



Ethnic Absolutism, Civilizationism, and Planetary Humanism: Troubling Black-Slavery, De-humanization/(Self) Dis-placement, and Cross-Cultural Existence in *James*

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Abstract

The paper positions Percival Everett's *James* within Paul Gilroy's theoretical inquiry to interrogate the lineage-locked system of racial segregation and (self) dis-placement. Through the interlocking mechanisms of racial and ethnic absolutism and civilizationism, James elucidates the brutal regimes of racism, slavery, and subjugation, scrutinizing the violent extraction of Negroes and the civilizational binaries. Jim, Young George, Kathie, and Sammy endure the prolonged legacy of racialized enslavement that sustains with blood and systemic brutalization of the enslaved. The white master, Hopkins, rapes Kathie, Henderson ravishes Sammy every night, who dies during escape, while Young George is scourged to death for stealing a pencil, demystifying the systemic brutalization of black slaves in South America. The protagonist, Jim, suffers from racial segregation, de-humanization, and oppression inherited at birth, which induce dis-placement, racial ostracism, and stripping of humanity. Jim betrays the civilizational ideologies of the White; he rebelliously writes, reads, finds his hiding place a safe habitat, and (re)names himself. The act of "civilizational betrayal"¹ paves the way for self-(dis)placement, identity (re)formation, and the transformation of the protagonist from Jim to James². James' self-(dis)placement stimulates his cross-cultural existence with Huck/Huckleberry, emphasizing the co-existence of black and white ethnicities, cultures, and races. The cross-cultural existence of Huck/Huckleberry and Jim/James manifests convivial existence, living with shared vulnerabilities, and planetary humanism. In *James*, ethnic absolutism and civilizationism formulate a perpetuated cycle of coercive enforcement of a segregationist racial regime, transitioning from racial slavery to (self) dis-placement, and planetary humanism dismantles racially absolute existence, fortifying cross-cultural existence. The paper aims to dislodge the racial assumption that whites are ethnically, civilationally, and racially superior, and blacks are inferior, de-institutionalizing legally enforced slavery and ethnically absolute segregation.

¹ For readers' enlightenment, civilizational betrayal refers to de-practicing one's civilization, i.e. culture, traditions, and epistemologies etc. Jim/James's act betrays the monolithic ideology of the Western civilization. So, it is a civilizational betrayal.

² The author (re)names the protagonist, converting from Jim to James. So does the paper.



Keywords: *Ethnic Absolutism, Planetary Humanism, Transatlantic slave trade, Dis-placement, Cross-cultural existence*

Introduction

Ethnic absolutism, an offshoot of Paul Gilroy's theoretical framework of cultural studies, "secures the modes of inclusive exclusion that betray a distinctive ordering of power and space" (Gilroy 8). Racial absolutism emphasizes that "with regard to rights blacks were by nature and divine will greatly inferior to [Whites]" (Gilroy 74), consolidating rac(ism), double consciousness, black criminality, and the idea of white supremacy. This atavistic force sustains mystification of raciality, which is "the brutal result of the raciological ordering of the world" (Gilroy 39), entrenching a formalized system of racial stratification. The thematic concerns of *James* align with Paul Gilroy's ideology, as he divulges the catastrophic consequences of slavery during the 19th century. Huck asks Jim: "Being a slave, you got to do whatever your owner say to do?...whatever dey say" (Everett 29). Jim answers. This fortifies the racial invention of binaries such as blackness and whiteness, slave and master, superior and inferior, and civilized and uncivilized. Ethnic absolutism forges justifications for the racial segregation, emphasizing the natural order of White superiority and Black inferiority, stymying the co-existence of multiple ethnicities, races, cultures, and origins. The racial segregation engenders twoness, dehumanization, gratuitous violence, and devastation on a larger scale. The paper propounds that ethnic absolutism institutionalizes the segregationist racial regime, buttressing White and Black binary, double consciousness, and oppression faced by marginalized communities.

The inclusive exclusionary force of racial absolutism ostracizes Blacks from the mainstream, asserting the normalization of state-sanctioned racial hierarchy. The ethnic absolutism makes it "[im]possible for a man to be both Negro and an American without being abused" (Gilroy 35), showcasing the American Negro double consciousness, an ugly expression of human existence. Percival Everett follows this trajectory, accentuating the lawlessness, oppression, and dehumanization of Blacks through the experiences of Jim: "without someone white to claim me as property, there was no justification of for my presence, perhaps for my existence" (208), spotlighting the systemic racial stratification—which intensifies the ideology of white supremacy as a practical mechanism of racial hierarchy, deepening the race-based authoritarian regime. The ethnic absolutism sustains the racial myth that the lives of Blacks are best administered by the Whites, situating the West at the center of civilization, literacy, etiquette, and an idealistic way of manifestation of life. The paper contends that racial absolutism deepens institutional racism, black inferiority, and barbarity, asserting that White civilization, culture, epistemology, and religion are superior, and the rest of the civilizations, particularly the Black way of living, are the most primitive, uncivilized, and unethical.

Civilizationism, a corollary of racial absolutism, "lubricates the functioning of violent colonial projects [such as slavery], is there because it makes the brutal tasks of the torturer and the gaoler easier to complete" (Williams 49), inducing racial hierarchies, dehumanization, and racial essentialism. In the 19th Century, the imposition of White civilization on Africans was a ramification of the "terrifying prospect of racial decline and degeneracy" (Gilroy 22), implying civilizationism as an ideological warrant for civilizational segregation. The White American



always remained in “conflict with savages and [less]-civilized opponents” (Gilroy 22), authenticating violence to protect their fictional civilization from contamination. Percival Everett exposes the ruthlessness of the White Duke who validates his cruelty, shouting at Jim after scourging him: “He don’t feel pain like we do...that’s the way these creatures is built” (Everett 104), sub/dehumanizing Jim, emphasizing “American Black man is the world’s most shameful case of minority oppression” (Gilroy 40). Throughout the 19th Century, Whites vindicated their tyranny, sub-humanization of Black, inferiority of African civilization, and superiority of the South American civilization where slaves bled, torn, and ripped apart. The paper claims that the South American myth of civilizational superiority and purity legitimizes state-sanctioned racial hierarchy, harmonizing segregationist socio-racial structures, unjust systems of laws, division policies, and racial regimes, deliberately fashioned to exclude and stratify humans based on race, ethnicity, and origin.

The 19th-century South American civilization intended to “denigrate the achievements of black civilizations, a useful political move when the superiority of European civilization was a major justification for colonial expansion” (Williams 35). Civilizationism constructs rigid civilizational identities, with one Western civilization as the enlightened, superior, sophisticated, rational, and pragmatic, and the other as African civilization, unethical, inferior, irrational, impractical, ugly, and primitive. *James* acknowledges that civilizationism reinforces a strange way of existence in which “one’s equal must argue for one’s equality” (Everett 37), illustrating the race-friendly system of domination it stabilizes. Civilizationism solidifies the ideology that “inhabitants of the less-developed [and uncivilized] countries are themselves a form of planetary pollution” (Gilroy 11). The South American people remained obliged to civilize the Blacks, masking the exploitation, catastrophe, and annihilation brought by the Whites. Western civilization considered slaves’ language, way of living, and existence in the controlling sections as a threat to it. Civilizationism deepens racial hierarchies, social injustices, gratuitous violence, and discrimination, entrenching the marginalization of Negro-blood in South America. The paper recognizes that the facile version of White-civilization annihilates Black-humanity, intensifies White supremacy, and solidifies the assumption of the West being civilizationally superior, sustaining legally enforced racial division.

Ethnic absolutism engenders rac(ism, sustains segregationist socio-racial structures, and fortifies civilizationism, inducing consternation about the contamination of race, ethnicity, and civilization. The effects of “racism bring out the worst of everybody” (Gilroy 133)—one of the most terribly awful effects of racism is the fear of civilizational betrayal. In this way, ethnic absolutism strengthens the myth of civilizationism, extending the discourse by emphasizing that “Africans and their descendants around the Atlantic were perceived to be permanently excluded from North America and Europe’s journey into the future” (Williams 34-35). The interconnection between ethnic absolutism and civilizationism harmonizes the formalized system of racial segregation on a greater level, taking it from the ethnic groups to the civilizational level, to justify the violence, White-superiority, and Black inferiority, legitimizing the acts of torturing, whipping, and punishing slaves. In an ethnically absolute world, the black body is considered ignominiously inferior, disgracefully subordinate, and humiliatingly shame-inducing. The Africans are subsumed



in the society as a suited labour, maintaining the stereotypical assumption that primitiveness, barbarity, and inferiority are naturally linked to the Blacks. The paper affirms that ethnic absolutism consolidates the codified racial apartheid system, substantiating the race-based division/segregation law/discrimination, and hierarchical binaries such as inferior/superior, savage/civilized, and animals/humans on a civilizational level.

In contradistinction to ethnic absolutism, civilizationism, racial segregation, dehumanization, and black-slavery, Paul Gilroy brings planetary humanism to the forefront. According to Paul Gilroy, a true planetary humanism is “capable of comprehending the universality of our vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other” (Gilroy 4), advocating cross-cultural existence, and paving a way for the coexistence of multifaceted ethnicities, traditions, and races across the globe. *James* gives an account of planetary humanism. François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire appears in Jim’s hallucination, assuring him that “I’m like you, he said...like Montesquieu. I think we are all equal, regardless of color, language or habit” (Everett 34-35), diminishing racial hierarchies, discriminatory policies based on race, and ethnic absolutism. Planetary humanism objects to the formalized system of racial segregation, eliminating injustices, hierarchies, lawless policies, and all other forms of racial absolutism and civilizational binaries, violence, and stereotypical portrayals of Africans. The primary focus of planetary humanism is on the disruption of the systemic apartheid system, eroding the cultural conflicts, lawlessness, and civilizational identities formed during the 19th century in South America. The paper asserts that planetary humanism dislodges the assumption that Western civilization is superior and reinforces a delicate (co)existence of multifarious cultures, origins, cosmologies, epistemologies, and races.

Planetary humanism mandates cross-cultural existence, multiculturalism, and plurality, foregrounding the possibilities of a world manifesting conviviality. Paul Gilroy argues that a genuine planetary humanism “necessitates a secularization of suffering” (Goswami 109), emphasizing the living with shared vulnerabilities, common afflictions, communal adventures, and histories. Percival Everett showcases a true embracement of planetary humanism through a candid relationship between Huck and Jim. “He’s my friend. [Jim] said...[Huck] thinks he’s friends with this nigger” (Everett 113-116), bringing to the forefront the shared sufferings, excruciations, memories, and camaraderie in a chaotic segregationist environment. The sustainability of planetary humanism consolidates the permissiveness of myriad races, traditions, rituals, and ethnicities. The tolerance of people of different ethnical backgrounds, cultural histories, and opposite colors is a prerequisite to the implementation of planetary humanism, crippling the perilous quandary of South American civilizationism and racial and ethnic absolutism. This sort of humanism evinces the white matrix of supremacy, undermining the labyrinth of racism and civilizational purity, advocating for the human rights of blacks who are doomed in perpetuity to be outsiders, uncivilized, and mentally incapable people. The paper argues that planetary humanism asserts equality, conviviality, cross-cultural existence, and plurality, disrupting the mythical ideology of white supremacy and the pragmatic mechanisms of racial hierarchies.

Ethnic absolutism, civilizationism, and planetary humanism intersect in Percival Everett’s *James* to accentuate the racial commodification of the Negro-blood on the ethnic and civilizational



level in 19th-century South America. Ethnic absolutism and civilizationism sustain systemic racial segregation, the slave-trade, and black inferiority, dehumanization, diaspora, and dis-placement of African Americans, particularly of Jim, solidifying White superiority in the domestic and civilizational worldview. The racial segregation is illustrated in the afflictions of Jim, whose existence is worse than any other creature; he is sold three times and possessed by five masters: Ms. Watson, Duke, Massa Wiley, Daniel Decatur Emmett, and Henderson, illuminating the formalized system of the slave-trade. Civilizationism perpetuates racial binaries such as superior/inferior, barbarian/civilized, and slave/master on civilizational or national grounds. In *James*, Everett echoes the sentiment that all and sundry with a white complexion, even in the vicinity of a black man, is biologically, naturally, and civilationally the master and in command of a Negro. In contradiction to civilizationism and racial absolutism, planetary humanism dismantles the Western claim of being racially, civilationally, and ethnically superior. The paper builds on the argument that ethnic absolutism and civilizationism form a contagious bond, which fortifies the concept of racism from the community to state-sanctioned institutions. At the same time, planetary humanism buttresses cross-cultural existence, disrupting the codified racial apartheid system.

Literature Review

In the article “Analyzing Racism in Percival Everett’s Novel “JAMES” Through the Lens of Frantz Fanon”, Asif Khan examines the ways in which violence serves as a primary tool for liberation from the hierarchical labyrinth of structural racism. The critic emphasizes “mayhem is essential to get liberation from colonizers (white people)” (Abdullah et al. 1521), foregrounding the necessity of havoc to get rid of the race-based stratification. The analysis spotlights the internalization of inferiority, structural racism, and psychological oppression in the characters, particularly James, who suffers dehumanization, violence, and physical exploitation. Abdullah demonstrates Frantz Fanon’s ideology of language as a tool for the subversion of a segregationist racial regime, which is inherited from the injustices of slavery. Percival Everett protracts the analysis as he evinces cross-cultural existence in the form of a convivial relationship between Huck, a white boy, and James. Huck urges that he would “wish fer some adventure with [Jim]... and [he] wish all slaves was free” (Everett 55), showcasing the coexistence of Negro-blood with White superior boy. Asif Khan builds on the argument that Black afflictions are caused by the artificiality of White civilization, which sees Black people as objects and animals useful for fieldwork. In such a chaotic environment, violence and agency of language emerge as a resisting force against the legalized, illegitimate system of slavery. He extends the criticism by emphasizing resistance as a powerful force that dismantles the rigid social hierarchies, manifesting a transition from enslaved and (de)humanism to (new) humanism, leading towards liberation and a space where Black humanity is fully embraced.

The article “James versus Jim: The Fight for a Voice: A Comparative Analysis of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and James from an African American Critical Perspective” intricately analyzes the complexities of racial segregation, which were denied in the narrative of Huckleberry Finn. Megan Short comparatively examines *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain and *James* by Percival Everett, foregrounding the limited portrayal of racial impurity



during Twain's era, and spotlighting the authentic self of a Black man in James. The critic demonstrates "the concepts from African American literary theory that homes in on the marginalization of Black people—in history and in fiction" (Short 3). The author interprets the ways in which Percival Everett illustrates the afflictions of the slave-trade, racism, and violence endured by Negros. The analysis portrays Jim as ambitious, liberation-oriented, a rebel, and a revolutionary character, who employs twoness to overthrow the stereotypical constraints of the white gaze. Everett endorses the idea of critics, emphasizing the necessity of language, twoness, and freedom—Jim embodies ambition as he "couldn't lose sight of my goal of freeing my family. What would be freedom without them?" (Everett 110) Extensively, the review offers a nuanced exploration of the theme of double consciousness, which is strategically deployed by Everett's protagonist, a civilized, self-aware, literate, and psychologically and philosophically rich black slave, endowed with language, culture, and infinite ingenuity. Through comparative analysis, Megan brings to the forefront the limitations of Twain's depiction of the historical accounts of racial segregation, the black-slave trade, and the cultural appropriation of Africans, manifesting Everett's retelling of epistemologies and their cosmologies.

Emma Ekström's review "Language as a Tool for Recharacterisation and Empowerment in Percival Everett's *James*" offers a nuanced exploration of the journey of an African American from Jim to James. Ekstrom argues that "Everett' uses language to reshape the characterisation of Jim and to empower him through strategies involving identity performance and relationality" (Ekstrom 21), foregrounding the role of reading and language as a tool for resistance against the blacksmithing. His analysis situates *James* at the crossroads of the theoretical arrangements of identity formation and the use of language as a tool for empowerment, elucidating the necessity of language and performance of authentic identity. He compares the narrative of Jim in *James* with the tale of Huckleberry in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, criticizing the incomplete story of a black and a white man in Mark Twain's text, in which Huck, the white character, narrates events of his life, and the sorrowful and transitional life of Jim is unwritten. He proposes that *James* spotlights the untold anecdotes of Jim's life, a runaway sold for slavery, ambitious for freeing his family, who writes and reads to manifest his true self. Ekstrom scrutinizes the story of Huckleberry Finn, examines the afflictions endured by Jim, and analyzes the language used by Percival Everett and his protagonist, emphasizing the role of language in marking the transition from Jim to James.

Analysis

Percival Everett's *James* enunciates a segregationist racial regime substantiated by racial and ethnic absolutism. Everett asserts that "white folks expect [blacks] to sound a certain way and it can only help if [slaves] don't disappoint them...they enjoy the correction and thinking you're stupid" (11-12), showcasing the biological legitimacy of colored people as slaves and whites as masters. Jim exposes the infectious ideology of Whites, divulging that the civilization and religion are the "controlling tool(s) they employ and adhere to when convenient...the more you talk about God...the better they feel...and the better they feel, the safer we are" (Everett 13). The Africans are obliged to observe the laws, abide by the instructions, and adhere to contagious commands of their white masters. Percival Everett evinces the strange existence in which "one's equal must argue for one's equality" (Everett 37), illuminating the forceful and pragmatic mechanism of racial



and ethnic absolutism, which naturalizes Jim Crow-style racial separation, hierarchy, and policies. The paper claims that, bolstered by the state-sanctioned enforcement of barbarity and primitiveness of Africans, the deliberate exploitation of human rights based on racial division in South America consolidates the larger demons of legislated racial exclusivity.

In *James*, ethnic absolutism harmonizes the formalized system of racial slavery, demonstrating the plausibility of white supremacy ethnically, civilationally, religiously, and divinely. During the slave practice session, Rachel voices a mournful query—"why did God set it up like this?...With them as masters and us as slaves" (Everett 12), ruefully questioning sixteenth-century Spanish theologians' sentiment that "with regard to rights blacks were by nature and Divine Will greatly inferior to us" (Gilroy 74). This heinous remark is an answer to Rachel's question that God is blameless, and his creatures, particularly White colonizers/masters, are guilty of legalizing racial binaries: black/white, slave/master, uncivilized/civilized, and inferior/superior. Luke sorrowfully narrates to Jim that "colored people die every day...if enough of [whites] kill you, they're innocent" (Everett 16). The fictional civilizational, ethnic, and racial superiority establishes the legitimacy of the killings of the colored people. Percival Everett reveals that the White folks of South America blatantly refuse to include blacks in the category of humans. The paper posits that the mythical portrayal of Negroes by Whites depicts blacks as inferior, barbarian, and uncivilized; in God's set up and by Divine Will, Rachel, Jim, Luke, Sadie, Lizzie, or any other human being is equal irrespective of color, ethnicity, religion, and civilization.

James illustrates colonially fashioned racial binaries, intergenerational servitude, and the segregationist logic of civilization. Jim expresses his fear that "dead white people in the vicinity of a black man never worked out well for the black man" (Everett 76), showcasing the systemic stratification of blacks and internalized racism prompted by the imperiled ethnocentric, racial, and civilizational superiority of Whites. The race of whites is naturally, culturally, and religiously highly sophisticated, terribly dangerous, and excessively inhuman. Everett illuminates the ways in which Whites controlled blacks like objects for centuries, Huck curiously asks Jim, "how come you're a slave? 'Cause my mama was one" (Everett 18), indicating the long duration of black-slavery. Slavery has been transferred from generation to generation and from parents to progeny. Jim spotlights the self-replicating regime of enslavement, in which slaves/Negroes can make no choices. The historical account of slavery demonstrates South America's brutal treatment of Africans, dismantling ethnic absolutists' claim that blacks are biologically suited for labor work like animals, deliberately sub-humanizing Negroes. The paper recognizes that internalized racism, civilizational superiority of White Americans, and ethnical inferiority of African Americans fortify a lineage-locked system of human ownership.

In *James*, the racially demarcated public sphere sustains the mechanisms of coercion and bodily domination. Percival Everett evinces miseries of the life of slavery, asserting that slaves do "Waiting for demands. Waiting for food. Waiting for the end of the days. Waiting for the just and deserved Christian reward at the end of it all" (Everett 1), spotlighting the ruthlessness of slave/master binary and the raciological ordering of the world, in which slaves/Africans are bound to follow the instructions of the whites. Jim bewails that "when you are a slave, you claim choice where you can" (Everett 60), making a sorrowful revelation, exposing the injustices a slave faces.



Jim's rueful articulation propounds that slaves are insufficiently treated, deprived of freedom, and liberty of making choices, movements, eating, drinking, and even breathing. Whites were in command of blacks, physically, psychologically, philosophically, and ethnically. The racial hatred, civilizational myth, and skin color encourage the tyrants in the perpetuation of the violent infrastructures of domination. The color-line segregation engenders disruption of blacks' selves, augments gross violation of human rights, and invalidates the existence of African Americans, showing cruel and degrading treatment of human life.

James offers a nuanced exploration of de-humanization to expose unrestrained cruelty and abuse. In the pretended game, Huck and Tom play, Jim is "either a villain or prey, but certainly their toy" (Everett 1), showing the objectification of Negroes. Easter, who is a slave to master Wiley, recollects memories of his being pushed into the hell reigned by Whites, reminiscing, "I can remember the abuse. I can remember the splashing" (Everett 121), divulging the cruelties of white dominance. The white master named, Mistuh Hopkins, sinfully rapes Katie, a young black girl, "Katie begged him to stop...her face pressed against the rough wood of the table...the white animal covered himself and walked out of the shack...while Katie adjusted her clothes...she, I, all of us, were forever naked in the world" Everett (225-226), manifesting an act of extreme inhumanity. The white masters induce the de-humanization of the slaves, invalidating the humanization of Africans, excluding them from every sphere of life. Percival Everett shows that in James's 19th-century antebellum South, American masters assert the legitimacy of gross violations of human rights, perpetuating callous disregard for human life.

In *James*, Everett illustrates the institutional legitimization of Whites' brutal exploitation of black-humanity. Jim suffers from gratuitous violence, scourge, and racial and all other forms of de-humanization that exist in the world. The Duke rips Jim apart; the Duke "swung his belt and caught me at my knees. It did hurt...I didn't wince" (Everett 104), whipping terribly. The Duke vindicates his animalistic act, asserting that "they don't even feel like no human man...that's the way these creatures is built" (Everett 104), legitimizing entrenched patterns of human rights abuse. Jim's oppression maintains that "American black man is the world's most shameful case of minority oppression" (Gilroy 40), depicting the permanence and long duration of Negroes repression in South America. Jim becomes a victim of the systemic brutalization of Africans in South America, and this routinized regime of violence bolsters the disruption of marginalized communities. Blacks have been ostracized from the circle of humanity, dragged into the hierarchical labyrinth of Western civilization. Everett exposes the vulnerabilities of the life of an American-Negro in antebellum America, criticizes mechanisms of coercion and bodily domination, and foregrounds the stimulation of cruelty embedded in ethnic and civilizational absolutism.

In *James*, the plight of Jim spotlights the state-sanctioned violations of human dignity, bringing to the forefront, institutionalized de-humanization of Negroes. Jim painfully narrates the transaction between Emmett and Wiley that he was never "asked for either opinion or desire. I was the horse that I was, just an animal, just property, nothing but a thing, but apparently I was a horse" (Everett 126). Everett notes that the cost to feed one Nigger/slave, particularly Jim, is "food, water, just like a dog, except they can sort of talk...much easier to keep than a dog" (Everett 158),



demonstrating extreme performance of de-humanization, which equates Jim to a dog. Jim's sorrowful revelation, "it pained me to think that without a white person with me, without a white looking face, I could not safely travel through the light of the world" (Everett 208), reveals the infinity of afflictions Africans endured during the period of (trans)atlantic slave trade. Percival Everett showcases the ways in which a black man is bound to adhere to the laws, religion, and instructions of Whites. The extremely inhuman actions of Whites are prompted by the fictional portrayal of Western civilizational supremacy and racial and ethnic purity, emphasizing coercive enforcement of racial superiority. The paper proposes that segregationist racial regime, ethnic absolutism, and civilizationism engenders sub-humanization, dis-placement, and de-humanization, illustrating the brutalization of slaves in *James*.

Percival Everett accentuates the dominant civilizational apparatuses, which bear the onus of augmenting racial stereotypes and other forms of racism in *James*. Miss Watson is flabbergasted seeing Jim's inclination towards reading books in Judge Thatcher's library, she surprisingly asks Jim if he finds books in the library room, and Jim "laughed. What I gone do wif a book? She laughed too" (Everett 4). Miss Watson considers Jim mentally incapable of reading and writing. Young George is whipped and tortured to death by his master for stealing a pencil for Jim, "steal a pencil from the master, will you!...He struck Young George again" (Everett 74), forgetting the racial prejudices that "what's a slave need a pencil for?" (Everett 119). The inhuman treatment of the master ceases Young George to the death, spotlighting the fear of civilizational betrayal, which divulges the nervousness of whites about losing supremacy. The internalized mythical claim of civilizational prestige centralizes sub-humanization, primitiveness, and educational inferiority of blacks. The white masters exert their civilizationally superior identity, mandated by the stereotypical depiction of Jim and other Negroes, considering Jim's act of seeing books and George's activity of stealing a pencil, a civilizational betrayal.

James foregrounds the catastrophic consequences of dis-placement, resulting from the (trans)atlantic slave trade. Jim, with the sense of industry and history, notes: "I was sold when I was born and sold again. My mother's mother was from some place on the continent of Africa" (Everett 72), divulging the longstanding and hidden mechanisms of the slave trade. Everett concurs with the scholar who asserts that "a raciology best served to justify transatlantic slavery (Eze 881), elucidating the demonic nature of racial absolutism, racism, and color-line segregation. Jim narrates the anecdotes of his life during (self) dis-placement, stating that "I had accustomed myself to life on the river" (Everett 69), converting segregation, discrimination, and dis-placement into a strategic placement of self, amidst the chaotic environment of the slave trade and de-humanization. Jim's dis-placement since his birth reveals the segregationist policies of European colonialism, the discursive manufacturing of a specific place for the slaves, and violence behind the (mis) placement of African-Americans. Percival Everett apprehends the system of racial separatism, interrogates Jim's and his ancestors' lives circumscribed by a legacy of bondage, and cripples the constraints of dis-placement, thereby deploying dis-placement as a way out of the labyrinth of racial segregation.

The racially orchestrated cruelty, de-humanization, dis-placement, and civilizational betrayal prompt Jim to adopt twoness. The civilizational betrayal, along with running away from



slavery, becomes a rebellious tool, Jim deploys in his journey from Jim to James. Jim acknowledges that “running was something a slave could never do” (Everett 22). Despite being familiar with this, he runs. Old George appreciates Jim’s running, claiming that “no whipping in the world can undo the hope you will give us” (Everett 73) if Jim makes it. Audaciously speaking to himself, Jim says, “I knew I could run. I could always run” (Everett 109), showcasing the belief he has and the strength, courage, and confidence a black man possesses. Jim betrays the civilizational ordering of Whites, becoming a runaway, utilizing running as a pathway of liberation from the violent infrastructures of domination. His perilous adventures on the Mississippi River, woods, and in the Bluebirds village transform him into a bold, literate, and philosophical person with a complete identity. The paper posits that Jim’s unconventional act of running disrupts the ideological structures of ethnic absolutism and civilizationalism in the era of the (trans)atlantic slave-trade, initiating the journey of civilizational betrayal.

In *James*, dis-placement, civilizational betrayal, and running away from the trammels of slavery, become a very foundation of self-placing. Jim dismantles the ideological structures of displacement, stressing that his “hiding place had become a safe place” (Everett 72), implying the dis-placement for his liberation, safety, and resistance, and demystifying the vindication of the transatlantic slave trade in South. In his journal, Jim writes, he writes that I am a “man who can read and write, a man who will not let his story be self-related, but self-written...with my pencil, I wrote myself into being. I wrote myself to here [hiding place] (Everett 72)”, manifesting a rebellious act against the conventional hierarchies of slavery. Initially, Jim is restricted from reading and writing by Miss Watson. During his escape from the world of slavery, his act of running away fractures the myth of Western/Whites’ civilizational superiority in terms of literacy and agency. Everett acknowledges that Jim’s displacement paves the way for finding his true self, soul, and body. The paper argues that Jim’s recognition and implementation of twoness during self-(dis)placement assists Jim to (re)gain power, strength, and authentic identity.

Percival Everett accentuates the transitional journey of the protagonist from Jim to James³. In his diary, Jim notes, “I am called Jim. I have yet to choose a name” (Everett 42), and when he overcomes his identity crisis, he writes, “my name is James...I am James...just James” (Everett 72-249). He dislodges the civilizational assumption of Whites about Negroes being indolent, dull, and intellectually incapable, asserting that “dull tools are much more dangerous than sharp ones” (Everett 166), showing the sharpness and philosophical and intellectual insight a Negro can possess. James firmly says to Norman, “I’ll tell you this: I’ll never be a slave again” (Everett 183), slaying the entrenched mechanism of blacks’ rights abuse. Everett propounds that Negro’s profound transition from Jim to the James is the consequential foundation of self-(dis)placing, civilizational betrayal, and twoness. Jim has been possessed by five white masters: Miss Watson, Duke, Wiley, Daniel Decatur Emmett, and Henderson, and sold three times. Self-(dis)placed James disrupts the slavery system rooted in birthright and generational legacy, dismantles the racialized

³ Readers’ friendly, the author (re)names the protagonist, Jim to James. So does the paper, onward.



spatial ordering of South America, and scrutinizes ethnic absolutism and forms of racism, betraying the racially stratified societal structure.

The self-(dis)placement of Jim, running away from an ethnically absolute and civilizationally superior society, harmonizes planetary humanism and cross-cultural existence, rooted in the camaraderie of Jim and Huckleberry. Huck confesses to James that “you’re my friend Jim” (Everett 9), perpetuating the coexistence of blackness and whiteness. They live together, eat together, and go on adventures together. “We made it to the shore and hid in the woods. The next morning we ate some of our food. Berries and Catfish” (Everett 46). The coexistence of Jim and Huckleberry illuminates the cross-cultural existence, rooted in the shared vulnerabilities and tolerance of other ethnicities. Huck facilitates Jim during the self-(dis)placement. Jim notes, “Huck paddled us forward while I used my oar as a rudder” (Everett 50). James’ narration of his life as a runaway showcases the indiscriminate manifestation of life. Huck, irrespective of being a white young man, befriends Jim, who is inferior to Huck on the basis of complexion. Their mutual existence debunks the color-line racism, emphasizing plurality, cosmopolitanism, and multiplicity. Percival Everett spotlights the theme of cross-cultural existence, plurality, and co-existence of cross-ethnicities, religion, and rituals, advocating for planetary humanism.

In *James*, Percival Everett consolidates the cohabitation of African-Negro and South American white boy. James saves Huckleberry from drowning in the Mississippi River, stating, “I found Huck’s face, he was treading water...I dragged his body onto the beach” (Everett 200-202), showing compassion for a white individual. They both rely on their communal existence, sharing vulnerable experiences of exclusive inclusion. Huckleberry and James “staggered into a dense thicket” (Everett 202), rushing into the woods, accentuating the themes of camaraderie and conviviality, an offshoot of planetary humanism. James recognizes Huckleberry’s feelings of cross-color-line existence, as James narrates, “he had always felt affection for me, if not actual love. He had always looked to me for protection” (Everett 207), demystifying Western ideology of monolithic civilization and sole existence of humanity. Huckleberry, as a White American boy, represents the colonial civilization, white ethnicity, and superior identity, while James is the embodiment of American-African civilization, black ethnicity, and Negro-American identity; thereby, their coexistence demonstrates the theme of cross-cultural existence. Everett advocates for living with shared ethnicities, traditions, rituals, religions, civilizations, and cross-cultures, asserting genuine planetary humanism.

The cross-cultural existence of Huckleberry and James accentuates the manifestation of planetary humanism in *James*. Huckleberry, being a representative of Western civilization, de-centers the undiversified notion of living; he urges James that “you saved my life...you save me...we have to stick together...[James] realized that Huck was hugging [him]” (Everett 209-221), fortifying a symmetrical co-presence within the racial hierarchies. He reluctantly stays with James, stressing that “I’m going with you” (Everett 210), bolstering the possibility of symbiotic existence of black and white races, dislodging the ethnic absolutists’ assumption of fixed and rigid ethnic and racial identities. In this way, Huckleberry innocently compels James for a fragile co-existence of their shared values, dismantling and decentering the ideological structures of the ethnic and civilizational monolithic regime of existence. Everett suggests the necessity of the co-presence of



individuals with diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. The paper argues that the cross-cultural existence of James and Huckleberry endorses the idea that camaraderie and tolerance of others' ethnicities, cultures, religions, civilizations, epistemologies, diverse races, and communal vulnerabilities pave the way for the genuine expression of planetary humanism.

Conclusion

In *James*, the interlocking mechanism of racial and ethnic absolutism and civilizationism entrenches the circular reinforcement of racialized hierarchies. The state-sanctioned racial hierarchies de-humanize black slaves; Jim suffers from an institutionalized system of racial segregation, separated away from his family, owned by five masters and sold three times, treated like a dog. The rigid regimes of racial slavery and subjugation inflict humiliation and death: Young George is whipped to death, Hopkins rapes Kathie, and Henderson ravishes Sammy, who dies after escaping, reinforcing the acts of extreme inhumanity. Ethnic absolutism and civilizationism consolidate structurally reproduced slavery across generations, perpetuating (trans)atlantic slave trade, which induces dis-placement and color-line segregation. Jim's dis-placement since his birth exposes the transgenerational apparatus of slavery and subjugation. Jim's mother and grandmother were sold into slavery, revealing the chains of racial slavery passed from parent to child. The (self) dis-placement fortifies civilizational betrayal, impelling Jim to manifest twoness, and becomes a very foundation of the transition from Jim to James. The civilizational betrayal, an initiation of self-(dis)placement, and a space for embracing one's true self, disrupts the fixed racial binaries, particularly slave/master, superior/inferior, and white/black. The decentering of ideological structures of civilizational and ethnically absolute existence advocates for the co-existence of diverse ethnicities, civilizations, and cross-cultural existence, foregrounding planetary humanism and co-habitation of James and Huckleberry amidst a chaotic environment of racial segregation/dis-placement. The paper elucidates the intertwined pragmatics of ethnic absolutism and civilizationism, which strengthen the dominant narratives of racial segregation/slavery, inducing de-humanization/dis-placement; conversely, planetary humanism is evident in the mutual coexistence of James and Huckleberry.



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