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# Detention Camp and State of Exception in Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand*

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- 1 The figure of the refugee is often depicted in mass media as an archetype of the unrooted/uprooted, abject and intolerable being that is simultaneously excluded and included in the territorial boundaries of nation-states. Hence, this “disfranchised, displaced” figure (Wilson 2017, 2) continues to threaten the fixed binary limits between us and them, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion to further problematize the notion of borders. On the one hand, some postcolonial theorists such as Arjun Appadurai use the suffix “scapes” (2003, 31) to celebrate the fluid circulation of migrants, in terms such as mediascape, technoscape, ethnoscape, financescape and ideoscape, across the borders in this era of globalization. On the other hand, border-crossing is seen as entailing danger, loss, trauma and even death for the refugees. Therefore, the figure of the refugee is perceived as a passive, invisible and vulnerable victim who belongs nowhere and remains unwelcomed everywhere even in literature. Caren Kaplan, for instance, argues that the term “refugee” is a critical trope that alludes to a “faceless political construct outside the sphere of literature and aesthetics” (1996, 120).
- 2 Chris Cleave's novel *The Other Hand*<sup>1</sup> challenges this stereotype associated with the figure of the refugee by analyzing it through a gender perspective. It focuses on the life of the young Nigerian protagonist Little Bee by tracing her physical and psychological changes from innocence to maturity and from being a Nigerian citizen to a refugee in the UK. She saw her family slaughtered and her village burnt during the Oil wars<sup>2</sup> in Nigeria, after which she fled illegally on a cargo ship to Britain to join Sarah and Andrew, a British couple whom she had encountered in Nigeria, with the hope of finding refuge from the horrors of the past. She even renamed herself as Little Bee, in her yearning for a place of safety and comfort in the hostland. However, she ended up in a detention camp for refugees and asylum seekers. By focusing on the description of

her ordeal there, this article seeks to uncover how the novel balances narratives of exclusion and violence embedded in this imposed “state of exception” (Agamben 2005, 109) with her agency, resistance and self-assertion.

- 3 The article will first analyze the complexities of a life that marks the refugee as the “other” and as a threat. The second part will focus on Little Bee’s sense of alterity in the detention camp. The final section will challenge the common perception of the refugee as the vulnerable, silent and abject “other” by emphasizing the power of resistance and self-assertion through Little Bee’s use of language and communication.

## Refugee: a state of exception

- 4 The terms migration, refugee, exile, and diaspora are embedded within different political and socioeconomic realities. Claire Gallien warns that a failure to distinguish between such terms could dehistoricize the figure of the migrant and decontextualize writings on migration (2018, 723). In contrast to other types of migrants, Article 1A (2) of the 1951 United Nations Convention defined “refugee” as an international legal term for “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality” (UNHCR 1979, 18). Central to this legal discourse is the principle of “non-refoulement,”<sup>3</sup> which prohibits the host nations from forcing the refugees to return to their home countries if a violent situation still prevails there. Alastair Ager positions refugees in the “discourse of vulnerability” (1999, 18) as victims of external forces, and suggests that their lives straddle the gap between acceptance and non-acceptance, belonging and non-belonging in the host countries. Agamben draws on Hannah Arendt’s notion of statelessness and Foucault’s concept of biopolitics to show how refugees are dehumanized through legitimate power and violence. He also compares the refugee with the figure of the *Homo Sacer* (sacred man or accursed man) who in Ancient Roman law was someone who might be killed with impunity without having committed a murder (1998, 72).
- 5 Within the postcolonial context, Edward Said perceives refugees as “speechless emissaries” as well as “large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance” (2002, 181). According to him, the refugee is a collective entity that inhabits “the perilous territory of not belonging” (177). Similarly, David Farrier in *Postcolonial Asylum* goes on to describe him as a “new subaltern” (2011, 5), drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s work. He argues that the refugee is a “scandal for postcolonial studies”<sup>4</sup> because his/her brutal and traumatic experience of interstices reconfigures the postcolonial concepts of diaspora, hybridity and third space, which have been conceived in a positive way as sites of agency, resistance and empowerment in the seminal works of Bhabha and Rushdie, among others. Therefore, the term “refugee” has come to include multiple and sometimes ambiguous connotations in the field of postcolonial studies. *The Other Hand* appears to offer a new perspective on the figure of a female refugee in the detention camp, which Xavier Marquez calls “a space of surveillance” (2015, 22).
- 6 The novel draws on the author Chris Cleave’s first-hand experience of these detention centers in the UK. In an interview, he says:

For three days I worked in the canteen of Campsfield House in Oxfordshire. It’s a detention centre for asylum seekers – a prison, if you like, full of people who

haven't committed a crime. I'd been living within ten miles of the place for three years and didn't even know it existed. The conditions in there were very distressing. I got talking with asylum seekers who'd been through hell and were likely to be sent back to hell [...]. When we imprison the innocent we make them ill, and when we deport them it's often a death sentence. I knew I had to write about it, because it's such a dirty secret. (Little Bee author Q & A 2008)

Cleave claims to use his knowledge of the global refugee crisis as well as his artistic mediation skills to give voice to the voiceless. The above-mentioned lines also highlight Cleave's personal engagement to expose the inhuman treatment meted out to refugees by official organizations in the West. Cleave reiterates this in the novel by delineating the paradoxical relation between Little Bee's state of innocence as an adolescent and her refugee experiences of death, displacement and trauma in the detention camp.

## The detention camp: a space of exception

7 The novel opens in a peripheral and hidden setting called "Black Hill Immigration Removal Centre" (Cleave 2008, 17), encircled by "high razor wire fence" (29) from which sixteen-year-old Little Bee is being released after two years of detention without trial. The emphasis on "removal" stands in stark contrast with the epigraph of the novel, which the author quotes from an official textbook given to immigrants preparing for their citizenship test in the UK: "Britain is proud of its tradition of providing a safe haven for people *fleeing* [sic] persecution and conflict" (*Life in the United Kingdom*, 2005). Here, the author's deliberate choice of the word "fleeing" instead of the word "fleeing" in the official textbook, and his insertion of "removal" in the name of the detention camp, emphasize the stereotypical figure of the refugee as an undesirable being who needs to be controlled, monitored and eventually deported. This is also reiterated in the ensuing depiction of Little Bee's life in the detention camp, eventually culminating in her deportation to her home country.

8 Having been locked up in the exceptional space of the detention camp, Little Bee feels an intensified sense of homelessness, loss and trauma, as she is triply relegated to the margins as a woman, a refugee and an adolescent. She describes her experiences of alterity through an interior monologue in the following terms:

How I would love to be a British pound. A pound is free to travel to safety, and we are free to watch it go. This is the human triumph. This is called, *globalisation*. A girl like me gets stopped at immigration, but a pound can leap the turnstiles, and dodge the tackles of those big men with their uniform caps, and jump straight into a waiting airport taxi. *Where to, sir?* Western Civilisation, my good man, and make it snappy. (Cleave 2008, 2)

The discrepancy between Little Bee's age and the maturity of her remark reflects how new forms of systemic violence may strip this adolescent girl of dignity and agency and mark her as an undesirable outsider. The use of internal focalization in these lines also emphasizes her desire for mobility, symbolized by free circulation of money, while she is forbidden to cross the policed borders of the modern nation-state. Moreover, these lines reassert her status as a refugee girl, which is in stark contrast to the figure of the migrant whom Rushdie somewhat romantically described as "the man without frontiers, an archetypal figure of our age" (2002, 415).

9 Borrowing the words of Agamben, we could describe the detention camp where Little Bee is imprisoned as "a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and

rule, licit and illicit" (1998, 170). Standing on this threshold, Little Bee gives an insight into the camp in passages that express her viewpoint:

It was cold, cold, cold, and I did not have anyone to smile at. Those cold years are frozen inside me. The African girl they locked up in the immigration detention centre, poor child, she never really escaped. In my soul she is still locked up in there, forever, under the fluorescent lights, curled up on the green linoleum floor with her knees tucked up under her chin. And this woman they released from the immigration detention centre, this creature that I am, she is a new breed of human. There is nothing natural about me. (Cleave 2008, 11)

- 10 The lexical choice of "frozen," "locked" and "forever" reiterates Little Bee's feeling of stasis and her loss of self in the detention camp. The insistence on the lexeme "cold," used four times in these lines, evokes Little Bee's hopelessness in this dystopian setting, which is literally inscribed in her as she is forced to be "reborn" as an alienated and lonely creature. The trauma of her refugee condition is further exacerbated through her silent testimony, in which she conceives the detention camp as a counter-space of danger:

Two years, I lived in that detention centre. I was fourteen years of age when I came to your country but I did not have any papers to prove it and so they put me in the same detention centre as the adults. The trouble was, there were men and women locked up together in that place. At night they kept the men in a different wing of the detention centre. They caged them like wolves when the sun went down, but in the daytime the men walked among us, and ate the same food we did. I thought they still looked hungry. I thought they watched me with ravenous eyes. So when the older girls whispered to me, *To survive you must look good or talk good*, I decided that talking would be safer for me. (Cleave 2008, 9)

- 11 Little Bee's personal account individualizes her female refugee experience and captures her continuing trauma. The repetition of "two years" six times in the first chapter conjures up the haunting nature of her unforgettable ordeal. In addition, the insistence on the exposure of her adolescent female body to the unwanted gaze of male prisoners through the use of the simile "wolves" not only puts female inmates in the category of vulnerable and sexual objects, but it also reminds us of the colonial discourses that animalize black men (see for instance Fanon 1967, 112) and ironically turns them into victims. Besides, the constant pressure to adapt and conform to the detention camp's norms as well as an insistence on the fraught relationship to ways of dressing in the camp, "*To survive you must look good*," symbolize the forced commodification of the female body. Alternatively, this serves as a tool of self-assertion for the female inmate Yvette who uses her body to have consensual sex with a white employee in order to obtain freedom from the camp. It is important to note here that even if the reified, dominant and superior gaze of the white man is different from that of the racialized black man, both have negative psychological consequences on Little Bee and result in constant fear. However, she tries to overcome this by choosing to appear genderless. Hence, the female body emerges as a site of vulnerability and paradoxically as a space of "strategic struggles" (Marquez, quoting Foucault, 2015, 23) that allows resistance, self-assertion and individuality.
- 12 One of the characteristics of postcolonial refugee writings is that they deal not only with the place of arrival or transit, but also with the place of departure. As Little Bee's first-person narrative alternates between present and past, the detention centre is not seen differently from the violent spaces of her homeland. Although the novel seeks to break away from the stereotypical discourses on female refugees, it at times seems to

reinforce the same stereotypes. Little Bee recounts these in the following manner: “*the-men-came-and-they-burned... tied... raped-my-girls... cut-my-breast... I-ran-away... and-then-they-put-me-in-here*” (Cleave 2008, 15). “Rape” and “cut” are used as transitive verbs to depict the atrocities to which the female bodies are subjected. Moreover, the interwoven, fragmented and incomplete traumatic stories, which include hyphens, ellipses and italics, show that there are gaps and voids within them. In addition, the spectacular and aesthetic exposition of the terror and cruelty of the past depicted in these lines emphasizes the “intertwined histories and overlapping territories” (Said 1994, 15), implying that traumatic stories involving women are not separate but connected to one another. Just like any other refugee story, the shocking past life of Little Bee is marked by trauma and death: the murder of her parents, as well as the gang rape and murder of her elder sister, as the family was caught in the Oil Wars in Nigeria.

- 13 The disruption of filial bonds is one of the main features of this refugee novel. Little Bee recalls: “in the detention centre, I screamed every night and in the morning I imagined a thousand ways to kill myself... The detention officers sent the bodies away in the night, because it was not good for the local people to see the slow ambulances leaving that place” (Cleave 2008, 68–69). Little Bee is seen as amputated, not only from her original culture and identity through the murder of her family, but also from any potential future due to the appalling conditions both in the detention camp and in her home country. The life of Little Bee seems to illustrate the idea of *Homo Sacer*, the “sacred man” or “accursed man,” as she appears to the readers as a doomed person that is susceptible to being killed anywhere, including in her homeland and in the hostland. Moreover, the trauma of forced displacement along with Little Bee’s current situation in the detention camp complicates her situation as a refugee and puts her in a “discourse of vulnerability” (Ager 1999, 18). By drawing a parallel between the death threats looming large in the past and the present circumstances – “In my world death will come chasing” (Cleave 2008, 169) – the novel also critiques the host nation’s failure to provide a safe haven for the needy, in contrast to what is mentioned in the novel’s epigraph.
- 14 As the novel shifts its focus to the other female inmates of the camp who are equally relegated to the anonymous margins, the unsettling and hostile conditions of the detention camp are reiterated. The designation of the inmates as “The girl with no name,” “The girl in the yellow saree,” and “The girl with scars on her legs” (Cleave 2008, 14) shows how the detention camp turns most of the refugees into anonymous beings, with the exception of Little Bee and Yevette. The absence of proper names denies the characters the kind of personal information that names convey. Besides, the exposed body of the refugee girl, “the girl with scars on her legs,” reminds us of the various meanings of what Agamben calls “bare life” (1998, 8). Identity markers, in the form of reference to physical attributes, also suggest the complex value of the scarred body as a visible reminder of the staggering violence of the past and an “unspeakable” trauma for the refugee (Lloyd, 214).
- 15 Wounds and scars also parallel the working of the refugee novel as they pursue the impossible task of narrating trauma in its totality, disorienting and decentering its very form. In a literal sense, the novel seems to channel the readers’ attention to these visual markers so as to appropriate the “othered” refugee voices. In other words, these “other” refugee characters serve as a foil to Little Bee who then emerges as their

spokesperson, as she simultaneously orients the reader's gaze towards the refugee trauma as well as her own visibility: "I ask you right here please to agree with me that a scar is never ugly... We must see all scars as beauty... Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, *I survived*" (Cleave 2008, 13–14). A scar is seen as inscribed text in the flesh and as an identifying marker of suffering which could be both alien and alienating, but Little Bee invites the reader to re-appropriate it by showing her resistance to the aesthetics of human beauty.<sup>5</sup> Through this dialogical narrative, Little Bee also attempts to cope with her past as she controls the way in which her refugee story is conveyed to others.

## Coping mechanisms in the state of exception

- 16 The detention camp may impose a sense of non-belonging, undesirability and immobility and it may subject Little Bee to self-effacement and self-denial, but ironically, this "space of exception" also enables her to resist the state of non-being as she tries to negotiate a space for herself within it. As the story proceeds further, one finds that this space also provides her with enough time and space, enabling her to detach herself from her trauma. She claims:

I was born – no, I was reborn – in captivity... They say, *That refugee girl is not one of us. That girl does not belong.* That girl is a halfling, a child of an unnatural mating, an unfamiliar face in the moon... So, I am a refugee, and I get very lonely. (Cleave 2008, 11–12)

These lines foreground her refugee experience as she identifies it as a site of empowerment and "re-birth." This interior monologue and her deliberate addition of the diminutive "Little" to her name call attention to the need of re-asserting her voice and identity in her own limited way against the processes of silencing and ostracizing found in this invisible and isolated place. Invisibility is used as an instrument of control and power by the authorities to legitimize the use of violence. In the words of the philosopher Axel Honneth, this imposed invisibility reveals a lack of recognition. Ironically, the same detention camp creates the condition for "scriptural mobility," a term Hayette Lakraa coins in her article "Im/Mobility, Power, and In/Visible Refugees" to refer to the process through which

the words and voice of refugees are allowed to be expressed. The moment that freezes refugees in space and time due to external forces trying to stop their mobility at border crossings unleashes their imagination and artistic creation. As unbearable as those long hours are in confinement cells or on the other side of the fence, those moments of absolute uncertainty and deep anxiety become the special occasion... to speak out. (2017, 9)

- 17 Little Bee is able to subvert her invisibility through "scriptural mobility" by transferring it to speech; it then becomes a means to speak out her emotions in moments of "deep anxiety" and physical immobility. She thus begins to learn and speak the Queen's English: "I am only alive at all because I learned the Queen's English... I spent two years learning the Queen's English, so that you and I could speak like this without an interruption." (Cleave 2008, 8). Giving vent to her pain and suffering becomes a way of coping with her precarious and vulnerable situation that ironically aims to silence and negate her. Unlike other refugee girls who are condemned to oblivion and turned to ahistorical and "othered" figures, Little Bee claims recognition for her story of victimhood as a black, female, refugee child. Laura Savu points out that "speaking the Queen's English is, to a certain extent, empowering and liberating, in

that it enables Little Bee to stake a claim in the cultural conversation, and thus to assert herself as subject of and for history” (2014, 94). Unlike the other detainees who speak broken English and are reduced to stereotypes, Little Bee’s fluent language not only empowers her, but also serves the authorial purpose of diverting the reader’s attention away from stereotypes towards her experience of being othered. It also underlines the potential of language as a way of coping with trauma and as a powerful tool to flee harsh realities. Moreover, readers learn about Little Bee’s refugee life, marked by constant fear, isolation and profound spatial incarceration, as her voice occupies most of the textual space in the first part of the novel. But the irony of the situation is that in a postcolonial context, language becomes a double-edged sword: it functions as a form of domination for Little Bee and yet she continues to feel like an alien and an outsider. Little Bee is, therefore, both liberated and limited by language.

- 18 The detention camp is a space where extremely diverse refugees from the global South are involuntarily put together away from normal, everyday life to exhibit what Bhabha calls “gathering at the frontiers; [...] gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language” (1994, 139). The detention camp as gathering space, hence, emerges as the site of the uncanny, instability and liminality. As an alternative, Little Bee tries to overcome her isolation by confiding her fears and her intercultural experiences to an imaginary, heterogenous group of Nigerian girls whom she considers her companions, listeners and equals: “[What] I would have to explain to the girls from back home, if I was telling them this story, is the simple little word ‘horror’”(Cleave 2008, 65). These girls symbolize the trustworthy and understanding friends of her age missing from her life in the camp. According to Cleave, they serve as a “Greek Chorus” to whom Little Bee divulges her knowledge “from a position of superior knowledge” (Little Bee author Q &A 2008). As Little Bee tries to replace her amputated filial bonds with affiliative connections with these girls, a new relational system appears. This sort of relationship also resonates with Said’s “pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships” (1983, 17). This imagined association serves as her extended family and as a survival mechanism amidst the lack of any constructive bonding. Moreover, the spectral absence/presence of these girls from back home transforms the protagonist Little Bee from a mere tragic character to one holding a superior epistemic position.<sup>6</sup>
- 19 Little Bee’s dialogical communication with these imaginary friends also echoes Anne Frank’s diary, posthumously published as *The Diary of a Young Girl*, in which the adolescent Jewish girl Anne talks to her imaginary friend Kitty, her constant companion and her primary confidante. As Anne confides her loneliness and despair to her only friend Kitty, so does Little Bee convey her emotions to the girls back home through the literary device of the apostrophe. Just as Anne Frank’s friendship with this imagined addressee serves as a coping mechanism, so does Little Bee’s conversation with the girls enable her to escape from her actual entrapment in this utterly hopeless situation. In both cases, the dialogical narration results in an engaged friendship between the protagonist and her imaginary friends as well as in the re-assertion of their culture and value systems.
- 20 Apart from the girls back home, Little Bee tries to establish other connections with the outside world as well. She directly addresses the reader of the novel and involves her/him in her storytelling process so as to make herself heard. In spite of a binary divide between the reader and herself, “me” and “you” as former colonized and colonizer, she



attempts to subvert national and linguistic boundaries between these two opposing poles through the use of the technique of breaking the fourth wall.<sup>7</sup> She directly addresses the reader in the second person, "Let me tell you" (Cleave 2008, 12), and includes her/him as witness to her testimony and storytelling. Her address to the reader also becomes a marker of her agency and subjectivity, of which she is deprived in the detention center. Moreover, the presentness and the immediacy of the address invite the reader to access some private aspects of her life: "I am here to tell you a real story. I did not come to talk to you about the bright African colours. I am a born-again citizen of the developing world, and I will prove to you that the colour of my life is grey ... I implore you to tell *no one*. Okay?" (12). As a mixture of white and black, the colour grey symbolises Little Bee's unsettling feelings as a refugee girl. In addition, she deliberately highlights the distance between herself and the reader in order to reclaim her individual voice and identity, while simultaneously establishing a connection, leading to the creation of new transnational bonds. The paradox between distance and intimacy depicted in these lines also paves the way for the reader's empathetic unsettlement as s/he is prompted to reflect upon her/his own limited perception of the refugee in the face of death, violence and trauma. The gaps and fissures in this address also blur the boundaries of the diegesis.

- 21 This relationship established between the reader and the protagonist also reminds one of affiliative connections between Edward (white American) and Nash (ex-slave) in *Crossing the River* (1993) by Caryl Phillips. A similar type of affective bonding is established through epistolary communication between the two. However, unlike Nash, who finally frees himself by rejecting this affiliative bond, Little Bee maintains her affiliation with the reader until the end to survive her ordeal. She in turn appears to be the mouthpiece of the author Chris Cleave who exposes the hypocrisy of the global North towards the refugee crisis issue. In the words of Hayette Lakraa, Little Bee could be seen as the one who "underlines the limits of democracy and the confusion of the juridical and political institutions to the point where the borderline separating democracy from totalitarianism becomes, as asserted by Agamben, almost invisible" (2017, 11).
- 22 Moreover, by divulging her story to the reader, Little Bee tries to come to terms with her trauma. For every testimony, there has to be a listener; as Dori Laub states, "testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude" (1992, 70). The reader, hence, bears witness to her testimony and so becomes an agent in her recovery from the trauma as she articulates it in a dialogical form. In the words of Laub, the reader becomes a "witness to witnessing itself" (75). This form of witnessing then also confirms the reader's involvement at multiple levels in Little Bee's narrative. In addition, language emerges as a means of integrating traumatic experience in the realm of representability, thereby challenging the idea that traumatic memory<sup>8</sup> is inaccessible.
- 23 To conclude, *The Other Hand* draws on the refugee novel genre of the twenty-first century to propose an alternative way of conceptualizing the female refugee as well as postcolonial migration. It ascribes the protagonist Little Bee with an agency and individual voice in a counter-space of the detention camp which imposes limits on "relational freedom" and affiliative bonding. Even if the detention camp is perceived as a space of death, self-denial and anonymity, Little Bee tries to overcome these through her self-assertion, artistic creativity and the power of language in a limited fashion.

The novel hence tries to re-position the figure of this female refugee in the “discourse of resilience” (Ager 1999, 18) by focusing on her agency and subjectivity. Besides, the fictional space of the detention camp could be seen as an “interstitial” and “in-between” space to use Bhabha’s terminology (1994, 4), where the traumatic and vulnerable subject could undergo a transformation by gaining power to resist oppression and violence. Thus, the novel challenges the dialectics of invisibility/visibility and mobility/immobility that seem to encapsulate this refugee protagonist’s life. Through the depiction of Little Bee, her traumatic story and her wounded body, the novel moves beyond the “aesthetic of indifference” (Ghosh 1995, 35) by forging new forms of reciprocity and relationality, across the boundaries of race, gender and class. By doing so, the novel also questions the hegemonic and moral authority of the global North and revisits the notion of frontier and migration.

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## NOTES

1. Known in the US as *Little Bee* (2008). I will use the British title throughout the article.

2. The conflict in the Niger Delta first arose in the early 1990s between foreign oil corporations and Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups, which felt exploited. This also fuelled violence between ethnic groups, causing the militarization of most of the region. From 2004 onwards, violence took the form of kidnappings, mass murders, rape, etc. See for instance: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nigeria-2.htm>.
  3. The word "refoulement," from the French word "refouler," means forcibly sending a person back to her/her home country when s/he faces a danger to his/her life or freedom.
  4. To Farrier, the refugee is "a scandal for postcolonial studies" [...] "[a]s the interstices available to and inhabited by the asylum seeker differ from that described by postcolonial studies as a 'smooth space' of productivity and difference – rather, it is a space of detention and exclusion through inclusion, striated by razor wire and legislated segregation" (2011, 7–8).
  5. Little Bee's depiction of the scar echoes Sethe's scars shaped as chokecherry tree in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, which become a poignant and beautiful symbol of a traumatic experience of the past. In both these novels, the readers are prompted to make connections between beauty and human suffering.
  6. These ghostly figures symbolize Little Bee's private as well as collective past. Similarly, Sethe's conversation with the ghost of her daughter in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* illustrates ghosts' cultural role of healing the traumas of the past. This notion is described by Kathleen Brogan in *Cultural Haunting* in the following terms: "Cultural ghost stories, which feature the haunting of a people by the ghosts of its own past, represent one way a group actively revises its relationship to the past. Not surprisingly, these stories tend to emerge in the aftermath of times of swift and often traumatic change, when old social bonds have been unhinged and new group identities must be formulated" (1998, 174).
  7. A performance convention in which the character/actor talks directly to the readers or spectators. This trope not only attracts the reader's attention, but also makes her/him feel as if s/he are part of the story. It also serves as a link between the real world and the fictional world. See for instance, the famous statement in *Jane Eyre*, "Readers, I married him" (Bronte 1999, 498).
  8. Some critics assert that traumatic memories are "unrepresentable" (Kaplan 2005, 37) and "incomprehensible" (Caruth 1995, 154). This also emphasizes the limits of representation of trauma and its inaccessibility through language.
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## ABSTRACTS

In Chris Cleave's novel *The Other Hand* (2008), the detention camp is depicted as a space of exception where refugees are reduced to invisible and voiceless beings. This article analyzes how this fictional setting produces a sense of alterity in the refugee protagonist, Little Bee. It particularly focuses on how the novel balances narratives of exclusion and violence embedded in this counter-space with the refugee girl's agency, resistance and self-assertion. The article also explores the power of language in attributing voice and visibility to this triply marginalized African female, while revisiting the notions of migration and frontiers in the twenty-first century.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** refugee, postcolonial, alterity, invisibility, exception

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