

Innocent Akilimale Ngulube:

**Politics of Migrant Voices: Multicultural
Tolerance in Abdourahman A. Waberi's
*Transit***

Abstract

Although mass media today graphically captures travel perils of African migrants to Europe, it is deafeningly silent on racist, xenophobic and human rights perils they encounter there. This paper examines the resistance of both African and French migrants against racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses as emanations of neo-nationalism in Waberi's novel, *Transit*. Waberi comes from Djibouti, a country located at edge of the horn of Africa between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea in which the political turmoil ushered in by the 1991 civil war and the 2008 border conflict with Eritrea still forces Djiboutians in their droves into exile to France, the country's former colonizer. Against this backdrop of mass migration to France, I argue that the monologues of different characters in the novel embody polemical calls for multicultural tolerance in the face of a new wave of racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses. To this end, the paper employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia in the analysis of multicultural tolerance in Waberi's *Transit*. The suitability of heteroglossia lies in the Bakhtian postulation that "The novel orchestrates all its themes...by means of the social diversity of speech types (heteroglossia) and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (263). Thus, in order to examine the depiction of multicultural tolerance in *Transit*, the paper will analyze how different character monologues contribute to the theme thereof.

Keywords: migrant, multicultural tolerance, neo-nationalism, Djibouti, heteroglossia

Introduction

In the preface to Waberi's novel, *Transit*, translators David Ball and Nicole Ball observe that apart from "migration, colonial and postcolonial suffering, and resistance...other themes and ideals dear to Waberi's heart [are] multiculturalism, tolerance, and *metissage*" (9). In line with this observation, I argue that the narrative topos of different character monologues in *Transit* embody overtures to multicultural tolerance. For Nathan Glazer, "Multiculturalism is [...] a universalistic demand [that] all [cultural] groups should be recognized" (14). As such, this article demonstrates how Waberi's *Transit* imbeds our understanding of neo-nationalism as the root of racist, xenophobic and dehumanizing violence across the globe and that peaceful coexistence begins with mutual tolerance towards different cultural ethos.

In particular, the paper draws attention to monologic passages in *Transit* which advance multicultural tolerance by exposing racism, xenophobia and human rights violations. In doing so, this essay echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion that "The novel [is] a diversity of social speech types [...] and [...] individual voices, artistically organized" (262). Thus, although Bashir, Harbi, Alice, Abdo-Julien, and Awaleh speak individually and differently, they collectively inhabit the same narrative context and therefore coordinate related themes. Françoise Lionnet attests that "Waberi's touching, funny, and poetic style, as well as his ear for spoken language, draws the reader into the subjective realities of his characters" (786). Bakhtin enlightens us that such panoply of diverse yet complementary voices evinces the operation of heteroglossia:

The novel orchestrates all its themes [...] by means of the social diversity of speech types (heteroglossia) and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel, each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (263).

Bakhtin shows that heteroglossia is the generative principle in a novel. The social diversity of speech types creates a narrative milieu in which objects and ideas come not only into being but also into interplay. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist appends that heteroglossia is “The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance [by] insur[ing] the primacy of context over text” (428). It follows that the meaning of any speech type and the object or the idea it refers to depends on specific social conditions implying that the same utterance and its referents would have different meanings within different social conditions. *Transit*'s monologic but heteroglot voices enmeshed in the interface between multicultural tolerance and neo-nationalist fanaticism is a case in point.

Significantly, the appellation of Waberi's novel, *Transit*, evokes a kinesthetic imagery that foregrounds continental and intra-African migrations. For example, Bashir and Harbi seek political asylum in France while Alice and her European compatriots, Hindis and Arabs migrate to Djibouti for nuptial and mercantile pursuits along with migrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Mombasa, Sudan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Kurdistan, Albania and Bosnia and Djibouti's civil war

mercenaries from Poland, Lebanon and Czechoslovakia. These migrations turn *Transit* into a locus of multicultural tolerance in that the reader witnesses different races in the quest for integration despite differences in skin color and cultural mores.

In fact, the alternate setting of *Transit* at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport in France and in various locales of Djibouti underpins the pursuit of multicultural tolerance. That is to say, the presence of mixed races in France and Djibouti highlights a semblance of hospitality. Jacques Derrida encapsulates that:

[...] absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only the foreigner (provided with a family name [and] with the social status of being a foreigner), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names [...] Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it [...] but it is strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law (24).

Derrida affirms that by opening up national borders to migrants from all walks of life and granting them a right to a domicile within the borders, the host not only displays multicultural tolerance but also extends an invitation to peaceful coexistence. In other words, the heterogeneous nature of absolute hospitality

entails unconditional coexistence of hosts and foreigners within the confines of the same national borders on humanistic terms rather than on legal terms.

However, the scourge of xenophobic tendencies across the world continues to asphyxiate absolute hospitality. Saskia Sassen reveals that “today’s immigrants appear as threatening outsiders, knocking at, crashing, or sneaking through the gates into societies richer than their own” (1). Such intolerance emanates from neo-nationalism. Stephen Greenblatt acknowledges that:

[...] as the new century unfolds [...] those who thought to have bid farewell once and for all to the heavily guarded borders of the nation-state and to the atavistic passions of religious and ethnic identity find themselves confronting a global political landscape in which neither nationalism nor identity politics shows any intention of disappearing (1).

Admittedly, jingoistic indoctrination forces aboriginals into xenophobic straightjackets which disable them to embrace foreigners into their cultural fold. Unsurprisingly, then, migrant yarns are rife with harrowing versions of xenophobic atrocities.

Problematizing Neo-nationalism

The ubiquity of xenophobic violence prompts critics to problematize the very notion of ‘nation’ upon which neo-nationalism is based. Timothy Brennan defines ‘nation’ as “both the modern nation-state and something more ancient and nebulous – the ‘*natio*’ – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging” (45). However, Brennan decries that “th[is] distinction is often

obscured by nationalists who seek to place their own country in an ‘immemorial past’ where its arbitrariness cannot be questioned” (45). By privileging modern nation-state over ‘*natio*’, neo-nationalists distort belongingness as a natural human expression into a chauvinistic instrument which, since time immemorial, has engendered cartographic bloodshed worldwide.

In view of border conflicts, critics like Brennan tend to challenge the arbitrariness of modern nation-states. For instance, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin contend that “nations are not ‘natural’ entities, and the instability of the nation is the inevitable consequence of its nature as a social construction” (135). These critics further contend that the instability of the nation manifests in its likelihood to “collapse back into sub-divisions of clan, ‘tribe’, language or religious group [...] and the false tendency to assign this unstable condition to specific regions or conditions” (135). Thus, while the construction of the nation is designed to project a facade of cultural solidarity, it perpetuates cultural divisions even within national frontiers. To this effect, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin emphasize that:

Th[e] myth of nationhood, masked by ideology, perpetuates nationalism, in which specific identifiers are employed to create exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions. Such signifiers of homogeneity always fail to represent the diversity of the actual ‘national’ community for which they purport to speak, and, in practice, usually represent and consolidate the interests of the dominant power groups within any national formation. (135)

This emphasis outlines that the construction of nationhood is intrinsically fraught with self-incriminating contradictions. The overarching contradiction is that nationalist ideology advocates exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions in a culturally heterogeneous nation. Consequently, cultural interests of minority groups face perpetual marginalization. That is why Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin accuse nationalist oligarchs of using nation discourse as a smokescreen to attain hegemonic leverage.

On his part, Homi K. Bhabha considers the arbitrariness of nationhood construction as the cauldron of cultural ambivalence. He posits that:

[...] a particular ambivalence [...] haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality (1).

To Bhabha, the notion, discourse and culture of the nation are marked by uncertainty because they are amorphous entities. The uncertainty finds expression in the realization that although historians regard the nation as a stable entity the temporality of its culture proves that it is unstable. The explanation is that culture is always in a flux so that the infinite play of its signifiers and signifieds blurs any signification certitude. No wonder, Bhabha deconstructs the certainty of nationalist discourse and asserts that:

[...] the Western nation [i]s an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture [which] is more *around* temporality than about historicity [...] more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism (140).

Technically, nationalist discourse legitimizes the Western nation as a seamless form of living buttressed by historicity and not as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living characterized by its temporality. To justify the expediency of this lopsided conception, nationalists deny the unlimited free play of cultural signifiers and signifieds preferring instead hierarchical or binary articulation of cultural differences and identifications to hybrid articulation.

Like Bhabha, Maxim Silverman deconstructs the ambivalence of nationalism by arguing that “The ambivalence of the discourse of nation traverse social relations and [...] cuts across class affiliations and creates numerous contradictions in the ideologies” (7). These numerous contradictions that attend the ambivalence of nationalism discourse undermine the homogeneous conception of the nation. It stands to reason, then, that the heterogeneous conception of the nation embraces hybridity of cultural differences and identities. In this light, Ernest Renan holds that “A nation is a large-scale solidarity [in which] Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion [but] demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community” (19-20). This implies that the accommodation of cultural differences and identities irrespective

of racial, linguistic or religious encumbrances epitomizes cultural elasticity in a nation.

In turn, cultural fluidity produces identities that are multicultural in orientation. Homi K. Bhabha avows that “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond [...] the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity” (1). More importantly, Waberi himself substantiates Bhabha’s avowal by declaring that postcolonial subjects are “the transcontinental generation” (20). In other words, continental migration of postcolonial generations indicates their radical departure from neo-nationalist ideologies.

However, while cultural mobility is in vogue, a new wave of neo-nationalism stands in its way. Stephen Greenblatt notes that “Mobility can indeed lead to heightened tolerance of difference and an intensified awareness of the mingled inheritances that constitute even the most tradition-bound cultural stance, but it can also lead to an anxious, defensive, and on occasion violent policing of the boundaries” (6-7). To put it unequivocally, cultural mobility is a mixed blessing. Hence, this paper proceeds to analyze how the heteroglot voices of Bashir, Harbi, Alice, Abdo-Julien and Awaleh mitigate the surge of neo-nationalism as the bedrock of racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses.

The Cancer of Racism, Xenophobia and Human Rights Abuses in Francophone Migration

The mass media today is awash with images of African migrants in do-or-die journeys to Western countries, especially Europe. What is equally disturbing is the pejorative language that is used to describe these desperate attempts. A critical ear to such media discourses captures subtle racist undertones which stereotype African migrants. Russel King and Nancy Wood disclose that:

Often acting as the mouthpiece of political parties or other powerful groups, [host-country] media discourses have been shown to be immensely influenced in constructing migrants as ‘others’, and often too as ‘criminals’ or ‘undesirables’. Such a focus on migrant criminality creates stereotypes which are very far from the truth and very hard to shake off (2).

These racist attitudes and stereotypes are not strange considering the xenophobic history of Europe. Liz Fekete delineates the extent to which the institutions of xenophobia and racism are entrenched in contemporary European society as follows:

Those seeking asylum are demonized as bogus, as illegal immigrants and economic migrants scrounging at capital’s gate and threatening capital’s culture. And it is this demonization of the people that the capitalist western world seeks to exclude – in the name of the preservation of economic prosperity and national identity – that signals the emergence of a new racism (19).

Fekete suggests that modern European states hide their xenophobic and racist inclinations under the guise of economic prosperity and national identity. However, cancerous traces of deep-rooted xenophobia and racism in the fabric of modern European societies concretize Maxim Silverman's opinion that "Questions of immigration and racism are not adjuncts to the development of modern nations but a fundamental part of that development" (6). In practice, France is one of the European nation-states infected by the cancer of xenophobia and racism as Bashir's opening monologue exemplifies:

I'M IN PARIS [...] not really Paris yet but Roissy. That the name of the airport [...] I was stocked, no I mean scotched – taped – in the last row of the Boeing 747 where the cops tie the deportees up tight when the plane goes back to Africa. That's true, that the way they do it. Moussa, he told me that a little while ago. Moussa, you know he can pray the good Lord sitting down without lifting his behind from the seat of the plane, believe me faithfully (14).

Bashir's monologue depicts the racist treatment of African migrants to and from France. According to David Ball and Nicole Ball, Bashir's "monologues are delivered in a slangy, comical language very much his own, a mix of naïveté and sly, often cynical, observation" (8). In this specific monologue, Bashir's cynicism is directed at the inhumane transportation of African exiles and deportees to and from France respectively. In Bashir's case, he was stocked; cello taped to his seat to be exact as if he were a commodity. This debasement also applied to Bashir's fellow asylum seeker, Moussa, who failed to maneuver into a praying posture during the flight. In Marxist terms, such debasement of human beings into

commodities may be identified as reification or commodification or thingification or objectification. Tom Bottomore specifies that reification is the “transformation of human beings into thing-like beings” (463). The reification of Bashir and Moussa is racist in the sense that they are stocked in the same dingy alcove that is occupied by African deportees from France. Besides, Harbi’s monologue gives more evidence of racist ill-treatment that African deportees endure at the hands of French airport personnel:

Boarding time for the Africans being deported “of their own free will.” A dozen or so scheduled to be transported the usual way; three male individuals will be docked up in the cramped space of the restrooms, piled in and immediately incarcerated quick as two whiffs of a cigarette. A man wearing a glaring yellow vest with the word “technician” on his back, helped by three PAF agents, has struck a thick roll of gray tape on the restroom door so the passengers who happen to have missed the caging or whose eyes had avoided it won’t venture into these restrooms. Strange how the same scene keeps being repeated almost every day on other flights always bound for some African destination (16).

This passage disturbingly unmasks the high-handedness of French deportation policies. As Liz Fekete maintains, “the 1951 Refugee convention is under threat from [...] the introduction of EU deportation programme, with its target-based system for removals and its reification of failed asylum seekers as commodities to be parcelled and dispatched out of Europe” (135). Given France is one of the heavyweights in European Union, it is unsurprising that her airport personnel

display a cavalier disregard for asylum seekers of African descent on the basis of skin colour. For Fekete, this European Union programme “eats away at a political culture that professes respect for human rights” (135) or to put it bluntly, European societies are hypocritically multicultural and accommodative. Indeed, Harbi exposes more human rights abuses that African deportees undergo in the following passage:

Each time, the unfortunate deportee tries squealing like a tortured whale just to stir the conscience of the ordinary passenger, usually a tourist. Today’s deportee is Congolese, supposedly a shopkeeper from Pointe Noire, and his fate seems sealed. At least he’s alive, luckier than the ones who die of dehydration in the Arizona desert or freeze to death inside the undercarriage of some cargo plane (16).

This passage conveys the heartrending truth that human rights violations culminate into death of African deportees. That is why African deportees resort to last-ditch appeals for pity from equally unconcerned white passengers. This is evident when Bashir reflects upon Moussa’s advice to “Act dumb with the cops [...] don’t show you speak French. Don’t mess things up, so shut your trap. Or cry, to fish pity from French people” (14). Naturally, such racist debasement of fellow human beings is a recipe for counter-racial resentment as the musing of Harbi shows: “I have an old debt of memory to settle with France; people think migrants arrive naked in a new land at the end of their odyssey; yet migrants are loaded with their personal stories and heavier still with what is called collective history” (16). Here, Harbi refutes the French predilection for making sweeping

generalizations that all African migrants seek asylum because they are economically wretched ignoring other different individual and collective motivations like escaping civil strife and political persecution.

All the same, African asylum seekers suffer worse indignities when they disembark at Roissy. Harbi recounts indignantly that “The first natives of the country we glimpsed at the airport counter were already frowning with animosity [...] All we could see of them was their closed faces and the accusing hooked index finger” (143). The atavistic animosity and accusation that African asylum seekers are greeted with proves that they are unwelcome guests in France. Harbi further reveals that racist hostility assumes blatant proportions:

We hear that the personnel managing the reception centers of the Red Cross and the Secours Populaire avoid all contact with us. Can you believe it, they wash us from a distance with a hose. Aseptic masks protect their faces and rubber gloves their hands as they pass us a little splinter of soap, as if we were cankered with mold and covered with mange. The boldest of us walk out of the retention center in the night and find themselves in disaffected squats next to some railroad station or port, before the city files an eviction notice with the municipal authorities, and the zones around the trains and ports set up a heavy surveillance system with steel wire fencing and automatic doors. Every vehicle leaving these zones will be inspected from top to bottom by security guards equipped with thermal and carbonic gas detectors (146).

Such evidence of racial discrimination and human rights abuses summarizes the fate of African asylum seekers as social lepers and pariahs in French society. This inhumane disregard for human rights turns African asylum seekers, to borrow the words of Orlando Patterson, into people “without a legal personality” (22) just like their African-American ancestors back in the days of slavery. Like Harbi, Bashir expresses his suppressed indignation at the treatment of African asylum seekers as legal non-persons by accepting Moussa’s advice half-heartedly that “OK I don’t say nothing cause Roissy’s danger, they might say Africans, pains in the ass” (14). Thus, while Bashir embraces France as his new home, he has no illusion whatsoever that his overtures of racial solidarity are reciprocal. However, the cost of reifying fellow human beings into legal non-persons is the inducement of defensive vengeance. To be sure, Bashir’s evocation of Osama bin Laden’s name; the generally accepted al-Qaeda mastermind behind September 11 attacks on United States of America in 2001 is an apt manifestation of defensive hostility:

For six months now my name been Binladen, Moussa he choked on his coffee in plastic cup they give you. *Never* say that again here he say. That get the French fierce, and the English, and the Americans, and even the nice Norwegians who pay NGOs for us and keep their traps shut. But me, I like that, you say Binladen and everybody drop dead with panic [...] in front of barbwire and sandbags of the American Embassy in Djibouti. Binladen, dunno who he was before but anyways [...] In Djibouti, they said, yell “Long live Binladen” everywhere, that’s how I know his name,

then stop right away or else it Gabode prison for everybody, mamas, uncles, kids, everybody (14).

The evocation of Osama bin Laden's apparition is significant as it illustrates how victims of Western racism and human rights violations feel inclined to identify with bin Laden's act of terror as a form of emotional release. Bruce Lawrence affirms that "Osama bin Laden has become a legendary figure in the West, not to speak of the Arab world" (xi). While not necessarily condoning the murder of innocent Americans, victims of Western racism develop a natural affinity with the people of Islam and hence perceive bin Laden as their titular liberator from the fetters of common injustices. That explains why Djiboutians of all ages shout the name of bin Laden as a battle cry against socio-political yokes even under the duress of imprisonment. Such problematic affiliations, especially on the wake of the atrocities caused by global jihad, foreground the complex ambivalences generated by the cauldron of racism, discrimination and human rights violations.

The cancer of French racism also showed itself in colonial anthropology and history. Abdo-Julien claims that "the history books, articles, and newspaper chippings Maman used for her research [contain] numerous terms and insulting denominations, the wild theories of anthropologists or preposterous tribologists" (31). Frantz Fanon testifies that colonialists regarded the African continent as "the haunt of savages...riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals" (211). Abdo-Julien testifies on his mother's behalf that the literary text that provided the

impetus for this racist discourse is the totemic *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad:

In the editorials of the time, we were always subjected to the risks of mutilating voices: convert or exploit them, educate or emasculate them, develop or crush them. “Exterminate all the brutes!” vociferated Conrad’s counterpart, someone who knew how to speak the language of truth. As a young [...] sailor, he had commanded a steamer that went up the Congo River in 1890 (31).

This testimony establishes that not all French citizens subscribed to Conrad’s racist template. In Alice’s case, the description of racist discourse as “risks of mutilating voices” and Mr. Kurtz, Conrad’s main character in *Heart of Darkness*, as “someone who knew how to speak the language of truth” sarcastically vents her disapproval of racist conditioning during her time as a student back in her native France. Moreover, Alice concedes that “At that time [...] I wrapped up my studies of history with a college degree, and disgusted by what they were teaching me about Africa and the French Empire, I registered for the entry examination to the school of Journalism in Paris” (81). Relatively speaking, Alice’s anti-racist stance was rare in a society embedded with racist foundations.

However, Waberi’s *Transit* also portrays the cancer of African racism. Recollecting the colonial climate of Djibouti when she had arrived from France with Harbi, Alice tells Abdo-Julien that: “Your father dreaded the ordinary racism on both sides of the fence and what people might say once we were settled there.

Soon, they put you in a ready-made box: you're the mixed couple people look at suspiciously" (81). That is to say, both France and Djibouti suffered from racism as evidenced by the latter's ingrained suspicion of mixed marriages which Alice describes as the "situation of insidious adversity" (82). Alice details the enormity of racist adversity in Djibouti that:

Your father received a cool welcome from his family, and even from some of his friends who had recently returned to the fold. The time was not ripe for mixed race love or mixed flavors in this erratic country, this womb so fertile it cannot keep its children unless it uses a straightjacket and holds them in neurotic silence (82).

The account of this cold reception shows the propagation of racist propriety in colonial Djibouti. Even Harbi's family and friends were intolerant not only towards Alice for being French but also towards Harbi for marrying a French woman when he was a Djiboutian man. However, Alice seems to contradict herself when she downplays such atmosphere of racial intolerance as the logical product of the political acrimony that attended France's colonization of Djibouti. This way, the evocation of a straightjacket concretizes the trouble that colonial Djibouti took to institutionalize the demonization of French citizens:

I felt terrible when they associated me with the last little bunch of colonists just because I was French. In fact, I was a walking disgrace; maybe you'll understand that some day. An animal with horns avoided by your father's so-called friends. I couldn't have cared less about their

distrust, aside from the fact that all around us the atmosphere was insurrectional (84-85).

The effect of this arbitrary demonization on Alice was not so much her isolation from her husband's family and friends as her disillusionment with the entire racism establishment which finds explication in her wistfulness:

When we landed we were dreaming of a world in which people looked each other straight in the eye and spoke to each other like human beings, a world where people spoke man to man the way South Americans address each other [...] with no distinctions of class, race, or nationality. Alas, this country and its sun drove me mad. Their way of living in apnea infuriated me (82).

The craving for a world without class, race, or nationality distinctions suggests the possibility of multicultural tolerance. Alice cites racial solidarity of South Americans to underscore the fact that French and Djiboutian people can emulate it. To further underline her desire for multicultural tolerance, Alice directs her fury towards the docility of Djiboutians in the face of their country's propagation of racism during the colonial epoch.

The Possibility of Multicultural Tolerance and its Challenges

In recent years, multiculturalism has become the catchword in cultural parlance. Will Kymlicka points out that "Multiculturalism today is a global phenomenon" (17). Bhikhu Parekh concurs with Kymlicka that "Almost all societies today are multicultural and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future; this is our

historical predicament, and we obviously need to come to terms with it” (336).

Kymlicka justifies the currency of multiculturalism by arguing that:

What all struggles of multiculturalism have in common [...] is that they reject earlier models of the unitary, homogenous nation-state. Until recently, most states around the world have aspired to be ‘nation-states’. In this model, the state was seen as the possession of a dominant national group, which used the state to privilege its identity, language, history, culture, literature, myths, religion and so on [...] Anyone who did not belong to this dominant group was subject to either assimilation or exclusion (17).

Multiculturalists, like critics of neo-nationalism, refute models of homogeneous nation-state because they are culturally divisive. By constructing a dominant national group that mirrors the cultural homogeneity of a nation-state, oligarchs perpetuate the marginalization of minority groups for their own hegemonic benefits. That is why most nation-states embrace multicultural models today. May Joseph explicates that in postcolonial states “Since the 1930s, various conceptual frameworks for galvanizing ideas of plurality and multicultural citizenship against monocultural national identities within the state have been pursued by positing notions of a “third” space politically, geographically, and historically” (141). In African postcolonial nation-states, the movement from monoculturalism to multiculturalism is in the main reflected by migrant narratives.

For all practical purposes, Waberi's *Transit* reflects the praxis of multicultural tolerance. Corbin Treacy verifies that *Transit* "exposes the nomad's infinite possibility [...] of *necessity*, a condition in which exilic migration is not a monolithic experience, but rather one heavily influenced by class and social position in the postcolony" (64). In other words, *Transit* spotlights migration as a diverse phenomenon that offers boundless possibilities for postcolonial subjects in pursuit of their personal wants. Indeed, the monologue of Abdo-Julien first introduces us to the multicultural possibilities in *Transit*:

Maman kept repeating to whoever would listen that this country was hers too. This is where love made me put down my bags, she would say [...] Everything in this land is mine: its volcanic hillocks, its skinny fauna; the tragic, camel-like swaying of its hips; the aquatic flora pictured on postage stamps; the desert islets like the famous Guinni Koma [...] Yes, everything here is mine [...] my country sad and beautiful like the oilcloth of a village café in Brittany on a rainy Sunday morning (27).

Alice's claim that she belongs to Djibouti when she is a French native illustrates the existence of multicultural identities in Djibouti. Actually, Dominic Thomas states that there are "symbiotic dimensions of relations and population flow between France and the Francophone world" (3) which manifests in Alice's comparison of Djibouti's sadness and beauty with the oilcloth of a village café in Brittany where she grew up. As Bhikhu Parekh puts it, "Every culture is exposed to others and cannot avoid comparing itself with them. A section of its members might be attracted to some of the latter's beliefs and practices, and either

genuinely read them back into their own tradition or reinterpret it to legitimize the foreign import” (175). The exposure of Alice to Djiboutian culture has therefore made her not only to compare it with French culture but also to adopt it. However, Alice’s reflection affirms that exposure to different cultures breeds split identities:

What on earth made me go there, in the midst of those strange strangers with their Afros and bell-bottom pants? You always like to think of yourself as different; you want to escape the common fate, out of pride perhaps [...] I let myself be sucked up by destiny, something stronger than myself [...] Why would a young student, a girl from Brittany like me, set out for this crazy place? Fate took over and I dove into it headfirst (27-28).

The schizophrenic alienation from and identification with Djibouti exposes the downside of multiculturalism. Pnina Werbner elucidates that “Migration creates a sense of “double consciousness,” an awareness, as W.E.B. Du Bois (1994) argues in relation to American blacks [...] of a subject’s sense of belonging and alienation” (107). The fact that Alice inhabits the cultural third space means that she is caught up in a vortex of simultaneously identifying with Djiboutian culture and/or feeling alienated from it. However, Alice shows that the combination of time and personal effort extenuates migrant schizophrenia:

They seemed lost; so was I but a lot less than they were. They looked gentle, sweet, harmless. So did I, they said, afterwards. I knew nothing about them, about their country, their language, their culture. I had just turned twenty [...] Then I got used to their gregarious ways, their nomadic flesh that would start moving only as a group, with their worries locked inside themselves more often

than not [...] I was friendly with all of them, laughing with one, laughing with all (28).

This passage highlights the fact that multicultural overtures are instinctively reciprocal. Bhikhu Parekh stresses that “unless human beings are able to step out of their culture, they tend to absolutize it, imagining it to be the only natural or self-evident way to understand and organize human life and they cannot step out of their culture unless they have access to others” (167). In this sense, both Alice and Djiboutians step out of their respective cultures and mutually coexist in spite of their cultural differences. Such is the manifestation of multicultural tolerance in Djibouti that Bashir also pinpoints in the following monologue: “OK, I gotta confirm this story right away: yes, in the army everyone’s not native, plenty cousins from Somalia there! Some come from Mengistu’s army, specially with the rebels. (34-35). The reference to neighboring Somalis as cousins epitomizes the prevailing multicultural spirit. Furthermore, Alice demonstrates the cultivation of racial tolerance and solidarity across the African continent by recalling that “[Harbi] would make a date with me and then cancel at the last minute, saying he had forgotten his Interafrican soccer game. It was trendy at the time to form teams by countries and fight on the soccer field” (28). The participating teams would come from lands as far as Togo and Morocco. This, once again, proves the exercise of multicultural tolerance, through sports, among people of diverse cultural experiences and outlooks.

Another form of multicultural tolerance in Waberi's *Transit* is metissage or mixed-blood identities. As an immediate example of mixed-blood identity, Abdo-Julien meditates on his mother's declaration that:

ALL BLOOD IS MIXED and all identities are nomadic, Maman would have said, talking about me, Papa, herself, or the whole wide world. This business of mixed blood is a very old story, she would add, raising her voice – so old that the first traces of African migration in the Italian peninsula, to give just one example, date from the conquest and fall of Carthage (37).

This passage illuminates that multicultural tolerance is a global phenomenon. Migration and mixed marriages produced generations of mixed-blood identities and since these processes repeated themselves, they naturally produced a world of mixed blood. For example, Abdo-Julien describes himself as “the product of love without borders; a hyphen between two worlds” (46). Tess Lewis argues that Abdo-Julien's disposition derives from “simultaneous identification with and sense of isolation from the two cultures he must negotiate in establishing a sense of himself” (455). In other words, Abdo-Julien's sense of himself is multicultural given he is part Djiboutian and part French.

Bashir gives further evidence of multicultural tolerance in Djibouti by referring to the coexistence of different tribes and races. He claims that “In a lot of neighbourhoods of the capital, in Einguela, Ambouli, Districts 1, 2, 4, Plateau, etc. Wadags, Walals, and Arabs, we all mixed, with plenty Hindis an even some

Whites married to our girls, or just weirdos” (42). Like Bashir, Abdo-Julien foregrounds Djibouti’s multicultural landscape by referring to the absolute hospitality of his father:

People from all walks of life come to our house: Blacks and Whites, browns like me, the nobodies of the day and the phantoms of the night. Opponents of the regime who slip in stealthily. Reciters of 114 suras of the holy Book. He listens to their complaints and dips into his pocket more often than he should (105).

This passage ascertains that unconditional friendship is the prerequisite for multicultural tolerance. Harbi’s hospitality without regard to race, political or religious affiliation shows that he first and foremost considers all his visitors as friends. Likewise, Awaleh retrospectively describes refugees as “our relatives driven from Ethiopia or Somalia by the war between the Somalis and the Ethiopians, two age-old enemies in the Horn of Africa” (122). Thus, although Somalis and Ethiopians view each other as sworn enemies, Djiboutians consider them both relatives as shown by the solidarity to receive them as refugees. However, Harbi’s closing voice that “we left the country [...] where retracing one’s tribal genealogy was becoming more and more pressing” (147-148) reveals that while multicultural tolerance is exercised in Djibouti, it faces colossal challenges of tribalism and territoriality which culminated into the 1991 Djiboutian civil war and the 2008 Djibouti-Eritrea border conflict respectively.

Conclusion

The bane of racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses heralds a bloodier future for the global community. Timothy Brennan sadly acknowledges that “We live in a world obsessed with national pride, and rampant with boundary wars, with nationalism on the banner of countless parties” (44). Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt adds that “While the older conceptions of rootedness and autochthony seem intellectually bankrupt, the heady theories of creative metissage have run aground upon the rocks of contemporary reality” (1). Suffice it to say that the 21st century has been riddled with acts of terror that expose the pitfalls of the neo-nationalist shibboleth.

Until the West changes its discriminatory policies on migrants and asylum seekers especially of African or Arabic descent, the war on terror will always be a chimera because racism, xenophobia and human rights abuses are a breeding ground for extremist violence as recent terrorist attacks on France demonstrate. While in no way endorsing terrorist massacring of innocent citizens as collateral damage, Western oligarchs have to face up to the fact that they are willy-nilly caught up in the fire they ignited in the first place by alienating and antagonizing minority groups.

The same bloody precipices face the African continent. Neo-nationalist policies have hitherto abetted a deluge of civil wars, genocides, coups, revolutions and sectarian violence. For example, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the 2015 Al-Shabaab Garissa University massacre in Kenya and the lingering menace of Boko Haram in West Africa serve as wounding reminders that racism, xenophobia and

human rights abuses all too automatically beget counter-violence in which innocent people become both shields and targets between warring factions. It is against this cataclysmic presage that overtures of multicultural tolerance emerge as salvific antidotes to the cancerous proliferation of the whole gamut of man's inhumanity to man in the name of nation, race, tribe or religion.

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