

# Foreword

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*Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees*  
— Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit”

In 1939, a 23-year-old Billie Holiday stunned the public by closing her set with the evocative song “Strange Fruit,” protesting the inhumanity of racist lynchings in the American South. Holiday’s voice compelled her audience to digest the unsettling images of “bulging eyes” and the “smell of burnin’ flesh.” For Holiday, whose father was denied life-saving treatment for being a Black man, the song was deeply personal, and her audience also related to it personally, as they slowly went silent before finally erupting in applause. In the pre-World War era

that dictates the song's release, lynching was a practice that, although already on the decline, remained a vivid symbol of American racism and instilled fear and censure among Black communities. Originally written as a poem in reaction to a photo of two Black men being lynched in 1930, Holiday's auditory rendition brought the renewed horrors of racism to the public and advocated for its inhumanity, showing the impact a voice can have for social and cultural change. Just as it reverberated across the New York nightclub in 1939, so it still begs us to be heard. "Strange Fruit" is a poignant piece of art that reflects on what for many is still a lived, yet unheard, reality. It therefore forms the foundation of this issue on marginalised voices as a beacon of diversity and resistance.

In this issue of *FRAME*, we feature articles that consider the implications of silence and erasure within personal narratives, systemic oppression, or institutional injustice. Within the articles, we aim to further examine the role of literature as a tool for bringing marginalised perspectives to the foreground, from music as a crossroads for different knowledge traditions to undermining the institutionalised silence brought about by the colonial past. Speaking out is always a form of resistance. Much like the artist whose lyrics can only be heard when spoken, there are many whose voices can only be understood when we read between the lines.

Despite its political effects over time, "Strange Fruit" lived in the shadows of the impending Second World War, an event that defines the era in many history textbooks. Although it is not a zero-sum game, history is often written and read in such a way whereby one event takes prominence over another largely forgotten one. While increased attention to the rewriting of history is rightfully given in postcolonial research, for example, the retelling of Amsterdam's history of slavery through Black Heritage Tours initiated by Jennifer Tosch (Jonhston and Bagelman), there is much more to be undermined and challenged when it comes to unveiling cultural and social representations from the past and present.

An example of defiance that could bring to the forefront voices previously unheard is the challenging of canonisation and its

Eurocentrism. In our main section, Antonis Sarris offers a comparative analysis of two stories by the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar and the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, and further highlights how they each undermine Eurocentrism from a different intercultural perspective. Using Shunqing Cao's *Variation Theory*, the article examines how both authors challenge Eurocentrism while navigating their experiences of exile on the semi-periphery of Europe. Cortázar, through a disconnect from both Buenos Aires and Paris, critiques Western high culture, but also contradictorily seeks to integrate Argentinian culture into the European canon. Gombrowicz, on the other hand, embraces cultural immaturity and in doing so, critiques the imposed European hierarchical identity of maturity in art and therefore the very foundations of European cultural superiority. This comparative reading allows for a mapping of World Literature by addressing the precise concerns of a singular cultural model imposed on others.

Besides the canon and its one-sided Eurocentric perspective, there are more practices that we might take for granted as an objective testament of cultural and societal value, but that are in fact detrimental to the reception of marginalised voices. An example of harmful selectiveness can be seen in the systematic processes of archival methods. Museums are important sites for accessing the past through relics and evidence, but unfortunately, many such sites uphold a hierarchical structure that imposes a selective history that chooses to represent a Western discourse (Smith). In reaction to the selectiveness of museums, scholars have attempted a decolonial method of rewriting history by metaphorically shattering the glass box displays in museums that interpret and appropriate artefacts in an almost cannibalistic way (Ames). In this issue's main section, Reindert Dhondt similarly challenges the selective narrativization of traditional museum practices and their hierarchical methodology by examining the 2022 volume *Untold Microcosms: Latin American Writers in the British Museum*, a volume that reimagines objects from the British Museum's archives through fictional narratives and essays by Latin American writers. These short stories offer alternative readings of artefacts tied to Latin American colonial

history, recontextualising them as carriers of memory and identity. By understanding the potential of the “archival turn,” Dhondt emphasises how a literary reanimation of often forgotten or unseen objects allows them to talk back. A key example is Yásnaya E. Aguilar Gil’s Indigenous futurist story, which centres on a seemingly ordinary ceramic pot and explores the decontextualisation of the object within the museum, imagining its cultural revival in a post-capitalist future and therefore proposing a more communal, Indigenous approach to technology and heritage preservation. By revisiting artefacts through speculative fiction, *Untold Microcosms* offers a pluriversal vision of heritage that disrupts the museum’s retentionist and universalist claims. In this way, the collection not only addresses the ethical complexities of cultural restitution but also reimagines the future of museums as sites of narrative and social transformation.

Many of the authors in this issue explore sites of oppression that are created through a layering of subjects’ particular intersecting identities within a specific social context. Intersectionality, as a concept that originated in feminist and antiracist thought, provides a framework for understanding the intersections of gender and race in the oppression Black women face. Yet, it has gained traction as a relevant framework for exploring oppression within a variety of identity ‘crossroads.’ Indebted to the conceptual history of intersectionality theory, many of the authors in this issue explore how intersectional identity contributes to processes of silencing within different socio-political contexts, ranging from women in Kashmir, to Hungarians in Romania, to Indigenous and Latin-American people in US-America. The scholars explore, on the one hand, how intersecting marginalised identities interact and reinforce one another within specific socio-cultural contexts, and, on the other hand, how these dynamics are represented aesthetically in the literary texts that engage with these contexts. By doing so, many of the articles in this issue allow for a (re)consideration of the epistemological value of literature in writing the kind of nuanced accounts of identity and oppression intersectional theory vouches for. Furthermore, their focus on the textual aesthetics of literature allows for

an understanding of the importance of artistic work in conceptualising, (re)framing, and giving voice to nonhegemonic identity experiences.

Intersectionality theory posits that someone may simultaneously be subjected to multiple forms of othering which all synergise in their experience as a subject. In the masterclass section, Wasim Akram investigates how intersecting structures of oppression shape the lives of women in contemporary Kashmir through a reading of Nayeema Mahjoor's *Lost in Terror*. Akram argues that the militarisation of society that Kashmir has been undergoing since the 1990s has led Kashmiri women to experience violence and oppression from two intertwining ideologies: militarism and patriarchy. Through reading *Lost in Terror*, which is written as an account of an unnamed female narrator of her life in Kashmir, Akram showcases how the family and the institution of marriage are used to enforce patriarchal social structure. The patriarchy imagines women within family structures as in need of protection which allows the men of the family to control and restrict the women's movements in its name. Yet, despite the pretence of protection, the dual oppression of patriarchy and militarism makes women uniquely vulnerable. Akram argues that the oppression of women in conflict is a fundamental part of militarist ideology: domination and power over the 'other' are essential to militarism and, through the systematic silencing of female voices and the lack of power women possess, they easily become the 'other' in times of conflict. The emphasis on protection and the self-other dynamic introduces new axes of violent oppression to women's lives in conflict zones: Kashmiri women are raped, not only because they are women, but also because they belong to an 'other' (Kashmiri) ethnic group. Messages of victory and those of failure to protect can be conveyed through enacting literal violence on their bodies.

Art and literature have a unique contribution to make when it comes to articulating underexplored perspectives on the past, and creating new bodies of knowledge about events and experiences that have been erased. In our masterclass section, Muskaan Katiyar approaches experimental literary aesthetics themselves as a means to resist the political, cultural, and social erasure enacted by intersecting systems of oppression. In "Tarrying Between Speech and Silence:

Deferment and Disruption in *Story of a Stammer*,” Katiyar explores the aesthetics of dissent in Gábor Vida’s autofictional novel *Story of a Stammer*, which was originally to be titled the “great Transylvanian novel,” in reference to its Hungarian heritage. In the novel, the protagonist Gábor’s stutter becomes a pars pro toto for his layered experience of alienation: as a Hungarian under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romanian dictatorship, through his family’s shame and rejection of his speech impairment, and by the societal ableism he faces. Drawing on Joshua St. Pierre’s reflections on speech and ableism, along with Giles Deleuze’s theoretical insights on minority identity, language, and dissent, Katiyar argues that the protagonist’s stammer operates as a Deleuzian “minor gesture,” disrupting dominant modes of expression and identity. According to Katiyar, the incorporation of the stammer in Vida’s autofictional work creates an ‘anarchival’ mode of history-writing that challenges the ideological historical narratives of Ceaușescu’s regime. By doing so, Katiyar shows that against the medicalisation, politicisation, and marginalisation of the stutter, *Story of a Stammer* repositions the stutter, not as a ‘deficiency’ to be medicalized or marginalised, but as a form of dissent that can destabilise dominant historical and social myths.

“Strange Fruit” famously employs literary devices such as the metaphor to deliver its message about the cruelty of racial violence and the realities of lynching for many Black communities. This powerful use of imagery is not just a means of evading censorship, as the meaning of the song was abundantly clear even in Holiday’s time. Rather, figurative language is a central component of the kind of conceptualising and knowledge-production that art and literature engage in. In the current issue, which aims to highlight literary new ways of ‘listening’ to histories and experiences that are or have been silenced, metaphors are frequently related to sound. ‘Reading between the lines’ sometimes means paying attention to other organisms of sensation, like the ears, mouth, or nervous system, to acquire knowledge about what we cannot see. In our masterclass section, Elif Kayahan explores the metaphor of the echo in tracing current realities of oppressive historical structures such as racism and colonialism. Kayahan

explores how the metaphor of the echo is employed to create new ideas about the way in which history lingers for many colonised and racialized communities in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children's Archive*. Kayahan listens to the echoes between past and present in the novel about a married couple who, with their two children, set out on a road trip through the American Southwest. The characters work on separate documentation projects that record stories about state-sanctioned violence, respectively targeting Native Americans in the past and Latin-American illegal juvenile immigrants in the present. Kayahan analyses how Luiselli's characters engage with stories of resistance and resilience through auditory reiterations and reenactments of the past. Additionally, she investigates how Luiselli's use of literary devices, particularly narrative changes, emphasises the connectedness between these stories and portrays how different types of documentation can echo, contrast, and inform each other. Kayahan finds that echo and reenactment are key concepts for Luiselli to engage with forgotten pasts creatively and to stress the continuity of American colonial practices in the Southwest.

In the main section, we feature a co-written article by Cae Joseph-Masséna and Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, in which they attune to Tracy Chapman's music from the perspective of different knowledge-traditions—such as blues, Vodou, and North-Atlantic Black feminism. In “Hearing Together? A Listening Across the Lines of Tracy Chapman's *Crossroads*,” the authors closely consider Black, queer, and feminist musician and songwriter Tracy Chapman's oeuvre, using a unique methodology that combines personal and academic reflections. By doing so, the authors seek to ‘hear together’ the meanings of Chapman's oeuvre, exploring the resonances of Chapman's music in both their individual lives as academics and within broader societal and intellectual contexts. Within the article, the personal ‘paths’ of the authors of how they came to know and understand Chapman as fans of her music who have a different subjective experience of that music culminate into a ‘crossroads’ in which they offer shared reflections on Chapman's work, drawing on their expertise as scholars of Afrikana knowledge. Through both their shared and individual

reflections, the authors argue for the importance of the concept of the ‘crossroads’ for understanding Chapman as a musician, thereby countering narratives of stardom that have continued to shape the narratives around Chapman’s art—from her ‘discovery’ as a graduate from Tufts University to recent accounts of her Grammy performance with country singer Luke Combs.

Billie Holiday, beautifully represented on the cover of this issue by Grace Boehlke, as a public persona is just as monumental as her song “Strange Fruit.” She is a notoriously mythologised figure, not just because of her virtuosity as a musician and how she would subtly bend public narratives of her life in interviews to suit the public’s expectations of their entertainers (Banks 93), but also because of her tragic death after being targeted by the US-Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Holiday, as an affluent Black woman who struggled with addiction issues and protested racial violence through her art, became the target of a federal witch hunt led by Harry Anslinger, an early proponent of the drug war (Chasin), eventually leading to two court trials in 1947 and 1949. Recalling this in her memoir, she wrote “It was called ‘The United States of America versus Billie Holiday,’ and that’s just the way it felt” (Holiday and Dufty 124). Despite all this, she courageously continued her performances of “Strange Fruit,” a song she believed was too important to be silenced.

Over the years, biographical work on Holiday has attempted to look beyond the mythologised public persona of ‘Lady Day.’ Examples include Robert O’Meally’s *Lady Day: The Many Faces Of Billie Holiday* (1991) and Farah Jasmine Griffin’s *If You Can’t Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search Of Billie Holiday* (2001). Recently, the Lee Daniels biopic *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* (2021) focused on Holiday’s prosecution by Federal law enforcement. These examples offer a myriad of perspectives on her life and legacy, leading to renewed interest in her story and shedding a different light on the structures and dynamics that led to her career and death. O’Meally and Griffin, on the one hand, dismantle the racist and misogynist narrative that Billie Holiday was a ‘natural’ artist plucked out of the abusive situation of child prostitution, and instead emphasise her skill, practice, and virtuosity alongside her talent.

Lee Daniels, on the other hand, explores the racist and misogynist origins of the US drug-war through Anslinger's targeting of Billie Holiday. These portraits of Holiday show that, although her life was cut short, the memory of Billie Holiday perseveres and constantly shifts with the narratives told about her life. They show that reading between the lines allows us to look beyond dominant narratives and myths, and to acquire a different perspective on the past.

In this spirit, we hope this issue of *FRAME* will continue discussion on the specific socio-historical contexts featured, and on the literary and scholarly works that have each sought to increase understanding about these conflicts. Billie Holiday, who sang in "Lady Sings the Blues," that the blues singer "tells her side / nothing to hide," recognised the transformative power of art, and drew on this to define herself in a world that continued to try and marginalise her as a Black woman struggling with addiction. Holiday, instead, knew the importance of getting "the world to know / just what her blues are all about" (Holiday, "Lady Sings the Blues"). Fiction helped her tell that story.

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