

**On Extreme Responsibility: What if Blackness/Whiteness could Go an Extra Mile?****Sobre uma Extrema Responsabilidade: E se Negritude/Branquitude pudessem ir mais além?**

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“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.”  
Matthew 5:41 NRSVUE

“The free [hu]man is dedicated to his fellow; no one can save himself without others. The inside out domain of the soul does not close from inside. [...] No one can stay in himself; the humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for others, an extreme vulnerability. The return to self becomes indeterminable detour. Prior to consciousness and choice, before the creature collects himself in present and representation to make himself essence, [hu]man approaches [hu]man. He is stitched of responsibilities. Through them, he lacerates essence. It is not a matter of a subject assuming responsibilities or avoiding responsibilities, not a subject constituted, posed in itself and for itself like a free identity. It is a matter of the subjectivity of the subject, his non-indifference to others in limitless responsibility, limitless because it is not measured by commitments going back to assumption and refusal of responsibilities. It is about responsibility for others, where the movement of recurrence is diverted to others in the “move entrails” of the subjectivity it tears apart. [...] Without repose in self, without a solid base in the world, in that strangeness of all places, on the other side of being, beyond being –yes, that is some interiority! It is not the philosopher’s construction; it is the unreality of men persecuted in the everyday history of the world, whose dignity and sense were never retained in metaphysics, a reality to which the philosophers veil their faces.” Levinas (2003, p. 66-88)

**ABSTRACT**

This essay sets out to investigate the contribution that black women thinkers and feminists bring to the debate over decolonization/decoloniality and to find out how much mileage can be covered with differential and oppositional politics only. Taking the Cameroonian novelist Calixthe Beyala’s intellectual and creative journeys as a feminist, writer, and activist for Black causes and identities, I argue that the idea of decolonization as a break from something incompletely prepares us for a purposeful and inclusive activation of social transformation. Constructive decolonization, or a break from ontology toward some-Other, appears as a shock-event that reveals the crispation, contradiction and poverty of power in Africa’s racial experience.

**Keywords:** Constructive decolonization; Africa; identities; blackness.

**RESUMO**

Este ensaio propõe investigar a contribuição que pensadoras e feministas negras aportam ao debate sobre descolonização/decolonialidade, apurando quanto se pode avançar apenas com políticas de diferença e oposição. Tomando o percurso intelectual e criativo da romancista camaronesa Calixthe Beyala, enquanto feminista, escritora e ativista das causas e identidades

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negras, argumento que a ideia de decolonização como ruptura nos prepara de forma incompleta para uma ação de transformação social intencional e inclusiva. A decolonização construtiva, ou ruptura com a ontologia, em direção a algum-Outro, surge como uma experiência impactante que revela a tensão, a contradição e a carência de poder na experiência racial da África.

**Palavras-Chave:** decolonização construtiva; África; identidades; negritude.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this reflection, I wrestle with a simple but challenging question in two parts: Given the negatively racialized experiences that shaped and continue to influence Black lived experiences, how can Black Africana women (henceforth BAW) bring about meaningful racial and social transformation? To what extent do the politics of resistance advance or limit the agential depth of BAW's work for social transformation? These questions are triggering because they could be read as suggesting it is the responsibility of BAW to fix what goes wrong in society. This, some might object, is a classical "blaming the victim move" because the query conveniently lets the oppressors off the hook without a challenge. My queries could justifiably meet with resistance and objection from anyone committed to giving a voice to the victims as opposed to blaming or burdening them. The problem with this specific brand decolonizers/defenders of the proverbial victims is precisely that they limit the so-called victims' strategic options to oppositional politics only (Olúfemi, 2022). But oppositional politics often depends on the oppressor's willingness to abdicate power and change. Confrontation and challenge are not devoid of dependency, or some level of cooperation. The outcomes and values of such oppositional politics must always be nuanced given the very nature of politics as a game of interests.

To ask how BAW could bring about social change is to recognize that victimization and ideological alienation is only a partial story and its other half is the full realization of the *poverty of power* even when it takes on hegemonic and totalitarian characteristics. The status of a victim and oppressed is but one side of a condition which *simultaneously* mirrors another: the critic that points a finger at hollowness of anthropophagic systems and ideas hailed with fear and trembling. A better way to reframe the question of interest is to ask about what do the BAW know about (the poverty of) power and how does such knowledge exploit the depth of feeling and cognition to bring about social transformation?

*La Plantation*<sup>1</sup> a novel by the Cameroonian feminist writer, Calixthe Beyala, creatively converses with the knotted provocations pertaining to racial, sexual/gendered, economic, and political configurations that haunt postcolonial/decolonial African personhood. More specifically, *La Plantation* approaches the question of territorialized and racialized identity as important but ill-conceived grounds from which African identities could be theorized. In search for deep relationality that finally puts to rest the specter of identity-based provocations, Beyala invites us to consider rearticulating the place and meaning of contradiction in the African postcolonial/decolonial experiment, to take stock with the means at our disposal rather than worry about the details of a possible journey toward epistemological and social transformation.

Contradiction, it is argued here is not intended to be resolved by way of dialectical reasoning bound to invent an Other on whose back a monumental synthesis is laid over. An alternative possibility of engagement with contradiction is to treat it as generative of epistemologies and praxes in gestation/transition. Contradiction is an ethos awaiting to be

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<sup>1</sup> This novel is published in French. The translation provided in this contribution is mine. Throughout this reflection, the title of the novel is kept in French.

prophesized; it is possibility only murmured and whose emergence is predicated upon our willingness to throw the nest of our collective imagination to the other side of our sedimented ways of relating, thinking, and be(com)ing. Contradiction is pregnant with limitless responsibility that inflects and impoverishes coercive power by signaling it has already traveled a mile further than the status quo; it has traveled even farther albeit as a shadow cast upon time until as Levinas puts it, the “moaning entrails” (2003, p. 67) tear apart ontology deafness to responsibility calling a mile away. Contradiction is a tolling bell that announces the price for the right to interrogate has already been paid and lucidity has already broken the neck of prejudice. The novel sheds light on the question of power and the poverty of power in Africa’s in postcolonial/decolonial racial experience. It scrutinizes notions of territoriality and privatization as insufficient backgrounds criteria for understanding the implications of changing socio-economic dynamics in postcolonial/decolonial Africa.

Calixthe Beyala is a Cameroonian feminist novelist known for her passion for the defense of blackness within the Francophone world. Yet, in *La Plantation*, she attributes “Africanness” and agency to characters traditionally not perceived as Africans, namely, Blues is a young Jewish woman who grew up in Zimbabwe in a relatively wealthy environment. Her father, a plantation owner, taught her the love of hard work and of the people until the “the president elected democratically for life” took power and expropriated white landlords. Blues is torn between exile and resistance. Whichever decision she takes re-invents Africa. Sexual politics and racial identities in this novel challenge the assumption that “blackness” is the sole legitimate lens through which African personhood could be epitomized. In this reflection, I read Calixthe Beyala’s ideological metamorphoses via *La Plantation* and back. I treat her personal journey to racial inclusion as exemplar of the kinds of vulnerabilities that are needed in decolonial thought and praxes, but that many of us are still reluctant to expose ourselves to.

## **2 A WHITE-EVENT AT THE DOOR OF CONTRADICTORY POSTCOLONIAL BLACK REASON**

Political discourse always concerns itself with some subjects and neglects others. In postcolonial Africa, the political history that accompanies white presence on the continent is the backdrop of colonialism. Often opposed to this gloomy background of white colonialism is the social history of the (neo)colonized/oppressed subjects needing substantive freedoms in Africa. Adding to a Marxist contention which views capitalism as the exploitative machine of the bourgeois, African postcolonial reason has come to the realization that economic hegemony is also racial. For example, many scholars have documented the intrinsic links between economic exploitation and racial classifications. However, what stems from the theoretical conceptions of race as an important, if not the sole factor in determining economic outcomes, is the distrust of every white presence in Africa. Calixthe Beyala is not ignorant of this mistrust of white Africans. When asked to explain why she decided to publish *La Plantation*, a novel written from a white’s perspective, Calixthe Beyala states,

Il y a quelques années, une journaliste blanche de "l'Afrique du Sud" m'a sollicitée pour une interview. J'ai refusé parce que j'estimais qu'elle appartenait à la classe dominante et que n'étant pas africaine, je n'avais rien à lui dire. Au bout de trois mois d'insistance, j'ai fini par lui accorder l'interview. Quand elle est arrivée, j'ai découvert une grande africaniste. Cela m'a énormément remis en question par rapport à l'identité africaine, à la vision que l'homme a de l'autre, à nos crispations identitaires. (2005, p. 24 ).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis added.

Many years ago, a white journalist from ‘South Africa’ requested an interview with me. *I declined because I considered she belonged to the dominant class and was not African, I had nothing to tell her.* After persisting for three months, I finally granted her an interview. When she arrived, *I discovered a great Africanist.* This realization enormously challenged my understanding of African identity, my vision of the human and the Other, and tension with our identities.

Beyala’s statement is not just a confession. Her words describe a pervasive state of mind: the sting of colonialism lives on in the collective consciousness and continues to uphold the link between whiteness and slavery in Africa. The novelist’s posture towards non-Black Africans in Africa gives credence to oppositional consciousness and deconstruction as important categories, forms and contents in decolonial emancipation. Her cognitive awakening and transformation following an encounter with a white journalist woman previously deemed “un-African” testifies to the skewed politics of a certain kind of decolonial thought and praxes. That is, while it theoretically commits to renewal and reconstruction, the de-colonial season is, as Chela Sandoval puts it, “a transitive zone in which conversation from older modes of colonial domination is necessary” (2000, p. 6) and has mainly remained there. Contradictions that arise from differential and oppositional forms of decoloniality underplay the necessity of the second transition from deconstruction to construction of a decolonial season as purposeful and enabling “a hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world” as Sandoval asserts (2000, p.10). Prior to the encounter with the face that unravels her entrails, Beyala had no decolonial resources that would have enabled her to go the extra mile out of the self and beyond difference/essence into the territory of non-being and to “fall in love” with whiteness in a co-belonging embrace. Instead, the interview that instantiates the novelist’s search for deeper meanings and relations with the presumably non-African White-Other has the characteristics of Badiou’s “event-site” that gives “rise to a situation-transforming truth procedure” leading to the emergence of a work of change such as *La Plantation*, which “writes the event into *being*” (2005, p. xxx).

Ernesto Laclau has argued that every fundamental matrix of emancipation holds specific inconsistencies and incompatible logics. “There is no emancipation without oppression, and there is no oppression without the presence of something which is impeded in its free development by oppressive forces,” Laclau (1996, p. 1) contends. The problem with contradiction borne out of emancipatory logics is not that it creates chasm, but that this chasm almost always incompletely explains that which is resisted, rejected, submerged, or ignored leading to iterated conflicts. The Cameroonian historian, Achille Mbembe acknowledges that Black criticism taking up the concerns of self-determination from the nineteenth century onward adopted the contradictions that the epoch engendered. For instance, while Black criticism’s “discourse of rehabilitation [sought] to confirm the *cobelonging* of Blacks to humanity in general, it [did not] –except in rare cases –set aside the fiction of a racial subject or of race in general” (2017, p. 89).

In Beyala’s view, these “*crispations identitaires / tension with our identities*” are aggravated because of the rarity of real encounters between Black and non-Black Africans. To initiate these encounters, she finds it imperative to revisit the colonial background from which the white African subject is constructed and bracketed as “un-African.” The first step to construct such a background is to “tell the stories” of white immigration to Africa. This emphasis on the processes instead of outcomes allows Beyala to illuminate the limits of African/Black cultural hegemony as well as the absurdity of white supremacy in Zimbabwe. The beauty of *La Plantation* Beyala argues, is not in the characters per se, for she considers this work an anti-hero novel, but instead, “*c’est l’atmosphère qui en est sublime / the sublime phenomenon*,” says Beyala (2005, p. 24). Indeed, there are so many characters in the novel that it is hard to attribute a particular idea to someone. What is interesting is the common thread of

social engagement, loss, and bargain, which links all the characters and redefines Africa considering its internal metamorphoses.

*La Plantation* begins with Thomas Cornu (meaning horned in French) in his plantation. He is a European born in Zimbabwe. His ancestors have no ties with other famous names of Europeans “colonizers” such as Cecil Rhodes. Cornu’s parents arrived in then Rhodesia in 1939 shortly before his birth. Fleeing the atrocities of World War I and II, they left Lille, their native town in France, to go to Africa in search for a haven. After wandering for a while as “*apatrides / stateless*” in many countries, Cornu’s family finally found a place to “*poser leur misère / settle down their misery*” (2015, p. 13). Cornu’s father dies when he is a toddler and leaves his son with “*la honte d’être pauvre et la hargne de s’en sortir / the shame of poverty and the desire to overcome it*” (2005, p. 13). Later Cornu becomes a self-made man, who, after working several years as a houseboy, saved most of his earnings to acquire a piece of land. He works hard to transform his land: “*Travail! Travail! Un mot magique qui l’avait rendu, à l’instar de milliers d’autres Blancs, le maître absolu du bonheur; un mot qui ne semblait pas exister dans le vocabulaire de la négrerie locale / Work ! Work ! A magical word that rendered him, similar to millions of other Whites, the absolute master of happiness, a word that seemed nonexistent in the vocabulary of the local negro*” (2005, p. 14). However, if money and the acquisition of property position Cornu as an important economic agent in Zimbabwe, he cannot easily find the formula that would make his presence and identity as a White African acceptable to non-white Africans. His European ancestry is “*la tare de malnaissance / the birth defect*” that handicaps him and forecloses all possibilities to marry an African Rhodesian woman (2005, p. 14). Until he reached the age of forty, he could not fulfill his dream of a “*cercueil à deux places / a two-person casket*,” an image that refers to his unsatisfied search for an erotic partnership between himself and Black African women. Thus, economic activities are the only link between Cornu and the Blacks in Rhodesia.

Cornu is a single, prosperous white man who craves indigenous women among whom he lives. For many years, his sexual desire barking through the night sometimes transports his imagination into the bedrooms of two poor women named Shona and Agathe until one day he wakes up and decides to get a wife. Bored with life and with all his expensive European art collection, Cornu views marriage as a shield against boredom. He wants a woman just as he wants another valuable piece of art that would add onto the beauty of his collection. Thus, the woman he desires to marry must consent to live beside his marvelous objects without breaking them. Back in Paris, he meets Catherine Lallemand, a thirty-year-old seductive woman whose beauty, Cornu hopes, will enlighten the white Rhodesians full of prejudices, always keeping a Bible under the pillow and a gun below the mattress.

Regardless of Catherine’s status as the daughter of a French corporate investor living in Argentina, her extravagant life only places her in a third category among Rhodesian whites reluctant to admit her into their circle. By the time Thomas and Catherine have their first two daughters, Fanny and Blue, the plantation in Rhodesia is so transformed that “*même le fantôme du premier habitant de la Plantation s’[y] serait égaré / even the ghost of the first inhabitant of the Plantation would have gotten lost therein*” (2005, p. 18). However, even with a wife and children, Thomas Cornu continues to write love poems to another woman in his sleep. This time, she is not an imaginary mistress, but the land he loves and cherishes. In Africa, “*il s’était enraciné aussi fortement que le soleil et la pluie. Il ignorait s’il la préférait à ses filles, il ne posait pas la question. Mais il en extirpait le maximum de ressources et la domptait autant que les domestiques / He was grounded as firmly as the sun and the rain. He was unable to tell whether he preferred the land to his daughters, he never asked himself the question. But from the land he extracted maximum resources and domesticated it as he did with his servants*” (2005, p. 18).

Thomas Cornu has a double relationship with the land which combines eroticism and control. On the one hand, he domesticates the land and the people who work for him. However, unlike other whites in Rhodesia, Thomas never views himself as a colonizer. For him, the colonizers are “other” whites. As much as he can, he enjoys life and “*il avait fini par ériger la faiblesse de [ses] origines en force en affirmant: ‘Nous sommes différent’ / he ended up transforming the weakness of this origins into strength by affirming: ‘We are different’*” (2005, p. 18). Furthermore, Thomas Cornu is not a thief and when the president democratically elected for life wants to build an airport, Cornu voluntarily gives up part of his land for the development of the country.

Despite economic success, Cornu’s family life and fate remain unpredictable as the country remains divided between, on the one hand, the white community of landowners in Zimbabwe, and on the other hand a president with an arbitrary concept of democracy. The tension between these two economic and political interest groups provides the background from which identity crises emerge and contradictorily unfold throughout the novel. At the core of the tension is the question of the place of life and death in racially tensed Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia.

After establishing the background of the novel, Beyala begins her narrative with Ignazzio Barizio’s funeral, a scandal-prone man within the white community of Zimbabwe. Before he was shot dead, he was not just a drunkard but also a lover of “*nègresses / negro women*.” It was only when he was drunk that he challenged the white community, calling them “*colons spoliateurs voleurs de mes couilles / colonizers usurpers spoilers of my balls*” (2005, p. 24). To Ignazzio, white Zimbabweans were descendants of thieves and thugs ejected from Europe because they were unfit for civilized life. While the *nègres / negroes* appreciated Ignazzio, he became a pariah among the whites. However, Ignazzio was killed in the *nègres/negro* domain and although no one knew the circumstances of this death, the white community blamed the *nègres/ negroes* who in turn insisted on their innocence. Before the white community completes their deliberation on whether to allow the *nègres/negroes* to attend Ignazzio’s funeral, rumors of expropriation reached the plantation owners.

Beyala uses Ignazzio’s death to set up her plot. While Fanny is totally opposed to letting the *nègres* in the Church where Ignazzio’s body is displayed, Blues is horrified by the hypocrisy and pretense of the white community that continues to believe it can survive in Zimbabwe as it did in Rhodesia; that is, as a segregated community. However, as much as Blues does not support the conservative attitude of the white community, she is also appalled by the irrationality of the bill the president elected democratically for life introduces in the parliament to expropriate the landowners. The project of expropriation is carried out in the name of democracy. Presumably, if the land is nationalized, the government will build roads and hospitals. In the novel, the bidding for indefinite presidential mandates is accompanied by new promises for a bright future.

### 3 CONTRADICTION: A HORNED PROVOCATION IN BLACK CRITICISM

Although critics have seen Blues as the main character in *La Plantation*, I argue that all characters could be seen as the main protagonist owing to their struggle to unmask and embody contradiction. The exploration of truth about changing identities and citizenship in Africa is seen through many eyes and these are primarily the eyes of the youngest in both the white and Black communities. Older generations have so many grievances that they tend to dwell on the past rather than the present. It is Blues who introduces the reader to a critique of fossilized attitudes and mentalities that resist change in Zimbabwe. On the one hand, the whites continue to look upon the Blacks as mere servants, and on the other hand, the Blacks, because of their poverty, associate corruption with all forms of accumulation of wealth.

To address the hopes and the fears of both communities, one needs to avoid the pitfalls of circumstance-bound emotions. “*Adopter les mines de circonstances me gave! / to adopt the caprices of circumstances overstuffs me*” says Blues, exasperated by the narrow-mindedness of the whites as well as economic policies of expropriation promising economic growth and redistribution (2005, p. 32). For Blues, what is at stake in the president’s bill is not only the definition of social justice and welfare, but the important question about race and identity in postcolonial Africa also. In the case of Zimbabwe as depicted in the novel, the accumulation of wealth and knowledge raises many questions: Do colonial privileges account for the prosperity of all whites living in the postcolonial Zimbabwe? Who has the right to accumulate or redistribute wealth in post-colonial Africa? Does the expropriation of one elite group by another bring about redistributive socio-economic justice for the masses?

Without completely erasing the historical and politico-economic arrangements that contributed to the disenfranchisement of Black people in Rhodesia, Beyala insists on moving beyond traditional stereotypes and rediscovering the truth and lies about racially constructed social groups existing in Africa today. While some whites living in Zimbabwe clearly benefited from colonial privileges, not all whites owed their “wealth” to historico-economic arrangements. Thomas Cornu and his father are self-made men who experienced both social alienation from other whites and poverty in Zimbabwe. Identity crises are crystalized in this collective amnesia that insists on denying the changing dynamics within the Black and the white communities in Zimbabwe. Beyala expands the postcolonial/decolonial horizon and resources in the double entendre of the metaphor of the plantation.

Nation building in postcolonial/decolonial Africa requires that all “indigenous” socio-economic groups join forces. According to Beyala, immigration to Africa increases the possibility for extending the continent’s human resources by broadening the concept of citizenship. Firstly, the plantation is a physical structure with specific borders, predefined roles and performances. Secondly, because of its assigned physical delimitation, the plantation is presumably less open to the imagination. Thirdly, the idea of the plantation alludes to a privately managed domain rather than a site for national economic governance. Still, economic discourse and transition occurring within Cornu’s plantation have positive and negative spillovers in society at large. Therefore, Beyala mobilizes the plantation metaphor to show the porosity of the so-called public-private domains in general, and to specifically establish a comparative bridge between events taking place within the plantation and those constitutive of political agency in nation-state building in Zimbabwe. The plantation establishes contrast and similitude between the wild, the uncultivated, the raw, the pure, the same, the artificial and the public-private. Thus, the symbolic imagery of the plantation praises the power of transformation and the domestication of knowledge and skills.

In the postcolonial/decolonial era, Africa has not only been *transplanted* and given birth to her own Diaspora, the continent has also been internally transformed by migrations within and to Africa. These movements of people and ideas create and recreate new seeds that bloom in celebration of a renewed imagined community of Africa, a house with many mansions. Beyala’s plantation is a postcolonial/decolonial epistemological project that calls for a shift in perspectives and theoretical assumptions about monolithic Africa. As a postcolonial project, the plantation is a post-slogan world. What is “post” in this work of fiction are slogans such as “Africa for Africans” if by “Africans” we mean the being that is “authentic” and that the native is neither planted, nor *transplanted*.

Ernest Picadilli is a Canadian researcher sent by the United Nations Program for Development to study the intellectual consequences of poverty in Zimbabwe. As soon as he arrives in Zimbabwe, he embraces the cause of the Blacks and makes public statements targeting the white community as “*pires des exploitateurs...maniant le fouet des esclavagistes et menteries des néocolonialistes / the worse exploiters ... wielding the slaver’s rod and*



*neocolonial lies*” (2005, p. 38). For him, the death of Ignazzio is awe-inspiring and he hopes other colonizers soon disappear one by one from Zimbabwe. Picadilli has no investment in Zimbabwe; his stipend from the United Nations does not even allow him to keep up with his monthly rent. Had Sonia, a sex worker, not taken him under her shelter, he would have been thrown out of his apartment. As an “*activiste professionnel / professional activist*” his contribution to the debate on redistributive justice is solely rooted in ideology (2005, p. 50). He has no useful technical skills to share with the Blacks.

It is only through criticism of the white community that Picadilli establishes ideological partnerships with the Blacks. In Picadilli’s opinion, money should be given to the poor to solve economic problems—an idea that Sonia, more acquainted to Zimbabwe’s social life, opposed. She contrasts her insider’s analysis to Picadilli’s activist rhetoric about neocolonialism. “*Quand un membre d’une famille occupe un poste important, les autres le succent jusqu’au sang, parce qu’ils veulent leur part...Et le petit possédant est obligé pour survivre de voler dans les caisses, jusqu’au jour où il est coincé et où on le jette à la rue / When a family members holds an important job, the rest suck the lifeblood out of him, because they want their share...By and by the breadwinner is forced to steal from the public until the day he is caught and thrown out on the streets,*” explains Sonia (2005, p. 48).

The economy of corruption alluded to in Sonia’s objection is what Mbembe calls the “social tax or a multifaceted never-ending debt owed to the community...anyone who attempt[s] to avoid it without apparent reason [runs] the risk of social death. This [is] the signification of witchcraft” Mbembe (2021, p. 47). Colonization, therefore, does not explain it all. The social complicity that coerces individuals into economic predation seems to also contribute to economic alienation in postcolonial Zimbabwe. As Mbembe further observes, this economic predation based on privileges and impunity creates a “domination [of] a particular type, since it [is] founded both on highly personalized relations and the power to redistribute and protect” (2001, p. 48). Community coercion forcing individuals to abuse power ennobles the reign of the arbitrary in postcolonial/decolonial economies. Theorizing political and economic democracy in the postcolony therefore requires that individuals be freed from negative coercion. Individual rights come with duty to nation-state building through the multiplicity of voices and agencies acting within the “visible plantation” of practical consciousness. Such consciousness would consider as strategic and priceless the manifold agencies that citizenship and community belonging add to Africa irrespective of their native, planted or *transplanted* origin.

Blues criticizes both the political personalization of power incarnated in the president elected democratically for life, as well as the privatization of protection. In Zimbabwe, according to Blues, everybody should be protected against misfortune with the provision of social safety nets. However, before economic and social equilibrium can be realized, a dialogue between Zimbabwe’s racial groups must occur. Blues leaves Ignazzio’s funeral service before it ends and takes an unconventional route home. She eventually gets lost and finds herself in Tsombi’s village where Shona, her little friend that used to visit the peripheries of the plantation, lives. It has been twelve years since Blues and Shona’s paths crossed. As soon as Blues enters the poor village, she is welcomed with skepticism by old Kadjersi, “*avec deux rides d’amertume tombant à pic des ailes du nez jusqu’au menton tremblant / with two bitter wrinkles flanked to her nose all the way to her cheeks*” (2005, p. 53).

Kadjersi, Shona’s mother, had abandoned her alone in a hut to give birth to her first child but Blues arrives *in extremis* to assist Shona: “*Blues se pencha vers Shona, parce qu’il y a des situations qui vous obligent à vous démâter et à porter des fardeaux plus lourds que vos épaules...Blues déchira un morceau de drap et enveloppa le bébé / Blues leaned toward Shona because there are situations that oblige you to take on more than your shoulders can carry ... Blues tore apart a piece of cloth and wrapped the baby in it*” (2005, p. 56-57). While Blues



helps clean the baby, the whole village stands outside in condemnation of Shona, calling her a shameless prostitute. Transformed into a midwife by fortune, the adolescent Blues suddenly comes face to face with the material poverty that follows the workers into her father's plantation, Blues' exclusive place of interaction with the Blacks until she accidentally arrived at Shona's village.

Shortly after the birth of Shona's baby, Blues and Shona rush the baby to the hospital for medical care. Blues carries the Black baby in her hands and intercedes for a speedy medical intervention, but is told to wait: "*La belle époque de la colonization est terminée, lui dit-elle agressive. Faites la queue comme tout le monde, je vous dis / The old time of colonialism is over, she is told aggressively. Get in the queue like everybody else, I tell you!*" (2005, p. 66). At this Black hospital, no one notices the baby, but everyone reminds Blues of her winding white colonial privileges that will soon be taken away with the help of the president elected democratically for life. After waiting for many hours, in frustration Shona takes her baby back from Blues and returns to her village without receiving medical assistance for her newborn.

Before she could understand the world around her, Blues must comprehend the world inside herself. Her life as the daughter of a wealthy planter is surrounded by generations of poor workers who come and go every day in the corridors and peripheries of her house. Only Nanno, the *domestique / servant* seems to not age with time. Nanno "*était de la famille avec trois points de suspension / was the child of a family of ellipses*" old enough to witness the dis/continuities of Cornu's metamorphoses (2005, p. 77). She has been a faithful servant in bad and good times. She finds herself at the service of Cornu regularly just as any other object in his backyard museum. Nanno has no future because it is confounded with her past. Nevertheless, she is interested in the grammatology of everyday life and asks Blues to teach her French; she wants to read and write standard French because "*la vie est comme un serpent. Elle a besoin de changer de peau / life is like a snake. It needs to change its skin*" (2005, p. 78). Thus, Nanno is in search not of a type of non-being zone, where nakedness, as Fanon contends, gives birth to an "authentic upheaval" (2005, p.8). Rather, her world is that of renewal through the decoding the logics of internal and external speeches. To adjust to the changing social dynamic, Nanno commits to rebirth, renewal, and exploration of the "unknown" French language. Her attitude contrasts the president's elected democratically for life, who announces from the headquarter of the African Union in Addis-Abeba his intention to "*bantouser/ Bantou-ize*" Zimbabwe (2005, p. 82). Within her white community, Blues is a lonely voice that reminds both whites and Blacks to live up to the expectations of Zimbabwe, not Rhodesia. Independences such as, Blues understands, should be seen as new covenants for different forms of alliances between social groups.

Beyond race and economic disparity, Black and white farmers are further alienated from one another because of their respective attitudes toward history. Blues is a utopian in contrast to other characters in the novel. As Chatterjee writes, postcolonial history is in reality "more confederal in its political assumptions" and does not always assume the sovereignty of a single state (2005, p. 113). *La Plantation* is full of histories of colonial expropriation of the Blacks as well as "Rhodesians' rights" to stay in Zimbabwe. The impossibility to find elements for an alternative interpretation that accommodates all communities in Zimbabwe gives birth to fragmented narrations and imaginations. Racial tensions here induce "narrative break" and the end of utopia (98). Blues is reminded that her utopian project to increase cooperation between the white and Black farmers is wishful thinking and "*enfantillage / childishness*" (2005, p. 88). Nicolas, one of her father's "boys," challenges her bourgeois assumption that there could be a significant change in posture as long as society remains divided between masters and servants. "*Que diriez-vous si vous étiez à ma place? Demanda t-il avec un sourire politique. Vous voyez-vous galérant pour vous acheter des chaussures démodées? / What would you say if you were in my place? He asked with a political wink. Can you imagine yourself struggling to purchase*

*used shoes?*,” Nicolas challenges Blues (2005, p. 88). Nicolas’ critique suggests that Blues’ ahistorical project is utopian and bound to bring about more frustrations for the Blacks. While on the one hand Nicolas believes that historical development is determined by the interplay of material forces, Blues favors the Hegelian notion of history as a progress through stages of consciousness. From this second perspective, when Rhodesia changed into Zimbabwe, the new state supposedly embodied a new rubric of ideas and attitudes that broke with the past to recreate a new society of renewed minds. In actuality, the coming to terms with the inferiority/superiority complex remains incomplete. John, the son of Erwin Elioth, another white farmer, still calls the blacks, ‘sauvages / savages. “*Ces sauvages sont nos concitoyens...il faut apprendre à les respecter à défaut de les aimer; / Those savages are our fellow citizens ... You must learn to respect if not love them*” (2005, p. 89) Blues retorts.

Segregation between whites and Blacks is real but also only apparent. Wealthy white farmers take one or more Black concubines whenever they want. Sexual relations between the farmers and Black women happen anytime of the day. Erwin Elioth is Sonia’s “*amant fast-food, consommable et jetable vite fait et bien fait / fast-food lover, consumable and quickly disposable*” (101). Here again, the president elected democratically for life is blamed for the adultery of the white farmers. Similar to other men in the novel with Black concubines, the self-righteous Erwin Elioth always reassures his wife and places the blame on the pressure put on him by the expropriation laws. Obviously, there is no law that expropriates him from the bodies of Black women, the frontier of passion.

The land is loved and cultivated, whereas the Black woman’s body cannot be loved and remains a commodity, a mere object of white men’s desire. The history of the fetishization of Black women’s bodies is well rooted in Elioth’s family tradition. Known for his “*boulimie sexuelle / sexual bulimia*,” Michael Erwin, Elioth’s father, was before him, a commodity for Black women too (2005, p. 113). From mothers to daughters, the secret was passed on and a whole community of Black women consumed Michael as a fast-food until a biracial child was born. Elioth killed the child because he despised his father until his death. However, he inherited from Michael a plantation and the Black women’s body-farm. Erwin’s hereditary sexual bulimia not only highlights the impossibility of completely ignoring historical antecedents that inform social and political postures in Zimbabwe, but it also shows that obsession with history is not inherent to the Black consciousness. Both the ghosts of the Black child he killed, and of his deceased father constantly haunt Erwin. However, his crime is not recorded in public or legal documents. He confesses not to his Black concubines, but to Rosa Gottenberg, a widowed white landowner whom he recently added to his list of concubines. Meanwhile, the lost memory of this murder is suddenly recovered with the threats of expropriation. Thus, it appears that Beyala constructs synchronicity between these two seemingly unrelated events. The fear of losing the plantation reminds Elioth of the heavy cost he paid, including the murder of his Black brother. Nevertheless, despite the repression, “*trop d’enfants métisses sont nés et souffrent de la libido passe-partout des blancs / too many biracial children were born and suffer from unrestricted white libido*” (2005, p. 117). Since they are not welcome as “white,” biracial children in *La Plantation* ally with Ernest Picadilli, the activist for the universal cause.

With his money, Thomas Cornu secures friendship with the President elected democratically for life and with the Black people of Zimbabwe for a short while. He briefly served as the special counselor to the President and almost everyone in the President’s entourage used to thank him for his “gifts” such swimming pools, supersonic cars, among others. “*Tu es un vrai patriote, toi! Les hauts fonctionnaires qui profitaient de sa générosité corruptrice l’entraînaient sur les sentiers d’une fraternité lucrative, où la poésie administrative tartouillait leurs lèvres: ‘Qu’aurais-je fais sans toi petit papa?’ / You are a true patriot, you ! High-ranking public officials took advantage of his corrupting generosity and dragged him on a path of lucrative brotherhood where administrative poetics tickled their lips : ‘What would I do without*

*you papa ?*” they flatter him (2005, p. 141). With the pending law that would expropriate white farmers, the support of the “*fonctionnaires / public servants*” who used to sing his praises becomes impossible to secure. Cornu’s only comfort is Nanno, the Black governess who also pretends to possess ancestral secret knowledge that protects against evil spirits and invisible threats. If Nanno has any power, it is in her ability to negotiate her social agency by building strategic alliances that allow her to survive as a woman with some authority. The trajectory of her life is, however, not different from that of many Black women in the novel. John-John Bikolo, a former client of hers, reveals that Nanno is another aging prostitute just like any other. But, unlike other women, Nanno found an alternative way to earn a living by selling illusions to her white boss, Thomas Cornu. She has been the witch and the traditional healer trying to put an end to Thomas’ nightmares. In her private apartment, the interior design celebrates the *métissage / hybridity*. A crucifix made of colonized wood, a rug for Allah, a bed decorated with Asian dragons, and a wicker encircling the Tour Eiffel exemplify the ways in which her person and memory reconstitute the fragmented identity of Zimbabwe. She is the master of *nganga* and the *fatwa*, a *métissage / hybridity* of multiple discourses on self-containment spoken in different languages such as the kongo, pidgin, eton, shonas (2005, p. 166). Besides the agrarian reforms, there are many informal ways in which Black people seek justice, revenge, and compensation. Reference to the languages spoken in more than one country in Africa is Beyala’s attempt to both indigenize and Africanize the social dilemma that Nanno faces. Nanno speaks in these African languages to summon the repressive ancestral powers to punish John-John Bikolo, the black man who revealed her secret life as a prostitute. Nanno’s vengeance is not conclusive but helps highlight the intimate and intra-ethnic conflicts needing immediate solutions. For instance, John-John Bikolo, ends up killing Sonia. Blues and her sister Fanny are at each other’s throats competing for their parent’s attention. Fragmentation is therefore as pronounced in interpersonal relations as well as in inter/intraracial and ethnic interactions. For Nanno, power in this economically stressful environment means that the Black woman’s struggle is unavoidably intertwined with her bodily performances. As a former prostitute and governess, she uses whatever is available to protect herself and gain power.

Passion alone is not sufficient to reverse the course of history in Zimbabwe. Fanny, Thomas Cornu’s second daughter, is another character attracted to the idea of *métissage / hybridity*. She eventually falls in love with a Black man. However, the pending presidential bill that calls for the departure of white landowners from the country compromises “*l’amour entre les classes sociales / love between social classes*” (2005, p. 327). Not only do Black women beat up Fanny, but they also accuse her of stealing their Black men. Among the whites, she is the subject of mockery and gossip. The tension around the issue of land redistribution does not allow any of the characters in this novel to develop fully. Relationships are constructed and broken depending on the daily mood. Interpersonal relationships are interrupted by the omnipresent fear of imprisonment or deportation from the country. This pervasive fear is exemplified by the rapid shifts that take place in the novel after the land redistribution campaign is launched. Even after several months of pregnancy, no one in Fanny’s white family notices her physical metamorphoses because everybody is focused on the outcome of the land reform. Thomas Cornu is arbitrarily arrested and then released. Ernest Picadilli becomes Rosa’s lover, a wealthy landowner widow. His ideological shifts from being an activist defender of the poor Blacks to being the conspirator of a coup against the president democratically elected for life seem to have a minor impact on the course of events in the novel. Violence is omnipresent and “*la fesse et la violence sont partout... Désir d’amour et envie de violence sont deux grandes contradictions de l’humanité / Butts and violence are everywhere ... Desire for love and envy for violence are humanity’s two great contradictions*” in Zimbabwe (2005, p. 360-7).

White and biracial Africans are hyphenations that are hard to integrate into the political and socio-economic life of Zimbabwe after independence. Ironically, poor Black people do not

benefit from the land reform. While the friends of the president seize and share among themselves the property of expelled white landowners, the people continue to believe that they too will partake in this redistribution. Hoping against hope, *“les tombes des pauvres débordent jusque sur la chaussée, au milieu d’une végétation anarchique. Les singes viennent y jouer à la balançoire / the graves of the poor invade the pavements, in the midst of an anarchical vegetation. The monkeys come and playfully swing”* (2005, p. 393).

The reign of fear and death equally affects the white community in general. Unable to deter the president elected democratically for life, many white farmers and their families prepare to leave Zimbabwe and return to Europe – where they are not expected. Behind them, they leave memories of the land, the sun, the graves of family members deceased in Africa, and the recollection of sexual encounters with the Africans. However, Cornu’s family stays in Zimbabwe and organizes resistance until his death by cancer. Shortly after, Blues takes over the governance of plantation and contends, *“on est pas Africain parce qu’on est noir, mais que c’est une question de vibration / one is not African because one is black, but that it is a question of vibration”* (2005, p. 452). This vibratory space of renewal could be likened to Sandoval’s depiction of Barthes’s “unhabituated space and form of being” no longer relying on the lover’s image but rather on the “punctum,” the unraveling of entrails that guides “revolutionary maneuvers towards decolonization of being” (2000, p. 14).

Although Cornu’s plantation survives the tempest of land grabbing and anti-white public policies, the novel ends on a mitigated tone. After three generations of residence in Zimbabwe, Cornu’s family is still uncertain about the future. The relationships between the whites and Blacks have not improved significantly. Social tension, partly due to economic disparity instrumentalized by populist political leaders, further contribute to the alienation of social groups and individuals from one another. Finally, Beyala leaves the resolution of this racial, economic, and ideological conflict in the hands of time. *“Il faut laisser le temps au temps afin que les événements douloureux suscitent chez chacun la réflexion plutôt que la passion, l’interrogation plutôt que l’acquiescement, la lucidité plutôt que l’émotion. C’est à ce prix qu’on rompra les préjugés / One must leave time to time in order to allow painful events to arouse in each one reflection rather than passion, interrogation instead of acquiescence, lucidity rather than emotion. It is the price that will break prejudices,”* Beyala concludes (2005, p. 389).

#### 4 CONCLUSION

I set out to investigate the contribution that Black women thinkers and feminists bring to the debate over decolonization/decoloniality and to find out how much mileage can be covered with differential and oppositional politics only. Taking Calixthe Beyala’s intellectual and creative journeys as a feminist, writer, and activist for Black causes and identities, I argue the idea of decolonization as a break from something incompletely prepares us for a purposeful and inclusive activation of social transformation. Constructive decolonization, or a break from ontology toward some-Other, appears as a shock-event that reveals the crispation, contradiction and poverty of power in Africa’s racial experience.

In *La Plantation* Calixthe Beyala scrutinizes notions of territoriality and privatization as insufficient criteria for understanding the effect of changing socio-economic dynamics on identity and class formation. On the question of racial integration, gender roles and sexualities, the novelist explores the hermeneutics of love by blurring and locking past, present, and future in an inescapable encounter that unravels all ontologies, to leave characters with a bare minimum, a generative contradiction arising from their respective accumulated prejudices. Out of this generative residual, or rather excess of prejudice floating as signified contradictions of postcolonial/decolonial Zimbabwe, the novelist dis-covers / recognizes the shadow of lucidity

hovering just a step further, a mile away from a brand of decolonization that does not convincingly invest in the “construction” of full humanity. Were Africanist thinkers willing to walk the extra mile on this shadowy road of humanity, they may indeed rediscover the face(s) of the many Others alienated in the legitimate, but skewed quest for emancipation. What may emerge out of this extra mile is renewed appreciation for the arbitrariness of power and alienation that yesterday seemed to be the prerogative of the colonial master only. In postcolonial/decolonial Zimbabwe/Africa today, the extra mile challenge is one that calls for greater responsibility and ownership of our decolonial-induced prejudice, a crossing-over to categories, contents and forms exiled in our collective and individual imaginary and policies. In thinking blackness with its Otherness in Africa today, being otherwise than black-ness necessarily unravels certain brands of deconstruction/decolonization.

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