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An-Other Dancer, Unnamed, Undocumented, Unaccountable: Decolonizing the Future of
the Migrant in J.M. Coetzee’s *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*

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Abstract

My thesis engages the decolonial politics and aesthetics in J.M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* and examines how the figure of the migrant – the stateless individual who arrives in the host country without documents and without memory – disrupts the dominant discursive, sociopolitical, and aesthetic regimes of the host country. Drawing on Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* alongside decolonial thinkers such as Ann Laura Stoler and Sylvia Wynter, and human rights thinkers like Hannah Arendt, among others, the thesis aims to show how Novilla – the foreign city in an unidentifiable land where David and Simón arrive as migrants – is essentially a neocolonial state, which is haunted by the remaining traces of colonialism: a rigid bureaucratic system, poor living and working conditions for the foreigners and a racial classification of society divided into humans and sub-humans. Although Simón initially attempts to resist the neoliberal politics of Novilla on all levels – social, political, economic, and even epistemological – David is ultimately the only character that truly questions the laws of Novilla. He is the foreigner who does not accept being reduced to the position of the Other as waste; although he is an orphan boy in search of his mother, he still finds the power to challenge the oppressive system of Novilla. His uncompromising nature becomes even more evident in Coetzee's second novel of his trilogy, *The Schooldays of Jesus*; David becomes a dancer and performs an unorthodox choreography that voices not only his migrant narrative but also the trauma of all the dispossessed peoples. The child decolonizes the contemporary representation of the migrant as a helpless victim in his own artistic way, thus challenging the violent categorization of humanity that places him on the sub-human end. Through a close reading of both novels, the thesis discusses the way Coetzee problematizes the concept of the migrant as the radical Other. Rather than misrepresent the migrant as a burden to democracy, Coetzee foregrounds the conceptual framework that reconsiders and re-evaluates the idea of social and political equality as essentially problematic and founded upon the highly abstract and constructed concepts of race, nationalism and ethnocentrism that only serve the benefits of a rapidly growing capitalist economy. The thesis also examines the politics and poetics of hospitality by drawing on Jacques Derrida's *Of Hospitality*, which relates the unexpected arrival of the foreigner with the concept of (un)conditional hospitality. To problematize the significance of what Derrida

defines as the law of unconditional hospitality, a law which is usually unattended in the political discussions about the rights of foreigners, the thesis also focuses on Leah Cowan's *Border Nation*, and Tendayi Achiume's "Migration as Decolonization". Finally, drawing on the growing field of decolonial and migration studies and creating crucial associations between the aforementioned thinkers, I will engage and try to respond the following question: How does the arrival of the migrant decolonize our idea of democracy, thus challenging the conditional laws of hospitality by invoking the unconditional law of hospitality for the benefit of the democratic society at large?

INTRODUCTION

J.M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* dramatize the figure of the migrant – the stateless individual who arrives in the host country without documents and without memory – as a decolonial subjectivity who disrupts the dominant discursive, sociopolitical, and aesthetic regimes of the host country. Coetzee showcases the persistence of imperial and colonial politics in the two novels, while proposing that this oppressive sociopolitical reality can be challenged and, ultimately, reversed. *The Childhood of Jesus* maps the journey of a young boy, David and Simón who takes him under his care; they arrive in Novilla, a fictional Spanish speaking city, where they try to rebuild their lives, as they have been forced to erase the memory of their past and, as if the sea they forcefully crossed has carried away their identities. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, they settle in a place named Estrella, where David discovers his passion for dance. Drawing on the characters' trajectory, I aim to prove that, while critiquing the deepening of neocolonial politics – as manifested by a rigid bureaucratic system and poor living and working conditions for the foreigners – the texts foreground the figure of the migrant as a subjectivity that cannot be repressed and instead retains a form of sovereignty. Coetzee does not victimize his characters; for all their past trauma and their dispossession, Coetzee's texts dramatize the potential of the migrants to liberate themselves from the position of the Other as waste. It is in this sense that this thesis argues that Coetzee's texts offer a decolonial narrative of the migrant – a narrative that reconceptualizes and recenters the contemporary understanding of migration – in order to challenge and question the current experience of democracy where democracy is still possible in the world.

The first chapter examines the history of imperialism and colonialism to explain how past oppression still reverberates through the modern society. Humanity has been plagued by poverty, inequality, migration, and racism for centuries as a result of the imperial and colonial politics that have been subjugating peoples according to abstract and arbitrary hierarchies that are founded on the concepts of race, gender, and the economic, social, and political status of subjects. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the omnipresence of the colonial past as shown in Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The*

Schooldays of Jesus. The texts betray the nuanced but persistent ways by which the colonial reality is still manifested in the political, ideological, ontological, institutional, educational, and aesthetic strata of society. In *The Childhood of Jesus*, the main characters are constantly forced to conform to Novilla's sovereign politics. Having arrived there as migrants, Novilla only offers them the means of bare survival. The characters are threatened by a strict bureaucratic system that does not recognize their individuality, having absurdly ascribed specific names – David and Simón – to them, while also demanding that they use a foreign language. *The Schooldays of Jesus* plots another attempt of the protagonists to settle in a new city named Estrella with the hope of building a better life. However, once again, they are faced by unfortunate jobs, low wages, and limited educational opportunities. The identity of the migrant as a dispossessed person follows the characters throughout their journey from one place to another, reinforcing their political, social, and economic deprivation. To elaborate on this matter, the chapter draws primarily on Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*; the past, Said argues, informs the present and proves that temporalities, and therefore histories, coexist (5). European imperialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has left its traces in today's markets, labor policies and political institutions (Said 8). Imperialism births and intertwines with the neocolonial states (Said 9), consolidating categories such as "inferior" or "subject races" (10) that allow for the subjugation of those peoples that do not comply with the paradigm of the "overrepresented" White man, "as the generic, ostensibly supracultural human" (Wynter 288). This subjugation was not and still is not limited to the political level, but exists simultaneously on the level of the arts, education, and literature, all of which Said names as culture (12). It is the cultural manifestation of the neocolonial state that Said awakens his readers to, arguing that it subtly perpetuates the dominant and oppressive ideologies of the past (14). To further discuss oppression as a practice and ideology, the chapter draws also on thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Ann Laura Stoler, Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Étienne Balibar, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Sylvia Wynter. Arendt avers that race thinking has contributed to the consolidation of the political and economic reality of capitalism, resulting in an ever-increasing number of dispossessed peoples, migrants, and economic refugees (160,161). Peoples of a supposedly inferior class, nationality, or race have become the "de jure stateless", those with no place to inhabit (Arendt 279). This aligns with

Wynter's and Maldonado-Torres's arguments that that the persistence of coloniality, despite the formal end of colonialism, has to do with the fact that everything it entails, revolves around "two axes of power" that are omnipresent and omnipotent (Maldonado-Torres 243): race and capitalism. These were and still are so skillfully reproduced and established as the driving forces for the classification of humanity, that the end of colonialism as a system has not subverted their politics of exploitation (Wynter 264).

The second chapter discusses the ways in which the neocolonial state persistently excludes the migrant, as his/her foreign identity becomes a threat to its sovereignty. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the question of hospitality towards the foreigners to argue that modern states do not practically accept, neither embrace them. The state – and by state I refer to the legal institutions as expressed through the political, economic, and social bodies – dismisses the subjectivity of the migrant reducing it to a pariah that disrupts the prosperity of the community. *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* are set in two neocolonial cities where the persistence of xenophobia keeps the protagonists trapped into the position of the Other. David and Simón's foreignness is the defining factor on the basis of which society has deprived them of the right to self-appropriation. Even when the characters are given a house, a job, or an opportunity to educate themselves, the state still ensures their political and social stasis. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's *Of Hospitality* I will, thus, contemplate the figure of the foreigner together with the concept of (un)conditional hospitality. As he argues, the foreigner is considered, by definition, equivalent to the radical Other that invades a new land, threatening to disrupt its balance and order; the foreigner is destined to be denied hospitality because of the inherently negative predisposition that he/she comes to challenge the hosts (11, 15). The nature of hospitality is, then, proved limited and, essentially only conditional. This leads to laws and oppressive borders that prevent foreigners from equally participating in the commonwealth, treating them, instead, as sub-human entities whose only use is to serve the benefits of the upper class. To further explain this matter, I will draw primarily on Leah Cowan's *Border Nation* and Tendayi Achiume's "Migration as Decolonization". As Cowan argues, "[b]orders are indisputably sites of violence [as they] create citizens and non-citizens, 'aliens' and nationals, undocumented people and *sans papiers*, 'foreigners' and expats" (1). This thesis resonates with Achiume's argument that migrants constantly

experience “political subordination” and “socioeconomic marginality” (1547). Their marginalization raises the question of their integration in the community and problematizes the ways in which the identity of a foreigner is indissolubly related with that of the host, thus unavoidably creating a space of relations, as Jean-Luc Nancy avers (4).

The third and final chapter discusses how the migrant challenges the sovereignty of the neocolonial state by refusing to be seen as a redundancy. It also explores the ways in which Coetzee correlates the figures of the migrant and the artist. The analysis primarily focuses on the character of David who does not accept being reduced to the position of the Other and challenges the sociogenic codes of the state. Although Simón initially attempts to resist the neocolonial hegemony on all levels, David is ultimately the only character that truly questions its oppressive laws. The young protagonist embodies a new understanding of the migrant subjectivity: David is not presented as a victim, nor as a passive receiver of a reality that he is unable to change supposedly because of his foreignness. Coetzee’s text recognizes the potential of the migrant to subvert the politics of exploitation of the host country, primarily through awakening others to the fact that they have been dispossessed and treated as sub-humans. To consider the migrant as an active and equal member within society is an issue that has yet to be realized. Racism, xenophobia, and the violent hierarchization of humanity have created a sociopolitical and economic reality in which the ‘other’ must be kept at a safe distance from those whose humanity is deemed of more value. David refuses to be kept at a distance; he constantly attempts to form intimate relationships with people around him, proving that what is considered as a threatening otherness might be precisely what the community needs, namely the acceptance of people who can bring new ideas, visions, and aspirations for society at large. His resistance against being tyrannically assimilated into society points towards a world where no borders exist; David decolonizes our perspective of the migrant in a very artistic manner. In *The Childhood of Jesus*, he expresses his fascination with a children’s version of Don Quixote, aspiring to become a non-conformist hero just like him, while in *The Schooldays of Jesus*, he discovers his passion for dance and wishes to save others. David is not an inert character, but one that takes social responsibility. Drawing on Albert Camus’s words that “[a]rt cannot be a monologue” and that “if there is any man who has no right to solitude, it is the artist” (13), I wish to demonstrate how David uses his migrant and artist subjectivity to reinvent his

sovereign power in an insurgent and erratic manner. David embodies his migrant past and his voice and body through dance; as such, he choreographs his way out of coloniality and speaks of the shared trauma of all the dispossessed peoples, a trauma that words seem unable to convey.

Through a close reading of both novels, the thesis aims to discuss the way Coetzee problematizes the concept of the migrant as the radical Other. Rather than misrepresent the migrant as a burden to democracy, Coetzee foregrounds the conceptual framework that reconsiders and re-evaluates the idea of social and political equality as essentially problematic and founded upon the highly abstract and constructed concepts of race, nationalism, and ethnocentrism that only serve the benefits of a rapidly growing capitalist and neoliberal economy. Drawing on the growing field of decolonial and migration studies and creating crucial associations between the texts under examination, this thesis will try to engage the following question: How does the arrival of the migrant decolonize our idea of democracy, thus challenging the conditional laws of hospitality by invoking the unconditional law of hospitality for the benefit of the democratic society at large?

1. WHAT REMAINS OF IMPERIALISM? NEOCOLONIAL POLITICS IN COETZEE'S SETTINGS

“[W]hat are we *here* for? . . . [D]o we have to live *here*?”

“There is nowhere else to be but *here*”

J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus*

Here. What is this *here* that confounds J.M. Coetzee's setting in *The Childhood of Jesus*? The signpost that conjures the question of *here* arises at this unexpected moment in the novel when David – Coetzee's young protagonist – contemplates the *here* he experiences, the *here* he has not chosen. Coetzee chooses this *here* as the setting for *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*. *The Childhood of Jesus* opens with his two main characters, Simón and David, arriving as migrants in a foreign land. Simón, a forty-five-year-old man, takes David, a young boy at the age of five under his care, when the two meet on a boat that transfers them to a place that is alien to them and progressively emerges as a hostile place. David has lost his mother and Simón decides to take care of him, assuming the responsibility of finding the mother. Coetzee plots their migrant narrative in a city named Novilla, a Spanish speaking place – as its name suggests – which is fictional and sketched in a purposefully abstract manner. The name Novilla indicates “newness” or “no-ness” (Nashef 361) suggesting either a place where people can build a new life, or a place where there can be *no* life. Having just arrived in Novilla and having found no decent place to sleep, David and Simón settle in a poorly equipped room at the “Relocation Centre” (Coetzee 13), where the boy expresses his frustration and dissatisfaction and asks, “why are we *here*?” (21). Simón answers “[h]ere as opposed to where?”, adding that “[t]here is *nowhere* else to be but *here*” (emphasis added; Coetzee 21). A “faceless controlling bureaucratic authority” and “under the pretext of creating the ideal world” (Nashef 358), Novilla entraps individuals within its impositions, forcing them to abide by its rules in the Spanish language, the language of the place. Obedience is presented as the only means by which citizens' prosperity can be achieved. People should

not ask for more than bread to eat, or a cold room to sleep in. Jobs and wages are not sufficient, but workers must be content to have been granted the basic means for survival. As far as educational opportunities are concerned, Novilla's schools ensure an intellectual stasis, rather than a progress. In a word, Novilla guarantees only the citizens' bare means of survival. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, when the protagonists have moved from Novilla to Estrella in search of a better place to finally settle, the oppressive *here* that Coetzee's text has plotted from the beginning of their journey still haunts them. Having briefly sketched both novels, I argue that through the journey of his characters, Coetzee conjures the migrant and refugee crisis as we experience it today. Both novels problematize the figure of the migrant as the foreigner, the Other. Coetzee questions the sociopolitical, economic, and ideological parameters that have led to the hierarchization of humanity and the reduction of some peoples to the position of the subhuman, through the consolidation and perpetuation of the (neo)imperial and capitalist politics of exploitation. He, therefore, awakens us to the implications that such politics have for our contemporary societies, on the level of culture, education, economy, and ideology.

This haunting *here* the characters endure in both novels, and which forces the identity of the foreigner upon them is informed by the imperial and colonial politics of the past, as I intend to demonstrate below. Novilla and Estrella are essentially two neocolonial cities, in which past oppression reverberates and is constantly reinforced through the laws, the institutions, and the domination of a single language for all. Novilla and Estrella are interpellated by the living traces of colonialism: a rigid bureaucratic system, poor living and working conditions for the foreigners and a classification of society stratified into humans and sub-humans. This violent hierarchization of humanity is manifested in the political, ideological, ontological, institutional, educational, and aesthetic strata of these societies. For the foreigners who find themselves there after having been deported from their land, there seems to be only one reality, that of bare survival and that, in which they assume the place of the sub-human.

The Childhood of Jesus begins with David and Simón going through Novilla's bureaucratic procedures to find a place to settle and a job for Simón. The description of the place is ominous and suggestive of how Novilla functions as a city of colonial ruins. The protagonists see a "sprawling building" towards which they must hurry before "[it] close[s]"

[its] doors for the day” (Coetzee 1). This extended building, “partitioned by panes of frosted glass” bears a sign that reads “*Recién Llegados*. . . stencilled in black” (Coetzee 1). The text alludes to the remains of a colonial city, with buildings that resemble colonial mansions which extend all over the land and threaten the newcomers with black, indelible signs. Soon, David and Simón are bombarded with questions regarding their identity, their names, ages, and relation. While Ana – a woman that works at the Relocation Center – “inspects the passbooks” (Coetzee 3), Simón explains that people in Belstar – in the camp where he and David spent their days before their arrival in Novilla – “gave [them their] names, [their] Spanish names” (3). The identity that the characters present before the authorities of Novilla is not chosen, but “*given*” (emphasis added; Coetzee 2). Early in the plot, Coetzee awakens his readers to the fact that his characters have been deprived of the right to self-appropriation, while this deprivation soon extends to practical aspects of their lives. The Relocation Center provides them with a room that is “small, windowless, and exceedingly simply furnished: a single bed, a chest of drawers, a washbasin” (Coetzee 20). Their accommodation becomes increasingly difficult as they lack proper food to sustain themselves; David is hungry and, ironically, Ana tells Simón not to worry about the child, as he will “adapt quickly” (Coetzee 33). Literal and symbolic hunger is the new reality that David and Simón have to accept. After Simón starts working as a stevedore – a manual job that hardly pays him enough to satisfy his and the boy’s needs – his health gradually deteriorates, and he visits a doctor to address the matter. The doctor, who seems to fully endorse the Novillian philosophy, reassures Simón that his health is fine, without having properly examined him; he simply advises Simón not to “look down” (Coetzee 48), completely disregarding the latter’s concerns about his undernourishment. Simón leaves the clinic in a state of profound confusion and frustration and realizes that he cannot expect more than being treated as a sub-human. Later, he refers to this sub-human existence that Novilla imposes, complaining that “[t]hings do not have their due weight [t]here”: “[t]he music. . . [t]he food. . . [their] very words lack weight” (Coetzee 77). The citizens have ceased to question this life; they have abandoned their identities and passions and are subjugated by a “soft diplomacy” (Nashef 359) that subtly demands that they adjust irresistibly to their new reality. Interestingly, Coetzee refers to this subjugation as memory cleansing. Those who arrive in Novilla are expected to leave their past lives behind and

erase every memory. Ana explains to Simón that “[p]eople [in Novilla] have washed themselves clean of old ties” (Coetzee 24) and advises him to do the same. Initially, Simón resists this memory erasure policy, claiming that he “hold[s] onto . . . [the] shadows [of the past]” (Coetzee 77). Later, however, he too agrees that “[n]one of [them] has a past. . . [and they] start with a blank slate” (Coetzee 116). Thus, David and Simón’s voyage to Novilla functions as “a symbolic baptism. . . [that] purge[s] them of all previous lives” (Nashef 360).

Exploitation and expropriation have been plaguing the history of the human for centuries. Migrations and the dispossession and trafficking of individuals as a result is not a contemporary phenomenon. Violence and oppression still reverberate in the present and inform our political and socioeconomic reality, leading to an ever-increasing number of dispossessed peoples. According to Edward Said, “the past shapes our understanding and views of the present” (3), while the interconnection between the past and the present confounds temporalities and places, thus intertwining histories (3). Contemplating the “pastness *or not* of the past” (6), Said argues that, although imperialism ended as a system after the Second World War “with the dismantling of the great colonial structures” (6), there are still living traces of imperialism, and, thus colonialism, in modern times.¹ European imperialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has left its traces in today’s markets, labor policies and political institutions (Said 7); hence the exploitative practices that occur in essentially every part of the world and that are manifested in Coetzee’s settings. Imperialism in its new formations permeates the neocolonial states, consolidating categories such as “inferior” or “subject races” (Said 9) that allow for the subjugation of those peoples that do not comply with the paradigm of the “overrepresented” white Man “as the generic, ostensibly supracultural human” (Wynter 288). David and Simón are forced to abide by this paradigm; the very essence of their identities is altered and appropriated by a faceless authority. The consolidation of this paradigm as the only option for humanity, namely the white Man as the human par excellence and as the only type of human that can belong in the world and can take possession *of* the world,² requires the imposition and unquestioning acceptance of certain “ideological formations” (Said 9). These, Said avers, “include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination” (9). This ideology has been so firmly consolidated that “the *imperium* . . . [is

an] almost metaphysical obligation” (Said 10); and because of its metaphysical nature, it seems impossible to be changed, overcome, or even challenged and questioned. *The Childhood of Jesus* contemplates the metaphysical nature of the imperium, not only discussing the aspect which transcends the physical, but also examining the meta-physical, that which appropriates the physical, the tangible, in ways that facilitate and reinforce the system of oppression. According to Ann Laura Stoler, the remains of colonialism exist both on the material level of our environment and on people’s minds (2); these remains are manifested in a multilayered reality that permeates different levels of perception (2). They function as the “tangible effects of ruination” (Stoler 5). Ruins, as Stoler argues, are not just monuments, but “ecologies of remains ope[n] to wider social topographies” (22), that generate and are generated by what she calls “violent environments” (5). In such environments, the process of ruination (namely, the continuous process of violence) becomes feasible through the unequal access to wealth and material goods (Stoler 5,7). This inequality and, by extension, the deprivation of the right to self-appropriation is what David and Simón face when they are granted the room upon their arrival in Novilla, which, as I have already discussed, hardly satisfies their needs. They are, thus, entrapped in the process of ruination that materializes in “different durations and moments of exposure to a range of violences” (Stoler 11): First, they are kept at a camp in Belstar where they are given their new names and ages, then they are taken to Novilla and forced to speak the Spanish language, and finally, they are forced to follow a poor diet and survive with Simón’s low wages. Novilla, thus, creates what Stoler calls “[i]mperial formations”, namely not a fixed situation of oppression, but a process in which oppression is continuously generated in different forms and through a plurality of means of dispossession (8); in our contemporary world, these dispossessions are manifested in several sociopolitical problems, the more severe of which are racism, xenophobia, and high unemployment rates (usually among non-white people) and low wages (Stoler 18).

The Childhood of Jesus examines such violent sociopolitical phenomena. Novilla’s neocolonial ideology, however, is hardly questioned by its citizens. Simón, who initially reacts against the ideology of the new place and its absurd rules, ends up consenting to the Novillan way of being and, by extension, to his ascribed inferior status as a manual worker with basic working rights that secure the bare means of survival. Working as a stevedore

among other men, Simón experiences not only an economic but also an ontological deprivation. “There is a small wooden shed at the quayside which the men use as a dressing room. Though the door has no lock, they seem happy to store their overalls and boots there” (Coetzee 27). The description of the workplace and environment is revealing of the violation of their rights as workers and as humans. The stevedores are expected to be content with the conditions of their work, although there is really nothing to be content with. When the paymaster comes to allocate their wages, only one worker, Daga, reacts to his inadequate payment, calling it “[r]at’s wage” (Coetzee 55). Álvaro, having accepted this degrading situation, responds “[t]hat’s what we all earn” (Coetzee 55). Here, Coetzee addresses two parameters of inequality: first, the exploitation of people’s labor power and second, the passive acceptance of such conditions by workers who are deprived of the ability to claim their rights. Workers are busy but not productive; productivity no longer exists because the only purpose of work is to provide for the bare means of survival. The stevedores keep loading and unloading bags without questioning the fact that their rights as workers and as humans have been vaporized and, thus, they are unable to escape the inferior status they are ascribed, which is always contrasted to the paymaster’s superiority. According to Hannah Arendt, this “economic struggle of classes” (159) is a struggle that persists across geographies and temporalities, and shows that, for as long as the accumulation of wealth is in the hands of the white, bourgeois society, the economic fight between classes will not cease to exist. This fight is unjust since it always results in feeding the wallets of those who are already rich, reinforcing the idea that some people – those of the supposedly inferior race – are not qualified enough (as if by nature) to have equal access to the world’s wealth.³ Indeed, what facilitates the enforcement of the status of the underpaid laborer on these people is the fact that they are foreigners. Therefore, the economic struggle of classes coexists with the ideology of race thinking. As Arendt argues, since the nineteenth century the “laws of capitalism were actually allowed to create realities”, realities that exploited at once people’s labor power and race (136,137). The capitalist reality was further empowered in the years after the First World War, when the number of stateless people – migrants and refugees – increased dramatically (Arendt 267, 268). These people suddenly became dispossessed of their fundamental right to belong somewhere in the world. The supposedly sub-humans became then what Arendt calls the

“*de jure*’ stateless” (279), those that have nowhere to settle and who are nowhere welcome. This resonates with Simón’s claim that “[t]here is *nowhere* else to be but *here*” (emphasis added; Coetzee 21). Yet, this *here* is not welcoming. It violently ascribes a new identity to people, an identity that, on the one hand, establishes their foreignness and, on the other, absorbs them on the basis of the Novillian neocolonial practices. As foreigners, David and Simón are considered an “anomaly” (Arendt 283) within the parameters of the society they have entered as guests. The characters’ trajectory precisely reflects the history of the stateless peoples following the First World War; Arendt explains that those who attempted to settle in a new country, after being forced to abandon their lands, were by no means protected by the laws of the host country (275). In fact, because of their foreignness – their different nationality – the laws were not held responsible for protecting their citizen rights (Arendt 275). Nationality was and still is above the law (Arendt 275); nationality can create laws or transgress them according to the dominant political interests that always serve the benefits of the upper social classes, ensuring at the same time the degradation of all others. Coetzee does make references to the concept and omnipotence of nationality in *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*: the imposition of names and language on the foreigners foregrounds the issue of nationality and, by extension, raises the question of citizenship. In our contemporary society, the concept of citizenship has emerged as a bourgeois modality, namely as an institution that was created by and for the sake of those of the upper class (Balibar 14). Bourgeois interests are “immanent to the institution of citizenship” (Balibar 14), in the sense that the right to be identified as a citizen and exercise citizenship rights is granted only to people that belong in this social class. To construct and exercise citizenship as such is to perceive human differences such as race, culture, sex, and intellectual status as differentiating factors that determine who can or cannot be called a citizen (Balibar 15). Individuals of a supposedly inferior status cannot be considered citizens within such politics. Thus, the concept of citizenship is the result of the institutional power that the capitalist system established and, therefore, if one is to challenge and question citizenship, one must also challenge a long-consolidated politics.

The capitalist system has played a decisive part in the formation of the world as we know and experience it today. As Anibal Quijano suggests, “[M]odern [Western] capitalism [is] a new global power” (533), as it is essentially every part of the world that

functions within its impositions. Capitalism is consolidated through a variety of ideological and repressive apparatuses (Althusser 75); capitalism is the system in its wholeness, while the institutions are its various parts that allow for the regular conducting of its rules. All these institutions that comprise capitalism are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Quijano 545); the bourgeois family and the nation-state dictate and regulate the production of goods and the allocation of resources, ensuring the welfare of the upper class and the accommodation of national interests (Quijano 545). The mutual empowerment of these institutions and, by extension of capitalism, results in the perpetual subjugation, categorization, and exploitation of those people who do not belong in either institution because supposedly they lack the right nationality, economic, or social status. The persistence of these practices – which we call neocolonial – despite the formal end of colonialism as a system is what Quijano names as the “coloniality of power” (536). For Quijano, modernity is largely – if not completely – mediated by the coloniality of power since the latter affects “the quotidian life of the totality of the global population” (545). As he explains, “this model of power. . . mean[s] that historical-structural heterogeneity has been eradicated within its dominions” (545). Everyone that deviates from the capitalist paradigm and disobeys its dictations must be eradicated. Refugees like David and Simón have no place in the capitalist system; their one and only use is to serve the benefits of those who essentially lead them to the position of the Other as waste. It is this sub-human position that Walter D. Mignolo calls “subalternity” (426). Drawing upon Quijano’s arguments on the coloniality of power, Mignolo avers that “subalternity is not only a question of social classes, but is instead a larger issue *embedded* in the coloniality of power” (emphasis added; 426). “[S]ubalternity [is a question] of subordinated. . . *histories* within the interstate structure of power” (emphasis added; Mignolo 426). When an individual becomes subaltern, their whole history becomes subaltern; and when one’s history is claimed subaltern, this essentially means that all modes of existence related with this history – the traditions, language, education, knowledge – are redundant. This aligns with Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s argument that (neo)colonial practices “[lead] to the door of the coloniality of Being” (242); in other words, colonialism is “marked not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, but on the general understanding of being as well” (242).⁴ This is probably the most dangerous impact of colonialism, since

it shows that even after its end as a system or practice, its ideological foundations remain intact. The concept of coloniality refers precisely to these ruins and that, as Maldonado-Torres argues, “define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (243). Drawing again on Said’s arguments, “imperialism [and by extension colonialism] occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and – by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable *cultural* formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts” (emphasis added; 13). Colonial subjugation was not and still is not limited to the political level, but exists simultaneously on all the aforementioned levels, all of which Said names as culture (13).

Culture – which entails the politics, arts and literature as Said avers – manifests itself through the Spanish language and the educational system in *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*. As soon as David and Simón arrive in Novilla, the Spanish language interpellates them and reduces them to the position of the Other. “We are new arrivals”, Simón says, “articulat[ing] the words slowly, in the Spanish he has worked hard to master” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 1). This foreign language is imposed upon him and David and constantly reminds them that there are new laws, mandates, and expectations, and, essentially, a new life to which they must assimilate. While looking for a job, Simón is told that “[o]ne day [Spanish] will cease to feel like a language, it will become the way things are” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 14). This ominous affirmation reveals that language essentially foregrounds a world order that seems impossible to be challenged or questioned. Very telling of the oppressive nature of this order is the fact that the main characters have been named David and Simón in Belstar; they have not chosen their names, but have been forced to accept them. As Simón explains, “David is a name they gave [the boy] at the camp. He doesn’t like it, he says it is not his true name” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 67). Later, when they settle in Estrella, Simón also claims, “I have never grasped why the boy I am now calling David finds names so significant – his name in particular” (Coetzee, *Schooldays* 198). For David, names are important because they ascribe and delimit one’s identity; they are not just words by which people are addressed. Names have the power to mediate and define people, granting them agency or depriving them of it. Language renders David “a *huérfano*” (Coetzee, *Schooldays* 17), a child lost in the world. According to Michela

Canepari-Labib, Coetzee “in all of his texts . . . sets out to investigate the role language plays in the constitution of identity” (105). Coetzee’s novels should be read as “a more general investigation of colonialism. . . [that coincides with] explorations of the human psyche, in particular of the impact that language has on it and the way communication and identity are or are not achieved by human beings” (Canepari-Labib 106). In *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* Coetzee intentionally fuses three languages, English, Spanish, and German, foregrounding the difficulty of communication and the plurality of ways through which individuals are interpellated by these different languages. Indeed, although the two novels are written in English, English is identified as Spanish, possibly suggesting the omnipotence of the Spanish language upon the characters. David realizes the way language functions and he questions the effects it has on him. He, therefore, asks “[w]hy do I have to speak Spanish all the time?”, adding that he “want[s] to speak [his] own language” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 221). Interestingly, there is an incident in which he sings a German song, but claims it is English. He deliberately resists the Novillan language, having understood that it allows for no alternative ways of expression. His consistent questioning of language leads to his fascination with a children’s version of *Don Quixote*, a story of a hero that much resembles his own attributes, in the sense that Don Quixote enacts his own perceptions of the world. In fact, David believes that Don Quixote does fight a giant and not a windmill. When Simón tries to persuade him that Don Quixote is mistaken in seeing the windmill as a giant, David says “[h]e’s only a windmill in the picture” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 182). Being unable to grasp David’s perspective Simón suffices in teaching him how to read. Yet, the boy refuses to “read letters”, since he is interested in reading “the story” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 191). These exchanges reveal David’s general disbelief towards the imposed language, whether spoken in everyday situations or as expressed through literature. David sees beyond letters, not consenting to the idea that that these abstract symbols convey the meaning of the story. For David, the semantic surface of the story is not enough; letters do not constitute the story and pictures are likely to be deceptive. Written language, spoken language, and even language illustrated in pictures disappoint the child, and hence reinforce his perpetual doubts. David is punished for this direct challenge he poses to the authority of Novilla. Interestingly, Coetzee shows that the punishment of David exists within the educational system of the

societies he has entered in the two novels. In *The Childhood of Jesus*, David is sent to a school that can make him use language properly. The school – through its institutional power – further consolidates the Novillan rule by reproducing only a specific kind of knowledge: that, according to which citizens must be docile to obey the laws and consent to every restriction that supposedly only serves their own benefits. Soon after David first goes to school, his teacher, señor León, informs Simón and Inés that, although the child is “an intelligent boy. . . he is finding it difficult to adjust to the realities of the classroom” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 241). When he gives David the chance to prove that he knows how to write, David does not recognize him as the one and only authority. Señor León asks David to write “[c]onviene que yo diga la verdad, I must tell the truth”, but the latter writes “[y]o soy la verdad, I am the truth” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 266). For his unapologetic behavior, David is sent to “Punta Arenas” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 253), a school that can supposedly address his needs more effectively, when it is really a type of reformatory school surrounded by “barbed wire” (Coetzee, *Childhood* 253). The same educational approach is followed in the beginning of *The Schooldays of Jesus*. This time, it is señor Robles, a private tutor, that forces his methods upon David. While trying to teach David mathematics, señor Robles explains that numbers have a “definite order” and that “[e]very object. . . is subject to arithmetic” (Coetzee, *Schooldays* 28). When David starts raising questions, challenging these teaching methods, señor Robles concludes that David “[has] difficulty with mathematics and with abstract language in general” (Coetzee, *Schooldays* 31). Coetzee awakens his readers to the fact that the societies of Novilla and Estrella do not welcome anyone that deviates from their norm. David explains to Simón that if he were to abide by the rules, first he would “have to make [himself] small” (Coetzee, *Schooldays* 32). Through this incident, Coetzee exposes the Western traditions and philosophy that dictate a particular way of thinking, writing, speaking, and, essentially, a particular way of being human (Canepari-Labib 114). Canepari-Labib argues that Coetzee, following the structuralist and post-structuralist approaches, examines “reality. . . as a linguistic construct” (110); he challenges our perception of reality, claiming that everything we know – and everything we think we know – is actually a product of a long-consolidated politics that is always expressed and reinforced through language. This aligns with Roland Barthes’s arguments and views on language. Barthes suggests that in the language we

speak, there is no room for the Other; “in our society, the language of the *same* suffices us, we have no need of the *Other’s* language in order to live: *to each his own language suffices*” (Barthes 116). For this reason, Barthes talks not only of a language, but of a whole discourse, which he calls encratic (121). Encratic discourse “is a diffused, widespread, one might say osmotic discourse which *impregnates* exchanges, social rites, leisure [and] the socio-symbolic field” (Barthes 121). Barthes believes that reality and our perception of it are directly mediated by the dominant discourse as it has been established by the upper classes (121). This establishment could not have been possible without the “ideology . . . which sets, on one side, society. . . and, on the other, individual (Barthes 112); and because ideology is always a product of those in power, there is the perpetual struggle between the upper and lower classes, being visible in the production and *reproduction* of language. According to Louis Althusser, the omnipresent clash between social classes is manifested in the formation of the “Ideological State Apparatuses” (75). What Althusser names as Ideological State apparatuses is essentially the emergence of institutions like schools, families, literature, and arts, to name a few, which are mutually reinforcing and strive towards perpetuating the power and prestige of the upper class at the expense of the lower class (75). The union of these institutions forms a “*system*” (Althusser 81), which is sustained not only ideologically but also materially (76). The individual who participates in these institutions “behaves in such-and-such a way, adopts such-and-such a practical line of conduct and, what is more, participates in certain regulated practices, those of the ideological apparatus on which the ideas that she has as subject, depend *freely*” (emphasis added; Althusser 185). This is probably the most serious implication of these apparatuses: their enforcement upon the individual in subtle and yet so dangerous ways that he/she ends up consenting to what is imposed, as if freely choosing it. It is the material existence of this ideology that gradually and effectively manages to brainwash individuals, rendering them unable to realize what it is they do or say. Althusser concludes that “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (190); in fact, it utilizes a simple, “everyday hailing” (190), to subject people and to address them in ways dictated by the purposes and intentions of its institutions. This violent hailing becomes possible with a discourse that imposes a specific language whose voice is “not an inner voice, the voice of conscience, that interpellates [individuals]. . . [but] a public voice. . . that of the modern

constitution” (Bidet 8). Coetzee’s David realizes how the neocolonial ideology attempts to interpellate him – primarily through the Spanish language and the school – and refuses to be subjected to their authorities. The rest of the characters, however, seem to have already been interpellated through the memory cleansing practices of Novilla and Estrella.

Both *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* problematize the figure of the foreigner, the migrant, the one that has been seen as the Other. Coetzee conjures the migrant and refugee crisis as we experience it today, and as the humanity has been experiencing for centuries, in order to contemplate the political, social, and economic parameters that have led to the violent classification of humanity. Both novels present a multilayered reality that is informed by a long-consolidated politics – that of imperialism (and capitalism) – as well as a specific ideology that has normalized the consideration of some peoples as sub-humans, on the basis of abstract – and purposefully constructed – notions such as race, nationality, and citizenship. Neocolonial politics and practices are diffused in the world around us as the two novels reveal; and there is not a single individual that has not witnessed or experienced the implications of such practices, since our very jobs, educational systems, and the language we speak bear the living traces of colonialism. Coetzee subtly plots the omnipresence of neocolonialism and suggests that this haunting presence has been so skillfully sustained that people cannot recognize it, let alone question it, anymore. Indeed, in the historical continuum, exploitation and subjugation have always been present, so much that we have ceased to question their existence, as if taking for granted that they are inextricable parts of the world. Coetzee awakens his readers to the dangers of such thinking: To normalize (or even to expect) exploitation is to normalize the status of the subaltern, that is violently ascribed to those people who do not have the supposedly right nationality, race, or social status. Yet, if the subaltern becomes a category we accept, does this mean that we also accept that some humans cannot belong either *here* or *anywhere*?

Notes

¹ Said explains the connections between imperialism and colonialism, arguing that imperialism is “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory” whereas colonialism is the result of imperialism, and essentially refers to “the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (8).

² This paradigm presupposes that those people who were not lucky enough to have been born in the – supposedly – right skin color or country cannot possess the world.

³ “[T]he projected hierarchy of a graduated table, [includes] all forms of sentient life, from those classified as the lowest to those as the highest. It is, therefore, as the new rational/irrational line . . . comes to be actualized in the institutionalized differences between European settlers and Indians/Negroes” (Wynter 306).

⁴ According to Sylvia Wynter, colonialism consolidated a particular way of being human, and human beings who differed from the colonial norm were deprived of their very human nature and were forced into the status of the slave that came into complete contrast to the (white) master (268, 272).

2. THE CONDITIONALITY OF HOSPITALITY: BETWEEN BORDERS AND COMMUNITIES

“Benevolence, I must tell you, is what we keep encountering here. . . We are positively borne along on a cloud of goodwill. But it all remains a bit abstract. Can goodwill by itself satisfy our needs? Is it not in our nature to crave something more tangible?”

J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus*

“‘Where?’ as being the question of man. A question which, like that of the Sphinx, is addressed to a man on the move, who has no other place of his own than that of being on the way, bound for a destination that is unknown to him, but precedes him with its shadow.”

Anne Dufourmantelle, *Invitation*

What is it that Simón and David encounter in Novilla and Estrella? “Benevolence”, says Simón (Coetzee 66). If so, what is the nature of this benevolence, and why aren’t the protagonists satisfied with it? The seemingly benevolent intentions of Novilla and Estrella foreground the question of the actual politics of hospitality towards the foreigners, towards those who bring a new, and even alien way of understanding and experiencing the world around them. Having discussed how Novilla and Estrella are essentially two neocolonial cities in the first chapter, I now wish to extend the argument to address the issue of welcoming, by way of including, or internally excluding the radical foreigner. Coetzee painstakingly draws David and Simón’s integration into the cities they enter, explaining how they cannot be considered as members of these communities, unless they abide by the laws, language, and institutional regime. For all their benevolence and goodwill, Novilla and Estrella do not welcome David and Simón. They perpetually and consistently attempt to alter the characters’ identities, reshaping them into what they deem acceptable. Can such

an approach towards the foreigner be considered as an act of hospitality? Are Novilla and Estrella hospitable towards the newcomers? The answer is no, as Coetzee proves. David and Simón are not welcome into the society, essentially because they challenge a violently imposed homogeneity. Hospitality is not granted to them because, as foreigners, they bring the risk of disputing the dominance and power of the hosts over them. Memory cleansing and the practice of anaesthetizing their emotions are the necessary prerequisites, the conditions, with which they must comply if they wish to receive hospitality. By examining the conceptualization of hospitality within the neocolonial societies, Coetzee questions the arrival of the Other and problematizes our perception of the Other as a guest. In a world in which the Other is persistently excluded – through borders, detention centers, and xenophobic behaviors – is equality a long-lost ideal or even a utopic concept?

Upon their arrival in Novilla, David and Simón are greeted warmly. “Hello, young man” (Coetzee 2) says a girl who works at the Centro de Reubicación, addressing David, while she offers them a room to spend the night. Starting *The Childhood of Jesus* with the girl’s politeness towards the protagonists, Coetzee awakens us to the difference between the façade and the essence of hospitality. Soon, the protagonists realize that they will not be given the room, as it is not available yet; instead, they are encouraged to “make [themselves] a shelter” in a “yard” (Coetzee 7). When Simón frustratingly wonders if there is “a public room” for them to stay, the girl simply answers “[y]ou can’t do that” (Coetzee 8). Later, when he asks for money to provide for his own and David’s needs until he finds a job, the girl responds, “I said I would help you, I didn’t say I would provide you with money” (Coetzee 10). These exchanges are very revealing of the nature of Novilla’s hospitality. Novilla expects the newcomers to survive without receiving any help from the authorities or institutions, as if the latter are not responsible for the lives of the foreigners. The dominant definition of help in Novilla is not in the least what the protagonists need. Even when they are ultimately granted a room, David and Simón are expected to live under poor conditions, which disprove Novilla’s supposedly good intentions. Even so, Ana insists that people who arrive in Novilla do receive the help they need. She explains to Simón that “[Novilla] help[s] them and their lives improve. None of that is invisible” (Coetzee 35). Angry and disappointed, Simón says “[w]ith no disrespect to you or to your hospitality. . . [y]ou live on a diet of bread and water and bean paste and you claim to be filled. How can

that be, humanly speaking? Are you lying, even to yourselves?” (Coetzee 36,37). The way hospitality materializes in Novilla seems very absurd to Simón; he realizes that, even though Novilla has opened its gates and has allowed them to enter, he and David are not welcome. There is no hospitality in the way they are treated. Novilla’s subtle reshaping and reconstructing of their identities indicates that their foreignness will not be embraced. According to Jacques Derrida, whenever foreigners enter a new place, they are immediately recognized as those who “[do not] speak like the rest. . . [those who] spea[k] an odd sort of language” (5), while “the foreigner, the foreign citizen, the foreigner to the family or the nation. . . is a born foreigner” (87). As such, the foreigner is immediately thought of as a suspect, as someone who can potentially harm the society he enters because of his supposedly innate difference from the rest, and he should thus be questioned or challenged (Derrida 11). Indeed, the moment David and Simón arrive, they are asked to identify their names, ages, and relation to each other in the language of Novilla. They are essentially asked to provide an identity ascribed and not chosen using a violently imposed language. To ask for hospitality in a language not one’s own is, as Derrida avers, “the first act of violence” (15) against the foreigner, since (as I explained in the first chapter) language is not merely about words, but about identity construction. To impose the host’s language on the foreigner as a necessary prerequisite of hospitality means that there is a hierarchy in which the host is placed higher than the foreigner, the guest. The hosts are, then, superior to the guests because they are the ones whose language is responsible for granting hospitality. However, this hierarchy of languages and, by extension, of social statuses does not allow for either the granting or receiving of a benevolent type of hospitality. Derrida explains that the concept of hospitality should be approached in a twofold manner: He differentiates between absolute hospitality and hospitality as power, arguing that the first entails “open[ing] up my home. . . not only to the foreigner. . . but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other” without requiring anything in return (25), while the second type is about power relations between the hosts and the guests. The host wishes to be recognized as the master of his house and expects the foreigner to respect him, thus subjecting himself to the host’s sovereignty (Derrida 53,54). The dichotomy of hospitality in such a manner signifies that the newcomer is approached either as a “guest” or a “parasite” (Derrida 59). In Novilla, David and Simón are treated as parasites, precisely because Novilla is built upon the

hierarchy that recognizes individuals either as masters or as those subjected to the masters, and, most importantly, because it leaves no room for the hierarchy to be challenged. The very existence of a hierarchical order in Novilla proves that its intentions towards the foreigners entail their subjugation and exploitation. They must adapt to the Novillan rules if they wish to be embraced by the others. They must also realize that, unless they prove their willingness to assimilate to the philosophy of the host, they will not be granted hospitality (Bell 242). However, even when Simón seems to have adapted to his new life in Novilla, the hospitality he and David receive is not – as Derrida says – absolute. Something is always required of them, either their labor power or, in David’s case, blind obedience to his teachers. The only type of hospitality granted to foreigners in these two cities is that in which they must understand and accept the fact that their obligation is to recognize their foreignness as a differentiating and degrading factor. The “unforeseeability” and the new “temporal modality” (Dikeç et al. 11) that the arrival of the foreigners entails challenges the Novillan rules and, thus, absolute hospitality is not even an option in such a society. The moment a foreigner comes, becomes the moment at which the hosts must question their very identities and intentions. The unexpected arrival of the foreigner generates a feeling of unease as the host realizes that there is not only one type of human, neither one language to be spoken. David and Simón’s arrival does not pose only a territorial challenge to Novilla (in the sense that they live in a foreign land), but also a temporal one (Dikeç et al. 4). They question the place they enter not merely in terms of who has rights on Novilla’s land, but also in terms of when and how the holders of those rights decided that they are the ones to include or exclude others. The “temporalization” and “spatialization” of hospitality force the host to answer the question “[w]here exactly are we . . . when we encounter strangers?” (Dikeç et al. 4). As Novilla is a place that erases everyone’s memories and past lives, it immediately dismisses this question, thus avoiding facing the challenge of the newcomer towards its regulations. Neither the temporal nor the spatial aspect of its hospitality is addressed precisely because Novilla’s memory cleansing practices have forced everyone to forget the fact that they do belong to a specific place, and they have the right to belong in the history which Novilla persistently attempts to diminish.

David and Simón experience a system of power relations in Novilla which does not allow for the unconditionality of hospitality. The hospitality that Novilla provides – which can hardly be considered as a hospitable act towards the foreigners – is built upon the presupposition that the hosts are inherently superior to the guests. Because of the dominance they think they have over the newcomers, the hosts marginalize them, thus attempting to maintain the unequal power dynamic. This systematic subordination of the foreigners has led to their persistent exclusion through the imposition of borders, and detention centers, and the reproduction of xenophobic ideas and racist behaviors. In both *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*, David and Simón are constantly marginalized and stigmatized as the pariahs who can harm the homogeneity and unity of the societies they enter. They are always treated as the miasma that can pervade and stain the purity of the host place, and thus they must be controlled and kept at a distance, if the welfare of the community is to be preserved. Coetzee foregrounds the question of the inclusion and exclusion of the foreigner from the very beginning of *The Childhood of Jesus*. Conjuring the migrant and refugee crisis, the novel begins with a “man at the gate” who oversees the arrival of the newcomers (Coetzee 1). Referring to the Centro de Reubicación, he informs David and Simón that they need to “check in before they close their doors” (Coetzee 1). The closed doors are a recurrent motif in the novel; when Simón asks for a public room and wishes to return to the Centro in order to find one, he is told that “[t]he gates. . . are *closed*” (emphasis added; Coetzee 8). The repetition of the schema of closure unavoidably generates a suffocating atmosphere for the foreigners who are immobilized and forced to stay at a specific place, at least until someone grants them permission to move. “We keep a record of everyone who passes”, David and Simón are told (Coetzee 22). The containment of people’s movement deprives them of the right to freely choose a place to settle or start their lives anew. The authorities of Novilla that remain invisible but are omnipresent oversee the characters and subject them to its power. The regulation of the characters’ movement is evident throughout the plot; upon their arrival, David and Simón are denied the right to move freely. Very revealing of the deprivation of the right to move and express themselves freely are the incidents that follow David’s unsuccessful integration into the school and his disobedience to its authorities. When David’s teacher absurdly diagnoses him with a cognitive deficit (that supposedly causes the boy’s inability

to read, write and count properly), David is sent to Punta Arenas, a reformatory school which is surrounded by “barbed wire” (Coetzee 253). Excluding David from his previous school and sending him to another that much resembles a penal institution is the authorities’ explicit attempt to keep the subjects of Novilla in a state of anesthesia: David has to be restricted from influencing the rest of the students in the first school he attends, which could result in a revolt against the teachers and, by extension, against Novilla as a whole. Therefore, his withdrawal is necessary for the protection and preservation of Novilla’s ideology which is reinforced by its educational system. David explains to Simón that he has “lots of wounds. . . from the barbed wire” (Coetzee 289). This is a nuanced reference to the experience of countless migrants who are restricted by walls, fences, and oppressive borders and who try to cross them to build a life that offers more than the means of bare survival. These people are usually considered as trespassers and their movement to freedom, or a better life is thus criminalized. In fact, when David reports the existence of barbed wire, a woman that works at Punta Arenas refutes this claim, calling it “a myth”, “[a] complete fabrication” (Coetzee 300), thus belittling the child and immediately dismissing the accusation. Because David and Simón live in Novilla as “gypsies” – as they mention in an earlier incident of the novel – their voices are silenced, and their complaints are of no significance (Coetzee 273). By gypsies, they mean that they are in a state of belonging nowhere in the world, in other words, in a state of statelessness. This state is reinforced and reproduced by the existence and imposition of Novilla’s border regime that manifests itself in the bureaucratic mechanisms that keep the gates closed, as well as in the schools that punish noncomplying students. According to Leah Cowan, “[b]orders are indisputably sites of violence” (1), as they create a stratification of society, polarizing people into two categories: Legal humans and illegal (non)humans (Cowan 2). Borders affirm the right of people to be included or excluded, thus signifying one’s right to belong either somewhere or nowhere. Of course, the imposition of borders and the ideology that underlies border thinking is “elite, colonial and rooted in capitalism” (Cowan 4). As I have argued earlier, colonialism (and, by extension, neocolonialism) has generated a hierarchy of humanity based on distinct parameters such as race, sociopolitical and economic status; as such, borders were and still are implemented in attempts to maintain the opposition between those entitled to move freely and those who are denied the right to move, because

they possess a supposedly underprivileged identity. As Cowan argues, the movement of wealthy (and usually white) people is in most cases unrestricted, since their arrival in a host country facilitates the accumulation of its wealth (6); instead, those of the working class (and usually of color) cannot move unrestricted since they are recognized as “immigrants” and are, thus, “less permanently desirable” (6). The regulation of people’s movement through this double standard policy functions as an attempt to restrict not only the individual who enters a new country, but also the histories, cultures, and narratives that each individual brings (Cowan 9). Because some individuals and their histories are considered subaltern, the host countries do not allow them to enter. Their entrance – the host countries claim – would threaten the economic and political status of an uncontaminated state, which would unavoidably result in the degradation and corruption of the host society at large. An example that Cowan gives (and which is also significant in relation to Coetzee)¹ is that of Britain that still operates under neo-imperial politics: Britain includes or excludes foreigners based on color, (European) language, and their willingness – by way of providing labor – or unwillingness to contribute to its nation (23, 26). It has implemented a detention policy for those who enter, to supposedly protect the citizens from the invasion of foreigners, when in reality “[d]etention is high-security imprisonment by another name, through which people are taken away from their families and communities, incarcerated without their possessions. . . . punished for non-compliance” (Cowan 99). British authorities have claimed that these measures are necessary to safeguard its nation, a nation that ironically considers itself as too “vulnerable” and which, therefore, must be protected from the invasion and the alleged hostility of immigrants (Gibson 162). To protect its self-proclaimed vulnerability, Britain only grants permission of entrance to those who can practically demonstrate their gratefulness to the nation (Gibson 164).² However, the truth is that behind this acquiescent acceptance of the foreigner that Britain uses as a façade, there are fundamental national interests that are accommodated by the imposition of the border and detention regime (Gibson 159). Order and security have often been used as an excuse for excluding the foreigners; using such excuses, the host countries justify their politics of exclusion supposedly for the sake of economic, social, or cultural

prosperity (Carens 259, 262), which must not be disrupted or destroyed with the arrival of the foreigner. In *The Childhood of Jesus*, David and Simón experience these exact conditions: they are forced to use a specific language in order to become subjected to Novilla's order, while they must abide by the laws and regulations that only serve the authorities and do not attend to the actual needs of the migrants who keep arriving. When David refuses to obey, he is treated as a criminal that should be justifiably marginalized and kept at a safe distance from the rest of the community, so as not to contaminate it with his foreignness. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, David and Simón once again decide to start their lives anew, this time in Estrella. Leaving Novilla behind, they move towards this new place where they hope they can build a better future. Their movement is, however, always dependent upon laws and restrictive regulations. When they first arrive in Estrella, they reach the Office of Relocations, wondering whether "its beneficence [will] extend to fugitives from the law" (Coetzee 1). Persecuted by the authorities, they are forced to adopt an incognito identity and exist simply as "nameless transients" in Estrella (Coetzee 2). David and Simón continue to live as pariahs; they are the foreigners that are considered to have invaded Novilla and, who left illegally as criminals. They know that if identified in Estrella, they will be punished, and once more stigmatized. Their movement – their agonized flight – to Estrella raises the question of who has the right to move and, by extension, under which conditions. Coetzee's text resonates with this question that refers to the migrant crisis and challenges the regulations that underlie immigration policies. As immigration politics clearly dictate, granting legal permission to a newcomer depends on their status; authorities ask whether the newcomer is a refugee, a labor migrant, or an asylum seeker (Lahav 33), while always having national and sovereign interests in mind (49). The right to move freely and to access another country has long been reduced to a transaction between the host countries and the foreigners, as the former usually require from the latter something in return. Between the late 1960's and early 1990's in Europe, people were allowed to move to another country as workers, not as individuals (Lahav 39), and, thus, the exploitation of one's labor power has been a significant factor in granting the permission to enter. The capitalist system has guaranteed and facilitated the unobstructed regulation of goods and services, but has not allowed for the unrestricted movement of people as humans (Lahav 42). The vision of a "people's Europe" was refuted when

immigration politics started excluding migrants because of their non-European identity or inability to prove how they would be beneficial to the host country (Lahav 40, 49). Aiming at serving their own interests, most Western European countries implemented a border regime to control illegal migration, while justifying such decisions on the claims that with migration come terrorism and criminality (Lahav 30,31). This is precisely how David and Simón have been treated throughout their journey: as terrorists, criminals, and as those who the authorities need to take advantage of, if they are to be of any benefit. Their decision to move to Estrella is considered illegal, because the reason of their migration does not comply with the benefits of Novilla. Because Novilla provided them with a home, food, a job, and educational opportunities, their escape towards Estrella is deemed as punishable. The authorities of Novilla pursue them, as they refuse to accept that the means of bare survival that they provide are not enough, while also forgetting the fact that every individual has the right to seek a better future whenever and wherever they wish. The migrants' right to move aligns with Tendayi Achiume who argues that one's right to move is always assessed on the basis of the reasons behind their migration. As she argues, a differentiation between a migrant and an economic refugee has been framed to differentiate the former in need for another place to live because of his life being in danger, from the latter who decides to seek a better future somewhere else (1509). The migrant is, thus, considered justified to come and seek asylum (which, however, does not necessarily mean he will be granted asylum), whereas there are no provisions for the economic refugee who, by his own volition, left his country (Achiume 1509).³ This differentiation essentially signifies that only when a person's life is at immediate danger, the right to move can be exercised. Therefore, in the case of David and Simón whose life was not in danger in Novilla, their movement is not acceptable or well received, and, by extension, they are reasonably excluded. The sovereignty of the host countries justifies the exclusion of certain individuals on the basis of political, social and ideological factors, thus, granting or depriving people of the right to membership (Achiume 1524). It is usually people from First World countries that enjoy international mobility and can, by extension, become members of a given sovereignty, whereas people from Third World countries are

considerably more restricted and denied the right to migrate freely (Achieme 1530).⁴ Therefore, it is nationality (alongside wealth and political rights) that decides who can become a member of a society; but this adherence to nationality as a defining parameter of membership disregards the transnationality that every human being inherently possesses, namely the right to unrestricted and unconditional movement (Achieme 1530, 1573). This, Achieme suggests, creates two categories of people: “political insiders” and “political strangers” (1515). David and Simón belong to the second category, that of the political stranger, namely the nonnational, the foreigner who has been excluded from society. However, it is David that challenges the identity of the political stranger and even appropriates it to his own advantage. As his music teacher señor Arroyo says in *The Schooldays of Jesus*, David “is an exception [because] [h]e feels with unusual intensity the falsity of his new life, [having] not yielded to the pressure to forget” (Coetzee 215). David himself explains to Simón (during a discussion regarding the present and next life) that he “[does not] want to go to the next life”, despite Simón’s reassurance that it will be “an adventure” (Coetzee 139). This exchange reveals that, while Simón hopes for and envisions a better next life, David envisions a better present life. For David, their arrival in Estrella is in itself a reason to hope for something greater than mere bread, water, and a shelter. David recognizes not only his right to move but also the fact that he managed to move to Estrella. The enforcement of the political stranger status upon him has not stopped him from chasing his passion for dance, nor from trying to save others as he repeatedly says. In fact, he has embraced his otherness, because he understands that this is what people in Novilla and Estrella need: someone who can urge them to realize their right to act freely and who, is then, not so much different from the rest; those who have been subjected to the authorities can see in David an-other version of themselves, and they can potentially remember everything they have been made to forget. To remember is to decolonize; when people remember their past lives, histories, and the violent ways by which they have become subaltern, they can reclaim their rights and voices. The status of the subaltern is an imperial construct that facilitates the exploitation and violence against certain peoples. Therefore, remembering how the imperial (and colonial) past shaped contemporary forms of dispossession is the first step towards decolonization. Achieme suggests that peoples

and countries who share an imperial past also share a history, the most important part of which is the way national identities have been mutually constitutive (1549). She, therefore, argues that in neocolonial times it is important to remember the role of peoples who were colonial subjects in the construction of the colonial power (1549). For this reason, she avers, people coming from Third World countries should have the right to enter whichever First World nation they wish, as they are an inextricable part of its history and identity (1549). This co-dependency reveals that one cannot claim an identity unless he has accepted and embraced his relation to the Other. David understands that the societies he has entered affirm their dominance over him, but this necessarily means that they need him to consolidate their own identity. In this sense, the child moves – literally and metaphorically – from colonialism to decolonization, altering the uneven power dynamics and foregrounding the interconnection between those who rule and those ruled (Achieme 1522, 1574). David decolonizes the perception of the migrant as the helpless and hopeless victim, foregrounding instead his own subjectivity as a constitutive part of the host places he enters.

The arrival of David and Simón foregrounds the interconnection between the host and the guest and problematizes the concept and the experience of community.⁵ Coetzee's texts showcase that the protagonists are not simply treated as the Other, those who deviate from the norm of the community; they are essentially the radical foreigners, whose integration into the community threatens the sovereignty of the host, questioning the essence of his hospitality. David and Simón are foreigners, because the host places – Novilla and Estrella – have framed specific regulations and restrictions which do not leave room for them (Derrida 45); and they are radical foreigners because they challenge these regulations. As Derrida avers, *hostis* (namely the Latin origin of the word foreigner) translates either into stranger or enemy, thus revealing an interconnection between the two meanings (45). Therefore, the concepts of “*hospitality*”, “*hostility*”, and “*hostpitality*” intertwine and explain – or betray – the inherent fear of the host becoming the “hostage” of the guest (Derrida 45,54). The proximity between the notions of hospitality and hostility manifests itself in the politics of the host place, as well as its various institutions (the families, the bourgeois society, jobs, and schools) (Derrida 45). These institutions create communities of individuals and, in the case of Coetzee's settings, communities of

obedience. Coetzee presents the characters' integration into the society of Novilla and Estrella initially as a challenge towards the homogeneity of the communities, but ultimately, he showcases the similarities and the affiliations among the newcomers and the permanent residents, proving that they all exist in a state of interdependency. In *The Childhood of Jesus* Simón and David are forced to use the Spanish language, forget their past lives, and comply with the rules regarding their housing, jobs, and education. Simón reacts and repeatedly wonders “[w]hy do you treat us. . . [l]ike dirt?” (Coetzee 9). He claims that his resistance against this way of life is “[s]omething deeper [that] persists. . . which [he] call[s] the memory of having a memory” (Coetzee 117). David, too, complains about the bare survival that Novilla presents as the ideal life. When he says, “I’m hungry” (Coetzee 20), he expresses his frustration not only regarding his undernourishment, but also regarding all the absurd regulations of Novilla that belittle him. Unlike Simón who gradually accepts this life, David is constantly challenging and warning others against the ills of this society. Early in the novel, he says that “[he] [doesn’t] want to fall into a crack”, a statement that Simón quickly disregards as childish nonsense (Coetzee 43). However, David explains to him that “[people] fall down cracks and [Simón] can’t see them any more because they can’t get out” (Coetzee 211). The cracks the boy refers to are the traps of Novilla that stand in the way of those who try to move. These empty spaces impede the creation of a society that acts and thinks freely, without the authorities interfering. Both characters (and especially David) are overly critical of the Novillan philosophy and its cracks. For this reason, their integration in the communities they encounter is challenging, and, yet manages to showcase both the characters’ difference from the rest and their proximity to those who appear to have been anaesthetized. At this point I will focus on two different communities in *The Childhood of Jesus*: first, the community of the stevedores, and second, the community that Simón and David form with Inés as family. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, I will discuss the father-son community that Simón and David form and finally, the community of the dance Academy that David joins.

When Simón starts working as a stevedore, he realizes that, although his coworkers are “friendly enough... [they are] strangely incurious” (Coetzee 26). He is surprised to see that nobody wishes to know anything personal about him or David and, thus, he believes that, despite their friendliness, they are indifferent, as Novilla wishes them to be. As he

comes closer to Álvaro, one of his fellow stevedores, Simón expresses his fears regarding his vertigo, but Álvaro simply responds “[f]ortunately it is only in the mind” (Coetzee 49). Again, when Simón complains about their poor diet, Álvaro tells him that if he needs to eat meat, he could try rats. Because of such incidents, Simón thinks that Álvaro is benevolent and yet, not helpful at all. Álvaro appears to be just as abstractedly well intentioned as everyone else in Novilla. However, despite the difference and distance that appears to exist in the minds of the two men, Coetzee showcases that they gradually realize their shared characteristics. Álvaro suggests that he, Simón and David go to a football match together, to spend some time free from their work responsibilities. Furthermore, he reassures Simón that if he ever slips and falls, “[he] will save [him]” (Coetzee 49). Simón starts realizing that, ultimately there may be more than indifference in Novilla. He explains to David that “all comrades [labour] together with a common goal” (Coetzee 59), probably implying that this working routine has brought them closer. Finally, very telling of the fact Álvaro resists the anaesthetization of Novilla is the fact that he speaks of “the urgings of the heart” (Coetzee 112), while trying to convince Simón that he needs David and vice versa. The second community through which Coetzee proves – simultaneously – the difference among the characters, but also their proximity, is that which Simón and David create with Inés, the woman that becomes David’s foster mother. Early in the novel, Coetzee foregrounds the absence of meaningful relationships in Novilla. David asks Simón whether he is his “*padrino*” and when the latter responds that he is not, David claims that he “can invite [him] to be [his] *padrino*” (Coetzee 41). In a place that recognizes no bonds between its residents, David affirms his relationship with Simón and decides to become his son. Still, Simón defines David as a motherless child. “The boy [that] has no mother” (Coetzee 89) is an attribute that Simón ascribes to David, thus defining him on the basis of what he is missing, rather than what he has. Having assumed the responsibility to find the child’s lost mother, Simón encounters a woman named Inés and asks her to become David’s mother. “[W]ill you accept the child as yours?” (Coetzee 90), Simón asks Inés, thus attempting to compensate both for David’s incomplete identity and Inés’s, as he thinks that she, too, is incomplete without a child. Despite her initial hesitation to take care of a child that is not hers, Inés ultimately agrees, and she becomes David’s foster mother. Indeed, the child finds a mother thanks to Inés and, through this non biological and yet strong bond, Coetzee

showcases that, despite Novilla's attempt to deprive everyone of their emotions, still the feelings of love and affection persist. After spending some time with Inés, David tells Simón that his new mother reads him the "Third Brother stories" (Coetzee 173); in these stories, as David explains, the third brother must make an important sacrifice and have "[his] heart. . . devoured", if he wishes to "bring back the precious herb of cure that will heal [his] mother" (175). David exclaims "I want to be the third son!" (176), showing that he would selflessly sacrifice his life to save his mother.

The two communities exemplify the interdependence of subjects. One individual shapes the identity of the other and no one's I can remain intact when it comes close to someone else's; we all need another person in order to define ourselves, as identities emerge not only on the basis of similarities but of differences as well, and this is how communities are constructed. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, a central problem of our modern times is the "dissolution", the "conflagration" of community (1), which results from the alienation of the individual from the rest of the community. To think of a person as an entity detached from the rest of the community is both the cause and the consequence of the loss of communal thinking (Nancy 3). Having distanced oneself from the community, the individual becomes "indivisible" and is considered as an "atom", which, by extension signifies that s/he recognizes herself/himself as an "origin" and as the source of "certainty" (Nancy 3). This autonomy and self-efficiency of the individual has been consistently formed throughout modernity; modern communities do not exist just for the sake of being with one another, but with the purpose of producing and taking advantage of work (Nancy 8). Work has become the purpose of the community and, therefore, individuals fail to understand that the relationship with each other does not rely on any objective other than co-existing. Simply put, the modern individual fails to realize that it is always through the others that we understand and shape ourselves. Simón needs Álvaro in order to realize what a worker and his coworker are; Álvaro, too, needs Simón to remind him of the "urgings of the heart" (Coetzee 112). David and Simón are dependent on each other if one wishes to be a son and the latter a father; and both need Inés to complete their family as she becomes David's mother and Simón's fellow caretaker. Finally, Inés becomes a mother the moment she takes on the responsibility of David, while she has a debt to Simón who asks her to do so. The characters' identities intertwine and are mutually

constitutive. Each one would not be what s/he is if it were not for the other. Yet, as Nancy avers, modernity has generated the emergence of a “solitary figure” (9) that needs only him/herself. According to Donna Jowett, this solitary entity alongside the denial of communal proximity is the result of the consolidated fear of the Other which materializes in forms of apartheid (23, 24); coming close to the Other, to the radical foreigner, leaves the individual unguarded, forcing them to face even subject to the Otherness. The subjection to the Other happens because of the shared proximity, rather than because of similarities or differences (21); and because this proximity cannot be avoided, Nancy argues that there is no community without relations (4). *The Schooldays of Jesus* demonstrates the interconnection between the characters, thus consolidating our understanding of community as a space of relations, where our proximity to the radical foreigner is unavoidable and even necessary. The formation of one’s identity entails questioning one’s subjectivity and exploring the subjectivity of the other. David and Simón’s relationship emerges through the process of questioning each other’s identity. During a conversation with señor Arroyo – the owner of the dance Academy – Simón realizes that maybe it was David who took him under his wing when they first met on the boat. Señor Arroyo tells Simón “[y]ou remember meeting the boy. . .and deciding he was lost. . . [but] [p]erhaps he remembers the event differently”, adding that “[p]erhaps [Simón] [was] the one who looked lost; perhaps [David] decided to take charge of [him]” (Coetzee 198). Simón is surprised to hear such words, but he realizes that it is true that he “[does] not know who [David] is” (Coetzee 214). Indeed, the boy challenges Simón and questions his authority as a (foster) father. David does love Simón but experiences their relationship differently. For David, being the son does not necessarily mean that he must obey the father’s commands. The latter is upset that the boy rebels against him, precisely because this rejection takes away his fatherhood or his *padrino* identity, the identity that he ironically so much resisted in the first novel. A second community in *The Schooldays of Jesus* is the one that David encounters as a dancer, when he joins the Academy of Dance. Having repeatedly refused to adapt to others’ standards, even claiming that he “[does] *not want to be human*” (Coetzee 36), David finally finds a place that embraces him for who he is. When he first joins the Academy, Simón notices him being “responsive, trusting, childlike” (45) for the first time. David is mesmerized upon seeing the dance instructor and

the class. His reaction to the Academy is very enlightening as to what he needed all along. Simón has difficulty processing David's inclination towards dance and the fact that he is unusually well-mannered around his teachers. Señora Arroyo explains that "[t]he child. . . still bears deep impresses of a former life, shadow recollections which he lacks words to express" (67); the Academy recognizes the fact that David's memory is still vivid, and he must hold onto this memory. For the first time, nobody forces David to forget. On the contrary, the Academy encourages him to express himself and move however he wishes. David has finally found a community that shapes his identity not in a restrictive way, but in a way that appreciates his unique otherness, which is ultimately liberating. Through the communities of *The Schooldays of Jesus*, the necessity of relations in the construction of identity is further showcased. To draw again on Nancy, being is relational, as it is always through the relation with the other that individuals discover their identities (6). Drawing from Nancy's arguments, Ignaas Devisch argues that "*incompleteness* is something constitutive of both the community and of me, because I am always exposed to others" (emphasis added; 29). In other words, "[w]e are already in a relation with others, even before one can begin to speak of community" (Devisch 31). Thus, communities are not lost but falsely understood as "space[s] of the *egos*" (6, 15), instead of spaces of relations, Nancy says (15). To rediscover a community deemed as lost, we need to differentiate between "singularity" and "individuality" (Nancy 6,7). Individuality implies the autonomy of the subject and is, thus, an obstacle in thinking of a community. Singularity, however, entails the embracing of each person's unique identity which is necessary for a community's well-being (6,7). In David's case, it is his singularity that is finally embraced in the Academy.

In both *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* Coetzee questions the politics of hospitality. The inclusion or exclusion of the newcomers is problematic for Coetzee, as he showcases that David and Simón cannot be recognized as members of the society, unless they abide by specific and restrictive laws. Hospitality is, then, realized as an uneven power dynamic between the hosts and the guests, since it always presupposes that the latter accept an inferior position and subject themselves to the sovereignty of the former. These conditions and the conditionality of hospitality at large disprove the good intentions of the hosts, thus signifying their unwillingness to abandon their self-claimed

dominance over the Other. The persistence of such power relations has generated the border regime and the consistent marginalization and stigmatization of the newcomer that is recognized as a threat against a homogeneous community. Interestingly, Coetzee's novels challenge the politics and poetics of community making; though the protagonists do have difficulty adapting to Novilla and Estrella, their relationship with each other and with the rest of the characters foregrounds an intertwining of identities which proves the community to be a relational space, a space in which individuals must coexist and embrace their mutually reinforcing identities. Rediscovering and rebuilding communal thinking can function as the first step – the first move – towards a decolonial perception of the arriving Other. Our proximity to the newcomer urges us to face our shared differences and, thus, to accept the Davids around us by relating to them, even when they remain radically foreign to us, to our identities, communities, and lands.

Notes

¹ The fusion of the English, the German, and the Spanish language – evident primarily in *The Childhood of Jesus* – points towards the (neo)colonial politics of these countries and their imperial past.

² Britain's hospitality demands reciprocity; Britain does not accept granting hospitality without something in exchange (Molz 67).

³ I use the phrase "by his own volition" ironically here. Economic refugees would probably stay in their own countries if their living conditions were more viable there.

⁴ Achiume does not use the terms First and Third world countries to signify that the latter are inferior, but to explain that people that come from the latter are subjected to the exploitative neocolonial politics of the former.

⁵ I use the term community to refer to any relationship that is formed between individuals; as such, a community can consist of only two people.

3. CHOREOGRAPHING DECOLONIALITY: MIGRANT SUBJECTIVITY AND ART

“Because it is not enough to sit around waiting for destiny to act. . . just as it is not enough to have an idea and then sit back waiting for it to materialize. Someone has to bring the idea into the world. Someone has to act on behalf of destiny.”

J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus*

“Contrary to the current presumption, if there is any man who has no right to solitude, it is the artist. Art cannot be a monologue.”

Albert Camus, “Create Dangerously”

Who is responsible to take action against what is misrepresented as destiny? The question itself is problematic and I do intend to raise it as such. For one thing, neither *The Childhood of Jesus* nor *The Schooldays of Jesus* contemplate the question of destiny. If destiny had the power to control people’s lives, our words would be meaningless, our actions predetermined and our decisions futile. But it is not destiny that brought David and Simón – among so many others – to Novilla and Estrella. It is a historical past founded upon the exploitation and hierarchization of the human that, as I discussed in the previous chapters, forced the characters to embark on a boat, cross the sea and wash themselves clean of their past lives and memories, only to become subjected to the dehumanizing authorities. It is not destiny that made David and Simón the radical Other; as it is not by destiny that David acts against the rules and the absurd power of these places that force people to forget their histories, let go of their desires and quell the intensity of their affects. David does not forget his past, because he does not want to forget. The identity he has been ascribed – his name, age, birthday – and the language he is forced to speak do not suffice. For David, the bare life that is offered in exchange for survival is not enough. He does not

accept his new name, refuses to be considered as lost, and forms relationships with those around him despite Novilla's attempts to keep people at a distance from each other. The rest of the characters do not understand him, though. His behavior appears irrational, his words often sound devoid of meaning and his whole perspective seems distant. Yet, David finds a way to communicate and express himself; in *The Childhood of Jesus*, there are subtle and yet important glimpses of David's understanding of life. The child's fascination with the illustrated version of *Don Quixote* is very revealing of how David chooses to see his migrant narrative. David sympathizes with Don Quixote and, at times, completely identifies with him, claiming that he sees gaps that others cannot see and that he wishes to save the people around him. His aspiration to become a lifesaver is realized in *The Schooldays of Jesus*, when he joins the Academy of Dance and, for the first time, Simón sees him being "responsive, trusting, childlike" (Coetzee 45). In this chapter, I thus aim to explore the way Coetzee foregrounds David's subjectivity through art. Through dancing, David decolonizes the misrepresentation of the migrant as a subject without sovereign power; no longer is the migrant the underprivileged and silenced being, unable to communicate his own history as part of a shared human history. Through art, David conceptualizes and realizes new ways of expression, while reaffirming his presence using his own body. The young protagonist literally steps out of coloniality, claiming the responsibility to liberate society from the ongoing exploitation of the human and the subsequent erasing of voices and bodies whose histories must be heard.

The Childhood of Jesus presents David as a child always preoccupied with questions; he constantly asks about his and Simón's situation in Novilla and is rarely satisfied with the answers he receives. He rejects his name – since it is not his real name as he says – and refuses to speak Spanish, and live in a small, cold room, sustaining himself with tasteless bread. He also chooses Simón as his father, despite the latter's claims that the relationship between them does not have a name. David is not an ordinary five-year-old; the questions he raises reveal the child's purposeful doubting of the conditions he has encountered in Novilla. Coetzee sketches his young protagonist in an interestingly perplexing manner that requires a careful reading of the child's personality and perspective. Indeed, it would be comfortable, but perhaps shortsighted, to assume that David's mannerisms are merely characteristic of his young age and immaturity. From the moment

he is introduced, David appears as an enigmatic persona. During the first chapters, he remains relatively silent, speaking only to express his hunger and general dissatisfaction. Throughout the novel, Coetzee does not provide direct answers as to where David comes from, where his real mother is, or why he so fiercely rejects his new identity. However, there are incidents in which Coetzee gives us glimpses of the boy's true self and intentions; these glimpses, though subtle and scarce in comparison to other major events in the story, are very revealing of David's perspective. What I consider to be the most revealing among all the other incidents, is David reading "*An Illustrated Children's Don Quixote*" (Coetzee 179). Simón introduces the book to David in an attempt to teach him how to read: "Now, Don Quixote and his friend Sancho – you see, *Don Quixote* with the curly *Q* and *Sancho* again – had not ridden far when they beheld, standing by the roadside, a towering giant", Simón reads to David (Coetzee 180). Later, he reads "*A windmill may be what you see, Sancho, said Don Quixote, but that is only because you have been enchanted by the sorceress Maladuta. If your eyes were unclouded, you would see a giant with four arms bestriding the road*" (Coetzee 181). David is captivated by the story of Don Quixote and absorbed in the character's adventures. He asks Simón "[w]hy doesn't Sancho also fight the giant?", to which Simón answers "[t]o Sancho, it is a windmill" (Coetzee 182). When the child exclaims "[h]e's only a windmill in the picture", Simón explains that "[m]ost of [the people] – not [David], perhaps. . . will agree with Sancho that it is a windmill. . . [and] [t]hat includes the artist who drew a picture of a windmill" (Coetzee 182,183). Simón rushes to explain to David that what Don Quixote sees is a delusion. Because he knows that the story is generally assumed to be read as such, he wishes to teach David the supposedly true meaning of the story and the fact that Don Quixote is a madman. He attempts to convince David that what he says is right, claiming that since even the artist has drawn a windmill, then it is most certain that there is no giant. Simón realizes that David's imagination is very vivid and could potentially lead him to conclude that Don Quixote fights a giant. This explains his comment that most readers, but not David, see a windmill in the picture. Indeed, the child does not accept Don Quixote as a madman; he believes that the character is right to battle against a giant and, since Sancho refuses to help his master, David concludes "[i]t's not the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho. It's the adventures of Don Quixote" (Coetzee 183). I believe that this discussion helps us draw

parallels between Coetzee's and Cervantes' characters. In the following paragraph, I aim to read David as a counterpart of Don Quixote, and Simón as that of Sancho, to argue that Coetzee purposefully integrates the story of *Don Quixote* in his novel, to showcase the difference in his protagonists' perspectives.

Considering David and Simón's disagreement about the giant and the windmill, I wish to focus first on what the child sees that Simón does not. David talks about "crack[s]" (Coetzee 43) and insists that people fall into those cracks because they fail to recognize them. Frustrated, Simón tells him "[p]oint to the crack", but the boy responds "I don't know which crack. Nobody knows" (Coetzee 43). Later, David refers to a "hole. . . inside the page [of *Don Quixote*]" which Simón cannot see "because [he does not] see anything" (Coetzee 197). Simón cannot see what David sees, either because he searches only for material evidence of what David says or because he fails to comprehend the deeper meaning that these cracks and holes have for the child. Coetzee does not give a definite answer to that; we cannot be certain that there are cracks and holes, as we cannot be certain of whether David is merely speaking metaphorically to refer to the impositions and rules of Novilla that entrap people and function as empty spaces, devoid of meaning and emotion. If an artist were to illustrate *The Childhood of Jesus*, would s/he draw the cracks and holes? In any case, it seems that David is to Simón what Don Quixote is to Sancho: a madman. Simón cannot understand David's words or fears about the cracks; in fact, Simón believes there are no cracks. Similarly, Sancho follows Don Quixote, but thinks he is mad for seeing windmills as giants. The comparative reading of these characters is further reinforced when considering the issue of the passing of time. As David refuses to forget his past life and constantly rejects the name given to him, evidently, he is aware that time and, most importantly his time, did not start when he arrived in Novilla. Nevertheless, he knows that the identity given to him in Belstar scarred his time and became literally and metaphorically the point of departure for his journey. Simón, on the other hand, has been taken hostage to the monotonous and repetitive life of Novilla; he gradually becomes accustomed to this timeless existence and he "does not feel old, just as he does not feel young . . . [h]e feels ageless" (Coetzee 14). When Simón reads to David the episode of the "Cave of Montesinos" (Coetzee 194) from *Don Quixote*, it appears that Don Quixote and Sancho perceive time differently: Don Quixote says that he spent three days in this cave,

but Sancho tells him it was merely an hour. Simón reads “*No, Sancho, said Don Quixote gravely, three days and three nights I was absent; if it seemed to you a mere hour, that was because you fell into a slumber while you waited, and were oblivious of the passing of time*” (Coetzee 194). Since I read Simón as Sancho’s counterpart, I believe that he is himself oblivious of how time passes or seems to remain still in Novilla. He thinks that the reality he encounters in Novilla is the only reality and, therefore, he must accept this repetitive and dull life. Simón challenges David and tells him that if he believes that Don Quixote is right in what he claims, then David should write his own book. “Unfortunately, however, before you can write your book you will have to learn to read”, he tells David (Coetzee 196). David responds, “I can read”, adding “I don’t want to read your way. . . I want to read my way” (Coetzee 196). This is another point that I wish to explore. The child does not accept Simón’s way of reading to be the right way; he does not believe that learning the letters and reading the sequence of the sentences tells the story of Don Quixote. When Simón calls his reading “nonsense”, David says “[i]t’s not nonsense and I can read! It’s not your book, it’s *my* book” (emphasis added; Coetzee 197). How are we to interpret that “*my*”? Why does David go so far as to claim *Don Quixote* as his? At this point, I believe that the child completely identifies with the character of Don Quixote. This *my* – from my perspective – is not simply David’s claim that the book belongs to him; I read this *my* as David’s attempt to explain that the book is about him, in the sense that it involves a character that sees the world differently and perceives the dangers, manifested as holes and giants, in places where others see paper pages and windmills. Having said that, I conclude that one more aspect in which David resembles Don Quixote is his fascination with books and literature. Don Quixote is so affected by the stories of knights that he embarks on his journey to save the world. Likewise, David is enchanted by the story of Don Quixote, so much that he reads it his own way and sympathizes with him.

My reading of Coetzee’s protagonists as counterparts of Cervantes’ Don Quixote and Sancho is very much facilitated by the fact that *Don Quixote* has been read and analyzed through various viewpoints. Throughout the centuries, the story has been approached from different perspectives and there is not a single and dominant interpretation of its meaning. Few points have been widely accepted, though; Don Quixote is commonly perceived as a symbol of resistance against political and societal oppression, while major

artists have used him as a figure of the rebel that fights for justice. Picasso, for instance, has employed the character of Don Quixote as the subject of his paintings in order to make his political statements against the Fascist regime in Spain during the twentieth century (Bayliss 394). As such, Don Quixote has been seen as a symbol of the Spanish nation and culture (Bayliss 387). Interestingly, David is fascinated with a character that represents Spain, even though he completely rejects the Spanish language and everything it imposes on him. This might be an implicit comment on the trans-historicity of resistance and the intertwining of histories and temporalities. If we also consider the fusion of languages in the novel, we could argue that Don Quixote is intentionally employed in a novel written in English and, in which characters are supposedly interacting in a Spanish speaking setting. Language formulates reality and, in David's case, it is the Spanish language that attempts to frame reality in a way that suppresses people. Yet, the text is actually – and ironically – written in English, implying that, maybe, reality escapes the language of Novilla, the same way that Don Quixote's perception escapes the dictations of the norm. In the integration of *Don Quixote* in *The Childhood of Jesus*, it is not the madness, but the nobleness and chivalry of Don Quixote that are foregrounded. The latter's delusions (if we call them so) have been read by many as ideals, revealing his sense of responsibility to save the world (Mandel 157). Likewise, David appears to see cracks that other characters cannot see, but as readers, we would hesitate to call David delusional. However, the text does not give direct answers as to what the boy intends to do when warning other characters about the cracks. It is for this reason that David is often called lost, primarily by Simón; and sometimes, Simón seems right to say that the boy does not know how to behave. The story of Don Quixote often elicits the same reactions: Is Don Quixote a hero or just a fool, since the rest of the characters appear so rational and realistically depicted (Mandel 159)? In any case, what are the intentions of an author who employs such a character, who – even in what might be foolishness for some – attempts to change the world? (Mandel 161). Having posed this question and considering the significance of *Don Quixote* for Coetzee, I suggest that *The Childhood of Jesus* conceptualizes and encourages an intertextual reading. According to Julia Kristeva, who first coined the term intertextuality in the 1960's, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). She also argues that "[t]he novel in particular exteriorizes linguistic

dialogue” (37). Intertextuality foregrounds the connections between different texts and suggests that they can be read in a parallel manner that mutually reinforces their meanings. Reading Coetzee’s text through Cervantes’s text casts new light on the characters. An intertextual reading is, then, a revolutionary approach, since it rejects fixed meanings and encourages a dialogue between authors and texts, thus subverting the one-dimensional approach of texts; different cultures and ideas come closer through a textual dialogue, proving that the interpretation of a text should not be restricted within itself (Alfaro 275). Intertextuality proposes that a text should not be perceived as “a self-sufficient whole” or a “closed system” (Alfaro 268), and thus allows for the same consideration on the level of society: the multiplicity of layers and meanings within a text is nothing but a reflection of our multicultural and diverse world and, any contemporary integration of the concept of intertextuality should, therefore, be founded on this premise (Alfaro 271). I believe that through the character of David, the quixotic boy, Coetzee’s text offers the opportunity for a multilayered analysis that not only accepts this premise, but also embraces the Other. By presenting David’s fascination with Don Quixote, the text proposes the affiliation between different cultures, while suggesting that nonconforming, quixotic, figures can be the ones who change our perspectives.

The Childhood of Jesus plots David in a non-conformist, quixotic, manner. Nevertheless, Novilla rejects him, constantly reducing him to the position of the Other that should be marginalized and excluded. When David first joins school, his teacher señor León refuses to understand the boy’s behavior and soon declares David as an “extreme case” that he has never encountered before (Coetzee 242). He also absurdly diagnoses a deficit that supposedly does not allow David to read or count properly. Interestingly, the teacher concludes that this deficit may “hint at artistic talent”, though he does not seem to say so in a complimentary tone (Coetzee 243). Coetzee’s young protagonist does have an artistic nature which is more directly explored in *The Schooldays of Jesus*. When once more a teacher, señor Robles, claims that David has a “cognitive deficit” that prevents him from comprehending and using “mathematics and. . .abstract language” (Coetzee 30,31), Simón and Inés decide to enroll David in the “*Academia de la Danza*”, the Dance Academy (42). Nevertheless, Simón and Inés are quite doubtful about the Academy, as it does not function as a regular school; there are no books or ordinary classrooms – only one dance classroom

– because students are not expected to do the kind of homework that other schools require. The Academy seems suspicious to Simón, and he doubts that it could provide the proper learning environment for David. However, the latter looks for the first time “responsive, trusting, childlike” (Coetzee 45). It is at this moment that Coetzee clearly depicts David’s fascination with dance. David enters the Academy and seems to have rediscovered an inherent characteristic of his, a passion that he was forced to forget in Novilla. He “[f]eel[s] the floor” and notices how “smooth and . . . warm” it is (Coetzee 45), while this incident is presented as an experience that awakens his innocence and reminds him that, after all, he does not need to subdue his emotions. Through a very brief description of the dance classroom, Coetzee showcases how David’s artistic nature is revitalized by simply feeling and looking at the dance floor. David has an esthetic experience in the Academy, which reveals that it is in the ordinary and unexpected moments when one meets and is met by art (Dewey 12). “[T]he esthetic is no intruder in [the common] experience” but already belongs to it as an “intensified development of traits” (Dewey 46). David has always had the ability to feel intensely and express his emotions, but he was never free to do so. In the Academy, the child revives a part of him that he was forced to anaesthetize in Novilla, a part that now activates his senses and urges him to dance as a child again. David finally feels encouraged to externalize his emotions; Simón notices how different the child looks for the very first time and how much he interacts with the environment. Indeed, this incident reveals the power of art to make people aware of their surroundings and pay attention to details that heighten their senses (Dewey 19, 35). This awareness that art and dance bring, the realization that one’s senses are never dead but only put in lethargy, is the opposite of stasis (Dewey 41); through dance, David is able to move (literally and metaphorically) and use his body to resist the rigidity of rules that have always been imposed on him. The philosophy of the Academy encourages free expression and allows for the memories of the past to reemerge. As Ana Magdalena – the dance teacher – says “[the] Academy. . . [does] not teach the law of the ant” because “[a]nts are by nature law-abiding creatures” (Coetzee 69). “As we know, from the day when we arrive in this life, we put our former existence behind us. . . The child, however, the young child, still bears deep impresses of a former life, shadow recollections which he *lacks words* to express”, she explains to the parents (emphasis added; Coetzee 67). The purpose of the Academy is, therefore, to help students

communicate their emotions and remember their past lives through dance. Contrary to David's previous teachers and schools, this Academy and its teachers not only approve, but also facilitate and conceptualize their dancers' different ways of expression, ways that transgress the strict and inflexible limits of language. Dancing is then a non-linguistic or an extralinguistic esthetic experience through which David overcomes his inability to put his emotions into words. Simón, however, finds it difficult to understand the meaning behind the boy's dance. When David performs a dance, "sitting still, [with] his eyes closed [and] a slight smile on his lips" (Coetzee 62), Simón says "[t]hat is not dancing" (62). Later, however, the latter admits "I confess I find dance somewhat of a foreign language" (Coetzee 191), to which Mercedes responds, "[i]f your son were to explain his dance he would not be able to dance any more. . . That is the paradox within which we dancers are trapped" (191). Studying dance from an anthropological perspective, Anya Peterson Royce argues that, indeed, "dance is *not* the same as language. . . [and] it is not identical with other forms of expressive behavior" (32). While language functions and becomes possible through words, dance comes to life through the senses (Peterson Royce 194). In fact, dance is a "multi-channel expression" which uses the dancer's body as a means through which it stimulates different kinds of senses, the kinesthetic, visual, aural, and tactile (Peterson Royce 197, 200); and because it utilizes all these senses, dance often causes ambiguity as to what the meaning behind a choreography or a performance is, and, as a consequence, the audience may be left with "conflicting messages" (200). This is how Simón feels when he observes David dancing. He expects to see a particular dance, but the boy dances his own way – the Academy's way – which is not comprehensible to him. David communicates his emotions through dance, but Simón cannot decipher the meaning of the movement because he is used to communicating through words; however, unlike language, dance defies linearity, that is, it rejects a specific sequence of movements (Peterson Royce 204). If one is to make meaning out of dance, s/he should be willing to read through this unexpected sequence of movements. Dance becomes then "a potent, often threatening, vehicle of expression" (Peterson Royce 200), because it urges the audience to make meaning out of a performance by trying to read not words but senses, that are manifested as movements put in an indefinite order.

Through David's dance the text contemplates the capacity of art to reach the audience. Dancing does not only make the dancer feel something, but also the viewer, who participates in the performance with his senses and emotions (Peterson Royce 17,18). When Simón observes David dancing, he realizes how odd the performance looks to him and he feels frustrated that he cannot comprehend the meaning of the dance. As a spectator, he has the need to understand this "foreign language" (Coetzee 191); this necessarily means that the dance does not leave him unaffected. Until this moment, whenever David would say things Simón did not understand, the latter called the boy's words nonsense. Now, he senses that there is something more to discover, a deeper level of expression that David utilizes with his movements. I believe that the child's words, his verbal expressions, are thoroughly interpreted when read as supplements of his movements as a dancer. His words might seem abstract, but this is only until he manages to express himself through dance. Throughout the novel, David repeatedly says he wishes to be a lifesaver. First, he tries to save a duck from a boy who throws stones at it, then he complains that he "wanted to be a lifesaver but [Simón and Inés] wouldn't let [him]" (Coetzee 39), and he also wishes to save his dance teacher, Ana Magdalena. Presenting David as a savior is a recurrent motif in the story. This motif becomes even more significant in an exchange between Simón and señor Arroyo. When Simón complains he does not know David, señor Arroyo tells him, "[y]ou remember meeting the boy on board ship and deciding he was lost. . . Perhaps he remembers the event differently. Perhaps you were the one who looked lost; perhaps *he* decided to take charge of *you*" (Coetzee 198). These words are very enlightening for Simón because they indicate that the boy does not just wish to become a lifesaver, but maybe he has already been Simón's lifesaver. David's aspiration to save people is manifested in his dancing which makes him remember his past life and, consequently, urges those who watch him to remember as well. David dances the "noble numbers" which are the opposite of the "slave numbers" (Coetzee 53). I read this differentiation of numbers as the differentiation between being a Subject and being subjected. The child expresses his subjectivity through art and refuses to be subjected to the political, educational, and linguistic rules that have oppressed him for so long. The noble numbers are then numbers put in a different order, in the order that the dancer himself choreographs; and this new order foregrounds a different way of thinking that transgresses the strict limitations that reduce him to the position of the

Other. Coetzee, therefore, showcases the power of dance (and art in general) to have a social impact. David does not dance only for himself, but for others around him, and, thus, he refuses the art for art's sake ideology. Instead, art for David is "a revolt against everything fleeting and unfinished in the world, [and] [c]onsequently, its only aim is to give another form to a reality that it is nevertheless forced to preserve as the source of its emotion" (Camus 22). David dances not to escape reality – because that would be futile anyway – but in an attempt to face reality as it is and then, change it for the better. His dance is not a utopic place, but a place familiar to him and in which he finally finds the way to express his childhood and reaffirm his true identity, the one he had before he embarked on the boat. Since he has always tried to create relationships with people around him, he does not function merely as the solitary artist who becomes absorbed in his artform. Albert Camus argues that, such a solitary figure "will create nothing but formal or abstract works, thrilling as experiences but devoid of the fecundity we associate with true art, which is called upon to *unite*" (emphasis added;11). As he says "if there is any man who has no right to solitude, it is the artist. Art cannot be a monologue" (12,13). This is what David does: he invites people into a dialogue not expressed in words but in movements; and he does speak/dance for those who have been deprived of their voice/body, which is the purpose of the true artist (Camus 26). Through David, I believe that Coetzee (being an artist himself) makes a comment on the responsibility of the artist to act on behalf of the silenced. To use Camus's words again, I think Coetzee showcases that "[t]he time of irresponsible artists is over" (31). As an artist, David conceptualizes new ways of approaching and including the Other. He decolonizes our perspective of the migrant in his own artistic way. From being reduced to the position of the underprivileged being, David emerges as an individual ready to reaffirm the identity he has been deprived of. When he cannot speak or whenever he refuses to speak, he uses his body to dance, instead. He makes his presence matter showing that the ability to remember belongs to everyone and, thus, he encourages others to rediscover their memories, both individual and shared. As such, he defies borders. "No borders is not just about ending physical borders, but it begins with unpicking the internalization of borders and the social and spiritual divisions that physical borders both create and are created out of" (Cowan 135). Because art talks about common experiences, it foregrounds unity and connection and, by extension, it "requires decolonizing our minds"

in order to subvert the hierarchies and categories that (neo)colonialism involves (Cowan 138). Like a choreography, the process of decolonization requires smaller steps, the unity of which can finally liberate the migrant from the violently imposed status of the Other.

To dance is to decolonize. Art has this subversive power. David not only escapes Novilla but he also comes to Estrella and becomes a dancer. He reclaims his right to move and transgresses the rules and laws that wanted him imprisoned in a specific place. David defies borders, both physical and social; he dances to remember and to help others remember. As Ernst Fischer argues, this is the responsibility of the artist: “to unite his limited ‘I’ in art with a communal existence [and] to make his individuality social” (8). The only way for an artist to make a change through his artform is by perceiving himself as a member of a community and, thus, by allowing his art to become everyone’s art (Fischer 8). Dance, then, becomes the shared means of communication between the people of Estrella. David channels his memories through his performance and gives them a material existence using his own body (Fischer 9). His art is then “perceived as subversive.

. . . because it reminds people of what has been buried—desires their deepest selves dream but cannot manifest within the existing system” (Becker 118). The neocolonial practices of the places where David lives suppress emotions and leave people numb, depriving them of a voice to express their needs. The artist, however, finds new ways – indirect, we could say – to fight a system founded upon the exploitation and the subsequent silencing of everyone that it absurdly claims as subhuman (Becker 120). Towards the end of the *Schooldays of Jesus*, when David performs his dance before the audience of Estrella, Coetzee showcases the child’s power to reach people and awaken their memories. “As if the earth has lost its downward power, the boy seems to shed all bodily weight, to become pure light. . . [T]he being who dances before them is neither child nor man, boy nor girl. . . neither body nor spirit” (Coetzee 246). David transgresses categories and dances free of the violent labelling that systems of oppression dictate. Simón observes how the boy “floats through the steps with such fluid grace”, while “[t]he logic of the dance *eludes* him entirely. . . [and] the people of Estrella find it extraordinary too” (emphasis added; Coetzee 246). David’s performance is, indeed, elusive. It escapes the impositions of the neocolonial system through movements and emotions that are unfamiliar to the audience. David performs what Ann Cooper Albright calls an “autobiographical dance” (120), a dance that conceptualizes

and voices his migrant narrative “within an artform that traditionally glorifies the mute body” (120). The storytelling power of his movement transgresses the limits of language and, thus, reaches people. The audience observes the boy dancing, but their gaze does not subject him; David changes the power dynamic and, despite being watched, he returns the gaze to the audience, in the sense that he urges them to acknowledge their own histories, memories and personal narratives (Cooper Albright 121). Through his dance, David tells the story of his migrant narrative as part of a shared human history. The performance seems unfamiliar and distant to the spectators, but this is exactly how it becomes effective; through causing a feeling of estrangement (Becker 119), David’s dance disturbs their anaesthetization and shows them that, ultimately, they have buried, but not forgotten where they came from and what brought them there. In this sense, his autobiographical dance becomes communal and speaks of shared histories and traumas (Cooper Albright 149). All these people who have been forced to wash themselves clean of memories have a story to tell; their very bodies and the trafficking of these bodies speak for themselves. Their bodies are the archive and the proof of this exploitation. People who have no other option but to migrate to a foreign place should not forget their origins and their trajectories; neither should they forget that it is a system based on violence that treats them as less than humans – as subaltern – and erases their names and families for the sake of someone else’s profit. It is against this violence that David dances and encourages others to dance. In the final scene of the novel, affected by David, Simón dances as well; taking slow and uncertain steps, “he rocks back and forth in time to the music” despite not being “as steady on his feet as he thought he would be” (Coetzee 259). Here, Coetzee shows that change is not easy nor comfortable. If Simón wants his life to change, he should be willing to dance in ways that disrupt the balance he is used to. “You are going to raise your arms to balance yourself”, Mercedes tells him, and “[a]rms extended, eyes closed, he shuffles in a slow circle” (Coetzee 260). The description of Simón’s dancing is very similar to David’s, indicating that, after all, what Simón considered a foreign and incomprehensible language can be spoken by anyone who dares to dance.

The Schooldays of Jesus reveals David’s artistic nature and explores his quixotic character sketched in *The Childhood of Jesus*. Like another Don Quixote, David wishes to save people from the evils of this suppressive world. Simón, like Sancho, cannot see

the cracks – the pitfalls of the neocolonial ideology – that the child sees. Because Simón is unable to grasp the meaning behind David’s words, the latter finds a different way to express his emotions and to remind everyone of those memories that they were forced to abandon when they embarked on their journey towards an unknown and hostile place. David dances to resist the anaesthetization of the neocolonial cities he enters and, by extension, as a way to destroy the violent hierarchization and categorization of the human that reduce foreigners to the position of the inferior Other. David’s migrant narrative finds expression in his dance. The young protagonist uses the movement of his body to reaffirm his presence and to speak of a trauma that words seem unable to convey. His unorthodox and unanticipated choreography of the “noble numbers” (Coetzee 53) seems distant and unfamiliar to the people of Estrella, but this is how it defies borders, both physical and ideological. The fluidity of the child’s dance and the elusiveness of the performance resist being identified in a specific manner, in the manner that Novilla and Estrella dictate. As such, David decolonizes the contemporary perception of the migrant in his own artistic way. Without using any words, he voices the shared history and experiences of all the people who have been deprived of their narratives and bodies. His decolonial dancing reaches his audience and encourages them to use their own bodies as a means of resisting the imposition of a specific language, rules, and regulations. Ultimately, Simón too, finds the courage to dance and “[o]ver the horizon the first star begins to rise” (Coetzee 260).

CONCLUSION

J.M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* conjure the migrant and refugee crisis as we experience it today. Coetzee contemplates the figure of the migrant as the guest, the newcomer, and the radical foreigner to examine the ways by which this figure has been consistently marginalized, excluded, and essentially treated as the Other. Both novels present a multilayered reality that is informed by a long-consolidated politics – that of imperialism and, by extension, (neo)colonialism – as well as a specific ideology that has normalized the consideration of some peoples as subaltern, on the basis of notions such as race, nationality, and citizenship. The remains of imperialism, namely the neoliberal practices that hierarchize and stratify humanity, are diffused in our contemporary capitalist world, so much that we often fail to recognize them; and even if we do, it seems that sometimes we expect the exploitation of the human, as if taking for granted that it is an inextricable part of our societies. Our jobs, wages, educational system, and our very language are mediated by the living traces of imperialism and colonialism and, therefore, the reduction of some peoples to the position of the Other as waste has become our reality. The violence of the imperial past still reverberates through the modern society, leading to the construction and imposition of oppressive borders, walls, and fences, that keep the Other at a distance from the rest of the society, to supposedly protect and preserve its peace and order. The Other is, then, considered not just as a foreigner, but as an enemy that can pervade and stain the purity of the host place as a miasma. This stigmatization of the foreigners proves that the hospitality granted to them is nothing but conditional; the foreigner is not welcome, unless s/he abides by the rules of the host, thus recognizing and accepting her/his inherently inferior position. For as long as the nature of hospitality entails the power relation between the hosts and the guests, we cannot speak of a practical realization of hospitality, neither of a practically democratic world. We need to understand and accept the fact that we live in a multicultural and diverse world where we unavoidably encounter people who are not like us; they come from a different country, speak a different language, have different traditions and beliefs and they bring their very own narratives when they migrate to a new place. To maintain distance from these people

is impossible; it is through proximity that our communities are constructed and developed. Communities are spaces of relations, where the identities of individuals intertwine and become mutually reinforcing. We need to embrace the idea that not only similarities but also differences are valuable when building our communal thinking; and we need to relate to the newcomer even when s/he remains radically foreign to us and to the identity of the host community. This is the first step towards a decolonial perception of the arriving Other. Ultimately, we must recognize the traumas and histories that migrants bring and, most importantly, we must voice these traumas and histories. Our words, our literature, our quixotic dances have the power to give voice to the silenced, functioning as storytelling practices that convey the cultural elements that may differentiate people, but ultimately, bring them closer. We, therefore, need to realize that we too are responsible for our sociopolitical and economic reality and, thus, for voicing or silencing the narratives of individuals. Otherwise, we remain blind to the disasters of the human.

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Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία μελετά την πολιτική και την αισθητική της αποαποικιοποίησης σε δύο μυθιστορήματα του J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus* και *The Schooldays of Jesus*, και εξετάζει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους η παρουσία του πρόσφυγα – του ανθρώπου που καθίσταται ως άπατρις καθώς φτάνει στην χώρα υποδοχής χωρίς έγγραφα ταυτοποίησης και χωρίς αναμνήσεις – αποτελεί απειλή για το κυρίαρχο κοινωνικοπολιτικό και ιδεολογικό καθεστώς. Βασισμένη στο έργο του Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism* και σε άλλων μελετητών στο θέμα της αποαποικιοποίησης, όπως της Ann Laura Stoler και της Sylvia Wynter καθώς και σε μελετητών των ανθρώπινων δικαιωμάτων, όπως της Hannah Arendt μεταξύ άλλων, η εργασία αυτή υποστηρίζει ότι η Novilla – η ξένη και γεωγραφικά απροσδιόριστη πόλη στην οποία καταφθάνουν ο David και ο Σιμόν ως πρόσφυγες – είναι στη πραγματικότητα μια σύγχρονη αποικία που διέπεται από τα απομεινάρια της αποικιοκρατίας: ένα άκαμπτο σύστημα γραφειοκρατίας, αντίξοες συνθήκες διαβίωσης και εργασίας για τους πρόσφυγες καθώς και την φυλετική κατηγοριοποίηση των ατόμων σε ανθρώπους και μη-ανθρώπους. Παρότι ο Σιμόν αρχικά προσπαθεί να αντισταθεί από κάθε άποψη – κοινωνική, πολιτική, οικονομική και ιδεολογική – στις πρακτικές της Novilla, ο David είναι τελικά ο μοναδικός χαρακτήρας που πραγματικά αμφισβητεί τους νόμους της. Ο David είναι ο ξένος που δεν δέχεται να τον μειώνουν ως έναν κατώτερο Άλλο και, παρότι είναι ένα παιδί ορφανό σε αναζήτηση της μητέρας του, βρίσκει το σθένος να συγκρουστεί με το σύστημα καταπίεσης που επιβάλλει η Novilla. Η αντισυμβατική του φύση σκιαγραφείται ακόμη πιο καθαρά στο δεύτερο μέρος της τριλογίας, *The Schooldays of Jesus*. Εκεί, ο David γίνεται χορευτής και εκτελεί μία ανορθόδοξη χορογραφία που δίνει φωνή τόσο στο προσωπικό του προσφυγικό ταξίδι, όσο και στον συλλογικό πόνο όλων εκείνων που ξεριζώθηκαν από τις πατρίδες τους. Με τον δικό του καλλιτεχνικό τρόπο, το μικρό αγόρι αποαποικιοποιεί την λανθασμένη αντίληψη του πρόσφυγα ως ενός αβοήθητου θύματος και καταρρίπτει την βίαιη κατηγοριοποίηση της ανθρωπότητας που τον τοποθετεί στην κατηγορία του μη-ανθρώπου. Μελετώντας λεπτομερώς τα δύο μυθιστορήματα, η εργασία πραγματεύεται τον τρόπο με τον οποίο ο Coetzee περιεργάζεται την ταυτότητα του πρόσφυγα ως ενός ριζοσπαστικού Άλλου. Αντί να διαστρεβλώνει την εικόνα του πρόσφυγα παρουσιάζοντάς την ως εμπόδιο στη δημοκρατία, ο Coetzee φέρνει στο

προσκήνιο ένα νέο πλαίσιο το οποίο επανεξετάζει και επανεκτιμά την ιδέα της κοινωνικοπολιτικής ισότητας όπως τη γνωρίζουμε. Η ισότητα αυτή αποδεικνύεται προβληματική και υποκριτική, αφού βασίζεται σε ιδέες όπως η φυλή και η εθνικότητα, οι οποίες κατασκευάζονται με τέτοιο τρόπο ώστε να εξυπηρετούνται τα συμφέροντα μιας ραγδαίως αναπτυσσόμενης καπιταλιστικής κοινωνίας. Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει επίσης την πολιτική που διέπει το ζήτημα της φιλοξενίας, βασισμένη στο *Of Hospitality* του Jacques Derrida, ο οποίος συνδέει την απρόσμενη έλευση ενός ξένου με το απροϋπόθετο της φιλοξενίας. Για να εξηγήσει τη σημασία της απροϋπόθετης φιλοξενίας όπως την ονομάζει ο Derrida, και καθώς η απροϋπόθετη φιλοξενία σπανίως τίθεται ως θέμα στις πολιτικές συζητήσεις αναφορικά με τα δικαιώματα των ξένων, η εργασία προσεγγίζει αυτό το θέμα συζητώντας τα έργα των Leah Cowan *Border Nation* και Tendayi Achiume “Migration as Decolonization”. Τέλος, αντλώντας έμπνευση από τους παραπάνω μελετητές και συσχετίζοντας τις ιδέες τους στα θέματα της αποαποικιοποίησης, η εργασία αυτή θέτει και επιχειρεί να απαντήσει το εξής ερώτημα: Πώς αποαποικιοποιεί η έλευση του πρόσφυγα την αντίληψη μας για τη δημοκρατία και πώς αμφισβητεί τις προϋποθέσεις της φιλοξενίας, επικαλούμενη το απροϋπόθετο της φιλοξενίας προς όφελος της δημοκρατικής κοινωνίας;