

Exilic, Becoming Beings

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Abstract

Exile is the unique reliable way out for the world's citizens when they feel unsafe in their home countries. As such, it is neither confined to any particular era nor to any specific society. This is a pure human phenomenon, which can occur at any time in an individual's life. Its degree of occurrence might vary, up or down, depending on the political, economic, educational, cultural and legal conditions that a given society offers to its citizens. The more those values are promoted and put into practice, the less the spectrum of exile diminishes. A careful, up-to-date look at the global society helps to remove ambiguities about the exilic people's conditions. No human society is immune from the exilic phenomenon. Citizens are compelled to leave their native homes to avoid arbitrariness, injustice, and death. As a social fact, exile is considered as a necessary evil. Necessary, because by exiling, the exilic being survives, learns to recreate and reinvent him/herself, overcome social obstacles and negotiate a new way of life. Evil, because the exilic subject, regardless of his/her know-how, intelligence or culture, is perceived as an intruder, a threat to the host community. Thus, the hospitality, which is offered to him/her, is always fraught with difficulties; a dose of adaptation is always required for his/her survival. The issue of exile is recurrent in the 21st century societies and is dealt with in various news media. Literature subjectivizes it by creating fictional, imaginary characters with complex, uncertain exilic destinies. Interrogating the exilic individuals' conditions through the prism of literary works is therefore an ambitious exercise. For that purpose, *Crosian* sociocritical perspective will serve as a methodological framework. Its purpose will consist in digging into two major points of interest (exilic evil and integrating modes) in a series of novels by authors of varied nationalities.

Keywords: exile, human, injustice, literature, liminality

Introduction

The human condition as a topic of interest is interrogated in countless critical studies. Together, they all seek to comprehend the human's pains, concerns, and sufferings, in order to take care of him/her. In this sense, medical research provides tangible results. As far as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, history, literature, and psychology are concerned, they are also interested in human nature. Their common purpose is to dig into its origins, discourses, deeds, visions, and will. While the results obtained are varied, united and satisfying, it should be noted that the human remains an elusive, mystical, mythical, cultural being. It is unquestionably dynamic; it constantly attempts to transform its environment according to its prevailing aspiration.

Books such as Alain Badiou's *L'Être et l'événement* (1988), Alan W. Watts's *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing who You Are* (1989), Monique Atlan and Roger-Pol Droit's *Humain: Une enquête philosophique sur les révolutions qui changent nos vies* (2014), Jürgen Habermas's *L'Avenir de la nature humaine: Vers un eugénisme libéral?* (2015), Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (2018), Robert Greene's *Les Lois de la nature humaine* (2019), and Alain Perusset's *Sémiotique de la vie. Mondes de sens, manières d'être* (2020) belong to different areas of knowledge; however, their unique object of study is the human condition.

Due to the current emergence of threats such as demographic growth, technological development, natural disasters, military conflicts, and economic crises, people's conditions have turned more precarious than ever. This troublesome situation brings about their massive exodus, either from one region to another within the same country, or from one country to another, or from one continent to another. Anyway, the most pressing issue is that, as the world moves forward, one realizes that the earliest critical works having people as their core subject have just become benchmarks; people are still prey to new burning phenomena, constraining today's critics to undertake further research upon them. New analytical perspectives in no way call into question the originality of the earliest works; on the contrary, they reopen the debate on people, helping to shed light on issues that are still obscure, or account for the realities that are intrinsically linked to humans, and which have only just come up.

Literature, the field *par excellence* for social representation, pictures today's people as crisis-affected beings who constantly strive to transform their pain into joy and hell into paradise. A thorough reading of Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their*

Accents (1992) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2014) will contribute to determining the perilous experiences that sometimes compel people to move from one place to another. A critical look at the fiction of those novelists helps to reveal that they depict various societies, whose people embark on an adventure towards the American society. If the destination is unique, several social reasons motivate their displacements.

Thus, from an interpretative point of view, the study of the exilic subjects' social status turns out to be substantial, for the host space acquires a hellish value, to the extent that the exilic beings lose their dignity, and become socially invisible. A reflection upon those crisis-affected people is significant, but before going ahead, it is necessary to consider some of the works carried out on the novels under consideration. In the critical study titled "Notions of Home: Re-Locations and Forging Connections in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (2018), Ashma Shamail looks into themes such as immigration, exile, equality, freedom, racism, materiality, cultural reconnection and return to the ancestral source. This study shows that both immigrant and exilic beings are confronted with the same social difficulties. Furthermore, delving into the hardship undergone by the migrant characters in Paule Marshall's creative art, Kelly Baker Josephs avers that "(...) the dynamic Marshall probes between socially (and often financially) privileged white women and less powerful women of color illustrates the implicit 'limits of personhood' that plague attempts at intersectionality (when attempts are made at all)" (2023, p. 3).

Furthermore, in his article entitled "I can't be me without my people: Julia Alvarez and the postmodern personal narrative" (2003), David Vázquez questions "the real trauma inflicted on Dominicans in the insular and American contexts" (2003, p. 383). According to Vázquez's analysis, the prevailing crisis in the Dominican Republic is political. This is due to the absence of democracy and poor governance, while the American crisis is both economic and sociocultural. Better still, analyzing the ambivalent feature of immigration in "Gains and losses of immigration in Julia Alvarez: How the García Girls lost their accents" (2010), Šárka Bubíková asserts that "while moving to America most likely saves their lives, at the same time it involves a loss in status. The Garcías have to lower their expectations significantly—both in terms of possession and position" (2010, p. 11). Further, through an article on Adichie's *Americanah*, Aristi Trendel avows that:

in her polyphonic novel, she orchestrates the woes of a divided self thus transforming the shabby condition of loss into a treasured aesthetic motif. Her ironic title points both to a story of assimilation and acculturation and to the loss which exiles keep alive. (2018, p. 87)

In addition to that, in a critical reflection on Adichie's novel, M. Robert Chandran and C. Govindaraj account for "the minds and identities of African immigrants who face cultural adaptation and identity creation challenges [in the American society]" (2022, p. 77).

As we can see, building upon varied methodological approaches, those critical studies have tried to elucidate Marshall's, Alvarez's and Adichie's fiction. Taken isolately, each of them has scrutinized a specific aspect of the literary projects under investigation. A close look at those works also helps to realize that they all deal with both exile and immigration. From that observation, one can infer that the field chosen for this study is migrant literature. Without falling into a trap of overstatement, the preceding critical review of literature provides a momentous insight into those novelists' writings. Nevertheless, textual values such as the exilic subject's sociocultural shift deserves to be interrogated. For that purpose, Edmond Cros's sociocritical perspective will serve as a methodological tool. This approach differs from the sociology of literature; its object is the literary texts. With reference to *Crosian* view, [sociocriticism] postulates that referential reality undergoes, under the effect of writing, a process of semiotic transformation, which encodes the referent in the form of structural and formal elements.¹

With reference to *Crosian* thesis, the exilic beings are instances of codification. The interval between their homeland and the host society is made of various semiotic changes. They have undergone a set of figurative metamorphoses. To account for that social mutation, the use of *Crosian* sociocritical perspective will be helpful. Its interest for this study will consist in scrutinizing the forms of transformation that occur in the exilic beings' lives through two lines of research, *exilic evil* and *integrating modes*.

Exilic Evil

The current stage of research looks into the textual values of the chosen novels, which exemplify the hellish feature of exile. Exile is a purely human phenomenon and has ambivalent features; it can be forced or intentional. In both cases, there is always a displacement from an initial space (homeland) to another one (host space). Forced exile can be politically motivated, i.e. an individual is accused of anti-social actions. To avoid eventual acts of reprisal, the respondent might go into exile. This estrangement from the homeland might be short-lived, long-lasting or permanent. Here, the eventual coming home hinges on the prevailing socio-political climate. Forced exile can have economic reasons;

¹ "[La sociocritique] postule que la réalité référentielle subit, sous l'effet de l'écriture, un processus de transformation sémiotique qui code le référent sous la forme d'éléments structurels et formels" (Cros, 2003, p. 37).

growing poverty in a given society might compel its citizens to go into exile. They might also go into exile for educational, family or professional reasons. Despite the nuance between forced exile and intentional exile, they all involve the subjects' displacement. Whether exiled or immigrant, both seek to protect and improve their physical integrity and social well-being.

The novels under consideration substantiate that particular situation. Paule Marshall's fictional beings are Caribbeans, Julia Alvarez's are Dominicans and Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's are Nigerians. Despite those differences in terms of cultural roots, the American society emerges as the characters' single destination. This essentializing strategy praises the host society. Obviously, the novelists' characters migrate for different reasons. Marshall and Adichie picture a number of characters who evolve in a precarious situation in their home societies. Alvarez's heroes, on the other hand, are well-to-do, but are forced to leave their home country because of political unrest. In other words, they go into exile to preserve their physical integrity. Examining the reasons, which can compel a subject to go into exile, Clément Moisan maintains that

The reason for exile comes almost naturally to anyone who has to leave their homeland, and the people who are close to them. However, it takes various forms, depending on whether it is the result of an obligation to leave one's homeland and the impossibility of returning, or the action of leaving one's country voluntarily, either because of a particular context (dictatorship, war, risk to one's life, famine), or because of a desire to improve one's lot, to access a better existence, or even because of a taste for adventure.² (Moisan, 2008)

In line with both categories, Marshall's and Adichie's characters migrate to resolve their economic difficulties. Here, what is relevant in the homeland is that none of the fictional beings suffers from identity problems. Their only concern is to acquire economic autonomy. The passage below describes Silla Boyce's social misery in Barbados; the Caribbean island undergo a chaotic economic situation, which compels her to go into exile:

You know what I was doing when I was your age? She asks Selina. I was in the Third Class. ... The Third Class is a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise his heaven till it set. With some woman called a Driver to wash yuh tail

² "Le motif de l'exil s'impose presque naturellement à toute personne qui doit quitter son pays, et les personnes qui lui sont proches. Mais il prend des formes différentes, selon qu'il résulte d'une obligation de quitter son pays et de l'impossibilité d'y revenir, ou de l'action de quitter volontairement son pays, soit en raison d'un contexte particulier (dictature, guerre, risqué for sa vie, famine), soit par désir d'améliorer son sort, d'accéder à une existence meilleure, ou encore par goût de l'aventure" (Moisan, 2008, p. 73).

in licks if yuh dare look up. Yes, working harder than a man at the age of ten. ... And when it was hard times. ... I would put a basket of mangoes 'pon muh head and go selling early-early 'pon a morning. Frighten bad enough for duppy and thing 'cause I was still only a child... (1959, pp. 45–46)

In contrast to the above-mentioned case, Alvarez's characters suffer from no financial trouble. For example, the Garcías are wealthy enough. However, Carlos García, the head of the family is accused of conspiracy by Trujillo's government, thus forcing the Garcías to go into exile in New York, United States. The reason for that exile is purely political. Be it forced or intentional, exile is always tedious. Indeed, through a comparative approach, Gérard Keubeung reveals the exilic evil as follows,

(...) immigration is a perilous adventure for those who embark on it. From the moment you set out on your journey to the moment you settle in your host country, everything is fraught with danger. Even if you let yourself be lulled by the illusion of some kind of paradise. Moreover, the danger of immigration is all the greater given that the journey is fraught with signs of failure.³ (Keubeung, 2011)

As argued above, exile is a complex social phenomenon in today's world. Once settled in the American society, the exilic beings experience some dramatic realities. Henceforth, they are identified with the host society. David Álvarez points out that the "[exilic beings] are frequently seen and figured as faceless and racialized threats to the body politics" (2022, p. 41). Due to racial discrimination, they are deprived of various privileges. As a result, they are socially reclusive and lose their ancestral identity. In that state of cultural shift, the exilic people have no value. In Marshall's and Adichie's novels, race is deeply codified; it is one of the symbols that reinforces the exilic beings' social invisibility. From that perspective, Sharjeel Ahmad and many other critics affirm that "a person with black or grey color of skin has no equal rights in America to pursue his/her American dream and is only limited to the white color of skin" (Ahmad *et al.*, 2022, p. 1418).

In Adichie's *Americanah*, race embodies the metaphor of liminality. A thorough analysis of Ifemelu's trajectory helps to discover that her experience has three phases: separation, transition and incorporation, which correspond to what Arnold Van Gennep respectively calls "preliminary rites", "liminal rites" and "postliminal rites" (1960, p. 3). In the liminal phase, the exilic subject suffers from social invisibility; he is subject to restrictions, his freedom

³ "(...) l'immigration est une aventure périlleuse pour ceux qui s'y engagent du voyage que l'on entreprend à l'installation dans le pays d'accueil, tout n'est que danger. Même si l'on se laisse bercer par l'illusion d'un quelconque paradis qui y existerait. Et ce danger que représente l'immigration est d'autant plus grand que le voyage est émaillé de signes annonciateurs de l'échec" (Keubeung, 2011, p. 112).

is threatened. That is why Victor Turner, one of Genep's readers avers that "liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness" (1991, p. 95). Indeed, since birth, Ifemelu evolves in her native society (Nigeria) where no prejudice is associated with race. However, after migrating to the United States for educational purposes, she discovers that her race is a handicap, a barrier to her social achievement. Her words reflect her high degree of bitterness, "I came from a country where the race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black, and I only became black when I came to America" (2013, p. 290). With time, she realizes that her survival in her host space depends on her capacity to adapt to the new realities. In keeping with those details, one can assert that Ifemelu suffers from social difficulties (social exclusion) because of her race. This makes her a social invalid. Whiteness being the norm for survival, Ifemelu feels compelled to adopt the white style for her job interview:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky. (2013, p. 204)

This means that race is one of the factors of restriction, rejection and denigration. In the American society, the exilic people are socially handicapped; their rights are trampled on. Thus, they acquire the status of subhuman or subaltern. For instance, in *Americanah*, Aunt Uju, one of Ifemelu's relatives also suffers social liminality. The ensuing utterances illustrate that handicap, "ever write about adoption? Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don't mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don't want them. He told her that he and his wife had adopted a black child and their neighbours looked at them as though they had chosen to become martyrs for a dubious cause" (Adichie, 2013, pp. 4–5).

In other words, the American society appears in Adichie's text as a mirage. The opaque feature of its migration policy negatively influences the exilic subjects' social conditions. This discredits the American dream, whose prestige attracts people. A close look at its textual figuration helps to infer that the hypocrisy of the American laws mainly contributes to deepening dissensions between the natives and the exilic people. Those social shortcomings are vehemently decried in Adichie's novel. Indeed, the exilic beings have no value in the American society, for

There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, especially White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvellous rhyme goes: if you're white, you're all right; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back!). (Adichie, 2013, p. 184)

Plainly, the exilic people are erased from the scene; they do not exist socially. From a representational point of view, they are unrecognized as the American citizens' equals. Their invisibility is also noticeable through language. Most of the time, the exilic people do not speak the language of the host universe. Indeed, analyzing the function of language in *Poétique des valeurs*, Vincent Jouve avers that "language, too, is the object of very precise social codification. First, there is the grammatical norm, which draws a line between those who have not mastered the code. (...) The relationship with language is commonly used by authors as a means of evaluating characters" (Jouve, 2001).⁴ With reference to this quotation, one can infer that the exilic beings who are described in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* have no command of the linguistic codes. They are confronted with a linguistic barrier. In such a context, language becomes one of the key symbols of division and rejection. Consequently, Carlos García (husband) and Laura García (wife) are barred from the stage. Quoting Jean-Marie Le Clézio, in one of his essays, Alain Corbin notes, "silence is the supreme achievement of language, and consciousness" (Corbin, 2016).⁵

In that state of being, the exilic people are constrained to remain confined. This means that they cannot open up to their host society. In Alvarez's novel, the two heads of the García family (husband & wife) advocate the use of their native language (Spanish) at home. In reality, there is a conflict between their language and that of America, which is regarded as the norm. The Garcías' language seems to be losing its usefulness. According to García Carlos, any rejection of the language would annihilate their cultural values. Explicitly, Spanish is for them a sociolect, which embodies the Garcías' collective memories. Cros maintains that "the utterances of literary discourse always differ by one or more relevant features from those exchanged in practice, outside literary discourse, even if they are all syntactically correct" (Cros, 2003).⁶ In other words, Spanish utterances epitomize an ideological scope. Apart from its communicative use, it helps the Garcías connect with their past. With Spanish, they also avoid being acculturated. Pierre V. Zima maintains in this regard that "[the concept of sociolect] is an ideological language that articulates, lexically, semantically and syntactically, particular collective interests" (Zima, 2000).⁷

⁴ "Le langage est, lui aussi, l'objet d'une codification très précise sur le plan social. Il y a, d'abord, la norme grammaticale qui trace une frontière entre ceux qui ne maîtrisent pas le code. (...) Le rapport au langage est couramment utilisé par les auteurs comme moyen d'évaluer les personnages" (Jouve, 2001, p. 22).

⁵ "Le silence est l'aboutissement suprême du langage et la conscience" (Corbin, 2016, p. 104).

⁶ "Les énoncés du discours littéraire s'écartent toujours par un ou plusieurs traits pertinents de ceux qui sont échangés dans la pratique, en dehors du discours littéraire, même s'ils sont tous syntaxiquement corrects". (Cros, 2003, p. 41)

⁷ "[Le concept de sociolecte] est un langage idéologique qui articule, sur les plans lexical, sémantique et syntaxique, des intérêts collectifs particuliers" (Zima, 2000, p. 131).

Spanish helps the members of the García family preserve their cultural identity; they safeguard their ancestral heritage and protect their collective memory. Being socially handicapped, the exilic beings' conditions in the American society turn hellish. In other words, they are trapped in the exilic hell. For example, Yolanda is one of the members of the Garcías, whose painful experience is illustrative of that trap, "I saw what a cold, lonely life awaited me in this country. I would never find someone who would understand my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles" (Alvarez, 1992, p. 99). Obviously, Yolanda's new life in New York is intriguing. Examining the linguistic obstacles encountered by the exilic beings such as Yolanda, Simon Harel asserts that "for the [exilic] subject, one must imagine a primitive abandonment and the conquest of an adopted place so that the host language enables him to become a subject" (Harel, 2005).⁸ This negative image of the American society is also rampant in *Americanah*. Delving into the exilic people's difficulties in *Adichian* fiction, Chinenye Amonyeze avows, "Adichie's novel exposes America as a country where one does what needs to be done to succeed including adopting American accents, identity theft, and prostitution" (2017, p. 7).

Obviously, adopting the linguistic system of the host space is one of the prerequisite for the creation of a "new self." In this way, the American space takes on the nature of a *prison*, for the exilic people lose their dignity. Indeed, the loss of one's ancestral language is a threat to the survival of the exilic people's cultural identity. This is confirmed by Simon Harel as follows, "insofar as the [exiled] subject accepts the violence of a matricidal and parricidal act, which consists in killing a former language, he or she successfully responds to the gift of integration. The great complexity of this act lies in the fact that the former language becomes the stake in a psychic death" (Harel, 2005).⁹ More significantly, as depicted in Alvarez's novel, the American society is a space where the Spanish language falls into disuse. The Garcías' ancestral language undergoes alteration. That influence also gives rise to a number of crises. Interrogating the relevance of language, Moisan asserts, "the language of exile makes the mother tongue foreign, and the being who speaks and writes it, being foreign to oneself" (Moisan, 2008).¹⁰

Further, the exilic space does not promote the exiled individuals' ancestral identity. The latter negotiate a "new self," which is never stable. From that point of view, exile is harmful. To survive in the American society, Alvarez's characters appropriate new

⁸ "Pour le sujet [exilique], il faut imaginer un abandon primitif et la conquête d'un lieu d'adoption afin que la langue du pays d'accueil lui permette de devenir un sujet" (Harel, 2005, p. 60).

⁹ "Dans la mesure où le sujet [exilique] accepte la violence d'un acte matricide et patricide qui consiste à tuer une langue première, il répond avec succès au don de l'intégration. La grande complexité de cet acte tient du fait que la langue première devient l'enjeu d'une mort psychique" (Harel, 2005, p. 60).

¹⁰ "La langue de l'exil, rend la langue maternelle étrangère et l'être qui la parle et l'écrit, étranger à soi" (Moisan, 2008, p. 82).

identities: Laura (Mami), Carlos García (Papi), Sandra (Sandi), Yolanda (Yo, Yoyo, Joe), and Sofía (Fifi). Similarly, in Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, Jay Johnson turns Jerome and Avey Johnson takes on Avey. This patronymic denial epitomizes the death of the ancestral identity. *A priori*, those new names have no cultural background; they do not define the exilic subjects' ancestral roots for any possible identity construction. Avey Johnson encounters several difficulties when she embarks on a process of cultural reconnection. When visiting Carriacou (Caribbean), she does not comprehend the Patois spoken by her Carriacouan relatives, "Avey Johnson realizes then with a start that everyone around her was speaking Patois. She had been so busy examining them she had failed to take in their speech. Or her ears had perhaps registered it as the dialect English spoken in many of the islands which often sounded like another language altogether" (1983, p. 67).

Avey Johnson's incapacity to communicate with her Caribbean relatives compels her to be silent. In terms of analogy, Avey Johnson and Alvarez's characters are similar; their respective experiences show that, without language, one's identity disappears. That is why Fatou Diome avows in the prologue to her book titled *Marianne porte plainte* (2017), "language is the key part of identity" (Diome, 2017).¹¹ Beyond the linguistic aspect, the host space provides the exilic people with a high standard of living, thus constraining them to be more interested in the quest for material well-being and less interested in the ancestral values. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the narrator reveals Silla Boyce's daily activities as follows:

Each morning they (Silla and the other Barbadian women) took the train to Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay to scrub floors. The lucky ones had their steady madams while the others wandered those neat blocks or waited on corners—each with her apron and working shoes in a bag under her arm until someone offered her a day's work. Sometimes the white children on their way to school laughed at their blackness and shouted nigger, but the Barbadian woman sucked their teeth, dismissing them. Their only thought was of the few raw-mout pennies at the end of the day, which would eventually buy house. (Marshall, 1959, p. 11)

In Marshall's novel, Silla Boyce's cumulative materialistic yearning symbolizes her hatred towards her Caribbean heritage. Indeed, she persuades her husband to sell his Caribbean land; her desire is to buy a "brownstone house" in Brooklyn, New York. In her plan, any possible return to her homeland is banned. She defines herself as an American. Her love for the Caribbean relatives has entirely vanished:

¹¹ "La langue, c'est la part clef de l'identité" (Diome, 2017, p. 8).

at night the children were often awakened by muffled arguments from the master bedroom; savage words sparked in the darkness: Sell it, sell it... and always the same reply, growing more weary each night but persisting, it' mine to do as I please. (Marshall, 1959, p. 41)

This change compromises her integrity. In one of his critical studies, Roberto Strongman describes Silla Boyce as follows:

her voice stands the staunchs, assimilated voice of reason, and of the determination of immigrants to attain the mythical American dream. As such, Silla not only propagates stories, which paint Barbados as an unwelcoming place, she also participates in elitist-hegemonic discourses, which privilege the urban industrialized world over the under-developed region of the globe. (Strongman, 2005, p. 51)

More importantly, exile is an evil; its negative effects influence the exilic people. Their only concern is to get rid of their past. Silla Boyce's hateful attitude towards Barbados is an illustrative case. Likewise, examining Ifemelu's experience, Sharjeel Ahmad and many other critics maintain that "the suffering she faced as an African immigrant in American society traumatized her by causing some indispensable wounds to her identity. Furthermore, racism has aggravated her situation and creates a sense of guilt and inferiority complex in her mind" (Ahmad *et al*, 2022, p. 1424).

By the same token, exile is a transitional period experienced by some given citizens; it can change their standard of living. In the case of forced exile, the victimized beings might lose their initial job and fall into jobless; they might move from wealthiness to poverty. In *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, Carlos García's social status in the Dominican Republic differs from that in the United States. In the former society, he is wealthy. However, in the latter one, he is poor. His feeding regime changes. Those dietary changes negatively influence the Garcías. Psychologically, he feels unbalanced and disoriented. In his article titled "The Locus and Logos of Exile" Aliko Songolo notes that "what has been left behind continues to haunt the conscious of the exile" (1997, p. 114). In other words, the exiled subjects feel torn between two spaces; the former gradually slips away. According to Moisan, in the latter space, where the exilic beings are perceived as [strangers], they must constantly restart [their] quest for existence. [Their] identity, which is based on a perception of emptiness, a kind of divestment of reality, imposes a constant change of being (Moisan, 2008).¹²

¹² "Doit sans cesse recommencer [leur] quête d'existence. Leur identité qui se fonde sur une aperception du vide, une sorte de dessaisissement du réel, impose un changement constant de l'être" (Moisan, 2008, p. 81).

From the preceding analysis, it should be noted that exile epitomizes various evils (racial stigma, inequality, disenfranchisement, fragmentation of the self, cultural alteration and disconnection). Despite those threats, the exilic beings use some symbolic integrating modes, which need to be deciphered.

Integrating Modes

This section scrutinizes the *integrating modes* which help the exilic beings move from social invisibility to social visibility.

In accordance with that purpose, the first point to be deciphered is the spatial adaptation. Let us note that in the novels under investigation, the level of development of the host society is higher than that of the exilic individuals' homeland. From that point of view, the subjects who venture there are bound to adapt to what such a social development requires. This implies that they abide by the laws or rules in force and master the host language before claiming for what they really deserve. To keep up with the new standard of living encountered in the American society, the exilic individuals are to use some palliative measures to carve out a noble social place for themselves. For instance, Marshall's (1959) exilic characters, namely Avey and Jay embrace the capitalist system advocated by their host society (United States). They exert various jobs. As parents of three children, Avey Johnson and her husband (Jay Johnson) have no choice; the unique way out is to work hard. This contributes to turning the situation to their advantage.

With that ambitious stance, Avey and her husband (Jay) manage to overcome their daily difficulties. With regards to Avey Johnson's vision (Marshall, 1959), the exilic subjects evolving in the American society cannot be saved by the political system in place. To Avey Johnson, the only way out and the surest one is to cultivate courage or devotion. This means the exilic people are to invest in all sectors of activity without any exception and save enough from a material point of view to construct an efficient economic independence for themselves. Avey Johnson's reasoning contradicts the claim according to which the American society is an earthly paradise. In essence, that society epitomizes the great civilization, but it covers some undeniable shortcomings; the exilic subjects who evolve there are constrained to reinvent their social visibility by undertaking challenging and demanding jobs. In the passage below, a vibrant appeal is addressed to the exilic beings to take up the challenge nurtured by the host society,

The trouble with half there Negroes out here is that they spend all their time blaming the white man for everything. He won't give 'em a job. Won't let 'em a break. He's the one

keeping 'em down. When the problem really is most of 'em don't want to hear the word work. If they'd just cut out all the good-timing and get down to some hard work, put their minds to something, they'd get somewhere. (...) That's what most of these Negroes out here still haven't gotten through their heads. Instead of marching, protesting, and running around burning down everything in the hope of a handout, we need to work and build our own! Our own! Shouting it at her. Lashing out periodically at her, himself, his own at that world which had repeatedly denied him, until finally the confusion, contradiction and rage of it all sent the blood flooding his brain one night as he slept in the bed next to hers. (Marshall, 1983, pp. 134–135)

The call for activism (courage) resonates well in Jay Johnson's family; he and his wife (Avey Johnson) embrace the activist ideals. Through fair devotion, they embark on the quest for material well-being. This helps them acquire their desired goal (upward mobility) and leave the precariousness of Hasley Street to settle in North White Plains where their social visibility turns more obvious. Contrary to Hasley Street, North White Plains is a smart district where both wealthy Blacks and Whites cohabit. Here, there is an emergence of a friendly closeness. This is possible by virtue of Avey's and Jay's commitment. As exilic people, they are compelled to guarantee their upward mobility; this is a prerequisite for their recognition as worth beings. To put it differently, the acquisition of material goods provides them with an active power. The one they acquired through hard commitment has a thoughtful scope. It helps the exilic people be respected by the native Americans, be equally treated, find decent accommodation, share the same neighborhood.

At this level, the prevailing look postulates recognition of the exilic beings. For example, Avey Johnson and two other white characters, Thomasina Moore and Clarice, decide to go on excursion. Thomasina and Clarice share the same cabin. Thus, through a loving look, the relationship prevailing between Avey Johnson and her American friends (Thomasina Moore and Clarice) is friendly. Both communities, white and black share the macro-space (North White Plains) and micro-space (Cabin) on the ship used for their excursion. Avey Johnson is delighted to realize that the power of material wealth provides expressiveness and consideration to her words. The paragraph below describes her enthusiasm,

The marathon packing was done. On an armchair over near the widow lay the clothes she had hastily set aside to wear. The suitcases, all six of them along with the shoe caddy and hatbox, stood assembled near the door, ready for the steward. Giving the apprehensive glance over her shoulder, she immediately headed toward them, not even allowing herself a moment to rest her back on wipe the perspiration

from her face or to consider, quietly and rationally, which was normally her way, what she was about to do. (Marshall, 1983, p. 16)

The change in social status strengthens Avey Johnson's authority. She imposes her will on the other members of the family. For example, Marion, one of Avey Johnson's daughters does not approve of her going on excursion with some unknown white women. However, Avey Johnson systematically rejects her pieces of advice. Obeying Marion's orders is considered as a form of humiliation. Avey Johnson perceives this as being a dishonor. She overlooks her child's rebukes, because she feels independent enough to make her own choices. Indeed, to show off her economic asset and power, Avey Johnson travels with six suitcases for few days. Henceforward, she gets dressed in the Western style. Thus, through her attire, she gives her social visibility a sheen, which leaves no character indifferent in Marshall's fictional universe.

In *Carriacou, Caribbean*, she reveals her American identity and distances herself from Lebert Joseph by informing the latter of her eventual return to New York, USA. The construction of the "exilic self" and recognition of the "exilic self" are two major facts whose effectiveness provides the exilic beings with a new existence in the host space. In Marshall's novel, the exilic beings appropriate the power of material abundance to fulfil their dream. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, that asset is at the heart of the exilic people's emergence. Deciphering the respective transformations that have occurred in Silla Boyce's life, Marjorie Thorpe writes:

like Proteus, Silla cannot be fixed, pinned down, comprehensively defined. In the course of the novel, she moves from exploited child labourer, to hopeful wife and mother, to humiliated domestic worker, to the godlike figure on the floor of the wartime factory. And the effect of each experience is evident at different times. (1999, p. 308)

The charisma of Marshall's exilic characters is life-saving. It enables them to dominate their troublesome conditions. In Marshall's creative art, they assert themselves as the actors in the construction of their history. In terms of struggle for recreation and recognition, the female characters play a leading role. Through their image, Marshall's novel subverts the patriarchal power. As a result, the male voice loses its authority and emerges as a support rather than a guide. Analyzing Silla Boyce's courage, Mary Helen Washington avers that "on every issue confronting their lives Silla imposes her own meaning, affirming for herself and the others the role of language in the survival of oppressed people" (1981, p. 313). Silla Boyce is aware that Barbados is poor and that the American society is not a paradise either. Therefore, her dream is not to go back, but to define herself

as an American. That is why Swati Rana asserts that “Silla represents an attachment to the American dream that is both troubling and impossible to ignore. She views the United States as a site of economic advancement” (2020, p. 152).

Beyond the major role played by the material aspect of life in the construction of the *exilic self*, the adoption of the language of the host society also contributes to the exilic people’s sociocultural achievement. By familiarizing themselves with the language of their new dwelling (host society), the exilic people create a sense of brotherhood between them and the native population. This togetherness eliminates hatred and advocates altruism. In addition to the above details, the exilic people adopt the American accent to be accepted. For example, in *Americanah*, Dike “[appropriates] a seamless American accent” (2013, p. 129). To put it another way, speaking the language of the host society (English) is advantageous. Through that communicative strategy, the exiled people move from marginalization to the stage. Once visible and recognized, they construct a wide network of friends with whom they promote some cultural values and cultivate the ideals of Pan-Africanism. Indeed, Adichie’s novel features the exilic beings who adopt several modes of integration—they even militate in congregations. The textual clues below corroborate their strategy,

Try and make friends with our African-American brothers and sisters in a spirit of Pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. ... You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals, Koreans, Indians, Brazilians, whatever, than with Americans, both black and white. (2013, pp. 141–142)

Unlike the colonial feature of exoticism, which posits the concept of *elsewhere* as a location of confrontation with the Other, exoticism is revitalized in Marshall’s, Alvarez’s and Adichie’s fiction. Their migrant characters are neither colonists, nor conquerors, nor explorers. Rather, they are crisis-affected subjects who settle abroad to acquire security and social well-being. In that context, interbreeding is a significant way out for them as it contributes to their social integration. Jean-Xavier Ridon writes in that respect, that “today, on the contrary, *métissage* offers a dialogue between cultures that are becoming more open to each other and forms part of an ultimately more tolerant humanity” (2010, p. 203). Obviously, the acquisition of the host society’s cultural values enables the exilic individuals to consolidate their sense of belonging and humanity. Françoise Král maintains that “‘diasporas’ were commonly depicted as melancholy places of exile and oppression that restricted social and cultural fruition; (...) [today], ‘diasporas’ are enthusiastically embraced as arenas for the creative melding of cultures and the formation of new ‘hybridic,’ mixed iden-

tities" (2005, p. 5). Metaphorically, among the cultural markers, the host linguistic system functions as a cement, it unifies peoples. As such, its acquisition substantiates the exilic people's openness and hybrid feature. This makes the barrier between them and natives more porous, promoting love. In her text titled *Habiter la frontière*, Léonora Miano asserts that the border evokes relationship. It says that peoples met, sometimes in violence, hatred and contempt, and that despite this, they gave birth to meaning (2012).¹³ In other words, the language of the host society helps the exilic people externalize their truth, a truth that belongs to no one, but which emerges as the symbol of humanity.

Further, through the language of the host country, the exilic individuals pictured in the novels under investigation, provide the Americans with what they need, and in turn receive from them the vital sap, which gives meaning to their existence. This means, by acquiring the language of the host society helps the exilic beings communicate with their hosts, fraternize with them, understand their history, embrace their cultural values and have a successful integration. This also opens up jobs opportunities for them. Demonstrating the relevance of language in the exilic context, Joan M. Hoffman states that "language, in both its form and its content, is an important unifying agent here, every bit as essential as the strong family connections" (1998, p. 18). As a means of oral and written communication, a language acquired in particular circumstances such as immigration, is always advantageous. According to Aristi Trendel, the success of Latino writers in America is made possible by their perfect acquisition of English, "it is through a disrupting of the hegemonic language codes that Latino/a writers make English malleable enough to suit their purpose: recounting the story of a Hispanic in the United States" (2018, p. 92). Explicitly, the use of English by the Garcías in Alvarez's novel contributes to their social insertion.

Conclusion

The study of two points of interest, *exile evil* and *integrating modes* in four novels (*Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *Praisesong for the Widow, How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, and *Americanah*) emanating from some women writers pertaining to different cultural roots helped to account for the transformations that occur in the exilic beings' lives in the American society.

Drawing on the principles of sociocriticism, this reflection considered the texts under investigation as a figurative space where human experiences (history) and social realities are pictured. Through the lens of that approach, Barbados (Caribbean), Nigeria (Africa),

¹³ "La frontière évoque la relation. Elle dit que les peuples se sont rencontrés, quelquefois dans la violence, la haine, le mépris, et qu'en dépit de cela, ils ont enfanté du sens" (Miano, 2012, p.25).

and Dominican Republic (West Indies) were considered as the exilic beings' ancestral roots and the United States was defined as a host society plagued by injustice, exacerbating the exilic subjects' social conditions. The analysis of the textual data also revealed the exilic beings' steady resilience. That commitment was regarded as a substantial value in the construction of their new identity. The acquisition of material and language was regarded as being determining in constructing the *exilic self*. Those extratextual values provide the exilic beings with a new social status and help them consolidate their existence. In view of the achieved results, one can infer that the sociocritical approach was useful in the conducting of the current reflection.

However, it should be noted that the literary texts under consideration embody varied complex figures. People, as evolving beings, generate values whose picture in the literary texts is constantly renewed and semantically heterogeneous. The Caribbean and African people's figurative movement towards the American society is followed by transcultural, intercultural and cross-cultural phenomena, whose study remains advantageous. Those textual values are original; any eventual research upon them might be contributive and provide further insight into Paule Marshall's, Julia Alvarez's, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's literary projects.

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