

Chapter Title: Ananda Devi's Poethics of Accountability in *Ceux du large*

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Book Title: *Women, Theory, Praxis, and Performativities*

Book Subtitle: Transoceanic Entanglements in Francophone Settings

Book Editor(s): JACQUELINE COUTI, ANNY-DOMINIQUE CURTIUS

Published by: Liverpool University Press. (2025)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.27374513.18>

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Ananda Devi's Poethics of Accountability in *Ceux du large*

Franck H. Andrianarivo and Mike Lehman

Introduction

In the preamble to the short stories collected in *L'illusion poétique* [*Poetic Illusion*], Mauritius-born writer Ananda Devi claims that “aujourd’hui plus que jamais, la littérature est un combat nécessaire” [“today more than ever, literature is a necessary battle”].¹ Elaborating on the vital importance of writing in her own life, Devi explains that in our digitized age of increased violence and insensitivity towards the misfortune of others, the true power of literature lies in the medium’s ability to provide protection, consolation, and a remedy to the multifaceted ills and horrors that plague our globalized world today: “Le refuge de la fiction, seule consolatrice et unique guérisseuse des mélancolies contemporaines” [“The refuge of fiction, the sole consoler and unique healer of contemporary melancholies”].² Aesthetic works, which Valérie Loichot maintains “provide a grave or a postmortem ritual house of rest and peace,” possess the power to accomplish much more than solely creating empathy or catharsis in readers exposed to the intricate layers of (in)human experiences woven within the reparative pages of short stories, novels, and poems.³ In her trilingual collection of poems written by the author-translator herself in French, English, and Mauritian

¹ Ananda Devi, *L'illusion poétique* (Paris: Éditions Paulsen, 2017), 14. Translations by authors unless otherwise indicated.

² Devi, *Illusion*, 8.

³ Valérie Loichot, *Water Graves: The Art of the Unritual in the Greater Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 68.

Creole (Morisyen), *Ceux du large/Afloat/Bann nwaye* (hereafter CDL),⁴ Devi's "poetry of the gut," to borrow Brinda Mehta's expression, tells the untold stories of victims of what Mehta has identified as the "wounds of refugeeism."⁵ In fact, Devi's "livre-geste" ["book-gesture"], to use Patrick Chamoiseau's expression, advocates "pour la mise en place de la *politique mondiale de l'hospitalité*" ["for the implementation of a global policy of hospitality"].⁶ It goes beyond "draw[ing] the reader's attention to a gut-wrenching situation," situating the reader as a complicit participant in the dehumanization of migrants.⁷

In this essay, we argue that Devi posits the poetic text as a space for cultivating enduring emotional responses and a more sustainable means of engaging with and reflecting on the human consequences of disasters, countering the fleeting and often superficial nature of mainstream media coverage. Employing a transoceanic method, which involves archipelizing oceanic spaces in which the migrant crisis has taken its toll, the text uses translation to connect the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and the Indian Oceans to form a collective discourse that requires new and emergent reading and writing practices that more fully represent the diversity of human experiences. This approach unveils new ethical cartographies in which the act of opening the book itself reforms and challenges our literary categories and practices. By creating a multilingual method which refashions how migrant narratives are expressed and disseminated, Devi calls for a response that cross-fertilizes the poetic and the ethical—a *poethical* response that more truly considers the human across geographies and oceans. Devi's "poethical attitude," which Joan Retallack views as a response to "a certain poetics of responsibility with the courage of the swerve, the project of the wager,"⁸ dares

4 Ananda Devi, *Ceux du large* (Paris: Éditions Bruno Doucey, 2017), hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

5 Brinda Mehta, "The Wounds of Refugeeism in Ananda Devi's *Ceux du large* [Afloat]," *Research in African Literatures* 51, no. 3 (2020): 45–46.

6 Patrick Chamoiseau and Mélanie Le Bris, *Refusons l'inhumain! Les écrivains aux côtés des migrants* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2022), 13. Devi, along with twenty-two other writers, contributed one short story to each section, "Refusons l'inhumain!" ["Let's Refuse the Inhumane!"] and "Osons l'hospitalité!" ["Let's Dare Hospitality!"]; her stories "Banjaras" and "La Langue nécessaire" ["Necessary Language"] span pages 65–78 and 145–58, respectively.

7 Mehta, "Wounds," 46.

8 Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3.

readers to fully implicate themselves in the migration crisis, challenging them to reimagine a world where increasingly mobile and vulnerable communities can find proper refuge. Our suggestion is that in Devi's multilingual text, the three languages do not exist in isolation. Rather, they exist as interconnected islands enacting a relational process of linguistic embedding designed to generate an archipelago of meaning that readers, and scholars, facing the complexity of the trilingual text are invited to connect. Reading *CDL* involves a willingness to embrace risk, deviate from the norm, and step outside one's comfort zone, as the text itself encourages dialogue among culturally and linguistically diverse communities, inviting readers to open and cross borders.

New Linguistic Geographies

In a press interview discussing her collection, Devi revealed that the impetus for *CDL* was the image of Alan Kurdi's lifeless body found along the shoreline of Turkey on September 2, 2015.⁹ While she explained that the photograph was haunting in many ways, more shocking for her was the complete disregard for his narrative across media the following day. As Chamoiseau also claims in his fraternal manifesto to migrants, *Frères migrants* [*Migrant Brothers*], "l'intérêt s'épuisa vite" ["interest was quickly exhausted"].¹⁰ Criticizing the global hypocrisy surrounding the aftermath of Kurdi's drowning as the *raison d'être* of the collection, Devi thus shows how literature enables us to remake the world by providing access to things that might otherwise be forbidden or unavailable due to our limited experience. Mehta explains: "[Devi's] poetic scream establishes the political value of literature and the nuanced position of the transnational poet who wants to imagine a world 'beyond' pain,"¹¹ demarcating fiction as the preferred medium for creating and sustaining a collective understanding of the migrant crisis.

9 La Rédaction, "Ananda Devi: 'La sensation d'une menace imminente...'," *L'Express.mu*, June 6, 2017, <https://lexpress.mu/node/309039>.

10 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Frères migrants* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2017), 106; Patrick Chamoiseau, *Migrant Brothers: A Poet's Declaration of Human Dignity*, trans. Matthew Amos and Fredrik Rönnebeck (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 90.

11 Mehta, "Wounds," 48.

Counteracting what she terms a “language of hate” embodied in the discourses of receiving nations towards migrants and refugees,¹² Devi offers the poetic languages of her collection as a multi-layered lifejacket to try and rescue “Ceux que la vie éventre / De son coutelas” (31)~~~“Those razed and dismembered” (57)~~~“Kan lavi pe anfons so lam / Dan zot lekor” (82).¹³ In these corresponding lines within the book’s sections, the poems employ additional enjambment in both French and Creole. This technique severs the extremely graphic portrayal of violence, which involves vivid imagery of disembowelment with a cutlass and the slow, deep stabbing—conveyed by the word “anfons” [to drive in, to push in] in Creole—of the wounded bodies of migrants and refugees. This approach complements the equally horrific image of dismemberment, which is also present but contained within a single line in English. The absence of the agent “la vie”~~~“lavi” from the English adds further nuance to the understanding of the poems. Unlike in the French and Creole, which blame the general circumstances of life for the suffering of displaced individuals, accountability in English lies with an unspecified human agent responsible for enabling the disfigurement of the migrant. The passive voice used in the English suggests human involvement, neglect, or lack of intervention rendered, if not overtly perceptible, at least imaginable in the reader’s mind.

From the outset of the collection, Devi confronts readers with the ugly realities of forced migration and displacement. As Mehta has also noted, “the three titles highlight the act of gradually plunging into the depths of horror.”¹⁴ The sequence of multilingual titles stages a poignant narrative of migration that starts *in medias res* at sea. While the French title, *Ceux du large*, suggests the initial phase of migration, where migrants embark on their perilous journeys across the open sea, the metaphor used in

12 Yagnishsing Dawoor, “Walking on Fire: Limits, Transgressions and Possibilities in the Worlds of Literature. An Interview with Ananda Devi,” *French Cultural Studies* 32, no. 4 (2021): 464.

13 The use of the double tilde (~~) to indicate that quotations are each other’s translation in the different language versions of Devi’s poems is the editor’s choice, inspired by Anny-Dominique Curtius’ use of the tilde in her chapter in this volume. This seemed more appropriate than using a forward slash (/), since this volume uses that sign to indicate division between two lines of verse, and also more appropriate than a vertical line (|), which visually implies a hard division between the things it separates. The double tilde communicates the fluid, imperfect, approximate nature of the relationship between the multilingual texts.

14 Mehta, “Wounds,” 45.

the English title "Afloat" indicates a transitional state. It maintains a touch of positivity conveyed by the migrating group's *floating* and not *sinking* state, which is embodied in the unmistakable sense of tragedy captured in the Creole title "Bann nwaye," which could be more literally translated as "Those drowned." Thus, "those from the open sea" find themselves "afloat," a liminal state marked by uncertainty, instability, and vulnerability, ultimately turning migrants into "the drowned ones" when confronted with the harrowing experience of crossing. Each language within the collection serves not to discourage reader engagement or obstruct comprehension of the (in)humanity of the state of migration; instead, they emphasize the necessity of embracing a multilingual aesthetic in enhancing the delivery of Devi's poethics to readers. Through this approach, the author builds a network of exchange between migrant geographies spanning the Global South and North. Devi's innovative intervention in Morisyen alongside French and English resists the categorization of Creole-language literatures, as Françoise Lionnet has argued, as merely "'content' or source of knowledge about the local culture [...] and mimetic or pedagogical activity aimed at transposing European classics into local languages."¹⁵ Building upon this idea, Lionnet believes that Creolophone writers like Devi are "capable of pushing the existing boundaries of genre and the parameters of literary analysis,"¹⁶ thereby using their minor language as "an instrument of poetic playfulness, intellectual reflection, and creative dialogue that does not patronize the speakers of this marginalized language."¹⁷

Mimicking the ebb and flow of the tides and a sea that "washes faces and names" (35), the cyclical nature of the poems delves into the way we encounter the stranger. The effaced "faces and names" gain meaning as the reader's feet enter the tide line, becoming cemented in the "churned [...] mud" (35). Then, the speaker claims that the "sea is the only teacher" (35); yet, how do we encounter the sea when it has transformed into a place that "grants you a death" (35)? The speaker gives the reader an imperative to imagine otherwise, to see "the space beyond" the shores (36), to gaze at the horizon of possibilities, in which we see life rather than death. The collection churns languages to disturb and disrupt the readers' perception of belonging, moving toward what

15 Françoise Lionnet, "Creole Vernacular Theater: Transcolonial Translations in Mauritius," *MLN* 118, no. 4 (2003): 913.

16 Lionnet, "Creole," 912.

17 Lionnet, "Creole," 927.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne reminds us is the purpose of translation: “la visée même du travail de traduire, de la tâche du traducteur, de son éthique et de sa poétique est de créer la réciprocité, de la rencontre dans une humanité commune. C’est dire que, contre l’asymétrie coloniale, il est aussi force décolonisatrice” [“the very aim of the work of translation, of the translator’s task, ethic, and poetics is to create reciprocity, a meeting in a common humanity. That is to say that, counter to colonial asymmetry, it is also a decolonizing force”].¹⁸ In our reading, the poems are complimentary in meaning, a single body of text in which the reader experiences “a common humanity” by taking the vantage point in which the three languages collide while simultaneously coexisting. In *CDL*, translation is not merely repetitions or juxtapositions of meaning, but rather a decolonial aesthetic that favors openness and reciprocity across linguistic divides, mooring minor languages into our literary creation and scholarly investigations. In this way, the text mirrors the ocean, which Dilip M. Menon explains as “one body of water with its tides and seasonal winds, within which human beings negotiate and make claims.”¹⁹ As our own collective reading of Devi’s poems demonstrates, to “negotiate” the sea or the poems as “one body” highlights the necessity of seeing from other perspectives as the migrant narrative cannot, and should not, be told from a singular interpretation nor read from a single vantage point.

Devi elicits this reading on the opening page in her claim that “L’océan est la seule école” (9)~~“The sea is the only teacher” (35)~~“Losean sel lekol ki konte” (61). An understanding in one language does not tell the entire story, as the Creole goes beyond both the French and the English with the addition of “ki konte.” The line can also be translated as the sea is the only school that *recounts* or that *matters*, displaying the slippage in meaning from a monolingual or bilingual perspective. In this line, the additional perspective of the Creole “churns,” or disturbs the “colonial asymmetry” of the French and the English, obliging the reader to consider a transoceanic connection among minor and dominant languages. Devi approaches the sea as a method to churn a literary tradition that has historically left the migrant adrift, a flowing tide of images that cut

18 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *De Langue à langue: L’hospitalité de la traduction* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2022), 19.

19 Dilip M. Menon, “Oceanic Histories: From the Terrestrial to the Maritime,” in Dilip M. Menon et al., *Ocean as Method: Thinking with the Maritime* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 1.

across the three languages of the collection, recombining into a liquid and transoceanic, relational understanding. The poems create a new linguistic geography, one in which their very otherness authorizes what Chamoiseau phrases as “une nouvelle arche de représentations” [“a new ark of representations”], the purpose of which is “d’enthousiasmer une autre vision du monde et de son devenir” [“invigorating another vision of the world and its future”].²⁰

Chamoiseau’s “vision of the world and its future” echoes Denise Ferreira da Silva’s definition of a Black feminist “poethics” as an ethical intention to emancipate specific categories from “historical ways of knowing that produced [them] in the first place,” which she explains “demands for nothing less than decolonization—that is, a reconstruction of the world.”²¹ Devi’s approach to migration necessitates a decolonial reading practice because of the use of Creole as the concluding moment of the collection, demonstrating that her poetic translation can be read as the materialization of a silent scream that would otherwise be unnoticed in a globalized world dominated by English and French. We must remember that the global narrative of migration is not exclusively localized to the border between North Africa and Europe. In addition to resisting the linguistic imperialism of French and English, Devi’s intervention in Morisyen reminds us that “this crisis is a global phenomenon that reaches deep into the southwestern Indian Ocean and the Comoros,” an often-overlooked migratory hotspot positioned at the periphery of the traditional Mediterranean-centered European route.²² As expressed by the trilingual structure of *CDL*, there is a relationality of forced migration across geographies, histories, and cultures.

The ocean has become an underwater container for the legacy of colonialism and imperialism seen in the human detritus “afloat” and “drowned” in the sea, a space of suspension for those in transit. Returning to Kurdi’s death, the impetus for the collection, the dissemination of his image and its media portrayal transformed the Mediterranean into a modern symbol of tragedy. In response, Devi more

20 Chamoiseau, *Frères migrants*, 105; Chamoiseau, *Migrant Brothers*, 89, original emphasis.

21 Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness toward the End of the World,” *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 81.

22 Françoise Lionnet and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François, “Literary Routes: Migration, Islands, and the Creative Economy,” *PMLA* 131, no. 5 (2016): 1224, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26158921>.

strategically articulates the hidden spaces and contours of migrant death. By intertwining barbed wire with the natural environment in the text, Devi naturalizes a bordering technology to emphasize its foreignness: “Motionless in their coats of barbed wire / The reefs wait for the wreckage” (35). Here, the use of “barbed wire” becomes cemented into a historical marker of “wreckage,” the reef. The juxtaposition of the barbed wire and the reef foregrounds the way in which borders, natural and unnatural, have become synonymous with exclusion, a narrative construct that fixes bordering technologies from colonization into our contemporary moment.

In a moment of recognition, Pope Francis met with Alan’s father, Abdullah Kurdi, in 2021.²³ Acknowledging the role of the Global North in his son’s death, the dialogue between the Pope and Kurdi demonstrates a belated recognition that repeats the tragedy involved in the asylum process itself, a period of limbo in which the migrant waits as their narrative is dissected. Similar to how the reef eagerly awaits the wreckage foretold, the passive act of waiting for the inevitable becomes the tragedy of inaction, as families are separated and continue to queue for human rights and recognition. The cruel act of waiting resembles murder when receiving nation-states choose to prioritize bureaucratic processes over innocent lives, as Devi laments, “Drowning in three inches of water” (45). Alison Mountz describes this transitional situation as the death of asylum itself. For Mountz, migrant death parallels the political death of asylum, a slow dissolution that is hard to recognize.²⁴ Scenes of migration and the death of asylum are, as Devi points out, “Nothing but daily routine” (42). To break this dehumanizing and deadly cycle, Devi’s poems challenge us to navigate turbulent waters, urging us to transform fleeting empathy into sustained action. Confronting the discomfort of denying humanity, we can begin to imagine borders not as barriers but as spaces of connection and possibility. It is through this collective journey that we may finally edge toward the shore of human dignity.

23 “Pope Francis Meets Father of Drowned Syrian Boy,” *Reuters*, March 7, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/pope-francis-meets-father-drowned-syrian-boy-2021-03-07/>.

24 Alison Mountz, *The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), xx.

Implicating Readers

Addressing the complexity of composing an empathetic response to the migrant experience, Devi explains: “notre empathie pour ceux qui souffrent n’est que passagère” [“our empathy for those who suffer is only temporary”].²⁵ For Devi, the temporary nature of empathy highlights the inverse, the migrant’s wait for recognition. She further explains that she found the limits of literature, as she felt it illegitimate to write from Kurdi’s perspective: “I was forced to realize that I didn’t feel entitled to write about this child, to usurp in some way his tragedy and that of his parents to make a literary object of it.”²⁶ As the word “passagère” suggests, empathy alone is not an effective emotion to enact forms of social and political change. Yet, she found other possibilities in the urgency to translate her poems into English and respond to rhetoric that framed migrants as less than human:

The urgency of this translation, done in the evenings in between talks and traveling, fed by my heightening horror at what was happening, led to the slippage of meanings, but felt totally valid, almost ineluctable. So yes, *l’océan n’a plus de nom* [the ocean no longer has a name] relates to the fact that geographies become anonymous as migrants try to cross endless spaces towards *l’autre versant des possibles*, the other side of possibilities, but in the English version, the sea actually erases them, their faces and their names because when they arrive, they are seen as an invading herd, not people, not faces, not names.²⁷

Rather than creating an empathic text, the poetic process occupies a space of “slippage,” a text that is adrift in meaning. By creating a space of crosspollination and multilingual contact, *CDL* fosters what Julietta Singh terms “unthinking mastery,” or the process of “exil[ing] ourselves from feeling comfortable at home, turning instead toward forms of queer dispossession that reach for different ways of inhabiting our scholarly domains—and more primordially, of inhabiting ourselves.”²⁸ In dispossessing full mastery of the text when read as a collection rather than individual fragments, *CDL* unhomes readers by forcing them to experience a form of textual exile. Echoing Édouard Glissant, Devi’s

25 La Rédaction, “Ananda Devi.”

26 La Rédaction, “Ananda Devi.”

27 Dawoor, “Walking,” 464.

28 Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Humanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 8.

relational poetics similarly rejects all forms of fixity and mooring. As Renée Larrier and Georgette Mitchell explain, Glissant's poetics "encourag[e] the reader to visualize a new *plage* / *page* by abandoning his anchor—and ink—in order to advance freely on the open canvas of the sea."²⁹ To begin to navigate *CDL*, the reader must unmoor themselves, or, in Glissant's words, "délaiss[er] l'ancre" ["relinquish the anchor"],³⁰ an invitation to both monolingual and multilingual readers to take part in Devi's poethical project of "imagining languages" and "networking them,"³¹ as highlighted by Glissant, to collectively envision an alternative future for those afloat.

For Devi, literature possesses a unique power to open doors to new possibilities, engendering more humane emotions capable of counteracting the hostility often directed at migrants and replacing it with care. As she puts it, "il suffit d'une possibilité, voire d'un frémissement, pour que l'humanité puisse (peut-être) commencer à évoluer autrement" [all it takes is one possibility, or even a shudder, for humanity to (perhaps) begin to evolve differently].³² The trilingual nature of her self-translated poems magnifies this potential for (r)evolution, tripling its impact throughout the collection. Devi's work as translator demonstrates a "practice of caring" aimed at fostering a transformative engagement that refashions how we view and treat migrants and refugees on the global stage.³³ This process, which Elizabeth Anker calls a "remapping" of human rights, begins with "aesthetic experiences" that challenge indifference and spark a new poethics that tends to the wounded dignity of the human flotsam and jetsam whose lifeless bodies haunt our shores with increasing frequency.³⁴ Devi's three-step poethics invites readers to acknowledge the importance

29 Renée Larrier and Georgette Mitchell, "His Legacy Relates: Édouard Glissant's Thought in Literature and Culture," *L'Esprit Créateur* 61, no. 3 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2021.0030>.

30 Larrier and Mitchell, "His Legacy," 2, their translation.

31 Édouard Glissant, *L'Imaginaire des langues: Entretiens avec Lise Gauvin* (1991–2009) (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 27–28.

32 Ananda Devi, *Deux malles et une marmite* (Le Palais-sur-vienne: Project'îles, 2021), 95.

33 Jennifer Boum Make, "Translation as Care: On Fabienne Kanor's 'Humus,' Translated From French by Lynn E. Palermo," *Reading in Translation*, August 9, 2017, <https://readingintranslation.com/2021/08/09/translation-as-care-on-fabienne-kanors-humus-translated-from-french-by-lynn-e-palermo/>.

34 Elizabeth S. Anker, *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 222.

of their disposable lives, while encouraging us to actively imagine their marginalized subjectivities anew. For a monolingual reader, the collection forces them to *see* the presence of others through the *foreign* languages of the collection and abolish their foreignness by adopting a poethical attitude that fosters a positive engagement with otherness and the unfamiliar. Regardless of their linguistic ability in one or more languages, Devi invites her readers to dismantle barriers and offer genuine hospitality to the migrant as true players in Glissant's "relational game," which relies on the active engagement of each participant to come alive.³⁵

CDL leans in on accountability for the inhuman treatment that the displaced and the stateless face, constructing the audience as implicated subjects in the unparalleled atrocities that they passively hear about, watch, and read almost every day. According to Michael Rothberg, an implicated subject is a person "who participates in injustice, but in indirect ways."³⁶ Unlike the legal figures of the bystander, victim, or perpetrator who could be legally indicted, the implicated subject is "a figure who is neither the criminally responsible agent nor a mere innocent bystander to violence."³⁷ For Devi, readers, viewers, and even the poet herself are unconscious participants in the daily tragedies that reach the surface of their screens. The audience plays a crucial role in the unfolding of these humanitarian emergencies, even though their involvement may be indirect. The choice of pronouns from the distant and detached "Ils" in French (9), to the more direct and intimate "You" in English (35) and "To" in Morisyen (61) signals a gradual implication deepening the poet's personal connection and the text's emotional resonance, closing the distance between migrant and reader.

While "Afloat" begins from the second-person point of view, there are several shifts as the text moves from framing the audience as bystanders to complicit participants, and then implicated subjects. Key to understanding the use of position and perception in the text are the ways in which the speaker discusses the agential figures in the poem:

Head down arms loose
Body half-mast

35 Franck H. Andrianarivo, "Drawing Glissant's Unimaginable in Sylvain Savoia's *Les esclaves oubliés de Tromelin*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 61, no. 3 (2021): 30–47, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/esp.2021.0032>.

36 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 20.

37 Rothberg, *Implicated Subject*, 7.

In a Swiss bunker you cower

I have reached! I have reached!

You cry, eating handfuls of sand. (37–38)

The use of “you” to frame the opening section of the poem serves to create a sense of “indirect participation,”³⁸ one in which the speaker appropriates the scream and cry of the migrant, “I have reached!” Yet, the poem quickly moves from the second to the third person with the use of “she” when discussing sacrifice, then a collective “we” when moving to the contemporary moment in which we live: “And here we are, riding the same echoes / The same aftershocks of the same earthquake” (43). By discussing the “echoes” with a collective “we,” the speaker brings the history of colonization into the contemporary moment, the moment in which “the shovels became swords,” a moment where “death” is brought to the “Intruder interloper other” (43).

Rothberg explains that the use of slogans brings the speaker into “proximity” without taking the subject’s place. Yet, in what ways have slogans and signboards failed us and highlighted the failure, or “limits of political imagination” beyond an “individualist framework?”³⁹ The text calls into question protest slogans to the migrant crisis:

A signboard stated:

Les réfugiés sont des êtres humains

—Refugees are human beings—

Thank God the board told us

What we could hardly believe! (46)

For Devi, the “signboard” becomes a form of self-praise, a twisted and nuanced perspective in which the denial of refuge is not apparent unless it is written, displayed publicly, and recognized. The notion of recognition of personhood for refugees from a signboard is language empty of meaning. The speaker uses this moment to highlight the receiving nation’s complicity in forced movement, while at the same time disrupting the rescue-gratitude and chronological narrative structure that is expected.

Wait till we welcome them here

With our great souls

And you’ll see how they thank us

You’ll see! You’ll see! (46)

38 Rothberg, *Implicated Subject*, 13.

39 Rothberg, *Implicated Subject*, 7.

In this moment, hospitality becomes hostility. Rather than opening the door to the stranger, the speaker's expectation is the imagined gratitude.

Devi's speaker complicates the limits of the political imagination and a liberal framework of subjectivity when she moves the point of view from the "you/we/she" to "I." In a moment that we read as the crux of the poem, Devi writes:

I look at the pictures
See the waterlogged eyes
The pretty cheeks of a child
Pockmarked with salty burns
Hands latched to throats
To stay afloat of life

Eye-sockets scooped out
By blinding hope
Mouths sunken in
No teeth no tongues
No songs of course

The futile fury of a baby
Drowning in three inches of water

Yes, I see all that, I do
On my computer screen
Next to a flowering orchid
My left cheek warmed by the chimney fire
A glass of wine in my hand. (45)

We quote this passage at length because of its significance in understanding the poems' use of implication, in addition to how meaning slips and then adds layers of understanding from a multilingual reading. Drawing from the etymology of the word "implication," Rothberg explains that to be "implicated" means "to [be] entangle[d], involve[d], or connecte[d] closely"; he continues: "implication [...] draws attention to how we are 'folded into' (im-plic-ated in) events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects."⁴⁰

Rothberg's definition recalls Lionnet's reading of Devi's texts through the sari motif, wherein she contends that "the frequent unfurling or deployment of the sari serves as an ordering principle for story and character."⁴¹ Lionnet argues that,

⁴⁰ Rothberg, *Implicated Subject*, 1.

⁴¹ Françoise Lionnet, "Cinq mètres d'ordre et de sagesse..., cinq mètres

as an object that can be made of varying fabrics of diverse colors, [...] the sari is both the medium and the message, the way into Devi's narrative strategies and the objective correlative for themes and emotions, cultural or psychological dispositions that her reader has come to expect as radically and inevitably hers.⁴²

Although not explicitly presented within the collection, this key narrative device offers an attractive avenue for analyzing *CDL*. Considering Devi's thrice-told, multilingual poems as a metaphorical, unfurled sari meant to embrace the vulnerable bodies of migrants, we contend that the author calls upon her readers to actively participate and intervene—in other words to *implicate* themselves in the deploying and draping process performed in and through the text. Metaphorically wrapping the drowning and the drowned with the rehumanizing fabric of dignity, the poetic text itself acts as a sari, inviting readers to engage in the delicate yet transformative act of layering meaning and beauty. The poet's multilingual call for help strives to reshape the geometry of the reader's attention, refining its quality by redirecting focus toward human dignity. This process cultivates new sensibilities, drawing readers into a deeper, more meaningful engagement with the migrants' experience.

To show her own position as an implicated subject, Devi highlights her dynamic agency as a viewer. In all three languages, the verb—"regarder" (19)~"look at" (45)~"get" (71)—implies the active and focused act of deliberately "looking at" distressing pictures of people trying "To stay afloat of life" (45). The subsequent anaphoric and epiphoric repetitions of the verb "voir" in several verses such as "J'ai vu les regards ravagés / J'ai vu de jolies joues d'enfants rongées" and "Tout cela, tout cela, oui, je l'ai vu / Je l'ai vu" ["I have seen ravaged looks / I have seen the pretty cheeks of children gnawed" and "All that, all that, yes, I have seen all that, I have seen all that"] (19)⁴³ shift the agentive act of directing one's gaze towards dehumanizing images from mere observation to a more profound engagement characterized by a presentational, interpretative, and empathic mode of implication. In this context, the nuanced distinction between the verbs "regardé" and "vu" (19)~"look" and "see" (45)~"get" and "trouv" (71) highlights the intentionality behind

de jungle soyeuse': Ananda Devi's Unfurling Art of Fiction," in *Littératures, poétiques, mondes: La littérature comparée et ses sentiers qui bifurquent*, ed. Micéala Symington (Paris: Champion, 2014), 256.

42 Lionnet, "Cinq mètres," 257.

43 Our translation, rather than Devi's, to highlight the repetition of "J'ai vu."

the act of seeing. While looking involves the physical act of “conduct[ing] a visual inspection, examination, or search” in order to see and find something or someone,⁴⁴ seeing implies an additional mental or cognitive component, as it means “to have or come to have understanding or awareness; to understand or recognize a fact, the truth, etc.”⁴⁵ Through this distinction, Devi encourages a dynamic engagement that surpasses the borders of the visual typically associated with the passive bystander. The Morisyen word “trouv” supports this argument further. Derived from the French verb *trouver* [to find], Devi’s word choice implies an intentional exploration or discovery, which comes after the deliberate yet passive act of *looking at* the pictures. Here, Devi implicates viewers of such horrific scenes by provoking what Rothberg calls a “visceral response—that cringe [...] meant to awaken [them].”⁴⁶ She demands active emotional and intellectual engagement, involving readers in a way that brings questions about migration into their own subjective experience during the reading process.

By emphasizing the significance of seeing through repetition, especially in the French and Creole “J’ai vu” (19) and “Monn trouv” (71), Devi positions herself as a witness to the unthinkable experience of forced migration. According to Shoshana Felman, every trial “is contingent on the act of seeing,” with the “most authoritative testimony in the courtroom [being] that of an eyewitness.”⁴⁷ In addition to putting into words the violent realities experienced by these victims of the humanitarian crisis, Devi’s piercing words are evidence of the fragmentation that dispossesses these suffering individuals of their humanity. The poetic encounter between readers and migrants is facilitated metonymically, as Devi portrays their violent stories through the symbolism of their fragmented bodies. Their reduction to “cheeks,” “Hands,” “throats,” “Eye-sockets,” “Mouths,” “teeth,” and “tongues” reflects the severe decomposition of personhood and human rights faced by the distressed people seeking urgent assistance (45). Unlike the English

44 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “look (v.),” December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1185711749>.

45 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “see (v.),” December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4953027704>.

46 Susanne C. Knittel and Sofia Forchieri, “Navigating Implication: An Interview with Michael Rothberg,” *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 3, no. 1 (2020): 15, <https://doi.org/10.21039/jpr.3.1.66>.

47 Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 81.

translation “Yes, I see all that” (45), which employs the present tense, the use of the past tense in French and Creole—“oui, je l’ai vu” (19)~“Wi, monn trouv” (71)—further accentuates Devi’s and the reader’s role as eyewitnesses who are summoned to court, so to speak, by way of poethic justice. The past tense affirms the authenticity of the events Devi has observed and experienced as a witness, confirming that these occurrences are factual since she has “see[n]” them with her own eyes. Unlike the migrant body that has “Eye-sockets scooped out,” the witness becomes the reader, shifting the eye-witness to the “I” witness the speaker deploys in all three languages in the text. The implicated subject is not unique to a specific culture or geography, but solidarity specifically emerges from the collective multilingual “I” that continues to witness the horrors Devi viewed on her screen.

Interlude

In writing *CDL*, Devi complicates the challenges we as scholars face when addressing the others’ experiences. Devi’s method of writing about the migration crisis unveils a deep concern for the suffering and (un)becoming of migrants, especially innocent children, who are constructed as quintessential subaltern figures throughout the collection. The intertextuality with Arthur Rimbaud’s famous war sonnet “Le Dormeur du val” [“The Sleeper in the Valley”], also noted by Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François,⁴⁸ offers valuable insight into Devi’s poethics. Like Rimbaud, she sublimates the death of a “little guy,” an angelic figure who “fell down from the sky,” and who is portrayed “asleep,” with “a large hole / Where his skull used to be” (49). While Devi’s words express undeniable violence, horror, and tragedy, they also simultaneously construct a sense of comfort and tranquility, conveyed through the euphemizing of death as a teenager sleeping peacefully “In the blue meadow” (49). Our suggestion here is that Devi’s poethics of accountability seeks justice, reparation, and solace for the many other dead “little guys” like him, who are considered, Devi remarks sarcastically, “the menace of the century” (46). Often anonymized and improperlyly

48 Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François, “Kinships of the Sea: Comparative History, Minor Solidarity, and Transoceanic Empathy,” in *Reframing Postcolonial Studies: Concepts, Methodologies, Scholarly Activisms*, ed. David D. Kim (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 113–34.

buried in a “makeshift grave” (36), those eternal asylum seekers remain with the lingering specter of hate pursuing them even in the afterlife. A textual monument and tomb, *CDL* stands as a poignant testament to the dignity of young and adult migrants who never reached their destination, either in this life or the next. As Loichot has convincingly demonstrated, the artist can be “a spiritual guide and a performer of sacred acts who reritualizes the dead” deprived of rituals at the moment of their death.⁴⁹ We read *CDL* not merely as a cathartic or empathetic tool, but rather as a legible “sacred objec[t],”⁵⁰ created to perform a poethical mechanism of redress implicating readers in the challenging yet ethical process of rehumanization actively at work in the poems.

In addressing future generations, the text displays a prevailing sentiment of hope in the promises of the literary imaginary. The speaker notes: “And what shall we say to tomorrow’s children / The still-living, the not-quite-here, the not-yet-dying” (55). Devi’s use of “not-yet” suggests an unconditional, ethical dimension that may come into being in the future. The speaker positions this sentiment before encapsulating world history in a stanza:

What shall we tell them of this world
Its slaughterhouses
Its wastelands
Its furnaces
Its walls. (55)

The transition from “furnaces” to “walls” shows the partitioning of the world in our contemporary moment. The interrogative emphasis on “this world” offers a moment of hope, a sliver and crack where new meaning can emerge. Here, the poet projects history on the screen, describing it as a “disaster movie” but reminding the audience to “talk to them about hope,” choosing the scene of the “orchid” rather than “disaster” (57). In the final stanzas of the poem, the speaker repeats the phrase, “Do talk to them about hope,” instilling hope in

Those razed and dismembered
Just a spark
Who knows what might flare up. (57)

49 Loichot, *Water Graves*, 68.

50 Loichot, *Water Graves*, 68.

The poet continues from the flare:

A sun
A rebirth
Laughter
A bridge
An interlude. (57)

It is in this interlude, the moment of implication and recognition of complicity, that the world can be imagined anew. The speaker pushes the implicated subject into future generations, acknowledging the continual traces of historical legacy but offering an “interlude” for transfiguration and transformation, an “interlude” between each language marking a space of silence for the audience/reader to complete the necessary work of weaving newness into the world rather than predictable repetitions of disasters.

Devi’s poethics of accountability corroborates the imperative to offer a sanctuary where refuge, community, and belonging bloom like the “flowering orchid” emerging from the wounded bodies of migrants, transplanted into both the poet’s verses and home. As a metaphor embodying the utopia of successful migrancy, the epiphyte “orkide ki ti fek fleri” (71) invites readers to continue the difficult yet necessary work of relocating beauty and being in dehumanized spaces marred by violence and death. This decorative element “by the chimney fire” (45) captures the poet’s role as a cultivator of hope, beauty, and being actively engaged with readers in a collaborative, ethical reconstruction process destined to offer refuge, solace, and dignity to “L’intrus l’autrui l’autre” (17). A new kind of being, and, more importantly, understanding, unfolds in performing Devi’s multilingual task within the collection. The constant shifts in meaning between each version of the poem suggest a newly formed textual body that stays open for interpretation. The dismembered and wounded body reforms, “A rebirth” and “An interlude” (57), a moment of reflection where we can begin to see a method that introduces understanding of beauty in the face of death, an aesthetic weaving that moves into the future enacted within the text itself. Let us, then, sit in this interlude and interpret our world through this new lens to transfigure it.