

La Folle et l'Autre Femme: Perceptions of Identity in the Works of Myriam Warner-Vieyra

For the moment I, câpresse of mud, studied that wonder: a [Negro](#) blackman transfigured into a mulatto, transcended to the white through the incredible power of that beautiful language from France.

– Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*

Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much high a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.

– Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

The men recall their nocturnal dreams when they soaked their sheets and they're ashamed. So they defy me with their eyes to hide their desire. Why? Probably because I'm too beautiful for their ugliness, too light complexioned for the blackness of their hearts and skins.

– Maryse Condé *Crossing the Mangrove*

Understanding the Imperial Gaze

Women in the works of the Guadeloupien writer Myriam Warner-Vieyra often find themselves outsiders, shackled by “madness” and pushed to the periphery of society by imperial and patriarchal forces. *As the Sorcerer Said (Le quimboiseur l'avait dit)* and *Juletane* exist within a larger conversation of imperialism in literature that emerges in the 19th century works of Honoré de Balzac and Charlotte Brontë. *The Girl with the Golden Eyes (La fille aux yeux d'or)* and *Jane Eyre* depict women who are bound by men who designate them as socially and culturally subordinate, thus completely marginalizing the importance of cultural identities outside of Europe. We must, therefore, analyze the works of Brontë and Balzac to understand how the Nineteenth-Century colonial perspective informs the contemporary Caribbean perspective on the themes of madness and otherness.

Paquita Valdès is a Cuban woman who was born in Havana, transported to Spain, and later sent to Paris under the watchful eye of her owner Don Hijo. Paquita's slavery is as much a reflection of her cultural identity as a Cuban as it is of her gender. She is

exchanged as imperial currency between Cuba, Spain and France. Bertha Mason is also coveted for her wealth, although she possesses equal parts wealth and beauty. She was born of the landowning class of Creoles¹ in Jamaica. Bertha is forced to marry Edward Rochester of Britain in order to secure the wealth of her brother Richard who ensures Mr. Rochester his share. Bertha is ultimately interned in Britain. Mr. Rochester keeps her in a room in the attic because he fears as though her cultural indoctrination in Jamaica makes her too feeble for British gentility. Both women are assigned the identity of the madwoman, blending gender and racial representations through an imperialist patriarchal gaze. This gaze refuses to accept Paquita and Bertha as anything less than cogs in a colonial machine, as slaves or relics of a plantocracy. The reader witnesses Henri de Marsay and Mr. Rochester ‘knocking their heads against the riddle²’ of Paquita and Bertha as Caribbean women, as they try to make sense of their ‘otherness’ (Felman 42). As readers, we are forced to question the “labeling process” Bertha and Paquita undergo, who has the power to label them as either “the exotic other” or as mad, and whether these labels afford Bertha and Paquita any possible agency.

While Bertha and Paquita’s experiences overlap, *Jane Eyre* and *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* share few similarities in form and style, as do the authors themselves.

Balzac is firmly nestled in the French literary canon, writing and publishing voluminously for thirty years. While Brontë is a part of the English literary canon, it

¹ Note: There are different spellings of Creole used through my text. Creole refers to the Anglophone colonial context, their class of landowners, their progeny in the Americas, and the mixture of British and Caribbean culture. Créole refers to the Francophone colonial context, the language, the culturally mixed progeny, and the collective mixture of French, African, and Caribbean culture. Créolité is both a literary movement and on a personal level one’s understanding of their cultural hybridity.

² This phrase was adapted from Shoshana Felman’s *What Does a Woman Want?*

would be an injustice to ignore the substantial amount of work it took feminist critics and literary scholars to secure its rightful place among other texts considered as ‘required reading’. *Jane Eyre* is a bildungsroman focusing on the maturation of Jane Eyre as a strong, morally upright woman in a patriarchal society spanning the course of her adolescence to adulthood. Brontë’s work uplifts white working class British women, establishing feminist maxims through Jane’s responses to adversity, grounding the novel in feminine poetics. In stark contrast to Charlotte Brontë, Honoré de Balzac’s work presents an episode of a larger story about Paris in which Paquita Valdès can be understood as a mere attraction for Henri de Marsay and the Parisian public. Balzac’s prose is terse and scathing, using his short novel to make blanket statements about Parisian society. Both authors use Antillean women as objects of sexual attraction and commodification at the height of the British and French empires.

The Girl with the Golden Eyes (1833) may seem as though Balzac is only concerned with Paris and Europeanness after he dedicates the first major section to a critique of *moeurs parisiennes*. Balzac’s Parisian focus helps to establish the colonial métropole as the lens through which everyday Europeans can interact with the French Empire. In the middle of the novel Balzac introduces Paquita Valdès, a woman coveted for her beauty who is transported to Paris to be placed in sexual servitude. In an almost ethnographic style, if we imagine femininity functioning the same as race or ‘otherness’, Henri de Marsay’s first encounter with Paquita reveals his desire to comprehend her otherness; « Ah ! Mon cher, physiquement parlant, l’inconnue est la personne la plus adorablement femme que j’aie jamais rencontrée... ce que m’a le plus frappé, ce dont je suis encore épris, ce sont deux yeux jaunes comme ceux des tigres ; un jaune d’or qui

brille, de l'or vivant, de l'or qui pense, de l'or qui aime et veut absolument venir dans votre gousset » [Ah! My dear friend, talk of figure! The unknown, this creature is the most adorable woman I have ever met.... What struck me the most, what I am still in love with, are her two yellow eyes like those of tigers, a yellow that shines like gold, of living gold, of gold that thinks, of gold that loves and wants to enter your pocket] (Balzac 351). Henri's description of Paquita objectifies her as a commodity, an exotic creature waiting for passersby to feast their eyes on the spectacle and if possible, to covet. She is something to be coveted like gold, gleaned from foreign lands and then transported to the métropole to enrich the wealth of the colonial center. De Marsay's willingness to construct Paquita in his own image by seeing himself in her golden eyes relates to Shoshana Felman's reading where, "the relationship between men and women is one of sexual hierarchization, in which the man is the master, whereas the woman is reduced to the state of a mere slave" (Felman 45). Therefore it is only fitting that as the main plot element in the story, Paquita does not find herself in the *notes biographiques sur les personnages* (biographical notes on the characters) in the French editions of Balzac's *Histoire des treize* alongside Henri de Marsay.

Through Balzac's imperialist narrative voice Paquita's position as the exotic and seductive "other" is later articulated in terms of "madness": "Cette fille est folle, se dit Henri, qui tomba lui-même en des réflexions étranges... L'admiration de de Marsay devint une rage secrète, et il la dévoila tout entière en lançant un regard que comprit l'Espagnol, comme si elle était habituée à en recevoir de semblables » "This girl is mad, thought Henri, surrendering to strange reflections... De Marsay's admiration became a hidden frenzy, and he conveyed it all to her in a look which the Spanish girl understood,

as if she were accustomed to being looked at this way” (374). Balzac adds later that Paquita’s origins are not only Spanish, but that “elle est de la Havane, du pays le plus espagnol qu’il y ait dans le Nouveau-Monde” “she is from Havana, of the most Spanish country that there was in the New World” (388). The foreignness of Paquita’s origins afford her a certain “otherness” which is contagious to all French men and women, Henri is utterly defenseless from the “frenzy” Paquita sends him spiraling towards. Similar to Bertha’s attack on Richard Mason, Paquita’s “madness” has the potential to challenge and even disarm Henri.

Jane Eyre (1847) is a novel that is deeply concerned with life in and outside of Britain. Gayatri Spivak explains that Brontë, is very much in wonder of the world beyond Europe. Spivak argues that the act of writing and characterizing the world beyond Europe stands as one of the main goals of imperialism, to produce “cultural representations” for a European audience (Spivak 243). Brontë constructs a world beyond Britain, devoting major plot developments that depend on the colonial environments of the British empire in India and the Caribbean. Presumably having never encountered the colonial world, Brontë’s reconstructions of Jamaica and India come from a collective British consciousness. The same consciousness that allowed Jane Austen to write about an Antigua plantation and British naval life, even though she had likely never left Europe. Bertha Mason’s first encounter with Jane does not elucidate questions of cultural identity, however, though it does help to establish Bertha in opposition to Jane as the “other”. Bertha appears to Jane as, “Fearful and ghastly to me – oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!” (Brontë 327). Gilbert and

Gubar argue that Bertha is, “Jane’s truest and darkest double; she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead” (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Jane’s fear of Bertha’s “madness” is based on her own self-reflection, her ability to look inward to see the ways in which society shackles women to dependency.

Jane perceives Bertha in opposition to herself as a woman, but she relies on the subsequent testimonies of Mr. Rochester and Richard Mason to situate Bertha’s otherness in the Caribbean. The two pathologize Bertha’s Jamaican heritage, suggesting to Jane that Bertha’s “madness” and the “savagery” Jane believes she sees in Bertha’s face are a result of her creole genealogy. Thus, Jane begins to interpret Bertha’s creoleness as her “madness” through the imperial gaze of Richard Mason and Mr. Rochester:

Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! – as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. (337)

It is also important to note that Brontë most likely understood Creoles in the Caribbean as the progeny of English colonials who suffer from a “degeneration” of British values and purity. Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti note that although the term Creole or *Criollo* existed largely within an Ibero-American context, but “English writers were using the word also in reference to British-American colonials – often to express a ‘deep skepticism ‘about the survival of British character among the English progeny born in the Caribbean, Virginia, and New England” (Bauer and Mazzotti 5). This skepticism surrounds Bertha Mason as a Creole, giving another dimension to Jane’s observations. The British colonial gaze that has the power to both displace her from her status in Jamaica and place her within the role of an exoticized other, thus copying her mother’s

beauty and madness and her father's status and deviance. T.D Sharpley-Whiting notes Bertha's dilemma, which is also the fate of Paquita Valdès, as a binary of whiteness and blackness: "Both the Creole and the mulâtresse are white, yet inescapably black, and thus unable to shake the lascivious and ardent stereotypes of black female sexuality" (Sharpley-Whiting 46).

Men view Bertha and Paquita as equally exotic and fascinating for their physical appearances but their cultural and gender difference indicates mental instability in the male imperial gaze. Henri de Marsay suggests that Paquita has gone mad because she tries to escape her captivity but to no avail, and instead of living in servitude she begs for Henri to kill her. While Bertha's supposed madness is passed down to her through her mother and her handicapped brother, Mr. Rochester suggests that Bertha's madness is predicated upon her status as a Creole, becoming a family trait that is passed down matrilineally. Madness is used to explain how both of these women meet their demise in a manner that conveniently strips them of any agency they may have had whether sexual or material. Bertha throws herself from the highest tower as Thornfield burns to the ground, and Paquita dies helplessly at the feet of Henri de Marsay who later lies about her death to his confidant, saying she died of consumption. In contrast to Brontë, Balzac's approach to women is to make the "female [occupy] the inferior position, whereas the male... occupies the superior, ruling position" (Felman 45). However, Brontë and Balzac overlap in their understandings of culture and race, which they both contend is passed through women. Readers might question the willingness of these two writers to martyr Bertha and Paquita? Is it to garner sympathy for Jane or advance the sexual prowess of Henri? Balzac's willingness to push Paquita to the margins of society

and the page is simply because, his narrative suggests, women's liberation, especially *exotic* women's liberation, is "une petite chose, un ensemble des niaiseries" [a little thing. A bundle of nonsense] in the early 19th century (360)

Traversing Contemporary Contexts: Situating Myriam Warner-Vieyra

Paquita and Bertha's futures are marred by their *créolité* (creoleness) that constitutes their otherness. Paquita is 'recalled' from Havana to Spain and later transported to France. Like Bertha, her *métissage* (racial and cultural duality) marks her difference, lending her exotic physical traits to capture the attention of Europeans. In Bertha's case, she has lost her claim to Englishness because her family's values have been denatured in the West Indies. Bertha also comes to England with Mr. Rochester during a watershed in the British Empire where the creole elite began to lose their power and influence with the abolition of slavery. Jean Rhys' revision of Bertha's story depicts Jamaican plantations ablaze, signaling the literal and metaphorical end of the creole elite's domination. If we understand Rhys' novel marking the beginning of a new type of Caribbean writing, where she takes up Brontë's treatment of Bertha's character and creates her own pastiche from a Caribbean perspective. Rhys not only attempts to ameliorate Bertha's character but also wishes to critique one of the English writers who she greatly admired. Rhys writing back to Brontë, taking umbrage with her treatment of otherness, both gendered and cultural, is the type of political engagement embodied by the works of Myriam Warner-Vieyra. Juletane and Zétou are not *métisse* in the sense that they are split between two classes of people, but rather two languages.

Juletane and Zétou are intimately entwined in the history of Créole and French – placed between the "language of slaves" and the language of the elites. Patrick

Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant describe, “La langue créole, qui vit depuis sa naissance dans l’ombre du français, se retrouvera plusieurs fois orpheline.” (Chamoiseau and Confiant 94) [The Créole language, which lived in the shadow of French since it’s birth, many times finds itself an orphan] The *mouvement de la créolité* focuses on understanding the complex history of the Créole language from its uses as a language of promiscuity to its erasure in favor of French. Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s characters are “née ici, aux Amériques, elle a connu la créolisation qui, dans le creuset des îles ouvertes, a mélangé tout le Divers monde. Aborde-la en français et en créole : deux langues mais une même trajectoire” [born here, in the Americas, [créole literature] knew the creolization that, in the crucible of the open islands, mixed the every diverse person. It addresses in French and Créole: two languages but the same trajectory](14).

In *Juletane* and *As The Sorcerer Said*, Zétou and Julietane navigate the same patriarchal and imperialist constructs that ended the lives of Bertha and Paquita. Myriam Warner-Vieyra readily takes on these tropes of “otherness” and “madness” and her methods differ drastically from the imperialistic and misogynistic portrayals provided by Balzac and Brontë. Together, they define the West as the literary and cultural center, which is a position Warner-Vieyra has devoted her writing to reversing and de-centralizing. Warner-Vieyra is locked in this post-colonial project, which is to say that her writing is “rooted” in the colonial pasts of Africa and the Caribbean to make a case for the plurality of women’s identities (Elliott 45). J.E. Elliott’s interpretation of the field of post-colonial studies provides a route through which to navigate the world of Warner-Vieyra because of his acknowledgement of the presence of “the ‘colonial’ component of post-colonial theory” (45). Theorists such as Valérie Orlando have stated the problematic

nature that comes with referring to French départements and the writing that emanates from them as “post-colonial” because they “are considered a part of France” (Orlando 68). Adopting Elliott’s approach not only broadens the understanding of the function of post-colonial theory, but also its application can be extended to literatures that have not reached a post-independence reality. In *Éloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant discuss the reclamation of the French language as a tool essential to the project of de-centralization because Antillean writers have “*l’avons conquise, cette langue français*” [conquered it, this French language]³ (Bernabé et al. 46) Thus, Warner-Vieyra’s attention to the colonial pasts of the Caribbean and Africa allows her to explore the creation and suppression of identities through the themes of madness and otherness.

In Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s first novel, *As the Sorcerer Said (Le quimboiseur l’avait dit)*, Zétou is given the ability to choose. She decides to leave Guadeloupe in search of education but even though she does not achieve her intended outcome, she still escapes with an intact sense of self despite being labeled “mad”. In her second novel, *Juletane*, her protagonist marries an African student in Paris and they return to his home in Africa to establish a family. They arrive and Juletane is appalled when she discovers that she is Mamadou’s second wife. Juletane understands that she can leave and return to Paris, but there is little for her there as well, so she remains in Africa and begins to write a diary. The act of inscribing herself on the page is where Juletane’s power manifests itself. Although she may be crumbling under the pressure of her polygamist marriage and alienation from African culture that seeks to fit into the category of “the other”, her

³ Emphasis in original text.

identity remains stable in her writing. The two works do not end favorably for Zétou and Juletane in terms of where they find themselves in life. It appears that they have simply been duped into “madness” or “otherness”, but these women produce poignant critiques of patriarchal and colonial realities that impede female progress in African and Caribbean societies.

Antillean Confinement and French Imprisonment in *Le quimboiseur l'avait dit...*⁴

Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Le quimboiseur l'avait dit...* (As the Sorcerer Said) is her earliest work, published in 1980 by Présence Africaine and later translated in 1982 as part of a Longman project to produce a survey of African, Indian, and Caribbean literatures. To understand Myriam Warner-Vieyra as a writer emerging in a context of “discovery”, as the Longman mission suggests, would sever the ties from a previously established literary history in the Francophone Caribbean. Bernabé et al. illuminate the rich literary history of Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe in *Éloge de la créolité*, praising Édouard Glissant and paying homage to Aimé Césaire for his prophetic return. Therefore, Warner-Vieyra should be considered within an established literary heritage even though writers like Bernabé et al and Ernest Pépin do very little to prepare and define a literary space which women writers can occupy. In a 1987 article, Ernest Pépin delves into the

⁴ For my thesis I decided to translate all quotations from the original French texts. Upon rereading the Dorothy Blair translation (1982), I discovered that there were many issues with the text ranging from mistranslations to editing. The text seemed to be translated for a 1980s British audience, using many colonial concepts like “half-caste” and racial distinctions like “coloured” instead of “métis” and “nègre” which are common in French Antillean texts. In order to remain loyal to the political and linguistic context that the novel was originally written in, I chose to conduct my own translations. I do the same for texts by Fanon, Balzac, Chamoiseau, Confiant, and Bernabé. However, I stress that translations are merely a stand-in for the French text, and I have tried to maintain the same “feel” of the text, but cannot help to think that all translations fall short of the original text and author intentions.

problematic of “La femme antillaise et son corps” (The Antillean woman and her body) suggesting a reading of women’s bodies in the corpus of Caribbean literature. Pépin suggests that Antillean writers timidly approach the subject of women’s bodies, “L’écrivain antillais ne regarde pas la femme antillaise, il ne la contemple pas, craignant sans doute de tomber dans l’exoticisme” [The Antillean writer does not look at the Antillean woman, he does not contemplate her, fearing without a doubt of falling into exoticism] (Pépin 193). In his brief overview of authors writing about *la femme antillaise*, Pépin fails to mention a single female author writing about women’s bodies. Pépin’s troubling and limited exposition of female writers ignores a significant body of work written during the same time period as his article by writers like Simone Schwartz-Bart - *Un plat de porc au bananes vertes* (1967) and *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972) - and Myriam Warner-Vieyra – *Le quimboiseur l’avait dit...* (1980) and *Juletane* (1982).

Writing from a context of imperial, gender, and literary exclusion, Myriam Warner-Vieyra explores the difficulties Zétou confronts while forming a hybrid identity within patriarchal and (neo)colonial spaces. Zétou stands in contention with Pépin’s assertions that “[Antillean women] n’ont pas véritablement de corps. Elles incarnent un type abstrait et désincarné” [Antillean women do not truly have a body. They represent an abstract and disincarnated body type] because Warner-Vieyra boldly writes against tropes of exoticism and Eurocentric ideals (193). Not only is she writing against the women Brontë and Balzac depict as a way to ‘write back’ to the empire, Warner-Vieyra is writing back to her male Antillean contemporaries as the representative body of Antillean women’s writing. Just like Brontë and Balzac, Warner-Vieyra locates her

women in the islands. She critiques the colonial forces and providing a subsequent revision of the manner in which canonized writers of the Francophone Caribbean characterize Caribbean female roles. Evan Mwangi calls attention to the process of writing back to localities rather than the métropole helps to enfranchise nations like Guadeloupe by “indicating that [localities] can contribute to a resolution of their own problems rather than blaming colonialists and outsiders for all of the problems on the continent” (Mwangi 2). Warner-Vieyra engages in equal parts external and internal critiques of the treatment of Antillean women within and outside of Guadeloupe in order to map Zétou’s hybridity.

Zétou’s life in Guadeloupe follows a familiar storyline, where women who reach adolescence are supposed to quit school in order to tend to domestic life, which in turn, will serve as proper training for a future husband. Zétou’s father is the archetypal patriarch who wants to bind Zétou to domestic life. However, domestic life in Cocotier is not just a traditional gendered space for Zétou’s father, but it represents an anti-colonialist rejection of modernity through French education. Together, Zétou’s father and grandmother define the proper role for women in Cocotier, “Mon père ne se souciait pas de ce que nous faisions en classe, Zélia et moi. Il n’avait aucune sympathie pour ce que l’on apprenait, il n’en voyait pas l’utilité... Que doit savoir une fille? Faire la cuisine, raccommoder, tenir sa maison, disait [Zétou’s grandmother]” [My father didn’t care about what we did in class, Zélia and I. He never had any liking for learning, he didn’t see its use... What should a girl know? How to do the cooking, to sew, to keep her house, said (Zétou’s grandmother)](Warner-Vieyra 45-46). To the older generation, Guadeloupian femininity is part and parcel of the domestic sphere. Zétou is quick to

dismiss these maxims, “Moi, Je voyais mon rôle différemment. J’espérais fermement réussir à l’examen du certificat d’études et aller à la grande école de la ville l’année d’après, et plus tard avoir une profession” [Me, I saw my role differently. I strongly wished to succeed on the certificate exam and to attend the *grande école* in the city the year after, and later to have a career](46). Warner-Vieyra places Zétou in serious risk of backlash from the defenders of patriarchal society (her father and grandmother) by allowing Zétou to defy sociocultural conventions. As Valérie Orlando argues about Miriama Bâ’s *Une chante écarlate*, Warner-Vieyra positions Zétou in unconventional gender roles in order to condemn “both men and women’s insistence on ‘blind adherence to tradition and to an ideology’” (Orlando 114). Zétou possesses unwavering optimism that through education, which can be read as an intimate relationship with the French language, she can divert her path towards tradition.

As if at a fork in the road, Zétou’s choice is between her anti-colonialist father and her *assimilée* mother, Rosamonde, who leaves Cocotier with a white Créole during Zétou’s childhood. Rosamonde’s past has been marked by colonial structures since birth. Warner-Vieyra explains that Rosamonde’s mother “avait à peine dix-sept ans, quand ce fils gâté lui avait fait une bosse par-devant... Donc, elle n’avait plus eu besoin de travailler chez les Blancs” [Was barely seventeen years old when that delinquent got her pregnant... So, she no longer needed to work for the whites] (Warner-Vieyra 23). As the daughter of a black maid and a white Créole, Rosamonde’s physical appearance ironically makes up for her humble beginnings and explains her departure from Guadeloupe. Here *métissage* creates social confusion because Rosamonde’s phenotype, her light skin tone and Créole social standing, is ameliorative not detrimental to her or her

mother. Instead of causing her to be folded into the social ladder in *Cocotier*, Rosamonde is commoditized liberating her mother from the white Créoles. Zétou recalls her mother's almost mythical departure, "C'est avec un de ces Blancs que ma mère était partie. On disait qu'il l'avait emmenée en France parce que là-bas elle aurait du succès, car elle était belle et pas très noire..." [it is with one of those Creoles that my mother had left. They said that he had taken her to France because over there she would have success, because she was beautiful and not very dark-skinned (22). Thus, Rosamonde's primary role is to provide the French a sensual spectacle à la Joséphine Baker. Rosamonde divorces her Guadeloupianness in order to embrace a French identity. An identity that is only secure among other Guadeloupians because Rosamonde views them as inferior in order to become France French. Her manner of speaking, her presence, and her appearance no longer reflect Guadeloupe. She relies on the appearance of authenticity because she becomes French when Guadeloupians see her as French. Just like the mother in the Léon Damas poem, Rosamond "fallait parler français/ le français de France" [must speak French/ the French of France] (Damas 187). In Zétou's memories, her mother is still familiar, but upon her return Rosamonde resembles a fashion model:

Elle était plus belle que dans mon souvenir. On croyait voir une de ces femmes que l'on trouve dans les revues de mode. Ses sourcils étaient remplacés par un coup de crayon bien net, ses lèvres et ses joues étaient fardées... C'était un rayon de soleil éblouissant posé là sur l'unique chaise convenable que nous avions encore, ce que donnait à tout le reste un air de misère et de pauvreté que je n'avais jamais remarqué jusqu'alors.

[She was more beautiful than I remembered. You would think you were looking at one of those women you find in fashion magazines. Her eyelashes were replaced by a stroke of a pen; her lips and her cheeks were made-up... There was a dazzling ray of sunlight that rested on the only suitable chair we had then, which gave everything in the room had a feeling of misery and poverty that I had never noticed until now] (72)

Zétou is actually intimidated by her mother, whose presence dominates the modest home in Cocotier as though Zétou and her siblings are unworthy of her visit. She seems to have lost all of her maternal traits, and has embraced an exoticized figure of fashion. Not only is she an incarnation of Joséphine Baker in the sense of an exotic fashion icon, but Rosamonde's display of French opulence juxtaposed with her children reveals that she has not only divorced her husband but her familial past as well. Like the French planter class during the colonial period, Rosamonde is positioned as superior to her children, and her mere presence forces their eyes downward in shame. Rosamonde's assimilation goes beyond her clothing and her make-up and she has ostensibly become a French woman to her children, occupying "the only chair suitable" for her status.

Rosamonde's return to Guadeloupe is not the prophetic Césairean return, in fact, her sole purpose for returning to Guadeloupe is to legally divorce her husband. Rosamonde's divorce is a symbolic break from the patriarchal structures in Guadeloupe, however she simply swaps a Guadeloupian patriarch for a French one. This too, is ironic because even though Rosamonde deliberately divorces her husband, plans to leave Guadeloupe and never return, she fails to recognize that Roger is merely a trade off. Rosamonde also fails to comprehend the relationship between France and Guadeloupe in which she is merely a cog in a neocolonial département choosing to align herself with the status quo. Zétou uses this moment of divorce as an opportunity to break from the island patriarchy, "Maman, je voudrais continuer mes études après le certificat d'études. Emmène-moi avec toi à Paris" [Mom, I would like to continue my studies after the certificate. Take me with you to Paris] (74). Zétou has inexhaustible optimism that she will be able to improve herself through education, even though she overlooks the notion

that her appeal to Rosamonde is nothing but pleading with one's colonizer. Zétou's reality is a collective reality for all Guadeloupians in the Twentieth Century, especially rural communities. Zétou is also unaware of the volatile space she is about to enter when she leaves Guadeloupe and ventures to Paris with Rosamonde who more closely resembles an object of colonial objectification than a mother. Zétou's father greets her desire for education with violence after Zétou refuses to work the sugar cane fields with her grandmother, "Quoi! Moi je veux continuer mes études, criais-je. Une gifle sonore me brûla la joue gauche. C'était bien la première fois que mon père me frappait" [What! Me, I want to continue my studies, I cried. A resounding slap burned my left cheek. It was the first time that my father had hit me] (78). Zétou's choice is met with masculine violence, as if a reflex of patriarchy Zétou's "cry out" causes a break between feminine silence and Guadeloupien patriarchy. Leaving her sister behind to work the fields, Zétou proclaims "A Paris mon avenir était assuré... ma réussite ne dépendait que de moi, donc c'était certain" [In Paris my future was assured... my success only depended on me, that was for certain] (80)

No longer paralyzed by the Guadeloupien patriarchy and unaware of her dependence on outsiders, Zétou departs with Rosamonde and Roger Milan for Paris. Prior to her voyage, Zétou's understanding of race is largely based on her family history of *métissage* and only until she is placed in the hold of the ship is she aware how race is constructed in the post-colonial world. Aboard the ship, Zétou's journey to France appears to be a recreation of the middle passage taking place in the hold of the ship, "Moi, j'avais un lit dans le dortoir des femmes dans la cale. Il n'y avait pas d'air et beaucoup de gens étaient malades. Dieu merci, j'avais le pied marin et je pouvais rester

sur le pont toute la journée” [Me, I had a bed in the women’s berth. There was no fresh air and a lot of people were ill. Thank god, I had sea legs and I could stay on the deck all day] (92). Zétou’s middle passage is not only racialized, but gendered as well. The native female is regarded as a second-class citizen, and must be placed below where she cannot disturb the other passengers. Although Zétou has a bridge to first-class due to her relationship with Rosamonde and Roger, most women are left in the hull to rot in sickness.

Roger, the son of wealthy Creoles, is regarded as a status symbol on the ship. He is forged by the same egoism and masculinity as Henri de Marsay, as he appropriates Rosamonde and places her within the context of la mulâtresse and the exotic other:

Pourtant, c’est grâce à sa moitié de sang nègre qu’elle a cette tinte cuivrée et cette beauté exotique que m’en sorcelle. Je dois reconnaître que ce pêcheur qu’on lui avait donné pour mari n’était pas à même d’apprécier ce morceau de choix qu’il avait dans les mains... Zétou tient beaucoup de sa mère, elle a du caractère, cette petite.

[Nevertheless, it is thanks to the half-black blood that she has her copper skin tone and exotic beauty that bewitches me. I must recognize that the fisherman who someone gave to her for a husband was not able to appreciate the prime morsel he had in his hands... Zétou was a lot like her mother, she had her character, the little thing] (97)

Women are “defined by male subjects, by male parameters” ostensibly becoming objects for male possession and domination (Sharpley-Whiting 43). Although Roger is “bewitched” by Rosamonde’s exotic beauty, she is merely a possession of her former husband to be re-colonized by Roger Milan. Men have the power to pluck these women from exotic lands and engage in their trade or exchange as though they are commodities “to be given in marriage” or coveted like a precious object.

After Zétou lashes out against her mother, she is put into “L’Hôpital de la Charité” and declared “complètement folle” [completely mad] by her mother, Roger, and Parisian police. Madness provides her with an in-between space through which to contemplate her identity even though she is imprisoned by the whiteness of the French. The blank interior of the psychiatric hospital provides Zétou with a *carte blanche* that she can use to paint her identity in her own terms. In order to make sense of the situation she finds herself in, Zétou recognizes the importance of the past and her history. Warner-Vieyra writes, “je ne voulais pas parler du présent, ni de l’avenir, je n’étais pas prête à regarder en face la réalité...J’avais eu besoin de plonger dans ma vie passée, à Cocotier, comme dans un bain «démarré»” [I did not want to speak of the present, nor the future, I was not ready to look in the face of reality. I had left, the need to dive into my past life, in Cocotier, like in a bath [for] ‘a clean start’] (32). In her solitude, Zétou understands that in order to combat and re-compose an identity under her own terms and conditions, she must return to the past. Zétou’s historical baptism seeks to cast aside the colonial and patriarchal visions of self, so that she can visualize her own “depths” (Bernabé et al. 86). In Zétou’s re-imagining of her past, she has the benefit of hindsight, which becomes available through institutionalization.

Zétou has control over her narrative. She co-opts the past in order to assemble a hybrid identity that is in contention with and mixes anti-colonial and assimilated qualities. Zétou creates a post-colonial identity through an understanding of Guadeloupian history, language, and culture. The history of Créole is of particular importance to Zétou, because it is the tongue through which she communicates with the outside world. Zétou’s understanding of Créole is part and parcel of the French language

and the history of education in the Caribbean, “j’avais dû passer une année d’apprendre le français. Comme tous les enfants du village, j’avais parlé le créole jusqu’à mon entrée à l’école” [I had to spend a year learning French. Like all the village children, I had spoken créole until I began school] (74). Créole is her native tongue, and like all Guadeloupians, it represents an unbreakable tie between Zétou and her home. Zétou’s development as a bi-lingual individual also speaks to her *métisse*, post-colonial identity, because she is able to float between French and Créole without being rooted to one specific cultural identity. Hybridity is the enabling force in Zétou’s life that distances her from her anti-colonial father and her *assimilée* mother. She ostensibly creates a new generation, an identity neither embittered by the scars of colonialism, nor blindly accepting colonization.

The novel ends with Zétou’s escape to a hazy state, removing her from the grey skies and white walls of France, in which she can imagine the landscapes of Guadeloupe. Although Zétou never leaves the Charity Hospital in France, she is able to recall memories of Guadeloupe, transcend her captivity, and psychologically make a return to her native land; “tout ce que je pouvais voir au fond de la barque, c’était le large dos d’un homme au torse nu – ses muscles luisants de sueur évoquaient une puissance qui me rassurait – et un tout petit nuage blanc accroché à un ciel bleu” [the only things I could see beyond the raft, was the back of a man’s naked torso – his sweaty muscles evoked a power that reassured me – and a little white cloud hanging in the blue sky] (138). This mixture of abstract images indicates the sense of control Zétou has within a dreamlike state. It is not clear whether Zétou is “mad”, but her trance seems to anesthetize her from the white walls and grey skies of France and transports her to tropical landscapes. Unlike Balzac and Brontë’s madwomen, Zétou does not self-mutilate. She is in control, and her

lucid memories of Guadeloupe belie diagnoses of her mental capacity. However, she cannot manipulate her body to escape the mental hospital and remains captive under French psychiatric supervision.

Une toubabesse ou une femme antillaise: Being the “Other Woman” in *Juletane*

In the introduction to the translated text of *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra, literary critic Elizabeth Wilson suggests that Guadeloupian women’s fiction is “a literature of confinement and alienation rather than a literature of revolt” (Wilson vii). Wilson suggests that the fate of the women of the Francophone Caribbean has remained static since Bertha Mason and Paquita Valdès entered the female literary imagination. The suggestion that revolt is absent from the works of Warner-Vieyra, especially *Juletane* is a hasty proposition. Writers and critics like Hélène Cixous and Virginia Woolf emphasize the importance of women writing themselves rather than allowing men to write for them. Juletane’s use of writing allows her to create a physical representation herself, free from the prejudices and domination of patriarchy. Juletane’s autobiographical writing is cathartic resistance against external perceptions of her identity. *Juletane* represents Warner-Vieyra’s militant departure from *As the Sorcerer Said*. Juletane and Zétou share a similar ignorance about the world around them, but instead of being contained by outside forces, Juletane’s own depression causes her to turn her violence onto herself as well as those around her.

After losing her parents in a hurricane, Juletane is sent to live with her grandmother in Paris. Living in close quarters with her godmother in a tiny maid’s chamber, Juletane habituates herself to Parisian living and French life. Juletane learns to accept her bodily differences in Paris, often receiving compliments on her light

complexioned skin around the city. Over the course of her childhood and adolescence Juletane's identification with Guadeloupe becomes muted in favor of French culture and values. She meets a Senegalese student named Mamadou Moustafa at the Cité Universitaire de Paris (City University of Paris). He begins to introduce Juletane to other African students. "Jusqu'à ma rencontre avec Mamadou, j'avais donc vécu bien loin de tout écho du monde colonial. Aussi, indépendance ou autonomie étaient des mots tout à fait nouveaux pour moi" [Until meeting with Mamadou, I had lived so far from any echo of the colonial world. Also, independence and autonomy were words that were quite new for me] (*Juletane* 30). This moment is the first point in which Juletane confronts the animosity that exists between France and her former colonies. She re-encounters the "colonial world" as it is decolonizing through Mamadou. Symbolically, Mamadou positions the masculine struggle to freely self-govern as if the male body is the sole representation of the colonial trauma.

The future of African independence is a central theme of the conversations between Juletane and Mamadou in Paris. Juletane has a lot of hope for her future in Africa. Independence brings with it the hope for radical change in the social sphere, but there seems to be little change in terms of gender parity. If men represent the site of colonial trauma, women seem to represent the site for post-colonial trauma. Women are expected to be subservient to men becoming trophies or objects offered to African men as a way to heal colonial transgressions:

Ce qui du reste ne l'empêchait pas de tenir tendrement par la taille sa petite amie blanche. Très jolie blonde, elle se prénomme Martine. Elle avait rompu avec sa famille, qui ne voulait pas recevoir de nègres, et vivait en extase de son « homme ». Peut-être espérait-elle ainsi, par son amour, obtenir pour ses compatriotes une rémission de leurs crimes. (31)

[This however, did not prevent him from tenderly holding his white girlfriend by the waist. A very pretty blonde, her name was Martine. She had disowned her family, who did not want to associate with blacks, and lived in the ecstasy of her “man.” Maybe in that way that she hoped, through her love, to obtain for her countrymen a pardon for their crimes.]

Martine is the model of feminine purity. Her blonde hair, white skin, and wealth enshrines Martine as the representative of the Western standard of beauty. Martine’s objectification is intimately associated with post-independence Africa because her existence is tied to Mamadou’s friend through colonial antecedents. Post-colonial theorist Albert Memmi points out that the relationship between Martine and her lover represents a typical inversion of the colonial norms where the African man is now paired with French women instead of the French man with the African woman. Therefore Mamadou and Juletane’s marriage appears to be a testament to the progressive future of Africa in terms of race and gender. Warner-Vieyra uses this marriage to put post-colonial theory into praxis. In effect, challenging Frantz Fanon’s assertion that, “La [mulâtresse] non seulement veut blanchir, mais éviter de régresser. Qu’y a-t-il de plus illogique, en effet, qu’une mulâtresse qui épouse un noir ? Car, il faut le comprendre une fois pour toutes il s’agit de sauver la race” (44) [the mulâtresse not only wants to whiten, but to avoid slipping back. What is more illogical, in fact, than a mulatto woman that marries a black man? Because, one must understand once and for all that it’s a matter of saving the race]. This relationship helps to position Mamadou and Juletane’s marriage within a post-colonial and post-independence African context, while simultaneously pushing Juletane into the role of the mulatto woman. Although Juletane is Guadeloupian, her past is a blur and she has little connection to Africa. Thus, under the patriarchal and Africanist gaze of Mamadou, Juletane is a French woman.

Unlike Zétou who has an understanding of her Guadeloupian origins and history, Juletane's French cultural identity leaves her vulnerable to the Afro-centric and masculine conditions in post-independence Africa that cast her in the role of the *toubabesse*. Juletane's travel to Africa is an attempt to return to the roots of her parents. Even though she scarcely recalls life in Guadeloupe, Senegal represents a stand in for the Antilles because of its potential to fill the familial void in her life. She then becomes, once again, transnational and post-colonial nomad seeking acceptance. Elizabeth Deloughrey suggests that the female transnational is at a particular disadvantage, because the nature of the transnational is inherently masculinized within the body of post-colonial literature. Men are free to move, and their gender is enabling rather than disabling.

Deloughrey writes:

In the language of diaspora and globalization, masculinized trajectories of nomadic subjects and capital attain their motility by evoking feminized flows, fluidity, and circulation, while the feminine and women are profoundly localized. To be localized in this case does not operate with the ideological potential of the dictum "think globally, act locally," but rather registers as symbolic and physical stasis. (Deloughrey 5)

By boarding the ship to Africa with Mamadou, Juletane is travelling into uncharted waters. As a person whose life has been thoroughly defined by the domestic locality of her godmother's apartment, school, and her own apartment in Paris, for Juletane, France comes to represent this "physical stasis" and malaise. Juletane's hope for Africa rearranges the dictum "think globally, act locally,"⁵ to '*act globally, think locally*' because she needs to change her location from France to Africa in order to imagine the local space symbolized by family.

⁵ The original phrase was "think global, act local" from Patrick Geddes' book on Scottish town planning *Cities in Evolution* (1915).

Juletane's nomadic journey has only a flare of success that occurs from the moment she disembarks from France until she discovers that she is Mamadou's second wife and that she will have to navigate a polygamous relationship. Her first thought is to return to France, but little remains for her there because she no longer has an apartment and her godmother has passed away. Juletane is forced to relive the trauma of her first transnational experience, "Croyant trouver en Mamadou toute la famille qui me manquait, je ne l'aimais pas seulement comme un amant, un mari. C'était aussi toute cette affection filiale débordante en moi que je reportais sur lui. Une fois de plus je retrouverais mon angoisse d'orpheline. Perdue, seule au monde" (34). [Thinking I had found in Mamadou the family that I missed, I did not love him only as a lover, a husband. It was also all my overflowing filial affection that I carried over to him. Once again, I regained the anguish of being an orphan. Lost, alone in the world]. Juletane is forced to make this journey alone, she feels as though her purpose of building a family, a history, and a future has been prematurely taken from her during her voyage. It seems clear to Juletane that she will occupy the role of the outsider because Awa has her own family, her community, and her children to offer her support. The female transnational is alone, vulnerable, and enslaved by the role of the cultural outsider. Juletane's only defense from becoming the "other woman" is to attempt to position Awa as the other but that becomes a futile proposition in the end, "Je ne demandais plus comment j'allais être accueillie par la famille de Mamadou: sûre d'être une intruse, déplacée, déclassée. L'autre femme était avec sa fille, entourée de parents qui l'avaient choisie et qui la protégeaient... J'étais l'étrangère..." (35) [I did not ask any more how Mamadou's family would welcome me: sure to be an intruder, out of place, lost. The other woman was with her daughter,

surrounded by family who had chosen her and who protected her...I was the stranger...]

Juletane's 'return' to Africa becomes, more or less, a discomfoting experience because she understands she is different culturally from Senegal. As a daughter of the Caribbean who spent most of her life in France, she overturns V.S. Naipaul's infamous words that "nothing was created in the West Indies" (Naipaul 20). In fact, Juletane was created in the Caribbean, following in her parents cultural footsteps. She is later transplanted to France where her godmother's assimilationist cultural views make her more French than Guadeloupian. The rupture occurs when Juletane can no longer simply be herself in Senegal and another cultural change is impossible for her to fathom. Within the comfort and protection of her own community, Awa is able to maintain her stability within the family structure as the first wife and the mother of Mamadou's children.

Awa's family and Mamadou's community act as the primary bulwark between Juletane and her creation of a stable identity within the Antillean diaspora. Whether carrying on conversations in Wolof or confining Juletane to the domestic sphere, the patriarchal structure of the family and the community is utterly stifling. Valérie Orlando builds on and modifies the complications of Juletane and Mamadou's Fanonian marriage, suggesting that "color is not so much the cause of her isolation, but rather her background, her French upbringing, her lack of being able to communicate in Wolof, and her inability to adapt to a foreign environment" (Orlando 78). Wolof embodies the gender separation in the society where men speak with men and women are off to the side speaking amongst themselves. Juletane occupies a tertiary space, where she is not only the outsider but she becomes an object within a patriarchal system:

Quand nous sortions, il me présentait, puis m'oubliait dans un coin, comme une vieille chose, au milieu d'un tas de femmes, souriantes et gentilles, mais qui ne

parlaient pas le français. Je le voyais plus loin, volubile avec les hommes. Je ne comprenais pas non plus cette forme de ségrégation où les femmes semblaient n'avoir aucune importance dans la vie de l'homme, sauf au moment de ses plaisirs, ou encore, comme mères des enfants. (49)

[Whenever we went out he would introduce me, and then forget me in a corner, like some old thing, in the middle of a group of smiling and kind women, but who spoke no French. I saw him later, talking with men. Furthermore, I did not understand this form of segregation where women seemed to have no importance in a man's life, except for his pleasure or as the mother of his children.]

As an observer, a mere object in the corner of a room, Juletane recognizes the shift that has taken place in Senegalese society centralized around the native speech. Wolof evokes sentiments of a Senegalese national identity, in which gender segregation is prevalent. In post-independence Senegal, the French colonial regime is replaced by an oppressive patriarchy based on affirmations of virility.

Male sexual potency and desire are part in parcel to Senegalese society where polygamy is the vehicle through which men can assert their power and dominance over multiple women. Mamadou takes on Ndèye, a third wife, who demands monetary and physical attention because she represents the essence of Mamadou's existence as the provider and protector. Ndèye is also the arm of patriarchy that turns women on each other as an additional element of control by labeling Juletane as a *toubabesse* (white woman) and *la folle* (the madwoman). Hélène Cixous describes female control in terms of male virility, "Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs" (Cixous 878). Ostentatious and proud Ndèye views herself as the alpha female, therefore she must greet Juletane with disdain. In the first meeting between Juletane and Ndèye, Ndèye imparts to Juletane labels that begin to overshadow and dwarf her sense of self:

Voilà que pour elle je suis folle et, ce qui est tout aussi vexant pour moi « toubabesse »: elle m'assimilait, ni plus ni moins, aux femmes blanches des colons. Elle m'enlevait même mon identité nègre. Mes pères avaient durement payé mon droit à être noire, fertilisant les terres d'Amérique de leur sang versé et de leur sueur dans des révoltes désespérées pour que je naisse libre et fière d'être noire. (79-80)

[Here I was, to her, I am crazy and, what was just as annoying to me, “*toubabesse*”: She liked me, more or less, to the white wives of the colonials. She was even stripping me of my identity as a black woman. My forefathers had paid dearly for my right to be black, fertilizing the soil of America with their bloodshed and sweat in desperate revolts so that I could be born free and proud to be black.]

The competition between Ndèye and Juletane exemplifies the divisive role that polygamy plays in Senegalese society wherein women are “taught to share [their] master with other women” (63). Awa and Ndèye are protected from potential attacks on their identities because they have communities to fall back on, but Juletane can only fall back on a general history of her people. She must remember where she comes from in order to stave off the deleterious effects of Ndèye’s scorn. Juletane’s writing, then, becomes her primary defense from patriarchy and a pigeonholed identity.

The only way Juletane can create a local sphere is in confinement, by barring the door, and escaping to “a room of her own” (Woolf 54). Although it becomes a self-imposed prison, within her room, Juletane has a sense of autonomy; she can arrange and rearrange it in any way she pleases. Her room is a space where she can write and gain access to an interior vision. Inside, she can imagine and inscribe her personal history. At first, Juletane’s writing project was merely an activity to keep her occupied while Mamadou visited Awa during the weekends in her village. Her writing then became her friend and confidant to whom she could expose her vulnerability to and fill the void left by Mamadou. To escape the linguistic confinement of Senegal, Juletane seeks refuge in

her room and takes to her blank diary, “Je retourne dans ma chambre et prends le cahier posé au milieu du lit. Je l’ouvre et laisse surgir le passé au fil des souvenirs...”(45). [I go back to my room and pick up the notebook laying in the middle of my bed. I open it and allow the past to surge a flood of memories...] Juletane’s diary not only represents a blank space where she can assert her own cultural identity, but it becomes the space where she can trace the history of her family and imagine her future. The blank page gives Juletane freedom and control. She is able to take up her pen and choose the subject she wants to write about, making her diary her catharsis from alienation. Warner-Vieyra writes, “Je n’avais jamais imaginé que coucher ma peine sur une feuille blanche pouvait m’aider à analyser, la dominer et enfin, peut-être, la supporter ou définitivement la refuser”(60). [I never imagined that putting down my own anguish on a blank page could help me to analyze, to control it and finally, perhaps endure it or reject it once and for all.]

Juletane’s writing provides her with stability and a sense of finality where the things she puts on paper have certain permanence, free from obstruction or editing. Her diary allows her to return to the landscape of Guadeloupe, which is largely absent from the novel except in the story of Héléne Parpin. Similar to Zétou, Juletane’s imaginary return to Guadeloupe is essential to the discovery and assertion of an identity free from the prejudices of Senegal or France:

Aussi, ce matin j’y cours avant que quelqu’un d’autre n’arrive avant moi. L’eau est fraîche sur ma peau, c’est comme une douce caresse. Je me sens bien, je m’oublie, je m’endors, rêve de source, de cascade. Je me retrouve dans mon île, encore toute jeune au bord d’un ruisseau limpide ; je trempe mes pieds dans l’eau, ma fatigue s’envole au contact de cette fraîcheur. Mon cœur se gonfle de bonheur. C’est la première fois, depuis que je suis ici, que je pense à mon pays d’origine ; les souvenirs qui me viennent habituellement sont liés à ma vie en France. (58-59)

So, this morning I ran [to the shower] before someone else could get there before me. The water is fresh on my skin, like a soft caress. I feel good, I lose myself, I am fall asleep, I dream about streams and waterfalls. I find myself back on my island, a child again on the banks of a clear-running stream. I soak my feet in the water, my weariness vanishes on contact with its freshness. My heart swells with happiness. This is the first time since I have been here that I have thought about my homeland; the memories that usually come back are linked to my life in France (29).

Juletane's imaginary return represents a baptism, a resuscitation of her Guadeloupien identity that has been suppressed in France and Senegal. From the solitude of her room, or in this case the shower, Juletane is able to resurrect and contemplate memories she seemed to have forgotten. Her writing ultimately becomes a chaotic mixture of the past and the present where her memories of a verdant Guadeloupe blend with her depression and dejection, "Même mon prénom, Juletane, parce que mon père se prénomma Jules. Personne ne l'avait prononcé en ma présence depuis des années. Je suis « la folle »" (114) "Even my name, Juletane, because my father's name was Jules, is a distant memory. No one had called me by my name in years. I am 'the mad woman'" (63). At the mere utterance of her name, Juletane is thrust into the past only to return to the melancholy of the present. Just like Zétou, Juletane's abundance of solitude begins to work against her because she ultimately accepts her condition as 'la folle'.

Left to die alone in the psychiatric ward of a Senegalese hospital, Juletane and the other women reminisce about their lives before they were diagnosed as mentally instable. In a scene that is ostensibly mirrored in *As the Sorcerer Said*, Juletane recognizes the debilitating effects of being cut off from one's culture by venturing into transnational space. Instead of focusing on the malpractice and misdiagnosis of women during the 60s and 70s in mental institutions like she does in *As the Sorcerer Said*, Warner-Vieyra gives Juletane the floor to comment on the condition of women in confinement. She writes,

“Nous avons connu toutes deux la solitude de « l'étrangère », qui n'a que des souvenirs à ruminer pendant de longs jours, qu'une voix à écouter, la sienne, jusqu'à l'obsession...”

(140). “We both knew the solitude of “the foreigner” who had only memories to ruminate for days on end, only one voice to listen to, her own, until it becomes an obsession...”

(78). Solitude is both the antidote and the poison for the transnational, because it can temporarily cure loneliness and despair but an overdose can be lethal, causing one to spiral into obsession.

Canonizing the work of Myriam Warner-Vieyra

From Brontë and Balzac to Myriam Warner-Vieyra the definition of “creoleness” has undergone drastic changes. No longer signifying the offspring of the landowning békés, cultural impurity, or the abandonment of European values. Creoleness to Warner-Vieyra has evolved into an understanding of self, an interiority, or self-assessment that claims a syncretic cultural identity. Her characters critique French imperialism and reject African essentialism. Zétou and Juletane speak out against global perceptions of the Francophone Caribbean that labels them neither black enough for Africa nor white enough for France. This matter of authenticity follows the same track as Créole, which is in the essence of Warner-Vieyra's work. Créole was “accusé d'empêcher les enfants de bien acquérir le français et donc de réussir à l'école, seul moyen de promotion dans une société post-esclavagiste dominée par la minorité blanche et quelques mulâtres riches” [accused of preventing children to adequately acquire French et also to succeed in school, the only method of promotion in a post-slavery society dominated by a white minority and some rich mulattos] (Chamoiseau and Confiant 95). Warner-Vieyra's work places the reader in post slavery societies where women fight a similar linguistic as well as gender

oriented battles. Leaving us to question why she has been omitted from the *créolité* movement by critics and her peers. The *créolité* movement is highly selective, dominated by its creators Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant that strives to embody the linguistic and cultural struggle in a post-départementalisation era in the *Vielles Colonies*⁶. Very few women writers have been attributed to the movement even though their contributions are numerous.

Literary critic Michael Dash writes in his afterward that Gisèle Pineau's *The Drifting of Spirits (La Derive des esprits)*, "is one of the few novels of the *Créolité* movement to appear in English" (Dash 238). While Dash adequately qualifies Pineau's place in the movement, he gives little recognition to *créolité* writers beyond its architects. Pineau's novel was published in 1994, six years after Warner-Vieyra published her most recent collection of *nouvelles* entitled *Femmes échouées* and twenty years after Simone Schwartz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* that exhibit a similar orality and "linguistic code" as the *Drifting of Spirits* (240). Dash, among others, seems to ignore the contributions of Warner-Vieyra and other women writers to the movement. Perhaps perhaps the movement began before the publication of *Eloge de la Créolité* in 1989. The movement needs to look backward to the contributions of writers like Warner-Vieyra and Schwartz-Bart who undeniably embody the understanding of creoleness as two languages and peoples on the same trajectory⁷.

Maryse Condé, like Pineau, is a main contributor to the women's side of the *créolité* movement as well as one of the most outspoken writers against the literary

⁶ *Les Vieilles Colonies* consist of French Guyana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique in the Caribbean and La Réunion in the Indian Ocean.

⁷ See quotation in the introductory section from *Lettres Créoles* by Chamoiseau and Confiant.

patriarchy of the Caribbean. In her article “The Stealers of Fire: The French-Speaking Writers of the Caribbean and Their Strategies of Liberation”, Condé traces the female contributions to Francophone Caribbean literature from Suzanne Lacascade in 1924 to Gisèle Pineau’s *Chair Piment* in 2002. Condé’s exercise in revision is to liberate female writers and to destabilize the literary cartography established by male writers and critics throughout the twentieth century. Condé writes, “Women writers from the Caribbean are located on the margins of male discourse, they preempt it, accentuate it, or contradict it, and they introduce into the field of literature the notion of disorder. The words of women possess the power of anarchy and subversion” (Condé 159). Myriam Warner-Vieyra fits in perfectly with Condé’s assertions on women’s writing because she goes largely unmentioned in the context of the *Créolité* movement, she anticipates the movement by contributing key traits and characteristics, brings attention to notions of Caribbean identity politics, and disrupts the Négritude movement’s utopian affinity to Africa. Even though Warner-Vieyra’s work is largely in French, with the occasional word in Creole or Wolof, Condé argues that language is not the most crucial element of Caribbean writing. Perhaps it is more about the human experience of créolisation and a matter of language.

Furthermore, although they claim to rehabilitate it, the language of the Créolité writers is not Creole as it is spoken. It is an interlanguage, a product of standard French and basilectal Creole. Is it more revolutionary to write in an interlanguage than it is to write in French? (159)

Condé, in the spirit Woolf and Cixous, argues that it is not the mission of women writers to establish movements or fit themselves within the same discussion as male writers, but instead, they must redefine and challenge preexisting notions of language and culture.

Warner-Vieyra adds to the portrayal of Antillean women that Ernest Pépin finds so minute, changing the perception that Antillean women are passive, helpless, and abstract.

Condé and her female counterparts are not, however, caught in the romanticization of Creoleness even though they cannot possibly escape the period of Caribbean literature.

Women writers like Myriam Warner-Vieyra embody Creoleness and Créolité, they are the realists within a romantic period of Caribbean Literature. Instead of publishing manifesto after manifesto on the tenants of a literary period, women writers from the Francophone Caribbean publish novels of sacrifice, madness, mutilation, and revolt, capturing the ruptures that have taken place in the Caribbean. Characters like Zétou and Juletane struggle for selfhood in a world that wishes to prescribe identities, just like women authors are forced to adapt to the ebb and flow of the Caribbean literary consciousness.