Research Article

Jamele Watkins*

Silence as an Interlocutor in the Diaspora: Olumide Popoola's *this is not about sadness*

https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0023
Received August 21, 2018; accepted December 14,2018

Abstract: This article analyzes silences in the novella this is not about sadness. Using theories of community building by Fatima El-Tayeb, opacity from Édouard Glissant, and theories by Popoola herself, my work argues for the generative way silences function. Silence interweaves the text in community of women and PoCs who create healing and community in shared trauma. Further, the novella articulates diasporic space through language. The use of language is complimented by multiple silences; silences occur when recalling trauma. Violence against Black women looms as trauma occurs in and around the piece, but the novella rejects a narrative of trauma (considering even the title). The narrator continues to exert agency as she continues to narrate the story after her death; just because her life is over, the story is not over. In a novella centering around women, Popoola's diasporic story also allows for silence; the novella rejects the notion that words are necessary. Featuring multiple narrators, this novella embodies the struggle of and for language as well its emergence in a relational community.

Keywords: diaspora, rape, Black Britain, relational community

Audre Lorde famously said "Your silence will not protect you" (41). These words have propelled Black women across the world to speak truth, and I agree; her words are inspiring. My intervention shows the generative nature of silence before speech is possible. This article examines the various ways silence exists in Olumide Popoola's novella *this is not about sadness*. Within it, a new understanding of silence emerges. Silence facilitates conversation between characters to hold space for the unspeakable. The novella also destabilizes the importance of language through silence. This silencing exists on multiple levels: on the page through space, within the novella as pauses, and through the use of patois which silences the English language. This novella transcends linguistic and national boundaries; it incorporates English and Creole and takes place in England and South Africa. Popoola includes Jamaican Creole and South African English.[1] English and creole work as hybrid voices, as well do the multiple narrators within the story. Mrs. Thompson speaks patois, which also disrupts the novella and serves as a clear fissure as a narrator to the reader. In so doing, Popoola challenges dominant paradigms of language and diaspora. In this article, I argue that silence plays two different roles; silence mediates relationships as characters work through trauma, and silence takes a metaphorical role through destabilizing dominant language. Throughout the novella silences fill space that allow the depth of trauma to be felt.

Olumide Popoola is a Black German author and spoken word performer based in London. Publishing essays, a drama and poems, Popoola has been an influential author over a decade. She also wrote and edited (along with Beldan Sezan) a poetry collection entitled *Talking Home* in 1996. Recently, Popoola wrote a two-act Afro-German play entitled *Also by Mail* (2013) as part of the Witnessed series for a wider-African

1 The focus of this article will be on the Caribbean use of language instead of South African forms like Eish, and Izzit because the novella is mostly narrated by the Jamaican women. Therefore, my analysis will focus on patois.

***Corresponding author: Jamele Watkins,** Stanford University, E-mail: jamelew@stanford.edu

diaspora readership. Her recent work includes: poetry in the edited collection *Awaiting in the Future* (2015); "Fishing for Naija," in the journal *Feminist Studies* 41.1 (2015) as a fragment; *breach* (2016), co-authored with Annie Holmes; and novel *When we Speak of Nothing* (2018). For me, her English language novella, *this is not about sadness* generates am important discussion about feminist community and the Black diaspora.[2] It was published in 2010 and performed at the Goethe Institute in New York City during the Black German Heritage and Research Association's conference at Barnard College. Up until this point, little attention has been given to the novella.

this is not about sadness is written in English and Jamaican Creole and takes place in an immigrant neighborhood of London. The novella focuses on the lives of three women: Tebo, a South-African feminist and activist, Mrs. Thompson, an older reclusive Jamaican woman, and Amina, a young white English mother. Mrs. Thompson and Tebo, along with a third person narrator, narrate the novella. The intersection of three lives is examined through various community constellations. Popoola illustrates this primarily through giving space for silence and allowing language to slowly emerge. The relationship Tebo builds provides an opportunity for a community of women. These characters occupy a place of privilege as narrators; the main characters give a voice to women who experienced gendered violence. Featuring multiple narrators, this novella embodies the struggle of and for language as well its emergence in a relational community.

Similar to the hybrid voices of the narrators, the novella also utilizes hybrid form of novella and performance. The novella is a form that is a blend in itself—being blend of novel and short story. Popoola explains the way she envisions the novella as a performance piece: "[*this is not about sadness*] developed as a hybrid text, trying to be a truthful expression of my works as a writer and text-based performance artist. I was searching for a form that would function on the page and on the stage, and which I would perform rather than 'read'" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 97). Hybrid forms allow a new creation. In her use of orality, Popoola asserts: "I want to extend the term vernacular and include what I call hybrid voices, which I define here as speech, oral or written, which does not at first glance belong to a particular tradition. Something that happens because of the new realities of our lives" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 93). Popoola resists normative boundaries of genre convention to illustrate polyvocality in written form.

The first iteration of this piece exists as a three-page fragment of the same name. Popoola's "This is not about sadness (a fragment)" won the May Ayim Award in 2004. Shorter than the 104 page novella, the fragment only slightly covers the issues that the novella expounds on. The fragment is narrated mostly by an unnamed Black Jamaican woman in her 50s. While she is described as Jamaican, the Creole present on the page in the novella does not exist on the page in the fragment (but was possibly orally part of the performance). Tebo and Amina do not exist as narrators; instead, the fragment focuses on finding Tebo's body after the racialized violence. Germanist Claudia Breger published on Popoola's fragment in her book *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theater, Literature, and Film in Contemporary Germany* (2012). Breger considers narration, marginalized voices and community in her analysis. She argues that the piece creates community both socially and theatrically. Here, Breger does not consider Caribbean collectivity as I do, but she recognizes ways in which Popoola's community creates "alternative figurations of collectivity" (142). The diasporic community is essential for my reading of the novella, and in the fragment, community is essential in the complaints of Black Brits about racist soccer fans. The fragment silences the trauma, Creole language, and a community.

Community

Community is important to the lives of all three narrators. The non-linear novella focuses on the lives of three women, Tebo, Mrs. Thompson, and Amina. After being raped in her native South Africa, Tebo relocates to England to live with her brother. There, she befriends a neighbor, Mrs. Thompson. Additionally, she forms artistic and feminist activist groups, of which Amina is part. Tebo works as an activist for women: she fundraises for a woman who was raped and killed in her native South Africa; she facilitates two drama

2 Although the rules of English grammar dictate that the first letters in every word of a title should be capitalized, I choose to keep the spelling congruent with one the Popoola chooses herself in her article "In Tongues" I will discuss later in the paper.

classes, and she runs a community group and a women's art group (Popoola 41). The art gives the women a voice: "Each of them fleshing out first what initially would not be said, making a picture, then when it was able to fathom that picture, the voice would enter" (97). Most importantly, the women express their own opinions through first creating art and then speaking. These groups illustrate that Tebo seeks change through relationships with women.

Eventually, soccer hooligans kill Tebo in what appears to be racially and gender motivated crime. She narrates her own death: "I died a quick death. It didn't hurt much…I never knew how it happened" (93), but no one knows the details, including Tebo herself. This absence of knowledge points to real life; sometimes family and friends do not have all the answers surrounding someone's death. Conversely, the absence of knowledge also reflects the lack of importance to know how she died. The women of the community group still meets together: "But since they were all already at the centre, there was no reason to not have a session, even if it was without her" (101), they continued to meet and express themselves through art because of Tebo, who "had that gift of unraveling, letting someone unravel their tucked away needs" (97). Tebo's relevance for their lives did not change, even after she passed away.

Silence

Silence continues to play a large role in the relationship between Tebo and Mrs. Thompson and their relationships. Tebo and Mrs. Thompson work in an art form in a different medium, through gardening, which allows for them to bond. The relationship between Tebo and Mrs. Thompson begins in silence, as Tebo watches her garden before words emerge: "The girl can't pull herself away. In the bubble created by the confusion of her internal body clock and the new impressions, she's stuck…The woman's hands are moving, scraping, tugging" (Popoola 10). The act of gardening, like art, permits words to form. Tebo notices her; they look at each other. Tebo eventually compliments her on her garden, "I love your flowers in the back" (13), while the third person narrator scoffs, "How she [Tebo] speaks as if they were friends" (13). While Mrs. Thompson brings some potted plants into the house during a hailstorm, Tebo runs over to help (14). Without words but by using their hands to create something beautiful, their relationship evolves organically: "The woman works on the bed of peonies. The girl watches" (16). However, with the change of the season, the garden needed less attention (16). With the garden out of the forefront of their time together, the two can get to know each other. Silence continues to play a role in their relationship inside the house as Mrs. Thompson recounts her memories of her children, "Always, always just pain. Pause" (41). These written pauses take the place of silence (see also 53, 59). Instead of recounting the trauma of losing both children, Mrs. Thompson refuses to speak of it and instead shows pictures (56).

Popoola is interested in the stumble and process. The muscle of the tongue produces language even when it is not producing sound through the work it achieves. Popoola reflects on the stumble with her work in the article "In Tongues-The Trouble Inside Language." Popoola's novella asks the reader to reconsider what s/he/they has/have always held true. Instead of privileging the voice, Popoola's work calls the reader to consider the process of speech as relevant. The difficult inner dealings and stumbling in order to find the right words are just as relevant as the words themselves. While some value a flow of language, Popoola considers language changing through the work of the tongue; more specifically, she speaks to stumbling through language. Although tongue can flow fluently, occasionally, it does not. Popoola invites the reader to remember the times in which the tongue struggles: "Tongue as a language itself and as muscle producing sound and possibly struggling, enjoying, distorting, forgetting, innovating and altering words while doing so" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 98). The tongue actively works in language to remember and changes words on the basis of remembering. It forgets syntax or grammar and creates something new in its place. The active creation of words empowers; this new creation of the tongue imagines possibilities, as Popoola demonstrates, "Tongue as a muscle can be an instrument and by nature of that invites us to play, to try a different melody, to skip a beat so that the rhythm might compel from another angle (Popoola, "In Tongues" 98). Instead of following grammar rules or specific syntax guidelines, Popoola theorizes a resistance to sticking to rules. Instead she elicits the creation of new words, which comes from the individual and not a

rulebook or grammarians. Popoola demands changing the mindset on the use of the tongue to challenge power:

> The notion of in tongues and its call for an active engagement away from polarities like first versus second language, good or bad English—meaning literary or academically suitable – in keeping with tradition or challenging. Its pertinence re-establishes itself still through the allocation of privilege and the belonging or exclusion from places that install and generate those walks of life we might want to participate in (Popoola, "In Tongues" 98).

Popoola's theories of the tongue not only resist rules of language, they privilege certain languages and expressions over others. Popoola disputes the categories of good and bad language because they limit who is involved in the conversation; her theorization permits all people to participate without being forced to follow normative guidelines. Her novella depicts situations of silence and which language is a struggle. I believe Popoola's work presents the process of language, the importance of silence to get there, and the importance of process.

In part of the novella, art exists in the space of silence. Caribbean author and theorist M. NoursbeSe Philip discusses the importance of processing the English language in her article "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy." Much of her discussion is transferable to the struggle of language in Popoola's novella as the characters struggle to find words. For Philip, the image is essential (272). She describes how the image comes before the word: "At the heart of all creative writing therefore is the image, the basis for which the word or word symbol as I prefer to describe it" (Philip 273). This changes the power of the word instead of making it primary; it is secondary, and possibly even less important than the image. Philip recognizes a tension in the creation and recreation of the image-word as cyclic, not ending once the word emerges: "Tension is created by the interplay of image and word-image-creating word, word giving rise to further image and so on" (Philip 274). This destabilizes the importance of the word. The creation of new images leads to collective consciousness. The artist generates images that speak to the public to change society (273). In the case of the novella, everyone works collaboratively, instead of privileging one artist and one piece. Instead, everyone conceives art in silence and share this art with each other and support each other to deal with the world outside the walls of the community center.

Art and Activism

In the novella, communication emerges through art and activism, allowing feminist community to emerge. Tebo's activism centers around women: fundraising and leading drama groups. The characters in her group create language from art, instead of language being the gateway to creating art. In this way, art necessitates the production of language; art renders speech possible. Instead there is silence. The moment of silence in the community center allows for a space of contemplation and without being rushed. Further, there is no interruption while the artist tries to create her story. The space allows time and silence without interjection, question, or doubt. The space empowers women to process their experiences. The movement from art to speech is important, because the speech absent due to trauma. Throughout the book, absent language gives way for an image to release language to come into being in relational community. Tebo changes the community she is involved in. Because of her, the women meet together and her art discussions enable women to discuss past trauma where there were no words before.

Popoola describes her artistic work in relationship with language and those who do not have the chance to express themselves: "I have always been drawn to that which cannot be spoken, is uncomfortable or considered unsuitable to speak about" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 91). Popoola stimulates the unspeakable in art. The women create art, but the specifics remain unclear to the reader. One of the narrators details one piece by one woman: "It has one single pattern of henna colour applied to it; a small decoration, exquisitely beautiful and tender, and one shoot only with a few braches that curl and re-twist, sometimes closing in on themselves, sometimes reaching, reaching and remaining open, but always repeating themselves" (Popoola 43). The narrator describes and interprets the fabric without describing the outcome. Not all of the art is decoded to the reader. More unanswered questions than answered ones linger. This secretive aspect

echoes in the storyline. The emphasis lies on the necessity of a space to stumble through to explain and come into language. Not all information is given, nor is it necessary.

Silence facilitates the feminist bonds among the characters. Tebo and Mrs. Thompson meet in England, but their origins exist in diaspora: South Africa[3] and Jamaica, respectively. Tebo considers Mrs. Thompson her home: "The hideaway where we never quite wrote our stories into tales of womanhood, but hovered around, like moths encircling the flame" (Popoola 37). This hovering highlights the silences; not all things are said. Mrs. Thompson does not speak directly to Tebo and instead provides an inner monologue. Only the reader knows Mrs. Thompson's thoughts and opinions. Popoola analyzes her claim to space in the novella "[Mrs. Thompson] becomes a sort of narrator/commentator and takes over the novella temporarily, exercising her urge to be heard and claim space. This is a pivotal moment, as her withdrawal from the world due to losing both her children in an accident, has left her engaging with hardly anyone" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 92). Despite Mrs. Thompson's trauma and Tebo's death, they remain strong narrators in the novella: "their voices drive the narrative" (Popoola "In Tongues" 92). Mrs. Thompson's patois exerts agency and disrupts: "She [Mrs. Thompson] talks herself into the action, 'messing up' what otherwise could've been a 'straightforward' novel" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 92). In this disorder, there is rebellion: "Her [Mrs. Thompson's] interjections are her personal acts of opposing self-and superimposed voicelessness" (Popoola "In Tongues" 92). Together, these marginalized characters unsettle the narrative and portray language in non-standard ways.

Amina's whiteness contributes a different version of silence. A white mother, Amina does not take up space in the novel as narrator or as a character. The third person narrator begins telling Amina's story well into half way of the novella. (61). She rejects societal norms by choosing to co-parent with her friend. Amina's silence exists in her sense of purpose and feelings for Tebo. Her silence operates around her lack of career beyond motherhood (73). The last thing Amina writes is "But what are we going to tell our daughters?" (107). Amina doesn't tell her friends about her feelings for Tebo (75, 92). Silence also works as an interlecoutor in the relationship between Tebo and Amina; their friendship grows into a romantic relationship. Their encounters are filled with various moments of silence: "Amina hadn't been able to say anything at all" (100). Because of Tebo, Amina is able to impact the community and take over leading the group once she has gone. In this way, Tebo has linked Amina and Mrs. Thompson to the communities that they have lived in but not been part of.

The image is an important way in which silence serves to facilitate conversation and understanding. In a similar way, Tebo, Mrs. Thompson and the women at the community center cannot use their current language to express their experiences and had to first use the image. Mrs. Thompson cannot tell Tebo about the death of her children, and instead, she shows her a photo album: "I sey me waan show her sumting. She look tired herself. De photo album pon de table so...Me waan show her, waan her to know, to see me own dem." (51). Although this seems as if it could be a conversation starter, Mrs. Thompson does not speak about them and can only nod when Tebo asks her about them. While this seems as if it could be read as weakness and lack of agency, I imagine it otherwise. This serves as an act of empowerment being the master of your experience in the refusing to share. It rejects the necessity to share all pieces of yourself. Creating language to combat silencing women's voices is powerful. The creation of image and language allows for a space for women to speak in whichever way speech emerges. They create with their hands to generate words: "They do crafts and talk. The girl wants them to tell their stories in fabric" (Popoola 41). The art creation was "their voice, their breath, their choosing" (97). These elements amplify the importance of deciding what to share and how. In this sense, language is not privileged over the process. The silence in process acts as an interlocutor to bring clarity to the characters, but this clarity is not extended to the reader as a moment of opacity for the reader.

Opacity lacks clarity, which is another way to describe silence. Much is left unsaid; however, this silent information is nonessential. The specific images the women create remain unknown to the reader in a moment of opacity. Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant describes the relationship between Western

3 There are debates about whether or not African countries factor into the diaspora, but here, I do count South Africa as part of the African diaspora.

thought and transparency: "If we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is the requirement for transparency" (190). If the opposite of transparency is opacity, the novella argues for an understanding of people from a mode of opacity. Glissant urges readers to get beyond transparency, and he rejects the idea that someone has to grasp someone in order to empathize with them. He advocates beyond the desire to "grasp" someone (193). Think about it—Western culture requires the telling and retelling of trauma in courts, universities, to law enforcement and family members. This rejection of dominant forms is how Popoola approaches the novella. All of the information, and the retelling of trauma is vulnerable, hard, scary, and in the end the retelling of trauma benefits the other person, and not themselves. Therefore, opacity provides safety for the characters of the novella.

Creole

Creolization silences dominant language. The use of Jamaican Creole is subversive. Joan Anim-Addo researches patois in her book on Black women's voices in the UK, *Touching the Body* (2007). In the book, Anim-Addo argues that Caribbean English is non-standard and a sign of the unwillingness to let go of the original African language (180).[4] In fact, she calls diasporic texts "communal" and happening in a "creative space" (154). Polyphony is a feature in creole texts (Anim-Addo185). We see these communal aspects in Popoola's novella. Anim-Addo also discusses NourbeSe Philip and her relationship to language. Anim-Addo explains Philip's work: "A connectedness with silence, sexuality, gender and race are central to Philip's poetics and she returns to the genesis and functioning of African-Caribbean women's silence." (Anim-Addo 187). NourbeSe Philip calls creolization of English standard language radical: "The formal standard language was subverted, turned upside down, inside out and sometimes even erased. Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at times; rhythms held sway" (Philip 275). For example in the novella, Mrs. Thompson asks Tebo, "Yuh come here fi stay? Fi work?" (Popoola 16). The variety provides awkwardness and jolts a listener used to standard forms. Creole is not just deviant English, but instead "because the Creole signals intimacy even as writing implies distance, written Creole embodies contradiction. Because of the association of 'real language' with a standard written form and this with uniformity and homogeneity, written Creole conveys a contention with homogeneity" (Lalla 74). Using this form, Popoola draws the reader in to create intimacy but at the same time, the reader cannot know all of Mrs. Thompson. Further, Creole is unorthodox: "Not only is Creole dialogue deviant text but deviant text is Creole dialogue" (Lalla 62). Popoola constructs a force against standard language rules. I believe that Popoola does not simply change the standard in order to reflect Creole to indicate exoticism or to other Mrs. Thompson (Lalla 69). Instead, she manipulates reader expectation and gives her space to be vulnerable and honest. Creole allows for an air of intimacy with distance.

Creolization offers not a seamless whole but to create something with the pieces. This ability in beneficial because it rejects language norms while also challenge dominant forms. Creolization shows "how difference can be powerful" (El-Tayeb Keynote). The use of Creole as "multiple and dissonant dimensions of Caribbean identity" (Lalla 79), is mirrored in multiple narration. Popoola uses first person narration for the main characters: Amina, Tebo, and Mrs. Thompson. First person vernacular voices and multiple narrators are "typical of Caribbean and postmodern literature" (Forbes12). In her article "In Tongues," Popoola clarifies her use of multiple narrators as twofold: "plural writing as an opportunity for both inclusiveness and literary innovation" (95). Popoola uses many voices, including that of a spirit. Despite her death, Tebo continues to play an important role as narrator in the novel: "She [Tebo] calls for an appropriate evocation since although she's now dead, she keeps being called (witnessed)" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 99). More importantly, Tebo persists in telling her story. For El-Tayeb, creolization is useful to question of authenticity.

Through the characters of Tebo, Amina, and Mrs. Thompson, Popoola shows how a community can form based on relational affinity instead of a familial one. Fatima El-Tayeb's book *European Others* unpacks ways

4 For information on Creole suppression, please see Jan Voorhoeve and Ursy Litchveld, Creole Drum, trans. Vernie A. February NewHaven: Yale, 1975.

in which a queering of relational communities is possible. It demonstrates the importance of ideology in making connections, instead of race and homeland. El-Tayeb argues for a relational diaspora, which could include People of Color across various national boundaries. For this analysis, she utilizes theories from Edouard Glissant. El-Tayeb adopts Glissant's theory of the poetics of relation in examining the connection between women in Popoola's edited poetry volume *Talking Home: Writing Home from our own Quills* (1996).[5] The poetry collection includes women of various ethnicities, who are linked based on feminist ideology. A similar claim can be made for Popoola's *this is not about sadness*. This poetics is congruous to Popoola's text in that "calls forth disorder" (Glissant 138). For Glissant, identity should not be dependent on roots and family trees, nor should they be dependent on legitimizing, or "projected" onto others, but instead, the focus should be on connection (143-144, 153). The focus in *this is not about sadness* exists in the connection between the women based on a chosen family.

Feminist Revision

Popoola insists on focusing on women, making and remaking history. Tebo describes this as "histories are the futures in the making" (41). Tebo's statement brings the past and the future together in fluidity. With this interpretation of history, it can be written and rewritten and therefore changed. Particularly, the liminal figures stand at the forefront of this change as they meet together. Popoola explains, "[*this is not about sadness*] is about people who matter," (Popoola "In Tongues" 96). Mrs. Thompson further explains Tebo's saying: "[History] needs to breathe so it can know where it is and what it's supposed to do." (41). Like the silence, history needs breath-a moment, a silence to make sense of it all. These marginal figures matter to each other and build community. Amina, the white English character in the novella, is also a mother; she, too, finds community amongst these women as she falls in love with Tebo. Mrs. Thompson feels validated and accepted in her neighborhood for the first time thanks to Tebo: "My garden is full. I cannot remember de last time so many people are friendly to me…They are here for her but for me also" (52). The relationship between Tebo and Mrs. Thompson begins and ends in the garden. As I pointed out earlier in the essay, Tebo's observation of the garden propelled their relationship. Tebo compliments Mrs. Thompson on her flowers and helps her garden, and in Mrs. Thompson's garden, the garden Tebo helped with, the community celebrates Tebo's life. Because of Tebo's death, Mrs. Thompson became part of a relational community.

Popoola also intercedes in feminist discourse. While I would call this a feminist project, it is also important to note that the main character dies and is raped in the story. For many feminists, this type of story is incongruent with feminism because of the violence against a Black woman's body. However, I believe the novella rejects a narrative of trauma. Tebo is involved in activism to support a South African woman who was raped because she is lesbian (29). Further, side characters in the community work to make documentary about rape survivors world wide, and the characters discuss the anti-rape condom created originally in South African (83). Tebo is a survivor herself, and incorporates this activism within the community group she coordinates.

Tebo embodies a powerful position in the novel as narrator before and after death; her death is known already in the first few pages, so it comes to no surprise to the reader. Even her death is unclear; the reader only knows that she dies. Describing the details is unimportant; instead Popoola shifts the focus back to the fact that she was in the town to create a feminist community. These stylistic choices make it less traumatic for the reader because Tebo narrates most of the events, and most of the details of traumatic events are absent. This distancing in the novella requires the reader to make the vague connections more lucid. In an email exchange, Popoola offered me an alternative title to her novella: "This is not so much about sadness but about the love (friendship), about healing and connecting beyond the experience of trauma and pain" (Popoola). It is Tebo who narrates the last lines of the novella. Doing so, she reminds the reader who she is and her name. This is a sad story, but the protagonist's death is not the end of the story. Instead, the novella tells the story of healing and community building. The characters reclaim their identities through community and artistic expression.

5 Original Title: *Talking Home: Heimat aus unseren eignen Federn.*

Conclusion

Popoola resists dominant structural systems to give space for innovative creation. *this is not about sadness* challenges dominant paradigms of language and silence. Choosing to write in English and Creole, Popoola upsets dominant paradigms through the use of a hybrid language form. Popoola extends the hybrid form of novella (both novel and short story) further to create her own hybrid form—a performed novella. In the hybrid genre of novella and performance, Popoola tells the story of silence and working through silence to allow words come. The women of the novella find community together and create art in silence so that language can emerge. Language remains a constant negotiation. Popoola resists tradition through language and the performance of the novella demonstrates how Popoola resists boundaries. The space of silence fills the novel through showing the difficulty in sharing trauma, and art becomes the space of negotiation for language to come. In this sense, she dis-orders language so that the speaker occupies a position of power to be the creator of rules for her/him/themself. Further, the narrators are creators of their own stories. Silence marks the transition between characters and they allow silence to fill space. In this sense, silence works as a co-author or collaborator in these communal spaces and conversations. Demanding silences empowers the narrators as they meet together and choose to share part, but not all of themselves. Setting a space for silence in the diaspora, Popoola chooses language as she sees fit, giving silence space for language/s to emerge.

Works Cited

Anim-Addo, Joan. *Touching the Body: History, Language, and African-Caribbean Women's Writing*. London: Mango Publishing, 2007.

Breger, Claudia. "Evoking Community in Onstage Narration." *An Aesthetic of Narrative: Transnational Theater, Literature and Film in Contemporary Germany*. Ohio State University Press, 2012, pp. 137-45.

El-Tayeb, Fatima. "Dimensions of Diaspora: Women of Color Feminism, Black Europe, and Queer Memory Discourses." *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 43-80.

---. "Transnational Perspectives in Black Germany." Black German Heritage and Research Association Conference, May 23-25, 2018, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada. Keynote Address.

Forbes, Curdella. "X Press Publications: Pop Culture, 'Pop Lit' and Caribbean Literary Production." *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2006, p. 12.

Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. University of Michigan Press, 2010.

Lalla, Barbara. "Creole and Respec' in the Development of Jamaican Literary Discourse" *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2005, pp. 53-84.

Lorde, Audre. "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" *Sister Outsider*, Crossing Press, 2007, pp. 40-44.

Philip, M. NourbeSe, "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy." *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, Africa World Press, 1990, pp. 271-78.

Popoola, Olumide. *this is not about sadness*. Unrast Verlag, 2010.

---. "This is not about sadness" (fragment). *May Ayim Award: erster international schwarzer deutscher Literaturpreis 2004*. Orlanda, 2004, pp. 41-43.

---. "In Tongues: Imag(e)ing Presence." *Dialogues across Diasporas: Women Writers, Scholars, and Activists of Africana and Latina Descent in Conversation*, edited by Marion Rohrleitner and Sarah E. Ryan, Lexington Books, 2013, pp. 92-99.

---. Message to author. 5 Aug. 2013. Facebook Messenger.