

**“Immigrants are Stripping Europe of its Culture”<sup>1</sup>:  
the Far Right narrative of Europe and Two Migrant Responses**

*Roger Bromley*  
Emeritus Professor, the  
University of Nottingham, UK.

**Abstract**

Arguably, the most urgent narratives in the contemporary world are political in the widest sense of the term. It seems to me, certainly from a European perspective that there are two major, conflicting political narratives at the moment: a European one from a White Nationalist, Identitarian perspective, seeing itself in danger of being displaced by migrants, challenged by a narrative from the Global South, itself constructed by those in flight from war, poverty, and exploitation. Both, in a profound sense, are linked by displacement, one metaphorical/symbolic, and the other emergent and actual. In this paper, I want to concentrate upon this particular European (or, more precisely perhaps, Euro-American) far Right narrative which, if not exactly dominant, is

certainly gaining currency and is manifested in populist politics. The principal target of this narrative is immigration, specifically refugees; its main adversary is the ‘lickspittle mentality’ of Liberalism which has, it is claimed, nurtured the ethnic invasion threatening Europe. In attempting to locate the sources of this discourse in the concept of racialization, an analysis derived from decolonial thinking will be presented. In the second part of the article, I will look briefly at two texts (literary and cinematic) which have contributed to a counter-narrative about forced migration and actual physical, and psychological, displacement, rather than the metaphorical displacement of European ‘nativism’. This counter-narrative, it will be argued, is primarily imagined from the perspective of migrants/refugees on the borders of Europe in many senses.

**Keywords:** Narrative, Decolonial, Far Right, Displacement, White, Nationalist

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In this paper I shall outline the main themes and tropes of Far, or extreme, Right narratives in Europe today, and then will attempt to locate the origins of these narratives in colonial discourses. My argument will be that ideology is most effective when structured like a narrative, a convincing story. A number of these Far Right ‘stories’ will be outlined. Finally, I shall look briefly at two texts which seek to place the migrant/refugee at the symbolic centre of the contemporary world in order to produce an alternative form of cultural resistance, the potential for a counter-narrative.

In February 2018, Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary, called for a global alliance against migration as he began campaigning for the April election: “Christianity is Europe’s last hope”. He went on to add that with mass immigration especially from Africa, “our worst nightmares can come true. The West falls as it fails to see Europe being overrun”. (*The Guardian*, February 2018). This speech summarises one, dominant strand of what I am calling the Far Right narrative in Europe. This narrative takes almost as many forms as the Far Right itself which is composed, broadly of the following constituents: the electoral or parliamentary approach, the intellectual and conceptual, and the street with its varying levels of violence. These narratives are often contradictory. The

New Right (Nouvelle Droite) in France, for example, especially its leading intellectual, Alain De Benoist, opposes Christianity and the Judaeo-Christian tradition and favours a 5,000 year, Indo-European, pagan legacy. (see de Benoist, 2016)

In the conflict of interpretation over the current crisis in Europe, which are the narratives that dominate and how can they be countered? Who is setting the agenda and claiming ownership of particular issues? How do we go about developing new constitutive stories, alternative narratives? How can we find a narrative space beyond the increasingly dominant Right frame? Edward Said, in his book *Covering Islam*, refers to the ways in which Islam is framed by representations in which “a handful of reckless generalizations and repeatedly deployed clichés” (Said, 1997, li) come to constitute a public discourse of negativity. A repertoire of similar, recurring images makes up this fairly recent European narrative, shaped after 9/11 and sharpened since 2015, against which the ‘Other’ has to seek permission to narrate, in Said’s phrase. In *Time and the Other*, the anthropologist, Johannes Fabian, calls this “the denial of coevals”: “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse – the ‘otherer’” (Fabian, 1983, 31). Islam is, in other

words, seen as out of time, unchanging, fixed and backward, pre-Modern, othered.

### White Genocide

In Europe there is a war on immigration, mainly, but not only, articulated by, and shared by most of, the Right. However the opposition to migrants/refugees is formulated or coded, it is primarily a white nationalist, or nativist, narrative, and something shared with similar groups in the USA, although there are different inflections and referents. Also shared is the idea that Europe/the USA are being overrun by migrants, specifically Muslims, and the Islamification of Europe or the threat of Eurabia is often invoked: Guillaume Faye speaks of “a massive colonisation settlement of the West by peoples from the Global South”. (Faye, 2016, Introduction). Another enemy of the Right is multiculturalism and de Benoist advocates the ‘right to difference’ by which he means the establishment of separate civilisations and cultures, what he calls ethnopluralism, in which organic, ethnic cultures/communities live independently of each other in an ‘empire of the regions’. Richard Spencer, the USA alt-right leader, speaks of ‘operation Homeland’, the establishment of separate homelands dominated by those of white, European descent. The term ‘homelands’ is also commonly used by the Identitarian movement in Europe and the USA. *Generation Identitaire* was formed in France as the youth wing of the Bloc Identitaire and has spread across Europe. Identitarianism is a pan-European movement, primarily a cultural narrative – ‘our way of life’. Identitarian activists set up a ‘Defend Europe’ campaign in 2017 and chartered a ship in order to prevent migrants coming by sea from Libya, and to

disrupt NGO rescue vessels. Since that time, the new populist Italian government coalition seems to be following a similar course of action to exclude migrants.

For all their differences, what is also common to all shades of Far Right opinion is opposition to cultural homogenisation, the product, it is claimed, of elite global capitalism. In addition to this, the most frequently reiterated targets are liberalism, consumerism, Islam, the Left, feminism, political correctness and so-called cultural Marxism. The intellectuals of the Right see themselves as engaged in metapolitics – a cultural and ideological ‘war of position’, the winning of hearts and minds, the idea that cultural change needs to precede political change. This is a concept borrowed from the Italian Marxist intellectual and activist, Antonio Gramsci. De Benoist speaks of ‘Right Gramscianism’. This is part of resistance to what is perceived as the conquest of Europe by migrants, a reverse colonisation. The Right sees itself as engaged in a reconquest (*Reconquista* was the term used in 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain about the Christian defeat of Islam) the defence of Europe against the diminishing of ethnic purity, its demographic and cultural decline, betrayed by Left-liberalism and globalisation. *Reconquista Germania* is an extreme-right channel on the gaming app Discord; ‘Make Europe Great Again’ is the official motto of the German AfD far right party. There is an existential fear that the political and demographic character of the West will be altered forever by the influx (‘flood’ is often used) of migrants.

The essence of this Liberal modernity, it is claimed, is the idea of conquest formulated in a phrase, and the title of a book in 2012 by Renaud Camus, called ‘The Great Replacement’ (*Le Grand*

*Emplacement*), which is probably the most important narrative theme of the Right in recent times. This theme is also called *The Grand Coup* by Guillaume Faye, another, founding, New Right intellectual who broke with the group in the 1980s. Another book of his was called *The Colonisation of Europe*. Together these three phrases – replacement, coup, colonisation – constitute the core ideological precepts of the nativist, Far Right narrative. In this scenario, the dispossessed majority in Europe faces the possibility of extinction – ‘white genocide’ in US Right discourse – and will be substituted by immigrant hordes: ‘global substitutionism’, (*remplacisme global*) is the phrase used by Renaud Camus. This paranoid narrative, the idea of the sacred nation, brings to mind the mystical and mythical, ‘blood and soil’, at the root of much white nationalist ideology. I say ‘paranoid’ because it is predicted that by 2030, the Muslim population of Europe will only comprise 7% of the continent. It is currently 4%. It is hard not to see the Muslim stereotype as a pretext, a symptom of a much deeper anxiety and uncertainty. The title of a book by Thilo Sarrazin to be published in August 2018 is *Hostile Takeover: How Islam Hampers Progress and Threatens Society* which sums up one particular, and increasingly dominant, feature of the Far Right.

In Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, the ‘Unite the Right’, white nationalist, neo-fascist rally chanted ‘you will not replace us’ and ‘the Jews will not replace us’, echoing the ‘Great Replacement’ claim, with a sharper anti-Semitic edge than is currently deployed publicly in Europe. The fightback against this ‘replacement’ has its violent, street manifestations but is also articulated in

Right intellectual circles through publications such as *Manifesto for a European Renaissance* (de Benoist), *A New European Renaissance* (Faye), and *The Real Right Returns: A Handbook for the True Opposition* (Friberg), all published by ARKTOS, the publishing house of the Far Right, set up to circulate: “those ideas and values which were taken for granted in Europe prior to the advent of Liberalism” (Friberg, 2015, ix). Ideas, one might argue, which have leaked into mainstream discourse since the recession of 2008, as well as gaining considerable exposure in social media. An American far-right website (Daily Stormer) speaks of weaponising internet culture, of coordinating media disruption strategies.

There is a website called ‘European Civil War’ which articulates how this supposed conflict is seen, a conflict, which many on the Far Right see as being resolved by what is called ‘EuroSiberia’ (the reunification of all peoples of European origin), or ‘EurAsia’ which is a formulation produced by looking to Putin and Russia for leadership, a federation of white ethno states. The overall framing narrative consists of a belief in order and structure, hierarchy, leadership and authoritarianism. It is anti-egalitarian. In its street manifestations it revolves around a Vitalist ethic of the body, of Nordic masculinity. Generation Identity attacks the 68ers (the 1968 generation) for taking the ‘manliness out of man’. Richard Spencer urges his followers to ‘become who you are’. So, we can add ‘masculinism’ to the Right narrative I am trying to develop, a response to what they term the emasculation and enfeeblement of the ‘white race’. Most of the groups emphasise the importance of collective narratives, rituals and symbolic

repertoires, and stress the aesthetic and the affective in what is a rhetoric of belonging and the anxiety of unbelonging: the overarching narrative of displacement which comes to occupy a xenophobic polemical space:

Most importantly, right-wing populism does not only relate to the *form* of rhetoric, but to its specific contents: such parties...construct fear and – related to various real or imagined dangers – propose scapegoats that are blamed for threatening or actually damaging *our* societies, in Europe and beyond (my italics) (Wodak, 2015, 2)

The Far Right narrative is derived from ideologies of nation and concepts of national sovereignty:

The doctrine of nationalism which crystallized in 1848 gives a geographic imperative to the concept of culture itself: habit, faith, pleasure, and ritual – all depend upon enactment in a particular territory. More, the place which nourishes rituals is a place composed of people like oneself, people with whom one can share without explaining. Territory thus becomes synonymous with identity. (Sennett, 2011: 58)

At a time, since the 2008 recession, when the ‘European’ narrative is ceasing to make sense, cohere, motivate, or hold people together at the economic, social, or political level, mainly because of neoliberalism and globalization, it is being re-assembled symbolically/discursively on a negative construction of immigration. This is true for a number of countries in Europe where Far Right parties are gaining prominence on the basis of opposition to immigration. The explicitly neo-Nazi, ethno-nationalist party in Greece, Golden Dawn, is violently opposed to immigration

and, what its statutes call, the ‘demographic alteration’; the party gained 18 seats in the June 2012 Greek elections. The immigrant is mapped against an already existing, fixed, and (so the story goes) socially cohesive national culture – the symbols, stories and legends of the deeper normative notions and images that underlie the ‘social imaginary’, those once-common understandings and a widely- shared sense of legitimacy produced by the conversion and transformation processes brought about by nineteenth and twentieth century hegemony – a partly conscious, partly unconscious repertoire. The Golden Dawn predicate their statutes upon the assumption that, what they call, the ‘People’ is not just an arithmetic total of individuals but the *qualitative* composition of humans with the same biological and cultural heritage. This ‘tribal’ definition would most probably find echoes in the majority of far Right parties in Europe.

A struggle for recognition is taking place which is deep, complex and, partly at the level of the unconscious. Claims of Britishness, Frenchness, or Danishness (the three countries where Right parties led the EU elections in 2014) form the basis on which refugee and migrant issues are used as organising principles for the social critique of other political issues:

The originality and richness of the human heritages of this world are nourished by their differences and their deviations, which surprise and fascinate as soon as one passes from the culture of one people to another. These originalities can find protection, in turn, only in the homogeneous ethno-cultural space that is proper to them. (Krebs, 1997, 8).

The title of Krebs's book is *Fighting for the Essence: Western Ethnocide or European Renaissance* and the word 'essence' is crucial here, that same biological and cultural heritage just referred to.

Krebs is one of the intellectuals of the 'New Right' and exercises considerable influence on theories of ethno-nationalism. For example, the Danish People's Party states: "Denmark belongs to the Danes...a multi-ethnic Denmark would mean the breaking down of our stable homogeneous society by anti-development and reactionary cultures". (Danish People's Party, 2007)

The post-Cold War period has seen the "dismantling of ideological, political, social and identification reference points" (Lärdi 1998: 2)), readily available dyadic symbolic forms, and, as a consequence, the nation has come up against the limits of its being and meaningfulness, its representational currencies; what in psychoanalysis would be called its 'narcissistic self-enclosure', hence the preoccupation with borders and security. There is a crisis at the boundary of articulation. As de Benoist puts it: "once upon a time borders played a significant role: they guaranteed the continuation of collective identities" (de Benoist, 2004, 37). Beppe Grillo, of The Five Star Movement (in Italy) said at one point: "The borders of the Fatherland used to be sacred, politicians desecrated {sic} them" (Grillo, 2007, blog). The use of the word 'Fatherland' here has sinister echoes, and blaming politicians (in Italian, *La Casta*) is a core feature of Right populism. A coming ethnic civil war is predicted as Europe is overwhelmed through its porous borders, so the rhetoric goes.

### Colonial Roots of Racialization

At this point I shall try to trace those aspects of colonial discourse and Modernity which have produced the mindset which has led to European ways of seeing migrants/refugees with hostility. This section is influenced by the research project M/C (modernity/coloniality).<sup>2</sup> A good place to start is Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation" (2007). To speak of Eurocentrism is something of a cliché now but in order to understand European attitudes to refugees at the level of the State and in popular terms, I think it is still necessary to produce an explanatory account by going back and thinking about, what Wynter calls, the Western bourgeois conception of the human, Man, which *overrepresents* itself as if it were the human itself. The idea of the Western European as over-representing itself as human is of value because it helps to see why refugees are seen as disposable/expendable en masse, regarded as less than human. Once the idea of dehumanisation takes hold it is accompanied by impunity and indifference at the level of the State and in terms of the popular imaginary. How, otherwise, do we make sense of negative responses to the deaths of thousands of refugees at sea, and elsewhere, in recent years, and policies of exclusion which consist of building walls and fences to keep out would-be asylum-seekers? Refugees are the modern version of Fanon's 'wretched of the earth', as, much of what he had to say about 'les damnés' also applies to refugees.

Any attempt to unsettle this overrepresentation necessitates an

understanding of what a number of Latin American theorists have called ‘the coloniality of power’. In writing about displacement, generally, we need to ask ourselves why, and how, we (Europeans) distance ourselves from refugees, what set of values enables us to do so? One part of the answer is *racialization*, one of the primary legacies of colonialism, with the idea of race “the most efficient instrument of social domination invented in the last 500 years” (Mignolo, 2007, 46). Race as a master code, or narrative mentalité, has entered so deeply into common sense and daily discourse as part of the construct of the white Euro-American that the ‘epistemological disregard’ of the other informs all other forms of ‘disregard’. Global inequality is one of the root effects and premises of this racialization and a reason why degradation, immiseration, and the violent deaths of refugees are met with indifference. They are, In Judith Butler’s words, ‘the ungrivable’:

lives regarded as disposable or are so stripped of value that when they are imperilled, injured or lost, they assume a social ontology that is partially constituted by that regard....their potential loss is no occasion to mourn. Someone who has never existed has been nullified, so nothing has happened. (Butler, 2014,35).

Systematically representing refugees as figures of lack, without worth or value, lives not worthy of living, derives from ideas about racial difference that originated with slavery and over time came to apply to all other colonised subjects.

As an imperialising force, Western Europe not only practised slavery and extensive forms of exclusion and genocide but also developed an accompanying

ideology structured like a narrative related to this which persists today. Nationalism, the corollary of imperialism, is one way in Europe in which history is still present in all we think and do: “Right-wing populism endorses a nativist notion of belonging, linked to a chauvinist and racialized concept of ‘the people’ and ‘the nation’” (Wodak, 2015, 47). As Mbembe says, when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of foreign peoples, “race has been the ever-present shadow in Western thought and practice”. (Mbembe, 2003, 4)

Until recent years, the description ‘wretched of the earth’ would comfortably have been applied to those outside the West but neo-liberalism, austerity, and growing inequality mean that this term also now resonates within the West, with many commentators speaking of ‘the left behind’, ‘people feeling abandoned’ and lacking a narrative now that they can no longer identify with the dominant one of difference from the excluded ‘other’, the West’s ethnocultural field of the human. Today, the jobless, the homeless, the poor, the systemically excluded and criminalised are left by themselves, relatively unaided by the State. As a result, the abandoned in Europe are now made to occupy spaces originally prescribed for the ‘wretched other’. Disposability has come home and, as a consequence, Far Right populism is gaining ground.

Refugees are seen as waste to be excluded, refuse to be discarded, unproductive lives but, at a deeper level, they symbolise a precariousness, a liminality, which serves as an unsettling, unwelcome reminder of how many lives in the privileged West are now also remaindered. Refugees occupy the borderland between abandonment and value now shared by many, hence the need

to keep them at a distance. A generalised anxiety has taken hold such that any version of worldly belonging is seen through the lens of crisis and anxiety.

Any attempt to unsettle common sense thinking about migrants and refugees confronts ideological forms of nationalism, coloniality, and the state. In order to resist seeing the refugee as a knowing subject, with autonomy and agency, we (the pronoun use is important) essentialize the other, reduce them to a set of invariable and negative characteristics and stereotypes. How we deal with this indifference, this disengagement and emotional disidentification is a critical question of politics and representation. To dehumanize others is a form of displacement, to remove them from any identity other than as refugee.

How we render the refugee 'knowable' is another challenge, the challenge of representation at a time when, even if numbers are falling in Europe, thousands are still dying in attempting to reach the continent. In humanitarian terms, there is a growing focus on vulnerability, and, of course, the vulnerable have to be protected, but to see all refugees as victims, or vulnerable people, needs to be critically examined for its reductiveness and refusal of agency. Rather, it needs the development of other lenses for perception, a greater aesthetic-political reflexivity and sensitivity, a search for new, and radical, rhetorical strategies, linguistic and stylistic resources which unsettle, defamiliarize, and disrupt expectations and preconceptions. So, the forms of representation are crucial and the central point of political art is to highlight precarity and to insist that *intervention* in the world is possible. Intervention, that is, in the form of counter-narratives which

subvert the presumption of 'knowing the refugee'.

How can refugees be represented other than as vulnerable or pitiable? One way is through *recognition* enabling them to become, in terms already referred to, 'grievable subjects'. With more than a thousand people having drowned crossing the Mediterranean in the first six months of 2018, despite the number of refugees seeking entry to Europe having fallen sharply since 2015/16, *The Guardian* newspaper decided on World Refugee Day (20 June 2018) to make available a list of the 34,361 migrants and refugees *known* to have died in the attempt to reach the borders of Europe. The key word in that sentence is 'known', that is, reported deaths, as there well may be countless others. The list was compiled by United for Intercultural Action, a European network of 550 anti-racist organisations drawn from 48 countries. Banu Cennetoglu, an artist working in Istanbul, has incorporated the list in her work for the past 16 years. She had an exhibition at the Chisenhale Gallery, London from June to August, 2018, and the current edition of the list was commissioned and produced by the Gallery; it also featured as part of the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art. The name of the refugee, country of origin, year, cause and source of death constituted the data base of the list. (*The Guardian* 20 June, 2018).

In itself, the list as a compilation of data cannot make the particular individual 'grievable' but its existence and its distribution in a range of public places, rather like other public forms of commemoration, has an anamnestic effect – bringing to mind, to visibility and to memorability, those who might otherwise be disregarded. By disseminating the list at



bus stops, on billboards, in advertising columns in major European cities, on a wall in Los Angeles, and a public screen on top of Istanbul's Marmara Pera hotel, the artist is creating a form of public declaration, metaphorically restoring to a visual reckoning those who do not count, an attempt to interpellate, bind, 'those whose lives matter' (as a result of colonial and racialized computations) with those who have been, and continue to be, erased by means of, what Butler calls, 'norms of recognition' (Butler, 2009, 5).

I have dwelt upon this list at length because it seems to me to offer a framework for potential recognition and reciprocity, a revaluation of those subject to the 'failure of regard' (Butler, 25). It is never easy to measure the effects of a work of public art (which the *distribution* of the list effectively becomes) or of literature, but I wish to conclude this argument by briefly examining two cultural products – a film and a novel – which attempt to place migrants and refugees as 'grievable subjects' at the centre of their own narratives because, as Daniel Trilling has said, "often they are given no story at all, reduced to a shadow that occasionally flits across European vision" (Trilling 2018, 9). A decolonial narrative is one which corresponds with John Berger's words: "There isn't one way of telling a story. Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one (Berger, 1972, epigraph).

### The Southern Gaze

Reference was made earlier to Guillaume Faye's comment about "a massive colonisation settlement of the West by peoples from the Global South", and in this final section I shall examine two texts from the Global South: the film,

*Those who Jump* (2016) and the novel, *The Gurugu Pledge* (2017), drawing upon decolonial thinking. On the African continent the "coloniality of power" can be seen as "a crucial structuring process in the modern colonial/world-system" (Grosfoguel, 2007: 219-220). Notionally independent and decolonised, most African countries experience, at a range of levels – epistemological and structural – continuities from the colonial past in the form of neo-colonialism.

Both texts are based on Mount Gurugu in Morocco, the site of an informal, refugee camp inhabited by between 500 and 1,000 people, mainly young men, from West Africa. To screen its squalor, the men ironically name it 'the residence'. The camp is situated two kilometres from the Spanish autonomous, and anomalous, enclave of Melilla, which is on the African continent yet marks Europe's border with the Global South. It is structurally liminal but actively signified as 'European', with "Europe as a master signifier in discourses of exclusion and deportation zones" (Soto-Bermant, 2017, 138). Melilla, with its 11 kilometre long, six metre high, three-tiered, razor wired fence represents in microcosm the conflict of which I have been speaking, that narrative encounter between entitlement and disposability. This representation of the border, marked by Melilla, is symbolic, physical, and historical. It was captured by Spain from the Moors in 1497 and established as a military outpost. Its CETI (Centre for the Temporary Stay of Migrants) holds hundreds of migrants/refugees: the enemy *almost* within. The EU gives Spain and Morocco millions of euros each year to maintain this border. As Mignolo has said, "Decolonial projects dwell in the border" (Mignolo, 2010, 17) and Laurie has argued

that decolonial approaches attempt “to politicise epistemology from the experiences of those on the border”. (Laurie, 2012, 13). Hence, Melilla and Gurugu are appropriate sites for texts which take apart the logic of coloniality and seek to imagine the possibilities of decolonial societies.

The title ‘Those who Jump’ syntactically enacts the subjectivity and agency of the refugees, with its active verb. The idea for the film arose from a decision by two young filmmakers to hand over a camera to Abou, a university graduate living in the camp, in the hope that he could produce an insider’s view of the daily experience of those living there. In the course of filming Abou, in a sense, becomes the camera: ‘I feel that I exist when I film’. It is this presence of an active existence which moves the representation of the refugee away from the object of pity, the hapless victim. He, like all the others, *is* a victim, of repressive regimes, of hunger, poverty and unemployment but the film reverses the European gaze and presents the active, point of view of those held in time by the proximity of the fence and the desire to jump it. The temporariness, and the improvised quality, of their lives feature throughout the film. We see men cooking food over an open fire, clothes hanging out to dry on trees, with plastic and cardboard sheets the only bedding. Men scavenging for food and water in the nearby city of Nador hover between hope and despair, death and life. One voicemail message left by Abou is to the mother of a friend who died in the camp: Mustafa. The unstable, hand-held camera at times embodies the endangered lives of the men, particularly in a sequence showing the men being pursued by helicopter and armed police.

There are long-distance shots of Melilla which represent the tantalising, frustrated perceptions of the camp dwellers and an image of a plane coming in to land mocks the immobility of the watching men. One of the figures interviewed says: “every day I see my future in front of me but I cannot reach it”. Abou has been 18 months on Gurugu and attempted to climb the fence countless times. His journey began with 40 euros and his dream is to join his brother who reached Europe in 2015. The film underscores the fact that lives are at risk from a number of perspectives, from the police who raid the camp and burn all the meagre possessions of the inhabitants, and also attack them, as well as the clandestine journey to the fence, apart from the obvious hazards of the attempt to scale the fence. The shared strategy of the men is to approach the fence en masse, so as to outnumber the police. The sense of collective solidarity is shown, without sentimentality or romanticization, as also filmed is the ‘trial’ of someone who leaked information to the police. The scale of the danger involved is revealed by night-time, black and white editorial inserts of border surveillance images showing the vast numbers of men approaching the fence in ordered, single file.

The film indicates the makeshift nature of the camp, its rocky terrain, and focuses on the everyday: the first aid applied with care and precision to those injured by police, the numerous dogs roaming the camp, and a passionately engaged football match between Mali and the Ivory Coast. Humour is also evident throughout – the match is played at the Maracana stadium (in Rio de Janeiro) one man mockingly comments. ‘Makeshift’, maybe, but also evident is the way in which the different nationalities organise their own

administration and regulations, and plan the fence jumps and camp organisation. Rule One for all, it is stressed, is ‘we will all enter Europe’, so their whole existence is predicated on this, to become an African in Europe. Although each nationality has its space and structure set out, there is also a commonality in which versatility is a key aspect, with roles from the past – doctor, lawyer – changed by the exigencies of their condition. Resourcefulness and improvisation are also manifested by the construction of devices designed to aid the climb in the darkness. Frequent shots of the bright lights of the city below are a contrasting provocation to the watchers above. There is very little in the way of polemic or back story, but the hellish journey through the desert is remarked upon as is the fact that, with their countries having been exploited for years, Europeans cannot expect to take everything away from African people and expect to keep them outside. The men are aware of the hazardous nature of their lives and pray that they will never become anonymous corpses. This touches upon a key aspect of the film – the men are rescued from anonymity, given identities, and positions to speak from: subjects who act in unison, knowing that behind the fence lies the future. It is also recognised that this future may not be all that is hoped for, so they may dream but they are not illusioned.

In the final sequences of the film, fog shrouds the mountain as the men are shown approaching the fence and the film ends in a blaze of colour and on a collective note of song and dance as a number of men are shown celebrating in Melilla having successfully surmounted the fence and evaded the police. Abou, the filmmaker, is one of them and he is now

living in Germany with temporary leave to remain, having survived living on the borders but still subject to time waiting.

Juan Tomas Avila Laurel’s *The Gurugu Pledge* occupies a similar terrain to the film and also shows Fanon’s ‘wretched of the earth’ as subjects. The novel gives fictional form to what Ndlovu-Gatsheni has described as “a dominant Western power backed up by Euro-American epistemologies which resulted... in the colonisation of African imagination and displacement of African knowledges”. (Ndlovu- Gatsheni, 2013, 11). The fact that everyone in the ‘residence’ is displaced from the heart of Africa and had a past, but also spoke in French or English and are in thrall to Europe (a phone call or a letter from a European address would be a major event) articulates this hegemonic colonial legacy. The narrator comments ironically on “the brilliant future that awaited them in Europe” (*The Gurugu Pledge*, 2017, 25. All further references will be to this edition of the text and cited as GP). All of the people on Mount Gurugu have a life and a story which Europe cannot ignore. The novel begins with a first person narrator who then hands over to the stories of a range of other men. Although each story is different, there is a narrative convergence in the sense that they share a metaphorical neighbourhood of displacement and deprivation, the racialization of the Black ‘other’, and the cronyism, violence and corruption of African dictatorships, with Idi Amin singled out as the representative, neo-colonised figure. Added to this is the more recent build-up of armaments, the desertification of Africa, the destruction of biodiversity, and reduction of African agricultural knowledge and expertise to the service of corporate capitalism. The

narrator's role is to make sure the stories will cross the sea and be told on the other shore.

The inhabitants are divided into language groups: "eat or *manger* according to whichever History the whites chose for you" (GP, 65). The passivity of the syntax emphasises that, literally and metaphorically, these are 'disregarded, discarded subjects'; in the words of one man, "They told me I no longer have a country, that's what they said at the border: you've no country any more, now you're just black" (GP, 75). This epitomises the racialized abjection, the precarity and lack of value I have been speaking of throughout. At the borders of Europe, all those seeking to enter from Africa are indiscriminately regarded as 'just black'.

The story often uses humour for serious purposes, as in the sequence when two young men are sent on a shopping/begging expedition with sanitary towels one of the items needed but which they are too embarrassed to ask for. Apart from anything else, this shows the patriarchal nature of the settlement. Another instance of the humour is the lengthy sequence on football. Some of the men fantasise that if they owned Mount Gurugu they could cultivate it, grow food, and become self-sufficient; in other words, produce an Africa, in miniature, which they wouldn't have to leave. The republic created would be called the Republic of Samuel Eto'o (the world-famous Cameroon player) as football is the one preoccupation which distracts them from their wretchedness. The exodus of African footballers to Europe is held up as a model of their own ambition and names are reeled off like sacred icons. What the footballers have is, what is known as, exit capacity, the

mobility denied to those stuck on the mountain. As we shall see shortly, the narrative is critical of these models of aspiration as the only value they represent is that of the market and a focus on the exceptional. Football is a sustaining, if illusory, fantasy, with men keeping fit until signed by a European club.

Like *Those who Jump*, the novel does not sentimentalise the figures in the camp as blackmail and corruption are shown, and women are used and sexually abused. Some of the stories told are like moral parables, they synthesise qualities or faults which are generic. For example, the illness of one of the two women featured in the text, and her subsequent miscarriage encapsulates the shared narrative of hope, renewal and despair. What is also shared is the humiliations and terrors faced, the common perilous journey across hundreds of miles of inhospitable terrain: "the rule of thumb was that the closer you get to the gates of Europe, the more you disposed of, linking you to a concrete African country" (GP, 90). Tactically, this makes sense, but it also marks the emptying out of identity as well as the emptying out of a continent in order to go to another one. As one other person comments, "the closer we get to the finishing line, none of us is from anywhere" (GP, 121), their anonymity complete. What the novel shows critically is the existence of dependent voices: "Until we show them any different, what's written in books will be what's read out on the radio, day and night" (GP, 120). This is an argument for alternative voices, independent counter-narratives, no longer hooked on Europe. There are interludes in the text of fairly explicit analysis of the reasons for the flight from Africa, the displacement and dispossession of resources: "there will be whites here,

brother, but not on this mountain” (GP, 122).

The Gurugu pledge itself was a collective action, an act of unified solidarity, a mass stamping on the ground prior to an attempted scaling of the fence, during which they spoke of the history of Africa. Like the film, the novel concludes with this scaling but with a very different outcome. The Melilla Africans, the African in Spain came to the fence to hail those in the act of climbing but these failed, their failure synthesised by the shape of two figures, out of the hundreds, stuck with one leg either side of the fence. In an act of self-sacrifice and altruism those who failed the climb, took the two sick women to the top of the fence in the hope that they would be rescued and given medical help. This act of solidarity undercut the patriarchy and misogyny shown earlier in the text, a form of overcoming in itself.

The final chapter – ‘The Beginning and the End’- departs radically from the film, and many similar narratives in that the first person narrator steps forward to tell his own story, with its tortuous path, and the failure of others to understand the reasons why he left his country. The ill-treatment of a fellow teacher, an albino, the irrationality of followers of the occult who had damaged the man, caused the narrator to set out on ‘the long road to nowhere’. On the mountain, he had decided to

withhold his story because it would cause pain to the others; he also decided not to join in the attempt to scale the fence and abandoned his quest to reach Europe. Images of Africans dead on a Spanish beach, shown by journalists visiting Gurugu, confirmed him in his decision. He reflects on the impunity with which Africans are killed in Europe and on the lack of respect for their lives: “They didn’t kill you for not having papers, that was just the excuse they used” (GP, 180). Symbolically, he makes his way to the mountain’s southern face, to the sides where the lights of Europe do not reach and his story becomes a narrative of decolonial thinking: “I chose the southern face, that my gaze was turned towards the River Zambezi” (GP, 185).

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donald Trump. 13 July 2018

<sup>2</sup> The M/C (Modernity/Coloniality) project is a loose collective of intellectuals from Latin America, some based in the USA, which has developed the critical concept of a decolonial perspective which takes its starting point from the conquest of America in 1492, and argues that racialization was the basis of a capitalist economic system of power which, as the core of European Modernity, also installed an epistemological hegemony which decoloniality is designed to subvert.

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