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A Journey across Multidirectional Connections: Linda Grant's *The Cast Iron Shore*

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Abstract: Among the numerous groups that have negotiated their fragmented identities through various literary practices in the last few decades, the Jewish collective has come to symbolize the epitome of diaspora and homelessness. In particular, British-Jewish writers have recently started to reconstruct their fragmented memories through writing. This is an extremely interesting phenomenon in the case of those Jewish women who are fiercely struggling to find some sense of personhood as Jewish, British, female, immigrant subjects. Linda Grant's novel *The Cast Iron Shore* will be analyzed so as to unveil the narrative mechanisms through which many of the identity tensions experienced by contemporary Jewish women are exhibited. The different stages in the main character's journey will be examined by drawing on theories on the construction of Jewish identity and femininity, and by applying the model of multidirectional memory fostered by various contemporary thinkers such as Michael Rothberg, Stef Craps, Max Silverman, and Bryan Cheyette. The main claim to be demonstrated is that this narration links the (hi)stories of oppression and racism endured both by the Jewish and the Black communities in order to make the protagonist encounter the Other, develop her mature political self, and liberate her mind from rigid religious, patriarchal, and racial stereotypes. *The Cast Iron Shore* becomes, then, a successful attempt to demonstrate that the (hi)stories of displacement endured by divergent communities during the twentieth century are connected, and it is the establishment of these connections that can help contemporary Jewish subjects to claim new notions of their personhood in the public sphere.

Keywords: British-Jewish; identity; displacement; multidirectional memory; trauma; ethics; politics; femininity; hybridity; Other

1. Introduction: British-Jewish Writers and Multidirectional Links

“A long-standing legacy of violence, compounded by new disasters, has engendered a set of rites—both individual and collective—that have taken many forms: the reconstruction of past histories, the retrieval of lost communities, the activation of historic sites, and a quest for origins” ([1], p. xi). This article starts with Hirsch and Miller’s words since they wisely refer to our current era. In the society they describe, individual and collective damaged identities and traumatic memories have been redefined in the public sphere through a good range of cultural practices. Among these “rites”, literature offers a valuable space to redefine identity, reconfigure memory and history, and deconstruct stereotypes. This relevant aspect of literature has been invigorated since the 1990s, the moment when Trauma Studies emerged in the field of the humanities to claim that there are some specific literary strategies that may allow the representation and negotiation of trauma.

When drawing on the fields of Trauma and Memory Studies, the Holocaust unavoidably comes to the fore. Due to its extreme and extraordinary nature, the historian Michael Rothberg explains that the Holocaust has “come to be understood in the popular imagination, especially in Europe, Israel, and North America, as a unique, *sui generis* event” ([2], p. 8). Several contemporary thinkers have started to realize that this line of thought could engender some kind of competition for “first place in victimhood” among many other groups that have also been the victims of armed conflicts, genocide or diverse forms of abuse across history ([3], p. 159). In fact, making reference to Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy’s ideas, there exists a common agreement that, if Trauma Studies are to be meaningful in the near future, they “must move beyond its focus on Euro-American events and experiences, towards a study of memory that takes as its starting point the multicultural and diasporic nature of contemporary culture” ([4], pp. 13–14). These ideas have become especially significant in the postcolonial context. As Stef Craps explains in *Postcolonial Witnessing*, there has been a recent broadening in the fields of Trauma and Memory Studies from the national to the transnational so that “traumatic colonial histories” may “be considered in relation to traumatic metropolitan or First World histories for trauma studies to have any hope of redeeming its promise of ethical effectiveness” ([5], p. 72). Together with Craps’ ideas, the theories formulated by Michael Rothberg, Bryan Cheyette and Max Silverman will shape the theoretical framework of this study in order to allow me to connect this contemporary interest in fostering multidirectional memory connections with the works produced by some British-Jewish writers such as Linda Grant.

If there is a group where multidirectional connections could and should be established, these are the Jewish communities around the world which have traditionally been defined by their transnational and diasporic nature. This is an aspect which has left permanent traces in their literary creations, as the Jewish people need to come to terms with a past marked by displacement is reflected on the increasing number of literary works problematizing Jewish identity conflicts. Drawing on this, Sheila Jelen, Michael Kramer, and Scott Lerner highlight that Jewish literature “lacks the basic markers of national

literatures: it has neither a shared language nor a common geography” ([6], p. 1). Also, it can be asserted that Jewish writings, “hover between places, finding their voice in their sense of displacement [...], bridging geographic centres or spaces” ([6], p. 14). In addition to this, Hana Wirth-Nesher explains that Jewish literature has to do with “a symptom of incomplete assimilation [...], or a lack of self-sufficiency in one language culture” ([7], p. 4). All these thoughts would support the analysis of contemporary Jewish writers’ works under the prism of multidirectional models of memory that seek to avoid national markers and promote an extraterritorial awareness.

Regarding the case of British-Jewish writers, this group of authors has recently started to trace the past of their ancestors in their creations as subsequent generations of Jewish immigrants and Holocaust survivors looking for the cross-cultural memories that have configured their identities across time. Just as Bryan Cheyette ([8], p. 26) and Sue Vice ([9], p. 20) have defined their writings according to a deep sense of dislocation, this article will attempt to demonstrate that this lack of territoriality has given place to the need to establish multidirectional connections that can allow today’s Jewish subjects to frame their history of exclusion and trauma within a more universal context. The case of contemporary British-Jewish women writers is still more to the point: they have not been perceived either as part of the British or the Jewish literary tradition; and they have been marginalized because of their status as Jews, immigrants and women ([10], p. 10).

It is in this context that the works of Linda Grant emerge powerfully. This writer and journalist, born in Liverpool in 1951 as a child of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants, grandchild of Holocaust survivors, belongs to the third generation of British-Jewish women authors who, like Jenny Diski and Zina Rohan, acquired a central role in the British literary milieu of the 1990s. Since her first publication in 1993, her works have recreated many current Jewish and female concerns, such as the conflicting use of space in the construction of Jewish identity and the depiction of fragmented memories across the subsequent generations of Holocaust survivors. Many of her novels revolve around the stories of Jewish women reinventing themselves through multifarious journeys of discovery. In this article, I will analyze her first novel *The Cast Iron Shore* [11], which was awarded the David Higham First Novel Prize and was also shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Prize, a retrospective narration of Sybil Ross’ life made at the time when, as an adult woman, she re-examines the main events of her life. This *bildungsroman* depicts the maturation process of a woman looking for roots since the moment she left Liverpool, being a young girl looking for personhood, to her travelling through America and Canada. My main claim is that this novel offers more than a simple portrayal of the life of a beautiful and vain woman, as some reviewers have argued [12]. It displays a model of multidirectional memory as the narrative device that links the (hi)stories of oppression of both Black and Jewish minorities in order to offer invigorated alternatives to solve the conflicting process of Jewish identity formation, and to work through the traumatic feelings experienced by the half-Jewish protagonist. Also, the main character’s multidirectional journey will be examined to check whether or not it is targeted at helping the Jewish female subject to overcome her legacy of displacement. Moreover, I would like to contend that this multidirectional model of memory is made possible thanks to the encounters with the Other depicted along the heroine’s journey, which will be analyzed from a Levinasian perspective as liberating tools in the construction of the main character’s personality. This way, Grant will be aligned to other contemporary writers like André Schwarz-Bart in *The Last of the Just*, Caryl Phillips in *The Nature of Blood*, W. G. Sebald in *Austerlitz* and Richard Power in *The Time*

of *Our Singing* who, in spite of writing in very diverse contexts, have also been aware of the need to overtake limited Western visions of genocide and trauma. In the end, my ultimate goal will be to demonstrate that novels like Grant's go in tune with Craps' main claim that "breaking with Eurocentrism requires a commitment not only to broadening the usual focus of trauma theory but also to acknowledging the traumas of non-Western or minority populations for their own sake" ([5], p. 19).

2. Traumatic Departure: Jewishness, Hybridity, and Femininity

By creating a first-person, autodiegetic narrator that recounts the main episodes of her life retrospectively, Grant renders the character's process of maturation with the insight of the wiser person who has learnt the relevance of the past in the construction of her personality. If the re-visitation of the past is an essential task for all those individuals and communities that have been denied an identity and place of their own ([13], p. 12), this task is even more compelling for the Jews because, as Raymond Federman points out, they have maintained their collective identity through the continuous telling of their (hi)story across generations [14]. This is made clear when analyzing the novel from a structural point of view. The narration starts in 1989 in communist Vietnam after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when readers meet a sixty-year-old Sybil who has a profitable business as an antiques dealer. Although the main purpose of this trip has to do with her business, it becomes the narrative device to start a mental journey to the protagonist's past. More concretely, she meets a Jewish man that makes her reflect on her Jewish roots when he asks her: "Do you think that to be a Jew you must only be born in such-and-such place? [...] Ours is a complex identity and Jews have always done what they had to survive. Black Jews, Asian Jews, what's the difference? We carry our identity not in a place but in our story" ([11], p. 14). These words help the narrator realize that, as a Jewish woman, "[she] cannot forget the past, it is with [her] all [her] life" ([11], p. 15); giving place to the flashback that shapes parts one, two, and three of the novel. In these three sections readers encounter Sybil's journey across America and Canada from 1946 to 1965. This travel constitutes the core of the novel, narrated by mature Sybil but focalized by the younger character as the events were happening at that time. This use of narrator and focalizer creates an effect of discordance between the Sybil of the past, who saw the events of her life through the eyes of an innocent and, sometimes, shallow woman, and the narrator's reflections, which belong to a more insightful and reflective Sybil. For example, throughout the first section of the novel her innocent and young self frequently asks her father what it means to be a Jew ([11], p. 30)—some knowledge she gains as the narrative advances, as will be analyzed further on. Then, section four goes back to the present 1990s, creating a narrative gap between the 1960s and 1990s, the time when Sybil lives peacefully in London and agrees to take in her cousin's son as a refugee from the Yugoslav Wars.

To begin with the evocation of the past provided in section one, the feelings and events which are constantly evoked by Sybil when setting off on this recovery of the past appear to be linked to displacement and foreignness—feelings that lie at the core of the Jewish sense of communality. Jewishness cannot be defined by having recourse to a specific place, language, or tradition; on the contrary, Jewish identity is "about belonging to a collective whose parts are scattered around the world, with multiple common sets of values, symbols, and practices" ([15], p. 206). These diasporic

feelings are embodied by Sybil Ross when she is initially compelled to face the Jewish legacy of uprootedness that her father attempts to transmit to her in episodes like this:

“When we were slaves in the land of Egypt”, he began, “and our forefathers toiled for the pharaohs with the blood of their hands and the sweat of their backs...” He ranged through history, ancient and modern [...]. There was no chronology in anything he said. Our slavery in Egypt could have been yesterday, [...]. The *shofar* is sounded to announce our freedom and raise the banner to collect our exiles and gather us together from the far corners of the earth, the outcasts of the people of Israel ([11], p. 31, italics in the original).

Her father’s words match Elan Ezrachis’ definition of the Jews as a group of people condemned to an eternal state of displacement which will be rewarded with the ultimate access to the Promised Land. Nevertheless, the reaction of young Sybil does not consist of accepting her father’s Jewish faith, but she rebels against the destiny that he intends to impose on her, as may be seen when she argues: “I did not want to be part of the world of pain he described. I did not want to be an outcast; I wanted to belong” ([11], p. 31). Therefore, one of the main identity conflicts that emanate from these words has to do with her refusal to accept the role of the outcast that has conventionally been assigned to Jews by the Christian Western tradition ([16], pp. 123–24). A status that the Jews have also assimilated as an intrinsic facet of their identity, as the exaltation of the tradition of the “*shofar*” mentioned in the previous extract demonstrates.

Still, Sybil also has to struggle with the fact that she is not a proper Jew. Her mother has German roots and, consequently, she is not one of the chosen people described by her father ([11], p. 32). This complicates the difficult task of assuming Jewishness—an aspect that will remain the most hurtful issue at the heart of Sybil’s narration. As her own reflections illustrate, “almost before I was conscious that I was a girl not a boy [...], I knew that I was not a real Jew” ([11], pp. 25–26); this character has grown up being aware of her inbetweenness. Thus, if the task of keeping Jewish memory and history alive is always very complex ([17], p. 32), *The Cast Iron Shore* proves that this is even more so when the Jewish subject is caught between two or more different cultures at once, and especially if one of these cultures is related to Germany to some extent. In the case of the Jewish population that migrated from Germany to Britain and other European countries during and after the Second World War, some critics like Sue Vice have observed that they destabilised all the fixed categories that had been ascribed to traditional Jewish immigrant communities because they were considered as alien immigrants as well as they came from the enemy country ([9], p. 21). Although this is not Sybil’s situation, as her mother is not a German-Jew, the fact that her mother has German blood turns the protagonist into an extremely complex hybrid: half-German, half-Jew, and half-British; a person who will have to struggle to try to be accepted by society all her life—first in Britain, and later on in her subsequent journeys ([11], pp. 87, 145, 165, 322).

Furthermore, these identity problems increase when it comes to Sybil’s femininity. The Jewish woman has conventionally been restricted to the private sphere of the house, keeping the Jewish tradition alive and maintaining the unity of the family. This belief draws on the fact that, within the Jewish culture, the preservation of the family ties is one of the most sacred aspects for a collective that has survived thanks to the identity roots that women carry with them. Yet, this is an aspect which, according to current feminist thinkers such as Judith Baskin [18] and Linn Davidman and Shelly

Tenenbaum [19], has been one of the main causes for the deprivation of freedom and power endured by Jewish women along history. Sybil's case is again further complicated because she does not have a Jewish female role to identify with, as her German mother does not fulfil the Jewish matrilineal function of preserving the family memories. Just as the novel shows that that Sybil does not want to be a sufferer like his father's chosen people, she is later convinced that she does not want to embody the idea of femininity represented by her mother either. She is very critical towards the feminine stereotype of the woman treated as a beautiful object represented by her mother, as she claims that "I contained my grief that I was not, like my mother, a blonde" ([11], p. 40). Sybil's troubled femaleness is rooted, then, in the lack of identification with a Jewish model of womanhood, her hunger for more progressive models of femininity than those offered by her suffocating family sphere, and the unavoidable fact that her mother belongs to alien Germany, which makes it even more difficult for her to feel a filial bond with her.

In the end, Sybil's identity conflicts increase when the Second World War breaks out and England is battered by the Blitz. Her adoptive country is being attacked by the German enemy, making her family's lives disintegrate ([11], p. 59); whereas news starts to arrive that many of her Jewish relatives are disappearing under the Nazi regime ([11], p. 68). This moment becomes the turning point for the protagonist. She realizes that her identity is somewhat related to the people who try to kill them in England and who are killing their ancestors in Europe, as observed when she finds out that: "as it turned out, I had Nazi uncles and Nazi aunts, Nazi cousins. The enemy was in me, Nazi blood pumping my empty heart" ([11], p. 65). In the fields of Trauma and Holocaust Studies, much research has been done on the feelings of guilt developed by the different agents implied in the Holocaust: perpetrators, survivors, and bystanders. In Sybil's case, her words describe the feelings of guilt derived from her family connections with Nazi Germany. As Lifton explains, guilt is common among those people who have gone through war, abuse, or natural disasters, and it has been observed in numerous Holocaust survivors as well as in their descendants ([20], pp. 113–26). For Sybil, the impossibility of facing these intricate guilty feelings finally leads her to escape from a "home" that had already been destroyed by the war ([11], p. 69). Together with the burden of this guilt, the traumatic effects of the war on her parents and herself ([11], p. 69), her inability to feel neither Jewish nor German nor English ([11], pp. 25–26), and the entrapment she felt within her patriarchal family ([11], p. 69) are the reasons that force Sybil to escape to New York, thinking that: "Europe was a dark continent, lined with skeletons of burnt-out warehouses" ([11], p. 69). Therefore, even though she initially rejected the stereotype of the Jews as a diasporic people, she ends up embracing her destiny as a wanderer, believing in the possibility of "be[ing] entirely reborn" ([11], p. 70).

3. The Journey: Multidirectional Connections, the Development of the Political Self, and the Encounter with the Other

Nowadays, it is broadly accepted that identity emerges from the layered contacts with place; identity is fluid and hybridized. A key factor that has contributed to this hybridization is the rise of migratory movements which have helped to define current identities as born out of exchange, movement, and relationality. Geographical movement has come to be accepted as "a crucial human experience" ([21], p. 1) that produces a change in both the individual and the society during and after

the migratory process. In *The Cast Iron Shore*, Sybil's journey across America represents one of the greatest migratory movements of the previous century, that of the Jews in the post-Holocaust era. In fact, this is a migratory movement that has been represented in many of the narratives by British-Jewish women writers; for instance, Anita Brookner's *The Latecomers*, Eva Figes' *Journey to Nowhere*, Anne Karpf's *The War After*, Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, Louise Kehoe's *In This Dark House* are representative of the collective experience of many Jews who lived similar situations of homelessness after the Holocaust by depicting various journeys of self-discovery caused by or derived from the Holocaust. As will happen to Sybil, most of these journeys appear to confirm the difficulties found by the Jewish protagonists when trying to be integrated within the new societies.

Together with Sybil's initial vision of the journey as an opportunity to rebuild a new life out of trauma and war, we could follow those critics who have seen travelling as "one of the most potent metaphors of our culture for women's transgressive moves" ([22], p. 65). Drawing on the idea that the journey was already a typical motif in the women's writing of the 1980s and 1990s with a plethora of narratives depicting women's journeys escaping from the *status quo*, Sybil's female identity continues to be problematized in the new land. Sybil's relationships with men are not depicted in egalitarian terms: she embraces her affairs with Stan—"I was at Stan's beck and call. Like a dog, I always came when he whistled" ([11], p. 80)—and Julius—he saw me as a blank sheet of paper he could write on and fill out all his thoughts" ([11], p. 140); but they are not based on love equality. On the contrary, these men attempt to model her personality to the extent that she even wonders "if I was to spend all my life being passed from hand to hand. [...] Each time I lost myself and became whatever they wanted me to be" ([11], p. 161). These comments point out that it is very difficult for Sybil to get rid of the patriarchal models that her family wanted to impose on her in England ([11], p. 43), and they show the difficulties in finding a voice of her own to define her true self, as she is usually described by others throughout a great part of the narrative. For instance, she narrates the way Julius addresses her as a half-human being and she is incapable of showing a critical attitude towards his words ([11], pp. 138–40). Moreover, these relationships are more complex than mere representations of gender roles, as encountering other hybrid male identities will help Sybil reflect on her own diasporic self. Stan is a bisexual seaman travelling around the world and Julius is an Afro-American who is strongly committed to the Communist cause. Through the liminal relationships with these two men, Grant problematizes the notion of stable and rigid identities, favouring dialogic notions of the individual subject whose identity may be molded by external factors, such as meeting Others who defy previous notions of the world. It can be said that, on the one hand, these men limit Sybil's freedom to decide the kind of person she wants to be but, on the other hand, they represent new Others who show Sybil that she is not the only one to have a hybrid identity. From a feminist stance, the early stage of the main character's journey turns out to be quite contradictory since it reveals that, while trying to escape from the burden of war and trauma represented by her Jewish family heritage in Britain, she is being caught up in a patriarchal network that deprives women of free will in America.

This aspect becomes especially evident in the case of her relationship with Julius. The protagonist starts feeling attracted towards the Negroes in the dance club in New York ([11], p. 106). Yet this attraction is not merely sexual, as happens to most of the white girls who felt their attraction towards the animal nature represented by the Negroes as a way of transgressing conservative social rules, since it seems to be based on her unconscious establishment of links with Black people's history of

dislocation; an aspect that becomes clear when she thinks to herself that: “No, I wasn’t prejudiced. Stan had made sure of that. And who was I, with my own secret history, to lower people for what they were born to be and could not help?” ([11], p. 101) Some early connections are made between Sybil’s homeland, England, and the lives of Julius’ ancestors. For instance, after meeting for the first time, Julius tells her that Liverpool was the place from which the slaves were shipped ([11], p. 130). This link is emphasized during the first night that Sybil sleeps with him, the first night that she feels “homely like home” in the US ([11], p. 135). Following Rothberg’s terms, this feeling at home in the presence of another alienated character could be interpreted as Grant’s attempt at connecting “shared histories of racism, spatial segregation, genocide, diasporic displacement, cultural destruction, and—perhaps most important—savvy and creative resistance to hegemonic demands” so as to “provide the grounds for new forms of collectivity that would not ignore equally powerful histories of division and difference” ([2], p. 23). Grant’s main character starts linking both Jewish and Afro-American histories of oppression, finding in Black people echoes of other minorities who, like her, had been mistreated by hegemonic forces. Moreover, this multidirectional consciousness is reinforced by the symbolic meanings ascribed to the sea, one of the key motifs in the narrative, which is depicted as a natural frontier not only dividing but mainly linking Europe and Africa: “Europe and Africa are that close, *just* separated by one *little* sea” ([11], p. 155, my emphasis). This frontier links these continents’ traumatic memories across time and space, reinforcing the multidirectional site that this narrative aims to construct, and portraying the Jewish diaspora, embodied by Sybil, in a more universal context, fostered by Julius’ experience. This way, this novel displays Silverman’s view of memory as following “a principle of transversal connections across time and space which disrupt essentialist readings of cultural identity and ethnic and national belonging” ([23], p. 22).

Subsequently, Sybil starts an affective relationship with Julius and he teaches her about the history of American slavery and the suffering that the Black population had to endure in the US. Learning about this historical episode leads her to establish parallelisms between the racism manifested in the US during and after the time of slavery and in Europe during the Holocaust; as is made evident when she adopts Julius’ argument that “Denying Negroes their rights and keeping the African people in the slavery of colonialism is the same argument as fascism” ([11], p. 154). She integrates this comparison in her new perspectives on self and world, as shown when she claims that Jews have traditionally been the “niggers of Europe” ([11], p. 183). By doing this, Grant’s novel endorses Silverman’s argument that the reunion of Jews’ and Blacks’ (hi)stories of oppression “should be an enriching line of enquiry rather than one that necessarily negates the uniqueness of the Holocaust” ([23], p. 20). It corroborates Paul Gilroy’s claims that Jewish and Black (hi)stories should be discussed together without developing a “dangerous competition and without lapsing out into a relativizing mode” ([24], p. 213). In keeping with this, Julius’ teachings make Sybil react against her parents, who had hidden from her the traumatic reality both of Nazism and other similar events that happened around the world. For example, this is perfectly illustrated when, after attending several meetings of the Communist Party, she wonders

When he [her father] told me of our slavery in the land of Egypt, why did he never mention the slavery of less than a hundred years ago? And when we freed ourselves and went into

the Promised Land, why was there no mention of the Africans and Indians who actually lived in the Promised Land which was made foreign to them by the invader? ([11], p. 185).

This speech symbolizes the clash between traditional Jewish views on the Holocaust and the Jewish Diaspora as a unique and extraordinary event—represented by Sybil’s father—and the contemporary theories arguing for the need to develop a multidirectional sense of memory that can foster “transversal, transnational, and transcultural solidarities” ([23], p. 21)—embodied by the figure of Sybil. Furthermore, her reaction of anger illustrates that, following Cheyette’s terms, here the literary imagination is used “to reclaim a past and a sense of self where diverse histories intertwine metaphorically and, [...], are not eclipsed by a unique sense of victimisation” ([25], p. 113).

It should also be observed that the narration not only links European and Afro-American (hi)stories of genocide but it establishes connections between the racism suffered by Black people in America in the past and the racism exerted in such far away places as Russia during the Cold War. This is concretely depicted when Julius moves to Russia to support the Communist Party, which had previously had liberating synergies for his traumatised self; and then, once back, he admits to Sybil that he has suffered the same racism in Russia as he had experienced in America: “the whole place was white. There was some fuck-up and they put me in prison. A mistake. So what? [...] Some other coloured fellow. Because of course we all look the same” ([11], p. 287). With this episode Grant gets to unveil the universal nature of racism, which has been widely studied by thinkers such as Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha in the postcolonial context. All of these critics refer to the process by which Western societies had justified the subordination exerted upon those Others which challenged their *status quo* on the grounds of establishing binary oppositions between Self and Other. Being a hybrid Jewish subject herself, Sybil had already experienced the negative consequences of this Manichean view of the world, according to which those hybrid subjects “who do not fall easily into any established categories tend to cause anxiety within a given community” ([26], p. 144); following Zygmunt Bauman’s understanding of these concepts. Therefore, by establishing these universal links, *The Cast Iron Shore* fosters a model of multidirectional memory in setting up connections between very diverse traumatic events—Black slavery and the Holocaust and the Jewish Diaspora—and drawing attention to non-European traumatic conflicts. This memory demonstrates an ability to cut “across genres, national contexts, periods, and cultural traditions” ([2], p. 18) and, through it, Grant re-examines the complex relationship between the Jewish and the Black history of discrimination and genocide.

Along with this, the emergence of Sybil’s multidirectional awareness leads to a key facet in the evolution of the protagonist’s personality: the development of her political self during the second part of the book. Although at the beginning she is not politically conscious, she ends up being a member of the Communist Party in 1948 once she has established the multidirectional connections analyzed, and once the journey across America has revealed not to be as ideal as she initially expected, leading her to assume her soul as that of “every Jew who wanders” ([11], p. 191). The narration shows that the focalizer of the action is now aware of the prejudices that different races encounter everywhere, whether in Britain or America; as the following words illustrate:

the connection between Jews and Negroes was there. When I remembered what had happened in Nazi Germany and how my own relatives had died, [...] I feel a mixture of

fear and guilt. [...] For I seized my on the Race Question as a way of burning out of my soul that diseased part of it which I had inherited with my mother's blood. So I threw myself into political work ([11], p. 183).

The repetition of the first pronoun "I" points at the main character's evolution of personhood from a more immature girl, whose voice was hardly heard at the beginning of the narrative, towards a more mature woman who is more aware of her inner thoughts and political opinions, as the frequent use of verbs referring to feelings and emotions demonstrate ("remember, feel, seize"). Then, she takes these more sophisticated personal connections further ahead when she points to the hidden links between Communism and Nazism, the American fight against the Soviet Union at that present moment and the Allies' fight against Nazism some years before. Yet the most intriguing aspect is that these links are established for Sybil to refuse any armed conflict on the grounds that wars are always destructive; as she herself experienced when living the Blitz in Britain: "Everything Red was bad. It was like Germany under Hitler. [...] I replied. *I could not bear to live another war* where there was still so much from the last one I could not speak of." ([11], p. 213, my emphasis). Still, politics becomes Sybil's way of trying to work through her personal feelings of "fear and guilt" ([11], p. 183); as evinced when she claims: "What could I do to purge myself of that terrible legacy of slaughter and evil? [...] I would stand for justice and equality for all. [...] If the Nazis had persecuted the Jews I would rescue the Negroes and the poor and the hopeless" ([11], p. 234). These words prove that she tries to find her way out of her burden of guilt by finding out what Judith Lewis Herman describes as a "survivor's mission". According to this psychiatrist, many subjects "recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action" ([27], p. 207). For Sybil, a possible way to liberate herself from guilt consists of fighting against injustices by virtue of her recently acquired multidirectional consciousness.

As has been demonstrated so far, section two—portraying Sybil's and Julius's leaving New York and moving to California to continue their fight for the Communist Party—is focalized by a thoughtful narrator that is able to identify her guilty feelings and elaborate philosophical thoughts. This evolution is identified in the language used by the main character, who compares her teenage preoccupation with "powder compact" ([1], p. 234) with her current reflections on justice, Marxism, and Communism. At this moment, Sybil comprehends the full meaning of the political and transcultural associations exposed, but the "encounter with the Other" depicted in her relationship with Julius should be revisited to understand the changes it produces in both characters. The main premises of multidirectional memory have been influenced to a great extent by Levinasian philosophy in the sense that they are "oriented towards some wider opening, some greater sensibility and a surrender of the same in favor of the other/the infinite, [...], with correlative notions like vulnerability and disinterestedness" ([28], p. 3). That is to say, the openness to the Other fostered by Levinas can be achieved by the establishment of multidirectional connections. The "ethics of alterity", strongly reclaimed in the 1980s, demands the subject's responsibility towards the Other as a basic tenet for the functioning of society. Levinas defined the encounter with the Other as the Self's openness to the Other's suffering, without appropriating his/her experience, "in the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others" ([29], p. 105). LaCapra's concept of

empathic unsettlement follows these assumptions, and he defines it as “a form of virtual, not vicarious, experience [...] in which emotional response comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one’s own” ([3], p. 40). In *The Cast Iron Shore*, Sybil does experience this true encounter with the Other when she gets to know Julius’ damaged soul and the traumas he and his ancestors endured. For instance, she thinks, after listening to Julius’ story of trauma, that “I barely knew what Julius was talking about, but I did not forget his story and it would come to mean more to me when my own little soul, as shrivelled and as dehydrated as a dried pea, began to sprout and shoot” ([11], p. 153). Her response is not based on appropriating Black slaves’ traumas, but on opening her mind to set genocide in a more universal context than she had been taught. Encountering Julius’ diasporic and traumatic life makes her accept the responsibility for the vulnerable Other fostered by Levinas, which is exteriorized in the development of her political attitudes.

Nevertheless, Julius does not manage to reach this stage of pure encounter with Jewish suffering, embodied by Sybil’s story of migration. In fact, Julius’ failed encounter with the Other may have to do with the choice of narrator and focalizer in the novel. As the narration is dominated by an autodiegetic narrator acting as the main focalizer of the story, readers only have access to the action through Sybil’s eyes and her point of view is imposed on the narrative. Readers may observe the evolution of her personality while this does not happen to some of the other characters. For example, Julius’ story of trauma is narrated from Sybil’s eyes, and this makes it hard to really understand the deep nature of his grief. This narrative aspect points out that Sybil’s empathical attitude towards the Other’s pain does not reach its full potential, as she does not transgress her own self completely and merge her story with that of Julius. What is perceived from Sybil’s viewpoint is that Julius rather establishes a relationship that follows the model of master/slave domination, repeating compulsively the trauma he and his community endured in the past; which creates a barrier between the two characters that do not allow Sybil, as the focalizer of the story, to have access to her lover’s inner feelings. There are several examples that illustrate Julius’ attempts to dominate and look down on Sybil; he tells her that: “I don’t see you as a human being at all” ([11], p. 138), and she admits that Julius’ mission was meant to turn her into a human being, as well as she reckons that they were only equals in bed ([11], p. 146). Despite this, they get married after Julius has spent four years in Moscow ([11], p. 270) and, even within their marriage, he is not completely able to abandon his resentment and see Sybil as an equal human being.

In the light of this, this narrative constructs a partial development of the multidirectional memory proposed, as it succeeds uniquely for the main character when it comes to race and trauma connections. This model of memory does not manage to connect gendered memories, but rather it fails to reconcile a character that has suffered the negative consequences of patriarchal oppression (Sybil) with a character that has undergone the malaise of racism (Julius). Nevertheless, though gender equity is not reached in this relationship, the fact that the only voice and eyes behind the narrative are female shows Grant’s intention of providing (half) Jewish women like Sybil with a voice of their own so that they may tell their silenced versions of history, recounting episodes of such magnitude as the Holocaust, Black slavery, and migration from a perspective that differs from traditional, hegemonic, and male versions. Also, Julius acts in the end as a key agent in Sybil’s growing up as a mature political self. He could be considered as the narrative agent that makes the encounter with the Other and with the history of Black diaspora happen, which generates deep changes in Sybil’s construction of racial identity, leaving gender roles aside. Therefore, the pattern of memory displayed in *The Cast*

Iron Shore would point at two main critical considerations: firstly, it misses the opportunity to place the memories of trauma and war caused by historic episodes such as the Holocaust and Black slavery at the same level as the historic trauma undergone by women under patriarchy [30]; and, secondly, it unveils a partial failure in the theoretical concept of multidirectional memory itself, which seems to have forgotten the history of female subjugation across time and space by mainly focusing on such racial and trauma connections as those displayed in Grant's novel.

Taking all these ideas into account, the question that remains to be answered would be: in spite of the drawbacks mentioned, do the development of Sybil's multidirectional sense of memory and history and her encounter with the Other contribute to the ultimate working through of her feelings of guilt and to her reconciliation with her hybrid Jewish female identity?

4. The Return: Dissolving the Family Ties, Reaching Freedom?

In response to the previous question, the motif of the sea appears as a narrative device that alludes to Sybil's identity construction. A very good example appears when she and one of her latest lovers, after separating from Julius, talk about the movement of the waves in the following terms: "When the wave changes, the ocean bed changes as well, but when the bottom changes, so does the wave. The sand is always being rearranged. The land below has its effect but so does that transient foam have its effect'. [...] The wave lasts only a moment, then it spends itself but it leaves the ghost of its form on the ocean bed" ([11], p. 320). Here, the relational process that happens when an individual migrates to a different place is symbolized: just as the movement of the wave changes the ocean's bed and the changes in the bottom of the ocean modify the trajectory of this wave, the immigrant's identity—the wave—changes the adoptive place, while the new country—the ocean's bottom—alters the original essence of the immigrant. Sybil endorses this possibility ([11], p. 246), as she imagines herself as that wave altering the people and the places she has encountered throughout her journey, just as she has been changed by the new places and people she has met along her life journey. This is further explained in the fourth section of the book when, while recalling the past, Sybil admits that she never managed to feel she had roots to any place, and that her role in life always consisted of "skat[ing] along on the surfaces of things" ([11], p. 364) just as the waves do. Sybil's uprootedness is emphasized along the third part of the book. Here, in 1955, Sybil appears as a much more developed character after having travelled around America for six years. Now she is able to recognize the changes the journey has produced in her own self: "I was not the same woman who had left New York" ([11], p. 254). Moreover, she has acquired a voice of her own that allows her to recognize her war trauma—"the constant trauma of imminent capture" ([11], p. 261)—and to admit that she needs to escape from Julius's alienating relationship—an aspect that is symbolized by the oppressive forces associated to the land when she says that "I had witnessed the heart of America [...]. The land had held me down and imprisoned me" ([11], p. 296). In the end, these feelings lead her to escape once again and go back to Canada with Stan.

Along with this metaphoric use of the land and the sea to allude to Sybil's lack of belonging, the crucial moment in Sybil's wandering arrives in this section three when she goes back to England after her father's death, a journey which represents her return to the original conflict that had obliged her to leave home many years ago. One could think that this circular journey symbolizes the final stage of

reconciliation with the family and that, as she has acquired a multidirectional consciousness, she might come to terms with her hybrid self and be reintegrated in the society. Nevertheless, this journey does not provide an easy resolution. Now that she is an adult she is confronted with her parents' struggles to cope with their own legacy of war and displacement. She discovers that, prior to dying, her father had gone back to Israel "to be with his own kind" ([11], p. 342) and look for the desired Promised Land; and her mother also admits that she would like to return to Germany so as to reconcile with her motherland. Sybil's parents, thus, also endorse the potential belief in healing power of transnational journeys which is fostered in many Jewish narratives. But the most striking moment of Sybil's return is the confrontation with her mother when they finally speak out their feelings about the German and Jewish origins of the family. In this encounter ([11], p. 343), Sybil finally rejects any German connection and blames her parents for her feelings of guilt, showing a similar process to the transgenerational transmission of trauma experienced by many descendants of Holocaust survivors. The so-called second generation has often become the recipient of their parents' traumatic memories, which becomes a burden for them, and may change into feelings of shame, guilt, and exclusion ([31], p. 195). Sybil's feelings are oxymoronic, as she is not a proper descendant of Holocaust survivors; they comprehend both the shame of having German origins, and the guilt of knowing that many of her Jewish ancestors died during the Holocaust while she survived because of living in a different country. On her part, her mother's attitude embodies a common tendency among many post-Holocaust Germans to neglect this historical episode and look the other way when confronted with the Nazi genocide. On account of this conflict, the clash that had been hovering over Sybil all these years is at last encountered as she has to face a mother denying the Holocaust, as well as assimilate the fact that some of her ancestors could have contributed to the Jewish destruction ([11], p. 345). Then, her inability to accept this complicated family background, mainly from an ethical perspective, leads Sybil to finally "dissolve the Ross family" ([11], p. 350).

The contradictory journey of reconciliation turns out to be both a journey of disintegration of family ties and a journey of personal liberation. In fact, it demonstrates that journeys have a strong liberating power, which increases from the perspective of Western feminist thinking that sees the "act of leaving home as a universally desirable movement and event for women" ([32], p. 173). In this sense, Grant's novel goes in line with the feminist facet of many "leaving-home narratives" which envision travels as sites of resistance where the ideas of home and unity are evaded, favouring instead the vision of the journey as not "only politically but also spiritually empowering" ([33], p. 186). This outlook on the idea of the journey is reinforced in *The Cast Iron Shore* by the fact that the heroine has changed after the journey is complete—developing a multidirectional and political consciousness—but she does not want to be reintegrated in the society when she comes back because she was never an intrinsic part of it. This rupture is, in fact, materialized in the formal structure of the book, as the third section of the novel ends up with this dissolution, closing Sybil's quest and her retrospective narration when she returns to Canada to find out that Stan has abandoned her. However, as has been mentioned, *The Cast Iron Shore* does not finish when this remembering process is over. The very last section of the book depicts another encounter with the Other when Sybil shelters her second nephew, Nebojsa, escaping from the conflict in Yugoslavia. Again, the novel displays the multidirectional connections, but focusing on the more recent dark episode of the Balkan Wars which left young people like Nebojsa completely shattered and traumatized ([11], p. 381). Now, old Sybil recognizes in him the signs of

someone who has suffered the disturbing effects of war and tries to get into him in a way she could not do with Julius by, for instance, trying to help him obtain his residence card ([11], p. 391) and transmitting to him the wisdom that life has provided her with. For example, there is a very telling episode when Sybil values some of Julius' lessons in positive terms when he taught her that "there are two ways of changing the world. Either you can first make it work, then you can make it just. Or you can make it just and then make this just society work" ([11], p. 387), and she encourages this young fellow to take the latter path and try to leave the resentment and hatred that war has caused on him behind. Therefore, this encounter proves to be more successful, as mature Sybil can now leave her own ego apart and be aware of Nebojsa's needs. Maturity and her life journey have provided the narrator-focalizer with that ability.

In the end, the very last chapter of the novel recounts the conversation between Sybil and Stan when they meet, both in their seventies, in Liverpool many years after they separated:

"I [Sybil] wish I'd belonged somewhere. I wish I hadn't spent so much time on the edge of things"

"You belong, all right."

"Who to? What?"

"To yourself."

"That's not enough."

"But it's had to be, hasn't it? [...] I always had somewhere to go back to and here I am. I knew who I was and where I was from. [...] You never knew who you were or what you came from. You were *free*. [...] You're neither one thing nor the other and that drives people mad, but we've got to have you. It wouldn't do if we didn't" ([11], pp. 400–1).

Drawing on these words, the contradictions embodied in Stan's and Sybil's conflicting views on her freedom epitomize the feelings that diasporic Jews have evoked throughout history since, as the use of the first-person plural pronoun demonstrates, "we"—the non-Jews—have traditionally felt both rejection and attraction towards the Jews—the "you" embodied by Sybil. Also, this fragment shows that Sybil regrets not having found the ties she needed when she left England, as she has only managed to live on the edge of things. Nevertheless, Stan's description of her indicates that this lack of belonging should not be considered as a failure, but as an opportunity to open the hybrid self to other people's traumatic experiences, to explore other silenced traumatic (hi)stories, and to develop a political and multidirectional awareness that makes it impossible for her to adapt to claustrophobic and narrow-minded Eurocentric settings as the one she originally came from. Thus, the universal consciousness she has acquired throughout her life narrative has lastly provided her with the freedom not to be committed to any religion, to any husband, or to any land.

5. Conclusion: "Neither the Land nor the Sea, neither Fish nor Beast"

As this reading of *The Cast Iron Shore* has shown, this novel proves the current tendency to see historical processes and collective traumatic episodes within a more interrelated global context. It has been proven that Grant's work challenges the competitive models of memory that attempt to politicize the degrees of victimization of different collectives, and the notion that the Holocaust and Jewish

suffering are unique. It has also been pointed out that, by seeing the Holocaust in the light of American and Russian racism against the Black population, the novel does not support the discourse which sees the Holocaust as the single referent of the traumatic nature of the twentieth century. On the contrary, this novel highlights the idea that human catastrophes are inherent parts of a history that repeat themselves both for the Jewish people, the Black people, and humanity as a whole. This way, Grant can be said to have succeeded in carrying out the complex task of unveiling the connections between divergent historical processes, which Craps and Rothberg have explained as follows: “the Holocaust, slavery, and colonial domination are in fact interconnected, and by refusing to think them together (except in competitive manner) we deprive ourselves of an opportunity to gain greater insight into each of these different strands of history and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the dark underside of modernity” ([34], p. 518). Thus, this half-Jewish female character has made the most of this “opportunity” to come to terms with her family inherited trauma by setting her individual story of diaspora and alienation within a more universal context that helps her become a more cosmopolitan human being.

However, it has also been explained that this has not been a completely reciprocal process, since Sybil has been changed by the encounters with the Other and by this physical and spiritual journey of self-discovery, but she has not been so capable of producing similar changes in those characters and places around her. Although the relationship with Nebojsa opens the door to a more fruitful process of mutual encounter and empathy, the narrative closes without drawing further on this relationship. In keeping with this, it has also been noticed that Sybil has gained a multidirectional political consciousness, as well as her longed-for freedom through her travelling, but during that journey she has lost some other things: the possibility of forming a family, the capacity to embrace the Jewish tradition, the desire to feel she belongs somewhere, and the strength to be exclusively defined on her own terms. Sybil’s incomplete journey could suggest, then, that her quest represents both an incipient step for current Jewish women to reclaim a more active position in society [17] as well as it suggests a revision of the model of multidirectional memory so that it may incorporate women’s traumatic (hi)stories of oppression.

Focusing on the novel’s final words, their symbolic meaning also sheds some light on this open-ended quest:

But I had already turned and was looking out of the window. Across the top of the city my gaze sped, to the river as it widened and narrowed and met the sea. My thoughts were rushing down to the sea, and the brass and the ivory horns and the trumpets were sounding on the water, where ships sail on the surfaces of things to the very end of our burning world ([11], p. 403).

Here, the eternal atmosphere depicted through the use of a poetic style, which reminds readers of the Eliotean depiction of eternity and time in *The Four Quartets*, demonstrates that Sybil will continue her everlasting wandering just as many Jews had done before her. The novelty in this narrative is that the establishment of liminal multidirectional relationships has freed the female protagonist’s mind from rigid racial and religious stereotypes; providing her diasporic eternal state with a refreshing and regenerating potential. Through this character, Grant opens up innovative multidirectional territories for those new-fangled Jewish women who, being “neither fish nor beast” ([11], p. 145), wish to

explore hidden facets of their identities. Grant's novel goes a step further in the creation of a woman who does not only try to escape from her initial suffocating situation but who also explores her manifold facets as a hybrid Jew, a woman, a political subject, and an individual human being. This exploration has been carried out through a transnational journey of liberation, the establishment of liminal relationships that have broadened the main character's mind, the development of a multidirectional consciousness that allows her to claim for social justice, the recourse to politics as a possible way of working through painful memories, and the encounter with Others' stories of displacement.

In the light of all the aspects analyzed, it could be concluded that Grant's novel both exceeds and resists the multidirectional model of memory just as some other British-Jewish women writers have done in the last few years. To give some examples, in *The Memory Man* Lisa Appignanesi connects different male and female generations that are linked to the Holocaust in one way or another across a spatial and spiritual journey of discovery of the Holocaust—its history and individual and collective memories—in Poland. Eva Figes' *The Tenancy* establishes parallelisms between the economic crisis lived in England in the 1990s after the New Right Policies of the previous decades, the traumatic traces in the lives of the Jewish characters and the Holocaust; turning the novel both into some kind of fictional re-enactment of the Holocaust and a reflection on universal victimhood. Elaine Feinstein in *Children at the Rose* also travels across time and space to connect places such as Britain, France, and Poland under the common background of war. To sum up, these novels mainly focus on the connections between diverse memories of racism, war, and trauma just as *The Cast Iron Shore* does, without paying excessive attention to the gender aspect. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Grant's posterior novel *Still Here*, published in 2004, does not only connect divergent places—Britain, Germany, Poland, Israel, USA—and diverse traumatic memories—connected to the Jewish Diaspora, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the post-war period, the Yom Kippur War—but it also connects these divergent memories in terms of gender. The two main characters, Alix and Joseph, do not only travel mentally and physically to the places where their traumatic memories originated but throughout the journey they construct refreshed models of femininity and masculinity that escape stereotypical and patriarchal assumptions. Alix accepts her femininity in a more natural way, and Joseph embraces a new model of liberated womanhood that replaces the patriarchal stereotypes that had been transmitted to him. This is achieved by the alternation of the roles of narrator and focalizer that swift between the two main characters throughout the narration. In keeping with this evolution in Grant's *oeuvre*, it can be said that *The Cast Iron Shore* represented an initial step in the depiction of multidirectionality and gender relations in travel; while some of her later works draw on some of the weakness that have been analyzed in this study, and continue to develop this author's concept of multidirectional memory by integrating a more feminist stance.

In conclusion, on various occasions *The Cast Iron Shore* depicts the main character's multidirectional wandering in a negative light—as when Sybil regrets her lack of belonging, when several characters reject her because of being a foreigner, and when the patriarchal hints provided by the male characters are not sufficiently counteracted by the female protagonist—which might foster the reactionary views that Jews, and concretely Jewish women, are eternally condemned to be outsiders wherever they settle, together with the fact that women have to struggle very hard to enjoy their freedom, even at the risk of ending up their lives alone. However, it is my main claim that this pessimistic meaning should be counteracted. This novel means a step forward in the reconciliation of both Jewish, hybrid, and female

identities, offering new sites of negotiation which may become the future arena where individual and collective memories of war and conflict continue to demonstrate to be mobile and interconnected, and where traumatic (hi)stories still prove to be implicated in each other ([2], p. 313) when we try to come to terms with the multifarious traumas of displacement and oppression of our contemporary age.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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