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PLANTATION NOSTALGIA: IMMIGRATION, LABOR, CASINO INDUSTRY, AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA IN CYNTHIA SHEARER'S *THE CELESTIAL JUKEBOX*[*]

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Abstract

Recently, scholars have devoted considerable attention to the study of labor in literature, and specifically in the literature of the U.S. South due to the region's global connections and complicated history. These studies have given insights into material conditions and exploitation of labor in southern spaces. The South has been an exception to the American experience with its exceptional history of labor, as the region has attracted many immigrants to a labor force that shaped and continues to shape the racial, social, and economic relations in the region. Immigration and immigrant labor are some of the most controversial and popular discussion topics among mass media, politicians, and scholars today. These discussions are not region specific; yet due to its historical background, geographical location, and reconstructing plantation as a living memory, the U.S. South has a profound role in labor and immigration debates as one of the most prominent regions with deep-rooted global connections. Cynthia Shearer in her novel *The Celestial Jukebox* (2005) problematizes and challenges the idea of labor exploitation through historical contexts and tends to portray immigrants within the framework of cultural diversity and richness with liberal ideas of multiculturalism that acknowledge cultural differences contributing to the cultural diversity of the region. In this vein, this paper attempts to discuss the current condition of global capitalism, casino industry, immigrant labor, the role of historically rooted labor exploitation, and labor trauma in Cynthia Shearer's *The Celestial Jukebox*.

Keywords: Plantation, nostalgia, exploitation, capitalism, slavery economy.

SÖMÜRGE ÇİFTLİĞİ NOSTALJİSİ: CYNTHIA SHEARER'IN *THE CELESTIAL JUKEBOX* ADLI ESERİNDE GÖÇ, EMEK, KUMARHANE İŞLETMESİ VE TARİHSEL TRAVMA

Öz

Son zamanlarda araştırmacılar edebiyatta göçmen işçi sorunsalına, özellikle de ABD Güney edebiyatında, oldukça yoğun bir ilgi göstermişlerdir. Bu çalışmalar Güney edebiyatında işçi sömürüsü ve iş şartları konusunda yoğunlaşmıştır. ABD'nin güney bölgesi Amerikan tecrübesinde emek ve işçi tarihi açısından bir istisna oluşturmaktadır çünkü bölge çok sayıda göçmen çekmekte ve bu göçmenler bölgenin ırk, sosyal ve ekonomik ilişkilerini değiştirmiş ve değiştirmeye devam

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etmektedir. Bugün göçmenler ve göçmen işçi sorunu popüler medyada, politikacılar ve bilim insanları arasında en tartışmalı konular arasında yer almaktadır. Bu tartışmalar sadece bu bölgeye özgün değildir ancak tarihi geçmişi, coğrafi konumu ve köleliği yaşayan bir anı olarak yeniden canlandırma arzusu nedeniyle, Güney, küresel bağlantıları göz önünde bulundurulunca, iş ve göçmen işçi tartışmalarında çok önemli bir yer teşkil etmektedir. *The Celestial Jukebox* (2005) adlı eserinde, Güneyli yazar Cynthia Shearer tarihsel süreciyle bağlantılı olarak işçi sömürüsünü eleştirmekte ve göçmenleri ülkeye zenginlik katacak kültürel çeşitlilik unsuru olarak görme eğilimindedir. Bu bağlamda, bu makalede Shearer'ın *The Celestial Jukebox* adlı eserinde mevcut evrensel kapitalizmin, kölelik ekonomisini sürdürme eğiliminde olan kumarhane işletmesinin, tarihi geçmişi olan emek sömürüsününün ve iş travmasının incelenmesi hedeflenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürge çiftlikleri, nostalji, sömürü, kölelik ekonomisi.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. South has been a center of political, literary, and anthropological studies since the arrival of first settlers to the region. The expansion of cash crops and introduction of the institution of slavery, the American Civil War, Reconstruction, racial issues, and its backwardness distinguished the South and southern literature from the rest of the nation. After losing the Civil War, a group of Southern Americans, Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate among others who were later known as "the fugitives," focused on historic romances about the "Lost Cause" and argued that the Antebellum South is the source of good life and, therefore, they should maintain the legacy of Old South. However, with the Southern Renaissance–William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, Allen Tate, Robert P. Warren were among the significant representatives–focused more on race, religion, family, and the troubled history of the South. In contemporary southern literature, racial binaries and the religious topics have given way to the southern multiculturalism that recognizes ethnic presences in the South including Hispanic, Latino, Asian, European, Native and African among many others.

Within these contexts, some southern writes, including Cynthia Shearer, Tom Wolfe, Roberto Fernandez, Barry Hannah, Cormack McCarthy, who acknowledge multiculturalism and challenge traditional views of distinctiveness, complicate the representations of the South and argue that exceptionalism is in the past. By extending its borders, they aim to make a connection between the U.S. South and the global souths as the region's literature shares historical, social, political, and economic commonalities with the global souths. In this sense, writers, such as, Cynthia Shearer depicts transcultural society and argues that immigrants bring diversity and richness to the culture of the region, yet historical burden and nostalgia of plantocracy which is ingrained in the psyche of the regions aim to perpetuate the legacy of slavery and exploit both the space and people, which Shearer aims to problematize in her novel *The Celestial Jukebox*. In this vein, this paper attempts to discuss the current condition of global capitalism, immigrant labor, casino industry, and the role of historically rooted labor exploitation in Cynthia Shearer's *The Celestial Jukebox*.

Set in the fictional twenty-first-century town of Madagascar, Mississippi, *The Celestial Jukebox* (2005) (*The Celestial*, hereafter) envisions a new southern landscape with immigrants and casino business, yet paradoxically repeats the legacy of exploitation. The text depicts historical connections between the U.S. South and Africa through the African immigration and the way the Mauritanian character, Boubacar, travels to America. Boubacar's travel is reminiscent of traditional immigrant narratives, which portray immigration as a quest for economic prosperity and freedom. The paper looks through the lens of traditional immigrant narratives to discuss how readers might best interpret contemporary immigration and casino labor in the U.S. South. In relation to this purpose, the paper seeks to uncover some of the deeper transformations such as the perpetuation of plantation logic, displacement, and historical connections occurring beneath the surface of Lucky Leaf Casino and immigrant labor as presented in the novel. By doing so, this paper, through its unpacking of troubled southern psychology, focuses on immigration and its global connections to deconstruct historical and economic exploitation of human labor in the U.S. South.

The setting, Madagascar, is a microcosm of the new U.S. South and mirrors many spatial and demographic changes that have to come to the American South as a whole. Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer acknowledge Madagascar as a clear representation of the Global South, "*not as an enclave of hyper-regionalism but a porous space through which other places have always circulated*" (2006: 679). The South demographically became a multicultural and hybrid space in which the black and white dichotomy is shattered with the arrival of various immigrants. In other words, *The Celestial* explores the multicultural South through an array of characters and backgrounds and portrays a

panorama of immigrants and labor in the contemporary U.S. South while offering a global connection through these immigrants.

Bringing these diverse immigrants to Madagascar, Shearer manages to depict more vibrant and pluralistic aspects of the global U.S. South. In this sense, the text challenges and complicates perceptions about the undiversified characterization of the region. In other words, the text disavows the ideas that the U.S. South is "*anti-intellectual, impervious to change and racist*" (McPherson 2003: 10), while portraying diverse cultures and an economically developing region. However, while exploring multicultural hybridity, the text at the same time problematizes abuses and exploitations of the modern day capitalist approach of the market economy, which considers surplus as the most important outcome. Thus, the text consistently depicts land and labor exploitation–as rooted in the history of the region–capitalism, dislocation, and colonialism. While portraying the South as a place integrated into a capitalist economy which brings a great many opportunities as well as insurmountable problems, *The Celestial* can be read as a social critique of the maintenance of exceptional status of the region which correlates the relation between the antebellum South and contemporary capitalist economy.

Regarding various ethnicities, Shearer addresses political, social, and economic issues through her choices of characters. Among the characters that create a transcultural community once backward southern spaces are: Boubacar, the protagonist, is a young Mauritanian Muslim who comes to America to join his uncles, Teslem and Salem, and yearns to play the blues. Angus Chien is a Chinese immigrant through which the text addresses the history of Chinese grocery stores in the South and Asian immigration to the region. Dean Fondren, who symbolizes changing face of the southern land owners, is a long-time white farmer whose wife has left him for reasons neither understands. Honduran farmer workers represent Hispanic immigrants through whom the text complicates illegal immigration. Along with these immigrant characters, the text also highlights various ethnicities that are significant in region's labor and political history such as Aubrey Ellerbee, an African American farmer with a gambling problem, and Peregrine Smith-Jones, an African-American college student with family roots in the area, and Ariadne, long dead at the time of the novel's events, was an African American midwife who helped bring many of the Mississippi natives into the world. Through the stories of its characters, *The Celestial* unfolds as a contemporary history of immigration and displacement juxtaposing the arrival of immigrants to Mississippi with the Indian removal from Mississippi.

This arrival and displacement are depicted through the casino business. The "*gambling company" sends offer letters to all around the casino to buy their lands and "[talks] about buying everybody out*" (Shearer 2005: 37). This purchase reminds of historical transactions and its "*auspicious meanings to Americans*" (2005: 17). Among these auspicious meanings was the collective memory of the past which reminded of the displacement of Native Americans who later initiated mostly casino business in Oklahoma. In this regard, there are many tensions in the casino and its establishment in an old plantation. The text sets up the casino through Angus's point of view as "a fat, money-sucking larval colony on the landscape" (2005: 129), and the customers are described as "*casino trash*" (2005: 347). Setting up a casino business in an old plantation, the text faces the fact that, as Jessica Adams writes, the "*past itself may return, inflicting new wounds and reopening old ones*," and offers a remedial critique to the historical traumas of the region (Adams 2007: 5).

Immigration to Mississippi

The Celestial is a contemporary text which uses an amalgamation of traditional and modern immigrant narratives; the methodology that Shearer uses mostly follows the conventions of the traditional narrative because the text chimes in with traditional immigrant narratives because its immigrant subjects strongly emphasize the U.S. as the ideological "promised land." In order to understand the ways in which the ideologies of the traditional immigrant narrative have persisted,

it is useful to place it in conversation with hegemonic immigrant narratives from the past. In contemporary immigration narratives, the main reason behind immigration is political rather than economic as in the case of the Cuban exile in Roberto G. Fernandez' *Holy Radishes*!, and Vietnamese immigrants in Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*, just to name a few. However, the immigrants in *The Celestial* come to America to achieve their American dream; for better job opportunities, which leads to classifying *The Celestial* as a traditional immigrant narrative.

The Celestial's main occupation with immigration is to show that immigrants from various backgrounds and cultures transform both individual and national cultural identity, which negotiates regional identity and culture. In other words, the text creates a multicultural worldview through their religions, folklore, music, and foods, which together mirror the collective consciousness of immigrant groups. Somalian food and Mexican food, for example, enrich food culture of the region. Consuela, a Honduran woman who works for Angus, cooks "tamale" that Angus could not remember when he had such delicious ones before (Shearer 2005: 92). In addition to food, the Honduran's dances, as well as The Wastrel's and Boubacar's African music, create a pluralistic musical aura in which African, South American and American music are intermingled. The Chinese grocery functions as a hub and portrays the U.S. South as multicultural New South. Thus, the immigrants as presented in the novel enrich and expand the borders of social order and community projecting a grand narrative, a historical actuality.

The fact that the immigrants in the text are mostly employed in the casino business evokes the old wounds such as slavery, displacement, exploitation, in the psyche of the region. The casino offers incentives to the immigrant Africans that they cannot refuse such as working in a place with "*air conditioning*" and wearing "*tuxedos*" (Shearer 2005: 35). Aubrey Ellerbee criticizes the new African immigrants as he "*can't get 'em*" work in his field in the sun; they prefer to be inside and make good money (2005: 35). The casino occupies an old plantation in which slaves were bought and sold as commodities to perform the hard labor in the fields. In the modern southern town of Madagascar, the casino business fetishizes plantation nostalgia through tourism agencies, which bring tourists from all over the world. A group of German tourists visit Madagascar and ask Dean to "*show* [them] […]*where [the southerners] kept the slafe*!"(2005: 103).

There are several incentives behind employing immigrant labor which casino industry takes advantage of. As Cornelius Wayne explains, "*immigrants are willing to do low-pay work that is boring, dirty, or dangerous with little or no prospects for upward mobility and that even in firms involving highly advanced technologies such work is critical*" (cited in Suárez-Orozco 2007:101). Employers perceive them quite favorably–as reliable, flexible, punctual, and willing to work overtime. Immigrant transnational labor recruiting networks are a powerful method for delivering eager new recruits to the employer's doorstep with little or no effort on his part. The Mauritanian immigrants and Honduran farm workers are employed in Madagascar as their labor is cheap and they do not have many alternatives to work elsewhere. Interestingly enough, these immigrants are eager to work under the exploitative conditions. With regard to low wage policy and the region's paradoxical situation, James Cobb points out that "*although wages in the South […] are well below the U.S average […] in the broader global context the South has become a high-wage region*" (2005: 4).

Paradoxically, although the region offers low-wage labor, it attracts immigrants because they find the wage still higher than that of in their homelands. Boubacar admits that "*casino money is very good in my village*" (Shearer 2005: 23). This paradigm shift can be understood easily if the "*labor [...] is understood as historically changing through forms of bondage to waged 'freedom'*" (Godden 1997: 3). In contemporary immigration patterns, immigrants arrive at the region as a result of political and economic upheavals around the world. There are several questions that need to be answered to understand the reasons for immigration to the region: What are the reasons why immigrants preferred the South? Or why did the South employed or attracted such a large number of immigrants after the 1965 Immigration Act? The South offered cheap land and cheap labor for

international corporations, such as Nissan, Toyota, and Mercedes to build factories in the region. With the transformation of field works into industrial areas, the workforce in the agricultural fields is filled with immigrants coming from poor parts of the world. During the 1970s the region became a center of growth and economic expansion, attracting new industries and stimulating urban growth by means of a variety of factors including its lower cost of living, improved consumer services, and changing racial attitudes. Equally important were the region's weak labor unions and right-to-work policies, its cheap labor force, and a widespread campaign of image-building boosterism by southern cities (McPherson 2003: 13-14).

In a 2008 American Prospect article, David Bacon states that the source of immigration for Mississippi is the casino industry. Here, David Bacon argues that immigrant workers from Florida arrive in Mississippi as construction workers to build casinos in 1991 when Mississippi has passed a law permitting the casino business (2008: 2). Following their construction, the casinos continued to use the immigrant workers to fill their growing labor needs. The fact that casinos recruited immigrant labor to fill the chasm in their workplace is not a result of the lack of labor in the region; rather, they prefer immigrant labor because it is cheap and easy to manipulate and control as they do not have any unionization. In this regard, the text traces the arrival of cheap immigrant labor to the South. Therefore, this paper argues that the immigrant labor in a casino is the reconfiguration of antebellum peonage in the form of low-wage labor. In contemporary immigration patterns, immigrants arrive, as Bacon mentioned in his article, for better job opportunities in the U.S. South when compared to their own lands. The casino business, which is one of the most important business sectors as portrayed in the novel, enabled the immigrants to work both in the construction of the casinos and to work for the casino. When the immigrants arrive in the U.S., they experience some certain stages of adaptation to the culture.

William Q. Boelhower identifies the macroproposition of the immigrant novel as "*an immigrant protagonist(s), representing an ethnic worldview, comes to America with great expectations and through a series of trials she/he is led to reconsider them in terms of his/her final status*" (1981: 5). For him, there are three major moments that immigrant subjects experience: expectation, contact, and separation. In the expectation stage, immigrants have desires and dreams to achieve in the host country, while in contact stage, they experience facts and have a chance to try what they have encountered. In the last stage, separation, there are three alternatives that immigrants can experience: assimilation, hyphenation, or alienation. Thus, Boubacar is the embodiment of these stages, and *The Celestial* follows the story of Boubacar from his hometown in Africa where a white Quaker from Harvard purchases "*Boubacar's freedom"* from his mother and *"finances his trip to Mississippi*" (Shearer 2005: 22). Television cameras from America had filmed the white man from Harvard "*buying him to set him free, signing his papers. […] when the white man from Harvard had left for Morocco taking the French television cameraman, his mother had used the money to purchase a little Sudanese refugee girl to fetch the water every day*" (2005: 22).

Boubacar's purchase perpetuates the idea that people are seen as commodities. His purchase is reminiscent of slavery narratives in which African slaves were bought by Northern philanthropist and set free. In other words, the Quaker plays the role of abolitionists and sets the slave free. In this sense, the text uses master-slave dialectic to problematize exploitation. With his arrival to Madagascar, this association continues as his uncles work in a casino, which is seen as a "neoplantation" in modern Mississippi because the casino, as Bone states, "*performs selective gestures to the old South*" (2010: 71). Merle Purty coins the idea of "neoplantation" as an "adaptation of the plantation model for the mid-twentieth century" (1955: 459). One of the gestures to the "neoplantation" in *The Celestial* is that the casino is established in an old plantation with many references to the plantation life and the Old South. Boubacar travels to the "promised land," and his first impressions about the U.S. begin with a "*mesmerizing*" effect of TV commercials (Shearer 2005:46). In the expectation stage, Boubacar arrives in the U.S. with the hope of fulfilling a version

of the American dream. He states that "*[he] will be having money in America*" (2005:24). In the traditional immigrant narrative, America as the "shining city on a hill" has been a prevailing ideological tool. Shearer extends this metaphor with a chapter "*Golden Cities, Golden Towns*" (2005: 64). Boubacar's name is a conventional indicator of his old world provenance. In Madagascar, he is alien, uprooted, naïve and ignorant of American life. He has a language barrier, unassimilated and is hopeful.

In the contact stage, Boubacar, mostly through watching and imitating the TV commercials, invests in the ideology of America as a land of opportunities and discovers American culture. Watching the commercials in a mesmerized condition, repeating the words, and trying to pronounce them in the style of a native speaker, are the initial traces of contact stage which insinuates the beginning of assimilation as well. He learns new phrases such as "*straight off the boat*" (2005: 24) and uses them frequently. These initial contacts imply the effect of commercials and consumerist economy. However, what Shearer creatively introduces into her narrative is the function of "*the role of media networks in mediating and determining immigrants' relation to nation, diaspora, and homeland*" to question transnational and transcultural changes (Knippling 1996: xviii). Through the rhetoric of media, the text highlights the transculturation of the immigrants. Boubacar is mesmerized by what he sees on TV and aligns himself to the culture of the region.

Boubacar's journey reaches a final phase in which he, as the immigrant protagonist, starts to reconcile the tension between the Old World and the New World and its values. The final reconciliation reflects the position of a character in traditional immigrant narratives in which the protagonists generally attempt to hold on to the new world culture and being assimilated into this new world leaving the old one behind. *The Celestial*, in this sense, is written in a traditional linear structure in which the immigrant protagonist follows Boelhower's three stages. To display the stages and their effect on individuals, Shearer, as E.L. Doctorow did in his famous novel *Ragtime,* describes the living conditions of the contemporary immigrants in a way that some of them refuse the sentimental and nostalgic perception of America as a dreamland, while others embrace it. In this sense, *The Celestial* follows the trajectory of Ragtime and portrays the conditions of immigrants and their struggle to achieve the American Dream. While Doctorow portrayed European immigration and the living conditions in the North, Shearer turns the gaze to the contemporary U.S. South and connects the immigration to global actors while portraying societal changes in contemporary South.

By delving into the casino business and immigrant imagery, Shearer shows the exploitative strategy for the hegemonic power to maintain an economic monopoly. Shearer convincingly establishes an evident chain of microstructural contiguities so that the physiognomy of the immigrant labor can dominate other possible topics in the text. In this sense, the text problematizes the fact that immigrants constitute the very labor for an expanding American capitalism. The narrative of the text uses its portrayal of mediascapes, to borrow Arjun Appadurai's phrase, to portray and problematize the Americanization of the immigrants. For instance, in the contact stage, Boubacar watches TV and meets the American culture. However, the text complicates this contact as "*America emptied itself into the room*," as if the TV regurgitates all the miseries of the consumerist economy into Boubacar's room (Shearer 2005: 131).

The mediascape becomes a form of "*schooling [Boubacar] in the ways of Americans*" as it creates the perception among the viewers (Shearer 2005: 110). The Americanization process starts with the first scenes as Boubacar "was eating like an American" in his uncles' kitchen (2005: 45). The criticism against such Americanization is given through the moment when Boubacar meets old Sufi the Wastrel. The TV in Wastrel's room "*was on but the sound was off*" (2005: 112). Symbolically, having the TV on acknowledges the existence of the culture at the subjective level, yet turning the sound off is the Wastrel's resistance to the schooling of the American way of thinking and living. The Wastrel believes that the mediascape has a hypnotic effect on viewers. Through advertorials,

people are encouraged to spend more on things they do not need. Worse than that, this mediascape plays a significant role in instilling Americanization, which may lead to assimilation or acculturation of the immigrants. Thus, through its mesmerizing effect, the mediascape turns people into commodities because for the Wastrel, "*to L'Américain, everything is commodity*" (2005: 117).

The Wastrel criticizes the exploitative aspect of commercials, which instill immigrants' values that do not align with their own cultural and traditional values. As a conservative mind, the Wastrel tries to save Boubacar from the influence of American culture, so he turns down the volume of the TV while it is still on. It is in this contact stage that Boubacar sees the silver National Steel Guitar and the mesmerizing old celestial jukebox in the Chinese grocery store. The jukebox and the guitar are central tropes that play a key role in Boubacar's Americanization since he is into music. The Wastrel is afraid that music can be a tool in Americanization of the young boy and warns him to "*stay away from American music*" (2005: 117). Because of the Wastrel's conservative and protective attitude, Boubacar decides to say nothing about his job at the Celestial because it was the place that he could listen to all the songs that "*he had not heard yet*" (2005: 117).

He starts working at the grocery at nights in return for "*food and such like*," which gives him an opportunity to play music on the jukebox. Since he does not have a green card to work, Angus states that "*can't no cash pass between [them]" until he gets a green card" (*2005: 49). Thus, Boubacar becomes a part of immigrant labor at the age of fifteen by sweeping the floor and getting the stove ready for the next day. It is at this stage that Boubacar also learns basic dynamics of the American economy, in which to be rich, people need to "*own a product's name-brand name*" (2005: 108). This connects to the larger issue of commodification of not only things but also people. The financescape through this logic of market economy reiterates the idea of commodification. While urging for consuming, the market economy, at the same time, turns people into commodities as they unconsciously follow the principle and the logic of free market capitalism. The final stage in Boubacar's immigration experience is the resolution stage. According to Boelhower, the immigrants in the macrostructure of narrative experience reality and reach to the resolution stage, which can be characterized as assimilation, hyphenation, and alienation (1981: 5).

In resolution stage, the immigrant subject reaches a point in which he or she accepts the values of the new world, begins interacting with the community and makes significant decisions about his or her future career and life. Boubacar listens to Reverend Myles and church music on the radio and decides to go to the church in Clarksdale to play music with the band, "The Sons of Destiny." Boubacar internalizes an American lifestyle and learns to respect the differences. He admits that he *"[is] from Africa*," but "*loves America*" and participates in Angus's prayer with his "*Amen*" (2005: 298). On the other hand, the Wastrel represents Old World values and warns Boubacar to stick to his old values and ignore the New World values which he finds "Kaffir." In Wastrel's rhetoric, which reflects his interpretation of Islamic philosophy, Kaffir means unbeliever, and Boubacar should avoid imitating what Kaffirs do. In contrary to the constructed Old World views, Boubacar believes that there would be no harm being among the people in the church where he plays with the band and receives recognition from the congregation. The experience in the church is a significant point that contributes to the spiritual adjustment of Boubacar to the host country, where he feels "*he was somewhere he belonged*" (2005: 329).

The cultural and spiritual adjustment of the immigrant protagonist is given through various scenes. The chapter "Ceremony for the Giving of a Name" reinforces the spiritual adjustment. When Boubacar wants to play music with the church group, the Wastrel gives Boubacar a sharp stare; however, Boubacar engages in playing music with the band and ignores the Wastrel and thus the old worldviews that the Wastrel symbolizes. He plays with the band; surprisingly the Wastrel participates in the band with his Wolof drum as well. In the resolution stage, the characters reach either spiritual or material adjustment. Boubacar has not reached the material status that he dreamed yet. However, he is on the way to achieve his "city on the hill," dream just by starting to

play music with professional bands. His American dream is related to music. Therefore, he wants to play music and make money. For that reason, he frequently visits music studios, such as Tower Records, in Memphis.

Tower Records functions as another symbol that the narrative uses to signify the American Dream or "city on the hill," because the name of the company itself symbolizes American imperialism and capitalism as the tower buildings stand for the twin towers that were the finance and economy capital of the world. By referencing to Tower Records, the text reminds the readers of its post9/11 context and connects the collapsing of the towers to globalization rather than referencing "*bare facts and figures, names and dates, the irreducible reality of what had happened*" (Gray 2011: 6). In *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011), Richard Gray explains that "*the destruction of the World Trade Center took place in front of what Habermas called 'a global public*" (2011: 6). Since the collapse of the Towers was broadcasted alive, the whole world's population witnessed the event and this created a global public. It was not only the Trade Center that the attackers destroyed but an American cultural icon. Gray argues that "*one vital consequence of this, for writers, was that the traumatic moment was also an iconic one*" (2011: 7), and thus he fall of the Twin Towers has become a "*powerful visual image for other kinds of fal*l" (7). This symbolically encourages and suggests the fall of exploitative approaches to establish mutual understanding and recognition in southern spaces as well as global ones.

The Celestial portrays this global public when Dean turns on the radio and listens to Hank Williams who sings about a wooden Indian, and then he hears how Israeli bulldozers uprooted an olive tree in Jerusalem, and then listens to the chants of Monks from the Himalayas. He finally hears "*a plane hit the building in New York*" (Shearer 2005: 409). This radio program brings the global public and shows how the Twin Towers is not only America's icon but a global image the collapse of which brought hardships to a global public. Gray states that "*in some texts, the towers, or the people, fall over and over again*" (2011: 7); however, Shearer's text rebuilds the national icon through the Tower Records, which continues to be "*the hub of the music business and embraces the global public as a multicultural space*" (Shearer 2005: 7). Boubacar's spiritual adjustment reaches resolution after hearing the news of 9/11. Upon the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, Boubacar decides to go to Memphis to see the immigration judge to help him. When Boubacar entered the Tower Records in Memphis after 9/11, his eyes "*raked the room. The living and dead were all [there], in this place that was like a jukebox of all spirits*" (2005: 418). This syncretic hybridity aligns with Boubacar's becoming a hybrid character. Shearer uses 9/11 to bring the global public together in her text, as Angus argues "*Ain't no such thing as original Americans. Original settlers*," which Dean supports by saying that "[his] *people were all thieves out of the jails of England*" (2005: 414). Through these characters, the text challenges the antagonistic and separatist rhetoric of post 9/11 literature and brings the global public together to enliven the notion of multicultural nation. The casino business, which the following section analyzes, allows the text to bring the "global public" together in Madagascar, Mississippi and contributes to a global and multicultural U.S. South. In addition to Boubacar's story of assimilation and travel throughout the phases of traditional immigrant narratives, Shearer adds a new phase to the immigration narrative by placing the casino business in an old plantation.

Lucky Leaf Casino and Plantation Nostalgia

Through the casino business, the text problematizes the haunting memory of slavery and labor exploitation. The roads of new immigrants and history of the region intersect in the casino. Thus, the Lucky Leaf Casino invokes the central themes in *The Celestial*, which evokes the structure of labor exploitation. It also reminds the reader of labor traumas in the South gesturing to the institution of slavery. The casino problematizes the southern history of labor exploitation and forced displacement. In other words, the casino allows the readers to make a connection with the haunting logic of slavery, codes of slavery, and forced displacement of Native Americans. The

casino business in Mississippi dates back to colonial times. In his book, *People of Chance* (1986), John M. Findlay explains why Mississippi in colonial times became such an attractive place for gambling. He notes that the Mississippi River and "the connected waterways were major avenues of trade for farmers and merchants and the riverboats carried passengers who had a lot of cash"(4). These people with money slowly started the casino gaming. Findlay states that "*taverns and roadhouses would allow dice and card games. The relatively sparse population was a barrier to establishing gaming houses*" (1986: 51). This explains why the Lucky Leaf casino was built in an old plantation house after so many years following the abolishment of slavery. There is an increase in the population, which makes it easier for the casino owners to find employees and customers.

This increase in the population led to the opening of lavish casinos by the early 1800s. After the great depression, especially after the stock market crash of 1929, gambling became a legalized business action because legalized gambling, in the form of the casino business, was looked upon as a way to stimulate the economy. Edward J. Clynch et al. state that casino gaming for cities such as Biloxi is "*a way out of the financial morass in which they have been mired for a number of years*" (Clynch 2006: 80). They further state that today "twenty-nine Mississippi casinos employ around 30.000 people and generate $885 million annual payrolls" (2006: 84). In this sense, *The Celestial* addresses the historical and political characterization of the region while displaying the historical role of gambling and casinos and their economic and social impact in the U.S. South. Through such references, the text can be read as an aspect of economic drive and labor economies, which are associated with labor and trauma in the region.

To better portray the exploitative logic, Lucky Leaf casino is established in a former plantation in Madagascar. In this regard, Martyn Bone describes the casino as a "*kind of neoplantation that employs African workers*" (Bone 2010: 71). Shearer uses Madagascar as a setting place for the casino to accentuate the significance of place, since it is a place that is being "*received and made and remade*," to appropriate a phrase from David Harvey (2001: 169). The casino industry is the embodiment of the notion of a place that is being "made and remade." As Richard Godden states, "*the earth itself is a fact of labor, whose meaning is inseparable from the dominant forms of work in the South*" (1997: 61) which alludes to the methods of slavery and labor exploitation. These dominant forms imply manual work that does not require any skill that would allow the employers abuse the workers. The narrative of immigration starts with Boubacar's arrival to Memphis airport. Boubacar travels from Mauritania to stay with his uncles who work in a casino in Madagascar. Boubacar's travel is the reenactment of the arrival of the labor force from Africa to the U.S. South. The African migratory streams are linked by the legacies of colonial history, and with Boubacar, Shearer mirrors historical labor traumas, which can be read as her critique of the exploitation of labor in global market economies.

Boubacar's travel to Mississippi reminds the audience that "*postmodern destinies are as old as ancient memory*" (Muller 1999: 218), which brings a new level of transnationalism into the memory of the nation with a lot of hyphenated identities such as African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Mexican-Americas. To better depict the relationship between the U.S. South and African labor, a nameless African-American soldier helps Boubacar at the airport and gives him a ride to Madagascar. Throughout the chapter "Six Mabone," the narrator calls him "the soldier" (Shearer 2005: 20). A nameless African American soldier helping an African boy to travel to Mississippi addresses the trauma of nameless slaves who were brought to work in the cotton fields and plantations, one of which is turned into a casino in *The Celestial*. Through the soldier, the narrative also reminds the readers of the story of black soldiers who had no choice but to go to the war to feed their families, such as Aubrey's father.

The historical trauma is displayed as the soldier speaks: "*It was some troubles here, long time ago*" (Shearer 2005: 23). The soldier talks about the labor exploitation and how slaves were forced to work in Mississippi. The history of labor trauma haunts the memory of the soldier in the modern

day. The stories that the soldier tells Boubacar depict that slavery and exploitation of labor are embedded in the region's culture. Through the soldier's memory, Shearer complicates the notion of slavery and as Adams points out, her work emphasizes the fact that "slavery does not, nor can it, just go away" (2007: 8) and problematizes the haunting methods of the modern day forced labor practices through the soldier:

> *Used to could see peoples hitchhiking, hooping freight trains, anything to get out of those cotton fields. Time to pick cotton, white man stop the black man on the road, minding his own blindness, put him in the police car, put him out to work on the country farm. Jailhouse first, then they decide the reason. Cotton all picked, you free to go on down the road* (Shearer 2005: 23).

In reminding us of the chain gang and exploited laborers in the South, Shearer, as a social critic and commentator, attracts her readers' attention to the issue and enables the community to face historical facts such as slavery, indentured servitutede system, chain gang, and sharecroppers. Through this confrontation, she complicates the modern day labor exploitation to which immigrants are exposed. Playing the role of a psychologist, Shearer unveils the trauma in the collective conscious of oppressed people. The trauma, in the psychological context, is, as Olick defines, a "*psychic injury caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed*" (Olick 1999: 343). As Olick further argues that once the "*memory of […] personally traumatic experience is externalized and objectified as narrative means it is no longer a purely individual psychological matter*" (1999: 345).

The soldier's articulation of labor exploitation is the externalization of this trauma. This notion may explain the galvanizing role of history long after its participants are gone. Collective memory, as in the haunting economy of slavery, becomes the external narrative. Through the soldier's memory, both history and collective memory become publicly available social facts. The social framework that shapes the soldier's memory transforms the experience and explains the perpetuation of exploitation. The main motive behind the employment of black workers as chain gang is the commercial reflexes of landowners. Since the "*social history of the various manifestations of a ruling class dependent upon black workers,*" it is a commercial reflex of the white oppressor to manipulate the laws and finds alternative ways to employ black manpower in their business to create a surplus (Godden 2011: 2). The soldier, as Tara McPherson puts it, represents "*new ways of feeling southern that are more fully come to terms with the history of racial oppression and racial connection in the South*" (McPherson 2003: 8). For that reason, as the soldier claims, most of the people left the region to go to "*Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Oakland… never to come back except maybe for the Fourth of July [and] Decoration*" (Shearer 2005: 23). This textual evidence explains why so many field hands left the region for better opportunities. The psychic traumas have profound implications at the personal and communal levels (cited in Richardson 2006: 336). The collective memory that the Lucky Leaf Casino symbolizes addresses blunt traumas of dislocation, torture, oppression, and exploitation.

The gambling interest of state elites will follow from their perception of their own balance of symbolic and economic capitals. Jeffry Sallaz argues that "[g]*ambling policy creation is a capital conversion project, as state actors seek to balance economic and symbolic capitals and outside parties try to convert economic and organizational resources into the highly symbolic form of political capital*" (2009: 294). Such conversation takes place in Lucky Leaf's political domain, which is a product of political history, slavery, and displacement.

In *Disturbing Calculations*, Melanie Benson Taylor explains that "*delivered from slavery, Reconstruction, and segregation, the twentieth century South finds itself at least nominally integrated into an American capitalist economy of limitless opportunity, but increasingly attached to slavery's prescriptive calculations of worth, value, certainty, and hierarchy*" (2008: 2). In this space, which is shaped by globalization and capitalism, Shearer complicates "slavery's prescriptive" methods and

stratification. Devaluation of the human labor and focusing surplus leads to the perpetuation of plantation logic which substitutes immigrant labor with slavery. The low-wage immigrant labor becomes the scaffold of the casino business and therefore the economy in Madagascar. Immigrants from many parts of the world dominate the casino and food industry jobs once held by blacks and poor white workers. In that vein, Shearer's novel reminds tends to read as a "historiographic metafiction," to use Linda Hutcheon's term, to reveal the contemporary human condition. Thus, Shearer textualizes historical contexts as significant element in order to problematize the ill logic of exploitation and nostalgia. Thus, she reinvents and retells the nation's story through Dean's perspective and observation of the conditions of the workers in the casino. Dean observes that "*liveried valets from Africa and Arkansas loitered in purple coats with golden epaulets under a splendid fringed purple awning*" (Shearer 2005: 181).

The human condition in the casino business is depicted through Mauritanian casino workers and their attachment to the casino. The valets from Africa are the altered form of human commodification and labor exploitation. The Western flavor of a uniform of epaulets and the association of Western values with the color purple which represents royalty, high-ranking positions of authority, wealth and fame, and bravery and honor as in the U.S. military (Purple Heart), challenges the dominant power and its romanticization. In addition to the symbolic significance of the color purple, the Eurocentric superiority is reinforced with the epaulets, which signifies the rank. In other words, the casino owners reinforce their position as modern-day slave owners through these signifiers.

Popular culture reflects that the investment in plantation ideology is indeed a national phenomenon. Its commercial appeal is certainly clear in the Lucky Leaf Casino. The sense of "neoplantation" is repeated through the murals in the wall which depict plantation life, and the text embodies the fact that the strange and contradictory possibilities that slavery released into the realm of the normal still "*shape social spaces, including the reimagined plantation*" (Adams 2007: 4-5). Upon Boubacar's arrival at the Memphis airport, the narrative voice explains why there is no one to meet him at the airport. Boubacar's uncles cannot leave work to meet him at the airport because of the fear that they may lose their job in the casino if they take a day-off. The fear of punishment (the loss of a job) makes the immigrant labor in the casino more profitable for the employers not because they are more efficient than black or white American labor but because their labor costs less.

According to Karl Marx, capitalism has the ability to enslave, while consumer culture has the capacity to commodify everything, an idea which is embodied through the casino investment and its rhetoric in the novel. Through Boubacar's uncles, Shearer both exemplifies this argument and problematizes the perpetuation of "*quantification and commodification*" of the labor force in the South (Taylor 2008: 2). Since "everything is commodifiable" at some level in this system, the commodification of human labor is the result of the increasingly globalized capitalist system (Rieff 1993: 72). The commodification is portrayed when a "*man takes a day off to take his wife to the hospital to give a birth. When he leaves for the hospital, he is replaced by the very same day by another immigrant from Mauritania*" (Shearer 2005: 17). This pressure of losing one's job epitomizes that the immigrant workers in the casino are not free agents as they are not free to sell their labor but they are forced to sell their labor. For that reason, the transaction depicts that "*slavery is not simply an antebellum institution that the United States has surpassed but a particular historical form of an ongoing crisis involving the subjection of personhood to property*" (Best 2014: 16). The transaction between the casino employers and the employee is a voluntary contract with capital as the immigrants have limited choices.

In relation to the commodities and commodification of human labor, social theorist Karl Polanyi in his book *The Great Transformation* (2001) explains that with the advent of modern capitalism, the three key concepts of "*land, money, and labor*" become "*fictitious commodities*" since

we can price, sell and buy them (29). There are ways in which the text and Lucky Leaf embed those fictitious commodities by buying and selling them starting with Boubacar's purchase. In this vein, *The Celestial* revisits the concepts of human property in its descriptions of workers in the Lucky Leaf, which represents the dynamic, efficient and veritable model of managerial modernity, which replaces the logic of the old plantation economy. In other words, the casino symbolizes the transformation of the highly capitalistic form of agriculture in the antebellum South, under the form of slavery and plantation economies, into the modern day capitalistic form of labor exploitation.

The success of the casino is dependent on the devoted, hardworking, responsible, and obedient workers that would increase the wealth of the casino owner. The perception of the casino among the members of the community supports this criticism. Angus, for example, perceived the casino as "*a fat, money-sucking larval colony on the landscape across the field*" (Shearer 2005: 129). Angus's perception negotiates the paradigm shift in economic space and immigration. Analyzed from capitalist and free market economy, the casino maintains the logic of plantation economy as "*the plantation was categorically a business enterprise, organized and geared for revenue and participation in both local and national economies*" (Taylor 2008: 7).

On the surface and deeper levels, the Lucky Leaf underscores the idea of business enterprise as it creates revenue for the local and global economies through immigrant labor. The main drive behind this business enterprise is to make a profit. From the employers' perspective, the casino business contributes to the local government by creating value added tax. However, the description of the interior of the casino from Dean's perspective as a place with "*the noise first, hypnotic drone, an electronic beckoning like thousands of dreamy false coins falling, a way of wooing fools*" strikingly emphasizes how consumerist market economy exploits people's desires to win (Shearer 2005: 182). It implies that the customers in the casino are in a hypnotic trance and controlled by the noise just as the galley slaves that were instructed to move according to the rhythms of the drums. It is striking that the casino management uses the same techniques to seduce the customers that plantation owners used to control the slaves and get the utmost outcome from their labor.

As slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), and Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861) inform the readers that the slaves during antebellum period were allowed to drink on holidays in order to ward off their contemplating on slavery and the dehumanizing attitudes of slave owners towards them. The slaves were controlled by letting them drink and play music. In this sense, *The Celestial* does not only problematize the immortalization of exploitation but also complicates the fact that the oppressors use the same methods. Aubrey is intoxicated and Peregrine is asked to serve him more drinks so that the casino managers can have him sign some papers (384). In *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (2004) Stephen M. Best observes that "*slavery is not simply an antebellum institution that the United States has surpassed but a particular historical form of an ongoing crisis involving the subjection of personhood to property"* (16).

The readers see how the new world of market capitalism relies on an often-uncanny repetition of plantation principles of abusing workers. There are ways in which Lucky Leaf is represented as a place that exploits not only the workers but also the gamblers. This double-edged situation reminds of the slavery, which dehumanizes not only the slaves but also the hegemonic power. It is highly acknowledged that the institution of slaver did not only abuse the slaves but also took the humanitarian feelings of the slave owners. Shearer revisits the concepts of human property with the descriptions of the murals on the walls, which recalls optical illusions to deceive people while romanticizing the myth of the plantation. Jessica Adams argues that "*careful readings of plantation images suggest that slavery's physical and psychic violence is always active within scenes of nostalgia*" (2007: 17). Similarly, In *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and Postmodern Perspective* (1998), Antonio Benitez-Rojo defines plantation as a machine, which facilitates the destructive work

of colonialism from its "*mercantilist laboratory*" (5). Similar to the plantation economy, the casino business, as a proliferating and insatiable machine, mirrors the economic and spiritual destruction through capitalist lenses. Moreover, "*the plantation machine*" is highly adaptable to the changing economic and social circumstances and attempts "*systematically to shape, to suit to its own convenience*" (Benitez-Rojo 1998: 27). Thus, the plantation machine metamorphoses into the casino machine in the Lucky Leaf. The nostalgia that the Lucky Leaf represents emerges as problematic for modern habitants of the South in that it represents the persistence of the catastrophic capitalist machine. The vivid depiction of the plantation and the overseers in a mural on the wall of the casino functions as a historical document that portrays how the exploitative mode of the plantation is romanticized and perpetuated in the South.

The references to the exploitative logic of plantation and its perpetuation through the modern day casino business are not limited to the murals on the walls. The output of the plantation machine is not confined to agricultural products; "*it also manufactures political structures, violent conflict, and repression*" (Russ 2009: 98). When Dean enters the casino to look for Aubrey and save him from the blood sucking economy of the casino, the narrator describes the manager of the casino as "*a white man*" with a chest of "*massive expanse elegant pinstripes*," who holds Dean's hand and was ready to increase the pressure that he is applying to his hand (Shearer 2005: 184).

The manager's behavior reinforces the plantation's power and portrays the side of capitalism that "*has the ability to enslave consumer culture and has the capacity to commodify everything*" it encounters (Adams 2007: 8). His description of the bodyguards associates the plantation management with the casino management as they behave like overseers. When Dean wants to take Aubrey out of the casino, the bodyguards surround him and give him the sense of "*muscled overseers standing on what one had been all cotton fields*" (Shearer 2005: 185). By trying to save Aubrey from the cogs of the plantation machine, Dean assigns himself a role of an abolitionist who tries to save slaves from the dehumanizing conditions in which they live and work. Just as the abolitionists fought for the freedom of the slaves, Dean fights for the freedom of Aubrey and tries to save not only his pride and soul but also his fortune and future. However, Dean's existence in the casino as is not welcomed and they ask him to leave. The logic of commodification that started with Boubacar's purchase is repeated when the casino manager "*pulled something out of his pocket…. [a] pseudo-money, something resembling old plantation scrip*" (2005: 185).

The old plantation scrip is the proof of commodification as people are bought and sold through the scrip. The pseudo-money, as a form of scrip, functions as a modern day document that enslaves the gamblers in the casino. As Adams puts it "*new technologies and the rise of new economic forces and cultural forms caused [the plantation] to evolve in terms of what it could do and what it meant*" (2007: 5). The scrip evolved into a form of pseudo money that maintains the exploitative logic of the plantation economy. It epitomizes destruction to humanity and exploitation of human labor, which caused a variety of oppositional resistance movements. As in the case of Boubacar's uncles, the workers do not have any mobility and flexibility at the workplace that would enable them to perform their daily chores. The oppressive power of the modern day overseers controls every movement of the workers in the casino. This surveillance strips their human feelings and the workers turn into robots that obey the orders, which generally involve either to seduce or intoxication of the customers.

There are ways in which the casino business attracts and figuratively enslaves its customers. Modern consumerism and marketing strategies use sexual codes and images to create consumer desire, which is another form of enslavement and exploitation. According to Darren W. Dahl et al. sexual economies theory "*marries the of gender in sexual attitudes with social exchange theory, which conceptualizes interpersonal interactions as two or more parties that each give up something with the aim of getting back something of greater value*" (2009: 217). This exemplifies the main drive behind the casino business that exploits employees, customers, and the owners. There are ways in which *The Celestial*

portrays this interaction and exploitation; for example, the relation between sexual economic theory and casino business is portrayed through the billboard on the highway that advertises the casino. On the board, a waitress with sexually attractive costumes, says, "*SPEND THE NIGHT WITH ME*" (Shearer 2005:139, emphasis in the original). The sexual rhetoric of the billboard implies double exploitation played out in the casino business.

In addition, the casino business in the text is associated with the alluring and hypnotic effect of sexuality to seduce the customer's ties the casino business to plantation economies. The visual imagery of sexuality starts with the billboard and continues when Dean enters the casino for the first time and ends with the fountain in front of the casino. Dean enters the casino and encounters with waitresses that wear the same costume seen on the billboard that is reminiscent of the French boudoir maids. The waitresses serve alcohol to the customers to "*get [them] in there drunken enough to lose everything*" they have (Shearer 2005: 187). Dean acknowledges these ways and tells Peregrine that "*there's more'n one way to be a slave to white men*" (2005:187). These ways utilize sex and liquor to enslave people. Dean believes that the Lucky Leaf Casino "*seemed like some vaguely pornographic piece of cardboard left behind on the horizon to fool tasteless Americans who could not afford the real Europe*" (2005: 181).

The use of sexual economics theory offers insight into the ongoing operation of the casino industry. Through sexual imagery, casino business transforms the symbolic capital into economic capital. *The Celestial* conceptualizes modern space as a "*political field which improves upon theories of the state implicit in both economic sociology and Marxist accounts*" (Sallaz 2009: 269). In this sense, the inside of the casino with its sexual elements ("the lights were dim in some places, bright in others"), which Dean states is "*more pornographic*" than the billboard, portrays the convertibility of space economies. The casino is physically designed to appropriate and control both the workers and gamblers at the same time. In this sense, it is reminiscent of a cavern with "*a big bunker with no windows*" (Shearer 2005: 182). This structure would terminate the relationship with the outer world, so the people inside "*will lose track of time*" (2005: 182). Losing a sense of time turns them into zombies that the casino owners can easily direct, control, and abuse. In other words, it can use them as commodities and as vehicles to make more money.

In addition to the economic exploitation that the casino brings to the workers, the most severe impact is experienced by the customers. The gamblers are totally economically exploited when they lose what Dean calls "*legalized theft*" (2005: 183). The relationship between casino owners and gamblers in the casinos can be explained with the help of social exchange theory. According to social exchange theory, social behavior is the result of an exchange process. The purpose of this process is to maximize the benefit while minimizing the cost. However, there is an imbalanced relation of power. The casino owners utilize several marketing strategies to seduce and entice their potential customers. Music and, more importantly, sexual attraction are among these strategies which are highly applied by the casino management. The economic exchange and imbalance of power are depicted through Aubrey and Angus's grandson. The destruction that the casino brings is the re-envisioning of the systematic economic exploitation of the plantation. It is significant that it is Aubrey, an African American, who "*got himself in a situation*" and was destroyed by the gambling industry (2005: 179).

The casino business and the transformation of an old plantation in a casino portrays how the South has transformed from a cotton and tobacco producing, "backward" place to a modern site of consumption. The consumerist mechanism of the market economy changed the fertile cotton land into a commodity that covered all that land into asphalt today. In *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* (2004), Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee explain that "*the fulcrum of power and profit begins to shift from the production of commodities to the circulation and capital*" (cited in Godden 415). Thus, it is not only the casino but also the landscape with shopping malls that depicts the transformation of producing, working hands into losing hands. Dean observes how casino

business turns people into zombies who unconsciously feed the slot machines. Among the customers, Dean witnesses black sharecroppers, an elderly man who is attached to a portable oxygen tank on wheels, and even Mennonites at the casino, which leads him to think that "*this is the end*" (Shearer 2005: 183).

This customer demographic communicates the larger issue of plantation logic in the casino: as Dean explains, "*there were thousands of people were here… no man is free*" (2005: 185). This reminds the reader of the antebellum master-slave relationship, which was a physically coercive labor system. The slaves who produced the cotton, tobacco, sugar, rice, and other crops that enriched the antebellum planter class worked for their owners and worked hard because of their slavery status left them few other choices. Similarly, the customers, immigrant workers, and addicted gamblers became a commodity to produce a surplus for the casino owners.

The destructive effect is not limited to the workers and the gamblers; the owners themselves became a commodity as well for their voracious appetite to make more money. The owners, in this sense, become the slaves of their eagerness and enslave themselves. As Dean said with a shaking rage, "*nobody is free in the casino, not even the owners*" (2005: 185). With the Mennonites, the destructive aspect of the casino is carried from economical level to spiritual level, as Mennonites are known for their emphasis on issues such as peace, justice, simplicity, community, service, and mutual aid. The distinction between a tourist gaze and the reality of lived lives in Madagascar is vital to *The Celestial Jukebox*, as when the narrator describes the fountain through Dean's gaze. When Dean comes out of the casino, he notices the sparkling fountain and depicts it in the following manner: "*concrete cherubs cavorted, while concrete angles with the bodies of whores watched over them. Then he saw the cottonpickers and combines, arranged in a circle around the fountain. Each one had a For Sale sign on it"* (2005: 186).

The meaning attached to the figures is embedded in an environment actively molded and achieved through the text, which brings up the notion of commodification. The figure depicts the deep continuity of relationship between the land and labor exploitation. Through cotton-pickers and a For Sale sign, the text brings historical traumas and labor economies into the light and challenges the human commodification. However, for Peregrine Smith-Jones "*there is a kind of justice*" through the casino's commodification of people. Peregrine believes that those who abuse people abuse themselves. This justice can be seen in several different ways as she states "*big daddies could finally lose their plantations*" (2005: 186). The plantation owner "Big Daddy" thus loses control over everything around him. *The Celestial Jukebox* problematizes how Old South remains "at once the side of the trauma of slavery and also the mythic location of a vast nostalgia" (McPherson 2003: 6). With the casino business, the text conceptualizes the postmodern condition of labor. Through a plethora of ethnic and racial identities, the text excels at observing the ways in which the South is imbricated in a network of globalism that ties its residents together.

CONCLUSION

With Boubacar's story, *The Celestial Jukebox* invites its readers to become a part of this Global South and reinvent and revive the nation's story of "city on the hill." By merging African-American, Native American, African, Honduran and Chinese cultures with their colliding myths and histories interactively in the fictitious space of Madagascar, the text portrays how the South became a hybrid space. In other words, the text inscribes a new nation that shatters the biracial and bicultural landscape of the U.S. South attributing to the region a more global and more comprising role in the twenty-first century. With casino enterprise, the text aims to challenge plantation nostalgia, human commodification, and exploitation. In doing so, the text contributes to the subversion of economic and historical abuses of the immigrants and labor in contemporary U.S. South. Shearer's criticism also demonstrates what Quentin Compson, famous character in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, told to his Harvard-roommate Shreve, "you can't understand it. You have to be born [in the South]" was wrong (289).

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