

Ideology and its Non-all: Rereading Repression, Race and Sexuality in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

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Abstract

This paper closely focuses on how ideology and repression are interdependent facets through the lenses of both psychoanalytic and philosophical theories. It shows how repression works in often overlooked and nuanced areas of individual internalization of ideology – leaving its traces in the form of dilemma and disillusion. This paper explores an array of themes such as guilt, alienation and pathos that emerge through a dissonance between ideology and sexuality in James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*. Elucidating upon Baldwin's narrative, this paper divulges the precarious boundary between race and sexuality by delineating the structural impasse that sustains both. Instead of simply positing the correlation between race and sexuality in terms of repression, this paper refers to Lacanian psychoanalysis to tarry with silence and utterance that hauntingly undergird the entropic non-all of their ideological construct.

Keywords: ideology, sexuality, repression, alienation, psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

Critical receptions surrounding James Baldwin's novels have predominantly posited themselves with a peculiar proclivity towards considering socio-political and racial facets. Even though the spectrum that inhabits these tenets is significant - perhaps even central - to his oeuvre, they are certainly not representative of the vast extent of the spectrum itself. The imposition of contours that strictly adumbrate his novels within the African American thematic crudely defies the colossal nature of his elliptical ingenuity. Nathan Scott, for example, argued that Baldwin should focus on African American issues while other works would be a deflection and a detour (Scott 27-28). Despite such criticism, Baldwin perceived the sexual issue to be an inherently racial and political issue as well. In his interview with Richard Goldstein, Baldwin explicitly stated that the "sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined" (Baldwin, "Go the Way" 178). In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin subtly yet strongly delineates this interrelationship between sexuality and race through the character of David. Through his tormenting and repetitive oscillations to find a final mooring for his sexual disposition, he only manages to divulge the precarious nature of both his subjectivity and sexuality. In psychoanalytic theory, the notion of subjectivity is problematized as a construct that arises through an unconscious repression of sexuality itself. In his perspicacious essay, Mladen Dolar, focuses on this issue from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective: "As a subject, one has to choose being, but a being devoid of thought[...]while the other alternative, that of thought without being, belongs to the unconscious" (Dolar 27). The discourse of psychoanalysis reinvigorates the duality of being and thought with great complexity. The entire theoretical corpus of Lacan is especially dedicated towards a formulation of the notion of the subject and its existential (im)possibility. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject is 'a being-of-language' (parlêtre, to use Lacan's

condensed writing). The subject is always “fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations” (Žižek, *The Sublime* 125). This intersubjective symbolic network of relations is purely “performative, it cannot be accounted for by reference to the ‘real’ properties and capacities of the subject” (Žižek, *The Sublime* 126). Lacan’s statement that the “signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier” (Lacan, *Écrits* 694) is not directed towards subsuming the subject within the mire of the Symbolic but to reinstate the true kernel of the subject to be decentered from the symbolic chain of causality itself. In the dispersed chain of signifiers, the “point de capiton is the point through which the subject is ‘sewn’ to the signifier, and at the same time the point which interpellates individual into subject by addressing it with the call of a certain master-signifier[...]in a word, it is the point of the subjectivation of the signifier’s chain” (Žižek, *The Sublime* 112). So, it is not only the subject but also the master who relies on the master signifier for their ontological essence. It is through this subtle indication that Lacan implies the fact that both the subject and the master of the symbolic network are marked by an inherent lack. This lack is supported by knowledge. Lacan mentions that if “there is knowledge that is not known[...]it is instituted at the level of S2 which is the one I call the other signifier. This other signifier is not alone. The stomach of the Other, the big Other, is full of them” (Lacan, *The Other Side* 33). The Lacanian notion of the big Other is the order of the signifier in the symbolic network. The big Other is the final support of the symbolic network as well as the guarantor of the subject’s symbolic identity as the subject is “originally split, divided: he is divided as to the object himself, as to the Thing, which at the same time attracts and repels him” (Žižek, *The Sublime* 204). The Lacanian notion of the Thing is of a pre-symbolic kernel of enjoyment that the subject loses through his entry into the desexualized symbolic order itself. From here, Lacan proceeds to formulate two of his major propositions – that there is no sexual relationship and that the subject is castrated. I will focus on these two facets as they are very pertinent to the fundamental tenet of this paper. I will elucidate upon David’s tormenting journey as a homosexual American through the meandering gloom of Paris and his disorienting association with Giovanni whose disposition both attracts and repels him. I will focus on the incapacity of his ideological rubric that informs his masculine American self and disenchant his amorphous sexual self. I will delineate how this ideology fails to self-enclose itself in David’s psyche and jeopardizes his desperate attempts to reconcile his masculine self through the female figure of Hella. I will finally show how sexuality functions as the inherent impasse of ideology and how every repression (racial as well as sexual) involves this negative deadlock.

2. Initiation and Encounter with the Other

From the preliminary pages of *Giovanni’s Room*, David is presented to be very reflective and pensive about his stature. He is thoughtful and decisive about his appearance, especially in the form of his mirror image: “My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times” (Baldwin 9). Lacan, in “Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function”, mentions that the subject’s recognition of himself in the mirror is crucial “because it manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject primordially identifies with the visual gestalt of his own body” (Lacan 92). This identification, however, is extremely vulnerable as this “imaginary self-experience is for the subject the way to misrecognize his radical dependence on the big Other, on the symbolic order as his decentred cause” (Žižek, *The Sublime* 116). The Symbolic takes precedence over

the specific. David's 'face' is then rightfully mentioned to have been visualized repetitively in the atemporal matrix of symbolic ideology. David's recognition of his image as a descendent of his ancestors who "conquered a continent" (Baldwin 9) is mediated by a white, heterosexual and hypermasculine ideology. Jürgen E. Grandt, in his essay, also mentions that David's assertion of whiteness inevitably entails "eradication of the non-white, only to be faced again by the literal and figurative blackness of history" (Grandt 276). This view is very crucial as it emblemizes the exclusionary logic of ideology as its inherent doxa. I will explore this topic in a later section of this paper. For now, we will see how David – throughout the course of the entire novel – will restlessly tarry with this trait to find "something to be moored to" (Baldwin 11). In his desperate attempt to find an ideological mooring point, David will experience countless encounters that will rattle the seemingly apodictic nature of his masculine subjectivity. One of the first instances of these encounters occurs with the character of Joey. Their unexpected sexual encounter defies the masculine and heteronormative notion of subjectivity upon which David enshrines his sense of the self. "But Joey is a boy", David disconcertedly asserts (Baldwin 14). This encounter with Joey is significant as it presents the first intimation of that inexplicably traumatic substance that Lacan referred to as the '*Jouissance*'. Lacan sees the very kernel of the symbolic discourse through the failed assimilation of this strange enjoyment. It is not only the symbolic that gets discursively constructed with a series of signifiers but it also "produces the dimension that Lacan calls the Real, which is related to the points of structural impossibility/contradiction of symbolic reality itself. This is what irredeemably stains the symbolic, stains its supposed purity..." (Zupančič 41). The subject becomes desperate to identify and adumbrate the contours of this strange feeling and get rid of the disillusionment. David enunciates his own disillusionment through a reference to his body and its loss of some supposedly pre-existent purity. He mentions that his "own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing" while the desire that was rising in him "seemed monstrous" (Baldwin 14). David's sense of self completely collapses with his subversive sexual act with Joey. His consciousness gets reduced to an atomic level while the symbolic discourse liquidates around him. "A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty word...I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror" he rumbles (Baldwin 14). This chasm at the very heart of the symbolic is probably what Hegel called "the night of the world" (Žižek, *The Metastases* 122). This is the radical negativity that lurks within the fabric of the Symbolic. Lacan links this negativity lurking behind everything that is positive with the Freudian notion of the '*Urverdrängung*' or primal repression that coincides with the emergence of the subject (Zupančič 11). This radical negativity is the minus that sustains the curvature of every positive substance in a subject. But the signifying/positive operator of this minus is precisely nothing other than "castration" (Zupančič 52). David's subjective disposition is constructed by "being filtered through of the signifier" (Žižek, *The Sublime* 136) that castrates him. This castration means "that jouissance must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire" (Žižek, *The Metastases* 97). David's visceral and agitating proclivity to submit to this 'law' of desire is a recurring event throughout the novel. He will refer to this tendency as a 'decision' made long ago after his encounter with Joey. This decision nudges him "to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me" (Baldwin 24-25). This enforced submission to the law of masculine desire will, however, not last very long as nobody truly "stays in the garden of Eden" (Baldwin 28). But what David fails to understand is that the garden of Eden does not exist outside his unconscious as a spatial and tangible space. This prelapsarian garden is very much present as an epistemological entity whose boundaries are

constantly threatened by his own *jouissance*. This gnawing shame that David tries to evade is precisely connected to *jouissance* that is the most intimate in the subject (Miller 13). David will explore the edge of his Symbolic and encounter this *jouissance* in its most radically unnerving form after meeting Giovanni. Baldwin formulates the narrative – surrounding this meeting – with a very dense and dirgelike tonality that ominously recalls the dark ‘cavern’ that David refers to after the incident with Joey (Baldwin 14). David describes the bar like an “ill lit sort of tunnel” (Baldwin 29) where the sight of a transvestite boy turns his stomach in the same way as “the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement turns some people’s stomachs” (Baldwin 30). The usage of the excremental metaphor is suggestive of the fact that David is threatened by the excremental Real that resists the homeostatic enclosure of his Symbolic identity. He is petrified and anxious at the sight of the ‘grotesque’ Other whose presence is reflective of the non-all of his masculine ideology. The character Jacques rightfully sums up this jarring consternation of David. “You are afraid it may change you”, he says (Baldwin 57). Jacques further comments: “If you think of them as dirty, then they will be dirty – they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his” (Baldwin 57-58). Dirt, flesh and excrement are all metaphors that posit the age-old Manichean binary. What is interesting is the fact that the opposite of these grotesque properties (beauty, spirit, soul etc) are not present within a mythical gilded cage of purity while keeping the ‘dirt’ outside. The ‘grotesque’ is the inextricable obverse of the same fabric that foregrounds purity. David will become painstakingly aware of this fact after his restless attempts to sustain his heteronormative sexuality fails. This uncannily projects one of Freud’s most famous dictums which I will reflect upon in the next section.

3. Wo es war, soll ich werden

Sigmund Freud, in the thirty-first lecture of his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, proclaimed his canonical dictum: “Wo es war, soll ich werden”. In English, it is roughly translated as “Where id was, there shall ego be” (Freud 112). Freud’s idea regarding this dictum was heavily invested in the notion of the ego. Freud was surmising about the ways of strengthening it so that the ego could “widen its field of vision, and so to extend its organization that it can take over new portions of the id” (Freud 111-112). In Lacan’s rereading of this, the power dynamic is somewhat demystified through the introduction of the notion of the ‘symptom’. The symptom is nothing but the formation of a positive substance that gives a structure to the inherent negativity pertaining to the formation of the Symbolic. The symptom ties the three circles of the Borromean knot – that is representative of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real in Lacan – and “keeps them together in order to form a knot” (Dolar 36). Žižek is very particular in his Lacanian reading of Freud’s dictum: “That is how we must read Freud’s *wo es war, soll ich werden*: you, the subject, must identify yourself with the place where your symptom already was; in its ‘pathological’ particularity you must recognize the element which gives consistency to your being” (Žižek, *The Sublime* 81). We must also read David’s relationship with his fiancée, Hella, along this line as well. The figure of Hella appears as a faint suggestion of being the bastion of salvation – freeing David from the unrest of Giovanni’s room. David is very obvious about his queasy feeling of being with Giovanni and within Giovanni’s room. He emphatically mentions the disorder of Giovanni’s room and refers to his life with Giovanni as being “beneath the sea” where “hours and days had no meaning” (Baldwin 73). He also mentions that beneath the joy and excitement of being with Giovanni, there was “anguish” where he “slipped and slid, losing balance, dignity and pride” (Baldwin 73). Looking at

Giovanni's face made him "guilty" (Baldwin 73). He tries to cope with guilt as well as to run away from it. He even tries to ameliorate the disorder but realizes that the "key to this disorder...was not to be found in any of the usual places" as it was "not a matter of habit or circumstances or temperament; it was a matter of punishment and grief" (Baldwin 84). Lacan meditates upon these issues by saying that guilt "is the effect on the subject of an Other that judges, thus of an Other that contains the values that the subject has supposedly transgressed" (Miller 13). David is guilty of his very existence. He confronts Giovanni's room and his 'transgressive' life within it in metaphysical terms. In turn, his ideal masculine image is also confronted by his big Other of heterosexual ideology. Monica B. Pearl, in her essay, mentions that one of the first intimations of this ideology occurs when David overhears his father telling his aunt that he wanted David to be a man (Pearl 68). He tries to follow this ideology for escaping the agonizing gaze of the Other. He longs to "go home" but not to a hotel in Paris but to "home across the ocean, to things and people I knew and understood..." (Baldwin 62). David begins to associate Giovanni with Paris by saying that he "belonged to this city" (Baldwin 62) which did not belong to him. Baldwin further explores this correlation between Paris and Giovanni and connects it with the metaphor of the dirt that has been discussed above. David mentions that while going to Giovanni's room after their first meeting, Giovanni passingly mentioned something about "his room being very dirty" (Baldwin 83). Waking up after their first night together, David finds Giovanni asking him to "look at the garbage of the city" (Baldwin 83). "...all of the garbage of this city? Where do they take it? I don't know where they take it – *but it might very well be my room*", Giovanni ruminates (Baldwin 83; emphasis added). The metaphors of 'dirt' and 'excrement' reappear for adding Giovanni's room to the list. Giovanni's room becomes the very leftover/abject entity, the "little piece of Real, a disgusting protuberance which cannot be integrated into the totality of our own body" (Žižek, *The Sublime* 85). David is disillusioned and agitated as his masculine/heterosexual ideological matrix is incapable of accounting for his strange *jouissance* and for the "beast which Giovanni had awakened" in him (Baldwin 81). This is the entropic foundation from which David will venture into his arc of salvation. One of the early intimations and suggestions that David acquires is presented to him by an old lady who advises him to find a "woman, a *good* woman, and get married, and have babies" (Baldwin 67). There is no better injunction than this hyper-conventional formula for finding socially sanctioned stability and David will covetously cling to it. When Hella sends a letter, announcing her return to Paris, David finds his *point de capiton* that would 'quilt' all the sporadic smithereens of his heteronormative American identity in his Symbolic field of aberrant signifiers. The *point de capiton*, in Lacan, is the nodal point that "on the level of the signifier itself, unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is, so to speak, the word to which 'things' themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity" (Žižek, *The Sublime* 105). David's expression after reading Hella's letter is very pertinent: "I folded this letter, which I now realized I had been awaiting for many days and nights, and the waiter came and asked me what I wanted to drink. I had meant to order an aperitif but now, in some grotesque spirit of celebration, ordered a Scotch and soda. And over this drink, which never seemed *more American* than it did at that moment, I stared at *absurd* Paris..." (Baldwin 90). David posits the letter as the nodal point around which a generic drink becomes a signifier of being 'American'. We have to understand that, historically, homosexuality has been treated with extreme reprobation in the United States. Homosexuality was banned and criminalized in every state while the American Psychiatric Association referred to homosexuality as a "psychopathic" disturbance and aligned it with "pedophilia, fetishism and sexual sadism (including rape, sexual assault, mutilation)" (Association 38-39). The arbitrary nature of

ideology becomes clear when a number of people are occluded and denied a 'true' American identity for their 'aberrant' sexuality. What is of extreme relevance is the simultaneous 'Othering' that happens with the consolidation of a normative identity. This is how – in David's speech – Paris becomes this 'Other' city that is 'absurd' with its chthonic catatonia. David's stern desire to reflect the bright side of being 'American' is strongly suggestive of how ideology germinates with the awareness of its inherent limit. David thus associates Paris, Giovanni and Giovanni's room to be the inherent limit to his desire of subsuming the heteronormative ideology. Later, Hella will also question this strange association of "why getting out of Giovanni's room means getting out of Paris" (Baldwin 128). But David, of course, will never have an answer.

After reading Hella's letter, David pays for his drink and goes off to "find a girl, any girl at all" (Baldwin 91). From here on, David will become more and more invested in his longing to reconstruct his masculine identity in various ways. In a way, he is after a union or an 'event' that "stops not being written". This is how Lacan postulates the subject's repetition of an act that revolves around the inherent negativity/gap of the subject's Symbolic identity whereas the appearance of a proper object at the very gap marks the shift from "doesn't stop not being written" to "stops not being written" (Župančič 134). A writing occurs on the fabric of the Symbolic and the subject finds a foundation. The 'object' that appears and "gives body to this gap" is precisely the Lacanian *objet petit a* (Žižek, *The Metastases* 178). This 'object' is nothing but a fantasy construct – something that covers the lack of the Symbolic. Mladen Dolar, in his essay, sums up the status of this enigmatic object correctly: "The covering of two lacks produces something; the very status of the object of desire, which appears precisely where the two lacks coincide - the lack of the subject and the lack of the Other" (Dolar 25). David is surprisingly aware of the inherent depravity and shallow performativity of his acts. He mentions his heterosexual encounter with Sue as "a job of work. A job which it was necessary to do in an unforgettable manner" (Baldwin 96). Baldwin is acerbic in his way of making the narrative saturated with libidinal acts that become morbidly mechanical. The pattern of David's failed disavowals becomes interminable while his helplessness becomes tangible. After dropping off Sue, David finds himself to be incredibly forlorn. His gaze pierces through the steady walls of the houses where he imagines "little Jean Pierre and Marie" being cared for by their parents who "held them in and protected them against the darkness and the long moan of this long night" (Baldwin 100). Baldwin is careful about exerting the recurrence of the binary in this case. The houses with their steady walls and caring ambience are preset against the darkness of the night outside. But there is another element that burrows through the dichotomy and demystifies it. That element is David himself. He will follow through the agony of the night and desire for the security of the walls but – at the same time – bring out its dialectic in due course. "I wanted children. I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed", he asserts (Baldwin 100). Just like Sue, David will engage Hella to the task of covering the void and fulfilling his desire. Baldwin attempts to construct Hella's disposition along this line. When receiving Hella from the station, David welcomes her as if his arms were "home" which was "welcoming her back there" (Baldwin 114). Hella is not another human but precisely David's symptom. The material tonality surrounding Hella points to a kind of instrumental inanimacy. For instance, David describes her as a "familiar, darkened room" (Baldwin 116) in which he fumbles to find the light or as a "walled city" (Baldwin 118) that will allow the "king of glory" (Baldwin 118) to come through. Hella is aware of it. She is mindful to point out that men like to be at the mercy of women as it

“strokes the misogynist” (Baldwin 119) in them. What Hella isn’t aware of is that both men and women are implicated by the same dimension that renders their existence with anaclitic dependency. Men and woman are not opposite sexes who together form a ‘whole’ since “each of them is already in itself a failed Whole” (Žižek, *The Metastases* 160). Both David and Hella would tarry with this non-all symbolic matrix of their “ex-sistence” (Zupančič 54) to the point of aporia. David will become increasingly distant and disturbed to the point of making Hella plead and cry for attention (Baldwin 152). Despite his fervent desire to construct the contours of his socio-symbolic life, David will gradually disrupt it with time. The important facet – that is so central to Baldwin’s tenet – is this dilemma. David’s adamant attempt to restore his subjectivity is nothing but an injunction to suppress his corporeal transgressions through the affect of guilt. The conventional ‘law of desire’ compels and binds him to the Symbolic big Other of heterosexual masculinity. In this sense, David is essentially doing nothing other than tarrying with this guilt. Hella is precise in her reproach of this aspect: “I’ll soon be gone. Then you can shout it to those hills out there, shout it to the peasants, how guilty you are, how *you love to be guilty!*” (Baldwin 154; emphasis added). There is essentially no other ontological component to David’s life than these psychic affects which haunt him. Hella abandons David as he watches his reflection “fading away” (Baldwin 157) before his eyes. David is left with nothing except himself. But has it not always been like this? Hasn’t he always been with himself and loving only himself? Hasn’t he always breathlessly chased the forever slipping signifiers of heterosexual knowledge for forfeiting the windless opening of his *jouissance*? The most scathing criticism of this predicament of David comes from Giovanni himself: “You have never really been here...What are you always hiding? And do you think I did not know when you made love to me, you were making love to no one? *No one!*” (Baldwin 130). David is absent on the visceral level while his corporeal self is trapped within the rubric of ideology that is metaphorically suggested by the “man and the woman...who walked together among roses” (Baldwin 133) in the torn wallpaper of Giovanni’s room. That is the way David gets woven into the chain of his socio-symbolic matrix. He *returns* to where his unconscious repression lies but not without a cost. He is the paradigm of the Lacanian “split subject” who is inadvertently constructed through the “mechanism of alienation” (Dolar 17). But David’s alienation is *twofold* as he is distant from the symbolic Other as well as distant from his own Self. I will reflect upon this in the final section of this paper.

4. The Racial avec/qua the Sexual

William Du Bois – often considered to be the pioneer of African American letters – problematizes the concept of identity formation and communal cohesion in his seminal book “The Souls of Black Folk”. Notions of identity and self-hood – as we have already seen – are complex terms that touch upon various social, political and ideological problems. The idea that the self is not part of a larger social dynamic is a disconcerting revelation. “I remember well when the shadow first swept across...”, Du Bois writes, “...then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others...shut out from their world by a vast veil” (Du Bois 8). Du Bois uses the veil metaphor to encompass a wide range of politico-ideological strategies that relegate certain races to a state of social invisibility. Du Bois accentuates this strife when he writes: “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (Du

Bois 8). Du Bois extends his critique of social displacement to a broader dynamic of cultural displacement where he enshrines his critical idea of double consciousness. For African Americans, the Self is divided as the objectified and excluded Other and as the subjective Self. Despite his African roots, the black man is politically connected to the American nation. He no longer belongs to his native land nor is he welcomed in his displaced cultural dynamic. This crisis reflects the similar strings of the dichotomy of inside/outside that are abundant in *Giovanni's Room*. The domineering white population created the debilitating stigmas regarding Black people to suppress and control the presence of the Other in 'their' social matrix. African Americans were given menial jobs and are exploited without impunity. These practices reinstate the age-old binary of the master and the slave. Clearly, David's proclivity to attune himself to the domineering heteronormative ideology echoes Du Bois' vociferous critique of any form of "tasteless sycophancy" (Du Bois 8) from the Black populace. But, Baldwin and Du Bois are both aware of the fact that the other side of this 'tasteless' submission contains the abyss of tormenting disorientation. "Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?", Du Bois inquires (Du Bois 8). This is uncannily in tandem with the entire narrative edifice regarding David. Du Bois oscillates between these two kinds of existential attitudes. Homi Bhaba in his book *The Location of Culture* talks about the idea of a 'third space'. He describes this third space as an unrepresentable liminal zone in-between the margins of two cultures (Bhaba 37). Du Bois presupposes Bhaba's theoretical maxims when he writes: "One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 8). Bhaba further reflects upon the Third Space as an intervention that "challenges our sense of historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (Bhaba 37). This Third Space is nothing but the inherent deadlock of the Lacanian Real – the disturbing non-all of ideology. David's reference to his American ancestors reflects the predisposed notion of a homogenous and homosocial culture that gets deconstructed by his own sexuality. David's sexual act with both Giovanni and Joey burrow through male-homosocial terrain and dismantles its "protective/expressive camouflage" (Sedgwick 161). David – like Du Bois' 'black folk' – exists as the Real of every homogenous ideology and demystifies its camouflage.

5. Conclusion

This is the foundation from which *Giovanni's Room* germinates. The sexual alienation of David is formulated in such a way that it folds into the racial through the mediating modality of ideology and its non-all. As we have seen, David is neither fully submitted to the symbolic heteronormative ideology nor is he fully present to himself. The Real cannot exist without the Symbolic but it also cannot live with it. This is the paradox that is presented by a radical split of the subject. Zupančič explains this state of existence to be a with-without formation: "What splits into two is the very nonexistence of the one (that is, of the one which, if it existed, would be the Other, the radically Other). What splits in two is the very one that lacks, the minus, the with-without" (Zupančič 49). This lack nullifies the attempt of integration and total submission into the Symbolic and leaves a space for the traumatic Real. The Real is the impossible limit to every ideology's inherent proclivity towards achieving totality and universalization. This also explains the hegemonic logic of ideology. Ideology is inextricably hegemonic and exclusionary in its structure. But this exclusionary logic, as Žižek explains, "is always redoubled in itself: not only is the subordinated Other (homosexuals, non-white

races...) excluded/repressed, but hegemonic universality itself also relies on a disavowed obscene particular content of its own" (Žižek, "Class Struggle" 102-103). This has been the core axiom of this paper. I have explained in detail how the self is structurally implicated in the socio-symbolic ideology that doesn't only exclude something 'beyond' its bound but also something that is the most intimate in it. Both David and Hella are implicated by this impasse of ideology. Both of them have – in their own way – attempted to enforce repression upon themselves. Hella's reflection on her aimlessness while living by herself in Spain slips into the desire of getting "knocked up" and "start having babies" as – she contends – that's all she's "good for" (Baldwin 118). Hella's desire for interpellation into the masculine ideology is anchored in David while David's own confusion about his sexuality functions as the stumbling block that resists Hella's full integration into it. Interestingly, this ideology that Hella seeks is the same heteronormative ideology that disorients David and makes his desire for Giovanni seem 'obscene'. David's notion of obscenity is reflected by Hella when she asks David to "let her be a woman" (Baldwin 152). "I don't care what you do to me. I don't care what it costs. I'll wear my hair long, I'll give up cigarettes, I'll throw away the books... Just let me be a woman... It's *all* I want. I don't care about anything else", she gasps (Baldwin 152). Unsurprisingly, Hella is precise in her identification of 'obscene' signifiers (smoking, books, short hair) that rattle the enforced homeostatic closure of patriarchal ideology. This is the loop that implicates both David and Hella, who function as registers of repression while existing as the very limit of ideology. This is the core implication of my argument which puts the racial in bracket with the sexual while keeping the subject in their interstitial abyss. The genius of James Baldwin lies herein. Unlike Du Bois, he centers the idea of repression at the core of subjectivity. In his "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel", Baldwin writes that it is "the level of private life which is after all where we have to get to in order to write about anything and also the level we have to get to in order to live" (Baldwin, "Notes" 229). In a way, Baldwin also asserts that it is the private/interior life that harbors repression as the a priori condition for the formation of the subject before his implication into any socio-symbolic matrix. This is how Lacan codified his theory of sexualization. This primary repression that castrates the subject also puts the subject in contrast to ideas of castration. I have shown how the subject comprehends castration and attempts to deal with it by internalizing ideology. I have also shown how and why ideology inherently harbors prejudice as a means to divert its own structural negativity through projecting and subjugating the construct of an Other. This reading reflects upon the nature of castration to be the "subjectivizing reiteration of the inaugurating minus" (Zupančič 49). Baldwin creates the characters of David and Hella under the aegis of this ideological non-all. Their restless attempts at associating their subjective selves to the socio-symbolic fabric of ideology are repetitively rattled by the structural negativity of the very ideology they seek. In a way, all their attempts are reiterations of this *negativity* itself. This is where the discourse of the racial falls into the same mire with the sexual. Every discourse involving hegemony and repression is presupposed by the originary repression that begins with a "minus one" (Zupančič 50). Baldwin is aware that dichotomy (center-margin, heterosexual-homosexual, white-black, yin-yang, tradition-transgression) doesn't involve distinct antinomies with positive substantiality but is produced in response to a negativity that presupposes it. Historically, both homosexuality and blackness have been used as a site of violence for coping with this impasse. Discussing Franz Fanon in his book *Extravagant Abjection*, Darieck Scott mentions that "Negrophobia is essentially a sexual phobia, because blackness is primarily associated in Western (and Western-influenced) cultures with perverse, nonnormative sexuality" (D. Scott 6). I have delineated how this relation between race and sexuality becomes apparent within the rubric of hegemonic

ideology. I have also shown how the sexual functions as the most intimate impasse of subjectivity and how the subject invokes ideology to 'gentrify' it through the affect of guilt and isolation. So, to return to Baldwin's claim, the racial question is indeed entwined with the sexual question but – as I have tried to foreground – in a more visceral manner. The crux of this paper lies in the exact ground from which the subject emerges as the structural impossibility of both the racial and the sexual forms of ideology while maintaining its unrelenting constancy to nothingness.

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