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Postcolonial Memories and the Shattered Self

Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark. (...) One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?

Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*

Hauntings

Postcolonial selves are always enmeshed with the ghostly and the phantasmatic. Even if the construction of identity always depends on a certain violence – be it just the violence of the struggle between memory and forgetting – without which no possibility for a sense of self can be forged out of the multiple possibilities made available, the violence involved in colonialism is of an altogether different order and intensity. Because its goal was the annihilation of any sense of self or of human identity in all of those under its dominance. And because, as Edward Said and many others since have noted, colonialism was never just a one-way process, so that even if one takes into consideration the immense inequality of power that characterizes colonial relations, they affected the colonizer as well. Some fifty, forty, or in some cases less, years after decolonization, the question of colonial violence has not abated. Indeed in some cases it is still either impossible to name it as such, or at least large segments of the population or those endowed with political power, still attempt to deny it, or would like to simply forget it. And yet, the more some would like to forget the ghosts of the past, the more they return to haunt the present. Although the critical conditions of life in many countries formally colonized by European states have been forcing migration northwards for a long time, the acute aggravation due in part to the spread of violence in several North African countries, and especially in Syria, has meant that an unprecedented crisis has forced the question into everyone's attention in the last couple of years. If there is to be any hope for advancing Europe as a common polity, rather than the ill-advised current attempts to turn back the clock on all social

and economic democratic gains of the period after World War II, and even to dissolve the European Union on the deluded belief that the past might be somehow recovered, addressing those ghosts of colonialism becomes an imperative. Postcolonial selves will not simply adjust themselves to some ideal of a unified identity supposedly characteristic of bourgeois life, itself a myth as has become more and more clear since the advent of psychoanalysis. But they might stop being shattered selves as they still are now, split between two impossible allegiances, to a cruel world that has vanished but whose memory is still haunting, and to a newer one that does not accept them and often does not even see them for who they are.

The kind of systemic violence brought on by colonialism and imperialism is not limited to the past, however recent, nor of course to any one specific part of the globe. Even if there will always be specific historical differences, the linkage between extreme violence, modernity and colonialist ideologies focused on South America, established by Jean Franco in her harrowing and seminal book, *Cruel Modernity*, makes clear the magnitude of the horror. The importance of addressing the ghosts of colonialism is not limited to Europe of course, or to the more recent cases of decolonization. The United States became independent in 1776 and slavery was gradually abolished throughout the nineteenth century, but the consequences can still be felt today, even if the United States in turn has assumed its role as an imperial nation as well. Toni Morrison's novels are eloquent and beautiful reminders of that past and its haunting presence in the present. Florens, one of the main characters in Morrison's latest novel, *A Mercy* (2008), is one of the strongest reminders of that haunting quality: herself a sort of ghost, as the reader cannot be certain whether she is dead or not, even as she goes on testifying about the harrowing circumstances of her life as a slave child and as a young woman incapable of dealing with the fear of being substituted again, and who thus kills her lover when he decides to adopt a boy. Her words at the very opening of the novel, which I have used as epigraph, leave no doubt as to the force, animal like, of the haunting and of the need to testify and seek out responsibility while being able to read the various signs that can help one make sense of one's tormented life as an ex-slave: "Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark. (...) One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?" (Morrison, 2008: 1). Morrison thus not only forces her readers to rethink the nature of the American nation even before it became one – a questioning that has much to do with an understanding of the past as

well as with a political choice in the present – but also asks us to see that for all its development away from colonialism and slavery the United States, and indeed Europe, as the other main characters are Dutch, English, and Portuguese, still must confront its colonial ghosts. Florens, for all her strength, remains a shattered individual whose love only too readily can turn into murderous hate.

If I am starting with the example of Morrison it is because I would like to distance myself from any attempts to read the postcolonial solely in chronological terms or indeed to limit considerations of colonialism to the hegemonic form that British colonialism assumed in the 19th century. Europe in a sense, remains central for my argument, but not because of any assumed superiority, civilizational or otherwise, but merely because for the longest period, indeed, from the early incursions of the Portuguese into Africa in the fifteenth century, to the more recent past, it did assume a pivotal role in the forceful dehumanization, torturing and killing of millions upon millions of people, until it turned those forces upon itself and almost destroyed itself completely in the two world wars and especially, with the Holocaust. Indeed, I think that in order to properly understand the shattering of the postcolonial Self one should have recourse to trauma studies in general and in particular to studies of the Holocaust. In *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) Michael Rothberg presents the first detailed and systematic study of how indeed combining cultural memory studies with postcolonial studies can present us with tools for not only a better understanding of both, but even, I would suggest, of how one may recognize the mechanisms at work in both colonialism and the Holocaust, and thus work against their reappearance. As Michael Rothberg remarks, “[u]ltimately, memory is not a zero-sum game” (Rothberg, 2009: 11). Previously, others had already started sketching out the necessity to rethink both histories and a case in point would be Walter Benn Michaels’ essay in which he uses Toni Morrison’s previous novel, *Beloved*, to start teasing out the ghosts of the past that must be confronted in one is not to simply be lulled into forgetting:

“If, then, we must not see the ghost in *Beloved* as a real (albeit biologically exotic) entity (like a visitor), we should not see her either as a figure for a real (and also biologically exotic) entity (like a race). She is a figure instead for a process, for history itself; *Beloved* is, in this respect, not only an historical but an historicist novel. It is historical in that it's about the historical past; it's

historicist in that – setting out to remember "the disremembered" – it re-describes something we have never known as something we have forgotten and thus makes the historical past a part of our own experience" (Michaels, 1996: 6).

As Hannah Arendt, and after her Giorgio Agamben (see Agamben, 1998), had already demonstrated and explored, Rothberg also picks up on the intrinsic link between the cruel methods for containment and extermination of whole populations in the American and African colonies and their subsequent use in Europe itself. Rothberg is very aware of the political significance of his work for current controversies and his lucid analysis, for instance, of Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005), in relation both to the Algerian question in France as well as to the problematics of cultural memory is a case in point, to which I will want to return. More importantly, for now, is the recognition that the haunting conditions of postcolonial subjects, those one may want to side with the oppressed as well as those who would be the inheritors of the perpetrators, or indeed, who are on both sides and on none simultaneously, are wide-spread and must be addressed if one is to hope to move towards a different future.

Negative Inheritances

Anil Ramdas killed himself on his fifty-fourth birthday, 16 February, 2012. A prominent writer and television presenter in the Netherlands, Ramdas had been writing more and more openly disgruntled and accusatory columns as Dutch politics had taken an increasing turn to the right, expressed in all sorts of measures against cultural institutions and indeed in direct conflict with European law on the subject of migrants, for instance. In one of the obituary articles published in all the national newspapers, one could read for instance, that he always was an alien everywhere he went: "No matter how intellectual and well-known he was, Anil Ramdas remained a stranger in his country of birth, Suriname, a foreigner in his country of origin, India, and an 'allochtoon' in the Netherlands. His life was a struggle, say his intimates, a fight against several demons, all of them within the triangle Netherlands, Suriname

and India” (Ramesar, 2012). The use of that euphemistic adjective, “allochtoon”, literally meaning someone from another place, and loaded with a pejorative sense by now, to describe Ramdas as a foreigner in the Netherlands, is a strange choice. But, however poor and annoying such an obituary is, it does pinpoint the ghostly shattering of Ramdas’ self, at home nowhere, and fighting demons in all the places he could rightly claim as his own. Since 2012 the situation with “foreigners” in Europe has escalated and reached unprecedented and perhaps at one point unthinkable, levels with xenophobic crimes becoming widespread and racists feeling more and more emboldened as the economic situation in Europe worsens and politicians are the first to demonstrate a moral bankruptcy beyond imagination. One of the most concentrated and sharp analysts of this crisis has been Etienne Balibar, who has relentlessly offered reflections on the threats to the very idea of Europe (Balibar, 2016). Although not contributing to any immediate relief, So one should look at how in the shattering of postcolonial selves one of the main issues is the question of cultural inheritance, and how, I would like to suggest, such an inheritance, curse-like, is foremost a negative inheritance.

This negative inheritance can assume many forms. Clearly, slavery, either its lingering memory and aftereffects, or its new versions, from human trafficking to sexual exploitation, must be seen as one of the strongest ways in which one can see a negative inheritance affecting postcolonial selves in Europe and the world today. In *A Mercy*, Morrison had sketched out a form of an alternative community, indeed a would-be family modeled on solidarity if not necessarily on love, composed by the Vaark household to which the young Florens is taken. Jacob Vaark, the Dutch trader, had taken in women from different backgrounds, from the English wife he had literally bought from her father, to a Native American woman or the former Portuguese slave, Florens and, together with a couple of men who also helped in the household, they seemed to flourish. Yet, when Jacob Vaark dies, that alternative model dissolves, as they realize that by not being a legal family, they did not even have the right to inherit his estate, so that in a sense, that legacy must also be seen as still falling under the negative. But other forms must not be neglected even if harder to pinpoint and identify. For instance, Lúcia Jorge, one of the most significant contemporary Portuguese novelists has systematically explored the consequences of Portugal’s social, racial and economic inequalities and has also, sometimes bitterly, exposed the multiple ways in which the inheritance of Portuguese colonialism has

become a negative one, as the ideals proposed by fascist propaganda of a pluri-continental and multi-racial society have long been abandoned and revealed as empty and negative as they really were all along. In one of her first novels, *The Murmuring Coast*, originally published in 1989 and recently made into an eponymous film directed by Margarida Cardoso (2004), Jorge not only revealed the postcolonial self as basically a split one – the entire text presents us with two versions of the same narrator, one as a young bride joining her husband in Africa, the other as an older woman who revisits the past and exposes through her memories the failings of historical narrative – but she also showed how the supposed legacy of Portugal as an imperial nation with a manifest destiny, was a hollow, cruel, and blinding lie, shattering an entire generation. The enormous success of the film version, fifteen years later, readily shows the need to expose such a fallacy as well as to allow for some form of public discussion of the traumas of colonialism and of the colonial wars that had been to a great extent silenced as Portugal tried to correct its image from a decrepit and ruined former empire in the hope of becoming a modern European state. Having largely ignored the ghosts of its own imperial past for more than two decades, yet seeing its hopes for prosperity still hindered and ever more precarious, Portugal started, even if hesitantly, to address its haunting inheritance. In one of her recent novels, *A Noite das mulheres cantoras* [The Night of the Women Singers, 2011], Lídia Jorge presents readers with a group of young women, all of them part of families who returned to Portugal after decolonization, and who try to forget their identity and remake themselves as a pop music band. One of the key aspects of all of Lídia Jorge's novels has been the emphasis put on testimony and bearing witness. And in this latest novel, it is indeed the voice of one of the young women, who testifies to their loss of identity, their silencing of the death of one of them, of her own wrecking in the pursuit of a spectral simulacrum of fame and an impossible lover, and of her memories of the escape from Africa, of her father's violence towards one of his African students who wanted to join them in escape and whom the father threatened to cut the hands off if he would not let go of their get-away vehicle. That image of the father suddenly revealed as a cruel, inhuman, would be perpetrator, is one that gets replayed as if it were a film and that in a sense is offered as yet another form of negative inheritance behind the shattering of the postcolonial self.

Truth or Dare

One writer who significantly links the notion of a negative inheritance with the assumption of a postcolonial self is J. M. G. Le Clézio. Indeed, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2008, Le Clézio cleverly disarmed the arrogant comments made by the Swedish Academy's permanent secretary, Horace Engdahl, on the centrality of European literature in the world, by claiming his Mauritian identity: "I am half Mauritian, I have two nationalities. I am also happy for Mauritius that I have won this prize" (2008). In both *L'Africain* (2004) and in his latest novel, *Ritournelle de la faim* (2008), Le Clézio explores the past from an autobiographical perspective in which he demonstrates how a postcolonial self is always rendered asunder and enmeshed with the ghosts of the past, in general, and specifically with those of World War II in particular, in a way that makes Rothberg's claim to combine postcolonial studies with cultural memory studies very pertinent. Whereas *L'Africain* can be considered as a memoir, or at least a sort of autobiographical essay, *Ritournelle de la faim*, even though it is an evocation of, and homage to, his mother, is presented as a novel and thus as a fictional work. But in reality, it would be hard to know exactly what is factual and what might have been embellished, fictionalized, altered, in both narratives. This is an important element to consider not only because, as always, autobiographical genres call for this question between truth and fiction, but because in the case of postcolonial selves, the obvious need to both testify on the one hand, and to allow for a semblance of a self out of all the inner divisions and externally imposed contradictions can be said to be an important characteristic. What would be wrong, in my view, would be an attempt to separate the two realms in a futile search for some sort of objective factuality. Even when it can be easily determined that some elements have a clear correspondence with reality such as dates, place names and so on, that is only secondary. The very beginning of *L'Africain* makes exceedingly clear why the conflation between reality and fiction can be assumed as an important characteristic of the construction of a postcolonial self:

J'ai longtemps rêvé que ma mere était noire. Je m'avais inventé une histoire, un passé, pour fuir la réalité à mon retour d'Afrique, dans ce pays, dans cette ville, où je ne connaissais personne, où j'étais devenu un étranger. Puis j'ai découvert, lorsque mon père, à l'âge de la retraite, est revenue vivre avec nous en France, que c'était lui l'Africain. Cela a été difficile à admettre. Il m'a fallu retourner en

arrière, recommencer, essayer de comprendre. En souvenir de cela, j'ai écrit ce petit livre (Le Clézio, 2004: 10).

On its surface this is a perfectly straightforward explanation for a process of memory, necessary to reconfigure his postcolonial self in light of reality and away from a necessary fiction spun out to deal with displacement. And yet, as the reader comes to realize, both his mother and his father are not African at all. The fact that the father is named as such has to do with his elective affinity with Africa, where he spent most of his adult life as a country doctor, in spite of all the hardships and personal suffering, and not with his ethnicity or place of origin. But it is also an important way for the constructed self of the author, who had to fashion himself as a displaced postcolonial subject, to reinvent himself again at a different age. The fact that this reinvention is triggered by the return of the father is relevant, but not in the sense of a confrontation with some truth that had been denied, but rather as yet another readjustment of the author's concept of self in relation to his parents.

Another author who also, perhaps even more forcefully, problematizes and erases any distinction between truth and fiction in the construction of a postcolonial self is J. M. Coetzee. His specific conflation of both realms is very visible in a number of works, notably in his openly autobiographical ones, but also in the creation of a fictional alter ego in the figure of Elizabeth Costello. A striking case also, was the occasion of his lecture to mark the award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003, as he started the lecture with a brief narrative in which, by way of reflecting on his childhood reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, he problematized any simple assumption of authority to an author at the same time that he made clear how, by writing *Foe* he also had decisively intervened in the construction of Daniel Defoe's image as an author. Although one could see such a preamble to the lecture as a specifically postmodern strategy for deconstructing the very lecture that would ensue, while also both claiming and denying the power invested in an author, I think it far more important to see Coetzee's statements as a way to deal with the difficulty of assuming a postcolonial self. Indeed, as the novel *Foe* makes abundantly clear, Coetzee's engagement with the postcolonial can be said to be grounded in his own experience in South Africa, but goes far beyond that, to reveal a deep intellectual questioning of the very processes by which the literary assumes foundational status. Were Coetzee solely intent on addressing the specific dilemmas facing post-Apartheid South Africa, his other novel,

Disgrace, might appear a more relevant example. But in *Foe* Coetzee is able to expand the ground of his critique, indeed, to make it return back to a different period of colonialism, before the British assumed their hegemonic function, while also directly engaging with literary history and with readers' expectations and preconceived notions about memory and history. If novels such as *Foe* already represent a daring move into a questioning of the possibility of any stable narrative of the postcolonial self, in his memoirs, clearly and openly presented as mixing fiction with autobiography, Coetzee manages to go further, and in a more recent one, *Summertime* (2009), this assumes an altogether other scale through the artifice of having the book appear to be not his own autobiographical writing at all, but rather the result of the research conducted by a scholar after Coetzee's death, and of the interviews supposedly conducted with several women who knew Coetzee personally and whom he failed in several ways. Coetzee is a consummate critic as well as an exceptional writer and as such, one should not be surprised at such a move to further destabilize the notion of the author or of authorship and authority. But one should also recognize that in the intensity of the criticism leveled by his characters at himself – even if the Coetzee of *Summertime* is also a fictional character, and even if the conflictuous relationship with the father is yet another way of expressing a negative inheritance – lies one possible way for dealing with the tormenting haunting of memory and the consequent shattering of the postcolonial self.

Shattered Selves

Although in clinical terms the notion of a shattered self applies properly to multiple personality disorders, I am using it here in a metaphorical, though concrete, sense, to refer to a specific condition of the postcolonial self divided between places that simultaneously claim and reject his or her allegiance, and split across traumatic memories of colonial and colonially derived violence. This condition is obvious in many postcolonial texts and the examples I want to mention could be multiplied without any difficulty. Postcolonial subjects are always hybrid subjects and hybridity, at least as advanced by Homi Bhabha, has been seen for a considerable amount of time as primarily a positive, distinctive factor, enabling postcolonial subjects to be more than others who would be simply monocultural, monoethnic, monolingual. In *The Location of Culture*, the seminal text where Bhabha articulated the importance of

hybridity for a valorization of the postcolonial subject and a rejection of a simple dichotomy between Self and Other, we read:

(...) colonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid. (...) Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation, and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition (Bhabha, 1994: 114).

Understandable as such an attempt to theorize hybridity as a positive factor might be, and in spite of the fact that indeed, many postcolonial representations will emphasize hybridity as a gain, one should not lose track of the fact that hybridity always was a tool of colonial repression and that it applied primarily to racial miscegenation based on violence. More recently, for instance, Anjali Prahbu has examined the claims of hybridity in a postcolonial sense and did not hesitate to put it in such a context: "The hybrid is a colonial concept. (...) Tracking the notion of hybridity in the plural, multiracial societies of Mauritius and La Réunion reveals from the outset that hybridity can only be understood through a proper understanding of its connection to colonial administration" (Prahbu, 2007: xi-xv). Amar Acheraiou has also traced at length the uses of the notion of hybridity in history, problematizing a simple celebratory usage in *Questioning Hybridity: Postcolonialism and Globalization* (2011). Thus, while not wanting to forget the importance that notions of hybridity might have as empowering elements for creating real agency, I am also concerned with the fact that, often, hybridity will not lead to such a positive reevaluation but rather to a negative shattering of the self, unable to reconcile its disparate images and allegiances. Even without wanting to engage in any futile and crass speculation into the death of Anil Ramdas, the way in which the event of his suicide was portrayed by the media in general pointed out to such a negative outcome, a perspective only reinforced by reading Ramdas' texts in which a searing criticism of Dutch colonial violence would be counterbalanced by an equally fierce defense of Dutch cultural traditions.

One of the fiercest representations of the shattering of the postcolonial self that I know is Isabela Figueiredo's autobiographical report, *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* [*Notebook of Colonial Memories*, 2010; 2015). In it, the author relates her memories from adolescence on, of her life in a repressive, patriarchal and abusively sexist Portugal, then of her life in one of the Portuguese colonies with a violently racist father and then her return to Portugal after decolonization, while the father still lingered on in prison awaiting a judgment that never came until the family was able to intercede and procure his release. It is a violent narrative, meant to shock its audience with its naked references to colonial and sexual violence, with its unrelenting accusation of the father, and with its obsessive, though critical and lucid, use of memory to grasp reality. As such it is also yet another example of the negative inheritance of colonialism, a very recent one, as Portugal, under its fascist-like regime, aggressively held on to its image as imperial nation, fighting extremely devastating colonial wars for over thirteen years until finally forced in 1974-1975 to accept the independence of the several African nations it had desperately tried to hold on to. The child evoked by Figueiredo is constantly torn between her ideas and allegiances to the others around her, and the norms of colonial society brutally imposed by the adults and especially by her father. The several photographs dispersed without any reference throughout the book, showing a completely blonde girl posing for the camera alone or among a group of other, all black girls dressed for First Communion, for instance, only reinforce that sense of total alienation. In many ways this book of memoirs is an indictment of Portuguese colonialism, of its senseless violence, as well as of the father who embodies the most negative aspects of the society and yet remains as an always unreachable loved one and object of desire. In the brief interview included in the book, Figueiredo remarks on the perception that her writing is a form of treason against the father, by stating that it is also a form of confessing what he never confessed and thus both procuring and granting him a sort of posthumous absolution, a final attempt at liberating herself from him. As such, one could emphasize the cathartic aspects of the book. Nonetheless, that liberation of the self is only partial and temporary. Asked if another volume of memoirs might be expected, Figueiredo lucidly answers that it would be good if there were no sequel, as that would indicate there was no need, at least personally, for such devastating writing. At the same time it is obvious to any reader how the very writing of these memoirs, its therapeutic value notwithstanding, is foremost also a form of self-

laceration. The indictment of the father and of colonial violence is at the same time almost a form of self-mutilation as well, and one that does not end with the closing narrative. The present is as much under the sign of that colonial violence and shattering of the self as the past. Even the printing notice is evidence of that, noting 2010 as the date of publication and adding, “35 years after the author’s return to Portugal”. There is no possibility of looking at Portugal, at Europe, in the present, without also always looking at Africa and at the haunting past. One can only be reminded of Florens’ questions: “One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?” And the telling does hurt.

Postimperial Challenges

At the conclusion of one of the most important studies of the postcolonial condition, *Sortir de la grande nuit* (2010), Achille Mbembe sounds a positive note as he calls for a new perspective for Africa after decolonization:

Si les Africains veulent se mettre debout et marcher, il leur faudra tôt ou tard regarder ailleurs qu’en Europe. Celle-ci n’est sans doute un monde qui s’effondre. Mais, lasse, elle représente désormais le monde de la vie déclinante et des couchers de soleil empourprés. Ici, l’esprit s’est affadi, rongé par les formes extrêmes du pessimisme, du nihilisme et de la frivolité.

L’Afrique devra porter son regard vers ce qui est neuf. (...) Il faudra qu’elle le fasse en ayant conscience d’ouvrir, pour elle-même et pour l’humanité, des temps nouveaux (Mbembe, 2010: 243).

There is much that I find seductive in such an injunction. At the same time I am also perplexed by the almost simplistic call for a turning back on Europe. One cannot but agree with the call for a renewal of Africa in its own image, but the idea that such a step is to be realized in isolation or by leaving behind the past seems strangely reductive. Even as we realize now how the ideals of the Enlightenment on which Europe still mirrors itself were corrupted and perverted to the point of self-destruction, the ideals themselves do not have to be rejected. Certainly, Mbembe’s criticism of Europe as fatally given over to pessimism, nihilism and frivolity, ring true and has been proclaimed by a score of other intellectuals before him. But is that a

reason to simply ignore Europe or any other part of the world? I would rather see an engagement with precisely those aspects of a European malaise that, like it or not, are themselves inextricably linked with a postcolonial condition and a postimperial present that many, in Europe, still refuse to acknowledge. Simply pretending to move on and leave the ghosts of the past untouched will not bring about the “new times” Mbembe wishes for. One of the strongest points of representations of shattered postcolonial identities is precisely their indictment of a forgetting of the past. Now, to be fair, Mbembe devotes the bulk of his study precisely to an analysis of the past and of the discredit of ideals, including democracy, as a political form. But I think that before one can indeed assume that move towards the future he rightly calls for, one has to come to terms with the unresolved business of postcolonial identities that still shape our present whether we like it or not.

Consider Michael Haneke’s film *Caché*, for instance, as it makes very visible how the shattered postcolonial selves are still both haunted and haunting, and how the refusal to engage with the traumas of colonial violence, under the guise of a desire for normalcy, for a bourgeois good conscience, for a wish to claim oneself childishly untainted and seek refuge in an amnesiac existence, are shown as a simple form of evading responsibility with dire consequences, the gory suicide of Majid in front of Georges, who remains protesting his innocence even when confronted by Majid’s son. The critical reception of the film varied, as Ipek A. Celik has well demonstrated (2010), ranging from those who insisted on seeing Haneke as basically an outsider to French issues, and others calling for a view of the issues as transcending the specific French case and symptomatic of a European inability to deal appropriately with the ghosts of colonialism. The only openly negative view was expressed by Paul Gilroy as he feared that the film might allow for a wrong view on the possibility, even desirability, of self-destruction of the postcolonial self (2007). As much as I find that Gilroy’s admonition is important, I take rather a different view: instead of allowing for a European wishful thinking that the disrupting otherness embodied by the postcolonial self might simply do away with itself, Haneke’s film forces all of its viewers to assume the same position of Georges, that is, to witness the final consequences of the shattering of the postcolonial self (see also Medeiros, 2011). It is for viewers then to draw their own conclusions, but I find that identification with Georges’ obstinate claim of innocence in such violence becomes impossible. Instead, I would suggest, viewers are forced to confront the ghosts of Europe’s colonialism

and of its present postcolonial condition and cannot simply ignore it or fall back into nostalgic longings for a past they might wish would exonerate them. The direct involvement in the crimes of colonialism might indeed be an affair of previous generations, but the avoidance to confront its legacy and acknowledge its negative inheritance is very much a question of present, and perhaps even future, generations. As varied as the representations of postcolonial selves that I have briefly mentioned are, they all share a common refusal to indulge in nostalgia or to remain silent. Their testimony reveals how profoundly shattered the postcolonial self can be but they also enjoin us to accept those fissures and to try, if not to mend that which can not be mended, at least to work towards a different form of coexistence that might avoid the continuous wrecking of the self on the rocks of indifference, fear and hatred. Contrary to Florens' reassuring comment the telling does, and should, hurt; but only by accepting the varied responsibilities, by learning indeed to read the different signs, might one hope for a laying to rest of those haunting ghosts.

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