

Migrancies and Modernities in Jamal Mahjoub's *The Carrier*

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Postcolonial fictions of dislocation and exile are many, ranging from Sam Selvon and Bessie Head to Salman Rushdie. They map the fates, paths and histories of various migrant groups, often backtracking the routes of slavery and the Middle Passage. By thematizing the representation of history, postcolonial historical novels also pay attention to resistance to European and Western colonization and traditional historical writing. This can be seen in such works as Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* (1993), an Asian-American novel focussing on the journeying of a seventeenth-century American woman to the courts of India, and Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1994), a text ranging in time and space from nineteenth-century Liberia to the American West and post-Second World War Yorkshire. In this essay I will present a reading of *The Carrier* (1998), a migrant novel written by the Sudanese/British novelist Jamal Mahjoub (b. 1960). I will argue that migrant and diasporic identities are not restricted to the Black Triangle, but that they are present more generally in the (hi)stories told of European identities. It is my intention in this paper to show how a postcolonial text, by thematizing and racializing movement and migrancy, is able to question the alleged stability of identity and reveals the constructed nature of home peculiar to Euro-American discourses of modernity.

Mahjoub's historical novel, where issues of 'race' are connected with Europe and its Enlightenment, problematises the issues of belonging and home. *The Carrier* explores the movement of the seventeenth-century Arab scholar and scientist Rashid al-Kenzy from Africa to Europe and eventually to Denmark, with the intention of

gaining the possession of the telescope, the recent Dutch invention. Rashid's slow journey in search of this chimera-like "form of magic which is not sorcery" (59) is narrated partly as a traveller's tale, partly as a quest for knowledge. Though Rashid never enters Dutch soil, he finds himself in Denmark, owing to a shipwreck. Captured by the Danes, incarcerated and forced to submit to painful medical experiments, the black man is saved by the Danish astronomer Verner Heinesen, whose friend and colleague he becomes, a process that hybridizes everyone involved. Yet the local reaction to their privileging of science over religion leads to violence and murder: the end of the novel finds Heinesen dead, his house burnt and Rashid back in movement. This curious story of migrancy and exile reveals itself gradually to Rashid's twentieth-century counterpart, the historian and archaeologist Hassan. An immigrant to Denmark, Hassan finds in Rashid's narrative a site for self-reflection and a way of countering nationalist narratives emphasising the purity of Nordic lands.

The Carrier, like Mahjoub's earlier fictions *Navigation of a Rainmaker* (1989) and *Wings of Dust* (1994), is not a celebratory text praising the opportunities provided by the opening up of transnational spaces, but a much more melancholic novel telling of loneliness and racism lurking in various contact zones at different times. As I will show, the novel, by telling Rashid's (and Hassan's) story, explores issues of 'home', of belonging and of mapping new spaces. In doing so, the novel contributes to the critique of the Enlightenment's western fantasies of knowledge and progress, and explores what Paul Gilroy has labelled the experience of black modernity in his study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Indeed, *The Carrier* thematizes and rewrites a number of features peculiar to the black counternarrative of modernity, ranging from the sense of alienation and dislocation to a critique of the dominant western narrative explaining the history of the sciences. Hence, in this essay I will problematise the role given to home in Mahjoub's novel, and seek to present a reading arguing that in its emphasis on movement and mobility, the novel hybridises the binary model of modernity identified by Caren Kaplan (1996: 49).

In his novel, Mahjoub contests the role of fixedness of home peculiar to nationalism, one of the Enlightenment's master narratives, which assumes a normalized sense of home and rootedness. This can be defined as a notion, normally related to place, of belonging to a community or a nation with a particular geographical space. In the view of Anthony Smith, territory is a central factor in the production of national identity:

But the earth in question cannot be just anywhere; it is not any stretch of land. It is, and must be, the 'historic' land, the 'homeland', the 'cradle' of our people, even where, as with the Turks, it is not the land of ultimate origin. A 'historic land' is one where terrain and people have exerted mutual, and beneficial, influence of several generations. The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where 'our' sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought. All this makes the homeland unique. (1991: 9)

In such thinking the idea of being home is contrasted with that of not being home. Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, criticizing the ideological baggage of home and domesticity, suggest that we can distinguish between

two specific modalities: being home and not being home. "Being home" refers to the place where one lives within the familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself. Because the locations acquire meaning and function as sites of personal and historical struggles, they work against the notion of an unproblematic geographic location of home. (1988: 196)

In so arguing, Martin and Mohanty both problematise the idea of home as an alleged site of harmony, suggestive of the hidden and gendered histories of domestic violence, and, more importantly from

the perspective of this paper, pointing to the threats that the Other space lacking safety may pose to the individual subject because of its status as a space of strangeness. As Smith's view (1991) cited above shows, narratives of nationalism in particular have emphasised the place-related character of home, however imaginary and mythic such spaces are. Therefore the fixedness of the nationalist's home is in stark contrast with that of the migrant. In discussing migrant identities, David Morley mentions that from the perspective of the nationalist, migrants, foreigners and strangers are particularly suspicious because of their mobility and possibility to challenge the maintenance of stability (2000: 34). According to Morley's view, migrants construct their sense of home in a way in which place-relatedness is not always the crucial issue, but more symbolic objects, such as keys and suitcases, may help to connect the individual to home and the emotions it evokes when living an exilic life in the territory of the Other (2000: 44-5).

Mahjoub's novel represents home by allowing different conceptions of home to conflict with each other. Denmark, for instance, is both the home of its inhabitants and the not-home of the migrant—from the perspective of those who rely on the sacred character of their homeland, Rashid is a colonizer and an intruder. The novel plays with the narrative perspective of the traveller's tale by selecting a non-western character as its protagonist, transforming the genre's traditional roles. The role of Oriental (or American or Asian) space usually exoticised by the western traveller (cf. Said 1991) is now played by a Europe that is Othered and appropriated by the non-European traveller who, like his numerous western counterparts, is captured by the savage natives poking irons at him, as can be seen when Rashid is subjected to a medical examination by a Danish doctor. This not-home is contrasted with the more civilized seventeenth-century Mediterranean spaces that Rashid is familiar with. For Rashid, the shores of Jutland are spaces inhabited by Others "speak[ing] the language of forest creatures" (174). The Danes of the period are "[m]uddy children" (260) and "exhausted men covered in soot and grime" (261). According to the novel, "[t]heir faces were grimy with sweat and dirt, their hands were hardened and bruised from work. Their clothes were simple, rough garments"

(260). Yet Rashid's presence in this space intimidates these barbarian-like people and threatens their mythic homeland.

The solution of rewriting the traveller's tale is not a mere intertextual trick aiming at producing a counternarrative. *The Carrier* problematises the idea of home by showing that Rashid has no home but his life has been one of exile and migration. It is only temporarily that he has been able to find a sense of being home, each time in a setting allowing him to enjoy a connection with tradition and learning. Libraries and schools, tradition and education, form a home for him. The role of the more dominant fixed and geographical sense of home is also undermined in the fact that Rashid is a stranger and a foreigner in both Algiers, his point of departure, and Denmark, his destination. While a traveller's tale may imagine a return to a happy home, Rashid has no high hopes of such a return, and the journey to Europe is a mere act of survival for a man blamed for murder by his neighbours in Algiers claim.

Issues of racism and xenophobia play significant roles in the novel. Both Rashid and Hassan are harassed by the Danes, who think that Rashid is an embodiment of evil, an "apprentice of Satan's, whose body is the colour of darkness, a sure sign of his tarnished spirit? He carries the blackness of Lucifer into the world" (263); the local youth consider Hassan a freak. While the text's repeated representation of racism appears to generate an understanding of its universal character, it may also be argued that *The Carrier* is not merely a didactic text preaching the message that racism is wrong, but that it scrutinizes the binary model organizing colonial discourse and the relations between the colonizer and the colonized. In searching new ways of representing home, nation and identity, Mahjoub's novel seeks to work through what Caren Kaplan calls the binary model of modernity, a model distinguishing "between past and present, home and away, center and periphery" (1996: 48), to present a hybrid form of identity. In so doing, the novel performs what Kaplan finds central in the deconstruction of these mutually exclusive categories: it is through travel, migration and dislocation that "new concerns over borders, boundaries, identities and locations arise" (1996: 102), a process that transforms fixed notions of nation and race for instance, as seen in the story of Rashid (and Hassan).

When Euro-American notions and discourses of modernity have stressed the maintenance of binary categories, they have celebrated exile, the sense of being cut off from one's home, and emphasised its role in the creative process. As Caren Kaplan mentions, nomadism has been defined as a romantic opportunity enabling the modernist subject to return to premodern times (see 1996: 90). Literary critics such as Terry Eagleton, in his *Exiles and Émigrés* (1970), have emphasised the role of exile in the making of such writers as Conrad, Joyce and Beckett, the great heroes of modernism. Alternatively, they have praised, as Malcolm Cowley does in his *The Exile's Return* (1982), the unrestrained life of American intellectuals in the European metropolises of the 1920s (see Kaplan 1996: 41-49). Yet Kaplan argues that in the era of postmodernity modes of travel and migration change: "the difference between modernist and postmodernist imaginary geographies may be a nostalgia for clear binary distinctions between 'country and city' on the one hand and an attachment to less oppositional hybrid cosmopolitanisms on the other" (1996: 31). For Kaplan, postmodernity is the era of migration(s) and hybridity, of continuous displacements that question the binaries peculiar to modernity mentioned above (see 1996:49).

What marks Mahjoub novel is the the blurring of these binaries, suggesting that it seeks to work these oppositions peculiar to western modernity. The first binary mentioned by Kaplan, the relationship between past and present, is blurred: *The Carrier* problematises the writing of history, the task of its contemporary protagonist Hassan, by making it a dubious task where the boundary between the subjective and the objective appears to be easily crossed. As a result of his research, this twentieth-century migrant becomes fascinated with the story of his predecessor, identifies himself with Rashid, and allows the past enter the present. While, on the individual level, Hassan's desire to find out more about the earlier migrant functions as a cure for his failing marriage, it is also important for the dissolving of binaries that his task transforms from that of a professional archaeologist to a

form of story-telling. This leads him to question the boundaries of what counts as science in the West:

He was beginning to wonder to himself what he could do with all this material when he had finished. It could not be described as an academic dissertation, for he had long since stepped over the line between the available facts and his imagination. A work of fiction then, describing the apparent arrival of a visitor from the Middle East at the beginning of the seventeenth century? An unlikely story in its own right. (251)

The novel also thematizes another one of Kaplan's binaries, that between centre and periphery, a binary showing modernity's fascination with metropolitan centres as voiced by such critics as Malcolm Bradbury (see Kaplan 1996: 29-31). According to well-established views emphasising the cosmopolitanism of modernism, it is in the centre, the modernist metropolis, that intercultural and other transactions occur and new identities are formed, rather than in rural and colonized spaces. Metropolitan spaces are, of course, present in *The Carrier*. It tells of movement between metropolitan spaces (it is Rashid's aim to enter the period's Dutch centres) and of economic interaction around the Mediterranean and its major port cities. This can be seen in its representation of Cadiz, where "trading houses were packed; with timber and grain, beams from the Hanseatic states, silver from America, Valencian perfumes, caps from Cordoba and cloth from Toledo" (73). The metropolis is also present in its twentieth-century incarnation, as the (dangerous) site of cultural contact and migranhood. This can be seen in the discussion between Hassan and his colleague Okking and the latter's wife during a one-off dinner supposed to mark the end of the project. During the small talk, the couple mention uneasily that their daughter is living so far off, in the big city. In picking up the topic, they voice repressed and silenced fears of more cosmopolitan life-styles where identities more mobile than theirs are prevalent:

'It is such a busy place. So many people, and so much happening.' The mother clasped her hands together on the table.

Hassan was wondering if this was leading towards an oblique comment about immigrants. Of course the capital was more 'cosmopolitan' than the province, she was saying, but young people today are so much better at taking care of themselves than we imagine.

They were worried. The city was hours away by train—another world, and one inhabited by people like him.
(256)

The Okkings' thinkin is based on their acceptance of nationalist ideologist, as is shown in their way of contrasting the purity of their rural space with the hybrid metropolis populated by Hassans, Rashids and migrants with different lifestyles. Their territory is not Hassan's and the black man's presence threatens their identity: as a solution, they praise the virtues of rural life, the nation state and racial homogeneity, phrases familiar from any anti-immigration discourse.

Thus *The Carrier* voices a critique of such Eurocentric models contrasting centre and periphery by showing that all European spaces, regardless of whether they are remote, rural and uncivilized like seventeenth-century Jutland, are revealed to have their silenced histories of migration and to function as spaces where the reconstruction of identity is possible (though often disliked). Undoing official histories, Hassan's rewriting of the past of the village shows that it has never been without external influence though it may think so. As a result, the racism of its contemporary inhabitants, marked in their final acts of hatred, the spraying of foam onto Hassan's windows and the nailing of a toy monkey onto his door (see 257), can be seen as their unwillingness to abandon the security of fixed boundaries, locations and neat identities, their fantasy of purity. By showing that Hassan comes to know more of the history of the village and its inhabitants than they do themselves, the novel argues for a historical understanding of cultural contacts. As the

archaeologist finds hybridity where purity was thought to have reigned, he deconstructs fixed national histories and identities. When the inhabitants' naturalized image of the ethnically homogeneous nation-state, represented here synecdochically by a rural village, is contrasted with the hybrid multicultural history of Europe and its migrations, Mahjoub questions the prevailing ideological paradigm stressing national purity. As the modernist politics of location and rootedness is contrasted with a more postmodernist narrative of movement, *The Carrier* shows that the villagers' insufficient awareness of history forces them to adhere to ideas of fixed home and stable identity. As Martin, the boy in the shop whom Hassan makes friends with, asks the visitor: "Well, I don't know anything about it, but I always thought that having a family... I mean a child and a wife. I mean, there's something special about that, isn't there? I mean, something worth protecting" (221). What the question formulates is the problem of roots in the rhetoric of domesticity and, by extension, of nationalism. The fixedness of identity and location practically haunts Martin, who has just finished school and does not know what to do with his life. For him, Hassan represents, rather romantically, movement and cosmopolitanism, an alternative way of life. Yet Hassan's status as a migrant (and the presence of race in the white village) questions Martin's naturalized idea of the sacredness of family, home and nation, as his blurredness shows.

The third binary, that of home and away, is also blurred in the novel. It shows that Rashid's sense of home is not place-related in the manner that modernist discourses would require. In this movement and negotiation between home and not-home figures prominently the chronotope of the ship, the eponymous carrier of the novel, a central maker of the black modernity (Gilroy 1993: 4). While the galleys, carracks and urcs of Mahjoub's novel, unlike the ships in Gilroy's text, do not cross the Atlantic with cargoes of slaves (though several references to the riches of the New World are to be found in the novel), they provide their owners with wealth by connecting Mediterranean spaces with the most remote coasts of Scandinavia. However, Rashid, a bastard son born to a Nubian slave-woman and her master in Aleppo, does not locate himself in any

particular geographical space or nation (though he does claim to have a good reputation in Cairo) but makes his home in tradition and knowledge. He is shown to "swallow" libraries, to "drink the ink, eat the paper" (220). Where the arts and sciences are respected, he is able to construct a sense of home. One particular site is "the academy in the Valley of Dreamers" (58). Though it has been destroyed by the time of narration, as the place of his education it appears to be central to his values:

The great stone arches rose again before his eyes. The Beit al-Hikma, named after that House of Wisdom founded by the illustrious Caliph al-Mamnu in Baghdad. From the distant, cool shadows beneath the elegant script which read, '*The ink of the scholars is worth more than the blood of the martyrs*', the echoes of chanting voices reached him. He had dreamed then of visiting the great libraries of Cairo, of travelling through the world and living in an observatory, devoting himself to the science of the celestial spheres, *ilm al falaka*. (58)

As Rashid does not identify himself with any particular nation and has no proper home to return to, nationalism's idea of rootedness is practically erased in the novel. As a sign of this, the commonsense understanding of the stability of home with its familiar landscapes is shown to be a mere illusion. Hassan, driving through Jutland, makes this explicit by contrasting nostalgic views of home with historical realities. In referring to the constructedness of landscape, the passage deserves a closer look:

The air was cold and the surface of the water calm and motionless. On the left flank, which he worked out must have been due east, there was a plantation, a thickly wooded rectangle of straight pines that marched like a column of foot soldiers towards the lake. People look at a landscape and think it must have been like that for all eternity. The idea that the ground under one's feet is reliable. The plantation trees were no more than

thirty years old. Before that this would have been open, unkempt moorland shaped by the last ice age. (37)

As the passage makes clear, the stability of home is a historical illusion and its traditions invented. Here Rashid's task as an archaeologist, to shake people's sense in the reliability of ground, is connected to the presence of the hidden histories of the Danish landscape. This national landscape, thought to be unchanging and "reliable", is literally shown to be hybrid, a Danish *moorland*. Thus the novel interrogates fixed ideas of history, identity and home, and calls for the historicization of the apparent fixedness of identity. To pinpoint the issue and Rashid's deterritorializing identity, the novel works further into the modernist logic and seeks to transgress its fixed identities. During his stay in Denmark, Rashid transforms from a migrant labourer, one who "is among them, but [...] will never be one of them" (181), into Heinesen's colleague, friend, and almost his sister's lover. This process of making home in another's space is made possible by Rashid's and Heinesen's finding a common language and sharing in the scholarly astronomical project. In both cases scholarship is valued more than nationalist rhetoric; dialogue is the prerequisite for salvation.

This narrative of emerging cross-cultural dialogue is explored in the novel through Rashid, who initially feels that his identity is under threat. His resistance to the process of making home in the space of the Other is narrated in the novel as his fear of losing self, of losing the fixed boundaries of his identity based on a naturalized world view and knowledge:

So he struggles day after day to try to fathom the knowledge of this new world. He has been drawn into a net where all that he has learned previously serves only to tie his feet more firmly. He must fight to break free, but where will that leave him? He is afraid that he will lose everything, including his mind, to end his days shackled to a post like a dumb animal, staring vacantly at the sky, his soul eaten by the stars. (215)

This fear posed by the Other and its knowledge is now shaking the foundations on which a fixed identity rests and forcing the subject to change through dialogic action. It should be emphasised that my understanding of dialogue is different from what has been identified as a liberal discourse in which the mutual and equal worth is recognized but one remains the same, though more enlightened. As Bhabha's critique of Charles Taylor shows, relations of power remain unquestioned in liberal discourse (see Bhabha 1998: 32-3). In this context dialogism should be understood in Bakhtin's and Bhabha's sense, where through its doublings it generates a transformation, a sense of hybridity, defined by Bhabha as a "construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism and inequity" (1998: 34).

Following Bhabha, it can be argued that Mahjoub's novel explores the construction of hybridity in a politicized space from a number of perspectives, ranging from the subaltern's appropriation of the space of the dominant (colonizer, majority) to the dangers inherent in forming a hybrid subjectivity. A particularly good example of the former is the way in which Rashid manages to deterritorialize the majority by introducing the double-sided character of utterances. As the priests suggest that Rashid is in charge of the burning of the town church and should be punished with death, he first howls and then reverts to his elementary Danish to greet the suspicious and unsympathetic general public. Not only does this gesture generate surprise and transform the inevitable death into general laughter, but it carnevalizes the whole witch-hunt:

The crowd instantly fell motionless. They stopped breathing. There was a deathly silence. He surveyed them from on high. He gasped or laughed, in exhaustion, in relief. He struggled to control his breathing.

'Good day, dear people,' he said loudly, addressing them in their own language. 'Is there food on the table? Is there fire in the hearth?'

There was utter silence for a moment. Whatever else Rashid might have been about to say, and his knowl-

edge of their tongue was so severely limited that he would have had difficulty uttering another word, was left unsaid, for the silence was broken by the sound of laughter. It broke out in fits and starts, rolled itself into a ball and rattled around the town square in front of the charred ruins of the cathedral. (264)

According to Homi Bhabha, the hybrid may emerge in conditions where power may belong to one party but the other has access to language, leading not to "assimilation or collaboration" (1998: 34). In this particular situation dialogism and hybridity are solutions through which Rashid renegotiates the power relations temporarily. Unfortunately, the humiliated authorities have a different view of the situation and later burn down the Heinesen estate, the site of hybridity, which threatens the maintenance of 'pure' national, religious and ethnic categories.

Yet the construction of hybrid subjectivity is not entirely unproblematic because it occurs in a space defined by Bhabha as the Third Space. According to Bhabha, this is a space of both promise and terror where the postcolonial subject is constructed anew in a space beyond modernity's binaries, free from the limitations of home and away and also from those of cultural authorities (1994: 34); in its in-betweenness, this ambivalent and uncanny space is dangerous because it changes the subject's once fixed identity (see Nyman 2000: 165-191). The process is represented in the novel in what may appear to some readers as morbid homesickness, sleeplessness and loss of appetite. Read from the perspective outlined above, these are signs of the reconstruction of Rashid's increasingly hybridized subjectivity, telling of his gradual acceptance of the Other space with its narratives. Yet this process of hybridization is both a slow and painful one. In *The Carrier*, Rashid's initial sense of "being eroded" (226), of losing fixed boundaries, is strengthened by his growing awareness of the fact "that his entire life encompassed a process of dislocation" (226). Indeed, the novel represents his progressive loss of identity in geographical terms and refers to it as the disappearance of once familiar routes/roots: "Now he floated in a sea of voices, none of which was his. His sense of the stars was now

betrayed by magic. His geography had crumbled into confusion" (227). Yet in Rashid's case the sense of threat gives way to an acceptance of living in the northern hemisphere. This can be seen in his attachment to Heinesen's scholar/poet sister, who as an exceptional seventeenth-century woman is able to discuss and debate astronomy and knowledge. Dreams of escape turn into different fantasies; as fixed items of knowledge transform, so does the migrant subject:

She was guiding him along the path, feeding him fragments crumbs to keep him on the right track. The irregular motions of the planets were difficult to explain. If one followed the Ptolemaic model of concentric circles describing the paths of the orbs, how does one then explain the varying distances of the planets?

A circle, then, is no longer a circle. (237)

Thus movement is not standard, circle-like, but elliptical; it is no longer fixed and revolving around the centre, the Earth or some points near it, as was the case in the Ptolemaic model. In this text, then, the blurring of astronomical models marks the reconstruction of a hybrid migrant subject. Rashid's desire for the knowledge of the infidels by far exceeds his suspicions:

Silently he made a prayer to the almighty creator that he might forgive him for entertaining such vagaries. But he has been drawn in. His ears hunger for more of these tales, for they are as seductive and filled with wonder as any story he has ever heard or read, and they are the key. He is mesmerized, spellbound. (236)

As Rashid learns about the Western models, he also teaches the Heinesens about the other tradition, thus changing through dialogue their understanding of scientific models. In more theoretical terms, the learning process promotes the view that identity is a process, a matter of becoming rather than being, as Stuart Hall would put it. As Heinesen's sister puts it: "Your perspective is changing," she said. "It is nothing to be afraid of." (238). In the novel this

issue is raised by replacing the fixed idea of identity with an emphasis on more mobile forms of identity where the notion of movement-related change is made central; the trope of translation is also evoked at a crucial point: "He is looking for a translation, a transformation, a change of form. A metamorphosis that would enable him to reach her" (249; cf. the task given to Rashid, to translate astronomical texts for Heinesen [see 212]). Rashid's crossing of geographical, linguistic and cultural boundaries is brought to a conclusion in the novel's epilogue, where stasis and movement are equated, respectively, with death and life. After the deaths of the Heinesens, "[t]he world has stopped moving" and Rashid appears to lie "on a frozen stretch of unfamiliar land in territory" (277). A sudden movement in the form of an out-of-body experience restores his need to carry on living. Only mobility can offer salvation:

He lifts one foot, and then the other. Slowly he begins, like a child learning to walk for the first time, to move.

In the quickening distance there is a nameless ship waiting for him and a passage to work his way south, back to the world he left behind. With each step, he tells himself, it will get easier. (278)

As the project of making home in the North ends in its xenophobic inhabitants' violent reaction to Rashid's reterritorialization of their space and the loss of his love, his only hope of survival appears to be to seek his way out of loneliness, to regain contact with his tradition: "He has been chasing a sarab, a mirage—science cannot lead us anywhere, but back to ourselves" (278).

This closure of the novel, with its nostalgic glimpse of home and evocation of the long-dead mother's voice, appears to reinforce rather than to criticize the model of modernist binaries that I have argued the text has been testing. Yet there is another way of reading the protagonist's rejection of science and sudden nostalgization of his homeland. It can also be argued that the emphasis on home is not so much an act of privileging it as an expression of the desire for a politics of location of a particular kind. Here location can be

defined following James Clifford, for whom it "is not a matter of finding a stable 'home'" but

being aware of the difference that makes a difference in concrete situations, of recognizing the various inscriptions, "places," or "histories" that both empower and inhibit the construction of theoretical categories like "Woman," "Patriarchy," or "colonization," categories essential to political action as well as to serious comparative knowledge. "Location" is thus, concretely, a *series* of locations and encounters, travel within diverse, but limited spaces. (qtd. in Kaplan 1996: 168; italics original)

If location is understood as suggested by Clifford, the politics of location promoted in this novel do not seek to promote nationalism. They argue for the recognition of the fact that postcolonial subjects are not outside 'official' western histories but have made their mark there, occupying different positions in different narratives. While locations are passed through and homes are merely temporary, as Rashid knows from experience, and identities are in constant flux, what unites the Rashids of Algiers, Cyprus, Denmark and the Valley of Dreamers is an idea of community.

In this novel the trope of travel and the function of movement, rather than stasis, are important in constructing identity, showing that one 'changes one's perspective' through encounters. While the movement is physical for Rashid and Verner Heinesen, both of whom cross borders in their search for knowledge, in the case of Heinesen's sister Sigrid the movement is mental, opening up new vistas of thinking. Through learning and creative writing she crosses the boundaries of gender, but also sacrifices herself by making herself a stranger in her own society. In closing his novel and deciding to send his protagonist 'home', Mahjoub's ending remains open. If Rashid returns, as we would like to happen, he returns not intact but transformed, aware of different positionalities and histories, wishing not to "fall into the darkened gaps between the frail flickers of silent unspoken light" (278), as the final sentence of the novel puts it. The same goes for the parallel twentieth-century narrative

which closes in Hassan's decision to telephone his wife, seeking change by means of making contact. Therefore the novel's politics of location are not those of any fundamentalism but positioned historically in the different narratives of modernity and those of post-colonial Europe. In other words, the novel shows how the minority deterritorializes the majority and leaves its mark in history, showing the presence of 'race' in the allegedly white spaces and narratives of Enlightenment Europe.

As I have argued above, Mahjoub's novel tests what are known as the fixed binaries of modernity by defining the migrant's identity as a process and movement contrasted with more place-related identities. The novel's narrative of the exilic migrant subject shows that the migrant subject may be transformed during travel and stay in the spaces of the Other where she may find community where it does not appear to exist. As exile, therefore, appears to unfold in a positive manner, its representation in Mahjoub's novel may seem to resemble that peculiar to dominant Euro-American modernist discourses of displacement. To quote Caren Kaplan's valuable study,

Euro-American modernisms celebrate singularity, solitude, estrangement, alienations, and aestheticized excisions of locations in favor of locale—that is, the “artist in exile” is never “at home,” always existentially alone, and shocked by the strain of displacement into significant experimentations and insights. Even more importantly, the modernist exile is melancholic and nostalgic about an irreparable loss and separation from the familiar or beloved. (1996: 28)

As its attempt to work through the binary model of modernity reveals, the case with *The Carrier* is more complex than that of canonized Euro-American modernisms. While Mahjoub's semi-existentialist novel uses the same tropes of exile round positive by modernists (e.g., Camus) to thematize its protagonists' exile and estrangement, it rewrites, from a racialized perspective, the tropes of silence (e.g., Hassan's “empty” flat and the silence in the village that he encounters [see 9]), solitude (e.g., the condition of Rashid's ini-

tial months working at the Heinesen estate, where the workers treat him with caution: "He sat alone, his head down, savouring each sip, each mouthful of the salty bread. He heard their comments, but he learned to ignore them" [167]), melancholy and alienation.

As the alienation and melancholy of Mahjoub's characters is related to their problem of constructing identity in societies dominated by racism, their representation in *The Carrier* can be explored with reference to Paul Gilroy's use of the same tropes of exile, estrangement, alienation and displacement in his *The Black Atlantic*. In his work Gilroy calls for the recognition of "ambivalence over exile and homecoming" (1993: 24) with particular reference to the dislocated histories of (and discourses on) the experience of the black people on all sides of the Atlantic where different ideas of home have often been raised. In exploring the experience of black modernity and the case of Richard Wright, Gilroy discusses Wright's theory of modernity, concluding that the alienated and dislocated black characters of the American writer's later fiction contribute to his explicit attempts to rewrite Continental existentialism in a distinctly black idiom (see 1993: 163). According to Gilroy, Wright's voiced criticism of "European and ideology and culture in its religious and communist forms" stems from "their special history in the modern world. It originated in slavery and stood at the centre of a space unevenly triangulated by industrialisation, capitalism and the institution of democratic government" (1993: 172). Here a narrative of the black experience is evoked as a counter-narrative to the Enlightenment's story of progress and development: "Wright did not see this destructive pattern of modern experience as unique to blacks, though, for a variety of reasons, he felt that blacks encountered its effects at a special intensity" (1993: 172). The Other has always been present in the making of modernity, though often limited to a position in the margins (cf. Eze 1997; Gikandi 1997).

Wright's and, in particular, Gilroy's ideas open up a new way of thinking about Mahjoub's novel. It is not a mere existentialist treatise but a text providing us with a further representation of the experience of dislocation as the state of black modernity, showing that Mahjoub's black North Sea is another part of the black diaspora.

This guides toward a rethinking of migrancy in relation to spaces other than those of the more canonical metropolises and to reconsider silenced histories of race. As a historical novel set around the invention of one of the most important devices of modernity, the telescope that was to promote the scientific world view, *The Carrier* constructs a counter-narrative to the western story of the origins of modern science, showing its hybrid character and usually forgotten interrelations with Arab scientists. In representing the clergy's denial to accept such new narratives and their subsequent definition as mere Satanic plots, it refuses all fundamentalisms. Rashid and Hassan, dislocated and diasporic, are two historically different examples of the estrangement peculiar to the racialized experience of modernity. Their recognition of the split within the self marks their problematic inclusion in the larger national community. While Rashid manages to surprise the locals by learning a few words of their language, upon the death of his protector his difference is highlighted and his act of deterritorialization is understood as one of colonization. Yet Rashid's, as well as Hassan's, story of exile and estrangement expresses what Gilroy finds central in Wright (and what I find central in Mahjoub), namely that he "articulates simultaneously an affirmation and a negation of the western civilization that formed him" (1993: 186). They (and we) are all insiders and outsiders at the same time, present (and absent) in different histories in different ways.

The same dilemma is also expressed daily in all western societies with increasing migrant populations and destabilizing national borders. Questions of community, nostalgia and national (and often also) European identity have been raised: Whose home can these spaces be? In Mahjoub's novel, which shows the fates of Others within, the question of belonging appears to be separated from a particular nation-state, which nevertheless does not mean that it becomes a free-floating transnational experience. By voicing a black critique of modernity and showing the historical character of the migrant experience, I would argue that the novel appears to test the limits of constructing a European identity. It shows that no periphery can be a pure *Volkish Heimat* but that the Other is always already there, calling for recognition rather than harassment. In de-

constructing naturalized identities of home and nation, *The Carrier* reveals the extent to which all identities are constructed through movement and mobility, through encounters with alterity, in a process that changes hosts and migrants alike.

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