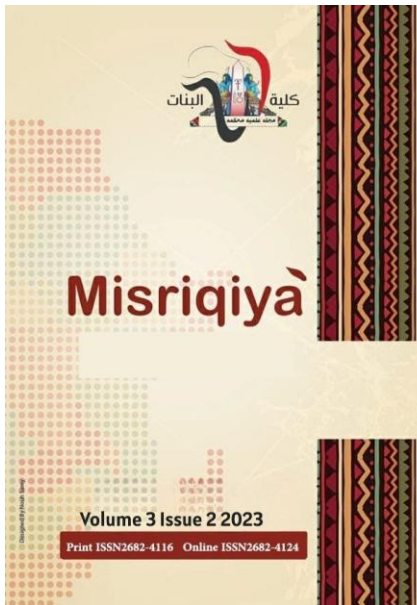




Forging Black Identity in Selected Children's Poetry by Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni

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Abstract

This paper exhibits some of the literary efforts exerted in order to assist in the process of forging the Black identity of Black children and young adults. It provides an examination of selected children's poetry by a Black late literary figure: Langston Hughes (1902-1967), and a contemporary one: Nikki Giovanni (1943-). The poems are studied with reference to William Cross's racial scale of Black identity development (2000). In the poems under analysis, Hughes and Giovanni try to help Black children and young adults to overcome their identity crisis and develop a positive Black identity.

Keywords: Black children's identity, Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, Cross's scale

One of the major issues that literary criticism currently investigates is the issue of 'identity'. The objective of this paper is to discuss the process of black identity formation as reflected in classic and contemporary African American poetry. A definition of the term 'identity' is provided at the beginning. Then, William Cross's expanded scale of racial identity development (2000) is presented. Through his model, Cross aims to aid in transforming negative Black identity into a positive one.¹ The paper attempts to set an analogy between a late poet: Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967), and a contemporary one: Nikki Giovanni (1943-), with regard to their attempts to forge a Black identity for Black children and young adults with reference to Cross's expanded scale.² Through a selection of children's poetry by both poets, the researcher tries to detect the attempts by each of the two poets to motivate Black children towards the highest stage in Cross's scale, which is 'Internalization'.³ In some of the examined poems, Hughes and Giovanni try to create a mixture between Cross's stages of 'Immersion/ Emersion' and 'Internalization', while in other poems, they address children in the 'Pre-Encounter' stage and attempt to aid them develop to the 'Internalization' stage.

Identity

In their definition of identity, Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (1999) state that it is "the way we may choose to represent ourselves and act out our thoughts, beliefs and emotions in the social world" (p. 32). These words declare that individuals are responsible for their own identities, they "choose" them. However, this chosen identity is subject to transformation as asserted by Courtney Clayton (2008) who stated that identity is "dynamic across time", it is "ever-shifting, depending on such factors as mirroring, age, membership (the groups to which we belong and want to belong), and our relations with others" (p. 37).⁴ Stuart Hall (1992) also believes that identification is in a "construction" progression, it is "a process never completed – always 'in process'" (p. 2). Cross's model presents a combination between the perspectives of Clayton and Hall.

The African American minority has suffered with the issue of identity. As a result, many intellectuals have investigated this crisis and set out theories to describe its emergence and development. The Nigrescence Racial Identity Models (NRID) came into being around the 1970s. The theorist Janet E. Helms (1990) defines Nigrescence as a "developmental process" through which a person "*becomes* Black" (emphasis added) (p. 17). Helms continues that

“Black” here does not refer to skin color, but it is “defined in terms of one’s manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one’s reference groups” (p. 17). So, Blackness here is related to one’s thoughts about self and race. Black scholars have attempted to change feelings of inferiority experienced by the Black individual and have tried to assist Blacks creating a Black identity.

William Cross is one of the first (NRID) theorists. In 1971, he has established the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). It is a model that traces the development of Black identity from “the least healthy” stage, in which one identifies in relation to Whites, to the healthiest stage, which is “self-defined” (Helms, p. 17). Cross has revised his model across time. To compare Cross’s original model (1971) to the revised models (1991 and 2000), Cross’s most substantial changes are: decreasing the number of the stages from five to four, and exhibiting various identity clusters. His expanded scale (2000), which is the core of this study, incorporates four stages: ‘Pre-Encounter’, ‘Encounter’, ‘Immersion/Emersion’, and ‘Internalization’. Through his scale, Cross proves that one’s feelings, thoughts, and reactions differ in each of these stages.

The ‘Pre-Encounter’ stage is characterized by three identities: ‘Assimilation’, ‘Miseducation’, and ‘Self-hatred’. Black individuals with ‘Assimilation’ identity have a “preference for an American worldview and culture” (Cross, 2001, p. 184). They regard themselves as Americans rather than as African Americans (Cross, 2006, p. 537). Thus, race is not “salient” to them (Cross, 2002, p. 72). ‘Miseducation’ identity, however, “describes the negative stereotypical mindset a Black person has about the Black community in general” (pp. 72-73). Thus, he or she believes in the stereotypical images imposed by Whites. A ‘Pre-Encounter Self-hatred’ identity reveals the individual’s “negative views about being Black” (p. 72). Hence, individuals underestimate themselves due to their race. This ‘Self-hatred’, according to Cross, could be direct i.e. “anti-Black”, or indirect i.e. “pro-White” (2001, p. 175).

The second stage in Cross’s model is the ‘Encounter’ stage. The ‘Encounter’ comes as a reexamination of one’s race. It takes place due to experiencing an “event” or a “series of events” (Cross, 2002, p. 72). The Black individual faces incidents that push him/her to encounter him/herself. This stage is described by Helms as a stage of “struggle”, “depression” and “confusion” (p. 25).

In the third stage, ‘Immersion/ Emersion’, there is a “quest for nigrescence” (Cross, 2001, p. 178). The individual starts to ask some “critical”

questions, such as “How could *they* do this to me?”, “How could *they* do this to us?”, and “How could I have failed to see what society was like before now?”; these questions develop feelings of “rage”, “anxiety” and “guilt” (p. 178). The individual feels a “profound rage” at the White society for “deceiving” him/her for years, and feels enraged and guilty for allowing the deception to occur and for betraying the Blacks “by ignoring or downplaying the impact of race” (p. 178). In an attempt to “baptize” him/herself into “a new way of being”, the individual is immersed into Black activities (p. 177). The ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ stage has “two separate, but related” identities (p. 177): ‘Intense Black Involvement’ and ‘Anti-White’.

Individuals who go through ‘Intense Black Involvement’ plunge themselves deeply into the “Black experience” (Cross, 2002, p. 72), which can be defined as “the immersion into Black culture and the *romanticizing* of everything Black” (2001, p. 184) (emphasis added). Thus, there are exaggerated emotions towards being Black. Such identity has a positive aspect which is “the unbridled enthusiasm for information about Africa and African Americans”; consequently, it might lead to “well-informed individuals who have a sense of their place in the world and of the contributions that they and their ancestors have made over years” (2001, p. 177). At the same time, there are negative aspects that affect the individual and the society because of the Intense Black Involvement, such as the negative emotions of “rage”, “anxiety”, and “guilt” which can become “destructive when uncontrolled” (p. 177). An “unforgiving stance” to the Blacks involved in the ‘Pre-Encounter’ stage characterizes this stage (p. 178). In addition, being deeply involved into Blackness, individuals in the ‘Immersion/ Emersion Intense Black Involvement’ stage mistake ‘Multiculturalists’ as “anti-Black” since they are “pro-White” (p. 178). Again, this can motivate anxiety and rage.

An ‘Anti-White’ identity, says Cross, is “based on the hatred and negation of White people” (2001, p. 178). Individuals with ‘Anti-White’ identities refute everything White to the extent of “demonizing” the Whites and their culture (2002, p. 72). Cross states that this attitude is revealed in social relationships and in one’s behavior, thus individuals involved in ‘Immersion/ Emersion Anti-White’ identity are sometimes haunted by ideas of hurting the Whites (2001, pp. 177-178). Consequently, the ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ stage is the germ from which violent racist attacks take place.⁵

Cross's final stage, 'Internalization', represents the end of "anger" and "guilt" and the acceptance of Black selves "without romanticizing Blackness or hating Whiteness" (2001, p. 179). It is a stage of "*reconciliation*" between being Black and living in a multicultural society (2006, p. 522) (emphasis added). 'Black Nationalism', 'Biculturalism', and 'Multiculturalism' identities are the attitudes adopted during the 'Internalization' stage. The "heart" of all internalized identity clusters is "Black self-acceptance" (2001, p.182). Additionally, a sense of "*pride*" characterizes this stage (p.179) (emphasis added). Individuals with 'Internalized' identity possess a positive Black identity without denigrating or demonizing the "other".

A 'Black Nationalist' focuses his/her energies on "empowering the Black community", as pointed by Cross (2002) (p. 72). Cross identifies this stage to be characterized by concentrating on "Black empowerment", "economic independence", and "a heightened awareness of Black history and culture" (2001, p. 180). 'Black Nationalists', thus, owe a sense of pride in self and in origin; moreover, they are eager to see the attainments of the Blacks.

A 'Bicultural' identity is the acceptance of the Black-self together with focusing on "one other cultural orientation", such as "gender, nationality, and sexual orientation" (2002, p. 72). Usually, 'Biculturalists' accept being both African and American (2001, p. 182). Thus, the "positive aspects" of both identities are accepted without romanticizing the Black race, as in the 'Immersion/ Emersion' stage, or the American nationality, as in the 'Pre-Encounter' stage (p. 182). 'Biculturalists', hence, display a sense of pride in their double-identity leading to a creation of 'Multicultural' Blackness. 'Multiculturalists' do not only accept Whites, but they also accept others from various origins and countries.⁶

Focusing on Black children and their identity, Bagley and Young emphasize that "[i]dentity is important for all children and crucial for ethnic minority children who face many disparagements to self-esteem from the external world" (p. 87). In other words, the Blackness of a child stresses his/her need for identity more than other children. For this reason, authors have paid special attention for writing literature addressed specifically for the Black child.

Characteristics of Children's Poetry

Agnes Repplier (1973) argues that "children do not need to have poetry written down to their intellectual level" (p. 264). This is simply because they are "the most attentive, curious, eager, observant, sensitive, quick, and generally

congenial readers on earth” as pointed by E. B. White (1973) (p. 140). Poets writing for children have tried to attain the needs of their young in their works. Some of the major characteristics of children’s poetry are investigated below.

Children’s poetry has to teach and delight. As for knowledge, Margery Fisher (1973) states that children’s literature has to aid the child either to realize something new or, at least, to confirm what he knows (p. 313). Alec Ellis (1968) believes that children’s literature has to satisfy the child’s “curiosity” and answer his/ her questions (p. 207). Moreover, Edwin Muir (1973) believes that a children’s poem should provide the child with information about the past (p. 270). On the other hand, Jeanne Machado (2013) points out that humorous poems are enjoyed by children (p. 333). Natalie Babbitt (1973) notices the “Happy Ending” found in children’s books as they usually end with “hope” (p. 158). This underlines the significance of pleasure.

According to Rebecca Lukens (1986), it is essential to address children in a simple language (p. 8). And according to Fisher, the explanation has to be clear (p. 313). Jean Guttery (1976) praises children’s authors who place themselves “on the level of the child” and address him/ her in an “informal”, “friendly” and “intimate approach” because this creates an “understanding” between the writer and the child (p. 172).

The form and the sound are essential components in the poetry written for children. With reference to the form, Machado highlights the distinctive format of printed poetry. Machado maintains that the “page layout”, and the use of “punctuation” and “capitalization” are enjoyable for children (p. 335). As for the sound, Lesley Jeffries (2009) states that “the musical use of sound” is “dominant” in children’s poetry (p. 220). Frequently, metre and rhyme are significant in children’s poetry (p. 223). Repetition is also essential in children’s poetry, for Machado, the use of alliteration and assonance is a kind of repetition (p. 335). Refrains, as well, are common in poetry that appeals to children (Jeffries, 230).

According to Jeffries, numerous poems for children display “present-tense description as their main stylistic characteristic”, so the young readers are invited to “imagine themselves into the moment of composition” (p. 232). Jeffries also notices that many children’s poems are “deictic”, “something is ‘deictic’ when it directly points to something”, such as referring to specific places or the use of the first-person pronoun “the ‘I’ character” (p. 233). However, Jeffries also asserts the presence of many children’s poems that are

“narrative in content, reflecting this in using a past tense and third-person narrative” (p. 233). Thus, present and past tenses, and the use of first-person and third-person, are all features of children’s poetry.

The use of imagination is essential in children’s poetry. Machado thinks that a children’s poem has to stimulate the child’s imagination (p. 333). Muir, as well, asserts the significance of “imagination” for children (p. 270). Imaginative works “furnish the mind” and “give it scope and awareness, beauty and growth”, as pointed by Katherine Smith (2004, p. 397). According to Machado, giving “human characteristics and emotions to inanimate objects and animals (personification)”, such as finding talking objects and animals, is common in children’s poetry (p. 335). For Muir, children believe the poem that is rich in “wonderful” events (p. 270). Joan Aiken (1973) affirms that children love mysteries, as they are attracted to “the crazy logic of magic” (p. 154). In addition to imagination, Henry Saxby (1997) believes that poems written for children have to deal with daily issues and “domestic routines” (p. 160). Nicole Clifton (2005) also thinks that they have to reflect child’s personal experience and to “focus on actions...of real children” (p. 191). To relate both perspectives, Guttery concludes that the author has to bring “figures of speech” from the child’s “experience” (p. 174).

Babbitt states that there is no adult emotion and children emotion. Emotions like “love, pride, grief, fear of death, violence” are found in children’s literature as children can realize these feelings and “are torn by them” (p. 156). She adds that children’s writings are not as “gentle and sweet” as expected, they uncover “all the harshest aspects of life” such as “[w]ar, disability, poverty, cruelty” (p. 157). Johnny Wheelbarger (1974) argues that children’s literature should attain to the child’s psychological needs through handling issues such as “loneliness”, “acceptance of bodily characteristics”, “coping with parents”, “death” and so on (pp. 61-62). Hence, the child should be exposed to issues that he may face in life. This “can provide an outlet ... or at least show that the individual is not suffering alone” (p. 221). Furthermore, according to Wheelbarger, exposing the child to virtuous models creates a “healthy personality” (p. 210).⁷

Finally, Barbara Harlow (1987) describes poetry as capable of “serving as a means for the expression of personal identity or even nationalist sentiment” (p. 33). Machado thinks that poems for children are capable of “building self-worth and self-confidence” (p. 333). In many of their children’s poems, Hughes and

Giovanni try to shape Black identity for Black children and young adults, as will be discussed in their selected poems.

Application

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) and Nikki Giovanni (1943-) are two Black poets who have been preoccupied with the problems of their own people; therefore, they are both granted the title “the poet of the people”. Both poets have mixed poetry with Black music and preferred free verse.⁸ Hughes and Giovanni have been awarded honorary doctoral degrees and several awards for their achievements in Black literature. In many of their children’s poetry, Hughes and Giovanni aim to assist Black children to deal with their identity crisis. This paper attempts to reveal how the two poets have helped their Black audience to move across Cross’s Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) towards the stage of ‘Internalization’, which is the healthiest stage according to the model.

Hughes’s “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and Giovanni’s “Ego-Tripping” are poems that appeal to children and adults. In both poems, a mixture between the clusters, as well as the characteristics of Cross’s final stages: the ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ and the ‘Internalization’ is shown. The researcher also sets a contrast between Hughes’s “Brand New Clothes” and Giovanni’s “Jonathan Sitting in Mud”, in which both poets address children in the ‘Pre-Encounter’ imposing an ‘Internalized’ identity. The rationale for choosing these specific poems is not only because they impose an ‘Internalized’ Black identity, but also because of the resemblance between “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “Ego-Tripping”, on the one hand, and between “Brand New clothes” and “Jonathan Sitting in Mud”, on the other. This resemblance is evidence of Hughes’s influence on Giovanni.⁹

In his poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, Hughes expresses his pride in Africa and tries to counter the shameful stereotypical image of Africa as the land of ignorance and savagery.¹⁰ He writes:

My Soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. (4-7).

In the above lines, Hughes associates Africa with civilization. In his personification: “when dawns were young” (5), he refers to America, which has just seen dawn when Africa has already been civilized. Commenting on this line, Onwuchekwa Jemie (1979) says that the Black man has witnessed “the rise and

fall” of early civilizations and “will survive” in America (p. 103). Hughes also mentions the “pyramids” which are built long ago before America, as evidence of civilization. In addition, a parallelism may be intended between the pyramids that were built by slaves, and America that was also built by Black slaves. Thus, the poet seems to be reminding America that the Blacks have “raised” its civilization. Within CRIS, the persona in this poem does realize the place of the Blacks in the world. He is involved in the “Intense Black Involvement” attitude

Yet, along with the pride in the African ancestors, and the African heritage, there is an exaggerated idealization of Blackness. Besides being the symbol of civilization, Africa in this poem is the source of love, security and maternity. This is especially clear when Hughes writes: “I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep” (6). The Congo river is personified as a mother who lulls her baby to sleep. According to the author Martha Cobb (1989), the “humiliations”, “violence”, and “injustice” faced by the Blacks in America have “caused them to romanticize a racial past centered in feelings for Africa as the only real home for black people” (p. 105). This romanticization is a sign of an ‘Immersion/ Emersion Intense Black Involved’ identity. Despite “romanticizing” Black culture, the positive aspect of the ‘Intense Black Involvement’ is clear as the poet appreciates the contributions accomplished by his ancestors. Moreover, he sounds to be in an ‘Immersion/ Emersion Anti-White’ stage when he denigrates the Whites by referring to their culture as infantile: “dawn” and “young”.

In his simile “My soul has grown deep like the rivers” (4), Hughes refers to Blacks as both beautiful and prehistoric. Rivers are “deep”, pure and wholesome beneath their surfaces, and so is the Black individual who is a fine and pure human being under the black skin. Moreover, there is a sense of confidence and pride as he considers Blacks to be as beautiful as the rivers. The poet puts an extra emphasis on this meaning by repeating this line, by making it the last line of his poem, and by writing it apart from the lines above so as to further highlight it. Jemie comments that “[a]s the rivers deepen with time, so does the black man’s soul; as their waters ceaselessly flow, so will the black soul endure” (p. 103). According to Cobb, the poem has “projected a proud image of black life” especially, by defining the “soul” as “African or Black” which gives “a reassuring sense of identity” (p. 104). Cobb goes farther to assume that the poem “ends with lines that leave no doubt concerning racial

affirmation”: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers” (p. 104). Hence, an intense sense of pride is asserted.

The poet carefully chooses the rivers. The “Congo” is the deepest river in the world, and the “Nile” is the longest one; so, through comparing them to the Black soul, the poet exaggerates in dignifying it. Hughes mentions the Congo and the Nile, in addition to the Mississippi. The rivers are ordered according to “their association with black history” (Jemie, p. 103). The poet begins with the African rivers in order to stress his pride in his origin and his race; at the same time, he insists on his Americanness through the reference to the Mississippi. Hughes is thus proud of his double identity, which denotes an elevation up the CRIS to an ‘Internalized Bicultural’ identity. A ‘Multicultural’ identity is also suggested through the reference to rivers from African and American countries.

The poet continues writing about the Mississippi saying “... I’ve seen its/ muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset” (9-10). In this metaphor, the word “muddy” refers to the gloomy old days that have turned the river muddy, while “golden” refers to the bright future. However, for Jemie, “[t]he magical transformation of the Mississippi from mud to gold by the sun’s radiance is mirrored in the transformation of slaves into free men by Lincoln’s Proclamation” (p. 103). This vision is a hope and a prediction of a “golden” future instead of the “muddy” past. The poet seems to expect the coming days to be better than the old ones. This “magical transformation” of the Blacks from slavery to freedom echoes the transformation occurring to the Black identity throughout the scale. The “golden” future and the “muddy” past set an analogy to the positive identity of ‘Internalization’ and the partly negative one of ‘Immersion/Emersion’. The tone of the poem is melancholic when Hughes recalls past incidents of slavery trading, then, it turns into a happy one when he actually foresees a better future.

The form, the chosen pronoun, and the tenses used in the poem help to clarify the different identities forged in the poem, in addition to revealing the essential characteristics of children’s poetry mentioned above. The poet affects the child reader through the visual shape as lines vary between long and short ones. In addition, some lines are indented, while others are not. This may be deliberately done to underline differences in general, and differences in identities in particular, and to create a distinctive format by emulating the flowing of rivers, “I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.” (2-3).

The flowing of the rivers is also felt through the use of enjambment. Furthermore, most of the lines start with the pronoun “I”: “I bathed” (5), “I built” (6), “I looked” (7), “I heard” (8), and the repetition of “I’ve known” (1), which indicates the poet’s pride, a characteristic of ‘Internalization’, as pointed by Cross. Moreover, the use of the first-person pronoun and repetition characterizes poetry written for children. As for the tenses used throughout the poem, the poet starts and ends his poem using the present perfect tense in order to highlight that his focus is the present state of the Blacks. However, inside the poem, he uses the past simple tense in narrating events in the past. His lines: “I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln/ went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy/ bosom turn all golden in the sunset” (8-10), makes a mixture between both tenses, to connect the past to the present. So, like the rivers, the tense connects the past to the present. The use of the two tenses sets an analogy to Cross’s two final stages. The past tense symbolizes the ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ stage, since it is used to express the most exaggerated emotions in the poem: “I bathed in the Euphrates ...” (5), “I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep” (6), “I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it” (7), and “I heard the singing of the Mississippi ...” (8). The present perfect tense, on the other hand, symbolizes the ‘Internalization’ stage. The sentences in the present perfect are repeated in the beginning and the end of the poem to refer to a reasonable sense of pride: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.”, and to display ‘Multiculturalism’: “I’ve known rivers”. As pointed earlier, both tenses, the present and the past, are present in children’s poetry.

Other characteristics of children’s poetry are also clear throughout the poem. For instance, the language is simple and the explanation is clear. The poet brings figures from the child’s experience when he mentions the singing of the Mississippi. Through this personification, poet tells the past by recalling slavery trading which used to take place under the Mississippi river. Hughes also reveals one of the harshest aspects of the life of the Blacks, i.e. slavery. The poet also tells the past and provides knowledge when he notes that the Africans have established America. Again, the poet brings figures from the experience of the child when he gives human characteristics to the “Congo” in “it lulled me to sleep” (6). In addition, the poet tries to be “deictic” by mentioning specific rivers. Various emotions are displayed throughout the poem, such as, the emotion of pride along the poem, and the emotion of grief felt when the poet recalls the trauma of slavery. Yet conforming to most children’s poetry, the

poem has a happy ending when the “muddy” past turns into “golden”, which refers to a hope in the future. Finally, the poet pays attention to punctuation marks, as he uses colons, commas, and full stops, as well as capitalization.

Similar to Hughes, Nikki Giovanni has been concerned with the identity of Black children. An extreme sense of pride that reaches to superiority is strongly asserted in Nikki Giovanni’s “Ego Tripping”. From the very beginning, and through each stanza, the persona praises herself in an exaggerated manner. She is “romanticizing” her experience, and celebrates the abilities of Black women in general.

The poet proudly starts the poem:

I was born in the congo
I walked to the fertile crescent and built
the sphinx
I designed a pyramid so tough... (1-4).

Besides the clear hyperbole in the lines above, there is the same parallelism traced in Hughes between the pyramids that are built by slaves, and America that has been established by Black slaves. The poem could be viewed as an intertext of Hughes’ poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”. Similar to Hughes, the poet is reminding America that the Africans are the ones to be credited for its civilization. Giovanni continues:

I got hot and sent an ice age to europe
to cool my thirst
My oldest daughter is nefertiti
the tears from my birth pains
created the nile
I am a beautiful woman (10-15).

Mentioning the “congo”, the “sphinx”, the “pyramid”, “Nefertiti” and the “nile” reveals the poet’s pride in her African roots, her African civilization and her African ancestors. The poet connects the female child to her origin. In the previous exaggeration, the persona denotes that her tears are the cause of the fertility of Africa. Moreover, mentioning “europe” proves that she is so powerful that she could control the whole world. Her donations to the world are revealed in the hyperbole whereby the “ice age” is a mere gift that she could easily send. Her power to control the whole world is so clear through the hyperbolic paradox: “I sailed west to reach east and had to round off/ the earth as I went” (43-44).

The poet persists in informing the reader of her supernatural abilities. She is so powerful that “[she] sat on the throne/ drinking nectar with allah” (8-9). The poet writes:

I turned myself into myself and was
jesus
men intone my loving name
All praises All praises
I am the one who would save (30-34).

Through the above lines, the persona claims to be Jesus who is praised by all. By capitalizing and repeating “All”, and also by repeating “praises”, the poet declares her superiority. Arrogantly, the speaker announces: “the filings from my fingernails are/ semi-precious jewels” (37-38) and “I caught a cold and blew/ My nose giving oil to the arab world” (40-41). These lines also stress the persona’s superiority. She continues: “I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal/ I cannot be comprehended/ except by my permission” (47-49). These lines are indicative of the speaker’s exaggerated self-confidence, especially by repeating “so”. The speaker proudly chooses three outstanding figures, who are “nefertiti” (12), “hannibal” (24), and “noah” (27), to be her own children, which, again, asserts her superiority. Indicative of the hyperbole is not capitalizing nouns that have to be capitalized along the poem: “congo”, “nile”, “europe”, “arab world”, “nefertiti”, “hannibal”, “noah”, “jesus”, and even “allah”. Thus, the poet is arrogantly asserting her upper hand.

The persona is so proud of her gender. This is clear throughout the poem and is asserted as she says, “I am a beautiful woman” (15), “I am a gazelle so swift” (21). In the last line the persona asserts her freedom in her simile: “I... can fly/ like a bird in the sky” (50-51). The emotion in the poem is superiority, and the tone is this of an exaggerated self-confidence and pride.

“Ego-Tripping” is rich with the characteristics of children’s poetry. For instance, the poet uses the first-person pronoun, as well as a simple language. By mentioning specific places and characters, the poet tells the children of the past when he speaks about the favor of the Africans on America. The poem is highly imaginative; it is full of wonderful events and magic, which is enjoyed by children. In addition, it is musical through the use of repetition in “All praises All praises” (33) and in (so swift/ so swift) (21-22). The poem ends happily “I ... can fly/ like a bird in the sky” (50-51). The layout of the poem is distinctive, as many of the lines are indented.

To compare both poems, Giovanni's tone is much more exaggerated. In addition, Giovanni mainly addresses Black females which makes of her poem a feminist appropriation of Hughes's text. The two poems enjoy a strong intertextual connection. Contrary to Hughes's double identity, Giovanni has a multicultural identity. She mentions the "congo" (1), the "nile" (14), the "sahara desert" (17), "europe" (10), "rome" (25), the "arab world". So, the poet seems connected to the whole world. It is essential to note that both poems are enjoyed by adults as well as children.

However, in other poems, Hughes and Giovanni focus on the 'Internalization' stage through criticizing the 'Pre-Encounter' stage. This is clear through Hughes's "Brand New Clothes", and Giovanni's "Jonathan Sitting in Mud".

In "Brand New Clothes", Hughes writes an attractive conversation between a Black mother and her child. Hughes sings:

My mama told me,
Kindly, please,
Do not get down
On your Knees
With your brand new
Clothes on. (1-6).

Hughes here is rebelling against the stereotypical image of the inferior and docile Black individual formerly imposed by society. Through the voice of the mother, Hughes tells every child never to accept the White man's view of the inferiority of the Blacks. The alliteration in "My", "mama", and "me" shows the intimacy between the child and the mother, while in "Do not" and "down", it reveals tenderness in her request. The poem turns to be more realistic when the child replies: "I'm already down./ Can't I stay/ On the ground" (7-10). Within CRIS, the child here exhibits a 'Pre-Encounter Miseducation' identity; he accepts the negative stereotyping of the society which looks at the Blacks as inferiors and is not willing to change it.

However, the tone of the poem gradually turns into pride, this is clear when the mother firmly refutes her son's request: "No, I say!" (14). This firm maternal answer pushes the child to rethink, and thus to move to the 'Encounter' stage. The role of the mother in taking her child along the scale of identity is appreciated by the child himself as he says: "So my mother had her way-/ That's why I'm so clean today" (15-16). The adjective "clean" may refer here to one's

dignity that could be protected only through insisting on claiming one's rights, it may also literally refer to living a good life by having clean clothes, clean food, and good jobs. Moreover, "clean" can be read in terms of CRIS as referring to the highest and the healthiest identity attitude: the 'Internalization'. We find the orders as if they are coming from a real mother. The mother here begins in a calm mood saying "Kindly, please", but when she finds her child arguing with her, she turns to be more serious in saying "No, I say!" like any mother who wants to tame her child. This dialogue, which seems so natural, lures the young audience to know the rest of the story, and to forge one's own identity as the little boy does with the help of the mother.

Each of the three stanzas in the poem ends with "With my brand new/ Clothes on", the purpose of this refrain is to stress the significance of the title. The "Brand New Clothes" may refer to the development of a "brand new" Black identity. The poem asserts self-confidence and pride through simple, yet expressive words. This pride is heard by the mother along the poem and by the son at the end when he declares his new identity. This proud tone is indicative of the 'Internalization' stage, as identified by Cross.

Through this poem, it is clear how strongly Hughes believes in the role of mothers in shaping identities. Black mothers struggle the double dilemma of being Blacks and females which puts an overload on the process of identity development. Nevertheless, the mother has to function as a positive role model. She insists on defying her circumstances and pushes her child towards resistance. She seems realistic in her conversation and her advice. The poem also offers a symbolic representation of the Black experience through the action of getting down on knees.

Many of the characteristics of children's poetry are shown in Hughes's "Brand New Clothes". Throughout his narrative poem, the poet uses simple, informal, and friendly language. The poem is "deictic" as the first-person pronoun is used. Moreover, the mother is brought as a role model. The poem displays different emotions, the mother's emotion is that of pride, while the emotion of the child turns from disappointment to self-confidence. Hence, the poem ends happily: "That's why I'm so clean today" (16). The figures in the poem are borrowed from the experience of children, especially when the poet compares accepting humiliations to getting down on knees. In these lines, he also reveals harsh aspects in the life of the Blacks. The poem turns musical through the use of refrain and alliteration. Punctuation marks play a role in the

poem, as the poet uses a question mark, an exclamation mark, and a dash, in addition to the commas and the full stops to reflect the conversational style and assert the confident tone.

Giovanni's "Jonathan Sitting in Mud" gives another example of a Black child in the 'Pre-Encounter' stage. Giovanni writes:

Jonathan sat in the mud
all day
Jonathan sat in the mud
His Mother cried
His Father tried
But Jonathan sat in the mud (13-18).

The "mud" here is a metaphor of inferiority which parallels the kneeling down in Hughes's poems. The boy, Giovanni visualizes, insists on staying in the mud because he believes in the stereotype the White society casts for him. Therefore, he experiences 'Pre-Encounter Miseducation' stage of identity formation. In spite of the tears of his mother, and trials of his father, the boy does not change his opinion. Thus, the parents here are trying to aid their child in forging a healthier identity. Their attempts are doubled by repeating the lines at the end of the poem.

However, the child sounds to be totally convinced that he is right: "And Jonathan said/ as he stretched out for bed/ 'I'm happy where I am'" (25-27). The child decides to take a bed in mud, which reveals his refusal to change himself. Admitting his happiness assures his blindness to the extent that evokes the anger of the audience. Using the continuous tense in the title: "Jonathan Sitting in Mud", asserts the continuity and insistence of the boy on doing the action. The poet is capturing Jonathan's humiliation so that the young readers get angry and move beyond their own 'Pre-Encounter' stage of identity formation. Blaming the boy for accepting inferiority is the first step towards 'Internalization'.

"Jonathan Sitting in Mud" reveals some of the characteristics of children's poetry. A simple, informal, friendly, language is used. It is written in a third-person narrative structure, and in a past simple tense. Various emotions are shown, such as the grief of the mother, the love of the parents, and the stubbornness of the child. Furthermore, the figures of speech are brought from the child's experience, as the poet compares accepting the humiliations to sitting in mud. Thus, he is revealing one of the harsh aspects in the life of the Blacks. The poem proves to be musical through the repetition of "mud" and the

repetition of the main stanza, as well as the use of assonance in “tried” and “cried”, and in “His father said “Hey!/ Won’t you come in today?”” (10-11). Finally, like Hughes, the poet makes good use of quotation marks, exclamation marks, and question marks in delivering his ideas.

Through “Brand New Clothes” and “Jonathan Sitting in Mud” Hughes and Giovanni offer examples for children in the ‘Pre-Encounter’ stage of developing identity. Both poets try to elevate the child to the ‘Internalization’ stage. Both children accept the stereotyping of society, and both of them accept to stay on ground. However, the child in Hughes’s poem is luckier to have a strong confident mother to assist him, while the mother in Giovanni’s poem is weak, she only cries. The role of mothers in forging identities is more accentuated in Hughes. His message is more direct through the realistic conversation between the mother and the child, while Giovanni’s message is implied whereas she uses the third person to represent the ‘Pre-Encounter’ stage of identity.

To conclude, Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni are two Black poets who have been preoccupied with the identity of Black children and who are aware of the dilemma those children face in an oppressive White society. In many of their children’s poems, both Hughes and Giovanni try to assist Black children in forging a positive Black identity. In the selected poems, both poets aim at forging an ‘Internalized’ Black identity. In “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “Ego-Tripping”, the personas sound to be immersed in Cross’s ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ stage; nevertheless, the two poets have created a distinctive mixture between the ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ and the ‘Internalization’ stages. In “Brand New clothes” and in “Jonathan Sitting in Mud”, both Hughes and Giovanni attempt at pulling Black children from a ‘Pre-Encounter’ identity up to an ‘Internalized’ one. Hughes’s message is conversational and direct, while Giovanni’s is narrative and indirect. Yet both poets seem to use their poetry to censure the ‘Pre-Encounter’ identity stage defined in Cross’s scale in terms of ‘Assimilation’, ‘Miseducation’ and ‘Self-hatred’ and to pull Black children up the scale towards the ‘Internalization’ where no rage or guilt are discerned and where a ‘Multicultural’ identity is forged without denigrating the White “other”.

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Notes

¹ “Black” and “White” are capitalized throughout the paper, since the terms are not meant to refer to skin color, but rather to a race and a culture.

² The verb “forge” (from the French “Forge”) has synonyms like “form”, “create”, and “build”. Yet it carries connotations of the careful effort exerted in the creation since it was first used in the context of heating metal in a forge and beating or hammering it into shape. Thus, this paper aims to examine how identity is carefully and intricately “formed” or “created” through poetry in children of color.

³ William Cross’s scale is chosen as the framework of this paper as Helms notes that “counseling” and “psychotherapy” literature is “based”, in many cases, on Cross’s model (p. 18). Counseling and psychotherapy are mainly concerned with self-understanding, and since many of Hughes’s and Giovanni’s children’s poems focus on self and identity, therefore, Cross’s model is applicable to many of their poems.

⁴ Mirroring is the reflection of our images in society; this reflection may be positive or negative (Clayton, p. 36).

⁵ Kevin O. Cokley (2002) concludes that an individual in the ‘Immersion/ Emersion’ “celebrates everything Black or Afrocentric as good” (Intense Black Involvement), while he/she “views everything White or Eurocentric as evil” (Anti-White) (p. 476).

⁶ ‘Multiculturalist’ identity is further divided into ‘Multiculturalist Inclusive’ and ‘Multiculturalist Racial’. For Cokley, the ‘Multiculturalist Inclusive’ identity “embraces a Black identity as well as at least two other identity categories (e.g., gender and sexual orientation)” (p. 477). While ‘Multiculturalist Racial’ identity reveals an attainment to Blackness together with being able to deal with persons from various races, as suggested from its name.

⁷ Nicholas Tucker (2009), a psychologist, maintains that “desirable role-models” shown in children’s literature are now sometimes replaced with “more earthy and often less idealized” characters (p. 153). However, this is not satisfactory for many adults who believe that children’s literature has to stand for something “different and better than ordinary reality” (p. 154).

⁸ James Baldwin (1986) believes that the “Negro music” expresses the Blacks’ “private or collective experience” (p. 86).

⁹ Giovanni (1992) has often expressed her love and respect to Hughes, she considers herself as a “continuum” to him, and claims that she belongs to his “tradition” (pp. 145-146).

¹⁰ “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, one of Hughes’s early poems, was written in a few minutes during Hughes’s trip from Cleveland to Mexico as he passed over the Mississippi.