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De-Nationalizing American Music in the 'Third Space' of *GraceLand*

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In Chris Abani's novel *GraceLand*, the constant presence of globalization in early 1980s Nigeria is played out in a 'coming of age' tale that involves drug smuggling, the organ trade, migration going to America and the movement of culture, tourists, and capital coming from America. The novel alternates between late 1970s and early 1980s Afikpo and Lagos, Nigeria, as the protagonist, Elvis, tries to find his place in the world. Elvis dreams of becoming a dancer (partly inspired by his namesake), befriends drug dealers and beggars, runs from the military, travels with a theater group, and laments the failings he sees in his society without understanding why they exist or how to fix them.

GraceLand shows how, to quote Pheng Cheah in his examination of postcolonial culture and cosmopolitanism, 'postcolonial national identity formation is in part a response to neocolonial economic globalization' (1998, p.310). The characters in the novel interact with and live in a world where South Asian millionaires, Igbo 'druids,' Lebanese housewives, trans-African military dealings, and a barrage of American films and products are part of everyday life. According to Madelaine Hron, in most 'third-generation' Nigerian writing, including *GraceLand*, 'the child's quest for a sociocultural identity is inextricably linked to issues arising from postcolonialism and globalization, often manifested in the context of

repression, violence or exploitation' (2008, p.29). Urban culture in Abani's novel is depicted as the fallout of capitalism's explosion in a Nigeria that is 'half slum, half paradise' (2004, p.7). This novel has been seen by critics as a polemic against cultural imperialism in the way it depicts globalization's distortion of self-understanding through the creation of new, 'plebian,' cosmopolitans which are created not by 'postmodern pastiche' but from the 'meetings and mixings of distinct national and ethnic styles' (Brennan 1997, p.39). Abani presents a paradoxical situation for the characters that are both connected and alienated from local, national, and international culture.

Critics of *GraceLand* have viewed cultural imperialism along the same lines as international trade expert David Rothkopf who described it as a 'win of the world's information flows, dominating the airwaves as Great Britain once ruled the seas' (1997, p.39). Amy Novak sums up *GraceLand* as a depiction of how 'the hegemonic inheritance of colonial culture is seen in the identities and values adopted by characters surrounded by the artifacts of Western culture in contemporary Lagos' and focuses on the 'trauma' caused by this situation (2008, p.34). The ideas of globalization and cultural imperialism put forth by critics such as Novak highlight significant themes in *GraceLand*, such as the kinetic confusion of urban modernity, at the expense of not examining the importance of music in the novel. In fact, the critical attention given to *GraceLand* has almost solely focused on the detrimental effects of cultural imperialism.

Previous treatments of Abani's novel, while keen in their analysis, have missed the way in which foreign music in the novel provides identity, creates domestic cultural affiliations, and functions as an anodyne respite from slum life. This omission of the role of

music within the criticism of *GraceLand* is surprising considering the almost constant presence of it throughout the novel. The signifier ‘American’ is dynamic in *GraceLand* and this allows Elvis to experience, deal with, and react to the effects of globalization. To start, this paper will briefly look at the way *GraceLand* has been viewed by other critics. This will lead into the notion of the ‘third space’ which helps characterize Abani’s depiction of Nigeria and provides a critical tool to understanding the role of music in the novel. Lastly, I will explore media that is given national labels and counter this with the way music functions in the novel.

By examining the role of American music in Elvis’ self-understanding and in *GraceLand* as a whole this paper will show how music subverts critical discourse on cultural imperialism and how removing national labels from global cultural imports allows them to be incorporated into the social reality of the novel. My analysis will show that music can be distinguished and separated from the rest of the foreign cultural presence in *GraceLand*. This analysis requires an examination of the imported cultural presence that is given explicit national labels to be contrasted with the non-nationalized, transatlantic, and domestic cultural mixture. Through this reading I hope to show how the movements of some cultural products are not easily mapped to track border crossings, where the country of origin is clearly displayed, but instead shift geographic associations. Additionally, this will highlight the dynamism of Abani’s commentary of post-independence Nigeria and show how *GraceLand* depicts the (con)fusion of old and new, native and foreign in the postcolonial city.

Other critics have largely commented on the harsh world that Abani depicts in the novel and broadly see the media mixture as a negative effect of globalization. Similar to Novak’s focus on ‘trauma’

in the novel, John C. Hawley, in an examination of novels that deal with the Biafran war, lists *GraceLand* as a novel ‘from Africa [that] focuses on children and the effects of violence upon them’ (2008, p.22). In her well argued essay, Madelaine Hron describes how the figure of the child is well-suited to capture the hybridity of modern Nigeria. Hron articulately recognizes this aspect of *GraceLand*, yet plays into the rhetoric that all foreign media is inherently neo-colonial by stating that Abani ‘explores the “clash of civilizations” in [his] *Bildungsromane*’ (2008, p.34). While these critics are certainly not misguided in their analysis of *GraceLand*, they are too broad in dismissing the American cultural presence as imperialist. The margin-center dichotomy implied in an essentialist notion of cultural transmission assumes that the hybridity in the novel is purely the combination of an autochthonic Nigerian or Igbo culture and a uniform, hegemonic American one. The idea of a single flow of cultural domination is complicated by the way Abani depicts music in the novel. As Adélékè Adéèkó acknowledges in his study of the role of America and travel in *GraceLand*, globalization does not necessarily ‘fragment the Nigerian national imaginary because the work of inventing that nation, which started during the independence struggle, was never completed’ (2008, p.12).

Music in *GraceLand* occupies Homi Bhabha’s idea of a ‘third space,’ a space that ‘displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom’ (1990, p.211). Bhabha’s insight departs from other ideas about the ‘mixing’ of cultures and is useful in understanding the society Abani presents. Scholars Peter Stallybrass and Allon White theorized in their text *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression* about a hybrid space in the 18th and 19th century European urban marketplace where there occurred a

process of ‘hybridization or inmixing of binary opposites, particularly high and low’ (1986, p.44). However, Bhabha’s idea of the ‘third space’ moves hybridity into the postcolonial realm and critiques the very notion of ‘binary opposites’ between a traditionally perceived colonized and colonizer through an adaptation of Jacques Derrida’s *differance*. Derrida proposed the idea that ‘meaning is always *deferred*’ and that language contains no essential truth by capturing the moment where ‘differ’ shades into ‘defer’ to create ‘endless supplementarity’ (Norris 1991, p.32). For Bhabha, ‘colonial hybridity is not a *problem* of genealogy or identity between two *different* cultures’ but instead causes “‘denied” knowledges to enter upon the dominant discourse’ (1986, p.175, Bhabha’s emphasis). Bhabha’s reading of ‘hybridity’ creates a ‘third space’ which questions and ‘terrorizes [colonial] authority’ by distorting dialectic lines (1986, p.176). The ‘third space’ confronts an idealized binary and ‘ensures that meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity’ (Bhabha 2004, p.55). What is important about Bhabha’s notion of the ‘third space’ is that it does not essentialize the process of incorporating the foreign into the local. The lines drawn between what is foreign and local are not only blurred, but the ‘fixity’ of such terms is called into question to create the ‘third space.’

Bhabha’s ideas are extremely appropriate for examining the development of a youth trying to figure out the ‘third space’ of the world around him, but existing where the only reality is the ‘third space.’ The ‘old’ and the ‘new’, the ‘two original moments from which the third space emerges’ (Bhabha 1990, p.211), are not present and have never existed for the young characters in *GraceLand*. Abani’s critique of post-independence Nigeria shows how these ‘two original moments’ are present in forms that have been rendered and processed through the ‘third space.’ This reality is one of the reasons

Elvis has trouble confronting his identity. In a telling characterization of Oye, Elvis' grandmother, Abani writes, 'she had a Scottish accent, picked up from the missionaries she had worked for, and he [Elvis] didn't always understand what she said' (2004, p.35). The people who embody the past for Elvis have themselves been rendered through the colonial process, in its various forms, and also occupy the reality of the 'third space.'

The notion of a 'domestic' culture is ambivalent in *GraceLand*; like the development and growth of Elvis in the novel, it is shown through contrasts of the culture being built around the slums. In an interview with Zuade Kaufman, Abani, who fled Nigeria after imprisonment there, said, 'I don't care about Africa, because Africa doesn't really exist. It's a continental mass. Africa is hundreds of countries and thousands of ethnicities' (2006). Abani represents the confusion of creating and maintaining the political borders of Nigeria throughout *GraceLand*. The *bricolage* of Lagos and Afikpo is shown through notions of 'traditional' practice and explicitly foreign culture. An emphasis on the national origin of the native or the foreign does not succeed in the urban culture of Lagos and Afikpo; however the characters and the narrative create separations based on national origin throughout the novel. An analysis of domestic and foreign media in *GraceLand* will help show how music functions differently from other media in the characterization of Elvis and can even be seen as non-national. This will highlight music's role in the novel and distance music from the discourse on cultural imperialism by moving it away from essentialist categories which imply that the country of origin reflects certain political or economic motives onto cultural products. Elvis' journal, Abani's binary chapter headings, and the presence of film will show the function of domestic and foreign media in *GraceLand*. By

examining the depiction of the journal, chapter headings, and film as overtly domestic or foreign a contrast can be set up to show how music does not fit into this binary, but instead is part of the novel's 'third space.'

Elvis carries around a journal his mother wrote of 'things she wants to remember in her next life' (Abani 2004, p.44) and Abani splices pages from the journal into each chapter of *GraceLand*. The effect of the insertion of journal entries which consist of recipes, folklore, and prayers is somewhat jarring against the realism and violence of *GraceLand*'s plot. Yet these journal entries serve as a way to create a 'first space:' they are the only part of Abani's story that appears to be untouched by the effects of globalization on the characters. Elvis finds security and stability in the journal, often carrying it with him, and the journal presents an idealized culture to the reader and Elvis. The cultural practices in the journal are a view into what Elvis' mother believed to be special about Igbo practice and help inform Elvis and the reader about the culture not seen on the surface in the novel, but which is hinted at throughout. The journal entries feel forced into the narrative, often upsetting the dramatic movement of the story, and by the end of the book even the journal is recognized by Elvis as flawed and tainted by the ruptures of post-independence Nigeria. However, this concession to the impossibility of a 'pure' tradition does not come until the penultimate page of the novel when Elvis realizes that the journal 'had never revealed his mother to him' (Abani 2004, p.320). It is notable that Elvis comes to this realization while in the international terminal of the Murtala Mohammed International Airport—a liminal space—right before leaving for the United States, and as all centeredness of national identity has crumbled. The journal ties Igbo culture in Nigeria into the narrative and reminds Elvis and the reader

that the story is taking place on top of the ruins of a different, much less Americanized, culture. Although the journal entries provide a respite from the globalized chaos of Lagos and depict blatantly domestic cultural associations for the reader and Elvis, the journal eventually is discarded once the false construction of an immemorial past is recognized. However, the journal is the only material presence within the narrative that contains traces of a culture and past to which Elvis can neither return nor relate.

Abani provides a different kind of pastiche at the start of each chapter by setting up an explicit binary heading. These chapter headings highlight the dichotomy of the domestic and local against the foreign and American.

Each chapter of *GraceLand* begins with two views of the Igbo kola nut ceremony and the role of the kola in Igbo tradition and culture. Chapter One commences:

This is the kola nut. The seed is a star. The star is life.
 This star is us.
The Igbo hold the kola nut to be sacred, offering it at every gathering and to every visitor, as a blessing, as refreshment, or to seal a covenant. The prayer that precedes the breaking and sharing of the nut is: He who brings kola, brings life (Abani 2004, p.3, Abani's italics).

This kind of description continues throughout the novel and, as Chris Dunton of the University of Lesotho writes, 'In this counterpointing of materials lies an assertion of the therapeutic or corrective power of published knowledge' (2008, p.74). While this is an overt attempt to show 'traditional' practice against a Western anthropological understanding, it also exemplifies the two worlds that mix within each chapter. With the exception of the journal, the division between Igbo and Western practice does not appear as segregated anywhere else in the novel. The start of Chapter Fourteen

emphasizes the way Western anthropology essentializes the cultural practice of the 'Other.'

Chapter Fourteen begins with a single laconic line, 'This is how the kola nut must be presented,' and the Western analysis reinforces the reduction of non-Western cultures in a center-margin binary by positing all 'Other' cultures to be somehow analogous: '*The actual ritual of the kola nut is as complex as the Japanese tea ritual...there is something about old cultures and their similarities that bears mentioning.*' (Abani 2004, p.143, Abani's italics). The Western statement, in full, attempts to relate Japanese and Igbo practice for no apparent reason except to tie together 'old cultures.' The comparison between the concise Igbo statement and the essentialist meandering of the Western follow-up expresses a clear domestic-foreign division. Within the story, this division can occasionally be seen in brief asides throughout the novel. For example, Elvis undergoes an initiation ceremony where he is told to kill a chick while elders watch and remark, 'In our day it was a real eagle' used in the ceremony and not a chicken (Abani 2004, p.20). Novak characterizes the initiation ceremony as 'The erasure of traditional culture by colonialism' where 'fragments of old ways exist, but they are shorn of their meaning' (2008, p.37). As Novak's reading cogently shows, this scene is one of the few points where Abani displays traces of the 'first space' in Igbo culture.

The chapter headings set up an explicit contrast between one view and another by first displaying Igbo ceremony from the perspective of the Igbo themselves and then showing an anthropological interpretation of Igbo ceremony. As illustrated in the passage from Chapter Fourteen, the Western interpretation of Igbo practice expresses a critical distance devoid of the heartfelt cultural importance Abani provides in the Igbo statements. However, once

the narrative of each chapter begins, the separation established in the chapter headings ends, and only traces of a separation between the overtly domestic and distant foreign are found through asides by elders and comments about the way things ‘used to be.’

Film is also presented in the novel and understood by the characters in explicitly national ways. Elvis makes sure to note whether he is seeing an Indian musical or an American western. At one point in the book he is invited by his some-time mentor, the King of Beggars, an anti-government minstrel, activist, and veteran of the Biafran war, to see a Yugoslavian film, to which Elvis replies ‘They make films in Europe?’ (Abani 2004, p.132). Film is both explicitly associated with nationality and presented as part of globalization’s influence in Nigeria. In a flashback scene in Afikpo, an American tobacco company gives free cigarettes to people who attend a showing of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. After the film, Elvis, age 13, and his friends practice the phrases they heard, remarking of the older viewers, ‘dese people don’t hear American’ (Abani 2004, p.150). Nationally labeled media in *GraceLand* are constantly being evoked as Elvis tries to negotiate his own identity and, because much of the media and cultural imports are American, it would be easy (as other critics of *GraceLand* have done) to dilute the story into a description of ‘how the catastrophe of colonialism continues to assert and reassert a material legacy’ (Novak 2008, p.36).

Critiques based around cultural imperialism and the way in which Abani blatantly asserts it into the characters’ reality are too broad in their implications of guilt and the role of free will to capture the complexities of ‘trauma,’ yet do address key issues such as the personal effects of cultural transmission and the interplay between culture and identity. However, a discourse that broadly dismisses global or American cultural products ‘as [...] the most disruptive [...]

forces of the twentieth century' (Wagnleitner & May 2000, p.1) misses the way music supports Elvis' 'coming of age' in *GraceLand*.

Elvis views 'America,' as an idea and place, ambivalently throughout *GraceLand*. At the start of the novel Elvis covers his face in talcum powder to perform an Elvis Presley impersonation for American tourists; an event that is humiliating, degrading, and exacerbates the youth's search for identity in Lagos. A few chapters later, Elvis' friend Redemption tells him that 'States is de place where dreams come true, not like dis Lagos dat betray your dreams...It [the United States] is full of blacks like us' (Abani 2004, p.26). Redemption makes plans to go to the United States and Elvis' Aunt Felicia immigrates to Las Vegas, yet Elvis, despite his love for westerns, 'wasn't really sure he liked America' (Abani 2004, p.56). The presence of the United States in *GraceLand* is constant, through film, television, and music—as well as the obvious name of the protagonist—but the view of the U.S. is constantly in flux and never resolved even as the novel ends with Elvis waiting to catch a flight to the United States. Although American films provide entertainment and help expose Elvis to outside cultures and values, part of his self-awareness is learning the cost of these cultural imports.

The King of Beggars tells Elvis about 'does tiefs in the IMF, de World Bank and de U.S.' who take advantage of Nigeria's fragile post-independence government and its tumultuous political history (Abani 2004, p.281). The role of neo-liberalism in this book should not be undermined nor should the way *GraceLand* depicts the realities of the 'free' flow of goods on personal and 'national' identity. Much can be said on the subject and even the title of the novel can be seen as an ironic comment about Lagos, a play on the association with Elvis, and a critique on imperial acquisition of culture similar to Neil Lazarus' examination of Paul Simon's

Graceland, which posits Simon's album as culturally 'imperialist in its effects' because of the way it 'contributed to the *underdevelopment* of South African music' (1999, p.204, Lazarus' italics).

What will now be examined is the way that American music in *GraceLand* is not associated with a particular nation, unlike the rest of the media in the novel, and how this allows it to be incorporated into the everyday 'third space' reality to help shape identity. James Clifford called this the 'localizing of global symbols' (1992, p.114) and this occurs in the novel to the point where the 'symbols' become non-national. Bob Marley, James Brown, and Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly* are all part of an 'American' media in the novel, yet they all lose some of their 'American-ness' through a 'localizing' process. A solely nation-centered analysis, similar to other critics' work, which focuses on Nigeria, the effects of capitalism, or generalizes all cultural transmission under the heading 'globalization' (meaning American cultural imperialism), misses the dynamism of American music in the novel. Edward Said quotes C.L.R. James as saying that 'Beethoven belongs as much to West Indians as he does to Germans' (1993, p.xxviii). Said's quoting of James keys into the way culture moves, however neither James nor Said highlight the fact that this still places Beethoven as belonging to a specific place or people ('Germans'), even if he is shared by others ('West Indians'). In *GraceLand*, music belongs to the characters in Lagos as if it could not belong anywhere else or perhaps as if it could belong everywhere else, including Lagos; spatial categorization is removed. By making explicit the presence of American music in *GraceLand* it is possible to reach a better understanding of the way music in general functions in the novel and the way national and self-identities are formed,

The opening scene of *GraceLand* immediately introduces the harsh reality of poverty in Lagos:

Outside: Heavy rain [...] He [Elvis] felt claustrophobic [...] Naked children exploded out of grey wet houses, slipping and splaying in the mud [...] the smell of garbage from refuse dumps, unflushed toilets and stale bodies was overwhelming (Abani 2004, pp.3-4).

This bleak picture is soon assuaged by the sun peeking through the clouds as Bob Marley's 'Natural Mystic' begins to play on the radio.

This scene is also used by Novak in her critique, however she ends her example before music is introduced into the scene and focuses on the 'trauma' of *GraceLand's* opening. However, this example sets up a common model in *GraceLand*: the soothing and redeeming quality of music and the description of music in non-nationalized terms— 'Natural Mystical' is not described as a Jamaican song or 'foreign.' This model contrasts the already explored national labels of other media ('Indian musical,' Igbo practice) and does not work within a critique where all culture is part of a capitalist system that disrupts identity formation. The fact that there is a variety of music from all over the world, but mostly the United States, is a result of one-way cultural transmission. However, the transmission of music, unlike other imports from the United States into Lagos, provides a creative outlet which helps support Elvis' self-awareness in the narrative as opposed to being a hegemonic presence destroying a non-existent, stagnant notion of identity. Jonathan Rutherford posits that 'In the commodification of language and culture, objects and images are torn free of their original referents and their meanings become a spectacle open to almost infinite translation' (1990, p.11); this idea is exemplified in *GraceLand*. During the transatlantic transmission of music, nationality is lost and this plays into the process of identity formation which creates a 'third space' that is familiar with the foreign, yet encounters it in an appropriated form. Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* hints at this idea, although with a specific

focus on race, and in that text Gilroy writes, 'Music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction' (1993, p.102). Just as Elvis is in the process of 'coming of age' which takes him throughout Nigeria and, eventually to the U.S., so too does music work in a non-static, non-nationally confined, transitive way. The movement of Elvis from Afikpo to Lagos, around Nigeria, and eventually to the United States detaches the character from the idea of the nation as a source for identity. Similarly, music is shown to be detached from a nationality and is equally migratory which links it to Elvis' characterization. Abani does not state music's national origin which distinguishes it from the discourse on other (imported) media and, just as in the opening scene, this helps make it an integral part of Elvis' 'third space' social reality where explicit 'foreign' and 'domestic' markers are obscured.

Abani's chronology in *GraceLand* alternates between Elvis' early years in Afikpo and his life at sixteen after migrating to Lagos. This alternation contrasts the simplicity of living with a nurturing mother and a generally loving family against the harsh reality of urban teen life with the memories of a recently deceased mother, the nuisance of an alcoholic father, and a survival mentality. Despite the change in location and the way this affects Elvis' view of America, the world, and himself, music is shown to be a comforting force. In a scene in Afikpo, the five year old Elvis relishes dancing to Elvis Presley with his mother, Beatrice, and cousin, Efua. Beatrice is suffering from cancer, yet gets up from resting to dance and laugh with her son. Music provides an escape from the reality of terminal disease and a means for mother-son bonding. Abani writes that 'the sicker Beatrice got, the more often she held these impromptu little music-and-dance sessions' (2004, p.43). There is a brief interruption from Elvis' father,

Sunday, but he quickly exits and the scene ends with Elvis sleepily sitting with his grandmother and mother as they listen to Edith Piaf. This scene is typical in *GraceLand* in that two musicians with overt national associations—Presley and Piaf—are presented as anodyne forces against the realities of life (sickness, poverty), no national origin is given for the musicians, and both are ‘localized’ and made a part of Elvis’ identity formation and memory of his mother.

In an essay exploring the anthropology of music, Bruno Deschenes writes that developing musical tastes and associations begins with the way music is introduced and ‘there will always be a psychosocial and psychocultural background upon which all types of music will be [...] judged’ (1998, p.139). Music in *GraceLand* is non-national for Elvis because in his ‘psychosocial and psychocultural’ development music’s ‘background’ was his relationship with his mother, a tranquil past, and his love of dancing. There is never a mention of ‘French’ or ‘American’ music, unlike with film or the journal depicting Igbo practice, and music is made a part of his identity and the way he identifies the ‘third space’ culture around him. Simon Frith echoes Deschenes’ point by stating that music becomes ‘that aesthetic process through which we discover ourselves by forging our relations to others’ (1996, p.118). Frith notes the ‘mobility of self’ (1996, p.110) and the idea of ‘mobility’—which is appropriate to Elvis’ maneuvering through the ‘third space’—helps show the ways confined, static national labels are undermined in the ‘psychocultural’ musical process and in identity formation. The Afikpo scenes are filled with moments where music is present at pivotal points in Elvis’ life. At the start of Chapter Six, set in Afikpo, Elvis and his family listen to Al Green on the radio while preparing for Beatrice’s funeral ceremony; American music is present but appropriated into Elvis’ local understanding of the world and given

no national attachment. This process continues when the story is set in Lagos.

In Lagos, Elvis takes up a job as an escort and dance partner for 'rich patrons, mostly Indians and Lebanese' (Abani 2004, pp.91-92). On his first night working he is hired by Rohini Tagore—the beautiful heiress to a department store chain in Nigeria whose grandfather came to Nigeria from India 'in 1912 to help build the railways' (Abani 2004, p.92). Elvis is immediately smitten with Rohini and the two dance to James Brown, a moment that he savors and thinks about later when he has to escort a less attractive Lebanese customer. In the later escort scene music provides a means of escape: Elvis sings along to Jimmy Cliff (who, like Bob Marley, was not American yet is not given a nationality in the text) in an attempt to get away from the embarrassment of his situation. Elvis uses music to escape 'her bear grip around his ribs' (Abani 2004, p.118). However, once the music stops the scene moves from a comical contrast with the earlier escort experience to one of violence where Elvis encounters the Nigerian army.

While these two scenes reflect the escapist role of music in *GraceLand*, music appears elsewhere, de-nationalized, and part of a 'plebian' cosmopolitanism. Elvis is inspired to become a dancer after a visit to the market where he sees Ajasco dancers perform a routine to Elvis Presley's 'Hound Dog' (Abani 2004, p.65). This moment combines the foreign 'Hound Dog' with the local Ajasco, 'a dance characterized by unsteady and unpredictable movements of the body' (Ihonvbere 1996, p.198), where hybridity is obvious but without acknowledging a binary (native-foreign). For Elvis, there is not a binary present, just the reality of the 'third space.'

In another scene, Elvis' cousin Innocent, a child soldier in the Biafran war, is told by the 17 year old leader of the child army to

play the Beach Boys on his harmonica. Innocent ignores the command and it almost costs him his life. This scene exemplifies the tragic realities of post-Independence Nigeria and the request for the Beach Boys could be read as part of the global reach of U.S. culture. This reading would render the scene more ironic than tragic considering it occurs during a war for national identification. However, there is no designation of nationality for music when it is mentioned and this pattern occurs throughout the novel. Abani does note in a few places (pages 117 and 137, as well as in Chapter Twenty-Six) a specifically 'Nigerian' music, but this does not imply that it is somehow better or more 'native' than the presence of other music in the text. It instead works to help create the 'third space' of *GraceLand*.

Examinations of globalization and culture which ignore the fact that these are transitive notions gloss over the way a medium, such as music, can provide identity without displacing domestic culture. However, in *GraceLand*, this is further complicated because imported media is not always delineated by national categorization. Unlike other media—such as film and Elvis' journal—or Abani's binary chapter headings, which help show explicit 'tradition' next to 'Western' views of tradition, music in *GraceLand* is largely unattached to nationality. The 'third space' of Elvis' world is exemplified by music's presence in the novel. The 'American' label is lost somewhere in the transatlantic journey. Once de-nationalized and non-static, music is able to maintain its role in Elvis' life as his identity is shaped even as he begins to question the society and neo-liberal practices around him. To assume that 'musical globalization [...] mirror[s] the establishment of a general world marketplace' (Robinson *et al* 1991, p.227) and write off all cultural imports as part of neo-liberal cultural imperialism does not do justice to the text.

Such treatments assume an underlying ‘primordial’ culture which ignores the ‘third space’ reality of Abani’s postcolonial Nigeria. The reading of *GraceLand* in this paper should not work to undermine other scholars’ critiques, but merely fill the gap that is left by focusing solely on national ‘trauma’ and explicitly foreign media and culture. Certainly, in name alone, Elvis is a part of the global transmission of media. The fact that music in *GraceLand* is not issued a passport requires a recognition of the foreign, but this also brings about a recognition of de-nationalized, ‘third space,’ realities. Music does not fit into a neo-imperialist discourse where it over-powers a ‘fixed’ notion of culture, but instead is part of the transitive portrayal of identity in Nigeria. Abani’s statement about Africa ‘not existing’ and Said’s quote regarding Beethoven meet half-way in *GraceLand* and music is made part of a local identity—origin unstated and unknown. By viewing the way music in *GraceLand* obfuscates national labels, critics will better be able to see how it aids the ‘coming’ in ‘coming of age’ and captures the transient nature of identity and culture as they exist and change for Elvis.

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