, "that he was trying to

¹⁰ A junky saved from drug dealing by the Movement.