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The cover design is based on an Athenian silver tetradrachm from the 5th century B.C., depicting Athena on the obverse and her owl on the reverse. Courtesy of the Ancient Coin Forum.

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RESISTING COLONY AND NATION: CHALLENGING HISTORY IN MARYSE CONDÉ'S *MOI, TITUBA, SORCIÈRE ... NOIRE DE SALEM*

Kristin Pitt

Born into slavery in late-seventeenth-century Barbados as the daughter of an Ashanti woman raped in the middle passage, Tituba, the title character of Maryse Condé's historical novel *Moi, Tituba, sorcière ... Noire de Salem* (*I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*) is expelled from the plantation of her birth after her mother's public execution, exiled to New England as the slave of a Puritan minister, and jailed as a witch during the 1692 Salem trials. When she returns to Barbados, Tituba is executed in the aftermath of a failed slave revolt.[1] While tracing Tituba's journeys, Condé's novel explores the complex web of narratives that colonial American societies employ in the attempt to naturalize their existence and their fundamental institutions. In the process *Moi, Tituba* suggests that prevailing accounts of history must be reconsidered and new histories uncovered before contemporary postcolonial societies can escape the legacy of oppression bequeathed to them by the colonies. Simultaneously, *Moi, Tituba* proposes alternative means of understanding history's relationship to the present and to the future, understandings that will support this societal transformation.

Throughout her life, Tituba explores a series of social roles and narrative positions that might enable her to achieve personal freedom or social justice, constructing alternative narratives and communities

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[1] This is the biography of the fictional character who narrates Condé's novel, not the biography of the historical person accused of witchcraft in Salem in 1692. Although, as Manzor-Coats argues, the first French edition of the novel was marketed to suggest it was a historical novel, Condé insists in an interview with Ann Armstrong Scarboro that *Moi, Tituba* is "the opposite of a historical novel" (201). For a discussion of the historical Tituba—a woman who, despite her representation in American literature as an African or Afro-Caribbean Creole, was most likely an Amerindian slave from the Caribbean coast of South America—see Breslaw's study.

that challenge foundational fictions designating black bodies as destined for servitude and female bodies as abject receptacles of male desire. Although her efforts lead only to limited successes during her lifetime, *Moi, Tituba* suggests that Tituba's most significant contribution to social resistance is her own life history, which exposes the inaccuracies of American historical narratives representing slavery as a "peculiar institution," an aberration that is separate and separable from other social and political institutions of the state. Looking as much toward the future as the past, the novel draws connections between Barbados' and the United States' colonial histories and their contemporary societies, highlighting their violent origins while nevertheless predicting that, at some point in the future, "tout cela aura une fin" (271) ["there will be an end to all this" (178)]. Because of this proleptic turn in the narrative, and because of the novel's insistence that the past can be put to use in the task of shaping the present and the future, the assassination of the protagonist at the hands of the government toward the end of the novel does not prevent it from remaining, in a certain sense, optimistic.

Moi, Tituba is set during the late 1600s, when the plantation economy is just beginning to thrive in the American colonies, and the novel interrogates the foundational narratives and ideologies of the societies that were later to become the independent nation-states of Barbados and the United States of America. Scrutinizing the profit-driven society of Barbados, to which white English planters came in order to increase their financial well-being, as well as the religious society of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, to which white English Puritans came in order to ensure their spiritual well-being, *Moi, Tituba* insists that the benefits allotted to individual colonists through their societies' survival and success cannot be separated from the dehumanization and genocide of the Indian and African peoples upon whose territorial and bodily resources they rely. Tituba's experiences reveal both colonial societies to be carefully and intentionally constructed—through a network of legal, economic, and religious institutions—to provide white, English, male citizens with worldly and heavenly benefits not easily attained in Europe and to deny these benefits to those persons who are not adult, Christian males of European origin. Nevertheless, both societies also rely upon narratives that naturalize their existence and their fundamental institutions.

As Robin Blackburn has argued in *The Making of New World Slavery*, plantation societies throughout the Americas made use of a fluid set of both economic and religious narratives to support a racially-based system of slavery:

   For most Europeans the Africans' lack of Christianity and 'savage'

> nature was thought to explain the need to keep them in bondage. The story of Noah's curse, and the theory that blackness constituted the symbol of this curse, furnished justification for the permanent enslavement of blacks regardless of their faith or conduct. But it did not supply legal formulas for treating slaves as property—these were furnished by residues of Roman Law.… Where capitalist relations had emerged the sacred aura they gave to private property cast a cloak over chattel slavery, while the biblical injunction to bring forth the fruits of the earth was harnessed to accumulation and slave planting. As the new slave systems were consolidated they thus combined the secular and the sacred, the new and the old. (312)

Hence, multiple, and often contradictory, religious arguments supporting the institution of slavery gradually merged with diverse legal, political, and economic arguments. However, the arguments were presented *as though* they formed a coherent and seamless narrative in defense of racially-based slavery.

Although the large-scale plantations of the Caribbean did not exist in Massachusetts, *Moi, Tituba* suggests that Puritan New England society also played a vital role in this process of naturalization. Certainly, the economic prosperity of many New England port cities—and hence, many New England colonies—depended upon trade routes that connected Africa, the Caribbean, and North America and provided plantations with slave labor. But Condé's narrative portrays Massachusetts' collaboration with plantation slavery as extending beyond economic and cultural exchange and human trafficking. Puritan society in the novel centers around the identification and eradication of evil and sin. "[É]crasés par la présence du Malin parmi eux et cherchant à le traquer dans toutes ses manifestations" (104) ["[O]ppressed by the presence of Satan in their midst and seeking to hunt him down in all his manifestations" (64)], Condé's Puritans treat even innocuous people and events as though they were particularly threatening; Samuel Parris has "prunelles verdâtres et froides, astucieuses et retorses, créant le mal parce qu'elles le voyaient partout" (58) ["greenish, cold eyes, scheming and wily, creating evil because they saw it everywhere" (34)]. Within Condé's Massachusetts, the most successful means of gaining public influence is through the identification of sinful acts and signs of evil, and colonists have substantial incentive to accuse others of sin, thereby shifting potential accusations away from themselves and accruing power. Those who stand out visibly as different from the collective, including the indigent, the physically disabled, indigenous Americans, and people of African origin, are particularly vulnerable to these accusations of embodying evil, and in fact the association between them and sin is shortly made to appear natural and inherent. Thus, Samuel Parris' wife Elizabeth is able to offer the following analogy of Salem's frenzied

witch hunt that began with the accusation of Tituba, along with a poor woman and a physically disabled one:

> Je ne peux comparer cela qu'à une maladie que l'on croit d'abord bénigne parce qu'elle affecte des parties du corps sans importance ... puis qui graduellement s'attaque à des membres et à des organes vitaux. Les jambes ne peuvent plus fonctionner, les bras. En fin de compte, le coeur est atteint, puis le cerveau. Martha Corey et Rebecca Nurse ont été arrêtées! (169)

> [I can only compare it to a sickness that first of all is thought to be benign because it affects the lesser parts of the body … then gradually attacks the limbs and vital organs. The arms and legs can no longer move. Then the heart is attacked and finally the brain. Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse have been arrested! (107-108)]

This description, meant to serve not only as an explanation but as an apology to Tituba, takes for granted that certain members of the community are radically inferior, so much so that their bodies—and hence their lives—are expendable. Goodwife Parris is able to suggest such an analogy only because she has fully internalized the Puritan social hierarchy—one in which she is far from empowered—and believes it to be both necessary and natural.

Moi, Tituba explores and challenges the mechanisms through which such processes of naturalization occur. Looking toward a future in which the community does not purchase the freedom of some of its members by sacrificing that of others, Tituba dreams of a time when "l'État sera providence et se souciera du bien-être de ses citoyens" (184) ["the state that will truly provide for the well-being of its citizens" (118)]. But if, as the novel suggests, both plantation and Puritan societies of the American colonies have so successfully naturalized institutions granting liberty to some by denying it to others that it becomes difficult if not impossible to challenge the *status quo*, even after the abolition of slavery and the end of colonial rule, how might Tituba's dream become a reality?

The opening chapter of *Moi, Tituba* explores the suggestion that the family might provide a model for a benevolent and just community. The nation-state is often imagined through the metaphor of an extended family, a collective of persons bound together and "related" through the unifying construct of the nation, which offers them a singular point of origin, much like a common ancestor. Hegel, for example, suggests even more fundamental connections between the state and the family, a social unit he describes as "specifically characterized by love…. Hence in a family, one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself, with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member" (110). When the family

experiences a "peaceful expansion until it becomes people, i.e. a nation" (122), Hegel argues that it functions as the first "ethical root of the state" (154); however, he also argues that "[i]t is within the state that the family is first developed into civil society" (155). As Michael Shapiro demonstrates, Hegel proposes that the family and the state exist within a fundamentally interdependent relationship, wherein the state both "creates the conditions of possibility for the moral family, and … embodies the enlargement of an ethical life begun within the family" (54).

If, however, neither the family nor the state is in fact "characterized by love," the interdependence between the two social units is potentially quite dangerous. In *Moi, Tituba*, Darnell Davis, the white planter into whose possession Tituba is born, lavishes care and attention on his white son, a pale and sickly infant who struggles for survival after his mother's death. Davis ensures that the child is nursed and nurtured, and he eventually relinquishes his own dreams of financial grandeur in order to tend to his son: he sells the plantation and returns to England in search of a cure for the boy. On the surface, the Davis family might appear to model the behavior of the welfare state Tituba envisions, for its bond generates individual and collective sacrifices made to attend to the needs of its most vulnerable members. However, the care that Davis extends to his child is literally robbed from another. Davis' son survives on "le lait que lui donnait en abondance une esclave, forcée d'abandonner pour lui son propre fils" (24) ["the copious milk he was given by a slave, who had been forced to quit nursing her own son" (10)]. The starving slave child could even be a brother to the nourished white one, for Davis "avait déjà une meute d'enfants bâtards" (3) ["had already fathered a horde of illegitimate children" (14)]. While his "instinct paternel ... se réveilla pour son unique rejeton de race blanche" (24) ["paternal instinct was aroused for his only white offspring" (10)], Davis does not identify his mixed-race progeny, who by law follow the condition of their mothers into slavery and are considered black, as a part of his family. With no clear line separating the nuclear family from the system of racial slavery, the integrity of Darnell Davis' family relies upon the same forms of oppression that uphold the broader colonial society.

While the novel does demonstrate that some families develop out of and produce loving connections, it resists depicting the family as a natural, essential, or inherently ethical social unit. Indeed, it opens with the creation of a family born of horrific violence: "Abena, ma mère, un marin anglais la viola sur le pont du *Christ the King*, un jour de 16** alors que le navire faisait voile vers la Barbade. C'est de cette agression que je suis née. De cet acte de haine et de mépris…"

(13) ["Abena, my mother, was raped by an English sailor on the deck of *Christ the King* one day in the year 16** while the ship was sailing for Barbados. I was born from this act of aggression. From this act of hatred and contempt…" (3)]. Tituba's very existence is predicated upon her father's brutality and her mother's suffering; only by virtue of this violence do she and Abena form a family. Consequently, Abena can never separate her feelings for her daughter from the anguish of her conception: "ma mère ne m'aimait pas ... je ne cessais pas de lui remettre en l'esprit le Blanc qui l'avait possédée sur le pont du *Christ the King* au milieu d'un cercle de marins, voyeurs obscènes" (18) ["my mother did not love me … I never stopped bringing to mind the white man who had raped her on the deck of *Christ the King* while surrounded by a circle of sailors, obscene voyeurs" (6)]. For Abena, the family exists only through the institution of slavery; even the familial relationship that makes her happy—her marriage to Tituba's adoptive father Yao—is not the result of a decision they make but of one made by their mutual owner, Davis.

The families of Condé's narrative—the cherished, the disdained, the denied—are intensely vulnerable social constructions that rely upon the support, or the violent reinforcement, of society. Neither Abena's cherished relationship with Yao nor her ambivalent relationship with Tituba is protected by British colonial law, which denies kinship relations among slaves. Darnell Davis' family is also limited by legal codes, albeit ones much more to his liking: his mixed-race children cannot legally be incorporated into their biological father's family. Neither a model for an ethical state nor a sanctuary from an oppressive one, the nuclear family acquires its form only through the meanings and codes assigned to it by a particular society. As Anne McClintock has argued, the idea of the family has been repeatedly marshaled into service by both colonial and national narratives to naturalize structures of racial and gender dominance,[2] and indeed the families within *Moi, Tituba* demonstrate an institutionalized interdependence between family and state that is decidedly less ethical

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    [2] See, in particular, McClintock's chapter "The White Family of Man: Colonial Discourse and the Reinvention of Patriarchy," where she explores the ways in which British colonies allowed for the "reinvention of the tradition of fatherhood, displaced onto the colonial bureaucracy as a surrogate, restored authority" (240), and her final chapter, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race," in which she examines the implications of the "metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial—the 'national family,' the global 'family of nation,' the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father'—depend[ing] … on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere" (358).

and benevolent than the relationship proposed by Hegel.

But if the institutions of state, religion, and family are all impli-cated in forms of violence that the narrative rejects, what options are available to Tituba and to those of her contemporaries who wish to construct social communities that are neither oppressive nor invol-untary? One possible model that the novel explores is the intentional community, a collective social unit established through the conscious and voluntary decisions of its members. These members generate their own narratives about their relationships to each other, and in-evitably such narratives rely upon creative, interactive uses of history and memory. When Tituba is born, for example, Abena's husband Yao embraces the child and proclaims to Abena, "[a] partir d'aujourd'hui, ton enfant c'est le mien…. Et gare à celui qui dira le contraire" (16) ["[f]rom this day forward your child is mine…. And just let someone try and say she isn't!" (5)]. In claiming Tituba as his child, Yao does not undo the violence of Abena's rape or overcome the conditions of slavery that the family faces on the plantation. However, in his refusal to allow Abena's tortured memory of her history to be the single most influential fact in determining her present and future, Yao is able to establish a network of mutual affection and support, extending what little protection and care he can offer to the infant born into slavery and attempting to reframe Abena's experience of motherhood. The family that Yao narrates does not rely on history or memory in order to come into being or to remain intact, and it provides an alternative to the social, legal, religious, and economic narratives that employ this discourse to naturalize sexual assault and slavery.

As an adult, Tituba attempts to develop other intentional mini-communities that follow the model Yao provides, resisting the nar-ratives that naturalize her oppression and her disenfranchisement. Many of these relationships ultimately fail, but one model proves to be particularly successful. When the young child Tituba is banished from the plantation after Abena is hanged for attacking Davis as he attempts to rape her, an elderly slave and traditional healer takes Tituba in and instructs her in the secrets of the natural and super-natural worlds. Man Yaya is able to communicate with spirits, and she teaches Tituba that "[l]es morts ne meurent que s'ils meurent dans nos coeurs. Ils vivent si nous les chérissons, si nous honorons leur mémoire" (23) ["[t]he dead only die if they die in our hearts. They live on if we cherish them and honor their memory" (10)]. Unlike many of the other social, religious, and familial communities into which Tituba enters, this remembered community, a reconstitution of the past, provides her with love and support without requiring that she sacrifice dignity or personal agency. It also offers Tituba a

position from which to challenge the English, and particularly the Puritan, belief that a connection with spirits can result only from a malevolent collaboration with Satan. Embracing her own "faculté de communiquer avec les invisibles, de garder un lien constant avec les disparus, de soigner, de guérir" (34) ["ability to communicate with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others, to heal" (17)], Tituba insists that being in league with spirits is not cause for torture, imprisonment and death; rather, her relationship with the dead is "une grâce supérieure de nature à inspirer respect, admiration et gratitude" (34) ["a superior gift of nature that inspires respect, admiration, and gratitude" (17)]. Like Yao, Tituba attempts to challenge received notions of memory's relationship to the present, but whereas Yao refuses to allow to the pain and violence of the past to shape the present, Tituba refuses to surrender the love and support she had known in the past when she finds those resources scarce in the present.

Not all of Tituba's attempts at establishing communities and alliances are as successful as her alliance with the spirit world. Having been granted her freedom as a child when banished from the plantation, Tituba voluntarily enters into slavery again as a young woman in order to marry John Indien, the man she loves. This leads to her sale to Samuel Parris and her exile to New England. The young Puritan girls of Salem, whom Tituba pities and attempts to entertain with stories of witchcraft, turn against her and publicly accuse her of being in league with the devil, leading to her torture, arrest, and imprisonment. Christopher, the leader of a Maroon community with which Tituba briefly allies herself upon her return to Barbados, betrays her by alerting the plantation owners to a slave revolt she is helping to plan, leading to her arrest and execution. Even so, Tituba persists, continuously attempting to develop alliances that will enable her to undermine the social and religious narratives that sustain the oppression she witnesses.

While *Moi, Tituba* offers no definitive models for a revolution that might produce a liberating and egalitarian society not predicated on the suffering of the majority of its residents, there are two traits shared by the revolutionary communities that achieve any real measure of success within the novel: like Yao's parenting of Tituba and Tituba's connection to the spiritual world, they are intentional alliances designed to contradict or to undermine institutionalized forms of oppression, and they establish non-traditional, creative relationships with history and memory so that the past is neither erased from, nor repeated in, the present. After Tituba is hanged in Barbados for her role in a failed slave revolt, she continues to develop such relationships

from the spirit world, insistently pursuing revolution across years and even lifetimes. From beyond the grave, she works with the living to inspire their continued resistance, "[a]guerrir le coeur des hommes. L'alimenter de rêves de liberté. De victoire. Pas une révolte que je n'aie fait naître. Pas une insurrection. Pas une désobéissance" (268) ["[h]ardening men's hearts to fight. Nourishing them with dreams of liberty. Of victory. I have been behind every revolt. Every insurrection. Every act of disobedience" (175)]. Refusing to rest once she herself has achieved the liberty that comes with death, Tituba provides slaves with the dreams and narratives they need in order to challenge both the martial and ideological arsenals of the planters.

Tituba's own life story, which she narrates by means of the novel, is instrumental to this project. In part, this is simply because her story reveals the inaccuracies of American foundational fictions that represent slavery as a unique aberration, distinct from a broader narrative of freedom and liberty. Because of this challenge to national narratives, Tituba's tale is not readily included in the history of Salem; as she bemoans upon her return to Barbados, the written historical record relegates her to a marginal note:

> «Tituba, une esclave de la Barbade et pratiquant vraisemblablement le hodoo.» Quelques lignes dans d'épais traités consacrés aux événements du Massachusetts. Pourquoi allais-je être ainsi ignorée? ... Est-ce parce que nul ne se soucie d'une négresse, de ses souffrances et tribulations? Est-ce cela?
>
> Je cherche mon histoire dans celle des Sorcières de Salem et ne la trouve pas. (230)
>
> ["Tituba, a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo.'" A few lines in the many volumes written on the Salem witch trials. Why was I going to be ignored? … Is it because nobody cares about a Negress and her trials and tribulations? Is that why?
>
> I look for my story among those of the witches of Salem, but it isn't there. (149)]

As Tituba suggests, her historical marginalization helps to hide the injustices that both people of color and women have suffered throughout the post-contact histories of the United States and other nations of the Americas, and, as Walter Benjamin warns, "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255). The suppression of Tituba's story within the public record makes it easier either to deny the existence of such suffering or justify it in both past and future, when Tituba foresees that "ils se couvriront le visage de cagoules pour mieux nous supplicier. Ils boucleront sur nos enfants la lourde porte des ghettos. Ils nous disputeront tous les droits et le

sang réondra au sang" (271) ["they will be covering their faces with hoods, the better to torture us. They will lock up our children behind the heavy gates of ghettos. They will deny us our rights and blood will beget blood" (177-178)].

Critics including Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi and Jeanne Garane have engaged the work of Edouard Glissant and Alain Brossat to explore the ways in which Condé's novel reconstructs a lost Caribbean history through the fictional recreation of a verisimilar life. Garane argues that through her disappearance from historical accounts of Salem, "Tituba incarnates the problem of West Indian identity… West Indians must search for an independent identity, looking neither to Europe nor to Africa, but to a West Indian past for its (fictional) origins. Since this 'history' has been undocumented or lost, another must be created" (155), highlighting the means by which Condé, as author, fills in the gaps within the historical record with her novelistic creation of Tituba's life story. And yet, within the fictional world of Condé's creation, in which past and present coexist in an open and mutually dependent relationship, neither historical victories and lessons nor historical atrocities need to be reinvented imaginatively, even when they have seemingly disappeared from public record. While historical accounts of Salem suppress Tituba's life story, Tituba becomes "une légende parmi les esclaves" (246) ["a legend among the slaves" (160)] even before her death for her healing powers and for escaping the Salem witch hunt alive. After her hanging, Tituba discovers that the slaves of Barbados know much more about her story than is recorded in written history; there is a popular song about her life and death which they sing "d'un bout à l'autre de l'île" ["from one end of the island to the other" (175)]. In and of itself, of course, the song will not lead to the collapse of oppressive political structures, social practices, and economic institutions. Nevertheless, the story it relays does serve to refute the narrative webs that allowed these systems to come into existence in the colonial era and which continue to support their dominance in postcolonial nations. Tituba's song keeps her memory alive and acknowledges her suffering and that of millions of others. By insisting that such suffering be somehow accounted for in the narratives as well as the institutions of the nation-state, both song and novel function not merely as an important accounting of her suffering, but as an avenue toward its denaturalization and its eradication in future generations.

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CONSUMERISM AFTER THEORY: GLOBALIZATION AND THE END OF TRANSNATIONAL DISCOURSE IN NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI'S CULTURAL EMPIRICISM

Vartan P. Messier

> Today's cultural theory is somewhat more modest … it believes in the local, the pragmatic, the particular. And in this devotion, ironically, it scarcely differs from the scholarship it detests …
>
> -Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*

After having retraced the rise of poststructuralist theory and the prominent position it occupied in western culture, Terry Eagleton appears somewhat nostalgic in observing that the theoretical endeavors that have striven to define the new era of globalization lack the ambition and impetus of "high" cultural theory. While the latter "were prepared to venture into perilous territory" the former seem to be merely preoccupied with more immediate matters that remain within the realm of the observable and the quantifiable (72).

Originally published in 1995, Néstor García Canclini's book-length essay on consumerism and citizenship offers a refreshing, and much needed, reflection upon these issues from a Latin American perspective. Within the various attempts to conceptualize the global, it only seems appropriate for a leading Latin American cultural studies scholar[1] to lend an internal voice to a region whose reality, both past and present, has been largely shaped by the colonial and neo-

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[1] García Canclini was born and raised in Argentina, received a doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Paris and is currently Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Program on Urban Culture at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana—Iztapalapa in Mexico. Two of his previous critically-acclaimed books include, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico* (1982, Trans. 1993), which won the Casa de las Américas prize, and *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1990, Trans. 1995)

colonial forces of Western Europe and North America.

While García Canclini's various case studies of Mexico City are certainly insightful as a localized cartography, his effort to provide a cogent theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which citizenship and consumerism might intersect in a global capitalist economy provides a telling example of the short-sightedness that Eagleton finds regrettable in much of contemporary cultural theory. Subtitled "Globalization and Multicultural Conflict," García's Canclini's book seems nonetheless entrenched in a reductive perspective of local empiricist thought. Prompted by the lack of an adequate theoretical approach that would have more adequately framed the various case studies that constitute the developing argument of *Consumers and Citizens*, my article explores the ways in which theoretical paradigms, such as those articulated in Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle* and Jean Baudrillard's *La Société de consommation*, might have provided a cogent framework to weld García Canclini's empirical analyses together.

Although the author acknowledges the transnational properties of the local marketplace, he appears to disregard these theoretical paradigms and I argue that by seemingly focusing solely on his immediate context, García Canclini misreads the ways in which Latin America in general and Mexico City in particular have been affected by the global expansion of a capitalist ideology that had been accurately mapped out by the likes of Debord and Baudrillard. Admittedly, García Canclini might also consider them to be irrelevant to this particular locale because they lack empirical data[2] which might have prompted him to advance a different theory of globalization—one in which individuals do play a part in the processes of citizenship and consumption—and thus to consider the theories advocated by critics like Baudrillard and Debord as overwhelmingly nihilistic or pessimistic. Yet, what strikes me the most is that some of García Canclini's own local observations appear to be aligned with Baudrillard and Debord's conclusions regarding the ways in which a mode of spectacular consumption allied with mechanisms of differentiation at work in the sign-value of goods and services has increasingly asserted itself on a global scale. I will demonstrate that what makes these

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[2] Although García Canclini did not criticize directly the work of Baudrillard or Debord, he considers postmodern thought in general to be almost exclusively philosophical (41), and in another context, he has voiced his discontent with the fact that most U.S. cultural studies scholars do not conduct empirical research (see "El malestar en los estudios culturales," *Fractal* 6 (julio-septiembre 1997), año 2, volumen II: 45-60).

theories relevant to García Canclini's case studies is that capitalist globalization has eroded cultural and national boundaries, and that, as Debord and Baudrillard noted, the strategy of global consumerism identifies and organizes target markets in homogeneous wholes by conflating the modes of production and consumption in a visual code of a signifying order,[3] eventually eliminating distinctions that are culturally and/or linguistically situated.

Eagleton cites the leftist motto "act locally, think globally" to indicate that in fact, "we live in a world where the political right acts globally and the postmodern left thinks locally" (72). While I would contend that on the one hand we have recently witnessed the passing of much of what constituted the postmodern left,[4] and that on the other, García Canclini could hardly be identified as a (postmodern) theorist, what is certainly distressing in this case is that by overlooking the transnational value of postmodern/poststructuralist theory, and *in lieu* of thinking globally, García Canclini decides to remain strictly in the local and forego global political thinking altogether.

The Spectacular Consumer: Debord meets Baudrillard

"*Je ne suis pas quelqu'un qui se corrige",*[5] boasts Guy Debord in the foreword to the third French edition (published 1992) of *La Société du spectacle,* his seminal essay on the mediatization of society. Proclaiming that recent historical events—such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc—have only confirmed the observations he had made a quarter of century earlier, Debord indicates that his text has not been altered since its original publication in 1967:

> *Une telle théorie critique n'a pas à être changée ; aussi longtemps que n'auront pas été détruites les conditions générales de la longue période de l'histoire que cette théorie aura été la première à définir avec exactitude. La continuation du développement de la période n'a fait que vérifier et illustrer la théorie du spectacle dont l'exposé, ici réitéré, peut également être considéré comme historique dans une acception moins élevée : il témoigne de ce qu'a été la position la plus*

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[3]   While Debord observes that socio-political and economic realities are mediated through images of a spectacular nature (7), Baudrillard posits that "[t]he ideological function of the system of consumption in the current socio-political order can be deduced from the definition of consumption as the establishment of a generalized code of differential values and form the function of a system of exchange and communication" (94).

[4]   *In Memoriam*: Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004).

[5]   I am not one who corrects himself (translation mine).

extrême au moment des querelles de 1968, et donc de ce qu'il était déjà possible de savoir en 1968.[6] (7-8)

In parallel, it could be inferred that the decision to translate and publish Jean Baudrillard's *La Société de consommation* in English in 1998, 28 years after its original date of publication, was motivated by the same observations regarding the relevance of Baudrillard's theories on consumption on the eve of the 21st century.[7] The disappearance of state-sponsored communism in Eastern Europe, the accelerated industrialization of developing countries, the promulgation of free-trade agreements across nations, and the increased internationalization of the production and consumption cycles of goods and services have propagated the spread of a model society of spectacular consumption whose structure closely resembles that theorized by Debord and Baudrillard.

Debord famously argued that society has become a "spectacle" to the degree that "[e]verything that was directly lived has receded into a representation," thus affecting the ways in which society functions as a whole: "The spectacle is not a collection of Images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (7). This hegemony of representation over reality goes beyond the mere affluence of images in the media. Rather, it pertains to a world-vision that, Debord explains, is objectifying (7), extending itself in such a way that "the spectacle is an *affirmation* of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances" (9). Moreover, as images have hijacked all aspects of social reality—existence, being, and subsequent interaction—they have also absorbed their own means of production as well as all other modes of production (8), thus creating a rapprochement between the orders of production and consumption at the level of representation, implicating both the sender and receiver of images in an all-encompassing "spectacle." Hence, the spectacle is the site and the means through which citizens and public institutions, consumers and corporations inform and interact with one another.

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[6] Such a theory has not to be altered, as long as the general conditions of the long historical period that this theory was the first to define accurately is not destroyed. The continuing development of that period has only further verified and illustrated this present theory of the spectacle and on a lower scale, this theory can also be considered historical: it bears witness to what has been the most extreme position during the troubles of 1968, and hence, of what could already be known in 1968 (translation mine).

[7] I refer the reader to both the "Foreword" and the "Introduction," written by J.P. Mayer and George Ritzer respectively, to *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Trans. George Ritzer. London: Sage, 1998 for a more detailed explanation.

Debord's "Spectacle," and in particular his observations regarding both the hegemony of signs and the subsequent conflation of the signifying orders of production and consumption, are an adequate platform to approach Baudrillard's theories on consumer society and the media.[8] While Baudrillard's study is partly based on a traditional Marxian perspective, following Debord, he eventually departs from the concepts of *use-value* and *exchange-value* since they do not take into account the proliferation of images in the contemporary capitalist landscape, where goods and services acquire value through the properties they are able to communicate to the consumer. Although Baudrillard recognizes the pertinence of production in the reproduction of capital, he considers that both social orders—that of production and consumption—are entangled and deeply interrelated at the level of the sign (33). In modern industrialized societies, where all the basic needs of the masses have been satisfied, consumption does not strictly aim to satisfy a need (for given the overabundance of goods it seem that there is a *perpetual excess of needs*-whereas these are merely created by the media to provoke their fulfillment), but rather aims to stratify the social body according to the "classes" of goods and services consumed by the various socioeconomic collectivities that constitute society (57-59). Consequently, Baudrillard argues that the social logic of consumption is neither one of "the individual appropriation of the *use-value* of good and services" nor is it that of satisfaction, but rather it is a logic of "the production and manipulation of social signifiers." Acknowledging a predominant system of signs not only positions Baudrillard's work in alignment with that of Debord, it also enables him to articulate a theory of consumption that addresses the ways in which goods (both cultural goods and material objects) are circulated, displayed, and appraised according to their respective and relative significance within the social sphere. Baudrillard posits that the process of consumption can be approached from two interrelated perspectives that take into account the play of signifiers: a structural analysis, wherein consumption is "a system of exchange, and the equivalent of a language," and a strategic analysis (following Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*), which analyzes the ways in which status values are distributed. In Baudrillard's own words, the former regards consumption as a "*process of signification and communication*, based on a code which consumption practices fit and from which they derive their meaning," while the latter considers

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[8]   I would argue that in an extended way, Debord's work has also helped shape Baudrillard's later theories in both *Simulations* and *Simulacra and Simulation*, where spectacularization is taken to its logical conclusion and produces the "desert of the real," a pure simulacrum of reality: the hyperreal.

consumption as a "*process of classification and social differentiation* in which sign/objects are ordered not now merely as significant differences in a code but as status values in a hierarchy" (emphasis his, 70-71).

Nestor García Canclini's Cultural Studies: Latin America and the End of Theory?

Within the continuity of García Canclini's work, Baudrillard is conspicuous by his absence in *Consumer and Citizens*. This absence seems inconsistent within García Canclini's larger oeuvre: in earlier studies (for instance in the concluding pages of *Culture and Power: the State of Research* (493-494), a paper that was originally presented at an international symposium on "Popular Culture and Political Resistance" in 1985) he suggested that Baudrillard's *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* was a partial platform on which future studies could be constructed. In that essay, while delineating the possible theoretical problems of considering consumption as the "locus in which conflicts between classes, caused by the unequal participation in the structure of production, continue by way of the distribution of goods and the satisfaction of needs," García Canclini stated that his endeavor was to articulate a "*coherent theory of consumption processes*" (493). However the "multidisciplinary theory" presented in *Consumers and Citizens* does not appear to have remained consistent with his earlier project; has the Latin American scholar chosen to dismiss (post)structuralist theory altogether? This appears to be the case, and I will demonstrate that incidentally, *Consumers and Citizens* suffers from an overall lack of structure and coherence; while the case studies certainly provide an interesting and compelling set of observations regarding the dialogism between consumer practice and public agency in Latin America, he fails to provide a lucid theoretical framework which would allow us to further investigate the dialectics of consumption and citizenship beyond present conjecture.

García Canclini's apparent dismissal of Baudrillard's work and his reluctance to address (post)structuralist theory even nominally are somewhat of a regrettable omission and add to my own skepticism regarding the conceptual coherence of *Consumers and Citizens*. Although some of Baudrillard's illustrations might appear outdated or out of place,[9] his structural analysis of consumption as a system of

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[9] In an endnote in his introduction to *The Consumer Society*, Ritzer notes that some of the examples used by Baudrillard, such as a reference to a 1960s Radio show, or to Brigitte Bardot as the embodiment of female beauty, could be considered

signs and his strategic analysis of a system of differentiation would both have informed Canclini's work in ways that would have allowed the latter to articulate a more acute theoretical framework and a deeper understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the global marketplace, even within the multicultural communities of Latin America that he privileges. While García Canclini aptly observes that the shift from a sociopolitical subordination to socioeconomic submission has "encouraged a model of society in which many state functions have disappeared or been assumed by private corporations, and in which social participation is organized through consumption rather than through the exercise of citizenship" (5), he remains reluctant to address the interplay of social, economical, and political signifiers entangled in the communicative processes of spectacular consumption. Baudrillard's structural and strategic analyses would have permitted García Canclini to observe more efficiently—and consequently, theorize more effectively—the socio-cultural interactions—their messages and their affiliated "meanings"—between citizens and public institutions, consumers and corporations, in the multicultural landscape of Latin America.

In the Absence of Theory: the Desertification of Citizenship

In the opening chapter of *Consumers and Citizens*, García Canclini attempts to articulate a "Multidisciplinary Theory" of consumption and simultaneously to review various disciplinary approaches. In doing so, he bases his integrated theory on the definition that "*consumption is the ensemble of sociocultural processes in which the appropriation and use of products takes place*" (emphasis his, 38) and considers three possible frameworks: "*economical rationality*," "*interactive sociopolitical rationality*," and the "*symbolic and aesthetic of the rationality of consumption*" (emphasis his, 38-40). In elaborating these three models, García Canclini's discussion of the interactive sociopolitical rationality contains what appears to be the crux of his argument regarding the intersection between consumption and citizenship. Yet, as we will see, García Canclini fails to deliver a

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obsolete for a present-day audience. Yet, one could argue that the name Bardot is merely a "sign" for female beauty, which has presently been replaced by other signs with similar significations. Furthermore, even though the French sociologist focuses on Western Europe and the United States and does not address the societies of Latin America in particular, the fact that the socio-economic conditions of South America are strongly influenced by the presence of European- and U.S.-based multinational corporations that attempt to activate capitalist market models validates the applicability of Baudrillard's observations to that region.

cogent theoretical framework: his supposed "multidisciplinary theory" reveals the absence of a cohesive theory—it is, in fact, the simulacrum of a theoretical framework—and due to its many contradictions, his overall project lacks consistency.

García Canclini argues that studies in urban anthropology and sociology have demonstrated that consumption is "motivated by *interactive sociopolitical nationality*" (emphasis his), pointing towards the existence a complex and intricate web of interactions and communicative processes between producers and consumers. Under this perspective, consumers inform producers of their particular needs and tastes through their patterns of consumption: "[t]o consume is to participate in an arena of competing claims for what society produces and the ways of using it" (39). García Canclini proposes that consumers are capable of shaping the types of messages sent by the media, thus implying that consumption is more of a dialogic interaction than a strictly one-sided communicative process from producer (i.e. sender) to consumer (i.e. receiver): "if consumption was once a site of more or less unilateral decisions, it is today a space of interaction where producers and senders no longer simply seduce their audiences; they also have to justify themselves rationally" (39).

Nevertheless, one wonders whether the push for senders/producers to "justify themselves rationally," and their potential success of doing so, merely reinforces the seductive powers of mediated messages. Consumers, having clearly articulated their desires, become more gullible when their expectations are met, when they are promised exactly what they were asking for. In fact, this not only demonstrates the degree of co-optation of the consuming public in the play of signifiers, it is also under these specific conditions that the media are able to adequately manipulate the meanings entangled in the communicative processes to consumers. Keeping in mind that marketing strategies are always elaborated in relation to the tailored needs of the demographics of a specific target market, in this case, the advertising message is more effective as it relies on a precisely tailored model of "rationality"—of a specific message—expected by the target audience.

The effective use of an audience's expectations for marketing purposes can be seen in García Canclini's own example of political propaganda, where political candidates rely on the communicative power of mass media to send messages that are tailored to their audience's expectations. While García Canclini claims that this "demonstrates the complicity of consumption and citizenship" (39), this complicity can only appear suspicious: is the total assimilation of the political processes inherent in the practice of citizenship by

the media industry truly something to look forward to? As mentioned above, it is precisely this complicity, that of the "spectacularization" of all aspects of social existence, that lies at the root of Debord's original and effective critique of society and Baudrillard's similar and subsequent observations. In borrowing McLuhan's formula of "the medium is the message," Baudrillard convincingly demonstrates that through the codification and interpretation of the world through visual media, we consume "the whole culture industrially processed into finished products, into sign materials, from which all eventual, cultural or political value has vanished" (124).

While it could be implied that García Canclini might very well equally repudiate the prevalence of such spectacles, his failure to explicitly condemn, let alone criticize, "the complicity between consumption and citizenship" as he puts it, is somewhat disappointing. In fact, what is rather bewildering is his reliance on a paradigm that conceives of consumption as a site of interaction through which consumers are capable of expressing their interests as citizens effectively. For him, the mediation of social life through consumption implies that "the political notion of citizenship is expanded by including rights to housing, health, education, and the access to other goods through consumption," and thus he endeavors to conceptualize consumption more specifically "as a site that is good for thinking, where part of economic, sociopolitical, and psychological rationality is organized in all societies" (5). This, however, raises certain questions. Can we speak of "expanding" citizenship within the practice of consumption? Does consumption actually permit one to express opinions that are not directly implicated with one's own practices of consumption? Does the exercise of consumption enable one to think and act beyond fulfilling one's own self-interests? Can the "Right to consume" reflect one's own civil rights and one's ability to assert them?

I would argue that in an effort to vouch more specifically for those citizens in Latin America whose basic needs are scarcely being met, García Canclini sometimes forgoes the bigger picture of economical politics and the ideologies of market profitability in the global era. Economic globalization has encouraged various nation states, especially in Latin America, either to sell or subcontract basic services, such as housing, health, education and communications, to private entities and multinational corporations,[10] which in turn are able to exert profit margin and bottom line practices indiscriminately

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[10] I refer the reader to the sale of the state-operated telephone services as well as the subcontracting of the water-operating facilities in Puerto Rico and Argentina to international corporations.

in these new markets. Consequently, these basic services cease to be regulated by the state and thus, *in lieu* of benefiting from getting their basic needs fulfilled as social rights, citizens are no longer considered as such, but rather, as "consumers," who in turn become vulnerable to the volatile variations of a market regulated almost exclusively by monopolies. This lack of choice, especially prevalent in the Latin American context, does not guarantee the voices of consumers as those of citizens are being heard. To the contrary, they are often entirely disregarded by the tautology that governs world markets. In fact, this is where García Canclini appears to contradict himself: he first proposes that in a society where the media have replaced "discredited political organizations," the processes of consumption could be considered an expansion of the political notion of citizenship,[11] yet he ultimately vouches for repositioning the state as arbitrator in the provision of cultural goods and services:

> The real challenge is to revitalize the state as the representative of the public interest, as the arbiter or guarantor that will not allow the collective need for information, recreation, and innovation to be subordinated to commercial profitability. (155)

This last proposition is undoubtedly more appealing than his initial suggestion; nonetheless one cannot help but wonder whether the return to a federalism of the state represents a desirable solution in the wake of various nationalist movements gone awry. While struggling to reassemble the debris the international community anxiously awaits to see what will ensue from the recent resurgence of various socialist and populist governments in South America.

At a slightly different albeit interrelated level, García Canclini explains that the framework of economic rationality conceives of consumption as a site where the larger imperatives of capital expansion and labor reproduction shapes and conditions consumer demand through advertising. While García Canclini first observes that "it is undeniable that the supply of goods and the inducement through advertising to buy them are not arbitrary acts" (39), he ends up arguing that this perspective, which is largely promoted by Marxist studies of consumption and mass communication research in the 50s and 70s, "exaggerated the determining forces on consumers and audiences," and he relies on Edmond Preteceille and Jean-Pierre Terrail's 1977 book *Capitalism, Consumption, and Needs* (translated 1985) to support his claim.

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[11] In doing so, García Canclini refers to and draws from the position of James Holston and Arjun Appadurai in "Cities and Citizenship" (*Public Culture* 2:2 (1996): 187-204).

Interestingly enough, one section of the book aims to repudiate Baudrillard's superimposition of *sign-value* over the Marxist concepts of *value*, *use-value*, and *exchange-value*, claiming that Baudrillard, in fact, misunderstands Marx (27-34). I would argue that in turn, their reactionary critique suffers from a certain essentialism whose objective is to validate a materialist approach to the question of needs. Preteceille and Terrail's attempt to reinstate a framework of need-based and satisfaction-driven market economy from the perspective of production and a model of supply and demand as opposed to the framework of capital reproduction and expansion through mass communication falter because they fail to acknowledge the social logic that underlies consumption in a global marketplace. As a result, they address neither the integration of production and consumption as a socio-cultural process, nor the existing disjunction between the localized act of consumption and the international networks of production and circulation, nor the increasing marketing of goods through image-driven branding and labeling. In addition, Preteceille and Terrail also seem to overlook the starkly competitive nature of the global marketplace where, in order to gain market shares and conquer new markets, international corporations rely on massive promotional campaigns and the constant bombardment of spectacular images by the media industry. The aim of these strategies is unilaterally geared to seduce the potential consumers of their target audiences by relying on demographic information rather than actual consumer demands. Recent studies by Daniel Miller, as well as by Toby Miller and Marie-Claire Leger, confirm the irrelevance of the supply and demand matrix and the unilateral perspectives of marketing strategies. While Daniel Miller argues that modern marketers rely more on a model of a "virtual consumer" than on actual shopping needs (175), Toby Miller and Marie-Claire Leger observe that "this model may occasionally describe life in some fruit and vegetable markets today. But as a historical account, it is of no value: the rhythms of supply and demand, operating unfettered by states, religions, unions, superstitions, and fashions, have never existed as such" (96). Hence, these critics seem to concur with the view that a model of supply and demand is thoroughly inadequate as a framework to understand the ways in which global trends operate in post-industrial consumer society. García Canclini's position could well be more cognizant that consumption in a global era can be described as an anesthetized and homogenized space, created and marketed by international corporations under the guise of signifying brand names, each competing for a bigger part of market share within the consuming public.

Apart from a fastidious critique of Baudrillard's apparent misun-

derstanding of the Marxist value system, there is little in Preteceille and Terrail that would allow us to understand García Canclini's rationale for overlooking the determining forces of market imperatives on consumers—especially when some of his own findings seem to confirm this view. In his study of the video industries in Latin America, García Canclini makes several appropriate observations regarding the disjunction between supply and demand and the marketing strategies that have successfully homogenized the sites of cultural consumption. At one level, he argues that by mostly providing U.S. productions, the supply in video clubs does not reflect the diversified tastes of the audiences: "[i]n Mexico, as in other countries, this aesthetic unilateralism is more the result of the pragmatic criteria of business than a careful attention to the interests and preferences of viewers" (121). Yet he also notes that the predominantly young demographic of the video audience seems to buy into the ideologies of the U.S. film industry in demonstrating a clear preference for "the most recent film available, especially if it is an 'action-adventure'" (116), a genre largely dominated by the U.S. film industry. Although there is little doubt that a diversity of tastes amongst videophiles does exist, the latter point demonstrates the efficiency of Hollywood's advertising power on global audiences quite tellingly. As the major producers of visual entertainment, U.S.-based production companies have the financial means to aggressively market and distribute their products across the world, and in doing so—in addition to providing a plethora of goods to choose from to the point of overexposure—they are able to curve consumer preferences to conform to their offerings. In this spectacular marketing scheme of supplying a generic cultural product of mass appeal within multicultural communities, mass marketers are able to homogenize consumer preference and unilaterally shape demand to suit their own ideologies of cultural production, thus totally undermining the existence of individual tastes. This case aptly illustrates the ways in which García Canclini's observations are aligned with the paradigms articulated by Debord and Baudrillard, and consequently weaken his overall argument that consumers are capable of effectively shaping the form and supply of goods and services.

Under the rubric of "*symbolic and aesthetic aspects of the rationality of consumption*" (emphasis his, 40), García Canclini criticizes studies that consider consumption a sign of difference and distinction between socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups and refers to works by Pierre Bourdieu, Arjun Appadurai, and Stuart Ewen, and it is in this particular section that one can perceive a more or less direct critique of Baudrillard's "strategic analysis" of consumption. This perspective, García Canclini observes, "shows that in contemporary

societies a significant aspect of the rationality of social relations is constructed less in a struggle for the means of production and satisfaction of material needs than in the appropriation of the means of symbolic distinction," yet he proceeds to argue that "this research model's shortcoming is that it tends to understand consumption as primarily a means of creating divisions." Nonetheless, it is not quite clear why he chooses to partly dismiss it, for he seems to recognize the fact that on the one hand, commodities contain significations that are unanimously understood by all members of society and that on the other, these significations act as mechanisms of distinction: "If the members of a society did not share the meanings of commodities, if these were meaningful only for the elites or the minorities that use them, they would not serve the purposes of differentiation" (40). What García Canclini seems to suggest however, is that social classes are not differentiated since they share a same and common understanding of the significance of goods and services: "consumption contributes to *the integrative and communicative rationality of a society*" (40). Nonetheless, one may ask if the ability to understand what Baudrillard would call the *sign-value* of commodities and their position within a hierarchy of signifiers does not merely indicate a common and collective understanding of the system of signs—its codification and subsequent interpretation: its *language*. Consequently, if one acknowledges that certain commodities contain features that others do not, marking their economic distinction, their "class," does this not imply that we are in fact complicit in the processes of distinction? In other words, it is not because all classes understand the *language* of consumption that we are immune to its distinguishing and differentiating capacities. Quite to the contrary, I would argue that consumption as a site where "*the industrialized production of differences*"[12] takes place is a most pertinent framework; as Baudrillard observed, it is because we live in a society where the sign-value of commodities is accepted by all classes and groups—i.e. Canclini's *integrative and communicative rationality of a society*—that consumers are drawn to obey "the code"—albeit unconsciously—and confirm their distinct position, their *status*, within society (61-62).

What is quite bewildering is that even though García Canclini repudiates the concept of consumption as a site for social distinction

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[12]   In discussing the meaningfulness of advertising Baudrillard argues, "[a]dvertising as a whole has no *meaning*. It merely conveys significations. Its significations, (and the behaviours they call forth) are never *personal*: they are all differential; they are all marginal and combinatorial. In other words, they are of the order of the *industrial production of differences* – and this might, I believe, serve as the most cogent definition of the *system of consumption*" (88).

in his multidisciplinary theory, the conclusions he derives from his own sociological case studies confirm the very viability of the differentiating propensities entangled in the consumption of cultural goods: "The Mexico City Festival reproduced the segmentation and segregation in the general population ensuing from inequalities of income, education, and residential distribution of the city's inhabitants" (55). Baudrillard's observation regarding consumer behavior in relation to their choices adequately sums up the divisive properties of selective consumption:

> The consumer experiences his distinctive behaviours as freedom, as aspiration, as choice. His experience is not one of being *forced to be different*, of obeying a code. To differentiate oneself is always, by the same token, to bring into play the total order of differences, which is, from the first, the product of the total society and inevitably exceeds the scope of the individual. In the very act of scoring his points in the order of differences, each individual maintains that order, and therefore condemns himself only ever to occupy a relative position within it. (61)

While the social system of classes has been inherited from the division of labor instigated by the industrial revolution that coincided with the fall of the feudal system, modern urban centers have efficiently re-appropriated the perpetuation of the system's distinguishing capacities by categorizing its inhabitants and grouping them into collectivities according to their purchasing power and their consumption patterns. To that effect, Baudrillard claims that "manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs[…] distinguish[es] you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by making you off from your group to a group of higher status" (61).

Contrary to his initial incredulity towards considering consumption as a sign of distinction, García Canclini seems to eventually concur with Baudrillard's strategic analysis. In referring to his own case studies, he notes that popular sectors are faithful to forms of cultural expression that most likely adhere to the choices that have traditionally been endorsed by their communities (42-43). In doing so, they not only bear witness to the distinguishing *sign-value* of various cultural goods (their symbolic meaning or lack thereof for specific social groups), they are also reinforcing the existing hegemonic social order. Either due to the lack of interest in (43) or the limited access to (53) certain forms of cultural expression, the entrenchment and confinement of various ethnic and socio-economic groups are undeniable, and are a reflection of both the heterogeneity and degree of segregation prevalent in the large urbanized centers of developing world economies. As García Canclini concurs, the various communities that constitute these urban centers share more common traits

in their consumption patterns with similar socio-economic classes in other nations than with the other classes that live within the same geographical region. This last observation confirms the prevalence of the processes of distinction embedded in consumption practices: the ordering of global consumer societies operates homogeneously across heterogeneous categories of socio-economic classes.

Cultural Criticism: Contradictions (and Resolutions?)

Following his attempt to articulate a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, García Canclini summarizes the musings of various schools of thought on consumption. In the process, he dismisses postmodern theorists for their overwhelming emphasis on philosophy and their disregard for empirical data,[13] arguing that "we need structures by means of which to think and give order to what we desire" (41). García Canclini claims that through various consumption processes, such as that associated with certain symbolic rituals (birthdays, anniversaries, and the like), "consumption is a process in which desires are converted into demands and socially regulated acts" (42). In turn, these processes assist in the ordering and organizing of society into diverse multicultural communities, where individuals remain faithful to their original groups, regardless of the international nature of the goods and services they consume (41-43). Yet it is precisely in his interpretation of the structuring of desire and society—i.e. "[the] play of desires and structures, commodities and consumption [that] also serve to give political order to each society" (42)—as well as his reference to "codes that unite us" (43), that García Canclini's observations are again closely aligned with that of Baudrillard's structuralism. Regarding ritualistic expenditure, Baudrillard makes the following observation:

> [i]n a logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite* function or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something quite different, which is either the social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification. (77)

In other words, we can consider that both the consumption of rituals and the consumption associated with rituals are informed by the respective meaning(s) of these symbolic rituals, thus confirming the

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13   "It is … surprising that postmodern thought should be constituted almost exclusively by philosophical reflections, even when it deals with such concrete objects as architectural design, the organization of the culture industry, and social interrelations" (41).

existing and prevalent *sign-value* of both the rituals and the traditional commodities associated with them. In addition, as García Canclini does, Baudrillard also relates consumption to the political order:

> The ideological function of the system of consumption in the current socio-political order can be deduced from the definition of consumption as the generalized code of differential values and from the function of the system of exchange and communication… (94)

Baudrillard goes on eventually to link this with his strategic analysis of differentiation, where the common understanding of the "the code," i.e. the collective comprehension of meanings associated with commodities in their sign-value eventually creates a homogeneously heterogenized society. The stratification of society into groups and collectivities of similar tastes and values closely resembling class structures was already discussed above, nevertheless, what should be retained is that even though García Canclini does not directly acknowledge it, he (unconsciously?) recognizes both the structural and differentiating processes associated with consumption. On the one hand, he acknowledges the play of signifiers in his own observations regarding ritualistic expenditure, and on the other, he identifies the existence of distinguishing properties in the sign-values of commodities: "[ethnicity, class, and nation] seem to be reformulated as *mobile pacts for the interpretation* of commodities and messages" (43).

The Responsible Consumer: False Consciousness and the Expansion of the Signifying Field

Apart from observing that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other social advocacy groups fail to attract the masses (31), García Canclini does not particularly address the recent resurgence of social movements advocating fair-trade practices and the consequent labeling of goods produced under these conditions. He does not provide a specific explanation, yet one rationale for the lack of interest amongst consumers for these organizations would be that they—perhaps as opposed to citizens—display a form of "false consciousness," and are too engrossed by their own self-interests of self-preservation.

The orchestration of various, sometimes contradicting, messages of the advertising industry to buy at minimized costs—the ideologies concealed behind the ever seducing messages of "discounts" and "interest-free financing" marketing for instance—compel consumers to either disregard entirely or be totally indifferent to the existing labor conditions in countries of production—often shamelessly, considering that due to the circulation of various recent reports and documen-

tary films, there exists, albeit perhaps in the repressed realm of the collective unconscious, some knowledge of these labor conditions. Labels and slogans such as "Made in Bangladesh" on Nike sneakers, or "Brought to you by Nestlé" should draw consumers to the realities of production and marketing, yet as signs they are easily manipulated and consequently set aside to allow for consumption processes to take place at various levels—be it the conspicuous consumption of the middle class or the "underconsumption" or "inconspicuous consumption"[14] of the socio-economic elite.

The impetus to be an informed consumer and/or a socially-responsible consumer goes hand-in-hand with consuming "intelligently": an attempt to alleviate both post-purchase anxiety and the guilt associated with consumption. On the one hand, the stratifying function of status symbols as signs exerts considerable social pressure on consumers with regard to their choices of similar, yet competing brands and cultural events. On the other, in a world where the majority barely survives, consumption can possibly bring forth a feeling of guilt in the sense that one recognizes his/her privileged status over others whose basic needs are scarcely met.

It is definitely admirable that certain corporations and organizations are aiming to raise consumer awareness of global socio-economical issues by unveiling the complex networks of the international production and circulation of commodities. Yet, if one takes into consideration recent studies such as that of Darren W. Dahl, Heather Honea, and Rajesh V. Manchanda, who observed that the feeling of guilt can encourage consumers to act in a socially-responsible manner (168), one could also argue that the current resurgence—and relative success—of private companies and social movements that promote and advocate fair-trade practices is closely associated with their capacity to comprehend the ways in which consumers respond to the meanings enclosed in labeling practices. By acting "rationally" as García Canclini would say, by disclosing a specific message, they are in fact relying on a careful play of social, political, and economical signifiers, thus confirming the pertinence of an inherent structural dimension, even within the recent resurgence of socially-conscious global market processes and consumption practices.

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[14] Baudrillard uses the terms 'underconsumption' or 'inconspicuous consumption' to refer to the "paradox of prestigious super-differentiation," which is effectuated in the "discretion, sobriety, and self-effacement" of the higher socio-economic classes.

The Death of Theory and the Return of the Hyperreal

In the concluding paragraph of *Consumers and Citizens*, Néstor García Canclini utters a somewhat anxious cry to reconcile the economical politics of globalization with the humanist academic discourse on multiculturalism: "[i]t occurs to me that our first responsibility is to salvage these tasks that are properly *cultural* from their dissolution in the market or in politics; that is to rethink the real together with the possible, to distinguish globalization from selective modernization, to reconstruct a democratic multiculturalism from its foundation in civil society and with the participation of the state" (161). Unfortunately, while his overall project to relocate a public forum for citizenry within the multicultural collectivities of consumers is commendable, it suffers from the lack of a cogent theoretical framework and a somewhat incoherent if not paradoxical reading of existing socio-economic conditions. In juxtaposing the two, the contradictions, borne of their dissonances, appear irreconcilable.

Perhaps García Canclini considers that the very nature of academic "dis-course" is "dis"-engaged from any definite "course" of action, and that until this order is reversed, the endeavor to emancipate the "docile bodies" from the enslaving ideologies of global market economies as promoted by mass media seduction will remain a mere simulation, or in García Canclini's own words, a "utopia" (161). Nonetheless, while García Canclini well recognizes the grasp of market laws on consumption and consequently enumerates the requirements that would allow consumption to become a site for the "reflexive exercise of citizenship" (45-46), he remains reluctant to articulate a cogent theoretical paradigm let alone a coherent set of enabling strategies. "Consumption is good for thinking," García Canclini proposes (5), and while consumption certainly represents a stimulating forum to discuss the multilayered implications of globalized market economies—but only if one thinks "globally," as Eagleton advises us, which is precisely what García Canclini fails to do—the probability of such discourses reaching beyond the comfortable realm of bourgeois academia is unlikely.

Coda: The Return of Theory

Was Terry Eagleton correct in pondering what would happen After Theory? *If we have definitely turned the page, then perhaps it is appropriate for García Canclini to reject relativism and embrace empiricism. However, I cannot help but find it regrettable that García Canclini renounces the playful—yet pertinent—possibilities of "high" theory for*

the practicality of statistical data. What would a structural model of consumption and citizenship in a system of global political economics in constant flux look like? One could consider the social being as the sum of two parts, the consumer and the citizen, simultaneously representing them in the topography of a sign and positioning them in an oppositional relationship, before pushing the consumer/citizen equation to its logical point of rupture. The first proposition entails that as signifier, the consumer would be perpetually deferred from the signified, the citizen, hence confirming the incommensurability of the two parts. While the second suggestion establishes the two parts as being mutually exclusive, it nonetheless allows itself to be inverted, subverted, or even completely deconstructed. Although the différance between consumption and citizenship illustrates the improbability of their meanings to correspond, the subsequent treatment implies that this dichotomous structure could very well be undermined. Consequently, it seems that this perspective would allow us to address and reveal the complexity of what García Canclini's considers "the complicity of consumption and citizenship"; as the late—and already profoundly missed—Jacques Derrida pointed out "… we cannot do without the concept of the sign, we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity …"

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RATIONALE FOR THE INDIAN MUSLIMS' PHILOSOPHY OF LOYALISM TO BRITISH COLONIAL RULE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Belkacem Belmekki

It is historically taken for granted that the Great Revolt of 1857 in the South Asian Subcontinent delivered a *coup de grâce* to the Muslim community there, which had already been suffering under the East India Company's rule prior to this uprising. Indeed, in every walk of life, Indian Muslims found themselves trailing far behind their Hindu fellow countrymen, who had made steady progress under foreign rule. It was against this gloomy background unfavourable to the Muslim community that some Muslim figures in the Indian Subcontinent realized the necessity of adopting a loyalist approach towards the British Colonial Government, as the only bittersweet solution to save Islam and Muslims from further disgrace and avert total collapse.

The main focus of attention in this article is on the person of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan,[1] one of the greatest Muslim educationists, writers and reformers during British rule, considering his historically decisive role in shaping Muslim destiny in the Subcontinent up to independence, namely the creation of an independent Muslim state, Pakistan.

After gauging the circumstances in the Subcontinent, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan realized the urgent need to persuade his co-religionists to let bygones be bygones and come to terms with the British rulers. Indeed, in accordance with his approach, Sir Sayyid Ahmad's immediate objective was to defuse the state of tension and misunderstanding that characterized Muslim-British relationship, following the downfall of the Mughal Empire as well as the happenings of 1857,

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[1] Sir Sayyid (*also* Syed) Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), born into a well-off family, was a Muslim jurist, educator and author who entered the service of the East India Company as a clerk in the Judicial Department, and later rose to the position of sub-judge. S.M. Ikram, 'Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 2001, CD-ROM Edition.

and to establish, instead, a good rapport between the two (Ali Khan 61). Towards this end, he strongly advised Muslims to adopt a loyal attitude towards the British Colonial Government.

In reality, the happenings of 1857 and their negative impact on the Indian Muslim community established the absolute superiority of the British in the South Asian Subcontinent. This was a significant factor that convinced Sir Sayyid Ahmad of the fact that the British might was invincible (Muhammad xii), and that its confrontation would not be a sane endeavour (Taha and Afzal 101). Consequently, he urged his co-religionists to wake up to this reality and make some sacrifices in order to adjust to the new situation.

This adjustment, according to him, was to accept the British as their masters, given the fact that, as he realized, all current circumstances indicated that they, the British, would not cease to be so, at least, in the foreseeable future (Aziz 19). In this respect, Aziz Ahmad stated that "an adjustment of some sort with Western civilization in general and with the British Government in India in particular became a condition for survival" (Ahmad 55).

To put it differently, Sir Sayyid Ahmad thought that it would be a wise decision and in the interest of the Muslim community to be on good terms with the British Government (Aziz 19). Besides, in his opinion, the adoption of a pro-British attitude was a *sine qua non* for any betterment of the Muslim community since the latter were "the patrons par excellence" and "were responsible for distributing the limited quantity of 'loaves and fishes' available" (Masselos 120).

In attempting to read Sir Sayyid Ahmad's mind through his writings and speeches, K.K. Aziz affirmed that the pro-British attitude of this Muslim reformist was by no means the result of a thoughtless sentiment; on the contrary, it was based on three main convincing reasons.

In the first place, he believed that loyalty to the rulers was the one and only remedy currently available to the Muslim community in order to remove the enmity and hatred that featured their relationship with the British Government as well as to "wipe off the stigma of Muslim instigation of the mutiny" (Aziz 19). For that reason, he published, in 1860, a book entitled *The Loyal Muhammedans of India*, in which he highlighted the services that many Muslims had rendered to the British at the height of the Great Revolt (Muhammad xi). He even declared that the Muslim community was worthy of praise for its support to the British, as S. Muhammad reported him as stating:

> It is to the Mohammedans alone that the credit belongs of having stood staunch and unshaken friends of the Government amidst that

> fearful tornado that devastated the country and shook the Empire to its core. (Aziz 19)

By the same token, Sir Sayyid Ahmad also attempted to convince the British officials of the Muslims' firm loyalty, and hence, no need to look at them with suspicious eyes (19).

Be that as it may, according to M.A. Karandikar, the British idea of the Muslim community as being a "bunch" of disloyal elements still lingered among some high officials in London. For instance, in a speech given in the House of Commons on June 6th, 1861, Charles Wood, the then First Secretary of State for India, referred to the Muslim subject as "the bigoted Muhammadan, who considers that we have usurped his legitimate position as the ruler of India" (Karandikar 140).

On the other hand, Sir Sayyid Ahmad's idea of adopting a loyal attitude also resulted from his examining the current affairs in the Indian Subcontinent, which were characterized by the introduction of parliamentary institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as the increase in the employment of natives in the Civil Service by means of open competition (Aziz 20).[2] For him, this situation represented a serious threat to the Muslim community since the latter were but a minority in India and would remain so for a long time.

In other words, the Muslim community was, numerically speaking, smaller than the Hindu majority; as corroborated by the historian S.R. Mehrotra, who asserted that the Hindus were four times more numerous than the Muslims. Therefore, in Sir Sayyid's opinion, every advance towards democracy in the Indian Subcontinent was tantamount to the oppression of the Muslim minority under the rule of the Hindu majority, since, as he put it, "we can prove by mathematics that there will be four votes for the Hindu to every one vote for the Mohamedan" (Mehrotra 78). In addition, he further wondered how Muslims could guard their interests since "it would be like a game of dice in which one man had four dice and the other only one" (78).

Again in this regard, K.K. Aziz quoted Sir Sayyid Ahmad as saying that "such political principles could only be applied to a country inhabited by one nation. In India every step towards a representative goal would be one more rivet in Muslim chains" (Aziz 20). Indeed, Sir Sayyid placed too much stress on the fact that Muslims and Hindus

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2 The process of introducing native Indians to the parliamentary institutions began shortly after the Great Revolt, namely following the passage of the Indian Council Act of 1861. S.R. Wasti, 'Constitutional Development: From 1858 to 1906', in *Muslim Struggle for Freedom in India*, Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1993, p. 47.

constituted two different and unequal nations, being diametrically opposed in terms of interests, culture and religion (Masselos 124). Consequently, for the sake of their salvation and survival, Indian Muslims had to be loyal to the British who had the upper hand in the region.

Briefly speaking, Sir Sayyid was of the opinion that the Muslim community, being outnumbered and powerless, had only one option left open to them, namely siding with the British, or else, they would live under the mercy of the Hindu majority. As summed up by Percival Spear: "A democratic regime means majority rule, and majority rule in India would mean Hindu rule. Therefore the British cannot be dispensed with …" (Spear 226).

Indeed, Sir Sayyid Ahmad was convinced of the fact that if the British were to withdraw from the Subcontinent, the Muslim minority would be swept off by the Hindu majority (Aziz 70). Here, it is worth recalling the fact that Muslims were no match for Hindus as the latter had been progressing by leaps and bounds while Muslims were mourning the loss of their power and prestige. Commenting on this, K.K. Aziz observes:

> Sayyid Ahmad Khan foresaw that the Muslim minority was no match for the progressive Hindus and that if it also alienated the sympathies of the rulers its ruins would be complete. (70)

Hence, Sir Sayyid Ahmad came up with the conclusion that loyalty to the British was not a mere policy of opportunism, but also the dictate of political realism (Abbasi 14).

Sir Sayyid Ahmad's loyalist disposition to the British equally sprang from his conviction of the superiority of the Western civilization to the Oriental one (Aziz 20). This conviction was further enhanced following his trip to Britain in 1869, where he was impressed by the British culture and way of life (Hay 186), as corroborated by Shun Muhammad: "The English civilization and culture had impressed Sir Syed much earlier and a visit to England dazzled his eyes all the more" (Muhammad xviii).

Besides, Sir Sayyid's fascination with Britain and her civilization, which he attributed to western education, made him castigate his countrymen back home, Muslims and Hindus alike, for their benightedness and ignorance. This could be reflected in the strong language that he employed in a letter that he sent home while he was in London in which he wrote:

> Without flattering the English, I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners

and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and upright man. The English have every reason to believe us in India to be imbecile brutes. (Symonds 28)

Apart from that, Sir Sayyid Ahmad wanted to prove to those who raised their eyebrows over his loyalism, mainly the most orthodox elements of the Muslim community, that loyalty to the British Government did not conflict with the Islamic faith. In order to back up his statement, he asserted that "God has made them (the British) rulers over us," and that the Prophet Mohammed said that if "God place over you a black negro slave as a ruler you must obey him," hence, the Indian Muslims should be pleased with the will of God (Mehrotra 180).

In addition to that, he put stress on the premise that both religions, namely Islam and Christianity, were monolithic creeds which had originated from the same source and had more convergences that united them than divergences that divided them. In this regard, Spear reports that Sir Sayyid Ahmad stressed the resemblance of "fundamental Islamic and Christian ideas with their common Judaic heritage" (Spear 225).

Thus, as part of his efforts to delineate the similarities between Islam and Christianity, Sir Sayyid Ahmad wrote a book entitled *Tabiyn al-Kalam Fi Tafsir al-Tawrat wa al-Injyl Ala Millat al-Islam* (*The Mahomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*), which he published in 1862 at his own expenses (Malik 83-84). By this work, Sir Sayyid Ahmad blazed a trail in undertaking such a venture since, according to Hafeez Malik, no Muslim scholar had previously dared to write a commentary on the Old and New Testaments (Malik 84). Yet, his sole objective was to explore areas of harmony and to foster sympathetic understanding of Christianity among the Muslims, as well as to prove that these two monolithic religions had never been opposed to each other (Muhammad xi). In this respect, Shun Muhammad quoted him as saying that:

> No religion upon earth was more friendly to Christianity than Islam; and the latter had been more beneficial and advantageous to Christianity … Islam fought against Judaism in favour of Christianity, and openly and manly did it declare that the mission of … Jesus Christ was unquestionably 'the Word of God' and 'the Spirit of God'. (Quoted in Muhammad xi-xii)

Then, he added:

> Mohammedans as all people guided by a sacred Book believe in the necessity of the coming of Prophets to save mankind and have faith in these books. Mohammedans have full faith in the divine nature of the Christian Gospels. (Quoted in Hasan 54)

Furthermore, according to M.A. Karandikar, Sir Sayyid argued in his book that the message received from God by the Prophet Mohammed was the same message received previously by Jesus Christ, and that the latter was not corrupted, as many orthodox *ulama*[3] alleged (Karandikar 140).

While on the subject, it is worthwhile to refer to the fact that many Western intellectuals, past and present, have lent support to Sir Sayyid Ahmad's idea of Muslim-Christian resemblances, by stressing the fact that both of Islam and Christianity represent two creeds that share almost identical characteristics and principles. One of these was Sir William Baker, a British writer, who insisted on the close affinity between both religions where worshippers believe in the same God (Aziz 71). The same author went further in stating that "the Muslim among all oriental races is the nearest to what a Protestant terms Christianity" (Quoted in Aziz 71). Again in this regard, Richard Fletcher, a twentieth-century British historian and Islamologist, stated:

> There was so much that Muslims believed, or did, that was familiar to Christians. They believed in one God. They revered patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, David, Solomon. They venerated the Virgin Mary, to whom indeed one of the chapters or suras of the Koran is devoted (Sura 19). Respectful references to Jesus and his teachings occur repeatedly in the Koran. Like Christians they prayed and fasted, gave alms and went on pilgrimage. (Fletcher 18)

Again in the same line of thought, Chis Horrie and Peter Chippindale, so convinced of the close affinities between Islam and Christianity, claimed that in spite of their errors, Christians are believed to be closer to Islam than any other religion in the world. To substantiate their claim, they quoted a passage from the Holy Quran, the Chapter of Al Maidah, in which the Almighty, addressing the Muslims, stated:

> And you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe to be those who say: We are Christians…And when they hear what has been revealed to the apostle (Muhammad), you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognise; they say: Our Lord! We believe, so write us down with the witnesses. (Horrie and Chippindale 11)

> (The Holy Quran, the Chapter of Al Maidah "The Table," verse: 83)

On the other hand, Sir Sayyid Ahmad urged his co-religionists to refrain from regarding the British as their enemies, but rather,

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[3] 'Ulama' is a term used by Muslims to refer to a group of learned people in religious affairs.

as friends. In doing so, he brought forth many arguments from his religious study and social experiences (Aziz 70). According to K.K. Aziz, Sir Sayyid wanted to convince the Muslim community of the fact that Islam was nearer to Christianity than any other religion in the world, and that it had more in common with the monotheism of Christianity than the polytheism of Hinduism (70). With regard to Hinduism, Syed M. Taha and Nasreen Afzal noted that its relationship with Islam was characterized by marked differences in the belief-system. As an example, both authors observed that whereas Islam, as a monotheistic and iconoclastic religion, believed in conversion through preaching, Hinduism did not, as it might adversely affect the caste-based society nurtured on inequality (Taha and Afzal 100-101).

Sir Sayyid Ahmad further added that Christians were referred to in the Holy Quran as the 'People of the Book,' namely Christians and Jews, and that Muslims should respect them (Aziz 70). In this respect, Richard Fletcher confirmed that the Holy Quran made it clear that it is incumbent upon every Muslim to respect the *Ahl al-Kitab*, the 'People of the Book' (Fletcher 20). To back up his statement, Fletcher cited the following passage from the Chapter 29 (The Spider) of the Holy Quran:

> Dispute not with the People of the Book save in the fairer manner, except for those of them that do wrong; and say, 'We believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have surrendered. (Quoted in Fletcher 20)
>
> (The Holy Quran, the Chapter of Al'Ankabut "the Spider," verse: 46)

Moreover, Sir Sayyid Ahmad drew an analogy between both faiths in the social sphere to show to the Muslim community that they shared many common ideals and practices with Christians, unlike the Hindu community (Aziz 70). For that purpose, he wrote another pamphlet, entitled *Tuaam Ahl-e-Kitab*, in which he urged his co-religionists to get rid of their prejudices which prevented them from socializing with Christians (Muhammad xii). In his opinion, socializing with the British was an essential ingredient that would create friendly feelings with them, whereas aloofness would only lead to more misunderstanding (Aziz 74). Thus, for that reason, he encouraged his community to dine with Christians "at the same table with spoon, knife and fork" (Muhammad xii).

As a matter of fact, Masood A. Raja asserted that eating with foreigners, or non-Muslims, was often considered un-Islamic behaviour in the Muslim community. This, he believed, could be attributed to the strong influence of the Hindu community on Indian Muslims (Raja 163). Furthermore, Masood A. Raja confirmed that Sir Sayyid

Ahmad wanted to free his co-religionists from this prejudice by arguing that:

> … as British were people of the book, breaking bread with them could not be considered a contaminating experience. … this practice of not sharing food with non-Muslims was strictly un-Islamic and was caused by Hinduization of Indian Islam. (163)

In other words, Sir Sayyid Ahmad was of the view that in day-to-day life Indian Muslims were closer to the Christian rulers than to the idol-worshipping Hindus. As K.K. Aziz put it:

> In social matters … the Muslim found himself in more congenial company among the British. The two could, and did, intermarry and intermix in society without disagreeable taboos. With the Hindu one was always on one's guard against breaking some caste restriction or polluting a Brahmin household. *(Aziz 74)*

It should be noted that Sir Sayyid Ahmad's statement regarding intermixing with the British in social matters, such as dining and marriage, brought him a lot of anger and criticism from the orthodox *ulama.* Yet, in facing such opposition, he often quoted the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* of the Prophet as well as took support from some learned Muslim intellectuals like Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmizi, and many others, in order to prove that there was no restriction in Islam on such social intermixing with Christians (Muhammad xii).

On the other hand, Sir Sayyid Ahmad's determination to give a religious sanction to the concept of loyalism among his co-religionists led him to the extent of renouncing "jihad" against the British Colonial Government (Abbasi 23). In fact, in clear defiance of those radical elements of the Muslim community who called for a holy war against the non-Muslim rulers, Sir Sayyid advised Indian Muslims to shy away from any such attempt since "jihad," as a religious obligation, was not incumbent on Muslims in a country where they were offered protection (62).[4] To put it differently, K.K. Aziz observed that in the Islamic tradition, "disobedience to those in authority is not permitted unless the ruler interferes with the religious rites of the Muslims" (Aziz 75). Thus, for Sir Sayyid Ahmad, that was not the case in the South Asian Subcontinent since the Muslim community there "enjoyed all protection—religious and otherwise" (Muhammad xii).

Indeed, Sir Sayyid Ahmad wanted to clarify the meaning of "jihad," a hitherto very controversial subject, which was often referred to in the Anglo-Indian press as a serious threat emanating from the

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[4] According to M.Y. Abbasi, Sir Sayyid Ahmad did not consider the Great Revolt of 1857 as a "jihad". *Ibid*., p. 61.

Muslim community in South Asia (xii). In reality, the aim behind Sir Sayyid's attempt to elucidate the concept of "jihad" was twofold: on the one hand, he wanted to clear the minds of the British officials in Calcutta and London as well as the public opinion in Britain of the false assumption that "jihad" was "a duty of the Muslims against the Christians," and on the other hand, he wanted to explain to his co-religionists the circumstances in which Muslims could have recourse to "jihad" *(*xii).

In order to substantiate his claims, Sir Sayyid Ahmad made use of many *fatwas,* i.e., legal pronouncements or clerical verdicts issued by the *Hanafi, Shafi'i* and *Maliki muftis* (i.e. religious scholars) based in Mecca,[5] in response to a question regarding the legitimacy of "jihad" in the Indian Subcontinent under British rule. According to M.Y. Abbasi, these *muftis* clearly declared that India could not be regarded as *Dar-ul-Harb*, or country of war, in which case "jihad" is a duty for every Muslim. Rather, it should be considered as *Dar-ul-Islam*, or country of Islam or safety, and that the ruler should be obeyed *(*Abbasi 22).

By the same token, Sir Sayyid Ahmad equally sought support from some moderate local *muftis*, or *maulvis*, as they are usually referred to in the Subcontinent, with regard to the question of "jihad." Like the *muftis* of Mecca, these Indian *ulama* or *maulvis* also repudiated the idea of a holy war against British rule in India since the conditions which were said to transform a country into a *Dar-ul-Harb* were not present there. Moreover, these local *maulvis* went so far to as to interpret the resort to "jihad" in India as a "rebellion" (Abassi 14). As an example, M.A. Karandikar cited the case of Moulavi Karamat Ali, who not so long ago had been a strong opponent of the British Governnment. This religious leader in the region of Bihar had issued a *fatwa* declaring that India under British rule should not be viewed as a *Dar-ul-Harb* and that it was "not permissible to fight a religious war against the British Government" (Karandikar 141).

While on the subject, it is important to note that Sir Sayyid Ahmad did not consider the Great Revolt of 1857 as a holy war or "jihad" (Abbasi 61). Commenting on this, H. Malik observes that this Muslim reformist did not "consider the revolt as a war of independence planned in advance by patriots. In his eyes it was an insurrection triggered off by dissatisfied Hindu and Muslim soldiers" (Malik 222-223). This stance was backed up by a local cleric, Maulvi Qutb-ud-

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[5]   These were three of the four classical schools of Islamic law (the fourth being the *Hanbali* school), named after the four learned religious men who were commissioned by the early Abbasid emperors to elucidate and write down the Islamic law (Horrie and Chippindale 130).

Din, who issued a *fatwa* (or a clerical verdict) stating that "the joint Muslim-Hindu struggle against the British in 1857 was not a "jihad" but a rebellion" (Abbasi 15).

Additionally, according to M.Y. Abbasi, some other Indian *maulvis* came up with different arguments to back up their view of India as being D*ar-ul-Islam* instead of *Dar-ul-Harb*. For instance, Maulvi Fazli Ali contended that so long as the British maintained a good rapport, based on "friendship and cordiality," with the Sultan of Turkey, the Custodian of the Holy Places, it would be unjustified for the Muslims of India to wage a holy war against the "Ally of the Sultan" (Abbasi 14-15).

Again, in the same line of thought, Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1895), who was an important pro-British Muslim figure in the South Asian Subcontinent, went to the extent of branding that faction of Muslims who entertained the idea of a holy war against the British Government as "injudicious and ungrateful" since they, the British, had stood by the Sultan of Turkey during the Crimean War (15).[6] Besides, Nawab Abdul Latif also argued that the British government was on friendly terms with many Muslim leaders throughout the world, like the Amir of Afghanistan, who owed his existence to the subsidies offered by the British, and the Khedive (or Ottoman Viceroy) of Egypt. Thus, Nawab Abdul Latif concluded:

> It was … proper that the Indian Muslims should not wage a war against a 'Nation ever ready to help the Mahomedan, whenever and wherever there should be occasion for it.' (Abbasi 15)

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that Sir Sayyid Ahmad's philosophy of loyalism to the British Government went beyond the geographical borders of the Indian Subcontinent. In other words, not only did he want his co-religionists to be loyal to the British Government in India, but he also urged them to support British imperial interests throughout the world (Abbasi 64). However, this tendency had an immediate negative outcome among the Muslim community in India since many Muslim nations in the world had conflicting interests with British imperial designs (64). Actually, in spite of the fact that Muslim Indians had adopted the Indian Subcontinent as their home for good, they still entertained the idea that they formed a part of

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6 *Ibid*., p. 15. The Crimean War (1854-1856) was fought mainly on the Crimean Peninsular (currently part of Ukraine in Asia Minor) between the Russians and the British, French, and Ottoman Turkish. It was the fear of Russian expansion into the Mediterranean during the decline of the Ottoman Empire that prompted Britain to take part in it. D. Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century: 1815-1914*, London: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 157.

the larger Muslim world (Aziz 78).[7] Thus, whatever affected Muslims anywhere in the world would automatically be felt among the Muslim community in India.

To sum it up, as a Muslim person Sir Sayyid Ahmad defended his loyalist policy on religious grounds, and in so doing, he resorted to several *fatwas* made by many moderate religious clerics, both inside and outside India. As an Indian Muslim, he advocated this loyalism as a political necessity (Aziz 70-71), or, to use M. Y. Abbasi's phraseology, a "necessary phase of historical process" (Abbasi 62). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Sir Sayyid by no means wanted his community to be subservient to the British; he only advised them to co-operate with them for their own good (63).

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[7] With regard to this extraterritorial attachment of the Muslims of India, K.K. Aziz stated that they (Indian Muslims) "looked out of India to recover their Arab, Turkish or Persian roots and retain their pride as former conquerors" (Aziz 78).

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THE SACRED AND THE FEMININE:
WOMEN POETS WRITING IN PRE-COLONIAL INDIA

Dimple Godiwala

This article explores the poetry of Indian women poets writing since 600BCE. The idea of freedom, love and desire in the work of poets writing in Pali, Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati and Telegu reveals the *jouissance* experienced and expressed by Indian women in pre-colonial times. The critical framework used is culled from the most ancient texts of Indian theory.

Some of the earliest Indian philosophical texts discuss the phenomenal world in terms of a paradox: it is both sacred, and also ultimately imprisoning. The sacrality arises from the maintenance of the dharmic order, so important and central to Hindu society.[1] Yet, the Puranas, composed c. 4th or 5th century, also state that the very dharmic duties prescribed to maintain the order of society, such as procreation and funereal rites for one's parents, are revealed to be rooted in egoism and to bear the fruit of bondage (See Brubaker in Hawley & Wulff 205).

As Richard Brubaker puts it, "India knows both the sacredness of order and the sacredness that abandons order" (Brubaker in Hawley & Wulff 204), endowing the sacred, which is always female, with a complex polarity quite different from the western patriarchal binary divide implicit in the nominal *sacer* (which, in a later period, splits to denote the oppositions of the sacred and the profane). Thus the sacralization of the normative sexual relations in the dharmic order prescribes male hierarchy over the female, making the insubordination of the female decidedly adharmic, or breaking the bounds of duty. Yet, on precisely this account, breaking the bounds may be a powerful agent of moksha, or liberation from material bondage/salvation, which is the highest state to which the human being can aspire

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[1] Dharma, or the code of ethics, prescribes and governs the actions of individuals and groups in Indian Hindu society.

(See Brubaker in Hawley & Wulff 204-209).

Through ancient history, the Indian women who defied social norms, challenged caste hierarchy, and were outspoken before authority have been regarded as saints. Most refused the social norm of marriage and family: Mira, Gauri and Venkamma refused the rituals of widowhood. The famed poet and critic A.K. Ramanujan stresses that the classical ideals embodied in the figures of Sita and Savitri (both ideal dutiful wives of fiction) are not the only models available to Indian women. The iconoclastic poet-saints of the bhakti movement offer the example of hundreds of women who took a different path, rejecting the sphere traditionally reserved for women (Ramanujan in Hawley & Wulff 316-326). The lives of these poets present a challenge to the dharmic order which is represented in Hindu religious tradition by various goddesses, but primarily the figure of the goddess *Kali,* who symbolises the powerful female principle, which is ultimately erotic.[2]

A substantial part of Hindu literature describes the beauty, functions and accomplishments of courtesans (who are not to be conflated with prostitutes, as the British regarded them). The *Arthashāstra*, the classical text of Hindu statecraft which was compiled c. 300 BCE, mentions the state courtesan who served as a spy and intelligence agent and whose earnings supplied government revenues (Gaur 11-12). During Mughal rule, the *tawaif* was a respected member of society, sophisticated and well versed in the arts, to whom the elite of the town would send their sons for education in manners and letters.[3] Similarly equally respected was the *devadāsi*, who was dedicated to the service of the deity in the temple. They were trained in dancing and the erotic arts from around the age of seven (Gaur 11-12).

Ancient Hindu cultural production speaks candidly of the sciences of sexual technique, the definition of erotic emotions and their relation to music, painting, literature, particular types of landscape and certain times of the day and the year. The many texts of the Kāma Shāstra, written in the 8th century BCE, deal with the science

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[2] *Kali* is most often represented as the slayer of *Shiva*, who is represented as a corpse with his phallus erect. Here, male and female both display an intense and even dangerous sexuality. Even though the female is portrayed as victorious, Shiva is still alive in the representation of his sexual desire, and thereby his desire to unite with *prakriti* the female principle. He may be seen to be *granting or allowing Kali moksha,* see woman as adharmic, above. Thus both are victorious and therefore equal. For the representation of Kali, see David R. Kinsley (144-152) and Brubaker (204-209) in Hawley & Wulff .

[3] For example, Mahlaqa Bai Chanda (1767-1824) of Lucknow (Tharu & Lalita 120ff).

of sexual technique and emotion (Gaur 11-12). The various works of the Kāma Shāstra were collected and summarised by Vātsyāyana in the 4th century. This text, the Kāma Sātra, is the now classic treatise on love, eroticism and the pleasures of life. Kāma is regarded as one of the three aims of life, and these are mentioned in the most ancient texts such as the Veda, the Purāna, the Laws of Manu (Dharmashastra) and the Mahābhārata. These principles are Dharma, the code of ethics, which ensures the cohesion and duration of the species; Artha, material gain which assures survival; and Kāma, pleasure of the senses including erotic behaviour which ensures the transmission of life (Vātsyāyana; trans. Daniélou 1-12). These principles have to be practised with a sense of balance for the ideal life.

The *Rig Veda*, the earliest collection of hymns, songs and poetry, contains verses authored by both men as well as women (Tharu & Lalita 51). However, there are many extant poems and songs by women which date to pre-Vedic societies. Aryan patriarchy, which dominated ancient India from c. 1500 BCE, acculturated with the indigenous agricultural societies, which were ruled by *prakriti* or the female principle, giving rise to what is now called the Vedic period in Indian literature.

This ancient period of Indian poetry (around 1200 BCE until 1200) was dominated by the Indo-European languages of Sanskrit, Hindi, Persian, Arabic, Urdu and Bengali, as well as the pre-Vedic Dravidian languages which consist of 25 languages, particularly Tamil, which dates from the second century BCE (Preminger & Brogan 585-604).

The status of women in ancient India was equal to that of the male. As Romesh Chander Dutt narrates in his *History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, "women were honoured in ancient India, more perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the globe. They were considered the intellectual companions of their husband […and] affectionate helpers in the journey of life" (Dutt 67 in Tharu and Lalita 49). A.S. Altekar, in *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, opines that the status of women is one of the best gauges of the spirit of a civilization, its excellencies and its limitations, going on to argue that the Vedic age was one in which women enjoyed singular freedoms (Altekar 1, 13 in Tharu & Lalita 49). In fact, the pre-eminent principle which forms the basis of one of the earliest texts of the Sanskrit Purāna, the *Devi-mahatmya* (which forms part of the *Markandeya*, composed c. 4-5th centuries) is that the ultimate reality in the universe is feminine (Coburn in Hawley & Wulff 153-165).

During the time of the Bābhravyas (8th to 1st centuries BCE) as in

Vātsyāyana's own day (4th century) women enjoyed great freedom (Vātsyāyana; trans. Daniélou 1-12). This is apparent in the poetry and verse of women writing in various Indian languages from at least the 6th century BCE.

Many ancient women poets "chafed at the strictures of the household and the family" (Tharu & Lalita 58). These sentiments are apparent in their earliest poems, written by the *theris* (Buddhist nuns), whose verse is compiled in what is the oldest anthology of women's verse: the *Therigatha* (written around 80 BCE). The *theris* used verse to speak of the space Buddhism allowed them to contest the patriarchal powers that determined their lives.

Mutta, whose life, like that of the other theris, is documented in the commentary to the Therigatha, the *Paramatta Dipani*, rejoices in her freedom from domestic duties:

> So free am I, so gloriously free,
> Free from three petty things –
> From mortar, from pestle and from my twisted lord. (Tharu & Lalita 68)

Similarly, Sumangalamata speaks of freedom from both, her husband as well as the duties of attending the family:

> A woman well set free! How free I am,
> How wonderfully free, from kitchen drudgery.
> Free from the harsh grip of hunger,
> And from empty cooking pots,
> Free too of that unscrupulous man,
> The weaver of sunshades. (Tharu & Lalita 69)

The later poets of the Sangam period (c. 1 BCE – 250 AD) betray an absence of Sanskrit words and mythology, suggesting that Vedic culture had not influenced this geographical area of Southern India. The two modes of pre-Vedic poetry were *akam*, that which related to inner space, and *puram*, that which spoke of external events. The poems which speak of a thriving agricultural economy in kingdoms which traded with foreign countries (in fact, coins in that area indicate trade with the Roman empire) reveal a society in which women shared an equal status with men, but were also considered sacred. Tharu and Lalita remind us that contemporary feminist readers might be tempted to conflate the stress on Sangam women's chastity with contemporary notions of virtue, and the control of women's bodies at crucial points in their life cycle with contemporary sexual politics. Yet the remarkable sense of equality, of freedom of movement, to make relationships and take on responsibilities suggest that Sangam society's concept of women as sacred cannot be translated into forms familiar to us today (Tharu & Lalita 70ff). The complex polari-

ties in which Hindu women have always been constituted make their positions unreadable to most western-educated feminists, who often succumb to the binary thinking of their patriarchies. The following verses by Venmanipputi Kuruntokai are typical in the voicing of female desire. In "What she said to her girlfriend" Kuruntokai writes:

> On beaches washed by seas
> older than the earth,
> in the groves filled with bird-cries,
> on the banks shaded by a *punnai*
> clustered with flowers,
>   when we made love
> my eyes saw him
> and my ears heard him;
>
> my arms grow beautiful
> in the coupling
> and grow lean
> as they come away.
>   What shall I make of this? (Tharu & Lalita 73)

In a poem where the friend speaks about her lover who has left on a journey and not returned, Velli Vitiyar Kuruntokai writes:

> He will not dig up the earth and enter it,
> he will not climb into the sky,
> he will not walk across the dark sea.
> If we search every country,
> every city,
> every village,
> can your lover escape us? (Tharu & Lalita 74)

The theme of sexuality runs through art and literature, exemplified in the very many sculptures still found in the temples of Khajurao. Although these were built in the 10th century, the theme of sensual pleasure in the erotic *mithuna* figures has a sculptural ancestry of at least a thousand years, going back to before the onset of the Christian millennium (Watson 91).

The 12th century Akkamahadevi's poetry is a document of carnal pleasures which are enjoyed and evoked to mystical or spiritual ends in her search for the divine lord Shiva. As the subject of her own poems it is she who possesses agency as she actively seeks out her lord using the symbolism of love outside her binary marital bond with which she will unite with him. In one poem Akka says:

> It was like a stream
>   running into the dry bed
>   of a lake,
>   like rain
>   pouring on plants
>   parched to sticks.

It was like this world's pleasure
        and the way to the other,
                                            both

        walking towards me.

Seeing the feet of the master,
O [Chennamallikarjuna],
        I was made
        worthwhile. (Tharu & Lalita 77)

Tharu and Lalita point out that this deceptively simple poem encapsulates not merely the themes of Virasaiva poetry but also the philosophy of the brilliant 12th century Kannada poet Akkamahadevi. The first stanza speaks of orthodox brahmanic religious practices, parched and dry like a water-deprived lake bed, flourishing and regenerated by the conviction of a personal and mystic union with the lord Shiva. The second stanza, introducing another recurrent theme, speaks of finding the way to the lord, not by ascetic withdrawal as taught by the Vedas but by the seeking and embracing of life's pleasures. It speaks of a spiritual union through the senses: "this world's pleasure." The third stanza speaks of the self as constituted in the larger self of the personal deity. The self achieves legitimacy only in the presence of the divine. Of course, the poem can also be read as one of a lover deprived of love ("dry bed," "parched") which finds its resolution in seeing the beloved, and this gives it the additional dimension of the aesthetic mode of *sringāra rasa.*

Akka's poetry goes beyond Virasaiva poetry to record the struggles of the female body, struggles of the pettiness of the roles women are forced to play and the struggles of social expectations that restrain the female self (Tharu & Lalita 77-81).

Poetry which spoke of *bhakti* or devotion to Shiva or Krishna, both aspects of Vishnu, originates in the 11th century.[4] The Cholas of Tanjore, who ruled most of South India at the time, were Vaishnavites. It was in Southern India that the caste system attained the inflexible rigidity which most Northern kingdoms, ruled as they were by combinations of mixed-race Aryans, Greeks, Persians, Mongols, and Turks, did not possess. Unlike the flexibility of caste, then known and practised as *varna*, in the North, by the time of the Cholas in the 11th century it had attained a particular rigidity. It was the Tamil Brahman, Ramanuja, who voiced a protest against the exclusion of the lowest orders. He

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4   The trinity represented by Brahma (the creation), Vishnu (the preservation) and Shiva (the destruction) is one conceptual unity which may be said to represent godhead or the primal forces which make up nature, and are universal.

challenged monism by reverting to the pre-Vedic atheist spiritual philosophy which distinguished between the universal absolute and the individual soul. Having divided them he thus sanctioned the concept of love between the divine and the human.[5] The devotional momentum for which he provided a theology did more than exalt the cult of Krishna as Vishnu's popular incarnation. It strengthened the power to resist the later appeal to Christian conversion, and it enriched Tamil literature as a vehicle for preserving the abundant celebration of its regional saints by wandering minstrels.

The bhakti movement in Hinduism spread northwards and surfaced as representations of the mystically sensuous and powerfully pervasive Krishna, in Indian painting, sculpture, dance, song and literature in 12th century Bengal.

The Persian mystical cult known as Sufism reached India at just the point where it could find some common ground with the bhakti devotional movement. In Bengal and Bihar, Jayadeva's poetical celebration of the Radha-Krishna theme was followed between the 14th and 16th centuries by Vidyapati, Chaitanya and Chandidas. Agra produced the blind poet Surdas; Rajasthan the wandering Princess Mirabai; in Maharashtra there were Muslim converts to Hinduism among the Bhakti devotees. Of the twelve disciples of Ramananda who brought Ramanuja's teaching from the South to Banaras, spreading it in the Hindi vernacular, one was a barber, one a shoemaker, and one, Kabir (c. 1440-1518), a weaver (Watson 85,94,102).

A.K. Ramanujan points out that love had long been a central metaphor for religious experience. He cites a well-known passage in the *Brhadāra nyaka Upanishad* which likens the ultimate attainment of freedom and fearlessness to the sensation a man feels in the embrace of his wife: so does a person, "when in the embrace of the intelligent soul, [know] nothing within or without… [H]is desire is satisfied, in which the soul is his desire, in which he is without desire and without sorrow" (*Brhadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.3.21).[6] Philosophers continued the tradition through the ages, and in *bhakti* poetry

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[5] The dualism between *prakriti* (primordial matter which translates into the material universe, and thus the female principle) and *purusha* (spirit) was an atheist one. This atheistic dualism had been adapted to theistic philosophical needs in the later Vedas. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* the distinctions between the Lord and the individual soul are articulated but both are subsumed in the divine absolute. (See Coburn in Hawley & Wulff 153-165).

[6] *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.3.21, trans. R.E. Hulme, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, 1931. Quoted by A.K. Ramanujan in Hawley & Wulff 316-326.

one finds new expressions of this old awareness. *Bhakti* itself is a celebration of the feminine principle, which pre-dates the Aryans in India, thereby pre-dating the rigorous Brahmanic codes which made *varna* – hierarchization by colour – a social norm. The chief mood of *bhakti* verse is *sringāra* or the erotic. Erotic love is expressed entirely from the woman's point of view, in a phase of separation or union.

Mirabai, the famed Rajputani, who was married into a royal family, is a renowned *bhakti* poet. Celebrated for the evocation of the *sringāra* in her verses to Lord Krishna, Mira sings:

> I am pale with longing for my beloved;
>   People believe I am ill.
> Seizing on every possible pretext,
>   I try to meet him "by accident'.
>
> […]
>
> The sweetness of his lips is a pot of nectar,
>   That's the only curd for which I crave;
> Mira's Lord is Giridhar Naagar,
>   He will feed me nectar again and again. (Tharu & Lalita 92)

The poems of Rami, the mid-fifteenth century Bengali washer-woman, speak of a more earthly love for her lover, the Brahmin poet Chandidas who was ostracized from his village for his intimate relationship with the lower-caste woman. The much later 19th century Tarigonda Venkamamba, also a poet-saint, similarly writes of earthly love, although it is about Satyabhama and Krishna:

> Gently he lifts me up
> Wipes the stream of tears from my eyes
> Trails his fingers softly through my twisted hair
> Braids my tresses and decks them with flowers
> Gently requests I change my crumpled clothes
> Into a flowered raiment of his choice
> And adorns me with trinkets of gold and silver.
> On my forehead he places the
> vermilion mark of fidelity and artfully
> Darkens my reddened eyes with *kajal*
> And on my breasts with his own hands
> Playfully rubs a sandal salve to
> Cool my burning flesh… (Tharu and Lalita 125)

There are thus numerous examples of Indian women writing poetry and literature through the ages, women of all castes and classes, even low caste women such as Atukari Molla (early 16th century), who belonged to the potter caste and who wrote the Ramayana in Telegu.

It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries, under British rule, that the response to women's writing underwent an ideological change. With

the now-famous ban on the 18th century Telegu poet Muddupalani's erotic epic, *Radhika Santwanam*, the government considered women writing on the subject of desire and sex objectionable, improper and obscene. The early 20th century critic Bangalore Nagaratnamma's judgement of *Radhika Santwanam* was that the work met the strict demands of classical aesthetic theory which required a skilled work of art to balance all the nine *rasas*.[7] In contemporary western terms, the sexual inversion practised by Muddupalani on the traditional relations between male and female lovers--making the woman's sensuality and sexuality central to the poem which also speaks of her taking the initiative in love-making, making her satisfaction and her pleasure the focus of the work of literature—may seem startling, but is well in keeping with the ancient tradition of Indian women poets' verse of pleasure and sexual freedom. However, the foreign ideology which dominated this period in India silenced the centuries-old voices of women intellectuals who had written of freedom, love, desire and sexual *jouissance* from ancient times with no censure from their societies. Instead they had commanded respect as scholars and artists in their own right. It was with the imposition of a rigidly Victorian sexuality that they lost their independent status, as court patronage was withdrawn under the new rulers, throwing women artists into poverty and homelessness. Lalita and Tharu record the political and ideological change in Indian society:

> As the British established their commercial and military authority over India in the second half of the eighteenth century, the old rulers were overthrown or marginalised, and the earlier centres of trade and administration lost their importance to the new port cities. By 1799, all revenues from the Thanjavur kingdom went to the British. Those driven to destitution as a result of these changes were principally artisans and craftspeople, but poets, musicians, architects, scientists, indeed scholars and artists of all kinds who depended on the patronage of courts were deprived of a means of sustenance. Large numbers of women artists, mainly folk singers and dancers, who depended on wealthy households for patronage, but also court artists like Muddupalani were driven to penury and prostitution. (7-8)

Muddupalani's opening to *Radhika Santwanam* is a celebration of her own personal attributes, which may appear arrogant, but is perhaps well deserved in light of her many intellectual accomplishments.

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[7] Nagaratnamma reprinted *Radhika Santwanam* in 1910. (See Tharu & Lalita 1-2).

The nine *rasa* are *sringāra* (romance and eroticism); *hasya* (comic); *karuna* (compassion); *raudra* (fury); *veer* (heroism); *bhayanka* (the fearful); *vibhatsa* (disgust); *adbhuta* (amazement or wonder); *shanta* (peace). See Bharata's *Natya Shastra*.

Which other woman of my kind has
Felicitated scholars with gifts and money?
To which other woman of my kind have
Epics been dedicated?
Which other woman of my kind has
Won such acclaim in each of the arts?
You are incomparable,
Muddupalani, among your kind. (Tharu &Lalita 116)

   In the section of her epic in which Radha teaches Krishna how to make love, Muddupalani writes in the aesthetic mode of *sringāra rasa*:

Move on her lips
The tip of your tongue;

Do not scare her
by biting hard.

Place on her cheeks
A gentle kiss;

Do not scratch her
With your sharp nails.

Hold her nipple
With your fingertips;

Do not scare her
By squeezing it tight.

Make love
Gradually;

Do not scare her
By being aggressive.

I am a fool
To tell you all [this].
When you meet her
And wage your war of love
Would you care to recall my do's and don'ts, [sweetness]?
                                                        (Tharu &Lalita 118)

Krishna complains that he no longer wishes to make love to Radha in this passage which, though written in the male voice, asserts the sexual agency of the woman:

If I ask her not to kiss me,
Stroking on my cheeks
She presses my lips hard against hers.

If I ask her not to touch me,
Stabbing me with her firm breasts
She hugs me.

If I ask her not to get too close
For it is not decorous,
She swears at me loudly.

If I tell her of my vow not
To have a woman in my bed,
She hops on
And begins the game of love.

Appreciative,
She lets me drink from her lips,
Fondles me, talks on,
Making love again and again.
How could I stay away
From her company? (Tharu &Lalita 120)

Women's erotic and sensual writing such as this, which had a rich historical tradition in India from pre-Vedic times, came to be viewed differently during the British Raj as the norms of Victorian society were imposed in a reform movement which separated women into the western opposition of virgin and whore. The previously unrestrained social intercourse of women from different caste- and class-backgrounds with each other was now restricted, as the sexuality of the middle-class housewife was created by the opposition that the "unbridled licentiousness" of the low-caste Vaishnava women provided. Thus was the newly created respectable middle-class housewife's sexuality progressively formulated and contained.[8]

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This article is based on a paper read at the CongressCATH conference: "The Sacred and the Feminine: Image, Music, Text, Space', University of Leeds, 15 January 2005.

Dedication: This article is for my friend Seema Edwards Kormoczi.

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[8]   See Dimple Godiwala, "Language, Experience, Identity: Contemporary Indian women poets writing in English,' *forthcoming*. Also see Tharu & Lalita.

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* All poems quoted are from *Women Writing in India, 600 B.C. to the present*, Vol. I, ed. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. Most biographical details are to be found in this source.

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LA TRANSCULTURALIDAD Y LA TRADUCCIÓN TEATRAL: EL CASO DE EDWARD BOND

Susana Nicolás Román

1. Introducción

Los nuevos retos que la traducción plantea para el siglo XXI parecen perseguir una tarea utópica puesto que sus objetivos de traslación cultural se enfrentan directamente con la individualidad intransferible de la propia esencia de cada cultura. En este sentido, el traductor se encuentra ante la difícil disyuntiva de aunar una perspectiva ecléctica que englobe el contexto original y el contexto meta respetando las diferencias de cada modelo cultural. Aspiramos a una traducción que comunique contenidos pero conservando la unidad de cada entorno y un respeto absoluto por el original y su mensaje. Entre las máximas del buen traductor teatral propuestas por Zuber encontramos las directrices que conducen a este objetivo:

> The task of a translator […] should be to transpose the play in such a manner that the message of the original and the dramatist's intention be adhered to as closely as possible, and be rendered, linguistically and artistically, into a form which takes into account the different traditional, cultural and socio-political background of the recipient country. (Zuber 95)

No obstante, la cultura en la que se encuentran inmersos el traductor y el autor de la obra presupone un uso de la lengua específico así como una línea de pensamiento. En sus consideraciones sobre la cultura, Trilling concibe una unión personal entre el individuo y su entorno: "[…] it is not possible to conceive of a person standing beyond his culture. His culture has brought him into being in every respect except the physical, and given him his categories and habits of thought, his range of feeling, his idiom and tome of speech" (Trilling 11). Los aspectos intrínsecos de una cultura, con sus reservas tradicionales, se encuentran íntimamente unidos a su lenguaje y, por tanto, son incomunicables hasta cierto punto. Sin embargo, parece posible limitar esta pérdida al mínimo a través de la transposición

cultural que constituye el mayor reto del traductor. El objetivo fundamental de cualquier obra de teatro persigue la universalidad de sus temas y consiguientemente, los elementos culturales no deben suponer un obstáculo sino favorecer un proceso de "extrañamiento" que reitere las diferencias con el texto original. Este proceso de alienación permite a la audiencia una percepción más objetiva de los acontecimientos desarrollados en escena: "It is a belief still preeminently honoured that a primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his culture in the environmental sense and to permit him to stand beyond it in an autonomy of perception and judgement" (Trilling 12).

De este modo, la tarea del traductor no consiste en promover una familiaridad hacia la obra sino en mantener la concepción del artista con sus percepciones inesperadas y sus emociones originales. Nuestro punto de partida para este estudio presupone, pues, una aproximación ecléctica por parte del traductor que debe tener en cuenta el contexto cultural de la lengua meta así como las limitaciones de la lealtad al original.

2. *El angosto camino hacia el profundo norte*: dificultades para una traducción transcultural.

La traducción teatral implica la representación ante un público como una de sus mayores dificultades ya que la tranlación lingüística y cultural debe además favorecer una representación creíble. Carla Matteini, la traductora de *Narrow Road to the Deep North* al castellano, reconoce la importancia de este factor diferenciador con la traducción de prosa o poesía:

> Puesto que el teatro se articula a través de diferentes formas expresivas— textual, visual, sonora, dramatúrgica— mi opción fue bastante natural: de todas ellas, la que más me interesaba, donde quería incidir, era la textual […] El traductor del teatro […] debe traducir también escuchando, visualizando la posible puesta en escena y, ahí soy más radical, siempre que sea posible debería vivir el tránsito de la palabra escrita a la hablada a pie de escenario. (Matteini 44-45)

Asumiendo la puesta en escena como objetivo último de la traducción teatral, realizamos a partir de *El angosto camino hacia el profundo norte* un estudio de los aspectos a tener en cuenta en toda traducción de un texto dramático: contexto histórico y cultural, gestualidad y lenguaje, ritmo y entonación, alusiones externas, entre otros. Nuestro objetivo propone dilucidar si las dificultades interculturales que el texto presenta imposibilitan de modo irreversible su traducción al castellano.

a) Contexto histórico y cultural

El contexto histórico de *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, obra original de Edward Bond, plantea una serie de dificultades añadidas por su localización en Japón y su inexactitud temporal entre los siglos XVII, XVIII y XIX. Como constata su traductora en la introducción, esta historia de invasión colonizadora inglesa ofrece la perspectiva del pueblo atacado por lo que presupone una interpretación concreta por parte del autor. Por otro lado, al tratarse de un relato alejado de nuestro entorno cultural más inmediato, Matteini especifica las fuentes originales de las que Bond se nutre para la construcción del prólogo. Del mismo modo, constata la religión budista que profesan los sacerdotes japoneses en la obra, hecho que no aparece en el original, para poder contrastarla con la religión protestante de los invasores colonialistas. El efecto que se persigue a través de estas estrategias logra facilitar el acercamiento del lector al mundo de la obra original. Las divergencias religiosas y su extensión en líneas de pensamiento y hábitos sociales constituyen así uno de los principales elementos de traslación cultural que la obra plantea.

En una típica construcción de la iconografía bondiana, *El angosto camino hacia el profundo norte* equipara la religión budista y anglicana en su excesiva ritualización. En concreto, las referencias vacías a Buda y la veneración a los objetos sagrados se convierten en la principal sátira del autor contra la religión budista. Como ilustración de la intención burlesca del autor, el siguiente ejemplo revela un grupo de sacerdotes jugando con una reliquia sagrada hasta que termina incrustada en la cabeza de uno de ellos:

> KIRO *starts to jump and whirl about.* BREEBREE, HEIGOO *and* TOLA *dance with him.* KIRO *tilts his head back and tries to pour drink down the neck of the pot. He splutters and chokes. The drink falls down his robes in a vivid red stain*. (Bond*, Narrow* 184)

> KIRO *empieza a saltar y girar.* BRIBRI, HEIGU *y* TOLA *danzan con él.* KIRO *inclina la cabeza hacia atrás y trata de beber por el cuello de la vasija. Se atraganta y tose. El licor se derrama sobre su túnica en una brillante mancha roja.* (Bond, *El angosto* 46)

No obstante, la transposición de esta época y sus características específicas no debería resultar excesivamente compleja para una audiencia española, teniendo en cuenta que el momento histórico no supone un factor central en el teatro de Bond. De hecho, uno de sus traductores al alemán defiende la universalidad de sus obras en base a la aplicabilidad de sus mensajes a todas las culturas: "I discovered that it was easy to translate B's [Bond] plays, which surely is a great compliment—a kind of proof for the universality of a text"

(Hay & Roberts 49). Por tanto, las características propias del teatro de Bond favorecen en este sentido la comunicación intercultural puesto que elimina la supremacía del momento histórico como punto central del contenido de la obra.

b) Gestualidad y lenguaje

En cuanto a la representación gestual de cualquier texto teatral, resulta relevante mantener un equilibrio entre la lengua original y la lengua de destino (SL- TL) sin limitarse a la simple traducción de los elementos lingüísticos. Como asegura Bogatyrev: "Theatre discourse, that must be the sign of a character's social situation is accompanied by the actor's gestures, finished off by his costumes, the scenery, etc., which are all equally signs of a social situation" (qtd. in Bassnet 122). A la vista de estas afirmaciones podemos argumentar que la comunicación cultural se convierte de nuevo en unidad central de la traducción. Parece evidente que el lenguaje gestual que los personajes utilizan en escena difiere del código habitual del espectador. Sin embargo, su inclusión como testigo de la acción otorga la impresión de participación en un sistema común de comunicación. Es decir, el espectador forma parte de un intercambio intercultural donde aprende las reglas sociales de una nueva situación.

En esta especie de subsistema, el vestuario forma parte importante ya que también se convierte en vehículo de información del nuevo entorno. Toda traducción de *Narrow Road to the Deep North* debe prestar especial atención a la apariencia de los personajes puesto que el aspecto enfatiza el carácter paródico que el autor les imprime. En este sentido destaca la vestimenta de Georgina y Commodore, los invasores ingleses, donde la comunicación se convierte en visual y símbolo inequívoco de burla:

> *The* COMMODORE *and* GEORGINA *come on. He wears white trousers, a navy blue jacket with brass buttons, and a navy blue Van Gogh hat. She wears a Victorian crinoline and bonnet. She is shaking a tambourine. (*Bond*, Narrow* 197)

> *Entran el* COMODORO *y* GEORGINA*. Él viste pantalón blanco, una chaqueta azul marino con botones dorados y una gorra azul a lo Van Gogh. Ella lleva un vestido victoriano con miriñaque y una cofia. Sacude una pandereta. (*Bond, *El angosto* 64)

Las distintas costumbres en los vestidos entre la audiencia original y la audiencia meta supone una traslación inexacta de esta variable sociocultural. De este modo, 'a Victorian crinoline' podria equivaler a 'vestido victoriano con miriñaque' a pesar de que el adje-

tivo 'victoriano' se encuentra lejos del contexto español y 'miriñaque' representa un vocablo en desuso y prácticamente desconocido. Sin embargo, la identificación entre 'bonnet' y 'cofia' no responde a una adecuada adaptación semántica fomentando la aparición de nuevos matices que no aparecen en el original. La idea del autor se enmarca en el carácter infantil del objeto para una dama inglesa mientras que la traducción al castellano parece aludir a una imagen de sirvienta. En este caso, la comunicación intercultural proporciona un mensaje erróneo a causa de dificultades lingüísticas.

En *El angosto camino hacia el profundo norte,* el movimiento a través de gestos también supone un elemento clave que debe ser correctamente traducido para producir el efecto buscado. A este respecto, debemos recordar que Bond responde a un tipo de teatro en el que los gestos y los aspectos no verbales se convierten en la esencia del lenguaje dramático. Por ejemplo, en la escena III de la primera parte, las acotaciones del autor dirigen de forma precisa el efecto cómico de esta acción:

> ARGI *shouts and ducks about.* KIRO *gropes for him. The others block* ARGI *and* KIRO *catches him and moves his head awkwardly from side to side.* (Bond, *Narrow* 184)

> ARGI *grita y lo esquiva.* KIRO *le busca a tientas. Los otros sujetan a* ARGI *y* KIRO *lo agarra y sacude torpemente la cabeza.* (Bond, *El angosto* 46)

No obstante, la gestualidad en el teatro de Bond no sólo persigue la comicidad y la sátira, sino también la transmisión al espectador de un mensaje de denuncia. Concretamente en esta obra, los ataques al lenguaje ritual propio de la religión se expresan en una conjunción visual que pretende ir más allá de la comunicación verbal. Así se observa en la escena III de la segunda parte, donde la misionera cristiana Georgina realiza una pantomima con un grupo de niños con la intención fallida de salvarles. De nuevo, la traducción al castellano transmite de forma directa la intención clara del autor en su ataque a las creencias ciegas:

> GEORGINA. Kneel, kneel. Quickly, children. Not too near the river. (*The* CHILDREN *kneel*.) Hands together. Eyes tight. No fidgeting. O Lord Jesus, save us from the soldiers and keep us in your care. Tojo, eyes shut, please [….] (Bond, *Narrow* 214)

> GEORGINA. De rodillas, niños, de rodillas. Deprisa, niños. No os acerquéis al río. (*Los niños se arrodillan*) Manos juntas. Ojos cerrados. Nada de muecas. Oh señor Jesús, sálvanos de los soldados y cuida de nosotros. Tojo, ojos cerrados, por favor […] (Bond, *El angosto* 87)

c) Ritmo y entonación

En consonancia con la traducción poética, el ritmo y la entonación de los diálogos suponen una de las mayores dificultades para la traducción teatral. Más aún en el caso del teatro bondiano puesto que incorpora de forma natural poemas o canciones como parte central de su técnica dramática. *Narrow Road to the Deep North* supone en este sentido una mayor especificación porque uno de los personajes centrales de la obra, Basho, es un poeta experto en verso *haiku* lo que supone atenerse a unas normas formales en su transposición al castellano. Este tipo de verso va más allá del recurso estilístico y se convertiría en precursor de la moda posterior en el teatro europeo de lo oriental. Su valor de síntesis poética prefigura una escritura diferente y un género novedoso con los consecuentes obstáculos para el traductor, puesto que estos poemas constituyen un referente filosófico en el transcurso de la obra. La propia traductora reconocía cómo este tipo de versificación dificultaba el acercamiento a la obra: "La primera lectura de la obra puede resultar algo lejana e incluso hostil: la frialdad de la construcción y la estilización del lenguaje remiten al pudor descriptivo y a la particular calidad poética de la literatura japonesa (Bond, *El angosto* 11)".

No obstante, Matteini logra trasladar de forma efectiva el contenido de los poemas aunque la mayor parte del ritmo se pierde por la mayor longitud de las palabras en castellano frente a las del inglés. Observemos la disparidad silábica que se aprecia entre la lengua original y la lengua meta:

> BASHO.   The river was red with fire and blood. - Dogs howled at him. - If his shadow fell on a tree it died. - Stone flinched. - Coffin breath… (Bond, *Narrow* 221)

> BASHO.   El río enrojecía de sangre y fuego.
> Los perros aullaban a su paso,
> su sombra secaba los árboles,
> las piedras estallaban.
> Aliento de muerte… (Bond, *El angosto* 96)

La introducción del lenguaje poético en una obra teatral favorece la distinción entre distintos niveles de comunicación lingüística con el espectador/lector. En este sentido, Link afima "it may be said that poetic or ritual language characterizes the reality in which the performance and audience participate as fictitious or as something outside or "beyond" every-day reality" (27-28). La poesía *haiku* de *Narrow Road to the Deep North* favorece, por tanto, la percepción de lejanía del entorno y refuerza la idea de fábula que el autor imprime a la obra.

Además de los fragmentos poéticos, la entonación fluida que promueve el diálogo abrupto entre los personajes puede llevar a introducir un número desmesurado de signos lingüísticos en la traducción. Esta forma de solucionar el problema del ritmo en los personajes no sería del gusto del autor, como observamos en estas palabras de su traductor al alemán: "This is what he never does, it's all economy and when in doubt cut" (qtd. in Hay & Roberts 49). En cuanto al uso de la entonación en la traducción al español, Matteini realiza la traslación de algunos de los nombres de los personajes para asimilarlos a la fonética española: Heigoo- Heigu / Breebree-Bribri. Sin embargo, mantiene sólo en algunos casos el énfasis de Bond en palabras clave del texto, sustituyendo la cursiva original por letra en negrita: "It hasn't done anything to *earn* this suffering (Bond, *Narrow* 174) / No ha hecho nada para **merecer** este sufrimiento (Bond, *El angosto* 32)". En otros casos, este énfasis desaparece como consecuencia de la imposibilidad de una identificación equivalente: "*That's* what you're blaming me for (Bond, *Narrow* 195) / Eso es lo que me reprochas /Bond, *El angosto* 61)". Algún ejemplo también demuestra la omisión en la traducción de este recurso tan típicamente bondiano: "He's so stupid I *think* I can control him (Bond, *Narrow* 197) / Es tan estúpido que creo poder controlarle (Bond, *El angosto* 64)".

d) **Dialectos y alusiones externas.**

En la mayor parte de su teatro, Bond presenta como elemento característico, y una de sus mayores dificultades, el uso de dialectos y acentos propios que diferencian a los personajes. Sin embargo, *Narrow Road to the Deep North* facilita la labor del traductor en ese sentido porque no utiliza el lenguaje dialectal de forma tan acusada sino en contados ejemplos. Por un lado, la jerga de los artilleros en la escena VI de la primera parte se traduce de forma adecuada por giros coloquiales propios del lenguaje vulgar aunque se pierden inevitablemente las referencias fonéticas a dialectos específicos ingleses:

> GUNNER TAR'S MATE. As the mathematician said to 'is girlfriend.
> […]
> GUNNER TAR (*stepping back from the cannon*) That'll put a curl in the end a their pigtail. (Bond, *Narrow* 201)
>
> ARTILLERO 2º. Como le dijo el matemático a su novia.
> […]
> ARTILLERO 1º. (*Da un paso atrás alejándose del cañón*) Este tiro les va a rizar el rabo a esos cerdos. (Bond, *El angosto* 70)

Por otro lado, el lenguaje marcadamente infantil del personaje denominado el Comodoro se descubre como elemento fundamental de la comunicación con el espectador por su carácter burlesco. La traducción de este lenguaje propio supone entender el mensaje de crítica hacia el personaje inglés como representante de la invasión colonialista: "Whenny-when-when! (Bond, *Narrow* 206) / ¡Hasta do-do-do-do-dónde! (*El angosto* 77)". Siguiendo a Link, Matteini traduce los dialectos como caracterización del estatus social de los personajes utilizando el lenguaje del correspondiente grupo social de la nueva audiencia, en este caso, la española. Consiguientemente, diferentes niveles del lenguaje entran a formar parte del intercambio cultural que todo texto teatral propone exigiendo una adaptación continua de este tipo de lenguaje a sus equivalentes actuales. Es decir, la lengua debe modificarse continuamente para reflejar la realidad lingüística del momento por lo que una traducción teatral siempre supone una tarea inacabada. Esta reescritura constante exige un reto firme para el traductor que, ante problemas de incomprensión por parte del espectador, debe modificar el lenguaje utilizado por uno nuevo más adaptado a las nuevas circunstancias.

En esta misma línea de continua adaptación se encuentran las alusiones a acontecimientos externos a los que hace referencia la obra. Generalmente, el autor supone un conocimiento —social, histórico, mítico y costumbrista— por parte del espectador que no siempre se ajusta a la realidad. Link propone evitar toda información irrelevante para la obra o presentar esta información "by new prologues, play-bills or—and particularly on the present-day stage—by the introduction of a narrator or commentator" (33). Sin embargo, Matteini no utiliza estas soluciones en su traducción y evita las alusiones al carácter escocés de un personaje, sustituyendo su nacionalidad. A nuestro juicio, la traductora elimina este matiz de susceptibilidad para facilitar su comprensión ya que no supone una información central en la obra. Con este guiño, el autor alude a las relaciones especiales entre Escocia e Inglaterra, marcadas por años de historia, que ofrecen numerosas alusiones incomprensibles para una audiencia española:

> GEORGINA. […] I learned all this from my <u>Scottish</u> Nancy. She taught our Prime Minister, the Queen, the Leader of the Opposition, and everyone else who matters… (Bond, *Narrow* 208)

> GEORGINA. […] Todo esto lo aprendí de mi institutriz <u>inglesa</u>, que educó también a nuestro primer ministro, a la reina, al jefe de la oposición y a todo el que en nuestro país ocupa algún puesto de importancia… (Bond, *El angosto* 79)

El desconocimiento de las canciones tradicionales inglesas también supone un enfrentamiento cultural entre lengua original y nueva audiencia. En referencia a este conocimiento común, propio de cada cultura, la traslación propuesta por la traductora no termina de aclarar el tipo de canción al que se refiere: "a Sullivan medley" or "Sussex by the Sea" (Bond, *Narrow* 222) / un "pot-pourri" estilo Sullivan (Bond, *El angosto* 97).

No obstante, Matteini mantiene una de las alusiones al contexto histórico inglés de la obra en una referencia a la reina Isabel. En este caso, el anacronismo consciente del autor favorece una mención al poder contemporáneo como extensión de los deseos imperialistas británicos de la reina Victoria. Es cierto que esta referencia supone cierto conocimiento histórico por parte de la audiencia y la falta de mayores aclaraciones en la traducción puede facilitar su incomprensión, pero su clara relación con el mensaje de denuncia de la obra exigía su traducción exacta. Veamos la solución propuesta por Matteini:

PRIME MINISTER. Traitors. They tried to break the firing gun.
COMMODORE. Spike Big Betty? (Bond, *Narrow* 204)

PRIMER MINISTRO. Traidores. Trataban de sabotear el cañón.
COMODORO. ¿A nuestra Isabelita? (Bond, *El angosto* 74)

e) Algunas conclusiones

La complejidad implícita que conlleva la traducción de cualquier texto teatral presenta un desafío aún mayor en el caso de este tipo de teatro. Como ejemplo de estas dificultades, Arora analizó los errores que la traducción de una obra del mismo autor, *The Fool,* supuso para el público hindú. En sus conclusiones, admite que el carácter diametralmente opuesto entre ambas culturas imposibilita la interpretación del texto: "The substitution by an alien language that does not share a similar background of thought and feeling leaves the analysis incomplete […] The cultural inconsistency at the core of the translated world denies it the validity possessed by the original" (Arora 10-11). Las inadecuadas traslaciones lingüísticas y la inefectividad de los nuevos personajes para reflejar acontecimientos históricos creíbles empujaron a esta iniciativa directamente al fracaso. En este caso concreto, las divergencias culturales supusieron un obstáculo insalvable para la adecuada captación del mensaje.

No obstante, este ejemplo no implica la imposibilidad de traducir a Bond a otras culturas más próximas a la inglesa. En el entorno

teatral, son de sobra conocidos los éxitos cosechados por las adaptaciones francesas y alemanas de las obras bondianas que gozan del beneplácito del autor. En su medida, también *El angosto camino hacia el profundo norte*, traducido por Carla Matteini, representa un ejemplo de la posibilidad de traducir a Bond al castellano como texto de comunicación transcultural. Su acercamiento de la cultura japonesa así como la nueva perspectiva que propone de las invasiones coloniales favorece un entorno integrador donde los principios de igualdad y justicia social definan nuestra actual comunidad global. De acuerdo con Tuts, el transculturalismo propone entre otros aspectos: "el respeto a las culturas, incluida la propia, desde una mirada crítica que cuestione aquellas prácticas y destierren aquellos valores que entren en conflicto con los derechos humanos universales" (Tuts 262). El caso de Edward Bond responde de forma clara a estos parámetros de convivencia en su desarrollo de un teatro político y social donde la condición humana se convierte en tema dramático universal. De este modo, la traducción de su obra al castellano permite traspasar los límites de la lengua proporcionando elementos de reflexión para un verdadero entendimiento entre culturas.

Tras esta revisión de las dificultades que propone la obra *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, nos preguntamos si un autor como Bond es traducible desde el punto de vista de la comunicación transcultural. Debemos reconocer que el uso preciso de los dialectos, el distanciamiento temporal y cultural del entorno o el estilo parabólico de muchos de sus monólogos dificultan en gran medida una adaptación exacta de la intención del autor e incluso de una representación comprensible para el espectador. No obstante, la revisión realizada de *El angosto camino hacia el profundo norte* presenta unas conclusiones positivas solventando la mayoría de dificultades y ofreciendo la posibilidad de una comunicación transcultural con garantías.

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"WHY SHOULD HE BE HERE, WHY SHOULD THEY HAVE COME AT ALL"?: TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN DEREK WALCOTT'S *OMEROS*

Anna Boyagoda

In thinking about Derek Walcott's concern with transnational community, I turn to *Omeros*, the long poem in which Walcott presents, in some ways for the first time, the classic story of postcolonial community formation, the story of a people reclaiming their ancestral rituals and customs in an effort to assert a cultural identity independent of the colonizing culture. Part of this story concerns the character of Achille, the poem's hero, who resurrects African traditions after a dreamlike return to the continent, and also the character of Ma Kilman, whose efforts to recall the language and knowledge of her African ancestors lead both to specific and general healings on the island.[1] But confronted with a modern St. Lucia made heterogeneous by a series of intersecting dispersals and resettlements—the African, the Indian, and even the Irish—the poem develops beyond the effort at cultural gathering along racial lines that is exemplified by Achille and Ma Kilman. Instead, the poem envisions a community which encompasses all of St. Lucia's once dispersed, and now culturally disparate inhabitants. Walcott represents this hoped-for St. Lucian community in some of the poem's most intricate imagery, notably in a silk embroidered with birds from diverse origins that have found their home in the Caribbean. Region is thus presented as a natural container for community, but not as its cohesive force. The poet narrator, who guides the reader through the St. Lucian landscape and others, discovers the ties that bind the disparate members of a regional community together in moments of person-to-person identification that undermine strict racial unities and divisions. The most

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[1]   See Charles W. Pollard for a discussion of the way that "African-oriented cultural sources" in particular broaden Walcott's "New World classicism."

significant of these moments occurs at a funeral, where attendees mourn together, despite the ill-will prescribed by colonial history. But the poem tests intercultural unities in an even more unexpected way, by transgressing space and time through the narrator's encounter with a nineteenth-century Boston woman, who was herself moved to identify with the suffering of the Sioux Indians upon their forced removal from ancestral lands. Through readings of these two moments of intercultural empathy, this article argues that *Omeros* asks us to question the viability and indeed the value of concentrating aesthetic attention on a strictly black diaspora. As an alternative, the poem offers strategies for responding to and articulating a multiplicity of diasporic experiences. At their most provocative, these strategies enable us to imagine instances of human solidarity that transcend the immediacies of time, race, and space.

I am not the first to read *Omeros* as concerned with those relationships that resist conventional diasporic identity dynamics. Joseph Farrell, for one, has explained that "in a limited way, the poem can thus be read as an allegory of our own relationship to classical culture, or to the immigrant culture of our personal ancestors or even of groups to which we feel or imagine a sympathetic connection rather than an ethnic or biological one" (267). Focused on issues of genre, however, Farrell does not explore the tensions that *Omeros* presents as surrounding such relationships, tensions born of a postcolonial wariness of the desire for any community not determined by race or nation. Aijaz Ahmad offers a persuasive explanation for the source of this wariness:

> There appears to be, at the very least, a widespread implication in the ideology of cultural nationalism, as it surfaces in literary theory, that each 'nation' of the 'Third World' has a 'culture' and a 'tradition', and that to speak from that culture and that tradition is itself an act of anti-imperialist resistance. (9)

Several of the characters in *Omeros* engage in such acts of resistance: notably, Dennis Plunkett, a retired British major who attempts to rewrite the history of military engagement in the Caribbean from the victim's perspective: "Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war" (30); and also the narrator, who strives for a vision of St. Lucia independent of that which is discernible via Western cultural lenses. A focus on the efforts of these characters could encourage a standard postcolonial reading of how community is formed and defined in *Omeros*. This reading would identify community by way of calcified, singular notions of race, place the narrator as central, and lionize his alienation from the tourist-embracing community of St. Lucia. As my reading will show, however, the poem rejects such facile prescriptions

for the production of culturally responsible art and reveals Walcott as focused on the irreducible heterogeneity of the modern Caribbean, a heterogeneity borne of multiple, intertwined diasporas that lead to a collective resettlement as the post-colonial society of St. Lucia.

A World on Islands

Walcott shows local, heterogeneous community as superseding community formed around race most clearly at Maud Plunkett's funeral. Maud, an Irish woman married to a British expatriate and WWII major who now owns a pig farm on the island, has no means of entrance into St. Lucia's black community. But in addition to "the big shots," and every "brown dignitary," the significant characters from the poem's black community are in attendance at the funeral (267). The relationship between the members of this oddly assembled group is initially unclear, at least to the narrator, who, as a Protestant among Catholics, feels himself an outsider. But the narrator also understands the gulf that separates him from the others in the chapel as representative. Self-absorption seems to distance the priest: "a smooth black priest with a smoother voice that pleased him / more than his listeners in its serene unction." And social obligation easily explains the presence of the rest in attendance. The narrator attends because "the Major had trained us all as cadets;" Achille and Helen come as employees should; and the brown dignitaries, particularly the medaled and beribboned ones, appear to pay their respect, not to Maud, nor to Plunkett, but to Plunkett's title.

At least this is how the narrator perceives the situation until Achille's tears startle him enough to forget about Helen's beauty—that "seduction of quicksand" ruining his concentration on the solemn event—and reevaluate the scene:

> I recognized Achille. He stood next to Philoctete
> in a rusted black suit, his eyes anchored to the pew;
> then he lifted them and I saw that the eyes were wet
>
> as those of a boy, and my eyes were watering too.
> Why should he be here, why should they have come at all,
> none of them following the words, but he had such grace
>
> that I couldn't bear it. I could leave the funeral,
> but his wet ebony mask and her fishnetted face
> were shrouded with Hector's death. Could he, in that small
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> suit too tight at the shoulders, who shovelled the pens
> in the rain at Plunkett's, love him? Where was it from,
> this charity of soul, more piercing than Helen's

beauty? runnelling his face like the road to the farm?
We sang behind Plunkett, and I saw Achille perspire
over the words, his lips following after the sound. (265)

The key to this passage's significance lies in the narrator's casual comparison of Helen and Achille. By depicting Achille with a *charity of soul* more engrossing even than Helen's beauty, the poem's ostensible focus, Walcott not only marks him as the hero of this epic but also marks this scene as central to an understanding of the poem's wider dynamics. When the narrator notes tears in the eyes of a man whose compassion should have been forestalled by the prejudices of race and class imposed by an imperial system, he is not just taken aback; he is taken in. In an inexplicable moment of sympathy, Achille's wet eyes lead to the narrator's wet eyes and to the disbelief expressed by his seemingly involuntary questioning: *Why should he be here. Why…Where….* World traveler, artist and intellectual, the narrator knows that Achille and Plunkett's should be a relationship of bitterness rather than fellowship; he notes the class differences that locate them in separate communities not only in Achille's illiteracy—*I saw Achille perspire over the words, his lips following after the sound*—but also in the French-based Creole that he speaks—*why should they have come at all, none of them following the words*.[2] But the narrator also recognizes the source of Achille's sympathy for Major Plunkett. The narrator will leave death behind when he leaves the funeral, but Achille, who has recently lost his friend Hector, will not: *I could leave the funeral, / but his wet ebony mask and her fishnetted face / were shrouded with Hector's death*; the immediacy of the men's shared experience of loss prevails over any prior divisions set in place by race and class.

The pertinence of this moment of sympathy to Walcott's diasporic concerns is explained by the attention that he gives to the cloth draping Maud's funeral bier in this and other passages:

Plunkett's falsetto soared like a black frigate-bird,
and shifted to a bass-cannon from his wattled throat,
Achille lowered his head for the way it circled

high over our pews, and I heard the brass bugle-note
of his khaki orders as we circled the Parade Ground,
and then the hymn ended. We watched the Major lift

his wife's coffin hung with orchids, many she had found
in the blue smoke of Saltibus. Then Achille saw the swift
pinned to the orchids, but it was the image of a swift

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2 See Laurence Breiner on the class significance of language in St. Lucia.

which Maud had sewn into the silk draping her bier,
and not only the African swift but all the horned island's
birds, bitterns and herons, silently screeching there. (266-267)

As it appears here, the silk's birds correspond to the chorus of human voices singing the recessional hymn. Like the frigate to which he is compared, Plunkett is solitary in his suffering, but as he leads the song, Achille feels Plunkett's voice circling the various villagers that have gathered for the funeral until, like the birds on Maud's silk, they are all singing, not necessarily harmoniously, but together. That Walcott intends us to understand this motley chorus as a community which circumvents racial loyalties is clear from the way he draws Achille's (and thus the reader's) eyes to the swift. Achille recognizes the swift, which acted as guide on his journey to Africa and back again, as representative of the African component of this chorus, but he recognizes it as part of a larger group rather than as primary; it is one bird among many, one voice in the island's silent chorus.[3]

Walcott underscores the heterogeneous nature of the silk's diasporic charge even more clearly later in the poem:

And those birds Maud Plunkett stitched into her green silk
with sibylline steadiness were what islands bred:
brown dove, black grackle, herons like ewers of milk,

pinned to a habitat many had adopted.
The lakes of the world have their own diaspora
of birds every winter, but these would not return.

The African swallow, the finch from India
now spoke the white language of a tea-sipping tern,
with the Chinese nightingales on a shantung screen,

while the Persian falcon, whose cry leaves a scar
on the sky till it closes, saw the sand turn green,
the dunes to sea, understudying the man-o'-war,

talking the marine dialect of the Caribbean
with nightjars, finches, and swallows, each origin
enriching the islands to which their cries were sewn. (314)

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[3] This communal moment resonates with the moment of *phantasmal peace* from another of Walcott's poems, which also features a silent chorus of birds: "Then all the nations of birds lifted together / the huge net of the shadows of this earth / in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues, / stitching and crossing it. ... /.../ .../ .../ the net rising soundless at night, the birds' cries soundless, ..." ("The Season of Phantasmal Peace" *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, 464). This peace is momentary—"and this season lasted one moment, like the pause / between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace, / but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long" (*ibid*)—but not insignificant; the moment is enough to suggest the future possibility of a lasting peace.

Here, Walcott addresses the relevance of diaspora to the formation of community in the modern Caribbean, and he explicitly avoids delineating it along strictly African lines. Rather than a black diaspora, he gives us a cosmopolitan one: the African and Indian birds speak with the Chinese bird in the language of the British bird (white, tea-sipping); while the Persian bird speaks with a variety of other birds in a Caribbean dialect. As in the earlier appearance of this image, the African swift or swallow is merely one species among many in the Caribbean. Walcott's shift away from an exclusive focus on the black diaspora comes from his attention to the ever increasing phenomenon of transnational migration. By referring to the migration of birds of diverse origins as a diaspora, he temporarily strips the term of its ability to designate an unnatural event or a homogenous group of people, and asks, by implication, whether the concept of a *black* diaspora remains useful when so many of the world's people are inhabiting new spaces.

Pinned and stitched to Maud's silk, the displaced birds are bound together, as are the people of the Caribbean. But Maud's' silk is not simply an idealistic image of regional pluralism; more significant than the image itself is the underlying metaphor of its construction. Maud's birds are stitched onto the green silk rather than being organically woven into it, as would be expected if Walcott were simply incorporating a Penelope allusion. As an act of penetration, this stitching acknowledges the violence fundamental to the Caribbean's construction, the fact that it was shaped by what Benítez-Rojo refers to as the *Plantation Machine*, but as an act of binding, of suturing, it acts as a corollary to the poem's controlling metaphor of the wound and represents the means of the Caribbean's healing.

Like the stitches closing a wound, the binding effected by Walcott's metaphors is itself a form of healing within the economy of the poem. As many critics have noted, by its very operation, metaphor suggests a more extensive interconnectedness.[4] Ramazani astutely discusses metaphor's capability within a specifically postcolonial context: "Forced and voluntary migration, crossings of one people with another, linguistic creolization, and racial miscegenation—these are the sorts of displacements, wanderings, and interminglings that poetic metaphor can powerfully encode in the fabric of a postcolonial text" (69).[5] In seeking to enter that light beyond metaphor, the poem's

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[4] For an in-depth analysis of Walcott's understanding of metaphor, see Patricia Ismond's *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*.

[5] Camille Paglia, says the same quite simply: "Metaphor is based on analogy: art is a revelation of the interconnectedness of the world" (xiv).

narrator wishes to avoid such claims of interconnectedness, but in proceeding by way of metaphor, *Omeros* nevertheless asserts them. Throughout the poem, Walcott plays with images (images of the swift, the butterfly, the circle, the ants, etc.), varying their presentation and significance with each repetition, and placing as much of the poem's meaning in the development of the metaphoric value of those images as in the trajectories of its various plots. By placing divergent tenors within the same vehicle, Walcott professes a complex commonality, and this commonality frequently crosses the boundaries of culture and nation. In using ants to represent the St. Lucian women carrying their baskets of coal up to the ship liner, as well as the Cherokee marching along the trail of tears, and the ancestors who lead Ma Kilman to the flower that will heal Philoctete's wound, he professes a common suffering; in making the circle or "O" (which signifies both as the first letter of Omeros, and as the "conch-shell's invocation," and as the scream of the cauldron in which Philoctete is bathed), resonate in the vase-like throats of the St. Lucian fisherman, and of Antigone, the Greek woman, he professes a conjunction between them.

Like these metaphors and like Maud's silk, the poem itself incorporates material from various geographical origins in an effort to assert thematic and material dependence upon the concept of interrelation:

> I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text;
> her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking
> basins of globe in which one half fits the next
> into an equator, both shores neatly clicking
> into a globe; (319)

As the passage's initial simile suggests, the hyphen's stitch serves not merely to draw together, but to draw together what geography naturally separates. *Omeros* depends on such artificial binding with an unapologetic confidence that suggests Walcott's overarching intention with the poem. Although Achille's journey to Africa (to be addressed) and the narrator's travels through Europe are in some ways pro forma in a postcolonial text, the narrator's engagement with Native American history is not, and Walcott does not worry himself with an overt explanation for the inclusion. The narrator meditates upon the life of Catherine Weldon, a widow from nineteenth-century Boston who became embroiled in Sitting Bull's negotiations with the U.S. government during the time of the Ghost Dance. He is drawn to her story by chance, but remains with it because he needed something to draw himself out of his solitude, or out of his solipsistic world and into an even wider community based on the shared experience of loss: "I was searching for characters, / and in her shawled voice

I heard the snow that would be blown / when the wind covered the tracks of the Dakotas, / the Sioux, and the Crows; my sorrow had been replaced" (181). Despite the chronological, geographical, and cultural distance between the two, the narrator experiences a force in Catherine Weldon's voice similar to the one Achille experienced in Major Plunkett's voice. The next section will be concerned with the way Walcott uses this moment of identification to reveal the insufficiency even of communities that form around region rather than race, while at the same time trying to discern the complex, lived nature of those connections, real or imagined, that form between individuals outside the boundaries of prescribed forms of community.

Community Unbound

At Maud Plunkett's funeral, the narrator wonders: "Could [Achille], in that small /suit too tight at the shoulders, who shovelled the pens /in the rain at Plunkett's, love him?" To his real question: *could Achille, the representative descendent of the African diaspora, love Plunkett, the representative descendent of the colonial masters*? the answer is no. The poem, however, provides an answer to the question that the narrator did not ask: *could Achille, a St. Lucian fisherman who toils for Helen and grieves over the modernization of his island, love Plunkett, a pig farmer who desperately wants to be considered just another St. Lucian local?* And to this question, the answer is a measurable yes. The difference between these questions lies in the particulars, or more precisely, in the fact that the second question is concerned with particulars and therefore considers a discrete relationship rather than a representative one. It is these discrete relationships that Walcott shows as standing outside mutually enforced communal boundaries. In attempting to empathize with the Native American tribes as a communal unit elsewhere in the poem, the narrator discovers that generalized searches for symmetry between racial communities only produce intercultural opacities, but in imagining the particulars of Catherine Weldon's life, he discovers the permeability of communities and a humanism that individuates, rather than imposing abstractions about the human person.[6]

The narrator fails in his initial attempt to see the Native American tribes and the Afro-Caribbeans as part of a larger community, despite

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[6] Several theorists of diaspora have addressed the phenomenon of "ethnicity-exclusive" forms of transnational community. For some of these see Paul Gilroy, James Clifford, and Evelyn Hu-DeHart.

the fact that both groups qualify as the dispossessed peoples of the Americas. He fails because he attempts to sympathize with the community as a whole, and thus with a suffering that is beyond him: [7]

> Clouds whitened the Crow horseman and I let him pass
> into the page, and I saw the white waggons move
>
> across it, with printed ruts, then the railroad track
> and the arrowing interstate, as a lost love
> narrowed from epic to epigram. Our contracts
>
> were torn like the clouds, like treaties with the Indians,
> but with mutual treachery. (175)

With the first person plural of "our contracts," he distinguishes between the broken contract of his marriage and the broken treaties with the Native Americans by denoting the Native Americans' innocence in the affair. The disparity of the simile, however, is startling nevertheless, and it is repeated:

> A spike hammered
> into the heart of their country as the Sioux looked on.
> The spike for the Union Pacific had entered
>
> my heart without cheers for her far gentler weapon.
> I could not believe it was over any more
> than they did. Their stunned, anachronistic faces
>
> moved through the crowd, or stood, with the same expression
> that I saw in my own when I looked through the glass,
> for a land that was lost, a woman who was gone. (175)

At this point in the poem, theoreticians of identity politics could be writing scathing critiques of a privileged tourist's outrageous attempt to identify with the suffering of an oppressed people. And admittedly, the narrator's claim to understand the Sioux suffering on the Trail of Tears by way of his own is not only absurd but embodies the "lust for symmetry" that, according to Wilson Harris, characterizes a negative universalism (101). Walcott's full cognizance of this absurdity is unclear. The poem never explicitly disapproves of the parallel, but the narrator's attempted identification with the oppressed tribes quickly becomes subsidiary to his identification with Catherine Weldon, a move which suggests that Walcott at least intuited the ineffectuality of such a monumentalist approach to transnational community. Nothing comes of the representative Native American, the Crow horseman that he let "pass into the page" he was writing (175), but a close, if

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[7]   This at least is the basic argument of Robert D. Hammer's excellent explication of the poem in *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros.*

one-sided, relationship does develop between the narrator and the woman who materializes and takes over his story as he reads about her elsewhere: "A smell of innocence / like that of the first heavy snow came off the page / as I inhaled the spine. She walked past the lanterns" (181).

The fact that this is an imagined relationship even within the fiction of the poem (the narrator is distanced from Catherine Weldon not only by race but also by time and space) reveals the centrality of the imagination to each of those moments of identification that Walcott shows as occurring outside definable forms of community. In substituting Catherine's grief for his own, the narrator is able to empathize with her; that is, he is able to project his mind into, and so comprehend, Catherine from her perspective. Robert Bensen, one of the few critics to engage fully with the Native American material in *Omeros*, discusses the nature of this empathetic act: "There is at least the possibility of merging human identity in an imaginative act, across time and space, as when Walcott writes, 'This was the groan of the autumn wind in the tamaracks / which I shared through Catherine's body…' (*Omeros* 207)" (122). Bensen's understanding of the effect of such a merging of human identity as the "opposite of [a] hardening of position and identity" explains the indispensable role of such instances of human solidarity to challenging "imagined communities" that depend on an 'us / them' dynamic: empathy requires, at least initially, a softening of position and identity.

The empathy that marks the narrator's response to Catherine Weldon stands in stark contrast to his attempt to identify with the tribes directly; only after imagining the particulars of Catherine's life does the narrator allow himself an emotional response, and the tenderness of that response is borne of an immersion in her sorrow rather than a fumbling attempt to understand her sorrow as akin to his own:

> Look Catherine! There are no more demons outside the door.
> The white wolf drags its shawled tail into the high snow
> through the pine lances, the blood dried round its jaw;
>
> it is satisfied. Come, come to the crusted window,
> blind as it is with the ice, through the pane's cataract;
> see, it's finished. It's over, Catherine, you have been saved. (217)

The apostrophe in this passage, which reminds us of the lyric mode of this narrative poem, suggests the Narrator's desire to erase the historical time separating him from the woman, if only to find asymmetry rather than symmetry in their respective instances of grief: [8]

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[8] According to Jonathan Culler, apostrophe is one of the fundamental tropes

When one grief afflicts us we choose a sharper grief
in hope that enormity will ease affliction,
so Catherine Weldon rose in high relief

through the thin page of a cloud, making a fiction
of my own loss. I was searching for characters,
and in her shawled voice I heard the snow that would be blown

when the wind covered the tracks of the Dakotas,
the Sioux, and the Crows; my sorrow had been replaced. (181)

The narrator learns her particular story by re-placing his sorrow in the context of her life, by imagining not how he would feel if he were Catherine, but how Catherine would respond to the circumstances of her life.

This recognition of particularity defines both the formal and the thematic trajectory of the entire poem. Although his critics, this one included, still attempt to reconstruct the metaphoric lineage of his characters in order to understand just what they represent, Walcott asserts the absolute singularity of each by thwarting our efforts and insisting that his characters "are their own nouns."[9] As Susan Stewart explains, *Omeros*'s "allegory is undermined by the transformation of apparent depth into surface" (323); "Hector is Hector, but in his taxi, *The Comet*, he is also Phaeton; Philoctete has a wound like the character abandoned on an island in the *Odyssey*, but here Philoctete is also linked to Achilles because he has a wound to his heel" (320). The contradictory allusions prod Walcott's readers to relinquish them all and to accept his characters as representing nothing but themselves. This formal effect is instantiated by the narrator's and Plunkett's struggle to see Helen as a discrete individual, to see her "as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow" (271), as "only a name / for a local wonder" (309). Before either of these characters can overcome the cultural barriers marking them as outsiders and fully join the St. Lucian community, they must recognize what Jean Luc Nancy sets as fundamental to a community that would successfully resist becoming a totality: the understanding that "every being is absolutely singular" (77). *Omeros* presents this recognition as ultimately prior to the imperatives towards gathering and healing that characterize

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of the lyric because it transforms temporal presences and absences into discursive presences and absences and thus works against the impulse of narrative. For a further treatment of the trope see "Apostrophe," in *Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.*

9 As cited by Robert D. Hamner in *Derek Walcott*, 143, and by Susan Stewart in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 320.

cultural responses to diasporic experience, imperatives that delineate difference by way of the group rather than the individual.

This is not to say that Walcott's understanding of intercultural movement and contact is naïve: freely-chosen encounters may produce understanding: "the widening mind can acquire / the hues of a foliage different from where it begins" (207), but also may not: "Men take their colours / as trees do from the native soil of their birth, / and once they are moved elsewhere, entire cultures / lose the art of mimicry, and then, where the trees were, / the fir, the palm, the olive, the cedar, a desert place / widens in the heart" (208). The contrary impulses expressed in these two quotations speak not only to the difficulty of imagining any sort of commonality in a world marked by division and conflict, but also to the hazard of failing to do so. If nowhere else, that hazard is experienced in the arts. Referring to the "synchronicities" between cultures that are discovered in the "womb of cultural space," Wilson Harris claims that "its gifts to the human imagination, its corollaries of ongoing and ceaselessly unfinished explorations in the arts and sciences are rewarding beyond measure. It confirms the necessity for complex mutuality between cultures" (101).

Omeros illustrates, both thematically and formally, how to find synchronicities between cultures without imposing a false "symmetry," or how to embrace a humanism that individuates rather than imposes ideological abstractions about the human person. Walcott's interest in the distinction is seen most clearly in the narrator's obsession with Homeric allusion. Eventually, the narrator learns to control his "lust for symmetry" between cultures: "Names are not oars / that have to be laid side by side, nor are legends" (313); but Walcott never entirely abandons his assertion of a synchronicity between the Caribbean and Aegean archipelagos, or the dispersed peoples of Africa and the Americas, or any of the minor synchronicities discovered in the various places to which the narrator and his characters travel in the poem.[10] Rather he leaves Achille's measured response to his own experience of diasporic homecoming as a model. Achille returns from his sun-stroke induced journey into the African past with a renewed interest in his cultural heritage; he institutes a private Boxing Day ritual based on "something that he had seen / in Africa" and urges Helen to give her child an African name (275). But Achille intuits that the African elements of his identity are secondary to the Caribbean

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[10]   See J. Michael Dash for a discussion of Walcott's "vision of the New World Mediterranean" and the connection that he draws between Athens and Port of Spain.

elements. When he is in Africa amongst his ancestors, he is homesick for those culturally disparate individuals that constitute his Caribbean island community; he is "homesick / for the history ahead, as if [his] proper place / lay in unsettlement" (140).

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EMPIRE, POWER, AND LANGUAGE: THE CREATION OF AN IDENTITY IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S THE MYSTIC MASSEUR

Divya Sood

Naipaul's novel *The Mystic Masseur* begins and ends as Ganesh's search for selfhood and identity. Embedded within this search for self is the greater question of the concept of nationhood and the struggle of identity as faced by a colonized nation that has come of age. In basing the work in Trinidad, Naipaul has created a spatial distinction where while we accompany Ganesh in his search for self, we also are at liberty to stand on the periphery and analyze the politics and language of imperialism and nationhood as it relates to England and the colony of India.

It is ironic but not accidental that Naipaul has chosen the post-colonial space of Trinidad to stage this novel. As we will uncover, it is only in a space that is removed from the immediate battles of nationhood and independence that we can feel safe and grounded. Also, in Trinidad, we see the consequences of imperial influence, the aftermath of independence, and the cultural implications of both.

There are distinct discourses that interact upon the landscape of Trinidad. First, we have the politics of space and the physicality of place. Secondly, we have the metaphors of spirituality and secular thought. Finally, we have the discourse of politics, questions of identity, and enlightenment. Naipaul engages us in these discourses through the realm of language. Through language and words, we see the hierarchical structures and attempts at creating and maintaining identity. *The Mystic Masseur* is, in fact, above all, the narrative of the forming of a writer and the finding of a narrative voice and it is this search that becomes a metaphorical search not only for a narrative voice but a search for self that is both political and spiritual. The fusion of language and thematic elements within *The Mystic Masseur* allows us to uncover the central question inherent in the novel: is there true selfhood? Is nationalism merely a hollow discourse or is it a vehicle

one can use to find independence and peace?

Given the socio-political implications of *The Mystic Masseur*, we cannot ignore the politically charged climate of the text although we are driven by its linguistic complexity. Hence we cannot reduce the work to a formalist or structuralist reading because such readings would render incomplete. In order to fully grasp the implications of the work, we must engage in a deconstructionist, post-colonial analysis of the work to fully recognize the literary and political implications of *The Mystic Masseur*. It is imperative, then, to refer to two essential non-fictional works of V.S. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado* and *An Area of Darkness: A Discovery of India*. These works drive us to consider *The Mystic Masseur* not merely as a fictional account of Ganesh but as a reflection of post-colonial identity and the lost causes of spirituality and politics.

The function of this article is to examine these issues of identity and nationhood with regard to the language used in *The Mystic Masseur* as well as to complicate our reading of the text by using V.S. Naipaul's non-fictional works regarding British, Indian, and Trinidadian identity. Moreover, I will illustrate how space is used in *The Mystic Masseur* to delineate shifts in language and identity as well as to attempt both a redefinition of the self and of the other as studied in post-colonial discourse Finally, I engage in a discussion regarding the symbolic implications of Ganesh's career as a writer, mystic, and politician.

Gaston Bachelard, in his *Poetics of Space,* notes that "Dialectics of *here* and *there* has been promoted to the rank of an absolutism according to which these unfortunate adverbs of place are endowed with unsupervised powers of ontological determination" (Bachelard 212). Interestingly, Bachelard contends that in designating "here and there" we also designate the interior and exterior (the interior being us, here and the exterior being them, there) and that these distinctions of self and other are best seen in syntactical manipulations of language that combine conjugations or negate the verb "to be" in conjunction with the spatial "here" and "there" (Bachelard 213). If we are to study the exposition of the novel and the introduction of the characters in the first chapter of *The Mystic Masseur*, we note a definite situating of self and also a lack of the verb "to be" as it relates to the characters. Moreover, the only places that we see the verb "to be" are sentences that refer to Ganesh.

Let us take, as an example, the first line of the novel, "Later he was to be famous and honored throughout the South Caribbean; he was to be a hero of the people and, after that, a British representative

at Lake Success" (*The Mystic Masseur* 1). Note here the recurrence of the assertion "was to be" in regard to Ganesh. We have, in the first sentence, a spatial and temporal distinction that alerts us that in a space in the future, Ganesh will become an identity. Yet when we see the mother and son speak, we see a dropping of the copular. When speaking of his infected foot, the boy does not say "What are we going to do?" Rather, he says "What we going to do?" (*The Mystic Masseur* 1). One can argue that this is a dialectic obligation that is employed to maintain the local color of Trinidad. But I contend that the negation of the copular goes beyond a dialectic or syntactic choice and becomes a metaphor for self and negation of self. We see throughout the exposition that it is only Ganesh who is spoken of as "Who is *this* Ganesh? (*The Mystic Masseur* 2) or "He was to be famous…" (*The Mystic Masseur* 1). This alerts us to the difference between self and other, us and them. For while Ganesh occupies the same space as the Trinidadian natives, the narrator makes it a point to have the young boy state, "*I* know what going to happen. I going to lose the whole damn foot, and you know how these Trinidad doctors like cutting off black people foot" (*The Mystic Masseur* 1). We must notice here the missing copular in each sentence of this assertion. We also notice that the character makes it a point to reveal that he is black and that the Trinidadians like tormenting black people. Yet Ganesh becomes a man removed from the world of the black boy first, because he is spoken of with use of the verb "to be" and hence is established as an identity and, secondly, because he is Indian and hence removed from the space of the black boy or the native Trinidadian. Moreover, notice that the black boy is not even given a name and hence his identity is established no further than to have him be a blurred voice that becomes nothing more than the backdrop of the novel that occupies the space of the storyteller and functions as the narrator.

We must also recognize that the mother's response in answer to her son's question, "Who is this Ganesh?" She mocks, "Who is *this* Ganesh? *This* Ganesh? You see the sort of education they giving you children these days…. the man old enough to be your father" (*The Mystic Masseur* 2). Here we become familiar with the distinction of language as it relates to proper and improper. The mother's words alert us to the fact that there are two linguistic planes on which the narrative is operating: linguistic propriety as observed by the British who teach proper English at academic institutions, and the Creole spoken in Trinidad, which is a dialect and hence regarded as improper. We also see, however, in the character of Ganesh, a third linguistic plane: the Indian's English which is neither fully British nor

fully Trinidadian Creole but tinged with remnants of Hindi that has metamorphosed the English of the Indian Trinidadian. "He began mumbling a Hindi couplet over me," says the boy of Ganesh's efforts to heal him (*The Mystic Masseur* 6). We see already that the planes of language help set up the stage of otherness and the implications of nationality. For example, British English becomes the proper and Britain then, symbolically, becomes the place of academic propriety and learning. Hindi is seen as the language of the mystic and hence India, metaphorically, becomes the place of spirituality and of mystic identity. And, finally, in being the land of Creole where language is both proper and improper (for the mother can recognize proper and improper speech and, therefore, both must exist somewhere in Trinidad), and in being the land where dialect prevails (although Hindi is not spoken, words such as "dhoti" have been absorbed into the language), we see Trinidad as the place of fusion and mixture. The question then arises: can anyone become a Trinidadian and hence avoid the tensions between British propriety and Indian spiritual identity? In the case of the black boy, it seems that he fits so well into the hybrid landscape that he becomes part of the backdrop as our neutral voice: the narrator. But in the case of Ganesh, we see that hybridity is not possible and Ganesh is forced to ricochet back and forth between his Indian and British selves until he is forced to renounce one in favor of the other.

It is Naipaul's own experience with identity that leads him to re-mark in his travelogue, *An Area of Darkness: A Discovery of India*, "The confrontation of different communities was the fundamental West Indian experience…" (*Area of Darkness* 30). Yet he also asserts that for the Indian Trinidadian, "Britain still feels far from home and can be seen as a country which is an emblematic map, curling at the corners" while "India…was the background of my childhood…was an area of the imagination" (*Area of Darkness* 36-37). Naipaul posits the Trini-dadian Indian as an individual without a home and as an individual who is always caught between Britain and India even though, ironi-cally, both places are purely metaphorical and exist only in the space of emblematic representation or imagination. This distinguishes the Indian Trinidadian from the various cultural populations of Trinidad.

One cannot help but question why the Indian is distinct from the various cultural identities found in Trinidad. Naipaul's historical explo-ration *The Search for El Dorado* contends that Trinidad had two major historical moments: the invasion of the English and the invasion of the Spaniards. It was these powers that settled Trinidad and, by the time the Indians arrived from India, Trinidad was already established as a country with an indigenous population that was a result of the

cultural hybridity of the conquerors that had tried to settle Trinidad (*The Search for El Dorado* xiv). Hence Indians became the "other" or the outsiders in a place whose populations were already firmly rooted. To Naipaul, the Indian then is not indigenous to Trinidad but the outsider who stays in Trinidad because he has no home elsewhere (*Area of Darkness* 45).

It is these notions of the Indian as outsider in Trinidad yet homeless outside of Trinidad that allow the space of Trinidad to function as a neutral space with a neutral narrator devoid of the politics of British, Indian, or Trinidadian British Indian, so that we can observe the collision of the Indian and the British in the character of Ganesh. Moreover, we can also observe the coming of age of the colony of India, the implications of this coming of age for Imperialist Britain, and the implications of identity as accepted, rejected, and portrayed by the figure of Ganesh.

As the novel opens, Ganesh is an established mystic and the narrator's mother takes the narrator to Ganesh so that he can fix the boy's broken foot. We see this chapter as a flashback and the narrator ends by saying "I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times…" (*The Mystic Masseur* 8). It is no wonder then that the narrator observes that "Nineteen forty-six was the turning point of Ganesh's career; and, as if to underline the fact, in that year he published his autobiography, *The Years of Guilt*...." (*The Mystic Masseur* 8). This sentence is of great importance if one realizes that nineteen forty six is one year before Indian independence from the British. Hence it is of great importance that Ganesh publishes his autobiography on the brink of Indian independence and we can metaphorically see *The Years of Guilt* as a political statement that questions identity in terms of nationality and guilt. After all, why the years of guilt and whose guilt and at what wrongdoing? In asking these questions we are left without any clear answers but we are forced to ponder the political implications of Ganesh's character.

Ganesh starts his career as a student at Queen's College in Britain and the narrator writes, "Ganesh was never really happy during the four years he spent at the Queen's Royal College" (*The Mystic Masseur* 9). We see Ganesh's role as the misfit in the academic environment for the narrator says of Ganesh and his father, "Father and son left Fourways that Sunday and took the bus to Princes Town. The old man wore his visiting outfit: dhoti, *koortah*, white cap, and an unfurled umbrella on the crook of his left arm" (*The Mystic Masseur* 9). At the very beginning of Ganesh's academic career we see then the incongruity of his father's very ethnically Indian garb and yet his father's zeal to have Ganesh educated at a fine British school. In recognizing

the setting the stage, we begin to sense the hierarchical relationship between the Indian and the British national consciousness in that Britain, not Trindidad and definitely not India, is the place for proper schooling. We sense the colonial aspiring to become the Imperial and to this end we see the narrator observe, "Ganesh never lost his awkwardness. He was so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spread a story that he was really called Gareth. This did him little good. He continued to dress badly, he didn't play games, and his accent remained too clearly that of the Indian from the country…." (*The Mystic Masseur* 11). Here we see that even though Ganesh is by residence a Trinidadian, there is great care taken to paint him as a country boy who is markedly Indian. It is this distinction that leads me to believe that the stage set for us in the novel is one on which Britain and India are the contenders: Trinidad does not factor into the ethnic identity of the Indian Trinidadian characters.

Another marked distinction is that while Ganesh's father is overly zealous to have Ganesh educated in the proper British manner, the narrator remarks of Ganesh's return home during the holidays, "A fresh mortification awaited him. When he went home for his first holidays and had been shown off again, his father said, 'It is time for the boy to become a real Brahmin'" (*The Mystic Masseur* 11) . This dichotomy in Ganesh's life, where his father aspires to be British yet cannot let go the traditional Indian system of caste and ritual, identifies the crux of the crisis as faced by Ganesh and, metaphorically, by the Trinidadian Indian who tries vehemently to straddle both Britain and India. In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul offers a scathing attack regarding the tenacity of the Indian caste system: "Caste imprisons a man in his function…It is inefficient and destructive; it has created a psychology which will frustrate all improving plans. It has led to the Indian passion for speech-making, for gestures and for symbolic action" (*Area of Darkness* 80). Hence we see the narrator relay that Ganesh is "mortified" by his caste initiation and we metaphorically read this as Ganesh's inherent refusal to succumb to the acceptance of caste and rank. This perhaps is a key point because it will illustrate that in his ultimate rejection of his Indian self, perhaps Ganesh is not rejecting an identity on the basis of its colonial implications and embarrassing subjugation to imperialism but, rather, because it brings with it implicit notions of caste laws and what might be seen as bound inequality.

If we trace Ganesh's career, we see that his first attempt at a career is as a schoolteacher in England. He quits soon after starting and leaves because, as he says of the headmaster of the school, "I can't take rudeness like that" (*The Mystic Masseur* 16). Ganesh's

next venture is to write a book about the Hindu faith. Here, we see a distinct departure from the Ganesh who aspires to be the British intellectual to the Ganesh who, after acquiring a British education, uses the English language to write a book on the Hindu faith. Soon, Ganesh jumps from his writing to becoming the mystic masseur. The narrator notes that Ganesh hence "…became a great Indologist and bought all the books on Hindu philosophy he could get in San Fernando…India was his great love" (*The Mystic Masseur* 103). It is ultimately Ganesh's rank as the mystic that elevates him to fame and allows him to rise in the eyes of the public. Even his next book, *The Years of Guilt,* is described as "a spiritual thriller" (*The Mystic Masseur* 108). Yet even as we read of Ganesh's role as the mystic, we sense a satirical twist. Hence we see that the word "Indologist" is created especially to describe Ganesh and we cannot help but sense that there is satire in Ganesh's trying to embrace an India he knows only through text and theory.

Yet when Ganesh enters the realm of politics, we sense the same sense of satire at Ganesh's ineptitude as a proper gentleman. We see him at a dinner at the Governor's house and the narrator remarks of the evening, "The meal was torture to Ganesh. He felt alien and uncomfortable. He grew sulkier and refused all the courses. He felt as if he were a boy again, going to the Queen's Royal College for the first time" (*The Mystic Masseur* 197).

In his inability to stay the mystic and aspire to be a political success, yet in being inept as a political figure when faced with British culture, Ganesh becomes a symbol of the angst of the Trinidadian Indian who knows India and Britain yet cannot comfortably belong to either. It is not so much that Ganesh cannot stay the mystic but, rather, a desire in him to rise above the mystic that cannot allow him to occupy the world as an Indian. Yet his inability to be successful as a British gentleman because of the implications of his Indian identity leaves him frustrated and determined to become accepted by British society.

We see Ganesh by the end of the novel abandon his mystic practices and become a politician. "He still dispelled one or two spirits; but he had already given up his practice when he sold the house in Fuente Grove to a jeweler from Bombay and bought a new one in the fashionable Port of Spain district of St. Clair. By that time he had stopped wearing dhoti and turban altogether" (*The Mystic Masseur* 199). Ganesh, therefore, rejects his Indian spirituality along with his Indian manner of dressing. We see him finally choosing an identity rather than trying to straddle two. Ironically, in the independence movement, we do not see Ganesh embracing the India that he used

to gain his spiritual foothold but, rather, embracing the British imperial identity that he had rejected as a schoolteacher fresh out of college.

The implications of Ganesh's choice are multifold. First, I think it is wrong to simply state that Ganesh has followed in the path of his father in aspiring to be British, because Ganesh's father still held his Indian systems of caste and faith. Ganesh rejects his mystic identity altogether and, in a symbolic gesture, renounces the traditional clothes of his Indian self to be reborn as a British politician. In a defiant end, the narrator encounters Ganesh again and cries, "Pundit Ganesh!" to which Ganesh replies coldly, "G. Ramsay Muir" (*The Mystic Masseur* 208). Linguistically, Ganesh's rearranges the letters of his name to show how he can somersault between his Indian name and his acquired British identity.

The question then arises, what is the meaning of Ganesh's transformation from Indian mystic to secular British politician? It should be no surprise that the answer is the thematic intent of the work: to show how the Trinidadian Indian can change himself from Indian to British and yet still feel alienated in both situations because he is neither "the other" nor "the self," neither as an Indian nor as a British national. *The Mystic Masseur* functions, ultimately, to show that straddling two identities yields nothing but confusion and that it is imperative that the Trinidadian Indian embrace one although it will result in a renunciation of the other.

Why then would Ganesh embrace his British and not his Indian self even though his mystic status did bring him fame and wealth? The answer lies in the notion implicit in the Indian characters such as Ganesh's father who illustrate that a quality inherent in the Trinidadian Indian is the reverence paid to the British and a desire to attain equality with the Imperial power. Moreover, we see India as the place of tradition, caste, and religion whereas Britain becomes secular and political. In a thrust towards modernity, *The Mystic Masseur* suggests that while both identities are metaphorical for the Trinidadian Indian, the British identity promises more of a modern identity than that of the Indian spiritual- and caste-entrenched identity. In this way, the work becomes a political quest to show the inequalities still remnant in the fabric of Indian identity even in those who are themselves only Indian in a metaphorical sense.

In this manner, *The Mystic Masseur* becomes a political statement as to the torn identity of the Trinidadian Indian and a critique of the Indian national. It is Jean-François Lyotard who writes in his essay "The Postmodern Condition," "I define postmodern as incredulity

toward metanarratives" (Rivkin and Ryan 356). In relation to *The Mystic Masseur*, I would disagree and say the work gears towards a metanarrative of self-definition and identity. In all regards, *The Mystic Masseur* illustrates how the individual is, in all regards, a great meta-narrative that finds voice in the choices made by that same individual. Hence Ganesh defines himself until he can find an identity that is his great autobiography or his great metanarrative. In constructing the individual as the story it wishes to tell, *The Mystic Masseur* shows that identity is a construct and as such can be created and changed.

In conclusion, *The Mystic Masseur* becomes a metaphor which shows that the individual is just as much a work of fiction as the narrative that tells his story. To better illustrate this metaphor, one could say that the work uses nuances of language and syntax and implications of the spiritual, political, and national. We see Ganesh, ultimately, as a man who has constructed himself in much the same way as the narrator has constructed Ganesh's story for us. We also see Ganesh struggling to emerge an individual with an identity that he can comfortably slip into and realize that although he chooses an identity, it is still a construct that requires him to conform to a preset mold. *The Mystic Masseur* functions, ultimately, to explore the mystical process of creation of self and leaves us to ponder whether identity can ever be anything but a fabrication of the individual either by those who tell his story or in the stories he chooses by which to identify himself.

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GOGOL'S NAMESAKE: IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE*

Judith Caesar

Allusions to Nikolai V. Gogol and his short story "The Overcoat" permeate Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, beginning with Gogol's being the name the protagonist is called through most of the book. Yet few of the reviewers of the novel mentioned Nikolai Gogol at all in their discussions of the novel, except to describe the protagonist Gogol's loathing of his name, or to quote without comment or explanation Dostoevski's famous line, "We all came out of Gogol's Overcoat." So far, no one has looked beyond the surfaces to examine the significance of the allusions to Gogol that are so much a part of the fabric of Lahiri's novel.

Without the references to Nikolai Gogol, it is easy to read the novel as simply another account of the difficulties of a first-generation American trying to "find himself," nicely written, but not particularly thought-provoking. It may seem merely unexamined documentation of the confusion of its main character, a confusion which itself has become a bit of a cliché. The conventional wisdom about first generation Asian Americans is that an awareness of two cultures is a kind of curse which makes them unable to understand who they "really" are, as if identity were nothing more than cultural identification. Read with an understanding of the significance of the Gogol story, however, the novel is much more clearly an elucidation of the causes and meaning of that confusion, which comes not only from having a multiple cultural identity, but from some of the ways in which people in modern American society tend to view identity. In particular, the allusions to Gogol, along with the motif of naming and Lahiri's own unique literary style, seem to suggest that some of the characters' unnecessary unhappiness arises from the tendency to identify oneself with the aspects of selfhood that William James called the material self, one's surroundings, clothing, food, and possessions, and the social self, the loves and friendships that surround us. Furthermore,

in a mobile society like modern America, unfortunately, the relationships of the social self are apt to be transitory, which seems to be part of the protagonist's problems in *The Namesake.* In addition, although James includes the immediate family as part of the material self, the protagonist does not seem to realize the extent to which this is true until too late, which is also not uncommon. In any case, what is often left underdeveloped is the essential self, the organizing consciousness that strives to understand the meaning and patterns of the events of one's life in this world, that searches for continuity, or that seeks a way to make peace with the irrational.

At first it seems that neither the hapless Akaky Akakyvitch of Gogol's story nor his eccentric creator can have anything in common with the bright, handsome, conforming Gogol Ganguli of Lahiri's novel, or this fantastic, grotesque, and very Russian nineteenth-century short story with the seemingly realistic novel about a twentieth-century Indian-American's search for an identity in American society. Nevertheless, "The Overcoat" is about identity, among other things. The protagonist's name, Akaky Akakyevitch, suggests a contradictory identity in itself, being a saint's name and yet sounding like a Russian baby-talk word for feces; and of course the name is also simply a repetition of his father's name. Akaky is a non-entity. A scrivener, he delights in copying out other people's writing, and yet is strangely unable and unwilling to try to write anything of his own, or even to change a word in the original text when he is specifically asked to. As a text, he isn't anyone; he is simply copies of what is written by others. But this copying is bliss. His very lack of identity is the source of his happiness. This changes when is obliged to buy a new overcoat, a costly overcoat, and becomes another person. Or rather, he becomes his overcoat. He and his new overcoat are even invited to a party in its honor by the assistant head clerk of his department. He becomes a new man, noticing women, for instance, when before he would forget where he was while crossing the street. As he is coming back from this uncharacteristic outing, his overcoat is stolen. When he reports the loss to a local dignitary (on his co-workers' advice—no idea is his own), he is bullied and insulted for his temerity in approaching such an important person. Tellingly, the Very Important Person demands, "Do you realize, sir, who you are talking to?" (Gogol 263), as if he didn't know who he was himself, without its being reconfirmed by other's fear of him. Exposed to the cold once again, the overcoatless Akaky then catches a fever and dies, but this is not the end of the story. Shortly after Akaky's death, a "living corpse" who looks like Akaky begins haunting the same square in which Akaky was robbed, but this time as a stealer of overcoats rather than as a victim. One of

this Akaky's victims is the same Very Important Person who bullied him, who had been mildly regretting his harshness, and who is now frightened into real repentance. The last we hear of Akaky and his ghost is when a policeman sees a burly man whom he takes to be the ghostly overcoat thief, accosts him, and finds instead a man who is clearly not Akaky, but may be the original thief who robbed him.

It's a strange story, suggesting very non-American ideas about identity and the undesirability of having a fixed identity. The overcoat that Akaky buys at such cost seems to be both the material self and the social self, both of which he previously lacked, and which he then mistakes for who he is. Vladimir Nabokov even suggests that for Akaky, the coat is like a mistress or a wife—some one/thing that defines him as a normal member of society and yet paradoxically causes him to lose his essential self. One can read the story as a kind of parable about identity theft and shifting identities, in which Akaky goes from being no-one, to being an overcoat, to being a ghost, and finally to being, perhaps, a version of the very person who robbed him, or at least into something that can be mistaken for him. Charles Bernheimer has suggested that the story reflects Nikolai Gogol's own horror of having a fixed identity. One of the reasons that Gogol was unable to finish *Dead Souls,* Bernheimer says, was that "for Gogol to write The Book would be equivalent to a fixing of his personality, an act of definition that would subject his secret soul to understanding, to penetration and violation by the other" (54). Richard Moore suggests as well that Akaky's copying is parallel to Gogol's own writing in which he assumes a series of voices. There is a way in which Akaky, then, is a version of his creator. Moreover, the ending is deliberately ambiguous so as not to impose a meaning, an identity, on the story itself. The true protection seems to lie in not being known, not being knowable, and yet, some kind of outward identity is necessary too.

"The Overcoat" is a meditation on identity and loss, but exactly what it is "saying" about these abstractions is ambiguous, because the story is clothed in language and structured to evoke meanings and evade them at the same time. The meaning of the story is not just in the plot; in fact, Vladimir Nabokov suggests that to the extent that the story has a meaning, the style, not the plot, conveys it. The story combines voices and tones and levels of reality. Nabokov says, "Gogol's art discloses that parallel lines not only meet, but they can wiggle and get most extravagantly entangled, just as two pillars reflected in water in the most wobbly contortions if the necessary ripple is there (58). Multiple, contradictory realities and identities exist as once. Like a Zen paradox, the story does not have a fixed meaning,

but serves rather to create a space in which the reader can experience his own private epiphany.

It is this ambiguity that draws Ashoke Ganguli, Gogol Ganguli's father, to the story in the first place. As he reads the story on the almost fatal train ride that becomes a turning point in his life, Ashoke thinks, "Just as Akaky's ghost haunted the final pages, so did it haunt a place deep in Ashoke's soul, shedding light on all that was irrational, that was inevitable about the world" (Lahiri 14). Lahiri does not tell us any more than this about what exactly it is that he understands about the irrational and the inevitable, because she, like Gogol, is working to evoke meanings rather than convey them. But perhaps one thing that Ashoke responds to in the story is the sense that both reality and identity are multiple, existing on many planes at the same time. Life is not a simple, rational, sequential experience. Ashoke gains some unarticulated knowledge from the story that enables him to be many people at once and accept the contradictions of his life. He himself is both the dutiful son who returns to India every year to see his extended family and the man who left this hurt and bewildered family behind to begin a life in another country, both a Bengali and the father of two Americans, both the respected Professor Ganguli and the patronized foreigner, both Ashoke, his good name, and Mithu, his pet name. His world is not just India and America but the Europe of the authors he reads, his time both the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries. A person is many people, just as Akaky is all of the documents he copies and no one in himself. For Gogol Ganguli, however, the several identities that he takes on in the course of the novel are a source of pain, perhaps in part because he passively accepts them one after the other, often conjoined to a relationship with a woman, apparently confusing a series of material and social selves for who he is. Moreover, because these outer selves are sequential rather than simultaneous, they provide him with no sense of continuity, which is part of their function in the lives of more contented and secure people.

And as in Nikolai Gogol's short story, the meaning of Lahiri's novel seems to lie not so much in the plotline as in the style. It is a type of realism that assumes that to show reality, one must abandoned the tight causal plot of realism to show the randomness and irrationality of the events that define the characters' lives. In addition, the present tense prose, which at first may seem to be merely trendy and irritating, also creates the effect of "suppressing the shared past that connects writer and reader," as Ursula Le Guin has observed with some asperity about present tense prose in general (74). In this novel, however, the effect seems deliberate, as the characters are indeed cut off from their

pasts—by physical distance, in the case of Ashoke and Ashima, or by the inability to understand the significance of the past, in the case of Gogol Ganguli and his wife Moushimi. Thus it seems appropriate that the readers are cut off from this past as well.

Lahiri's dispassionate, elusive style is one of the many items to come out of Gogol's overcoat. From him through Vladimir Nabokov and the modernists she has taken the idea that the style is the meaning, not merely the means of conveying it. The way in which she writes also comes through a tradition of American writers as well, particularly Hemingway and Raymond Carver, who acutely observe the details of physical reality as a way of implying the characters' inner struggles ("Big Two Hearted River" and "Cathedral," for example). Yet this style is blended with Gogol to create a hybrid entity, Russian, American, and Indian, through which Lahiri creates vivid characters whose identities are nonetheless unknowable.

Lahiri layers on detail after detail, until we can see the last eyelet in Ashoke's shoes. But something essential is always left out. We learn the names of all the people who attend Ashima's parties. We don't know what Ashima or Ashoke like about these friends or what makes them more than names. We know that the first girl Gogol has sex with was wearing "a plaid woolen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights" (105), but we don't know her name or what she looked liked or even the details of her body that a man would be more likely to remember than the girl's clothing. We know what Gogol reads as a boy and the names of his boyhood friends, but we don't know what he thinks about these books or likes about these friends. We know what Gogol and his wife Moushumi say when they are chattering at yuppie dinner parties, but not what they say to each other when they are arguing or when they are expressing their love for each other. We sometimes learn what the characters feel, although more often, we are given a catalog of the details of their surroundings which they are noticing while they are having the feeling. And we almost never know what the characters are thinking, about who they are to themselves as they experience the rush of sounds and sensations that are their lives. Introspection, even if it were presented as interior monologue, would suggest that this voice was who the character "really" was. The effect is both eerie and deliberate, and perhaps suggests the ways in which essential identity, the self as a continuous organizing consciousness, is beyond the power of words to describe. We can only know the surface. A sense of what lies beyond the surface can only be evoked and illuminated.

The novel is told through the sensibilities of four different characters, Gogol Ganguli, his mother Ashima, his father Ashoke, and

his wife Moushumi, all of whom reveal different aspects of the material world and the personal relationships which are a part of each character's outer identity. Of these people, Ashoke alone seems to have found the balance among the various aspects of self that enable him to live comfortably in a foreign country which his children will experience differently than he does. He has his family back in India, a network of Bengali friends whom he has known since coming to America, a house that he has lived in for years, and familiar Indian customs blended with American ones until the blending itself becomes familiar, all of which provide an outer protection for an inner self. The material world of America seems to be a source of unhappiness to Ashima (it is her consciousness, not Ashoke's, that frequently notices American habits with distaste). Thus throughout the book, she struggles to recover the material and social selves of her life in India and yet somehow adapt herself to life in the country to which she has come. For both Gogol and Moushumi, the process of finding a way to live comfortably with what seems to them a double identity, two very different outer worlds, is even more complex, since, like other young Americans, they tend to confuse the outer identity with who they are. In part, they do this because modern consumer culture tends to encourage people to view themselves as their material selves, which makes finding a sense of self even more challenging for a person raised among different cultures and subcultures, especially if he concentrates on the question, "Which am I?," rather than realizing that he is both all and none of them.

Ashoke Ganguli seems to want to help his son discover a way in which to live with the complexity of identity. To begin with, following Bengali custom, he attempts to give him two identities, one identity, his *daknam* or pet name, who he is to the people who have known and loved him all his life, and another name, his *bhalonam,* his good name, who he is to the outside world. This will embed in him the knowledge that he is at least two people, who he is to his family and the people who care about his, and who he is to outsiders. Perhaps he also wishes to convey the idea that identity is multiple and many faceted, like reality. It is not one thing or another, but simultaneity, as his own life has been.

But the good name Ashoke later selects, Nikhil, the five-year old Gogol and his school reject; and then the eighteen-year-old Gogol rejects the name Gogol and becomes his good name, Nikhil, to everyone except sometimes his parents. Ashoke has given his son two names, two identities, but Gogol must find their meaning for himself in the country and the time in which he has been born. And with his acceptance and rejection of his two names, he begins a pattern of

first accepting and then rejecting outer identities that seem imposed on him by others and which he is seems unable to distinguish from his essential self. He seems to think he must be one thing or another, Bengali or American, rather than accepting ambiguity and multiplicity.

The name Gogol means very different things to Gogol and Ashoke. To Ashoke, the name Gogol is first of all a reminder of the way in which the reading of Gogol's short story saved his life, how it was his dropping of the page from the story that alerted rescuers that he was still alive after the train wreck and made them stop and pull him out of the wreckage where he would otherwise have perished. It is a rebirth of himself in a different form, as a person who wants to leave India and travel to other places, to form an identity for himself different from the one created by his life in India. And so, in a way, is the birth of his son. But Gogol is also a connection to his own family, to his grandfather who told him to read the Russian realists, and whom he is going to see at the time of the train wreck. There is an identity here that transcends culture, as generations of Indians (ultimately, Gogol Ganguli becomes the fourth) find a sense of life's essence in an English translation of a Russian work.

But to Gogol Ganguli, Gogol is simply a strange name that he has been saddled with by accident. It makes him too different. (And it probably doesn't help that when pronounced correctly, the name sounds like the English word "goggle"). When he is in high school and supposed to study Gogol's story in English class, he refuses to read it. And strangely, instead of leading a discussion of the story itself, his teacher tells them about Gogol's life, focusing on Gogol's inner torment and his death by self-starvation. Gogol the writer is reduced to what was most bizarre about his personal life, for the delighted horror of American teenagers. He is treated in exactly the way the living Gogol most feared. He becomes his difference, not his genius. And ironically, because of Lahiri's style, the teacher himself becomes nothing more than his clothing and his mannerisms. To Gogol Ganguli, then, Gogol becomes the identity of a foreign madman who never experienced sex or any of the other initiations that lead to an adult identity for modern Americans. And yet he is still ambivalent. As Lahiri explains, "To read the story, he believes, would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow. Still, listening to his classmates complain, he feels perversely responsible, as if his own work were being attacked" (92).

Throughout the novel, many of the most significant conversations between Gogol Ganguli and Ashoke begin with Nikolai Gogol, as Ashoke attempts to connect with his son through Gogol the same way

that the Russian writer connected him to his grandfather. But Gogol Ganguli rejects these gestures, not recognizing them for what they are. When Gogol Ganguli is fourteen, his father gives him a hard-bound copy of Gogol's short stories; Gogol thanks him politely and then continues listening to his Beatles' album. When Ashoke quotes to him, "We all came out of Gogol's Overcoat," Gogol Ganguli asks, "What's that supposed to mean?" His father doesn't answer, but merely tells him it will make sense to him someday (78). Character-istically, Lahiri doesn't tell us how it makes sense to Ashoke, or how it will later make sense to his son. Later, when Gogol is no longer officially Gogol but Nikhil, Ashoke does tell him directly part of the personal significance of the name to him, how it was by dropping the page of Gogol that he was rescued the night he almost died. When Gogol asks his father if he then reminds him of that night, Ashoke re-plies, "You remind me of everything that followed" (124). For Ashoke, Gogol is a new life, a rebirth, the creation of another life in another country, both his own life and his children's. While Gogol Ganguli is disturbed by this knowledge, Lahiri doesn't tell us precisely what he understands from it, except to imply, perhaps, that he feels to some degree guilty about having changed his name to Nikhil.

For at eighteen, Gogol rejects the name, and with it, the trans-cultural identity that his father tried to give him. Although Nikhil is an Indian name, it enables him to try on a sophisticated identity he thinks he wants, sexy, cool, "normal." (He is "Nick" in dialogue later in the novel, especially when he is talking to Americans who are not the children of immigrants). Nikhil is his overcoat which makes the ways in which he is different from other Americans invisible. Thus it is as Nikhil that he first kisses a girl, thinking afterward as he tells his friends about it, "it hadn't been Gogol who kissed Kim. Gogol had nothing to do with it" (96). It is Nikhil whom he becomes at college and as Nikhil that he has his first girlfriend. Yet despite their appar-ent intimacy, he never introduces the girlfriend Ruth to his parents, because "He cannot imagine being with her in a house where he is still Gogol" (114). And Ruth herself is part of a series of identities which Gogol tries on, in this case, probably, the identity of typical Yale student. She is never precisely who she is in herself, since we never know the traits he values in her or what they talk about or who he is to her. The relationship dissolves when she goes to England and comes back full of British mannerisms and expressions which have no place in his life. Thus, a person who had once seemed the emotional center of his life moves out of it forever, beginning a pattern which will continue throughout the course of the novel. Perhaps it is not particularly unusual that he seems to have no lasting friendships

to give him a sense of continuity either; his emotional life centers on his lovers, and when each woman ceases being his lover, she moves out of his life entirely, taking with her the self he was with her.

The overcoat, the name Nikhil, seems to represent part of the material self, along with the personal possessions, the clothing, the food, the houses and apartments. The transient love affairs like that with Ruth through which Gogol becomes a series of alternate identities are also the overcoat. Or to be more exact, his relationships provide him with possible identities which he passively accepts, at least temporarily. But to him, unlike his father, these identities come one at a time and are mutually exclusive and transitory. They are not what protect him from the outside world, but rather a disguise that he confuses for himself.

This becomes even more clear when time shifts, and we next see Gogol twelve years later when he is an architect living in New York, where he has gone in part to escape being too geographically close to his family. Although he is now a grown man, he still seems to be going through the adolescent struggle to form an identity for himself separate from the world of his parents. His being an architect seems to be a metaphor for the building of an outer self that he himself has designed. Yet he doesn't seem to have been able to do that. Tellingly, he wanted to build homes, but ends up designing staircases and closets for offices instead. Instead of making personal spaces, he creates impersonal public ones; even his own apartment remains as an impersonal space, without décor, without anything of him in it—or perhaps its very absence of personality reflects him and the way in which he lives elsewhere, in other people's spaces and material and social selves.

Maxine, a beautiful, wealthy American woman from an old WASP family has sought him out after they met at a party and absorbed him into her world and her lifestyle. He spends most of his time in the house where Maxine lives with her parents, learning their tastes in food, wine, dress, and conversation. She has a sense of herself, of the continuity of her life with that of her parents and grandparents that he thinks he will never have, because he doesn't have a sense of what he might have in common with his parents emotionally or intellectually. At one point, "He realizes that she has never wished to be anyone other than herself…This, in his opinion, was the biggest difference between them" (138). And yet he never actively tries to create another identity for himself, as his parents have done, or to make sense of the one he has by trying to understand more about the permanent relationships in his life, those with his family.

Maxine's sense of continuity and selfhood enable her to weather unhappy love affairs (she has just gone through one before meeting Gogol) without being devastated by them. Perhaps this is part of what draws him to her. She and her house and her parents' summer place in New Hampshire and their whole material world are his next identity. He is Maxine Ratcliff's lover, or, as her parents introduce him, "the architect Max brought up with her" (157). It's a lovely, expensive, comfortable identity, given to him as a love-token, which he seems to accept without thought.

The only problem is that he cannot reconcile it with his identity as Ashima and Ashoke's son and thus on some level, it feels like a betrayal. It's not just a rejection of the home and food and conversational style of his parents, or of personal habits that are not to his personal taste; to him it seems a rejection of them. Thus he imagines hearing the phone ring in the middle of the night at the summer cottage and thinks it's his parents calling him to wish him a happy birthday, until he realizes that they don't even know the number. The call is an imaginary connection to a self he has tried to cut himself away from to become something different from the identity which he thinks has been given him by his parents. It is a reminder of the guilt he feels in rejecting their world and by extension, them. He hasn't yet realized that instead of being an identity imposed on him from outside, they are part of the pattern of key relationships in his life through which he can define himself.

Gogol's way of living with Maxine and thinking about himself changes when Ashoke dies suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack. The material self is not the real self. And yet it is also necessary, just as Akaky's overcoat was. The paradox is true in the way the multiple realities and identities of "The Overcoat" are true. Ashoke has created a material self of familiar rituals, places, and foods and social self in his relationships with other Bengali families, both of which have formed a buffer for him, allowing him to live as a complex human being in a country which still seems to feel foreign to him. When Ashoke dies, all that is left of him are his material and social selves, the anonymous apartment where he was living by himself while on a fellowship at another university, his clothing, which Gogol Ganguli collects from the hospital, his rental car, the meager possessions in the apartment, the more ample possessions in the house he shared with Ashima, the scores of condolence letters that come from colleagues and friends that represent a lifetime's network of relationships. These things both are and are not Ashoke. They make the absence of his living self in all its potential so much more acute. Perhaps to feel that sense of lost potential, Gogol stays overnight

in his father's apartment, drives the car, and then returns to stay for weeks in the house in which Ashoke lived with Ashima, not only to comfort his mother but to immerse himself as much as he can in who his father was.

Lahiri describes all of Ashoke's possessions and the places he lived in intricate detail, catalog after catalog of specific and vivid descriptions of objects, their shape, color, texture, turning them into a trope for Gogol's grief. She describes the objects instead of the grief to show us more powerfully that grief's intensity, for the grief is beyond words. Only the objects are not. They alone can evoke that an approximation of that grief.

She also describes the objects because that is what Gogol focuses on while feeling that grief. Among Ashoke's possessions is a copy of *The Comedians*, Graham Greene's bitter novel about murder and revolution in Papa Doc's Haiti, in which the characters come to regard the horror of the police state with a mixture of idealism, cynicism, and a strangely energizing despair. Like "The Overcoat," it's a work about the absurdity of the human condition, and it's a key to understanding something of Ashoke's sensibility and his rich and complex intellectual life. This is the book he was reading when he died. But Gogol apparently never thinks to read it.

After his father's death, and in part perhaps because of his guilt over the way he had distanced himself from his parents, he separates himself more and more from Maxine and her world, presumably to Maxine's confusion and distress. But he himself doesn't seem to realize why he is doing this. Finally, when the relationship ends, we are told almost nothing about what he thinks or feels. We merely learn what he does and more tellingly what he fails to do. When Maxine comes to visit him in his family home, now a place of mourning of which she is not a part, he "doesn't bother to translate what people are saying (in Bengali), to introduce her to everyone, to stay close by her side" (182). It is the same technique Lahiri used to convey Gogol's desolation at the loss of his father, but now it is used to imply something different, to suggest, perhaps, the difficulty of understanding one's own motivations, especially concerning deeply felt emotions. The self that he assumed with Maxine is abandoned, an empty shell of a self he can walk away from with few regrets. It is not who Gogol is. Indeed, Gogol defines himself primarily by who he isn't, by rejecting or refusing to choose potential definitions, as he did when he was a baby and refused to choose the object that was supposed to foretell his occupation in life.

There seems to be in Gogol a reluctance to explore on his own,

to make the active choices through which some people can gain a sense of self. After Ashoke's death, a memory returns to Gogol, a memory of one of the few significant exchanges between father and son Lahiri reports which did not involve a discussion of Nikolai Gogol, perhaps because it suggests an idea about identity so different from that of Gogol, of identity as something to be actively created. (Yet it too is one of the many simultaneous and contradictory truths about reality and identity). Ashoke takes Gogol Ganguli on a walk on Cape Cod, picking their way over the rocks to the last point of land, the furthest point east, the place where they can go no further, with Gogol literally following in his father's footsteps. "Try to remember it always," his father tells him. "Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go" (187). The anecdote is an open metaphor, and although Gogol Ganguli himself doesn't seem to explore its meaning, the emblematic image seems to suggest the way in which his father had wanted to guide him, to show him that exploration could be exhilarating, that he wasn't "too little" to discover for himself where he could go and what he could do. It also suggests that the action of seeking can in itself be part of who one is, how one defines himself. However, at the time, and indeed even as an adult, Gogol doesn't seem to understand this meaning or this feeling. In fact quite the opposite sensation occurs to him later, when he is in Paris with his new wife Moushumi on what could have been like a honeymoon for them but which is not. He looks at the way in which Moushumi had created a new life in a foreign country for herself when she had lived in Paris before she met him. He thinks, "here Moushumi had reinvented herself, without misgivings, without guilt…He realizes that this is what their parents had done in America. What he, in all likelihood, will never do" (233).

The choice of Moushumi as a lover and then a wife seems to have been part of an unconscious attempt to concretize another identity, an adult identity that would connect him to his childhood world and to his family. But to say he chooses her is perhaps to misrepresent the case. She is the daughter of a Bengali couple whom Ashima and Ashoke had known since coming to America, and whom he calls at his mother's insistence. When Moushumi turns out to be attractive and interesting, the two begin dating, and then decide to get married in part because their families assume that they will marry and there seems to be no good reason not to. He passively assumes this other identity in marrying her, as he assumed the identity Maxine had offered him. Although there are habits and traits he loves about her, a factor in both his love for her and hers for him is not just the person him/herself, but the image of the self reflected back through the

other. In fact, a waiter in a restaurant once mistakes them for brother and sister rather than lovers, which suggests the way in which they are mirror images of one another, versions of the same experience, both seeking identity from material things and from sequential and temporary relationships, just as Gogol's Akaky had done with his overcoat.

But for Moushumi, however, the ways in which the partner reflects the self proves problematic, because her sense of identity seems in many ways more incomplete and insecure than Gogol's, at least in the way in which she is presented through Gogol's perceptions of her actions. Like Maxine, Moushumi has undergone a broken relationship just before she met Gogol, but unlike Maxine, Moushumi was totally devastated by this breakup because she had invested so much of herself in it. The relationship defined her, and thus its ending was a kind of death of the self. She seems to have found little else to sustain and confirm her when this part of herself is gone—except the material self, and the self created by yet another relationship, this time the one with Gogol. Tellingly, one of Moushumi's friends later accidentally calls Gogol "Graham," the name of Moushumi's former fiancé, which suggests that perhaps Gogol is simply a substitute for Graham in Moushumi's mind as well.

Moushumi loves the sense of herself which she created while she was living in France, of herself as brilliant, sensual, exotic, and cosmopolitan. But this self seems primarily material. This may be why it is so important to her to conform to the all the habits and customs of the French when she and Gogol are in Paris, not having her picture taken "like a tourist," and worried that Gogol will order a café crème at the wrong time of day and identify himself as a bumbling American tourist.

She also likes the American self she has created through her artsy-academic friends, Astrid and Donald, who also seem to be a predictable set of ideas and behaviors and possessions, nothing more than the material self that they share with thousands of other educated urban upper middle-class Americans. (One wonders about the extent to which Moushumi is to them simply an ethnic accessory to their ready-made yuppie outfits, a Pashmina shawl thrown over their designer name-brand overcoats). There must be more to them than that, and yet this is how they seem to Gogol.

And it is to them Moushumi turns for all advice on furnishings, food, and clothing, so that she gets the American material self right too, an American material self that Gogol feels he neither has nor wants a part in. The inadequacy of this upper middle-class American

material self of Astrid and Donald is suggested by an emblematic scene in which Moushumi and Gogol celebrate their first anniversary at a restaurant recommended by Astrid and Donald. The place is hard to find, unimaginatively decorated, over-priced, and the chicly tiny portions of food leave both of them ravenous, just as the yuppie material self does. This section is narrated from Gogol's point of view, with his perceptions of Moushumi's actions and his distaste for the material self she is creating for the two of them. The technique enables Lahiri to establish Gogol's growing sense of the fragility and falseness of these created selves that consist of where one lives, where one shops, what one talks about, and how one dresses. If he sees in this a reflection of his own behavior, Lahiri doesn't tell us.

The next section, dated 1999, switches from Gogol's interior perceptions to Moushumi's, making her the fourth character from whose perspective we see the world. In this section we get no sense of her attempt to build a material self for her and Gogol that dominated his recording consciousness. Rather, she seems most concerned with not being swallowed up by the identity of being a married woman, which she associates with her mother's helplessness and dependency. Again, like Gogol, her sense of herself seems to come more from refusing identities rather than trying to form one for herself by making sense of her own experiences. She has refused to change her last name to Ganguli, part of the novel's pattern of probing the relationship between naming and identity. She deliberately spends time by herself, telling Gogol she is studying, a lie that seems as necessary to her as the time alone to maintain a sense of herself as a separate entity from him. She is also troubled by what Gogol has come to represent to her in her own mind. "Though she knows it's not his fault, she can't help but associate him, at times, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind" (Lahiri 250). Gogol himself has wondered earlier "whether he represents some sort of capitulation or defeat" (Lahiri 231). Unfortunately, his intuition seems to be right. Although Gogol is referred to as Nikhil in this section and this section only, since this is how Moushumi thinks of him, the Nikhil to whom she responds is not the sophisticated man that Gogol thought he was becoming in assuming that name, but the safe and familiar man she associates with her own awkward adolescence. Just as Gogol saw in Ruth and Maxine an identity he thought he wanted and then ultimately could not reconcile with his own sense of himself, however vague and unarticulated that sense of self might have been, so Moushumi seems to see in Gogol an identity for herself that she doesn't want to be.

This pattern of looking for identities in relationships seems to

be dangerous for both Gogol and Moushumi. It is because of the sense of herself that she feels with Gogol, a self she doesn't want, that barely a year after she and Gogol are married, she has an affair with an older, less attractive man with the unlikely name of Dimitri Desjardens, a man she knew and was infatuated with back when she was the bookish girl who had crushes on unattainable men and seemed to herself doomed never to have a boyfriend. The name of Moushumi's lover is significant, again a part of the motif of naming. The first name is the same as that of the adulterous protagonist in Chekov's "The Lady with the Pet Dog" and of the tormented brother in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The last name, which looks French and yet has an Anglicized pronunciation, suggests the kind of multicultural, cosmopolitan identity Moushima would like to claim. (The pet name he has for her, "Mouse," doesn't sound particularly promising).

Gogol learns of the affair when she accidentally mentions her lover's name and then immediately reacts with such horror that Gogol understands at once that this is not just the name of some friend he doesn't know, but of a man with whom she is having an affair. All that Lahiri tells us of his response is, "And for the first time in his life, another man's name upset him more than his own" (283). At first it seems strange that it is the name, and not the man, that he hates. However, it is the name, or the part of herself symbolized by that name, that Moushumi has fallen in love with, so it is strangely appropriate that the name itself disturbs Gogol.

Lahiri tells us little more about the suffering Gogol experiences at the breakup of his marriage and nothing at all about Moushumi's feelings. Instead, we get long descriptions of each of them going about their daily lives during the period when Gogol was still unaware of the affair. In all of these descriptions, they are alone, and we see almost nothing of their interactions with each other. The effect is strangely cinematic, and suggests perhaps the ways in which the outward behavior of people is what is most knowable and yet is nevertheless so misleading.

When we see Gogol next, when he returns to his parents' house to help his mother pack up their belongings prior to selling it, he seems changed, more complex, more aware of the contradictions of his life and more accepting of them. In this section, he looks back on his relationship with Moushimi and realizes that "it seemed like a permanent part of him that no longer had any relevance or currency. As if that time were a name he'd ceased to use" (Lahiri 284). He seems to be becoming aware that the discontinuity of his life is one of the sources of his pain. He has other insights into the complexity of his identity as well, as he begins to understand that he is not defined by

one relationship, but by all the things that have happened to him and by the ways in which he has tried to understand these experiences. And he comes to some understanding as well of the irrationality and unpredictability of the life that has defined him. "Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end" (Lahiri 287).

Of course, much of anyone's life is accidental. Ashoke's life was accidental as well, having the good luck to survive a train wreck when the genial man next to him died, and having married a stranger who turned out to be a person he could love and respect. But he had also made conscious decisions to change his life, as he did in coming to America. He seemed to have inner resources his son lacks, including an acceptance of the irrational and of the fluidity of his own identity. Perhaps by understanding more about his father and what a writer like Nikolai Gogol meant to his father, Gogol could understand something of his own passivity as well and the inadequacy of the ways in which he had sought to define himself.

It is immediately after this insight about the accidental quality of his own life that he finds the copy of Nikolai Gogol's short stories which his father had given him those many years ago, and reads for the first time the inscription that his father had written for him, "The man who gave you his name, from the man who gave you your name" (288). He reads this while a celebration of multiplicity and hybridity is taking place downstairs, a Christmas and going-away party for Ashima, attended by her Bengali-American friends who have made a Christian holiday now part of their own family tradition even though they are not Christian. It seems an emblem of the potential for a continuous blended and fluid identity that Gogol may be now ready to accept about himself.

We are left to ponder with Gogol the meaning of both the sentence that Ashoke wrote and the name Gogol was given. The name can mean genius, the need to lose identity rather than find it, an understanding of the absurd tragedy of mistaking yourself for your overcoat, a world of multiple realities, of the irrationality and randomness of life, all of the things the fourteen-year-old Gogol Ganguli didn't realize he might need to understand. And yet these may have been exactly the sorts of things he needed to know to help to prevent at least some of the "out of place and wrong" things from happening to him and to enable him to create a self more of his own choosing, rather than one composed of what he had refused or what others would have chosen for him.

Finally, then, in both its style and plotline, in the characters'

repeating patterns of behavior, we get hints of how the various aspects of the self can interact and of the many things identity can be. We see for one thing that this interaction may vary from one person to the next, as the four main characters show, and that not only do individuals differ, but the same person can react differently at different times, can feel he or she "is" different aspects of the self. Gogol's unhappiness may not come from the problems of being bi-cultural, precisely, but from his own limited self-understand and his rational impulse to see alternative selves as binary and mutually exclusive. Both nationality and ethnicity affect one's sense of identity, because they are part of the material self, and yet they are not all of what one is, and there are ways in which multiple and seemingly conflicting material selves may increase the difficulties of self-knowledge. Yet there is a self beyond and within this that can never be articulated, only sensed and evoked—as are the meanings of this novel. As in Nikolai Gogol's "the Overcoat," the form, the language, and the subject matter of the novel work together to help us to find the space in which to discover our own meanings and contemplate the ineffable.

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POSTCOLONIAL MIMIC OR POSTMODERN PORTRAIT? POLITICS AND IDENTITY IN V.S. NAIPAUL'S THIRD WORLD

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The Mimic Men is a dense, complicated work of prose that allows many points of entry, all of which arrive at an inconclusive reading. Understanding this difficulty, I will not try to make a definitive reading because multiple readings must be allowed to exist. Instead, I will provide one avenue that can be explored in the text, namely, the balance of the private and public or the personal/psychological with the plural/political: a problematic, but commonly perceived split between the writing of the First and Third Worlds.

Reading Naipaul has become overly complex because of the polarized critical reception that has won him both the Nobel Prize for Literature and the label of bigoted, racist hatemonger. Admiring critics draw attention to Naipaul's style, complex structure, fine detail, and sophisticated sense of humor. Indeed, Naipaul's fiction goes further than his Caribbean contemporaries, Sam Selvon and George Lamming, to reveal the multifaceted results of decolonization. Perhaps it is his skeptical or critical positions on Third World independence and decolonization movements that cause many critics to attack Naipaul the person rather than his literature. While this article will make no efforts to defend Naipaul's often inflammatory public statements, two points on this subject must be noted. Postcolonial critics of Naipaul often object to his rejection of "whole concepts" such as First and Third World. In other words, Naipaul's criticism of the postcolonial nation/society can be seen as a result of relative or relational thinking. In this line of argument, critics object to Naipaul's treatment of the postcolonial nation that falters in comparison to the stability of the First World. Allowing any argument to be framed in terms of First and Third World categories also ignores the presence of modernity in the Third World and the presence of the Third World in the First. Furthermore, Naipaul seeks to problematize popular movements, be they colonial or anti-colonial. This negation of the unity of the "Third World"

or the "newly independent nation" can be seen as an affront to the conceptual lines previously drawn by politicians, activists, and critics with interests in areas that are often defined in "whole terms" such as nationalism, culture and economic position. We may notice that these two lines of criticism are contradictory. How is it that Naipaul both fails to understand the dialectical interaction between "worlds" while at the same time failing to differentiate the wholeness of collective independence movements? Both of these criticisms may be valid on singular occasions, but clearly *The Mimic Men* does address the convergence of colonizer and colonized. While it is true that the novel is critical of the Isabella decolonization movement, credit is given to the initial organization and blame is clearly served to those who promote radical, essential concepts that confound the movement. Naipaul's critics rarely acknowledge the importance of harsh criticism coming from within the Third World that could be more positively spun as a challenge to newly independent nations to create independent identities, build non-radicalized collations, and rule justly.

Although Naipaul's writing is admired by hybridity-minded theorists like Homi Bhabha, his novels do little by way of celebration of the hybrid or migrant that postcolonialism is so often critiqued for ignorantly celebrating. Instead, Naipaul's fiction delineates the pains of decolonization and the difficulty of independence. Ralph Singh, the narrator and central character of *The Mimic Men* is estranged from both Isabella, his place of birth and immediate source of culture and history. But nor is he unaccepted by England, the nation, history, and culture with which he aspires to identify. In a rejection of more positivist postcolonial theory, Ralph fails to find areas of growth in spaces of interstices between these cultures and identities. In order to examine why Ralph fails, I would like to look at some of the most significant actions in the novel, namely: the importance of writing, the impossibility of the authentic, and the creation of personality.

We turn to *The Mimic Men* because of the attention that this novel in particular pays to writing as a means of creating order and identity. To summarize briefly, this disjointed narrative travels between the fictionalized Caribbean island Isabella—a British colonial possession in the midst of nationalization, which contains elements of many Caribbean states but is primarily modeled on Trinidad—and England. The novel begins in England among immigrants in London, where Ralph meets his working-class English wife, Sandra.[1] The two escape London to seek revitalization on Isabella. What proceeds is

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[1] Ironically they meet in the Broadcasting Services canteen from where "the very voice of the metropolitan authority and commerce" is spoken to the colonies.

the happiest part of the book, wherein Ralph and Sandra enjoy the setting. However, boredom as a result of lack of activity and meaning quickly erodes the relationship, causing Sandra to leave both Ralph and Isabella. The narrative remains on the island but moves back in time to Ralph's childhood, which allows for an opportunity to elaborate on his family and initial motivation for departing for England. After the attention to Ralph's adolescence is complete, the narrator continues Ralph's story when he returns from England. In this section, we witness the rise to power that Ralph and his childhood friend Browne make by becoming political figures and eventually power holders on the island. Ralph's position of power sends him once more to England, this time to lobby for nationalization of industry. However after making a half-hearted effort, Ralph curiously loses interest in representing the nationalist party line; he returns to Isabella as a failure. The final period of the novel sees Ralph escape Isabella as a political refugee to London, where at forty years of age he seems poised to lead a peripheral existence at a transient hotel.

Writing and the written word

The written word, the act of writing, and the power of narrative figure as important principles in understanding Ralph's relation to the British tradition. Returning to a theme developed in the earlier novel *The Mystic Masseur*, Naipaul illustrates the authority that the colonizers have over the written word. However, in *The Mimic Men*, that control is less obvious as Ralph grows up idealizing stories and myths of Europe and India, cultural forces of authenticity that shape his Isabella, and also define the island as a second-rate imitation. We can see this construction develop in the way that Ralph and Sandra grow apathetic to the beauty of the Caribbean after listening to pastoral odes to America, Britain, and the Continent espoused by the cosmopolitans on Isabella (58). The cosmopolitans complain of the lack of a good symphony and similar artifacts of high culture on Isabella. With this criticism, the charm of the island wanes for Ralph and Sandra, causing them initially to look for culture, but upon failing they search for escape instead. Ironically, one such place of entertainment and escape becomes the airport, where they enjoy listening to the names of the foreign cities (72). These scenes portray the power of the story and myth of the First World, or metropole, which displaces the beauty of the periphery.[2] Because this construction goes

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[2]   The airport is also something of a no-man's land between nations, a position of liminality where you are leaving your present location, but not yet in your future location. In this sense, the fondness for the airport can be read as a desire for escape.

unchallenged, value is framed around culturally specific items that originate in the centre. The pastorals of the centre— the cosmopolitan voice that critiques Isabella's lack of centres of national and cultural arenas—exemplify the power of Western writing to influence the imagination of the colony and create a hierarchy of culture, whereby the colony defines itself on the colonizer's terms. This construction is particularly powerful because it is the colonized who lust for Western commodities and traditions.

Examples of written text appear in Ralph's memory of the island, these cases pointing towards an authority that shapes this construction of Isabella as a second-class society defined in relation to the centre. Ralph is in awe of the book when Mr. Deschampsneuf, of the old French colonial family, shows him a passage of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, where the family, albeit in very minor terms, is alluded to. For Ralph, this bond with Europe and history illustrates the very connections that were previously fantastic: "the outside world was stripped of its quality of legend and reduced to the comprehensible" (188). In pointing out this allusion, Deschampsneuf reminds Ralph that indeed history and power are consolidated in literature, a literature that historically has offered little material for Isabella to build upon. Indeed an early account related by Ralph's father tells of a British "imperialist pamphleteer," James Anthony Froude, who hated Blacks and the French (80). Ralph's father, like Mr. Deschampsneuf, derives some fame from an allusion to his own personage in the text. However, in the case of Ralph's father the reference comes from *The Missionary Martyr of Isabella*. This text is made up of "extracts from the missionary's diary, his wife's diary, letters, sermons"; it also includes "many photographs which contrived to make Isabella look exceedingly wild" (93). Among these photographs is the image of Ralph's father who "looked faintly aboriginal and lost, at the end of the world" (93). The missionaries present Isabella in their writing as a wild, scary place, so much so that for Ralph, "It was not an island I recognized" (93). The representation of the island not only seems foreign, but the description of Ralph's father appears faulty to both father and son as Ralph labels the text: "The book, of magic, was in his bookcase; but he never spoke of it; I never saw him reading it. Perhaps he too felt that it described another man" (94-95). It is this biased secondary representation that authenticates the centre's presentation of the world which leads Ralph to look for validation from the colonizer. In failing to challenge the missionary's text, Ralph allows history to limit his avenues for independent thinking and creation.

Writing not only shapes Ralph's paralytic understanding of history but it also affects his memory and ability to imagine. It is important

to understand the extent of the written text's ability to shape colonial identity, a powerful dynamic which forces the colonized to understand their experience in relational terms to the centre. In the following passage the narrator describes the effect of English pastorals in influencing his vision of his grandparents and family history:

> In my imagination I saw my mother's mother leading her cow, a scene of pure pastoral: calendar pictures of English gardens superimposed on our Isabellan villages of mud and grass: village lanes on cool mornings, the ditches green and grassy, the water crystal, the front gardens of thatched huts bright with delicate flowers of every hue. (95)

Ralph has a vivid imagination, but ironically, with the aid of his colonial education, he imagines his ancestors as British villagers. This construction seems likely because of the colonial hierarchy of culture: the beautiful and the pastoral are represented in literature located exclusively in the centre. Ralph does not want to identity with "aboriginal, wild" ancestors living "on the end of the world," but would prefer to relate to a more proper and commonly recognized vision of the English countryside. Perhaps even more troubling is Ralph's inability to distinguish his own memories of childhood from his desire to relate to pastorals of Englishness. In this excerpt, Ralph re-imagines an early moment from his colonial education:

> My first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have. (97)

Ralph's memories, so immersed in identification with Englishness, distort his understanding of the past. In this sense, writing shapes the way that Ralph understands history, creates his identity, and imagines his future. These primary interactions with writing will affect the way that Ralph understands text and identity as an adult as well.

As Ralph matures, his attitude towards writing oscillates between desires for political action and a paradoxical need for escape. Writing provides a legitimate avenue for social activism; therefore Ralph and Browne found a newspaper and continue to gather momentum for the nationalization movement with their famous speeches.[3] But the goals of social activism are constantly doubted as the narrator at times treats writing as an entirely personal act of self-discovery, unconnected to politics. The narrator, writing after the fall from power, expresses sentiments of both despair and hope in the writing of colonial history:

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[3] I am not going to explore this avenue here, but the speeches are a textual creation worth analyzing in their own right.

> The empires of our time were short-lived, but they have altered the
> world forever; their passing away is their least significant feature. It was
> my hope to sketch a subject which, fifty years hence, a great historian
> might pursue. For there is no such thing as history nowadays; there
> are only manifestos and antiquarian research; and on the subject of
> empire there is only the pamphleteering of churls. (32)

This passage begins by expressing the importance of the beginning
of the post-colonial period, the area of interstices where culture is in
transition from overt domination to covert dependence. It is in this
period of transition that Ralph questions the validity of his voice,
doubts his ability to write, which would seem like a rejection of his-
tory, but yet he appeals to history to validate his experience.[4] Ralph
proceeds to harangue both the colonial and postcolonial for the lack
of perception of the wrongs committed as well as the failure to suc-
cessfully repair those wrongs.

The first revelation Ralph has about writing as an adult concerns
its lack of legitimacy or authenticity. Using the language of revolution,
Ralph is in awe of the emotion he can provoke in a crowd but simul-
taneously considers his own speech false. He explains, "We spoke
as honest men. But we used borrowed phrases which were part of
the escape from thought, from that reality we wanted people to see
but could ourselves now scarcely face. We enthroned indignity and
distress, we went no further" (216). In this instance Ralph manages to
appropriate the language of revolution but only so far as to produce
a racialized coalition. In other words, he has mastered the ability to
borrow the language, to act the part of revolutionary but fails to think
independently or in a revolutionary manner. Although aware of his
failure, Ralph is still using this appropriated language of revolution for
political ends, whereas language and text will become pure escape
by the end of his career.

Having returned to the island in disgrace, Ralph spends his last
days on Isabella in his home surrounded by armed guards. Members
of the Hindu minority call on him to stop the brutal race riots aimed at
their people. Rather than muster language to prevent the atrocities,
Ralph offers this cold wisdom:

> I offered them the comfort I offered myself. I said, "Think about this
> as something in a book, in a newspaper. Do not give me names. Do

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4   Doubt in general of course is not specific postcoloniality. But I read Ralph's
doubting as going beyond the normal philosophizing on human existence when this
doubt is of the ability of his own writing to produce history. That seems to be a form of
doubt specific to subaltern groups. This doubt does not signal a transition for Ralph:
he is not becoming aware of histories shortcomings--in fact, he is trapping himself
between British history and the lack of Isabellan history.

> not tell me how people died. Say instead, "Race riots occurred". Say, "There was loss of life". (263)

In depersonalizing the language, Ralph hopes to escape the results of the ill founded movement that his borrowed revolutionary rhetoric created. By making the analogy specifically to text, Ralph ties writing to interior escape. This act of distancing is a wholly personal understanding and the opposite of political action. At this point the value of text is completely de-politicized as power to change remains elusive to the colonized.

After this low point in Ralph's understanding of text, we see what may be a cautious optimism. Although the memoir might have begun for reasons of escape, Ralph finds value in continuing in an ambivalent desire to shape his past:

> By this re-creation the event became historical and manageable; it was given its place; it will no longer disturb me. And this became my aim; from the central fact of this setting, my presence in this city which I have known as student, politician and now as refugee-immigrant, to impose order on my own history to abolish that disturbance which is what a narrative in sequence might have led me to. (266)

By finally telling his story on his own terms, in his own language, Ralph declares himself capable of finding peace with the past. However what remains is the point of distance and distortion that writing can create, as with the race riots, where we might wish to question the narrator's handling of the past. In other words, has he recorded the history that is most manageable, a history that will merely allow order? Furthermore, does Ralph learn anything from history or does his act of writing negate history by simplifying his past to a convenient self-serving narrative? The novel insists that this point remain undecided, perhaps as an allegorical challenge to the direction for postcolonial nations, as Ralph considers two possible futures for his life in exile:

> I might go into business again. Or I might spend the next ten years working on a history of the British Empire. I cannot say. Yet some fear of action remains. I do not wish to be re-engaged in that cycle from which I have freed myself. (274)

Ralph remains tantalizingly close to entering the public as an authentic speaker; however the fear of mimicry arises to complicate the move towards independent expression. If Ralph holds on to the fear of being trapped in the colonial paradigm, it seems his future will be escapism and obscurity. To understand how Ralph's writing and personality have become trapped, it is necessary to address the binary structure of the colonized identity in this novel.

The impossibility of authenticity

We have seen how writing and text paradoxically figure as vehicles to both public and private power over history, both of which influence the narrator's understanding of himself and his position in the world. However, I would now like to address an aporia of postcolonial identity expressed in this novel, which I will call the impossibility of authenticity. Colonialism limits Ralph's identity and future to two roles: the mimic man or the colonized man. At least in Ralph's understanding, he has the option of idealizing the colonial culture and, therefore, trying to become the colonial man or adopting the colonized, racialized position of "aboriginal savage." Clearly Ralph's colonial education has pushed him to aspire to the center. As he notes, "at Isabella Imperial we were natural impersonators" (144). This early mimicry training leads an adult Ralph to see himself, "not as an individual but as a performer, in that child's game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command of this tormentor" (85). In these pessimistic terms, Ralph makes this analogy between his scripted identity, which is effected out of a desire to assimilate. Allowing himself go beyond the level of impersonation, Ralph even regrets the present depoliticized decolonization period, in comparison to his colonial day-dream, wherein he is the master, supervising the depoliticized, black labors (34-35). In this dangerous avenue, Ralph allows himself to live in the fantasy of being clearly defined apart from the long-suffering segment of oppression, the black majority. Ralph's motivation for impersonation also stems from a loathing for the perceived lack of Isabellan history and culture. He scathingly comments:

> To be descended from generations of idlers and failures, an unbroken line of the unimaginative, unenterprising and oppressed, had always seemed to me to be a cause for deep, silent shame. (89)

Buying into this hierarchy, Ralph distances himself from his own heritage and negates any counterargument, by assuming the colonialist's justification for colonialism. By continuing to define himself as closer to Britain than Isabella, Ralph sets himself up for problems of assimilation to one culture, which he wishes to negate, and another that will refuse him. Although the problem of racial identity is articulated, Ralph fails to escape this double bind by continuing to act in relation to the other's expectations of his nationality and race. Comparatively, Ralph is entering into a much older debate that begins with Plato's allegory of the cave. The primitive identity is ignorant of questions of identity before colonization which seeks to shape the colonized. The backlash to colonization is nationalism which asserts an invented pre-colonial identity that did not exist prior to the colonizer's arrival.

Ralph has arrived at this critical crossroads of identity, but is failing to forge an independent creation, as he is aware of the ignorance of not doing so, but likewise is in rapture of British power and authority.

In no scene is this bind more apparent than in Ralph's meeting with the wealthy Isabellan landowner, Lord Stockwell. Ralph has been invited to dinner at Stockwell's estate during his political visit to London. Stockwell remembers Ralph's father's mystical phase, near the end of his life, when he lived in the bush as a pseudo-religious figure going by the name Gurudeva. For Stockwell, the memory of Gurudeva is couched in orientalized material, Gurudeva's "little hut by the sea," his "queue of people waiting to see him," as well as his "yellow dhoti" and "bare chest" (249-250). These images mixed in with Gurudeva's simple advice to his followers represent the type of other that Stockwell and the dinner guests can understand and value, whereas Ralph's mimicking personality as an English gentleman is seen as inauthentic. Ralph thinks to himself, "He was disappointed in me; that I could feel" (250). This disappointment stems from Stockwell's desire to encounter the stereotype of Hindu Caribbean mystic as well as his disdain for what is otherwise merely a colonial servant. Naipaul's narrative clearly does address the blurring and problematizing of the First and Third World construction by highlighting Ralph's lack of freedom. The colonized is forced into accepting the role of the stereotypical native that is accepted by the centre, or mimicking the colonizer, to gain power but exist as a second rate in relation to the colonizer. For Ralph this movement between nations and identities leads to a detachment from fixed identity markers; he feels comfortable in neither role or either island.

Much of this discomfort is the result of an identity that is built upon comparison to the center. Sadly for Ralph, "Everything of note or beauty reminded me of my own disturbance, spoiling both the moment and the object" (30). When Ralph is forced to recognize his liminality, it is like a torture. Despite his best efforts to impersonate the colonizer, to have the fixed identity, he is reminded of his differences. However, one distinction remains even less enviable than the limen of fluid identity. For Ralph, the worst-case scenario is to be understood as the savage, black native.

The result of the impossibility of authenticity climaxes when Ralph is forced to ask a British minister for help with the nationalization issue. After being harshly rebuked for taking up the Minister's time, the following exchange leads to a self-revelation that concludes the identity issue around which Ralph has so carefully constructed his identity:

> Then I spoke the sentence which tormented me almost as soon as I
> had said it…I said, 'How can I take this message back to my people?'
> 'My people': for that I deserved all I got. He said: 'You can take back
> to your people any message you like.' And that was the end. (245)

The Minister, like Lord Stockwell, has no interest in Ralph's personal
or Isabella's national issues of identity and clearly sees Ralph as a
simple stooge in the colonial machine, a colonial politician playing
the colonial game, without any power or importance. For Ralph,
this harsh characterization forces him to consider the cruelty of his
identity's being confined to that of mimic man, but also demonstrates
that these British higher-ups view colonial mimic men as subservi-
ent blacks. For in this passage Ralph is as much an Isabellan as the
blacks who work in the fields, the other that Ralph has for so long
feared and hated. The question at this point becomes, does Ralph
choose to identify with the colonizer, or does he choose to disdain
the Isabellans? If we adopt the position of the latter, then we push this
narrative into the realm of personal psychology. Or is Ralph trained,
forced to adopt this problematic identity by his colonial education,
his migratory state and his minority status? This would in turn lead us
towards a public-political ends. It is now necessary to consider how
Ralph's identity has been formed.

Creation of Personality

The conflict with personality in this novel juxtaposes independent
creation with definition by the other. Again I must emphasize that this
juxtaposition relies on the tension between personal and public influ-
ences on and interpretations of Ralph. In this segment of the analysis,
we turn towards the two possibilities of the origin of personality: the
personality formed by the other and the personality freely created.

The problem of developing an independent identity begins with
the influence of history. One of Sandra's more significant remarks
to Ralph encapsulates the problem of appropriating our history to
suit our future. Ralph remembers the statement: "'A father,' she said
to me at our first meeting, 'is one of nature's handicaps'" (43). This
notion exploits two national consciousness metaphors: should we
interpret the father as the colonizing British or the oppressive weight
of nationalism and national culture? If we complicate these metaphors
by considering Gurudeva, then Ralph could be seen as handicapped
by both his father's earlier personality of missionary boy or his latter
mystic phase as a social leader. But if we read this passage literally,
the statement could be read as avoiding issues of politics to reside
in the personal-psychological.

Another method of engaging Ralph's identity construction would be to return to Aristotle. In *Poetics*, Aristotle contrasts the thinking of the historian and the poet to conclude that the historian's understanding of the possible is limited to what has happened, whereas the poet is free to imagine what could conceivably happen. Aristotle claims, "The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (Part IX). Ralph attempts writing but is bound by the historical construction of particularity, as he is unable to express himself beyond the confines of colonial or colonized constructions of identity.

As an unpopular child, Ralph had previously tried to distinguish himself by being "nervous," which was an act of impersonation and competition with the most nervous boy, Hok. However, Ralph's development takes an unexpected turn when he becomes a cricketer for his college team. The result is a change in identity, a revelation of the ease by which one's identity can change to provide a new source of confidence. The narrator describes this change:

> While I was 'nervous' I was in fact unsure of myself. Seeing myself as weak and variable and clinging, I had looked for similar weakness in others. This was the cynicism I now arrested. The discovery that many were willing to take me for what I said I was was pure joy. It was like a revelation of wholeness. (122)

This boyhood discovery would seem to allow for independent creation even if that creation is based on a falsehood.[5] At two other points in the narrative Ralph experiences similar moments of freedom. Upon arriving in London as a new man Ralph feels free to create himself anew and once again when first returning to Isabella from his University studies. In London he observes, "It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive" (19). The role that he chooses is that of the dandy, a role he plays by constantly dating and rarely working. But Ralph's freedom seems questionable when he implicates Lieni as the driving force behind his dandyism. Ralph remembers, "It was Lieni who dressed me, approved of me, and sent me out to conquer" (20). Now it seems explicit that Ralph would like to minimize his self-governess. Furthermore, after having praised the freedom he felt to create himself, Ralph posits, "We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others"

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[5]   It is a falsehood because Ralph is playing cricket to promote an image of himself as a sporting type, while remaining aware that he is not playing for fun or out of any sense of passion. It should not be surprising that Ralph is not a very good cricket player.

(20). Ralph's position moves increasingly closer to dependence on the other as he concedes identity to outside of his control upon the end of his first stay in London. As the narrator puts it:

> I had tried to give myself a personality. It was something I had tried more than once before, and waited for the response in the eyes of others. But now I no longer knew what I was; ambition became confused, then faded; and I found myself longing for the certainties of my life on the island of Isabella, certainties which I had once dismissed as shipwreck. (26)

It seems that in the pressure of London, Ralph's constructed personalities clash with what others expect of him, becoming too difficult to challenge and landing him in a voiceless role of mimicry. But before we allow this passage to sway the reading into the politics of the colonizer defining the colonized, we must weight Ralph's interaction with the unnamed English University student who seeks guidance and validation from Ralph. Of the student Ralph thinks, "He was like me: he needed the guidance of other men's eyes" (18). When decentered from the postcolonial discourse, the narrator's position on identity moves closer to a postmodern, interior psychology musing.

Despite this identity crisis in London, Ralph's return to Isabella allows for a remembrance of the lesson learned as a cricketer. Leading the life of a dandy on the island, Ralph rediscovers his ability to shape himself: "at last my 'character' became not what others took it to be but something personal and ordained" (59). Of course this phase of confidence will erode too, culminating with Browne's urging to political life. At a critical moment, when Sandra has left and Ralph is particularly unsure of himself, Browne offers wholeness. The narrator remembers: "He presented me with a picture of myself which it reassured me to study…He presented me with a role. I did not reject him" (204). This final search for meaning, justification, and identity in politics is, of course, ill-fated.

Classifying *The Mimic Men*

Thus far I have illustrated the themes of writing, authenticity, and personality that oscillate between begging for both private and public readings. In order to address this difficulty of interpreting *The Mimic Men*, to understand approaches that treat the text as a First World style interior psychological study or conversely as a Third World public-political novel, it is essential to look at the classification of the postcolonial novel. Jameson's essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," although too reductive, is one of the most essential essays in the postcolonial critical canon. In this essay,

Jameson distinguishes Third World literature as relational to the West, as the Third World is created by political and economic pressure. For Jameson this common struggle produces a postcolonial style of writing that interacts with international and therefore political issues. Jameson then uses this categorization of Third World Literature to create a canon, wherein the defining feature goes beyond location and history to include structure and political resonance. Perhaps modern Western Literature has tended more towards Freud, while Third World Literature and postcolonial studies have urged readers to reconsider the role of politics and social action in art, or as Jameson puts it, "Marx." However, is Jameson's distinction a self-fulfilling prophesy of postcolonialism? In other words, we might more skeptically read the development of Third World texts being published, studied and defended in the West because of their adoption by First World Marxists eager to challenge Western Literature's lack of interest in politics.

Naipaul's writing is brutally honest. As postcolonial theory continues to shift with critics steering the discourse into yesterday's constructions of Marxism, Feminism, and Structuralism, we readers must be aware of the pitfalls of such navigation lest we become subsumed into those narrow non-intersecting discussions of theory. When used to its full potential, postcolonial theory appropriates elements of the previous turns in critical theory, because postcolonial theory is merely a conglomeration of past approaches conjoined. *The Mimic Men* should remind critics that the Third World is not wholly Third World, not consumed completely in politics or issues of identity, although these issues are of course there as well. Naipaul's novel moves the reader in between "Marx and Freud," while touching upon the tradition of the novel, but it also offers innovation as well by blending cultures and confusing our perceptions of both the Caribbean and Europe.

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EL DESPLAZAMIENTO DE BINARISMOS
Y LA FUNCIÓN RETÓRICA DE "LA HIBRIDEZ"
EN *NAUFRAGIOS*[1]

Marlene Hansen Esplin

El "yo" que propone Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca a lo largo de la relación o reconstrucción de sus encuentros con la gente indígena en la región que hoy constituye parte de México y el suroeste de los Estados Unidos difiere radicalmente de la voz narrativa que suele caracterizar las otras relaciones y narraciones del periodo colonial español. Por una parte, el "yo" de la relación es un náufrago. Como arguye Beatriz Pastor, la relación de Álvar Núñez invierte o desmitifica muchas de las convenciones típicas del discurso del conquistador al relacionarse con el fracaso, la debilidad, la vulnerabilidad, la desorientación y la humanización de los indios así como con la barbarie de los españoles (Pastor 294-298). Por otra parte, Álvar Núñez se caracteriza principalmente por ser alguien culturalmente híbrido. Insinúa que sus infortunios le obligan a convivir, trabajar e identificarse con los indios, de modo que sus experiencias le hacen cuestionar algunos de los estereotipos y las oposiciones binarias que forman y estabilizan el discurso colonial: e.g., europeo/indio, amo/esclavo, cristiano/pagano, civilizado/salvaje. Luis Leal y Juan Bruce-Novoa sugieren que la narración que construye Álvar Núñez sirve como uno de los primeros textos chicanos, ya que el narrador ocupa un lugar intermedio o de "mediador" (Adorno 329) y enfatiza las ambigüedades y las convergencias de las caracterizaciones de dos comunidades supuestamente distintas u opuestas. Bruce-Novoa propone que la reconstrucción de sus experiencias se basa en "los mares de la significación" (291).

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[1] El título de las dos primeras ediciones del texto (1542, 1555) era sólo *La relación*. Fue retitulado en 1749 por Andrés González Barcia (Bruce-Novoa 292). La edición de Cátedra—adecuadamente anotada—trata de tomar en cuenta las diferencias entre las ediciones, e.g. incluye el proemio del autor frecuentemente excluido en ediciones más contemporáneas. Sin embargo, es importante señalar cómo el cambio del título predicaba transformaciones de la recepción e interpretación del libro.

Me pregunto cómo funcionan los binarismos coloniales, de qué manera el texto de Álvar Núñez los interroga y si el posicionamiento híbrido de Álvar Núñez, el protagonista (o de cualquier otro), realmente le ofrece un lugar privilegiado desde el que puede desestabilizar y efectivamente deconstruir estas polaridades. Al mismo tiempo, me planteo examinar si Álvar Núñez, el autor, manipula su posicionamiento cultural para legitimar su historia y ganar la simpatía y la recompensa del rey. Rolena Adorno explica, "The success of Cabeza de Vaca's writing can be explained by the fact that it took a counter-conquest position. [. . .] Cabeza de Vaca advocated peaceful conversion of the natives and demonstrated that good treatment of the Indians produced results that served both the well-being of native populations and the economic interests of Spaniards" ("Discursive" 220). Propongo que las posibilidades de cada inclinación pluralista o relativista de la relación de Álvar Núñez son mitigadas o atenuadas por el carácter hagiógrafo o auto-justificador del texto. Quizás el binarismo predominante de la relación sea la yuxtaposición de discursos coloniales y discursos pos- o anti-coloniales.

Al nivel fundamental, las oposiciones binarias que informan "la colonialidad" son relaciones de poder: e.g, hombre/mujer, blanco/negro, adulto/niño, amo/esclavo, cristiano/pagano, centro/periferia. "El colonialismo" funciona al mantener o vigilar estas relaciones de poder, de manera que la colonialidad es el estado o el orden en que una nación, grupo o individuo ejerce autoridad sobre otra nación, grupo o persona. Aunque pretenda aparentar estabilidad o permanencia, el orden de la colonialidad siempre resulta inestable, ya que los colonizadores, que ocupan las posiciones de poder, se enfrentan con la constante necesidad de recurrir a estrategias discursivas para poder mantener su autoridad y sus lugares predilectos de enunciación. El planteamiento de oposiciones binarias —que muchas veces se manifiestan por medio del uso de estereotipos— es una de las estrategias primordiales de este discurso. Los colonizadores reconocen, explícita o implícitamente, que estas construcciones discursivas son necesarias para preservar las jerarquías que organizan y dan sentido y seguridad a sus relaciones sociales. Como resultado, los binarismos —extremos o polaridades— abundan en el lenguaje, el arte, la política, los medios de comunicación masiva, las iglesias, las escuelas y otras instituciones sociales. Estas instituciones se adaptan a y, al mismo tiempo, perpetúan estas polaridades.

De esta manera, el discurso "poscolonial" se aventura a exponer la producción de estas estrategias discursivas y deconstruir o deshacer los lugares de enunciación junto con las prácticas de los sujetos que enuncian. Walter Mignolo explica:

> el lugar de la crítica y teoría postcoloniales [sic] sería el de la perma-
> nente construcción de lugares diferenciales de enunciación en los
> marcos discursivos [. . .] construidos por los sucesivos momentos
> del proceso de occidentalización desde la expansión capitalista.
> Como prácticas culturales, la crítica y la teoría postcolonial contribui-
> rán a mantener en constante vigilancia, hasta disolverlos, conceptos
> que conservan la divisiones imperiales. (81)

Idealmente, la deconstrucción poscolonial de estas polaridades con-
siste en invertir o desplazar estas relaciones del poder. Al producirse
este desplazamiento de las relaciones jerárquicas entre colonizador
y colonizado, los textos poscoloniales aspiran a abrir nuevos luga-
res de expresión y enunciación. Como opina Sara Castro-Klarén,
"El poscolonialismo ofrece un espacio intelectual donde sujetos
marginales y marginalizados pueden levantar una (¿su?) voz, inter-
pelarse, interpelar y ser interpretados" (970). Pero, como también
insinúa Castro-Klarén al preguntarse si la voz que levantan los mar-
ginalizados es de ellos mismos, las aspiraciones y las pretensiones
del discurso poscolonial son problemáticas ya que ellas también se
nutren de los sistemas que se contraponen. En muchos casos, los
sujetos colonizados o todos los que se esfuerzan a enunciar (ha-
blar y escribir) el discurso poscolonial sólo pueden expresarse por
medio del lenguaje del colonizador y sólo después de haber sido
instruidos en y autorizados por las instituciones educacionales que
los colonizadores establecieron. En el caso de Álvar Núñez —au-
tor y narrador— él nunca puede desligarse totalmente de su base
imperialista y evangelizadora española, ni de sus ansiedades por la
censura y la inquisición.

Dado que los sujetos y voces poscoloniales no pueden librarse
totalmente de los legados coloniales, su único recurso es interrogar
y tratar de apropiarse de lo que Homi Bhabha denomina modos de
representación del discurso colonial (94). Bhabha propone que el
estereotipo, que mayormente se caracteriza como una oposición bi-
naria, es la estrategia principal del discurso colonial (94), y como tal,
la más fuerte afirmación de jerarquías imaginadas y la más dañosa
articulación de otredad. La fuerza y el daño del estereotipo derivan
de la manera en que el estereotipo se instala en las instituciones y
relaciones de la sociedad. De este modo, los sujetos poscoloniales
se centran no sólo en denunciar la existencia y la falsedad de los
estereotipos u otras polaridades sino también en deconstruirlos al
analizar cómo están producidos y diseminados. Idealmente, un
análisis cuidadoso del estereotipo puede culminar en abrir o crear
otro espacio de enunciación crítica.

Claro que la ansiedad por deconstruir oposiciones binarias, que
se construyen sobre la base de estereotipos, no sólo se manifiesta

en los posteriores textos literarios que intentan reconstruir, reevaluar y reimaginar los encuentros de la conquista y el periodo colonial hispanoamericano sino que esta inquietud también está vigente en los textos de la misma época colonial. Al tratar de aproximarse a estos textos, coloniales o más contemporáneos, vale hacerse varias preguntas: ¿Cuáles son las oposiciones binarias de estos textos y cómo son representadas? ¿Quiénes son los que representan y quiénes están representados? ¿Sólo pueden enunciar o articular el discurso poscolonial los sujetos marginalizados o los seres híbridos? ¿Quiénes son los que ocupan los lugares del poder? Bhabha sugiere que más vale analizar el proceso de significación o articulación del estereotipo en sí mismo, ya que "the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself" (100). Este crítico propone que la deconstrucción del estereotipo sólo se consigue cuando uno se enfrenta con su efectividad, con las formas en que ha sido producido y perpetuado. De acuerdo con el razonamiento de Bhabha, el acto de subrayar la inestabilidad discursiva de los estereotipos y extremos discursivos que caracterizan los textos que revisitan el periodo colonial —los indios salvajes y los españoles civilizados, los indios ingenuos y los españoles educados— vale más que sólo señalar la existencia de estas categorías y conceptos. Lo importante es discernir las contradicciones internas de estas construcciones discursivas, por ejemplo, ¿Cómo pueden ser los indios ingenuos y salvajes al mismo tiempo; los españoles cristianos y violadores; los negros brutos y engañosos; las mujeres vírgenes y putas? Siendo que estos estereotipos tratan de definir u homogeneizar a un grupo real e histórico, siempre tienen que ajustarse o reinventarse ante la realidad más compleja de sus sujetos quienes siempre forman parte de un concreto y distinto contexto histórico. Los textos y obras que más ponen en entredicho el discurso colonial son aquellos que desplazan la estabilidad de sus principales estrategias discursivas, en otras palabras, los estereotipos y las oposiciones binarias.

Tomando en cuenta esta discusión del discurso colonial y las estrategias de disolución del discurso dominante tomadas por los sujetos y los textos poscoloniales, la relación de *Naufragios* es particularmente curiosa por la forma en que revela la desarmonía interna del discurso colonial y, también, la manera en que estabiliza otros aspectos del mismo discurso —la necesidad de hacer conversos a los indios y la obligación de los indios de hacerse conversos y sujetos del rey. Álvar Núñez enfatiza las contradicciones o inestabilidades internas del discurso colonial al crear insólitos retratos que simpatizan

con los indios y al insinuar que él se identifica con ellos. En general, el efecto es el de desplazar algunos de los binarismos y estereotipos más patentes del discurso colonial; al identificarse con los indios y querer disociarse de los otros cristianos, el "yo" que crea Álvar Núñez parece deconstruir las oposiciones binarias entre español e indio, cristiano y bárbaro. Al igual que los indios, él se acostumbra a andar desnudo y sin botas. Él convive con ellos, trabaja con ellos y participa en sus ritos domésticos y ceremoniales. En uno de los episodios más dramáticos de la relación, él cuenta cómo los indios sienten pena por él y hasta lloran al ver su desventura. Como lo describe Pastor, en la relación de Álvar Núñez "esos mismos indígenas que han sido identificados como salvajes, bárbaros y enemigos a lo largo de la Conquista lejos de aprovechar de la debilidad española para acabar con los invasores, se comportan como hermanos, y lloran y comparten el infortunio de Alvar [sic] Núñez y sus hombres" (312). Este episodio de *Naufragios* contrasta con otro en que Álvar Núñez se encuentra con los otros cristianos e insiste en aclarar que él y sus compañeros son diferentes de ellos, "Que nosotros sanábamos los enfermos y ellos mataban los que estaban sanos; y que nosotros veníamos desnudos y descalzos, y ellos vestidos y en caballos y con lanzas. Que nosotros no teníamos codicia de ninguna cosa, [. . .] y los otros no tenían otro fin sino robar todo cuanto hallaban, y nunca daban nada a nadie" (205). En este instante, Álvar Núñez el protagonista redefine o problematiza la identidad discursiva de los cristianos o los colonizadores. Al subrayar las diferencias entre cristianos y cristianos, indios e indios —habla de "mis indios" y de otros indios más salvajes— él señala, de una manera no sólo teórica sino también práctica, la inestabilidad de estas denominaciones estereotípicas.

Las múltiples ambigüedades del texto han incitado a muchos críticos y lectores de Álvar Núñez a leer al texto como proto-moderno o anticipatorio de teorías poscoloniales, ideas éstas relacionadas con las posibilidades pluralistas de la hibridez o el mestizaje. Uno de estos lectores es Nicolás Echevarría quien, en su película *Cabeza de Vaca* (1991), hace hincapié en la manera en que Álvar Núñez se identifica con los indios, particularmente en su representación como chamán. Como una recreación de una recreación, la película de Echevarría se toma aun más libertades creativas con el personaje de Álvar Núñez. En su primera experiencia o iniciación chamánica, Álvar Núñez parece perder el control de sus movimientos; él se configura, literalmente, en el médium que el otro chamán indio usa para sanar al enfermo. La distancia entre él y su otro, en tanto que conquistador e indio, está totalmente abolida. El "Álvar Núñez" de

este texto cinematográfico llega a ser un personaje culturalmente híbrido ya que se identifica con dos mundos y culturas supuestamente incompatibles y contradictorios. Su personaje afirma esta transformación en la escena en que resucita a un muerto al hacer magia indígena, mientras sus compañeros de España lo observan horrorizados y le dicen que lo que hace no es natural. Sus protestas son un reconocimiento implícito de la manera en que la identificación de Álvar Núñez con la cultura indígena desestabiliza y choca con los imaginarios tradicionales y las típicas construcciones discursivas de estos españoles; su horror ante la magia de Álvar Núñez se relaciona con lo que Kimberle López define como "la ansiedad de identificación" (18), o sea la ansiedad o el temor de estar tan intimadamente relacionado con el Otro que uno se pierde en él y las fronteras del "yo" se desvanecen (18). De acuerdo con el concepto de López, la ansiedad de los compañeros de Álvar Núñez tiene muy poco que ver con él. A lo mejor la indignación de ellos señala su propia ansiedad al tener que enfrentarse con la deconstrucción de sus creencias y las oposiciones binarias sobre quiénes son los indios y quiénes son ellos mismos. Tania de Miguel Magro arguye, el Álvar Núñez que representa Echevarría, "will eventually become neither Spanish nor Indian but rather both things at the same time" (59). Como un lector de *Naufragios*, a Echevarría le interesa explorar y reimaginar los aspectos híbridos o sincréticos del texto original.

Claro que la película de Echevarría y el texto colonial de Álvar Núñez son textos dispares que se nutren de diferentes contextos históricos. De Miguel Magro explica, "For Echevarría there is no doubt about the existence of mixture in the modern concept of acculturation and American *mestizaje*" (56). Es más difícil determinar si Álvar Núñez (el autor) sinceramente acredita tal entendimiento de sus relaciones con la gente indígena. Sin embargo, la película de Echevarría sirve como un buen punto de partida para mostrar cómo algunos críticos de la relación han celebrado las posibilidades heterogéneas y anti-esencialistas del texto. Bruce-Novoa mantiene que Álvar Núñez es "el signo de la perdida promesa americana, el ideal de la vida siempre por hacerse sobre la marcha de la aventura, nunca limitado por fronteras nacionales ni territorios monolingües, en la cual el individuo puede ser todo y aun todos los que quiere ser si es capaz de convencer a los demás de su utilidad" (302). Sylvia Molloy propone que el texto se apoya en "el descubrimiento del yo con respecto al otro, el permanente replanteo de un sujeto ante una alteridad cambiante que determina sus distintas instancias" (220). De manera parecida, Nan Goodman sugiere que el texto en sí es inherentemente ambiguo o subversivo ya que se sitúa entre los intersticios de cuatro

géneros literarios: las narrativas de la conquista, las crónicas más pa-
cíficas de los colonos, las narraciones de la cautividad y las escrituras
de los misioneros en el Nuevo Mundo (238-241). El concepto que
reúne todas estas interpretaciones de *Naufragios* es la hibridez. El
subtexto de los argumentos de todos estos críticos es el del posicio-
namiento híbrido como un lugar privilegiado de enunciación. Como
explica Bruce-Novoa, "el éxito del sincretismo, tanto religioso como
semiótico, aumentó sus privilegios de movimiento y su autoridad,
señalados por la calabaza que los mismos curanderos autóctonos le
regalan como prueba de aceptación y de rango dentro del sistema
indio" (300). Tal como otros críticos, Bruce-Novoa mantiene que al
representarse como un ser híbrido Álvar Núñez se localiza adentro
y afuera del mundo que quiere figurar y significar; sus experiencias
personales le distinguen como un testigo más verosímil e inviola-
ble.

De esta manera, Bruce-Novoa, Magro, Jacques Lafaye y, sobre
todo, Molloy insisten en la importancia del último papel que Álvar
Núñez asume hacia el final de sus nueve años como náufrago en
el Nuevo Mundo, el de curandero —al cual Álvar Núñez dedica la
mayor parte de la narración (Molloy 232). Como explica Molloy, "La
curación introduce un nuevo modelo de tomar contacto con el otro,
basado en el beneficio mutuo: la salud a cambio del alimento" (234).
Al otorgarse este papel (aunque señala que al principio los líderes
indígenas le *obligan* a trabajar como curandero), Álvar Núñez encar-
na las posibilidades transculturales del ser híbrido ya que maneja su
conocimiento de tradiciones indígenas y europeas para poder ayudar
a la gente. Como argumenta Molloy, para los lectores de hoy en
día, la transformación personal de Álvar Núñez "constituye su mayor
hazaña, su prueba de grandeza" (241). Tal como a Echevarría, a
estos críticos les interesan los frustrantes y fecundos mestizajes que
nacen de las íntimas interacciones culturales de Álvar Núñez con la
gente indígena. Como explica Bruce-Novoa, los chicanos de hoy
reconocerán las similitudes con Álvar Núñez: el salir del país natal
para buscar riqueza, el desengaño de la nueva realidad difícil, el lar-
go periodo del aprendizaje y el acto de apoyarse en la memoria del
país natal (305-306). Al señalar la hibridez de las curaciones y otros
actos de Álvar Núñez, estos críticos subrayan las potencialidades
subversivas o poscolonialistas de *Naufragios*.

Pero las curaciones sincréticas o híbridas de Álvar Núñez tam-
bién cumplen la función de hagiografía, la mitificación de sí mismo
como santo o héroe cristiano. La representación de sí mismo como
chamán o curandero, aunque heterodoxa y tal vez herética, le sirve
a Álvar Núñez para aumentar la autoridad empírica y espiritual de

su texto. Es probable que se arriesgue a la reprobación de la censura para establecer su íntimo e irrefutable "entendimiento" como cronista y, como resultado, enfatizar sus méritos como buen sujeto del rey ya que puede ser útil por su conocimiento singular de cómo evangelizar y apaciguar a los indios. Los aspectos evangelistas del texto aparecen con más frecuencia en los últimos capítulos de la relación —constituyen el gran clímax del texto. Tanto como Álvar Núñez anhela relacionarse con los indios él se esfuerza en diferenciarse de ellos al enfatizar las profundidades de su fe cristiana. Kun Jong Lee explica, "After all, he wrote the *Naufragios* to demonstrate that he did not go native and become a religious renegade among the savages and, more significantly, to seek the royal favor for a new expedition under his command to conquer La Florida in the near future" (257). Lo que Molloy, Bruce-Novoa y otros críticos no consideran es la ambivalente constitución del discurso colonial en sí, la manera en que el discurso se va adaptándose a las corrientes y circunstancias de la historia en constante variación. Como explica Goodman al resumir los argumentos de Ralph Bauer y también José Rabasa, "the *Relación* should be read not as a precursor of the twentieth-century cultural relativism but as an example of the turn in the sixteenth-century theory of conquest from violence to pacification" (230). Es cierto que la narrativa de Álvar Núñez invierte muchas de las convenciones típicas del discurso del conquistador. Además, es casi inconcebible imaginar que Álvar Núñez no estuviera transformado de alguna manera después de haber vivido en un país extranjero por casi una década. Sin embargo, yo propondría que, más que una inversión del discurso colonial, el texto de Álvar Núñez es un elogio a sí mismo, como buen cristiano y buen imperialista (aunque más pacífico). A lo largo del texto, él siempre se vindica y glorifica al justificar sus acciones, decisiones y relaciones con los otros personajes. Este proceso de auto-vindicación o hagiografía culmina con una visión mesiánica de sí mismo. Propongo que las posibilidades transformativas o sincréticas de la relación están mitigadas por la manera en que Álvar Núñez se representa como héroe cristiano.

El proemio de la relación da fe de las aspiraciones eclesiásticas del texto. Álvar Núñez insinúa que "la fortuna" (75) o sea la "voluntad y juicio de Dios" (75) es lo que más determina los éxitos o los fracasos de los hombres. Conforme con esta noción, él enfatiza su humildad —su desnudez— la manera en que ha tratado de someterse a la voluntad del Señor y, al mismo tiempo, a la voluntad del rey: "el cuidado, y diligencia siempre fue muy grande de tener particular memoria de todo, para que si en algún tiempo Dios nuestro Señor quisiese traerme a donde ahora estoy, pudiese dar testigo de mi voluntad, y

servir a Vuestra Majestad. [. . .] pues este todo es el que un hombre desnudo pudo sacar consigo" (76). Además, en sus referencias a los aspectos inconcebibles, extraordinarios y "muy difíciles de creer" (76) de sus aventuras, Álvar Núñez implica que su éxito, su regreso a España, ha sido posible sólo por la misericordia de Dios porque no hubiera sido realizable de otra manera. Esta conclusión, junto con la declaración de la "mora de Hornachos" (220) que "si alguno saliese, que haría Dios por él grandes milagros; pero creía que fuesen pocos los que escapasen o no ningunos" (219-220), funciona para crear una narrativa circular; al principio y al final de su texto Álvar Núñez se representa como enviado y elegido de Dios cuyas acciones y opiniones están sancionadas por prueba divina. De este modo, su narrativa, más que distanciarse, se acerca a las convenciones típicas del discurso colonial.

Esta "allegorisis" (Rabasa 1) mesiánica sigue a lo largo del texto. Tal como Cristo, quien tuvo que descender al mundo para poder entender y luego redimir a toda variedad de seres humanos, Álvar Núñez deja su cultura más civilizada y desciende al mundo de los indios bárbaros. Convive con los indios —llora, se ríe, y simpatiza con ellos. Como su esclavo él apunta las aflicciones y penas que tuvo que sufrir como parte de su misión cristiana. Como mercader entre ellos, muestra como él entiende y maneja sus costumbres de modo que puede liberarse de su esclavitud. Explica que "*yo puse* en obra de pasarme a los otros, y con ellos me sucedió algo mejor; y porque *yo me hice* mercader, procuré de usar el oficio lo mejor que supe" (133, subrayado mío). Al enfatizar como él mismo lleva a cabo este cambio de vocación, Álvar Núñez subraya su capacidad de vencer o superar las pruebas mortales. Pero es en su capacidad de curandero que Álvar Núñez más se representa como Jesuscristo e insinúa cómo el poder de Dios mora en él. Recuenta, por ejemplo, cómo resucita a un muerto y cómo lleva a cabo otras curaciones milagrosas. Además, retrata el aura apostólica que le caracteriza a él y a sus compañeros cristianos, "Por todo este camino teníamos muy gran trabajo, por la mucha gente que nos seguía, y no podíamos huir de ella, aunque lo procurábamos, porque era muy grande la prisa que tenían por llegar a tocarnos" (177). Álvar Núñez recurre a la religión como estrategia narrativa y legitimizadora. Como explica Magro la religión le sirve como "a survival strategy toward the Spaniards, a necessary tool he has to use to survive as a Conquistador, and a way to convince the King to give him a position (62). Tanto como las experiencias de Álvar Núñez como chamán o curandero funcionan para deestabilizar o deconstruir las oposiciones binarias del discurso colonial, también le sirven al propio autor para establecer su autori-

dad moral sobre los indios y su singularidad como evangelizador y administrador ante el rey católico.

A partir de sus peregrinaciones como curandero y su reencuentro con los españoles, el discurso de Álvar Núñez llega a ser aun más didáctico y moralizador. Al mismo tiempo que condena los abusos de los otros españoles "cristianos," adopta un tono más evangelizador con los indios. Les explica que "si ellos quisiesen ser cristianos y servir a Dios de la manera que les mandásemos, que los cristianos tendrían por hermanos y los tratarían muy bien, [. . .] mas si esto no quisiesen hacer los cristianos los tratarían muy mal, y se los llevarían por esclavos a otras tierras" (210). A pesar de la compasión y empatía que caracterizan su discurso en cuanto a los indios, a final de cuentas Álvar Núñez revierte a la lógica de ser cristiano o ser esclavo. Más que subvertir el discurso colonial, el autor lo reitera al plantearse como héroe cristiano y recurrir a las oposiciones binarias entre amo y esclavo, cristiano e indio.

Es casi imposible discernir qué aspectos de la relación de Álvar Núñez se presentan a raíz de la auto-censura y cuáles no. A pesar de las tendencias hagiógrafas del texto, se puede afirmar que el escrito de Álvar Núñez es más progresista que las relaciones de la conquista que le procedían. Como explica Rolena Adorno,

> When Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca wrote his final report to the emperor on his years of travail in North America (although quite close in time to the events he recorded), he did it with the knowledge of the conquest of New Spain and New Galicia. His original account of his experience was already mediated by the reports he had heard of those events. There is no doubt that he was truly moved by what he had heard and seen in Nueva Galicia and that his literary effort was motivated by a vision of compassion and justice much broader than the narrow needs of his own failed conquest experience. ("Discursive" 228)

Sin embargo, como Adorno misma sugiere, celebrar la relación como texto poscolonialista que efectivamente deconstruye o desmitifica los estereotipos y las oposiciones binarias que legitimizan el discurso colonial es negar la inherente complejidad de la narrativa. El texto mismo se acomoda en otra versión o adaptación del discurso al que contesta —la de la obligatoria evangelización, pacificación y aculturación de los indios. Como arguye Goodman, "Sympathetic though he is to the needs and desires of his captors, the author of the *Relación* remains throughout his narrative divided by the binary of Self and Other, a far cry from the later nineteenth-century colonial subject that inspired Bhabha's understanding of hybridity" (229). Álvar Núñez no se representa como un español-indio sino como un español que tiene conocimientos privilegiados sobre los indios, información que puede

manipular a favor de los fines del imperio español en sus proyectos de la conquista y la colonización. Molloy sugiere, "La maniobra [como se revela en el proemio] es clara: distinguirse y, desde esa posición de diferencia, hacer del relato mismo su servicio" (221). Las posibilidades transculturales y poscoloniales de la relación le sirven a Álvar Núñez el autor para enfatizar la "autoridad" que ha adquirido de su largo periodo de aculturación. De esta manera, la oposición binaria entre el "yo" colonizador y el "otro" colonizado nunca se disuelve totalmente en el texto. Al contrario, la relación de Álvar Núñez se apoya en este binarismo.

De manera parecida, una de las más fuertes críticas a la teoría poscolonial actual es que la mayor parte de su argumentación y razonamiento deriva de la oposición binaria entre colonizador y colonizado. Sin embargo, hay varios críticos que se resisten a la invariabilidad y sistematización de esta relación. Ellos se oponen a la manera en que esta oposición sienta la base del dogma o de la doctrina del discurso poscolonial. Como explica Sara Castro-Klarén, "Los críticos de Bhabha se sienten incómodos con su postulación de un sujeto (colonial) lacanianamente inestable, sujeto a un desplazamiento continuo" (968). En otras palabras, estos críticos lamentan la estabilidad de la inestabilidad del sujeto colonial. Además, como aclara Castro-Klarén, críticos como Aijaz Ahmad rechazan el término "poscolonial" de modo que "homogeniza la historia del mundo entero en una relación única y determinada con Europa" (968). Para ellos, este término establece al sujeto colonial en una ineludible dialéctica con el occidente. De igual manera, Chandra Mohanty sugiere que el discurso pos- o anti-colonial suele imponer un entendimiento homogeneizado de los dominados o los oprimidos. Hablando del feminismo occidental y la mujer, Mohanty denuncia "the uncritical use of particular methodologies in providing 'proof' of universality and cross-cultural validity" (261). Ella mantiene que insistir en la universalidad de estas metodologías da como resultado la homogeneización de los colonizados y los condena a las mismas relaciones y a los sistemas que quieren combatir. Así lo explica:

> When 'women of Africa' as a group (versus 'men of Africa' as a group?) are seen as a group precisely because they are generally dependent and oppressed, the analysis of specific historical differences becomes impossible, because reality is always apparently structured by divisions—two mutually exclusive and exhaustive groups—the victims and the oppressors. (262)

Mohanty insinúa que el discurso poscolonial es eficaz sólo cuando toma en cuenta "the historically specific material reality" (262) de los sujetos coloniales. De acuerdo con Mohanty, propongo que es siempre vigente examinar si los críticos y textos poscoloniales pro-

blematizan o deconstruyen su propio discurso al homogenizar los grupos que representan y al ignorar sus específicas circunstancias históricas. Las circunstancias históricas de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca parecen sugerir que, a pesar de los momentos transculturales o casi-híbridos del texto, la relación que escribe tiene el fin de extender el doloroso proyecto de la subordinación de los nativos aunque de manera más pacífica, ya que Álvar Núñez manipula su estatus "híbrido" para legitimizar a su relación y persuadir a Carlos V para que le dé permiso para encargarse de otra expedición parte de la conquista.[2] Por último, propongo que la relación es esencialmente híbrida, no por la síntesis de aspectos indígenas y europeos, sino por la constante convergencia de elementos coloniales y poscoloniales a lo largo del texto.

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    2   Nan Goodman explica que al final de cuentas, en 1540, Álvar Núñez recibió un puesto como el adelantado (administrador de la expedición de la conquista). Según Goodman, parte de sus problemas derivaron de su buen tratamiento de la gente indígena (341). Además, en su artículo "Peaceful Conquest and Law in the *Relación* (Account) of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," Rolena Adorno relaciona el texto con las leyes aplicadas hacia una política imperial más pacífica.

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LOCATING WHITENESS: HISTORY, POWER, IDENTITY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL FRAMEWORK[1]

Ruma Sen

> What has become irreducibly curious is no longer the other but cultural description itself.
>
> — James Clifford, 1988

A Prologue, 2003

Whiteness matters. I realized this today more than ever before as I discussed bell hooks' video, "Cultural Criticism and Transformation" with students in my class on Communication and Persuasion. In her discussion of the politics of representation, hooks speaks of the institutionalized oppressiveness of what she calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." In the discussion that followed, a student questioned hooks' use of the word "white" because, as she said, "supremacy could be of any color - white, black, pink, purple, it has nothing to do with white alone." Another student commented that while she understood that racism as a term continues to put white people at the center of the discussion, she cannot understand how the term "white" would add to the "supremacist capitalist patriarchy." A male student said that he was uncomfortable with the images of white males on the video and the references made by hooks because, "I am white but I do not see myself in those images." As I discussed the implications of using the term "white," I noticed that several students had already dismissed the term as irrelevant as they had disengaged themselves from the discussion. A discussion on the hierarchies of race and color had just fallen through the cracks of white apathy and denial. It is perhaps appropriate to mention here that this is a primarily

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[1] A version of this essay was presented at the 98th Annual Convention of the Eastern Communication Association at Providence, Rhode Island. The paper was selected as a Top Paper in the Intercultural Communication Interest Group.

"white" classroom besides two Asian students. This is not my single encounter with whiteness, not even the most recent.

> Although all people exist within what we might call the "strata" of subjectivity, they are also located at particular positions within the strata, each of which enables and constrains the possibilities of experience, but even more, of representing and legitimating those representations.
>
>   Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds" (13)

Cultural Studies is now known for its extensive writing on issues of race and identity (Allen 1993; Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993 and 1997; Hill 1996; Ignatiev 1996; Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Nakayama and Martin 1999; Sleeter 1994). The recent years have witnessed a conceptual shift in this discourse from race to whiteness, which has allowed us to "identify the ways that white privilege functions without having to name anyone a racist" (Wander, Martin, and Nakayama 23). This discourse has produced some of the more contradictory claims in the field as most of the writing has emerged from two seemingly opposing positions. The deconstructionist projects of the poststructuralists (like Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan) have treated identity as both always already there and constantly under erasure. The position of the race theorists has been somewhat essentialist in the assumption that whiteness is racially determined and experienced. The point of studying whiteness, as I view it and unlike the predominant perspectives on whiteness, is "to dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it" (Dyer 10).

In this essay I explore whiteness as a "location," a "standpoint," and a "set of practices" through the interlocking axes of power, history, and multiple subject positions. Drawing largely from recent writing in whiteness studies that have been premised on the Foucauldian principle of "exteriority," I seek to explicate the rhetorical character of whiteness rather than the essentialist notion of what whiteness really means. This is why the study is grounded in postcolonial studies and hence looks for a (non)essentialist and a historically specific understanding of whiteness. The historicity implicit here is that of the postcolonial that speaks of the white as colonial, and hierarchy as always already there.

This essay thus adds to the discourse on whiteness by extending it to forms of expression in a non-white world, a world that is not simply non-white but which has the overtones of a past that is eminently experienced in the "colonial" privileging of white. The non-white world I refer to is postcolonial India, traces of which permeate/ filter into the space of Indian immigrants. I draw from critical theory's use of "location" to speak of the context, I use notions of power and history

to understand that location and interrogate the influence of whiteness as a discursive formation in the postcolonial moment.

Generally, whiteness has been studied as a monolithic category within the scope of racial identity. I argue that for a radical constructionist ideology of whiteness to emerge, it needs to be studied at the intersection of both anti-essentialist notions of poststructuralism and the somewhat strategic use of essentialism within postcolonial theory. For instance, whiteness is witnessed in what it embodies (the face, the skin color, the more apparent nature of difference) as much as it is expressed through the hierarchy of knowledge that is produced by those who oftentimes negotiate and influence relations of power. Here I refer to assumed positions of power and ways in which hierarchies of power operate to attribute authority to some by virtue of occupying such positions. Further, postcolonial scholarship has so far theorized racial identities of people of color as an effect of power and knowledge, while social constructions of whiteness remain largely undertheorized (Supriya 109). This essay therefore examines whiteness as a trope for the social construction of hierarchies of power and the representations of both the white and the other.

White people just as much as people of color live "racially structured lives" (Frankenberg 1) that enforce and affirm their relationships with each other and the positions they occupy within the hierarchical social structure. Interestingly enough, while the politics of identity engages in exploring, mapping and examining the subject positions of people of color, white people's identities have remained either largely disengaged from these conversations or have been treated as essentially (non)threatening to peoples of color and hence not contentious in the discourse of identity and whiteness.

Looking, and being looked upon, produces relations of power, the premise of the politics of identity. Implicit in such relations of power is the assumption that the "gaze" of observation and hence evaluation is partial, limited to those who can be subjected to the gaze as opposed to those who have the gaze. It is the gaze of the supposed surveyor in the watchtower of Bentham's Panopticon, whose gaze is legitimate and who is never gazed upon. In the same way, those who are gazed upon have historically been observed and analyzed, and continue to be subjects of the gaze. Also, similar to the Panopticon, those on whom the gaze is focused then become "programmed" into gazing at themselves with the same lens as that which is used by the surveyor. Simultaneously, the surveyor remains neutral, ungazed and dominant yet unseen. This is the gaze that can be referred to as shifting between being invisible and yet made awkwardly visible by the attention that is cast more as aspersion—more negative than

affirming. As an Asian Indian graduate student at a large Midwestern university commented, "my dress, my color, and most of all my accent draws attention to me that makes me so uncomfortable that I do my best to blend in, change the way I dress, alter my accent, so that I am not so noticeable any longer" (Sen 1998).

As mentioned earlier, the discourse on whiteness has focused on the "white." White is seen here not just as a color but that which signifies and significates power. "[White] wields power yet endures as a largely unarticulated position" (Nakayama and Krizek 88). White culture is also the "structural pre-condition for the existence of ethnic groups" (MacCannell 129). However, white is not an essence, even when premised on the strategic essentialist notions of the postcolonial context. In other words, whiteness is not and can not be studied as an absolute. Further, the ironic treatment of the construction of whiteness as marking only the space of otherness becomes untenable in the long run unless there is a simultaneous interrogation of the white as studied by the other (Supriya 128). This essay introduces a new kind of engagement with the rhetoric and power associated with being white. For the non-white other, it is the pursuit of whiteness and the process of "becoming white" (=having/owning power), an experience that is distinctly different from the lived reality of always owning privilege, of whiteness being always already there.

Can whiteness be made strange?

> White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; . . . whiteness needs to be made strange.
>
> <div align="right">(Dyer 9-10)</div>

Ruth Frankenberg defines whiteness as "a location of structural advantage" and as "a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (1). For instance, as Dean MacCannell writes, the consensus about this hierarchy is so structured that institutions such as tourism exemplify it with a lack of white cuisine where there is an abundance of ethnic cuisine (120). Similarly, the university/academe exemplifies it with a lack of white studies where there is an abundance of ethnic studies. As MacCannell reminds us, "(t)his structural imbalance is fundamental, operating on grammar and rhetoric as well as in social and economic relations" (122). Within a Foucauldian discussion of power, no one speaks of "white power" since power is white. The struggle here is to make that which is seen as the dominant, whiteness, into that which is also strange. It is perhaps in this interlocution—of being both essentialist as well as critical—that disparate grounds can be navigated simultaneously. This is

the challenge that my research aims to explore and address.

Raka Shome argues that whiteness remains an empty term unless examined from the perspective of location (110). For instance, India's history with British colonialism implies a relationship with imperial whiteness that is very distinct from the relationship of the African American with whiteness in the United States. Understanding the reasons behind an existing Anglocentrism in various sectors of the Indian culture, for instance Indian cinema, requires an examination of India's own relations with the colonial past as well as its negotiations with the current surge of white American cultural norms and practices, as they influence and inform the cultural psyche of the nation in this postcolonial moment. The postcolonial context in India is complicated by the exposure to and ready acceptance of white American cultural cues by increasing numbers of the population who form the emerging middle class with an exponentially growing purchasing power.

As a product of enterprise and imperialism, whiteness is "always already predicated on racial difference, interaction and domination" (Dyer 13). As a power-laden discursive formation that privileges, secures and normalizes the cultural space of the white, Western subject, and sustained by forces of imperialism and capitalism, whiteness has "traveled" to "other" worlds and influenced "other" identities and cultural spaces. It is in/ through these travels that the postcolonial subject has come to be located within the locus of whiteness at once influencing and being influenced by it. Most evident of these interlocutions have been the discursive practices of the white and the postcolonial subject. Shome contends, "Whiteness is not just about bodies and skin color, but rather more about the discursive practices that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews" (108). It is a system through which certain individuals are granted greater degrees of social acceptance than others.

Studied within the postcolonial framework, whiteness can be perceived as that which represents superiority. At the same time, the postcolonial subject's long engagement with the superiority of the white, Western, colonial entity can offer ways for dismembering the power source, i.e., the white. This capitulation can be viewed as an outcome of the years of struggle that results ultimately in shifts within the structures of power. Framed thus, whiteness can be conceived as a discursive formation that is being constantly constructed and which takes its shape depending on the "location" within which it is studied.

Framing the location of whiteness

Drawing on Foucault's writing I suggest here that power is experienced through relations among subjects and influenced by a multiplicity of factors such as the subjects within that relationship, the history of the relationship, the discourse within which that power relationship is produced and maintained. We need to re-contextualize power as relational struggles of power rather than suppose that power might exist on one side, and that on the other side lies that upon which power would exert itself. Also, we cannot assume that the struggle develops between power and "non-power." Thus, Foucault argues, power is simultaneously the institutionalization, the definition of tactics, and the statement of arms and implements, which are useful in all these clashes. It is that which can be considered in a given moment as a certain power relationship, a certain exercising of power. As Foucault writes, power is conceived out of a plurality of relationships that emerge from interactions among entities and permits the development of something besides that from which it emerges (Foucault 70).

A discursive formation, in the Foucauldian sense, is that which is taken for granted within an enunciative field, which leads to what Foucault calls a regime of truth, i.e., an episteme. An analysis of the dispersion of statements in the enunciative field leads to a regime of truth. Foucault's project is the negotiation of the enunciative field as engaged through the discursive act. Power exists through language in the construction of discursive formations and it shifts constantly depending on the enunciative field. Thus, when whiteness is examined within this framework, it is claimed that power is not invested in the white, rather in the negotiation of the enunciative field of identity as expressed through the discursive act within which both the white and the other are engaged.

Foucault (*Power*/*Knowledge*) writes that power "doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse," and at the same time needs to be considered as "a productive network which runs through the whole social body" rather than as a "negative instance whose function is repression" (119). If this were true, how then would such an understanding of power illuminate the discussion of whiteness as a discourse of power that marks both white people and the people of color? I believe that the shift in the gaze, or perhaps the "reversal" in the gaze in the study of racial identity today to include the gaze of the so-called periphery or the other towards the so-far "invisible" center is in itself an expression/ symptom of the scope/ nature of power as shifting, never fully determined. In making

the center visible, power is being continually established within the framework of the relationship between the white and the other. This situation thus affirms that power is not "had" or possessed by any one individual, group or collectivity, it exists in the relations between individuals, communities and nations.

If truth is to be understood as a regulatory system of ordered procedures, it is possible to claim that whiteness is a representation of the system of power which is produced and sustained by the social order and which exists because of its circular relations with other systems of power. These systems of order establish and maintain the hierarchies within which subjects are interpellated. In the Foucauldian sense, whiteness is thus a regime of truth that establishes hierarchies of knowledge, which in turn operate and influence relations of power. The subject is interpellated both by and within these relations of power.

Whiteness as a discursive practice systematically forms the objects for which it speaks, that is both the white and the non-white other. As Foucault notes, "discourses are (obviously) composed of signs, but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. ... It is this more that we must reveal and describe" (Foucault 49). In the discursive formation of whiteness, both the white "center" and the non-white 'non-center" are being constantly constituted through a continuous process of negotiation and re-inscription (Bhabha 31). This constitutive process is perhaps the key to a Foucauldian understanding of whiteness: that power relations evolve through negotiations between the discursive strategies employed by those who are situated within that discourse. While the positions of the center and non-center are central to an understanding of the discursivity of power, whiteness is constituted by the white and the non-white. The discursivity of whiteness shifts as the white is positioned and articulated just as the non-white has been historically. So white is made visible by the non-white through a production of the meaning of the white as an expression of power. It is an invisibility that operates intrusively just as power functions discursively.

Whiteness and/in the Postcolonial Moment

> Whites must be seen (italics added) to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen. To be seen as white is to have one's corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal.
>
> (Dyer 45)

The recent spate of writing on whiteness has articulated positions that place whiteness at the center of the discourse, under the analytic gaze. The meaning and apparent emptiness of "white" as a cultural identity, the persistence of a discourse that engages race relations with a gaze that is exclusively directed at the other, and the political contexts, strengths, and limitations of different ways of "thinking through race" all lend themselves to a postcolonial analysis that examines whiteness vis-à-vis power, space and identity. While the West and imperialism have been studied at length in postcolonial studies, the examination of whiteness from the postcolonial perspective has been a more recent scholarly engagement, the most prominent of such research being essays in the edited collection by Tom Nakayama and Judith Martin.

Here I argue that terms such as whiteness or white are significantly more political than the more readily available terms like the West or western, even American. White not only implicates a skin color but it pivots any engagement with identity within the postcolonial framework on the notion of power. White is thus that which embodies power and non-white is that which remains outside the domain of power. While working within what is apparently a binary, I claim that white(ness) allows us to examine power not only relationally, but also as a both/and, i.e., that which is negotiated, never completely possessed. However, there is value in some degree of essentialist assumption that those who perceive themselves as "having" power seldom, if ever, cease to "have" or relinquish power. For instance, I cannot assume that the white male professor who presumably does not need to exercise authority in a classroom since he "automatically" commands respect, is likely to willingly relinquish that authority. Even if/when he wishes to, it is obvious that the position is intrinsically associated with power. Consequently, even when as a student in his classroom I am able to question that professor's authority/capability, I am perhaps shifting the balance of power, but in no way do I displace that hierarchy of power.

That subjectivity and subject position are inextricably woven together is a reflection of the condition that language speaks us. Since the Foucauldian analysis is based on institutional discourse (and I agree with Bhabha that one cannot ever escape the institution), the subject position that he refers to is embedded in the impersonality of the discursive formation. For a broader understanding of whiteness as a discursive practice, the study needs to include traces of one's own experiences, both individual and collective, along with a reflection on the subjectivity associated with such experiences. Barthes' description of the sign-as-symbol is conveniently analogous here to

the language we use to describe these experiences of identity. The symbolic consciousness of the sign is in turn useful in articulating the gestures of identity construction.

Identities evolve in negotiation, but are maintained by the locations within which the relations of power are enacted. Identity is thus studied in the context of both subjectivity and the subject position within the discursive formation, because it moves beyond the formation and location of subjects into thinking in terms of communal or collective and individual experiences/ expressions of identities (Gilroy 37).

The dominant ideology of whiteness, which as Stuart Hall writes of ideology, "unproblematically reproduces itself," has marched onto multiple shores of "other" worlds particularly because of its fit with the notion of "false consciousness" (17). The implicit assumption that whiteness embodies knowledge that is the domain of thinking subjects belies the production of meaning as a result of discursive endeavors. The postcolonial subject's reliance on a white, Western education, whether on her own grounds or having traveled to the Western world, also echoes of this assumption of knowledge as Western, and essentially white. At the same time, whiteness can also be viewed as a "system of representation" in the Althusserian sense, whereby whiteness is a discursive character that is also materialized in practice. Systems of representation are defined here as "the systems of meaning through which we represent the world to ourselves and one another" (Hall 23). However, as it can be argued that there are no social practices outside the domain of meaning, then all practices must always be discursive. Whiteness is thus discursively produced and maintained.

I argue that whiteness needs to be viewed from within the somewhat essentialist recognition that someone like the white male professor operating within the largely male environment of the American undergraduate classroom is quite unlikely to experience "being" the other. The Asian Indian (other), on the other hand, is hailed as a subject inferior relationally to the white and that subject position is maintained within these parameters. As the white is produced and maintained discursively, the relations of power negotiated between these subject positions produce the hierarchies of structure. I am encased as the non-white other just as a white American college student is framed as white. Our negotiations are influenced by the positions we believe we occupy. The relationality that emerges through our interaction composes how the whiteness/otherness is maintained and re-produced in future. Thus, while whiteness is discursively produced and maintained, the positions we occupy in the hierarchies of structure as white/non-white are always already there.

It is likely however that the discursive formation itself evolves to include possible shifts in these relations of power. My experiences as an international graduate student and teaching assistant/ instructor illuminate this condition. When I entered the academic world, my position was very clear: a female student from a Third World country "out there," who was here in the United States in search of knowledge, wealth, freedom and other such "ideals." Gradually, as I began to succeed as a student, I was soon viewed as a repository of some knowledge. After all, coming from the Third World in this postcolonial moment has its own share of the baggage of fame: I am that indigenous other who can speak knowledgeably about being the other and disclose hidden treasures of exotic lands. Operating within such assumptions, a student like me is viewed as valuable but only within the confines of the pre-determined position of the other. However, as these lines of demarcation become blurred, i.e., I take on the role of instructing young Americans, my body is more questioned than my credibility on the subject–public speaking, fundamentals of human communication, even higher level communication courses. Through such experiences I realize that as a non-white other I am being constantly re-read as a text in my own classrooms. More recent experiences of teaching material that requires critical thinking, for courses like 'Introduction to Women's Studies' or 'Cross-cultural Communication,' further complicates the positions by requiring me to engage in discussions that critique the mainstream. Similar to Indira Karamcheti's experiences, "my students study me for clues, decipher me for cultural understanding, and look at me for cultural references" (276).

As Richard Dyer observes, postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up spaces for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white, it may also simultaneously function as "a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them" (3). Whiteness therefore needs to be visible *for* its power, and its power needs to be out in its place and its rule ended. This is why studying whiteness matters. Within the postcolonial frame, the complexity of whiteness as a discourse and a practice, and the complicity of the postcolonial subject in maintaining the hierarchies of power that act as manifestations of whiteness need to be further examined.

As a nation still embedded in its colonial legacy, India's experience with whiteness is that of "always already there." I write this because I believe the postcolonial nation is unique—both historically and geographically—and that the influence of whiteness in the Indian cultural context needs to be understood in terms of the presence of

white cultural traces and how that presence is articulated, or discursively formed. Forms of representation in the cultural capital of a nation, for instance in the film industry, contribute to the discursive formations occurring within that culture. Consequently, representations of whiteness and the subject position/ subjective experience of the Indian in relation to such representations of whiteness are likely to indicate the extent to which whiteness symbolizes power and the consequent implications for power relations in the postcolonial context.

The discursivity of whiteness extends the manifestation and expression of the white in far too many ways that have less to do with racial identity and are rather embedded in issues of power relations. Using whiteness as the central organizing principle, I intend to narrate some incidents that speak to and illuminate the discursive formations that maintain structures and relations of power.

Constructing Whiteness in the Indian Diaspora

There is no better point of entry into a critique or a reflection than one's own experience. It is not the end point, but the beginning of an exploration of the relationship between the personal and the social and therefore, the political (Bannerji 7). It is an interesting point of argument that reflection into one's own lived experiences reveals not only the gamut of influences on our thought, but such reflection also provides the platform wherein research interests are formulated and paradigmatic positions take shape. Much of the readings that I have engaged with on the issues of identity and whiteness have to a large extent echoed the same sentiment—for instance Shome, Supriya, Mani, Nakayama and Krizek, and Steyn.

Experiences of whiteness such as the incident narrated at the beginning of this essay abound and have largely influenced my thinking about whiteness. Every time I enter a classroom I am faced with expressions of students that frame me as the non-white other, an experience recognized by other scholars, such as Bannerji, Mani, and Karamcheti. Here I present "being the other" as almost necessarily a "baggage" that one must carry, a baggage that simultaneously binds and confines to positions that are rarely contested. Such experiences are typically narrated as comments that appear on student evaluations or even in casual conversations: "s/he cannot teach," "we don't understand what s/he says," from a typical white under/graduate student.

On the non-white other's part (teacher or student), the experience

typically generates either a desire to "fit in" as expressed in: "no matter how hard I try I cannot overcome the barrier of my face," or a feeling of discomfort or inadequacy brought about a "special scrutiny" or "look over" that as the non-white other I receive from colleagues and acquaintances (Sen 21). This gaze is both a look and a judgment. This gaze, Himani Bannerji notes, "is also the look of the mentally blind which does not see that is actually in front of it, but only sees inward into a mental image of those terrible stereotypes which are pasted onto us with invisible glue every time someone looks at us" (149). Such politics of the gaze enforces "others" like me to experience and occupy the unique position of being visible as an object, invisible as a subject. This in turn creates in "others" like me the need to conform, a feature most certainly symptomatic of the "otherized" mind. As Bannerji has observed, "We forget that those who make the rules can change them and that while we can make small gestures of self-mutilation we can not really flay ourselves of our skins and features" (150).

In the process, as Homi Bhabha notes, the "other" is framed, encased, and "loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse" (31). The other is expected to represent the "docile body of difference" and exist to (re)affirm the dominant. As Jean-Paul Sartre points out, the dominant always seeks to understand himself within the context of the "other." Inversely, the "other" seeks to fulfill the demands of the category to which s/he has been relegated and attempts to perform the role to which s/he has been ascribed. The implication here, for both the dominant and the other, is that how one experiences one's own body/text influences ways in which people relate to each other.

The "visibility" and the construction of one's self as a "minority," who is somehow lacking and needs to learn, is seen by Bannerji as ways of rendering people powerless and vulnerable. They work as operative categories not because they possess any truth, but because they enforce the racist and imperialist relations that are already in place. I realize that these are harsh words but so long as the desire continues to be that of a guilt-ridden self, wanting to "impersonate" the dominant other, the posturing of the superior vs. the inferior remains unresolved, even perpetuated. When a people can be commanded to be silent, *to become the images*, then it is not the image, but the relations of domination, that kills. The politics of images is the same as any other politics; it is about being the subjects, and not the objects of the world we live in.

Instances of subtle nativization places the other in a separate

frame of analysis, who is then, to use Appadurai's phrase, "spatially incarcerated" in that "other place" that is proper to an "other culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 11). I argue here that such encasing is not an active product of choice but an expression of the discursive formation of whiteness within which such relations come to exist.

In his book, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha provides a useful location to speak of negotiations of identity in what he calls the "cultural space" which is both physical and discursive, constructed by those occupying the cultural "borderlands." These cultural spaces form contingently, disjunctively in the inscription of signs of cultural memory and eventually emerge as sites of political agency. If cultural difference is considered to be produced and maintained in a field of power relations in a world that is always spatially interconnected, then the treatment of the other becomes visible as one of the main means through which the disempowered are kept that way. The enforced difference becomes part and parcel of a global system of domination. Thus, we continue to be determined and defined by the center, as the periphery exists because and out of a center that creates that space. Our concerns are viewed as a direct outcome of occupying these interstitial spaces, and in the articulation of these concerns by the "cultural dominant" these concerns are foregrounded.

The dominant center, at the same time, continues to remain invisible. Simply expressed, my white colleagues expect an understanding of essentially white cultural cues like dating as the established norm, that which is assumed as "commonplace." Such opinions are articulated in conversations that even pre-empt any explanation that the practice of dating is Western and cannot be assumed to take place in India. Both verbal and non-verbal responses are that of extreme surprise and wonder, "How can you not have ever dated?" By the time I am able to respond and explain, the stereotypical associations regarding patriarchy and/in the Third World are readily aired, "You mean you are not allowed to date?" Thus the white, Western practice of dating in its invisibility as white, becomes articulated as the commonplace. In its very commonplace nature whiteness, in this case dating, becomes a representation and enactment of the culturally dominant. And the postcolonial other, in this instance I, become the forever "colonial"—the one in need of a "re-awakening" to the natural—a condition already (always) the given experience of the white.

Thoughts for now and the future

White identity is thus founded on compelling paradoxes: a vivid corporeal cosmology that most of all values a "transcendence of the

body," that hinges on the need to be both all and none, everything and nothing, being simultaneously present and absent. The "paradoxes and instabilities of whiteness also constitute its flexibility and productivity, in short, its representational power" (Dyer 40).

Whiteness is not easily de-constructed, nor could it possibly be completely de-constructed within the scope of any single project. Constructions of whiteness emerge in multiple domains. Even in the analysis of the discursivity of whiteness within the postcolonial framework, and beyond the issue of race relations, whiteness can be made problematic in multiple forms.

Within the framework of whiteness as a postcolonial experience, whiteness is figured and recuperated as: (a) the postcolonial subject's negotiations with the white as culturally dominant, and (b) a construct that is articulated through the subject's engagement with the "circuits" of power. Here power is viewed as that which allows anyone (irrespective of whether they have been historically located in the margin or the center) as potentially occupying positions that provide the scope for "being" white, in and through their "exercise" or experience of power.

The postcolonial subject's negotiations with the white-as-culturally-dominant is well articulated in relations between individuals and among groups, and does not preclude the shifting nature of relationships. Whiteness is also negotiated in and through the relations that establish and/or maintain the subject as ignorant/inferior/subjugated, whether overtly in situations that question his/her competence as in teaching, or subversively in testing familiarity with cultural codes like dating, that are treated as essential, normal, established and thus somehow neutral. The postcolonial condition makes such essentializing relevant at the same time that the poststructural framework of the discursivity of whiteness makes all assumptions tentative and any attempts at "meaning" irrelevant.

How can one dismiss the oppressiveness of a system that expects one to regulate one's behavior according to norms of dress, talk and behavior that are coded as general, obvious and hence implying change that is taken-for-granted? At the same time, one cannot also dismiss the idea that possibilities abound wherein someone who is "essentially" non-white (in race and/or skin color) can experience power in exercising control. As an instructor today, and possibly in future positions of increased "perceived power" I am likely to negotiate such conditions that are recognizable markers of power. When students in my classes overtly express their concern over their grade, which to them I "give," or when at the end of the quarter, they echo

sentiments/statements that I made in class, my position acquires a power that is made apparent by the students' articulation of the position I occupy relationally to their positions. I would however be remiss if I did not mention here that it is this position, this hierarchy, that fosters some of the resentments that international teachers like me face from American undergraduate students.

Yet, as Chandra Mohanty and M. Jacquis Alexander have argued, it is also quite likely that it is my face which continues to mark me more than any position of power that I may occupy. It is a likelihood where the nature of the position the other occupies within any hierarchy accompanies power dynamics that dismantle the idea that only those who "look" white can have power. Power is established in exercising control or maintaining a hierarchy of power, relationally. Whiteness is then a trope for the negotiation of power within a relationship.

Whiteness is complicated particularly because it is not viewed as obvious, apparent or seen. The discourse of white is replete with denials of the power or signification associated with white (Dyer 29). Whiteness as a lived experience becomes significant primarily in its capacity to influence the non-white experience. The white experience is also notable in its inability to identify itself as "white." This is evident in the reluctance of my white friends and colleagues to understand the implicit and often potentially dangerous attempts at homogenizing, mainstreaming, or perhaps even worse, essentializing. As an other, I experience all or one of the above when broad claims about India/n are made on the basis of their rather limited experiences. The voice of authority, authenticity, and most of all the subtle indication of being politically correct and liberal, further legitimates their claims and even essentializes my Indian identity.

When an Indian's narrative on identity derives the response of "as a white I have the same experience," not only is the Indian's experience being slighted, once again the implicit nature of "white power" is emphasized. Whiteness is thus continually established as a sign that is articulated, enacted, and affirmed through gestures of identity and power. "White identity," "white space" and "white privilege" continue to be enigmatic terms. I am also reminded here of the curiosity or sometimes even discomfort that is generated by the idea that I, as an Other (and I use the upper case advisedly), should study whiteness. Interestingly, there is an implicit and sometimes voiced assumption: what is there to be studied in whiteness, isn't everything that we study generally all about whiteness? Agreed, but how about making whiteness strange?

As I reflect back on the prologue I am increasingly aware that

such instances continue to mark my teaching experiences, and are likely to frequent my future years in the academic world. There needs to be much more than the recent spate of whiteness studies to make whiteness truly strange. Perhaps whiteness needs to be sought in places and situations where whiteness is not expected, as in the expression of whiteness among the non-white. Such explorations offer ground for making whiteness problematic and extend/remove whiteness from the discourse of the dominant/center. As the white is located, negotiated and framed—made strange—the power that is inherent and assumed within whiteness can also be fully interrogated.

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ROSARIO FERRÉ'S *THE HOUSE ON THE LAGOON*: REPRESENTATIONS OF DOMINANT AND MARGINAL DISCOURSE

Irene Wirshing

The narrative voice of the protagonist, Isabel, in *The House on the Lagoon*, conceptualizes the ambivalent, fluid, and split Puerto Rican identity. Isabel represents the fragmented nationalism of a postcolonial commonwealth struggling with political and cultural ambiguity. Her retelling of the island's history provides an account of a nation that has never stood on its own. Born in Ponce, a town in the southern part of the island, Isabel's liberal discourse seems an appropriate and legitimate representation of the tension existing among the diverse citizens who call themselves Puerto Rican. In *The House on the Lagoon*, Rosario Ferré dismantles a dominant patriarchal society by allowing a "representative" voice to those who have been previously marginalized.

By the time Isabel marries Quintín, her bourgeois husband from San Juan, she is an orphan. The absence of parental authority places Isabel in what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call a "*non-place*" (Moreiras 35). She is a hybrid subject who oscillates between two worlds and is a part of neither. There is no place for Isabel; she is "both everywhere and nowhere" (Moreiras 35):

> Being an orphan, on the other hand, and not having anyone but Quintín in the world was a point in my favor because it cast me in a vulnerable light. His parents could adopt me without reservation; I was to be a part of the Mendizabal clan and participate in all their activities. (Ferré 210)

Isabel's "adoption" by the Mendizabals is a symbol for Puerto Rico's attempt to unite and balance two cultures and two world views. This "in-betweenness" becomes Puerto Rico's only fixed identity.

Isabel's narration is unique due to Puerto Rico's free associated status with the United States. Her discourse represents the "structural doubleness" mentioned by Linda Hutcheon in "Circling the Down-

spout of Empire" (133). Her voice indicates "the paradoxical dualities of both post-modern critique and post-colonial double identity and history" (Hutcheon 133). First colonized by Spain, and later the United States, Puerto Rico's status is now that of a "commonwealth," which is a postmodern and postcolonial collage where an ambiguous past and present fuse into a pluralistic and indefinable national identity. The citizens were left in political limbo for 19 years between the Spanish-American War in 1898 and 1917 when the Jones Act signed by President Woodrow Wilson gave Puerto Ricans American citizenship. Quintín's grandfather, Arístides, is a symbol of U.S. domination in the island. He spoke perfect English at a time when hardly anyone in San Juan could speak English. His loyalty and pride in the Unites States were instilled in him by the American nuns who ran the school he attended: "The history of the United States was taught thoroughly at their school, yet Puerto Rican history was never mentioned. In the nun's view, the island *had* no history" (Ferré 91). Puerto Rico as a nation represents the history of the vanquished. Isabel tries to recover the past of a people that have ceased to have an identity.

Because of Puerto Rico's ambivalent status, Isabel's manuscript is socially, racially, and politically fragmented. Isabel faces the "transculturation" of her country as she attempts to rewrite history in the guise of hybridity under her own neoimperial voice. In *Between Two Waters*, Silvia Spitta defines "transculturation" as "the complex processes of adjustment and re-creation—cultural, literary, linguistic, and personal—that allow for new, vital, and viable configurations to arise out of the clash of cultures and the violence of colonial and neocolonial appropriations" (2). Yet, because hybridity today "has developed into a code word associated to a large extent with hegemonic politics" (Moreiras 289), then Isabel's manuscript is a "resurrection" of the same colonization she adamantly criticizes.

The notion of history's authenticity is perhaps the central theme of the novel. Isabel and Quintín get into continuous battles over Isabel's descriptions of their families. Memory becomes the weapon for crystallizing history because it allows the neocolonizer, now Isabel, to choose what to remember. The fact that Quintín believes that Isabel had "altered everything" and "was manipulating history for fiction's sake" (Ferre 71) suggests that not one, but both, have simply chosen what to remember and what to erase from their histories. Quintín represents the Eurocentric view of a dominant patriarchy. He is a byproduct of years of Spanish colonization followed by more than half a century of U.S. rule.[1] As Toral Aleman points out, Quintín

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[1] "Quintín es heredero de esta tradición masculina de escritura (auto)

is heir to this masculine tradition of autobiographical writing identifying himself with Plutarch—for whom he has great admiration—and with the whole literary and cultural European tradition that includes historical figures like Alexander the Great (Toral Alemán 86). Quintín is unable to see beyond colonial representation. He firmly believes his wife "had unscrupulously plagiarized the historic material he had given her" (Ferre 72). Quintín doesn't recognize that he constantly interrupts his wife's work, discriminating against any other history that is not related to his ancestry.

Quintín's comments on the margins of the manuscript suggest that history has been reinterpreted by the colonizer: "El habitante del Nuevo Mundo fue entonces reinterpretado o 'releído' por el discurso colonial donde el Otro racial y cultural es sinónimo de barbarie e inferioridad biológica y cultural" (Toral Alemán 87). [2] Quintín's comments represent the notion that language does not automatically grant authority or authenticity for agency. Neither Quintín nor Isabel can represent the non-represented of their island's history.

The irony is that Isabel fails to see she is inadvertently thinking like her husband, hence reinterpreting history. In "The Im/possibility of Politics: Subalternity, Modernity, Hegemony," John Beverly notes that "one can derive the possibility of a new form of hegemony from the principle of multiculturalism" (57). Isabel negates "resentment of and resistance to inequality and discrimination as such" (Beverly 57), by failing to recognize her own limitations as a writer within the form of internal colonialism. Isabel is the voice of post-colonial guilt. In fear of Quintín, the symbol of America, Isabel feels guilty for what could have been as she struggles with the notion of Independence.

Isabel's victimization as Quintín's wife is a metaphor of the island's commonwealth status. Isabel's guilt is the guilt of all political parties, of a colonized island that does its best to create a national identity from a people without a history. Isabel's trauma is in essence the "collective schizophrenia" (Ferré 359) of Puerto Rico's political, cultural, and linguistic struggles:

> The confusion as to whether we were Puerto Rican or American, whether we should speak English or Spanish, had gotten the better of us and turned our will to mush. That was why, when election time

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biográfica identificándose con Plutarco —por quien siente gran admiración— y con toda una tradicion literaria y cultural europea que incluye a figurás históricas como la del citado Alejandro Magno" (Toral Alemán 86).

[2] [The inhabitant of the new world was then reinterpreted or "reread" by the dominant colonial discourse where the racial and cultural Other is synonymous of barbaric, cultural, and biological inferiority] (Toral Aleman 87).

came around, half the country voted for statehood and half for com-
monwealth or independence—the country could not make up its mind
what it wanted to be. (Ferré 360)

Instilled with pride and longing for autonomy, Isabel who is Puerto
Rico in the way Quintín is the U.S., becomes complacent and passive
with the advantages of the United States on the island. In "White Inuit
Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy," Diana Brydon notes, "in
effect, then, ambivalence works to maintain the status quo" (137).
The status quo will remain the same, a commonwealth status, until
Puerto Rico decides what it wants to be. Isabel's grey area is a fusion
of polar binaries that are fluid themselves, hence, again, Puerto Rico's
commonwealth: "It would seem to suggest that action is futile; that in-
dividual value judgments are likely to cancel each other out; that one
opinion is as good as another; that it would be futile and dishonest to
choose one path above any other; that disinterested contemplation
is superior to any attempt at action" (Brydon 137). Isabel's views are
ambivalent; she is the "politician" in limbo.

In her guilt, Isabel functions as the intermediary between the
dominant and the marginalized cultures. From Ponce to San Juan,
upper-middle class to elite, Isabel makes it possible to recount and
understand the contradictions of her culture. Isabel is the *entre* men-
tioned by Derrida "that carries the burden of the meaning of culture"
(Bhabha 209). Homi Bhabha claims that a "Third Space, though un-
representable in itself, constitutes the discursive conditions of enun-
ciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no
primordial unity or fixity" (208). Isabel is that Third Space; she is the
voice that differentiates and enunciates the Spanish, African, Indian,
and American cultures that influence Puerto Rico.

Isabel's unique hybridity allows for a double consciousness
that permeates between the colonizer and the colonized. In her es-
say "The House on the Lagoon: Tensiones de un discurso de (re)
composición de la identidad puertorriqueña a traves de la historia y
la lengua, " Irma López observes that Ferré expands the concept of
interpretation:

> El texto de Ferré, más que desechar o relegar la explicación mascu-
> lina, amplía los márgenes de la problemática de la interpretación. ... La
> alternancia de dos voces y visiones distintas, pero justificadas desde
> la posición de quien las formula, manifiesta la continua consideración
> de la autora sobre el modo en que la historia ha sido y está siendo
> transmitida. [3] (López 137)

[3] Ferré's text more than expels or relegates the masculine explanation; it ampli-
fies the margins of the problematics of interpretation. ... The alternating of two voices
and different visions, but justified from the position by whim it is formulated, manifests

Though Isabel is the marginalized voice, she indulges in the advantages of San Juan's wealth, and as a result becomes aware of herself as an outsider in San Juan. Isabel is able to detach herself from biased notions defining race and social status. She has a special friendship with Petra that transcends the roles of master and servant. She is able to recognize Petra's contribution to the family: "I thanked Petra for everything she had done for us. Her name suited her well: Petra means rock, and for the many years I had known her, she had been the rock on which the house on the lagoon had stood" (Ferré 384). Petra is the loyal servant who keeps secrets and runs the house. She is the backbone of the family whose dedication and commitment get overlooked and unrecognized.

Petra Avilés is a symbol of a sect of the African diaspora that landed in the Caribbean. Petra, whose ancestors were brought to Puerto Rico as slaves from Angola, represents not only the image of slavery, but also the stratified racial and social structure that constitutes all of Latin America. She "couldn't understand why all the land on the island belonged to a few white *hacendados* dressed in white linen suits, with panama hats on their heads, when the rest of the population lived in abject poverty" (Ferré 59). Whereas Isabel's marriage represents U.S. control in Puerto Rico since 1952, Petra's relationship with Quintín represents Spain's rape of an enslaved culture for hundreds of years.

Abby is another hybrid character full of contradictions regarding identity politics. Abby claims she is an adamant *Independentista*, yet she also clung to the advantages of American influence on the island. The Sears catalogue suggests the unbreakable ties the island had already formed with the United States. Isabel recalls how wonderful it was to be able to order a Madame Alexander doll for Christmas, and how Abby "would read about the new revolving lawn sprinklers from Delaware, the pine-bark bird feeders from Maine, the redwood furniture from California…" (Ferre182). Abby contradicts herself when she claims that Puerto Rico is "a different country from the United States, and asking to be admitted to the Union as a state wouldn't be fair to the U.S., or in the long run to us" (Ferré 183). At the same time, she cherishes "her American passport as if it were a jewel" (Ferré 183). Despite the technological advantages the commonwealth status brought the island, Abby remained firm with her *Independentista* ideals, because to her, commonwealth signifies floating in limbo. To homogenize the Caribbean as a whole places Puerto Rico in a historicized framework that is defined by a varied hegemony. Homi K. Bhabha suggests "we rethink our perspective on the identity of culture" and that "cultures are never unitary" (207). Puerto Rico is the

"in-between" United States and Latin America and its commonwealth status is what differentiates the island from other Spanish-speaking countries in the American hemisphere. *The House on the Lagoon* suggests that "many people believe that commonwealth is transitory" (Ferré134) and that one day the island will have to choose between statehood and independence. Isabel states the polemics of Puerto Rico's political status in this way:

> The way I see it, our island is like a betrothed, always on the verge of marriage. If one day Puerto Rico becomes a state, it will have to accept English—the Language of her future husband—as its official language, not just because it's the language of modernity and of progress but also because it's the language of authority. If the island decides to remain single, on the other hand, it will probably mean backwardness and poverty. (Ferré 134)

The end of the novel suggests the road towards a revolution. Isabel finally emancipates from her husband, Quintín. Her escape symbolizes a racial and social emancipation of the oppressed under a dominant patriarchal society. The appearance of Manuel (Quintín's son), with the AK 47 suggests the thirst for autonomy, nationality, and a cultural identity for Puerto Rico:

> I left him there and quietly pushed out toward the lagoon. When I looked back at the shore, I could see the flames shooting out of the Art Nouveau windows. And there was Manuel standing guard on the golden terrace, machine gun at hip, watching the house on the lagoon burn to the ground. (Ferre 407)

The House on the Lagoon, Rosario Ferré's first novel written in English, demonstrates the writer's dual command of both English and Spanish. Isabel's fluidity and ambivalence provide a closer look at the fusion of gender binaries and Puerto Rico's hybridity in postcolonial times. Through Isabel, we immerse ourselves in the complexities of a beautiful culture that has struggled and continues to fight for the hope of one day having a national identity.

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the continuous consideration of the author about the way history has been and continues to be transmitted] (López 137).

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POESÍA / *POETRY*

CAMÁNDULAS

Hugo Ríos

I
"Un solo eslabón no hace cadena."
Se pierde la cuenta.
De los principios; de un comienzo tras otro.
Y se repiten los mismos gritos cada vez con menos fuerza.

II
Primero la cruz de Castilla,
arde en las venas y engendra demonios.
Luego la sajona, seductora y amarga
que trae consigo la bala y la oda del ruiseñor.

III
Quema:
¿Qué más da, qué queda?
Armarse de sombra y tiempo
Resistiendo la invasión, invadiendo.

IV
Mientras, se desteje la madeja
que nos hace nuestros
y buscamos excusas
para protegernos de nosotros mismos.

V
Dos caminos, muchas dudas:
Aprender a cargar la cruz de las dos lenguas
o vivir por siempre entre el papel y la pena,
la plaza y la danza: Botella y baraja hasta el final.

LA MENTIRA DE CALYPSO

No hay tanta arena como mentiras
en las tierras de Colón
¿Desde cuándo y hasta cuándo
me retienes en tus tierras, Calypso?
No me hagas elegir
entre la tierra que tienta
con sus secretos a voces
con sus estatuas de sal y sol;

y del otro lado, el viento, donde
todo se repite con otro acento.
El reverso de la moneda es un espejo.
Yo permanezco en el borde, al margen del reflejo
En la frontera exacta
Entre la tierra y el viento.

DUALIDAD

"we succumb to the pictures they construct"
- Salman Rushdie

Dicen "sean"
y somos;
no entendemos las reglas del juego
porque ellos somos todos
en una esfera infinita
que se extiende y al mismo tiempo está en ninguna parte.

Hugo Ríos
Rutgers University
Estados Unidos de América

EATING CULTURE

Kenneth D. Capers

Fajita fantasy
Curry lover
to whom I am
untrue
because it is only
your flavor and never the texture
of you I want to taste.

You are a resort location
where tourists strip down
wearing sun block
while roasting golden
brown in your
heated kitchen.

How admired are your dishes
served up prettily
to stimulate taste buds,
moving patrons to salivate and
lick their thin lips hungrily.

Paying for the privilege,
clientele sample gingerly
because they are fickle and
proud to be
hard to please.

Your exotic fare meets
approval when curious
patrons discover
in the face of different spices
and carefully concocted coconut
delicacies that
you taste just like chicken.

Going native with
floral prints on the
worn sheets where
your tapered fingers
and thin ankles hold on

to sturdy capitalists
thrusts that
pillage your Thai
treasures off the menu,
as timbales and drumbeats
soundtrack the plunder
and minutes of this
international affair.

You, my sweet, are the Chinese buffet
to be sampled selectively
and scraped off
the plates once a short
attention span has
been satisfied.

Today we will do
Caribbean you
until satiated,
heavy,
full of the knowing
that first world
privilege can
sleepily
lick its fingers clean,
leaving
disenfranchised, penetrated you
a large
tip for silent
survival,
offered in
compliant
passive
reception.

Kenneth D. Capers
Clark Atlanta University
United States of America

Número Especial - Convocatoria

La junta editorial convoca a la entrega de trabajos (ensayos, poemas, cuentos, reseñas) relacionados con **los hombres y las masculinidades** para la publicación de un número especial (junio 2008) de la revista.

Los ensayos pueden referirse a una amplia variedad de tópicos relacionados con el género (incluyendo, pero no limitándose sólo a esos temas), tanto la confluencia de la masculinidad con el feminismo, la etnicidad y las instituciones sociales, así como las representaciones de los hombres y/o las masculinidades en la literatura, el cine, la cultura popular y los medios.

Fecha límite para entrega: 1 de noviembre de 2007. Véase las normas para entrega de manuscritos en http://www.uprm.edu/atenea para información sobre el formato de manuscritos.

Special Issue - Call For Papers

The editorial board invites submissions (essays, poems, fiction, book reviews) for publication for a special edition (June 2008) on **Men and Masculinities**.

Essays may address a wide variety of topics related to gender discourse including (but not limited to) the intersection of masculinity with feminism, ethnicity, and social institutions as well as representations of men and/or masculinities in literature, film, popular culture, the media.

Submissions for this issue must be received by 1 November 2007. See submission guidelines at http://www.uprm.edu/atenea for details about the format of manuscripts.

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