Towards a Minor Black Atlantic: The Aesthetics of Minority Discourse in Niger Delta and Black Maritime Poetry

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Abstract

This dissertation, "Towards a Minor Black Atlantic: The Aesthetics of Minority Discourse in Niger Delta and Black Maritime Poetry," describes the aesthetics of minority discourse in the poetry of Niger Delta and Black Maritime writers. I read Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998), George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls* (1990) and *Execution Poems* (2001), Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* (2005), Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* (2014), Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* (2006), and David Woods's *Native Song* (1990) as poeticized minority discourse that confronts the nation-state and reveals minority subjectivity in Nigeria and Canada. The rationale for this project is hinged on the need to study literary responses to how the nation-state structures and subjectivizes people with its inherent coloniality and violence. These literary responses allow us to understand the connections between the nation-state, minority subjectivity, and aesthetics. Recent scholarship in postcolonial, Black, and world literature studies has grappled with the problem of the nation-state, but the trend has been to go beyond it with transnational thinking and approaches. Scholars like Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have paid attention to minority subjectivity within the nation-state to underscore its transnational impulse, while others like Tanure Ojaide have described an aesthetics of minority discourse that allows it to contest dominant discourses and function as a comparative category. I deepen and extend these positions by describing and close reading the aesthetics of minority discourse in poetry and poetics. Specifically, I theorize and describe the poetics of place, the poetics of subalternity, the poetics of witnessing, and the poetics of lachrymation as aspects of the aesthetics of minority discourse that ground the poems I study in marginal places and encode history, melancholia, and subalternity as dimensions of minority discourse. My work contributes to knowledge in the fields of: minority discourse studies with its theoretical intervention and textual analysis of poems by writers who identify as minorities; postcolonial studies, with my focus on the coloniality of the nation-state and statist violence as forms that should be interrogated; comparative and world literature studies in my focus on minority perspectives as opposed to the nation-state as the focus of "worlding"; Black studies, in the way I focus on other dimensions and registers of Blackness as well as minor spaces ("the minor Black Atlantic") that have been produced and shaped by the nation-state; and the two national literatures whose minority writers I read within and against the nation-state. A study of Niger Delta and Black Maritime poetry in the context of the aesthetics of minority discourse provides lenses through which we can understand various forms of statist hegemony and resistive identities across the world, even as it specifically offers ways of approaching subversive subjectivities and social justice in the background of oil politics, environmental poisoning, and socio-political marginality in the Niger Delta as well as the afterlife of slavery, anti-Black racism, erasure, and socio-political marginality in the Maritimes.

Resumé

Cette thèse, intitulée « Towards a Minor Black Atlantic: The Aesthetics of Minority Discourse in Niger Delta and Black Maritime Poetry » (« Vers un Atlantique Noir Mineur: L'Esthétique du Discours Minoritaire dans la Poésie du Delta du Niger et de la Maritime Noire »), décrit l'esthétique du discours minoritaire dans la poésie des écrivains du Delta du Niger et de la Maritime Noire. J'y interprète les textes *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) et *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) de Tanure Ojaide, *Whylah Falls* (1990) et *Execution Poems* (2001) de George Elliott Clarke, *The Oil Lamp* (2005) d'Ogaga Ifowodo et *I Alone Escaped To Tell You* (2014) de Sylvia Hamilton, *Tears in a Basket* (2006) de Sophia Obi et *Native Song* (1990) de David Woods en tant que discours minoritaires poétisés qui confrontent l'état-nation et qui révèlent la subjectivité minoritaire au Nigéria et au Canada. La raison d'être de ce projet repose sur la nécessité d'analyser comment la littérature offre une réponse à la façon dont l'État-nation structure et subjectivise les personnes avec sa colonialité et sa violence inhérente. Ces réponses littéraires nous permettent de comprendre les liens entre l'état-nation, la subjectivité des minorités et l'esthétique. Les études récentes sur la littérature postcoloniale, noire et mondiale se sont attaquées au problème de l'état-nation, mais la tendance est d'en aller au-delà en adoptant une pensée et des approches transnationales. Des chercheurs comme Françoise Lionnet et Shu-mei Shih ont prêté attention à la subjectivité minoritaire au sein de l'état-nation pour souligner son impulsion transnationale, tandis que d'autres, comme Tanure Ojaide, ont décrit l'esthétique du discours minoritaire qui lui permet de contester les discours dominants et de fonctionner comme une catégorie comparative. J'approfondis et élargis ces positions en décrivant l'esthétique du discours minoritaire dans la poésie et la poétique et en y appliquant une lecture minutieuse. Plus précisément, je théorise et décris la poétique de lieu, la poétique de la subalternité, la poétique du témoignage et la poétique de larmoiement comme des aspects de l'esthétique du discours minoritaire qui ancrent les poèmes que j'étudie dans des lieux marginaux et encode l'histoire, la mélancolie et la subalternité en tant que dimensions du discours minoritaire. Mon travail contribue aux connaissances dans les domaines suivant : des études sur le discours des minorités grâce à son intervention théorique et à son analyse textuelle de poèmes écrits par des écrivains qui s'identifient comme membre de minorités; des études postcoloniales, avec son attention portée sur l'aspect colonial de l'état-nation et la violence étatique en tant que formes qui devraient être remises en question; les études de littérature comparée et mondiale, avec son attention portée sur les perspectives des minorités par opposition à l'état-nation comme point central de l'actualisation du monde; les études noires, avec son attention portée sur d'autres dimensions et registres de la culture noire ainsi que sur des espaces mineurs ("l'Atlantique noir mineur") qui ont été produits et façonnés par l'état-nation; et les deux littératures nationales, avec sa lecture d'écrivains minoritaires comme partie intégrante de l'état-nation et s'y opposant. L'étude de la poésie du delta du Niger et de la poésie noire des Maritimes dans le contexte de l'esthétique du discours minoritaire permet de fournir des lunettes à travers lesquelles nous pouvons comprendre diverses formes d'hégémonie étatique et d'identités résistantes à travers le monde. Spécifiquement, elle offre des moyens d'aborder les subjectivités subversives et la justice sociale dans le contexte de la politique pétrolière, de l'empoisonnement de l'environnement et de la marginalité sociopolitique dans le delta du Niger, ainsi que les séquelles de l'esclavage, du racisme antinoir, de l'effacement et de la marginalité sociopolitique dans les Maritimes.

For my parents, Professor Abraham Ejogba Orhero and Mrs. Magdalene Iniovosa Orhero,

who made certain that my star never stopped shining despite all odds,

and in memory of Professor Monica Popescu (1973-2024),

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**

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Ad Rosam Per Crucem. *Ad Crucem Per Rosam*

**

INTRODUCTION

Nation, the Aesthetics of Minority Discourse, and a Minor Black Atlantic

In this dissertation, I argue for an aesthetics of minority discourse in the poetry of Niger Delta and Black Maritime writers. Specifically, I read Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998), George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls* (1990) and *Execution Poems* (2001), Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* (2005), Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* (2014), Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* (2006), and David Woods's *Native Song* (1990) as poetic responses to the nation-state and statist violence that can be understood aesthetically and discursively as minority discourse. The selected writers come from minoritized places in Nigeria and Canada, and I approach the spaces they occupy as constitutive of what I term "minor Black Atlantic." I focus on Nigeria's Niger Delta and Canada's Black Maritimes as parts of this minor Black Atlantic because of how the nation-state operates in both contexts. In *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada*, Rinaldo Walcott suggests that Black subjectivity in Canada responds to specific forms of domination by working within and against the nation-state (102). Similarly, Oyeniyi Okunoye reconfigures the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as an "Other" (416) in the way it is positioned in and against the Nigerian nation-state. In these two contexts, the nation-state is a dominant structure that exercises hegemony over citizens, and some of the citizens experience this hegemony more acutely due to their minoritization. If we focus on the workings of the nation-state, we can understand how it shapes people through its inherently colonial and violent nature that emerges from its historical purposes in various colonized spaces as a regulatory, extractive, and hierarchizing mechanism.

Nigeria and Canada are quite different in many ways, so much so that Laura Moss suggests a sort of incomparability because of "vastly different histories, relationships with

imperial power, contemporary social and political environments, and current relationships to globalization" (2). Despite the differences between Nigeria and Canada, they are both connected by the similar thread of British colonialism and its resultant nation-state that employs statist violence to subdue minority groups. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih describe this statist similarity as a consequence of transcolonialism across the world (11).[1] Moss also suggests that if we look at Canada's treatment of its First Nations people and Nigeria's treatment of its Ogoni minorities, the illusion of incomparability begins to blur. This blurring comes out through the focus on the nation-state. In Nigeria and Canada, imperial and settler colonialism respectively created nation-states that operated with an inherent logic of homogeneity – that everyone is the same or can be made the same – and this resulted in the racialization and ethnicization of power that continues to be perpetuated by the inherently colonial structure of both nation-states. To dismantle the illusion of incomparability in both contexts, we must focus on the operations of power in the nation-state even as we reduce the analytical scale and turn to places and spaces that are not visibilized in the nation-state through its operation of power. There is a lot we can learn about Blackness, the postcolonial condition, and the coloniality of the nation-state from both contexts if they are approached comparatively.

Despite significant socio-political and historical differences and trajectories, my choice of Nigeria and Canada is justified by the regionalism inherent in both contexts and the desire to contest their seeming incomparability. What is screened out in the binaristic way in which we currently treat both nation-states comparatively – First World/Third World, Global North/Global South, West/Other, Core/Periphery, etc. – is that they share similarities in their dominant narratives and hegemonic mechanisms that are contested by racialized or ethnicized minorities

[1] They define transcolonialism as "the shared, though differentiated, experience of colonialism and neocolonialism (by the same colonizer or by different colonizers)" (11).

and mediated by belongings to specific places. In addition to this, minority subjectivity in both contexts is accentuated by regional identity and histories of exploitation and commodification of land and bodies. In choosing Nigeria and Canada, as opposed to any other modern nation-state, in the conceptualization of minority discourse as a comparative theoretical category, I advance a framework that works against current binaries even as I position minority discourse as a critical apparatus to mediate "voices and texts constructed from the sites of irreducible cultural difference and inequality, from the perspective of the nation's margin" (Amoko 36). Furthermore, my choice of Nigeria and Canada foregrounds locations across the conceptual Black Atlantic that have been shaped by similar statist colonial and extractive enterprises in both historical and contemporary terms. For example, it is the nation-state that legitimizes the extractive economy of oil in the Niger Delta and both the afterlife of Black extractivism and the racialized economy of the Canadian Maritimes. Also, in these contexts, coloniality manifests materially and affectively through statist policies, various forms of violence, and a kind of peripherality that can be read comparatively. I am guided in my choice of Nigeria, where I am from, and Canada, where I reside, by voices like Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, who are committed to recovering the perspective of the marginal through scholarship and archival work. I am motivated by the desire to document forms of minoritization that are ongoing in varying degrees across the world even as I do what Sharpe calls "wake work" (14) in tracking, reading, and documenting the ways colonial statist projects produced and continue to produce various registers of Blackness and what it is to be minor.

This dissertation also responds to the current lack of comparative perspectives on Nigerian and Canadian literatures. Most recently, Ojaide and Enajite Eseoghene Ojaruega invite us to think of the Niger Delta through "bioregional, politico-historical, sociocultural" lenses (13).

However, there is a tendency, as with many other studies of Niger Delta writing, to subsume the minority experience of the region under the politics of oil and environmentalist despair without ample attention to how other forms of statist violence and asymmetrical nationalism complicate the region's status within Nigeria.[2] Apart from Ojaide and Ashuntantang's *Routledge Handbook of Minority Discourses in African Literature*, the study of the Niger Delta from a predominantly minority discourse perspective is largely missing in the available literature. This is not the case in Canada, where Clarke, Rinaldo Walcott, Winfried Siemerling, Karina Vernon, Katherine McKittrick, David Chariandy, and many others have studied minority subjectivity in Black Canadian literature. Clarke, in particular, has given ample attention to Black Maritime writing and pioneered its study and documentation.[3] Efforts have also been made to link Black Canadian writing to other Black spaces in North America, especially the Caribbean, but little has been done to put Black Maritime writing within a world frame that includes other Black and postcolonial spaces like Nigeria. Very few scholars have compared minority discourse from different locations, and as far as I know, no research exists that reads both Niger Delta and Black Maritime literatures from any comparative frame. These two literary traditions have unique national contexts that inform the representation of Black and minority experiences. By bringing them together, I foreground the centrality of place, subalternity, historicism, and melancholia in minority discourse and demonstrate how minority discourse, as presented in the unique form of poetry, can be used as a comparative theoretical category in Black, postcolonial, and world

[2] The term "Niger Delta" refers to a region in Nigeria where the Niger River reaches the Atlantic Ocean. It has been a site of extraction and, more recently, of identity formation within Nigeria. Literary and cultural production emanating from the region has been described as "Niger Delta Literature" by many scholars, including Ojaide, in his seminal work "Examining Canonization in Modern African Literature."

[3] The term "Black Maritime" or "Black Maritimes" can be traced to Mark Davis who uses it to describe Black place in the Canadian Maritimes. George Elliott Clarke prefers the term "Africadian" to refer more specifically to Black Nova Scotian people (*Directions Home*). I am using Black Maritimes in an expansive way to refer to all forms of Blackness in the three Maritime provinces of Canada: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. I extensively discuss the terminologies "Niger Delta" and "Black Maritimes" in chapter one of this dissertation.

literature studies. I am particularly interested in the operation of power in the national space, and throughout this work, I demonstrate how it works in racialized and non-racial contexts. Beyond this, I also show how regional identities accentuate minority discourse. This is why my selections from both Nigeria and Canada are based on specific regions: the Niger Delta and the Maritimes.

In the poetry collections selected for this project, the minoritized places come alive at an aesthetic and affective level and transgress dominant narratives of the nation-state that exclude people, groups, bodies, and places/regions. Minoritized Nigerian and Canadian writers use poetry to inscribe their complex subjectivities in a way that can be read comparatively. Poetry is central to the argument this dissertation makes through its capacity to create focused subjectivity in terms of the personal, sometimes lyrical, and deeply subjective voice that comes alive through the numerous poems in a collection. The focused subjectivity that we find in poetry allows us to conceptualize statist violence, minority subjectivity, and the minor Black Atlantic. This focused subjectivity operates within and against the nation-state in the context of this dissertation, and by reading the complexity of voice and subjectivity across various poems, we can better understand the production of minority identity within a nation-state, even as we grapple with how such identity resists the nation-state. Furthermore, focused subjectivity melds with poetics to enrich the centrality of poetry to the aesthetics of minority discourse.

Poetry is also the least-studied genre of literature in Black and postcolonial studies, making it a minor genre in literary scholarship. Foundational works of Black and postcolonial studies, such as the works of Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Chinua Achebe, among others, focus mostly or exclusively on the novel. While works on poetry and other forms like drama and oral literatures exist, they are in the minority. The importance of the novel to theorizations of the nation-state, modernity,

postcolonial subjectivity, and even Black subjectivity has been established in scholarship. In fact, Bhabha is of the view that the nation-state is a kind of narration or a "narrative strategy," and this hints at the links between the novel and the nation-state (292). What my dissertation does is to bring poetry, as a minor genre, into conversation with minority subjectivities in Nigeria and Canada in order to reconceptualize minority discourse and its aesthetics in the context of the nation-state, postcolonial studies, Black studies, and world literature studies. Such a focus on poetry from minoritized writers allows us to learn more about the condition of marginality within the nation-state, Blackness, postcoloniality, and the world.

This dissertation's argument for the aesthetics of minority discourse is based on the overlaps in the aesthetic responses to statist violence despite the differences in the nature of minoritization and the responses to such minoritization. I take these differences into account in my engagement with this aesthetics in terms of its production through statist violence and the ways it responds to the hegemony of the nation-state. My comparative approach draws from Lionnet and Shih's idea of "minor transnationalism" and its focus on a "horizontal approach that brings postcolonial minor cultural formations across national boundaries into productive comparisons" as opposed to "a vertical analysis confined to one nation-state" (11). However, I deploy "minority discourse" despite Lionnet and Shih's position that the term is unhelpful because of the different mechanisms involved in being minoritized across the world (10-11). My thinking is that regardless of these different mechanisms and realities of minoritization, there are commonalities in aesthetic responses that make "minority discourse" a productive conceptual framework. When we turn our attention more specifically to the aesthetics of minority discourse, the location and material nature of minoritization do not obscure the comparative analysis. In addition to "minor-to-minor networks" and "transversalism" in a "postnational world" (Lionnet

and Shih 8-9) as the key features of minor transnationalism, I focus on aesthetic responses that are localized but similar enough to be approached comparatively and transnationally. The importance of using the terminology "the aesthetics of minority discourse" is that it allows us to think intra-nationally, transnationally, and formally without sacrificing one element for another. The aesthetics of minority discourse responds to the nation-state, allows us to think beyond the nation-state, and encodes the comparative value of minority subjectivities within and beyond the nation-state.

My theory of the aesthetics of minority discourse is illustrated by the form and content of poems by Niger Delta and Black Maritime writers that I study. By bringing these writers together, we can understand the coloniality of both Nigeria and Canada as nation-states, reveal the processes through which both nation-states minoritize people, and examine how these create a form of minority subjectivity that can be explored beyond national boundaries and as a part of Black and postcolonial experiences. Furthermore, I introduce the conceptual terminology of the minor Black Atlantic as a way through which we can reconceptualize Black Atlantic studies, postcolonial studies, and world literature studies in terms of methodology, focus, form, and scope. In what follows, I unpack the key ideas that run through the dissertation and establish the broader interventions of this work in Black and postcolonial studies.

The Nation-State and Statist Violence

Recent scholarship has explored the conceptual complexity of the nation-state and the centrality of cultural and geographical place in its conception. Scholars in the field of Black, postcolonial, and world literature studies, including Kehinde Andrews, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Neil Lazarus, and the Warwick Research Collective have positioned the nation-state as a theoretical category to express complex ideas about global power and other

transnational and international understandings of the postcolonial condition and the world literature paradigm. These explorations are also evident in literary production – writings that mimic how the nation-state responds to colonialism or how the nation-state structures global power. My interest in the nation-state and statist violence in this dissertation necessitates a careful understanding of the concepts and how they have been discussed by different scholars.

The nation and the nation-state are interrelated but different concepts. While the nation could refer to either a people or a state, the nation-state or the state refers exclusively to the political power that administers a sovereign space. Ernest Renan provides one of the earliest definitions of the nation as "a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form" (19). This definition comes from an understanding of the nation as an essentialist identity bound by previous exploits and present solidarity. Here, the past and the present fuse together to produce a national imaginary based on the consent of people to be identified as one. The nation, to Renan, is a stabilizing force that guarantees liberty, rights, and civilization (20). Written in the context of 19th-century French nationalism, Renan positions the nation as a socially constructed concept with a central, stabilizing essence.[4]

In defining the nation and nationalism, Benedict Anderson responds to Renan's social constructivism with anthropological solidity.[5] This response is essential in understanding the logic of modern nation-states, including postcolonial nation-states that operate with colonial models. In the time between Renan's theorization of the nation as a socially constructed essence

[4] Renan's ideas had a sinister afterlife in the ethno-nationalisms of the 1930s and 1940s, including in Germany.
[5] By this I mean, he describes the form of the nation vis-à-vis its social and cultural makeup.

and Anderson's socio-political exploration, the notion of the nation attracted theorizations of linguistic homogeneity, economic integration, and "common destiny."[6] However, beyond these descriptions, Anderson goes further to historicize and determine the socio-political form of the nation. He writes that the nation is an "imagined community" based on a shared essence that is rooted in cultural and historical antecedence (6). This shared essence is facilitated by a people's sense of collective existence in "'empty, homogenous time' in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (24). Anderson theorizes that the temporality of the nation is both linear and synchronous in such a way that people imagine that their sense of temporality is shared by everyone in the nation. This understanding of nationalism is further complicated by Anderson's thesis that the rise of print capitalism concretized the imagination of simultaneity in the nation: most citizens of the nation would read the same newspapers in the same language, around the same time in the morning, allowing them to imagine themselves part of a community (36). In many ways, Anderson's understanding of the nation draws from the European experience, and even though he situates later (post-World-War II) nationalisms in the evolutionary matrix of official nationalism, his Eurocentric insights create the sense that the nation, and its accompanying political nation-state, is inherently and essentially homogenous in the way it is conceived, thus accentuating its coloniality. In thinking of the postcolonial nation, he positions colonialism as a socio-economic process that produced bilingual intelligentsias who imagined the nation into being based on the "print-literacy" established in the European colonial

[6] Horace Davis's *Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917* and Joseph Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question* come to mind.

nation-state (116). Consequently, Anderson traces the national imaginary in Asia, Africa, and other colonized parts of the world to the colonizing force of Europe.

Although Anderson engages with some aspects of the postcolonial nation-state, his limited exploration does not account for many of its peculiarities. Therefore, it is crucial to engage with how scholars in postcolonial and Black studies conceive of the nation-state. Partha Chatterjee thinks of the nation-state from a unique postcolonial perspective. He submits that the idea of the nation-state and nationalism are derivative and contradictory in the way they imitate and reject the colonial model (*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* 2). By derivative, he implies that the postcolonial nation-state evolved from the mostly arbitrary colonial nation-state, and by contradictory, he is referring to how the process of decolonization and self-rule necessarily opposed the logic of the colonially-imposed nation-state. Despite this contradictoriness of the postcolonial nation-state, Chatterjee concedes that "every nationalism has invented a past for the nation" (9), and he links anti-colonial nationalism with the myth of national sovereignty. Although he positions nationalism as a useful category in thinking of anti-colonial movements, especially in Asia and Africa, Chatterjee still understands the nation as a socially constructed category that serves specific purposes. In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee argues that there are two domains of nationalism: the material and the spiritual (6). The material domain, he contends, is the realm of the "outside," where Western modernity and its models of nationalism thrive, and he describes the spiritual domain as the inner domain that precedes the colonial nation-state and its form of nationalism (6).[7] This inner domain is described with the essentializing concept of "national culture," and Chatterjee accentuates the independent communities that are fragmented from the colonial nation-state as part of the inner

[7] By "outside," he meant institutions imported from the West.

domain (6-7). What is significant in Chatterjee's position is that the nation-state in the postcolonial context is a product of different "fragments" or essences bound by language and communal identity. This understanding of the nation-state is also expressed in the writings of Timothy Brennan, who distinguishes the "modern nation-state" from the nation as "a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (45), Victor Adefemi Isumonah, who thinks of the nation and nationalism as predominantly communal or ethnic before taking a modern geo-political shape (11), and Dane Kennedy who explores what he calls "the problem of the nation-state" through the politics of decolonization and how that created "conflicts between different cultural or ethnic groups" (70), hinting at the distinction between state and people. This bottom-up reconfiguration is useful as a first layer of critiquing the homogenizing essence of the modern nation-state.[8]

Homi Bhabha's critique of the nation-state foregrounds the constitutive people as its first layer. This critique is important in understanding the inherent problems in the concept of the nation-state, at least from a postcolonial perspective. He provides multiple ways of approaching the inherent theoretical contradictions of the Western nation-state and its iteration in a postcolonial context in response to the idea of homogenous empty time, and one of the key aspects of the critique is his theorization of minority discourse and cultural difference. Bhabha conceives the nation-state as a narrative with complex strategies involved in writing it into being. He responds primarily to Anderson's notion of the nation as an imaginary that is defined by empty homogenous time and proposes a "doubleness" in writing the nation in such a way that it disperses "the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society" (293). Bhabha questions the

[8] By bottom-up, I mean the nation as a people before the nation as a state.

cohesive unity of the nation from the perspective of temporality, and he makes a case for the nation as a "contested cultural territory" where

> the people must be thought in a double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pregiven or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process (297).

Bhabha's purpose here is to demarcate the realm of nationalism as a statist project from the *natio*, defined by Brennan (45) as the domain of the people. This domain or "space" of the people is further elaborated by Bhabha as "a space that is internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations" (299). What is evident here is that the putative homogenous time of the nation-state is ruptured by the temporal heterogeneity of the peoples in the national space. This double time-space of the nation, which Bhabha designates as dissemi-nation, complicates any simplistic understanding of the nation as a narrative of singular temporality. One consequence of the disjunctive temporality of the nation is that counter-narratives are constantly produced to "evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries" and "disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (300). These counter-narratives unveil the asymmetry of the national space and disrupt dominant notions of nationalist pedagogy.

Bhabha's ideas parallel Anthony Marx's views that the nation-state typically codifies inclusions and exclusions as part of its dominant narrative. He contends that nation-states have

"not consistently incorporated all potential internal constituents, but instead have often purposefully excluded some" (107). These exclusions usually produce what Marx refers to as "subalterns" who contest the dominant and exclusive notions of the nation even as it serves the interest of the state in terms of mobilizing those who are considered central to its nationalist pedagogy. Ultimately, Marx submits that the nation is "a set of relations, which not surprisingly refer to inclusion and exclusion" (125), hinting at the dominant narrative of the nation and its capacity to produce subjectivities. The state's capacity to include and exclude through discourses and narratives is at the heart of Dave Gunning's position that some of the prejudices and violence against minoritized people (especially Black people) can be misread if they are interpreted as "individual prejudices" but when they are approached from a nation-state perspective, we can better understand the implicit constructions of self vs other in national discourse (41). Gunning denounces the view that we are in a denationalized or post-national world where the transnational impulse triumphs over national discourses. Rather, he reminds us that "[t]he manoeuvrings of national discourse do not evaporate when confronted with international transactions" (41). This position stems from his reading of Caryl Phillips's work within the framework of nationalized racism and antiracism.

Although Bhabha, Marx, and Gunning explore how the nation-state produces subjectivities as a fundamental part of its nature, it is also important to think about the idea of statist violence, another core concept deployed throughout this dissertation. In my thinking of statist violence, I refer to the ability of the state to discipline people, places, and bodies and produce various forms of alterity relative to state power. The violence that is inherent to the nation-state emanates from its dynastic, sacred, and colonial beginnings. In all three beginnings of the nation, the discipline and control of bodies and spaces are central to the legitimization of

the state. Statist violence owes its origin to statist hegemony or what Antonio Gramsci calls "direct domination" (31). Gramsci defines direct domination as "command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government" and contends that it is based on consent acquired via "position and function in the world of production [i.e., colonial capitalist production]" (32). To Gramsci, the divide between those who control the means of production and those who do not have such control in any national context produces the relationship between state and people as well as the "the apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively" (145). In essence, the nation-state, for all its imaginations of homogeneity, deploys a kind of power acquired via hegemony to violently subjugate people.

Epifanio San Juan takes this logic further in his position that the authority of a nation-state as a "regulative juridical organ, and administrative apparatus bearing a monopoly of coercive force" is based on its "historical origin in enforcing individual, civic rights of freedom against the absolutist monarchy" (24). This hegemonic organ violently suppresses and obscures "internal heterogeneities and differences" (21) in favour of the interest of the bourgeois class. San Juan's interest in the class dimensions of statist hegemony comes from his perspective that the main tensions within the nation-state – the heterogeneities – have a class dimension. This view has strong resonance in the two contexts selected for this dissertation. On the one hand, the Niger Delta is a site of extraction where bodies were historically taken as part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and where resources are currently being extracted. These extractive encounters have produced a subaltern geography with class implications. This logic also applies to the Black Maritime context, where the history of slavery and the commodification and demonization of Blackness have produced the racialized and economic geography of the region.

These subaltern geographies are only possible because the nation-state exercises its hegemonic power – granted through the state's narrative capacity to gain consent – on people. Those who are narrativized outside the state feel this statist violence more acutely. Robyn Maynard's exploration of "antiBlack disposability and spatial control" (125) in the context of the borders of the nation-state in the US and Canada exemplifies the state's capacity to exclude bodies that are deemed undesirable even as it grounds the idea of statist violence in material terms. Maynard's premise is that

> The category of national citizenship has always placed Black peoples in a uniquely precarious and unstable position. The legal category of citizenship has always required its definitive outside; to be a "citizen" is meaningless without the continual (re)production of those exiled and excised from the category itself. (127)

What Maynard emphasizes here is how Blackness has functioned in North America as a counternarrative to racializing and essentializing notions of the nation-state. She argues that because of slavery and the social production of race in the settler states of the US and Canada, citizenship was considered the domain of "white" people (127), producing not only the dominant discourse of the nation but also the rationale for statist violence on those deemed non-citizens or excluded from the racialized citizenship of the state.

In the Nigerian context, statist violence manifests in the capacity of the state to determine who is dominant or "major" and who is "minor." Eghosa Osaghae tells us that the creation of ethnic minorities in Nigeria was part of the colonial reorganization of the state into various "regions" in the mid-1940s (238). However, I extend that logic to say that the process had started before then through the politics of colonial appointments at the point the colonial state was instituted. This politics hierarchized peoples and groups and placed them in competing positions,

relative to state power. Osaghae's history locates regionalism as the catalyst for exclusionary notions of citizenship in Nigeria that ultimately metamorphosed into the production of the so-called dominant or major ethnic groups shortly before Nigeria's Independence. The newly created Nigerian state became a site for contestation and ultimately took control of land and resources with the mantra of state ownership that excluded and continues to exclude those citizens deemed "minor." Cyril Obi describes this form of statist violence as a kind of control "by the political elite from dominant ethnic groups" who "seized monopoly control of the collection and distribution of oil revenues" ("Nigeria's Niger Delta" 115). The combination of socio-political marginality and resource politics motivated statist violence and excluded the Niger Delta region from equal socio-political and economic citizenship in Nigeria.

Some scholars have articulated their critique of the coloniality of the state through a sort of transnational thinking. For instance, Jahan Ramazani moves beyond the nation-state and theorizes a "transnational poetics" with the thesis that literature, or more specifically poetry, "participates in global flows, planetary enmeshments, and cosmopolitan engagements" (9), thus downplaying the centrality of the nation-state in literary discourse in favour of a transnational vision. Ulka Anjaria's meditations on the postcolonial nation-state reveal the growing contrapuntal position of the nation in terms of its centrality in postcolonial studies and its usefulness to cosmopolitan visions (26). Most of the solutions to the problem of the nation-state in postcolonial and world literature studies involve thinking beyond the nation-state with a transnational vision. For example, David Damrosch's definition of world literature as an "elliptical refraction of national literatures" (281) suggests that the insistence on the nation-state could be bypassed by focusing on the worldliness of its literature. However, their methods go beyond the nation-state without necessarily interrogating the mechanisms through which it

produces specific subjectivities and positionalities. One argument that I make throughout this work is that the transnational vision that fuels current studies in postcolonial and world literature studies can be mediated by minority discourse – writings emanating from marginal spaces within the nation. Minority discourse provides both comparative and theoretical lenses through which we might investigate the coloniality of the nation-state, the responses to this coloniality, and the transnational impulse of its aesthetics.

Minority Discourse and its Aesthetics

The term "minority" emerged vis-à-vis the rise of nationalism in Europe between the 19th and early 20th centuries (Killian 18). It is derived from the Latin word "minor," which is also used in place of "minority" in some studies. By the 1930s, sociologists had deployed the term to refer to the relationship between races, ethnicities, social groups, and political entities. For example, Donald Young uses the term to refer to racial minority groups in the United States. By the 1950s, the term had been accepted in American and European scholarship to refer to various racial and ethnic groups that are asymmetrically positioned within the nation-state. Minority discourse is a term that was proposed by Bhabha as a theoretically singular concept that describes the counter-narratives of the nation and provides a way for those who are excluded, erased, and pushed to the margins of the dominant national imaginary to contest notions of homogeneity, singular temporality, statist modernity, and colonial imaginings of being. Bhabha suggests that minority discourse "contests genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture — and the people — as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life" (307). Bhabha's understanding of minority discourse is not simply from a dialectical perspective. He believes that the real power of

minority discourse lies in its ability to shield its intention and present itself in "the terms of reference of the dominant discourse" (306). The primary purpose of minority discourse, Bhabha argues, is to antagonize the power that gives sociological solidity to the nation (306).

Further describing minority discourse as a "subaltern voice," Bhabha foregrounds the concept of cultural difference "as a form of intervention, [that] participates in a supplementary logic of secondariness similar to the strategies of minority discourse" (312). Cultural difference appears as a concept that haunts the totalizing singularity of the dominant by inserting its "Other" as an irreducible force. In this sense, cultural difference gives us the position to challenge exclusion and erasure. Bhabha helps us think of cultural difference as an act of reading and writing that "marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference of itself" (313). As an interpretative paradigm, cultural difference involves reading the dominant narrative, in this case the nation-state, as it is written by those with discursive authority, against the grain to uncover its implicit *difference*. Although Bhabha takes up this concept as a complement to minority discourse, I approach it as constitutive of the discursive and critical elements of minority discourse. In other words, while minority discourse is broader in its contestation of national homogeneity or nationalist pedagogy, cultural difference specifically works within minority discourse to fuel and legitimize the counterdiscursive imagination of the nation-state from the perspective of the irreducible other or to identify the irreducible voice of the other in dominant discourse.

The concept of minority discourse appears in Bhabha's writing as a way of confronting the nation-state regardless of where it manifests. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd also

operationalize minority discourse in similar terms. In their preface to *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, they declare that

> By "minority discourse," we mean a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture. This definition is based on the principle that minority groups, despite all the diversity and specificity of their cultures, share the common experience of domination and exclusion by the majority. The common experience does not induce any kind of homogenization, but it does provide the grounds for a certain thinking in solidarity across the boundaries of different identities – which, as often as not, are imposed rather than autonomously constructed. (ix)

JanMohamed and Lloyd foreground key themes that are central to the concept of minority discourse and how it is used in this project. The first is the focus on minority discourse as a theoretical category to navigate different minority cultures. This position establishes the comparative usefulness of minority discourse. The second is the emphasis on domination and exclusion as a common experience, and the third is the artificiality and performativity of identities, and as I understand it, national identities. These points are important if we take note of their declaration of defining a "field of discourse" and "developing a theory" (ix-x). Significantly, they configure minority discourse as a category for comparative studies that allows one to see across national and institutional boundaries.

In framing a theory of minority discourse, JanMohamed and Lloyd foreground the negative consciousness that is inherent in the voice of the minority. They assert that

> minority discourse, is, in the first instance, the product of damage, of damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture. The destruction involved is manifold, bearing down on variant modes of social formation, dismantling previously functional economic systems, deracinating whole populations at best, decimating them at worst. In time with this material destruction, the cultural formations, languages, the diverse modes of identity of the 'minoritized peoples' are irreversibly affected, if not eradicated, by the effects of their material deracination from the historically developed social and economic structures in terms of which alone they 'made sense.' (4)

Here, they position minority discourse in many currents, including the way it allows us to understand the effects of domination and exclusion by the dominant culture and the system through which such domination and exclusion thrive. To them, domination thrives because minorities are "coerced into a negative, general subject-position" (10), thus foregrounding an inherent negative consciousness in minority discourse. In many ways, we can read minority discourse, through JanMohamed and Lloyd, as a counter-discourse to the narrative of modernity in a world where nationalism is increasingly intertwined with neoliberal economic development. This produces internal contradictions that confront the idea of linear and progressive social advancement. One way minority discourse reveals this contradiction is its capacity to transform negative consciousness into a mode of representing the minoritized people in a way that is both identifiable to the dominant culture and subversive to its power.

Beyond negative consciousness and negation as a form of minority discourse, JanMohamed and Lloyd also emphasize the "positive" aspect of minority discourse in its ability to act as a "critical-discursive articulation of alternative practices and values that are embedded

in the often-damaged, -fragmentary, -hampered, or -occluded works of minorities" (8). In this sense, they position minority discourse as a critical pedagogy that transforms works by minoritized writers into important vehicles of self and collective representation that are worthy of canonization.[9] This is particularly necessary if we must think of minority discourse as a comparative category that allows us to, in JanMohamed and Lloyd's words, demonstrate the "similarities between modes of repression and struggle that all minorities experience separately but experience precisely as minorities" (9). It is at this point that the nation-state returns as a key category. The process of minoritization is predominantly a political process that is orchestrated within the boundaries of the nation-state. JanMohamed and Lloyd confirm in their assertion that "subject-position" is central to minoritization. They ask us to think of minoritization in terms of the "effects of economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, social manipulation, and ideological domination" (9). While these are just some of the ways that violence can be meted on minority peoples and cultures, they all function within the construct of the nation-state, thus allowing us to connect the ideas of JanMohamed and Lloyd with those of Bhabha.

Even though JanMohamed and Lloyd frame minority discourse as an open-ended field that could be both intra- and inter-national, the terms of reference for the material and immaterial domination of minorities operate within the nation-state. Bhabha is very clear about the centrality of the nation in his framing of minority discourse as a counter-discourse to the dominant national narrative. In another essay, Lloyd complicates the notion of minority discourse by hinging it on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conception of "minor literature" as "that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). Here, the focus is on the displacement of minorities

[9] They do not use "critical pedagogy" in the same sense as Bhabha frames it. To Bhabha, the nationalist pedagogy involves critical and discursive practices that frame the nation as homogeneous, but here, minority discourse is positioned as a way of reading literary and cultural texts by transforming the negative consciousness in them into positive ways of self-representation.

and how they articulate their condition in the "deterritorialized" language of the majority. Despite this linguistic complication, Lloyd's understanding of "hegemonic power" (382) can be located in the operation of the nation-state. From this perspective, minority discourse responds to the operation of power in the nation-state and can be a useful comparative category to think beyond the nation-state. Although the theorists of minority discourse provide us with useful ways of thinking about the concept, the ways that these ideas manifest in self-theorizing literary and cultural texts deserve closer attention. In the few instances of close reading, as in JanMohamed's reading of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* ("Negating the Negation" 102), there is no effort to describe an aesthetic mode associated with minority discourse.

Minority discourse has both discursive and aesthetic implications. Ojaide's definition of and insights about the aesthetics of minority discourse give us a foundational framework to work with here. He argues that

> Minority studies, minor literature, and minority discourse are used to mean the same thing in this chapter to discuss theory and aesthetics in African literature. Minority discourse has to do with the conception of minority groups, as opposed to majority, with different identities or traits in specific spatiotemporal settings, and often relating to power in political and social issues. It is thus minor in not being dominant but different from the mainstream. Minority studies is therefore unique in its discourse, which is eclectic as it relates to political, social, economic, ethnic, racial, and other ideological and identity issues that may be set in contexts of place or time. It is panoramic in its "crossover" and interdisciplinary attributes and focuses on the specificity of its minority status. (11)

Here, his purpose is to define a field of study in the broader area of African literature, and he draws from the groundwork of earlier theorists of minority discourse. In particular, this

definition accounts for minor literature as a category (as defined by Deleuze and Guattari in terms of writings produced by minorities) even as it gestures towards the critical and conceptual underpinnings of the minority discourse. Ojaide positions minority discourse as an "eclectic" concept that binds different minority identities and contexts, and this is useful if one must think of its comparative value. Furthermore, his focus on the spatio-temporal dimension of minority discourse allows us to insert it squarely into the boundaries of the nation-state as a transgressive discourse. In framing an "aesthetics" of minority discourse, Ojaide foregrounds the centrality of "interest, value, meaning, and literary devices such as form and realism" (13). This framing of aesthetics is important and useful, but there is also the need to deepen this conceptualization through literary texts whose poetics offer a way to understand the aesthetics of minority discourse comparatively. In my thinking of the aesthetics of minority discourse, I pay attention to the form and content of literary texts and how they respond to the nation-state, statist violence, and minority subjectivity. This response is read in both representation and formal elements like voice, structure, tone, poetic techniques, and poetic genre. It is also present in the contextual dimensions of the poem. Throughout this dissertation, I close-read the spatiotemporal context of the poems alongside the formal elements and representational politics to unveil how the poems invite a definition and conceptualization of the nation-state vis-à-vis its production of minority subjectivity, as well as an understanding of minority discourse as a comparative category to understand texts produced from the margins of the nation-state. Ultimately, through a close reading of poetics and other representational paradigms, I not only describe an aesthetics of minority discourse that is present in the poems but also deploy the category to think about minority subjectivity across national borders.

Monica Popescu's theorization of "affective temporal structures" (111) is a useful way to navigate the politics of the aesthetics of minority discourse. In her study of the influence of the global Cold War on African writing, she frames affective temporal structures as "ways of perceiving the present moment and establishing relations (whether of continuity or rupture) between the present, on the one hand, and the past and the future, on the other. Affective temporal structures are social, allowing individuals to see themselves in the community, to be affected by and to affect others" (111). Here, Popescu reveals how bigger structures, both far and near, might have implications for the aesthetic modes of writers. With a focus on positionality, Popescu subverts notions of "social class, nation, gender group, or generation" (111). In thinking of the aesthetics of minority discourse through this lens, this dissertation argues that the historical experiences of subjugation, domination, exclusion, erasure, and the very process of subalternity create affective temporal structures that are present in minority writing. Even when the historical or ongoing experiences are not articulated, we can discern, from the writer's aesthetic mode, the influence of the affective temporal structures. If, as Stuart Hall tells us, the nation-state is a "symbolic formation" or a "system of representation" (355), then the aesthetics of minority discourse draws from the semiotic basis of the nation-state to affectively and representationally question the character, mechanisms, dynamics, and workings of the nation-state itself. To read the aesthetics of minority discourse is to read spatiotemporally against the instituted system of representation that is the nation-state.

Towards a Minor Black Atlantic

The term "Black Atlantic" was first introduced by Paul Gilroy as a conceptual framework to understand Blackness as a site of modernity. Gilroy goes beyond the nation-state and nationalism to theorize Black transnational modernity that is rooted in the "ship" and the "middle

passage" that moved Black people across the various regions of the Atlantic: Europe, North America, and Africa (*The Black Atlantic* 4). This seminal work of Black and Black diaspora studies unpacks Black modernity by putting Black British subjectivity and cultural production in conversation with mostly American and Caribbean subjectivities and cultural production to underscore how these constitutive regions of the Black Atlantic transgress the trappings of the nation-state and unveil the interlocutory dimensions of Black subjectivity across the Atlantic.

Although Gilroy's work has received ample praise for its intervention in Black and Black diasporic studies and its project of provincializing modernity, its scope – spatial and generic – tells us its shortcomings in clear terms. In terms of its spatial limitations, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza draws attention to Gilroy's purpose in his comment that:

> Gilroy's central concern was to deconstruct the idea of the black race, to divorce it from any African essence or presence, to demonstrate its fluidity, mutability and modernity, and that black Atlantic cultural identities emerged in the transnational and intercultural spaces of the diasporic experience itself, in response to the terrors of racism and out of transoceanic transactions in which creolized and hybridized experiences, ideas and cultural artifacts, especially music, emerged and were exchanged. (36-37).

Zeleza's position here is that Gilroy divorced the Black Atlantic from Africa in order to theorize a diasporic cultural province that emerged from the process of diasporization itself. What is hinted at here is that Africa is removed from Gilroy's thinking of Black modernity, and this is evidenced in the fact that Gilroy focuses more on the African-American experience and how it draws from the entire Black diasporic network of the Atlantic.[10] Yogita Goyal and Simon Gikandi also explore Gilroy's excision of Africa from Black modernity. Gikandi had flagged

[10] African-American thinkers have also criticized Gilroy for what Zeleza describes as "over simplifying the African American experience" (37).

Gilroy's omission of colonialism and its consequences in the framing of the Black Atlantic but adds to this thinking that Africa was omitted because it could not do "the conceptual work that Gilroy considered central to his project, namely an exploration of how culture could enable the minority to become a subject" (242). To Gikandi, Africa could not give the semiotic racialism that Gilroy wanted because its marginalization was more "economic and political" (242). These thoughts also resonate with Goyal's view on the purpose and limitations of Gilroy's work. Goyal's solution, however, is to situate "Africa at the center of aesthetic inquiry that takes place in the wider black Atlantic" (vi).

Similarly, scholars from other absented regions of the Black Atlantic have criticized Gilroy's work for not taking their peculiar contexts into consideration. In Canada, Clarke and Siemerling draw attention to some of the contradictions and omissions of Gilroy's work. Clarke poses the question, "Must all blackness be American?" in response to what he perceives as Gilroy's lumping together of Canada and the United States (*Odysseys Home* 81). To Clarke, Gilroy's politics of decentring African-American cultural nationalism into its constitutive waves of influence ultimately reproduces African-American cultural hegemony that omits Canada as a region of the Black Atlantic. Clarke returns the nation-state to his thinking of the Black Atlantic by opting for the term "African-Canadian" as a counterdiscourse of a transnational Black Atlantic that reifies American hegemony. This is also what motivates Siemerling's claim that "Canada is an important site for a substantial exploration of slavery and the black Atlantic and their foundational role in the development of modernity" (353). His project of "revisiting" the Black Atlantic recovers Canada as a site of Black cultural production that contests its omission in Gilroy's work.

What African and Canadian theorists have done with Gilroy's work is to remind us that transnational models can create dominant discourses that omit spaces and contexts that are important. This reminder is very important in the face of the transnational turn that now drives African and Black studies, with key concepts like Afropolitanism, cosmopolitanism, minor transnationalism, and Global Black. These concepts, like the Black Atlantic, are conceptually helpful and allow us to understand the various ways Black subjectivities are constituted in the world today. However, there is a need to focalize those state-produced minor spaces of the Black Atlantic that can allow us to unpack not only Black subjectivities but also the postcolonial condition and the nation-state. Gilroy's approach discarded the nation-state in favour of transnational networks that produce Black diasporic subjectivities. I suggest that we can learn more about the way Blackness has been shaped in various spaces by the nation-state through the conceptual framework of a minor Black Atlantic.

The minor Black Atlantic has spatial and formal implications. On the one hand, it focuses on spaces that have been shaped and produced as minor by the nation-state across the various regions of the Black Atlantic. In the same vein, it also redresses Gilroy's omission of Canada, Africa, and other parts of the world by focusing on their unique versions of Black and postcolonial experiences. On the other hand, it takes up forms like poetry that are arguably minor in theorizations of the Black Atlantic. By bringing spatial and formal minorness in conversation with the nation-state and the Black Atlantic, we can methodologically account for some of the shortcomings of Gilroy's works even as we understand various non-American forms of Blackness and minority subjectivities across the world. The minor Black Atlantic invites a reconsideration of the nation-state in postcolonial, Black, and African studies in terms of its coloniality and its production of subjectivities that contest homogeneity. The "minor" in the

minor Black Atlantic alludes to minority discourse in nature, form, and character. To understand the aesthetics of minority discourse in the context of this dissertation is to understand the minor Black Atlantic. Throughout this dissertation, I spell out the terms of a minor Black Atlantic by focusing on the aesthetics of minority discourse in both spatial and formal ways. I read poetic constructions and reconstructions of specific places like the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes in addition to poetics to describe the coloniality of the state and various forms of Black subjectivities that have been shaped by statist violence, the nation-state, and regional identities.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four chapters, each examining two poetry collections by the selected poets. The first two chapters focus on Ojaide and Clarke because they are central to Niger Delta and Black Maritime literatures, respectively. They have been active since the 1970s and have also written extensively on their respective literary traditions, so much so that they can be described as embodying the traditions they work within.[11] Although poetry and other forms are abundant in these traditions, published collections are fewer. The selected poets for this project are among the few published poets and writers from the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes. Niger Delta and Black Maritime literatures are contemporary and emerged as distinct traditions between the last two decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, coinciding with the end of the Cold War and other developments across the world, including the rise of multiculturalism, racialized and non-racial postcolonial identities, critical race theories, greater environmental consciousness, and subnational nationalisms. The period is significant because of the creative and critical contemplations on nationalisms and national

[11] Ojaide's first poetry collection, *Children of Iroko*, was published in 1973, while Clarke's first collection, *Saltwater Spirituals*, was published in 1983. Before these major collections, they had been published in little magazines and journals.

literatures, especially from minority perspectives. Former binary and trinary ways of viewing the world that emerged from the Cold War era made way for various forms of alternative solidarities and networks based on common experiences. All these shaped and influenced the writers I study in this dissertation.

The first chapter explores how place functions vis-à-vis minority discourse and describes the poetics of place in Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* and Clarke's *Whylah Falls*. This chapter sets the primary methodological framework that informs the rest of the dissertation even as it provides important context on the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes as minoritized places within the Nigerian and Canadian nation-states, respectively. I read how representations of place contest homogenous national narratives and reveal minority subjectivity. In the collections, Ojaide's speaker says, "We did not fall from the sky" (25) and Clarke's speaker "climbs to Whylah Falls" (34), his home. In both instances, place is specified and painted as a marginal space within the nation-state. Throughout the collections, place is imagined in a regional sense and imbued with a vitality that actively responds to socio-political, historical, economic, and racialized minoritization. I describe how these notions of place inform a poetics that manifests in the way the selected poems specify and represent the inherent sociality of places. This chapter positions place as an index of the aesthetics of minority discourse.

In the second chapter, I continue the reading of place in minority discourse by focusing on Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* and Clarke's *Execution Poems* to explore how the concept of subalternity – and its implications of crime, agency, and resistance – can be applied to the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes. More specifically, I identify the subalternity of place as central to what I describe as the poetics of subalternity in the selected poems I study. The argument I make in this chapter is that place is not only imagined and reconstructed as minority

discourse but also imbued with agency and resistance in the context of inverted criminality. By reading voice, perspective, and personification, among other techniques, I explore violated and executed places as contestations of national narratives. In the selected collections, the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa for his activism in the context of the marginality of the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta, the extrajudicial killing of Sampson by White police officers in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the hanging of George and Rufus Hamilton for the murder of Silver, a White man, in Fredericton, New Brunswick, become the socio-historical contexts through which minority discourse aesthetically and thematically recovers criminalized and martyred figures to resist national narrations. In this recovery, subaltern place is imbued with agency and resistance and becomes a way to explore what Bhabha describes as dissemi-nation, a double-space time marked by the "heterogenous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations" (299).

In the third chapter, I describe how the past is *present-ed* in Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* and Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped to Tell You*. In both collections, history is not static but active in the way the past becomes an "active condition of the present and a useful resource for the future" (Siemerling 11). Furthermore, Ojaide's contention that minority discourse is "historicist" (15) and Walcott's imbrication of history with transgressive narratives of the "nation-state principles" (115) both confirm the centrality of history to minority discourse. My position in this chapter is that far from merely presenting history as a fact in the poems, history is *present-ed* through a poetics of witnessing that is grounded in subaltern polyphony, naming, and orality, among others. For example, in Ifowodo's collection, Major Kitemo is the "chief pacifier / of the lower Niger's // still primitive tribes" (37), alluding to the assault, arrest, and ultimate hanging of some leaders of the Ogoni minority group. In Hamilton's collection, the history of slavery in

Canada begins with tense images: "shackled below on the *Severn* in full sail" (9). By reading specific historical incidents like the Jesse fire incident, the Odi massacre, and the attack of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta, as well as the complex history of Black slavery and its afterlife in the Maritimes in the poetry of Ifowodo and Hamilton, respectively, I argue that the poetics of witnessing creates a sense of proximate memory that allows the past to be *present-ed*. I position the *present-ed* histories in the context of deracination and exploitation, both of which, as JanMohamed and Lloyd argue, produce minority subjectivity (4).

In the fourth chapter, I interrogate the production and nature of subaltern melancholia in minority discourse with reference to Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* and David Woods's *Native Song*. The argument of this chapter is that statist violence creates melancholic desire in the minds of those who experience such violence. This desire can be described as a form of subaltern melancholia in the way it allows us to understand the subjectivities and positionalities of those who have been violently marginalized by the nation-state. Furthermore, I read how subaltern melancholia produces a poetics of lachrymation that can be read in the works of minoritized people. This poetics of lachrymation manifests in forms like metaphor, simile, symbolism, irony, voice, tone, subject-position, the lyrical "I," critical realism, personification, satire, imagery, and poetic structure to encode despair, longing, desire, hope, and misery in the selected poems. Whether in the context of extractive catastrophes and the devastation of environment and people in the Niger Delta or the psychic consequences of slavery and other forms of erasure in the Maritimes, I position subaltern melancholia and its poetics of lachrymation as ways through which we can better grasp the aesthetics of minority discourse, especially in the context of its response to statist violence in various places.

This dissertation concludes with a coda that not only brings the significant interventions of the project together but also gestures toward how minority discourse can help us rethink world literature. I revisit arguments by David Damrosch, Susan Andrade, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Pascale Casanova, Frederic Jameson, and the Warwick Research Collective on the place of the nation-state in the production and circulation of world literature and position minority discourse as a comparative theoretical framework that allows us to understand and further conceptualize the nation-state, minor literatures, and forms like poetry.

CHAPTER ONE

Place as/and Minority Discourse: Indexical Place and the Poetics of Place in Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* and George Elliot Clarke's *Whylah Falls*

In this chapter, I attend to the concept of place and how it influences the aesthetics of minority discourse. I contend that place is an index of minority discourse in terms of how it responds to the coloniality of the nation-state and the state's ability to narrativize people within and outside its body politic. This chapter maps out the concept of place and its importance to the conceptualization of the aesthetics of minority discourse and proceeds to demonstrate the way indexical place and the poetics of place can be read productively as a counterdiscourse of the nation-state. In the second segment, the two regions under study, the Niger Delta and the Black Maritimes, are defined in terms of their marginal position within Nigeria and Canada, respectively. The third and fourth segments of this chapter undertake a reading of the poetics of place vis-à-vis the aesthetics of minority discourse with reference to Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) and George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls* (1990). I focus on concepts like site specification and site sociality and techniques like naming, imagery, personification, and voice, among others, in my description of the poetics of place. By reading how place is imagined, reimagined, and contested in selected poems, I foreground its centrality to the aesthetics of minority discourse.

Place as an Index of Minority Discourse

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews writes that "[s]pace and place are crucial regulators of our being in the world. Geographically, place is differentiated from space: space is abstract, featureless, indefinite; place is lived space, and carries connotations of familiarity, stability, attachment, nostalgia and homeliness" (1). This point is taken further with the idea that cultural

identity and even national identity are bound to the notion of place and particular landscape. Kennedy-Andrews's claim comes from the need to position the centrality of place to imaginings of Northern Irish identity. Significantly, he links place to understandings of the nation and argues that "[m]eanings of place are tied up with questions of territoriality, belonging and social power" (2). The idea here is that claims to place, or place-bound imaginations, are intertwined with notions of nationalism in such a way that place can be contested, reimagined, and embraced. This imbrication of place and the nation is also present in the works of other scholars, including Yi-Fu Tuan, who argues that place is an experiential phenomenon that implicates many things, including the nation-state (159), and Michael Skey, who positions the nation as a "homely place" (232). In the context of Northern Ireland, Kennedy-Andrews thinks of place in terms of borders that mediate neighbourliness and protect specific identities like the British Protestant identity of Northern Ireland (2). Beyond borders and identities, place is also both "real" and "imagined," to draw on Robert Tally's terminology (46), and this implies that place can be constructed and experienced not only in terms of inhabited space but also through imaginative explorations such as those we find in literature.

Place literature, Kennedy-Andrews claims, is deeply communal and enhances "ideological self-representation" and a "sense of social integration and identity" (1).[12] This awareness of place in literature or the literary mapping of place evokes what Tally calls "*topophrenia*" or "placemindedness" (38). In explaining this concept, Tally foregrounds how literary texts contribute to the imaginative making of place even as the critical reader is drawn to "the text's spatiality" (6). This "*topophrenic* condition" is present not only in literary works that

[12] Here, Kennedy-Andrews is referring to what literary texts can do in terms of place-making. He is not assuming that all readers of literature have a stake in the works they read.

map place but also in the way we engage with these works as imaginative cartographies. Following this place-literature nexus, I argue in this chapter that place is central to the aesthetics of minority discourse, especially in how it responds to the nation-state by contesting, reimagining, and making claims for home. I position place as a type of situated geography that implicates not only locations or regions and the experience of such locations or regions but also the complexity of subjectivity (racial, gendered, ethnic, class, etc.) and forms of belonging that inflect how locations or regions are experienced. This "sense of place," to borrow a concept used by geographers in describing "the emotive bonds and attachments people develop or experience in particular locations and environments, at scales ranging from the home to the nation" (Foote and Azaryahu 96), also has discursive implications in terms of how people construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct place. So, while place might be a location, it is also an experience. In fact, the experience of place is just as important as the concrete sense of place. In literature, this experience of place can be read in many ways, and a major argument of this chapter is that minority discourse is one lens through which place can be read. This approach takes place and the experience of place as counternarratives of the nation and suggests that literature, and in this particular case, poetry, participates in the counterdiscursive making of place.

To read the operations of place, we must combine the ideas of place as situated geography and place as a form of positionality. In theorizing a "world republic of letters," Pascale Casanova conceptualizes a literary space that mirrors but is semi-autonomous from the sociopolitical and economic space ("Literature as a World" 72).[13] Echoing Pierre Bourdieu's

[13] This "literary space" differs from a geographical understanding of "space" even though one mirrors the other. Henri Lefebvre, a major theorist of space, thinks of space in terms of its natural, mental, and social dimensions (*The Production of Space* 20-30), with his main argument being that space is produced materially based on biological and economic factors. The type of literary space Casanova talks about is really shaped by the circulation of literary forms and texts.

notion of the cultural field and Wallersteinian world-systems approach, Casanova contends that in this space, "struggles of all sorts—political, social, national, gender, ethnic—come to be refracted, diluted, deformed or transformed according to a literary logic, and in literary forms" (72). Despite her focus on how this literary space allows us to think of world literature, the idea that a writer's positionality in the world literary space is "according to the position he or she occupies in a national space" (*The World Republic* 351) is significant when considering national space as a domain where there are zones of centre and periphery. In this sense, the national literary space is asymmetrical, and a writer's position could be based on how power operates within the nation. This sense of positionality mirrors the logic of place as "lived space" (Kennedy-Andrews 1) or as "tamed space" (Koch and Latham 10). In essence, we can conceptualize place as positionality in terms of a writer's position in place as both situated geography or position in the national literary tradition. This positional reality is, like Casanova's literary space, reflective of the sociopolitical and historical realities that shape and structure society. Dominance and minoritization thus come up as categories that are central to the workings of place.

This chapter also unsettles notions of the world literary space by putting minority writing in Nigeria and Canada in conversation to foreground how dominant narratives, like the nation-state and power, operate and are represented, resisted, or reimagined in Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* and Clarke's *Whylah Falls*. Place plays an important role in this conversation because both nation-states, Nigeria and Canada, occupy different positions in the world literary space. In both contexts, minority writing occupies a peripheral space or accentuates its own peripherality. Because of how it is influenced by and responds to the nation-state, place is a productive analytical category to think comparatively across borders and to connect the various articulations

of minority discourse despite the material differences in the context of their production. Furthermore, there is an inherent regionalism that is central to the construction of place in both Nigeria and Canada, and this has comparative value. This regionalist approach follows Laurie Ricou's position that "the regionalist impulse seeks to define a manageable space in this expanse. As it resists the homogenizing and centralizing tenets of Canadian nationalism, it also defines the nation as a loose confederation of provinces, territories, and local affiliation" (948). Although Ricou's context is specifically Canadian, his position suggests that regionalism spatializes the nation in significant ways.[14] I go beyond Ricou's provincial regionalism and insert the minoritarian experience of place as a counter-narrative of provincialized nationalism (in Canada) and statist nationalism (in Nigeria).

Whether in terms of situated geography or positionality, place can be read as an index in conceptualizing minority discourse, and we can identify its influence in the accompanying aesthetics. In many ways, notions of place and belonging contest the dominant narrative of the nation/-state, especially if we take Evan Gottlieb and Juliet Shields' position that if one thinks of place as "phenomenological as much as geographical," we can "displace the nation-state from its privileged status as the imagined community par excellence" (3). Their insights on how place is constructed in British literature have implications for the location of place in minority discourse. They argue that "[t]he demarcation of a locality, for example, usually acknowledges that the area in question is always implicitly subordinated to a larger geo-political entity" (3). The point here is that people's sense of place and their rootedness in particular places should be understood in the context of broader and even hegemonic notions of place. Gottlieb and Shields think of place

[14] What Ricou might have missed is that this regionalist impulse, especially in the context of Canada, frames a nationalist discourse that, though spatially provincial in nature, homogenizes the nation and its constitutive parts in its mythology.

in both national and world contexts, thus providing a foundational framework to think of "global places" of dominance and minoritization. From this perspective, we can read subaltern geographies from both national and "world" frames. This subaltern understanding of place responds to the way Henri Lefebvre thinks of the statist production of space in his comment that

> the State engenders social relations in space; it reaches still further as it unfurls; it produces a support, its own space, which is itself complex. This space regulates and organizes a disintegrating national space at the heart of a consolidating worldwide space [*l'espace mondial*]… It tends to renew not only the social relations inherent in industrial production, but also the relations of domination inherent in the hierarchy of groups and places. (*State, Space, World* 225-226)

Lefebvre's position about the statist production of social space goes in tandem with his thesis about the capitalist production of space. What is key here is that place, as an aspect of space, is organized via statist hegemony, and this produces domination in both national and global contexts. It is this hegemonic organization of place that minority discourse responds to, and literary works, including poems, often contest and reimagine place.

There are many ways to read what I call "indexical place" in poetry.[15] Tim Cresswell draws from notions of ecopoetics and geopoetics, which are predominantly used in ecocritical studies, and frames the concept of topopoetics. He asserts that "[a] topopoetic account is one which recognizes the specificity of the nearness of things in place and at the same time focuses our attention on the way in which the poem is itself a form of building and dwelling. Poems of place are not simply poems about places, rather they are a species of place with a special

[15] By this I mean, the capacity of place to index minority subjectivity.

relationship to what it is to be in (external) place" (323). Here, the focus shifts from simply discussing the presence of place in poetry to thinking of poetry as a kind of place itself. In this sense, one can read poems as the literary places of the geographical places they represent. This type of reading will turn the elements of the poem into "sites" where place is fully experienced. Such a reading not only acknowledges that poems are "sites," but that poems represent "sites." It is this double-trafficked way of thinking about place vis-à-vis poetry that makes Cresswell's approach interesting. In my usage of Cresswell's methods in this chapter, I focus on the poetic topo of the selected poems to uncover the sites they represent in terms of situated geography or literary position. By reading the form and structure of the poem as well as techniques like parallelism and symbolism, the poetic topo is revealed and contextualized.

Another way I read place in this chapter is based on David J. Alworth's notion of "site reading." Alworth draws from insights in environmental humanities in his conceptualization of "site reading" as an "interpretative method" that addresses the representation of social life in literature in the way texts transform "real sites into narrative settings and thereby [render] them operative, as figures in and of collective life" (2). Although the focus here is on fiction and its setting, there are many things we can learn from the interpretative methodology. If Cresswell's method focuses on poetry as both a place and a container to represent place, Alworth's strategy is to consider the text as a container for specific social sites. He argues that "setting contains vivid and valuable insights about the experience of collectivity" (4), thus demonstrating both the social constructionism of place and its collective identitarian implications. Furthermore, he defines "site specification" as "the process whereby imaginative literature defines and delimits a locale" (10). This conceptual category is helpful in thinking of how writers deliberately construct places in their works. It is a process that can be read in many ways, and I argue that a writer's

"site specification" is deliberate and deeply political, especially for writers from minoritized places. By analyzing places as "sites," we can uncover the implicit struggles that inform sociality in those places, as well as how such sites are "specified" to challenge dominant narratives.

In my reading of poetic topo and site specification and sociality in this chapter, I describe a poetics of place that manifests through poetic voice and elements like voice, visual imagery, personification, poetic realism, and the lyrical "I." Site specification has a realist aesthetic dimension with important affective temporal structures that implicate the past and present as a way of establishing tensions, contestations, and important structures that might inform minority discourse. Building on Cresswell's topopoetics and Alworth's site reading, I read the poetics of place in Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* and Clarke's *Whylah Falls* in terms of how it indexes minoritized places like the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes. The selected poetry collections reconstruct specific Niger Delta and Black Maritime geographies in order to confront the dominant narrative of the nation-state. Nigeria's Niger Delta region and Canada's Black Maritimes are different places with complex discursive formations. To understand how and why these places are specified in the poems, it is important to explore their historical and socio-political realities.

The Production of Place: The Niger Delta and the Black Maritimes

In this section, I offer a concise overview of the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes and foreground the unique place they occupy within Nigeria and Canada, respectively. The Niger Delta region has a complex history that predates the modern Nigerian nation-state and, in many ways, challenges national history. Ojaide indicates this complexity in his comment that "the numerous ethnic groups, often referred to as 'nationalities' by many scholars, had already established themselves as different peoples who were self-governing and relatively self-reliant.

These groups that Britain used its imperial power to incorporate into the Nigerian nation have riverine, socio-cultural, and political affinities" ("Towards a bio-regional" 13-14). Here, there is a deliberate dual usage of the concept of nationalism. The first has to do with the nation as an independent socio-cultural space that predates colonialism, and the second is the nation as a political space derived from British colonialism (nation-state).[16] Ojaide positions the pre-colonial nations as the primary indicator of the people's sense of identity, and he uses a bioregional approach to indicate the precolonial affinities that the independent groups of the Niger Delta shared.[17] These shared essences are rooted in culture, understandings of place and geography, and mythic memories.

The ethnic groups that people the Niger Delta region today lived in various clans with loose connections before the colonization of Nigeria. These clans were autonomous and largely self-ruling. Although these groups did not have any sense of collective identities beyond some ancestral, linguistic, and geographical connections, they understood themselves vis-à-vis the natural geography they occupied. For example, Peter Ekeh writes about the Urhobo adage in the context of a "sense of geography": "*Mi kp' Aka, mi kp' Igbo,*" which translates into "I have been to Benin and I have been to Igbo" (16). He further asserts that this adage "specified the lands that ancient ancestors of the Urhobo people considered to be distant in Olden Times" (16). The implication then is that the people had a sense of geography and understood their boundaries vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. Similarly, Chukwuemeka Ojieh foregrounds the centrality of the Ethiope River in precolonial intergroup relations between the Ukwuani, Urhobo, Isoko, and

[16] The modern nation-state in Nigeria and across Africa is a direct inheritance of the colonial state. This colonial state evolved into the postcolonial state and inherited the doctrines of territory, sovereignty, and hegemony, all instituted by the colonial order.

[17] By "bioregional," I mean that Ojaide's approach foregrounds the Niger Delta as not only a political region but also a biological region. This approach draws from the philosophy that people who occupy unique biological zones have mutual socio-cultural registers that are based on the shared space they inhabit.

Itsekiri-speaking groups of the Niger Delta (93), further demonstrating the riverine affinity theorized by Ojaide.[18] This riverine rootedness paved the way for the colonial extraction of both enslaved Africans and palm oil from the region.[19] In exploring this point, Afam Ifedi and Ndumbe Anyu submit that "the collapse of the slave trade led firms from Liverpool to turn their attention to other Niger Delta exports, such as palm oil, which was used for soap, candles, and lubricants in Europe's early industrial revolution" (77). As a riverine region, it was easy to extract from and exploit the region, and this was the first stage of the region's minoritization in the colonial project of nationhood.

Beyond precolonial understandings of nation and identity, Ojaide also thinks of the Niger Delta as a discursive construction facilitated by "[t]he shared experience of a dispossessed and robbed people whose land and resources are forcefully taken from them" (18). In this sense, the phrase took a deeply political meaning, signalling the shared experience of minoritization, expropriation, and exclusion by the numerous groups that inhabit the geographical Niger Delta vis-à-vis the three ethnic groups that have dominated the postcolonial nation-state and written its narrative since political independence from Britain in 1960. This is the same sense that leads Oyeniyi Okunoye to assert that

> the shared agony of the people based on perceived neglect and exposure to the ecological disasters that result from oil exploration seems, ironically, to have become a stronger basis for a Pan-Niger Delta identity. The process of constructing a common identity for

[18] Ojieh's focus on the Ethiope River is based on its importance as a major conduit for commercial activities for the groups that inhabit the region. The river begins at Umuaja, in Ukwani land, and flows from there to the Atlantic Ocean. As the fastest means of reaching some hinterland communities, it attracted traders from all over the Niger Delta and entered into the mythic memory of the people. It also served as a key pathway for the palm oil trade immediately after it was surveyed by Capt. Henry Lionel Gallwey of the British colonial mission (Adogbeji Salubi 119).

[19] The region was called the Oil Rivers Protectorate by the British.

> the region itself reveals the dynamic nature of identities in Africa as the symbolic acts of dissent initially conceived by such figures as Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa in no little way inspired trans-ethnic resistance. (191)

Here, Okunoye positions the Niger Delta beyond geography and confirms its identitarian function in the context of marginality, alterity, and the oil encounter. Since the discovery of commercial quantities of crude oil in the region in 1956, the land and its people have suffered various forms of environmental, human rights, and political injustices. These injustices led to the proclamation of a short-lived independent Niger Delta Peoples Republic in 1966, shortly after Nigeria's independence, the rise of Ogoni and other ethnic activism that led to the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1996, and armed militancy in the region. In contemporary Nigeria, the following political states are considered part of the geopolitical Niger Delta: Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, and Edo. These states are all arbitrary creations of the Nigerian Federal Government, but the people define themselves as people of the Niger Delta, thus echoing the shared experience of minoritization that is further mediated by geographical place.

The politics of oil is also a complex layer of Niger Delta minoritization. Uyilawa Usuanlele and Bonny Ibhawoh historicize the minority condition in Nigeria, and they describe the Niger Delta minorities as "oil minorities" (9). Furthermore, they assert that

> the oil minorities of the Niger Delta have historically felt shortchanged by the revenue allocation model of the federal structure, which has left their communities exploited and undeveloped, even as they bear the burdens of environmental degradation due to oil production. Although their protests and agitations question the basis of Nigeria's federalism, they also offer new opportunities for addressing lingering minority discontent. (9)

Their focus on the oil encounter as the basis of minoritization does not occlude pre-oil issues with the structure of the nation from its colonial creation to its independence from British rule. In fact, they accentuate these issues by treating the nation in terms of power relations. The phrasing of the Niger Delta minorities as "oil minorities" is just one of the many attempts of using the oil encounter to navigate the minoritization of the Niger Delta. Even though this is a very relevant way of thinking about the Niger Delta, I treat it together with the primary minoritization of the people by the structure of the nation-state and those who appropriate state power.

The Black Maritimes is a geo-cultural region within Canada that forms a part of the complex space known as Black Canada. Like the Niger Delta, Black Canada is a discursive construction that refers to the vast Black geographies of Canada. David Chariandy captures the conceptual complexity of Blackness within Canada in his position that "[i]n contrast with the United States, in which people of African descent have long been singularly powerful focalizers of nationwide laws and debates on 'race,' Canada is home to a Black population that, although indisputably significant, is smaller proportionally and likely more culturally fractured" (539). His comment speaks to the multiple streams of Black identity in Canada. Furthermore, he identifies two approaches to navigating this discursive complexity: "roots" and "routes" (541). The first has to do with historical Black presence in Canada, with some dating to the mass immigration of Black Loyalists between 1783 and 1785 after the American Revolutionary War ended and the Black refugees from the War of 1812. The second has to do with a more recent Black diasporic presence, predominantly from the West Indies and, later, from Africa. Privileging African-Canadian over Black Canadian, George Elliott Clarke confirms the heterogeneity of Black Canada in his comment that "African Canada is, then, a fragmented collective, one fissured by religious, ethnic, class, and length-of-residency differences. And few African Canadians express

black nationalism that is not merely a nostalgic yearning for homelands in Africa, the Caribbean, or the southern United States" (*Odysseys Home* 15). Clarke's purpose here is to demonstrate that what binds the heterogenous Black spaces of Canada is their positioning in and against the nation-state. Despite this, Clarke is a firm believer in the notion of rootedness, and his archival work transgresses the White settler myth of Canada in many ways.

Black presence in Canada is as old as the formation of the Canadian settler state. Winfried Siemerling confirms this point in his submission that "[t]he first name we have for a black individual in Canada is that of Mathieu de Coste (or de Costa), who was a servant of Port Royal's governor in 1608. The first black slave whose voice is recorded is Olivier Le Jeune. He lived in the first half of the seventeenth century in the city of Quebec" (33). Siemerling's comment foregrounds the idea that Blackness in Canada is as old as the development of the nation-state. Interestingly, de Coste served as a translator when Samuel de Champlain explored the St. Lawrence River region, and this logically implies prior knowledge of the languages of the indigenous people.[20] Beyond slavery in New France (Quebec) and other parts of Canada, which was practised for "over two hundred years" (Robyn Maynard 36) in different parts of Canada, including the Maritime region (Harvey Amani Whitfield 4), the resettlement of the Black Loyalists in the 18th century, the flight to Canada by enslaved Black people and freemen from the United States between the 18th and 19th centuries, and the massive exile of Blacks to Canada as refugees following the War of 1812 all culminated in the establishment of Blackness on the

[20] While it is clear that de Coste (de Costa) understood some aspects of indigenous languages before he travelled with Samuel de Champlain, it is not exactly clear which exact languages he spoke or how many. One plausible theory advanced by John Johnson is that da Coste had spent sufficient time in the Americas prior to Champlain's visit and had learnt one or more languages or creoles there (155). Another theory is that the Portuguese-based creole he spoke was also used in the Americas, but this is the least likely theory, in my opinion.

landscape now known as Canada.[21] In all their history, they remained, as Clarke argues, "*Others* […] within colonies and within nations" (*Directions Home* 8). Here, Clarke refers to the experience of Black people in both Canada and the United States as "postcolonial" (8), foregrounding their otherness in both French and English colonial contexts. This statist otherness connects both Black and Indigenous peoples. Clarke complicates this by highlighting the presence of Black Mi'kmaq people (7), a development from what Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence describe as the "strong interconnections between Black and Aboriginal peoples" which complicates Black settler status in Canada (112).[22]

Clarke also establishes the complex identities of Black Canadians in his position that "We are divided severally; we are not just 'black' and Canadian, but also adherents to a region, speakers of an 'official' language (either English or French), disciples of heterogeneous faiths, and related to a particular ethnicity (or 'national' group), all of which shape our identities" (40). The complexity that is foregrounded here speaks to the complex ways identities are formed in the vast terrain of Canada. It is this complexity that Chariandy alludes to in his description of Black provinces in Canada and those who research specific regional Black literatures and cultures. He identifies Black Maritime, Black British Columbia, and Black Prairies as significant Black spaces in Canada (543). Clarke further identifies Black Quebec (*Odysseys Home* 168) as its own domain, in addition to the multiple Black diasporic spaces that usually focus on both "here" and "elsewhere."

[21] The subject of slavery in Canada is taken up further in chapter three of this dissertation. However, it is important to note here that slavery in Canada produced Black people as victims of the state.

[22] The question of whether Black people should be considered "settlers" in Canada is a complex one that implicates the history of slavery, Black suffering and victimhood, freewill, and the relationship between Black and indigenous people over the years. Blackness comes unwillingly to a White-settler state on Indigenous lands in the first instance as a victim of human trafficking and then later as a survivor. In this survivorship, it contests its own erasure from the land by the state.

Clarke's focus on the Maritime provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick motivates his coinage of "Africadia," a term that is etymologically derived from Africa and cadie, the Mi'kmaq term for "abounding in," and he explains that "*Africadia* is my coinage (c. 1991) for the land-base of the historical black communities of the Canadian Maritimes, especially Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and particularly Nova Scotia. Hence, those who inhabit or descend from these communities are *Africadian*" (*Directions Home* 15).[23] This operational term encompasses a unique aspect of the Black geography of Canada. However, scholars like Rinaldo Walcott take issue with Clarke's terminology and his project of locating Blackness within the Canadian nation-state. Walcott acknowledges the plurality of Blackness in Canada with his phrasing of "black Canadas" and suggests that "[a]s a location for post-emancipation and post-national independence for Caribbean migrants, and more recently for continental African migrants, and as a sanctuary for escaping enslaved African-Americans and their descendants, the multiplicities of blackness in Canada collide in ways that are instructive for current diasporic theorizing" (40). Here, Walcott situates the multiple Black spaces of Canada within a Black diasporic discourse that responds, in many ways, to Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic discourse. He argues for the treatment of Black literatures and cultures in Canada as part of a greater discourse outside the realm of the nation-state, circumventing what he terms "Clark's regressive localism" (17). Essentially, Walcott disavows regional or "national" readings of Black Canadian literature and argues for a diasporic frame of reference that operates both within and outside the nation-state.

[23] It should be pointed out that this term is also similar to "Acadia," which refers to the French settlement in the Maritime region and the people who speak a form of French called "Acadian French." While one theory states that the word "acadia" originates from the Greek word "Arcadia," which means idyllic place (see William Morley's biographical entry on the Italian explorer, Giovanni da Verrazzano), Clarke ignores this theory and instead adopts the Mik'maq version of the root morpheme – "cadie."

Aligning with Katherine McKittrick's notion of the "spatialization of blackness in/and Canada" and the way place helps us frame "power, resistance, community and connection" (31), I read Black Canadian literature from the perspective of place/region. Regionalism enables us to understand the discontinuous Black spaces of Canada by focalizing specific places where transgressive narratives of the nation are conceived. It also allows us to connect minoritization in geographical places with literary places in a move that Andrea Davis calls "spatial literary transgression" (33). Here, the region or place allows us to investigate specific Black cultures and literary canons in Canada in order to understand positionings within and against the nation-state from a clear socio-historical perspective. For example, the place model can allow us to understand the specific socio-historical context that led to the racist demolition of Africville, a Black Canadian community near Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the 1960s or the criminalization of Blackness in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick between the 19th and 20th centuries.[24]

By linking the Black Maritimes, a minoritized Black region of Canada, with the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, my claim that minority discourse can be a useful comparative theoretical category becomes clearer. In the two regional contexts, the structure of each nation-state is very different, and the type of minoritization is not the same. In the Niger Delta context, minoritization is mostly socio-political, and in the other, it is based predominantly on race, which also has socio-political implications. However, there is a shared sense of erasure, exclusion, marginality, material deprivation, neocolonialism, and alterity within the nation-state in both contexts. The distinct responses to these issues can be framed in a comprehensible way as the aesthetics of minority discourse. Since this aesthetic mode is very much linked with the way place functions, how then might we read place in the poetry of writers from these regions as an

[24] According to Jacobs A.C. Remes (223), Africville was demolished between 1964 and 1970.

index of minority discourse? What is the purpose of the poetics of place in the poetry of the Niger Delta and Black Maritime writers? The following segments explore and attend to these questions.

Representing the Niger Delta: Indexical Place and the Poetics of Place in Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta*

In this segment, I explore the concepts of site specification and site sociality in Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* and describe these through the poetics of place. My contention is that Ojaide represents the Niger Delta as a site of contestation through techniques like imagery, metaphor, voice, contrast, and poetic structure. Ojaide's collection is divided into two parts, and most of the poems are lyrical and written in free verse form. His titular poem, "Labyrinths of the Delta," is a long narrative poem of five parts that specifies the Niger Delta as a topo and as a people through the function of history.[25] Ogaga Okuyade's comment that the poem "mythologizes the origin of the Delta people, who keep faith under the yoke of bondage" (37) confirms the transgressive pre-nation-state narrative of the Niger Delta evident in this poem. Every part of the poem captures a different space-time of the region and, more specifically, the Urhobo people whose history it traces, thus making the very structure of the poem a literary site for the real space-time that it represents. If, as Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd argue, minority discourse is produced by "damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture" (4), then the structures that produced this damage have to be foregrounded. This is what Ojaide does with this poem as he tracks the marginality of the Urhobo people of the Niger Delta across time:

[25] I use "topo" here in the context of "topopoetics," i.e. that place could inspire poetics as much as poems could be places.

We took off without thought of where we were going,

And paths opened for our anxious feet.

It was not for fun men and women split from bed,

Not for fun mothers ran with babies on their backs;

We rushed into the vast night

Living, not in our homes

But caravaned in hope. (23)

In this extract, the speaker is a collective voice, confirming JanMohamed and Lloyd's position that "the collective nature of all minority discourse also derives from the fact that minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically" (10). This collective "we" produces a certain consciousness that takes us through the site that is specified in the poem. A sense of rupture and removal pushes the speaker towards negative consciousness, and this negative voice is inscribed in the last stanza of the first part of the poem: "Ogiso choked flaming faggots into men's throats, / Castrated the manly among us, and / Fell on anybody he loved or scorned. / […] We knew we had not come to our own home." (23).[26] In this myth-making process of the poem, Ogiso, a mythical despot from Urhobo folklore, is constructed as a symbol of oppression, thus building the foundation for a negative consciousness that is to become relevant to the people. Beyond Ogiso's tyranny is the focus on "home." If we think of place as home, then Ojaide is, in this poem, narrating how the people have come to describe the Niger Delta topo as their homeland, thus accentuating a pre-nation-state history of land ownership.

[26] I use "negative consciousness" in the context of the production of negation in minority cultures, which JanMohamed and Lloyd outline for us (4). This negation, or the idea that a people have been dispossessed relative to others within a specified space, is transformed into a vehicle for self-inscription and affirmation. The negative consciousness or negative voice is then the generic voice that negates its negation.

Ojaide's reconstruction of the Niger Delta as homeland continues in the second part of the poem:

Let us go to the River
With drums, goats, and cowries;
Let us go, draped in our favourite madras,
Powdered and perfumed;
Let us go to her.
She called us this way,
And we came, absorbing accents
Into our tongue. (23)

In this passage, the speaker gives us a quick glimpse of the new homeland specified by images of the river. As the Niger Delta is a riverine area, the lines seem to flow from one to the next seamlessly. Alworth's argument that the setting of literary works is operational in the way it reveals collective life (2) is quite relevant in thinking of the riverine site of the poem as a way the writer inscribes the people's identity and claims to home – defined by the topo of land and water. This site specification is important as a vital part of the affective temporal structure of Niger Delta minoritization, signalling their geographical marginality in the nation-state and consequences like erasure or exclusion. Ojaide's site specification makes claims for the people's habitation of the "virgin beauty of the Delta, / who until now in a clear voice / Told us we had a place" (23). The "until now" moment in the poem signals the speaker's need to make claims of rootedness in the region, suggesting that such claims are currently contested.

Using visual imagery, Ojaide inscribes the physical and cultural beauty of the Niger Delta in the third and fourth parts of the poem with the apparent purpose of demonstrating that "We

did not fall from the sky, we did not / Pop out of holes […]" (25). This declaration is significant given the collective voice of the speaker and the focus on mythmaking so far. However, Ojaide's critique of the modern nation-state appears in the fourth part of the poem, where the "one region" of the Delta was attacked by "Conquistadors" from the "Atlantic" who "drove stakes into the labyrinths of the Delta" and "split the fold into liveried bands" (25-26). If minority discourse responds to the nation-state as a problematic construct, then by implication, minority discourse also responds to the colonial encounter. The temporal contrast of the romanticized beauty of the pre-colonial Niger Delta with the colonizers who are imaged as "Conquistadors" reflects the ruptured space-time of the people and the imposition of a new space-time in the form of a modern nation-state. The fifth part of the poem captures the transient sense of victory that accompanied independence from the colonizers: "The River swells with boats, a regatta for statehood, / and throughout the land a warrior's dance at homecoming" (26). The striking images of the river and regatta are very deliberate site specifications that suggest that the people's real war was for the freedom of their home from foreign invaders.

Recognizing the complex issues that will come with the newly achieved statehood or derivative nationalism, the speaker draws strength from the achievements of folk heroes in his prayer for "resolve to fight for years on years" (27). Here, the speaker acknowledges the conflicts that will arise due to the newly achieved "statehood," which contrasts radically with the pre-colonial pristine state of the Niger Delta. Ojaide's site specification in this poem reveals many things. Chief among these are the visual images of the Niger Delta, which serve to articulate the immense physical and cultural wealth of the region and how these mediate social relations between the inhabitants of the place. Furthermore, the site is positioned as the locale for numerous conflicts, beginning with the colonial encounter and the subsequent battles for

recognition and resources within a nation-state that was imposed by British colonizers. By articulating the region as home, Ojaide counters any national narrative that situates the Niger Delta on the margin of the nation-state, echoing its irreducible cultural distinctiveness and centrality in the national collective. The affective temporal structures that necessitate Niger Delta minority discourse are also introduced through the representation of the strained colonial encounter that ultimately foisted the problematic nation-state and its implication of place on the people. Through this titular poem, Ojaide specifies the site of his minority discourse, and the other poems operate within this specific topo.

Beyond site specification, Ojaide also represents how place mediates sociality and social relations in his poems. Site specification allows the reader to follow the poems based on the inherent struggles and dynamics in the sites, but once the sites are specified, the struggles that they mediate become evident. If we take Alworth's position that "sites (both imagined and real) mediate sociality" (18), then it becomes important to read the sociality in the specified sites from the perspective of minority discourse. The point here is that minority discourse can be encoded aesthetically through the imbrication of site sociality in poetry and poetics. Ojaide's "We Know" uses the collective transformative voice to encode place in terms of asymmetrical power relations. Both the poem, as a topo, and its collective speaker represent the social relation or sociality mediated by place. [27]

"We Know" is a five-stanza poem that uses the negative voice to accentuate the minority condition of the speaker. The type of negative voice in this poem is implicated in JanMohamed's position that negation in minority discourse arises from the negation that is inherent in hegemonic domination. However, the negative voice negates its constructed negation rather than

[27] JanMohamed and Lloyd define the collective transformative voice as the negative and generic subject position that is transformed into a positive, collective voice.

being essentially negational, thus transforming it into a positive voice ("Negating the Negation" 103-104). In Ojaide's poem, the first two lines reveal the negative tone: "We drive them / But they won't go" (30). The speaker uses the "we vs they" to calibrate resistance to the dominant narrative of the nation. As a mediating category for the relation between the "we" and "they," place functions at an affective level and as an element of topopoetics:

> Open the windows
>
> They are entering through the doors
>
> The rats were bad
>
> But we slept in our beds
>
> The masqueraders are fat through diabolic cunning
>
> Close the doors
>
> They are coming through the windows
>
> Before we close up one side
>
> They pull down the other (30)

In this passage, every line contributes to the bigger image of a home under siege. As a way of placemaking, Cresswell comments that once there is a poem, "an act of dwelling has occurred that brings space and place into being" (326). Agreeing with Cresswell's perspective, I interpret every line in this extract of Ojaide's poem as different "parts" of a place, here imagined as a home. Significantly, the tension between the "we" and "they" is mediated by this home, the Niger Delta imaginary. There is also a sense of urgency and cinematographic time in the poem through active verbs – "open" and "close."[28] This also foregrounds the sociality of the poem by creating a sense of constant and never-ending assault, a temporal loop that exacerbates the

[28] By cinematographic time, I mean each line of the action seems to be a movie frame and time seems to move much faster in the context of the poem.

condition of the oppressed. Apart from the poem's placemaking, the site here is the Niger Delta, and it is imagined in metaphors of a home, connecting this poem with the site specification in "Labyrinths of the Delta."

The oppressor in the poem is framed using terms like "masqueraders," "lechers," and "slavers," all connoting the idea of deceit even as they transtemporally link old (colonial) and new forms (post-independence) of domination. These terms not only configure the oppressor but also accentuate the negative voice of the speaker, creating a discourse that confronts oppression and exploitation. In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker alludes to the Niger Delta oil discourse: "By the time they have penetrated us / From all sides / Our sweat will have gone down / Into the soil" (30). The word "penetrated" invokes the discourse of resource extraction that is closely tied to the Niger Delta minority discourse, and as in "Labyrinths of the Delta," the speaker accentuates resistance against the dominant socio-political and economic discourse of the nation by drawing attention to the oppressed and their plights in a national narrative that pushes them to the margin. In this poem, place mediates the asymmetrical power relations between the minoritized speaker and the dominant discourse of the nation-state, and the poem's placemaking reveals its implicit sociality.

Ojaide's site specification reveals that placemaking is deeply imbricated with minority discourse. He creates sites that make claims for home and uses these sites to contest the nation-state or narratives of homogenous nationalism. More specifically, placemaking, for Ojaide, is a historical fact that resides in the collective memory of the people, and their "sense of place" is tied to the topo. Ojaide's "We Know" not only reconstructs the Niger Delta topo through its five parts but also uses these parts to accentuate aspects of the historical claims to land and the environment which are now part of present-day Nigeria. Similarly, place mediates social

relations in Ojaide's "We Are Many." In this poem of three stanzas and unrhymed lines, the lyrical voice of the poem critiques Nigeria's nationalist pedagogy through a negative voice that stages a transgressive temporality on the national space-time.[29] The poem's title echoes the type of solidarity that JanMohamed and Lloyd describe as "a certain thinking in solidarity across the boundaries of different identities" (ix). The "many" alludes to the minoritarian condition that traverses national narratives. In the poem, the speaker frames the dominant discourse of the nation in a negative voice that performs resistance to this homogenous time:

> From birth I have been in the custody
> of three overlords . . .
> They extract oil from my wet soil,
> prospect for iron in my bones,
> and level my forests for timber. (72)

The invocation of "birth" here encodes the homogenous national time that the speaker denounces, and this national time is consolidated with the phrase "three overlords," demonstrating the putative notion of the Nigerian state as one with three *dominant* or *major* ethnic groups.[30] This narrative was ascribed to the British colonial policy by Usuanlele and Ibhawoh: "In British Africa, the policy of indirect rule required the homogenization of ethnic identities and the creation of distinct hierarchies of 'tribes' and clans" (2).[31] Furthermore, they link this experience to the minority condition in their comment that "'Minority' might be a concept of numerical relations, but is also intricately related to influence, the exercise of power

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[29] I use "nationalist pedagogy" in the way Homi Bhabha (297) conceives it in terms of how the nation-state frames people as objects of its own historicity and discourse.

[30] In Nigeria's national discourse, three ethnic groups are privileged, and historically speaking, these three groups have dominated the nation's politics. Three is a significant number in the Nigerian socio-political context. The resource extraction dimension of the lines incorporates the "oil minorities" framework successfully.

[31] In Nigeria, for example, there were originally three regions (Northern, Western, and Eastern), with each corresponding to a dominant group (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo).

and access to resources. Ultimately, minority status is best understood not simply in numerical terms but also in terms of power relations and the collective aspiration for equity and autonomy" (3). Usuanlele and Ibhawoh's thoughts navigate the thin line of sociality in terms of power and resources; however, the category of place gives more concreteness to their theorization.

Ojaide's poem represents place through pronouns and images that establish land and rootedness: "They extract oil from my wet soil, / prospect for iron in my bones, / and level my forests for timber" (72). Here, we can see the centrality of the soil in the speaker's negative voice, demonstrating, as in "We Know," the idea of a home under siege. The juxtaposition of the "they" with "my" creates a power binary that reveals the counterdiscourse of oppression and exploitation in a land whose habitation predates colonial temporality. The recursiveness of this exploitation and structural imbalance takes more shape in the second stanza through the implicit sexual imagery:

> And they take turns to ride me:
> one, two, three. One mounts me
> as another descends – my bane
> has always been the incubus of power;
> the third busies himself
> knocking out whoever is on top
> to secure for himself
> the comfort they find from my back. (72)

The sexual imagery here connotes the idea of assault, also further invoking power and dominance. The play on the number "three" in this poem foregrounds Nigeria's national narrative of three *dominant* ethnic groups. The poem has three stanzas but with a speaker who

denounces this triad, demonstrating its performative resistance to the dominant narrative. As a poetic topo, the form recreates the nation-state by building on each of the three stanzas with a transgressive voice. The speaker's negative voice provides counter-temporality to the initial line of the poem, "From birth," and it encodes the minority discourse in its representation of oppression, both political and economic. In the final stanza, the speaker inscribes solidarity by saying: "I have donkey companions worldwide / kept alive by their tormentors / to slake their thirst for outcast sweat" (72). I read these lines as Ojaide's way of thinking transnationally and inserting his work into the world literary space with an awareness of its position in and against the nation-state. Here, place mediates the writer and the world, undermining the national as a category due to its insistence on homogeneous temporality. Between the minoritized "I" of the poem and the dominant "they," notions of place create a power imbalance that the speaker foregrounds and ruptures.

Ojaide's lyrical voice further negates its negation in "The Cross." This is a lyrical poem of three stanzas, with the first and last stanzas having nine lines and the second stanza having eight. Again, the three-stanza structure of the poem accentuates the national narrative of Nigeria as a nation of three major groups even as the speaker's lyrical voice dismantles it. Here, the poem's form recreates and deconstructs place by inserting the Niger Delta into the structure of the nation-state. The negative voice of the speaker laments his oppression:

> And I am the one that must shed the blood
> on which the big ones thrive;
> they will only accept my blood type
> which they say is light and sweet, so digestible.
> They have grown so fat in the neck, so beastly

they know the forbidding dishes they consume. (73)

I read the binary opposition in this poem between the collective "I" of the speaker and the oppressive "they" in terms of Usuanlele and Ibhawoh's concept of "oil minorities" (9). The image of blood in the poem relates not only to the idea of life and vitality but also to the crude oil that is extracted from the region. As crude oil is deeply tied to the land, its extraction mediates social relations and produces power asymmetry.

The "they" of the poem represents the structure that marginalizes the people of the region and the multinational oil companies that view the Niger Delta as a site of extraction. In many ways, we can read the speaker's negative voice here as a response to the structure of oppression in the national space and the neoliberal economic system that facilitates exploitation and extraction. The use of "blood" here stages a multidimensional critique against colonial capitalist modernity that makes the oppressors "fat in the neck": they "redouble their wealth" while the speaker "suffer[s] the plight" (73). In the final stanza, the speaker accentuates resistance in the declaration: "I have only this voice, an ivory trumpet / carved by the rugged hands of an outcast. / It is guerilla war I must wage / small as I am / to live in this helpless land" (73). As a way to mediate sociality, the land, described as "helpless" through pathetic fallacy, informs the asymmetrical positioning of the speaker vis-à-vis the oppressor. The recourse to guerilla war encodes what Cyril Obi describes as the militarization of resistance in the Niger Delta (221). This image of violence and the accompanying image of an "outcast" demonstrate the subalternity of place in the Niger Delta, and this responds to the slow violence meted on the region by the state and its actors. Ojaide's three-stanza poem "Ughelli" also demonstrates this type of slow violence using verbs like "leave," "starve," "dehydrate," "spat upon," and so on by "an army of leeches" (74) to show Ughelli's subaltern position as the victim of oppression. Ojaide's purpose

in this poem and throughout the collection is to index the Niger Delta for the reader and spell out the terms of its marginal status within the Nigerian state.

Mythologizing the Black Maritimes: Indexical Place and the Poetics of Place in George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls*

Whylah Falls is a collection that revolves around the mythical community of Whylah Falls, which as Michelle Banks suggests, is "*the* ideal Nova Scotia black community" (66). As a work that is deeply anthropological as much as it is political, Clarke recreates a community based on the Black communities in the Windsor Plains of Nova Scotia. With the destruction of Africville, a significant Black suburb around Halifax, Nova Scotia, Clarke's placemaking and the poetics of place in the collection become significant as a response to the systematic erasure of Black Canadian presence in Canada. In line with this, Anne Compton suggests that "*Whylah Falls* mythologizes a specific place (Weymouth Falls) and an event (the killing of Graham Cromwell), but it does even more than that. Under the pressure of events (the razing of Africville and Cromwell's death), it reconceptualizes a people and a 200-year-old history in mythic terms" (139). What makes Clarke's site specification complex is the sheer amount of mythmaking that is done in the work, making it difficult to locate any poem that casts a looming shadow on the rest of the collection. The form of the collection as a mix of poetry, drama, and prose makes it difficult to read; however, this also makes it interesting, echoing the idea that conventional forms of poetry do not completely capture the complexity of the Black Canadian experience.[32]

[32] This collection is unorthodox in many ways and presents its fictive setting, Whylah Falls, in a very realistic way, with photography, journalism, and other modes enhancing the verisimilitude of the work. Clarke invites the reader to question what is true and what is not, and this question speaks to the experiences that are represented in the work. This complex world-making and the heterogeneity of forms might be a way through which Clarke questions many years of Canadian history, literature, and culture. Clarke's mythology presents the alternative history of the erased.

Three poems are significant in terms of the site specification of the collection. The first is "Look Homeward, Exile," and this title is suggestive of a speaker who is away from home and reflecting on home. The focus on home here is important because, like Ojaide's home, Clarke inscribes Blackness on the Canadian landscape, locating home in it. The poem begins, "I can still see that soil crimsoned by butchered / Hog and imbrued with rye, lye, and homely / Spirituals everybody must know" (17). Here, the topo – soil – is described in romanticized language and linked to "Spirituals," alluding to the negro spirituals that define the culture of the Black Maritimes, considering their history of having two major waves of immigration (1783 and after the war of 1812) to Canada from the United States (Clarke, "On Black Canadian Writing" 190). The "I" of the poem is a case of what JanMohamed and Lloyd describe as the transformation of the "individually, atomistically oriented experiences into collective modes of articulation" (10). This transformation has the capacity of turning the subject-position into a "positive, collective one" (10), and through this voice, Clarke inscribes a collective presence in the mythical Whylah Falls, emblematic of Africadian rootedness in Canada in terms of its rupturing of the space-time of the nation and its soft claims to indigeneity through "Black Mi'kmaq" influence ("Introducing Edition" *Whylah Falls* 9).[33]

By linking Black social life to the soil, Clarke specifies Whylah Falls as home. In the first canto of the collection, the poem "The River Pilgrim: A Letter" also reconstructs Black rootedness in the Canadian national space. Xavier Zachary, or X, the speaker, says:

At eighteen, I thought the Sixhiboux wept.

[33] Clarke acknowledges the complex imbrication of Blackness and Indigeneity in the Maritimes due to similar experiences of marginality and the intermingling of Black and Indigenous peoples. In his memoir, *Where Beauty Survived,* he writes about "First Nations ancestry, which, I later learned, is often repressed in Africadian communities – a manifestation of anti-Indigenous racism" (302). His project of recovering that repressed ancestry intersects with his inscription of Blackness on the Canadian body politic.

Five years younger, you were lush, beautiful

Mystery; your limbs – scrolls of deep water.

Before your home, lost in roses, I swooned,

Drunken in the village of Whylah Falls (25)

What is significant here is that the speaker is an exiled person, echoing in some sense the collective feeling of removal from homeland, who makes a claim for home through memory. Specific sites like the "Sixhiboux" river establish the geographical topo of the speaker's home. In many ways, Shelley Clemence, the woman the speaker longs for, becomes a symbol of Africadian rootedness in the Windsor Plains. This is even more significant in the third poem that specifies site, "How Exile Melts to One Hundred Roses," where Clarke moves beyond making claims for home and implicates the affective temporal structure that necessitates Black Canadian minority discourse. Here, the speaker's sense of home becomes clearer and more immediate with the opening lines: "I climb to Whylah Falls because I thirst, / Hunger, for you, Shelley, and shake to touch / Your house that slides down Mount Eulah to fog - / The misery of the Sixhiboux River" (34). In this extract, Shelley is more than a person and represents a sense of home, a collectivity rooted in the topo of mountain and river; a place where "tears once hammered dirt," images signalling the toil it took to tame the wilderness and make it home.

In thinking about how home might be constructed in terms of one's affective relationship with it, Alison Blunt asserts that "[t]he home is a material and an affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions" (507). Here, the centrality of the ordinary in the representation of home is key. Clarke's focus on the quotidian aspects of life in this home is significant for his site specification. He demonstrates how the topo mediates social interactions with images of "drunk sailors," "Bearded, black saints, reeking of

oil, [who] comb fields / That plunge to poverty no budget soothes," and "Revered Langford," (Reverend) who preaches against drinking and fornication (34). These images are painted on a site – a landscape or topo – and portray home as a complex scene of neglect, poverty, and exclusion. This portrayal is further inscribed with the allusion to the demolition of Africville, "Shelley, we wrest diamonds from coal, / Scrounge pearls from grubs and stones, lest penury / Work filthy rags of our magnificence, / or planners bulldoze our flowers into dirt" (35). Here, the speaker emphasizes the resilience of the Africadian community despite all the odds against them, including the need to establish their "magnificence" or risk being bulldozed out of existence. The line that mentions planners directly alludes to the demolition of Africville, a historically Black area of Halifax that was founded in the mid-19th century, following the second wave of immigration from the United States to Canada after the war of 1812, and was demolished in the 1960s in a racist-motivated form of gentrification. Here the word "dirt" takes us back to the beginning of the poem, where the speaker describes Whylah Falls as "roses gorged where tears once hammered dirt" (34). The cycle from one dirt to the next indicates the struggle against erasure in a nation that has crafted exclusionary dominant narratives. The affective temporal structures that inform the poem's minority discourse are foregrounded in the encoding of dirt, here emblematic of historical rootedness, as a symbol of Black presence in Nova Scotia. Clarke's mythmaking process in this poem becomes transgressive in how it plants Black bodies on the landscape, contesting any narrative of Canada as an exclusively White settler state.

Clarke reconstructs place as both literary and mythical. This is also deliberate because his claims to place are based on a long history of Black presence in Canada that has been relatively erased from national discourse. This systematic erasure necessitates the construction of place as not only a real place but a literary place. Clarke's poems not only contest narratives of Canadian

history but also insert Blackness into the literary field by its placemaking maneuvers. Furthermore, place mediates the social relations between Blacks and Whites in Nova Scotia. However, unlike Ojaide, Clarke imaginatively reconstructs place to insert Blackness on the Canadian topo. This literary reconstruction responds to the systematic erasure of Blackness in the Canadian national narrative, and Clarke demonstrates, on the one hand, how place in literature can contest geographical place, and on the other, how such imaginative place encodes the centrality of place in inter-race relations. Alexander MacLeod suggests that Clarke "actively (and even aggressively) claims both the agency and the capacity first to reimagine his home and then to reconstruct it, physically, in the real world" (107). MacLeod hints here that Clarke's placemaking positions Africadia as a spiritual or imagined home painted on the landscape of Canada, thus emphasizing how place in literature might mediate the geographical sense of place. MacLeod further suggests that in this placemaking process, "the fixed facts of Nova Scotian geography become more flexible: Weymouth Falls can turn into Whylah Falls, and Digby County can change its name to Jarvis County" (107). This indicates that Clarke's poetry operates as a topo, a place, and this imaginative place reveals the position of Blackness in a province that has tried to erase Blackness despite its complicity in Black enslavement and anti-Black racism.

In the fifth canto of *Whylah Falls*, Clarke draws attention to the violent and hostile encounters between races. This canto is named "The Martyrdom of Othello Clemence," and the poems deal with the murder of Othello Clemence, a Black Nova Scotian, by S. Scratch Seville, a White man who is eventually acquitted of the murder (107). This altercation between Seville and Othello has important affective temporal structures that are implicated. For one, Clarke reveals the worthlessness of Black life in a nation that has written Black people outside its official narrative despite evidence to the contrary and the state's complicity in the production of Black

alterity. Furthermore, the altercation shows how the national narrative, through the agency of the law, is wielded as a weapon against Black people. Significantly, Clarke's character, Othello, directly alludes to Shakespeare's *Othello*, a tragic hero whose Blackness is central to his alterity in the play. This character, in many ways, facilitates Clarke's representation of Blackness not only in the geographical space of Canada but also in its literary space. By invoking Shakespeare's Othello, Clarke calibrates his literary topo to account for the marginal place of his work and to assert the long history of Black oppression that correlates with both literary and real time.

In "This World is Passing Away," Clarke transgresses the national narrative by inserting Black place into the Maritime imaginary. This single-stanza poem of eleven lines uses contrasting images to reveal the violent relations between races in Nova Scotia:

> Night wields its death blow, nullifying
> The trains that writhe across this map, stilling
> The crows that crack the air with blackened cries.
> Cora mourns her son, Othello Clemence,
> Who, shot down by Scratch Seville, dreamt and bled
> Too much. He dropped in the garden where he
> Had crawled, bowled over, like a dog. (126)

The murderous violence, symbolized here with the "night" and personified through the victimized "crows," mediates the "trains" and the "blackened cries." The image of the trains relates to the Canadian statist modernity that is narrated through the frame of Whiteness, and its associated "map" image reveals the way the nation-state has literally mapped Blackness outside its socio-cultural borders. The audio-visual image of blackened cries encodes the marginal place

of Black people in this national narrative even as the cries inscribe another temporality that operates against the nation-state.

The hostility between races in 20th century Nova Scotia is distilled into the altercation between Othello and Seville, and here both literary and real time collide in the lines: "Who, shot down by Scratch Seville, dreamt and bled / Too much …" (126).[34] In these lines, the speaker alludes to the Shakespearean Othello, whose tragic flaw, according to Diana Brydon, is "his desire for whiteness until he actually begins to forget that he is black" (192). This allusion encodes the affective temporal structure of prior Black-White sociality in literary time and superimposes it on Clarke's fictive reconstruction of the murder of Graham Cromwell in the 1930s (Brydon 192). The tragic flaw in Clarke's poem is thus the desire for place in a nation that is hostile to Blackness. The national narrative, represented with the metaphor of "white-wash jury," makes a joke of Othello's murder (126), thereby accentuating its production of Othello's place outside the socio-political boundaries of the nation-state.

Clarke's form of minority discourse locates Blackness firmly in Canada. That the national narrative erases Black presence is a function of its version of homogenous empty time that likens Canada to White presence.[35] Clarke's Blackening of this narrative produces place as a contested terrain where social relations are inherently hostile. In "The Ballad of Othello Clemence," Clarke navigates notions of place by focusing on a Black perspective vis-à-vis the

[34] The murder of Othello follows Thomson's slander of Othello to Seville, who is made to believe that Othello is sleeping with his wife. Thomson's slander is a revenge strategy after Othello had confronted him for harassing Amarantha, his sister. Really, what we see here is a character who is persecuted and killed for standing up for what we can read as the persecution of his people.

[35] Statist erasure manifests in instances where Canada denies Black presence and presents itself as a society devoid of the racialized atmosphere one finds in a country like the United States. David Chariandy presents some examples in his essay "Black Canadian Literature: Fieldwork and 'Post-Race'," including the major perception that Canada is a haven for Black slaves who wanted to escape slavery in the United States. This perception ultimately screened out Canada's own complicity in the enslavement and maltreatment of Black people who were around from the very start of White settlement in the region.

murder of Othello Clemence. Titled a ballad, the poem's musicality and narrative nature encode both orality and folklore in unique ways that transcend the conventional ballad. A poem of three stanzas of eight lines each, Clarke reconfigures the ballad form to resist the typical features of rhyme, rhythm, and meter, and instead, he focuses on Black folk musicality, repetition, parallelism, and a solemn tone to tell the story of Othello Clemence's murder:

> There's a black wind howlin' by Whylah Falls;
>
> There's a mad rain hammerin' the flowers;
>
> There's a shotgunned man moulderin' in petals;
>
> There's a killer chucklin' to himself;
>
> There's a mother keenin' her posied son;
>
> There's a joker amblin' over his bones.
>
> Go down to the Sixhiboux River, hear it cry,
>
> "Othello Clemence is dead and his murderer's free!"

The use of parallelism and repetition here accentuates the musicality and creates a topo for the poem, with each line revealing a new dimension of the place and the event. Here, topopoetics works to inscribe the landscape into the poem's form. Images of nature like "wind," "rain," "flowers," and "petals" construct the poem as a place, named "Whylah Falls." Significantly, this place is blackened with the image of the wind and the invocation of Othello. All these come together to build the poem itself as a contested place even as Whylah Falls, the mythic reconstruction of Weymouth Falls, becomes a site of constant altercations between Blacks and Whites. As a poetic place, Clarke ascribes agency to Whylah Falls and intrusive symbols like the "mad rain" and "joker" orchestrate violence against place itself and those who call it home. The

agency of place is further encoded in the personified Sixhiboux River that cries for the murder of Othello Clemence, demonstrating the interconnectedness of Blackness and the land/river-scape.

As a ballad, the poem's speaker prioritizes both narration and melody, and this is encoded in the second stanza where Othello's condition is narrated: "Walked that dark road between desire and regret. / He pitched lumber, crushed rock, calloused his hands: / He wasn't a saint but he was a man" (127). This portrait of Othello does not only humanize his plight but also encodes the affective temporal structures that minoritize Othello, including the crushing of rocks that directly alludes to the provision of infertile and rocky terrains to the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia after their resettlement in 1783 (Clairmont and Magill 13). Clairmont and Magill also emphasize that this was a common experience for Black people in Nova Scotia even after the mass immigration that followed the War of 1812 (13-14). Othello's "calloused" hands point to how racial tensions surrounding place have produced poverty, marginality, and untold suffering for Black people in Nova Scotia. In this stanza of the poem, Othello sings from Whylah Falls, a place that, despite all odds, has become home to him, and it is this sense of home that leads Scratch Seville, a White Nova Scotian resident, to shoot him. In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker's painful tone further reveals the "black wind" and "river of blood" in this place, concretizing how the place, Whylah Falls in Jarvis County, informs the hostile social relations between Black people and White people. That the landscape and riverscape of Whylah Falls "moans" for Othello confirms his place in this terrain, and the injustice surrounding his murder haunts not only the poem as a place but Whylah Falls, the Weymouth Falls imaginary in the poem. Here, place, Whylah Falls, informs Clarke's minority discourse and confronts the national narrative of Canada that locates Blackness outside of the state even as it constantly erases Black bodies that exist at its margins.

In the last poem of the canto, Clarke directly confronts the national narrative through the subversive voice of the poem's speaker. "Vision of Justice" is a single-stanza poem of thirteen lines that explores the law as an instrument of national narration. When nation-states are imagined into being, the constitution and other official writings carefully narrate the form of the nation and even dictate its content. This national narrative operates on the basis of power, with those who have power being able to wield the writings to systematically erase others. This is how totalizing or homogeneous narratives of the nation are produced. The narrative, anchored on notions of place, mediates how different groups are positioned in the national space. In this poem, Clarke subverts the imbalanced national narrative by confronting the law and its mediation of social relations. Alluding directly to the occupation of hilly and mountainous regions by Blacks in Nova Scotia, the speaker inscribes resistance to the dominant narrative:

> I see the moon hunted down, spooked from the hills,
> Roses hammer his coffin shut, O stilled
> By stuttered slander, judicial gossip,
> And a killer's brawling bullet… (131)

Here, the moon is personified and imbued with persecutory consciousness, signalling its implication of Black presence in the hills of Nova Scotia. The alliterative "stuttered slander," which also alliterates with Scratch Seville, becomes a narrative, a "judicial gossip" that writes the personified moon to death. This dominant national narrative is further described as "loose law," "dour commandments," and "their law books," hinting at the writtenness of this exclusionist narration even as it is compared, through simile, to "lime-white, open pits / Lettered with bones, charred gibberish, of those / Who dared to love or sing and fell to mobs" (131). These images encode the national narrative as inherently oppressive, White facing, and hostile to

Black people who call the nation home. Clarke's critique of this narrative locates the Black voice squarely in the location – the Canadian Maritimes – and uses poetry to configure minority discourse: "Poetry come among us" (131). In many ways, this final line reveals the poem itself as a minority discourse that transforms the "us" of the poem, the collective voice of the Black people, into a transgressive narrative that negates the negation. Through the agency of writing, Clarke inscribes the poem and, indeed, Blackness as a counter-narrative to the Whiteness of the Canadian national narrative.

Conclusion

Regardless of how Ojaide and Clarke make place, the goal is the same – to articulate a certain minority consciousness that is both historical and transgressive in the way it is positioned in and against the nation. In their collections, home is imagined as a stabilizing force that binds people together, and there is also a longing for home that accentuates how both groups have been deprived of this stabilizing force. The language used in achieving this is romanticized, thus establishing site specification as both inherently political in terms of what it does, i.e. contesting any exclusionary idea of home or the nation, and romantic in terms of how it does it. In their representation of site sociality, both Ojaide and Clarke reveal the implicit tensions present in notions of place. While Ojaide uses the Niger Delta to contest Nigeria's dominant narrative as a nation of three "major ethnic groups," Clarke builds his Black place on the Canadian landscape and reveals the Black and White racial tensions that accompany notions of place.

Ojaide and Clarke also use poetry to perform place in the way the inner dynamics of their poems reveal the tensions inherent in place. Clarke, in particular, moves beyond poetic topo and inscribes his work into a literary space that draws inspiration from earlier representations of Blackness. In presenting their minority discourse, place comes alive at an aesthetic level and

mediates social relations hinged on power, narration, and the negative consciousness of the minoritized people. Both writers demonstrate how notions of place contest homogenous conceptions of the nation regardless of the distinct socio-political and historical peculiarities of the minority condition in both representation and poetics. What this shows is that by reading the poetics of place in writings by people from minoritized groups, we can uncover similar strategies of representation that are hinged on spatialized difference.

CHAPTER TWO

The Subalternity of Place: Agency, Resistance, and the Poetics of Subalternity in Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* and George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems*

In this chapter, I continue my exploration of place in minority discourse by applying the concept of subalternity, a term extensively used in South Asian colonial historiography and postcolonial studies, to minoritized place. My continued argument here is that in addition to being specified and indexed in poetry, the inherently resistive impulse of subaltern place manifests through what I describe as the "poetics of subalternity." This poetics, framed within the theoretical scope of the aesthetics of minority discourse, gives agency to place and figures bound to place through voice, character, and techniques like personification, even as it contests dominant narratives through subaltern inversion. While the previous chapter's goal was to underscore the way indexical place can be read in its imagined and reimagined forms as a contestation of narratives of exclusion and erasure, this chapter's goal is to describe and demonstrate the poetics of subalternity in the context of the representation of inverted criminality and martyrdom in other poetry collections by Tanure Ojaide and George Elliott Clarke. The first part of this chapter engages with the concepts of the subalternity of place and the poetics of subalternity to show the theoretical relevance of subalternity to this work, the second part explores criminality in the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes, and the third and fourth parts read the poetics of subalternity in Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) and Clarke's *Execution Poems* (2001). The concept of subalternity is important in the context of minority discourse because it accounts for how minoritized people recalibrate criminality that is rooted in place as a vehicle for political resistance. Furthermore, the subalternity of place is central to the development of the poetics of subalternity as part of the broader aesthetics of minority discourse.

The Subalternity of Place: Agency, Resistance, and Poetics

The concept of subalternity does not have any consensus definition. From its initial reconfiguration by Antonio Gramsci from military terminology to mean a non-unified class whose history is "necessarily fragmented and episodic" (206) to its deployment in the works of the Subaltern Studies Collective to refer to the independent domain and agency of the people in colonial India, subalternity is an unstable signifier shaped by power and asymmetry. It is this centrality of power and its capacity to produce a certain form of agency and resistance that informs how I conceive the subalternity of place as a way to understand the aesthetics of minority discourse. By subalternity of place, I mean how place is subalternized or imagined as a subaltern or minoritized domain by social constructs like race and ethnicity or by socio-historical contestations mediated by place in the national space-time. My view resonates with Katherine McKittrick's position that place is a process that has experiential implications rather than being just a homogenous location (29). As a process, subaltern place facilitates the spatialization of difference and contests fixed or essentializing notions of place through an inherently transgressive discourse. Based on this definitional premise, this chapter's argument is that subaltern places, like the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes, as represented in Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* and George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems,* confront national narratives and dominant discourses through the kinds of agential roles and resistive impulses inherent in them. This contestation not only happens thematically but also aesthetically in the ways through which place is embodied and personified in poetry. More specifically, I read subalternity through the frame of inverted criminality and martyrdom in the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes. By linking the aesthetics of minority discourse to the idea of subalternity of place, I extend Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal's claim that "[t]he study of marginal groups is

necessarily linked to the study of the marginal places they inhabit or are forced to inhabit" (370). Focusing on the subaltern places occupied by minorities in both Nigeria and Canada allows us to frame subaltern resistance as a form of minority discourse from a comparative perspective and to ground it as a key component of the counterdiscursive construction of place vis-à-vis the nation-state.

Ranajit Guha's focus on the colonial historiography of India reveals how national narratives can erase the agency and place of the subaltern, and his focus on the agency of peasants in various revolutions reveals the possibility of reading "the presence of a rebel consciousness" (15) as an intrusive or transgressive element in the national narrative. Here, the idea is that the figure of the subaltern actively interrupts and resists the narration of the nation in empty homogenous time, especially when we consider the colonial context of Guha's writing.[36] By taking his focus from the colonial capitals to other peasant locations, Guha's work configures place as an active agent in thinking about subalternity. In essence, we can frame subalternity not only through the lens of the independent domain of the people but also from the perspective of the geographical place they occupy. This geography-oriented approach to subalternity implicates Daniel Clayton's notion of "subaltern space" (246). Clayton conceptualizes place in terms of situated and ontological geographies in his comment that

> This split in the subaltern's location underpins a series of paradoxes, many of which revolve around whether the aim to subaltern resistance and critique is to identify and protect the subaltern's exteriority or dissolve the subaltern's interior marginality. In other words, subaltern politics of knowledge are inextricably linked to how the subaltern is placed, ontologically, existentially and geographically. (247)

[36] The concept of empty homogenous time comes from the work of Benedict Anderson (24).

This idea that the subaltern occupies a space that is exteriorly or interiorly marginal, relative to the geographical scale or other systems that ground "differential space" (247), centralizes the politics of place and position in how we might frame the subaltern. Clayton also suggests that we should think of this "subaltern space" as a differential space where the relations of power, including political power, produce domination and subordination (248-249). It is also within this subaltern space that we can conceptualize subalternity as a kind of resistive subjectivity that is grounded within place. Moving beyond the abstract notion of space, this chapter is interested in how the lived experience of place, as a dimension of space, by those who have been minoritized actively resists its condition of subalternity. This sort of resistance must first be situated in the context of agency, and here Guha tells us that we must pay attention to the "discourse of power" (3) and how it is deployed in the service of the nation-state. It is in the realm of this discourse of power that subaltern place confronts those with the discursive power to narrativize the nation through acts that might be framed as forms of resistance. In Guha's understanding of resistance, violence is inverted and deployed as a strategy to confront the power of the nation (9). This inversion of violence in subaltern subjectivity also has affective temporal structures that imply a sort of normative violence against minoritized groups even as it responds to the violence through inversion.

Following Guha's themes of the agency and resistance of the subaltern, Dipesh Chakrabarty explores how colonial and capitalist modernity, through the nation-state, presents a singular narrative of the nation that the subaltern resists. To him, the concept of subalternity entails "*(a)* a relative separation of the history of power from any universalist histories of capital, *(b)* a critique of the nation-form, and *(c)* an interrogation of the relationship between power and knowledge (hence of the archive itself and of history as a form of knowledge)" (15). There are

some intersections among Chakrabarty's understanding of subalternity, especially in the critique of the nation-state, the examination of power, and minority discourse. However, the debate surrounding the "speakability" of the subaltern figure is circumvented in this chapter's focus on how minorities discursively map their place and experience.[37] My interest in the Subaltern Studies Collective is to recover their themes of agency and resistance to read how subaltern places like the Niger Delta and the Black Maritimes demonstrate agency and resistance in the way they challenge singular narratives of the nation.

There are other ways we might frame the subalternity of place beyond the Subaltern Studies Collective. One such approach is present in Donald Moore's attempt to conceptualize the relationship between subalternity and place. Moore argues that places are not "inert" and should be seen as "products of contestations" (347). This perspective is important in grounding the spatial politics of place and going beyond the "social production of space" which takes space (the superstructure of place) as the product, terrain, and representation of specific individual, social, statist, and even capitalist practices.[38] Place, in the context of Moore's paper, is more than a dimension of social space and encapsulates specific territorial struggles that are in themselves "highly territorialized" (347). The specifically territorialized struggles over place might contest statist politics and foreground "symbolic and material struggles over territory" (347). It is in this realm where the "micropolitics of place" comes alive that we must read the subalternity of place as something produced through "oppositional practices" (353). These oppositional practices

[37] I use "speakability" in the same sense as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses it in her important essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this essay, Spivak questions the structures that impede subaltern speech, including ways of representation that take agency from the subaltern.

[38] The concept of the "social production of space" comes from the works of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Edward Soja, among others. In Lefebvre's writings, in particular, space is positioned as a natural phenomenon, mental projection, and social production. As a social production, it mirrors and is shaped by both "production and reproduction" (Lefebvre 32). Basically, space is produced based on the logic of biological and economic production and reproduction.

allow us to take concepts like agency and resistance in terms of their mutual imbrication with the dominant national narratives that motivate the conditions for the existence of minority discourse. The very existence of a national narrative, as Homi Bhabha argues, implicates the existence of a counternarrative (307). This counternarrative plays out spatially in the way place is imagined and reimagined, and in the context of contestation, subaltern place might, by virtue of its very existence, aesthetically enrich minority discourse.

This idea of grounding resistance politics within place is a framework that has also motivated Paul Routledge's assertion that "sites of struggle therefore have a strong geographical component" (590). Although Routledge's claim is influenced by the work of the Subaltern Studies Collective and the groundwork of Lefebvre and David Harvey, his purpose is to situate Indian social movements in the matrix of statist hegemony versus civic resistance. This grounded sort of resistance, which he frames as the "terrain of resistance" (593) is based on the principle of "a sense of place" (600) and how it influences the resistive strategies inherent in both place itself and people's relationship with it. Routledge makes this point clearer in his comment that "[t]he Baliapal movement was informed and motivated by a potent sense of place which refined and strengthened the economic motivation provided by the locale. This sense of place was epitomized by the movement's ideology of 'Bheeta Maati' (our soil) articulated as 'our soil; our earth; our land'" (600). Evident in Routledge's comment is the idea that people's understanding of place might be rooted in the economic and affective bonds they develop with it. If these bonds are threatened, place transforms into a terrain of resistance. In the context of this chapter, this notion of terrain of resistance is quite relevant as it grounds the way subaltern place is transformed through acts that sever the affective bonds people develop with place. These bonds, I contend, are always motivated by a desire for home, identity, and autonomy. However, statist

policies and dominant narratives might alter these bonds in the way place is narrativized. This ultimately forces place to become a terrain of resistance.

Another approach that is relevant to the conceptualization of the subalternity of place is based on Steve Pile's attempt to "uncouple" the imbrication of power and resistance (2). His position shifts from the Certeauian idea that resistance is present in everyday responses to the spatialization of power, and he suggests that resistance occupies a separate space from the space of power (3-4). The space of resistance, while responsive to domination, is primarily based on subject positions "taken up not only in relation to authority – which may well leave people in awkward, ambivalent, down-right contradictory and dangerous places – but also through experiences which are not so quickly labelled 'power', such as desire and anger, capacity and ability, happiness and fear, dreaming and forgetting" (3). This domain of resistant subjectivity is always based on some sort of historicity. It is an autonomous domain insofar as those who deploy it as a "terrain of opposition" (Pile 8) recognize that such space exists a priori before it interfaces with the space of power.[39] In fact, Pile contends that the space of resistance is both partially connected to and disconnected from the space of power (14). This implicates what Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton term "autonomous geographies" (731) as a way of moving beyond the binaristic mode of thinking about power relations evident in place. This approach to resistance implies the autonomy of place, as a domain of space, and acknowledges how spaces of power work to control and subordinate even as spaces of resistance respond not only through direct intervention but by the mere fact of their autonomous existence.

[39] We can conflate the concepts of "terrain of resistance" and "terrain of opposition" suggested by Routledge and Pile, respectively, into my conceptualization of the subalternity of place. This concept not only specifies place as having a latent or overt resistive impulse but also extends this resistive impulse beyond "terrain" to include the actors and temporal factors through which such resistance is realized.

As a key concept in my research, I read place as an index of minority discourse and explore its capacity to evoke an aesthetic mode. Beyond this place-based aesthetic function, the concept of minority discourse also implicates autonomy and resistance in terms of how this discourse is produced and how it functions in any society where it is produced. This is integral to why the idea of subalternity of place opens up the way we might conceive the aesthetics of minority discourse. Abdul R. JanMohamed's and David Lloyd's argument that minority discourse responds to the various damages inflicted on minoritized people by the dominant group is helpful, but there is also the need to territorialize this "damage" and the ways in which minorities respond to their geo-cultural and spatiotemporal deracination.[40]

As a comparative category, minority discourse is a sister concept to what Joel Nickels describes as "the forms of territorialized resistance on display in world literature" (1). Beginning with the premise that the concepts of resistance and world literature seldom appear together, Nickels conceptualizes the resistance that operates outside the ambits of the nation-state as a productive way of thinking about world literature (2). This sort of "eidetic rupture" (37), as he describes it, transforms the existing hegemonic apparatus of the nation-state into new spatialities and spatial practices that exist outside the control of the nation-state. While Nickels focuses more on non-state spaces and the representation of spaces that reclaim territories from statist hegemony (22), I open up his ideas through the concept of minority discourse to include spaces that are semi-autonomous in the way they operate within the nation-state and against the nation-state. This contrapuntal working of minority discourse allows it to operate as a double-edged mode of circulation within the theoretical scope of world literature. On the one hand, it moves beyond the nation in its very resistance to the dominant narrative of the nation, and on the other,

[40] See p.20 for JanMohamed and Lloyd's argument.

it provides a comparative framework to read minority cultures in various national spaces, including in seemingly disparate contexts like Nigeria and Canada. In the case of the Niger Delta and the Black Maritimes, we encounter subaltern places that exist within the control of the state but are semi-autonomous in how they challenge the national space through resistive subjectivity and a counterdiscursive notion of place. Through the concept of minority discourse, we can ground the commonalities in how poets have imagined subaltern place and subvert any illusion of incomparability.

The subalternity of place, therefore, allows us to read the aesthetics of minority discourse since it not only locates subaltern place within minority discourse but also encodes the resistive impulse of subaltern place through specific techniques. I describe the techniques that ground subaltern place in poetry as constitutive of a "poetics of subalternity." A central element of this poetics is the personification of place. This personification of place, evident not only through the lyrical "I" of the poem but also in the characters and figures presented, invokes affective temporal structures that imbricate the socio-historical production of subaltern place and the resistive impulse inherent in it. Symbolism, synecdochal relationships, imagery, allusion, proper names, local diction/dialect, and voice also register the poetics of subalternity in poetry. This *topophrenia*, to borrow Robert Tally's term (38), forces us to read "the persistence of place" through a wide range of forms that come together to constitute topographical poetics and the representational forms and politics of subalternity as part of this poetics of subalternity. Whether we read the stanzaic arrangements, the way the poem maps its actual or imagined terrain, or the cartographic impulse of allusions, naming, and diction, poetry can reveal the workings of place in general, and through the complexity of voice, tone, and subjectivity, also reveal subaltern place. In addition to this topophrenic conceptualization of the poetics of subalternity, a

significant interest of this chapter is in how minoritized poets aesthetically transform criminality into resistance through inversion and countermemory of official history. To attend to this inversion of criminality, a technique Guha identifies as integral to subaltern resistance (9), it is important to understand the production of criminality in Nigeria's Niger Delta and Canada's Black Maritimes.

The Production of Criminality: The Niger Delta and Black Maritimes

This section focuses on the links between criminality and resistance and how criminality is produced in the context of Nigeria's Niger Delta and Canada's Black Maritimes. Although criminality is not always tied to resistance, there are instances where it could be produced by specific affective temporal structures and transformed into subaltern resistance. In the case of the Niger Delta and the Black Maritimes, alterity and minoritization within Nigeria and Canada, respectively, might help us nuance the production of criminality as a means through which the people inscribe resistance. In the case of the Niger Delta, inverted criminality is rooted in "the history of the struggles for self-determination, local autonomy and democracy of the ethnic minorities in the region, which goes as far back as the second decade of the twentieth century" (Cyril Obi, "Nigeria's Niger Delta" 114). This struggle against statist hegemony in the context of the colonial and postcolonial Nigerian state involved the creation of political parties (Obi 114-115), the creation and deployment of ethnic nationalist groups as a means of negotiating the nation, and the rise of pressure and militant groups like the Niger Delta Volunteer Force which attempted to secede from Nigeria in 1966 (Obi 118). However, all of these, as a result of the neglect by state actors, failed to address the issues that the people of the region decried.

Another factor that complexifies the Niger Delta minority condition and its treatment within the Nigerian nation-state is the politics of oil. Here, Ben Tantua and Palash Kamruzzaman

locate the discovery of oil in the region in 1956 and tie the aftermath of oil extraction and the neglect of the local Niger Delta communities with the already existing dismay with the nation-state (1). This neglect continued well into the first decade after Nigeria's independence from British rule. Augustine Ikelegbe's note on the Niger Delta condition is noteworthy:

> The northern hegemony taking advantage of military dictatorship began a regime of near total appropriation of the region's oil resources through an intense centralization and concentration of power and resources in the federal government. Oil resources were a major target. By decrees, oil and gas became owned by the federal government and progressively, the regions' entitlements by way of derivation-based allocation declined from 50% to a mere 1.5% in 1984 and later 3% in 1999. Further, the region was marginalized and in fact neglected in the developmental efforts that followed massive oil revenues. The region by the 1990s was one of the least developed and poorest. But more unfortunately, increasing oil exploration had made the region economically and socially prostrate, courtesy of extensive environmental degradation and ensuing socio-economic disruptions and poverty. (214)[41]

Here, Ikelegbe's focus is on the marginality of the Niger Delta vis-à-vis the concentration of power in the Nigerian state, and he foregrounds the economic dimensions of this extractive minoritization. His position is similar to Cajetan Iheka's description of the region as "a site of exploitation and unequal exchange" (93) in the context of "the slave trade; the trade in palm oil; and the crude oil business, following Shell's 1956 discovery of oil in Oloibiri in present-day Bayelsa State" (90). While Iheka's focus is on the ecological dimension of the Niger Delta

[41] The idea of "northern hegemony" as deployed by Ikelegbe here refers to the geopolitics of Nigeria, which is divided into a predominantly Muslim and Hausa-dominated North and a predominantly Christian and Yoruba/Igbo dominated South. In this geopolitics of power, the minority people of the Niger Delta do not often feel included in the power structure of the nation despite being the major site of extraction and economic powerhouse of the nation.

condition, his ideas certainly foreground the alliance of an extractive oil economy and the Nigerian state in the minoritization of the Niger Delta people.

The Niger Delta people's response to their minoritization birthed what Ukiwo Ukoha describes as a "non-elitist resistance movement" (22). Ukoha's distinction between elitist and non-elitist resistance parallels Guha's distinctions between elite and subaltern classes in the context of resistance and revolutions. Obi also describes this sort of community and place-based resistance as "local resistance" (121). These descriptors reveal the complex minoritization and exploitation of the Niger Delta in terms of its land, resources, and peoples as well as how the people have formed themselves to resist their condition within the nation-state. Fuelled by the desire for resource control and more inclusion within the power structure of the nation, groups like the Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro-led Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and the Ken Saro-Wiwa-led Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) deployed various strategies to highlight the maltreatment of the land and people of the region and to agitate for minority rights.[42] These groups and subsequent ones like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were ultimately criminalized by the Nigerian state for their advocacy for equity and justice. This criminalization is hinged on both the peaceful dimensions of resistance via protests and civil disobedience and an ambiguously violent mode that is akin to what Obi describes as the "militarization of resistance" ("Oil Extraction" 230).

In terms of the production of criminality in the context of subaltern resistance in the Niger Delta, it is important to emphasize three historical moments: the Boro moment, the Saro-Wiwa moment, and the Kaima declaration and the period that followed. In the Boro moment, the

[42] Resource control is a term used by the people of the Niger Delta to indicate their desire for autonomy within the nation. This autonomy generally has to do with the control of resources but also means political power in the context of the nation-state.

militant and former police officer, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, decried the failure of political parties and movements in addressing the plight of the Niger Delta people, formed the NDVF, and ultimately declared a Niger Delta Republic in 1966 (Obi, "Nigeria's Niger Delta" 118-119). He was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. However, as a result of a countercoup in 1966, he was freed and conscripted into the army to fight on the federal side in the Nigerian Civil War. He died under mysterious circumstances as a combatant in the war. Despite his death, he remains a rallying point for many people in the Niger Delta. In the Saro-Wiwa moment, the MOSOP advocated strongly for the minority rights of the Ogoni people, including producing an important document known as the "Ogoni Bill of Rights," which, among other things, emphasized the need for political autonomy and resource control in the context of minority rights. MOSOP circulated its demand beyond Nigeria and was able to draw international attention to the plight of the Ogoni and the people of the Niger Delta. However, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the writer and activist who was the main face of MOSOP, was convicted and hanged in 1995 alongside other Ogoni leaders to "send a signal to other ethnic minority groups that the government would not brook any challenge to its control of oil" (Obi, "Oil Extraction" 228). Not too long after the Ijaw Youth Council made the Kaiama declaration in 1998, subaltern resistance in the region gradually became more violent and militarized.[43] In response to the government's violent approach to activists and groups that had decried the condition of the region, groups like MEND took to sabotage, kidnappings, and other violent means to press their demands (Obi, "Oil Extraction" 230).

[43] The Kaima declaration, like the Ogoni Bill of Rights, foregrounds the forceful insertion of the Ijaw people into the Nigerian nation through colonial and postcolonial state powers and ultimately requests political autonomy and resource control.

What the foregoing demonstrates is that inverted criminality in the Niger Delta is a response to the failure of the political elite to find solutions to the issues raised by the people of the region, including those that border on minoritization and exploitation within the nation. Transformed into subaltern place, statist policies gradually produced inverted criminality or criminalized resistance in the Niger Delta. This inverted criminality ultimately informs the resistive impulse inherent in subaltern place. In the context of the Black Maritimes, criminality is closely tied to the specific historical conditions of Black people, some of whom were enslaved or arrived as fugitives from the United States. In the first instance, Blackness was "demonized," to borrow Robyn Maynard's (35) terminology, in order to successfully orchestrate slavery and position Black bodies as "inferior, usable, disposable chattel" (Maynard 36). This demonization of Black bodies and personhood motivated the racial dimensions of slavery in both Canada and the United States. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, many Black people in the Maritimes arrived as either freed Black Loyalists or the slaves of White Loyalists.[44] Furthermore, the institution of slavery continued in Canada for "over two hundred years" (Maynard 36) and both slavery and racism haunt Black subjectivity in Canada in various ways. At the heart of this state-sanctioned violence against Black people is the notion of "Black fugitivity" (Maynard 45). As perpetually demonized bodies in a condition of slavery, it was common for Black people to escape their condition of slavery and stage little acts of resistance. Maynard explores these acts of Black resistance and the racialized economy of the Maritime region in the context of the

[44] Harvey Amani Whitfield discusses the multiple dimensions of slavery in the Maritimes and comments that "[t]he legacy of slavery in the Maritimes greatly affected subsequent race relations in British North America, but slavery per se has not attained its rightful place in Canada's national narrative" (17-18). Although this chapter is not squarely on the subject of slavery, it is important to emphasize the links between slavery in Canada and the production of race and criminality. Interestingly, Whitfield uses the framework of agency and resistance to explore how enslaved Black Maritime people made their lives: "Maritime slaves nevertheless retained agency in the making of their own lives. They asserted themselves and their interests by running away, by not working, and by attempting to keep their families together under the most arduous of circumstances. This agency extended to the process of ending slavery in the Maritimes" (6).

transformation of Blackness from a signifier of chattel to that of a "criminal" (64) and contends that "[t]he etymology linking Blackness to crime in the popular imaginary stems from the representation of Black freedom seekers who had escaped bondage, in the form of runaway slave advertisements. Seeking freedom, indeed, is one of the first crimes publicly associated with Blackness" (64). This position inserts Blackness into the discourse of criminality in terms of how the institution of slavery produced Black criminality as a sign in the semiotic system of Canada, one that must constantly be policed and pushed to the margins.

Charmaine Nelson also explores the production of Black criminality through fugitive slave advertisements and slave owners' attempts to "justify slavery, extend their social control, produce and embed a racial hierarchy, and criminalize the enslaved for the act of 'self-theft'" (229). This mass circulation of Blackness in terms of criminality naturalized perceptions of Black people as inherently against the law. However, like Whitfield (6) who uses the framework of agency to interrogate fugitivity and resistance, Nelson contends that Black fugitive narratives, such as those on runaway slave advertisements, are "representations of resistance, depictions of individual and collective quests for freedom. But in the hands of enslavers, this resistance was rescripted as crime" (230). This position is akin to Afua Cooper's exploration of Marie-Joseph Angelique, the enslaved Black woman accused of burning down parts of the old city in Montreal. Although official narratives positioned Angelique in the realm of criminality, Cooper urges us to read her attempt to flee slavery with her lover, which ultimately led to her execution after an arson conviction, as an "oral narrative of resistance" (12). In Canadian official and dominant narratives, Black people who try to escape or contest the condition of servitude or racism are criminalized. This criminalization exacerbates the demonization of Black bodies that was instituted by the regime of slavery. However, beyond slavery, Black personhood continued to be

associated with criminality in official discourses.[45] This point comes up in Maynard's position that

> After slavery, associations between race and crime, and particularly between Blackness and crime, took hold as an important means of legitimating the ongoing state surveillance and control over Black people's lives. Beyond prostitution and drug laws, the creation and application of criminal laws in general were used by the Canadian government to manage deep-seated fears and anxieties about Blackness. (74)

Maynard's attempt to link this construction of Black criminality with the power of Canadian law is important as it signals a shift in the production of criminality from the now obsolete institution of slavery to the nation-state. Here, the nation-state and its coercive apparatus deploy undue carcerality on Black persons, thereby codifying and reproducing the Black person as a perpetual criminal in official or dominant discourses.

In his exploration of the question of Black crime in Canada as instantiations of resistance, Clarke invites us to think about the imbrication of Black criminality and "its punishment by white authority" (*Directions Home* 79) in the context of resistance, socio-historical structures, and "state narratives about 'dangerous black lawlessness'" (82). With respect to the Maritime region, Clarke unveils Black people who have been executed or lynched for various crimes, especially involving White people (82-83), and positions them as heroes and martyrs who shaped and continue to shape Black subjectivity in Canada. His position finds easy alliance in Constance Backhouse's extensive exploration of Viola Desmond, who was arrested in 1946 for refusing to leave a Whites-only section of the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia (229). The

[45] For example, Black people were often (and to some extent are still) accused of crimes like rape, prostitution, and drug abuse (Maynard 65-75). They were also given stricter punishments for petty crimes, often deported to other countries, and barred from immigrating to Canada based on these perceptions (Sarah-Jane Mathieu 14).

criminalization of Viola Desmond's resistance and her eventual recognition as a Black Maritimes hero foreground the centrality of inverted criminality in the way we might conceive resistance in the context of the Black Maritimes.

Crime and criminality, especially when they are put in the context of a region like the Black Maritimes, can allow us to understand the forms of agency and resistance that are present in subaltern place. Whether we read this in the context of slavery or post-slavery statist violence, Black subaltern place in the Maritimes has resisted its subaltern condition through acts that are coded in dominant discourses as crime. However, from the perspective of subaltern place, criminality can be read as a response to minoritization, a response that dares to disobey dominant structures and powers. This response, regardless of whether they occur in Nigeria's Niger Delta or Canada's Black Maritimes, has an aesthetic mode associated with it. By locating subaltern agency and resistance in this aesthetic mode, we can begin to see not only how place functions in minority discourse but also how nation-states wield violence and other coercive apparatuses to subdue and criminalize people in peculiar ways, producing people and the affective bonds they develop with place in terms of subalternity. Through poetry, writers like Ojaide and Clarke present countermemories of official history and respond to the discourse of power. By giving perspective to subaltern place, we learn more about its resistive impulse.

Criminalized Resistance and the Poetics of Subalternity in Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs*

In this segment, I read the connections between criminalized resistance and the poetics of subalternity in Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs*. The collection is divided into two parts, and most of the poems focus on the Niger Delta minority discourse from different perspectives. The first part, "Delta Blues," personifies the Niger Delta and ascribes agency to the place. Most

of the poems were inspired by the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa.[46] As a figure whose activism was criminalized and whose position in the nation-state has been essentially erased, his condition mirrors that of the Niger Delta, and as a subaltern place, Ojaide encodes the agency and resistance of the region to statist violence in his poems.[47]

In the poem "When Green Was the Lingua Franca," Ojaide reflects on the transformation of the Delta to a subaltern place by the Nigerian state and oil multinationals that see the region as a site of extraction. A poem of nine stanzas comprising unequal unrhymed lines, "When Green Was the Lingua Franca" begins with the speaker describing the topo (place) and temporality of the Delta: "In the forest green was / the lingua franca / with many dialects" (12). Green here functions as a symbol of wealth and stability, presenting the Niger Delta as a place with its own temporality and identity rooted firmly in its geography. In the description of this counter-temporal place, Urhobo words like "*erhuvwudjayorho*," "*Uwara*," and "*koto*," among others, disrupt English and perform resistance to its colonial modernity that foisted a structurally problematic state on the people. This reflection on a prior temporality that operated outside the realm and logic of the nation-state is ruptured by the national narrative and its Western capitalist logic, producing subaltern place:

> Then Shell broke the bond
> with quakes and a hell
> of flare. Stoking a hearth
> Under God's very behind!

---

[46] Ken Saro-Wiwa's full name is Kenule Saro-Wiwa. Interestingly, George Elliott Clarke also cites Ken Saro-Wiwa as an influence in his writing. In his two critical books, *Odysseys Home* and *Directions Home*, Clarke pays homage to Saro-Wiwa, including dedicating a chapter to him and exploring his son's writing in the context of Black Canadian heroism and martyrdom. Ken Wiwa, Saro-Wiwa's son, is a Canadian citizen.

[47] Ken Saro-Wiwa has not been exonerated. Officially, he remains an executed criminal. I use "erased," based on Clarke's usage of this word in his essay "Raising Raced and Erased Executions in African-Canadian Literature" (*Directions Home*).

[…]

Explosions of shells to *under*

mine grease-black *gold*

drove the seasons mental

and to walk on their heads.

Who denies doomed neighbours?

it intensifies with execution

of our very friends; the ogre

closes on every foothold. (13)

The speaker outrightly names Shell or SPDC as one of the causes of the Niger Delta's subaltern status in its rupturing of the space-time of the region to extract crude oil by approval of the colonial and postcolonial Nigerian state.[48] As "oil minorities," to use Usuanlele and Ibhawoh's terminology (9), the people's minoritization is linked to the neoliberal economic moment facilitated by the structurally asymmetrical Nigerian state. Ojaide condenses the nation-state into the image of an "ogre," and through the allusion to Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni leaders' execution in the penultimate line of the excerpt, the complicity of national narratives and resource exploitation in the minoritization of place and people is revealed. Significantly, the "I" of this poem, a collective voice that I read as the Niger Delta itself, is not just a victim but also an entity aware of its subalternity. In the last three stanzas of the poem, the speaker uses active verbs to demonstrate agency – "I see victims of arson," "I failed to plant trees," and "Now I commune with ghosts" (14-15). This agency, following ideas by the Subaltern Studies Collective, encodes, within it, a form of resistance.

[48] SPDC stands for Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria

The politics of power and marginalization that produce the Niger Delta as a terrain of resistance is the subject of Ojaide's "Immortal Grief," a relatively short single-stanza poem of twenty-five lines. Its elegiac tone positions Saro-Wiwa, emblematic of the Delta, as a martyr whose death confronts the state and its agents. The poet's use of contrast to establish the binaristic tension between the "loud Republic" and the "martyr in the Delta" (20) encodes the micropolitics inherent in place. Described as a "policed cemetery," the Niger Delta's subaltern status is revealed through words that capture the acute state of the region: "there's no door out of the other world to this, / no counsel for wraiths to ease their severed lives" (20). The pervading sense of death and despair that is present in these lines is further contextualized through the image of a "uniformed lord" who conducts "the last primitive act of the century" (20). This uniformed lord alludes to General Sani Abacha, the military head of state who hanged Saro-Wiwa and persecuted the people of the region. However, in this poem, the uniformed lord also represents the power of the state and its capacity to produce subalternity. It is in the context of this production of subalternity, a consequence of what Achille Mbembe describes as the "fetish" of state power or the capacity of the state to institute a "distinctive regime of violence" and a "world of meanings" (*On the Postcolony* 102-103), that the resistive impulse of place also becomes obvious.[49] This resistive impulse is present in the following lines:

> In the frontierless underground, the nine dead snipe
> at the lord, shake the executive from sleep –
> there can be no sleep after consuming so much flesh

[49] It is important to point out that Mbembe thinks of the state and the people as not being in a simple binaristic relationship. He is of the view that there is a mutual imbrication of state power and the people's capacity to "banalize" such power through everyday practices. This point is related to my position insofar as I consider subaltern place as its own domain and, although it does respond to state power and dominant discourse, it is a semi-autonomous terrain that does not need state power to authenticate its existence.

…

The dead several steps ahead of the lord and his caste

have the advantage of being canonized, unlike those

vultures already rotting before their inevitable end. (20)

Here, the speaker invokes the dead in the same way that Viet Thanh Nguyen uses the image of the dead as a grounding mechanism for minority discourse rooted in place (32) and synecdochically extends that to the terrain of resistance. The criminalized martyrs of the Delta haunt the uniformed lord, symbolic of the state, and through their recovery as saints, they articulate a minority discourse that confronts dominant narratives and their subaltern condition. The recovery and inversion of those produced as criminals in statist discourse is what grounds Ojaide's minority discourse here.

In "Delta Blues," the titular poem of the collection, Ojaide's speaker meditates on the subaltern condition of the Niger Delta. Through ten stanzas of unequal free verse, the region is depicted and personified as a victim of multiple injustices and ordeals caused by what Obari Gomba calls "slick alliance" in the era of "crude postcolonialism" (121). In explaining this dispensation, Gomba comments that "[i]n the new scheme, there is still a link between a local suzerainty (mainly represented by the state and the ethnic majorities) and a foreign hegemony" (122). This alliance between state actors and the hegemonic influence of the global oil economy has transformed the Niger Delta into a minoritized and neglected site of extraction. In Ojaide's poem, the region "reels from an immeasurable wound" and "[b]arrels of alchemical draughts flow / from this hurt to the unquestioning world" (21). In these lines, the speaker indicts the entire world and its crude oil economy in the production of the region as a subaltern place. This

indictment, based on the logic of statist and global complementarity, is reinforced through the sordid visual images of the region:

> The rivers are dark-veined,
> a course of perennial draughts.
> This home of salt and fish
> stilted in mangroves, market of barter,
> always welcomes others –
> hosts and guests flourished
> on palm oil, yams and garri.
> This home of plants and birds
> least expected a stampede;
> there's no refuge east or west,
> north or south of this paradise. (21)

In these lines, the idea of oil minorities is grounded in the "dark-veined" rivers, alluding to the pollution of the pristine beauty of the region by the activities of oil multinationals with the approval of the state. This allusion is contrasted with images that signify a pristine past – "palm oil, yams and garri" – staple food items that not only ground the poem in place but also magnify the devastation produced by marginality and resource exploitation. This exploitation ultimately severed the affective bonds people developed with place, and their notion of "home" produces negation to hegemonic negation as an agential and resistive strategy that is geocondensed in subaltern place.

In addition to the onslaught against land and the natural geography of the Niger Delta by the slick alliance of state and oil multinationals, Ojaide's speaker focuses on the production of

criminality and its inversion in minority discourse. The speaker crafts the image of the "standard-bearer" who is "betrayed" and abandoned by those who "could care less for minority rights" (22). This standard-bearer, alluding to Saro-Wiwa, and the "nine mounds" ultimately "woke / into another world, ghostly kings / scornful of their murderers" (23). Here, the lexical shift from hanged criminals used in official discourse to "ghostly kings," and the inversion of state executioners into "murderers" are attempts to recover Saro-Wiwa and the hanged Ogoni elders as victims of statist violence whose martyrdom stands out as a strong instance of minority discourse.

This representation of inverted criminality vis-à-vis subaltern place is also present in Ojaide's "Elegy for Nine Warriors." In this relatively long poem of six parts, Ojaide gives us a countermemory of official discourse. Beginning with the lines, "[t]hose I remember in my song / will outlive this ghoulish season, / dawn will outlive the long night" (25), the speaker establishes the importance of memory in minority discourse and commits to memorializing figures cast into official narratives as criminals. Although the speaker of the poem mediates the countermemory that is very rooted in subaltern place, the tone of pain transforms into anger and a resistive impulse. The emblem of statist violence is described using words like "demons," "barbarian," "butcher," and "sorcerer" (25-27), all establishing the state as a force that dispenses bodily and psychic pain on land and people. By the fifth part of this elegiac poem, the speaker's countermemory begins to take shape in terms of agency and resistance. In this part, the speaker laments the actions of the personified tyrannical state, earlier described through the metaphor of "[t]he butcher of Abuja" (26), in terms of how it criminalizes Wiwa's body and personhood.[50] However, in this lament, the speaker also contests the narrative power of the state:

[50] Abuja is the capital of Nigeria. It was conceived and developed as Nigeria's new capital region during the early oil-boom period of Nigeria.

He forgets he has left Ken's name behind
& the communal chant of the singerbird's name
rising along the dark waters of the Delta
will stir the karmic bonfire
that will consume his blind dominion.
Surely, that name will be the rod by which
the cobra will meet its slaughter.
The sorcerer to my shame still lives,
but day will surely break over the long night. (28)

Here, the speaker demonstrates the capacity of subaltern place to be conscious of its condition and to engage in a counterdiscourse. This subaltern condition is not only ascribed to Saro-Wiwa in terms of how his name might invoke subaltern place but also grounded in the image of "dark waters of the Delta," alluding to the polluted waters of the region, and synecdochally pointing out the ecological devastation and other consequences of socio-economic and political marginality. Using the figure of Saro-Wiwa, the poet conjures the "communal" in terms of its capacity to resist its conditions of being. This resistive impulse is only possible through the affective bonds that bind people to place. On the one hand, the Niger Delta emerges in Nigeria's official discourse as a site of negation, and, through the figure of Saro-Wiwa, as a site of criminality. On the other hand, the region produces its own discourse that negates official discourse and recovers Saro-Wiwa as a fighter whose martyrdom would ultimately shape the dimensions of resistance and justice. This is how the subalternity of place, as a form of minority discourse, evidences and counters its production.

Further focusing on Saro-Wiwa as a symbol of the Niger Delta, Ojaide's "Journeying" narrates Saro-Wiwa's ordeal in three parts, with the last part having three stanzas. Ojaide's interest in the number three is significant in how the collective minority voice of the Niger Delta subverts the structure of the nation-state. Written as a narrative poem, Ojaide's portrayal of Saro-Wiwa alternates between a third-person point of view in the first and last parts and a first-person point of view in the second part. At the heart of the poem is the subalternity of place and how this generates agency and resistance in the context of Nigeria's nation-state. The story of Saro-Wiwa in the poem is the story of place, the Niger Delta, and there is a conscious attempt to imbricate Saro-Wiwa's personality with the region: "A column of helmet-dressed anthills marched through his youth / now a desolate swamp over-ridden by brigades of speculators. / He participated in the regatta of ancestral gods, / his paddles swifter than other rowers can keep with" (30). The use of past tense in this excerpt encodes a sense of historicity in the narration, especially when we see the tense shifting to the present in the second and third parts of the poem. This past tense also solidifies the representation of the assault of "helmet-dressed anthills," an image that invokes the exploitation of the Niger Delta by the state and its multinational collaborators. The Niger Delta's situation is then presented with the temporal marker "now," and the image of a "desolate swamp," hinting at the "damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture" (JanMohamed and Lloyd 4).

The poem's second part is predominantly biphonic, and Saro-Wiwa's voice erupts into the narration: "I am going to be saved to tell this story of / life after death; their crime, my punishment! / But no one stayed the hangman's hands" (30-31). Here we see Saro-Wiwa's reflection on his condition and his negation of the criminality imposed on him. This separation of crime and punishment reveals how the nation-state can wield its power to construct resistance as

crime. In the last part of the poem, the collective voice of the speaker invokes resistance using Saro-Wiwa's death as a rallying call:

> The campaigner dies to launch his grand campaign,
> the felon that's now the envy of the sentencing judge;
> the prisoner freer than his army of jailers.
> The pigmy stands taller than the big ones,
> a minority voice sung by the vast world.
>
> They conspired to cut his lashing tongue
> But they failed, and his tongue's become
> oracular rattles that penetrate frontiers. (31)

The image of Saro-Wiwa as a martyr is inscribed in the first line of this passage. Furthermore, the construction of resistance as criminality and of crime as a way of responding to affective temporal structures is accentuated in the description of Saro-Wiwa as a "felon." This negative consciousness of Saro-Wiwa polarizes him and the "judge," which I read here as an instrument of national narration and erasure. The speaker further inverts Saro-Wiwa's condition in the reversal of roles between "prisoner" and "jailer" and "pigmy" and "big ones" (31). This inversion, in addition to the auditory image of "minority voice," inscribes resistance through the function of negation. Here, Saro-Wiwa's agential inversion becomes a form of resistance that is discursively extended to the Niger Delta. The "they" in the last stanza of the poem works as the binary opposition to Saro-Wiwa, representing those with the power to write national narratives, and the action ascribed to them – "cut his lashing tongue" (31) – reveals the act of erasure and minoritization that produces place as a subaltern location. However, the resistance imaginary

(i.e., the representation of resistance) in the poem is consolidated in the inability to silence subversion.

If "Journeying" can be described as a biphonic narrative poem in which the figure of Saro-Wiwa becomes a symbol of subaltern agency and resistance, Ojaide's "Remembering the Town-Crier" takes a lyrical turn and employs a first-person speaker, transformed into the collective voice of subaltern place, to establish agency and resistance in the context of Niger Delta minority discourse. In this poem of nine numbered parts, the speaker reflects on Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni activists' hanging and performs a rallying call for all the minoritized people of the Niger Delta to resist their erasure and exclusion from the imaginings of the nation. In the poem's first part, the speaker subverts the legal processes that condemned Saro-Wiwa to death using irony: "But the head hunter and his tribunal 'followed' / procedure, 'made' a case against the nine / that they 'convicted' and swiftly hanged" (52). The speaker's irony works to transform the description of the plight of the Ogoni nine into a critique of power, where the "head hunter" and the "tribunal" function as instruments of wielding power against subaltern place.

In the second part of the poem, the speaker speaks to a greater structure that operates against minorities by comparing the hanging of the minority Ogoni activists with the historical lynching of Blacks in the United States: "Hangings in Nigeria beat the American South" (52). This line responds to the broader issue of Nigeria's military rule and how it took to hangings and other forms of public executions to execute those condemned by "tribunals," including activists and journalists (Owoade 136; Ihonvbere 212). Here, too, Ojaide is conjuring the image of the nation-state as a vicious construct that is as problematic as it is asymmetrical. In the third part of the poem, the speaker moves from the "I" to a "we," further demonstrating the place-bound

collective nature of the poem. This point is also made by JanMohamed and Lloyd in their position that "minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically," hinting at the possibility that there is no true lyricism in poems written by writers from minority groups. The lyrical is always the song of collective identity, and here too we see how the forced collective voice interrupts the transformed individual voice: "We who share the same tenements of the delta / should not lose sight of the tear-logged day. / […] & we fellow sons and daughters of the trampled delta / must not lose sight of the tear-sogged day" (52). The resistance imaginary here is encoded in the collective "we" which is linked precisely to subaltern place: "the trampled delta." The speaker charges the people of the Niger Delta to remember the hanging and what it means for the region. This strong encoding of subaltern resistance sprouts further in the eighth part of the poem through an allusion to "Moses": "I am Moses but against the law's payback" (53). Here, the speaker invokes the Biblical figure of Moses, who resists the Pharoah of Egypt and leads the Israelites to freedom. This is a significant symbol in Black Atlantic writing, particularly African-American literature, where Moses represents "liberation and hope" (Zeppenfeld 48). In this context, Ojaide uses it to resist marginality and the national narrative by not only invoking the figure of Moses but also rejecting "the law," here a symbol of the nation as written by those with power. Ojaide's vision of resistance here takes the form of self-defence against those who continue to exploit and mistreat the Niger Delta: "I have witnessed damp cells / and hecatombs of corpses / but I can only kill in self-defence" (54). Violence here becomes a response to the constraining affective temporal structures that have origins in the imagination of the nation and the way power has been wielded in its chequered history. Ojaide imagines violence as a form of resistance in the context of self-defence against the marginalization of the Niger Delta, produced by the nation-state as a subaltern place.

In Ojaide's recovery of Saro-Wiwa, the Niger Delta is given a personality that anchors not only the poetics of subalternity of the poems but also the way subaltern place contests narratives of exclusion and dangerous criminality. Saro-Wiwa never advocated for violence before he was hanged, but the state imposed its own narrative of criminality on him and, ultimately, on the entire region. What Ojaide has done in his poems is to give perspective/voice to both Saro-Wiwa and the region. This voice then transgresses the dominant narrative, ultimately birthing minority discourse that is grounded in subaltern place.

Humanizing the Criminal: The Poetics of Subalternity and Black Criminality in George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems*

This section's focus is on how George Elliott Clarke deploys the poetics of subalternity to represent Black criminality as resistance. In *Execution Poems*, Clarke centralizes violence and crime as active forms of resistance against decades of abuse, erasure, violence, enslavement, and all the numerous assaults that Blacks in the Maritimes endured. Using the story of his cousins, George and Rufus Hamilton, who were convicted and hanged for the murder of a White man in Fredericton, New Brunswick, as well as a few other instances of Black crime in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Clarke recovers Black criminality in terms of its implications of subaltern agency and resistance in the context of the marginal place of Blackness in the Maritime region of Canada. In his essay, "Raising Raced and Erased Executions in African-Canadian Literature: Or, Unearthing Angelique," Clarke asserts that "The erasure of *le captif noir canadien* in African-Canadian literature is problematic, for the Canadian state has hanged – and the Canadian people have lynched – recoverable 'heroes.' Their narratives, if unearthed, could bare the 'clandestine' racism of Canadian authority and popularize the resistive strategies of African-Canadian communities. Scholars must eye those occasions when black Canadian 'crime' met with white

Canadian punishment, for the penalties were usually bloody" (81). Clarke's charge that scholars should recover the resistive impulse of Black criminality is quite similar to Guha's methodology of recovering the subaltern insurgent in colonial Indian archives.

Furthermore, Maynard's exploration of the criminalization and policing of Black lives foregrounds the links between Canada's history of slavery and the statist codification of Black freedom as a crime (120). It is in these instances of Black "criminality" and the policing of Black persons that we might locate the resistance of Black place in Canada's state-sanctioned racial hierarchy. Beyond criminality, a place-based reading of Clarke's collection allows us to contextualise the complex history that is implicated. Jennifer Andrews is quite right in her view that "Fredericton takes on a life of its own in these poems by virtue of its impact on the Hamilton brothers and Clarke himself" (122). Her reading of the way Blackness functions vis-à-vis the Maritimes locale in the poems to produce a racialized rationale for the Hamilton brothers' crime touches on the importance of paying attention to subaltern place. However, beyond reading how Clarke contests the idea of Fredericton as a "bucolic, pastoral setting" (129), there is the need to understand how criminality is deployed to ground the resistive impulse of subaltern place.

In Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, one of the categories used to define subaltern resistance is ambiguity. He contends that due to the nature of the so-called criminality associated with peasant rebellions, violence is ultimately and ambiguously transformed into a weapon of resistance (79). However, Guha's concern is geared towards collective action, not the predominantly individual acts of violence in Clarke's understanding of resistance, but this is where affective temporal structures strengthen Clarke's argument: "Canadian state narratives about 'dangerous black lawlessness' are rooted in African slavery (the Profitable Institution), which thrived in five of the six eastern-most provinces

(excusing Newfoundland) of what is now Canada" (82). In essence, Clarke reads these seemingly isolated acts of Black criminality as delayed forms of resistance to the marginal place of Blackness in the Maritime region.

There is a need to nuance Clarke's representation of Black criminality in the specific context of George and Rufus Hamilton. Unlike Saro-Wiwa, the non-violent Niger Delta activist to whom Ojaide accords sainthood in his poems, the Hamilton brothers committed actual crimes, acts that would be read – and rightly so – as plain criminality. What Clarke does is to humanize the brothers, to give them perspective and voice, so that one can understand the affective temporal structures that produced them. In "George & Rue: Pure, Virtuous Killers," Clarke's speaker paints a portrait of George and Rufus Hamilton and accords them not only human dimensions but also the status of Black heroism. The subtitle "Pure, Virtuous Killers" acknowledges the crime – murder – even as it recovers them as Black heroes, at least in the same sense of tragic heroism that motivates Birte Christ's comment that "[t]he frame of the tragedy, updated – in Arthur Miller's terms – as a tragedy of common men, interprets the story of George and Rue as a story of destiny: the two tragic heroes are bound towards destiny" (284). In this poem of fourteen stanzas with a line each, Clarke's speaker specifies the site of the poem and introduces the tragic characters whose presence haunts the national narrative:

They were hanged back-to-back in York Country Gaol.

They were rough dreamers, raw believers, set out like killers.

They sprouted in Newport Station, Hants Country, Nova Scotia, in 1925 and 1926.

They smacked a white taxi driver, Silver, with a hammer, to lift his silver.

They bopped Silver and hit backwoods New Brunswick in his black cab.

They slew him in the first hour of January 8, 1949, A.D.

They were clear Negro, and semi-Micmac. (12)

Apart from the use of proper names to specify place – Nova Scotia and New Brunswick – the poem also declares subject positions – "white taxi driver" and "clear Negro." It is in this terrain of situated and constructed geographies that the poem's project of recovery begins. The speaker acknowledges the crimes, and one might even say the tragic flaws, of the Hamilton brothers in the almost journalistic and documentary style of the poem. However, the tone and stance of the speaker actively humanize and are sympathetic to George and Rufus. The poem appears like a eulogy with a tone that encodes both the reality of their crime and a sense of what they represent. This is present in the image of "rough dreamers, raw believers" (12), granting a tragicness to their aspiration to be included in the nation they "sprouted" in – Canada. The White taxi driver, named Silver, becomes emblematic not only of racial tensions but also of the entire project of statist modernity that prevents Blacks from economic mobility. The symbolism of Silver's name is further concretized in the "silver" that the brothers steal, hinting at its association with both Whiteness and economic class. Through the way place functions in the poem, in terms of Black place in the Maritimes of Canada, the affective temporal structures that produce and define Black criminality are revealed.

The speaker, who maintains some distance from the Hamilton brothers in the poem until the last two lines where the pronoun "my" is deployed to communalize and even personalize their experience, describes the brothers as "clear Negro, and semi-Micmac" (12). This description positions the brothers both within and against the nation, with Blackness effectively written outside the nation-state despite its long presence and the Mi'kmaq casting a gaze of contestation upon any settler-narrative of Canada. The Hamilton brothers exercise agency in their confessions: "[they] backed each other's guilt" (12); however, Clarke points us to the Black negative consciousness inherent in the brothers in a previous poem in the collection, "Negation," where the speaker, "*Le negre* negated" with a regional accent, positions himself against the White-coloured law, or the national narration: "A whiskey-coloured provincial, uncouth / Mouth spitting lies, vomit-lyrics, musty, / Masticated scripture. Her Majesty's / Nasty, Nofaskoshan Negro, I mean / […] My black face must preface murder for you" (11). Here, the speaker's critique of the nation-state stems not only from its attempt to erase Blackness but also from how its instrument of power and narration, the judicial system, symbolized as the "scripture" in the poem, creates the condition for Blackness to signify violent resistance.

Some of the conditions that produce Black criminality are linked to the subalternity of place. Through the dramatic monologue mode, Clarke gives voice to George Hamilton, Geo, in "Ballad of a Hanged Man," a poem of ten stanzas with four lines each that reveals some of the conditions that motivate Black criminality. The dramatic monologue mode is interesting in the way it recovers the brothers and gives them voice/perspective. It is this perspectival insistence that allows Clarke to not only humanize the brothers but also to invert their criminality as a response to subaltern place. In particular, we see how Geo reflects on his condition as a racialized man in Nova Scotia: "Have you ever gone in your life, going / two days without eating, and whenever you

get money, you're gonna eat and eat / regardless of all the bastards in Fredericton // was bust in the head, skull jimmied open?" (13). Earlier in the poem, Geo mentions that he will not let his "child starve" (13). This focus on hunger and starvation has socio-political and historical underpinnings in terms of the history of Black enslavement in the region and how this produced Blackness first as a commodity and, later, as the lowest arch of society, with race and class intersecting to concretize the subaltern place of Blackness. Maynard historizes this connection between slavery, racial capitalism, and Black poverty in her book, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present.* Decades of neglect and imagination outside the nation-state produced Geo, a hungry Black man who would do anything just to eat. This socially constructed negation allows him to resist the White power that produces his marginal place in Fredericton: "If I hadn't dropped the hammer, laughing, / Silver would be laughing now. Laughing. Silver / moon and snow dropped on the ground" (14). By reclaiming the power of the "hammer," here a symbol of Black resistance, Geo demonstrates active agency in resisting the conditions that minoritize him in the Maritimes. Laughter is also weaponized in this passage as an instrument of both power and resistance to power, and Geo's laughter demonstrates a subversion of his condition and thus reads as a form of resistance. In addition to this, he presents himself as a victim of circumstance, a victim of a long history of neglect and demonization, and reflects on how his act should be perceived: "I wanted to uphold my wife and child. / Hang me and I'll not hold them again" (14). Here, the argument is based on how the punishment of Black criminal resistance births a vicious circle which would ultimately affect not only Geo but his wife and child, emblematic of the future in this context. Geo's verbal justification not only resists his subalternity but reveals the factors that produce and perpetuate Black subaltern place. What we see then is a tragic hero who has been produced by specific structures that are linked to place.

Rufus Hamilton, or Rue, moves beyond negation and demonstrates conscious intellection of his resistance. In "Identity I," a dramatic monologue of eight stanzas, Rue says "I'm negative, but positive with a knife. / My instinct? Is to damage someone" (19). Beyond the tone of anger in the lines, Rue demonstrates ambiguity and modality, both theorized by Guha as key aspects of subaltern resistance. His transformation of the knife as a weapon, generally associated with crime, into a positive and justifiable means of resistance in a conscious way reveals his notion of ambiguous violence as well as the mode of his resistance: the knife that negates his negation. Later in the poem, he alludes to the reality of other Black people owning a pistol: "Am I the only nigger in this province with a pistol? // What I am / Cannot be dreamt // By anyone / Imperfect as you" (19). This synonymic association of Black people with weapons plays on dominant constructions of Blackness found in "encyclopedias" and "the radio" (19) but transforms it into a vehicle of resistance that cannot possibly be comprehended by those whose power and actions have shaped such reality. In "Identity II," Rue continues his meditation on Black negative consciousness in the Maritimes through very vivid images and allusions to scientific racism: "I hear comparisons of me to a pig, a monkey, a cow. I am alone much" (21). These instances of racism and their accompanying affective temporal structures motivate Rue's choice to "crush violets and butterflies" and inform how he conceives his destiny as being to "always murder or to be murdered" (21). Like the knife and the pistol, which symbolize the resistive agency of Black place in the poem, Rue's choice, laden with socio-political motivation, to do something about his condition represents how subaltern place can stage resistance when read through the lens of inverted criminality.

In "Public Enemy," a dramatic monologue of nine stanzas and unrhymed couplets, Rue reflects on the often neglected and erased Black contribution to the creation of Fredericton:

"Fredtown was put up by Cadians, Coloureds, and hammers. Laws and lumber get made here" (32). This reflection on the hard work of both enslaved and free Black people in the creation of the city has an implicit binary opposition in "laws and lumber," with "laws" referring to the homogenous White narrative of the city and "lumber" encoding Black servitude and subaltern place in the city. Furthermore, Rue, imbued with the same revolutionary temper seen in run-away slave narratives and slave rebellion leaders, reveals: "I want to muck up their little white paradise here. / I want to swat their faces til I'm comfortable in my gut. // I want to give em all headaches and nausea: / I'll play *fortissimo* Ellington, blacken icy whiteness" (32). This declaration transforms what the national narrative reads as Black criminality into the domain of real political and social resistance through violence. Rue's negative voice transgresses "white paradise," symbolic of the putative White narrative of the nation and declares a form of insurgency that will ultimately "blacken icy whiteness" (32). His self-awareness reveals the political stakes of Black criminality in a region that, though it is their home, erases their presence. This is how minority discourse contests the nation-state by operating both within and against it.

The question of the place of violence or its inescapability is addressed in "The Killing." In this dramatic poem of fifteen stanzas, Rue converses with Geo about their murder of Silver with a "hammer":

> *Rue*: Here's how I justify my error:
>
> The blow that slew Silver came from two centuries back.
>
> It took that much time and agony to turn a white man's whip
>
> into a black man's hammer. (35)

Rue's awareness of the affective temporal structures that necessitated his act of violent resistance transforms the hammer from a symbol of Black servitude to that of Black agency and resistance.

With the "white man's whip" alliteratively reeling in slavery, the "black man's hammer" becomes a symbol of subaltern resistance. Here, place resists narratives of erasure and marginality that have structured Black and White relations in New Brunswick and the Maritimes. As poetic personas, Geo and Rue contextualize their attack on Silver as a response to centuries of violence, mistreatment, and systematic exclusion from the national imagination. Ultimately, they are hanged for resisting the violence that they have been bequeathed as a legacy, and in the last moments, captured in "Famous Last," a dramatic poem of seven stanzas, Rue declares: "We'll be *disjecta membra* of Loyalist New Brunswick. / We'll furiously spew up air as we fall. / We'll try to eat your faces through our hoods. / We'll plunge our bodies into pools of air / into coffins snug as our shadows, / the shallow graves of morning news" (41). What is interesting here is Rue's subversion of victimhood into a rhetoric of heroism. The allusion to "Loyalist New Brunswick" encodes their long and bitter history in the province, and they codify their death into a psalm of resistance where their agency becomes the basis for heroism. Geo's last speech, "I can't forgive this fierce world" (41), reveals the resistance imaginary that outlives their hanging and martyrdom. Like the peasant insurgents of colonial India recovered by Guha, Clarke recovers Geo and Rue as Black martyrs whose tragic arches are based on the subaltern place of Blackness in the Maritime region of Canada.

Apart from Geo and Rue, Clarke also recovers another Black martyr, Sampson, in the context of his execution in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Like George and Rufus Hamilton, the figure of Sampson is based on a real Black man who was hanged in Halifax in 1933. Accused of killing two White brothers, he was tried by an all-White jury and condemned to death in what Dorothy Grant describes as "Halifax's last execution." Although Sampson is codified in Canada's case law as a criminal, Clarke reconstructs the factors that produced Sampson's criminality and recovers him as

a hero in the context of Black resistance to racism and other affective temporal structures that produce Blackness as a signifier of criminality. In five stanzas of unequal lines, Clarke moves away from the dramatic form used in the other poems about Geo and Rue and narrates the place of Blackness in Nova Scotia through Sampson as a focalizer. In Halifax's racialized geography, the North End, home of a predominantly Black population in the city (Ted Rutland 81), is described in very stark visual images: "ramshackle stairs screw into air, then accordion into heaps / of brick-broken bottles, trash, jalopy remains. Rubble / architects the North End, some left dying / from '17's Explosion" (23). These strong images construct the North End as a site of neglect and suffering and allude to the explosion that took the lives of many people, including Black residents of the North End, in 1917.[51] It is in this background of Black poverty and neglect that we encounter Sampson:

> Indigo Sampson, pop-eyed drunkard,
> violet scar raping his Billy-Eckstine-but-darker face,
> remembers wharf rats be so very bad: Like
> white gentry promenading in elongated mansions
> while black folk pray in taut shacks. This day's not the one –
> he's toxic, shabby, cross-eyed, tizicky –
> for two white small boys to accost him, zestfully,
> as "n-i-g-g-e-r": He's staggering from killing rats.
> His ex-boxer fists – used to hauling junk – elevate an axe.
> "Let this blade spit! Let your bloods stink!" (23)

[51] This explosion, described by Jacob A.C. Remes as a "germinal event in the city's history" (224), is much talked about in terms of how it disproportionately affected Black people at the time.

Here, Sampson is visually constructed, and his profile begins to emerge as one who has been produced through the racial economy of the Maritimes. The contrast between the "elongated mansions" of "white gentry" and the "taut shacks" of "black folk" establishes the subaltern place of Blackness and encodes the structures that have produced Sampson's negative consciousness. This context nuances Sampson's violent response to his assault by two White boys. What the speaker suggests here is that Sampson's response moves beyond the two boys and acts as a form of resistance to his subalternity. This point is also grounded in the simile and symbolism of wharf rats and the White gentry. In essence, by "killing rats," Sampson defies the racialized economy that has produced Black subaltern place. In another stanza, the poem's speaker says, "Doors have always been flung in his face, in his face" (23), demonstrating that Sampson's criminality here responds to a long history of violence against him and his racialized place in the Maritimes. Ultimately, Black criminality meets White punishment as Sampson's head "popped open; / his black scalp puffed fatally scarlet" (24). However, it is through this fatal blow that Sampson's case is transformed from criminality into resistance. By confronting the structures that produce his subaltern place, Sampson's status as a Black martyr is consecrated.

What Clarke does with both the Hamilton brothers and Sampson is interesting in that he presents them as flawed characters who, like the vengeful hero in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* that informs the subtext of the collection and specifically the poem "Reading *Titus Andronicus* in Three Mile Plains, N.S.," have been produced by specific structures that they respond to. As flawed heroes, they respond to long violence with violent acts, positioning themselves as figures whose tragic fates have been determined by the subaltern place they occupy.

Conclusion

Both Ojaide's and Clarke's recoveries of martyrs demonstrate how the subalternity of place can produce active resistance against national narratives. In establishing their minority discourse, the figure of the criminal, as the nation-state constructs it, can be read as a site of resistance, and this is encoded in their poetics. One difference between Ojaide's and Clarke's representation of subaltern place is in the way place appears in their poems and, by extension, how place operates in their separate socio-political and historical contexts. For Ojaide, place is an autonomous domain, the Niger Delta, that is asymmetrically located in the nation-state, creating situations of exploitation, marginality, and negation, in addition to the resource politics that accentuates its subalternity. The implication is that place is represented as a contested landscape that transgresses homogenous or singular narratives of the nation. Saro-Wiwa's recovery in Ojaide's poetry as a martyr thus becomes the recovery of the resistance inherent in place, and this resistance demonstrates the heterotemporality of the nation. For Clarke, place is deeply tied to race and, therefore, responds to narratives that negate and erase Blackness from the Maritime region. This erasure has roots in the historical experience of slavery, indentured labour, cheap wage labour and other exploitative perceptions and use of Black persons, racism, and the ostracization of Blackness from Canada's statist modernity. Clarke, therefore, paints the picture of the subaltern place of Blackness in the region as both an autonomous domain and a shared space. It is from the autonomous realm that subaltern agency and resistance are invoked to respond to the affective temporal structures that constrain Blackness in the shared space.

CHAPTER THREE

Present-ing the Past: Poetic Witnessing as Minority Discourse in Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* and Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You*

In this chapter, I attend to the place of history in minority discourse. My argument is that history manifests at an aesthetic level in minority discourse through the way writers witness and *present* the past. This form of counterdiscursive witnessing works within the theoretical scope of minority discourse as a response to historical realities and the dominant narrative of the nation-state that shape and subjectivize people in specific ways. I read the poetics of witnessing in Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* (2005) and Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* (2014) with the premise that poetic witnessing is an important concept in understanding the aesthetics of minority discourse. My reading foregrounds proximate memory, subaltern polyphony, voice, naming, allusions, and other techniques as central to poetic witnessing. The first section of this chapter unpacks the concept of poetic witnessing vis-à-vis the "presence of the past" as constitutive of the aesthetics of minority discourse. The second and third segments turn to the literary texts to explore how poetic witnessing facilitates the "present-ing" of the past in the context of statist violence and extractive catastrophe in the Niger Delta and Black slavery and its afterlife in the Maritimes. By putting history and witnessing into conversation with poetry, this chapter demonstrates the centrality of poetic witnessing and counterhistory to the aesthetics of minority discourse.

Poetic Witnessing and the "Presence of the Past"

In his book, *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*, Winfried Siemerling writes, "[m]uch contemporary black writing turns its gaze beyond the immediate present to the past […]. These texts guide our interest towards the presence of the past and to our contemporaneity with some of

its dimensions" (11). This idea, explained using the theoretical frame of the "presence of the past" (11), is part of Siemerling's effort to theorize Black writing in Canada as a memorialization of history and the past in a way that the past, present, and future are temporally entangled. One way Siemerling explores this temporal entanglement is through the concept of witnessing, and here he goes beyond how the past invokes melancholia to foreground the way it facilitates a kind of transformation that reorders "time and also space" (24) through engagements with "hegemonic histories." Siemerling's thoughts on witnessing as a form that accentuates the presence of the past in the works of the minoritized other is a good starting point for thinking about the relationality of poetic witnessing, history, and minority discourse. Foregrounding this relationality allows us to read poetic witnessing in minority discourse and extend the aesthetic strategies of minority discourse that make it a very useful comparative category especially in the context of world literature and Black Atlantic studies. It also grounds how history is deployed and affectively presented in minority discourse.

The concept of witnessing has been deployed in various fields to mean various things. In law, it could describe one who is present when something happens, including and perhaps especially when a crime has occurred. It could also be used in the context of trauma and memory studies to ground the sort of responses people could have when they confront victims and narratives of trauma.[52] In this sense, Elke Heckner comments that "[w]itnessing involves more than looking on. It is a bodily experience intended to disrupt the visitor's sense of physical well-being. It demands, in other words, that viewers partake in a traumatic affect" (63). Although Heckner uses "looking" in the context of her engagement with visual forms, her ideas help us understand witnessing as an act – a kind of affective engagement with an event that might have

[52] This understanding of witnessing has its origin in Holocaust studies.

traumatic implications. This perspective on witnessing is also echoed in Martina Kopf's description of witnessing as a kind of reading that is "aware of the mechanisms of trauma" (43). This sort of witnessing is mediated by narratives of trauma or some sort of memory or memorialization and is based on the principle that the witness is one who sympathizes and affectively connects with the primary victim or memory.[53] For Dori Laub, witnessing is only truly realized when the "hearer," one who listens to or reads trauma narratives, comes to a point where they "partially experience trauma" (57). In this sense, the witness is not just a passive observer or reader but someone who shares the traumatic space that the victim's narrative initiates.

The second way witnessing is deployed in trauma and memory studies also has implications for this chapter. Rather than focusing on witnessing as an act of seeing, reading, hearing, or feeling, some media, literary, and cultural studies scholars think of literary and cultural texts in terms of their capacity to witness events discursively. This kind of witnessing extends what Berel Lang describes as the "archetypal motif of witnessing" that focuses on individual or cultural/collective accounts and testimonies (4). In defining this form of witnessing, Nikki Suh comments that it is based on "documentation and evidence creation" and grounded in the witness's ability to "capture events through photographs, videos, or written testimonies." Here, Suh foregrounds witnessing as a discursive act that shapes and grounds the witness's subjectivity as well as the reader's affective response. The imperative to witness events discursively manifests in the many literary and cultural texts that witness genocides, wars, and other traumatic events. This kind of discursive witnessing appears either as eye-witnessing or

[53] Michael Richardson and Kerstin Schankweiler call this "affective witnessing" (237), Martina Kopf calls it "empathic witnessing" (42), Dale Tracy calls it "compassionate witnessing" (8), and Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez calls it "faithful witnessing" (68).

what Wendy Kozol calls "embodied witnessing" (6) through victim testimonies, both oral and written, or as secondary witnessing through media/literary/cultural texts.[54] Studies by Susan Sontag (*On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others*), Susie Linfield (*The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*), and Marianne Hirsch (*The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*) have explored how media forms like photography can represent victims of trauma, visualize their experiences, and evoke affective responses. In essence, these studies think of witnessing as a separate phenomenon from narratives/testimonies of trauma or the embodiment of trauma. Media witnessing becomes a way to document and represent victims of trauma and testimonial narratives.

Unlike other forms of witnessing, i.e. photography, literature has the double function of being both a form that can be used for eyewitness accounts or testimonies and secondary witnessing. The former, what John Beverley calls "testimonio" (524), is characterized by the use of an "I" that "demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim to our attention" (525). In this mode, the narrator, speaker, or one or more characters in the literary text narrate their experiences or testimony in a way that implicates the reader in the affective space created by the text. Literature can also act as a secondary witness in the context of representation. Ian King calls this form of literary witnessing "literature of witness" and submits that it "observe[s] things that need pointing out, and, at least for some, motivate us to act in some, perhaps prescriptive, manner in order to remedy something." In this sense, literature not only represents but invites the reader to act on what it witnesses. This inherent call to action necessitates the production of the reader as "the witness of the witness," to draw on Jacques Derrida's

[54] The distinction here can sometimes slip, depending on the mode of transmission. For example, Chijioke K. Onah blurs the line between eyewitness accounts and literary witnessing with the idea of "testimonial discourse," which covers "literary reportage, testimonial narratives, poetry, films, and documentaries based on survivors' testimonies" (7-8).

terminology (189).[55] The reader becomes a secondary witness to the textualized experience of the primary witness. As a mode of mediating the textual and the experiential, literature bears witness: it inflects the experience that it witnesses through its own aesthetic structures and presents a perspective of the event so that the reader may enter into the affective space created by its representation and aesthetic structures.

Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba and Sakiru Adebayo have explored the capacity of literary witnessing to create meaning and memory discursively, facilitate remembering, and highlight the connections between the past, present, and future. In Anyaduba's work on postcolonial African genocides, he reads literary witnessing as a discursive process that creates meanings. His premise is that he does not "approach the meanings of a genocide in these works as already determined by the standard definition of the term or as a fixed and otherwise stable concept but as a construct deriving from a social process in which cultural representations work to produce the meanings of a genocide" (15). This perspective allows us to conceive literary witnessing as a powerful discursive tool that generates meanings through representation. The texts not only present one or more dimensions of an event but also discursively frame that event in such a way that the "witness of the witness," i.e. the reader, understands the text as a memory and discourse-creating work. This imperative to understand literary witnessing as a discursive and memory-making process also motivates Adebayo's thesis that literary witnessing goes beyond representations of conflicts or trauma and "invites critical deliberations on the continuity of the past within the realm of positionality and the domain of subjectivity" (4). Drawing from Michael Rothberg's notion of "implicated subjects" (1), Adebayo argues that the past continues to be present through the "subject positions of victims, perpetrators, implicated subjects as well as

[55] In Derrida's usage of this expression, the "witness" could be the reader of literature, a judge or arbiter, or a historian (200).

secondary and transgenerational witnesses" (4).[56] These "frictions of memory," to use Adebayo's term, manifest in literature's insistence on *present-ing* the past even as it affectively reels in the future. Adebayo's ideas, like Siemerling's, foreground the persistence of the past as a function of literary witnessing.

Literary witnessing also serves another function. Rather than being a means through which the victim testifies, it also recovers the voice of the victim or the subaltern. Beverley explores this subaltern recovery in literary witnessing and comments that the testimonial narrator or "the 'I'" is the "organic intellectual" who metonymically extends the self to the subaltern through a "textual simulacrum of direct oral expression" (526-527).[57] Beverley tells us to read the testimonio as an invitation to alliance with the subaltern rather than a pure expression of subaltern speech. This alliance is meant to produce both the text and the reader as active agents that can transform and subvert the workings of power and hegemony (Beverley 532) even as they create a multiplicity of discourses that come to define events and people's responses to them (Rovit 51). Following Beverley's project of theorizing subaltern recovery in testimonio, Chijioke K. Onah reads testimonial discourses, including literary texts, to uncover how death and silences can be theorized within the scope of subaltern recovery. His thesis is that the testimony of survivors, who are themselves embodied or eyewitnesses, also bears witness to the experiences of those who died or who would otherwise be unable to speak, and through the various silences that permeate testimony discourse, subaltern voice is recovered and inscribed (9-17). This idea of witnessing as a project of subaltern recovery is central to this chapter's argument that poetry by

[56] Michael Rothberg coined the term "implicated subjects" to refer to those who are implicated, through subject positions or other functions of power and privilege, in acts of violence or trauma. The implicated subject, according to Rothberg, is not strictly a victim or a perpetrator but is a "participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator" (1). To put it simply, implicated subjects could be direct victims or perpetrators or those who are part of the socio-economic and political processes that facilitate the production of such roles.

[57] Rebecca Rovit calls this sort of literary witness the "witness-artist" who presents a "past event" to the reader (46).

minoritized writers in Nigeria and Canada recovers subaltern voice and witnesses history (*presents* the past) in a counterdiscursive way.

Most works and theories on literary witnessing have focused on fiction or other narrative forms. Poetry has received the least attention despite possessing certain peculiarities that allows it to represent subaltern voices powerfully. To think of what I describe as "poetic witnessing" as a unique form is to think of form and aesthetics as central components of witnessing. Czeslaw Miłosz deploys the term "poetry of witness" to refer to the way experiences are co-opted and lyricized, and Carolyn Forché deploys it as a "readerly encounter with the literature of *that-which-happened*, and […] is evidentiary rather than representational" (Forché 163). Forché grounds witness poetry on language and argues that the language of poetry goes beyond representation or simple "confessionalism":

> the poem is the experience, rather than a symbolic representation. When we read the poem as witness, we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us. Language incises the page, wounding it with testimonial presence, and the reader is marked by encounter with that presence. Witness begets witness. The text we read becomes a living archive. (168)

What Forché foregrounds here is the capacity of poetry, through poetics, to become the experience itself rather than simply "bearing witness." To Forché, the reader is the true witness to the experience that is versified.

Forché's perspective gives us a way to think of poetic witnessing in terms of aesthetics with the view that the poem itself, through its poetics, is evidentiary and acts as a testimonial. Dale Tracy contests aspects of Forché's ideas and reminds us to always make a distinction between speakers and readers or listeners in poetry (18). She contends that "[i]f readers are

listening to a speaker's witness, then they are not occupying the same role as that witnessing speaker" (18). This contention is not intended to reduce the place of poetics in the way we might frame the experience conveyed or coded in the poem, but it clarifies the importance of poetic voice in the way this experience is shaped and witnessed by the reader. The poetic voice bears witness so that the reader can bear witness.

Divya Victor's distinction between subjective poetry, like the lyric, and poetic witnessing is relevant to the way we might come to an understanding of the poetics of witnessing in poetry. Framing her intervention under the concept of "appropriation," Victor asserts that "[t]he use of appropriation in bearing witness thus always carries with it the question of access to sensitive discourses and documents, as well as the question of access to traumas that cannot be claimed as 'one's own.'" (13). This view is based on the idea that poets can access certain historical evidence or data and traumatic experience(s), including those for which they are implicated subjects, and transform the data available to them into poetry through the compositional philosophy of appropriation. To Victor, it is this poetics of appropriation, through redistributed language, that distinguishes poetic witnessing from the lyric or other kinds of poetry (13-14). Going further, Victor thinks of this poetics of witnessing in poetry as a "documentary and historiographic practice, rather than as primarily expressive, representative, or imaginative practice" (16), further complicating the lines between experience and representation. The poet, described as the "absent witness" (16), transmits experience that is based on actual historical sources. Ultimately, Victor's position is that the poetics of witnessing is based on the repurposing of historical sources to transmit traumatic experience through an absent witness. Some of Victor's ideas are paralleled in Antony Rowland's theorization of witnessing in poetry. To Rowland, poetic form is very important in the conceptualization of poetry as testimony. He

argues that "[t]estimony can only be performed through form and genre" (4). Unlike Victor who makes a distinction between subjective poetry and witness poetry, Rowland believes that all poetic forms, including the lyric, can transmit the "epiphanic moment, truncated traumatic recollections, silences beyond the black print, and the emotive space that need not be repressed behind the supposed objectivity of testimonial facts" (4-5). Here, there is no clear distinguishing feature between subjective poetry and witness poetry. In essence, poetic witnessing can appear in any poetic form and capture not only the actual historical experience but also the subjective moments or "epiphanies" that dot that experience. Rowland further foregrounds the elements of witnessing in poetry, including and perhaps chiefly its "fragmentary openness" (5). This fragmentary openness, Rowland asserts, allows the poem to present trauma and grapple with the meaning of events (6). In Rowland's view of poetic witnessing, faithfulness to historical account must be mediated and nuanced by the constraints of genre. He contends that "resisting history" is one of the key elements of the poetics of witnessing in poetry, and that in the poems, the speakers often "interrupt" history to reflect on what is being experienced or represented. Ultimately, Rowland urges us to read poetic witnessing in terms of its inseparability from "the performance of form, genre, and subgenre" (13).

Throughout this chapter, I describe a poetics of witnessing that manifests in Niger Delta and Black Maritime poetry through selections from Ifowodo's and Hamilton's collections. This poetics, when contextualized in minoritarian experience, facilitates our understanding of the aesthetics of minority discourse and allows us to read poems from different locations as expressions of the desire of minoritized groups to eye-witness their experience aesthetically and invite other forms of witnessing. As implicated subjects, minoritized writers create testimonial or witness poetry that documents and epiphanizes both statist violence and the resultant subjectivity

and responses to such violence. This poetics is grounded in the complex subjectivities of the speakers and parallels common tropes in testimonial discourse, such as fragmentations, orality, evidentiary tone, subtle or apparent silences, multiple perspectives, and counterdiscursivity, among others. In addition, I ground this poetics of witnessing in what I call "proximate memory." I contend that poetic witnessing is important in the general context of the aesthetics of minority discourse and has theoretical value through the concept of proximate memory. My approach navigates debates or contentions over the place of the poet or the poet persona in the transmission or representation of experience or memory that implicates minority subjectivity and positions poetry itself – through its peculiar language, voice, and form – as primary or eye-witness even as it facilitates secondary witnessing via readerly intimacy. Proximate memory implies proximity to the experience captured in poetry, and this proximity could be generated by implicated subjects or other experiential, subjective, intergenerational, or even historiographical forms of proximity.[58] Proximate memory, therefore, does not imply that one must have experienced the events directly. Through one form or another of proximity or nearness to the experience, the link necessary for memory to function becomes active. In the same vein, proximate memory accounts for the reader's proximity to the experience in the poem. This readerly intimacy functions as a second level of proximity that generates memory and facilitates witnessing.

Furthermore, I underscore the poetics of witnessing not only in terms of how it is informed or motivated by the aesthetics of testimonial discourses or testimonio but also in terms

[58] Unlike concepts like "postmemory" or "rememory" which are used in memory studies (i.e. Sakiru 25; Etim 7) to refer to inherited memory or reconstructed memory, respectively, proximate memory is more elastic and grounded mostly in the lyrical intimacy of poetry – the poet, the persona, the experience described or versified, the characters involved (if any), and the reader are all implicated aesthetically in the proximate space of the poem, producing proximate memory in various tiers: the poem (and its elements) and its proximity to actual historical experience and the reader's proximity to the poem and the experience.

of its imbrications with proximate memory. Beyond the aesthetic projects of recovery and giving perspective, poetic witnessing performs proximity through the shared speaker-character-reader intersubjective space of the poem. It is this intersubjective space that makes poetic witnessing more appealing to the minoritized writers I consider. The lyrical "I" intersects with the authorial voice, other characters or subjectivities, and the reader, creating a complex terrain of proximate memory. It is in this proximal space that the past is *present-ed*. In poems that witness events and experiences, the past is allusively, thematically, and aesthetically brought to life in such a way that its presence creates a kind of proximity that facilitates eye-witnessing (in the case of the poem and through language) and secondary witnessing (through the intersubjective space of poem and reader). In essence, proximate memory, as an outcome of the poetics of witnessing, allows the past to continue through language, allusions, naming, form, poetic techniques and elements, subject position, and the discursive presence of poetry. This persistence of the past is not simply a matter of *historophrenia* or *historophilia* but a matter of poetics.[59] History persists through the insistence on certain forms of representation and the compositional and formal qualities of the poem. Poetry becomes an elegant technology to stage what Sakiru calls "continuous pasts."

When deployed in the context of minority discourse, poetic witnessing contests dominant narratives, confronts statist violence, and transmits the histories and counterhistories of minoritized peoples. All of this gives poetic witnessing important comparative value as a form of minority discourse. In what follows, I read Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* and Hamilton's *And I Alone*

[59] By *historophenia* or *historophilia*, I refer to a condition in which history informs and drives one's consciousness to the point that it is phrenic or philic. This condition can manifest in a writer's insistence on history or a reader's focus on the historical dimensions of the text. Reading in, within, and around history in literature produces *historophrenia* and *historophilia*.

Escaped To Tell You as instances of poetic witnessing in which the peculiar histories of the Niger Delta and Black Maritime people are brought to life through proximate memory.

Witnessing Extractive Catastrophe, Statist Violence, and Precarity in Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp*

Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* is a collection of predominantly long poems that explore statist violence and extractive catastrophes in the Niger Delta. Divided into five parts, the collection chronicles significant historical events that define the Niger Delta experience.[60] These historical events are not only memorialized in the verse, but the poems serve an eye-witnessing function that ultimately facilitates secondary witnessing through proximate memory. In this section, I ground the idea of poetic witnessing and proximate memory in how Ifowodo's collection witnesses statist violence and extractive catastrophe in the Niger Delta. Ultimately, I contend that the poems *present* the past through the poetics of witnessing.

The first part of the collection is titled "Jese," and it witnesses the Jese or Jesse fire incident that killed 1098 people in October of 1998. The second part of the collection is titled "Odi," and it witnesses the state-sanctioned massacre of the people of Odi in 1999. Nnimmo Bassey believes that 2483 people were killed. The third and fourth parts of the collection, titled "Ogoni" and "Pipe Wars," respectively, witness the state-sanctioned military occupation of Ogoni land and other peculiar issues the region contends with. The fifth section, titled "Cesspit of the Niger Delta," foregrounds the precarity of people in the Niger Delta. The long poems I focus on are written in unrhymed tercets, further inscribing the significance of the number three in Nigeria's national narration even as they subvert that significance with the counterdiscursive

[60] Apart from the five major parts, the collection also has a sole prologue poem titled "A Waterscape" and an epilogue of four poems collectively titled "The Agonist."

purpose of the poems.[61] I focus on "Jese" in the context of extractive catastrophe, "Odi" and "Ogoni" in the context of statist violence, and "Cesspit of the Delta" in the context of precarity.

To properly read "Jese" in terms of the poetics of witnessing and the function of proximate memory, it is necessary to give some context.[62] On October 18, 1998, crude oil pipelines belonging to the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation burst into flames, taking the lives of 1098 people (Akande; Onuoha). According to a timeline on Al Jazeera, it is the deadliest pipeline disaster experienced in Nigeria. In addition to other environmental concerns and issues that define Nigeria's Niger Delta, the Jesse fire incident demonstrates the extractive catastrophes that have ravaged the region and its people. As a site of crude oil extraction, the region has been at the receiving end of environmental disasters and statist violence. In this fire incident, the Nigerian state refused to accept responsibility and blamed the people for the carnage (Akande). Akande reports that the fire went unabated for five days until an American firefighting team arrived to control the situation. Another report by Doifie Ola and David Eighemhenrio indicts the Nigerian state for not properly maintaining its oil pipes and doing "nothing to salvage the situation when the leakage was reported." In fact, Ola and Eighemhenrio indicate that the police were deployed to harass people who were around the site of leakage. What we find with the Jesse fire incident is that the Nigerian state extracted important resources from the region and did not even bother with routine care and maintenance of pipes and other oil installations, ultimately leading to the disaster that took so many lives. This event did not happen in isolation. The website of the Urhobo Historical Society shows that six

[61] In the previous chapters, I explained that the number "3" is significant in Nigeria because the nation is usually imagined as a nation of three dominant groups. From its colonial beginnings to the present, the number three has shaped Nigeria's form and politics. The tercets in "Jese" could also be alluding to Dante's *Inferno* in terms of the representation of fire in both poems.

[62] Although Ifowodo titles the poem "Jese," the actual place is named "Jesse," an anglicization of its Urhobo name, "Idjerhe."

petroleum oil disasters happened between 1998 and 2000 in Urhoboland alone. These disasters all impacted human lives, property, land, and the environment.

Different testimonies by victims of the Jesse fire incident are available in historical archives and other sources. The Environmental Rights Action (ERA) curates three such testimonies, and they all indict both the Nigerian state and its regulatory organs, like the police and military, in this extractive catastrophe that treated the Niger Delta as a disposable site of extraction within Nigeria. Ifowodo's work undertakes a witnessing of the Jesse carnage from a subaltern perspective. Divided into fifteen sections, this long poem poses the question of the subaltern's capacity to witness through two layers of memory: on the one hand, there is the speaker who is proximate to the event but also acts as a witness. This speaker is implicated through tone and subject-position and the poem itself becomes proximate to the experience described through the speaker's own proximity. On the other hand, the speaker presents fragments of primary testimonies through a sort of polyphony that concretizes not only the collective nature of these experiences but also the proximity of people to them. Through these multiple layers of proximity or poly-proximity, Ifowodo's work invites the reader to witness the impact of extractive catastrophes on minoritized regions.[63]

In the first two sections of the poem, Ifowodo provides context for the reader to facilitate proximity to the event that will be witnessed:

> It was the fourteenth month of the fuel crunch
>
> and stoves cooked cobwebs in cold corners.
>
> Dreading the spirits that live in trees,

[63] By poly-proximity, I refer to the multiple perspectives that ground proximate memory in the poem.

they would not break green twigs to make a meal,
till the fuel crunch compelled choice between
tree and human, today and tomorrow.

[…]
the women wept into their pots.
In the fourteenth month of the fuel crunch,
with oil lamps dry and dusty, nightfall

wrapped their village in a veil of ink. (3)

In this passage, the speaker draws potently from history. The expression "fourteenth month of the fuel crunch" alludes to the fuel scarcity that ravaged Nigeria in the months preceding the Jesse fire incident. The situation was so dire that James Rupert of *The Washington Post* describes it as a "disaster." As a country that not only imports but also subsidizes fuel from outside, despite the abundance of crude oil in the Niger Delta, there is a lot of corruption that happens behind the scenes in Nigeria. Rupert reports that "[t]he Finance Ministry says the company [the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation] has lost, stolen or squandered more than $2 billion in government allocations for maintenance work in recent years -- but the company insists it never got the money." This back and forth between various organs of the state had forced the people of the Niger Delta, from whose land the crude oil is extracted, into a kind of precarity that manifests in the poem through the image of "stoves" cooking cobwebs, a visual image that encodes poverty and precarity through the metaphor of cobwebs that represents decay and death. This image is heightened with the second image of women weeping into their pots, an image that creates a

sense of lachrymation, pain, and hunger. In essence, in this first poetic sequence, Ifowodo's speaker crafts the subaltern location that is the Niger Delta and positions it as a site of neglect and lachrymation. Through this historical context, Ifowodo's speaker not only makes a claim for truth – poetic and historical truth – as expected in testimonial discourse but also draws the reader closer to the realities of the Niger Delta through the images that are crafted.

After the poem's historical context is textualized, Ifowodo's speaker begins the project of witnessing extractive catastrophe. It is important to contextualize the numerous testimonial fragments that are presented in the poem in light of the idea that the poem is essentially acting as a document that not only bears witness but also an experience in and of itself. It is this textual "present-ing" of the event that constitutes its most significant dimension, i.e. that the poem is not just an account of an account but an experience itself. The speaker begins the third segment thus:

> This was how the damage was done,
> with old pipes corroded and cracked
> by the heat of their burden –
>
> petrol and paraffin piped away
> from rotting dugouts and thatched huts
> to float ships and fly planes (5)

Here, the poem's evidentiary tone starts to manifest in the descriptive precision of "old pipes corroded and cracked." This evidentiary tone grounds the poem in history and facilitates proximity through the subtle argument of truth and believability. The extractivist imagery of "petrol and paraffin piped away" alliteratively inscribes violence in the context of the Niger Delta, which is metaphorically rendered as "rotting dugouts and thatched huts." This description

situates the Niger Delta as a disposable site of extraction from where "crude oil is siphoned to develop and enrich other worlds" (Aghoghovwia 163). Philip Aghoghovwia also tells us that Ifowodo's politics here is to inscribe the "oil encounter" counterdiscursively as an extractive and hegemonic encounter (163).

Ifowodo's speaker deploys contrast as a strategy to heighten the poetics of witnessing. He says, "Four boys chasing rodents for the day's meal - / while their mates in cities where the pipes end // learnt their letters in song and rhyme – were first / to find the fountain" (5). This contrast crafts the portrait of not only subaltern place but also the circumstances that increase the intended affective impact of the poem and the carnage it witnesses. It also provides important context and rationale for what led to the inferno. The pauperized people of the Niger Delta had no choice but to use the leaking fuel and kerosene to ameliorate their "music of deprivation" (Ifowodo 6) and to partake in the subaltern economy of the oil industry from which they are normally screened out. This situation ultimately metamorphosed into Odiri's tale of the inferno.

In the poem, Odiri is one of the victims who testify about the cause of the fire. The poetic voice brings the reader close to Odiri and establishes the intimate proximity that prompts the memory work of her tale. This multi-perspectival insistence is consistent with literary works that bear witness. In this specific instance, the speaker bears witness to Odiri and textually renders this testimony so that the reader also bears witness:

> That was Odiri's tale of the cause of the fire
> moaned from a bed in the local clinic,
> whose calico sheets, gummed to her bum
>
> and back, were the graft for slipped-off skin.

She had fallen face-up, hands in front to reach
for her daughter as the flames engulfed her.

A full keg of kerosene on her head,
she had stepped out of the pool, now ankle high,
to wait till her daughter filled a buffer keg

when she saw the raised arms and gun.
The crack of trigger on hammer, her daughter's
cries, and the shrieks of the scavenging crowd

became a deafening *whoosh!* (8)

Odiri's version of the story foregrounds "raised arms and guns," hinting at the complicity of the state in the carnage. The dual images of "arms and guns" suggest sabotage from military or police personnel who are assumed to have lit the fire. The auditory images of "cries," "shrieks," and the ideophonic "*whoosh*" not only represent the fire outbreak but also foster sensual proximity in such a way that the reader is affectively grounded in Odiri's tale. However, Odiri's version is fragmentary in its insistence on subjective perception and selective remembrance. This sort of memorial unreliability accentuates Odiri's marginal experience even as it prompts the speaker to ask, "But what can we trust she saw? remembered?" (9).

Odiri's version of what caused the fire demonstrates how subaltern subjectivity perceives state power in the wake of an extractive catastrophe. However, as with other testimonial discourse, other perspectives ground the experience and create polyphonic proximity. The

second victim's voice tells us that "a bus driver, dizzy with the joy / of a week's hoard of petrol, struck / a reckless match for the celebration" (9). Yet another version blames agricultural practices: "brush fire, set by a slash-and-burn farmer, / threw sparks carried by the harmattan wind" (9). A final version says an "old woman" whose "grandson" was startled dropped an oil lamp that eventually started the fire. In these instances, polyphony enhances proximate memory by giving readers different possibilities and perspectives. The reader necessarily has to form their own truth from the fragmented versions of the catastrophe, but this truth-formation allows the reader (the witness of the witness) to enter into the intersubjective space shared with the victims, further facilitating the construction of proximate memory.

Through a combination of audio-visual images, Ifowodo's poem strongly paints the extractive catastrophe so that the reader relives and witnesses the experience. The catastrophe is mapped onto land and people through the acts of a personified fire that "uncoiled like an infinite / cobra": "The rivers, now on fire, rushed / to the sea for a dip, floating along land's burning question, // unanswerable as every spot soaked the flow / and wind and water showed the fire where to go" (13). These lines reveal the impact of the Jesse fire on subaltern place; the economy of oil extraction devastates and poisons both land and waterways. The flame takes a life of its own and symbolically encodes both the oil multinationals and the Nigerian state in terms of how they produce the subaltern geography of the Niger Delta. The personification also facilitates proximate memory in the way fire is anthropomorphized and made tragically relatable to the reader. In terms of its capacity to evoke affective responses, nature is represented as a victim: "the land burned, the trees burned, the rivers burned, / the smoke unrolled endless bolts of cloth / to wrap naked grief and shield the world" (14). In the face of this catastrophe, the speaker names one of the culprits, the "head of state," and explores his culpability in the production of

catastrophe. Interestingly, the "head of state" is also given voice and perspective, hinting at the ability to find silences and truth in the account of the oppressor. He says, "*I came to see the damage you have done / and the roast dinner for me and my guests*" (14). The irony in these lines reveals how state power not only creates the condition for catastrophe in the Niger Delta but also denies culpability while blaming the people themselves, those so plagued by the agony of being minoritized. There is also an evidentiary tone in these lines. Not only are they presented as direct speech, but they are italicized and foregrounded as actual representations of what the Nigerian "head of state" at the time said.

The "predatorial hegemonic" (Montesano 97) character of the state is further inscribed in terms of the impact of the catastrophe on the human population and the response of the state to this regime of the disposable minor body.[64] The speaker invites us to witness the consequences of the fire: "bloated bodies fished from creeks, wells and rivers, / totalled a thousand, the record-keepers said – / far from where stubborn bones queried the count" (15). In that same stretch, the speaker also tells us, through the voice of the head of state, that the bodies are considered disposable through terms like "thieves," "saboteurs," and "dangerous youths" (15-16). These terms are intended to transform the victims into criminals. However, through the proximate memory initiated by the poem and the history it presents, the reader, as a witness, can draw from the polyphonic versions of the event to sympathize with the victims. Through the very form of the poem as a polyphonic work and vivid images and techniques like irony, "Jese" bears witness to extractive catastrophe and the culpability of the nation-state and oil multinationals.

[64] Michael Montesano invites us to read the representation of the Delta communities in the poem in the context of "disposable waste." In this sense, land and body are treated like the fledging flame as toxic wastes and nuisances rather than as victims of catastrophe.

The capacity of the state to wield violence on minoritized people informs the poetics of witnessing in "Odi," a long poem in Ifowodo's collection that versifies the historical attack on Odi by the Nigerian army. The Odi massacre, as it has been called by historians and journalists, happened a year after the Jesse fire incident. In November 1999, some youths from the community of Odi in Nigeria's Niger Delta executed police officers as part of a wide range of both criminal and legitimate acts (like protests) that registered discontent with the Nigerian state and its failure to respond to demands for the rights and dignity of the people of the Niger Delta. In response, the Nigerian president deployed over 2000 military officers to the town of Odi (Omeje 432). Despite the condemnation of the murders by community leaders and other concerned people of the Niger Delta, the Nigerian military assaulted Odi and used excessive force to ransack the town, killing and raping residents in the process (Human Rights Watch). Omeje (432) and Bassey report that over 2483 people were killed in this attack. Ebuka Onyeji's interview with Goddey Niweigha, one of the leaders of Odi, confirms that thousands of people were killed and over 1240 houses were burnt by the Nigerian army. This massacre is a watershed moment in the history of the Niger Delta because statist violence was wielded on a large scale to tame and terrorize the people of the Niger Delta. Survivors of this massacre have narrated different versions of what occurred, and the Nigerian state continues to deploy such military measures that it did in Odi in other contemporary instances of statist violence in the context of the Niger Delta.

"Odi" versifies the historical massacre through the poetics of witnessing and proximate memory. In the poem, the common tropes of testimonial discourse are deployed, and the reader is invited to bear witness to the textualized history of subaltern place. The poem's speaker takes a narrative turn that oscillates between the authorial voice and the perspective of both the state

(or those who work on behalf of the state) and the victims. This perspectival insistence creates proximity between the reader and the actions versified in the work and allows the textualized history to emerge as living memory for the reader. In the first few stanzas, the speaker introduces the context and sets the tone for the massacre that the poem witnesses: "A battalion of justice scorched its path / to Odi, came to solve by war / a case of homicide: five cops and four // soldiers sent to break a youth revolt / lay dead in the dark labyrinth of the delta" (21). The historicity in these lines accentuates the presence of the past to the reader, who must bear witness to the textual witness. The speaker creates the binary between the "battalion of justice," emblematic of the state, and "Odi," a synecdochic microcosm of the Niger Delta. The appellation "battalion of justice" is meant to inscribe the power of the state in this context while also ironically reducing the state to its military might. Aghoghovwia's suggestion that the "battalion of justice" is meant to "poke at the reader's sense of justice so that objectivity may be renegotiated as one reencounters the Odi episode in narrative" (168) is insightful if we contextualize this in light of Ifowodo's insistence on readerly proximate memory throughout the collection. Apart from the play on "battalion" and "justice," which ridicules the state's vision of justice in this instance, the state continues to be configured for the reader as a violent apparatus through descriptions like "the president, / ex-commando, false-star general" (21). Beyond this authorial configuration, Ifowodo deploys perspective to further ground proximity in the poem. It is this perspective and the accompanying oral testimonies encoded into the text that strengthen its poetics of witnessing.

In the segment titled "XIX," we encounter "Pa Piriye," a survivor of the violence who, as an older man, has lived through various forms of statist violence in the Niger Delta. Although Pa Piriye escapes most of the violence, the speaker tells us that he was born "eighteen years / before

the Benin punitive expedition," allusively reeling in the normative nature of statist violence that was wielded on the people of Benin in 1897.[65] Pa Piriye is one of the lucky few who relied on history and the workings of the state to survive the ordeal by hiding in "outlying towns and villages, fishhuts and dugouts" (24). He becomes symbolic of the historicity and normativity of statist violence, and his perspective as a survivor invites the reader to reflect on victimhood and the marginal place of the people of the Niger Delta. Later in the poem, after the massacre, Pa Piriye returns to the demolished town and speaks:

> *I have lived too long. Today, my feet*
> *sink into the ground at the sight of my door.*
>
> *When British soldiers looted and burned Benin,*
> *we cursed strange men come from beyond the sea,*
> *from the land of the dead, so evil they had no skin.*
>
> *But who shall we curse now, who now is the enemy?*
> *My eyes have seen two evils, must not see another.* (31)

Pa Piriye's agony, presented in direct speech, not only facilitates proximity but also sets the tone of the poem as a counterdiscourse. Statist violence creates complex, non-binary situations where the "we vs them" dynamic becomes irrelevant in terms of how the nation-state functions. It is this reality that informs Pa Piriye's agony and rhetorical question about who the enemy might be.

[65] The Benin punitive expedition, also called the "Benin massacre" (Boisragon), is a historical pogrom that happened in Benin City in 1897. Armed agents of the colonial state ransacked the city of Benin to avenge the death of colonial officers. Ultimately, the city was brought to its knees, and the Oba (King) of Benin was deposed and exiled to Calabar, another city in Southern Nigeria. It is one of the early instances of colonial violence, and this allusion confirms the historicity of statist violence as a function of the state. See Thomas Obinyan's "The Annexation of Benin" for more context.

By inviting the reader into this rhetorical space where statist violence necessitates an exploration of victimhood, Ifowodo wants the reader to contend and grapple with the question based on the textualized history they witness. In essence, Pa Piriye symbolically and allusively grounds the poetics of witnessing in the poem. Apart from Pa Piriye, the speaker introduces other victims of the military campaign: "mother and child" who were "cleaved into two by another bomb" and the children and parents who are given voice: "*We're dead! We're dead! / Save us, O God*!" (25). These words are deeply evocative and auditorily insert the reader into the affective space of the poem through their reported and documentary nature. The poem's politics and poetics of witnessing are strengthened by "hearing" the words directly from the victims.

Apart from the victims, the army, emblematic of the state, is also given voice and perspective. This adds to the overall objectivity of the poem, even as the reader draws from the intersubjective space of the poem to form their truth – as a witness – of the textualized events. The army officers, armed with grenades, machine guns, and other weapons, ransack the town, break into homes, and commit all kinds of atrocities in a way that alludes to the Nigerian Civil War.[66] The soldiers later use the blood of a dog to write on the wall: "THIS IS THE END OF ODI / THIS IS WHAT WE DO TO COWARDS / THIS IS JUST A WARNING" (30). This signifies the capacity of the nation-state to mobilize violence, terror, and anarchy on both land and people that are deemed disposable and minor. The blood-ink graffiti indexes violence for the reader in a very close, proximate way. This stark and bare terror is consolidated when the soldiers say, "There's no place called Odi anymore," and the President himself is quoted in the poem, "We'll protect our oil wealth at any cost" (31). These words invite the reader to witness

[66] A significant portion of Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba's work is devoted to the Biafran genocide, and he studies this in the context of memory and literary witnessing. During the war, the Nigerian army's major philosophy can be found in the following expression: "To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done." In the poem, a military officer has the nickname "One Nigeria," alluding to this philosophy.

the terror of the state and its agents on subaltern place and people – a terror that is hinged on socio-political marginality and resource politics within the nation-state. Rather than the speaker simply narrating the events, the reader is brought into the intersubjective space of the poem through its documentary aesthetics and evidentiary tone that ultimately facilitates witnessing.

The coloniality of the state and its capacity to deploy violence create precarity for the people of the region. This production of precarity is woven into Ifowodo's description of the state through the figure of Major Kitemo in "Ogoni" as the "chief pacifier / of the lower Niger's // still primitive tribes" (37). This description alludes to colonial imaginings of precolonial societies. By voicing this deeply colonial expression, Ifowodo's speaker positions the state as a colonial organ that lords its power over the minoritized people of the Niger Delta. Major Kitemo is given voice in "Ogoni," and his long meditation on violence and the state's ownership of oil and other resources also follows the style of testimonial discourse, but in this case, the army officer testifies, ironically, about the state's production of precarity in the region. He tells us:

> Fifteen nights and days in swamps and creeks
> broke them. First, they pushed out two little girls,
> who kept running back, scared to death. Then, a boy
>
> and a girl. As the matinee grenades went off,
> they fainted. I'd waited for the surrender;
> we took them in and kept shelling. I wanted
>
> the smart-ass quartet: the old man, the schoolboy
> and his father, the woman. I didn't have to wait long.

They came out among a crowd and fell on their knees:

Please, please we will do what you say, anything

you want. But stop the shelling. Please! Please! (48)

In this biphonic passage, we encounter the voices of both Major Kitemo, emblematic of the state, and the assaulted and displaced Ogoni people of the Niger Delta, whose precarity is cast in the image of the children. Like the other poems in this collection, this poem is based on the actual occupation of Ogoniland. Between 1993 and 1994, armed military officers occupied Ogoniland in response to the activism of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni elders.[67] During this occupation, which is dated to 1995 by Tijen Demirel-Pegg and Scott Pegg, the military killed over 2000 Ogoni people while many others were raped and injured (24). In Ifowodo's textualization of this dark history, Major Kitemo weaves a narrative about the good of the nation-state and the need to subdue the activism in the Niger Delta. Throughout his testimony, the voices of the people of the Niger Delta interrupt the flow and reveal the inconsistencies of the hegemonic narrative and the cruelty of the state. In one such instance, Major Kitemo states that the land and all its resources belong to Nigeria (38), and an old interlocutor replies: "That's Lord Lugard's colony, the cartographer's / trade map for British expropriation … // How long do you think we have been on this land, / how long the oil, the trees, the creeks and the rivers?" (39). This rhetorical response reveals the coloniality of the state and its deployment of the same strategies used by the British colonial enterprise in the context of the Niger Delta. In terms of the poetics of witnessing, it also maps out the inconsistencies of hegemonic testimonies even as it reveals the silences that are latched onto images of destruction and brutality. Through the biphonic mode, the reader's

[67] Saro-Wiwa's activism has been taken up in the second chapter of this dissertation.

poly-proximity is established in such a way that they can interrogate dominant discourse and also see the vestiges seeping through or hear the silences that comprise minority discourse.

While "Ogoni" consolidates Ifowodo's extensive attempt to witness statist violence, his "Pipe Wars" and "Cesspit of the Delta" reveal the precarity of the people in material terms that can be witnessed. In "Pipe Wars," the speaker makes a case for the Niger Delta: "Can anyone think of the Niger Delta / and not feel an ache in his heart?" (52). This rhetorical question inscribes the precarity of place and people in the context of the resource curse.[68] This resource curse or poverty paradox grounds the poetics of witnessing in this poem as the speaker invites the reader to reflect sympathetically on the lives and conditions of those "that live amidst such wealth in our / land; to hear them bewail the dissipation / of their share of earth's bounty, the devastation // that pours oil on rivers to float fish" (52). The tone of loss and mourning that permeates these lines is meant to facilitate proximate sympathy and to invite the reader to bear witness to precarity in actual material terms.

In "Cesspit of the Delta," Ifowodo uses the perspectival testimonial mode to ground the idea of precarity. The speaker introduces a mother who "sings" of a dying child in an oil-rich community where "there's no doctor," "no clinic," and "no motorway" (60). By textualizing this oral testimony for the reader, proximate memory is accomplished in a way that enhances witnessing. In another instance, an entire town is in "darkness" (62), demonstrating not only the absence of electricity but also the presence of death and despair, and this is contrasted with the "oil staff estates," which not only have electricity but are also "well-drained and paved and mosquito-proof" (62). This contrast accentuates the poem's politics and poetics of witnessing in

[68] Resource curse is a term coined by Richard Auty and defined by Anthony Venables as "the underperformance of resource-rich economies, drawing attention to the weak performance of Bolivia, Nigeria, and Venezuela, amongst others" (161).

the sense that the reader, as a secondary witness, sees the precarity of the Delta and compares it with the activities of the state and oil multinationals. In Ifowodo's usual multi-perspectival style, the subaltern voice of the Delta irrupts into the verse and testifies further,

The Niger flows down to us its floodwaters,
swells our rivers with the dread tributes

of seasonal carnage washed in from the fields.
And we stay afloat by treading tears, reclaiming
footholds with the humus of hate and envy.

And when they rise to spit on our heads the rinse-water
of early morning mouths, I remember the dew,
the one thousand and one gone, and what will remain true. (63)

This deeply poetic reflection on the Niger Delta grounds Ifowodo's politics even as it demonstrates the idea of proximate memory as a function of the poetics of witnessing through poly-proximal voice. This poetic voice, here the Niger Delta itself, comes in response to all the horrors and injustice that the minoritized people have to face. Dealing with the reality of hopelessness and a futile struggle, the subaltern voice bursts into poetry/song to anchor their experience and to initiate further proximity. At this point, subaltern place anchors the poem's supreme poetics – place speaks for itself and testifies so that the reader may witness and form memories. Ifowodo's style of "showing" the reader the voices of those who have been minoritized by the state enhances his poetics of witnessing. In this specific passage, the tone of resignation comes alive in the alliterative "treading tears" and the image of those who lost their

lives. These are heightened further by the evidentiary allusion to environmental issues – through the image of "dread tributes" – and the violence of the state – encoded in the binaristic term "they." This irruptive voice not only "remembers" but also invites the reader to "remember," thus facilitating the reader's role as a witness of the witness. Ultimately, Ifowodo demonstrates throughout the collection that poetry has the capacity to create countermemory through poetics.

Witnessing Slavery and its Afterlife in Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You*

In this segment, I read the poetics of witnessing in Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* to excavate how this poetics allows for a proximate memory of slavery and its afterlife. In particular, I am interested in how Hamilton deploys perspective, orality, naming, and irruption to present the past and challenge hegemonic history. Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* is an important collection that textualizes the chequered history of Black people in the Canadian Maritimes. Divided into three sections, Hamilton's collection excavates the often anonymous and obscured slave pasts of Black people and *presents* them in a way that not only gives perspective but allows the reader to form intimate, proximate memories about the slave enterprise in Canada and the consequences of that bleak historical period on contemporary Black Canadians. Her project follows two seminal methodologies in Black studies. On the one hand, Hamilton's work parallels Saidiya Hartman's methodology of narrating and giving voice to the "nameless and forgotten," those whose histories are filled with silences and death (4). Hamilton's project differs from Hartman's in the sense that while Hartman's purpose is not to "*give voice* to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified… to respect black noise" (12), Hamilton goes the extra mile to give voice to the enslaved and their descendants. This voice, far beyond just narrative recovery, creates an intersubjective space through which the reader can achieve a proximate memory of textualized history. The other methodology Hamilton

deploys parallels M. NourbeSe Philip's work in *Zong!* Philip's work documents the silenced history of the enslaved persons who were massacred in the slave ship, Zong, as part of an elaborate insurance scam.[69] While historians and other scholars have established the historicity and even the implications of this event, Philip's approach concretizes the massacre by giving perspective – a style that Philip herself describes as "poetics of the fragment." Through various fragments of historical material, songs, chants, moans, and other oral forms, Philips recovers the victims of the massacre through textual eye-witnessing.

The context for Hamilton's collection is slavery in Nova Scotia. This context is not only created in the blurb, which draws attention to "[t]he settlement of African peoples in Nova Scotia" and the collection's purpose of giving "historical events a human voice … to evoke the lives of these early Black Nova Scotians and of the generations that followed," but also in the names of actual places that are presented as subtexts throughout the collection. Although the subject of slavery has been broached in earlier chapters of this dissertation, it is important to emphasize the fact that the dominant narrative of Canada is that it was a safe haven for fugitive slaves from the U.S., and its history of slavery, especially in the Maritimes, is mostly silenced. Historians have contested Canada's national narrative of benevolence towards enslaved people by excavating evidence of slavery in Canada. Among these historians is Harvey Amani Whitfield whose important book on Loyalist slavery in Canada unpacks the many layers of slavery and the sliding signifier "servant" in the context of the racialized history of the Maritimes.[70] Whitfield concedes that one reason why historians have yet to study the multiple dimensions of slavery in Canada is the absence of "historical documentation" (5), alluding to the erasure of concrete

[69] Ian Baucom's theory is that Philip's work and the works of others in this tradition create a "counter-Hegelian, antiprogressive, and testamentary philosophy of history" in terms of how they deploy the figure of the witness.
[70] Although Whitfield focuses on Loyalist slavery in the Maritimes, Watson Smith emphasizes the fact that slavery existed in pre-Loyalist Nova Scotia.

materials that document the reality of slavery in the Maritimes. However, Whitfield manages to find "small mentions of bondage embedded in often fragmentary sources" and examines these historical moments based on how they appear: the mass movement of "approximately thirty thousand" people, including enslaved Black people, via ships to the Maritimes after the American Revolution, Black fugitivity in the Maritimes, and the conflation of racism and cheap Black labour (6).

The history of slavery in Canada begins, as with the history of slavery elsewhere, on a ship. Robin Winks confirms this point in his account of how enslaved Black people reached Nova Scotia via their White enslavers through ships (32). Those who were not legally regarded as slaves were sometimes described as "servants," blurring the lines between slavery and cheap wage labour (Winks 34-35). The material condition of both the enslaved and "servants" was such that they were doomed to be socio-economically subordinate even as their bodies were demonized via racist philosophy and fugitivity (Maynard; Nelson). Although they seemed to have more agency (Whitman 6), compared to enslaved people in the United States, they were often victims of various violent attacks, punishments, and laws that were instituted to control and regulate Black bodies and personhood. So little is known about the actual day-to-day life of enslaved Black Maritimers and their experiences with statist violence, racism, and other prejudices that it becomes imperative, in the Hartman sense, to reconstruct this history through a form like poetry. As an implicated subject in the historical experience of slavery and its consequences, Hamilton invites the reader of her collection to form memories of slavery in Canada even as they witness various forms of violence and their consequences on contemporary Black bodies.

Hamilton's "The Passage" prefaces the collection's politics of witnessing. Through seven stanzas of unequal run-on and unrhymed lines, the collective speaking voice of the poem historicizes the Middle Passage that brought enslaved Black people to North America by contrasting the past with the present as a way of indexing the point of historical rupturing:

> We had our own names
> a past a present.
> We worked we loved.
> Sang songs to the wind
> prayed to our Gods.
>
> We did not know the future
> would not be ours. (9)

In this passage, Hamilton deploys fragmentation and orality to ground the poetics of witnessing through the presentation of a speaker who connects the fragmented histories of the past to the present and the future. The run-on lines create a sense of oral immediacy and proximity, bringing the speaking voice close to the reader in a way that imitates oral testimonies. The lack of commas and conjunctions in the poem further accentuates this sense of immediacy and works to reveal the evidentiary case that the poem makes. In the fourth stanza, the pristine past is ruptured by "terrors, like a buzz of locusts," a simile that alludes to the violent extraction of Black people from Africa to North America. "Terrors" in this poem not only refers to the actual violence that was instituted through the historical removal of Black persons from Africa but also configures the image of the statist project behind the extraction. This idea manifests in the lines that follow the simile: "invaded our sleep, night terrors, / not chased away by the morning sun, / night terrors

stalking us" (9). These terrors are rendered as potently violent forces that are ubiquitous in their workings. The implication of the statist project in "terrors" becomes the premise of the testimony in its capacity to not only remove, "shackle," and kill but also to unname those who were named.

Hamilton's use of orality not only ruptures and dismantles the coloniality of the written word, which is associated with the statist project, but it is also a key element of the poetics of witnessing that grounds proximate memory. In "Ambrose Smart," the enslaved woman, Hannah, narrates her act of resistance against her enslaver, Ambrose. Normally, archival proof of such acts of resistance would barely mention or focalize Hannah in a way that grants her agency, but Hamilton foregrounds the enslaver through the poem's title and subverts his position by focalizing Hannah. Hamilton also invites us to read this poem through the perspective of subaltern place by referring to "Cape Negro" and giving place voice in the last stanza.[71] In the first part of the poem, Hannah provides her testimony in a style that is fundamentally oral:

> I fix my left hand round his throat,
>
> I reach for my blade – it gone.
>
> His sons jump me from behind, knock me down.
>
> He cough and sware, sware and cough: he say
>
> *Hannah is my property you hear mine.*
>
> I spit in his red pockmark face. (25)

My claim for an aesthetics of orality in this passage is hinged on its ability to create urgency, its focus on presence, and Hannah's direct charge to the assumed listener: "Hang me now or sell me. None of you safe / long as God give me breath" (25). The orality of the poem draws the reader into the context in such a way that they are affectively impacted by Hannah's words and

[71] Cape Negro is a coastal community in Nova Scotia first settled by the French in the 17th century.

actions. This orality allows Hannah to be an agent of witnessing – she speaks directly to not only her assumed historical listeners but also to her contemporary listeners, who now form memories about her condition. Beyond Hannah, land and water also speak in the poem. The speaker tells us that "the voice of the sea" at Cape Negro "was strong that night / raging until dawn" (25). The focus on the "voice of the sea" encodes orality even as it further focalizes Hannah's plight and her capacity to induce spatial parlance. In the fourth section of the poem, the speaker echoes the title of the collection, "And I alone escaped to tell you" (26), an expression drawn from the Bible and explained by Vicent Cucarella-Ramon as implicating "survival and the act of storytelling as a means of passing on memory and testimony" (73).[72] The verb "tell" registers orality and immediacy in a way that strengthens the poem's focus on Hannah's textualized oral testimony.

The need to tell and document the individualized experiences of slavery in the Maritimes also motivates the poetics of witnessing in "JCH Ledger: John Cooper Hamilton" and "HMS Diomede, Halifax Harbour, 13 September 1813." In these poems, perspective and orality are used to create proximate memory. In "JCH Ledger: John Cooper Hamilton," the speaker emphasizes the importance of memory and remembrance: "Someday one day / someone will know about us. / On my mother's grave I believe / this true" (27). These lines anchor Hamilton's purpose in the collection: to textualize the echoes and whispers of those whose histories have been erased or undocumented. The poem's title alludes to slave ledgers which often anonymize the enslaved or describe them using racialized language. The speaker of this poem uses the importance of oral storytelling to contextualize the dominant discourse of the ledger by humanizing those whose stories are told. The oral aesthetics of this poem manifests through run-on lines and the reporting tone of the speaker. The speaker acts like a traditional bard or

[72] The expression comes from Job 1:15. Hamilton (8) also frames the book through reference to Isaiah 24:9. These Biblical verses ground the idea of memory-making and transmission.

raconteur and tells us the story of "Dinah and her children" who were "mortgaged" as property and have recently returned, as well as the story of her cousins who "stole / freedom ten marks ago" (27). These stories that are woven into the speaker's testimony not only strengthen its oral aesthetics but also ground the production of proximate memory about the speaker's condition and the lives of those whose stories are told. In "HMS Diomede, Halifax Harbour, 13 September 1813," the speaker speaks intimately to the reader and weaves in symbols that encode the primacy of orality:

> Ambrose Smart say we about two thousand now
> all come here with little but our name never mind
> we don't know our name the one
> we had before they stole us long before I born
>
> Hear talk pretend I can't they don't want us here
> one of them say governor going to stop ships from coming
> We British subjects now pains them We the same as they. (29)

In this passage, not only do the run-on lines and lack of punctuation inscribe the aesthetics of orality, but the speaker also draws attention to orality through the expression "hear talk" and "one of them say." Hamilton's purpose in this poem is to document the experiences of those enslaved persons who arrived in Canada after the War of 1812 as refugees.[73] The poem is dated 1813, one year after the war started and in light of new Black migration to the Maritimes, and is set in Halifax, a very important city in the Canadian Maritimes. This mobilization of place and

[73] Whitefield writes about the impacts of the War of 1812 on Black people in the Maritimes. While they were not enslaved legally in Canada, their socio-economic condition resembled slavery. They worked as low-wage labourers and were treated badly, producing a new type of anti-Black racism and bitterness (86).

time into the poem grounds its evidentiary nature. The poem's speaker orally transmits the fact of their presence in Halifax through the precise number mentioned, "two thousand," and the status that was conferred on them as "British subjects." The lines of the poem flow into each other in a way that invokes speech even as they bear witness to the namelessness and precarity of the arrivals. The speaker's agency and oral transgression can be read vis-à-vis the title that names a ship, rather than the people in it. Hamilton's speaker contests this politics of naming and, indeed, the statist project of documenting history by deploying oral testimony as history that needs to be told.

Naming is deployed throughout the collection to construct the history of the enslaved and the silenced in a counterdiscursive sense. In "Next Witness," a two-part narrative poem that quotes Lord Dalhousie's words that the Black refugees from the War of 1812 are "slaves by habit and education," we encounter a named individual speaker, "Byna." The poem plays on the word "witness" in its title and through the characters that are represented. Hamilton presents the speaker, Byna, as a witness and uses her voice to challenge Dalhousie's words and restrictive understanding of witnessing. As the primary eyewitness, Byna names herself, her cousin "Sylla," and their enslaver "Joseph Wilson," who is described as "owning our bodies" (10) in the first part of the poem. This attention to naming deanonymizes the enslaved persons and facilitates proximate memory through the concrete personhood that grounds the intersubjective space shared with the reader. In addition to naming, Hamilton reconstructs the quotidian life of enslaved persons who, apart from being enslaved "forever and ever / and ever," are made to "pick vegetables," "pull apples," "cook," and "clean" for their enslaver, in addition to taking care of his children (10). These actions are grounded evidentiarily in history and place through the allusion to 1776, just after the American Revolution, and Nova Scotia.

The institutionalization of slavery is evident in the transfer of enslaved persons to the children of the enslavers as well as the legal apparatus of the state that reifies slavery. The poem invokes statist complicity through the figure of the "proper judge of Nova Scotia" (10), who bears "witness" to Byna's "property" status. Although not given an actual name, the significance of naming the role - the judge - as "the witness" is hinged on the institution represented, his embodiment of the nation-state, and the idea that enslaved people cannot bear witness. This poem subverts the idea that only specific people (White people in the Nova Scotian context) have the capacity to bear witness by focalizing Byna's testimony and making her occupy the significatory role of the "proper judge" of Nova Scotia. Byna, the witness-speaker in the poem, documents her transfer from father to son in her statement that she will pass on to Joseph Wilson's son, Jonathan (10). In the second part of the poem, where the speaker focalizes Sylla, an enslaved person and cousin to Byna, we learn that Cato, another named young boy of 10 years, might be sold by Wilson. By naming and undoing anonymity through the various names mentioned, the poem's witness-speaker insists on the humanity and perspective of the enslaved.

Naming is also used to ground the poetics of witnessing in "Tracadie," a two-part poem that unveils Manuel, an enslaved man who is renamed "John." Hamilton infuses naming with a resistive impulse through perspective and voice. The speaker, Manuel, testifies about his condition and tells us that, like Byna and Sylla, he, too, has been transferred from father to son. The images the poem invokes are meant to ground its goal of witnessing: "This land does not forgive. We cut our way / in tangled forests. Backs ache, hands, feet bruised / bodies broken. Ma name me Manuel. He call me John" (13). Here, the "land" alludes to Nova Scotia and historically interpellates the idea of supposed new beginnings that is undermined by the condition of slavery. The land represents the actual terrain of the Maritimes but also semantically

wraps in the nation-state. Hamilton revisits Canada's narrative of White statist modernity by locating and naming invisibilized Black presence like Manuel. Manuel's insistence on the name his mother gave him invites us to witness what slavery does to people – eliminating their individuality and agency through the capacity and power to name and unname. This resistive impulse that accompanies the aesthetics of naming is strengthened in Manuel's statement that "He pass on my body to his son, not my spirit" (13). The spirit here then metaphorizes a certain psychic agency that exists regardless of the material condition of being enslaved. Through naming, Manuel connects with his mother as well as his "ancestors" (13), allowing the reader to witness not only slavery but an enslaved person's minor resistance from a proximate, name-based perspective.

Hamilton's commitment to naming and perspective as elements of witnessing also manifests in the context of Black fugitivity.[74] The dominant way historians understand fugitivity in the context of slavery in Canada comes from runaway slave advertisements and fliers. Slave narratives, such as the ones we find in the United States and other parts of the world, are not abundant in the Maritimes.[75] The implication, then, is that runaway slaves in the Maritimes have not been accorded agential perspective. Hamilton's "Apollos" focalizes two runaway slaves, Cudjoe and Congo. Their recovery in this two-part poem is not only meant to allow the reader to form proximate memories of them but also to facilitate a sympathetic witnessing of their freedom narrative:

> Iron-clad wrists cuffed together,
>
> bare feet bruised bloody.

[74] Charmaine Nelson invites us to think of Black fugitivity as resistance. Robyn Maynard is of the view that codes about Black criminality and dangerous Blackness were also partly circulated through runaway slave adverts.
[75] This is not to say that such narratives do not exist. George Elliott Clarke lists slave narratives that mention Canada or are partly set in Canada (*Directions Home* 22). However, these are not specific to the Maritime region.

Cudjoe and Congo sank into
the dense forest.

Brothers
by blood and love
by soot and smoke
by iron and coal.

Leaving behind his names
and a souvenir of their trade:
a smith's nail hammered his right palm
to the bedpost where their Ma died.
Where he prayed but death would not answer. (20)

In this passage, the visual image of "iron-clad wrists" conveys the condition of slavery and surveillance, which is consolidated auditorily through alliterative plosives in "bare feet bruised bloody." The alliteration conveys the loudness and urgency of Cudjoe and Congo's escape. This alliterative urgency also factors into the second stanza, where the parallelism and imagery work to visually inscribe their shackles and their humanity. Not only are the brothers named, but the speaker also invites us to contemplate their humanity through the function of brotherhood and lexical items like "blood" and "love." As part of their freedom narrative, they drop the names their enslavers call them "Apollo 1 and Apollo 2" (20), fashion the key to their freedom, and promise each other "never to part" (20). The speaker tells us that the brothers "hammered" their enslaver's palm during their escape as part of the freedom-making act and as revenge for the

death of their mother. This act subverts the situation of slavery through the contrast between the "iron-clad wrists" of the brothers and the hammered palm of their enslaver. Hamilton makes the reader grapple with Black freedom-making as a form of resistance to slavery. Through the intimate portraiture and naming of the brothers, they emerge as counterdiscursive agents who not only testify to Canada's complicity in the slave enterprise but also individualize freedom-making in the Maritimes.

In "Martha," another Black fugitive is named within the spatial context of Liverpool, Nova Scotia. In this specific instance, Martha is the focalizer whose presence bears witness to the reality of slavery and freedom-making. In the first two parts of the poem, Martha is a shadow of herself. It is presumed that she is sick as a result of her endless wandering and digging, acts that ground a sort of subaltern melancholia that results from the experiences of slavery and racism more broadly and the death of three of her children more specifically. These deaths are encoded metaphorically through the image of digging "holes": "If she / digs deep enough, she'll find them – / all three there waiting" (24). Martha names her dead children – Miriam, Rose, and Aaron (24) – to consecrate them as victims and to offer her testimony of loss. In the third part of the poem, Hamilton deploys naming as a part of the poetics of witnessing. Joshua, one of Martha's sons, is assumed to have run away (24), and a note from Martha's apron indicates that he no longer answers the name his enslaver gave to him – Bill Hicks. This sort of disidentification with the name forced on enslaved persons by their enslavers transmits active resistance and allows the enslaved and the fugitive to emerge from the margin as a maker of their destiny, grounding the idea of naming as minority discourse.

Apart from naming, Hamilton's poetics of witnessing also manifests in the documentary aesthetics of the collection. The work fuses poetry and prose with slave sale adverts, ledgers and

runaway slave announcements. These forms are used to ground the work's poetics of witnessing by providing the rationale for its subversive politics of naming and agency. In "The Ledger," Hamilton reproduces a slave trade ledger to ground the objectification of Black bodies in dominant discourse. The poem is a graphical work that spans two pages. Objectifying and racializing words like "black wench," "thick lips," "healthy negro," "lusty squat wench," "very short," "lusty scars," "stout fine fellow" and "old & worn wench" (16-17), among others, are splattered throughout the pages to visually recreate the dehumanization, racism, sexism, and objectification that were semantically imposed on Blackness. I agree with both Cucarella-Ramon and Pilar Cuder-Dominguez's reading of this poem as a sort of countermemory-making that asks the reader to remember how Blackness has signified in terms that are "not-quite-human" (Cuder-Dominguez 6). Slavery's capacity to unname the enslaved and control their lives is also present in "1769," a work that mimics a slave sale poster. Hamilton invites the reader to contemplate the unnamed "Negro girls, aged fourteen and twelve," who will be sold to the "highest bidder" alongside items like "two hogshead of rum, three of sugar" (14). In "Freedom Runners," a runaway slave advertisement, two runaway slaves, Joseph Odel and Peter Lawrence, are declared wanted with a compensation of "TEN DOLLARS" for anyone who can catch them (28). These documentary forms strengthen the witnessing task of the collection by allowing the reader to form proximate memories of slavery in Canada in terms of how it manifested and can be found in Canada's national narrative and other dominant discourses as well as in terms of the actual testimonies of the enslaved persons that are poetically textualized.

Beyond slavery, Hamilton's work also contains sections that address the afterlife of slavery. In the second and third parts of the collection, we encounter speakers who grapple with identity and belonging in the context of a world far removed from the experience of slavery. The

speakers invite readers to bear witness to what slavery does to people on a personal and social level. In "At the Museum," school students are taken to a museum where they encounter Hitler's jawbone and a work of art featuring two Black figures named Bunga and Simba. According to Cucarella-Ramon, the artwork "facilitate[s] the diasporic memory infused with resilience that the teacher was lacking" (77). His insight is hinged on how the painting could be seen as a form of visual proximate memory of Africa and other Black domains that are removed from the speaker's. The poem's interest in this art is based on its speaker's cathartic response, which is framed as a consequence of Black enslavement:

> Bunga was a Negrito boy,
> Simba, a boy from the deep Congo.
>
> They look out at me
> with simple inquiring stares,
> wondering where I've been
> these past forty years.
> They don't recognize me at all.
> I've changed. And they?
>
> Still trapped, half naked,
> Between these musty pages. (53)

In this passage, the speaker, who is a schoolteacher, meditates on the Black figures in a very personal way. The use of "they" represents difference at various levels, and the lack of mutual recognition calibrates what slavery does to a people. The deracination of people does not only

produce forms of violence that are felt at material and intergenerational levels, but it also creates identity issues. The interior monologue of the poem's speaker and the rhetorical questions that are posed are central to the poem's poetics of witnessing. By versifying the complexity of identity in this way, the reader bears witness to the afterlife of slavery in a way that creates proximate memory. The speaker says that Bunga and Simba are still trapped, alluding to not only slavery but the use-value that Blackness has signified in the context of both slavery and exoticism. This use-value and its economic implications are strengthened further in the poem through the contrast between "White passengers above the deck" and "Negroes wearing few clothes" who "ride below" (54). The speaker's meditations present the socioeconomic structuring of Black personhood as an ongoing affair that is complexified by the speaker's distance from her African past. This poem complements "The Passage," a poem earlier discussed in this chapter, in the sense that its speaker is forced to confront her past, a past that slavery has deprived her of. Ultimately, the poem's tone invites a sympathetic response when the speaker says, "I wish I could take them home with me" (54). The concept of "home" raises the idea of a Black home in Canada and confronts narratives that exclude Blackness from Canada. This line implies the acceptance of a double home for Black Canadians. On the one hand, home is a psychic space that the speaker is unable to grasp fully as a result of the experience of slavery, but on the other hand, home also locates Blackness in Canada's statist geography in a way that contests narratives of erasure and homogeneity. The poem invites readers to witness the fracturings that slavery has created for Black Canadians.

The race-making projects of slavery and "servanthood" that defined Blackness in the Maritimes also produce "frictions of memory" and the looming presence of the past. In "Crosses to Bear," a Black man sees a burning cross on his lawn, and the "paint" melts "from his face"

(84). The cross here alludes to the Ku Klux Klan, a White supremacist organization that operated and still operates in both the United States and Canada. The poem presents this event in a casual, relaxed, almost documentary way, inviting the reader to witness the horror that the image invokes. The victim's face is painted, symbolically establishing the amnesia and new subjectivities that one can find in contemporary society. The "melting" of paint from the Black man's face thus demonstrates the presence of the past, the unresolved horror of racially motivated violence that continues to irrupt into the present in a way that reminds Black people about how race has been violently produced and weaponized. The poem also visually registers the cross and the transformation it causes as part of its poetics of witnessing. This visual register of racist violence is documented through short, imagistic lines that transform the "heat" of the burning cross into a symbol of oppression and violence. The poem's title also grounds its politics of memory and witnessing, and in that sense, those who "bear the cross" are those whose histories have been defined by statist violence that produces and defines contemporary subjectivities.

These "frictions of memory" that manifest through an "aesthetics of irruption" run through some of the personal and deeply lyrical poems in the second and third parts of the collection, and "Potato Lady" registers it more potently. In this short imagistic poem, the potato lady who holds "dusty brown potato / white eyes protruding" suddenly remembers "Mary Postell / sold for a bushel of potatoes" (85). This poem visually inscribes the afterlife of slavery based on how it irrupts into the minds of its implicated subjects, those who did not experience slavery directly but are interpellated into its socio-political and economic consequences. Through this aesthetics of irruption, the colour-coded potato that is "brown" and has "white eyes" suddenly registers in the mind of the speaker as an item that was used to commodify Black people. As a

key element of the poem's poetics of witnessing, this aesthetics of irruption grounds the past in the present in a way that allows the reader to understand the presence of the past, i.e. the past continues to haunt those implicated subjects of violent histories. The imagistic nature of the poem and the naming of a victim of slavery in the Maritimes also facilitate the creation of proximate memory of not only slavery but the way slavery continues to be mapped into Black subjectivity.

Hamilton's interest in memory, and especially the type that the work forms for its reader, runs through the collection in these moments of irruption but also in very emphatic and assertive poetic moments such as in "Solongone," a poem that bridges the past, present, and future of Blackness in the Maritimes. In this poem, the speaker foregrounds the need to remember despite being "away from home longer than my memory / my mother's memory / my grandmother's memory" (90). This poem's politics of remembrance is textualized in its long and unequal lines, visually grounding the lack of a linear and parallel notion of memory and the past. Despite the flurrying of these "frictions of memory" that permeate the subjectivities of Black Maritimers, the poem declares remembrance – "still I remember" – as the basis for awakening oneself into who the ancestors of the past "imagined" (90). Hamilton's purpose comes full circle through this final poem. Her interest in memory-making and naming as strategies of witnessing slavery and its afterlife is hinged on their capacity to bridge the past, present, and future in a way that resists state-sanctioned violence and constructs narratives of perseverance in Canada's Maritimes.

Conclusion

Both Ifowodo's and Hamilton's works have deployed the poetics of witnessing to create proximate memory. As implicated subjects in the historical events and moments that they witness, they imbue their poems with a familiar, intersubjective texture that creates the

foundation for sympathetic witnessing. While Ifowodo deploys perspective and other elements of testimonial discourse, Hamilton focuses on orality and naming as ways of memory-making. The different strategies deployed by the poets are based on their specific socio-historical milieus. For Ifowodo, it is more urgent to contest dominant discourse through subaltern polyphony. This polyphonic approach democratizes history-making and confronts statist violence through perspectival inversion. For Hamilton, both orality and naming challenge the archive and history in general by foregrounding subaltern oral history as a counterdiscourse of the nation, even as naming deanonymizes the archive and the perspective of the silenced and the erased. In both contexts, witness poetry functions as minority discourse at the level of both form and content. This chapter demonstrates how we can read texts from minoritized writers in a way that grounds a common aesthetics of minority discourse. By reading poetic witnessing as minority discourse, I underscore poetry's capacity to document historical injustice and horrors through the poetics of the poems I study. I also show the place of poetic witnessing in the counterdiscursive construction of the nation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Subaltern Melancholia and the Poetics of Lachrymation in Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* and David Woods's *Native Song*

The premise of this chapter is that statist violence produces not only minority subjectivity but also what I call "subaltern melancholia." This subaltern melancholia has aesthetic implications in the poetry of minoritized writers. More specifically, subaltern melancholia, as produced by statist violence, manifests through the "poetics of lachrymation" in the poetry of the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes. I read the poetics of lachrymation as the aesthetic manifestation of subaltern melancholia in Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* (2006) and David Woods's *Native Song* (1990). I foreground imagery, metaphor, voice, subject-position, and allusions, among other techniques, as central to the poetics of lachrymation. My reading allows us to further conceptualize the aesthetics of minority discourse as a productive comparative framework through poetry and poetics. The first segment of this chapter explores the idea of subaltern melancholia and links it to the poetics of lachrymation, while the second and third segments draw attention to selected poems and how they mobilize the poetics of lachrymation to represent subaltern melancholia in the Niger Delta and Black Maritimes. Ultimately, this chapter reflects on how the group psychology and identity of marginalized and minoritized communities produce specific aesthetic modes that can be read under the theoretical context of minority discourse.

Subaltern Melancholia and the Poetics of Lachrymation

In this section, I trace the origin of the concept of melancholia and explore its contemporary deployment in post-Enlightenment thinking and psychoanalysis. My excursion into the history of the idea grounds my theorization of subaltern melancholia in the context of

group psychology and identity. This concept is helpful in terms of how it allows us to read the consequences of statist violence and minoritization on the subjectivities and identities of people in material and aesthetic terms, including its production of the poetics of lachrymation.

In its pre-18th century usage, melancholia or melancholy was considered one of the four temperaments matching the humours. More specifically, melancholia was associated with the secretion of excess bile in ancient medicine with the implication of physical and mental imbalance (Telles-Correia and Gama Marques 1). By the European Renaissance period, the term had already been associated with the mind in such a way that Timothy Bright, in his *Treatise of Melancholy*, likens melancholia to sadness and despair. Other Renaissance thinkers like Thomas Willis, Sennert, and Sauvages define melancholia as a kind of delusion that could be caused by partial excitement (Telles-Correia and Marques 2). After the Renaissance, the term evolved to encompass a range of emotional and psychological states grounded in loss. Martin Middeke and Christina Wald tell us about the "chameleonic changes" of the concept after the Renaissance and ground the concept's implication of a "sense of loss" (3) in post-Enlightenment philosophy and the works of Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts. Their argument is that melancholia lexically responded to:

> a sense of absence or lack, a deep-rooted, often unaccountable craving or a yearning for something more, different or other; a sense of absence that is often explained as a story of a previous loss – most famously, the loss of the Golden Age and the eviction from Eden. No matter whether it relates to religion or philosophy, medicine or psychology, literature or the visual arts, this sense of loss may surface as a sense of nostalgia for a better cultural or individual past; a loss of balance, visible in a surplus of black bile, as diagnosed by the ancient theory of the Four Temperaments propagated most famously by

> Hippocrates and Galen; a loss of interest in the outer world, as described by Renaissance humanists such as Ficino and Burton; the loss of a beloved object or even the ability to love; a loss of self-esteem or of self-respect resulting in self-reproach or in the conviction of being irremediably guilty. (3)

Melancholia can thus be contextualized as a response to not only the loss of something personal but, in this context, the loss of key elements of the Renaissance past or the so-called "Golden Age." In a way, melancholia, as it manifested in the cultural production that accompanied the post-Renaissance epoch, was imbued with the iconography of loss and deprivation, especially in a society that was gradually embracing industrialization and transformation. This loss manifested in terms of temporality and the alienation of past, present, and future. In other words, to Middeke and Wald, the initial post-Enlightenment usage of the concept is anchored on the perception and lamentation of severance from the past and a deeper appreciation of the temporal limitations of the individual and society. They give examples from Heideggerian thought and the iconography of "*memento mori* or *vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*" (5) to position melancholia as a consciousness that is both individual and social – known but not always so named.

Contemporary conceptions of melancholia, however, come from Sigmund Freud's important essay "Mourning and Melancholia." In this work, Freud parallels the state of mourning with the state of melancholia and adds that melancholia is a "reaction to the loss of a loved object" (*The Standard Edition* 245).[76] This object might have material dimensions, but Freud believes that unlike mourning, where the loved object and why it induces mourning are always definitive – i.e. a relation who has died – the loved object that produces melancholia might be known but the reason why the melancholic individual feels the loss of that object is not

[76] Freud also refers to this object as "object cathexis."

definitive. The melancholic individual may know "*whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him" (245). In essence, mourning is based on actualities while melancholia is pathological, producing "painful dejection, cessation of interest in the world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (244). The point Freud makes here is that melancholic individuals cannot explicitly or consciously state the reason for their melancholia since it results from a desire to hold on to a subconscious union that is severed. Freud goes further to liken the state of melancholia to "an impoverishment of the ego" (246) that results, in part, from a strong fixation on the loved object, a severance between the self and the object, and a feeling of "being slighted, neglected, or disappointed" (251).[77] In essence, Freud thinks that melancholia is rooted in how the conscious mind (the ego) processes the disconnection of the id (unconscious mind) and the loved object, resulting in emotions and feelings that create the state of melancholia which could worsen into mania. Unlike mourning, melancholia results from a "feeling" and the impossibility of letting that feeling go despite the severance between the individual and the loved object.

Freud's theorization of melancholia is significant in how I deploy the term in this chapter as a response to specific affective temporal structures instituted by the nation-state. This response is based on the severance of minoritized people from pre-statist temporalities, places, subjectivities, and identities. This severance is instituted via violence and experiences of expropriation, destruction, removal, slavery, and racism, among others. Ultimately, melancholic subjectivity produces feelings of marginality, neglect, erasure, abandonment, and minoritization.

[77] Freud's use of the ego here deserves more context. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud gives us a tripartite model of the model human mind and locates the libido as one of the driving forces of the id – the subconscious part of the mind.

Subaltern melancholia, therefore, results from the minoritization of people and the resultant production of melancholia on a group or macro level. Unlike Freud, however, I do not think of subaltern melancholia as a pathological condition. Apart from the fact that we are, in this context, dealing with group rather than individual psychology, Freud's approach is strictly psychoanalytic. My approach is only psychoanalytic insofar as some of my ideas are drawn from Freudian psychoanalysis. I am more interested in subaltern melancholia as a state-produced and subaltern agential subjectivity that defines the experiences and cultural production of minoritized people. My approach does not involve psychoanalyzing individuals but reading the aesthetic manifestations of subaltern melancholia as part of the broader aesthetics of minority discourse.

To further conceptualize subaltern melancholia, we must turn away from Freud and consider how the concept has been deployed in other contexts. Judith Butler's engagement with melancholia in gender and sexuality studies draws from Freud in her thinking that melancholia refuses loss and instead internalizes it in the psyche (167). In essence, like Freud, she believes that melancholia results from the ego's inability to expunge the loved object completely, resulting in an "identification," which she defines as "a psychic form of preserving the object" (167). This idea of identification is significant because it implies that the object which is lost in the external sense could be internalized as an "archeological remainder" of the unresolved feelings that produce the conditions for melancholia in the first place. Butler's approach is important to conceptualizing melancholia from an identity perspective. Her position is that social identifications – in her specific case, gender and sexual identities – are anchored on melancholic identification. She gives the example of how a girl "becomes a girl" through the "prohibition that bars the mother as an object of desire and installs that barred object as a part of the ego, indeed, as a melancholic identification" (169). What is significant in this example is that prohibition,

instituted by social processes and constructs, produces gender as identity. Gender melancholy, according to Butler, becomes a productive way of describing how masculinity and femininity emerge as "the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love" (172) that are governed by desire and "superego repudiations" (172).[78] Butler also extends this idea to homosexual identities insofar as they reflect the persistence of melancholia that refuses to be repudiated.

Butler's idea is helpful because it introduces identity to how we might think about melancholia and, more specifically, subaltern melancholia. State power works to "prohibit" specific modes of being in society in order to homogenize various people, producing minorities who resist homogenization and counteract state power. These minorities or subalterns resist the repudiation of the nation-state and allow their desire for socio-political agency and fairness to metamorphose into identification. Subaltern melancholia, therefore, accompanies minority identity as a way through which minorities register their resistance to state power and their desire for that which they have lost – the affective bonds with place, common humanity, socio-economic balance, and an unbattered psyche – and also that which they may not necessarily have lost but can have and do not have. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd's thesis on the production of minorities emphasizes how dominant culture – and indeed state power – starts the process by dismantling social formations and functional economic systems as part of the broader act of deracinating or decimating people (4). These forms of violence produce subaltern melancholia that is rooted in the former modes of social formation, previous economic systems, and prior socio-political subjectivities. Ultimately, subaltern melancholia manifests through identities that resist statist violence and stage the desire for the loss that the subaltern agents

[78] Butler uses the superego based on Freudian psychoanalysis to refer to the social structures and other external realities that interact with and contain the excesses of both the id and ego. Freud maps these ideas in his *The Ego and the Id*.

experienced. These resistive identities can manifest in terms of race, ethnicity, region, and other subjectivities.

The connection between historical loss and melancholia has been explored by David Eng and Shinhee Han and by Eng and David Kazanjian. In Eng and Han's work, the idea of racial melancholia is theorized to account for the way Whiteness works for racial minorities in the United States. Specifically, they aver that the "ideals of whiteness for Asian Americans and other people of color remain unattainable, processes of assimilation are suspended, conflicted, and unresolved. The irresolution of this process places the concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework" (36). In other words, they are of the view that the unattainable desire for Whiteness produces the racial melancholia that defines the identities and subjectivities of minorities. What is perhaps most useful to this chapter in their work is the way they ground the production of melancholia in histories and experiences of "institutionalized exclusions" (39) that ultimately reflect a "collective psychic condition" (35). In essence, racial melancholia, as produced by the institutions of the nation-state in the United States context, has group identity implications that result from histories of exclusions, the slave trade, and dispossessions (39). This idea can be refracted to other national contexts.

In Eng and Kazanjian's work, melancholia is linked to spectrality and an engagement with the past. More importantly, they contend that the object of melancholia is a flexible signifier that continually shifts "spatially and temporally, adopting new perspectives and meanings, new social and political consequences, along the way" (5). This contention accommodates the significatory power of items or other elements that are central to how we can frame subaltern melancholia. For example, concrete or abstract items, icons, or indexes can be mobilized to "stand in" for the state of melancholia. These can range from ghosts and spectral phenomena to

bodies, spaces/places, and aspects of history and folklore. These objects of melancholia persist within a group to ground their desire for that which is lost or yearned for. Through those items and their iconography, the subaltern resists the national space-time and constitutes what Eng and Han call "national melancholia" (38).

Anne Anline Cheng is one of the theorists who applied the concept of melancholia from psychology to literary studies. In her work, she thinks of melancholia both in terms of state power and dominant groups who must contend with the "ghosts" of the minoritized as well as in terms of the minoritized who internalize their erasure and rejections (13). In this sense, the subaltern is both a melancholic object and a melancholic subject. As a melancholic object, they transgress the national narrative as "lost" objects that define national melancholia, but as subjects, their dispossession produces racial melancholia, to use Cheng's appellation. Cheng devotes ample attention to the politics and aesthetics of melancholic objecthood and subjecthood in the American literary canon through the examples of Asian-American and African-American literatures, providing the framework to interrogate minority literatures and their relationship with the canon.

Paul Gilroy's take on melancholia parallels Cheng insofar as he argues that melancholia could be located within the group identity and psychology of the dominant group, and more specifically, Britain, which Gilroy describes as having a "postimperial melancholia" (*Postcolonial Melancholia* 90) that is grounded in the Empire that it lost through decolonization. While Gilroy focuses on the imperial subject, Ranjana Khanna believes melancholia represents the "unresolvable conflict within the colonial subject" (30) that allows us to understand the temporalities and subjectivities created by colonialism. This double-sided function of melancholia opened up the concept for mobilization in various other contexts. For instance, Eli

Sorenson deploys melancholia in the context of "aesthetic modes of representation" and disciplinarity. Sorenson's approach relocates the idea of melancholia from the domain of people and identity to the domain of aesthetics. He argues that "postcolonial critics have tended to ignore questions of form, style, and rhetoric altogether" (9), and for him, this absence of form and aesthetics has birthed a disciplinary melancholia. To read this melancholia, therefore, is to read aesthetics and form, especially in the novel, Sorenson's preferred genre.

Before turning to the connection between subaltern melancholia and aesthetics, especially in the context of poetry and minority discourse, I want to draw attention to Winfried Siemerling's position that it is troubling to ascribe "melancholia to entire aggrieved populations" because of its homogenizing tendencies (17). His claim is motivated by his focus on Black Canadian writing and Cheng's thesis that a desired but inaccessible Whiteness is at the heart of Black racial melancholia. One of his key arguments is phrased thus: "[i]n many black Canadian texts, however, historical haunting creates ghosts that speak more directly, inviting and provoking communication. They usually seek an engagement that exceeds the hopeless, 'crushed,' and inactive state of melancholia" (19). While this argument is well-intended and meant to subvert Cheng's view of subaltern melancholia as arising from racial desire, it does not account for how melancholia encodes not only history and the past – the sense of historical loss – but also futurity and an active desire for that which statist power – the superego repudiation, to use Butler's language – has taken from the subaltern agent. Rather than ghosts and spectral phenomena alone, subaltern melancholia has a double-gazing function: it laments the sense of loss rooted in historical experiences of exclusion and violence even as it gazes at the future in terms of hope and futurity, both functioning as desires of that which could exist but does not

exist. So, while melancholia has a back-looking function, it is also a way through which subaltern groups imagine their present and futures in a positive sense.

My approach to the concept of subaltern melancholia goes beyond the articulation or representation of desire, hope, and futility and touches upon aesthetics, especially poetry and poetics. If statist power and the structuring of people within the nation-state produce minoritized groups who express subaltern melancholia, how does this melancholia manifest aesthetically? As my dissertation is concerned with the aesthetics of minority discourse, one of my main interests is how minoritized groups respond to their condition at an aesthetic level that can be read comparatively. Subaltern melancholia is a productive concept that allows us to understand the group identity and psychology of minoritized people vis-à-vis dominant cultures and state power, but it is not an aesthetic category. Scholars like Siemerling and Robert William Gray have aestheticized this category through hauntings and spectrality or as a "site of affirmation and resistance against dominant discourses" (Gray vi), especially in fiction, but their efforts represent a way of reading melancholia in fiction through the main frame of desire and the non-synchronous present as forms of resistance.[79] I draw from this framework but contend that subaltern melancholia manifests in a peculiar way in poetry through the poetics of lachrymation. While subaltern melancholia manifests at a level of subjectivity, its conscious or unconscious workings create a poetics that grounds and represents desire, hope, pain, lamentation, despair, and a sense of loss. This poetics of lachrymation co-opts poetic elements like metaphor, simile, symbolism, irony, voice, tone, subject-position, the lyrical "I," critical realism, personification, satire, imagery (especially of loss and disillusionment), and poetic structure, among other

[79] Gray calls his aesthetic category "melancholic poetics," but it differs from my work in the sense that it is primarily a psychoanalytic analysis of Canadian novels that focus on the tensions between the inner self and external reality. My approach locates subaltern melancholia in poetics at an aesthetic level.

elements, to register resistance against the structuring and production of minoritized people as subaltern citizens. The subaltern melancholia that defines minority identity manifests aesthetically in the form of poetry and, more specifically, through the poetics of lachrymation.

In this chapter's description and demonstration of the poetics of lachrymation, I am interested in the representation of statist power or "repudiation" and the ways it creates minority subjectivity through melancholy, the subtle and obvious instances of subaltern melancholia, and the way elements of this poetics work to inscribe the feeling of loss, desire, despair, and hope, or to register subaltern melancholic subjecthood as a countersubjectivity of statist nationalism or national melancholia. Through the poetics of lachrymation, poetry becomes a significant technology that grounds melancholia at an aesthetic level. Poetry's capacity to do this in very strong terms is rooted in its nature as an intersubjective form. In a way, the seemingly individual melancholia we find in poetry also represents collective, psychic melancholia which is refracted onto the reader.[80] To read this poetics of lachrymation is to read how poetry from minoritized writers encodes their struggles, histories, psychic and affective states, and everything that produces them as subaltern agents. This sort of reading can be done comparatively despite material and other differences between subaltern groups, making the poetics under study instrumental to the aesthetics of minority discourse.

In what follows, I demonstrate how Niger Delta and Black Maritime poetry reveal the workings of the Nigerian and Canadian state, respectively. By reading the poetics of lachrymation in Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* and David Woods's *Native Song*, I describe how subaltern melancholia works to transgress national and dominant narratives even as it presents the subaltern agent as not only a product of historical circumstances but also one whose

[80] JanMohamed and Lloyd express this as the forced genericization of minority subjectivity due to the historical processes that shape and produce them as minorities.

melancholia haunts the space-time of the nation and allows for the reading of desire, despair, and hope in minority discourse. Subaltern melancholia and its consequent poetics are positioned ultimately as key aspects of the aesthetics of minority discourse that operate within and against the nation-state.

The Eye (I) that Weeps: Lamenting Loss and Desire in Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*

Sophia Obi's poetry collection, *Tears in a Basket*, is divided into two parts. The first part takes the stance of public lyricism to lament the destruction and minoritization of the Niger Delta, while the second part turns toward private lyricism to register gendered desire and loss on a sensual level. In both parts, we encounter weeping speakers; in the first part, the weeping speaker is both an "I" and an "eye" through which subaltern melancholia comes alive and in the second part, the speaker is an "I" that individuates the collective, psychic condition of the Niger Delta. I focus mostly on the first part but draw examples from the second part of the collection. My position is that Obi's poems deploy the poetics of lachrymation to lament loss and desire in a transgressive and subversive way. My rationale for reading Obi's collection in this manner is hinged on not only Obi's biographical context as someone from the Niger Delta but also the actual references to the Niger Delta throughout the collection and her clear commitment to the Niger Delta as evidenced in an interview with Eyoh Etim. Furthermore, studies by Blessing Ochuko Esamagu, Bernard Dickson and Ken Uche Chukwu have contextualized the collection within the Niger Delta. In particular, they read trauma, lamentation, and lachrymation in the collection as responses to injustice and violence. Esamagu's reading focuses on the speaking voice in the collection and how it represents the individual and collective trauma of the Niger Delta people. Her reading focuses on aspects of the lachrymal nature of the collection, but she is more concerned with the "testimonial potency of literature to trauma" (95). Dickson gestures

towards an aesthetics of lachrymation, but his reading is limited to a few poems. Chukwu's analysis, on the other hand, focuses more on linguistic structures rather than poetic forms.

One way Obi anchors the poetics of lachrymation is in her deployment of a lyrical "I" whose tone is fundamentally elegiac and negational. Obi's lyrical "I" is not just the speaker but also a conduit to access the intersubjective space of the poem. This lyrical voice is an active agent that allows us to understand the production and nature of subaltern melancholia even as it becomes an "eye" through which we can access the collective psyche of the Niger Delta people. This lyrical "I" takes on multiple roles as the perspective of place and people, and these roles manifest in the context of the specific poems. In "Tomorrow's Debris," the speaker laments loss on various levels through strong visual imagery, metaphors, symbolism, and lexical items that encode lachrymation, despair, and a sense of loss that comes from statist violence. A poem of eight stanzas of unequal and unrhymed lines, the lyrical "I" navigates victimhood and melancholia:

> I pop up my head in the midst of wolves,
> who wine and dine on the toil
> of the weak and wasted
>
> From among the battered thatches
> I hear the wailing of thirsty souls
> who till and toil,
> hungry for love (12)

In this passage, the lyrical "I" emerges as a generic, collective voice whose production is linked to the production of subalternity in the Niger Delta via the collusion of the nation-state and oil

multinationals. Strong visual imagery and metaphors work to encode the image of the oppressive and repressive state. "Wolves" visually and metaphorically inscribe violence and precarity vis-à-vis the lyrical "I" who is cast as "weak and wasted" due to exploitation and alterity. The image of "battered thatches" consolidates the idea of precarity by adding an economic dimension. The battered thatches metaphorize poverty and longsuffering as conditions that define the Niger Delta. However, the poetics of lachrymation inscribes melancholia not only in terms of the images and metaphors of violence and alterity but also in terms of the hunger "for love," symbolically stating the desire for things to function harmoniously.

The melancholic dimensions of the poem govern the thematization of loss and mourning. In the third stanza, the "soil and rivers" mourn and are "heavy with the weight of the dead" (12). This personification of place, a technique that this dissertation has already associated with the aesthetics of minority discourse, not only encodes an aspect of the statist repudiation that the speaker's melancholia responds to, but it also alludes to the actual deaths and loss of lives that define the Niger Delta experience. Whether by pollution, extractive catastrophes, armed assaults, or other forms of state-sanctioned violence, the Niger Delta has been transformed into a space of death. In fact, the state's capacity to determine who lives and who dies has produced a necropolitics of oil in the Niger Delta. In this sense, I agree with Olalekan Bello that the state "spectacularizes" (5) death as part of the way it dispenses what Mbembe describes as "power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its [the state's] principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (*Necropolitics* 66). As a space where death is tied to subjectivity, history, and the sustenance of national

narratives, the Niger Delta is cast in Obi's poem as a site where mourning and loss permeate not only the psyche of the people but the geography itself.

The presence and persistence of death produce a sense of loss and despair that is rendered in the poem through lexical items like "agony," "screams," "pain," "helpless," and "desolate" (12). These words contribute to the poem's poetics of lachrymation by semantically inscribing identificatory loss, such as the one caused by the necro-state. The identification with the melancholic object here – the desire for a world where land and people are not disposable – manifests more clearly in the last two stanzas of the poem:

> Helpless,
> the old and desolate hold tight
> to the shovel of hope,
> and dig into the depths of their minds
> for reasons best known to the cultists, hoodlums, terrorists
>
> Their victory is the painful survival
> through each bombarded second
> Beneath the rusty roofs of hatred,
> the extremist survives the wasted city
> while orphans
> wail their endless agony
> among tomorrow's debris (12)

In this excerpt, helplessness and despair transform into a "shovel of hope," symbolic of the melancholic desire for a world where "cultists, hoodlums, [and] terrorists" do not cause "endless

agony." At this point in the poem, the lyrical "I" becomes an eye through which the reader witnesses and hears despair and hope as part of the psychic conditions of the people whose severance from their melancholic object produces a state of painful identification with a world and society of which they have been deprived.

The lyrical "I" in "Oloibiri" relies on history to lament the loss of the pristine past that was truncated by statist modernity and oil politics. The poem's title alludes to the town of Oloibiri in Nigeria's Niger Delta, where crude oil was first discovered in 1956. In this poem of thirteen stanzas of unequal lines, the speaker relies on history, allusiveness, imagery, simile, metaphor, and emotive lexical items to ground the poetics of lachrymation and subaltern melancholia. The first stanza draws from the history of decolonization to set the tone of neocolonialism:

> At last I am free,
> Free from bondage
> Yet,
> Desolate like a wealthy aged whore
> Wrapped in gloomy attire,
> I lay on the altar of a faded glory,
> Oily tears rolling through my veins
> To nourish households in the desert. (13)

The first two lines in this passage allude to the gains of the anticolonial movement that ultimately saw Nigeria's independence in 1960. The purpose of this allusion is to set the idea of decolonization as a melancholic object that permeates the mind of the speaker – and by extension, the people of the Niger Delta. However, this object of desire is quickly taken away

and repudiated by the politics of the state. This sort of repudiation is encoded in the deprivation of the region and the simile of "wealthy aged whore" that is paradoxically rendered as "desolate" and made to inscribe the plundering of the region by state-allowed oil multinationals visually. The poem's interest in neocolonialism is strengthened by the image of "households in the desert" that are nourished by the lachrymation in the Delta, the "oily tears rolling through my veins" (13). These images metaphorically invoke the geopolitics of Nigeria through the contrast between desert and "coast" as representations of Nigeria's geopolitics of power, especially as it pertains to its Northern geopolitical region and the Niger Delta, respectively.[81] Later in the poem, the desert is associated with "bridges and mansions" (14), alluding to the politics of development across Nigeria that neglects the Niger Delta and its oil-producing communities.

The lyrical "I" of the poem expands its range to cover land and people by the second stanza and tells us, in a personified way, that "Along my coast, / The smoke and stench / Of my crude flow desecrates / My marine reserves // This is the coated freedom of torment / When anguish enfolds joy" (13). Here, the lines between land and people blur as the speaking voice laments the pollution of the environment and the loss of its pristine condition through the play on "crude flow" that encodes both the crude-oil-polluted rivers and the staggered flow of the rivers. The speaker continues to play with the idea of freedom through the paradox in instances like "coated freedom of torment" and "anguish enfolds joy." The paradox here relays the poem's poetics of lachrymation by demonstrating the truncation of hope and the transformation from colonial violence to post-independence statist violence. This transformation provokes the

[81] Dominance and hegemony is a framework that explains Nigeria's internal politics, especially with reference to the Niger Delta. Uvie Edo has explored this in the context of Nigeria's minority question and the Niger Delta. He contends that the dominant groups in Nigeria, and especially the North (Hausa-Fulani), have benefited more from the resources in the Niger Delta at the expense of the Niger Delta people, leading him to refer to this situation as "parasitic" (110).

emotive state that is conveyed in expressions like "I frown," "I hear the echo of the years gone by," and "My generosity hangs me on the scale of extinction," among others (12). Through these versified emotional responses, the poem registers discontent but also subaltern melancholia that is based on a fixation on the lost or unreachable object or state. This melancholic despair becomes acute in the final stanza, where the tone of hope emerges as the driver of the poetics of lachrymation:

> But I am awakened by the oily tears of the Ijaw Nation
> And I hear the laughter,
> I hear the celebration,
> That joyful uproar that comes
> With controlling the blessings
> Of my God-given inheritance. (14)

These lines are significant in the way they ground the melancholic object of the speaker: "controlling the blessings / Of my God-given inheritance." This melancholic object comes out through the sense of hope and the transgressive idea of "Ijaw Nation" that contests the homogenous empty time of the Nigerian state. The speaker's melancholia here is rooted in the prior temporality of the land and the people that is violated and repudiated by the nation-state. In this lamentation of loss, hope works to ground subaltern melancholia as an identificatory process that governs the subjectivity of the lyrical "I." This sense of hope becomes a way to resist material neglect and archive what has been lost and what is desired.

In "Tears in a Basket," the titular poem of the collection, the lyrical "I" melds with the collective "we" and latches onto subject-position, personification, imagery, allusion, symbolism, rhetorical questions, and the tone of misery to foreground the poem's poetics of lachrymation.

The poem's title is symbolic of the endless lachrymation that anchors its poetics. In terms of structure, the poem is divided into five stanzas, with three of those stanzas repeated as a refrain. The poem begins with the refrain: "*We are sacrificial leeches, / waiting to be squashed*" (19). These lines are repeated three times in the poem, further concretizing the symbolism of the number three in Nigeria's national narrative as a nation of three dominant groups. Through the triple repetition and the inversion of that number, Obi contests Nigeria's dominant narrative. Furthermore, the poem's refrain deploys the metaphor of "sacrificial leeches" in a subversive way. Leeches are typically associated with parasitism and extraction. One would expect this metaphor to be mapped onto the nation-state rather than the collective voice, but Obi repurposes the metaphor and extends it to refer to the Niger Delta people through another semantic implication of leeches – small, insignificant, and easily subdued. In a sense, by repeating these lines three times and inverting the parasitic quality of leeches, Obi maps the Niger Delta as a site of extractive parasitism and as a disposable region in the eyes of the nation-state.

"Tears in a Basket" relies heavily on tone, subject-position, and historical allusions as part of its poetics of lachrymation and the construction of subaltern melancholia. The speaker reflects on the contrast between past and present:

> Winds of bitter memory slap me silly
> As I cock my ears to the drumbeats
> Of the Niger Delta.
> Naked dances and dreams have been dampened
> By the cold winds of neglect.
> Drunk with anxiety,
> I flip through the memoirs

Of our ancestors, tracing our path

To a quaint communal disorder.

I am yet to fathom the obtuse grooves

On the forehead of our forefathers

Who, unceremoniously, gave our fate away

On a stained platter of gold. (19)

I have reproduced this passage because it is important to identify its tone of misery and despair as well as its deployment of subject-position and allusion. The tone of misery and despair comes out through the elegiac and reflective nature of the lines. The personified "winds of bitter memory" inscribe the place of the past and the actions of others that may have produced the speaker's melancholia. More specifically, the speaker foregrounds the loss of "dreams" that have been caused by the "cold winds of neglect," with the image of "winds" being repeated to symbolize the impact of the neglect and loss that the speaker speaks of. Through a sort of speakerly interiority, the reader encounters and understands the subject-position of the speaker. This speakerly interiority is accentuated by active and stative verbs: "I cock my ears to the drumbeats," "I flip through the memoirs," and "I am yet to fathom the obtuse grooves." All these expressions are rendered in an active, agential way so that the reader understands the speaker's perspective and response to the historical loss that is lamented. This historical loss is evident in the line in which the speaker mentions "forefathers" who "gave our fate away." This line alludes to both colonialism and decolonization, and the speaker believes that the hegemonic encounter with the nation-state is the reason for the loss of the melancholic object that motivates her lamentation.

In the penultimate stanza of the poem, Obi deploys rhetorical questions as part of the poetics of lachrymation. These questions are meant to ground the speaker's melancholia in a way that provokes introspection in the reader and facilitates a better understanding of the melancholic object – "dreams" that have been "dampened." The questions also provide a rationale for the speaker's melancholic sadness: "How do we think / When our thoughts are images lost in muddy streams, / Dangling on hooks that mock our existence?" (19). In Freud's thinking about melancholia, there is an emphasis on "the impoverishment of the ego" (*The Standard Edition* 246) that leads to feelings of doubt, disappointment, and sadness. The questions asked in the poem reveal the workings of the ego – here, the collective ego or the individual ego as formed by the superego. The speaker's impoverished ego does not accept the possibility of thinking, singing, and even smiling, and the questions asked ground this feeling, which is itself a consequence of statist violence and neglect. The speaker alludes to the plasticity of joy or hope due to the "painful tears" that go with it. Unlike the poems that end with a tone of hope, "Tears in a Basket" uses rhetorical questions to anchor the identification with the melancholic object and to express the futility of trying to overcome subaltern melancholia when the material realities are yet to change.

Obi's deployment of the rhetorical question as a key element of her poetics of lachrymation manifests strongly in "Swamps of Our Time," a poem whose title alludes to the geography of the Niger Delta as a swampland. This poem is significantly rendered in gendered language, with Obi positioning the region as a violated woman who must contend with statist violence and multinational extractivism. The genderization that is obvious in this poem not only reveals the precarity of the Niger Delta in terms of its natural and human geographies but also works to underscore the vulnerability of women in the context of the neglect and violence done

to the region. This poem of five stanzas and unrhymed unequal lines begins with a simile that likens the Niger Delta to "my mother's love," fundamentally inscribing the speaker's melancholic object early. Other similes strengthen this connection between land and motherhood: "Like my mother's smiles, / She welcomes, from molar to molar, / Traitors who danced to the rhythm of / Her broken heartbeats" (18). The speaker's contention here is that the Niger Delta is a region that welcomes all yet continues to be violated and assaulted on all fronts in the neoliberal capitalist moment. This repeated violation is grounded in strong visual images: "With the milk from her breast, / She moulds dusty earth into mansions, / While her children peep through tattered huts" (18). Here, the image of milk metaphorizes crude oil and other resources extracted from the region in its production as an oil minority zone. The contrast between the mansions that "she moulds" and "her children" who "peep through tattered huts" sets the stage for the poem's critical realism.

In the second stanza, the speaker further concretizes her melancholic object: "She marches with shameless pride on polluted soil / That once fed naked children / Who giggled in huts built with thatches of communal peace" (18). The speaker's fixation here is on a pre-statist temporality that fostered economic prosperity. This is an example of JanMohamed and Lloyd's claim that minority subjectivity responds to the "material deracination from the historically developed social and economic structures in terms of which alone they [minoritized people] 'made sense'" (4). Ultimately, being unable to let the melancholic desire go, the speaker poses rhetorical questions that ground both the poetics of lachrymation and subaltern melancholia in the poem:

> O' delta of our beginnings, how has the past left you?
>
> How is the present treating you?

What is the future of your ecosystem?

Can you turn back the swamps of time?

Can you chasten the sands of life?

Can you command the rivers to be still? (18)

The questions posed by the speaker invite consideration of her subjectivity as someone from a place that has been historically excluded, neglected, and violated. The first three questions ground this through the contrast between past and present, as well as the reflection on the region's future. The apostrophe in the first question creates a sense of who the assumed recipient of the question is, even as it strengthens the melancholic desire in a personal, intersubjective sense. The last three questions ground the speaker's confrontation with the irreversible situation that has produced her melancholia. This irreversible source of melancholia is anchored in the impossible images of turning back time and commanding the rivers to be still. In essence, by posing these questions, the speaker reveals her subaltern condition and the seeming impossibility of getting her melancholic desire for the countertemporality of the Niger Delta, which, despite its seemingly impossible recovery, continues to contest national space-time.

Obi's gendered approach to subaltern melancholia manifests more strongly in the second part of the collection. In this part, the privatist turn of the speaker individuates the condition of the Niger Delta but also allows the reader to read the individual as a microcosmic representation of the collective psyche of the people. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (17) and JanMohamed and Lloyd (10) tell us that minority literatures always take a generic, collective voice, even in instances where they would seem individuated. In Obi's poems, the individual is transformed into the collective and the libidinal desire of the individual anchors subaltern melancholic desire

in the poems. In "Discovery Channel," the speaker sensualizes and sexualizes her encounter with an unnamed lover who can be read as a symbolic and anthropomorphic version of the nation-state. In this four-stanza poem, the speaker draws from memory to inscribe her first night with this lover and the aftermath of that encounter. Through an aesthetics of sensuality, Obi's speaker maps out the fraught and extractive nature of the relationship between the state and the minoritized people of the Niger Delta[82]:

I felt your lips on mine
sweet and wet like the white
of a freshly boiled egg

That somber night
when you kissed me
the windows of my soul
rolled down smoothly
without prompting

Life acquired a new meaning
that night you explored
my every pore.
And ever since,
your discovery has left me

[82] I use aesthetics of sensuality to refer to the deployment of literary forms and elements, especially imagery, that represent sensual, sexual, and tactile experiences. N.V. Raveendran has used this expression to refer to the aesthetics of Kamala Das, an Indian female poet.

luminous with joy,

like an oyster shell

by the shores of Oloibiri. (48)

In this passage, the speaker introduces a sexual experience that is based on a primitive kind of desire governed by sensual images of acts like kissing. The deeply sexual undertone of the poem suddenly extends beyond the personal into the space of the metaphorical in the last stanza where the speaker alludes to the night when her "pores" were "explored." The significance of those words is hinged on the extractive metaphor that is coded into the idea of "pores" and "explored." This segment of the poem alludes directly to the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956, and this allusion is strengthened by the simile in the last lines that compares the feelings that accompany the discovery to "an oyster shell / by the shores of Oloibiri" (48). By naming Oloibiri in the context of the private, Obi brings the sensual experience of the speaker and the politics of oil exploration and exploitation into the picture. This poem deploys the metaphor of love and sex to represent the start of the fraught relationship between the Niger Delta and state-sanctioned extraction. Throughout the lines, desire manifests affectively as part of the poetics of lachrymation, but this desire is distilled into the tactile images of romantic contact and extraction.

In "Night Time Robber," the sensual images transform from the positive and hopeful tone in "Discovery Channel" into a metaphorical versification of what Philip Aghoghovwia, following Amitav Ghosh, calls the "oil encounter" (10). In this six-stanza poem, the speaker genderizes the sensual encounter in strong images that ground an aesthetics of sensuality: "You crack and tear through / the core of my womanhood / with the fierce and urgent plunge / of your wakefulness" (49). These lines construct the dominant "other" in phallic terms through the

sensual encounter described. These images take an almost pornographic dimension in the third stanza where the speaker talks of "Silky, wet strokes / blending answering the craving / of a re-echoed come" (49). I suggest that this near-pornographic representation metaphorizes the relationship between land and agents of extraction, which are usually phallic in nature. In the middle of this seeming union between the speaker and her lover, or between the Niger Delta and its agents of extraction, the final stanza interrupts the bliss to inscribe awareness of the condition of subalternity: "I have come awake since then" (49). This sense of awareness grounds the poem as a versified desire of what was expected at the point of contact between land (and people) and the nation-state (and its politics of extraction). The entire poem becomes lachrymal because of its fixation on the speaker's desire – a desire that is rooted in the current reality of the speaker. The last line deploys irruption to convey the poem's poetics of lachrymation. This sensual and sexual desire microcosmically coded into the speaker and her lover continues to metaphorize the fraught relationship between people and state in other poems in the collection, inscribing the place of fixation and longing in how we can conceptualize the poetics of lachrymation and subaltern melancholia in Obi's collection.

The Many Places and Faces of Despair and Desire: Black Realism and Subaltern Melancholia in David Woods's *Native Song*

In this section, I read Woods's *Native Song* as a representation of the multifaceted dimensions of subaltern melancholia in the context of the Black Maritimes. My reading is based on Woods's capacity to deploy critical realism to versify the lives of Black subjects in Nova Scotia in a multidimensional and multiperspectival way. I contend that Woods's poetics of lachrymation is anchored on his ability to present and reflect on the Black experience in Canada critically through realism, metaphor, symbolism, satire, subject-position (and focalizers), and

historical allusions. *Native Song* is an interesting collection of lyrical, narrative, and folk poems and paintings that present a near-anthropological portrait of Black Nova Scotians. This relatively lengthy collection is divided into five parts that touch on various topics and themes. The first part, "Discovery," is more lyrical in style, and the speaker reflects on various aspects of Black existence in Nova Scotia. The second part, "Reality Songs," has lyrical and narrative poems which present a kaleidoscopic image of various Black identities and subjectivities. The third segment, "Voices," contains mostly short and folkish poems that draw significantly from orality and folklore. The last two segments, "Desiderata" and "Native Song," contain reflective poems and paintings. My reading takes, as its point of departure, the description of the collection on the back page as containing works that "celebrate identity and shout despair; they speak the dreams of a new freedom while contemplating the hardship of the past. They take the reader into the hearts and lives of the people of Uniacke Square, North Preston, Hammonds Plains, Weymouth Falls and Black communities throughout Nova Scotia." In essence, the collection invites the reader to approach it from the perspective of Blackness in the Maritimes.

Woods's poetics of lachrymation is tied to his interest in Black realism. Throughout the collection, he crafts images of places, people, and realities that are central to understanding Black subjectivity in Nova Scotia. By Black realism, I mean a representational and aesthetic mode that focuses on the social totality of Blackness. This aesthetic mode operates through a semi-detached third-party perspective that is grounded in actual socio-historical conditions. While my usage of the term accounts for the representation of the Black working class, I do not use the term in the same sense as socialist or social realism. I am guided by Christine Wooley's thesis on African-American realism as a kind of literary realism that invites us to consider the realities that African-American authors "choose" to construct in their quest for social justice

(186-187). In the same vein, I use Black realism to ground Woods's deliberate politics of representation as a way he constructs Black socio-economic and political realities in the quest for social justice.[83]

Place is central to the construction of subaltern melancholia in Woods's collection. He imbues place with a sense of both despair and desire, and this is mapped into his poetics of lachrymation. In "Preston," a five-stanza poem that alludes to Woods's hometown of Preston, the speaker unravels subaltern melancholia through a lyrical meditation on Black place. Preston, especially North Preston, is considered a town with one of the largest Black populations in Canada (Provo; Livingston). Historians like James Walker and Daniel McNeil have emphasized the importance of this town in terms of its significant Black population and the formation of Black Nova Scotian culture and identity. In Woods's poem, Preston is granted personality and subjectivity in a way that speaks to Black reality in the town. The speaker romanticizes the town and produces it in the poem as a melancholic object, even as the town exhibits its own melancholia. In the first three stanzas, the town's neglect and struggles are inscribed through personification and subordinating conjunction:

> Our beauty lies in it,
> Though it often fronts a face of horror
> That darkens my eyes with shame.
>
> Our hopes and dreams enrich
> Its every corner,
> Though it often fails to bloom

[83] George Elliott Clarke describes Woods as having a "gift for realistic description" (*Odysseys Home* 303).

And leaves me tangled in a mass of despair. (13)

In this passage, Preston is both personified and objectified at the same time. The personification comes out through expressions like "fronts a face of horror," signalling its agency as a town with its own melancholia, as produced through decades of neglect, erasure, and race-inflected perception. Apart from personification, plant metaphor is used to ground the melancholic subjecthood of the town through expressions like "fails to bloom" and "leaves me tangled," all conveying the truncated prospect of this place that is alive at some level. At the same time, the speaker describes the town as an "it," hinting at its role as a melancholic object as well. This melancholic subject-objecthood works as a strategy to accentuate the representation of despair and desire. On the one hand, the speaker's melancholic desire comes alive through the town's transformation from a place of "beauty" to a site of "shame" and "despair." On the other hand, the town's despair is encoded in its personified "face." This melancholic subject-objecthood is strengthened by the subordinator "though," which is repeated thrice in the poem. The poem's poetics of lachrymation latches onto this word in the sense it signals the contrast between the speaker's desire in its pre-repudiated state and the state of loss that produces melancholia. It also signals the shift from objecthood to subjecthood in terms of the town's personified response to the loss of its ideal state.

In the last two stanzas, the speaker and the town merge into one subjective, collective voice to inscribe the ultimate melancholic desire in the poem: "Yet this is the measure of all / for which we stand, / A native-land – / wealthy with beauty, comedy, / joy, romance, / moves with its own style / against the dint of the modern world" (13). The change in the speaker's tone from utter despair to a seemingly positive desire strengthens the poetics of lachrymation by weaving despair into hope. The subordinating conjunction is also absent in the last two stanzas, allowing a

fuller picture of melancholic desire to emerge and producing identification and subjectivities that contest the "dint of the modern world." By latching onto the immaterial essence of the town, the poem's speaker portrays the reality of Blackness in its quest to thrive in a clime that is hostile to its material desires.

Woods's interest in Nova Scotia as a place to understand Black Maritime reality informs the poetics of lachrymation in "Nova Scotia Reality Song." The poem's title not only alludes to the Province of Nova Scotia but also declares its aesthetic project of Black realism. A relatively long poem of fourteen stanzas, it relies on historical allusions, imagery, lyrical presence, and a conversational run-on line style to drive its representation of subaltern melancholia. The poem's tone of despair is predicated on the events that are versified and the refrain: "I CRY - / Feeling the depth of black pain" (37-39). This refrain constitutes the heart of the poem's poetics of lachrymation, and the foregrounded word "CRY" strengthens the lachrymal nature of the poem. The rationale for the tears is provided in terms of "black pain" in Nova Scotia. The refrain acts as a subaltern voice that reflects on various aspects of Black reality rooted in place. In the first stanza, a Black couple is getting married, and White passersby call them the n-word without provocation (37). This stanza sets the tone of the poem as an interrogation of racism, statist violence, and other forms of repudiation that create the melancholic identity and desire to which the speaker responds.

Historical allusions engineer the representation of melancholia and the poetics of lachrymation. All through the poem, history comes alive at an affective level. Allusions are made to the formation of an "African Baptist Church" in 1852, Viola Desmond's resistance against racial segregation in 1947, and the destruction of Africville in the 1960s (37-38). These allusions demonstrate instances of statist violence that have contributed to the development of subaltern

melancholia. In particular, the poem's representation of the destruction of Africville spells out the material and psychic consequences it had on the people:

In 1962 –

The city of Halifax approved the destruction

of Africville,

Africville was a black community on the rim

of the Bedford Basin,

It was founded in the 1800s and ignored by

the city.

There was no sewage,

- no lights,
- no sidewalks
- no water

In Africville,

The people did the best they could –

Building from their dreams and industry

They built a church – houses for their families.

Starting in 1960 they listened as their homes

were called "shacks,"

Their community, "Canada's worst slum,"

By 1969 houses, church, people were all gone. (38)

This passage exemplifies what Clarke describes as "Woods's bleak vision" in the way it conversationally versifies the destruction of Africville. Woods uses simple images and a

conversational style deftly to inscribe the precarity of Africville even before its demolition. The historical allusion to the 1800s clears the ground for the representation of the deprivation and exclusion suffered by its residents on a material level. The absence of infrastructure and the dismissal of the community as a slum all work as part of the poem's Black realist aesthetic. The material deprivation and destruction ultimately create a psychic sense of immense loss that is coded into the rhetorical questions that follow. Through the questions, the speaker carves the image of loss and the impact of statist violence on both the individual and collective psyche of Black people in the Maritimes. The speaker asks, "Where is my way in Nova Scotia? / In whose words will I find comfort? / In whose love-filled hands will I find my peace?" (39). These questions are followed by the lexicalization of lachrymation in the subsequent line: "I cry out for dignity" (39). The poem also deploys lyrical presence to inscribe the affective aspects of its poetics of lachrymation. The speaker says, "I was there when Africville was taken … / And I am there now" (39). This lamentation, facilitated by the lyrical voice's textualized nearness to the lost object cathexis, not only brings the reader into the intersubjective space of the poem but also grounds the speaker's melancholic desire – the spatio-spiritual importance of Africville and other historical ways of being that have suffered statist violence.

In "For Old Men on Gottingen Street" and "Instruction," the speaker focuses on place-specific violence that impacts Black people. These poems deploy place as the spatial context for Black melancholia in the context of deprivation, violence, and exclusion. In the long six-stanza poem "For Old Men on Gottingen Street," imagery is deployed to ground Gottingen Street, a predominantly Black neighbourhood in Halifax, as a site of material and psychic misery. In the "banal avenues" of the city, there are the "sad faces of old men" who are in a state of despair as they cling to their "old guitars, / While the modern world / Lifts its limbs of terror" (73). The

visual images in the poem accentuate the tone of despair and the desire for a prior temporality. This desire is couched in the symbolism of the "old guitar" as an object that semantically invokes joy and communal happiness that is rooted in the past. The poem suggests, through these images and symbols, that the old men in the highly racialized Gottingen Street are melancholic insofar as they desire a different socio-economic reality. However, their desire is repudiated consistently by the "noises" that rise from "other places" (73). Here, the auditory image of the guitar and "old voices" is contrasted with the "noise" that emerges from other parts of the city. "Noise" represents the repudiatory force that drowns desire in Gottingen Street. It also indexes both material and psychic violence and ultimately produces "drowned and unheard" voices.

Apart from the old men's melancholia, which anchors the poem's Black realist aesthetics, the speaker also inscribes his melancholia in terms of how the images of old men affectively imprint despair and desire on his mind. The speaker enters the intersubjective space of the old men and "feels" their flesh "Rubbing against each aspect / of myself, / Bullying me with each uncovering / of knowledge / To save old men / In their drunken wills" (73). The images in this passage are potent and meant to produce an affective response in the reader. The speaker's ego is impoverished by the image of the old men, and he ultimately clutches a strong desire to "save" them. The old men's melancholia reinforces the speaker's melancholia, and he "finds no peace" in this strong image of "black and broken" men who represent "the hopes of the dead" (73-74). What the poem suggests at this point is that there is a cycle of melancholia that drives Black subjectivity. The reference to the "dead" implicates the hope and aspiration of those Black forebears who suffered slavery and other forms of racialized violence. Their melancholic desire for positive Black futurity is temporally entangled with the old men's melancholic fixation on a

joyous past and the speaker's present melancholic messianic desire. This transtemporal state of melancholia drives the poem's poetics of lachrymation.

In "Instruction," Woods relies on apostrophe to confront the affective temporal structures that produce place as a catalyst of subaltern melancholia. Here, the speaker speaks directly to Nova Scotia on behalf of its racialized residents. The charge is for Nova Scotia to "Love your children – all of them. / Give them a place in your / gilded palaces, / As quickly as you offer space / in your public spots" (98). Here, the imperative tone creates a sense of urgency, anger, and despair, even as the speaker directly advocates for equality and social justice. This advocacy becomes the melancholic object of the poem, and it is further grounded in the forms of violence experienced by Black citizens: "rejection," "rape of pride," "ruthlessness and disgrace," and "a heinous crime" (98). These words calibrate the production of subalternity, especially when contrasted with the "gilded palaces" that Black people are excluded from. Through the apostrophe, Woods's poetics of lachrymation becomes a stylistic way through which he represents Nova Scotia's racialized politics and its production of minorities via statist violence and exclusion.

Apart from place, Woods also attaches his poetics of lachrymation to people. In this sense, he represents simple Black individuals who either ground subaltern melancholia from a perspective of subjectivity or are themselves melancholic objects in the poems. In "For Slaves," Woods crafts a paean for his enslaved ancestors, who represent transtemporal desire and are central to the understanding of subaltern melancholia in the Maritimes. In this short two-stanza poem, subject-position, run-on lines, and images operate as part of its poetics of lachrymation. The speaker begins by affirming his subject-position vis-à-vis the topic of the poem:

Slaves are my Gods,

Titans of pained worlds,

Builders of new earth,

How they braved in unloved ambition,

And toiled in loveless sun,

How they fuelled the glory of

Other men's dreams,

And constructed palaces of wonder,

For those less than themselves. (17)

Here, the speaker appears to be inverting personal and collective history to create a sense of subversive melancholic desire. He refers to the enslaved people as "Gods," with the initial letter capitalization textually affirming this quality. Their condition as enslaved and tortured people is inverted and recovered in terms of braveness and selfless heroism. He also refers to the oppressors as being "less than themselves." This subversive melancholic desire for the humanity of the enslaved registers a transgressive identification with the enslaved as the object cathexis that produces melancholia. In a sense, the speaker's positive recovery is informed by a sense of historical loss and marginality that needs to be reimagined and archived in the psyche. This archival work of melancholia has implications for Black futurity as the speaker dreams of a "pure and gentle earth – / Where all lived in freedom" (17). These last lines of the poem unveil its main purpose – to archive slavery psychically as the melancholic object cathexis that should inform the future of the Maritimes.

Woods's strength in representing the lives of ordinary Black subjects is evident in the poems about individual figures. In "For Starr Jones," a seven-stanza poem, Woods paints the image of a Black woman who grounds the idea of subaltern melancholia for the reader. The

woman functions in the poem as a focalizer for Black female reality in the Maritimes. The poem relies on imagery, repetition, and diction to ground its poetics of lachrymation. The speaker maps melancholic despair onto both the woman's condition and his response to her through vivid images:

> I have heard her cry
> from the tear-stained room,
> I have seen her devotion
> to an aroused male fool,
> I have seen her naked
> Sit silent on a bed,
> I have seen her in desperation
> Fall to her knees in prayer. (28)

In this excerpt, we are presented with the image of an abused woman in a state of despair. The images are visual and auditory and portray an abjected figure who relies on prayers to keep going. At this point, the poem does not exactly tell us the cause of her sadness; however, this changes in the fifth stanza when the speaker reveals the "burden of poverty" and "loneliness" as the more immediate reasons. However, these conditions are only symptomatic of the greater structures that have produced the woman as a lachrymal subaltern agent. The repetition of "I have seen her often – / And listened to her cry" audiovisually inscribes her state as an existential state. The lexical range of the poem also strengthens this point through words like "cry," "silent," "cheap," "poverty," "hard," "cruel," "hunger," "object," and "whip," among others (28-19). These words contextualize the woman's condition as an existential one that speaks to Black precarity. These words express the cause of the woman's melancholia in a way that paints a

complex picture. The woman's melancholic longing for something that is absent in her existence provokes and stimulates the speaker, for whom the woman is a melancholic object that he cannot expunge from his consciousness.

Woods's concern with Black melancholia also comes alive in "Mama," a relatively long poem of ten stanzas with both a lyrical and narrative posture. Woods deploys biphony and a call-to-action tone to drive his poetics of lachrymation in the poem. In the work, the speaker and his mother are given voice and perspective as they reflect on the condition of Black people in Nova Scotia. The speaker begins by listing those relatives whose melancholia has either been fatal, acute, or even pathological: "Grandma dying an alcoholic / death, / Cousin Tony in Jail, / Aunt Margaret on the verge of / going insane, / These things had been laid out / in some pre-ordained scheme" (32). By listing specific figures in this way, the poet animates the Black realist aesthetic of the poem in an imagistic and conversational way. The poem's locale, "Guysborough County," is also significant since it is mentioned as a key part of the melancholic identification that comes out in the poem. This locale, based on an actual place in Nova Scotia with a significant Black population, is described in terms like "black woods, / desperate loneliness, / and cold shacks … / and white aggression" (32), hinting at the systemic exclusion of Black bodies from the body-politics that constitutes the place. The call-to-action tone emerges amid this versified melancholia and invites extensive action: "Someone should care for black people / Someone should speak for their / long-cherished hopes and dreams / Someone should rebel against / their hideous oppression in white towns" (33). On the one hand, this tone invites actual readerly action, but on the other hand, it also inscribes the purpose of the poem as one that draws attention to melancholic subaltern subjects who are forced into states of extreme anxiety and despair due to the actions and politics of a racializing nation-state. The poem's biphony allows the speaker's

mother to reflect on her melancholia by stating some of the issues Black Nova Scotians have to contend with. The poem's biphony manifests when the mother's voice breaks through the speaker's voice through direct speech and in quotation marks:

> "And you remember Mrs. Desmond's girl
> Daisy,
> Well she's living with this old man
> in Tracadie."
> "And Anna Morris is getting married
> in New Glasgow,
> Her husband's a drunkard, though."
> "And Cousin Viola got some kind
> of blood disease,
> The church is having a fund-raiser
> to send her for operation in Toronto." (33)

The mother not only paints the lives of simple Black individuals but also raises issues ranging from early marriage and drunken husbands to illnesses that require fundraisers to treat (33). Her voice is fragmented through the various quotation marks that convey a sense of irruption and abrupt entry into the poem. The purpose of this biphony is to allow the reader to understand how subaltern realities – Black realism – shape and produce subaltern melancholia at the level of both individual and collective psyches.

Some of Woods's poems privilege the collective pronoun "we" instead of the "I." These poems are significant because they ground subaltern melancholia in a self-conscious perspective. They are generally more reflective and scathing in their representation. In "Out-Town," and

"Native Song," the titular poem, the collective speaker paints complex and multifaceted images of the Black condition in Nova Scotia. In the former, visual images, symbols, and historical allusions reveal the poetics of lachrymation and its centrality to the representation of subaltern melancholia. In this five-stanza poem, the speaker relies heavily on illusions and how they both obscure and present melancholia:

> We laugh in old ritual
> Umbilical attachments of the soul,
> Uncle Tony's energetic dances
> Grandma's ebullient laughter,
> Banjo music and comedic
> Ravings,
> Attachments that maintain a romantic notion
> That a place can exist wholly apart
> Requiring only the single talent
> of human love. (77)

The pristine images in this passage convey a sense of communal identity and warmth that is rooted in "old ritual," alluding to the Loyalist culture that has been maintained in the Maritimes. Images of laughter, comedy, music, and dance all encode and symbolize this communal idea that is illusory. The illusory nature of these images is strengthened via the contrasting images in the following stanza: "But drunken men, and flamboyant cars / and brutalized women, / Vomit like a sick dog on this paradise, / And young children – babies in their / stomachs / show how defenceless we are, / how wild and ridiculous / we can become" (77). These contrasting images represent the "modern world" as the irruptive force that reveals the limits of perceived communal

joy. The speaker's interest in modernity and its statist politics is hinged on the people's melancholic fixation on an illusion that blinds them from their reality as "A battered people tossed into obscene pits, / Made poor, dulled of drive, stupefied. / Dragged into the modern world on a hook of cruelty, / Losing eyes. No longer able to see" (77). In these lines lies the poem's argument that subaltern melancholia irrupts into the illusion of contentment and reveals the historical production of alterity. The poem textualizes the links between subaltern melancholia and historical injustice, especially in the context of Black subjects whose material conditions inform forms of melancholia as exemplified in the simile and symbolism of a "sick dog" in an illusory paradise.

The speaker goes further to emphasize the need to move beyond the fantasy of contentment and pay attention to the realities that shape and continue to produce Black people. In a way, we can read the speaker's motivation here as hinged on the need to forge strong and active melancholic identification with that which has been lost. The speaker's charge that "sadness" still "breathes / in this land / Of a people lost to themselves" (78) invites a conscious archiving of what Black Maritimers have lost through their chequered history in Canada. The imperative tone of the collective speaker subverts the "fantasy image" that may produce superficial joy but is fundamentally tied to "complete misery." In essence, the speaker reveals the melancholic desire latent in illusory joy even as he advocates for a more active engagement with this melancholia as a subversive strategy.

Woods's concern with illusions and an active cognition of one's melancholic state is also present in "Native Song," a ten-stanza poem that declares its purpose as erecting "new hope in the dark" (101). The poem begins with a collective voice that laments the closure of the Black mind by racist education and draws attention to the "old men and old women" who know the

"horror of those days," alluding to historical experiences of racial segregation and racism in the Maritimes. These "old men and old women" ultimately had their "hope" and "sense of freedom" crushed by various forms of racialized violence. What is most peculiar in this poem is that the collective voice transforms into an individual, lyrical voice who appears to distance himself from the subtle subaltern melancholia of his society in order to appropriate the revolutionary nature of conscious melancholic subjectivity. In other words, the collective speaker is fragmentized from melancholic objecthood and becomes an active and individuated melancholic subject whose object cathexis is "To break these Nova Scotian / chains" (102). Through the active voice, the speaker registers his agency:

> And I will fight – as wickedly
> as the devil fights …
>
> I will sing a song
> And that song will be beautiful,
> And that song will be great
> And no man on earth will be able
> to block it from his ears.
> And this will be my monument
> Collected from the beauty and
> pain,
> Of all those who lived
> and died
> In the hungry chambers

of the black dream. (102-103)

In this passage, the speaker removes himself from what he perceives as a "mist" above "the land" and declares his commitment to the "archeological remainder," to use Butler's term, of the loss of self and dignity created by statist repudiation in the context of Canada. This commitment is inscribed through strong audio-visual images, repetition, and a revolutionary tone that embody not only the poetics of lachrymation but also the speaker's project of negating his negation as a minority subject. The poem, as the titular poem, also gives us Woods's ultimate thesis in the collection that subaltern melancholia is present in all aspects of Black Maritime subjectivities, but it needs to be consciously tapped for positive Black futurity.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the representation of subaltern melancholia through the poetics of lachrymation in Niger Delta and Black Maritime writing. Both Obi and Woods deploy the poetics this chapter describes to imagine the nation counterdiscursively and to affirm the perspective of minoritized people. In Obi's poetry, weeping is mobilized as a paradigm to reveal the production and consequences of subalternity in the Niger Delta. Although Obi's poetry is more hopeful, hope manifests as the conscious and subconscious articulation of melancholic desire. Furthermore, Obi's poetry deploys lyricism microcosmically to ground the collective and psychic experience of the Niger Delta. On the other hand, Woods's poetry has a potently bleak vision that is motivated by the realities of Black people in the Maritimes. His interest in Black realism informs his representation of melancholic object-subjecthood. In a sense, the places and people encountered in Woods's poetry are melancholic objects that are central to the speaker's melancholia, but in another sense, the places and people represented are also imbued with melancholic subjectivity in how they stage desire, despair, and longing.

Despite the minor differences in how Obi and Woods represent subaltern melancholia, they are united in their poetics and, indeed, in their greater aesthetic choices. It is this aesthetic unity that motivates this dissertation's commitment to an aesthetics of minority discourse. By comparatively reading the way subaltern melancholia manifests through the poetics of lachrymation, we come to a formal understanding of minority discourse as a transgressive discourse.

CODA

Minority Discourse as World Literature

This coda reflects on the sustained argument of this dissertation and explores the capacity of minority discourse to function as a methodological intervention in world literature studies. This dissertation's interest in the aesthetics of minority discourse has motivated comparative readings of poetry from Nigeria's Niger Delta and Canada's Black Maritimes in terms of how they aesthetically encode statist violence and minority subjectivity. I theorize the aesthetics of minority discourse as a comparative category that allows us to understand different minority groups and their subjectivities through the frames of poetry, region, ethnicity, and race. I have fleshed out this argument throughout the four chapters of this work by focusing on place and the poetics of place as an index of minority discourse, subaltern place and the poetics of subalternity, history and poetic witnessing, and subaltern melancholia and the poetics of lachrymation.

In the first chapter, I argue that place manifests at an aesthetic level in minority discourse. This argument is based on the links between minoritized people and the places they occupy. I read place in terms of geographical place and other kinds of positionalities. My reading of Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta* and George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls* reveals how indexical place can be read in terms of its imbrication with minority subjectivity and its transgressive function in the context of national narratives. My reading focuses on the poetics of place as an element of the aesthetics of minority discourse through concepts like site specification and site sociality. I read the poems as actual sites that reveal the workings of place formally and through its representational politics. In the second chapter, I extend the idea of place as an index of minority discourse and theorize the subalternity of place in terms of its implications of agency, resistance, and the poetics of subalternity in Ojaide's *Delta Blues and*

Home Songs and Clarke's *Execution Poems*. My reading of these collections underscores the way place comes alive at an aesthetic level through forms like personification, voice, and perspective. Through the poetics of subalternity, violated, criminalized, and executed place is given perspective and agency to lament and resist its condition of subalternity. In the third chapter, I focus on the persistence of history in minority discourse through the concept of poetic witnessing. I read the poetics of witnessing in Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* and Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* in the context of statist violence and extractive catastrophes in the Niger Delta and slavery and its afterlife in the Maritimes, respectively. I emphasize the place of subaltern polyphony, naming, and orality as key elements deployed by the poets to facilitate a proximate memory of historical events. My fourth chapter turns towards subaltern melancholia as a condition produced by dominant power in its violent acts on minoritized people. I read how subaltern melancholia manifests through the poetics of lachrymation in Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* and David Woods's *Native Song*. By reading instances of despair, longing, desire, hope, and misery in the collections, this chapter frames melancholia as a comparative category that allows us to understand minority discourse.

Throughout this dissertation, I have gestured towards the place of minority discourse in world literature studies. My claim in this regard is that the comparative value of minority discourse allows it to function as world literature. Theories of world literature (David Damrosch, Frederic Jameson, Pascale Casanova, Wesheng Deng et al., among others) have focused on the nation-state as a category that mediates how world literature is circulated, received, selected, and read. While there are historical and logical reasons for thinking of the world through the lens of the nation-state, there are also issues with such a model, especially in a postcolonial context where the nation-state is an invented and sometimes arbitrary category or in a racialized context

where the nation-state encodes racializing discourses that include and exclude specific bodies from the dominant narrative. Approaches that circumvent the nation-state (Jahan Ramazani, Amatoritsero Ede, Christopher Hill, Gisèle Sapiro, Cilias Kemedjio, and the Warwick Research Collective) complicate the issue by going beyond the nation-state through poetics (Ramazani), the world-system (Warwick Research Collective), and even through concepts like Global Anglophone and Afropolitanism (Ede) and Global Black (Kemedjio). However, this complication comes at the cost of not interrogating how the nation-state shapes and structures people fundamentally. The thinking that the nation-state can be escaped through broad categories and subjectivities undermines how these categories and subjectivities sometimes respond to statist violence in the first place. To better appreciate the transnational or to read transnationally, it is important to interrogate specific responses to the nation-state that have comparative, transnational value. This dissertation argues throughout the chapters that statist violence, especially in postcolonial and racialized contexts such as Nigeria and Canada, respectively, has motivated poetry that can be read as minority discourse because of how it transgresses coloniality and violence aesthetically. I read minority discourse as an interrogation of the nation-state and a representation of subjectivities that have comparative, transnational value.

I am not completely averse to the nation-state. Scholars like Susan Andrade foreground the importance of the nation-state in reading African texts in the context of anti-colonial and independence movements in Africa, and there are reasons to agree with the importance of nationalism and the category of the "national" in that context (2), but her decision not to problematize the national space is largely a by-product of her focus on how "the moment of national sovereignty offered the possibility for transformation of various social relations" (29). Her exploration of the gendered space of the nation justifies her engagement with the nation-state

as a category. However, she recognizes the limits of her engagement and does not position the nation-state as an essential or productive category beyond the scope of her work (29). I do not argue that the nation-state is not useful in some way as a scale of reading but it has to be theorized and unpacked carefully. Enajite Eseoghene Ojaruega's comment that the nation-state produces "'exclusive' literary discourse" (206) is instructive here. Her caution comes from her study of Nigerian Civil War narratives by minority writers whose positions are often disregarded in discourses on the Nigerian Civil War.

Due to the asymmetrical placement of groups within the nation-state, there is an imperative to engage its subnational cultures and how they reinforce or resist the space-time of the nation. This is one of the ways Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o conceives his idea of "globalectics." In his introduction to the book *Globalectics: The Theory and Politics of Knowing*, Ngũgĩ asserts: "I believe in the liberation of literature from the straightjackets of nationalism" (8). This assertion is important because it pushes Ngũgĩ's theory beyond the realm of the dominant narrative of the nation. Ngũgĩ's idea is that "there is no one center; any point is equally a center." This type of thinking is partially based on Ngũgĩ's multiethnic and multilingual postcolonial African landscape, and even though his ideas are not informed totally by minority discourse, his commitment to non-hierarchical representation in a refractory world literature paradigm is evident. Ngũgĩ contends that

> Reading globaletically is a way of approaching any text from whatever times and places to allow its content and themes form a free conversation with other texts of one's time and place, the better to make it yield its maximum to the human. It is to allow it to speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present. (60)

Ngũgĩ's claim for globalectics as a way of reading world literature is based on his desire to upend European-inflected hierarchization of languages and cultures. However, his approach focuses on language as the basis of the "local," estranging other factors that would have been useful in thinking about this comparative methodology.

My approach throughout this dissertation shares Ngũgĩ's apprehension of the nation-state and its tendency to hierarchize groups. By turning our attention toward subnational spaces, minority discourse responds to the need for new approaches to world literature studies even as it demonstrates newer ways of approaching fields like postcolonial studies and Black studies. I am transnational insofar as I understand minority subjectivity as one that can be read transnationally in terms of how it responds to statist violence, but I attempt to be transnational without reinforcing the dominant narrative of the nation-state. Throughout this work, I focus on subnational groups and regions and read how they resist the nation-state through representation, aesthetics, and politics. This approach brings minoritized groups and regions under a single comparative category that can be read from a world frame.

This dissertation also foregrounds how poetry facilitates this peculiar way of reading subnational literature as world literature. As the least studied form in postcolonial studies, world literature studies, and Black studies, poetry is a minority discourse that can subvert how we currently understand and do world literature. Through its capacity for focused subjectivity, poetry can teach us new things about the nation, Blackness, and minority subjectivity, even as it opens up a new circuit for understanding how people are structured across various national spaces. For example, the link between poetry and place allows us to conceptualize a minor Black Atlantic that emerges at the intersection of literary form, geographical place/region, and experiences shaped by the nation-state. It is deeply grounded within the nation-state as a

counterdiscourse of its colonial and extractive hegemony even as it goes beyond it as a postcolonial/Black subjectivity that can be read from across the world. My work draws serious attention to poetry and specific minority subjectivities as forms of minority discourse through its description of various poetics and elements like: voice and the subaltern capacity to speak and resist national space-time; personification and naming, especially as it is deployed to represent land, rivers, non-human life, and other natural elements; imagery and its capacity to invite sensual witnessing and proximate memory; allusions and the recovery of history beyond archives and artifacts; and tone and diction, especially in the context of expressing loss and desire. By bringing these elements into focus, I position the aesthetics of minority discourse as a paradigm of reading poetry and poetics from various national contexts in terms of how they respond to the nation-state and its inherent coloniality. Simply put, poetry can enable a minority discourse that is world literature in nature and method.

This dissertation's engagement with minority discourse as a comparative framework to study writings from the margins of the nation-state gives us a way to not only interrogate the nation-state but also to read the place of poetic form in the representation of minority subjectivity. Furthermore, by reading the aesthetics of minority discourse, I deepen the place of aesthetic choices in how we approach world literature studies, postcolonial studies, and Black studies. I also focus on places that are not always visible in the broad categories we use to understand the world. These "minor" places – made minor by their asymmetrical position within a colonial nation-state – have a lot to teach us about the nation-state, the Black Atlantic, and the world.

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