

Mario Zarate

Professor Ramser

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Aberrationism and its Discontents

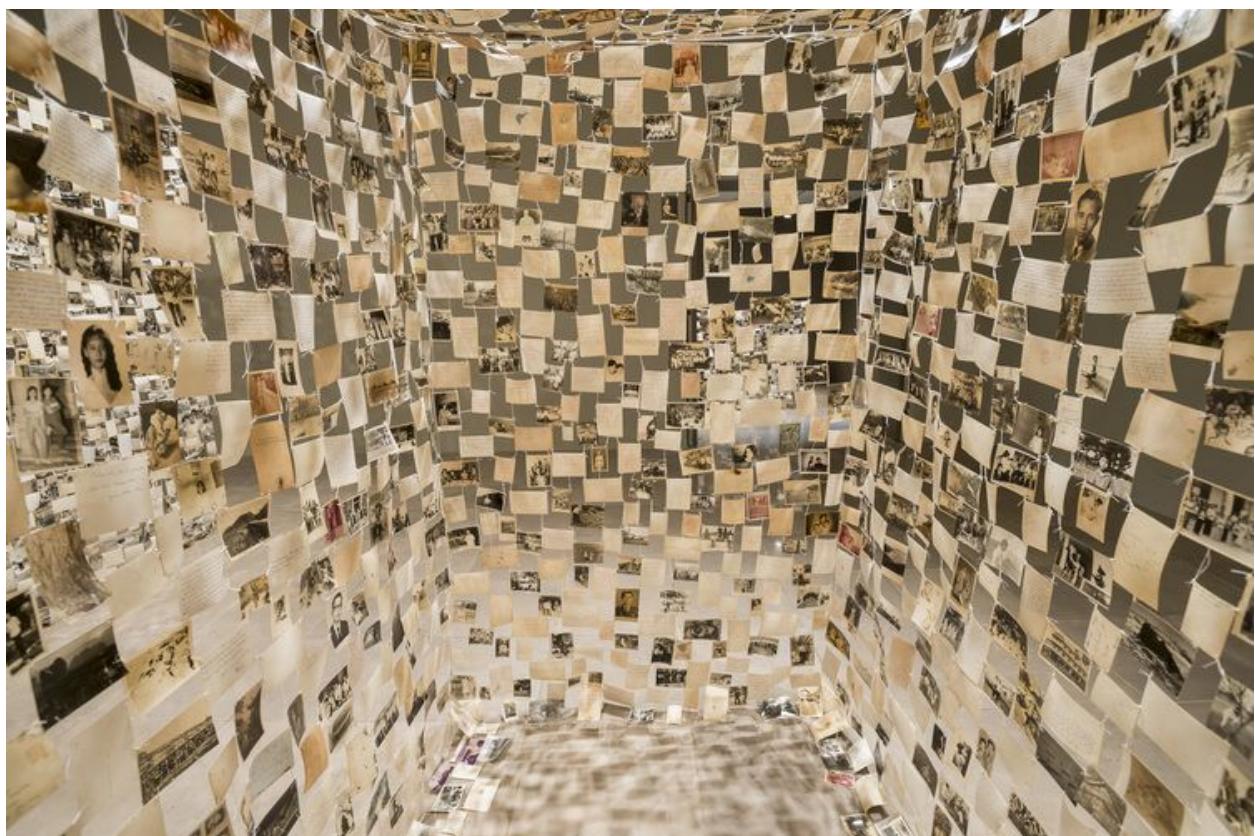


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Aberrationism and its Discontents

Refugee experiences can often be depicted as hyperbolic or unusual to the point where people cannot relate to them. When people cannot relate to them, they feel like they can more easily slander refugee experiences and get away with it because the lack of consideration is contingent upon connectivity with the subject. In the two essays from Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Displaced*, "Perspective and What Gets Lost" by Thi Bui, and "This Is What The Journey Does" by Maaza Mengiste, there are casual and relatable absurdities which help readers understand the refugee experience more intimately. In Chapter Four of *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen, the narrator describes a scene where him and his people reek of fish sauce. The stench drives away all the Americans who might have otherwise been welcoming. Such refugee experiences arise an existential situation amongst the populations that "do not belong here." There is a dependent American myth of what the refugee story is. This myth is open to interpretation and can always be changed by recognizing the casual absurdities that such individuals are subjected to. "Perspective and What Gets Lost," "This Is What The Journey Does," and Chapter Four of *The Sympathizer* are three essays which redefine the United States' perception of the refugee story.

In the visual essay "Perspective and What Gets Lost" by Thi Bui, there is a graphic titled "Perspective" which depicts what traveling light is like in 2017. It shows a lady with a heavy set of luggage and a carry on which includes toiletries, hair products, two iPads and a phone, tons of clothes, chocolates, and some alcohol. As the viewer scrolls down they see what refugees look

like when they travel light in 1978. The family has nothing more than the clothes on their back, an extra set, some identification cards, and ten limes in a plastic bag. The title “Perspective” apropos to the visual, demonstrates the commodification of what traveling light looks like and how the refugee experience compares. In the novel *Nausea*, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre writes, “...beginnings would have had to be real beginnings. Alas! Now I see so clearly what I wanted. Real beginnings are like a fanfare of trumpets, like the first notes of a jazz tune, cutting short tedium, making for continuity...” (page 22). The commodification of new beginnings is also the perspective which gets clouded in the myth that refugees choose to leave their country when in fact, they usually do not have much of a choice. It is so easy for Westerners to view the world from our own paradigm and see moving to another country the same as fleeing to another country. The introspective process of having an existential crisis, later shows this character in *Nausea* confused and detached from the very world he wanted to continue in. This is unlike those fleeing harmful situations. Willingly putting oneself into a feeling of *anomie* is a privileged situation for the individual taking part and is also inauthentic. The most authentic experience of detachment from one’s previous world is fleeing for economic refuge, safety, or general recovery from trauma. This authentication is a process which most United States citizens are not familiar with and cannot relate. “Perspective” illustrates the commodification of traveling versus fleeing.

The easiest way to familiarize Americans to such situation would be to simply witness the effects of trauma and identity politics that take place within refugees themselves, as demonstrated in the second graphic of the visual essay “Perspective and What Gets Lost” by Thi Bui. In this graphic, there is a young woman who is surrounded by fragments of her former self. These fragments are labeled family, friends, roots, job, home, cultural savvy/local know-how,

way of life, and language. Each fragment is an aspect of her previous identity lost to her forced flee. The significance of loss of identity is a crisis which existentialist Ernest Becker wrote about in his Pulitzer Prize winning book “The Denial of Death.” In chapter four of the book, titled “Human Character is a Vital Lie” he writes, “ most of us—by the time we leave childhood—have repressed our vision of the I primary miraculousness of creation. We have closed it off, changed it, and no longer perceive the world as it is to raw experience” (page 50). Humans never see only facts. Usually people do not merely see a woman when they see their mother. They often see a nurturing figure which is more familiar to them than most other people in their immediate world. In the same way, refugees do not experience the raw occurrences of traveling from one country to another. There is an emotional investment in where one comes from and what home means to them. The loss of one’s country deconstructs the person as a whole. Each interdependent attachment of identity which is associated with such place, (I would say most things experienced in a day i.e. food, clothing, language), are lost and must be reformed. Some Americans are unsympathetic to the refugee experience and need to address the proximity of that happening to us one day. “What Gets Lost” is a visual graphic which helps Americans become more sympathetic to stories where families are forced to escape.

Such trauma endured by those who flee their homes becomes manifested on their surface. In the essay “This Is What The Journey Does” by Maaza Mengiste, she describes an Ethiopian refugee who goes mad and starts conducting traffic in an intersection directly in harm's way. She argues that he is simply looking to be seen and heard. He is tries to find his voice. She calls this man Lazarus because the stories are similar. Lazarus was allowed to rise from the dead on the basis of not being allowed to speak. When he revived, he showed his ultimate gratitude for life

by giving up his most valuable possession: the ability to be heard. The ability to confirm one's existence in the world through wild displays which break public confines is found in the philosophical book *The Rebel* by Albert Camus. He defines, "What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion. A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command" (page 1). Likewise to Lazarus, the rebel becomes fed up with societies rules because the society's rules are deliberately against their own rebellious existence. The rules benchmarks for the absurdity which could be experienced if we did not have anarchists ready to deconstruct the lie they feed the public. In such metaphysics, the rules are just as arbitrary as the ones which will be formed directly proceeding, however the conditions of the new system usually serve those who revolted against the old system's favoritism. If Americans recognized their laws against refugees and organized themselves to change those laws i.e. being more honest about how many refugees enter the country, then we can achieve a higher moral polis. The character Lazarus forces privileged Westerners to reorient their proximus to the refugee story.

Next, there is the issue of estranging refugees who are unlike ourselves. In chapter four of Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* the narrator describes the reek of fish sauce all over the Vietnamese people's clothing. He claims it is more of a mark on their foreign nature than their squinty eyes. Akin to Ralph Ellison's book *Invisible Man* where a nameless narrator gets easily labeled and disregarded as a black man by many, he endured with his fellow brothers in an escape from their kidnapping, " Escaping, yes! helped by those who knew you and those who didn't know. Because for some it was enough to see him; others helped without even that, black

and white. But mostly it was our own who aided, because you were their own and we have always helped our own" (page 96). Each person within both novel stands by his own people because it is the only way to maintain power within that context. The shrinking populace of such people's amongst the majority only dilutes the whole group's power. In order to understand further, picture a pack of coyotes who clamp more strength with their jaws in a group than if they wander in solitude. Such is the minority and the refugee who are outnumbered by their "native" counterparts. One must commit doublethink when one is a foreigner in their new home. The main character in *The Sympathizer* is the epitome of such double-consciousness.

To conclude, the native counterparts give rise to a myth of their victimization and such myth cannot be believed by any intellectually honest individuals any longer. The irony of the situation's whole arises out of the white man's genocide over the real Native Americans in backstabbing contract dispute. The historical plot twist being those same native's blood being diluted into the Mexicans who wish to cross the southern border. As philosopher Michel Foucault writes, "the one who listened is not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth," (page 67) so each subject has power in interpretation of any occurrence, but the interpretation must be heard. Maybe the interpretation that us Americans should listen to is one that involves more than sympathy where we acknowledge the suffering; maybe it should be an interpretation of empathy for all people who become disenfranchised from their own existence.

Collection of Quotes

In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate

Toni Morrison

Our true nationality is mankind.

H.G. Wells

Motherfuckers will read a book that's one third Elvish, but put two sentences in Spanish and they [white people] think we're taking over.

Junot Diaz

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices.

Audre Lorde

You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

Ignorance and prejudice are the handmaidens of propaganda. Our mission, therefore, is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated.

Kofi Annan

You can't hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree.

Malcolm X

On the Subject

PERSPECTIVE

Is all they talk about, asking about the subject,

Talking to people who seem to be no more expert on subjectivity than a subject themselves,

And yet here we are:

Bashing and over-commodifying 'till the point of hoarding.

Incongruent with common thought: they are just like you, -

Yeah, I know that, (inner voice: but not really)

Yes, just like you except day to day, they get hit in the face more often.

They look fine to me (in a deeper voice so it seems more like facts than SUBJECT than

OPINION).

Not that kind of hit in the face.

The sort where your whole world goes spinning for just three seconds or so because you did not see that coming.

The wha-?

The microaggressions, the questions/statements being asked towards you and only you: where are you from?because you're a foreigner. You are a credit to your race.because nonwhites aren't usually as smart as whites. I'm not a racist, I have several asian friends.because I become immune to racism once I have foreigners under my wing, like a general with his assistant.

Or more accurately,

Like when I play the role I'm given.

In Vague Philosophical Writing

The 19th century philosophical writing style is often criticized to be vague, untested, and inscribed with a sense of entitlement. However, I know that this is the apex of humanity as human beings have been on the planet, certain groups of people, especially those of European descent have made accomplishments which have helped improve humanity. In the lineage of human progress the struggle for existence is a winning battle amongst noblemen: the Herbert Spencer's, the Edward Burnett Tylor's, the James George Frazer's, the Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's, as well as the Bentham's, the Rousseau's and the Hobbes' that preceded. I regard it as *unreasonable* to assume that Spencer tried to qualify racism scientifically and systematically. I regard it as *illogical* that Tylor and Frazer created a false spectrum of societies: from savage to civilized. I regard it as *uncooperative* that some men interpret Nietzsche's Übermensch as a justification for Hitler's Nazi party. I regard it as *unhelpful* to point out Jeremy Bentham's system as a plain justification for slavery. I regard it as *obstructive* to view Rousseau as a misogynist and a sexist. I regard it as *unaccommodating* to see Hobbes' Leviathan as merely a scared British man's absolute submission to the king because he fears chaos from childhood traumatization. I also find it very *disobliging* to view all these philosophers in negative light simply because they provide foundations for racism in our western society and are openly taught, preached, and quoted by emeritus professors all around the world.

Racism is not a product of these folks. Racism just gets *kinda* justified using these guys as a means of complicating what is being said. Spencer says every man for himself: the way it's always been and the way it always should be (convenient). Tylor and Frazer says our society is civilized and other societies are not because they don't live like us. Nietzsche says might makes

right (not even overinterpreted, basically quoted). Is it not preposterous that people say because these men have buildings, university squares, and statues, they prevail onward to give ethical justification to the bigotry of others? I do not think it is a big deal to see only white male names on corridors and street signs everywhere I walk, as a constant reminder that being half Puerto Rican is enough to not fully be part of this great male lineage of “progressive (for their time), esteemed philosophers, who without a doubt made an impression on the world.” I does not bug me at all that I am immediately disparaged when I enter a philosophical arena, and must over-wow the crowd in order to present myself as a respectable man. I can simply retain that my mother is Italian, or flaunt my green eyes about to show people that I’ve actually got white people blood. To wrap up: I am not Mario Zarate after my Puerto Rican father, I am Mario Zaratti after my Italian mother of course, even though her maiden name is Gallo. I will not be the Puerto-Rican-American philosopher because I’ll just be called an American philosopher-- that’s because they do not point out Italian heritage amongst whites anymore because they never immigrate over here anymore. I will be just like the philosophers who came before me: only white, only male, dominantly taught, and part of a continuation of the Greeks in Western Europe.



Sign: Vietnamese Refugees- “Boat People”- rowing their way to the United States-

NONLITERAL- into the simulation of capitalism/marketing/advertisements/psychology...

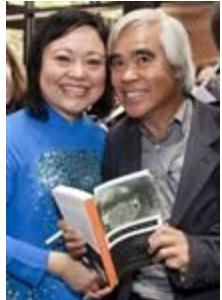


Apocalypse means *unveiling*. ...unveiling humanity's

paradoxical nature::



ICON



ICON LIVING



Apocalypse.

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