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Abstract

This thesis probes three texts to explore pathways between narration and refugee voices.

In Dave Eggers' text *What is the What* (2008), the words 'novel' and 'autobiography' on the title page set a framework for an exploration of the displacement of both genres. As Achak Deng, the Sudanese refugee-exile claims to have "gone out in search of a writer," so this thesis has sought textual manifestations of the voices of those labeled "refugees". In Eggers' text a temporarily-gagged narrator presents the question as to how the writer-refugee collaboration allows the voice of a refugee to be heard.

In *Little Liberia: an African Odyssey in New York* (2011), Jonny Steinberg's placement of himself inside the text demonstrates a different narrative approach to this question as he opts to share subject-space with refugee-exiles, Rufus Arkoi and Jacob Massaquoi.

Unsettling the idea of 'protagonist', the text challenges borders between story and history, telling and writing. Through a narrative relationship Steinberg probes acts of recounting, listening, reviewing in the routes he takes to the text eventually written.

By contrast, *Luxurious Hearses*, a novella by Uwem Akpan, places the extreme fate of the refugee-protagonist in the hands of a third-person narrator to wrestle with the distinctions between voice, mediation and representation. Through Jubril and his co-commuters, the text investigates forms of "rupture" (Bakhtin, 2000) that occur when identities are opportunistically exposed to social labeling.

Writer, reader and displaced person emerge as subjects of an economic framework which positions them within the powerful confines of terms such as citizen, refugee, exile. Said's affirming insight thus presents a challenge to all on this continuum to "cross borders, (to) break barriers of thought and experience" (Said, 2000:185). Reading the text then becomes associated with interpreting events through the collaborative work of relating, and through reviewing the frames of reference.

This thesis examines narrative approaches to refugee voices with the question 'How do voice and narration inflect the transitions in these texts involving refugees?' Rather than the easy transference this may seem to involve, acts of entrusting the timbre of such stories to texts require political vigilance and a sensibility cognizant that a globalized environment implicates all in the crises creating refugees.