

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **SISTERS IN THE SPIRIT: TRANSNATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIASPORA IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY BLACK WOMEN'S LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAS**

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This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that draws upon literary theory, diaspora and transnational studies, black feminism, and anthropology. It argues that, in contrast to their male counterparts who produce “high theory” about the African diaspora in the Americas—a theory that tends to exclude or marginalize women and remains tethered to nationalist constructions—black women writers use their literary works to unsettle the dominant gendered racial hierarchy, to critique national discourses, and to offer a vision of a transnational Americas. This study invokes an 1891 conception of the Americas advanced by the Cuban revolutionary Jose Marti, and it explores how the vision of these women writers rearticulates Marti’s early concept of “Nuestra America” (Our America), transcending geographic, temporal, and linguistic boundaries. Organized around issues of historiography, black cultural formation, gender and sexual politics, and racial spacialization, this project cuts across the North/Central/South/Caribbean division of the Americas, topples the primacy of “America” (read as the United States of America) in diasporic discourses, and engages the writing of black women of the Americas in terms of their literary characterization of the transnational exchanges that have produced and continue to re-articulate diaspora in the region. Furthermore, this study engages and enlarges a notion of a “Dutch pot diaspora,” as presented in Maxine Bailey and Sharon Mareeka Lewis’s play *Sistahs*. This transnational conception of diaspora recognizes the persistence of nation and the ways in which black subjects across the Americas negotiate limiting national constructions through transnational identifications. Using poetry, drama, and novels by authors from Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America, such as Toni Morrison, Erna Brodber, Luz Argentina Chiriboga, and Tessa McWatt, this dissertation reveals a transnational, diasporic poetics of the Americas.

SISTERS IN THE SPIRIT:
TRANSNATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIASPORA
IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY
BLACK WOMEN'S LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAS

By

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In this dissertation, the author has translated excerpts from various genres of texts from French, Spanish, and Portuguese to English.

For ME

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Introduction

Re-Mapping the Spirit of America

Where is America going, and who will unite her and be her guide?
—José Martí, “Mother America”

Migration, diversity, and revolutionary improvisation. For me, those terms are descriptors of the spirit of the Americas. My own history in the region has reflected those very terms. Having occupied and traversed multiple national spaces within the Americas, I claim multiple nations but have never truly belonged to any. For various reasons, my multi-national subjectivity never quite fit any of the constructions of national identity that were required for belonging to the nation. The only safe space of belonging was the kitchen, where my mother would prepare and serve to relatives and friends of many different nations dishes whose ingredients came from all over the region. But, alas, I could not take up permanent residency in the kitchen, nor could I express myself solely through the provisions and company that I found there.

Even as a child, I recognized that I would have to discover or make for myself a narrative of belonging that could encompass all of the places that were shaping me. In developing such a narrative, I began to refer to three “texts” in order to make sense of my cross-cultural identity: a Jamaican birth certificate, a Canadian passport, and a U. S. resident alien card. I thought that, in mentioning all three texts, I would be viewed as unique, exotic, special, somehow of and beyond the nations at the same time. I was wrong. Inevitably, subjects of those nations who truly belonged always expected me to choose one nation over the rest; and they were less than pleased when I chose not to choose. Being a stubborn sort of girl with quite the revolutionary spirit, I decided that I

would improvise and create a personal system of meaning for myself that would allow me to belong to all of those nations at once and not have to choose. I recognized, though, that I needed more than just texts that named the physical spaces which I have occupied; I also needed texts that could exemplify the characteristics and nuances of the system of meaning and belonging which I sought and that could characterize how to enact that system in my life. So, in my teen years, I turned to alternative texts in search of practical answers. I found those answers in the literature produced in the late twentieth-century by black women writers¹ of the Americas.

Many of the short stories, poetry, plays, and novels written by contemporary black women authors provided the models for the personal system of meaning that I sought. More than any other texts, the biographies of the writers and the works that they produced most closely mirrored my own biography of movement and cross-cultural identification. In between the lines of written text emanated what for me seemed to be the spirit of the Americas. During my graduate studies, I was surprised to find almost no criticism that fully engaged the epistemologies featured in the particular type of literature that so intrigued me.

As I analyzed these texts further, I considered how they signified on the Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí's 1891 exposition "Nuestra America" (Our America). In his own text, Martí suggested that "Our America" become "one in spirit and intent" (93). He expressed a transnational inclination that was in many ways a revolt against the nation. His vision was of a cohesive American landscape of interconnected nations, whose foundation would be a consciousness of difference within unity. As revolutionary as it appeared, Martí's vision of a unified Americas reflected an investment in patriarchy

and a paternalistic view of the place of blackness within the Americas. Mainly focusing on Latin American liberation, Martí also fell victim to what would later become a focus on regionalism. Taking up Martí's challenge, the authors that appealed to me appeared to be engaged in a revolution of their own by filling in the holes in Martí's map of the Americas. In effect, they were re-mapping the spirit of the Americas in order to reflect not only the migration, diversity, and revolutionary improvisation within the region but also their concerns over the continuing effects of imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, and white racism.

It seemed to me that, in addition to their signification on Martí's transnational formulation, this particular body of literature being produced by certain black women across the Americas in the late twentieth century also reflected a desire to expand the prevalent constructions of the African diaspora offered by male theorists of the region. An unfixed network of black subjects whose point of dispersal was Africa and who are characterized by migration and resistance to nation-state practices that often marginalize or exclude them, diaspora is constituted by a sense of affiliation that exceeds national boundaries.² Diasporic links in the Americas in particular have been used to combat the effects of European modernity and its many manifestations, including globalization.³ While many male theorists have assented to this characterization of diaspora, their discourses of diaspora have reflected an adherence to localized identifications, patriarchal constructions of nation, and a desire for national recognition. In contrast, the biographies and literary works of specific black women writers invest diasporic affiliation with a transnational mode of identification: a mode that resists patriarchy and overcomes the limitations of nationalism. This mode represents an alternative way of constructing and

understanding diaspora in the Americas.

As with the authors that inform my study, my work as what I call an “Inter-Americanist” is rooted in my personal movements and maneuvers around national spaces of the Americas and my affiliation with the diaspora of the Americas. I am interested in the ways in which the biographies and literary productions of black women writers may inform and complicate the discourses of diaspora and transnationalism within the Americas. Thus, this dissertation is a simultaneously personal and theoretical intervention into diaspora and transnational studies. My project places these two fields into conversation with one another in order to elucidate how transnational studies’ consideration of modernity, globalization, and their effects on women and the configuration of nations might impact the ways in which diasporic discourses interpret seemingly localized identities. My goal is to redirect the theoretical gaze toward a revolutionary discursive space that not only reflects the merger of these two fields but also offers an additional mode of inquiry into the historiography and trajectory of the Americas as they intersect the issues of race and gender.

Diasporic Literature, Then and Now

Previous scholarly discourses of diaspora, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s, reflected an investment in and adherence to the concept of the nation.⁴ Though several theorists, such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Larry Neal, gave the appearance of discussing diaspora in transnational terms by celebrating Africa and engaging African culture, they privileged the nation as a means to resist the effects of colonialism, racism, and white hegemony and to enunciate a black subject that would counter the

marginalization, objectification, exoticization, and commodification of blackness in the Americas. Black nationalism, which replicated European national models in order to present black subjectivity as equal to that of its privileged counterpart, reflected an understanding of identity formation in terms of patriarchy and a desire to fix boundaries. Discussions of diaspora in the Americas, influenced by multiple independence movements in Africa, the Caribbean, and South America, thus focused on the black *male* subject and his efforts to create the nation apart from white influence. These counter-discourses, while empowering for many blacks, failed to represent the subjectivities of women and of those who could not gain access to the arenas in which these discourses were being expressed. The result was the absence of key members of the diasporic community from theoretical discussions of the history, form, and progression of the Americas.⁵

The achievement of independence by former European colonies seemed to firmly entrench the idea of nation as male-dominated and static. Women's histories, issues, and stories were made secondary or completely denied in favour of the advancement of nationalist agendas. In response to this, women intellectuals, influenced by the Third World Women's Movement, pointed out the limits of First World/Western national constructions of discursive and material spaces for expressing and enacting female and minority subjectivity. This alternative sisterhood brought together "women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the *political* threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic" (Mohanty 4). Many of these women took up the challenge of using "writing as a tool for self-preservation and revolution" (Moraga and Anzaldua xxiv). Within the last two

decades of the twentieth century, a significant number of black women theorists and writers, empowered by such political threads of opposition and a belief in writing as revolution, began to intervene forcefully in discourses of diaspora. The writing of women such as Toni Morrison, Barbara Johnson, Joyce Ann Joyce, Carol Boyce Davies, Dionne Brand, Miriam Alves, Rosemary Feal, and Miriam DeCosta-Willis began documenting and reflecting, in various forms, the contemporary proliferation of black women's writing across the Americas.⁶

Though several black male and white female authors were also representing the concerns of black women and their communities in their literary endeavors, a consideration of a few exemplary works by black male and white female authors reveals some important distinctions.⁷ For example, in André Alexis's *Childhood* the male protagonist's Trinidadian grandmother and mother are rendered descriptively as unstable mother figures who disrupt their progeny's psychological development and sense of racial awareness in a Canadian context. Yet, these women do not represent themselves. Even their origins are marginally represented in literal footnotes to the narrative. Male Caribbean authors similarly limit the agency of their black female characters. Derek Walcott's *Omeros* signifies on legendary Greek epics in order to elevate the everyday lives of Caribbean people to the level of the most renowned epic heroes and heroines. However, while Walcott associates the character of Helen with the powerful figure of the Yoruba goddess Oshun, he casts her in the marginal role of a whore and objectifies her by representing her as the shadow prize sought after by Hector and Achille. Moreover, let us not forget that the title of Walcott's most renowned work privileges a male discursive system for representations of the postcolonial Caribbean. In Patrick

Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, the matron of Texaco, Marie-Sophie, records in her notebooks the history of this creole quarter of Fort-de-France, Martinique. However, her transcriptions, given to a male Haitian scholar, are described in terms of death—her own and the death of her beloved quarter. The translation of her text into French by a male mediator/interloper and his “correction” of her expressions rob her, her words, and her originary space of their vitality. Finally, white female authors such as Helena Parente Cunha, writer of *Woman Between Mirrors*, and Cristina Garcia, author of *Dreaming in Cuban*, celebrate black culture and complicate the idea of nation by highlighting the various cultural components of the nation and how those components may be reproduced outside of the nation. However, they too still privilege the nation as the discursive means through which blackness must be written. Cunha and Garcia both offer characters who take on the role of cultural translators. Cunha's unnamed protagonist and Garcia's Felicia claim an authority of knowledge of black culture through their engagement of blacks from Bahia, Brazil and of Afro-Cubans living in the U. S., respectively. Yet, their Orientalist⁸ positioning as cultural translators for the nation cannot adequately explain the origins and contexts for the black cultural markers which they identify. Ultimately, they merely act as voyeurs of a culture to which they seek admittance but cannot entirely enter.

Given these problematic differences, I contend that writing by black women of the Americas marks itself as unique from that of black men and white women by revealing the variance in constructions of diaspora that come with a racial *and* gendered point of view. Aware of the ever-present, diminishing gaze of the nation as it interprets black women's bodies in limiting ways, black women writers purposely move away from

static notions of the body, place, space, time, language, culture, and ethnicity. Instead of remaining invested in national constructions, black women writers draw connections between nations that reflect a mutual recognition of the particular diasporic materialities attendant to being black *and* a woman. Thus, black women writers have experimented with literary forms that engage the issues of diasporic formation, subjectivity, and agency in relation to women and the various communities of the Americas from which they originate. These alternative forms of expression represent a body of literature that operates as an alternative site through which inquiries over such issues may be posed. They offer novel approaches to recording and theorizing about black history and subjectivity in the Americas; and, in their representations of black communities, they most closely approximate real life as it is experienced by the subjects whom they characterize. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, these works provided additional ways of interpreting the nation and diaspora in the Americas.

With the emergence of newer discourses of transnationalism, recent theories of diaspora have challenged and complicated the category of “nation” as the preeminent means of understanding social and political subjectivity. More than ever before, citizens and legislators of nations across the Americas are reaching out to each other, forming alliances, and sharing resources in order to combat the effects of neo-colonialism and globalization. No longer represented by fixed boundaries, nations are thus being reconfigured ideologically and materially in terms of the movement of people and their ideas. As these transnational exchanges have achieved greater recognition, so too have theories of diaspora articulated inter-cultural connections that may be drawn across the physical and ideological boundaries of nation-states.

In spite of the renewed interest in transnationalism, discourses of diaspora have distinctly reiterated patriarchal conceptions of both the African diaspora in the Americas and of black subjectivity, by ignoring and/or negating black female subjectivity. Despite their significant contributions to diasporic literature, black women's voices continue to be marginalized in favor of the male perspective on theoretical questions. Theorists Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley agree that the African diaspora is characterized by a "*gendered racial hierarchy*" (20). As a result, as Mae Gwendolyn Henderson observes, "it has become almost commonplace for literary critics, male and female, black and white, to note that black women have been discounted or unaccounted for in the 'traditions' of black, women's, and American literature as well as in the contemporary literary-critical dialogue" (16). Renée Larrier articulates the problem succinctly in pinpointing the gaps in specific critical dialogues: "[Black] women's perspectives are largely overlooked in the theoretical formulations of negritude, créolité, and the Black Atlantic" (2-3). Though black women have indeed published texts that address many prevalent theoretical issues, the fallacy still remains that black women are afraid of and resistant to theory.⁹

My dissertation addresses the counter-discourses within black women's writing that recent critical studies have either ignored or only superficially acknowledged. The specific body of works produced by black women writers, whose biographies reflect transnational identifications, are important to consider theoretically in terms of their critique of nationalism and fixed notions of nation and of their reflection of a renewed transnational impulse that has moved across the Americas in the last two decades. The literary works of black women demand critical examination for what they have to add to

theoretical discourses of nation and transnationalism and for the ways in which they unsettle the dominant gendered racial hierarchy still present within the African diaspora in the Americas.¹⁰ Indeed, black women writers of the Americas are acting as “gendered outsiders inside,” or academic interventionists who are enacting through the written word a type of “transnationally literate resistance” in order to give voice to their concerns and to those of various communities across the region (Spivak 252). The challenge of a black women’s transnational poetics is to address the failure in diaspora studies to recognize black women’s literature as theory. It reflects the “habit of difference between using ‘high theory’ to diagnose the suffering of the exploited or dominated on the one hand, and a self-righteous unexamined empiricism or ‘experiencism’ on the other,” which leads to “the problem of recognizing theory when it does not come dressed in appropriate language” (257). Rarely read as theory, the novels, plays, and poetry produced by transnational black women characterize and enact the very issues that critics engaging in so-called “high theory” verbalize. If, as Allen Thiher notes, literary texts and theoretical discourses represent “two poles of a self-engendering activity,” then both forms of expression should allow for one to “find elaboration of contemporary theoretical notions” (339).

By engaging the subjects, tropes, and metaphors represented in these literary works, readers may consider theoretical issues of the African diaspora in the Americas in a form that is more immediate and less alienating to them than purely theoretical discourses tend to be. Close inspection of the imagined worlds of these texts and of their characters allows readers to extrapolate strategies for empowerment and liberation from oppression that they may apply to their own lives. The result is a process of discovery of

the self and of others within the diaspora. The literature, with its emphasis on interaction between characters and between the reader and the text, invites and creates a dynamic dialogue and intersubjectivity not present in most critical studies. The resulting connections, bridged across real and imagined borders vis-à-vis engagement with these literary works, go further than the theoretical discourses in achieving what Michelle Wright posits as a larger aim of diaspora studies: the recognition of a community, however diverse (133). Reading transnational black women's texts of the Americas as theory would, as Giyatri Spivak passionately argues, move our notions of diaspora "beyond the outlines of the [individual] diasporic subject into transnationality; and make indeterminate the borders between the two" (258).

While some contemporary black female critics agree that black women's texts themselves may be read as theory, critical discourses reflecting a black feminist standpoint continue to be limited to studies that adhere to national and linguistic borders. Despite the borders that define and confine these critical discourses, the literature produced by black women writers often breaks free of and transcends such borders. As Mae Gwendolyn Henderson emphasizes, "[t]his literature speaks as much to the notion of commonality and universalism as it does to the sense of difference and diversity" (36). Though several recent critical works have been presented as diasporic, their contents actually reflect the continued focus on singular ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities. For example, both Renée Larrier's *Francophone Women Writers of Africa and the Caribbean* and Valerie Orlando's *Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls* limit their discussions of black women's works to Francophone African and Caribbean women writers. Miriam DeCosta Willis's recent *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic*

Writers similarly restricts itself to Hispanophone women writers. Stelamaris Coser's *Bridging the Americas*, while attempting to reveal how U.S. black women authors have signified on cultures and histories of other parts of the Americas, centers on how U.S. identity is constructed as a result of contact with other areas and primarily examines each author's works singularly. Even Joanne Braxton and Andrée McLaughlin's important work on the black women's literary tradition focuses almost exclusively on Anglophone authors. *Moving Beyond Boundaries: Black Women's Diasporas*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies, remains one of the few critical works to view "black women's experiences as existing in a variety of dispersed locations" (13). Still, Davies' anthology only generally offers critical approaches to the literature of the black women's diaspora as a whole, and it tends to emphasize individual ethnic experiences of diasporic women as recorded in literature. These microscopic approaches have certainly been necessary and useful to the apprehension of specific national and regional concerns. However, discussions of black women's writing in the region must include national, regional, and comparative approaches so that both the local and the global aspects of diaspora in the Americas receive adequate attention. Engagement of black women's writing across the Americas must especially begin to recognize the transnational exchanges represented within the texts and the ways in which such movement across and beyond boundaries informs our notions of diaspora.

Sisters in the Spirit, Doing Things Differently

Black women writers of the Americas are conscious of the physical and ideological ways in which black women have given birth to nations and have contributed

to transnational conceptions of diaspora in the Americas. In light of what I perceive as a progressive, black feminist reading of diaspora that resists and redefines static constructs of race, gender, and nation in the Americas, several overarching questions inform my study: In what ways do black women writers articulate diaspora vis-à-vis black female subjectivity? How do their articulations alter the history and construction of the Americas? How are black women writers engaging discourses of nation and of transnationalism? What is gained when black women's literary works are included in theoretical discourses of diaspora in the Americas? My dissertation addresses these questions, focusing on late twentieth-century literary works of black women of the Americas and their interventions into discourses of transnationalism and diaspora.

The relationship of black women writers to constructions of the African diaspora in the Americas and to theories of its evolution and progression anchor my study. Few studies have examined the commonalities among members of the African diaspora and how those commonalities have been represented in literature by black women. Most recent theories of diaspora have emphasized a theoretical approach to the Americas that highlights heterogeneity and diversity within the region in order to avoid the accusation of essentialism. Yet, as Stuart Hall argues in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," diaspora must be defined by both difference *and* similarity. In "The Uses of Diaspora," Brent Hayes Edwards too, in using the metaphor of the joint, rearticulates diaspora as "both the point of separation [. . .] *and* the point of linkage" (66, emphasis mine). As with Hall and Edwards, I too am interested in the ways in which cultural productions may reflect junctures that allow for differentiation and union. However, unlike Edwards, I am not interested in re-inscribing a type of European imperialism by routing a black

intellectualism through Europe in order to “hear the border of another future of black internationalism in the archive of its past” (*The Practice of Diaspora* 10). The Americas itself offers so much in terms of an archive of hybrid cultural productions that are worthy of exploration for the ways in which they express the complexity of diaspora. The literary productions of black women, in particular, function as articulations of diaspora in terms of sameness and diversity. Thus, while the authors discussed in this study reflect the heterogeneity within the various locales that make up the Americas (the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Canada), I focus less on representations of singular national identities and more on the shared experiences (the points of linkage) that unite black women of the diaspora in the Americas, despite linguistic, cultural, and spatial borders, in order to reveal common ideological concerns among the writers.

My study crosses national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries by emphasizing areas of connectedness among black women of the African diaspora in the Americas, as characterized in late twentieth-century black women’s transnational literature. Thus, *Sisters in the Spirit* provides a close cross-cultural reading and analysis of specific texts by black women writers across the Americas. Ultimately, this study reveals the multiple ways in which selected black women writers have used creative literary productions to theorize about the significance of the black female to the history and evolution of the Americas as a transnational space. My work emphasizes the use of testimonials, symbolic references to the orishas of the Yoruba and Ashanti pantheons and to Kongo spiritual practices, black feminist and womanist positions on issues of patriarchy and spirituality, and critiques of race by black women writers as the means by which the socio-historical view of the Americas may be broadened.

Racial, linguistic, and cultural miscegenation are important to any discussion of theories of the diaspora in the Americas. I emphasize in my study that black women writers have produced texts that reflect a conscious awareness of the various forms of miscegenation that have produced the Americas. Yet, this awareness is not the only evident feature of their works. I argue that a particular group of black women writers in the Americas seek to transform the mark of mixture—racial, linguistic, ethnic, cultural—from marginal to central to any understanding of an American identity. They do so by representing the “diaspora space” of the Americas—a space “‘inhabited’ not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” (Brah 209)— as a transnational site.

In order to apprehend the transnational vision of these writers, it is necessary to recognize the language used by these writers as an alternative discourse with signs that must be decoded. Sylvia Wynter notes the “insufficiency of all existing theoretical/interpretive models” to represent the histories and voices of black women and to “de-code the system of meanings” within black women’s writing (363). Mae Gwendolyn Henderson also suggests that the literary voices of black women may themselves be interpreted as a discursive, dialogic system that resists patriarchy by simultaneously acknowledging “racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity” (17). Prevalent theories of diaspora fail to acknowledge the alternative contribution of this discursive system by black women writers to diaspora studies.¹¹

Central to my study is the choice of black women writers, aware of on-going debates regarding the nature of the African diaspora in the Americas, to re-root and re-

route Africa in the Americas through the inclusion of certain cultural signifiers. This stands in counterdistinction to the desire of Paul Gilroy and others to distance Africa from the Americas in order to avoid the trap of ethnic absolutism. Yet, I argue that knowledge of certain West African cultural epistemologies and cosmologies is crucial for analyses of the works of black women writers. These systems of knowledge appear within their texts in order to bridge borders and national boundaries and to make real the concept of a diaspora whose point of dispersal was Africa and whose members engaged in a revolutionary improvisation of culture in order to survive in the harsh new world of the Americas. As M. Jacqui Alexander emphasizes, “African-based cosmological systems are complex manifestations of the geographies of crossing and dislocation. They are at the same time manifestations of locatedness, rootedness, and belonging that map individual and collective relationships [. . .]” (290-91).¹²

My study ultimately elucidates the codes and cartographies used by particular black female writers in the late twentieth century to reveal the following historical and theoretical issues: (1) the limiting adherence to the ideology of the nation and the need for a renewed ideological movement toward transnationalism; (2) the contributions of women in the historical evolution of the Americas; (3) the recognition of West African ancestor figures, deities, and folk practices in constructions of the diaspora in the Americas; (4) feminist and womanist perspectives regarding female and communal identity in the Americas; and (5) the significance of the mulatta body in future constructions of the Americas.

From “Resistent Identities” to a Transnational “Black Women’s Literature” of the Americas

I recognize that literary works by black women of the Americas are cultural productions that emerge from historically specific locations, informed by unique histories of racial formation. These facts may well explain why few scholars have published work that engages in truly comparative, cross-cultural analyses of black women’s writing. Given the challenge of cultural specificity, how may comparative scholars group together various texts under the rubric of “black women’s literature” and still account for what may be termed their “resistent identities”? What common links may be found between Gayl Jones’s *Song for Anninho* and Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière . . . Noire de Salem*, narratives which represent the seemingly divergent slave experiences of women in relation to colonial Brazil, Barbados, and New England, respectively? How may we discuss Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby* in relation to Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*, novels that appear to offer differing views of black communities in the Americas? Beyond their critique of the patriarchal cultures of Jamaica and Ecuador, what further parallels may be drawn between Erna Brodber’s *Myal* and Luz Argentina Chiriboga’s *Bajo la Piel de los Tambores*? How do Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* and Tessa McWatt’s *Out of My Skin* signify on the parallel forms of racial discourse in the United States and Canada?

I propose that a possible means of negotiating an essentialist categorization of such texts is to group them together according to common issues with which the authors of these works appear to concern themselves. From there we may examine these texts for how the literary representation of these issues complicates and/or redefines our present

notions of national borders and of diaspora in the Americas. The texts which I have chosen for analysis specifically critique patriarchal and static notions of the nation, which have often limited the diaspora in the Americas from empowering its members. In shifting our attention from individual national spaces within the Americas to the broader inter-national American space, the authors of these texts offer a vision of the Americas that is not bounded by borders. Instead, they re-imagine the Americas as an open space, characterized by cross-cultural movements and exchanges, and as one in which voices from the margins are heard and recognized as such movements and exchanges proliferate. The collective works of these particular writers reveal that a transnational diaspora came into being and continues to exist in the Americas for those very purposes.

I intentionally organize my analyses of this group of texts in order to reflect the evolution of a transnational, black feminist poetics over the course of the late twentieth-century and to emphasize how the view of the history and potential of the Americas changes with the inclusion of a black female perspective. I have paired texts under common thematic considerations in order to show that (1) black women's literary critiques of the nation have been happening within similar historical moments, in spite of differing ethnic and national affiliations; and that (2) these critiques purposefully gesture toward a redefinition of diasporic subjectivity in terms of transnational alliances and identifications. Just as I view black women's literature as descriptive narrations of theoretical concerns, I purposely present my analyses as descriptive examinations of the literature in order to reveal the ways in which these particular texts function as theory.

The first chapter of my dissertation, "A New Alchemy of Diaspora: From Nation to Transnationalism and the 'Every body Bring Something Soup' of Maxine Bailey and

Sharon Mareeka Lewis's *Sistahs*," addresses the theoretical works of several diaspora theorists of the Americas in order to show the persistence of nation in diasporic discourses. I concentrate on the re-emergence of a transnational discourse within the late twentieth century to replace limited and limiting theories of nation. Finally, in utilizing the trope of the Dutch pot and the metaphor of "every body bring something soup" within Bailey and Lewis's drama, I emphasize that the Americas may be read as more than a geographic region of separate nations but as a transnational space characterized by cross-cultural exchanges. Within each subsequent chapter, the symbols of the Dutch pot and the soup within it reoccur in order to emphasize the various types of mixture that make up the Americas and that reflect its trans-cultural nature. My reading of Bailey and Lewis's play, then, sets the stage for the discussion in the following chapters of what I view as a transnational, diasporic poetics of the Americas.

The second chapter, "Rewriting History/Inscribing Herstory: Gayl Jones's *Song for Anninho* and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière . . . Noire de Salem*, focuses on how black women authors use the figure of the maroon woman and her remembrance of Kongo folk practices and Yoruba deities during slavery and colonization to reveal the hidden stories of black women in the Americas. Jones and Condé are especially interested in how black women, deleted from or marginalized in historical records, have contributed to the early history of the Americas as they too have translated African culture in the New World. Tracing the lives of individual women of Brazil and Barbados and recording their oral histories as part of a larger history of blacks in the Americas, the works of Jones and Condé bear witness to the fact that women's stories must not be viewed as mere insertions into the collective memory but even more so as already present elements that, once

recognized, completely transform the historical landscape as it has been previously recorded through the patriarchal lens and thus understood. I focus on how, as testimonies, such stories allow for not only a rewriting of the history of the Americas to include black female subjectivity and agency but also an empowering of female voices across the region.

In the third chapter, “Ancestral Interventions and Diasporic Revelations: Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow* and Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*,” I address the inclusion of representations of Yoruba deities within these works and the ways in which such references signal potential answers to queries regarding the nature and function of the black community in the Americas. The survival and viability of black culture are central concerns of Marshall, Morrison, and other black female writers whose fiction questions whether the embrace of patriarchal values is worth the destruction of the communal bond. Marshall and Morrison’s novels are notable in their dramatization of the effects of national constructions on the black female body. Through representations of the interactions between female ancestor figures who bear the attributes of the orishas and the characters of Jadine Childs and Avey Johnson, respectively, Marshall and Morrison emphasize the psychic force of the Americas to compel the protagonists to choose between life in one’s original community and mere existence within an adopted but alien culture that continually emphasizes individuality over community. The Americas, as the geographical and metaphorical site of cultural choices, remains pivotal to both texts.

The fourth chapter, “Toward a Black Liberatory Feminism: Erna Brodber’s *Myal* and Luz Argentina Chiriboga’s *Bajo la Piel de los Tambores*,” examines the critique

offered by such works of the male privilege and sexual politics that attempt to reinforce black female subordination and silencing, as exemplified by the representation of Ella O’Grady and Rebeca Gonzalez’s engagement with the patriarchal cultures of Jamaica and Ecuador. These protagonists offer a conception of the black woman as more than just a body to be objectified, but as an individual with a consciousness not to be restricted by societal conventions. Calling attention to their signification on West African folk practices and liberation theology, I focus on how these works operate polemically to stress the ways in which oppressed black women, so often defined through the male gaze, must enter into a psychological and spiritual process of cleansing, through interactions with orishas in the form of already empowered ancestor figures. This process ultimately heals, empowers, and redefines them through community and history, rather than through patriarchy. I also note how these works reveal theoretical considerations of how the mulatta body not only figures into gender oppression but also questions established racial boundaries and thus may resist that oppression.

The fifth and final chapter, “Passing On the Color Line: Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* and Tessa McWatt’s *Out of My Skin*” examines the ways in which black women authors across the region “read” the figure of the mulatta body as an agent of diasporic consciousness and resistance and as a symbol of a future Americas, particularly in terms of the ways in which she revises muted historiographies of the African presence in the Americas, resists patriarchal constructions of race, and thus critiques and destabilizes ongoing racial epistemologies. Senna and McWatt use their texts to question notions of racial difference and racial mixture, as their protagonists, Birdie Lee and Daphne Baird, negotiate U. S. and Canadian landscapes that reflect the unstable construction of race and

the mutable identities that accompany race, while continuing to be marked by the presence of the color line. Their allusions to certain West African cultural constructs within the Americas reflect this engagement. Differing from critics who assert that the mulatta continues to be regulated by national constructions of race, I argue that Senna and McWatt allow the mulatta figure to gain a voice and agency through her open critique of history and racial categorizations. These works are important to millennial constructions of a future Americas, especially in terms of the ways in which they imagine forms of resistance to patriarchal constructions of race while pointing to the potential for black women of mixed race to generate novel spaces of diasporic subjectivity that may simultaneously exist within and beyond the color lines constructed by various nations.

The conclusion of my dissertation revises José Martí's "Nuestra América" in terms of a transnational, diasporic poetics of the Americas, by which "Our America" may be viewed as a continuous continent whose members are connected and nourished by its fluid memory, translated through the bodies and stories of black women. I conclude that such a poetics of landscape and of nourishment reasserts the necessity of interpreting the signs within the works of black female writers and of viewing their discourse as indicative of a collective "American" black female consciousness, aware of multiple forms of oppression and seeking to empower the black community across the space of the Americas. In accentuating the ways in which these works enhance already accepted notions of diaspora, I again propose reading these works as theory—as discourses that thicken the soup in the Dutch pot diaspora of the Americas. Finally, I stress their interpretation as a means of legitimizing black women's creative expressions in theoretical arenas and, most importantly, of gaining a fuller "reading" of the Americas in

order to understand the importance of the black woman's place in its past, present, and future.

Chapter One

A New Alchemy of Diaspora: From Nation to Transnationalism and the “Every body Bring Something Soup” of Maxine Bailey and Sharon Mareeka Lewis’s *Sistahs*

The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly arranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.

–Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class and Sex.
Women Redefining Difference”

The African diaspora in the Americas has historically been defined by dispersal and cross-cultural movement due to the transatlantic slave trade and various forms of European colonization. Several theorists have noted that diaspora in the Americas was always already transnational and multicultural in terms of the intermingling of African nations and their cultural practices in the New World and the subsequent hybrid cultures created by the interactions between colonizer and colonized.¹ However, with the rise of independent nation-states in the Americas, the idealized concept of a transnational diaspora in the Americas began to stall over time. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, in particular, an attendant anxiety over the limits of diaspora characterized theoretical discourses. The focus on separate national narratives appeared to reflect a feeling among many scholars that a transnational diaspora as a community within the Americas may be impossible, given the issues of territorialization, borders, and nationalism. The question still lingers: Can the diaspora of the Americas be defined as a transnational community without collapsing into disparate nations? Such a query cannot be fully engaged until the concept of nation and its persistence in diasporic discourse are

interrogated.

What Is Nation?

Implicated in modernity and in its attempt to universalize groups across temporalities and spacialities, nation is both a normative and nebulous idea. Its multiple representations of government, boundaries, and people sharing a common culture and language mark it as multifaceted. Yet, when citizens of a nation are asked to define the term, most cannot do so. Still, those who claim citizenship in a nation are usually highly invested in the notion of belonging to that nation. This feeling of nationalism is also implicated in the definition of nation. Nationalism is, after all, bound up in a sense of identification with others in a nation. However, nationalism is not always adopted by recent immigrants who, though they may claim citizenship, are still invested in the interests of their homeland. Given these considerations, what then is nation?

Among the many and varied theoretical discussions of nation,² Ernest Gellner's extended definition of nation is foundational to apprehending the concept and its effects on the consciousness of its citizens. His exposition on nation, based on two separate but interconnected contingencies, is worth quoting at length:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them

into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non- members. (7)

Gellner interprets nation in terms of culture and mutual recognition of common social traits and mores not shared by other persons. Yet, he is quick to point out that, because definitions of culture are broad and relative rather than specific and normative, nation must be understood in terms of “what culture *does*” and how it is shared (7, 55). More specifically, nations arise when “pervasive high cultures (standardized, literacy- and education-based systems of communication),” imposed and sustained by the center, dominate populations (54-55, 57). If a category of persons recognize themselves in terms of what their shared culture produces (a particular system of communication, as noted above), the result is a national sentiment (nationalism). For Gellner, the national sentiment leads to the birth of a nation.

The link between literacy as a cultural production and nation formation informs another prominent theory of nation. According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is a modern construct that may be defined as an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” Anderson emphasizes that the nation is “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). The nation is imagined as limited by boundaries; sovereign, in that its citizens seemingly rule themselves through government representatives; and forming a community based on a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Though nations in the Americas and Europe were imagined, they did not make themselves. The proliferation of print culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially gave rise to the ideology of nation. With the emergence of “mass reading

publics” (43) in Europe and the Americas, members of nations imagined themselves, vis-à-vis the act of reading, as being connected to each other within the same nation.

Moreover, members of reading publics could imagine themselves as national subjects who, in counter-distinction to enslaved Africans within and beyond the borders of nations, possessed agency and the right to be recognized. Literature (the novel, in particular) became the vehicle that drove the concepts of nation, nationalism, and mutual recognition in the emerging Americas. Nation was thus constructed as community through literacy.

Imagining the nation as a community is also at the heart of Etienne Balibar’s interpretation of nation. Balibar points to the social process of “producing the people” as the means by which imagined communities are made real in nation formation (93). In order to reconcile class distinctions and the various ethnicities that make up modern nations, national states produce the people, or “make the people produce itself continually as national community” based on an assumed unity (93-94). The national community, or “the people,” sustain the “ideological form” of the nation “not by suppressing all differences, but by relativizing them and subordinating them to itself [the nation] in such a way that it is the symbolic difference between ‘ourselves’ and ‘foreigners’ which wins out and which is lived as irreducible” (94). Ultimately, becoming one of “the people” involves an investment in a “fictive ethnicity,” by which one is “interpellated, as an individual, *in the name of* the collectivity whose name one bears” (96). Nation, in this sense, is constructed as both an imagined *and* real community.

The idea of seemingly unified communities based on mutual recognition, a literate culture, and the production of the people around a fictive ethnicity is useful to

apprehending notions of nation and nationalism. If we synthesize the theories of nation offered by Gellner, Anderson, and Balibar, we get a clearer sense of how the modern concept of nation still holds sway, even in an era that has been labeled as “postnational.”³ Categories of people still invest in and enact in various forms the features of nation mentioned above in order to constitute national citizenship. This investment continues to be marked by a tacit approval of national narratives without further interrogation of the social inequality embedded in national constructions. As a result, few citizens of nations consider the more subtle, though no less normative aspects of nation that have not been codified but remain dominant nonetheless.

The nation, as Homi Bhabha stresses, has been and still remains “an agency of *ambivalent* narration” (“Narrating the Nation” 3). A simultaneously abstract and concrete aporia, the nation disseminates certain discourses of belonging at the same time that it propagates discourses of unbelonging. Though true to the forms that nations in the Americas have taken, Gellner, Anderson, and Balibar’s theoretical models of nation need to attend further to the notion of ambivalence within the national imaginary. Equal weight must be given to the normative, yet often unspoken identity politics and social economies that uphold skewed racial and gendered epistemologies. Upon closer examination, narratives of nation reveal that “the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation” (5).

Narratives of nation in the Americas, in particular, have consistently claimed heterogeneity as the basis of nation formation and yet have encouraged an adherence to discourses of homogeneity at the exclusion of visible and invisible others. In their

interrogation of the nation-state and its regulation of certain bodies, Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Minoó Moallem state that

[. . .] at the core of the modern nation-state, a contradiction is set in motion insofar as there is denial of sexual or racial difference or both, and simultaneous universalization of difference. [. . .] This deeply contradictory position, virtually foundational of the modern nation-state, underpins institutional, political, and cultural practices for the “good of the people.” This basic contradiction and paradox, so caught up with notions of equality and liberty, property, and individual self-possession, has become the complex crucial crisis of the “modern political community” today. [. . .] We propose that it is through racialization, sexualization, and genderization that the nation is able to transcend modernities and to become a timeless and homogenized entity. (2, 7)

Robyn Wiegman addresses the same issues succinctly in noting that national citizenship, often based on visual representations of the body, “functions as a disproportionate system in which the universalism ascribed to certain bodies (white, male, propertied) is protected and subtended by the infinite particularity assigned to others (black, female, unpropertied)” (6). But how does the nation relate to the “unruly” bodies that do not/will not align themselves with the production of “the people” that upholds the national imaginary? What national spaces do these bodies occupy? What about the ways in which race, gender, and patriarchy are validated by and represented within the nation? Are there national spaces for alternative narratives of nation? These issues need further elaboration. They remain especially important considerations in terms of the proliferation of late twentieth century discourses of nation and of diaspora in the Americas.

The Persistence of Nation in Diasporic Discourse

Late twentieth century discourses of diaspora within the Americas reflect the desire on the part of theorists for awareness of the heterogeneity of black subjectivity in localized spaces within the region. It is understood that diaspora begins in these localized spaces, that diaspora is always already local. However, it must also be understood that there are also global aspects to diaspora that warrant examination, especially given the proliferation of transnational activities. Much attention has been paid by theorists to various historiographies of nation, differing forms of racial formation, and the resistance by black subjects to state strategies of marginalization and erasure. While this has proven useful in terms of representing blackness in multiple areas of the Americas, diaspora theorists still remain tethered to the ideology of nation in one form or another. Diaspora theorists have especially implicated themselves in the universalism of certain aspects of nation. The results have been a reinscription of national economies of representation and a limited sense of the intersubjectivity of diasporic subjects vis-à-vis transnational networks.

Discourses of diaspora have reflected a motivation to expose hegemonic state systems and national narratives that seek to regulate and/or remove blackness. Indeed, the concern of many diaspora theorists has been to revise national narratives so that blackness is recognized as not just part of but integral to the nation. Among the many discourses of diaspora in the Americas, Rinaldo Walcott's Canadian "grammar for black"; Michael Omi and Howard Winant's concept of "rearticulation" of racial projects in the United States; Roy Simon Bryce-Laport and Trevor Purcell's historiography of the "Costaricanization" of West Indians in Central America; Michael Hanchard's

characterization of the resistance by a black Orpheus to Brazil's inequitable "racial democracy"; Edouard Glissant's "Caribbeanness"; and Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant's "creoleness" stand out as discourses that seek to intervene in national projects that have historically dealt with the presence of blackness as a problem to be solved. However, in spite of these meaningful interventions in diaspora studies, these articulations remain silent or ambivalent on issues of gender, patriarchy, and the possibility of a transnational diaspora that moves beyond a strict adherence to national constructions.

Regularly ignored in diaspora studies, Canada is a provocative site for the study of blackness. In *Black Like Who?*, Rinaldo Walcott argues that blackness in Canada is an "absented presence always under erasure" (27). Interpreted through a contemporary, legislated multicultural policy, blackness in Canada is represented as a new phenomenon and as homogenous. Yet, as Walcott notes, blackness has had a long history in Canada and is characterized by heterogeneity: "As a location for post-emancipation and post-national independence for Caribbean migrants, and more recently for continental African migrants, and as a sanctuary for escaping enslaved African-Americans and their descendants, the multiplicities of blackness in Canada collide in ways that are instructive for current diasporic theorizing" (40).

Engaging various black Canadian cultural productions, Walcott views these works as more than representative of the nation; they are expressions of blackness located "between national borders and diasporic desires" (26). Walcott uses these expressions to advance an articulation of what he terms a "grammar with its own Canadian syntaxes for black" (156). This "grammar for black" will be aware of the national narrative of erasure

and will rewrite it in ways that, Walcott predicts, “will cement blackness to the nation and reconfigure the nation for the better” (156). As outlined, Walcott’s grammar for black is distinctly male-dominated and still mediated by a national grammar. Walcott’s vision begs the question: Does the possibility exist for multiple grammars for black that reflect gender specificities and that originate within the nation and yet articulate themselves apart from the nation?

Walcott’s engagement with various forms of blackness in Canada and their physical and metaphysical movement within and outside of the nation suggests the possibility of transnational diasporic formation within a national space. However, his implied desire for national recognition of a grammar for black hinders his argument and curtails the transnational impulse to which he alludes. As with most nations of the Americas, full citizenship is contingent on investment in the national narrative and its construction of national identity. While Walcott argues for the impossibility of complete belonging to the nation, the language of his analyses of blackness in Canada intimates a longing for belonging. Instead of arguing for a grammar for black for its own sake, for the sake of self-recognition and empowerment, Walcott looks to the nation for their fulfillment. The articulation of humanistic, transnational, diasporic grammars for black will allow us to reconfigure nations in terms of the creation of transnational black spaces that represent men and women equally and that exist beyond the need for national recognition.

National grammars of race inform Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s work on racial formation in the United States. Focusing on the 1960s to the 1990s, Omi and Winant characterize U. S. racial formation during this time period in terms of “racial

projects,” such as neoconservatism, neoliberalism, and the responses to them. Such projects are linked to racial categories, by which “human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (55-56). Omi and Winant extensively trace the creation of state-based racial initiatives and corresponding racial movements that demanded state reform. These racial projects engaged each other reciprocally in a process of “rearticulation,” marked by the “*disorganization* of the dominant [racial] ideology and of *construction* of an alternative, oppositional framework” (89). Rearticulation, stress Omi and Winant, intensely framed the U. S. sociopolitical culture in the late twentieth century.

Omi and Winant’s theory of rearticulation provides a practical means of interpreting racial ideologies as they have evolved and operated historically in the U. S. Omi and Winant analyze the rise of the oppositional racial movements of civil rights and Black Power in terms of their rearticulation of black subjectivity. Unfortunately, what is missing from their work is a recognition and treatment of the ways in which black women in these activist movements rearticulated black female subjectivity in the face of nation-based racial projects that marginalized and muted their voices. Additionally, though Omi and Winant acknowledge the benefits accrued by other racial and ethnic minorities as a result of the civil rights movement, they treat the emergence of these groups on the post-civil rights national stage in terms of separate and almost isolated engagements of the racial state. Apart from noting the multicultural features of Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaigns, Omi and Winant ignore the broad range of oppositional racial projects enacted as a result of the transcultural and transnational alliances facilitated by minority activists and often spearheaded by women. These

omissions reflect the pervasive influence of national economies of representation on even the most progressive discourses of race in the U. S.

Omi and Winant conclude their study by emphasizing that, in spite of the competing, contemporary neoconservative and neoliberal projects of erasing race from national discourses, racism in the U. S. still exists and has real material effects. They stress the renewed need to oppose racism by being consciously aware of race:

By noticing race we can begin to challenge racism, with its ever-more-absurd reduction of human experience to an essence attributed to all without regard for historical or social context. By noticing race we can challenge the state, the institutions of civil society, and ourselves as individuals to combat the legacy of inequality and injustice inherited from the past. By noticing race we can develop the political insight and mobilization necessary to make the U. S. a more racially just and egalitarian society. (159)

To Omi and Winant's challenge, I would add that individuals should notice race beyond the national context in order to gain knowledge of additional ways to oppose racism. Ultimately, noticing race in a transnational context may inform the construction of new racial projects to combat the racial hegemony of the nation.

State-based racial projects do exist beyond Canada and the U. S. In their study of the racial project of incorporating blackness into Costa Rican society, Roy Simon Bryce-Laport and Trevor Purcell shed light on the often ignored history of blackness in Central America. Bryce-Laport and Purcell emphasize the exigence of their research: "The presence of blacks in the greater Central American Isthmus has never been emphasized in social, scientific or historical literature, even though Belice and Panama are rivaled only by Guyana (formerly British Guiana [in South America]) in having the highest concentration of blacks and mulattoes on the Central American mainland" (220). Costa Rica, a racially homogenous country constituted mostly by descendants of Castillians,

interests Bryce-Laport and Purcell because of the nation's historical relationship with migrant black groups, mainly imported Jamaican laborers, hired to work on railroad construction and banana plantations regulated by the U. S. The nation's almost overt demand that these laborers and their descendants submit to the acculturation process of "Costaricanization," in spite of their determination to adhere to British cultural standards, resulted in "at least partial cultural assimilation requisite for socioeconomic mobility" (228-31). Unfortunately, Costa Rica's ethnocentrism has precluded any "provisions for resolving the conflicts inherent in such selective competition as occurs in the context of racial plurality" (236).

Bryce-Laport and Purcell conclude that the case of Afro-Costa Ricans invites further consideration of the "comparative historical sociology of the New World black experience" (237). Unfortunately, though they mention other nations where imported black labor were forced to assimilate, Bryce-Laport and Purcell forego the opportunity to engage in their own comparative historical sociology that would outline the similarities between national assimilation policies in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. For example, there is no mention of the transnational connections established by West Indian laborers and their descendants across Central America and the Caribbean in order to combat the eradication of culture by national pressures to assimilate. Moreover, though they discuss attempts at Afro-Costa Rican political organization and activism, Bryce-Laport and Purcell are completely silent on the underground activism of black women and their transnational alliances with other women of the diaspora. The lack of attention to the above issues again reflects the limits of diaspora scholarship with a national focus.

As with Bryce-Laport and Purcell's study, Michael Hanchard also offers empirical evidence and metaphorical representations of the ways in which blacks in Brazil negotiate the unique racial dynamics of Latin America while attempting to resist national pressures to assimilate. In *Orpheus and Power*, he outlines the pervasiveness of a discourse of "racial democracy" and the dissemination of an ideology of whitening (*blanqueamiento*) as the mechanisms used to mask the actual social disparities between whites and nonwhites. In tracing the development of Brazil's racial hegemony, Hanchard emphasizes the uniqueness of Brazil in terms of racial stratification in the Americas: "What distinguishes Brazil from any other plural society in the New World is that no other nation has had such an elaborate 'solution' to the 'problem' of racial and cultural pluralism. [. . .] Cuba and Peru have ideologies of whitening dating back to the nineteenth century, but nothing as developed or sophisticated" (8).

According to Hanchard, black resistance movements, based on U. S. radical and integrationist civil rights activism and the anticolonial movements in Africa and the Caribbean, contributed to the development of a black racial consciousness in Brazil. Hanchard's reading of this consciousness points to a transnational sensibility among Afro-Brazilians. However, while activist movements have "had the ideational space to incorporate discourses of negritude, pan-Africanism, or black Power," they have lacked the "*practical* space to accommodate forms of 'peopled resistance'" (139). In the vein of a Gramscian politics, Hanchard suggests the need for further "institutional development within Afro-Brazilian communities" (163). This recommendation, though well intentioned, reflects a U. S.-centric apprehension of political mobilization and active resistance that refuses to recognize the power of Brazil's racial hegemony in minimizing

black activism. In this case, a reading of Brazil's transnational inclinations is circumscribed by national formulations from without.

In his concluding remarks, Hanchard refers to the film *Orfeu Negro* (*Black Orpheus*), which recasts the Greek tragedy of Orpheus and Euridice in terms of black subjects in Rio de Janeiro during Carnival. In alignment with the Brazilian national narrative, both the film and Hanchard represent the nation in patriarchal and ambivalent terms. If, as Hanchard's reading seems to imply, Orpheus represents black consciousness and Euridice is equated with history, then Orpheus is doomed in his pursuit of Euridice, who is ultimately lost to Death, the racial democracy undergirding the Brazilian nation-state. For Hanchard, Orpheus's ill-fated backward glance to capture visually his lost Euridice metaphorically represents the problematic of Afro-Brazilian politics: "the gaze toward a monolithic, unitary Africa as a basis for collective identity, ideology, and action" (164).

In spite of his U. S.-centric view, Hanchard is careful in his documentation of a history of contemporary racial activism, including that of black women in contributing to an Afro-Brazilian racial consciousness. However, by casting Euridice as lost to Orpheus forever, Hanchard narrows the possibilities of a recovered Afro-Brazilian history, specifically the roles which black women played in Brazil's past and the roles they may play in its future. If we re-read Euridice as freedom and equality in the face of Death, then Orpheus's perceived loss may be re-read as a gain of inspiration to continue to face Death in the hopes of reuniting with his beloved at some point in the future. Altering the perspective on the potential for the reclamation of black history and the development of

racial consciousness beyond a U. S., patriarchal paradigm would do much for studies of black empowerment in Brazil.

Seeking to alter the perspective of black history and expression in the Caribbean, Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant deployed the term “Caribbeanness” to combat discursively the encroachment of the European (specifically French) metropole on the cultural traditions of Caribbean peoples. The idea was to apotheosize the people and traditions of the Caribbean in terms of the region’s hybridity. Caribbeanness, for Glissant, rests on a “return to the point of entanglement” (26) between the African, European, and indigenous cultures that were foundational to the region’s histories. Glissant imagined an exploded literary discourse that would promote the full development of national literatures and cross-cultural identifications through the sharing of those literatures: “What interests us now is the possibility for the Caribbean people, whether Creole-speaking, francophone, anglophone, or hispanophone, to attempt the [domination of uncertainty and ambiguity] beyond the languages spoken, a process that is related to expression” (165-66). Though women occupy an ambivalent relation to his construction of Caribbeanness, Glissant proposed that this sense of identity could be realized by using literary discourses to fill in the gaps in the historiography of the Caribbean and create a feeling of self-possession among its people:

The rupture of the slave trade, then the experience of slavery, introduces between blind belief and clear consciousness a gap that we have never finished filling. The absence of representation, of echo, of any sign, makes this emptiness forever yawn under our feet. Along with our realization of the process of exploitation (along with any action we take), we must articulate the unexpressed while moving beyond it: expressions of ‘popular belief’ are a nonpossession that we must confirm; to the point where, recognizing them as a nonpossession, we will really deal with them by abandoning them. (201)

The theory of “Caribbeanness” supposes a Caribbean unity based on discursive expressions and exchanges. However, though he recognizes and traces the strategies of resistance to European influences on the part of peoples of neighboring islands, Glissant’s formulation is limited by a preoccupation with his native Martinique’s status as a “*département d’outre-mer*” (overseas department) of France. He concludes that Caribbeanness cannot be achieved for Martinique due to the control of its economy by another: “One cannot begin cross-fertilization (to become relative, to reject origins) unless one is not lost in pseudoproduction” (46). In lamenting the lack of independent cultural productions, particularly that of a national language, within Martinican society, Glissant effectively undercuts his argument. Caribbeanness may well be achieved for Martinique if Glissant’s narrative of nation moved beyond a focus on lack to a validation of the ways in which Martinique shares the sense of hybridity, that is a lack of purity, possessed by its neighbors.

Self-proclaimed students of Glissant, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant proposed a (re-)turn to “creoleness,” or the composite of multiple cultural elements, brought together by the historical reality of slavery, colonization, and indenture. These theorists push Glissant’s argument further by declaring that “Creolness is the cement of our culture and that it ought to rule the foundations of our Caribbeanness” (891). As *Créolistes*, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant also propose a literary discourse, one based in orality, racial memory, a thematics based on Creole existence, a reinvestment in and use of creole languages, and a search for new aesthetics to represent creoleness. They posit that only through the recognition of creoleness can

Martinicans gain a sense of Caribbeanness and a feeling of connectedness to the rest of the Americas (902).

While the Créolistes claim to eschew “narrow nationalism” (904), their exposition emphasizes an affiliation with other nations who share a history of French colonization. Sally and Richard Price even note that the language and implications of the argument for creoleness reflect an underlying desire to negotiate the politics of departmentalization: “Indeed, we believe that, in terms of cultural politics, the kinds of specificities championed by the Créolistes are in step with a rapidly modernizing Martinique in which people are, with considerable coaching from France, adjusting to their new place within a greater Europe” (135). The diasporic claims of the Créolistes are thus limited by the influence of national narratives of belonging dictated by the French metropole. “Creoleness,” as a theory, breaks down because it cannot sustain its own imperative toward cross-cultural recognition across the nations of the Americas without necessary mediation by Europe. Finally, similar to Glissant’s ambivalence, women remain absent in the construction of an Americas rooted in creoleness.

In light of the persistence of nation in the diasporic discourses highlighted above, what is the future of diaspora and of diasporic formulations in the Americas? If, as Audre Lorde suggests, definitions of diasporic subjectivity remain bounded by old national patterns, then to what new definitions of diaspora may we look in order to find new patterns of intersubjectivity and belonging? A possible answer to these queries may lie in the re-emergence of transnationalism as both a social process that links the local and the global and a theoretical discourse that exceeds the historically dominant framework of the nation.

Re-Enter Transnationalism

Though many diaspora theorists in the Americas continue to invest in national constructions and distinctions, a movement toward a transnational sensibility remains an interest. Issues of ethnic and national affiliation, differing forms of racial formation, and the need for further conceptual work in the social sciences to concretize the term have made slow the incursions by diaspora theorists into transnational studies. However, recent scholarly elaborations of transnationalism, its effects, and its potentialities have much to add to discourses of diaspora in the Americas.

In the late twentieth century transnationalism reemerged as a discourse in international relations and economics to describe the global flow of labor, capital, goods, and services between nations. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton characterize peoples affected by and integrating themselves into these movements as representative of a “new kind of migrating population,” a population “composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring together two societies into a single field” (1). According to Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, the new migrant sensibility produced by global capitalist markets characterizes the re-emergence of the discourse of transnationalism:

[T]ransnationalism [represents] the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated “transmigrants.” Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously. (1-2)

As Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton suggest, the power of transnationalism lies

in the abilities of transmigrants to use their “simultaneous positioning in several social locations both to accommodate to and to resist the difficult circumstances and the dominant ideologies they encounter in their transnational fields” (4-5).

As noted above, transnational practices have gained prominence in relation to global flows. These flows do not necessarily destroy nations, but they do alter their configurations. Thus globalization has resulted in the blurring of the boundaries of nations “from above” (at the level of the nation-state) and the destabilization of established relations of power “from below” (at the level of local communities). Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith refer to the latter result as an “expression of a subversive popular resistance” (5)—a resistance that is always evolving and adapting to encroachments by hegemonic structures of power. Guarnizo and Smith stipulate that, because of their local origins of resistance, transnational practices are not just spatially and temporally imagined:

Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times. [. . .] While transnational practices extend beyond two or more national territories, they are built within the confines of specific social, economic, and political relations which are bound together by perceived shared interests and meanings. Without such social closure, without a basic sense of shared meanings and a sense of predictability of results bounding together the actors involved (i.e., social control), it would be unthinkable for any person to try to establish any kind of relations across national territories, whether a transnational migrant network, economic project, or political movement. (11, 13)

Emphasizing the potential for novel sociological approaches to transnational studies, William Robinson claims that transnational networks and practices, connecting the local and global without the validation of nation-states, have resulted in the need for an “epistemological break” with the nation-state framework as an analysis for social

organization. He calls for new analytical mechanisms for distinguishing “between appearance (national phenomena derived from nation-state analysis) and essence (transnational phenomena)” in order to “decipher the transnational essence in social phenomena that appear as national” (573-74).⁴ Interdisciplinary incursions into the study of transnational phenomena may de-center the nation-state as the primary means of conceptualizing imagined communities. One may hope that, as Robinson suggests, studies of transnationalism may allow theorists in other fields to “explore the complex scenarios that emerge from the dialectical interaction of descendant nation-state and ascendant transnational spaces” (589).

Recent interrogations of transnationalism have influenced multiple areas of scholarship, extending the scope of transnational studies. Françoise Lionnett and Shu-mei Shih’s recent cultural studies project on “minor transnationalism” emphasizes a reframing of the concept of transnationalism in order to shift the theoretical gaze away from the binaries of global/local and above/below. They view these binaries as traps that merely reinscribe the dominance of discourses that emerge from the nation-state and are thus labeled as “major.” Instead, Lionnett and Shih propose a view of the transnational that is “not bound by the binary of the local and global and can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities” (6). Resting the theoretical gaze on the “minor or minoritized perspective” leads to “an awareness and recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries” (6-7).

Feminist discourses have also added a new dimension to the study of transnational networks that have influenced cultures across national boundaries. Transnational

feminist critiques call for a “transnational imaginary that places in synergistic relations diverse narratives offering prospects of critical community affiliations” (Shohat 52). The sharing of women’s narratives in relation to the nation and the spaces in between nations contribute to these affiliations. Increased attention to the persistence of gender inequity in multi-national sites has pointed out what Constance R. Sutton views as the “need to add a gender dimension to our transnational perspective and to our analysis of the reconfigurations in racial, ethnic, and national identities that are occurring. For women have not been passive ciphers in this process” (246). Women have often been at the center of transnational migration, particularly in terms of their impact on the expansion of multiple labor forces, community-based activism, and international relations. According to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, women’s involvements in outernational and transnational networks are very much a reaction to the “scattered hegemonies” brought about by globalization. For Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem, the transnational space between the migrating woman and the nation reflects the difference that obtains with the recognition of the performative resistance of women to the homogenizing processes of modernity and the nation-state:

“Between woman and nation” refers to a particular situated space of the performative and performativity where women and nation intersect in specific ways, giving rise to the interval of *différance*. [. . .] Women are both of and not of the nation. Between woman and nation is, perhaps, the space or zone where we can deconstruct these monoliths and render them more historically nuanced and accountable to politics. (7, 12)

As transnational feminist scholarship reveals, a sense of accountability for the ways in which women figure in both local and global spaces is necessary to considerations of nation and transnationalism.

Given the possibilities inherent in transnational practices, theories of diaspora can

only become more nuanced in their expression and liberatory in their effects with the adoption of a transnational and gendered vision of diaspora. Imagining the diaspora space of the Americas as transnational shifts our gaze from individual nations to the generative space between nations. A transnational focus redirects the energies of those engaged in separate national struggles for state recognition. Indeed, transnational relations allow groups to engage in network formation and community building both within and across nations in order to promote self-recognition and mutual empowerment without the need of state intervention. In terms of expanding the concept of diaspora, “a focus on transnationalism as a new field of social relations will allow us to explore transnational fields of action and meaning as operating within and between continuing nation-states and as a reaction to the conditions and terms nation-states impose on their populations. Migrants will be viewed as culturally creative but as actors in an arena that they do not control” (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szan 19). Adding a gendered perspective to diaspora may reveal also how women’s transnational practices have rearticulated “those ‘imaged/invented’ traditions and histories being used to support the many actual and symbolic forms of male domination that continue to be embedded in many of today’s religious, national, and ethnic projects” (Sutton 247). Representing diasporic subjects in the Americas as creators of culture, as actors with agency in multiple national spaces, and as framers and participants in an interactive network that empowers both men and women expands our notions of borders and boundaries. Defining diaspora in terms of transnationalism alchemizes fixed notions of the nation into more fluid conceptions of community that can accommodate differences in ways that remain impossible under the stronghold of the ideology of the nation.

From National Provisions to Transnational Soup: *Sistahs*

The possibility of a transnational diaspora of the Americas does exist; and the literary models of black women act as guides in its realization. While their male counterparts remained tied to notions of nation, several black women writers of the late twentieth century were narrating the transnational before the recent explosion of transnational studies in the social sciences. In launching a “revolt”⁵ against the ideology of the nation and instead defining the Americas as a whole by way of transnationality, these writers have mapped out a vision of what Lionnett and Shih define as a “space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center” (5). I propose that the discursive system constructed by these writers operates as one of the key “minor” creative interventions into the intersecting fields of transnationalism and diaspora studies.

Maxine Bailey and Sharon Mareeka Lewis’s *Sistahs* is one such literary model that offers a dramatic view of a transnational diaspora of the Americas. One of the focal points of the play is the image of the Dutch pot. In her preface to the written text of *Sistahs*, playwright and critic Djanet Sears emphasizes the character of the Dutch pot, the vessel that will hold the soup made by the protagonists, as central to the play. She describes the Dutch pot as the “psycho-physical and metaphorical container for an epicurian balm”; and she characterizes its handlers as “alchemists” (v). The trope of the Dutch pot is useful in interpreting the historiography and unity of blackness in the Americas. Though within the fictional space of the play the Dutch pot sits on a fire within the Canadian nation, its origins, movement, and use mark it as a tool constructed

against national boundaries. Attributed to eighteenth century Dutch makers of cast iron cookware, exported to other European nations and to colonies in the Americas, and used by the enslaved to cook the master's cuisine and their own, the Dutch pot is a product and symbol of modernity and the counter-discourses produced by modernity. A cauldron made up of seemingly unrelated ingredients dropped into a bubbling ocean and set to simmer in order to tenderize, yet heighten the flavor of its constitutive elements, the Dutch pot signifies on the black experience in the Americas.

Through acts of revolutionary improvisation, the enslaved adapted their skills in producing and handling clay pots for cooking and their particular knowledge of food preparation to the use of the Dutch pot. Although men and women alike possessed this knowledge, women usually managed the production of the pots and their use in food preparation in West African communities.⁶ Countering the myopia of First World/Western feminist assessments that a focus on the domestic space of food preparation limits the agency of women and their access to networks of empowerment, Josephine Beoku-Betts, in her work on food preparation within the African diaspora, notes that women's management of feeding in black communities is directly linked to "cultural identity and group survival." A consideration of the domestic space of food preparation encourages "women-centered networks, self-reliance, extended family, and community-centeredness" (553). The use of the Dutch pot primarily by black women, then, reveals the translation into new forms of distinctly West African cultural practices that empower black women and the communities which they claim. Containing ingredients from and deployed in multiple nations, the Dutch pot and what it may contain cuts across the North/Central/South/Caribbean division of the Americas, topples the

primacy of “America” (read as the United States of America) in diasporic discourse, and organizes diaspora in the Americas around shared histories of exploitation *and* survival. The Dutch pot, used for cooking and serving a soup made up of ingredients from various nations of the Americas, represents a type of counter-discursive alchemy by which diaspora is re-imagined and re-mapped in terms of transnational connections that facilitate the progress of multiple communities in the Americas.

In appropriating the play’s metaphor of “every body bring something soup” and its inclusion of West African cultural signifiers, I argue that black women writers of the late twentieth century signify on a history of miscegenation in the Americas and on the active roles played by black women in framing that history. Their impetus is to simultaneously record and encourage forms of resistance to patriarchal structures and to reaffirm the African presence in the Americas. I contend that black women authors, in revising José Martí’s conception of a transnational Americas, ultimately offer a vision of the region in which the black female body, the result of racial and/or ethnic mixture itself, becomes more than just a passive vessel through which American culture—a syncretism of multiple cultural experiences that transcends geographical, temporal, and linguistic boundaries—is (re-)created. As represented in the “print culture”⁷ created by these authors, the black female becomes an active agent, helping to create both physically and culturally the African diaspora in the Americas.

The dramatic form of Bailey and Lewis’s play facilitates the pursuit of agency, as it enacts the goals of feminist drama, while delivering a type of Marxist polemic. The play reflects the words of critic Janet Brown, who emphasizes feminist drama’s “commitment to telling stories of silenced and marginalized women, celebrating

women's community and sense of connection through group protagonists, and expressing the moral concerns and societal criticism that arise from women's experience" (155). Works by playwrights such as Bailey and Lewis complicate Brown's definition by adding racial and varied historical and ethnic perspectives. The framework of black women's drama, in particular, becomes a discursive vehicle that literally enacts a complex dialogue among all of its participants. The dramatic form of a play such as *Sistahs* engages in a Brechtian poetics, by which the wall between the audience and actors is removed, members of the audience become actors, and all participants are encouraged to answer the call to action which the play invites. The addition of racial and gendered perspectives and, more importantly, their enactment destabilize prevalent racial and cultural epistemologies and systems of power produced, rearticulated, and reproduced in the lives of the members of the audience viewing the performance. This is significant, because "gender, identity, and history are already socially constructed performances and are subject to the manipulations of power" (Claycomb 3). A focus on race, gender, and muted and marginalized stories of difference allows the writers, performers, and audience members "to revise and reconstruct [biases] within a new framework, one that resists hegemonic power and acknowledges difference" (3). As Mae Gwendolyn Henderson notes,

It is this notion of discursive difference and identity underlying the simultaneity of discourse which typically characterizes black women's writing. Through the multiple voices that enunciate her complex subjectivity, the black woman writer not only speaks familiarly in the discourse of the other(s), but as Other she is in contestorial dialogue with the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or 'ambiguously (non)hegemonic' discourses (20).

Central to the drama of Bailey and Lewis's *Sistahs* is its engagement in dialogue

over Caribbean blackness in Canada and the effects and potentialities of migration and cultural miscegenation on generations of black women in the Americas. Rinaldo Walcott states that the language of black Canadian women writers “desecrates communities in an effort to (re)build ethical and just places that might be called home” (*Black Like Who?* 77). He adds that “[l]anguage for diasporic black people is part and parcel of their resistance and reinvention of the self in the Americas, and this is especially true when the performative qualities of diasporic language become evident” (80). While I agree with Walcott’s position on the performative possibilities of language, I argue that writers such as Bailey and Lewis engage in more than just “calibanization” and the performance of the “displacement of immigrantness” (85). They deploy a new mode of diasporic theorizing that both emphasizes the active agency of black women in framing a history of the Americas and advocates transnational alliances between them and other women and men of the Americas in order to strengthen seemingly disparate groups within the African diaspora of the Americas. I posit that Bailey and Lewis’s *Sistahs*, by way of the metaphor of “every body bring something soup” and the drama’s neo-African cultural and historical signifiers, offers a vision of a “Dutch pot” diaspora, by which a mixture of individual roots, or ethnic and cultural origins, define and sustain a network of black subjects, made more potent as its members are “seasoned” in modern spaces.⁸

The pot and the soup which it will eventually contain produce what Walcott terms “dramatic instabilities” that critique the boundaries of the modern nation, push those boundaries “to include more than it is assumed the nation *can* include,” and signal to us “the unfinished business of modernity—its viciousness and its promise” (“Dramatic Instabilities” 99-100, 102). The play’s use of the Dutch pot to facilitate the articulation

of black women's counter-discourses to modernity and its attendant construct of the nation destabilizes prevalent notions of black women's contributions to the national scene and to the larger diaspora, which exceeds the nation. The role of the Dutch pot becomes clearer, as the characters prepare the pot for the soup:

DEHLIA Always put a little brown sugar at the bottom of the pot.

SANDRA Only if it's a Dutch pot.

DEHLIA Where we come from, it's called a dutchie.

SANDRA Yeah, well where I come from, we know how to call things proper, Not like you *small* island people.

DEHLIA Whoevah hear of Trinidad, is Jamaica everyone know about, right Assata?

DEHLIA starts humming Rita Marley's "Pass the Dutchie," and ASSATA starts singing.

ASSATA "Pass the dutchie pun the left hand side, me say pass the dutchie pun the lef hand side it ah go burn."

SANDRA (*laughing to DEHLIA and ASSATA*) Well I see you all do know something about cooking?

(9)

Apart from its humorous view of inter-island rivalries within the Caribbean, this scene is significant for its emphasis on the Dutch pot, or dutchie, as a locus of intersecting histories and subjectivities, of communal interplay, and of transnational dialogue. The reference to Rita Marley's "Pass the Dutchie" is a signifying move that allows the audience to consider transnational or diasporic blackness in terms of movement, circularity, and unceasing exchanges from a position of strength (the left hand side). The handling of the physical pot by the actors functions as tangible evidence of the song's directive. Finally, the location of the dutchie in the kitchen, a domestic space, reframes

notions of diaspora and of community by dismantling the gendered hierarchy that usually marks them. The process of preparing the soup privileges this domestic space, a space usually reserved for women; but it also empowers all, as both female and male contributions to the history of the Americas are discussed, and the soup is prepared to serve both men and women, who will be invited into this space of fellowship.

Sandra, a Trinidadian and a history professor, calls together four other “alchemists,” women of various ages and ethnic affiliations, in order to facilitate a healing of long-standing emotional wounds through the preparation and consumption of a unique soup. This elixir, a mixture of multiple national provisions, is simply referred to as “every body bring something soup.” Sandra’s Jamaican lover, Dehlia, poses the question of how to characterize Sandra’s evolving creation: “In Jamaica, we have gungo pea soup, red pea soup, cowfoot soup.... What kind of soup is ‘every body bring something soup’?” (8). Sandra’s response articulates a desire to subvert nationalistic Caribbean dialogues and to identify the group within an outer-national framework and a shared history of colonization: “It’s Wes’ Indian” (9). Identifying the soup as West Indian, a signifier for the multiple roots of origin and routes of migration of Caribbean people within the region, sets the stage for the actors to review and revise the history of blacks in the Americas and to enact a transnational, diasporic identification.

As Sandra and the other women take on the role of conjurers and prepare the pot, Sandra moves between “ancestral time,” which the playwrights define in their notes as being “connected to the voices of the older generation of the characters,” and “lecture mode,” which reveals Sandra’s “life, existence, and her personal history before her illness.” As Sandra progressively succumbs to cancer, “the deterioration that takes place

in [S]andra's personal health parallels the passage of slavery to its present day manifestations" (vi). The convergence of past and present within the play reflects a uniquely African sensibility that was transferred to the New World, in which ancestral, sacred, or circular time remains unfixd.⁹ As Sandra inhabits multiple temporalities, she works out her sense of history and of diasporic subjectivity within the space which Homi Bhabha refers to as the "beyond," or "an intervening space" in which one becomes a "part of a revisionary time," a time in which past, present, and future merge in such a way that we may "re-describe our cultural contemporaneity" (*Location of Culture* 10). Being in the beyond allows for a confrontation with the specters of history in order to facilitate not just an individual healing but also a communal progression. The beyond invites Sandra and others to embrace the generative inheritance that comes with historical specters and, as a result, to engage in political interventions on behalf of those specters. As Jacques Derrida advances,

The time of the "learning to live," a time without tutelary present, would amount to [embracing the spectral], to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, yet better. No, not better, but more justly. But *with them*. Not *being-with* the other, no *socius* without this *with* that makes *being-with* in general more enigmatic than ever for us. And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and generations. (xviii-xix)

The tracing of black history within the Americas and the adoption of a "politics of memory, inheritance, and generations" are dramatized within the play in terms of the steps in the process of producing the soup. In order to apprehend and heal from the violence of history that was/is inscribed on black bodies, Dehlia demands that they make the time, as they make the soup (17). Her directive is a disruption of the notion that time

is linear, allowing for a view of time as already containing within it the potential for alteration, if charged with enough focused energy, much like the contents of a Dutch pot under a focused fire. Thus, as the elements of water, sea salt, yam, daschene, pepper, and other ingredients are handled and added to the soup, while Sandra discusses the features of slavery in lecture mode, the audience gets a sense of how preparation for the middle passage represents the violent processing of bodies for the consumption of the larger hegemonic body of the plantation system. Signifying on the attempts by slave masters and historians to silence the unspeakableness of slavery and the failure of language to represent adequately the effects of its violence and the silence it produced, Cerise and Sandra's daughter, Assata,¹⁰ both born in Canada, instruct the women to "cover [the pot] with a towel to keep the (*mumble*) away." Sensing that the soup and the process of (re-)making time are not complete, Sandra poses the rhetorical question, "Too early huh?" (18).

With the arrival of Rea, Sandra's estranged half-Indian half-sister, the space around the Dutch pot becomes truly transnational/transcultural, and the (re-)making of time focuses on the history of violence perpetrated on the bodies of women of color. In the prologue, Sandra states that she and other women carry their stories in their wombs. Yet, as Cerise affirms, "Even a mother's womb is not a safe home for her child" (4). In the play, the womb becomes a metaphor for the birth place of multiple nations and for various negotiations. Through the wombs of women of color, the Americas was created, but through violent means that affected generations. As Rea begins to peel, chop, and cut her provisions for the soup, Sandra enters lecture mode. She remarks on the early struggles of women in the Americas, as the other women contribute to her statements in

ancestral time:

SANDRA The middle passage... the surgical removal of female reproductive organs.... I received some interesting papers on this topic.... Women were kept at the bottom of the ship, as they fetched less of a price than a stud; a few were kept on-deck to cook for the captain, and some were used for.... You see a good doctor will tell you as many facts as possible about the... give you books to read, but a brilliant historian... Indian women...

REA ...they can be your sistah...

SANDRA ...single and widowed... whatever caste were...

REA, ASSATA, and DEHLIA speak together, but DEHLIA adds her own take on it.

DEHLIA ...they can be your sistah-in-law.

SANDRA ...whatever caste were forced to cross the Kala Pani and become indentured labourers or face death... (*pause*) many faced death no matter what they did.

(24-25)

This scene resonates with multiple significations. The equation of the work of a doctor with that of a historian allows for a re-reading of the historiography of the Americas in terms of it being infected with a disease, namely the illness of European modernity, with racial terror as its symptom.¹¹ The debilitating effects of its infestation and spread were/are most visible on the bodies of women of color, affected by the double bind of gender and race in their confrontation with modernity. The subjugation of these bodies often affected the womb and, as a result, subsequent generations. The reference to the specific struggles of Indian women as they were forced into indenture in the Americas reveals the correlations that may be made between the histories of migration and labor production of Indian and African women in the Americas. The issue of estrangement signifies on the multiple ways in which the modern systems of slavery and indenture

caused individuals of disparate nations to fixate on national identities and the divisions they create. Up until this point, Rea and Sandra's focus on national identifications caused them to remain estranged. However, by refocusing their gaze from a national to a transnational frame, in which multiple nations are recognized for what they contribute to the larger transnational, communal space, a process of healing and growth may now occur. The reunion of the sisters ultimately draws attention to the history of miscegenation that resulted from interracial relations between individuals of Indian and African descent and the alliances that were formed and still may be formed between these two groups in their struggle against modern systems of oppression.

Bailey and Lewis's play critiques multiple forms of oppression experienced by women of color in the Americas. As Sandra recalls her involvement in the Pan-African and Black Power movements, the women name key figures (Eric Williams, Michael Manley, Jesse Jackson) of the post-colonial/neo-imperial experiments in governance of the Americas. Noticeably, women's names are missing from the list of influential leaders (27-28). This reflects the patriarchal and heteronormative discourses surrounding claims to power by blacks in the Americas.¹² Yet, these women share their stories with one another of the interventions they have made in ideological movements in general and more specifically in the academy (Sandra), in film (Cerise), and in government (Rea). The inclusion of their record of resistance within the play highlights the often silenced underground activism of black women and their ability to empower their communities and themselves, in spite of negation by nationalist discourses and male-dominated political agendas. Sandra further alludes to the significance of black women in contributing to, recording, and passing on the stories of their communities by referring to their work as a

“secret language, a recipe to survive genocide” (38). The collection of random ingredients for a soup, their transformation into a nourishing balm, and the role of black women in the stew’s creation and dissemination of its “recipe” represent the black woman’s historical and ever-evolving role in diasporic resistance to the effects of modernity, neo-colonialism, and globalization.

Concerned that the soup “be like it was back home” and reflect a “real Wes’ Indian family” (46), Sandra loses perspective and forgets the multiple maneuvers made by Africans in the New World in order to recreate communities in various spaces of the Americas. Dehlia reminds her, “We’re here now. We are a Wes’ Indian family. It’s going to taste like us” (47). Yet, as Rea notes, while the soup bears the memory of “back home,” the soup is made of ingredients not originating in the West Indies and is produced within the borders of the Canadian nation-state. While the soup may be remade as a hybrid form of the original, the original can never exist again in this new space.¹³ This realization reflects the challenges and potential forms of resistance to living in the in-between space of diasporic existence. The soup, made by women who claim home spaces in the West Indies and Canada, functions as a metaphor for all of the negotiations of the in-between that result from reinvention with a difference of a West Indian identity within a Canadian context.

Negotiations are often marked by conflict among members of the in-between space, as they seek to determine the “correct” means of apprehending an identity that is both familiar and foreign. As the drama unfolds, the tension over the production of the soup escalates and results in Sandra striking her own child. This “space of pain,” in which familial and communal relations break down (Walcott, *Black like Who?* 53), is

also a liminal space, charged with energy and passion, where transformation and rebirth may take place.¹⁴ That this space is marked by pain and birth is telling, as Sandra's womb bleeds after the conflict, reflecting the cathartic release and purging of romanticized notions of home and of the limiting nostalgia it produces. The larger ideological "womb space,"¹⁵ in which claims of authenticity and diasporic affiliation must be worked out, then becomes a potential space of change and revitalization. Like the hybrid soup, the women in this space are remade under fire, after a violent cutting, chopping, slicing, and throwing together of the elements of their subjectivities that signify their differences: ethnicity, culture, claims to home space, age, class, sexual orientation, etc. A necessary boiling over and simmering within the cauldron of the womb space is important to resolution of these women's subject positions within the Canadian nation and within the larger African diaspora of the Americas.

Bailey and Lewis's *Sistahs* concludes, as is fitting, in a circular fashion. Just as the prologue describes the soup as having the "taste of all our mothers" (4), signifying on the multiplicity of roots which characterized its production, the stew produced is discussed in terms of its mixture and the effects of its consumption:

ASSATA	When did this big pot of water, spices, and stuff start to taste like soup.
DEHLIA	It's alchemy.
REA	It's magic.
DEHLIA	Alchemy is magic.
CERISE	It's Voodoo.
ASSATA	It's Obeah.
SANDRA	Sistahs.

DEHLIA It's soup. (61)

As a “transnational essence” appearing in a national context, the soup reveals that a transnational diaspora does not destroy nations or the memory of nations. Instead, the soup’s preparation negotiates, reconfigures, and expands national borders. Informed by multiple roots/ routes, *Sistahs* illustrates that the cultural productions by particular black women within the Americas are the ingredients in a soup that represents a transnational, diasporic poetics of the Americas, one that makes “sistahs” and “brothahs” out of individuals seemingly removed from one another by multiple degrees of separation. Seasoned by modern spaces and simmering with possibilities for reinventing worlds, these alchemists are fashioning new ways of understanding diasporic subjectivity within the Americas.

Carole Boyce Davies stresses that the personal and fictive narratives of black women signify on a multiplicity of sites and reflect a “process of re-creating [. . .] worlds as they [black women writers] write new and positively transformed worlds into existence” (13). The literary works of black women writers such as Bailey and Lewis reveal that they are not limited by boundaries; rather, their texts operate in “cross-cultural, trans-national, diasporic contexts” (1). A focus on their creative works reveals the ways in which black women, in particular, are facilitating discursive border crossings. Analyses of these works can only make more dynamic past, present, and emerging discourses of diaspora in the Americas.

Chapter Two

Rewriting History/Inscribing Herstory: Gayl Jones's *Song for Anninho* and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière . . . Noire de Salem*

The absence of an outstanding popular figure (of a hero) does not result from the logic of defeat. A self-confident people has the ability to transform into a mythical victory what may have been a real defeat [. . .]. One can go so far as to argue that the defeats of heroes are necessary to the solidarity of communities.

—Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*

Hommage est ainsi rendu dans la tradition populaire à la capacité de résistance de la femme, à sa faculté de se tirer mieux que l'homme de situations de nature à l'abattre.

[. . .] Le rôle de la femme au sein des luttes de libération antérieures et postérieures à l'abolition de l'esclavage a été largement occulté.

(Honor is thus paid in the popular tradition to the capacity of resistance of the woman, to her faculty of drawing better than the man from situations in nature that would pull her down. [. . .] The role of the woman at the heart of former and more recent liberation struggles has been largely concealed.)

—Maryse Condé, *La Parole des Femmes*

In the dominant cartography and historiography of the Americas, black women have been consistently misrepresented or wholly absented. Patriarchal narratives of nation have relegated to the margins the roles of women in early nation-formation. Yet there remains evidence of their presence. Many black women writers have used the figure of the black woman and her remembrance of African cultural markers during slavery and colonization to reveal the hidden stories and shared experiences of black women in the Americas. Authors such as Gayl Jones and Maryse Condé are especially interested in how black women of maroon communities, deleted from or marginalized in historical records, have contributed to the history of the region as they too have translated African culture in the New World while

resisting assimilation to colonial ideologies, based on European constructions of the nation. In *Song for Anninho* and *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière... Noire de Salem*, Jones and Condé, respectively, focus on the ways in which maroon women formed transnational alliances. Their writing reveals a conscious decision to undermine narratives of nation in order to write/right stories of resistance and continuity in the African diaspora of the Americas.

With their narratives Jones and Condé enact what Toni Morrison refers to as a “kind of literary archaeology,” by which “on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply” (*Site of Memory* 92). Though Jones’s poem and Condé’s novel are fictional accounts of black women that imagine their roles in maroon experiences, they nonetheless excavate real historical moments and the memories inspired by them; and, “[. . .] no matter how ‘fictional’ the account of these writers, or how much it was a product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory” (101). Jones and Condé’s works thus rewrite national narratives in order to uncover the role of women in organizing and preserving self-rule in communities that set themselves apart from the nation, to reveal that elements of black folk culture transcended the boundaries of nation and language, to stress the pivotal role of black women in transmitting culture, and ultimately to move such women from the margins and into the center of the folklore and history of the Americas. In doing so, they fulfill Condé’s wish for homage to be paid to the role of black women in resisting slavery and colonial rule, and they achieve Edouard

Glissant's vision of retrieving a mythical victory for black women from the defeat created by their absence from the historical records of the Americas.

Jones and Condé, in recognizing the need to translate the role of black women in the Americas from the margins to the center, utilize a marginal, yet powerful genre of literary expression that is actually quite central to understanding subaltern identity: the testimonial narrative. *Song for Anninho* and *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière Noire de Salem* may be viewed as literary cousins to what Latin American writers refer to as "testimonio." John Beverley defines this mode of expression as "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (92-93). Usually associated with oral cultures and intended to authorize the voices of those usually "excluded from authorized representation," testimonial narratives are by their very nature forms of "resistance literature" (93).¹ Jones and Condé appropriate the testimonio tradition in order to record the acts of resistance by black women in the early Americas. In reinterpreting this tradition, both authors act as spiritual mediums who use their literary skills to translate the life stories of their subjects. Though Jones and Condé have "transcribed" the stories of their protagonists, the intention of the narrators to communicate their struggle *and* the struggles of their people fuel the testimony recorded within the narratives. Thus, the imagined "testimonial 'I'" achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. "The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole,"

notes Doris Sommer (108). Furthermore, as Beverley emphasizes, the writing of the testimony, likened to statements given in a court of law for a legal record, reflects the intention of the narrator to represent her story as true and her consciousness as real (94-95). The result, for Jones and Condé, is the creation of narratives that bear witness to the truth of the struggles of enslaved and colonized black women in the Americas.

Testimonial narratives may use the language of the colonizer, but they also challenge that very discourse by inserting that which is so often marginalized or ignored. The result, as Sommer observes, is “a medium of resistance and counterdiscourse, the legitimate space for producing that excess which throws doubt on the coherence and power of an exclusive historiography” (111). Because these narratives engage issues of marginalization and resistance, *Song for Anninho* and *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière Noire de Salem* may also be classified as maroon narratives. Though she focuses on Caribbean writers, Cynthia James recognizes that in the New World there developed two types of maroon narratives, from two perspectives: the non-European and the European. Thus, in defining this genre of literature, James posits that the maroon narrative

would be concerned with writing against the background of a record of estrangement. Alienation, abandonment, and homelessness would naturally be countered by a desire to build a home and a history out of traces of previous cultural knowledge. A hunger for the past, a groping for threads, fear, a lack of continuity, a sense of transience, and a desire for escape are also features expected to affect the maroon. Slavery and resistance, colonization and conquest, flight and hostility, superiority and inferiority would be important signifiers. Further, since each cultural group has its own ideological totems, both the European and non-European maroon would tend to create separate myths, each relevant to the particular perceptions and experiences of the group—warriorhood and resistance for the non-European, and adventurism, exploitation, and conquest for the European. (14-15)

James also notes the signifiers of such narratives: slavery and the plantation, syncretism, reverence for the spiritual world, and a “desire to write oneself into history” and “to invent the world afresh” (15). Jones and Condé have utilized a genre that integrates national records and the signifiers mentioned above to place the herstory of marronage, or the development of runaway slave communities, in Brazil and Barbados squarely within the narrative framework of the larger transnational history of marronage in the Americas.² These testimonies are metaphorical crystals of brown sugar that, once added to a unifying liquid base and later mixed with the provisions that make up the transnational soup within the Dutch pot of the Americas, infuse the diaspora of the Americas with the “sweetness” of a more complete sense of history.

Song for Anninho: A New Perception of National History

Despite the greater attention given to the maroon camps in Haiti, the Gullah Sea Islands, and the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, Gayl Jones recognizes that the history of marronage in Brazil is also quite notable and worthy of attention. Though the limited historical record of Palmares has been ethnographically skewed in favor of the Portuguese, studies have revealed that for most of the seventeenth century runaway slaves escaped from plantations in Alagoas and Pernambuco and fled to the dense mountains of Brazil’s interior. R. K. Kent’s study of Palmares notes that this area was originally a haven for slaves brought from the Angola-Kongo region of Africa and that this mountainous area became a refuge for many others seeking

freedom from oppression (164).³ A “quilombo,” or maroon state, developed there and became known as Palmares.⁴ Of this remarkably egalitarian republic, Kent states that it “cut across ethnic lines” and drew “upon all those who managed to escape from various plantations and at different times” (166). He ultimately characterizes the importance of Palmares in the following manner:

[T]he most apparent significance of Palmares to African history is that an African political system could be transferred to a different continent; that it could come to govern not only individuals from a variety of ethnic groups from Africa, but also those born in Brazil, pitch black or almost white, latinized or close to Amerindian roots; and that it could endure for almost a full century against two European powers, Holland and Portugal.⁵ And this is no small tribute to the vitality of traditional African art in governing men. (175)

Pedro Funari and Aline Vieira de Carvalho stress that the two most important features of Palmares are that it was “formado como uma resposta contra-aculturativa dos negros escravos” (formed as a counter-cultural response of the enslaved) (35) and that it remains “um exemplo duradouro de resistência escrava na América” (an enduring example of slave resistance in America) (47). Of its national legacy and its function in altering the view of history in the Americas, Dácio Freitas concludes: “Na historiografia dos dominadores, palmares perpassa como um episódio marginal escassamente significativo; na dos dominados, brilha como um dos seus momentos de maior grandeza. Os palmarinos vivem na consciência e no coração dos oprimidos e, como mensageiros de uma sociedade nova, conclamam do fundo da história: ‘Prossigam!’” (In the historiography of the dominators, Palmares passes as a marginal, barely significant episode; in the historiography of the dominated ones, it shines as one of their moments of bigger greatness. Those of Palmares live in the

conscience and in the heart of the oppressed and, as messengers of a new society, they proclaim from the depths of history: ‘Continue!’) (189).

The official Portuguese record of Palmares reflects a purposeful attempt to keep the memory of the palmaristas from living on. Ruled by Ganga-Zumba and in its final years by “Captain Zumbi,” one of its generals, Palmares operated as a military fortification and resisted assaults by the Portuguese until 1694, when Portuguese militia forces, led by Captain Domingos Jorge Velho, brought down the republic (Anderson 553-5, 563-4). Jones purposefully uses as an epigraph an excerpt from one of the final reports delivered to the king of Portugal by Velho, who warned of the potential re-emergence of the maroons:

“It is indeed true that the force and stronghold of the Negroes of Palmares located in the famous Barriga range is conquered . . . and that their king was killed (by a party of men from the regiment of the petitioner, which came upon the said King Zumbi on the twentieth of November, 1695) and the survivors scattered. Yet one should not therefore think that this war is ended. No doubt it is close to being terminated if we continue to hunt these survivors through the great depths of these forests, and if the regiment of the petitioners is kept along the frontier. If not, another stronghold will suddenly appear either here in Barriga or in any other equally suitable place. . . .”

In citing Velho, Jones recognizes, as he did, that the spirit of resistance that simply would not die among the surviving Palmaristas and their various followers remains in the memories of Brazilian people. In rewriting the story of Palmares, Jones characterizes that spirit and calls for alliances with those outside of Brazil who may find parallels between Palmares and other maroon communities in the Americas. More specifically, in constructing a narrative from the point of view of an imagined maroon woman of Brazil, Jones recoups the history of black women in that nation.

Richard Jackson points out that “Gayl Jones, like black Brazilian writers, recognizes that Palmares represents ‘a type of African *continuum*,’ a link or conduit through which African traditions of resistance and love of freedom were reinforced and passed on” (139). Adapted from her unpublished novel *Palmares*, Jones’ narrative poem follows the example of black Brazilian writers who have characterized the republic of Palmares in both theatrical and narrative production. In his analysis of the use of Palmares imagery in Afro-Brazilian literature, Ronald M. Rassner notes that the “images of a besieged nation defending itself against repeated white assaults, or of an isolated hero who refuses to surrender, has been preserved directly or indirectly in Afro-Brazilian literature since 1845” (203). These images, part of a transnational imaginary of maroon history, obviously continue to influence writers within Brazil’s borders and beyond.

A hybrid of blues song,⁶ love story, memoir, and historical record, Jones’s *Song for Anninho* celebrates the spirit of the people of Palmares and their desire to maintain a viable link to Africa and to continue the Yoruba and Kongo traditions with which they were still familiar. The song begins with the maroon woman Almeyda⁷ recovering from the amputation of her breasts at the hands of Portuguese raiders, who have decimated the stronghold of Palmares. Zibatra, an indigenous “magic woman” who creates “visions and voices and possibilities” for her, treats Almeyda’s body with herbs.⁸ Influenced by Zibatra’s soothing words, Almeyda reflects on her transformation as she calls on her lover, Anninho:

I wanted my body to become
one with the earth,
to become the earth.

And I saw it do so, Anninho,
the earth, the earth was me.
The flesh of the earth was my flesh.

* * *

This earth is my history, Anninho,
none other than this whole earth.
We build our houses on top
of history. (3, 5)

Almeyda's body indeed does become one with the earth and its history, as her severed breasts are left in the river to which she escaped after the fall of Palmares. Madhu Dubey reads Almeyda's loss as a metaphor for black womanhood, which she characterizes as being "predicated on bodily loss and disfigurement." In Dubey's words, "the violence of history is thus literally inscribed in the scarring of her flesh" ("Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition" 261). Almeyda's mutilated body signifies on the racial terror and violence wrought on the black body, particularly the black female body, as a result of modernity and a Portuguese national imperative to punish those bodies that did not conform to its legal, social, and spatial configurations. Lovalerie King notes that Almeyda's song "works through the trauma of violent severance, positing Africa as a spiritual home that accompanies its dispersed peoples throughout the world" (764). Given that Palmares was socially framed according to many African cultural principles, it follows that Almeyda's song about Palmares would signify on Africa as a source of strength and renewal. Africa functions as the foundation of the "house" that is/was Palmares; and, in spite of violence to and destruction of that house, the spiritual foundation still stands. Almeyda's breasts and the bodies of other Palmaristas add to the foundation, as they become one with the earth, an organic substance which resists national boundaries

and the claims of European powers to colonies and the people who inhabit them. With the linking of Africa to Palmares and the flesh of fallen bodies to the earth and river that join them all, what takes place is a re-membering of the collective body, history, and transnational spirit that produced Palmares.

Almeyda's song itself performs a process of re-membering, as the images of the severed body, the earth, and the river become, in the words of Dubey, the "symbolic projection of an active political imagination" and a powerful "elsewhere that lies outside the range of history" ("Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition" 262). The fallen bodies and mutilated body parts are evidence of resistance to a dominating and destructive force and of opposition to the Portuguese national agenda to erase such evidence from the historical narrative of colonial Brazil. The record of these images, expressed through Almeyda's song, occupy a space outside of the normative historiography of Brazil as colony and later as nation. In that sense, the song and its images do remember/re-member Palmares and transform its ruins into an "elsewhere" that exists apart from the history told by Velho and others of its existence. The river, in particular, functions as a liminal space, providing not only a means of transport to freedom but also the means by which Almeyda may confront life, death, history, and the possibility of rebirth through memory. The river becomes the site of active memory, as it re-members Almeyda's breasts with the living earth that accepts the bodies of her people. The river performs this function for Almeyda, as it aides her in remembering where she was at various moments in her own personal history and in the collective history of her people and in reclaiming her African spiritual and cultural roots.

The mutilation of Almeyda's body by Portuguese soldiers results in the creation of her love song to Anninho and to the people of Palmares. Her song will one day be sustenance to a restored Palmares. Recognizing this, Zibatra encourages Almeyda to recall her own life story as she considers the fate of her fellow

Palmaristas:

You must mend the universe together . . .
You were born in Recife in 1669, or
thereabouts . . .
Your name is Almeyda and you're a Catholic . . .
Your greatest desire is to be a good woman . . .
Your grandmother fought in wars
against the Dutch, then the Portuguese . . .
Some mystical connections . . . (8)

Almeyda's syncretic background reflects the cultural miscegenation inherent in the history of Brazil, in particular, and in the Americas, in general. The most significant aspect of Almeyda's personal history, though, is the presence of a female ancestor who appears to have been a maroon woman of significant spiritual power. Thus, piecing together the memories of her own personal history and that of her country, Almeyda recalls who she is and her place in this land:

A Dutch mapmaker
at the beginning of the century.
A land of deep forests,
oil-giving trees.
I am the granddaughter of an African.
This is my land.
I take palm oil and rub it on my hair and body.
This is my place. My part of the world.
The landscape and tenderness,

the wars too and despair,
the possibilities of some whole living.
A new perception. (13)

A new perception. This is what the trauma of mutilation and loss brings to Almeyda. Encouraged by Zibatra to engage in a psycho-spiritual journey of rediscovery, she recalls her grandmother's words to her, that she had "inherited a way of being," that their "spirits were one," and that "We are never alone. / We keep everything" (37). Recognizing her inheritance of African spiritual principles, Almeyda begins to comprehend what theorists of African religions refer to as sacred or circular time, by which the past, present, and future do not remain fixed, separate, and linear, but are interchangeable.⁹ As John S. Mbiti notes, this notion of time emphasizes the interconnectedness of past, present, and future experience, since "[t]ime has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations [. . .]" (17). Armed with the knowledge of African time, given to her by her grandmother, Almeyda truly can "keep everything" from the past and the present; and she uses this ability to imbue herself with her grandmother's mystical "way of being." Thus, digging through her memories, Almeyda slowly gains awareness of the significance of her grandmother's far-reaching vision ["she could see the unseen/even in the seen" (45)] and of her grandmother's role in the slave community ["They'd send for me as a macumbeiro"¹⁰ (56)] and beyond:

I remember things I could not see then.
Yes, that is the way.

I have heard things again that I
could not hear then.
Yes, that is the way.
She always talked about possibilities
in the world, as if she had some choice.
They say she had links with the invisible
world. I've heard her talk to the
invisible ones.
That is the way.
She said someday I would have links
with that world . . . Perhaps she meant
the things we can't see until a new time . . .
and place . . .

* * *

You only
know her from Palmares, and so you don't know
her before she took up arms against the Portuguese.
Some people only know swords they can see.
But she wielded swords then, too.
She's the one who needs to be looked at
very closely. She's the one you can't glance
at and know. Do you think she escaped
the destruction? She has escaped,
and is in some forest, and even if they
captured her and took her back, they
wouldn't know the mystic from the poet
from the clown. (38-40)

Almeyda, reflecting on her grandmother's actions as a maroon and the old
woman's continued resistance to colonial oppression, begins to embrace the spiritual
swords once wielded by her ancestor. Finally able to perceive the link she has

inherited to the invisible world, Almeyda assumes her grandmother's role; she appropriates the spiritual power her grandmother once possessed. Coser says of the relationship between Almeyda and her grandmother, "Almeyda's grandmother was wise and sensible, a strong survivor of a series of wars and disruption. She had brought from the African culture the ability to send away evil spirits and to divine future events. Almeyda is amazed at the powers of her grandmother, but she herself is not endowed with the same" (159). Clearly, Coser misreads Almeyda's transformation, as the conclusion of the song later points to her adoption of the powers of her ancestor.

Just as her grandmother shared with her visions that were beyond human apprehension, Almeyda too will record her own visions of the past and future glory of Palmares. She will write of King Zumbi, his civil codes, the battles against the Portuguese, and Zumbi's continued reign in the "New Palmares." Though the Portuguese thought they could kill the immortality of the palmaristas through murder and the misrepresentations of official records, Almeyda knows that Zumbi, Anninho, and the others who dwelt in the quilombos will live on in spirit, in her song, and in her "chronicles to hold against theirs [the Portuguese]." Of the Portuguese historical record, she says, "You see how they transform heroes into villains, / and noble actions into crimes, and elevated / codes into venality?" (78). As Dubey explains, "*Song for Anninho* compels us to read Almeyda's dream of an alternative future against an official historical text of slavery" ("Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition" 252). Almeyda's final attack as a maroon warrior-woman will be to rewrite/right the historical record and to capture not the actions of the

heroes of Palmares, “but the spirit!” (*Song* 78). Her testimony is not, however, just about the glory of Palmares; it becomes her own testimony, which she fights through her pain to express. Stelamaris Coser astutely notes that Almeyda actually records her own sensibilities within the text. Thus, in translating the spirit of her people, she translates herself. She makes her voice and her actions as significant as any other in the record of Palmares. As a result, the “narration, the point of view, the crisscrossing of relationships presented, and the anxieties and conflicts exposed all turn *Song for Anninho* into *her* chronicles” (152). The expression of her testimony reveals that a black woman’s story may factor prominently in the narrative of what is to become the Brazilian nation. Finally, her narration of the cross-cultural connections initiated by women during and after the evolution of Palmares signals a Dutch pot sensibility, an awareness of the transcultural mixture that constituted the spirit of resistance of Palmares and that will provide sustenance to the diaspora of the Americas. Almeyda’s song thus becomes a transnational narrative that more fully represents the nation and exceeds the nation.

As one now in touch with the spirit world, Almeyda can confidently invoke the spirit of Palmares through her visions and her words. According to Robert A. Voeks, practitioners of the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé refer to the force of the spirit as “axé” (“*ashe*” in other parts of the Americas), or the “vital force of existence” that provides “spiritual strength, prosperity, and health to its mortal attendants” (65). If one becomes filled with the spirit of a supernatural being, one becomes empowered by this force and can bring things into being that normally would not be present. Possessed of the spiritual gifts passed on to her by her

grandmother, Almeyda reflects many of the syncretic aspects of Yoruba and Kongo spirituality that indicate the presence of “*axé*”: her breasts fall in a river, the site governed by African riverain goddesses, known for alternating gentleness and militancy (Thompson 74); she handles and wears several “*minkisi*,” or charms that “effect healing” (117), such as an amulet, feathers, and a “necklace of shells and seeds” (Jones 8, 26, 76); and, as a mediator between the worlds of the living and the dead, she fully practices the power of the conjure woman, a vessel of African spirituality (Thompson 107).

Due to her powers of conjuration, Almeyda’s senses align with the natural and supernatural worlds. Watching for signs from nature and seeking empowerment from the spirit realm, she begins to believe in the possibility of the corporal and spiritual transformation of the dead warriors of Palmares into winged beings capable of fleeing the destruction of the republic. Recalling the final moments of the siege of Palmares, Almeyda expresses her desire for her people to live on:

And our brave Palmaristas,
jumping from cliffs rather than surrender.
Oh, if they could have become birds then!
Oh, had I a net! But what the god doesn’t grant!
Even now I watch out for birds,
hoping it’s some Palmarista! (42)

Thompson notes that birds are emblematic creatures in African art and religious philosophy: “It is the bird which, according to the Yoruba, God places in the head of man or woman at birth as the emblem of the mind. The image of the descent of the bird of the mind fuses with the image of the coming down of God’s *àshé* in feathered form” (11). Birds are also associated with the Yoruba deity Osanyin (44-45), or the

equivalent of the Afro-Brazilian forest deity Ossaim (Voeks 117, 161), the presumed god to whom Almeyda refers. Almeyda's escape and recuperation in a forested mountain range and her treatment by the medicinal healer Zibatra also indicate the presence of Osanyin/Ossaim, who governs the herbs of the forest, a place of spirituality that houses the "magical power of each of the green beings" (117). Filled with the hope of a reunion with the fallen of Palmares, Almeyda more fully taps into the power of *àshe* in order to hear the voices of the dead that have eluded her until this moment.

Almeyda's heightened intuition and sense of hearing allow her to hear and comprehend sounds beyond the range of normal hearing. As a result, she becomes attuned to the calls and songs of birds. She believes that the birds she eventually hears singing in confusion above the mountain range are the transformed bodies of fallen Palmaristas who, possessed of the power of "God's *àshe* in feathered form," are now trying to communicate with her. Almeyda says of the birds' songs,

Hear the birds.
They are making a racket, aren't they?
They are all singing together.
They are trying to sing in one voice,
but one discordant voice,
one voice with many variations.
It is a difficult song they are singing.
It hurts my ears to hear them.
Why are they all trying to sing at once?
Why don't they let me sleep,
just get a little sleep before we start
the long walk? This is the
kind of voice that can tear dreams apart

and make new ones. (Jones 81)

The allusion to discordant voices and dreams being torn apart and remade anew indicates a song with multiple parts that expresses the violence of the fall of Palmares; the confusion, fear, and even defiance of its inhabitants as their kingdom was suddenly invaded; and the all-consuming need to give voice to these events. These feathered creatures, reincarnations of dead Palmaristas, implore Almeyda to tell their story. Once she recognizes this, Almeyda is able to hear their song clearly: “They are singing in one voice, Anninho./ They are singing in one tight, careful voice” (107). Their unified voice will inform her own song.

Armed with the power of a song and of the spirit of her people, Almeyda becomes determined to “make roads” (119) for Anninho, for the other warriors of Palmares, and for the many ancestors that paved the way for the creation of that great republic. In Kongo religious and artistic culture, roads are often a signifier for a cosmogram, recurring throughout the Americas in various forms and represented by a cross-like structure. Thompson identifies this structure as being marked by the “circular motion of human souls about the circumference of its intersecting lines” (108). The sign of the crossroads is usually symbolic of the converging points on the cosmogram and best exemplifies the circularity of African time. It represents the transcendence of both life and death, the “point of intersection between the ancestors and the living,” and the “certainty of reincarnation” (109). More specifically, in the macumba tradition of Brazil, these points of intersection “summon a bewildering multitude of Yoruba goddesses and gods and their matching saints, plus Amerindian spirits, plus departed black elders (*paes velhos*), who return in the voice and body of

their devotees” (114). Almeyda’s song thus links various nations and ethnic identities across multiple spatialities and temporalities. Almeyda’s construction of “roads” ultimately signals the presence of a metaphorical Dutch pot in action, for every body of every nation (indigenous, European, and African) does indeed bring something to the discursive vessel of her song. Given the variety of ethnic groups that made up the republic of Palmares and Almeyda’s inheritance of knowledge of spiritual practices, her impulse to make roads through her song may be read as the manifestation of the desire of these transnational spirits to return through Almeyda’s words and actions. Conjuring her memories, her history, and her people at the crossroads, Almeyda is able to remake the voices of the proud Palmaristas. Through her song, she not only captures their spirit but also immortalizes them, thus avenging their deaths. Her song then becomes a form of spiritual warfare, true to the nature of this mystically endowed maroon woman.¹¹

In the final pages of her song, Almeyda returns to the image of her breasts. “Anninho, my breasts are swelling,” she says. “I feel them swelling./ They are gone but I feel them swelling” (88). The violence inflicted upon her body ironically maps out past attempts to annihilate the black body and the possibilities for the reconstruction of the body of history of black subjectivity within the Brazilian nation, in particular, and within the diaspora, in general. As Patricia Munoz-Cabrera notes, “By historicizing the female body and the pain that has ripped its flesh throughout the history of the African Diaspora, Jones weaves a ‘geography of pain’¹² [. . .] that calls for a revision of canonical [and national] myth-making that has imprisoned in its web the realities of black womanhood [and of blacks in general]” (113). Swelling with

memories and new possibilities, her breasts are no longer globes of mutilated flesh. They are even more than sacrifices. They are empowering gifts to her people. They are vessels filled with visions of a “New Palmares,” a transnational space, much like the New Jerusalem spoken of in the Bible—a city in which the diverse nations of the original republic may once again find a refuge, a city in which the nations “shall walk in its light,” and its people “shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it” (Rev. 21: 24, 26). And in her final visions she and Anninho will

go riding
through these mountains, whether it’s
against the law or not for a black man and a woman
to be seen on horseback.
At the New Palmares, we’ll
trade manioc and hide
for horses, and ride through these mountains. (89)

The allusion to maroons riding feral horses, as they celebrate their own self-possession, is clear. There is also the notion of an ancestral spirit “riding” one who is possessed until the individual achieves a higher state of consciousness, as commonly understood in New World African folklore and documented by Maya Deren in her work on Haitian vodun. Possessed of and by the spirit of her ancestors and of those slain at Palmares, Almeyda, through her own song, fictively penned in the Barriga Mountains in 1697 (119), continues to wage war against colonial domination and, most importantly, to “make roads” for past, present, and future maroons in Brazil and in the diaspora of the Americas.

Madhu Dubey and Patricia Munoz-Cabrera argue that the apparent lack of fulfillment in *Song for Anninho* of the reproductive imperative associated with black

womanhood suggests other paths toward a black feminist literary tradition and toward a reframing of the historiography of the Americas to make visible the invisible black female body. Read in this way, Almeyda's song is both an imagined entity that she has birthed and a marker of her presence as an agent in and recorder of events in Brazilian history. The expression of this song challenges the historiography of the Brazilian nation and makes roads in the larger Americas that lead to a new understanding of that nation in terms of a gendered and transnational imperative.

Tituba's Transnational Revenge

Like Jones, Maryse Condé also characterizes the life of a maroon woman who "makes roads." Recognizing, as Jones does, that the historical record of marronage and of the black woman's role in the Americas is still incomplete, Condé reclaims the real-life figure of Tituba Indian, the black witch of Salem and of Barbados, from the footnotes of history. Of her purpose in writing Tituba's story and of her desire to broaden the history of female marooning, Maryse Condé told Ann Armstrong Scarborough, "I wanted to turn Tituba into a sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary 'Nanny of the maroons'" (201). She adds, "I felt the need to give her a reality that was denied to her because of her color and her gender" (204). For centuries, Tituba remained almost voiceless, possessing no story of her own, other than what had been attributed to her by others. While transcripts remain of her deposition in the Salem witch trials of 1692, her place in American history has persistently been limited to her status as a slave. As with the historiography of Palmares, the record in this case has also been manipulated to maintain the

marginalization of the oppressed. However, in her preface to Tituba's tale Condé emphasizes the attention which her subject demanded: "Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à personne" (Tituba and I, we lived for a year in intimate contact. During our endless conversations she told me things that she had not confided to anyone). True to the nature of the testimonial narrative tradition, Tituba explains the exigence for relating her own story:

Il me semblait que je disparaissais complètement. Je sentais que dans ces procès des sorcières de Salem qui feraient couler tant d'encre, qui exciteraient la curiosité et la pitié des générations futures et apparaîtraient à tous comme le témoignage le plus authentique d'une époque crétule et barbare, mon nom ne figurerait que comme celui d'une comparse sans intérêt. On mentionnerait ça et là << une esclave originaire des Antilles et pratiquant vraisemblablement le 'hoodoo' >>. On ne se soucierait ni de mon âge ni de ma personnalité. On m'ignorerait. (173)

(It seemed to me that I disappeared completely. I felt that in the Salem witchcraft trials that would make so much ink flow, that would excite the curiosity and pity of future generations and would appear to all as the most authentic testimony of a gullible and barbaric period, my name would figure only as nobody of interest. There would be mention here and there of "a slave originating in the Antilles and probably practicing 'hoodoo.'" They would not concern themselves with my age or my personality. They would ignore me.)

Too many of the enslaved have existed without recognition of their place in human history, and the only record of their existence is a notation on a bill of sale or in a property ledger. Tituba actually participated in a major New World historical event. Yet, because she was illiterate, influenced by an oral culture, and thus could not pen her own story, she has been relegated to brief transcriptions that reveal nothing of her personality and individuality. Condé's reclamation of Tituba's story

attempts to right/write this wrong by “insert[ing] Tituba into the traditional cultural context of orality and, at the same time, incorporat[ing] the orality conveyed in Tituba’s narrative into the context of a new culture: the written one” (Mudimbé-Boyi 753). Though scholars continue to argue about the true racial and ethnic identity of Tituba,¹³ Condé’s recognition of a minority female voice, veritably dismissed as insignificant by patriarchal authorities, opens up a space in which Tituba may come alive for those seeking to find additional “herstories” within the Americas.¹⁴

Similar to Almeyda’s song, Tituba’s story opens with the commission of an act of violence upon a black woman’s body. Of her origins, Tituba says, “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” (Abena, my mother, an English sailor violated her on the deck of *Christ the King* one day in 16** while the ship was sailing toward Barbados) (13). As with Almeyda, out of violence and loss comes gain and a remembering of history. The rape of Abena ironically results in the creation of Tituba, one who will re-member the Africa her mother knew with the maroons she will later claim as her own people. The sites of the ocean and the womb, places occupied by water, function as liminal spaces, where the possibilities for death, life, re-memory, and movement from one space to another are initiated. Of the importance of water imagery in French Caribbean literature, Condé herself states, “Expression symbolique de la dualité Vie/Mort? Le fœtus baigne dans la liquide utérin. L’eau purifie l’enfant à sa naissance. Mais l’eau redoutable emporte, tue, saccage. Au commencement était l’eau. A la fin aussi, elle sera” (The symbolic expression of the duality of

Life/Death? The fetus bathes in the uterine fluid. Water purifies the infant at birth. But the dreaded water carries things away, kills, disrupts. In the beginning was the water. In the end it will also be there) (*La Parole* 69). Significant are the images of the fetus and of water as a permanent force that disrupts the apparent stability of things. Indeed, water simultaneously ushers in the death of Abena's innocence, carries her and her unborn child away to a foreign land, and ironically upsets the patriarchal order of slavery, as that very child will become one of the few female maroon heroes in the Americas.

The symbols of life and death accompany Tituba's birth in Barbados. Initially a reminder of Abena's defilement and shame, Tituba becomes a source of pride and recuperation of a lost vision of freedom and community, particularly for Yao, the Ashanti¹⁵ husband given to Abena by her slave master. "Il lui sembla que l'humiliation de cette enfant symbolisait celle de tout son peuple, défait, dispersé, vendu à l'encan" (It seemed to him that the humiliation of that infant symbolized that of all of his people, defeated, dispersed, sold at auction), explains Tituba (15-16). She recounts Yao's ability to imagine another identity for her than the one which her mother envisions will be her fate:

Ma mère pleura que je ne sois pas un garçon. Il lui semblait que le sort des femmes était encore plus douloureux que celui des hommes. Pour s'affranchir de leur condition, ne devaient-elles pas passer par les volontés de ceux-là mêmes qui les tenaient en servitude et coucher dans leur lits? Yao au contraire fut content. Il me prit dans ses grandes mains osseuses et m'oignit le front du sang frais d'un poulet après avoir entermé le placenta de ma mère sous un fromager. Ensuite, me tenant par les pieds, il présenta mon corps aux quatre coins de l'horizon. C'est lui qui me donna mon nom: Tituba. Ti-Tu-Ba.

Ce n'est pas un prénom ashanti. Sans doute, Yao en l'inventant,

voulait-il prouver que j'étais fille de sa volonté et de son imagination. Fille de son amour. (17)

(My mother was sad that I was not a boy. It seemed to her that the fate of women was even more painful than that of men. In order to free themselves from their condition, didn't they have to go through the will of the very same ones who held them in servitude and to sleep in their beds? Yao on the contrary was content. He took me in his large bony hands and anointed my forehead with the blood of a chicken after having buried my mother's placenta under a silk-cotton tree. Then, holding me by the feet, he presented my body to the four corners of the horizon. It was he who gave me my name: Tituba. Ti-Tu-Ba. It is not an Ashanti name. Without a doubt, Yao invented it, for he wanted to prove that I was the daughter of his will and of his imagination. Daughter of his love.)

Significant is Yao's assumption of the responsibility of naming a child that is not his biologically. Jerome Handler and JoAnn Jacoby infer from their research on slave names in Barbados that "slave parents, particularly mothers, were largely responsible for naming their children" (696). The emphasis on Yao's imagination creates the sense of him having willed Tituba into being. Like the acts of resistance to the Portuguese by the Palmaristas, Yao's act of political imagination defies the normative narrative of the shameful lineage and ill-fated destiny of the mulatto slave child. Yao, in this sense, functions as a type of creator-god, able to mystically alter past, present, and future moments in relation to the tragic events that constituted Tituba's birth. Abena, affected by the taint she believes accompanies her race and gender, may have potentially given her daughter a name that reflected her own trauma and fear. Reflecting his belief that Tituba may have been conceived in violence but may be born into happiness, Yao's declaration changes the "positioning of the child in relation to the mother—as a product of rape versus a being of love" (Barnes 197).

In naming Tituba himself, Yao transforms Tituba's gender from a mark of dishonor and apprehension to one of imagined honor and potential power. The source of this power emanates from the sacrificial elements used in naming his new child. Handler and Jacoby affirm that "in the earliest periods of slavery in Barbados, slaves followed certain principles and practices of African naming procedures even though these procedures were torn from the social and ritual contexts that had existed in Africa" (689). In terms of naming procedures, Handler and Jacoby specifically point to religious ceremonies that accompanied the birth of a child (690-691). Yao's ceremonial practices include anointing Tituba's forehead as if to bless her. He also buries the placenta as if to mark the death of an identity that emanated from her mother's defiled body. Finally, he presents her body to the four cardinal points that make up the cosmogram. Given that the site of a cosmogram signifies the mediation of death and life and of the "certainty of reincarnation" (Thompson 109), Yao's actions reveal a determination to generate a new life and new identity from the death of the old one and to imbue Tituba's spirit with the potential for imagination and reinvention.¹⁶ Ironically, her life will give testimony to his will on many levels.

Yao's love and imagination endow Tituba with a spiritual heritage upon which she will later rely, but they do not spare her from trauma and suffering. As she relates her trials in this blues narrative, she shares that early on she witnesses the hanging of her mother and the sale of her adoptive father, after Abena strikes the plantation owner who attempts rape.¹⁷ Re-adopted and tutored "à une connaissance plus haute" (in a higher knowledge) (23) by a conjure woman named Man Yaya who predicts that Tituba will suffer greatly in life but will survive (21), Tituba learns and

masters specific African spiritual practices: the use of herbs for healing, recognition and veneration of ancestors, offerings to the dead at their graves, communion with the spirit world for empowerment and aide, material transformations into other forms, and sacrificial libations (22-23).¹⁸ Upon Man Yaya's death, Tituba readily and easily adopts the role of conjurer, as she communes with the spirits of all three of her dead parents and mixes powerful potions in isolation. Under Man Yaya's guidance from the spirit realm, Tituba performs what may be read as a metaphor for the spiritual syncretism and cultural miscegenation that evolved in the Americas: "Je m'essayai à des croisements hardis, mariant la passiflorinde à la prune taureau, la cithère véneuse à la surette et l'azalee des azales à la persulfureuse" (I tried my skills at some bold hybrids, marrying the passionflower to the bull plum, the poisonous Golden apple to the apple-surette and the azalea to the persulfureuse) (25).¹⁹

Tituba's ultimate acceptance of her identity and the potential of her powers as a conjure woman occurs when she is met by several emaciated and dejected slaves at a crossroads well outside of the limits of her living quarters. When the slaves react with fear at the sight of her, Tituba muses over how she is perceived:

On semblait me craindre. Pourquoi? Fille d'une pendue, recluse au bord d'une mare, n'aurait-on pas dû plutôt me plaindre? Je compris qu'on pensait surtout à mon association avec Man Yaya et qu'on la redoutait. Pourquoi? Man Yaya n'avait-elle pas employé son don à faire le bien. Sans cesse et encore le bien? Cette terreur me paraissait une injustice. Ah! C'est par des cris de joie et de bonne arrivée que l'on aurait dû m'accueillir! C'est par l'exposé de maux que j'aurais de mon mieux tenté de guérir. J'étais faite pour panser et non pour effrayer. [. . .]

Cette recontre avec les miens fut lourde de conséquences. C'est à partir de ce jour-là que je me rapprochai des plantations afin de faire connaître mon vrai visage. Il fallait l'aimer, Tituba! (26)

(They seemed to fear me. Why? A daughter of a hanged woman, a recluse on the edge of a pond, should they not have pitied me instead? I realized that they thought especially about my association with Man Yaya and that they dreaded her. Why? Had Man Yaya not used her gift to do good. Good over and over again? That terror seemed like an injustice to me. Ah! They should have greeted me with cries of joy and welcome! I would have made my best attempt to heal the illnesses which they accounted. I was made to heal and not to frighten.

This meeting with my own was to have lasting consequences. From that day on I drew closer to the plantations in order to make my true self known. Tituba must be loved!)

Again, the site of the crossroads functions as a liminal space in which life and death may be mediated, choices may be made, and identities may be affirmed or altered. Confronted by slaves whose material, social, and spiritual existence is that of a living death, Tituba faces the choice of what to do to aide them in alleviating their suffering. She must also choose whether to maintain her isolation or to align herself with and involve herself in the lives and potential perils of the slave community. Finally, having contrasted her role and place within the slave community with that of Man Yaya, Tituba, as her pupil, daughter, and inheritor of her powers, resolves to fully assume the identity for which Man Yaya prepared her. As a conjure woman, she will serve the needs of the slave community by operating as a healer. However, Tituba's overwhelming desire to make her true self known and, more importantly, to be loved will prove dangerous.

Danger initially presents itself in the form of a man named John Indien, a slave descended from a Nago woman and an Arawak Indian. Determined to make him love her, Tituba ignores the warnings of her ancestors to avoid an entanglement

with him. Ironically, John Indien's playful reference to Tituba as a witch causes her to consider again the meaning of the role she has assumed:

Qu'est-ce qu'une sorcière?

Je m'apercevais que dans sa bouche, le mot était entaché d'opprobre. Comment cela? Comment? La faculté de communiquer avec les invisibles, de garder un lien constant avec les disparus, de soigner, de guérir n'est-elle pas une grâce supérieure de nature à inspirer respect, admiration et gratitude? En conséquence, la sorcière, si on veut nommer ainsi celle qui possède cette grâce, ne devrait-elle pas être choyée et révérée au lieu d'être crainte? (34)

(What is a witch?)

I noticed that in his mouth, the word was blemished with shame. Why was that? How? Wasn't the ability to communicate with the invisible world, to keep a constant link with the dead, to nurse, to cure a superior blessing from nature that should inspire respect, admiration and gratitude? Consequently, shouldn't the witch, if one wants to name the one who possesses this blessing, be cherished and revered instead of feared?)

Several words here demand attention, particularly given their French denotations and connotations. Conde transcribes Tituba's expression of her understanding of the word "sorcière" in terms of the verb "s'apercevoir," which literally means "to perceive." Perception implies that one achieves awareness through the senses. However, perceptions are never fixed; they are relative and may even be accompanied by queries regarding the nature of the subject in question. The choice of this word to define Tituba's comprehension of the label used to name her expresses and emphasizes her doubts with regard to the connotations associated with the term. Connoting shame and mistrust, as it comes from John Indien's mouth with a tone of mockery, the word "sorcière" becomes blemished and thus fails to resonate with

Tituba. She interrogates this label, as she seeks to unpack its discursive power in light of her own cultural understanding of the term. Her perception of herself and of Man Yaya's role in the visible and invisible worlds cannot be reconciled with the prevailing perception of a witch as a malevolent being that inspires fear and necessitates repression in the colonial world. The use of the word "gâce" to refer to her interpretation of the abilities which she and Man Yaya possess underscores Tituba's sense of conjuration as a pure gift from a spiritual realm accessible to those who are in tune with it. As Maryse Condé herself affirms, "Il s'agit d'une religion naturelle basée sur une connaissance intime de la nature et de la vie, une complicité avec elles. [. . .] La sorcière n'est pas considérée comme un élément maléfique, mais comme l'intermédiaire naturel entre le monde visible et celui de l'invisible" (It is a question of a natural religion based on an intimate knowledge of nature and of life, a complicity with them. [. . .] The witch is not considered a malevolent element, but is a natural intermediary between the visible world and that of the invisible) (*La Parole* 54). Thus, what is a beneficent function in the African worldview known to Tituba refuses alignment with the Eurocentric worldview conveyed by John Indien and others. Expressing an alternative cultural epistemology from those inhabiting the Eurocentric spaces governed by the slave system, Tituba speaks "from the space of the monstrous." Thus, "from the differing temporality and cultural space of the repressed, this label [the label of witch] is literally illegible" to Tituba (Breu 278). Unable to "read" such a label, Tituba remains perplexed, yet determined to communicate her perception of the true meaning of the term "sorcière."

Unfortunately, this war of perceptions will continue, as Tituba follows John Indien into enslavement.

Relinquishing her independence to live with John Indien on the other side of the island, Tituba enters into servitude under Susanna Endicott, the owner of John Indien. Immediately each woman senses the other's aversion: Tituba perceives well Susanna Endicott's racist and religious assumptions; the latter grudgingly recognizes the independent spirit in Tituba that resists subordination. As Tituba labors in the home of her new mistress, Susanna Endicott and her friends adopt the dismissive colonial gaze and discursively objectify Tituba and thus deny her subjectivity: "Elles parlaient de moi, mais en même temps, elles m'ignoraient. Elles me rayaient de la carte des humains. J'étais un non-être. Un invisible. Plus invisible que les invisibles, car eux au moins ~~tiennent~~ tiennent un pouvoir que chacun redoute. Tituba, Tituba n'avait plus de ~~réalité~~ réalité que celle que voulaient bien lui concéder ces femmes" (They were speaking of me, but at the same time they ignored me. They were crossing me off the map of humanity. I was a non-being. Invisible. More invisible than the invisible, for they at least have a power that everyone dreads. Tituba no longer had in reality that which these women would want to concede to her) (44). Sadly, as Tituba internalizes their words, her self-image is altered. She begins to speak of herself in the third person, reflecting her understanding of the transformation of her material state from being to non-being, from subject ("I") to object ("it").

Tituba's desire to be recognized as a human being and her white oppressor's refusal to acknowledge her anticipates Frantz Fanon who, invoking Hegel, relates his understanding of the relationship between recognition and humanity:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. (216-217)

Fanon notes that in the Hegelian dialectic there must be an “absolute reciprocity” of recognition between one being and another in order for both to achieve self-consciousness. “When it encounters resistance from the other,” he continues, “the self-consciousness undergoes the experience of *desire*”; it “accepts the risk of its life, and consequently it threatens the other in his physical being” (217-218). The response of those who desire recognition and meet resistance is: “He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me. In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible” (218). Failing to achieve recognition from her bondswoman, Tituba becomes obsessed with every word uttered by her oppressor, particularly focusing her attention yet again on the label “sorcière,” which she soon learns also connotes an affiliation with Satan. Ironically, Susanna Endicott too focuses her attention on compelling a recalcitrant Tituba to accept the former’s position as owner of her body as a source of labor. The misrecognition, or rather purposeful lack of recognition, by both women dictates their existence. The situation finally becomes untenable, with both women resisting the other and demanding acknowledgement of their desire: humanity for the freed slave; ownership of and absolute rule over the slave’s body by the slave owner. The result is a threat to each other’s bodies, with Tituba especially resolving that if their desires cannot be met then one of them must be destroyed: “Il n’y avait pas de place dans ce

monde pour Susanna Endicott et moi. L'une de nous deux était de trop et ce n'était pas moi" (There was not a place in this world for Susanna Endicott and me. One of us had to go, and it was not me) (50). Though legally it is impossible and punishable by death for a slave, even a freed slave, to demand recognition of their humanity under the colonial slave system, for Tituba the position of non-being is incomprehensible. The slightest possibility of a restoration of her humanity, even if only in her own consciousness, is worth the risk. Armed with this belief, Tituba strikes Susanna Endicott with a mysterious illness that eventually claims the life of the bondswoman. Yet, the slave mistress exacts her revenge on Tituba before her death by selling John Indien to Samuel Parris of Boston, Massachusetts. Refusing to be separated from her lover, Tituba reluctantly follows him again and leaves the spiritual comfort of her island.

While Caribbean slavery denies Tituba her humanity, slavery in Puritan New England does so in conjunction with an even more profound paranoia over the perceived malevolence of the black body. Tituba's new home in Salem, Massachusetts is situated in a small community made up of men and women "écrasés par la présence du Malin parmi eux et cherchant à le traquer dans toutes ses manifestations" (overwhelmed by the presence of Satan among them and looking to hem in all of his manifestations) (104). She and the few other black servants in the town are cast as "émissaires visibles de Satan" (visible emissaries of Satan) (105). Timothy McMillan's study of the link between witchcraft and race in colonial New England reveals that many whites automatically associated blackness with demonic forces and believed that blacks "mirrored Satan's image as well" (107). Though the

devil's image was usually associated with a black male, individuals "of African origin were considered to traffic with devils and actually resembled Satan himself" (107-108). What compounded matters was the Puritan belief in Satan's purposeful attack on the weaker bodies of women. The body, according to Elizabeth Reis, was not only the "means toward possessing the soul" but also the "very expression of the devil's attack"; and "[a]mong witches, the body clearly manifested the soul's acceptance of the diabolical covenant" (15). Given these facets of Puritan religious epistemology, Tituba finds herself in the double bind of being black and a woman. The conflation of these two signifiers with regard to Satan's influence marks her as a dark figure with immense power to do evil and to topple the patriarchal, socio-religious order set up by the men of Salem. As Mara Dukats emphasizes, the trial of witches in Salem was "a campaign of terrorization against women who exhibited power or defined themselves outside of the parameters that patriarchy had set" ("A Narrative of Violated Maternity" 747). It is no wonder then that the label of "sorcière" firmly sticks to Tituba, despite her insistence that she does not deal with the devil and has not caused the illnesses that have befallen the young women in Salem.

Performing the conflation of identities that they have associated with Tituba, Samuel Parris and several other men not only demand that Tituba confess her crime to a tribunal, but they also physically and sexually assail her body, as if to attack the very site that they view as a vessel of evil. The connection between her race and gender is clear in Tituba's brief description of the violent assault:

L'un des hommes se mit carément à cheval sur moi et commença de me marteler le visage de ses poings, durs comme pierres. Un autre releva ma jupe et enforça un bâton taillé en pointe dans la partie la plus sensible de mon corps en raillant :

— Prends, prends, c'est la bite de John Indien! (144)

(One of the men straddled me squarely and commenced to beat me in the face with his fists, which were hard as rocks. Another lifted my skirt and drove a sharpened stick into the most sensitive part of my body as he taunted me:

— Take it, take it, it's John Indian's penis!)

This assault is an attack on both the female body and the black body, dual markers of evil. It reflects a colonial imperative to repress violently women and slaves who failed to conform to the social mandates set by men in power. Violence to the minds and bodies of women and the enslaved would later mark the national framework constructed by the founding fathers, who would be invested in patriarchy and a skewed racial knowledge. The purposeful association made between John Indien's penis and the stick used to invade Tituba's body reflects the desire on the part of the men to punish her through another male who, though also associated with Satan, appears more compliant than his fellow slaves. As Christopher Breu infers, the Puritan ideology purposefully attributed blackness to these symbols (280).²⁰ Thus, as symbols of patriarchy, the penis and the rod are unleashed as weapons of torture, subjugation, and destruction against women in order to validate and reestablish the order that is threatened by a woman—in this specific case, a black woman.

In order to avoid death and to exact her own personal, transnational form of revenge, Tituba joins in the performance of a patriarchal script that demands her admission of practicing witchcraft, defined, of course, in Eurocentric terms. Ironically coached by both the men of Salem and her feminist prison mate Hester Prynne, the “black witch of Salem” performs well and saves her own life. In effect,

Tituba gives the appearance of surrendering to and investing in the tenets of early colonial America, while she masks her true beliefs in the value and virtue of blackness, womanhood, and a notion of communal healing that remains outside of the colonial framework that dictates fixed identities, boundaries, and punishment for transgression of those boundaries. The interaction between Tituba and Hester Prynne is particularly significant, for it marks the dismantling of colonial ideologies of fixed ethnicity, allegiances, heteropatriarchy, and suppression. Their exchanges suggest various types of transnational maneuvers that may be facilitated by women within the Americas for the purposes of empowering each other. Suggesting that the meeting between Hester and Tituba exemplifies the liberating power of joining different types of feminism, Jeanne Garane views the inclusion of the character of Hester Prynne as indicative of the potential for dialogue between women of various cultures. Carolyn Duffey also reads the exchange between Hester and Tituba as Condé's attempt to move beyond the dichotomy of first and third world feminism and to initiate a dialogue of intersubjectivity between two feminisms within the space of a New World jail cell. Bruce Simon posits that this intertextual move is part of a pedagogy of hybridity which seeks to place U.S. canonized texts into an international frame in order to reveal the cultural exchanges that influenced the formation of America. I agree with Annmarie Pinarski's broader contention that the intertextuality of the novel points to an amalgam of all of the above aims: "transnational alliances between and among women that may or may not be labeled 'feminist'" and a "critique of Western hegemony" in literary and historical narratives (xvii). The alliances forged between Tituba and Hester Prynne in the "Dutch pot" of the jail cell, a metal

container heated by the fire of Puritan conceptions of the emerging nation, reflects a transnational inclination by which every body brings unique sensibilities to resist the violence of modernity. As with Gayl Jones, the emphasis on the transnational opens up possibilities for a reframing of the narratives of the colonial Americas and its early nations in terms of those who were silenced and in terms of the dismantling of boundaries. The effect is a broader conception of the agency, subjectivity, and power that may accrue when multiple nations meet at a crossroads.

The potential of transnational alliances becomes stronger when, abandoned by John Indien and sold into slavery after the witch trials, Tituba is bought by a Jewish merchant who in stages becomes her new master, her lover, and her salvation. Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo enters Tituba's life as a crossroads figure, specifically as the embodiment of the Yoruba god Eshu-Elegbara, or Legba. Tituba immediately identifies his significance, as she prays that he will purchase her: "Il avait, je m'en apercevais à l'instant, la jambe droite plus courte que la gauche" (He had, I perceived in an instant, a right leg much shorter than the left). She recognizes that his arrival and stature change the space which she inhabits from one of dehumanizing imprisonment to one of potentiality: "Grand lieu de rencontre où le présent prend le passé par la main, où vivants et morts se mêlent!" (A great crossroads where the present takes the past by the hand, where the living and the dead join each other) (188). According to Thompson, an uneven stance in the space of a crossroads signals the presence of the Yoruba god Legba. Of the importance of this god to African cosmology, Thompson stresses that Legba possesses an immeasurable portion of *àshe* and is the guardian and "embodiment of the crossroads," where he mediates between

the human world and the spirit world. His position between the two worlds is characterized by his limp, as one of his legs is shorter than the other, each resting in separate worlds. Usually signaling the need to make a choice or the possibility of choices, he appears most often in moments of conflict and of great change (18-19). Initially purchasing her and ultimately liberating her from slavery by granting her freedom, this Jewish merchant/Legba figure opens up the possibility for Tituba to advance from the brink of death, to be reborn as a human being, and to return to her native land of Barbados, where she may reassume her role as healer.

After her rebirth, Tituba's return voyage to Barbados via the sea is marked by a change in her spirit and in her understanding of her purpose. As with her conception, the sea, as a site of transport, functions again as a liminal space, where the possibilities of renewed life, re-memory, and productive resistance to the patriarchal structures of slavery and colonialism become viable. Tituba's thoughts are overwhelmed by "un autre cours pour la vie, une autre signification, une autre urgence" (another course for life, another signification, another urgency). She imagines another reality for blacks in the New World: "Le feu ravage le faite de l'arbre. Il a disparu dans un nuage de fumée, le Rebelle. Alors c'est qu'il a triomphé de la mort et que son esprit demeure. Le cercle apeuédés esclaves reprend courage. L'esprit demeure" (The fire ravages the top of the tree. The Rebel disappears in a cloud of smoke. Then it is he who triumphs over death and his spirit lives on. The frightened circle of slaves regains its courage. The spirit lives on) (211). Inspired by the maroon spirit of those who died resisting their oppressors, slaves will persevere in continuing the struggle for freedom. Unbeknownst to Tituba, that inspirational spirit

has already taken effect, as even one of the slaves working as a crew member on the ship relates to her that her lineage and personal history is well known to him and to others. Tituba, impressed by the power of memory, thus resolves to re-member herself with her people and their emerging revolutionary spirit.

Hearing the island's soft celebratory murmur of her return, Tituba is led to join the maroons in the hills of Barbados.²¹ Tituba's involvement with the maroons is not, however, merely based on a noble wish to be of service to her people and to reconnect with them. Recognizing that her travails in Salem will never be documented, she longs to leave a historical impression that will cast her in the role of agent rather than object, hero rather than victim. As Geta LeSeur states, "Although Tituba reclaims herself as subject upon her return to Barbados after the ordeal of the Salem witch trials, she seeks historical *marronnage* as a subversive or transgressive act to assert her place in the history of the Caribbean" (98). Despite the disapproval of Christopher, the maroon leader and her temporary lover, Tituba is determined that there will be "un chant pour Tituba" (a song for Tituba) (236). With that decision made, Tituba returns to her original cabin where, through the practice of "petite marronne,"²² or subtle resistance through isolation from the plantations and encouragement of revolt, she administers treatments to the slaves. Her involvement with Iphigene, one of the young slaves whom she treats, culminates in Tituba's final acts of subversion. A son of Ti-Noel, one of the legendary maroons of the island, and of a slave woman who was killed for resisting her white owner's advances, Iphigene possesses a similar lineage and spirit that influences Tituba to dream of the possibilities of a different world on the island. However, her conspiracy with

Iphigene and other maroons to drive the planters and overseers off the island through fire leads to betrayal and death. As she is led to the gallows, Tituba's vision records the image that has sadly prevailed in the history of black resistance in the New World well beyond the modern era: "d'étranges arbres se hérissaient d'étranges fruits" (strange trees were bristling with strange fruit) (263).²³

"[E]lle existe, la chanson de Tituba!" (Tituba's song exists!) (267). This is Tituba's ultimate affirmation from the spirit realm; this is her revenge. Despite a history marred by violence and death, Tituba's name, like the names of the famous maroons of Palmares, is the subject of legend in the Americas. Just as Almeyda's song creates another space in which the dead may live on beyond the space and records of the nation, so too does Tituba's song recreate her existence in another form that crosses national boundaries. The inclusion of multiple ethnicities and nations in her testimony opens the lid on a Dutch pot diaspora, influenced by cross-cultural connections and transnational alliances. Moreover, the blues songs of Almeyda and Tituba reemerge "as a performative space of potential revolution" (Breu 284). As Tituba's story continues and spreads, she operates as a healer/mother figure from the invisible world and inspires transnational black resistance to colonial oppression: "Car, vivante comme morte, visible comme invisible, je continue à panser, à guérir. Mais surtout, je me suis assigné une autre tâche [. . .]. Aguerir le cœur 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" (For, living as dead, visible as invisible, I continue to dress wounds, to cure. But above all, I have appointed myself another task [. . .]. To harden the hearts of men. To nourish them with dreams of freedom.

Of victory. There is not a revolt that I have not given birth to. Not one insurrection. Not one act of disobedience) (268).

Mara Dukats, in “A Narrative of Violated Maternity,” argues that, because Tituba never becomes a mother, her tale is really a story of thwarted maternal desire, evidenced by the ellipses in the title of the text. In strictly focusing on maternity, I believe that Dukats has missed an important aspect of Tituba’s narrative: the ability to act as a mother through care, mentorship, filial bonds, and intersubjective relations within the material world and, more importantly, from a spiritual one. Rather than focusing on a failed displacement of maternity, it would prove more useful to read Tituba’s choice to “mother” as a choice not to reproduce biologically but ideologically and spiritually. As with Almeyda, her most powerful maternal act may be in birthing her influential story, with the help of her “midwife,” Maryse Condé. With this alternative reading of reproduction, the ellipses in the title of the text may be read as a continuation rather than the termination of the life and legacy of the maroon woman known as Tituba.

Of her legacy, Tituba offers this final declaration: “Ah! j’aime l’excitation de l’esclave à qui je permets de remporter le combat!” (Ah! I love the excitement of the slave whom I allow to take back the fight) (272). Condé’s transcription of Tituba’s words here is truly significant, as they emphasize Tituba’s influence in the victories claimed by the enslaved across the Americas. Moreover, the verb “remporter,” with its multiple denotations of “to carry off,” “to win,” and “to take back” or “reclaim,” influences the notions of combat and victory in multiple ways. The notion of a reclamation especially punctuates the desire, articulated by Glissant, to transform a

defeat into a victory. Thus, Tituba's words articulate the possibility of taking back, or reclaiming, a fight that may have been perceived as a defeat but may be translated in a different form and even in a different time into a triumph. This message, conveyed through the voices of black women of the Americas, may indeed be the legacy of the songs of Almeyda of Palmares and of Tituba, black witch of Salem and Barbados.

Conclusion: Reclaiming “Herstories” for a Transnational Americas

The marginalization or erasure of individuals, particularly women, from the historical narratives of nations affects the ways in which we interpret various temporalities and spatialities. To silence or censor the voices of those whose resistance to colonial domination and whose contribution to the development of the Americas marks it as unique reflects a willful attempt to conceal the holes in the timelines and maps of the nations of the region. Specifically with regard to the contributions made by black women, as Indira Karamcheti observes, the “grid of geography intersects here with gender” (125). Moreover, the “spatial dislocations through which we understand ‘woman’ coincide and collude with the geographic losses imposed on the subjects of colonialism” (125-26). The testimonial narratives of Almeyda and of Tituba function as counter-narratives to the colonial history recorded as the official and final word on the subject of how the grid of American geography came into being and of a black woman's place on the grid. They move the stories of black women and their communities from a space of marginalia in narrative history and cartography to a space of “textuality,” or a space that facilitates “the

making known or real of a part of the world assumed to have been previously unknown” (128).²⁴

Song for Anninho and *Moi, Tituba, . . . Sorcière Noire de Salem* invite readers to recognize that the legacy of marronnage is not merely confined to a general history of black resistance to colonial and patriarchal structures in places such as Brazil, Barbados, and the American colonies. Tales by women of the claims of maroons to freedom also invite recognition of the ways in which early black communities in the Americas exhibited transcultural leanings and created egalitarian spaces for women and others in ways not seen in European and colonial spaces. Their modern retelling by authors such as Jones and Condé invites an even more representative view of the importance of the maroon narrative and of the rebel woman to the history of the Americas. They also emphasize what Pascale De Souza views as the most important roles of maroon women: “as ‘healers of the breach’ and inspirers of literary works which seek to redress the theft of [American] ‘herstories’” (149).

The stories of Almeyda, Tituba, and other women warriors allow for not only a rewriting of the history of the Americas to include black female subjectivity and agency but also an empowering of other marginalized voices across the region. Their achievement of literary voice in the writing/righting of their stories and their gesture toward a transnational historiography may be their final acts of marronnage. The recognition of female voices may pave the way for others, who have been seasoned and silenced in modern spaces, to engage in their own acts of marronnage in order to reclaim the fight for subjectivity and to make further roads in charting the history of African people in the Americas. Herstories, in particular, may allow for a broader view of the

unique spaces that women have created across the region—communal spaces in which a nourishing, transnational American soup may be served from a diasporic Dutch pot that is full and representative of everyone’s histories.

Chapter Three

Ancestral Interventions and Diasporic Revelations:

Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow* and Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*

[The] ancestor figure [. . . is] symbolic for me of the long line of black women and men
–African and New World—who made my being possible, and whose spirit continues to animate

my life and work. I wish to acknowledge and celebrate them. I am, in a word, an unabashed ancestor worshiper.

—Paule Marshall, *Reena and Other Stories*

When you kill the ancestor, you kill yourself.

—Toni Morrison, “Rootedness”

Many black women authors of the late twentieth century not only seek to rewrite the history of the Americas from a gendered perspective. They also examine the relationship of individuals to communities, the historical and social links that connect groups across time and geographic locations, and the ways in which those groups may be empowered by belonging to a network that is constituted by transnational embraces, rather than national allegiances. In *Praisesong for the Widow* and *Tar Baby*, respectively, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison continue the work of historiography by exploring these issues through the figure of the ancestor, a parental figure, living or dead, that transcends the nation because of his or her apparent movement outside of the temporal and spatial configurations of national spaces. In “Words Whispered over Voids,” feminist critic Abena P. B. Busia notes that the purpose of literature by writers such as Marshall and Morrison is to effect a “process of self-definition and redefinition” both for the readers and the characters. This process can only occur if there is an “exploration of a sense of self through both personal and group history *to the final end of articulating a narrative of the self*, with a clear sense of one’s place among one’s people, in an accepted or chosen location” (3). In other words, Busia locates Marshall and Morrison in the context of a group of writers who explore issues of identity specifically within the context of a transnational, diasporic community. Speaking to, for, and about the diaspora, Marshall and Morrison suggest that no narrative of self may exist within a vacuum. They stress that a connection with a larger community is necessary in the creation of a full

definition of self. In addition, this relationship reflects the dynamics of the culture, as it shows that African culture holds as sacred these ties to community: “What matters is self-exploration as a process which, ironically, restores or unites the separated community” (34).

Both authors agree that the purpose of their writing extends beyond artistic self-expression to reflect a culture that consists of many identities best tied together by a communal relation. Toni Morrison states, “If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn’t about the village or the community [. . .], then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination [. . .] which is to say, the work must be political” (“Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation” 345). Paule Marshall concurs:

Perhaps a young black woman, a young black man, who is searching for self will come across one of my books, and see himself or herself and perhaps even their world, reflected in a truthful and complex way. I believe that seeing oneself reflected truthfully in the literature is a kind of empowering act. It not only gives you a sense of your right to be in the world [. . .] but it also gives you, then, the power to move to the next phase. [. . .] to really bring about the liberation of your community. (“To Be in the World” 105)

In viewing their artistic roles in political terms—in defining themselves as activists with a mandate to observe, record and comment upon the activities of members of a broad community that may span multiple nations—Marshall and Morrison have assumed the important title of culture-bearers, much like the griot in African societies. In Busia’s words, “In the traditional African context [. . .], the artist is an integral part of the community and is expected to be social historian, critic, and commentator. Griots, dancers, weavers, carvers, singers of praise songs, and other poets have not only recorded their societies, they have also criticized them” (13). Creative expression serves a

function: instruction of community members. Stories provide lessons by which to learn and live. As such, these tales may include positive or negative aspects of characters and communities. The expectation of the griot is that community members will take these stories and lessons, apply them to their lives, and even pass them on, leaving a legacy to be embraced by future generations. As griots, Marshall and Morrison view their texts as tools and legacies—a useful gift to the communities to which they speak.

Because their fiction reflects African diasporic culture they ask “critical questions,” as Barbara Christian notes:

[. . .] whether there is a functional black culture in the present-day West, a contemporary black community that is held together by bonds that work. Are blacks essentially upwardly mobile? Is color merely a camouflage? Is race in America operating as a communal bond or is it merely an indication of a past history once functional but no longer perceived by contemporary blacks as operative in their responses to each other? (*Black Feminist Criticism* 68-69)

Such queries reflect upon the cultural displacement that is the residual effect of the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent colonization of black peoples. Postcolonial theory has shown that, having adopted the cultural standards of the nation of the enslaver/colonizer, the enslaved/colonized often disconnect themselves from their home culture, the very culture that saved the enslaved from complete destruction in former days. Investment in the mores and tenets of the nation and the abandonment of the community results in the breakdown of cultural bonds. And yet, as Christian suggests, the only cultural bond that cannot be erased is that of race. Still, even that, as some would suggest, may become less recognizable as a cultural factor, due to the blending of races and the assimilation of “genetically” black people into other cultural groups. The survival and viability of black culture then is a central concern of Marshall and Morrison,

whose fiction questions readers, particularly those of the African diaspora of the Americas, about whether the embrace of Western national values is worth the destruction of the communal bond and, indeed, of the self. Both authors caution readers not to sacrifice their culture and the communal bonds that sustain it in favor of achieving mere acceptance by the “Other” through material acquisition. Angelita Reyes writes that “[t]he problem is to reach and maintain a compromise between material excess and spiritual propriety. By assuming a balance between Euro-American culture and African-American heritage, the community can better attempt to keep its feet on the ground” (“Politics and Metaphors of Materialism” 181).

Marshall and Morrison both note the destructive effects of disrupting the balance between the material and spiritual by denying an ancestor figure. Morrison specifically characterizes this figure in the following terms: “Ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to [others] are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom.” She continues by stressing that “whether . . . in the city or in the country, the presence or absence of that figure determine[s] the success or happiness of the [individual],” who may place himself or herself in harm’s way if “totally self-reliant” and “if there is no conscious historical connection” (“Rootedness” 343-344). For Marshall and Morrison, such a connection is paramount to a fulfilled life. Without it, individuals operate from a state of cultural deficiency, as they rely on their own power and strength to grapple with the nation and its demands. Lacking the buoying support of the ancestor, they lose much of themselves to the nation, as it drains them spiritually and psychologically. In Marshall and Morrison’s

novels, characters must balance material pursuits and connections to the black community, often represented by the presence of such ancestors.¹

In Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* and Morrison's *Tar Baby*, the negotiation between the material and the communal mainly takes place in the context of Caribbean culture, where key figures appear as ancestors, particularly through their embodiment as African deities. That the Caribbean figures so prominently in these novels cannot be viewed as mere coincidence. Both Marshall and Morrison have connections to the area. Marshall's family is from Barbados, an island connected historically to the Sea Islands; her second marriage was to a Haitian. Though Morrison's heritage is not Caribbean, her former husband is Jamaican; and she often notes the interconnection of the folk cultures of the Caribbean with her childhood in the midwestern United States and her family history in the South. In terms of valuing women's histories in the Americas, Stelamaris Coser points out that "[t]he islands of the Caribbean mark the birth of America. 'Steppingstones' linking North and South, they are a continuing symbol for the meeting of different 'cultural tributaries,' as well as the initial place of displacement and domination of native peoples and Africans in the *New World*' (*Bridging the Americas* 3). Noting the importance of the Caribbean in the works of Marshall and Morrison, Carolyn Cooper adds, "In these novels the Caribbean becomes the locus of (re)possession [. . .]" (65). I add that the cultural symbols of islands of the Caribbean may also be interpreted metaphorically as the floating spices and herbs that interact with other national provisions in order to enhance the flavor of the soup simmering in the diasporic Dutch pot of the Americas. It is no wonder, then, that both Marshall and Morrison have made the Caribbean a character in their fiction. It remains a site that more than any other, due to its

history, reflects both the challenges and the potentialities of a transnational black community in the Americas.²

Praisesong for the Widow: Stepping Out of Whiteness to Dance across Nations

In *Praisesong for the Widow*, the middle-aged character of Avey Johnson embarks on a physical journey to the Caribbean that results in a spiritual metamorphosis. Before her spiritual transformation takes place, however, she must come to terms with how her adopted material life has distanced her from the community and folk roots she once knew. Avey had been christened Avatara by her great-aunt Cuney who, after a dream of her grandmother, insisted that the child be named after the latter in order to honor this ancestor. Defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the descent of a deity to the earth in an incarnate form,” a “manifestation in human form,” and a “presentation to the world as a ruling power or object of worship,” “avatar,” the root word of Avatara, reflects the veneration of ancestors in Afro-diasporic culture. Yet, soon after achieving material success, Avatara becomes Avey; and the change in her name marks a negation of her roots.³ Instead of an incarnation, Avey becomes an empty vessel. Avey’s regard for herself is directly related to Western indoctrination and her investment in the U. S. nation’s emphasis on the acquisition of social and material capital.

The pursuit of upward mobility and status by Avey and her husband Jerome and their investment in whiteness engendered a disassociation from their roots. An intelligent and diligent man, Jerome, who had been known as Jay before his transformation,⁴ often held several jobs to provide for his growing family, while studying part-time to become a CPA. Learning of his wife’s third pregnancy, he labored all the more until he finally

passed the examination and began his own business; yet, by then, his sensibilities had changed greatly. Having been very connected for many years to the African-American community and its values in Harlem, he and Avey purposely relocated to North White Plains, an area whose name itself marks the lifestyle and character of its community. For Jay, a new identity overtook the familiar one, as if a “vague, pale outline of another face [was] superimposed on his, as in a double exposure” (131).⁵ A healthy marriage, characterized by lovemaking filled with playful talk and Jay’s worship of Avey’s body, the site of “a pantheon of the most ancient deities who had made their temple the tunneled darkness of his wife’s flesh” (127), was replaced by estrangement, petty bickering, and joyless, burdensome sex. The love of Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson poems and the jazz and blues records of The Duke, Lady Day, and Ma Rainey gave way to an obsession with obtaining the big house on the hill and the approval of their white neighbors—an obsession that literally drove Jerome to his death. However, as the narrator states, “Jay’s death had taken place long before Jerome Johnson’s. There had been nothing to mark his passing. No well-dressed corpse, no satin-lined coffin, no funeral wreaths and flowers. Jay had simply ceased to be. He had vanished without making his leaving known” (136).

Having appropriated her husband’s lifestyle, Avey wears its trappings: a “well-cut suit, coat or ensemble depending on the season. The carefully coordinated accessories. The muted colors. Everything in good taste and appropriate to her age. [. . .] The look of acceptability about her. She would never be sent to eat in the kitchen when company came!” (48-49). Reluctant to show too much emotion, for fear that too much of her hidden self will be revealed, she even pulls in her underlip in order to conceal the

“raw pink across the top which she always kept hidden” (10). Estranged from her culture and becoming increasingly unable to recognize this woman she sees in the mirror everyday, she has lost herself underneath the material trappings of her lifestyle. In the words of her doctor, “a sure sign [. . .] of money in the bank” (49).

The money in the bank does completely destroy the memories of the folk community Avey once knew. Indeed, Avey once had deep connections to a black community whose principles may be helpful to the healing of her dissociation from her culture. In addition to the memories of her life in Harlem with Jay, Avey possesses richer and even more powerful memories from her childhood, when she had been sent to spend summers on Tatem Island, in South Carolina, with her great-aunt Cuney, who introduced her to the members of its folk community: “Doctor” Benitha Grant, a contemporary conjurer, who could heal insect bites with fennel, and Mr. Golla Mack, an elderly man with a walking stick and immunity to time, among others (35-36). There she learned of how her always individualistic great-aunt Cuney dismissed herself from her church congregation, after being rebuked for crossing her feet during the regular ring shout (34). It was also there in Tatem, beyond the “vast denuded tract of land that had once [. . .] been the largest plantation of sea island cotton thereabouts” (36), that Cuney, an “othermother”⁶ to Avey, recited to her the story of Ibo Landing:

“It was here that they brought ‘em. They taken ‘em out of the boats right here where we’s standing. Nobody remembers how many of ‘em it was, but they was a good few ‘cording to my gran’ who was a little girl no bigger than you when it happened. The small boats was drawed up here and the ship they had just come from was out in the deep water. Great big ol’ ship with sails. And the minute those Ibos was brought on shore they just stopped, my gran’ said, and taken a look around. A good look. Not saying a word. Just studying the place real good. Just taking their time and studying on it.

And they seen things that day you and me don't have the power to see. 'Cause those pure-born Africans was peoples my gran' said could see in more ways than one. The kind can tell you 'bout things happened long before they was born and things to come long afer they's dead. Well, they seen everything that was to happen 'roun here that day. The slavery time and the war my gran' always talked about, the 'mancipation and everything after that right on up to the hard times today. Those Ibos didn't miss a thing. Even seen you and me standing here talking about 'em. And when they got through sizing up the place real good and seen what was to come, they turned, my gran' said, and looked at the white folks what brought 'em here. Took their time again and gived them the same long hard look. [. . . Then t]hey just turned [. . .] and walked on back down to the edge of the river here. Every las' man, woman and chile. And they didn't bother getting back into the small boats drawed up here—boats take too much time. They just kept walking right on out over the river. Now you wouldna thought they'd of got very far seeing as it was water they was walking on. Besides they had all that iron on 'em. Iron on they ankles and they wrists and fastened 'round they necks like a dog collar. 'Nuff iron to sink an army. And chains hooking up the iron. But chains didn't stop those Ibos none. Neither iron. The way my gran' tol' it (other folks in Tatem said it wasn't so and that she was crazy but she never paid 'em no mind) 'cording to her they just kept on walking like the water was solid ground. [. . .] They feets was gonna take 'em wherever they was going that day. And they was singing by then, so my gran' said. When they realized wasn't nothing between them and home but some water and that wasn't giving 'em no trouble they got so tickled they started in to singing. [. . .] They sounded like they was having such a good time my gran' declared she just picked herself up and took off after 'em. In her mind. Her body she usta say might be in Tatem but her mind, her mind was long gone with the Ibos . . .”⁷ (37-39)

Marshall's recounting, through the voice of Cuney, of the story of the Ibos falls in line with the intention of Jones and Condé to insert into national and regional records the repressed histories of African in the Americans. Marshall purposely uses the figure of Cuney to pass on to the reader the mission of disseminating these hidden stories. As the narrator explains, “in instilling the story of the Ibos in her child's mind, the old woman [Cuney] had entrusted her with a mission she couldn't even name yet had felt duty-bound to fulfill” (42). On annual summer vacations to Tatem with Jay, who admired this community that “reminded him of Leona, Kansas, where he had been born and raised

before coming to New York by way of Chicago at the age of twelve” (116),⁸ Avey, continuing the oral tradition of her ancestors, would recite the tale. The trips and the practice of such ritual traditions would end with their abandonment of roots in exchange for material wealth.

It takes the unexpected appearance of Aunt Cuney in her dreams to stir in Avey a sense of discomfort with regard to the present state of her life. Aunt Cuney will provide the catalyst for the flight of Avey from her materially filled, yet rootless life to the islands where she must confront her dissociation. On a cruise of the Caribbean with two other middle-aged girlfriends, Avey first experiences the sense of being ill at ease. On the *Bianca Pride*, whose name clearly suggests white imperialism, colonization, and arrogance, Avey dreams of Aunt Cuney, vibrant and waiting, in her trademark field hat and double-belted dress, to escort her to the Landing. Still trapped in her middle-class sensibilities, Avey, whose husband also appears in the dream to punctuate those sensibilities, responds incredulously:

Did she really expect her to go walking over to the Landing dressed as she was? In the new spring suit she had just put on to wear to the annual luncheon at the Statler given by Jerome Johnson’s lodge? [. . .] With her hat and gloves on? And her fur stole draped over her arm? Avey Johnson could have laughed, the idea was so ridiculous. That obstacle course of scrub, rock and rough grass leading down from the cotton field would make quick work of her stockings, and the open-toed patent-leather pumps she was wearing for the first time would never survive that mud flat which had once been a rice field. Glancing down, she saw they were already filmed with dust just from her standing there. Her amusement began to give way to irritation. (41)

Despite the old woman’s gestures for Avey to come forward, the latter refuses, not recognizing the urgency her great-aunt sees in the situation. “[T]ransformed into a preacher in a Holiness church imploring the sinners and backsliders to come forward to

the mercy seat” (42), Cuney, aware of Avey’s abandonment of the mission she entrusted to her, offers a soft invitation to salvation, to a return to roots, to home. When this fails, the long dead conjure woman begins to pull Avey forcibly. Alarmed by the ghost’s vigor, Avey wonders, “How could her flesh still be so warm and her smell the same homey mix of brown washing soap and the asafetida she wore in a sac pinned to her undershirt to ward off sickness? How could she still be so strong?” (43). Unbeknownst to Avey, Cuney, with her herbs, her strength and fighting spirit, her ability to defy death, and her desire to reunite Avey with her roots, holds the dual power of the conjurer and of the Yoruba goddess Oshun, who resides in rivers and other “sacred depths” and is capable of “acts of intricate generosity” and “warlock capacity and power” (Thompson 79).⁹ Ironically, much like Cuney, Avey too appears to have inherited Cuney’s spiritual propensities, as evinced by her equally independent and warring personality.

In their ensuing physical battle, Avey’s prized pale mink stole flies up into the air and then falls on the ground, “lying there, like some furry creature from the nearby wood that had been wantonly slain and flung in the dirt at their feet” (*Praisesong* 44). The symbol of her investment in the nation and of the violence and death produced by capitalism, the stole also represents the unease, or “blues,” Avey has experienced that, joined with the red blood of the animal killed to make the coat and the white ideals she pursues, make up the black experience in the U. S.¹⁰ Oblivious to these connections and outraged by the soiling of her prized fur, Avey ferociously attacks her aunt, who matches her blow for blow and succeeds in ruining the younger woman’s attire, thus destroying the signs of materialism that have held her bound to the national ideals which have separated her from the larger diasporic community that exists beyond national

boundaries. As she beats on her aunt's breasts, symbols of cultural nourishment, Avey's anger gives way to shame, as she realizes that this battle has taken place before the eyes of her upper middle-class neighbors—a spectacle she had always sought to avoid. Yet, it is the power of such a spectacle, with the “fur stole like her hard-won life of the past thirty years being trampled into the dirt underfoot” (45), that helps to move Avey into a state of consciousness regarding her empty existence.

Having been shown her cultural displacement by her imposing Aunt Cuney, Avey becomes disquieted enough to seek out an island retreat where she may regroup before continuing on her present life course. Ironically, the Atlantic ocean, the liquid base in a soup of many nations, touching and moving around those nations but not defined solely by them, facilitates her psycho-spiritual journey. Packing her six suitcases, yet more symbols of the excesses of her lifestyle, “[a]s if sealing a tomb” (16), Avey acts out her state of mummification by her material death-in-life existence.¹¹ Taken to the island of Grenada by launch, she waits for a taxi, as if one should automatically come for her, an expectation created by her upper middle-class life. Finally approached by a driver, yet surprised by the absence of tourist guides or the usual tourist trade, she is equally amazed by the procession of people moving toward the wharf and boarding rickety crafts, which she later learns is “The Carriacou Excursion” (75), similar to the annual boatrikes she took on the Hudson to Bear Mountain as a child (14).¹² She is also intrigued by their speech, which seems to resemble the patois she had heard in other islands and the Gullah dialect of Tatem, and by the approach of a native who mistakes her for a fellow Grenadian. These observances, signs of the interconnectedness of people within the African diaspora, begin to strip her of her separate national affiliation.

The recognition of diasporic connections that transcend nations, in addition to Avey's abandonment of the cruise, are all signs of hope that Avey may be transformed. However, before this transformation may begin, Avey must first confront her past in a room of a hotel that resembles the imperial stature of the cruise ship and that accommodates mostly white tourists (80-82)—a crossroads site appropriate for the final stripping away of her material entrapments. Within her hotel room, she finally confronts and mourns her life up to this moment. The net effect may be perceived in the words used to describe Avey's moment of epiphany, when she realizes the cost of past choices to her and her deceased husband's lives: "She felt like someone in a bad dream who discovers that the street along which they are fleeing is not straight as they had believed, but circular, and that it has been leading them all the while back to the place they were seeking to escape. [. . .] *Too much!* They had behaved, she and Jay, as if there had been nothing about themselves worth honoring!" (82-83, 139). Such is the emptiness Avey feels without the ancestral presence and a communal connection. However, as Avey learns, reclamation of self is possible, if one reclaims the ancestor.

Avey, awakening fully clothed in her hotel room to the baby smell created by her own perspiration, had done battle with her past on the night of her arrival and was now numb.¹³ Literally stripping herself of the accoutrements that symbolized her material life, Avey emerges from her hotel room in "flat-heeled shoes and a pink linen shirtdress" (152), simple clothes reflecting the beginning of Avey's multi-layered transformative process. Wandering too far along the beach and away from the hotel, a disoriented and dehydrated Avey enters the rum shop of Lebert Joseph, who ironically mistakes her for a native who should know better than to enter his shop during the season

of the Carriacou Excursion. Revealing her identity as a foreigner, she ignorantly asks if there is a special reason for such an excursion. His answer marks the beginning of her re-education concerning the importance of continued veneration of the ancestor:

“How you mean if there’s a special reason?” he spoke incredulously, his eyes—the whites a stained tobacco brown against his blackness—stretched wide. “It have many ‘special’ reasons!”—all of which she should have known, his tone implied. “Family for one. A man lives in this place all year he must go look for his family. His old father and mother if they’s still in life, and the rest of his people. [. . .] He’s sure to have a piece of ground there he has to see to. Or he might be building a house for when he goes home for good, or a schooner—thinking to get into the trade—and he must tend to that. [. . .]”

“But it have another reason.” He spoke after a long pause and the smile had vanished. “Is the Old Parents, oui,” he said solemnly. “The Long-time People. Each year this time they does look for us to come and give them their remembrance.

“I tell you, you best remember them!” he cried, fixing Avey Johnson with a gaze that was slowly turning inward. “If not they’ll get vex and cause you nothing but trouble. They can turn your life around in a minute, you know. All of a sudden everything start gon’ wrong and you don’ know the reason. You can’t figger it out all you try. Is the Old Parents, oui. They’s vex with you over something. Oh, they can be disagreeable, you see them there. Is their age, oui, and the lot of suffering they had to put up with in their day. We has to understand and try our best to please them . . .” (164-165)

Speaking to her most recent experience with the ghost of her great-aunt, he then informs her of the communal offerings of food and libation, in the form of roast ears of corn, rum, and lighted candles, given by his people to the ancestors and of the Big Drum ceremony, in which both ancestors and African nations are honored.¹⁴ He is then astounded and saddened, upon asking her for the name of her nation, to learn that she does not know, that she appears to have no connections, no roots, no people to claim. She can only answer that she is from New York, the name sadly reminding him of the many who selectively choose to abandon roots, as with the “grands and great-grands” of his own family he has never seen and who have never been to the Big Drum ceremony to pay

homage to the ancestors (168). However, Avey's sense of belonging will be altered by the old man's interrogation of the traditional concept of the nation as a bounded space to inhabit, as opposed to a more fluid space of kinship which one may claim.

Despite her unease at hearing his story, Avey remains and tells Lebert of how she ended up in his shop—the whole story of her cruise; the sickness, seemingly induced by the parfait; and the dream that prompted her flight. Yet, she need not have given him all the details. The old man, with his knowledge of ceremonial dances, his immediate understanding of her illness, and his lameness and walking stick, becomes a figure for Legba, as implied by his first name, and for Babaluaye. As noted by Robert Farris Thompson, Legba is the Yoruba deity associated with the crossroads, the cosmogram his crutch forms with the earth, and his limp, due to his position in the world of the living and the dead. Taking both male and female forms, he also functions as a messenger/interpreter, opens the door to the spirit world, and possesses a limitless amount of *àshe* (18-20). Babaluaye is the god of illness and suffering, watches over the lame and infirm, punishes excessive pride, and uses fear “to shock the thoughtless into social awareness” (61). Manifesting the powers of these deities in Avey's presence, Lebert Joseph “already knew of the Gethsemane she had undergone last night [. . .]. His penetrating look said as much. It marked him as someone who possessed ways of seeing that went beyond mere sight and ways of knowing that outstripped ordinary intelligence (*Li gain connaissance*) and thus had no need for words” (*Praisesong* 172).¹⁵

Recognizing her long denied need for communion and operating as a conjurer with knowledge of medicinal cures, Lebert offers Avey a glass of rum and coconut water, “a standard in the islands” (174), as he comforts her with the knowledge that she is not

the only one who is unaware of her nation. Naming some examples, he tells the story, recounted in a folk song, of a Bongo family who were separated during slavery—the wife sold to Haiti, the husband to Trinidad, and the children, retained by the master in Carriacou. This tale affirms Avey's disconnection from her African roots, as it speaks to the history of displacement created by slavery. As if educating her of the possibility of a still viable link, Lebert continues to inform her of names and characteristics associated with various nations. Finally recognizing his reference to the Juba, one of the dances of one of the nations, she reveals that her cultural connections have not been completely severed by the adherence to the U. S. nation's values. Rising to his feet, this Legba figure then proceeds to perform the dance, flipping an imaginary skirt and prancing about, thus taking on the dual forms of a man and a woman and suggesting a reincarnation of Cuney, with her double-belted skirt. Lebert's expression and Avey's recognition of the dance further alters the sense of what belonging to a nation can mean, particularly as the national spaces of Grenada, the U. S. mainland, and the American sea islands meet in the rum shop by way of a transnational dance. This dance foreshadows a later transnational dance that will mark Avey's recognition of and contribution to a performative, diasporic Dutch pot of the Americas. So excited by her recognition of the name of the dance, the old man beseeches her to accompany him on the excursion. Having lost track of time, which seems to have stopped in his presence, reflecting the sacred timelessness that occurs in the presence of ancestors, Avey insists on getting back to her hotel. She is soon convinced otherwise, though, for Lebert Joseph, like Legba, is a trickster, devising counter-arguments to her false excuses for why she cannot go. Additionally, with the last name of Joseph, he is like the Biblical step-father of Jesus,

leading a divine child to safety. Convinced to make the journey, Avey makes another choice regarding the fate of her spiritual self, as she follows the old man out of the rum shop, the sight of her third crossroads experience.

The most pivotal moment in the text, with regard to acceptance or rejection of the ancestor, comes in the form of a metaphorical cleansing, as Avey's schooner trip with Lebert and other islanders results in a too long delayed purging of the internal toxins of material life that have been plaguing her. The rocking motions of the boat recalled the "rocking" of the New York Baptist church of her childhood, with the preacher providing a powerfully clarifying Easter sermon to the congregation on the suffering of Jesus, his resurrection, and the possibility of any stone, meaning a hardship or burden, being rolled away; and the congregation answering his call to look to the power of the Spirit for salvation (198-203).¹⁶ This recollection becomes a metaphor for Avey's entire contemporary experience, for the stones of materialism and cultural displacement, produced by the pressure of national forces, have burdened and almost negated her identity. Her only means of salvation will be to call on and look to the ancestral spirits. Part of this memory includes the experience of becoming sick during the service. Psychosomatically connecting this incident with her present situation, the contents of her stomach are released through her major orifices, as two opposing currents—the material/national and the ancestral/transnational—meet in the overwhelming waves of her experience. Again, the fact that this purging takes place at sea is significant, for Avey is removed from the influence of the nation that would urge her again to repress the toxins. Instead, the transnational space of the boat trumps the nation's influence and applies enough positive pressure on Avey to encourage a release of that which has been

weighing her down. Moved to the cramped space below deck, after vomiting and defecating, Avey relives the Middle Passage experience, as she is forced to identify with the journey of African slaves and is possessed by their spirits:

[S]he had the impression as her mind flickered on briefly of other bodies lying crowded in with her in the hot, airless dark. A multitude it felt like lay packed around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moans, rising and falling with each rise and plunge of the schooner, enlarged upon the one filling her head. Their suffering—the depth of it, the weight of it in a cramped space—made hers of no consequence. (209)

Contained and set to simmer in a modern vessel, as the slaves were in their forced voyage across the Atlantic, Avey is metaphysically seasoned in the similar Dutch pot of the schooner. Avey's debasement is necessary here in order to strip her of feelings of superiority, encouraged by her upper middle-class existence in a U. S. context. The degradation and suffering involved in this, as a rite of passage, is necessary to the entrance of Avey into the final stage of cultural reclamation to occur at the Big Drum ceremony.¹⁷

The process of cultural reclamation is also marked by a laying on of hands, of sorts. As Avey emerges from sleep, after being escorted off the schooner and placed in bed at Lebert's house, she is greeted by Lebert's daughter, Rosalie Parvay, also a widow. Seen in the bedroom first and later in the kitchen, wearing "touches of gold at her ears and wrists" (216), Rosalie is a figure for Oshun, often associated with intimate domestic spaces (Teish 115) and with gold (Murphy 43). Exhibiting coolness and motherly nurturing, she is also a figure for Yemaya, a riverain goddess characterized by such qualities (Thompson 72-73, Murphy 42). As she later gives Avey a "proper wash-down" (*Praisesong* 217) in a tub similar to the one "out in back of the house in Tatem" (221),

she especially exhibits the nature of these water goddesses. Washing and massaging Avey's body with oil, Rosalie's healing touch brings the American widow back to life, through a semi-orgasmic experience long denied Avey:

[. . .] Under the vigorous kneading and pummeling, Avey Johnson became aware of a faint stinging as happens in a limb that's fallen asleep once it's roused, and a warmth could be felt as if the blood there had been at a standstill, but was now tentatively getting under way again. And this warmth and the faint stinging reached up the entire length of her thighs. (Their length shapeliness would excite him even when she was dressed and he couldn't see them, Jay, talking his talk used to say.) Then, slowly, they radiated out into her loins: When, when was the last time she had felt even the slightest stirring there? (Just take it from me! Jerome Johnson used to say.) The warmth, the stinging sensation that was both pleasure and pain passed up through the emptiness at her center. Until finally they reached her heart. (223-224)

Resurrected and energized, Avey is now ready to honor the ancestors with a dance.¹⁸

In many religious traditions, the laying on of hands is often accompanied by communion, which punctuates the entire process of cultural and ancestral confrontations in this text. With Christianity, for example, Christ serves as the spiritual guest whose elements are consumed in honor of the sacrifice of his life in order to give mankind salvation. Likewise, in ancestral veneration, the dead are spiritual guests, honored for the sacrifice of their lives' work for their progeny. As Avey prepares to leave for the Big Drum ceremony and sits down to dine with Lebert Joseph, his daughter Rosalie Parvay, and their maid, Milda, she sees on the buffet table the "sacred elements" laid out for the dead: "a lighted candle in a holder and, next to it on a plate, a roasted ear of corn fresh from the harvest. [. . .] Outside the house, which belonged to Lebert Joseph's daughter, the ground at the four corners had been liberally sprinkled with rum from a bottle of Jack Iron," along with the front and back steps, which "had also received the traditional 'wetting'" (213). For Avey, "[these acts] were no more strange than the plate of food that

used to be placed beside the coffin at the funerals in Tatem” (225). For Avey, communion, with its inclusion of the cosmogram and offerings to the dead, then becomes another means of re-acculturation and harmony. It marks her movement into diasporic consciousness, as the recognition of these cultural signifiers reveals to Avey that a diasporic community does indeed exist beyond national boundaries and that she may claim membership in it.

Again reflecting certain spiritual rituals, prayer and then celebration follow communion. Climbing the hill toward the Big Drum ceremony, Avey and her female companions meet Lebert at the crossroads, where Avey makes the choice to complete her transformation. As Lebert again assumes the role of Legba, he opens the gate to the area of the ceremony. The natural world of the yard welcomes Avey with the pitch blackness of the night and then with the light of a torch (*Praisesong* 233-234), as if restoring her blackness to her and then illuminating her mind to its reappearance. Avey is welcomed by the Carriacouans, who “regard her with those eyes which refused to see any differences” (235), as they acquaint her with the ritual prayers for forgiveness from the ancestors.¹⁹

As the import of the Beg Pardon becomes clear to Avey, Milda, the maid, becomes the channel through which Avey’s aunt may reappear. Looking at her, Avey would swear that “it almost seemed to be her great-aunt standing there beside her in the guise of the big-boned maid. *Pa’doné mwé?*”(237). The same was true when she first met Lebert who, without touching her, had made her feel the same pressure on her arm as when Cuney had grabbed her by the arm and demanded that she follow her (183). Close consideration reveals the perfect sense in this: Cuney, a descendant of Gullah culture,

historically linked more closely with the Caribbean and Africa than any other part of the United States, can only reappear in the Caribbean, for Avey had been too aligned with American culture to be liberated in the United States. Given this historical connection and with the diasporic members gathered in the ceremonial ring—a cosmogram and the sign of unity of time and of the community as it claims their nations and honors the ancestors, Avey is moved by the power of the drum, beating the rhythm of life.

Possessed by her Ibo ancestors, her great-aunt, and the deities present within the circle, who all tie her to the community before her, she dances, treading the ground as the Ibos had tread through the water and the ring shouters had tread the church floors in Tatem. Her steps are marked by the same rhythmic movements of the island where the dance is known as the “Carriacou Tramp” —a transnational, archetypal dance that transcends time and distance.²⁰ The power of the scene is represented in these words:

It was the essence of something rather than one thing itself she was witnessing. Those present—the old ones—understood this. All that was left were a few names of what they called nations which they could no longer even pronounce properly, the fragments of a dozen or so songs, the shadowy forms of long-ago dances and rum kegs for drums. The bare bones. The burnt-out ends. And they clung to them with a tenacity she suddenly loved in them and longed for in herself. [. . .] The theme of separation and loss the note [of the drum] embodied, the unacknowledged longing it conveyed summed up feelings that were beyond words, feelings and a host of subliminal memories that over the years had proven more durable and trustworthy than the history with its trauma and pain out of which they had come. After centuries of forgetfulness and even denial, they refused to go away. The note was a lamentation that could hardly have come from the rum keg of a drum. Its source had to be the heart, the bruised still-bleeding innermost chamber of the collective heart. [. . .] Clanging, insistent, soaring, the iron was [also] sending out a [message . . .]. Iron calling for its namesake and creator. [. . .] Ogun Feraille. Taking his nightly stroll around the islands he had heard the sound of the gong-gong and dropped in. [. . .] Finally, just as the moving wall of bodies was almost upon her, she too moved—a single declarative step forward. [. . .] She moved cautiously at first, each foot edging forward as if the ground under her was really water—muddy river water—and she

was testing it to see if it would hold her weight. [. . .] She had finally after all these decades made it across. (240, 244-248)

The images of the dance and drum in sync with a heartbeat and the reference to Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, are significant. In African religious ceremonies, dancing to the beat of a drum venerates ancestors and deities and further facilitates the reception of *ofàshe* (González-Wippler 7). Mirroring the ring shout Avey had witnessed as a child, the Big Drum circle becomes another site of worship and unity of ethnic groups, in spite of separate national affiliations. Essential to this gathering is the drum, associated with the communal life-force produced by its beat and interpreted as a “sacred object and even the tangible form of a divinity” (Mtraux 182). It sets the rhythm of the dance, calls ancestors and deities to the circle, translates messages from the spirit world, and signals the spirits to return to their world (Stuckey 19-20). The “talking drum” removes linguistic barriers created by national languages, as it speaks to the collective heartbeat of all present in the circle. Thus, “on hearing the *dun-dun*, anyone can dance the language” (Benítez-Rojo 169), even a reluctant Avey.²¹ Finally, the appearance of Ogun-Ferraille (“ferraille” the French word for iron) reflects the power of this deity to effect change when summoned. As the god associated with the “flames of the blacksmith’s forge,” with the machete used to clear overgrown bush in forests, and with iron chains that unite (Thompson 52-54), Ogun strikes at the metal of the Dutch pot that holds the elements of a diasporic soup and regulates the flames underneath it so that those elements will not be destroyed by the fires of modernity. His presence slashes and burns away the vestiges of Avey’s adherence to the limiting ideals of the nation and unites her in a transnational space to others of the diaspora who aide in her healing. Once lost in a forest of weighty memories and material

concerns, Avey may now dance freely, buoyed by her new community of ancestors, deities, and fellow members of the diaspora.

Avey's movements in this transnational dance represent her reunion with a Dutch pot diaspora, in which every individual body brings something unique to add to a metaphorical soup that will nourish the other members. Avey's steps are both progressive and regressive, as they represent a movement forward from her psycho-spiritual stagnation and a reclamation of her previous membership within the diaspora. According to Nada Elia, "In the Afrocentric worldview, such a regression is positive, signifying renewal, restoration, recovery, remembering and re-membering an otherwise disrupted, disjointed existence" (95). With these steps, "Avey overcomes the rage and silence that kills her husband, the alienation from her body's African rhythms that nearly kills her soul" (Bracks 120). Her dance becomes an expression of the melding of her past and present, as noted by Barbara Frey Waxman:

[Avey] dances her ancestry uninhibitedly, in bodily expression of the psychic process of remembering. In the act of dancing, she finds and names herself, reclaiming her ancestral name of Avatara and re-experiencing African religious ritual. Avatara dances herself into contact with a rich heritage and self-pride that spiritually recharges her. [. . .] Dancing enables Avey thus to think through her body [. . .], to grasp mentally and viscerally her collective and individual history. (98-99)

The dance also allows for Avey's aunt to feel part of a community of worshippers again. As Paulette Brown-Hinds states, "[Avey may] petition the ancestors for the soul of the angry aunt Cuney she encounters in her dream, whose unreconciled feelings over the Tatem Ring Shouts plagued her in death. In a sense, her participation in the Big Drum allows her to finally 'close the circle' to become psychically and spiritually whole" (114).

Forgiven by the ancestor, redeemed by her acts of repentance, and able to reclaim her original name and its meaning, Avatara Johnson returns home. There she will fulfill the mission which her aunt gave her and will once again adopt the role of the griot, telling her tale to whomever will listen, thus continuing the oral tradition practiced by her ancestor. With this, a praisesong may be lifted up for the widow who, in releasing herself from material/national concerns and embracing ancestral/transnational recognition, has not only returned to her cultural roots but will pass on her song in a triumphant, diasporic chorus to be heard by others whose lives she may touch.

***Tar Baby*: Negotiating the Neo-colonial Briarpatch**

As with Marshall, Toni Morrison focuses on the loss of self that may occur as a result of investment in national constructions. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison signifies on the image of the briarpatch in New World folklore in order to characterize the challenges associated with traversing the material landscape of the Americas and maintaining a connection with a transnational diaspora, especially when neo-colonial ideologies are used by nations to manipulate black bodies for the purpose of reinforcing those ideologies. By depicting the conflicting national investments of the characters of Jadine Childs and Son Green, Morrison suggests that the national briarpatch can be negotiated, but only if those of the diaspora redirect their gaze from the material/national toward the ancestral/transnational.

Like Avatara Johnson, Jadine Childs too must confront her feelings of displacement, discomfort, and rootlessness. Orphaned early by the death of her parents, Jadine has been reared by her aunt and uncle, Ondine and Sydney Childs, servants of a

wealthy candy manufacturer, Valerian Street,²² and his emotionally unstable wife, Margaret. Sent to the best schools, paid for by Valerian in exchange for her relatives' unflinching service, she has earned an art degree from the Sorbonne, has a career as a fashion model in Paris and New York, and hopes to open her own art gallery or boutique. She is truly an accomplished woman with immeasurable potential for success. However, commodified by European culture, due to her light-skinned, "exotic" look,²³ Jadine has, in turn, been influenced by European tastes: dinner parties with "a rich and tacky menu of dishes Easterners thought up for Westerners in order to indispose them, but which were printed in *Vogue* and *Elle* [. . .]" (*Tar Baby* 45); a preference for Picasso over Itumba masks and "Ave Maria" over gospel music (74); and sealskin coats, each made of the "hides of ninety baby seals" (87).

Highly successful by European standards, Jadine feels that cultural attachments are unnecessary. Her model for development was the dysfunctional white Street family, due to the peripheral positions her aunt and uncle have occupied as servants in the Street household. Ondine, especially, has failed Jadine as a mother figure and bearer of culture, simply due to her lack of active participation in her life. Feeling that supplying material support was enough, she was happy to indulge Jadine without instructing her, for "since this 'child' was a niece it was without the stress of a mother-daughter relationship" (96).²⁴ The result was a grown "child" with the belief in the value of European ideals over African ones and in the assumption that individuality and culture are mutually exclusive, as reflected by this statement: "I want to get out of my skin and be the only person inside—not American—not black—just me" (49).²⁵ Though appearing to eschew

the demands of any one nation and claiming a transnational consciousness, Jadine cannot make connections between her identity and that of others in the diaspora.

Just as Avatara's change of name accompanied her disassociation from herself and her roots, Jadine too becomes alienated from the qualities and power inherent in her given name, as she allows almost everyone to address and speak of her as Jade. The verb "jade," the root word of her name, means "to exhaust or wear out by driving or working hard," which is the case with Jadine, as she becomes fatigued by the personal conflict of not entirely fitting into a white world and feeling disconnected from the black community. When seeking shelter with her relatives, she returns depleted from her high maintenance life in Europe. Reflecting the deficient state in which she lives, jade is also listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a "term of reprobation given to a woman" and a mocking reference to a "horse of inferior breed." Finally, a jade is a popular green, ornamental stone, noted for its hardness and value. As will be noted, Jadine is "hard" of head and sometimes of heart, and she chooses to deny the qualities of the mineral after which she is named. Instead of a precious jewel, she often casts herself as a cheap stone, only posing as the true gem she could be. As she becomes aware of the important aspects of character that are missing in her life, she too develops an intense need to confront her origins and her self-divestiture and to redefine herself.

Unlike Avey, Jadine lacks the same pleasant and fertile soil of memories, filled with deep roots that would allow her to reconnect easily with communal traditions. Her aunt and uncle come from areas of the United States known for large black communities, populated abundantly after the Civil War, when many blacks relocated to the North and to the West. Sydney has recurrent and vivid dreams of a rust-colored Baltimore, which

he had left to go to Philadelphia, where he became “one of those industrious Philadelphia Negroes—the proudest people in the race[. . .] mentioned in the book of the very same name” (*Tar Baby* 61, 163), and where he met his present employer.²⁶ While Ondine is also from Baltimore, neither she nor her husband ever shared their communal experiences with their “daughter” Jadine, forcing her to have no “people,” apart from her relatives. With this, the most profound memory Jadine has retained of life in Baltimore has been one of the day she experienced embarrassment at the sight of a female dog in heat, being mounted by several other neighborhood dogs, and then being punished with a beating on the head and back by the retired postman, who feared an accumulation of stray dogs in the neighborhood. From this, she learns that the expression of passion is dangerous for females; and “so she decided then and there at the age of twelve in Baltimore never to be broken in the hands of any man.” This becomes her approach to life, as she, like Avey, veils her passions behind very subtle expressions, not easily read in the photographic images of her modeling: “The pugnacious lips became a seductive pout—eyes more heated than scary. But beneath the easy manners was a claw always ready to rein in the dogs, because Never” (124). Instead, white ideals, ironically sanctioned by Sydney’s Philadelphia Negro work ethic, become her passions. The only other black people with whom she socializes share in her investment in the American national ideal of success at all costs: “[They] wanted what she wanted—either steadily and carefully like Sydney and Ondine or uproariously and flashily like theater or media types. But whatever their scam, ‘making it’ was on their minds [. . .]” (126).

Ironically, while “making it” remains on her mind, Jadine, plagued by troubling dreams, decides to flee to the island retreat where her relatives live and work. The

catalyst for these dreams is the sight of an African woman in a Parisian supermarket several months earlier. Preceding the memory of the African woman, there appeared images of “[l]arge beautiful women’s hats like Norma Shearer’s and Mae West’s and Jeanette Mac Donald’s [. . .]. Feathers. Veils. Flowers. Brims flat, brims drooping, brims folded, and rounded. Hat after lovely sailing hat surrounding her until she is finger-snapped awake” (44). After dreaming of these hats, which allude to plumed African headdresses, symbols of titled women within a tribe (Thompson 235), Jadine is reminded of the African woman, described in this manner:

The vision itself was a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress Jadine knew there was too much hip, too much bust. The agency would laugh her out of the lobby, so why was she and everybody else in the store transfixed? The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress? The woman walked down the aisle as though her many-colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down V’s were scored into each of her cheeks, her hair was wrapped in a gele as yellow as her dress. [. . .] The woman leaned into the dairy section and opened a carton from which she selected three eggs. Then she put her right elbow into the palm of her left hand and held the eggs aloft between earlobe and shoulder. She looked up then and they saw something in her eyes so powerful it had burnt away the eyelashes. [. . .] Left arm folded over her waist, right hand holding three chalk-white eggs in the air, and what will she do with her hands when she reaches the door? they [the onlookers] wondered. [. . .] She would float through the glass the way a vision should. She did of course and they needn’t have worried—the door always opened when you stepped on the mat before it, [. . . and] that woman approached it with the confidence of transcendent beauty and it flew open in silent obedience. [. . .] And there, just there [. . .] the woman turned her head sharply around to the left and looked right at Jadine [. . .] and, with a small parting of her lips, shot an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement and the hearts below.²⁷ (*Tar Baby* 46)

This African woman clearly embodies many of Oshun’s attributes: Characterized in Yoruba divination literature as a “[t]itled woman who heals the children,” a “[s]trong woman who burns a person,” and a “love goddess,” much like Venus in ancient antiquity (Thompson 79), she exudes “power, femininity, and fecundity” (Badejo 27) and is often

seen adorned in yellow, one of the colors associated with the deity (Murphy 42). This Oshun figure, whose “skin like tar” bonds her to the earth, possesses a clear sense of her own identity and through her actions chooses to “burn” Jadine’s consciousness with a silent critique of Jadine’s contrastingly deficient identity. Communicating to Jadine her recognition of Jadine’s status as a child lacking a place and a title within her diasporic “tribe,” this woman could be a figure from whom Jadine may learn. However, the “copper Venus” (*Tar Baby* 115) and wearer of “gold-thread slippers” (130), as a potential Oshun figure herself, fails to understand the warning of danger, represented by the eggs (Thompson 119). She, like Avey, can only focus on the feeling of having her lifestyle and self-image called into question and trampled by the opposing presence of this other woman. In her recognition and awe of her counterpart, one may perceive the possibility for Jadine to embrace the qualities represented by the African woman. Yet, Jadine’s European sensibilities and material pursuits retain too powerful a hold for her to be completely transformed and to appreciate the African beauty, whom she can only regard in terms of European standards. The African woman possesses “too much”—something extra, both outernational and transnational—something that exceeds the boundaries of European national ideals. However, it is that something extra that intrigues others, including Jadine, who wants what this other woman claims so naturally. As with Avey, Jadine’s desire for the “sweetness” of the white world, ironically represented by Valerian’s business, and her prized coat, made of baby seal skin, become the symbols of her unease, or blues, and of her choice of the material over the cultural, the “Other” over the self.²⁸

Seeking a retreat from memories of the African woman in yellow and her troublesome dreams, Jadine escapes to Valerian's residence on an island near the smaller fictional island of Dominique, a name that hints at the history of Saint-Domingue. This is especially significant since the islands in the novel were cleared by Haitian laborers and the larger one bears the name Isle Des Chevaliers (*Tar Baby* 9), or "Isle of Knights," a native invention that reverences with a noble title those African slaves who, like the Ibos, chose flight, or in this case marronage.²⁹ The name of the property, L'Arbe de la Croix ("Tree of the Cross"), symbolizes the pain and suffering of its inhabitants and servants, who must bear the "white man's [Valerian's] burden" (Hawthorne 102). It also represents the crossroads experience to occur there. Jadine travels there to sort out her confusion regarding her future career plans, her choice to marry her white lover, Ryk,³⁰ and the meaning of the exchange with the African woman. She takes an Air France flight to the island in the hopes that her aunt and uncle will offer her the same approval and validation she has always gotten from them and that this will remove her doubts concerning the choices she must make and the inauthenticity she feels. Upon her return, as she ponders the myth of the one hundred horsemen riding through the hills of the island (*Tar Baby* 47), she fails to connect it to the history of slavery on the land "that, three hundred years ago, had struck slaves blind the moment they saw it" (8).

Upon returning to Isle des Chevaliers, Jadine easily reassumes her position in the household as the mulatto figure living between two worlds—the one of her black relatives and the other of her manic white patrons. Though still bothered by the reoccurring visions of the African woman, she does not exhibit the same numbness produced by the disturbing memories that Avey experienced. She expects to be freed of

the weight of that memory by the time she leaves the island. However, the discovery in Margaret's closet of Son Green, "a black man with dreadlock hair" (80), changes everything.³¹ In meeting Son, Jadine meets her match.

Himself an American exile, having killed his wife in a fit of rage upon discovering her with a lover, Son is one of "that great class of undocumented men. [. . .] Anarchic, wandering, they read about their hometowns in the pages of out-of-town newspapers" (166). Like Jadine, Son appears to live life apart from the dictates of the nation. However, his beliefs and actions reveal an investment in the patriarchal tenets that often characterize national structures. Having lived at sea for the past eight years, he became a stowaway on Valerian's yacht, which brought him to the residence. There he spent nights slipping into Jadine's room, like the African woman in her dreams, and tried to insert his own dreams into hers—dreams of his folk community in Eloë, Florida—and "to breathe into her the smell of tar and its shiny consistency before he crept away [. . .]" (119-120). By day, he would hide "in the washhouse, in the trees, in the gazebo, down by the pond, in the toolshed, near the greenhouse" and bring "the soldier ants onto the property with his trail of foil paper containing flecks of chocolate that the ants loved and sought vigorously" (104).³² A trickster, like the Brer Rabbit character of the folk tales he heard as a child, he steals bottles of Evian water from under the nose of Valerian, with whom he later ingratiates himself, assuming the role of the ignorant, yet talented folksy negro, who knows how to get cyclamens to bloom, thus also revealing himself as a conjurer with a link to the natural world. That link becomes more apparent as Son and Jadine begin to interact regularly.

Repelled yet fascinated by Son, Jadine is strangely drawn to him, even after he

outrages her by referring to her as a white girl obsessed with the thought of rape, hinting at just how white her transparent consciousness has become. Feeling the same fear she felt when thinking of the African woman who pierced her with her look of contempt, she recognizes that “[h]e had jangled something in her that was so repulsive, so awful, and he had managed to make her feel that the thing that repelled her was not in him, but in her” (123). Having stirred her repressed passions, he brings back the memory of the beaten bitch in heat, despite her determination to keep the dogs at bay. Yet, her European sensibilities pervert her natural desires. Like a white mistress objectifying and commodifying a prized African buck, Jadine would later desire to call her New York girlfriends to “show him off: her fine frame, her stag, her man” (223). Characterized in this manner, Jadine, seeming to embrace blackness in the form of Son, temporarily defies Fanon’s description of the mulatto woman who, invested in the colonizer’s aesthetics and ideals, rejects black men for a white lover in order to feel more white (58). Yet, because Jadine perceives herself as equal to a white woman, she thinks, with regard to black sexuality, in the manner that Fanon attributes to white women: “The women among the whites, by a genuine process of induction, invariably view the Negro as the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations” (177). Julia V. Emberley insightfully points out that Morrison answers Fanon’s dismissal of black female subjectivity by characterizing the complex identity of a “transnational first-world black woman,” possessing the right “to think and desire” (428) and still working out her relationship to the diaspora. I believe Jadine’s subjectivity lies between Fanon and Emberley’s positions: she is a black woman who remains invested in European ideologies of status and the objectification of black bodies, but she subtly

yearns for a communal connection that the nations of Europe and even the U. S. have not been able to provide for her.

As with Avey and Lebert Joseph, Jadine slowly begins to share aspects of her life with Son, as he does with her. Revealing the fact that his rootedness stands in sharp contrast to her lack of roots, she names the three cities where she has lived: Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Paris (173). Like Avey, she cannot name her “people.” On a trip to the beach, she informs him that she is an orphan and that Valerian paid for her schooling (118-119). He then tells her of his “original dime,” earned with true satisfaction for “cleaning a tub of sheephead” (169), of the circumstances surrounding his murder of his wife (174-176), and of his hometown, with only caring black residents and its “yellow houses with white doors which women opened and shouted Come on in, you honey you! And the fat black ladies in white dresses minding the pie table in the basement of the church and white wet sheets flapping on a line, and the sound of a six-string plucked after supper while children scooped walnuts up off the ground [. . .]” (119). Later, he, like Lebert, informs Jadine of other characteristics of his folk culture, such as the folk tales of “The Monkey and the Lion” and “The Spider Goes to Market” (225); and he too causes time to stand still, as she becomes so mesmerized by his presence and by what he has to teach her.³³

While returning with Son from the beach of Isle des Chevaliers, Jadine, like Avey, must experience a distasteful cleansing. As their jeep rolls down the road back to the house, it runs out of gas. Sending Son to get fuel, Jadine remains behind and, with sketch pad and charcoal in hand, walks near an elegant circle of trees which she intends to sketch. Failing to perceive the lack of solidity of the ground, Jadine ends up sinking in

the tar-like consistency of a swamp. Seeing her distress, nature initially tries to help her; but, with her failure to appreciate the ancestors who commune with nature, nature rejects her as an unnatural child:

[As she sank, she] grabbed the waist of a tree which shivered in her arms and swayed as though it wished to dance with her. She struggled to lift her feet and sank an inch or two farther down into the moss-covered jelly. [. . .] The women hanging in the trees looked down at her. [. . .] She tightened her arms around the tree and it swayed as though it wished to dance with her. [. . .] Don't sweat or you'll lose your partner, the tree. Cleave together like lovers. Press together like man and wife. [. . .]

The young tree sighed and swayed. The women looked down from the rafters of the trees and stopped murmuring. They were delighted when first they saw her, thinking a runaway child had been restored to them. But upon looking closer they saw differently. This girl was fighting to get away from them. The women hanging from the trees were quiet now, but arrogant-mindful as they were of their value, their exceptional femaleness; knowing as they did that the first world of the world had been built with the sacred properties; that they alone could hold together stones of pyramids and the rushes of Moses's crib; knowing their steady consistency, their pace of glaciers, their permanent embrace, they wondered at the girl's desperate struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were. (182-183)

Jadine's experience with the swamp women, mythic beings who defy time and may be spirits of maroon women who "mate with the horsemen up in the hills" (184), represents her continued rejection of the African ancestral presence, as she chooses to sink further into the mire of cultural dissociation. Morrison casts the female ancestors who inhabit the swamp as maroon women in the same vein as Almeyda and Tituba. As with Jones and Conde, Morrison recognizes that these figures can influence present generations to take back the fight against colonial and national pressures to assimilate. Like the African woman in Paris, these spirits represent the transcendent power inherent in black women aware of their roots. As ancestor figures and protectors of the tar swamp, these spectral maroon women also represent the bonding ability inherent in their powers. Morrison

purposely deploys the image of the tar swamp, which is much like a thick soup, as a metaphor for bonding and nourishment. The swamp women extend their hands to Jadine in order to embrace her, buoy her in her movement into a diasporic Dutch pot, and protect her from being burned by the flames of the discomfiting, material/national ideals in which she has invested. In characterizing the rejection of the swamp women by Jadine, the “tar baby,” as a rejection of the diaspora that will continue to produce a feeling of unsettledness, Morrison advances that continued identification with the material/national over the ancestral/transnational can only result in a persistent sense of alienation.³⁴ Unlike Avey, Jadine has failed to complete this critical rite of passage toward cultural wholeness by way of an embrace of the transnational/diasporic space of identification represented by the tar swamp. This failure signals her eventual rejection of Son, of his community, of her own family, and eventually of her own roots.

As Rosalie Parvay did for Avey, Son, as Jadine’s lover, also attempts to perform a healing rite on her body. First, after he enters her room unannounced, as she models her sealskin coat for herself in the mirror, and looks at the photos of her that she shows him, he grabs her and pins her to him, after she began beating him for insinuating that she used her body sexually to achieve career success. He smelled her and “pressed his loins as far as he could into the muted print of her Madeira skirt” (122). Later, at the beach, he “[p]ut his forefinger on her sole and held it and held it and held it there” (179), until she protested. Finally, when their bodies unite fully in her bedroom upstairs in Valerian’s house, he brings her to orgasmic release, as he makes her feel like a celestial star—one of those stars that throbs until, “when they can’t throb anymore, when they can’t hold it anymore, they fall out of the sky” (214), overcome by the power of their “drumming.”³⁵

Unfortunately, the communion that should follow Jadine's "healing" is marked by contention and division. This is ironically played out most intensely as the family is supposed to be celebrating the season of Christ's birth, which is usually equated with peace. Waiting for Valerian's absent son, Michael, who, like Christ, remains the unseen guest, scheduled to arrive for the holiday, the household prepares the "sacred elements," though the communion table will be tainted by the confessed sins of its occupants and by Son's response to those sins.³⁶ The sin that most desecrates the table involves Valerian's ill treatment of his servants. The reality of the modern-day slavery and neo-colonial oppression of this household comes to a head when at dinner Valerian announces that he has fired the native servants, ~~These~~ These and Gideon, for pilfering apples which they were sent to retrieve from the neighboring island.³⁷

Outraged, all of those who have been relegated to the margins of Valerian's "nation" attack its self-appointed ruler. Son is especially influenced to retaliate with a black nationalist counter-response. The island folk myth of the blind maroons, told to him by their descendents, ~~These~~ These and Gideon, reenters Son's memory and reminds him of the importance of remembering, upholding, and defending the ancestor, as those riders had done for their community: "Somewhere in the back of Son's mind one hundred black men on one hundred unshod horses rode blind and naked through the hills and had done so for hundreds of years. [. . .] They had floated in strange waters blind, but they were still there racing each other for sport in the hills behind this white man's house" (206). The image of maroons on horseback here function as a metaphor for reconnection with community and even with self, as Son identifies with the outrage over white exploitation and control that the maroons must have felt. In confronting Valerian, Son

assumes the role of Shango, an “eternal moral presence, rumbling in the clouds, outraged by impure human acts, targeting the homes of adulterers, liars, and thieves for destruction” (Thompson 85). The critiques expressed by Son, Ondine, and Sydney of the white island nation set up by Valerian destabilizes the boundaries of that nation, as those marginalized by its neo-colonial system of exploitation become aware of their marginalization and demand recognition. Moreover, Son’s identification with the horsemen further alters the boundaries of the nation, extending them temporally into the past of slavery and colonialism and spatially into the arena of the transnational, linking several black subjectivities from various places of origin under one powerful move of resistance against national pressure. With this movement, formerly isolated members of the Dutch pot diaspora become seasoned in the space of the island nation, as the pot begins to boil.

Leaving the Street household in disarray, Son chooses to escape the island and journey back to the U. S. with Jadine.³⁸ Son soon becomes determined to “unorphan” Jadine, to give her a sense of fulfillment with regard to roots. Functioning as Babaluaye, he decides to cure her cultural illness. But he risks being ensnared by this “tar baby,” whom he later names as such for conforming to European standards and for refusing to embrace her ancestors. Ironically, Jadine “appears as committed to rescuing Son from the poverty and dependency that she identifies in Eloë, as he is to rescuing her from servitude to an exploitative capitalist system” (Paquet 511). Thus, “while the household thrives on Jadine’s presence, it cannot accommodate Son and Jadine as polar opposites at the same time” (509). As potential Oshun figures, they are easily attracted to one another but markedly different in the application of the goddess’s attributes. Both assume

Oshun's primary function, to tie all things (and people) together in some way (Thompson 82). They share one of Oshun's colors, green (Teish 115): his last name is Green; and her shortened name is Jade, as in the rare green gem. The two spend much time in the bedroom, a place often associated with Oshun. Both are sexually alluring and highly independent. Finally, they both escape to an island, surrounded by water, the realm of this water goddess. However, as in the relationship between Avey and Lebert, it becomes clear that Son, due to his maintenance of a connection with his community, is the far stronger figure.³⁹ As a result, he, like Lebert, can demand that they both escape to his native community. So, after "the physical escape from the [island] plantation" (*Tar Baby* 219) and a sojourn in New York, the urban plantation, Son and Jadine set a course for Eloë, which will represent another crossroads experience for Jadine.

As Jadine sleeps with Son in the crossroads site of their bedroom in Eloë, she is confronted by the spirits of significant black female ancestor figures, who cause her to feel inauthentic once again. All, except the African woman holding eggs, hold out their breasts and show them to her, as if seeking to impress upon her the need to nourish her community as it has attempted to nourish her.⁴⁰ Seen last and still holding her eggs, the African woman communicates the final warning. Again failing to understand the meaning behind her dreams, Jadine responds, "I have breasts too" (258), as if that will convince them that she is the legitimate woman they would like for her to be. Unlike Avey, she is not made whole again by the intervention of these ancestors and incarnated deities, for she again refuses their transnational embrace. The offering of their breasts and Son's intimate presence fail to resurrect her from her entombment in cultural exile. Feeling more uneasy than ever, Jadine, the "prodigal daughter" (276), leaves Son and

returns to her island retreat. In disarray, the household of Isle des Chevaliers has no reason to celebrate the holiday season or Jadine's return. In contrast to Avey, Jadine refuses to supplicate those closest to her. She only offers to take her relatives back to France with her, as their situation with Valerian is now precarious. However, she is not really serious; and Ondine knows this. Finally functioning as a potential Yemaya figure, Ondine recognizes that she has culturally failed Jadine as a mother-figure by focusing on the material rather than the familial and the communal. She decides then to teach her "child" something now, even if it is too late. In her mind, there is still something to be learned. Her message to Jadine is Morrison's message to all who refuse to engage the ancestor and to recognize others of the diaspora and who pursue complete independence over the community:

"Jadine, a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man—good enough even for the respect of other women. [. . .] You don't need your own natural mother to be a daughter. All you need is to feel a certain kind of way, a certain careful way about people older than you are. [. . .] A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her. [. . .] What I want from you is what I want for you. I don't want you to take care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours."⁴¹ (281)

Continuing to be plagued by lack of insight and discernment with regard to the meaning behind the messages given to her by ancestor figures, Jadine interprets her aunt's words as a plea to take care of her and her uncle, to "parent" them, which she refuses to do. Failing to realize that the message is not about parenting but about honoring for the purpose of sustaining and elevating both the self, the ancestor, and the community, she is convinced that her individual life and the lives of her "parents" are and must remain mutually exclusive.

For Jadine, the dictates of community are too restrictive for the lifestyle she chooses to lead and for the material/national ideals she feels she must pursue. Not wanting what she perceives as the repressive “safety” of the community, she reasons that “[s]he *was* the safety she longed for.”⁴² With that, she leaves Isle des Chevaliers with her sealskin coat and five pieces of luggage, symbols of her choice once again of the material/European world over the familial/diasporic one. Still unclear about her identity and her relationship to the diaspora, Jadine only manages to produce “sixteen answers to the question What went wrong?” But “[h]aving sixteen answers meant having none” (290); and memories of the African woman in yellow and of Son continue to linger within her. It would appear that, as Julia V. Emberley notes, “Jadine’s success in dislodging herself from the roots of identity, from poverty, from multicultural ideologies of authenticity, nevertheless leaves traces of an unresolved dimension in her first-world experience as a black woman [. . .]” (423).

An abandoned Son is left in a state of confusion. The two lovers, at odds from the beginning, are not meant to remain together, due to their dichotomous, nationalist ideologies, represented by the narrator’s rhetorical statements: “Each was pulling the other away from the maw of hell—its very ridge top. Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save a race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing?” (269).⁴³ In the failed attempt to unorphan Jadine, he becomes “infected” by his companion’s rootlessness. The result of it is a blindness to the danger which she represents to his own maintenance of cultural connections, for he considers abandoning them for her.⁴⁴ Thus, he returns to Isle des

Chevaliers in pursuit of her. Yet, a hint to his salvation is found in the fact that “he is too full of his own past to be emptied by Jadine” (Holloway, “African Values and Western Chaos” 125).

Thése, who flouts the nationalistic hierarchies of the island’s foreign inhabitants, as her ancestors did, and an extremely powerful figure for Legba, Yemaya and Oshun, due to her machinations while guiding Son back to the island, her “magic breasts” (289) that “go on giving” (154), and her desire to tie Son with his cultural heritage, refuses to let him pursue a path of destruction. Instead, she hopes to lead him to the safety of her ancestors in mythic marronage. Having identified Jadine as a woman who has lost her “ancient properties” (305) and Son as a lost member (son) of the collective of blind horsemen, she is determined to take him to the crossroads of the river, where she believes he may find salvation for himself and his ancestral roots: “Reconnection with the copper Venus [Jadine] is not what Thése has in mind when, as water lady, she ferries Son in a heavy fog to the uninhabited side of [the island] to join the island’s mythic race of black horsemen” (Paquet 512-513).⁴⁵ Metaphorically blinded by Jadine’s allure and now groping in the dark to find his way back to the house where it all began, he may need to become literally blind, like the horsemen, in order to renew his spirit and to sense once again the presence of those ancestral riders who await his return to them. Purposely misled by Thése, Son is confused and resistant, as he begins the journey back. It appears, however, that the spirit of those maroons have fused with his, as they welcome him home:

[. . . H]e took a few tentative steps. The pebbles made him stumble and so did the roots of trees. He threw out his hands to guide and steady his going. By and by he walked steadier, now steadier. The mist lifted and the trees stepped back a bit as if to make the way easier for *a certain kind*

of man. Then he ran. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Looking neither to the left nor to the right. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Lickety-lickety-lickety-split. (*Tar Baby* 306, emphasis mine)

While the words “lickety-split” come directly from the tar baby tale, they also resemble the sound of hoofbeats, as a horseman rides away at a quicker and quicker pace. Horse, rider, and spirit have become one to allow a lost child to return to his people, as Son appears to hear and respond to the hoofbeats of history and to the call of transnational ancestors with whom he most identifies. He will become the hero in his own mythic quest. Yet, “[u]nlike the traditional questing myth, the guide [Son], not the hero [Jadine], is triumphant at the end. . . . He has escaped the tar baby and is free to return to nature or the ‘earth mother’ to live with the mythical reality of blindness rather than the historical reality of clear vision” (Mobley 166). Sandra Pouchet Paquet sums up the situation well:

If Son is exactly where he wants to be, where he was born and raised as the Tar Baby tale tells us, then he is well poised to renew the phallic⁴⁶ quest of the blind horsemen. The novel ends as it began. Son, repository of ancestral resonance, avatar of the trickster as hero, and would-be pastoral lover to Jadine’s Chloe, may be running blind, but Brer Rabbit is a survivor and he is on home turf in the briar patch that is Isle de Chevaliers.⁴⁷ (513)

Conclusion: Divesting from the Material/National, Investing in the Ancestral/Transnational

The question of what ultimately happens to the main characters discussed here remains unanswered. With Son, the signs seem to point to him having joined the mythic horsemen and becoming the subject of a new folk myth, thus existing outside of national configurations that seek to dictate black subjectivity. With Avey, there is the strong belief that she has become a folk teller, passing on the wisdom of her great-aunt Cuney, the story of the Ibos, her own mythic tale of redemption, and the transnational

identification she now claims. Jadine's fate, however, is still unclear, for she is still quite young and the possibilities for her life still numerous. Still caught between her investment in European national ideals and the transnational/diasporic energy that continues to attract her, she will continue to seek answers to her questions. However, she has the tools to resolve those queries, given to her in the lessons taught by Son and Ondine, and the time to engage the "too much" of the African woman in yellow and the "diaspora mothers" (*Tar Baby* 288). As Morrison states, "She now knows enough—she hasn't opened the door, but she knows where the door is" (Taylor-Guthrie 108). At the stage where Avey was several decades ago, there is the possibility for cultural reclamation, though Jadine must learn to appreciate her African roots and to embrace her identity as a "daughter," not just of her adoptive parents, but of a transnational, diasporic community, as well.

In writing *Praisesong for the Widow* and *Tar Baby*, Marshall and Morrison communicate that there exists an interconnectedness among African peoples of the diaspora—a connection marked by certain historical and cultural features that transcend national boundaries—and that this sense of a transnational community is the basis for the survival of its individual members. In creating a psychic link between the present and the past in the lives of the characters, Marshall and Morrison reveal the continued effect of history on the modern lives of individuals of African descent, who must negotiate the contemporary slave system fueled by modern national configurations and Western capitalism, which threatens to destroy indigenous cultural values and to replace those values with an overwhelming desire for material possession at the cost of self and

community. These authors warn of the great possibility of becoming culturally indistinguishable, as a result of assimilation into the neo-plantation complex.

Marshall and Morrison suggest, through their characters' actions, a regular renewal of the cultural self by way of a "flight" away from the world of the material/national and into the realm of the ancestor/transnational. Their texts warn us of the potential danger of not valuing a relationship with an ancestor figure and with the larger diasporic community. Both *Praisesong for the Widow* and *Tar Baby* imply that the maintenance of such relationships may indeed make more abundant the lives of the "daughters" and "sons" who remain in exile from the rest of the diaspora or who teeter on the edge of it. They offer a vision of community that suggests that, while the Dutch pot diaspora of the Americas is affected by the heat of material/national influences, the nearby presence of an ancestor may keep the constitutive elements of a transnational soup from being scorched by the fires of modernity.

Chapter Four

Toward a Black Liberatory Feminism:

Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Luz Argentina Chiriboga's *Bajo la Piel de los Tambores*

The body thereby becomes a text on which pain can be read as a necessary physical step on the road to a higher moral state, a destiny, or a way of being. This in turn reveals a radical transformation (generally considered positive) in the initial state of the individual or her community.

—Françoise Lionnet, "Inscriptions of Exile"

Hija de las aguas marinas,
dormida en sus entrañas,
renazco de la pólvora
que un rifle guerrillero
esparció en la montaña
para que el mundo renaciera a su vez

(Daughter of the ocean waters,
sleeping in its womb,
I am reborn from the gunpowder
that a guerrilla rifle
disperses over the mountain
so that the world may be reborn in its time)

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—Nancy Morejón, *Renacimiento*

The relationship of individuals to communities informs much of the literature written by black women in the late twentieth century. Additionally, many of those writers are also concerned with the effects of patriarchy and heteronormativity on the psychological condition of black communities in nations whose foundations rest on such restrictive ideologies. These writers often characterize the illness that results from these features in terms of their effect on black women's bodies. Writers such as Erna Brodber and Luz Argentina Chiriboga, for example, focus attention on black female subordination, erasure, and censoring. They are particularly concerned with combating "[m]ysogynist thought [that] has commonly found a convenient self-justification for women's secondary social positions by containing them within bodies that are represented, even constructed, as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control" (Grosz 13-14).

Specifically characterizing black women's oppression in terms of male privilege and discourses of repression and domesticity, Brodber's *Myal* and Chiriboga's *Bajo la Piel de los Tambores* critique the patriarchal cultures of the Americas and the social mores

which perpetuate the subjugation of the black female and her community. The protagonists of their novels offer a conception of the black woman as more than just a body to be objectified, but as an individual, connected to her community, pursuing agency, and resisting the restrictions of societal conventions. In characterizing their struggles, Brodber and Chiriboga signify on specific African folk practices and key aspects of liberation theology in order to suggest ways in which women of the African diaspora in the Americas may resist the male gaze. Black women in their texts achieve empowerment through psychological and spiritual processes of cleansing and interactions with spirits of the enslaved in the form of already empowered ancestor figures. They ultimately redefine themselves through community and history, rather than through limiting nationalist ideologies, such as patriarchy. Through their representations of the black female body, Brodber and Chiriboga tell the story of the transformation of the black female subject as she grapples with patriarchy and of her community as it too is altered by her struggle.

Both Brodber and Chiriboga use their works as polemical tools in order to propose activist agendas within the space of the African diaspora of the Americas. The intersections of race, gender, and diaspora in their fiction express their desire to engage in political and social interventions that will move beyond the stasis of imperialistic, male-dominated narratives of nation. Trained in Jamaica as a sociologist, Brodber purposely engages issues related to the perception of black women in the Americas and the dynamics of communal formation. Of her work, she insists, “My sociological effort and therefore the fiction that serves it [. . .] has activist intentions” (“Fiction in the Scientific Procedure” 164). She goes further by articulating her perspective on the difference between her methodology of fiction writing and that of a historian:

What conclusively separates these works (fiction) from history is the relations of the writer's 'I' to his data. While the historian, having collected his data, leaves them to move logically to a conclusion, the creative writer can impose his own sense of justice, his own feelings upon the data and guide them to a conclusion which accords with his prejudice. ("Oral Sources" 4)

Chiriboga too is concerned with animating history with a "sense of justice," as she uses her literature to articulate the challenges of inhabiting the ontological spaces of blackness and femaleness in the Americas. Like Brodber, Chiriboga is specifically interested in revising the history of the nation in order to achieve justice for black subjects in general and for black women in particular. As a writer from Ecuador, she seeks to shed light on the cultural contributions made by those of African descent. She says of her purpose in writing,

[. . .] I write in order to defend our natural resources. I write because I am committed to my race; I write in order to unmask white historians who deny the significance of the contributions of Afro-Ecuadorians in the Wars of Independence, of those people who fought side by side with Simón Bolívar for our freedom [from Spain]. I write in order to emphasize the fact that peoples of African descent also have contributed to the development of our country. (Beane, "Chiriboga: A Conversation" 81-82)

Chiriboga is particularly interested in the intersections of "el machismo" and racism and their visceral effects on black women's bodies and psyches. She describes herself as a feminist who aides "las masas femeninas a tener su propia voz y un decidido protagonismo social y politico" (the female masses in having their own voice and a decidedly social and political protagonism). She also speaks of her role as a writer of African descent in terms of the creation and elevation of diasporic subjectivity within Latin America: "[. . . U]na de mis funciones es elevar la auto-estima de los afro-ecuatorianos y el de sentirse orgullosos de sus ancestros y reafirmar su identidad; que olviden su posición de inferioridad, consecuencia de los años de opresión cultural a la que ha

sido sometido” (One of my functions is to elevate the self-esteem of Afro-Ecuadorians and the feeling of pride in their ancestors and to reaffirm their identity; that they forget their position of inferiority, the result of years of cultural oppression to which they have been subjected) (Seales Soley 64).

The activist aims of Brodber and Chiriboga are distinguished from other political agendas, such as mainstream feminism or black nationalism, in that they are rooted in cultural practices that elevate all of the members of the diasporic community, including women and those individuals who are not easily “read” as ethnic. Their aim reflects a type of cultural domino theory, by which one member’s “fall” affects the health and growth of the entire community. Thus, their fiction enacts Patricia Hill Collins’ definition of black feminism: “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (39). Critic Carolyn Denard expands upon the definition offered by Collins:

Among black women, who have historically suffered oppression because of both race and gender, there is usually a simultaneous concern for both these issues. They abhor both sexist and racist oppression. But because of their minority ethnic status, which keeps their allegiance to ancestral group foremost, they shun an advocacy to of the kind of political, existential feminism embraced by many women of the majority culture. For black women, their concern with feminism is usually more group-centered than self-centered, more cultural than political. As a result, they tend to be concerned more with the particular female cultural values of their own ethnic group rather than with those of women in general. They advocate what may be termed ethnic cultural feminism. (171-72)

This ethnic cultural feminism complicates isolated notions of race, nation, and gender difference by revealing their intersections. Such a feminism actually places the above categories into dialogue with one another in order to reach a humanist formulation as a way out of the trap of privileging any one of them. The black cultural feminism

advocated by Brodber and Chiriboga expresses this aim, in that it enacts a model of communal liberation from oppression vis-à-vis the transformation of the black female.

Though literary and cultural critics recognize the feminist poetics inherent in the works of black women writers like Brodber and Chiriboga, they wholly fail to link the polemics with the practice of liberation characterized within their texts. The works of Brodber, Chiriboga, and others are charged with issues of liberation and spirituality. The spiritual considerations go further than mere rendering of religious practices or models of existential ways of being in the world. They represent what literary critic Melvin Rahming refers to as a “critical theory of spirit,” by which certain presences function outside of time and operate “on individual, communal and cross-cultural levels to release human beings (and, by extension, human institutions) from the spiritual paralysis of essentialist and materialist ideologies” (Rahming, par. 3). Yet, even Rahming does not go far enough in his explication of this paradigm, for at the root of this poetics of liberation is a signification on the tenets of liberation theology.

Often associated with the Third World and the postcolonial condition, liberation theology has become a global phenomenon, claimed by dispossessed persons to whom its message of freedom from oppression and struggle rings a resonant chord. In *A Place in the Sun*, Dutch theologian Theo Witvliet critiques Western notions of spirituality by emphasizing its debilitating adaptation to modernity and its progeny, the nation, or “to the modern consciousness which developed out of the Enlightenment and which coincides historically with the growth of bourgeois capitalist society.” He notes that the distinct difference of a spiritual practice based on liberation theology is that its central focus is on those whom nations have labelled historically, due to gender, race, or class, as

“non-person[s],” or “those without possessions” (26), including self-possession. He argues that spiritual liberation practices have embedded within them a “deep awareness that the liberation of classes, races or groups can never be complete without the liberation of *all* people” (40). He emphasizes that much of the work of liberation theology takes place in the “underground” (111), a physical and/or metaphysical space at the margins of nations and/or national thought where a counter-culture of care exists to elevate the dispossessed from a position of non-person to a position of subject so that the community at large may be strengthened.¹

If we marry these notions of black cultural feminism, of spirit, and of liberation theology, I posit that we will, in effect, produce what I term a black liberatory feminism, by which a humanist vision of the black community is instantiated through the “underground” metaphysical transformation and political activism of its female members. This type of feminism resembles Alice Walker’s notion of “womanism.” The terms “black feminism” and “womanism” may be used interchangeably; for, as Walker herself says, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (xii). However, what I term black liberatory feminism marks its difference from womanism exactly because of its signification on liberation theology, its movement away from U.S.-centered formulations, and its diasporic implications. A black liberatory feminism may be deployed in spaces where “[r]eligion and postcolonialism, as disciplines, meet on an awkward threshold; one is confronting its own Western ideologies, while the other is deconstructing Western ideologies” (Darroch 206). Focusing on its potential for inclusion of various cultural, religious, spiritual, and metaphysical practices, it “makes space for a more heteronomous framework that embraces the powerful religious bodies throughout the diaspora”

(Darroch 206).

In addition to their signification on metaphysics, black women writers particularly focus on the liberation of the black female. The black female is significant to diasporic formulations, for her body has been implicated in late twentieth century nationalist discourses regarding the progression of the black community in various nations of the Americas. Such discourses render the black female body as an object of gratification and/or as a biological conduit of citizens of imagined, future nations. Writers such as Brodber and Chiriboga offer an alternative vision of the potential of the black female once liberated from such nationalist constraints. In counter-narratives such as Brodber's *Myal* and Chiriboga's *Bajo la Piel de los Tambores* the liberated black female births a new discourse of nation that will become part of the stock used to thicken the discursive transnational soup of the Dutch pot diaspora of the Americas.

Myal: The “Spirit Thievery” of Empire, the Frontier Space of Nation, and the Other Half That Has Never Been Told

Erna Brodber's *Myal* concerns itself with the effects of colonization and racial and cultural miscegenation on the rural community of Grove Town in the St. Thomas Parish of Jamaica in the second decade of the twentieth century. The village has consumed itself with the problem of what to do about the seemingly psychosomatic illness of the mulatta Ella O'Grady, who returns to the village after having “tripped out in foreign” (4). Unlike other villages, Grove Town is “not a peripheral site threatened, like all margins, by the imperialist expansion of the centre, but is a centre that has always defined itself against its enemies” (Kortenaar 52). Thus, a disruption that appears to be linked to the encroachment of cultural imperialism in the form of elusive bodies and

ideologies is met with alarm and an immediate call to action. The people of Grove Town react to the disruption of the equilibrium of their community by calling upon Mass Cyrus, a conjurer, to aid them in healing the body of the young woman, who remains trapped in a catatonic state. His private musings on the situation reflect the need of the town's people to confront not only an attack on one of its members but also the changing nature of its racial and social dynamic:

“These new people,” his score was saying, “these in-between colours people, these trained-minded people play the percussions so loud and raucous, the wee small babe could know they feared the tune. Now, if they think of worms and black boil, why come to me? I am not that kind of doctor. No. They know it is something else, that only I can handle yet they come blasting my ears and shaking my etheric with their clashing cymbals. This discord could shake a man out of his roots.”

In tune with nature's harmonious melodies, Mass Cyrus can sense the discordant notes of the misalignment of spirits with nature. Thus, he laments the failure of his people to perceive what he apprehends quite well. They seek material cures for what they view as a physical ailment. However, Ella O'Grady's sickness is of a metaphysical/spiritual nature; her “in-between colours” self is caught in the in-between of national, racial, and social epistemologies whose war with one another has left her almost devoid of life. As a symbol of the larger community's illness, she will function as the catalyst that allows for transformation of all. But, as Mass Cyrus notes, “Curing the body is nothing. Touching the peace of those she must touch and those who must touch her is the hard part. And you can't do that unless you can touch their spirits” (Brodber 1).

Deemed sensitive and intelligent by others, Ella's lineage and upbringing conspire to frame her as the locus of communal tension. Born of a black mother and Irish father, a police officer in the parish who abandoned mother and child because he could not cope

with the sea of blackness in the countryside, Ella became the town's "alabaster baby." Though her maternal grandparents descended from the Moors, the village people still viewed Ella and her family members as strange, especially since the grandparents would "skin-up pon Kumina"² and its drums and only attend services at the established church (7). The "long face, thin lip, pointed nose souls in a round face, thick lip, big eye country" appeared out of place (8); and Ella's near-white body only added to the strangeness, acting as a "conduit for a range of superstitions, jealousies and anxieties" (Narain 108). Her church recitation of a Rudyard Kipling poem about the expanse of the English empire garners her the attention of Maydene Brassington, a white English woman with a third eye of spiritual insight, despite being married to the "spirit-thieving" Methodist minister in charge of the parish. Though Reverend Brassington is also of mixed heritage, his austere desire to "exorcise [the folk practices of the people] and replace [them with 'holiness']" (Brodber 18) disconcerts enough people, including his own wife, as to facilitate division. With that in mind, Amy Holness, a friend of Ella's mother, demands to know of Maydene the Brassington's intentions in apprenticing Ella.

The negotiation over possession of Ella's body ironically takes place at the Cross Roads, signifying on the mediation of death and life (the death of Ella's marginal status in the countryside and her new life under the Brassington's tutelage) and the translation of bodies that occurs in a space marked by the sign of a cross. The name also alerts the reader to the presence of a Legba figure, Maydene, who, as a white woman married to a black Jamaican, straddles the worlds of the colonized and the colonizer, and who will operate as a trickster in helping to facilitate Ella's ultimate liberation. Her negotiation with Amy Holness foreshadows the claiming of Ella's body by her eventual husband,

Selwyn Langley, who completes the imperialist possession of Ella that the Brassingtons, though well-intentioned, began. It also foreshadows Maydene's final reclamation of Ella's traumatized body from Selwyn for the purpose of the young woman's healing and the growth of the community. This crossroads initiates a discourse of nation that will reflect the anxieties and potentialities of the larger nation in its desire to come into being as it grapples with imperial ideologies, racial constitution, and newly emerging national ideologies that run counter to imperial ones.

Hinting at Ella's subsequent demise, the narrator describes her husband Selwyn's character and lineage in terms of white privilege, landed inheritance, and imperialist tendencies:

If Selwyn had been born in eighteenth or nineteenth century Britain and of upper class parentage, he would have been called a black sheep. He would have been sent off to Jamaica and would have met Ella O'Grady and chosen her from among his stock to be his housekeeper. He would have given her two children, made his fortune and returned to England as an ordinary sheep ready for his rightful place in the fold there and she would have been left with a small consideration, and her children, with what she could make of it, along with their very profitable skin colour.
(42)

The narrator is clear in noting that a mere accident of birth placed Selwyn in the wrong social strata, but that his disposition has been groomed to enact the upper class values and colonial desires of the British nation. Despite his working class origins, Selwyn's subsequent inheritance of the Langley empire of herbal medicines and techniques and his attempts to expand that empire through the production of motion pictures frames him in terms of imperialist measures.

When Ella travels to the U. S. and shares her stories of her place of birth and emphasizes her Jamaican difference, Selwyn, as the colonizer apprenticing the colonized,

educates her about her true racial status and its implications. As the narrator explains, “It was Selwyn who explained to her in simple terms that she was coloured, mulatto and what that meant, taking her innocence with her hymen in return for guidance through the confusing fair that was America” (43). His objectification of Ella as an exoticized white woman and his desire to remake her as such reflect Ann Stoler’s reading of the intersections of colonial desire and imperialism. As she states, “sexual control was more than a convenient metaphor for colonial domination. It was a fundamental class and racial marker implicated in a wider set of relations of power” (Stoler 45). Selwyn’s understanding of these relations of power allows him to claim Ella’s body as a site of creation for his progeny, a minstrel representation entitled *Caribbean Nights and Days* that “grievously misrepresents Grove Town as a tropical heart of darkness against which white America can constitute itself” (Kortenaar 65). These relations of power play out in Selwyn’s revision of Ella’s life story through the negation of her black roots and the emphasis on her Irish lineage. As the British had done through the Jamaican education system, Selwyn reconstructs the history of the colonized in order to stave off the emergence of an independent consciousness. Ella, as symbol of colonized Jamaicans and of the emerging Jamaican nation, reflects the difficulty of the colonized in resisting imperial power with an alternative construction of nation that has not yet found articulation. Selwyn’s acquisition of further power in order to expand his empire rests on how successful he is in reinventing Ella as an exotic white woman whose body and spirit he may possess. As with all colonial rule, the identity of the colonized must recede in order to facilitate the normalization of imperial power, and Selwyn becomes determined to normalize his control over Ella.

Selwyn's claim to inheritance and imperial power are most clearly embodied in his plans for his coon show, based on Ella's stories of conjuration, spirit possession, and folk ways of being in Grove Town. Having already constructed a metaphorical partition between herself and the black people of her village, who always kept her at a distance due to her racial difference, Ella ambivalently celebrates her Jamaican culture while allowing herself to be inserted into spaces of whiteness in order to fulfill her longing for identification with the characters of colonial literature that she has read. When Selwyn enters her life, she willingly offers herself and her life story to him. Upon marrying Selwyn, Ella begins to lose herself, so much so that, though she can narrate her experience, she too becomes complicit in the objectification of her culture:

Selwyn had indeed propelled himself through the gauze partition and into Ella's carnate past. After a couple of months of marriage there was no gauze at all and Ella seemed to be draining perpetually. And the draining brought clarity so that Ella could, after a time, see not only mammy Mary and them people clearly but she could see things around them. She could show him the star-apple tree. (*Myal* 81)

Being "shown" a star-apple tree through someone's imagination is not the same as actually engaging the tree with one's own senses. This is what Selwyn misses and what Ella cannot impart to him. Hence, his insulting hybridization of her narrative reflects the taint in the star-apple of her imagination and his skewed perception of her native land.

Though Ella does possess an "indigenous narrative"³ to counter the colonial narratives in which she immerses herself, her marginalized status within the predominantly black community of Grove Town, her miseducation under her apprenticeship with the Brassingtons, and her misrecognition of the deeper cultural signifiers inherent in the folk practices and beliefs of the village people all leave her vulnerable to the influence of Selwyn, who slowly robs her spirit of that which marked

her difference. Drained of her limited understanding of her culture, Ella is erased and redrawn as part of Selwyn's exotic narrative creation; and "now there exist[ed] a version of her self outside herself in Selwyn's racist imagination" (Kortenaar 65). Selwyn's new colonial narrative, the child produced from his rape of Ella's imagination, is the version that remains outside herself; "[b]ut she wanted to make something inside, not outside of it" (*Myal* 82). Ignorant of Selwyn's use of prophylactics and other birth control measures, yet longing to bear a child to fill the loneliness created by her husband, Ella demands to be shown "how to fill the spaces he had created and give her too, a chance to create [. . .]" (82). Instead of filling the space he created, Selwyn completely divests her of her sense of self and of reality by taking her to see their bastard child, the fetishistic play based on her personal narrative, and by expressing his plans to translate the text into film. Insensitive to Ella's plight, "[h]e of course was a man on the make, a man of success who could not now be stopped: Ella's spirit and with it that of Grove Town would be locked into celluloid for the world to see for ages on end" (92). With that, Ella's complete disassociation from all she knows manifests itself in her zombification and in the swelling of her womb, which must be purged of its toxic growth in order to bring about healing for Ella and for the community that tenuously claims her.

As Ella succumbs to Selwyn's spirit thievery, her adopted mother Maydene senses that her surrogate daughter's spirit has been troubled and enlists the aid of Mass Cyrus, who demands that the Brassingtons and the community rally together for Ella's healing. In this moment of crisis, Maydene discovers another self within her, an ancient myal spirit,⁴ named White Hen and of African origin, that communes with other myal spirits who inhabit Mass Cyrus; Miss Gatha Paisley, leader of the Kumina tabernacle; the

Reverend Musgrave Simpson, the Baptist minister; and Ole African, another healer.⁵ Just as Ella's illness is pivotal to the unification of the community, so too does the syncretic union of the individuals possessed by myal spirits facilitate the community's growth and progression from colonized village to symbol of an emerging, independent nation. This syncretic improvisation encourages a movement "toward the excavation of spiritual substrata that can attest to a commonality of feeling and purpose that transcends religious differences" (Rahming, par. 13). Moreover, it allows for the heterogeneous resistance and shortcircuiting of "monolithic discourses of colonization, spirit thievery, and patriarchy that suppress otherness" (Smyth 12). Syncretism signals the presence of a transnational soup that has begun the process of a slow and steady boil in the microcosm of the diasporic Dutch pot of an emerging Jamaican nation. Maydene, as symbol of a mixture of a new British liberalism and a creolised sensibility, is especially important to this progression, for "Maydene finds it difficult to meet the people of Grove Town across the lines drawn by race and speech until spirit communion allows her to transcend the body" (Kortenaar 56).⁶ She then becomes the catalyst for the repairing of the breach in Ella's psyche and in the community. It is Maydene who urges her husband, Reverend Simpson, and Ella to traverse the racial, religious, and epistemological divides that have separated so many and to engage in a new, anti-imperialist discourse of liberation and nation formation.

Ella's healing, marked by the passing of a foul-smelling grey mass from her body, is accompanied by a greater clarity, distinct from the false clarity she felt she possessed while under Selwyn's imperialist gaze. As she assumes the role of teacher of A class children of the village, she begins to critique for the first time the imperialist narratives

which she has learned and is expected to impart to the children. A particular narrative about farm animals (Percy the chick, Master Willie the pig, Mr. Dan the dog and their friends—names shared by the myal spirits, incidentally) especially strikes her as problematic. In consultation with Reverend Simpson, she expresses her concern that the animals are treated as “sub-normals who have no hope of growth”; that the children “are invited into complicity”; and that the writer “has robbed his characters of their possibilities,” has “[d]ismissed the existence within them of that in-born guiding light,” and has “left them to run around like half-wits, doing what the master has in store for them” (*Myal* 97, 106). In her critique of the story, Ella finally recognizes that such narratives, sent to islands such as Jamaica by European educational authorities, function as colonial master narratives with imperialist metaphors meant to steal the spirits of generations of colonized individuals through the written word. Such stories operate as hegemonic texts in order to maintain the meta-narrative of empire that they reflect. Hence, Ole African’s refrain that “the half has never been told”⁷ is accurate, as the other half of the story, from the perspective of the colonized, is not reflected in these seemingly innocuous stories for children, who will be most affected by such narratives and who will perpetuate their implicit message by way of pedagogical indoctrination.

Ella’s intervention in the pedagogical space of the community sparks a new vision, for “[. . .] through pedagogical action, Ella is empowered to empower others like herself” (Oczkowitz 148). Reverend Simpson/Dan, perceiving that Ella’s healing is almost complete, begins to articulate this change in his subsequent communion with the other myal spirits:

— Percy, Willie, she is thinking. Did you hear her? — Then he sniffed the air and jumped around some more, muttering behind

- clenched teeth.
- There is hope. There is hope. There is hope. Willie, my job can be done. —
 - Calm yourself, Dan — Willie said.
 - But Willie, — Dan said — you heard her. How can I be calm? Has she not seen two things in one? The two first principles of spirit thievery — let them feel that there is nowhere for them to grow to. Stunt them. Percy and Master Willie stunted. Let them see their brightest ones as dumbest ever. Alienate them. Percy and Master Willie must be separated, be made to play... —
 - The coon, the buffoon — Percy came in. Perce the kind, lit in.
 - And where is that little cat choked on foreign? — Dan was happy. He just watched him with a smile on his face. The man understood.
- (98)

Animated by the notes and lyrics of resistance of the slave spiritual “Let My People Go,” Reverend Simpson/Dan recognizes that the “little cat choked on foreign” is no longer afraid to speak and will write back to the empire in order to resist zombification. As he pushes Ella further in her critique of the writer of the children’s book, Reverend Simpson questions her: “But does he force you to teach without this awareness? Need your voice say what his says?” (107). Armed with her experience of having been colonized/zombified in mind and body, Ella accepts Reverend Simpson’s challenge and determines to rewrite the imperialist text in order to express to a new generation the other half that has never been told.

Ironically, Ella’s new purpose revises Reverend Brassington’s former one. Where once he sought to exorcise the indigenous beliefs of his people and replace them with modern notions of spirituality and holiness, he now apprehends that the epistemology of empire inherent in modernity is what needs to be exorcised and replaced with an epistemology of liberation and wholeness. As Brassington suggests to Reverend Simpson, the key to this re-education will be the encouragement of an awareness and comprehension of the characteristics and effects of spirit thievery and zombification.

William Brassington, like his wife and Reverend Simpson, recognizes that a new nation is on the verge of being born—a nation whose foundation will include the Ellas and the generations that she and others teach about the half that has never been told. As Neil ten Kortenaar astutely notes, “Ella and William are thus positioned at the frontier where the myalist centre, a small community where everyone knows everyone else, meets the threat of literacy, which can strike from a great distance. This frontier position where colonial literacy resists imperial literacy has a name: the nation” (68). If, as Ulrike Erichsen argues, “the ‘other’ is ‘always already’ at the centre of any self-definition,” then in-between colours people like Ella are necessary to nation formation (93). In the words of Shalini Puri, “[c]ontrary to black nationalist accounts, then, *Myal* inscribes mulattoes as having played a significant role in Jamaica’s struggles for national liberation” (166). Reading Ella’s racial and social status within a larger transnational framework, Evelyn O’Callaghan states, “Ella embodies the Jamaican national motto (‘Out of Many, One People’)” (71). In this sense, the Jamaican nation, much like the transnational soup of a Dutch pot diaspora, is constituted by multiple and varied national provisions that mix to form a nourishing whole. With the recognition of in-between people like Ella and of their interventions in telling the half that has never been told, Brodber’s rewriting/righting of Jamaican history, like that of Jones and Condé, reveals that the Jamaican nation was and is already part of a transnational diaspora in spite of nationalist narratives to the contrary.

The resolution of the crises of Ella’s subjectivity and of Grove Town’s constitution reflect the ways in which the nation may be more broadly defined as more than just a nation-state but as a transnational space of mutual liberation. The something

that Ella wanted the chance to create will be a new transnational Jamaica, beginning with Grove Town. As a modern Eve, she will negate her stepfather's original belief that a black woman could not really be Eve "when the God of the garden had stacked the cards so that she could not say 'No'" (*Myal* 87). Though she may have succumbed and said "Yes" to the white imperialism represented by Selwyn, her later resounding "No" to the writer and to the empire behind the writer represents a paradigm shift in the consciousness of Ella and the potential for a ripple effect to occur within her community, within the larger nation, and beyond. Indeed, Ella's many cultural and racial claims mark her as a symbol of not only an emerging Caribbean nation, but also of an evolving transnational Americas, characterized by hybridity and the intermingling of peoples of many nations.

The myal spirit Dan, in conversation with White Hen and the others, sums up the potential effects of the paradigm shift that has occurred in Ella and William Brassington and of the transnational nation-building that is sure to take effect:

[. . .] Two people understand, White Hen. Two special people. My people have been separated from themselves White Hen, by several means, one of them being the printed word and the ideas it carries. Now we have two people who are about to see through that. And who are these people, White Hen? People who are familiar with the print and the language of the print. Our people are now beginning to see how it and they themselves, have been used against us. Now, White Hen, now, we have people who can and are willing to correct images from the inside, destroy what should be replaced and put us back together, give us back ourselves with which to chart our course to go where we want to go. Do you see, White Hen? (109-10)

These "special people," "in-between colours people," "trained-minded people" are the signifiers of the racial, ethnic, epistemological, and cultural miscegenation that make up the Americas. Such people signal a new way of outlining the boundaries of the nation,

not in terms of fixed lines of demarcation but in terms of underground, in-between spaces, where individuals of various national affiliations, histories, and subjectivities may meet and support one another in mutual progression. The particular position which they occupy between blackness and whiteness, their refusal to completely abandon their blackness, and their powerful affiliation with literacy all mark them as agents of change in developing societies seeking to resist imperial domination, construct their own identities, and chart their own destinies. The discursive medium of the written word will be the vehicle driven by these special people; and that vehicle will transport the minds of the colonized from enclosed pastures of sub-personage to open landscapes of humanity and liberation. It will enact a new transnational discourse of liberation that allows the participation of diverse individuals who may claim multiple roots and chart multiple routes of liberation.

Bajo la Piel de los Tambores: The Limits of Patriarchy, the “Marimbarization” of The Nation, and Activist (Re-)Percussions

Luz Argentina Chiriboga’s *Bajo la Piel de los Tambores* also enacts questions of what to do with “in-between people,” whose bodies and literacy mark them as different in white and black spaces of the nation, and of how their presence alters and transnationalizes those spaces. Chiriboga, like other writers whose works inform this study, is particularly concerned with nation formation and how the historical and social construction of the nation races, places, and impacts the lives of in-between people who struggle to reconcile the competing influences of whiteness and a persistent, though repressed African presence on the national imaginary. The excavation of this African presence and its effect on the black female, in particular, is implicated in the evolution

and effects of a transnational discourse of liberation.

In Chiriboga's novel, Rebeca González Araujo, a young woman from Sikán, a village in the Afro-Ecuadorian region of Esmeraldas, travels to a boarding school in the capital of Quito, where she begins to confront her blackness and her sexual awakening during the 1960s political turmoil within the nation. Rebeca's mother, Nidia Araujo, while desiring an education for her daughter, remains concerned that her progeny will not progress if she does not conform to the social prescription that women must invest in patriarchy through marriage and domesticity. Of her mother's concerns, Rebeca muses,

Yo, consciente de que en el internado tejía la urdimbre de mi destino, oía lejanos los consejos de mamá que solo dejaría de suspirar cuando me viera casada. Ella sabía que yo no era ni demasiado buena, ni demasiado mala; ni demasiado pulcra, ni demasiado vulgar; ni demasiado inteligente, ni demasiado tonta; ni demasiado blanca, ni demasiado negra. Justamente por eso le preocupaba mi carácter inestable, mi nadar entre dos aguas que la llenaban de pavor. (12)

(I, conscious that in the boarding school I wove the wrap of my destiny, heard in the distance my mother's counsel that she would only stop sighing when she saw me married. She knew that I was neither too good, nor too bad; neither too beautiful, nor too ugly; neither too intelligent, nor too stupid; neither too white, nor too black. That was exactly why she worried over my unstable character, my swimming between two waters that filled her with dread.)

The image of swimming between two waters metaphorically represents Rebeca's ontological and metaphysical position in the nation. She neither interprets herself nor is interpreted as too much of any one thing. Instead, she consistently finds herself in the position of occupying a space between two opposing states, particularly with regard to the issues of marriage and her racial identification. Her inability to conform to either side of the binaries created by society marks her as a problem, which her mother seeks to fix by encouraging her daughter to marry. Though she acknowledges and would like to

fulfill her mother's wishes, Rebeca cannot make the same kind of investment in marriage that her mother made. Her internal struggle with her desire to be claimed sexually by a man and her equal desire for an independent identity almost drowns her emotionally and psychologically. Finally, just as she seeks entry into the white spaces occupied by her friends in Quito, the voices of Afro-Ecuadorian slaves and freedom fighters and of her grandmother Uyanga speak to her and remind her of the importance of her African roots. In the face of issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender, these turbulent "waters" frame Rebeca's burgeoning identity and mark her as a symbol of Ecuador's changing national identity.

The tension felt by Rebeca as she seeks to differentiate herself from her mother is often the result of her mother's statements. In one of her letters, Nidia says that when she looks in the mirror, she feels as if Rebeca was staring back at her. Rebeca emphasizes the image of "el espejo de crystal de roca" (the rock crystal mirror) as the site that literally mirrors her divided self, influenced by her mother's discourse of domesticity and her own emerging discourse of liberation. In her discussion of the function of mirrors and mirroring in Afro-Hispanic literature, Rosemary Feal argues that the mirror

may constitute a stage of sorts where performances of identity take place. Rather than impassively reflecting some static, fixed, or pre-existent identity, the mirror, understood also as a psychological and ideological instrument, displays an image in flux or in motion, one that will be received, interpreted, analyzed, accepted, or rejected. In this sense, the mirror holds representational potential for an individual consciousness, since the eye that contemplates the *I* must reassemble fragments of the self into recognizable patterns of experience and existence. (31)

Attempting to differentiate herself from her mother and to bring together the fragmented parts of her consciousness, Rebeca examines her own body before her mirror: "Por las noches ante el me desnudo, observo complacida mi cuerpo azucarado, pido a la vejez que

haga excepción conmigo” (At night in front of it I undressed, observed with pleasure my sweet body, and begged old age to make an exception of me) (44). Despite her body’s youthfulness, Rebeca still regards herself within the parameters of her mother’s discourse. Even in her interactions with men, she is conscious of her figure: “el cabello recogido a un lado, la minifalda verde, el escote de la blusa negra, el cinturón dorado” (the hair collected to one side, the green miniskirt, the neckline of the black blouse, the golden belt) (46). Though she bears the colors (green and yellow) of the African goddess Oshun, whose belt ties all things together, Rebeca’s fragmented self marks her as an incomplete Oshun figure. Oshun is a powerful water goddess whose attributes empower those who reflect them. However, because Rebeca still cannot negotiate the “waters” that define her existence, she cannot fully embody all of Oshun’s attributes and use them to her full advantage. She especially finds it difficult to tie together her own body with her own consciousness. As a result, as she gazes at herself, “she sees herself *as* body — with her wide hips, firm behind, and narrow waist” (DeCosta-Willis “The Poetics and Politics of Desire” 221). Her failure to recognize her self as individual consciousness reflects the internalization of the objectification of her body by her mother and by men. Ironically, the intervention in Rebeca’s life of the black nun, Sor Irés del Rosario, facilitates the latter’s development of a consciousness separate from her mother’s and reflective of an activist spirit. Though the black nun also articulates conservative discourses that regulate the female body and encourage abstinence, her participation in a women’s prison ministry and her leadership of a black woman’s organization mark her as an agent for empowerment of black women. Her tutelage of Rebeca and her underground political movements will influence Rebeca to enact the words of one of Sor Irés’ fliers: “Solo

organizados se construirá la nueva América” (Only when we are organized will the new America be built) (*Bajo la Piel* 44).

Fleeing the social restrictions of the boarding school and the negative implications of her intense flirtation with Father Cayetano, Rebeca changes her status to a day pupil and takes up residence in a hostel for girls, with which Sor Irés is affiliated. In this new space, the image of the mirror once again reflects and influences Rebeca’s sense of self: “Mi pensamiento interior era mitigado por los espejos de diferentes formas y tamaños en los que me veía cada vez más tentadora. Así como el sacerdote coleccionaba mujeres, Milton Cevallos, el vecino en Oriki, botellas vacías de ron, yo reunía espejos” (My interior thought was mitigated by the mirrors of different forms and sizes in which I saw myself as more tempting each time. Just as the priest collected women and Milton Cevallos, my neighbour in Oriki, collected empty bottles of rum, I collected mirrors) (63). In terms of mirror images, it is significant that Milton Cevallos, a neighbour from Esmeraldas, is from Oriki. In Yoruba art and culture, *oriki* function as cognomen of deities. An *oriki* is also “an attributive name, expressing what the child is, or what he or she hopes to become, an endearment or praise intended to have a stimulating effect on the individual” (Folami, par. 3). Thoughts of Milton Cevallos should have functioned as *oriki*, with the stimulating effect of causing Rebeca to begin to live up to the praises given to the deities whose attributes she reflects. Her thoughts should have caused her to recognize that the gaze of men like Cayetano diminishes her and deters her from seeing herself as person instead of as body. However, in spite of becoming aware of the fact that her relationship with Cayetano, much like the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized, is based on objectification of her body and manipulation of her desires, Rebeca still turns to the false

mirror image in order to frame her identity. The mirrors, like the empty bottles collected by Milton Cevallos, are devoid of substance and sustenance; they lack the animating spirit that accompanies subjecthood. Yet, they hold the potential for the development of Rebeca's consciousness; and, coupled with the later image of trigonometric functions, they serve as catalysts in the process of self-recognition.

Trigonometry is the study of the relationship between angles and the sides they form. The mathematics used to solve trigonometric functions involves interrogating perspectives, solving equations, and deciphering the unknown. The trigonometric proofs and logic of Rebeca's math homework thus operate as symbols of her mental processing of her emotions in terms of her unequal position in her relationship with Cayetano and the unknown of her emerging subjectivity:

Revisé las funciones trigonométricas: Demostrar que el triángulo cuyos vértices son los puntos D (2 6) E (17 1), F (29 37) es isósceles. ¿Qué es un triángulo isósceles? El que $\frac{\quad}{2}$ $\frac{\quad}{2}$ tiene dos lados iguales y uno desigual. ¿Habrá dos cosas iguales? Si, Heráclito de Efeso, nadie puede bañarse dos veces en un mismo río; todo cambia [. . .].
(*Bajo la Piel* 63)

(I reviewed the trigonometric functions: Prove that the triangle whose vertices are the points D (2 6) E (17 1), F (29 37) is isosceles. What is an isosceles triangle? One that $\frac{\quad}{2}$ $\frac{\quad}{2}$ has two equal sides and one unequal one. Can two things be equal? According to Heraclitus of Ephesus, no one can bath twice in the same river; everything changes [. . .].)

Though she proves the reflexivity of equality inherent in the structure of the isosceles triangle, Rebeca's unconscious mind takes heed of the words of Heraclitus. It recognizes that, though Cayetano's interest in and pursuit of Rebeca give the appearance of equality with white women and of a subjecthood characterized by enacted desire, Rebeca's

position in the relationship, as an unknown object of desire, reflects her position in the larger white nation as an object of exoticization, possession, and oppression. Ironically, the acquisition of literacy in a space governed by white authorities alters Rebeca's relationship to those authorities and to the nation. Her particular achievement and use of mathematical literacy in relation to her subject/object position foreshadows her eventual achievement of a literacy of liberation that will accomplish her full evolution as a subject. But Rebeca must first reconcile the outside image/object with her inside self/emerging subject.

As with Ella, the war between the outside image and the inside self results in illness, as Rebeca comes down with the mumps and must be confined to her bed. It is significant that Rebeca is stricken with a colonial disease, a metaphor for imperialism and colonialism and their destructive effects. Cayetano, again acting as a colonizer seeking to re-establish his relationship to the colonized, attempts to prove his love for Rebeca by nursing her back to health and by offering to flee with her. However, the appearance of "la Cruz de Mayo" (the May Cross) in the night sky and of Venus "al pie de la cordillera" (at the foot of the mountain range) (65) signifies the simultaneous demise of their relationship and the growth of Rebeca's consciousness. Just as Rebeca takes notice of these signs, her classmate Amelia Roca, a Panamanian prostitute posing as a Costa Rican student, appears to claim Cayetano through extortion. Under the sign of the cross, Rebeca begins her transformation from a body into a person; under the watchful eye of Venus, also associated with Oshun, she begins to inhabit a new position as a subject rather than an object. She finally recognizes that, in the eyes of the nation (represented by father Cayetano), she is not equal to but rather less than the Amelias of the world

because of her blackness. With this knowledge, she begins to critique those white males who claim to be “defensor[es] de la libertad femenina” (defenders of female liberty) (70). The quest for subject status is not complete, however, without a truthful examination of her racial status and of her lineage, a challenge which Rebeca must engage for complete liberation of her body and spirit.

Rebeca’s ambivalent investment in national constructs of patriarchy and whiteness restricts her from completely eschewing the mask she has used to garner male attention and to insert herself into white spaces.⁸ Whiteness especially limits Rebeca’s development of self. While the urban space of Quito allows Rebeca to align herself with the national ideology of whiteness, the rural site of her birth marks her as an Other. As Jean Muteba Rahier notes of Ecuador, there is a “racist map of national territory: urban centers (mostly Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca) are associated with modernity, while rural areas are viewed as places of racial inferiority, violence, backwardness, savagery, and cultural deprivation” (259). The power of whiteness and of its attendant racial mapping in Ecuador is reflected in the peripheral place to which Rebeca assigns her own blackness and lineage. When a classmate’s father makes advances toward her and then learns of her rural origins and assumes that her family owns a farm, Rebeca quickly invents a landed background. “[. . .]na mulata con dinero, pasaba a ser blanca, pero mulata pobre es negra” (A mulatta with money, I passed for white, but a poor mulatta is black), she reasons (*Bajo la Piel* 72).⁹ Rebeca’s instructions to her mother that the house be repainted white, that Bavarian china and silverware be rented, and that cattle be borrowed to fill up the pasture in preparation for the visit of some of her classmates reflects her continued desire to pass socially as white by way of invented economic

prosperity and a claim to roots other than African.

Rebeca understands well the racial politics of Ecuador, but she forgets the rich history of black resistance within that country. Her visit to “la gruta de la Paz” (The Grotto of Peace) affords her a vision of the role played by a female slave, Nasakó Zansi (later named Jonatás), in collaboration with feminist revolutionary Manuela Sáenz, in the liberation of Ecuadorian slaves and later in the fight for Peruvian independence:

Entramos a la gruta. Allí el tiempo tomó forma inconvencible y desafiante, como si los siglos se hubieron superpuesto. [. . .] Era allí donde la materia y el espíritu convergían en un tranfinito, desde el cual se percibía el universo. [. . . Yo] vi en un cuarto una mujer con los cabellos echados a ambos lados del rostro y los pezones sobresalientes tras de una blusa de encajes negros. A la luz de la lámpara pude observar su hermosura. Junto a ella un hombre de pómulos salientes tomaba sorbos de café y tosía con frecuencia, mostrando una palidez sorprendente. Ladridos insistentes, que llenan el aposento, despiertan a una negra que ha estado durmiendo al pie de la puerta, Jonatás, le grita un hombre herido. Ella va al corredor, escucha disparos a tiempo que ve caer al soldado que realiza la guardia, regresa veloz, ¡Ahí vienen, son muchos, niña, huyan!, Jonatás defiende la entrada, con una lanza [. . .] Jonatás protege a Manuela. La Sáenz los reconoce, son los mismos de siempre, Manuelita, le dije, ella me miró, ¿Seré feliz? Moví el índice, No, por un largo tiempo, pero después, sí. La ventana de pronto se cerró y yo me quede con un grito de angustia atravesándome la garganta. (85-86)

(We entered the grotto. There time took on a firm and defiant form, as if centuries had been superimposed on one another. [. . .] It was there that the material and spiritual converged in transfinity, from which one could perceive the universe. [. . .] I saw in a room a woman with her hair thrown to both sides of her face and her nipples protruding underneath a black lace blouse. By lamplight I could see her beauty. Next to her a man with high cheekbones took sips of coffee and coughed frequently, showing a surprising paleness. Insistent barks that fill the room awake a black woman who had been sleeping at the foot of the door. “Jonatás!” an injured man shouts to her. She goes to the corridor, listens to the shots at the same time that she sees the soldier fall who guarded the door, and returns quickly. “Here they come. There are many, girl. Flee!” Jonatás defends the entrance, with a lance [. . .] Jonatás protects Manuela. Sáenz recognizes them. “They are the same ones as always.” “Manuelita,” I said to her. She looked at me. “Will I be happy?” She waved her finger. “No, not for a long time, but later, yes.” The window suddenly closed and

I remained with a cry of anguish stuck in my throat.)

Emphasizing the contribution of women to the historiography of the Americas and the transnational alliances they created, Lesley Feracho notes Chiriboga's characterization of the intersections of Peruvian and Ecuadorian national identities and histories: "Chiriboga uses [this connection] to show the development of revolutionary renegotiations of Ecuadorian, Peruvian and ultimately Latin American space." In alluding to the ideological and cartographic revisions enacted by slave women and mestizas in the Americas, Chiriboga's reference to Jonatás and Manuela Sáenz reflects the ways in which "the Americas as a whole are representative of these ruptures of gendered, racial, national, and geographical boundaries" (40). Rebeca's vision, influenced by sacred time and the presence of the ancestral spirit of Jonatás, especially identifies her with the slave woman's disruption of boundaries, temporalities, and spatialities. In a moment in which the past, present, and future converge, Rebeca's identity fuses with that of Jonatás; and their struggle against imperial forces is revealed to be cyclical, as the forces of empire rearticulate their oppression with each move of resistance.

As with Jones and Condé, Chiriboga's signification on the black "herstories" of the Americas represents a black feminist intervention in historiography. Chiriboga's move to place a black Eve at the frontier of Latin American nation formation also resembles Brodber's similar rearticulation of Jamaican historiography. Once again, the insertion of the black female body into the early historical record alters not just the ways in which the past may be apprehended, but it also influences the present. In general, this act of excavation re-members Jonatás to the Ecuadorian nation, to Latin America, and to the larger diaspora of the Americas. Moreover, Chiriboga's re-membering of the body of

Jonaús and of her story of struggle allows for readers of African descent within Ecuador, Latin America, and the larger Americas, who may be unaware of the foundational African presence in certain areas of the region, to reinterpret nations of the Americas that represent themselves through discourses of whiteness as always already having been transnational and diasporic. As with Marshall and Morrison's ancestor figures, Chiriboga places Jonaús in the role of ancestor for Rebeca and for the larger diaspora nation(s) which the latter represents. The excavated record of an early spirit of transnational liberation, articulated through the body of a black female slave, and the cross-cultural alliances formed in order to enact such liberation certainly affects Rebeca's sense of self and her relation to her community. Her temporary identification with Jonaús, specifically, is the catalyst that influences Rebeca to turn from an investment in whiteness and to embrace spaces of blackness that historically have been linked to the diaspora space of the Americas.

Though she represses the vision of Jonaús in her mind as she returns to Esmeraldas, Rebeca demands "una bailadita al son de la marimba" (a marimba dance) (*Bajo la Piel* 92). Marimba is an Afro-Ecuadorian musical expression that "carves out a distinctly black space against, and yet within, the context of a nationalist, mestizo discourse" and operates as a discursive and "sonic marker of liberated black space" (Ritter, par 2 and 5). Areas of Ecuador, such as Sikán, that are inhabited by blacks are often folklorized and viewed as quaint, not as civilized and progressive as those areas populated by citizens whose bodies are read as white.¹⁰ Thus, Rebeca's silence about her African ancestry and her instructions to reinvent the space of her parents' farm in terms of white attributes reflect an attempt to invest in the nation by moving herself and her

family away from folklore and the perceived blight of blackness. Yet, as Rebeca notes, “[M]anos antiguas, esclavas en cañaverales e ingenios religiosos, revivieron en mis adentros sus tambores. Entre la nubes de polvo de aquel abandano me parecõ leer: Apartheid” (Ancient hands. Slave women on sugarcane plantations and religious sugar mill workers. Their drums came back to life inside me. Between the clouds of dust of that abandoned place I seemed to read: “Apartheid.”) (*Bajo la Piel* 94). As with Avey, the living and persistent memory of slavery and of a diasporic dance and its drums, used by slaves to communicate to each other, resonate within Rebeca and cause her to reflect on her ancestry, her homeplace, and on the hegemonic system of racial division within the nation. Carole Beane, in “Strategies of Identity,” further articulates the significance of the marimba and its relation to slavery: “the marimba, with its empowering rhythms and signifying sounds, also shares with the drum a subversive indecipherability from the point of view of the white master. The marimba is more than folklore; it is a sign of cultural affirmation; sign and instrument of resistance to injustice, historically validated and authenticated in legend and story.” As Beane notes, Chiriboga’s use of the marimba image serves as a means “to assert the subversive intent of African culture in the face of Creole elites. This is the incident that provides closure for Rebeca González’s call to conscience” (171).

Jonathan Ritter further identifies the space of marimba performance as a transnational space that allows for Esmeraldas “to communicate with and take part in a cultural African diaspora that reaches far beyond their national borders” (par. 11). The reframing of the border space of the nation as transnational is later evidenced in Sor Irés’ use of the marimba space to communicate the Argentinian Ché Guevara’s message of

liberation. The actions of Rebeca and Sor Inés produce what I term the “marimbarization” of the nation. In effect, the space of the marimba reconfigures the nation by way of (re-)percussion. The percussive sound of the drum calls its listeners to action in order to rewrite/right national narratives and to map out alternative spaces of subjectivity and intersubjectivity both within the nation and across nations. The (re-)percussive counter-discourse produced in between the beats of the drum and the dance steps that accompany them mark the marginal black space of the marimba as an in-between space between the nation and the larger diaspora which it engages. This underground space operates subversively against national narratives of whiteness and patriarchy. The larger repercussion of this space is the broader sense of recognition, community, and empowerment that it produces. The space of the marimba, like the transnational soup within the Dutch pot, unites nations and provides performative and discursive sustenance to the diaspora. This in-between space is thus a fitting catalyst for the movement of Rebeca from object to subject.

Upon her return to Sika, Rebeca’s African heritage is disclosed by a black woman whose niece was going to marry Rebeca’s father at one time, until the niece found out about his lineage. Reacting to the opprobrium of the situation, Rebeca finally claims her suppressed African roots and lets the drums beat loudly under her skin:

Pero cuando la mujer hablaba, la abuela me afluyó lentamente a los ojos, la vi enseñándome a elevar cometas, contándome canciones de cuna aprendidas en su Africa, me sentí con una nueva identidad, había ocupado mi lugar. Soy su nieta, le dije como un desafío.

Después todo fue fácil, ya no me doló aquella raíz que antes, equivocada, deseaba esconder. Me sentí parte de la abuela, su consecuencia, oyendo sus tambores sonar bajo de mi piel. Desde entonces empecé hablar con frecuencia de ella, y cada vez que lo que lo hacía, encontraba más fuerza en sus recuerdos. (*Bajo la Piel* 104)

(But when the woman spoke, my grandmother flew up slowly before my eyes. I saw her teaching me to fly kites, singing to me lullabies learned in her Africa. I felt a new identity, had taken my place. “I am her granddaughter,” I told her as a challenge.

Afterwards everything was easy. My roots, which before I wrongly desired to hide, were no longer painful to me. I felt like a part of my grandmother, a consequence of her, hearing her drums beating under my skin. From then on I began to speak frequently of her, and each time that I did, I found more strength in her memories.)

The discourse of liberation inherent in the (re-)percussive sound of the drum are very much aligned with Rebeca’s grandmother and the homeplace of the village, whose ancestral spirits now inhabit the consciousness of an evolving Rebeca. “The homeplace,” as Beane points out, “elicits responses from her that oblige her to break the silence and to cease obfuscating her identity.” It gradually “becomes a place of sustenance for her, of empowerment and protection; it becomes a provider of strength, a healer of wounds” (“Strategies of Identity” 168, 170). Her embrace of her homeplace, history, roots, and racial and cultural difference marks the entrance into the final stages of Rebeca’s journey to full subject status.

Influenced by Sor Irés, Rebeca unwittingly becomes a conduit by which a message of liberation may be propagated in the rural black space of Esmeraldas. The activism of Sor Irés leads Rebeca to desire, like Ella, to create something inside of herself, to give birth to a type of pedagogy of empowerment through self-determination. Initially seeking to establish a fishing company that would benefit all in the area and lift residents out of poverty, Rebeca soon abandons that project, due to the destructive machinations of her co-investor Juan Lorenti, who tries to seduce her, despite his marital status. She eventually pursues a new plan, “un hijo a punto de nacer” (a child about to be born) (*Bajo la Piel* 114). This child, the result of her intimacy with the people of Esmeraldas, will

grow into a full-scale fishermen's co-operative, which will influence the reorganization and reopening of the local sugar mill. She implements these business ventures by selling the jewels given to her by Juan Lorenti, and she enlists the aid of Sor Irés in order to acquire the legal permits. Heralding Rebeca as their *savoir*, the people of the villages of the area cry out in celebration, "Changó bendito, que viva doña Rebeca" (Blessed Chango, long live Miss Rebeca) (124). The discursive and metaphysical alignment of Rebeca with the deity Chango is significant. Rebeca is already empowered by the attributes of the water goddess Oshun. With her assumption of the role of activist and leader, she, like Chango, expresses outrage at her people's subjugation and determines to avenge this through broad measures. The integration of Oshun and Chango into her personality marks her full acceptance of her African roots and her progression toward an identity as a fully liberated black woman living within yet identifying herself with those beyond the racist and sexist boundaries of the Ecuadorian nation.

Rebeca's evolution as a liberated woman is fraught with temptations and pitfalls, in the form of men (Father Cayetano, Juan Lorenti, Miton Cevallos, etc.), who continually enter her life in order to objectify her and, more importantly, to subjugate her and suppress her desire for liberation. They do so by demanding her investment in national discourses of patriarchy and domesticity. Rebeca's constant renegotiation of her identity in relation to these men stems from her fear that her ideal man, Julio Martínez, will never reappear to fill the empty space of loneliness that she persistently feels, despite the presence of her mother, the villagers, and Sor Irés. In the words of William O'Donnell, "In a broader context, Rebeca's search for identity and her evolution are synonymous with the search for a political ideology that will dethrone the reigning

patriarchy. This new ideology is symbolized by the mysterious Julio Martínez / Clé Guevara” (134). Because this ideology is new to Rebeca, who does not entirely understand its features and implications, Rebeca misrecognizes its manifestations, as she mistakenly refers to her white childhood friend and suitor as Julio Martínez. Milton Cevallos’s comfort with farm animals, his alignment with the land, and his interest in her business all cause her to conclude that he, like she, share the same ideals. This misrecognition, similar to the colonized misrecognition of the benevolent colonizer, reflects both Rebeca’s pursuit of companionship in the form of a man who will allow her to assert herself and be independent and her lack of examples of relationships with such a man that would reveal to her the vicissitudes of such a progressive interaction. She says the following of the lingering influence of Julio Martínez on her interactions with Milton:

Comprendí que era el hombre interesado en evitarme un fracaso en los negocios. Después del marquillaje de una partida de ganado, fue quedándose en casa como pájaro confundido de jaula. No olvidada que cuando equivoqué en el palmar su nombre por el de Julio Martínez, tuve la impresión de que le había quedado un poso de rencor. (*Bajo la Piel* 131)

(I understood that he was a man interested in keeping my negotiations from failing. After the branding of a herd of cattle, he stayed at home like a confused, caged bird. He did not forget when I mistakenly called the name of Julio Martínez in the palm grove, and I had the impression that there remained resentment in him.)

The branding of the cattle foreshadows the ways in which Milton will attempt to brand Rebeca, sexually and ideologically. Milton’s insecurity and virulent animosity will reappear in the form of infidelity and regular abuse of Rebeca. Her reaction to this abuse will be the litmus test that proves once and for all if she is truly capable of moving in the world as a confident black woman who has no need of validation from white authority figures or from men.

As with the relationship of the colonized to the colonizer, Rebeca's misrecognition causes her to offer her virginity to Milton, for whom it is a possession, much like her land and bank account, whose regulation she hands over to him upon their marriage. She realizes later that her misrecognition was based on her conflation of the images of Milton and Julio Martínez: "[. . .] de pronto, junto a él apareció la silueta de Julio Martínez, alternativamente las dos imágenes se interpusieron, vi a Milton como una sombra desdibujada [. . .]" (Suddenly, along with the silhouette of Julio Martínez he appeared. The two images alternated. I saw Milton as a misdrawn shadow) (151). Rebeca is repulsed at what she has lost, because of her failure to attract the embodiment of the new ideology she seeks in order to liberate herself from ideologies of domesticity and patriarchy. Her reaction takes the form of a brief breakdown:

Encerrada en mi cuarto lloré toda la noche, di golpes en la cama, arrojé mis cremas por la ventana, lloré por Cayetano y su cobardía; lloré por Fernando y su decisión; lloré por Lorenti y su maldad; lloré por la muerte de papa; lloré por la ausencia de Julio Martínez; lloré por mi odio a mama y su obstinación en no salir de Sikán; lloré por mí, por mi liviandad y mi estupidez al entregarme a un blanco. Di vueltas en el insomnio y en el sueño reuní destinos; juné a ellos el de Manuelita Sáenz, la vi caminando en la playa junto a Simón Bolívar, me sonrió y preguntó a papa por mí, él, cabizbajo, con la mano derecha en el pecho, avanzó hasta esconderse en una gruta, Rebeca, era mama la que golpeaba mi puerta, Otra vez estás hablando dormida, llama a ese tal Julio Martínez. No podía creerle, pero era cierto; asustada dejé pronta la cama. (136)

(Locked in my room I cried all night. I punched the bed. I threw my creams out the window. I cried over Cayetano and his cowardice. I cried over Fernando and his decision; I cried over Lorenti and his wickedness. I cried over the death of my father. I cried over the absence of Julio Martínez. I cried over my hatred for mama and her obstinancy in not leaving Sikán. I cried over myself, over my looseness and my stupidity in giving myself to a white man. I tossed and turned from insomnia and in sleep I joined destinies. I added those of Manuelita Sáenz. I saw her walking on the beach next to Simón Bolívar. She smiled at me and asked papa for me. He, downcast, with his right hand on his chest, advanced until he was concealed in a grotto. "Rebeca." It was mama that knocked

on my door. “You’re talking in your sleep again, calling out to that Julio Martínez.” I could not believe it, but it was true. Frightened, I quickly got out of bed.)

Rebeca weeps over her losses and frustrations and for the in-between space in which she again finds herself. However, as with Ella, the in-between space is generative; its pressures allow for a clearer vision of what has passed, of what is transpiring, and of what will be. Linking the past, present, and future, this space affords Rebeca with the opportunity to bring together several destinies: hers, her father’s, her grandmother’s, and those of Julio Martínez, Manuela Sáenz, and even Jonatás. She simultaneously identifies with all of their life paths and diverges from them in the same moment of her vision. While she longs for the guidance and companionship of the major heroic figures of her dream, she eventually comes to terms with the fact that the signification of their representations will form the substance of the later stance that she will take in defining her life against limiting discourses of hegemony, repression, and the threat of death. Their ideological and spiritual presence in her life will ultimately punctuate the words uttered by Julio Martínez to her during their first meeting: “[T]erés que vivir la vida en una nueva dimensón” (You have to live life in a new dimension) (14). Determined to enact this directive, Rebeca announces her plans to divorce her husband and responds to the summons of the military police to account for her activities with the fishermen’s cooperative.

Free of the restrictions imposed by Milton, Rebeca aligns herself more thoroughly with her ancestry and with her community, which responds in kind. She quickly identifies with not just the people of Esmeraldas, but with the people of her nation and with other nations where underground movements against oppressive national authorities

are thriving. When asked by the military police if she knows of the whereabouts of ammunition and weapons, how to make homemade bombs, and whether she has traveled to Cuba or had contacts outside of the country, she remains calm: “Me consolé con la idea de que en todo el país los ciudadanos teníamos que responder preguntas semejantes” (I consoled myself with the idea that all over the country citizens had to respond to similar questions) (151). Just as the organization of the fisherman’s co-operative had been a collaborative, communal project, so too is the process of organizing those at the nation’s margins to resist domination, embrace a new discourse of liberation, and endeavor to create a new nation, based on collective empowerment.

Rebeca, influenced again by Sor Irés, embraces the transnational, revolutionary spirit pervading her country and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. She regards Sor Irés in a new light, as a mother figure, martyr, and bearer of the African presence that is unaffected by time in the Americas:

Amanecía, atardecía y anochecía leyendo y haciendo acotaciones en sus libros. Con la ropa de mama se desplazaba más rápida, y con su cabellera hecha trenzas al ras del cráneo parecía nuestra ekobia. Nos contó haber sufrido discriminación en el convento, donde aún persistían las categorías impuestas por el color de la piel. Una noche que veíamos el desliz de la luna escarbó las estirpes africanas de Bolívar, de Flores y Alfaro, en el deseo de probar que Africa era una luz en nuestra república. [Sor Irés] no demostró miedo, debilidad ni arrepentimiento, pero tampoco nos habló del conflicto que yo creí vislumbrar tras su reserva. (152)

(In the morning, in the afternoon, and at night she was reading and making notes in her books. In the clothes of mama she moved about more quickly, and with her hair done up in tresses close to her scalp she seemed like our sister. She told us of having suffered discrimination at the convent, where categories imposed by skin color still persisted. One night while we watched the moon slip by, she revealed the African lineage of Bolívar, Flores, and Alfaro, in the hopes of proving that Africa was the light in our republic. [Sister Irés] did not show any fear, weakness, or repentance. But neither did she speak to us of the conflict that I believed I glimpsed behind her reserve.)

The assumption of the role of a close relative of the González family and the wearing of Nidia Araujo's clothes link Sor Irés more closely with Rebeca. As Sor Irés hides in the house of Rebeca's parents, her liberating image completely replaces the mirror image of Rebeca's mother. It negates the discourse of domesticity and patriarchy espoused by her mother and finally enacts for the young mulatto woman the discourse of liberation that she so passionately craved in her relationships. The black nun's fortitude in the face of racial discrimination resonates with Rebeca in ways that it had not previously. Her revisionist historiography of the Americas clarifies the vision Rebeca once had of Manuelita Sáenz walking on the beach with Simón Bolívar. Both were freedom fighters, but the latter, a male who is read as white, due to the negation of his African ancestry, is heralded as the ultimate signifier of liberation from Spanish colonial and imperial oppression. Sor Irés' speech act shatters the silences in the tales of the formation of the Ecuadorian nation and of the larger American landscape, with regard to the presence of strong African influences. Her discursive measures decolonise the patriarchal discourse of the Americas; reinsert Africa into the Americas; and reveal the multiplicity of races, genders, and classes in the region's formation. These measures help to reveal the true origins of various ingredients in the Dutch pot diaspora that is the Americas and point to the ways in which a transnational soup may be continuously recreated, as those origins are made known. That Africa is the light that illuminates this creation signifies on the message of the cryptogram, which instructs Sor Irés to pass on "la luz en el tumbado" (the light in the attic) to the bearer of the note (83). Rebeca, who solves the cryptogram, receives that light and is now entrusted with it.

As a neighbour later relates how Sor Irés was assassinated by soldiers under the direction of the military junta for not confessing to the identity and location of Julio Martínez, Rebeca comprehends the significance of the actions of these freedom fighters. The military junta's assassination of individuals associated with Julio Martínez / Clé Guevara reflects the state's attempt to stem the flow of revolutionary discourse within the nation and between nations. It also proves the fact that Julio / Clé has transcended corporeality and has become a transnational ideology. In the words of William O'Donnell, he "represents the new, subversive socio-political ideology that speaks for the Other" across the Americas (135). Embracing this ideology, Rebeca assumes the fortitude she regarded in Sor Irés and in her vision of Jonatás. She redeploys her old mask as a tool of dissemblance and resistance, as the soldiers interrogate her and the members of the household:

[S]obre mi llanto cayó el antifaz de terciopelo rojo oculto en mi recuerdo y con él saltaron los pedazos de la cómoda y una antigua cicatriz me sangró cuando no pude responder quién era Julio Martínez y el oficial me arrastró por los cabellos, No te hagas la inocente, es Clé Guevara, y me preguntó dónde estaba él y no pude confesarle que yo lo esperaba [. . .]. (155)

(Over my weeping fell the red velvet mask hidden in my memory, and out jumped pieces of the dresser, and an old scar bled when I could not answer who Julio Martínez was, and the official dragged me by the hair. "Don't make yourself out to be innocent. He is Clé Guevara." And he asked me where he was, and I wasn't able to confess that I was waiting for him.)

Rebeca's statement that she could not confess that she was waiting for Julio Martínez / Clé Guevara subtly expresses two seemingly divergent meanings. On the one hand, Rebeca knows that to reveal her association with the revolutionary figure would lead to her immediate death and to his potential capture, which she does not want because of her longing to reunite with her "hombre ideal" (ideal man) (140). On the other hand, given

the new spirit of liberation that courses through her being, she may no longer need her ideal man to rescue her from her circumstances; she may no longer feel the need to wait for him. For Rebeca and for many others in the Americas, Julio Martínez / Clé Guevara still retains the status of the romanticized hero, especially given his prominent participation in the Cuban revolution and his support of revolution against imperialism in the rest of Latin America and Africa. However, Rebeca also reveals through her own revolutionary activities that she can act without the presence, validation, or immediate intervention of an ideal male figure. Given its many connotations and the lingering presence of various socio-political influences, Rebeca's ultimate expression reflects an investment in a liberal form of patriarchy *and* an investment in a transnational discourse of liberation that motivates her to act on behalf of herself and her African roots. With these investments in mind, Rebeca becomes a type of freedom fighter in the vein of Jonatás and Sor Irés. History repeats itself, as the vision of Jonatás defending the entrance re-enters Rebeca's mind and moves her to combat the forces of imperialism and repression, just as Jonatás did. Rebeca's embrace of sacred time allows her to accept her fate: "Por un instante, aunque creí que todos mis caminos estaban cerrados, advertí perdurable la vida" (For an instant, although I believed that all my ways out were closed, I noticed that life was everlasting) (155).

Miriam DeCosta-Willis concludes that Rebeca never achieves

that wider freedom of the mind and spirit that will allow her to realize her full potential as a confident, secure, and independent woman, who calls into question her socially constructed identity as a middle-class, African-ancestored, Ecuadorian woman, but who eventually surrenders to a bourgeois femininity because she has internalized the socially-sanctioned values of a patriarchal society. (222-23)

I disagree with DeCosta-Willis, who judges Rebeca hastily and harshly. I argue instead

that Rebeca remarkably realizes more potential than is expected of her by society, especially given the turbulent waters of race, class, and gender, which she must negotiate even in her final moments of life. Though she has internalized some of the values of a patriarchal society, she has also moved beyond them in terms of valorizing her race and championing a liberating ideology that exceeds national constructions. As she embraces a new transnational discourse of liberation and claims her spiritual place alongside other liberators of the Americas, life will indeed be everlasting for Rebeca, whose life story and activism will identify her forever in the history of Ecuador and the larger Americas as a modern freedom fighter, who was ultimately willing to sacrifice her life for the liberation of her community, her nation, and the greater Americas.

Conclusion: Literacy, Liberation, and the Transnational In-Between

Erna Brodber and Luz Argentina Chiriboga's works confirm that resistance to imperial and national ideologies does indeed produce what Homi Bhabha defines as a way

to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization – the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding *to* does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification.

(The Location of Culture 232-33)

The “in-between” spaces, in the sense of Bhabha's notion of the term as the site of “articulation of cultural difference” (2), between imperial/national ideologies and extra-national ones, between the nation and the diaspora, function as other spaces of subaltern signification. These spaces allow for the subaltern to speak, and they are where marginalized communities may find empowerment. These in-between spaces, produced

by a lack of belonging to the nation, are sites that are ripe for cross-cultural interplay and the creation of new “discursive strategies,” or literacies, that may supplant static modes of articulating the self. Brodber and Chiriboga express that these new literacies must be understood and disseminated by those whom Antonio Gramsci referred to as “organic” intellectuals, or those intellectuals trained under traditional educational models but who use those very models to effect change in the everyday lives of the marginalized (10). Organic intellectuals such as Reverend Simpson and the Brassingtons, Sor Irés, Julio Martínez / Clé Guevara, and ultimately Ella O’Grady and Rebeca González exemplify the type of impact that new literacies may have in the in-between spaces of the nation that reflect a transnational sensibility.

The stories of Ella O’Grady, Rebeca González, and their respective communities indicate the possibility for a new apprehension of the diaspora in the Americas in terms of nations that already have the potential for transnational configurations and the dissemination of organic literacies. As Brodber and Chiriboga suggest, the release of the black female body, in particular, from imperial and patriarchal oppression will engender this transformation. The Ellas and Rebecas of the Americas must begin to feel that they are significant to its evolution, not just for what their bodies may (re-)produce, but for what their consciousness, empowered by larger communities, may engender. This can only occur if there is a reframing of the patriarchal ideology of the nation to include the birth of novel transnational ideologies and an attendant organic literacy of liberation that may be placed on par with the biological and political imperative to reproduce nations based on static, colonial/imperial models.

Erna Brodber’s *Myal* and Luz Argentina Chiriboga’s *Bajo la Piel de los*

Tambores reveal the ways in which the diaspora space of the Americas may be changed for the better by way of a black liberatory feminism that stresses organic literacy. The practice of this type of feminism, which combines features of ethnic cultural feminism and liberation theology, reflects not just a humanist vision of the black community, but a very real model of how to enact this vision within and across nations. What will lead to this is a divorce from discourses of empire, patriarchy, and domesticity that regulate the black female body, which may reproduce and rearticulate the region in novel ways. However, as Brodber and Chiriboga's texts express, this will only occur if diverse members of transnational black communities within nations across the Americas rally together in support of the radical transformation of the collective consciousness of the diasporic community, so that "we are not just confronted with people in other situations but, through them, with ourselves, with our own social commitment [. . .] to the struggle over issues of class, race and sex that is going on in our society" (Witvliet viii). With this in mind, Brodber and Chiriboga offer a vision of a transnational American soup that, after simmering in its diasporic Dutch pot, will serve as liberatory sustenance to multiple nations whose borders and ideological boundaries may be reconfigured for the better, as a result. This redefinition of diaspora, by way of a transnational discourse of liberation, may allow its members to live life in a new dimension—one in which everyone is empowered and elevated.

Chapter Five

Passing on the Color Line:

Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* and Tessa McWatt's *Out of My Skin*

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line.

— W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

“The border, the border is *you!*”

—from the film *Crucero*

At the end of the twentieth century certain literary works by black women also reflected a preoccupation with in-between spaces and their representations of racial and ethnic identity. For writers such as Jones, Condé, Brodber, and Chiriboga, the space of the in-between is very much linked to nation formation and reflects the hybridity inherent in the evolution of the Americas. Other black women authors have picked up where the writers cited above have left off by commenting on the ways in which investments in national structures perpetuate what W. E. B. DuBois viewed as the twentieth century's greatest challenge: the problem of the color line, which may be understood metaphorically as a racialized system of power relations that rearticulates itself in various national spaces of the Americas. DuBois expressed a desire to produce an equitable set of power relations through the revision of national structures that would liberate whites and darker-skinned individuals from the limiting and violent effects of the color line. Authors such as Danzy Senna and Tessa McWatt use their works to focus attention on the ways in which revisionist political structures based in the nation are doomed to fail in their attempts to overcome the skewed and hierarchical system of power relations produced by various color lines in the Americas. As with all of the writers in this study, these authors are concerned with how the burden of blackness in the national imaginary may be rearticulated as an asset to the self and to the larger diaspora. Senna and McWatt's works particularly point to the ways in which "in-between" people, or mixed-race individuals, of the diaspora may "pass" on the national border of the color line and embrace the transnational space of the in-between in order to thrive.

My use of the term "passing," which involves the transgression of racial boundaries, calls attention to two specific connotations: to pass through and to pass up.

Passing through the color line involves a movement along an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 5). In this sense, one lives on the border while advantageously using the gaps in the border to negotiate static spaces of identity while seeking one’s own space of identification. Passing up on the color line reflects an ideological movement from an investment in the boundary of the color line, as it is defined by the nation, into a space of investment marked by a transnational identification. This transnational space may still be a border, but it is a border that has been redefined in terms of diasporic subjectivity and an enunciation of that subjectivity. Authors such as Senna and McWatt focus on the mulatta¹ as the representation of these multiple maneuvers around the color line in order to reveal how the “fissures and the inadequacies of the nation and the state locate themselves in the body of the transnational minority subject” (McHugh 173). Senna’s *Caucasia* and McWatt’s *Out of My Skin* express a new type of diasporic subjectivity, by which individuals may challenge the inadequacies of the unstable racial boundaries of the nation from within those boundaries and may claim a transnational identification at the same time. These contemporary narratives of passing are hybrid ingredients that add texture and substance to the transnational soup of a Dutch pot diaspora of the Americas.

Like Gloria Anzaldúa, I am interested in what may emerge from the boundaries of races and nations. In her groundbreaking opus on the borderland of the U. S. / Mexico divide and the “mestiza consciousness” produced by that divide, Anzaldúa marries ontology and geography in order to articulate a consciousness born of living “on the border”:

At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somewhat

healed so that we are on both shores at once, and at once see through the serpent and the eagle eyes. [. . .] The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject–object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (78-80)

The border, for Anzaldúa, contains within it the potential for an uprooting of the Manichean trap of dualistic thinking. The border, as an in-between space, is a contact zone² where opposing racial and cultural epistemologies meet, contest one another, and intertwine in ways that may break down the binaries of subject/object, here/there, and white/Other. The consciousness that emerges from the border, or the line of demarcation that separates races and nations, may lead to transnational exchanges that may in turn facilitate a reorganization of racial and national spaces.

The in-between space of the border, an “elsewhere” where cultural difference and transnational identifications may be articulated, as Homi Bhabha points out, is linked to racial politics and space. David Theo Goldberg views race and space as foundational to the history and trajectory of modern cartography:

[T]he category of space is discursively produced and ordered. Just as spatial distinctions like ‘West’ and ‘East’ are racialized in their conception and application, so racial categories have been variously spatialized more or less since their inception into continental divides, national localities, and geographic regions. Racisms become institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms. [. . .] The materiality of racialized relations—of relations between knowledge and power, rationality and exclusions, identity, opportunity, and availability—are most clearly in evidence here. In the spatial delimitations of these relations it is human bodies, racialized human beings, that are defined and confined, delineated yet (dis)located.

Samira Kawash also emphasizes that “racial politics are spatial politics.” Though Kawash focuses her attention on mapping the color line as it is characterized in African-American literature, her analysis of the interrelatedness of race and space is useful to an analysis of literature of the wider Afro-Americas. For Kawash, the “color line persists as the organizing principle of racial space, that is, the maintenance of an absolute boundary between black and white and, more especially, the exclusionary line demarcating and bounding whiteness and assuring the continued value of ‘whiteness as property’” (12).

It would seem to many that the answer to the problem of the color line, as it fixes bodies in racial spaces and regulates access to property and economic advancement, is to destroy that boundary. Like Anzaldúa, I argue that the boundary need not be destroyed in order to produce greater movement in racial spaces. However, unlike Anzaldúa, I recognize that the material reality of living on a border means that you cannot always transcend the binaries produced by the border. The border still is useful, for the boundary itself may be used by the minority subject as a directional route toward a freer space. I share the sentiments of Kawash with regard to the revolutionary possibilities of the boundary of the color line:

[W]here the boundary has served as the mark of exclusion, of an irreconcilable and absolute difference across which position and privilege are determined, then its effects are not challenged by effacing the boundary (“beyond race, beyond racism”—on the further side of, outside the limits of). Instead, they are challenged from the zone of the boundary itself, as the eruptive possibility of its own (nontranscending) beyond, a beyond that recognizes the boundary as both its own limit condition and its own condition of possibility. Thus, not by trying to efface or escape the limits of race but by plunging into the zone of the boundary—the zone of the color line—can we perhaps begin to imagine the possibilities of an *elsewhere*. (22)

As with Kawash, I am interested in the material and ontological effects of the color line as a social apparatus used to fix bodies and identities in national spaces *and* in the possibilities of resisting those effects from the zone of the color line. However, in looking at the works of authors such as Danzy Senna and Tessa McWatt, I believe that readers may garner more than just knowledge of methods of resistance to the color line. They may also glimpse ways of using the color line as a means of transport into an elsewhere that represents a more open diasporic space of identification.

Often mis-read in terms of racial, ethnic, and national classifications, Senna and McWatt, mixed-race women themselves, have noted how their own life experiences have influenced their view of the politics and possibilities of resisting racial constructions that uphold the boundary of the color line in the Americas. Senna, whose lineage is African-American and Irish, acknowledges the influence of the “literature of passing” on her own writing. She characterizes her own experience of passing in terms of acting as a spy in order to disrupt the national boundary of the color line in the U. S.:

[. . .] I am usually seen as “white,” Italian, Greek, Jewish, and because of this optical illusion, so to speak, I have been witness to what white people say and do when they think they’re alone. As a child, I heard especially blatant expressions of racism in Boston. I was struck even at a very young age by the two faces I saw white people wear: the face they wore in mixed company, and the face they wore when they thought they were alone.

I don’t see my spy status as a blessing [. . .]. When I remain in the position of a spy, remain silent in these circumstances, I only feel pain. The hearing it is not enlightening or thrilling for me, nor is it a novelty. I’ve been hearing it all my life. Racism is banal. It is only when I cease to be a spy, and find the courage to speak out, to break the in-group comfort zone, to “out” myself, do I feel my position is a blessing. [. . .]

(Milian Arias 450)

A Guyanese citizen by birth, who grew up in Toronto and has lived in Montreal and

London, McWatt points to colonial and postcolonial literature and their references to miscegenation as her sources of influence. She relies on multiple claims of identification and her transnational experiences in order to define herself as a writer of the African diaspora:

[. . .] I have many traditions making themselves heard in my head. I think that's true of many, many writers today. It's mostly the job of critics to put those labels on, I think. But I can say that Canada has allowed me to be who I am. I would not be the same person, let alone same kind of writer, if my father had stayed in Guyana or had moved to England instead of Toronto. I feel hugely privileged to have grown up in Canada, and I identify with Canadian writers, but also with Caribbean and British writers. I suppose I have gone from, as a child, feeling like I belonged nowhere, straddling two cultures, to feeling like I belong everywhere. I feel very lucky. (Cook)

In spite of their strong affiliations with city spaces that are representative of various national multicultural initiatives, both writers express a desire to move strategically within and beyond national contexts that are determined by the color line. It is not surprising that their works reflect a determination to “out” mulatto identity as a border identity and to articulate the multiple traditions and cultures that may be claimed by that identity.

Senna and McWatt's works critique the concept of miscegenation as the impetus for the construction of racial epistemologies and boundaries in defining nations of the Americas. Race mixing and the instability of racial knowledge that it produces disrupt systems of power that are based on what may be termed an “epistemology of the skin.” This disruption and the attendant anxieties it produces are at the heart of the impetus of nations to rearticulate an epistemology of the skin through various racial theories that place and contain the mulatto body in a space that may be known and mapped by the nation. Senna and McWatt's respective texts engage these racial theories as they are tied

to nation formation in the Americas. They especially focus on the pitfalls and failures of such theories to account for the various identities produced by miscegenation. Senna's *Caucasia* and McWatt's *Out of My Skin* deconstruct specific rhetorics of hybridity, such as racial democracy, hybrid vigor, cultural syncretism, and multiculturalism, respectively, for the ways in which they reify static racial epistemologies and social hierarchies. Both authors signify on these theories of nation in order to reveal their limits, especially given national investments in patriarchy and the primacy of the masculine subject in controlling the voice and fate of the mulatta subject. Finally, they make clear that the mulatta subject may articulate a self in ways not determined by national structures.³

Era(c)ing the Boundaries of *Caucasia*

Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*, like many narratives of passing before it, calls into question racial knowledge and the ways in which that knowledge is used to fix bodies in national spaces. The novel's protagonist, Patrice "Birdie" Lee, the bi-racial daughter of a white activist mother and a black, Harvard-educated father, is forced to assume alternative racial and cultural identities in order to elude the FBI's Cointelpro investigations of radical political groups. Unlike her sister Cole, who runs away with their father to Brazil, Birdie is not visibly black. She is understood as a "nobody, just a body without a name or a history." Her invisibility allows her to float in racial spaces as a muted signifier of the tenuous construction of race in the Americas. Senna focuses on Birdie's negotiation of the U. S. landscape, "the easiest place to get lost" (1), in order to show how the nation's black-white configuration breaks down when the mixed-race individual gets lost in whiteness, survives the pressures of passing as white, speaks back

to the nation from within its own white space, and adopts the space of the color line as a passage into a space marked by plurality and difference.

The question of where to place Birdie Lee's mixed-race body informs all of her interactions with others. The misinterpretation and flawed interpolation of Birdie begins early in childhood. When Birdie's mother tries to enroll her daughters in a Boston public school, the City Hall clerk assigns each to different districts: predominantly black Dorchester for Birdie; Irish South Boston for Cole, "in the interest of dahvesetty" (37). The nation, signified by the legal apparatus of city hall, apprehends Birdie's body as white. Under the seemingly liberal measure of diversity, the nation mandates, as if by law, Birdie's separation from her visibly black sister. Birdie's mother resists the nation's re-imposition of the color line as a means to divide two sisters by enrolling them in the Black Power Nkrumah School. However, even there the national racial epistemology of skin creates confusion regarding Birdie's presence at a black school. The students assume she is white or "a Rican or something" (43), and they assault her because of her visible difference. Even Birdie's father has trouble relating to his daughter. Unlike Cole, who is his "young, gifted, and black" (55), Birdie is rendered invisible by her father precisely because of her visible difference, as seen through his black eyes. Despite Deck Lee's investment in the fantasy of a utopian "land of miscegenation" (11, 114), he maintains a distance with his fairer daughter, the embodiment of his fantasy. This is especially true after the force of the law and its threat of punishment of an obvious black body emasculate Deck, as he is subjected to a police interrogation that includes the insinuation that he has kidnapped, molested, and brought to Boston Common a little white girl who could not possibly be his daughter (59-61). The transgression of the color

line in racially demarcated Boston is swiftly met with a retaliatory response on the part of the nation, as represented by the police, who enforce the nation's racial codes. These experiences of being (mis-)read and (mis-)placed in relation to the ambiguous space of the color line prepare Birdie well for her performance of various identities.

The performance of whiteness is complicated in multiple ways in Senna's novel. Birdie's mother, Sandy Lee, whose marriage to a black man resulted in her estrangement from her blue-blood, New England relatives, reinvents herself when her marriage fails and the nation, represented by the Cointelpro investigations, begins to label her as a threat. She ironically assumes the identity of a middle-class white woman named Sheila and relocates to New Hampshire, one of the whitest states in the Union. Mutual recognition of phenotypic characteristics and the social privilege shared by white citizens links Birdie's mother to the white community: "Her bony nose, her blue eyes, flickering, nervous—an educated voice. They heard her accent, so like their own, and knew she would do just fine. Never mind that thin, glowering, dark adolescent by her side, they thought. They saw a woman and a child. No man? No problem. They knew she was one of them" (150). In spite of her progressive politics, Birdie's mother chooses to reinvest in the white privilege of her New England childhood. In effect, she reinvests in the nation by becoming the "woman her mother always wanted her to be" (145). She supplements that investment with another identity via an imagined marriage: Jewishness. Sandy Lee becomes Sheila Goldman, widow of David Goldman, a classics professor with "a mop of curly black hair, an afro, the way Jews have sometimes" and whose "Judaism was more like a cultural thing." Birdie thus becomes a "half-Jewish girl named Jesse Goldman," whose beige skin is attributed to her Semitic heritage (131, 140). Sandy

rationalizes her ambivalent investment in the nation and its racial and cultural codes by telling Birdie that the latter is not really passing because “Jews weren’t really white, more like an off-white” (140). Sandy, in choosing a Jewish identity for Birdie, “trivializes her daughter’s racial consciousness by assuming that Birdie’s blackness can be so easily exchanged” (Boudreau 64). For Sandy, Jewishness as a racial identity, rests on the boundary of the color line, somewhere between black and white, like Birdie. In promoting this alternative identity, Birdie’s mother articulates her daughter’s unreadable hue in terms of an identity that, though accepted as white, still occupies an indeterminable space of identification in the national mythology of race. Yet, when interpreted by the nation, as represented by its New Hampshire citizens, Jewishness falls directly into the white space of power mapped by the nation’s racial boundaries. Birdie’s Jewishness, constructed by her mother for the purpose of survival in a white space, becomes a “passable” (off-)whiteness; and it is read as such by a white nation. The “blank slate” (Senna 130) of Birdie’s body, covered by a superimposed image of Jewishness-as-whiteness, thus infiltrates the nation and era(c)es its boundaries, so that no one may know where blackness and whiteness begin and end. Birdie’s body ultimately becomes a tool of dissemblance for “going incognito” (128), or for disrupting the nation’s cognition of skin and the boundaries based on that cognition.

The reinvestment by Sandy in the nation’s racial boundaries in order to conceal and protect herself and her child complicates and alters those boundaries. Casting Birdie in the role of an adolescent Jewish girl, Senna subverts the national construction of “American” identity as monolithic whiteness, “for whiteness is not represented as a monolithic category” (Harrison-Kahan 21). Instead, whiteness is literally and

metaphorically colored by the insertion of a Jewish identity. This new identity blurs the color line and opens up spaces within it in which Birdie may move in and out of seemingly fixed racial spaces. Lori Harrison-Kahan insists that the insertion of a Jewish identity in texts by recent black writers represents a shift in literary representations of whiteness and racial otherness in American society:

Adding a third term to the typically black-and-white schema of US race relations, these contemporary texts deploy Jewishness to expose the social construction and plurality of whiteness as well as to challenge existing theories of mixed race identity that rely on binary configurations. Occupying more than one position at once, Jewishness simultaneously signifies whiteness and racial otherness; furthermore, the confusion over whether the label “Jewish” refers to race, ethnicity, religion, or culture is emblematic of its complex meanings across categories of identity. As it appears in contemporary ethnic literature, the theme of “passing for Jewish” underscores the debate about whether Jewish identity qualifies as whiteness or racial otherness. (22)

Senna’s purposeful deployment of Jewishness does indeed alter how whiteness may be read and reveals the limits of dualistic thinking with regard to race. The insertion of a Jewish identity complicates the novel’s discourse surrounding the terms used to identify bodies in racial spaces and the historiography that accompanies those terms. Birdie’s assumption of Jewishness as a race, ethnicity, and culture functions as a catalyst in her transformation from a nobody without a past and a knowable identity into an other white somebody with a sense of a fixed self within white spaces. However, the performance of a Jewish-as-white identity also results in an estrangement from her mind, body, and history.

Birdie’s estrangement from self occurs in proportion to the duration of her forced immersion in a white space that negates the racial and ethnic otherness that she must

repress. Her enactment of a white/Jewish identity begins as a game of mimicking the behavior of her white peers:

From the outside, it must have looked like I was changing into one of those New Hampshire girls. I talked the talk, walked the walk, swayed my hips to the sound of heavy metal, learned to wear blue eyeliner and frosted lipstick and snap my gum. And when I heard those inevitable words come out of Mona's mouth, Mona's mother's mouth, Dennis's mouth—nigga, spic, fuckin' darkie—I only looked away into the distance, my features tensing slightly, sometimes a little laugh escaping. Strange as it may sound, there was a safety in this pantomime. The less I behaved like myself, the more I could believe that this was still a game. That my real self—Birdie Lee—was safely hidden beneath my beige flesh, and that when the right moment came, I would reveal her, preserved, frozen solid in the moment in which I had left her. (Senna 233)

Over time Birdie's performance of whiteness leads to a psychological fissure, especially given the visceral impact of the racist comments she must endure in silence. She eventually finds it difficult to distinguish between the performance and her real self. She also ceases to recognize the significance of the sentimental objects which she keeps in order to remind her of Cole and her father: "They seemed like remnants from the life of some other girl whom I barely knew anymore, anthropological artifacts of some ancient, extinct people, rather than pieces of my past. And the name Jesse Goldman no longer felt so funny, so thick on my tongue, so make-believe" (190). Birdie's adoption of and adaptation to the imagined construction of Jesse Goldman reflects the tenuous construction of race itself in the nation. But the consequences of her investment in that construction also reflect the fact that race does indeed matter; it has real material and ontological effects.

Birdie's performance ultimately results in disassociation and the manifestation of a type of depersonalization disorder, usually characterized by a loss of familiarity with the self and by an out of body experience.⁴ Birdie copes with her estrangement from self

by inventing or accepting other ethnicities that fall outside of the black/white binary of the nation's racial discourses. When children at a local lake ask her about her origins, Birdie assumes the identity of an indentured Indian princess from Calcutta (185). She later allows a local boy to name her "Pocahantus," because she looks like "a little Indian" (192-93). His parents also express that she resembles an Italian (195). Birdie's body, according to these identifications, is a blank slate randomly inscribed with imagined racial images constructed by others. Senna herself compares Birdie to a "Rorschach test, where a person is shown an amorphous ink-blot image and has to say what image or emotion each design evokes, [and] Birdie's ambiguous features reveal people's hidden racial desires" (Milian-Arias 449). Seemingly originating outside of the racial boundaries of a white American nation, Birdie's body is thus transnationalized by those who interpret it. However, because the ethnic terms attributed to her are used as comparative descriptors only, Birdie's subjectivity cannot occupy the freeing space of the transnational in-between—at least, not yet.

Imprisoned in whiteness while seeking to express a transnational subjectivity, Birdie suffers a crisis of identification. The misrecognition of her blackness and her participation in this misrecognition facilitates Birdie's mind-body split:

Something else changed in New Hampshire, something I never told anyone for fear of being called crazy and sent away, like a girl I had seen on an after-school special. It was simply a sensation I had at times, when I experienced a sense of watching myself from above. It happened only occasionally. I would, quite literally, feel myself rising above a scene, looking down at myself, hearing myself speak. I would gaze down at the thin girl sitting by the fence, the one with her brown hair falling into her eyes, drawing patterns in the dirt, and watch this girl with the detachment of a stranger. And in these moments I would notice things about myself, about my body—the faint dusky mustache that made me look dirty in the wrong light; the bunions on my feet that twisted my toes inward like sad, beaten dogs; the remarkable length of my fingers; the knobby knees; and

the flat feet. I saw these things as neither beautiful nor ugly, but simply as facts. I would look at my own body the way that I looked at another's. I would think, "You," not "I," in those moments, and as long as the girl was "you," I didn't feel that I lived those scenes, only that I witnessed them.
(Senna 190)

Significant is the change in expression of the self in terms of the second-person instead of the first-person. From outside of her body, Birdie, in spite of her Jewish difference, regards the "you" of herself in terms of an undifferentiated whiteness that is just a fact and no different than any other white identity. Birdie, in gazing at her normalized white body from above, from the position of observer, morphs from a subject into her own foreign object of study, much like the memorabilia she saves. Disembodied, she becomes an anthropological item, once animated but now devoid of that which makes her human—consciousness of self and agency. Since her racial identity is tied to her humanity, the repression of the former results in the erasure of the latter. Given that Birdie is surrounded by white bodies and must use them as the frame of reference for her embodiment of Jesse Goldman, it is not surprising that Birdie Lee begins to disappear. Birdie Lee's "I" is the border of the color line, but that "I" has been shifted into whiteness by the "you" of Jesse Goldman. Birdie's unreadable and silenced black "I" is enveloped in a mass of white space. As long as everyone's gaze remains on the "you" of Jesse Goldman, the "I" of Birdie Lee can barely be seen or heard, even by herself.

In order to re-member the "I" of herself, Birdie searches for a reflection of herself, such as her marginalized bi-racial classmate Samantha Taper, and for a cultural marker that will connect her with her sister Cole. Never quite able to bond with Samantha, Birdie scours the pages of a library book that describes the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé. The god Exu-Elegba, in particular, holds her attention, for he represents

“potentiality and change. It [the book] said that although many people thought Exu was the devil, he was really just a trickster, always shifting his form, always at the crossroads. I had a feeling that Cole would like Exu” (242). According to Robert Voeks, in Brazil Exu is understood as a trickster-god known for causing chaos and disruption. He is also a “catalyst of change,” and he reveals himself “when the bounds of spiritual equilibrium established by the archetype of the orixá have been trespassed” (75-76). It is not surprising that Birdie is drawn to this deity, for she herself is a figure for Exu-Elegba. Like the god, Birdie is a trickster, assuming multiple identities and forms. Her beige body disrupts the boundary between black and white spaces and throws into chaos the notion of a fixed and clear color line. She too occupies the space of the crossroads, in that her subjectivity rests on both the racial axis of the color line and the epistemological axis of black and white knowledge systems. She possesses within her the potential for change in the apprehension and declaration of the “I” of her true self and in the ways in which racial knowledge may be understood and critiqued. Her prayer to Exu for change marks the emergence of the deity Exu within her, as she seeks to realign her own psychospiritual equilibrium, which has been trespassed by the imposition of a foreign identity on her sense of a black self. “Killing one girl in order to let the other one free” (Senna 289) is Birdie’s sacrifice to Exu, who is also “owner of streets” and roads (Voeks 75). As Birdie flees to Boston in search of her father’s sister, her potential is signified by her transport, for she will choose to pass through the color line, as represented by the highway, “where I felt most safe—on a moving vehicle, rolling toward some destination but not quite there” (Senna 293).

The suppressed black sensibility and potential for a transnational sensibility within Birdie are mirrored to her in their fullness through her Aunt Dot. Having traveled the world and lived in India for a time, Dot has become a transnational subject who admits to leaving America during the decline of the Black Power movement in order to invest in something beyond the boundary of the color line: “She had left in order to save herself. She wanted to go deeper than skin color, deeper than politics, to something more important. Something spiritual. Something she thought she could only find in India” (313). With her gold-tipped locks, her claim to the “soul color” of yellow, and her firm sense of spiritual equilibrium, Dot reflects the attributes of Oshun, the Yoruba goddess associated with gold and the color yellow and who ties people together. Dot eventually reads what she views as Birdie’s true soul color, red—the color associated with Exu (Murphy 42). From Dot Birdie learns that the something that goes deeper than skin is a “yearning for some place that doesn’t exist. [. . . A place where] you can see everything at once. It’s the only way how” (315). In order to attain peace and a firm sense of the “I” within herself, Birdie must inhabit an in-between space that cannot be perceived by the senses, given the nation’s static epistemology of the skin. If the nation maps out separate black and white spaces that must not touch, then the in-between space of the color line, where black and white meet, does not really exist. That invisible space, like Birdie’s body, is not mapped. The “I” space, the space of the line, is where Birdie must pass (through and up) in order to arrive at a place where she can see both races and many more at once.

Before Birdie can move to the space of the boundary, she must face and confront the nation, embodied in her blue-blood grandmother. Penelope Lodge, a resident of

Cambridge who claimed Cotton Mather as an ancestor, violently castigated her daughter for rejecting “Caucasia” and delving into the “land of miscegenation.” She believed strictly in the common sense of the color line and in the separate racial spaces produced by it. Sandy’s transgression of the color line, evidenced by two bi-racial children, tainted the family bloodline. In Penelope’s mind, Cole’s blackness could never be camouflaged or hidden in the way that Birdie’s blackness could. Thus, in pitying but hopeful tones, Birdie’s grandmother would regularly (re-)construct Birdie’s identity in terms of a dusky, but privileged Europeanness, which was a label that was as foreign to Birdie as a child as it becomes to her as an adolescent. The repetition during their reunion of Penelope Lodge’s discourse of the tragedy/travesty of miscegenation moves her granddaughter to retaliate with an alternative discourse. Articulating herself within a space of whiteness, but refusing to adhere to the terms of whiteness, Birdie launches a discursive assault on the racial epistemology and historiography of the nation. She speaks back not only to her grandmother but also to the nation by denouncing her grandmother’s theories of race as “Victorian crap” and labeling the blue-blood line as the tragedy (365). This assertion of self reflects Birdie’s transformation from an object to be labeled and studied to a subject with racial consciousness, agency, and voice. The momentum produced by speaking back to the nation propels Birdie toward a reunion with her father and sister and toward the “I” space of the boundary.

“I passed as white, Papa” (391). Birdie makes this confession to her father who, disillusioned with Brazil, has been residing in Oakland, California for several years. The ideal of a racial democracy,⁵ made up of seemingly egalitarian racial spaces, had propelled Deck Lee to divest from the apartheid he viewed in America and to invest in

the notion of a South American racial utopia that celebrates hybridity. Yet, behind the illusion of a utopia existed the reality of another form of the color line, by which “the poor people living in the favellas resembled Africans, the rich people in power resembled Europeans, and everyone in the middle was obsessed with where they and their children would fall on the spectrum of color” (406). Deck fails, as a research professor, to investigate and interrogate the desire to remove blackness from the Brazilian nation as the nation’s motivation for miscegenation, enacted through the black female body. Deck’s lack of critical engagement with Brazil’s particular history of racial formation reflects his short-sightedness with regard to race relations and the various articulations of whiteness in the Americas. His daughter’s confession, rather than outraging the former black nationalist consciousness in Deck, instead confirms his new equally limited theory of race as merely an imagined construct: “[. . .] there’s no such thing as passing. We’re all just pretending. Race is a complete illusion, make-believe. It’s a costume. We all wear one. You just switched yours at some point. That’s just the absurdity of the race game” (391). The real absurdity, however, rests in Deck’s disavowal of the very real material effects of the race game, as evidenced by his own children’s struggles.

Ironically, despite the disillusionment produced by the apprehension of the material flaws inherent in the patriarchal Brazilian practice of a racial democracy, Deck chooses to focus on the Brazilian color line’s middle spectrum of mixed-race individuals, who will form the basis of his proposal for a new America that will be free of the limiting illusion of race. He points to historical mulatto figures such as Alexander Pushkin, Phillipa Schuyler, and Jean Toomer as examples of mixed-race individuals who reflected the poisonous racial atmosphere of the U. S. Senna purposefully alludes to Phillipa

Schuyler, “child prodigy of the Harlem Renaissance” (392). Phillipa’s parents, George Schuyler and Josephine Cogdell, believed that their daughter, the result of their interracial marriage, would be proof of their theory of “hybrid vigor,” which is based on the agricultural theory of cross-breeding plants to produce a hardier species.⁶ The Schuyler’s theory did not find wide enough acceptance in America to be put into practice, and it did not account for the virulence of whiteness over other racial identifications as economic and social currency. Yet, Deck remains convinced that his rearticulation of the theory of hybrid vigor has manifested itself in his daughters’ experiences in racial spaces, and that the vigor which they have displayed in negotiating various manifestations of the color line in the Americas is proof of the success of his theory. Birdie characterizes Deck’s dream of a mulatto nation in these terms:

The canaries, he said, were used by coal miners to gauge how poisonous the air underground was. They would bring a canary in with them, and if it grew sick and died, they knew the air was bad and that eventually everyone else would be poisoned by the fumes. My father said that likewise, mulattos had historically been the gauge of how poisonous American race relations were. The fate of the mulatto in history and in literature, he said, will manifest the symptoms that will eventually infect the rest of the nation. (393)

Deck’s theory, based on the economy of mining, fails to take into account the state’s regulation of the movement of bodies, the economic motivation involved, and the limits of ornithology. Whiteness, as a system of power relations, metaphorically represented by historically white coal miners, mines spaces for material resources that may be converted into currency that will support the nation. Whiteness also regulates the movement of non-white bodies (the canaries) by mapping spaces (the mines) according to categories of stability (whiteness) and instability (racial otherness). Canaries in the hands of white, male coal miners have neither subjectivity nor agency in such spaces; they are easily

manipulated, expendable animal resources. The canaries' fate is ultimately based on a controlled experiment that purposely introduces the bird into a toxic environment in order to gauge the potential for profit to be made from mined spaces. Deck's conflation of Birdie and the canary in a coal mine is based on a flawed view of race as biology. His theory also reflects his failure to recognize that a white, male-dominated nation would regulate the movement of his Birdie/canary. Deck's limited vision causes him to interpret his daughter in the same way that she had begun to interpret herself during her experience of passing: as an object of study. His insistence on a theory that does not address his daughter's ontology directly reflects his recurring failure to deal with her subjectivity, which refuses to be enveloped and choked by the racial mines of the nation. For the child who was ironically nicknamed Birdie is not a bird, and she will no longer be manipulated by whiteness or by racial theories that rely on whiteness for their own flawed construction.

Caucasia concludes with a representational image of a space that exists apart from the rigid racial and social binaries of the nation. Having reunited with her sister in culturally diverse Berkeley, California, where mixed-race children are a "dime a dozen" (412), according to Cole, Birdie imagines for the first time a life that is not dictated and consumed by whiteness. Birdie's penultimate description of the space of a school bus characterizes her embrace of the border as a space of identification and transport to multiple spaces:

The bus was closing its doors, and I peered up at the faces just settling behind the windows. They were black and Mexican and Asian and white, on the verge of puberty, but not quite in it. They were utterly ordinary, throwing obscenities and spitballs at one another the way kids do. One face toward the back of the bus caught my eye, and I halted in my tracks, catching my breath. It was a cinnamon-skinned girl with her hair in

braids. She was black like me, a mixed girl, and she was watching me from behind the dirty glass. For a second I thought I was somewhere familiar and she was a girl I already knew. I began to lift my hand, but stopped, remembering where I was and what I had already found. Then the bus lurched forward, and the face was gone with it, just a blur of yellow and black in motion. (413)

The school bus, as a signifier of the educational system and as a mode of transport for children, is significant. The space of the bus is located between the public space of the school and the private, racially demarcated spaces of the residences where the children reside, both of which are regulated in various ways by the state. Moving between the public, private, and racially marked spaces of the nation, the bus, with its diverse makeup of children of parents from various parts of the Americas, is a transnational space that erases the nation's boundaries. The interactions between the pre-pubescent students also signals a new type of transnational discourse that evolves organically and has not been corrupted by the restrictive "adult" literacies of the nation. The movement of the bus along roads that border the spaces noted above reflects the movement of the transnational subject, freely passing through and up on constructed boundaries. The "blur of yellow and black," colors representative of mixed-race identity and the merging of several national identities, metaphorically represents the way in which transnationality makes indistinct the borders between races and national spaces but allows them to retain their color. The simultaneous blurring of borders and the retention of individual properties signal Birdie's membership in a Dutch pot diaspora of the Americas, which is marked by a transnational soup made up of multiple national elements that are mixed together but also retain their unique flavors.

The recognition of herself in the body of the mixed-race girl on the school bus introduces a new sense of completeness for Birdie. Her subjectivity and movement are

no longer dictated by whiteness and the racial spaces and theories of race that are produced by whiteness. Resting on the border, Birdie may observe multiple races and nations all at once. She inhabits a space that, to a nation invested in racial dichotomies, is not supposed to exist beyond the imagination. The freedom of the space of the border allows Birdie to celebrate the “plurality of her identity over its duality” (Harrison-Kahan 44). Once in this space, Birdie’s gaze shifts from the differences between the separate national experiences which she and her sister have had to the enactment of a union of sameness and difference within a transnational space. In aligning herself and her sister with this perspective, Birdie finally reflects the features of a transnational, diasporic subject of the Americas: able to claim a multiplicity of identifications and in motion along borders.

Caucasia’s Hyphen as Transnational Vector

Senna’s novel culminates in a reading of the potential for transnational identification within the space of the color line. Birdie’s narrative reveals that black subjects, whose movements are limited by the rigid racial spaces of the nation, may move more freely along the border of those racial spaces. The narrative’s comparison of racial spaces in Brazil and in the U. S. also leaves open the possibility of comparatively engaging racial spaces in other areas of the Americas. For example, *Caucasia*, as a set of power relations mediated by the color line, is rarely interrogated above the 49th Parallel. Black identity in multicultural Canada, particularly the hyphenated identity of Caribbean-Canadians, complicates the notion of movement along a border. Caribbean-Canadians, due to various roots of origin and routes of migration, already make multiple identity

claims. Yet, the Canadian nation's investment in Canadianness as whiteness and in placing non-white bodies in prescribed areas limits non-white claims to space and power. The mixed-race body, though claimed in multicultural discourses, troubles the understood cartography of the Canadian nation and of the meaning of Canadianness. Black Canadian literature that characterizes the experience of mixed-race individuals, particularly those of Caribbean descent, reflects this juxtaposition. As George Elliott Clarke notes, "[l]ike all African diasporic writing, African-Canadian literature engages the symbol and the image of the mixed-race black because this figure violates the sanctity of racial polarities [. . .]" ("Canadian Biraciality" 203). Tessa McWatt's *Out of My Skin* not only interrogates the Canadian nation's investment in a policy of multiculturalism, which masks the racial polarities produced by the nation's Other-white configuration. McWatt's novel also presents a view of a mixed-race Caribbean-Canadian who occupies the space of the hyphen and reconfigures that border space as a transnational vector, defined by her magnitude of phenomenological movement and the possibility of motion in a multiplicity of directions.

As with Birdie Lee, the protagonist of McWatt's novel, Daphne Baird, is a signifier of racial ambiguity; and the nation's misrecognition of her body and skin begins early in childhood. While Daphne's copper complexion, wide nose, kinky hair, slanted eyes, and "high-rumped gait," a "trace of Africa" (4-5) mark her as visible to the nation, her mixed-race Guyanese ethnicity cannot be read according to the color line of the hyphen mapped by the Caucasia that is Canada. Daphne's unknown "hyphenation" (81), so called by her biological aunt, eludes the nation. In second grade, when a classmate labels Daphne a "Negro," the teacher, a symbol of the state, articulates the Canadian

nation's desire to name, identify, and map onto Canadianness an ethnic affiliation by insisting that "people are certain things," such as Brazilian, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, etc. (16). Daphne's expression of confusion leads her adoptive, white father, Canadian history teacher Bill Baird, to impose upon Daphne an epistemology of the nation that is rooted in the normalization of Canadian identity as whiteness: "You're a Canadian, and don't you let anyone tell you otherwise" (16). However, Daphne lacks the "certainty" of Canadianness as whiteness, for the whiteness of her Toronto peers "made her feel absent" (48). Unlike Birdie, Daphne almost immediately resists the directive to abandon the desire for ethnic affiliation in favor of a feeling of being wanted by the nation:

It had begun that day: the appearance of the crack, the question *what are you* nudging it wider each time she asked it of herself. Events accumulated like clouds. Every gesture of belonging that other children showed prompted a repetition of the question. The intensity burst and she found herself in puddles of her own confusion. Her parents had explained what it meant to be adopted. They explained and explained until she lost all the other words except *wanted*. She had been *wanted*; she was to remember that, and they ensured that she did. It was her special status. But *wanted* hadn't been a good enough answer all the times she'd been asked *what are you*, or asked why she looked so different from her parents. So she began to invent better answers, and events conspired to confirm them. (17)

The image of the crack aligns well with the image of the hyphen, for the hyphen in the Canadian context signals a simultaneous union of and division between ethnic affiliation and national belonging. The intention of the hyphen is to answer the question of *what are you* and simultaneously maps that enunciation onto the nation space. The crack as hyphen represents a racialized cartography of nation invested in a subjective discourse of multiculturalism. Arising from the need to accommodate the demands of citizens of the French-speaking province of Quebec and an influx of newer ethnic immigrants, Canada's specific legal policy of multiculturalism, first proposed under

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government, encourages the expression and celebration of ethnic identity and the contribution of cultural difference to the nation. However, in everyday experience, ethnic identity is simultaneously attached to and subsumed by national affiliation. Minelle Mahtani, in her work on multiculturalism and mixed-race identity in Canada, emphasizes that the unique historiography of this policy reflects a desire to enact a "national framework of 'unity within diversity.'" This motivation was viewed as an extraordinary "change from the conventional strategies of nation building" (70). Yet, this strategy of nation building is quite conventional in terms of its investment in whiteness and patriarchy, particularly given the white male-dominated power structures of the nation and the nation's apotheosis of Trudeau, popularly considered the father of the modern multicultural Canadian nation. Mahtani emphasizes that mixed-race women, affected by the double bind of whiteness and patriarchy, are especially "placed 'outside' of Canadianness" (77). Given this history, it is not surprising that McWatt articulates the crack in Canada's multicultural policy as a color line signified by the hyphen between the binary constructions of ethnic and national identity. The crack represents the split in Daphne's psyche between the Caribbean heritage she will later discover and her confused and ambivalent relation to the nation. The jagged edges of the crack reflect this violent process of splitting. The crack as hyphen produced by Daphne's white adoptive father's insistence on her assumption of a national identity signifies on the paternalistic Trudeau-as-nation's seemingly benevolent insistence on the same, while encouraging a national discourse of identity through multiplicity. Finally, the crack as hyphen reflects the failure of the nation to recognize Daphne's ontology as a mixed-race woman, the insufficiency of the "special status" it produces, and her need for more than a

superficial discourse of national belonging.

Within McWatt's novel, the historical backdrop of the 1990 Oka Crisis⁸ in Quebec highlights the issue of national belonging and the image of the crack. Between March 11 and September 26, 1990, native people of Mohawk nations from across Canada and the U. S. joined together in Oka, Quebec around the beat of the drum to protest the denial of their claims to land. Native nationalism collided violently with the divergent, yet temporarily united nationalisms of Quebec and Canada. The standoff between the village of Oka and the Mohawk nation over the razing of sacred ancestral burial grounds for commercial purposes reflects the failure of the nation—in this case, both the French “nation” of Quebec and the larger nation of Canada—to recognize the history, subjectivity, and land rights of its indigenous people. The Oka Crisis focused attention on the obscured cracks within the nation, by which First Nations groups are made to disappear or through which they fall if they do not align themselves with state directives. The issues of heritage and inheritance at the heart of the conflict at Oka parallel Daphne's adult quest in Montreal for an ethnic heritage and cultural inheritance to make sense of the crack within her psyche and to provide her with a stable sense of belonging.

While Oka signifies on the fissures within the hyphenated nation space, the nearby city of Montreal signifies on the revolutionary possibilities of an improvised, transnational space that may arise from within a crack. Montreal, as Quebec's contradictory signifier of cosmopolitanism and of the linguistic and cultural division of spaces within Canada, both accentuates an adult Daphne's sense of disconnectedness from the nation and facilitates her exploration of the in-between space of the crack/hyphen. The gathering of various individuals called by the beat of the drum at the

open Sunday performances within Montreal's Mount Royal Park alludes to Daphne's eventual apprehension of the crack/hyphen as a transnational space of secure identification:

There were twelve musicians: eight men on congas, bongos, timpani, boxes, and cartons; one played a marimba; one a washboard; and one woman was blowing quietly on a saxophone next to a man playing clappers. The music was without measure, the varying pulses of a protracted afternoon. No one orchestrated the event; it was a Sunday improvisation, as unpredictable as its audience, which varied, though many in the crowd were regulars. It was simply known as "the drumming" to the residents in the area. Some afternoons it was wild and frenetic, on others it was subdued and forced – the mood governed by something intangible. But in the heat that Sunday there was genuine abandon in the arms of the shirtless men who, with palms pounding on stretched leather, carved out the afternoon, giving shape to the day's leisure. [. . .] Daphne began to bounce on the spot, although she wasn't aware of it. [. . .] making her way through the crowd and up into the woods, Daphne's own step was light and in tempo with the receding beat. (49-51)

Daphne, like the Mohawks and the crowd in the park, dances into a space characterized by a sense of mutual recognition that goes beyond the indeterminate signifier of skin. The rhythms of various instruments of the Americas signal a transnational intersubjectivity that transcends national affiliation. The parallel drumming at Oka and within Montreal's Mount Royal Park communicate a message of kinship and affiliation that trumps the nation's indoctrination of belonging as investment in Canadianness as whiteness. The drumming thus reconfigures the nation in terms of its own ideal of unity within diversity. In spite of the fact that "[h]er connection to others seemed like a tightrope on which she teetered, surrounded by empty space, no ground in sight," in Montreal Daphne manages to inhabit a "calm, free space, as in the eye of a tornado, which asked for nothing except her imagination for survival" (64-65). Because she lacks

knowledge of what exists on the side of the crack/hyphen that is not affiliated with the nation, the tightrope of the crack/hyphen barely maintains Daphne in her negotiation of the empty, white space of the nation. But, as with Birdie, Daphne purposely explores the other end of the line of the tightrope in hopes of discovering a safe space of belonging between nations that technically does not have a defined form, but which requires an act of the imagination to bring it into existence. Surefoot, a Mohawk activist who participates in the demonstrations at Oka, challenges Daphne to redefine belonging as a creative gift that “you give yourself” (98). This earth-mother figure, whose interaction with Daphne symbolizes the cross-cultural alliances formed between indigenous and black peoples of the Americas, provides Daphne with emotional guidance in passing through the “line to her [Daphne’s] blood” (61). Daphne’s aunt, one of the points on the line, connects Daphne to her Caribbean heritage and to an inheritance of journals, filled with discursive bones that, once unearthed, reveal the true nature of her ancestry and origins.

The journals, penned from late 1959 to early 1960 by Daphne’s father, Gerald Eyre,⁹ function as a means of re-membering history as more than just the record of a national narrative. They represent what Bill Schwarz conceptualizes as a dynamic “phenomenology of historical time,” which “brings together what conventionally are kept disconnected: on the one hand, the internal, subjective experience of temporality; and on the other, the socially organized, objectively structured operation of time, deemed to be historical” (63).¹⁰ In this sense, the remaining record of Gerald Eyre’s existence “both subjectivizes history and historicizes subjectivity” (64). The journals record the deteriorating mental state of a man whose illness was the result of his emasculation under

Guyana's colonial rule. Gerald's phenotype, the result of a Guyanese history of racial mixture, granted him a privileged status. However, seemingly betrayed by the nation's racial politics and spiraling toward madness as a result, Gerald sought relief/release from racial oppression in his youngest daughter's embrace:

She accepts me, each night, folding her limbs like a gentle flower around me. She is delicate, has the bones of a small bird and it is she who comforts me. [. . .] She has her mother's skin, almost green, and she has marzipan teeth. I am like chocolate beside her.

* * *

It's rising in me again, and it pours out of my head like an electric current. And the current is wet, changes to tears, salt and water dripping down the side of my face, sticking to it – a balm of penitence. And when it flows like that, I go to her, but if she doesn't accept me the hum increases, it flows from my ears to ignite and light up the room. And you have to take me, you can't deny me, not like this. So I push and she hits her head and she too has the saltwater billows in the eyes, and I try to help, but she thinks it's something else, and I try again, but she doesn't understand. She does not cry out. Not like this, Not like this, she whimpers.

(McWatt 92, 95)

Gerald's journal entries convey an urgency to get out of his skin and to embed himself in an entity that approximates the whiteness he so desperately wants to claim in order to feel whole and connected to the nation. His demise reflects the effects of the psychological violence wrought on the colonized by imperial authorities who seek to direct the course of national development: "the slow and deliberate eradication of memory. The annihilation of personality" (127). McWatt herself characterizes Gerald's expressions in terms of the tragedy of the post-colonial condition: "He [Gerald] believes very strongly in the days of Empire, primarily because he thrived in those days. He's confused about power. He's a product of confused notions of power, and hence the confusion with his own daughter. He's a victim as well as a perpetrator of that confusion and abuse. And

that certainly is one of the ugly sides of the effects of colonialism in Guyana” (Cook).

Daphne, the result of her parents’ incestuous union, inherits her father’s confused notions of identity in relation to power. Like her father, Daphne also attempts to embed herself in entities and spaces that will connect her to the nation. The pressures of heritage and of nation manifest themselves in Daphne’s psyche as a hum, similar to the hum which her father heard: “She started to hear it [the hum] and to feel the fear of being swallowed up by a foreign element so powerful it feels innate” (McWatt 192). However, while the faint admonishment of “Not like this” did little to deter Gerald’s resolve, it resonates within the hum for Daphne, whose desire remains to balance the two sides of the hyphen of her identity without settling for a superficial relation to the nation. Balancing herself on the crack/hyphen of her identity will allow Daphne to subjectivize her own history and historicize her own subjectivity at the same time.

On vacation in the Gatineau forest near Ottawa, Daphne finally balances the equation. As mythic deities hover nearby, Surefoot’s message of self-engendered belonging and creative forms of kinship within the nation mingle with the resonant humming of discordant notes of race and nation that once occupied Gerald’s consciousness:

Something was orchestrating this moment. A strange presence on the lake was blurring the lines that normally divided the earth, the sky, and the water. A wind. Surefoot’s Chinook met Gerald’s hurricane. A thousand names for the wind and the tricks it played. “*Nansi could call to the winds in their different names and talk in all their different languages. Kee, kee, kee – kee, kee, kee, Clever Anansi, couldn’t catch Monkey.*” A high, singing rhyme – familiar words she’d never heard before. [. . .] And there they all were at one moment: Daphne, Gerald and the prodigal circus. All moments existing at once in her head, she controlling it like a mighty Greek goddess. (200-201)

Weaving webs linking the earth and the sky, Anansi’s presence signals creative potential.

Having its origins in Ashanti folktales and later translated to the Americas, Anansi, a trickster with mastery of language, represents what Joyce Jonas refers to as a “deconstructive energy” that troubles and complicates the binary oppositions of modern epistemologies (2). The reference to a Greek goddess, most likely Ariadne, who, facing death, was transformed into a spider and is associated with weaving, also indicates the possibility of alternative states of being. Daphne’s identification with Anansi/Ariadne influences her own work as a creator, for she speaks in different languages in order to apprehend and move in multiple national spaces, and she draws together and reconfigures fragments in order to construct a subjective thread of her own. Her deconstruction of the elusive monkeys of history and of her hyphenated identity transforms her into an artist who, like Anansi/Ariadne, “escapes the disastrous prospect of nonbeing by weaving a [. . .] ‘text’ that turns history/his story into [an alternative space of interstitial belonging]” (Jonas 2). As if preparing her own transnational soup to sustain her in her dealings with the Canadian nation, Daphne channels multiple knowledge systems that will ultimately find articulation in her own conception of a Dutch pot diaspora that will link the various areas of the Americas represented by her lineage, experience, and present subjectivity.

Just as the wind and the deities influence Daphne’s consciousness, the earth itself beckons her to perform a rite of re-memory through reflection, burial, and consumption. Daphne’s act of re-memory ties together all of the lessons she has learned from contemplation of various acts of resistance to the epistemology of nation:

All of the others, she thought, had disobeyed the inevitable, had tried to reverse the current of their circumstances. Her mother had walked into the water to cleanse shame and had never walked out, but perhaps there she’d found the mercy she’d needed. Even in jail, Surefoot would continue her conversation with the pine trees, and belonging would drip from her like blood from a pierced palm. Then there was Gerald . . . he had been alive

enough to reinvent himself. She wanted to preserve this act of his, this triumph of the will in the pit of insanity, and it was then that she knew what to do with the diaries. A bow to memory. To let the snow and rain work on them until they became a place in which her own body could eventually be laid to rest. To have the paper petrify and fill the cleft between vegetable and rock, the words silent and grinning in the earth. (202)

The meditation on the subjective empowerment achieved in her mother's choice to immerse herself permanently in the space of a lake, in Surefoot's choice to embrace the space of a jail cell in protest over the violation of the pines of her ancestors, and in Gerald's choice to embed himself discursively in the white space of his journals leads to Daphne's choice to acknowledge an epistemology of imagined spaces of belonging. The acknowledgement of such spaces contradicts national epistemologies of belonging that are often held as "sacred," not to be interrogated or re-imagined. Like nature itself, creative spaces of belonging are not framed by borders. They may also become sacred, in a more open, metaphysical sense. Daphne's burial of her father's journals makes sacred her parents' constructions of alternative spaces of belonging. The burial of her father's discursive bones, in particular, is a sacred act of re-memory and a means of constructing for him another space of alternative belonging that connects him in a material way to Daphne and the land she partially claims in her identity. Though burial silences the record of her parents' existence, the body and memory of their daughter will continue to communicate the history of a young girl, whose skin was "almost green," and of a man, who felt "like chocolate" next to her.

Consuming the "green moss" and the "dark brown of the dirt" (204) that rests near the burial ground which she created, Daphne metaphorically consumes the "green" skin of her mother and the traces of chocolate skin which her father sought to expel from

his own history. This image of consumption revises Guyanese novelist and theorist Wilson Harris's notion of a hybrid identity produced by cannibalism. In discussing the anthropological influences on the evolution of his most famous work, Harris alludes to acts of cannibalism performed by Carib Indians before their decimation by New World conquerors: "The Carib flute was hollowed from the bone of an enemy in time of war. Flesh was plucked and consumed and in the process secrets were digested. Specters arose from, or reposed in, the flute" ("A Note on the Genesis of *The Guyana Quartet*" 9). Shalini Puri views Harris's metaphor of consumption as more than just a "reversal of relations of economic, political, and epistemic power," but as a movement toward a "more metaphysical transformation." Puri concludes that "Harris's account provides the security of neither reversal nor permanence. For him, the Other is not definitively destroyed, subdued, or incorporated. Whilst the incorporation of the Other is a source of strength for the Self, that strength is never secure or securing; rather, the spectre of the Other remains an *unsettling* presence for the Self" (73). From the discursive bones of Gerald's journals, with which Daphne has been engaged in a psycho-spiritual war, Daphne metaphorically plucks her parents' flesh, as if consuming the ingredients of the transnational soup which she has fashioned out of converging histories. The consumption of their flesh allows her to digest the secrets of her origins and heritage and to expel the specters of her parents' tragic history. This produces both a reversal of historical power relations and a metaphysical transformation, as the specters are released from former colonial and post-colonial pressures and are transformed into natural substances that nourish Daphne's self. The re-membering of her parents through the recognition of their histories, the consumption of their discursive bones, and the act of

burial of those bones, transforms their specters from unsettled and unsettling presences into sources of empowerment for Daphne's hyphenated identity. Daphne's choices to leave the bones within the safe space of the earth and not to return to retrieve them do indeed provide the security of reversal and permanence.

Daphne, whose name derives from that of a Greek goddess who was transformed into a laurel tree, finally apprehends the futility of attempting to graft herself to either the branch of her adoptive nation, represented by Bill and Jennifer Baird, or to the branch of her heritage, represented by Gerald and Muriel Eyre's history, in order "to close the gaping hole" (McWatt 196) in her complex Caribbean-Canadian family tree. She recognizes that she is neither nation nor heritage alone; she is both of those things and more. With this knowledge, Daphne finally heeds Surefoot's advice and offers to herself self-consciousness, a gift of her own imagination, inspired by alternative epistemologies of belonging. Aligning herself with the hybrid hum of multi-national sounds that emanate from the in-between space bridging heritage and nation, Daphne silently communicates to the spirits of her parents what she now knows: "that if you surrendered to the hum you could ride it,¹¹ straddle it like a back or a wing" (206). Daphne's surrender to the hum enacts a form of cultural syncretism, by which she plants herself firmly within the space of the crack/hyphen, where she may claim her racial, ethnic, and national mixture as ingredients that constitute her unique ontology. The embrace of a syncretic identity and the sustenance which it produces represents the power of a Dutch pot sensibility, once developed and performed.

The performative, borderline subjectivity created by the bridging of ethnic and national identities vis-à-vis the crack/hyphen represents an expressive identity that

enunciates itself from a space that is “continually, *contingently*, ‘opening out’, remaking the boundar[y], exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 313). The final scene of *Out of My Skin* characterizes the type of subjectivity that may emerge from a border space that is contingent upon ethnic and national affiliations and yet not bounded by them. As with Birdie, Daphne’s progressive movement along roads that border racialized spaces reflects the passage of the transnational subject through and up on constructed boundaries. Having hitchhiked her way back to Montreal, Daphne arrives in the transnational space of Jean Talon market, where she was scheduled to meet her new employer and potential boyfriend, Michel Duchesne, himself a result of French and Italian mixture. Holding Michel’s gaze as she enters the market, Daphne utters two words that enunciate all at once her history, her ontology, and her sense of belonging within and beyond the space of the nation: “I’m here.” They are “[s]lender words, but sharp as a deep cut exposing bone” (208). Daphne’s aunt, as she handed over Gerald’s notebooks, exhorted Daphne to be conscious of the fact that “some words hide truth just like fat hides bone” (82). At the end of Daphne’s turbulent passage to self-consciousness, the words “I’m here” convey the truth of the vocality, temporality, spatiality, and agency inherent in her new identity. “I’m here,” as a self-affirming utterance, defies national narratives of a silenced or muted mulatta voice that is outside of normalized enunciations of national identity. The assertion of “I’m here” confidently reframes and responds to the nation’s interrogatory of *what are you*. These simple words announce the *choice* to invest in an alternative epistemology of belonging. The declaration of “I’m here,” within a transnational space, expresses a diasporic subjectivity of the Americas that is rooted in a *personal* cartography

of hybrid hyphenation and transnationality. Moreover, Daphne's arrival at the enunciative point of "I'm here," by way of passage through and up on the border of the crack/hyphen, re-maps the space of the crack/hyphen not as a static segment with terminal endpoints but as a vector, which is defined by its magnitude and direction. Though Daphne's point of origin lies in a fractured past, there exists within the vector the potential for various magnitudes of conscious movement along a line that is ever opening out into a continuous present that exists beyond the limited temporality and spatiality of the nation. Daphne's emergent transnational, diasporic sensibility articulates the border subjectivity of those in the Americas who seek recognition that cannot be granted from nations invested in fixing bodies in place according to various forms of the color line. Simultaneously arriving and in motion as they pass on the borders of nations, such subjects remake those borders as themselves.

Conclusion: Passing into the Transnational

Annie Coombes and Avtar Brah, in their summary of various perspectives of the ways in which nation, community, and belonging may be reconfigured, link the term "hybridity" to considerations of the "local" and the "global": "The concept of 'hybridity' as it informs the analysis of the links between the local and the global operates polysemantically, bringing together disparate themes ranging from imperialism to subject formation, and different theoretical traditions covering a variety of disciplines including psychoanalysis, literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and history" (12). Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* and Tessa McWatt's *Out of My Skin* unite the various themes and theoretical traditions noted by Coombes and Brah in order to interrogate the color

lines of nations in the Americas. Senna and McWatt's polysemantic moves focus attention on the pitfalls of rhetorics of hybridity that are rooted in national constructions. Yet, these authors also propose a re-reading of color lines as border spaces by which hybrid subjects may pass from the "local" (national) into the "global" (transnational). This perspective offers a progressive understanding of the place of those of mixed-race in the diaspora of the Americas. Senna and McWatt's narratives suggest that mixture and plurality, not read as transgressions of racial epistemologies or as national agendas meant to erase or subsume blackness, but accepted as the natural evolution of the Americas, make diaspora in the region more dynamic.

Emphasizing the need to replace dated metanarratives regarding race and hybridity with alternative narratives of cross-cultural exchange, Lola Young suggests that "[a]nalytical, evaluative accounts of the various modes of contemporary cultural encounters, the fluid circuits of identification, the instances of a double-consciousness which are concerned with the contradictions of being hybrid and essentialized simultaneously are required to help us understand our ever-shifting positions of identification" (167). Senna and McWatt's focus on the mulatta and her place on the transnational boundary provides novel analytical and evaluative forms for identifying essentializing metanarratives of the nation and for proposing alternative narratives of the place of the mixed-race subject within the diaspora. Their re-characterization of the mulatta as a subject who demands recognition on her own transnational terms signals a shift in narratives of the nation. No longer does the mulatta remain voiceless or lack the ability to embrace multiple positions of identification. The embodied mulatta achieves voice and a fluidity of movement along seemingly impenetrable borders. The strength of

that voice and the limitless possibility for movement may challenge and reconfigure the narratives and boundaries of nations. Senna and McWatt's alternative narratives thus augment the possibilities of diaspora, for they account for black female subjectivity and agency, mixed-race identity, as well as the cross-cultural exchanges that may develop from living and moving on borders.

Senna and McWatt add hybrid ingredients to a diasporic soup. Their contributions articulate the need to include in diasporic formulations those whose bodies are not easily read and placed in space, those who occupy the space of the border. The movements of such bodies along various color lines in the Americas communicate that the soup that simmers in the transnational space of the diasporic Dutch pot must be characterized by a multiplicity of provisions that are recognized for their unique flavors. These additions can only make more delectable the mixture that is diaspora.

Conclusion

A Map and Sustenance for a Transnational Diaspora

Writing by black women of the diaspora in the Americas, whose biographies reflect a transnational sensibility, signifies on the cross-cultural interplay so often initiated by women in local spaces throughout the region. In her poem "Rotundamente Negra" (Fully Black and a Woman), Shirley Campbell emphatically asserts: "Me niego rotundamente/ a negar mi voz/ mi sangre y mi piel" (I fully refuse/ to deny my voice/ my

blood and my skin) (143). In the poem Campbell signifies on her race and gender and on the transnational sensibility that informs her Costa Rican identity. She celebrates her West Indian and Latin heritage and the particularities of black womanhood with words that exceed the nation's representations of blackness and femininity. In Spanish, the adverb "rotundamente" signifies fullness, largesse, roundness, and circularity. Campbell's purposeful use of the word alludes to the often circular movements of transnational black subjects in their negotiation of the full landscape of the Americas. The word also connotes the sense of satiation felt by those subjects who have fed well on their histories of migration. The role of black women in contributing to those movements informs the poetics of writers such as Campbell. Black women's transnational literature of the Americas thus charts the trajectory of the diaspora in the Americas and offers filling nourishment to its members.

In illuminating the power of black women's geographies, both spatial and conceptual, Katherine McKittrick emphasizes that the articulation by black women of a diasporic "poetics of landscape" is implicated in "a long and inter-human geographic story" of the Americas. Such a poetics reflects "the ways in which the act of expression reveals *why* these geographies are important and how they express new forms of life that contest our historically present, and uneven, genres of human geography" (146). McKittrick's reading of the possibilities of black women's geographies offers a means of considering further the still open spaces in narratives of nation and in diasporic discourses. As I have argued, a significant number of black women writers have been discursively re-mapping the Americas in terms of the open spaces, or holes, in its historical and theoretical cartography. Attention to these spaces reveal not only the ways

in which black women have inhabited national spaces in the Americas but also how they have moved beyond the nation by rearticulating the region in terms of transnational exchanges.

As a means of re-mapping the Americas, the literary productions of the black women whom I feature in this study function as novel sites of transnational representation. Black women writers with a transnational sensibility, in their writing/righting of “American” historiography, re-imagine the nations of the Americas as a “transnation,” or an endless American continent, free of the linguistic, cultural, racial, and gendered boundaries that separate individuals of the diaspora. Esmeralda Ribeiro’s “Continente Sem Fim” (Endless Continent) offers the following image that characterizes well the diasporic poetics at work in this body of literature:

Na curva do rio trilha
a
poesia sem imagem
 margem

* * *

(Alves 82)

(At the curve of the river travels
the
image
of poetry without
borders)

These writers have indeed narrated discourses of transnationalism which they have released at the bends of national “rivers.” This particular poetics of landscape travels along those rivers, which allow novel conceptions of diaspora to flow between, across, and around nations of the Americas.

With black women's transnational literature as its focus, *Sisters in the Spirit* signifies on the spirit of transnationalism that has evolved over time and that has traveled along multiple rivers in the Americas. Persisting in spite of colonial legacies of racial, linguistic, cultural, and gender differentiation and the tendency to interpret the region in terms of the isolated language groupings of English, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese, the concept of transnationalism has remained a unifying signifier of socio-cultural practices that may link the local and the global. Indeed, transnationalism, as a concept and a practice, has rearticulated itself consistently in response to colonial and national ideologies and formulations. José Martí's transnational vision especially informs this study, for his "Nuestra América" offers a poetics of landscape that conceives of the Americas as a boundless space, unified against national constructions that would isolate individuals and restrict cross-cultural connections. However, even Martí's utopian vision of an "American" landscape contains holes—holes that remain seemingly invisible to "cartographers" of diaspora who continue to replicate a hegemonic map, even as they claim to redraw and expand its framework. Any serious consideration of the diaspora of the Americas must take into account these overlooked spaces that resist colonial hegemonies, linguistic isolationism, and limiting national agendas. These holes, areas overlooked in modern national construction, yet embedded with racial, gendered, and transnational codes are the open spaces being excavated by black women writers with a transnational sensibility. Within the last two decades of the twentieth century, in particular, these writers have revised Martí's map of "Nuestra América" so that it more closely approximates the gendered and racial landscape of a diaspora of the Americas

that sustains itself through transnational connections, in spite of the encroachments of modernity and the nation-state.

Throughout this study I have emphasized the image of sustenance as central to black women writers' conception of a transnational diaspora of the Americas. Authors such as Gayl Jones, Maryse Condé, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Erna Brodber, Luz Argentina Chiriboga, Danzy Senna, and Tessa McWatt all concern themselves with how history and transnational connections may nourish members of the diaspora. With the ideas of sustenance in mind, I have repeatedly signified on the trope of the Dutch pot, originally deployed by Maxine Bailey and Sharon Mareeka Lewis, as a symbol of black revolutionary improvisation that both nourishes and eliminates boundaries within a transnational space. Within the Dutch pot is a soup of many nations, constituted by revised historical narratives (brown sugar), ethnic cultural markers (herbs and spices), transnational literacies (stock), and mixed-race identities (hybrid provisions). The soup's liquid base signifies the many tributaries that run through and between nations and that connect to the sea waters that surround the Americas. This liquid base facilitates the exchange of flavors between the various ingredients of the soup; and a fluid memory is what holds those ingredients together. This poetics of nourishment runs parallel with the poetics of landscape, both of which reappear in various forms in the transnational black women's literature of the Americas. If served in addition to the seemingly "haute cuisine" of prevalent theoretical discourses of nation, these texts offer additional, equally nourishing forms of sustenance to members of the diaspora who read and see themselves in their pages.

Transnational black women writers of the diaspora in the Americas are speaking not just to nations but beyond them. They are writing a transnational diaspora into existence by way of a poetics of landscape and nourishment. As a new cartography, the literary works of black women are redrawing the map of the Americas in order to unearth open spaces of blackness *and* gender within, between, and across nations. As a new cuisine, the Dutch pot poetics of “every body bring something soup” represent a transnational entrée that reflects an alternative construction of the American landscape to be served regularly to the African diaspora in the Americas.

Notes

Introduction

1. Over the course of this study, whenever I use the term “black women writers,” I specifically refer to women whose biographies reflect their claim of blackness as a racial and cultural identifier, though they may be interpreted by society in other ways.

2. My definition of diaspora is influenced by Paul Gilroy's formulation of the Black Atlantic, characterized by its "desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and constraints of ethnicity and national particularity"(19). However, unlike Gilroy, who focuses attention on African-American and Black British cultural productions to the exclusion of other identities, my conception of the diaspora of the Americas includes the various national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic spaces of the region.
3. Citing several theorists who have examined the concept of modernity, Alberto Martinelli provides a thorough overview of the history of modernity from the Enlightenment to the present. According to him, the major features of modernity include: a persistent desire for mastery of knowledge and of the technological innovations produced as a result of that knowledge, the emergence and growth of capitalism and the global markets which it produces, the proliferation of class systems and systems of labor, and the development of the nation-state. Martinelli argues convincingly that globalization, or "the growth of networks of worldwide interdependence," is a result of the radicalization of modernity and the expansion of multiple modernities around the world. In effect, "[m]odernity has gone global [. . .]" (104, 113-15).
4. The time period of the 1960s and 1970s were especially pivotal to a U. S. diasporic consciousness, garnering its strength from the idea of a global black "nation." However, I am less concerned with the development of a U. S. hegemonic discourse with regard to diaspora than I am with the development and flaws inherent in contemporary discourses of diaspora.
5. Michelle Stephens accounts for the tension between transnational inclinations and national investments by radical black intellectuals. She specifically focuses on Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and C. L. R. James, who "drew from a less visible transatlantic maritime history of the black world, one that shadows histories of empire and colonization in the Americas in ways fundamental to the creation of discourses of black masculinity" (6). Michelle Wright effectively deconstructs theories of key black male intellectuals, including Fanon, Césaire, and Neal in order to reveal the triumphs and failures of their masculinist and nationalist discourses.
6. See Alves, Davies and Fido, Feal, DeCosta-Willis, and Barbara Godard, who offer specific theoretical discussions of the features of black women's writing in various areas of the Americas in the late twentieth century.
7. Michael Awkward and Laurie Finke note the problem of black men and white women, respectively, speaking of marginality in discourses of feminism without adequate self-critique in literary and theoretical arenas. Awkward states that "in its differences from black feminist texts that are produced by individual Afro-American women, a black male feminism must be both rigorous in engaging these texts and self-reflexive enough to avoid, at all costs, the types of patronizing,

marginalizing gestures that have traditionally characterized Afro-American male intellectuals' response to black womanhood" (553). Finke stresses that feminist criticism still needs to reflect difference, must refrain from claiming an authority of knowledge of all oppressed women, and should engage in a "dialogic, nonauthoritarian critical rhetoric" (269).

8. Edward Said defines the "Orientalist" as an expert, one who interpreted for Western cultures the unique cultural idiosyncracies of the Orient and yet, due to his origin in and relation to the Occident, maintained a distance from it (222-25).
9. The infamous debate between Houston Baker, Henry Louis Gates, and Joyce Ann Joyce reflected this contentious issue. Michele Wallace has also expressed the feeling that black women are resistant to theory.
10. In "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian argued this position, specifically in terms of African-American literature. However, I propose an extension of her argument to cover the writing of black women across the Americas. If we extend theoretical discussions beyond the borders of the United States, then the "race for theory" may become a transnational one that empowers the diasporic community of the Americas.
11. For a critique of examples of theories that fail to recognize the particularities of the discursive system of black women, see "The Persistence of Nation in Diasporic Discourse" in Chapter One.
12. Kristin Mann also emphasizes the need to reinsert Africa into theories of diaspora: So far as the African diaspora itself is concerned, what we know about the past now requires a model that begins in Africa, traces the movement of specific cohorts of peoples into the Americas and examines how, in regionally and temporally specific contexts, they drew on what they brought with them as well as borrowed from what they found in the Americas to forge new worlds for themselves. (16)

Chapter One

1. Scholarship on the cultural transnationalization of diaspora by slaves and their descendants include the work of Robert Farris Thompson, J. Lorand Matory, and Kevin Yelvington, to name a few.
2. A myriad of theorists have attempted to define nation. Given the historical moment that frames this project, I purposely focus on the most prevalent theories of nation in circulation in the late twentieth century.
3. Though this term often connotes the disintegration of national structures, I have in mind Yasemin Soysal's conception of the word:

[W]hat were previously defined as national rights become entitlements legitimized on the basis of personhood. The normative framework for, and legitimacy of, this model derive from transnational discourse and structures celebrating human rights as a world-level organizing principle. Postnational citizenship confers upon every person the right and duty of participation in the authority structures and public life of a polity, regardless of their historical or cultural ties to that community. (3)

Anthony Smith remains suspicious of cosmopolitan conceptions of citizenship that are labeled as postnational. He views the resurgence of ethnic nationalism as a sign that the nation, however ambivalent a construct, will always remain the primary means of making real different imagined communities.

4. Though they do not overtly emphasize the importance of differentiating between essence and appearance in transnational processes, the work of Arjun Appadurai, Liliana Goldin, and Alejandro Portes also call for new terms and methodologies in the study of the dynamic processes of transnationalism.
5. I purposely stressed the word “revolt” here, as I signify on Michael Hanchard’s use of the term in relation to the concepts of nation and diaspora in his essay “Identity, Meaning and the African-American.” Hanchard argues that:
Embedded in the tale of the diaspora is a symbolic *revolt* against the nation-state, and for this reason the diaspora holds a dual significance. It suggests a transnational dimension to black identity, for if the notion of an African diaspora is anything it is a human necklace strung together by a thread known as the slave trade, a thread which made its way across a path of America with little regard for national boundaries.
(40, emphasis mine)
6. Nigel Barley, Michael Cardew, and Barbara E. Frank offer detailed studies of the production and use of African pottery.
7. Anderson’s excellent study of nation-building in the Americas brings together the concepts of print culture and imagined communities in order to show how links may be made between various nations through the written word.
8. I differentiate the Dutch pot from the North American multicultural melting pot. While individual elements may be placed in the Dutch pot and still retain their form and individual flavor, the melting pot was created and strategically deployed as a social metaphor for the sole purpose of collecting individual elements together in order to produce sameness in the modern world. My focus on the Dutch pot as a metaphor may invite comparisons to Ortiz’s notion of transculturation. However, my reference to the Dutch pot privileges a domestic space most often occupied by women and used to serve a larger community. Ortiz’s conception of mixture omits the black female subject and the domestic arena from his theory of cultural miscegenation in the Americas. He thus limits

the type and extent of agency black women and those who commune with them may achieve in such spaces.

9. For an extensive treatment of African time, see Mbiti.
10. The name of Sandra's daughter appears to signify on a prominent figure in the U. S. black liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s: Assata Shakur. Affiliated with the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, Shakur was convicted for the murder of a police officer and was sent to jail, from which she escaped and fled to Cuba, where she still resides in exile. The reference to Shakur in the play alludes to a period in the contemporary Americas, specifically in North America, when black women were actively involved in revolutionary activities meant to benefit the entire black community. Sandra's naming of her daughter celebrates the political consciousness and activism of women such as Shakur—women whose contributions to and sacrifices for black communities across the Americas are still marginalized in the historical records of nations.
11. Gilroy outlines quite well the “complicity of racial terror with reason” in the development and spread of modernity in the West (73).
12. For critiques of these male-dominated, nationalist politics and discussions of the literary productions that respond to them, see Dubey, Wright, and Boyce Davies and Savory Fido. As I suggest in note 9, Assata's name may function as a metaphorical critique within the play of nationalist constructions that have obscured the contributions of black women.
13. Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* and Stuart Hall's “New Ethnicities” theorize about the nature and possibilities of hybridity in the development of postcolonial identities and diaspora subjectivity.
14. Van Gennep and later Turner characterize and articulate the liminal space as an interstitial site between old and new modes of being and relating to others.
15. My invention and deployment of the metaphor of the “womb space” emphasizes the violence, pain, and pleasure of the birthing process—a process unique to women. It emphasizes the womb as a space of comfort, refuge, vulnerability, and creation. While I signify on Wilson Harris's “womb of space,” a syncretic consciousness bound up in the imagination, by which the Caribbean region may combat a legacy of conquest and colonization and evolve through the creative use of its own mythologies and cultural resources, I focus attention on the ways in which women's bodies, specifically the womb, record a history of conquest and the cultural markers that continue to define black communities in the Americas. In this way, I insert a feminist perspective into the syncretic space which Harris celebrates.

Chapter Two

1. Barbara Harlow uses the term “resistance literature” to express the ways in which political resistance by marginalized groups to hegemonic structures may result in the transformation of literary forms produced by those very structures. Caren Kaplan theorizes about the nature and characteristics of testimonial literature as resistance literature. Kaplan views this form of writing as performing “out-law” and “in-law” functions:

As an out-law genre, testimonial literature is a form of ‘resistance literature’; it expresses transitional material relations in neo- and postcolonial societies and disrupts mainstream literary conventions. Testimonial literature highlights the possibilities for solidarity and affiliation among critics, interviewers, translators, and the subject who ‘speaks.’ As an in-law genre, *testimonio* may refer to colonial values of nostalgia and exoticization, values that operate via a discourse of ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity.’ (122-23)
2. Pascale De Souza explores oppositional strategies recorded in French Caribbean maroon narratives by women. De Souza distinguishes between resistance (disrupting a system from without) and opposition (disrupting a system from within) in these narratives. The latter is the means by which female maroons “claim a femininity of their own” (141). I find that De Souza limits his analysis of these figures by framing them in these terms. I view the behavior of the female protagonists in Jones and Condé’s narratives as forms of simultaneous resistance and opposition, as their actions occur both within maroon areas and within areas of expression usually reserved for authoritative voices within the patriarchal system of slavery.
3. R. K. Kent, James H. Sweet, and Robert Farris Thompson note the influences of the “Guinea,” “Angola,” “Kongo,” and “Yoruba” regions of Africa to the development, history, and culture of blacks in the Americas. All three emphasize that by the seventeenth century these terms no longer carried the same weight, as these ethnic references were eventually used interchangeably to refer to any slave from Africa. Thus, maroon communities often reflected an amalgam of African people and traditions from different ethnic groups.
4. The term *quilombo* is usually used to describe maroon camps in Brazil. However, as Kent makes clear, “*quilombo* does not appear in the vocabulary of early seventeenth-century Brazil. Instead, the fugitive slave settlement is known as *mocambo*, an appropriate description since *mu-kambo* in Ambundu [an ‘Angola’ language] means a hideout.” Kent also mentions that the name given to the most famous *mocambo* in Brazil originally referred to “any area covered by palm trees” (164).
5. Kent traces the development of Palmares and of early African culture in Brazil. Of the history of the Dutch and Portuguese in Brazil, Kent succinctly explains, “In 1630, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) captured Pernambuco, and within a decade Portugal had abandoned Brazil to the Dutch. It was ultimately the decision of local settlers, the *moradores*, to fight the West India Company that

led to restoration of Portuguese control in 1654” (161). Palmares then came about as a result of “Portuguese-Dutch struggles for Pernambuco” (163).

6. Lovalerie King offers an innovative reading of the poem as a blues song that laments and celebrates the death and spiritual flight back to Africa of many Palmaristas upon the invasion and defeat of the republic.
7. Patricia Munoz-Cabrera points out that Almeida was the name of the Spanish general who founded Brazil and that Jones’ protagonist either “holds the power of the Conquistador or the woman is imprisoned in a name that is not hers” (113, n.7). King identifies Almeyda’s name as a reference to “both the Pernambucan governor who took office at the pivotal historical moment of 1674, D. Pedro de Almeida, and the infantry colonel in the 1694 destroying force, Matias Cardoso de Almeida,” which “endows her protagonist with official status, changes the meaning (or historical significance) of the name, and repositions a woman victimized by slavery from a marginalized space to a centralized one” (761).
8. Zibatra’s role as a magic woman who helps to heal Almeyda’s body and mind recreates the social dynamic of Palmares, where interactions between Amerindians and Africans occurred freely, as both groups shared similar spiritual practices. Laura de Mello e Souza discusses the syncretic practices represented here in terms of the effects of colonizing practices on European, African, and Amerindian cultures in colonial Brazil.
9. In an interview with Charles H. Rowell, Gayl Jones states that she is “interested in studying how time and space are handled (and transformed)” in “myths that challenge or provide creative alternatives to European ones [. . .]” (34). She emphasizes that her poem focuses on “‘spirit’ and interior landscape—the landscape of imagination and dream and memory” (43).
10. According to Stelamaris Coser, this is the Brazilian word for “healer” (160). It also refers to a priest/priestess of the Brazilian macumba order which, as documented by Thompson, is a fusion of Kongo/Angola, Yoruba, Catholic, and Native American spiritual practices and cosmologies (113).
11. Almeyda’s proclamation that she will “make roads” through her powers of conjuration aligns well with Sweet’s discussion of the use of “witchcraft” by Africans in Brazil to counter the evil of their Portuguese oppressors. Sweet states that “Africans, who understood their enslavement to be the result of Portuguese religious malevolence, countered with their most powerful religious antidotes, which were recognized and feared by the Portuguese as ‘witchcraft’” (164). Almeyda views the historical record as a spiritual battleground. Thus, her act of “making roads,” in the spirit world and in the righting of the historical record so that the valiant Palmaristas may become immortal, functions as a spiritual countermeasure to Portuguese suppression.

12. Munoz-Cabrera borrows this term from Françoise Lionnet's essay "Geographies of Pain."
13. Critics such as Chadwick Hansen, Robert Morsberger, Elaine Breslaw, Bernard Rosenthal, and Veta Smith Tucker have argued vigorously over the racial and ethnic identity of Tituba. While it is highly unlikely that this debate will ever be resolved, the conclusion drawn by Angela Davis may prove the most fruitful to this discussion: "[I]n the final analysis, Tituba's revenge consists in reminding us all that the doors to our suppressed cultural histories are still ajar. If we are courageous enough to peer through the narrow openings, we will discover our fears, our rage, our hopes, and our roots. And sometimes there is magic behind those doors, sparkling clues about the possibilities ahead" (Foreword, *I, Tituba* xi).
14. Mara Dukats, in tracing the ways in which *Concô* signifies on Aimé Césaire and Nathaniel Hawthorne, asserts that, by recording Tituba's story, "*Concô* reclaims Tituba's presence as a sharpening force, as a background against which both the Caribbean hero and the American heroine took form" ("The Hybrid Terrain of Literary Imagination" 143).
15. Abena and Yao are both of the Ashanti people of the area of West Africa that is now known as Ghana, which Lucille Mathurin Mair identifies as the region from where most Caribbean slaves originated (1).
16. According to Thompson, versions of Kongo rituals flourished in the British West Indies (107, 111).
17. Just as Lovalerie King views Almeyda's narrative poem as a blues song, I too read Tituba's narrative as a blues song that celebrates the trials, death, and resurrection of Tituba and of African people in the Caribbean. The refrain "On pendit ma mère" (20), which Tituba uses to emphasize the emotional impact of the final act of violence performed on her mother's body, reflects the "elegiac lament" of Houston Baker's blues matrix (5).
18. Thompson thoroughly outlines these practices. Specifically focusing on the purpose of documenting these practices within literary texts, Geta LeSeur states, "The retention of these African healing practices are a part of the resistance of the literary female Maroon. Guarding these practices challenges the Western notions of the body and healing, much in the same way as Maroon settlements challenged colonial domination" (97).
20. Breu rightly identifies this scene as signifying on the violence of racism and sexism in the Americas. Specifically with regard to the U. S., he states that the "sexualization displaces the rape of black women by white men onto a complex ideological formation that constructs black women as sexually promiscuous and black men, rather than white, as rapists" (280).

21. Robert McCormick, Jr. concludes that Tituba's return to Barbados and collusion with the maroons indicates that she "has found her geopolitical home in the Caribbean" and does not need to look back to Africa for her identity (280). Jeanne Garane argues that Tituba "symbolizes West Indians who can look neither to Africa nor to Europe (nor, in Tituba's case to North America) for an affirming mirror" and that her tale represents a West Indian woman's search for identity and subjectivity (155-156). While I agree with both that Tituba ultimately claims the West Indies as a home that provides her with subjectivity, I disagree with their view of the place of Africa in Tituba's consciousness. While Tituba does not need to return to Africa to complete her sense of self, she does attribute much of her identity to Africa in terms of her lineage and spiritual knowledge.
22. I borrow this term from Pascale B cel who, in differentiating this form of marronage from " brouillardise" (assimilation) and "grande marronnage" (absolute resistance), reads Tituba's position as a conjure woman as an "interstitial space between the plantation system and its outside" (611-612). I view this as a more accurate view of Tituba's maroon identity than that of Pascale De Souza, who distinguishes between "resistance" (completely moving oneself outside of a system in order to topple it) and "opposition" (engaging in acts within the system for the same purpose) and claims the latter for Tituba. Since Tituba sustains neither resistance nor opposition, her identity is better described using B cel's label.
23. This line is clearly a reference to the blues song, "Strange Fruit," made famous by Billie Holiday. In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Angela Davis describes Holiday's rendition of this song as a "frontal challenge not only to lynching and racism but to the politics of a government that implicitly condoned such activities" and as an example of the "extraordinary interpretive capabilities" of a black woman's consciousness (196). The rendering of Tituba's imagined death may be viewed in much the same way.
24. Karamcheti signifies on Spivak's use of the term "textuality" in *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1).

Chapter Three

1. The importance of ancestors, history, and wholeness are reflected in the dedication pages of each author: Marshall refers to her grandmother ("Da-duh"); Morrison names several women of importance to her—women who knew their "true and ancient properties." Morrison goes a step further by quoting I Corinthians 1:11, which speaks of division noticed by the "house of Chloe," Morrison's given name. In effect, she is calling on her community, the diaspora, to unite. Significantly, the reference has four numerical representations: one by itself, representing the ego, or the individual apart from the community; and the others grouped together in a set, representing several individuals coming together

to form a community. In effect, she is telling readers to make a choice of one or the other.

2. The Caribbean, as a crossroads site for the main characters in Marshall and Morrison's works, alludes to the triangular slave trade. Yet, as the novels' endings reveal, the two women choose different ways to retrace its metaphorical path. Jadine retraces it almost exactly by leaving Europe and avoiding Africa, going to the Americas (the Caribbean and the U. S.), and then returning to Europe as its imported product. Avey retraces it in reverse and negates it, by leaving the U. S., going to the Caribbean, and bypassing Europe in favor of a symbolic return to Africa, by way of Carriacou, the closest island to the "motherland." While Macpherson and Smith-Wright note how these characters are removed from African-American culture by being placed in the Caribbean, they fail to relate it directly to the image of the slave trade. Several other critics mention Avey's middle passage experience, but they do not mention the total image of the triangular trade. Wilentz, who astutely points out that the stronger cultural traditions of the Caribbean, where slavery was less harsh than in the American colonies, would have a greater effect on Avey than those of the U. S. Pollard remarks that Avey had to physically cross a body of water, between America and the closest region, the Caribbean, in order for there to be a full cultural connection (293). Olmsted says that Avey is drawn to this area by a "spiritual and historical force resonating from the place itself, Carriacou" (260). In a thoroughly comprehensive study of the text, Melchior notes how the island functions as a site for placement and displacement of self, as Avey is forced to confront and redefine her identity. Few critics discuss how Jadine is pulled to the Caribbean, though many, like Pringle, mention it as a site which forces her to confront her nonidentity. However, Morrison specifically states that she chose the Caribbean not only for its history, but also because she wanted an isolated area, apart from the United States, "[s]o when they find a 'nigger in the woodpile [Jadine's foil, Son],' there's nothing they can do about it" (Taylor-Guthrie 142).
3. Coser explores the subject of Avey's name change, as does Denniston, who alludes to this by discussing Avey's life in terms of African time.
4. While Jay, like his wife, also changes his name, it is interesting to note that he goes from a familiar folk name, given to him by his community to show endearment, to his formal name, reflecting his assimilation of white values.
5. Applying the language of photography and signifying on DuBois's theory of double-consciousness, Gikandi states that "a doubly exposed image has no clear outline; it exists as a fragment of two things without the representative value of either. So, in the end, Jay is defined by distance and difference from the things that were supposed to mark his new self-hood [. . .]" (174).

6. I borrow the term “othermother” from Collins, who notes how the African concept of extended kinships have been translated into the Afro-American female experience.
7. Dash borrowed these powerful words for her film, which also takes place in the Gullah Sea Islands, where Ibo Landing was located. At Ibo Landing, newly imported Africans, having just stepped off the ship that carried them to the Carolina coast, are believed to have taken one look at the land and to have envisioned the horrors to come with their enslavement; and, with that insight, they turned around and walked into the water and drowned themselves. The Quimby’s posit that the song the slaves sang as they drowned is the popular song “Oh Freedom.” For a record of slave testimonies regarding this event, see *Drums and Shadows*, which inspired Marshall to write her novel. Concerning the myths and realities of Ibo Landing and its legacy, see Goodwin. In addition, Demerson writes briefly on the subject, as does Walters and Brøndum.
8. Jay represents Locke’s “New Negro,” a reinvention of the old Negro stereotype and one who travels from the country to the city, represented by Harlem, in order to better himself. Unfortunately, he takes this new identity too far, as he obsessively pursues success in a white world.
9. Cuney represents Braxton’s “outraged mother figure,” who, as a female ancestor, seeks to protect her children, “passes on her feminine wisdom for the good of the ‘tribe,’ and the survival of all Black people, especially those in the African diaspora created by the Atlantic slave trade” (300), and may be both comforting and disturbing (305). She also embodies Wright’s diasporic mother figure, who “deploys dialogue instead of logos [. . .] in order to retrieve and recuperate both Black female subjectivity and the generations that preceded her revolutionary peers (142).
10. With regard to the blues and the African-American experience, I borrow Ellison’s characterization of life for the black man, metaphorically represented by the conflict between the ideals represented by the American flag and the realities of black American existence represented in blues music expression. This image is also applicable to Avey’s hallucination while on the deck of the cruise ship, where a white man in a red, white, and blue bathing suit reaches for Avey’s hand as she is seeking a place to be alone (58).
11. Smith-Wright also analyzes Avey’s flight from the cruise in terms of ghost-like behavior. She notes that the appearance of the ghosts of Cuney and Jerome, who will not be sealed away in the tomb of her repressed memories, represent the two halves of her divided soul that cannot be reconciled. Finally, she views Avey as having assumed Cuney’s ghost identity, in that Avey too will “haunt” others in order to bring them to an awareness of their own spectral states of rootlessness. It should be noted that Marshall names this section of the novel “Runagate” and quotes the Robert Hayden poem of the same name, alluding to Avey’s flight as

the beginning of her maroon identity, as she flees the trappings of the modern plantation. She also uses a quote from Amiri Baraka, who pays tribute to his mother and other ancestors, in order to stress the importance of the appearance of Avey's great-aunt Cuney.

12. In making this connection, Avey imagines herself as having streams or threads coming out of her and connecting her to the rest of the diaspora, as her experience in Carriacou does. Of this, Olmstead states, "The thread are the living link between the living and the dead, between people separated by distance or culture or heritage, between self and other" (265).
13. Stanford offers a medical analysis of the psychosomatic malady that results in Avey's collapse in the hotel room. See Birch and Macpherson for discussions of the birth and baby metaphors used to represent Avey.
14. Carriacouans, like many of the diaspora, offer food and libation to the dead, referred to as the "old parents" (Smith 140) and invoke them over a cosmogram in a sacred, yet carnivalesque atmosphere known as the Big Drum Ritual, in which various ritual dances are performed to celebrate the continuity of life. McDaniel whose chapter titles correspond with sections of Marshall's novel, thoroughly analyzes this ritual, which may be explained with Bakhtin's characterization of carnival as the "symbol and incarnation of the true folk festival [. . .]" (220), in which the "individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself [. . .]" and "the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community" (255).
15. Most critics point out that Lebert Joseph is a Legba figure, but none mention his other manifestations.
16. The image of the preacher calling the church is part of the African-American "call-and-response" tradition. For an excellent source on this, see Hill, who traces the tradition throughout African-American orature.
17. Note that this section, entitled "Lavé Tête" (literally "Washed Head"), including Avey's shower and change of clothes in the hotel and the soiling of herself later on the schooner, represents the cleansing that she must endure in order to be purged of that which has tainted her life, so that she may be presentable before the ancestors at the Big Drum ceremony. Marshall also includes two quotes that speak of freedom from self-imposed restrictions: the Haitian invocation of Legba to open the gate for those who seek communion with the ancestors and the deities; and a line from a Randall Jarrell poem, commanding the bars of a body to open. In relation to cleansing, Bakhtin refers to excrement as a carnivalesque element used to debase in order to induce humility (147-149, 175-176), which is exactly what happens to Avey. Pettis views this water crossing as pivotal to Avey's process of redefinition. In addition to the cleansing it induces and its allusion to slavery, the boat is important for transporting Avey to salvation, for its name, *Emmanuel C*, alludes to Christ; and Avey equates its sails and its figurehead of a

saint with a cross to the emblems of Catholicism. Given this, one may view the saint as a syncretic representation of Ogun, who is often equated with St. Peter, and the cross as a symbol of her crossroads experience on this vessel. This is a spiritual sign for Avey to reconnect with her roots; for, like Peter, she has denied her roots but will become one of the chief apostles in proclaiming the good news of ancestral and diasporic connections. Couser echoes this: “[T]he process is that of persuading a lapsed believer to become not mere disciple but an apostle. In effect, Avey is the vehicle, the unconscious medium, of an oral gospel [. . .]” (109). For discussions of rites of passage and metaphors of healing in Marshall’s novel, see Lederer and Scarboro, as well as Christian’s “Ritualistic Process” and Busia’s “What Is Your Nation?”

18. In addition to Cobham’s allusion to the image of laying on of hands (58), Olmstead discusses Avey’s body as a site of cultural reclamation.
19. The title of this section of the novel, “The Beg Pardon,” suggests a final confrontation with the past and with the ancestor, as Avey seeks forgiveness for abandoning her roots and ‘begs’ for reclamation of self, community, and memory. Marshall quotes Susan Sontag, who characterizes memory in its simplest form as an act of honoring. This is symbolic, since Avey cannot undo the past; but she can preserve her experience and call upon her memories as a means of making recompense. In relation to the image of darkness, Konan and Clark discuss this metaphor in relation to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and as a redefinition and apotheosis of the African diaspora. Finally, Ojo-Ade observes that Avey and the islanders form kinships much like imported Africans did upon arrival in the New World (19).
20. Another excellent discussion of the metaphor of dance in Marshall’s novel is found in Reyes’s “Reading Carnival,” in which she stresses the historical and cultural features of African dance as they relate to the novel.
21. Given the fact that the drum is a percussive instrument, it is important to note that Benítez-Rojo defines the “rhythmic network” between orishas, humans, and ancestors as a “percussive language” (170).
22. Ironically, Valerian is named after an emperor, yet his last name reflects his pretensions. Ruler over his island domain, bought with the fortune he made from candy production, he is actually a common white man with a common background. As a neo-plantation master and neo-colonial planter in his greenhouse, his production of sugar becomes a burden for others, especially his native servants, whom he fires for stealing apples, a fruit rich in sugar. In her brief analysis of *Tar Baby*, Willis discusses the link between sugar production during slavery and its later legacy of capitalism. Likewise, Parker notes how sugar “acts as a signifier of race and gender power structures” (614) in Morrison’s novels, but specifically as a source of black oppression and imagined success in *Tar Baby*. Since sugar is synonymous with colonialism, Pereira’s article on the place of *Tar Baby* in Morrison’s canon is important for noting how Morrison

breaks away from the theme of colonization of the black psyche, and with this novel begins to focus on how African Americans may empower themselves through ancestral connections. Comparing Morrison's novel to *The Tempest*, Grewal and Walther also discuss colonialism. Page similarly explores the plantation structure of the island. With regard to the island as a type of Eden and the stealing of apples in this postlapsarian scene, see Otten, Jones, and Lepow. Lepow also explores the meaning of Valerian's name, as it applies here. Finally, Mbalia and King focus on how his name is related to a root that has a soporific effect on the neo-colonial structure of the household.

23. Jadine's objectification and commodification as a fashion model may be linked to the pornographic association of sex with black bodies, as discussed by Collins (167-176). Elkins also treats this issue.
24. Fultz notes the suppressed tension which restricts mature and healthy nurturing in the relationships between Jadine and her aunt. Paquet states that Jadine's relatives are mainly to blame for her disconnection from her African roots, since they "give her no direction; nothing that will help her to know them and to know herself in ancestral terms." She continues by noting that "[o]ne of the ironies of the Street household is that the ancestral connection is very much alive around them in the island's myths and natives; a reality from which they are cut off by a carefully cultivated attachment to wealth and privilege [. . .]" (508). Adding to that, Samuels and Hudson-Weems link the lack of cultural nurturance of Jadine with the lack of fertility in the Childs's marriage, for they have been "far more interested in the welfare and care of white culture than in their own lives" (83). Furman also discusses the Childs's failure to provide Jadine with a cultural legacy.
25. Drawing upon Jung's theories, Reyes, in "Ancient Properties," notes that Jadine's desire to divorce herself from race points to her estrangement from the collective unconsciousness of her people.
26. Like Jay, Sydney also represents Locke's "New Negro," as he stresses his relation to the new negroes of Philadelphia, which is a reference to DuBois's 1899 sociological study of black domestic workers in that city (Jurecic and Rampersad 149) and also to the fact that Locke too was a product of an elite black community in the same city.
27. Morrison says of this woman that she is "somehow transcendent and whatever she really was, what was perceived as by Jadine, is the real chic. The one that authenticated everything. The one that is very clear in some deep way about what her womanhood is" (Taylor-Guthrie 194). In her chapter on the deity Oshun, King specifically identifies this woman as Oshun-Yeye, representative of fertility and the ultimate in black womanhood and black consciousness (138-139).
28. Cooper notes the similar attire of Avey and Jadine (84). Coser observes that the coat represents the ability of Jadine to be seduced by blackness, but that the black

objects of her desire are usually “abused for the pleasure and profit of the white, upper-class rule” (109). In addition, Lupton views Jadine as a black Cinderella who is perverted by Western values, embodied in her sealskin coat. None of these critics equates this with Ellison’s blues metaphor, however.

29. The name of the island also hints at the history of maroons on horseback, for in the word “chevaliers” is the root word “cheval,” meaning “horse” in French. The reference to maroons is also fitting given the fact that all of the characters are in some way maroons in their own right—some more than others.
30. Note how the name Ryk closely resembles the word “rich,” alluding to Jadine’s desire of the material over the cultural.
31. Son’s hair is an important marker, especially after he cuts it. With woolly deadlocks, Son is like the marginalized Rastafarians of the West Indies. As Samuels and Hudson-Weems state, “His dreadlocked hair is more than chic; he is Africa’s son/Son, the bearer of its culture and values, its black Messiah come to save Jadine from the street/Streets of Babylon” (85). Both powerful and vulnerable, he also may be linked with Samson, who was temporarily conquered when he was shorn of his locks. Traylor agrees, as she refers to Jadine as Delilah, “sucking at the Samson strength of Son” (146). King also discusses Son as a symbolic Samson (112-113).
32. Very applicable here, Benítez-Rojo’s deconstruction of the *Historia de las Indias* by Bartolomé de Las Casas provides a remarkable analysis of the hidden guilt felt by the historian over the treatment of slaves, who, according to Benítez-Rojo, are represented by ants that are overrunning the plantation. The same is true of the ants in Morrison’s novel, as they overrun the island and begin to enter the house just as the black characters topple Valerian’s household. Ironically, Jadine will come to view herself as an independent queen ant; however, she fails to note that even the queen ant, unlike her, is part of a community. Moreover, because she continues to align herself with European culture, which still controls her, she cannot assume power for herself, as her family in the end perversely does. Assuming a rare critical stance, Duvall, emphasizing the inclusion of Morrison’s given name in her epigraph to the novel, argues that she uses Jadine’s independent character to signify on herself, showing the difficulty of being an independent black woman, who is expected to genuflect before white patriarchal culture. He does note, though, that Morrison chooses not to bow to this power, despite its “rape” (exploitation and criticism) of her. It should also be added that Morrison, unlike Jadine, also maintains strong ties to the community.
33. Paquet points out that “Son as her lover assumes the role of ancestor, instructive and protective [. . .]” (510). Byerman’s “Beyond Realism” discusses the relationship similarly but emphasizes Jadine’s rejection of Son and of the folk community (77-84). Erickson notes how Son, in addition to other figures in the novel, functions as a nurturer. King concurs, as she points out that Son works in concert with other ancestor/orisha figures to remind Jadine of the importance of

community (163-164). Smith-Wright provides an innovative analysis of Son as a ghost whose failed life motivates him to haunt the world, as he seeks readmittance. Unable to fit into modern life, she reasons, Son can only find security in the mythic world of the horsemen. Borrowing from her point, one may also reason that Son, as ghost, haunts Jadine because he sees in her a kindred in exile, whom he may educate about the importance of community before it is too late for her to reconnect. Morrison's own words seem to point to Son as a ghost-like figure, as she points out that in making the final decision to join the horsemen, Son "would lock himself up forever from the future. He may identify totally and exclusively with the past, which is a kind of death, because it means you have no future, but a suspended place" (Taylor-Guthrie 112).

34. Sadly, the swamp waste (tar), produced by the colonizer's change of the island's landscape and which stains Jadine, reflects the unholy act of defecation by white culture on other cultures, which Son notices. Of the bonding power of tar, Morrison states, "At one time, a tar pit was a holy place, at least an important place, because tar was used to build things. It came naturally out of the earth; it held together things like Moses's little boat and the pyramids. For me, the tar baby came to mean the black woman who can hold things together" (Taylor-Guthrie 122). Werner and Harris provide excellent analyses of Morrison's use of the tar baby tale of African-American folklore and note the unresolved ambiguity of the identity of the true tar baby in the novel. Morrison is much more definitive than they are, though, when she states that the tar baby is a black female, often called tar baby by white men; and the rabbit is a black male, who "is determined to live in the briar patch, even though he has the option to stay with her and to live comfortably, securely, without magic, without touching the borders of his life" (Taylor-Guthrie 53, 122). She further states that a white man made her to trap the black man. Yet, in the novel, "[t]he tragedy was not that she [Jadine] was a Tar Baby," Morrison remarks, "but that she wasn't. She could not hold anything to herself" (102). Thus, in rejecting the swamp women, Jadine has rejected the holiness and bonding power naturally inherent in her people. As a result, she has become unholy and unnatural; nothing can stick to her. King also notes this in her analysis of Jadine's rejection of the swamp women (132-133).
35. Bakhtin notes the erotic connotation in the use of the word "drum" (204); and the pulsating star may be imagined as keeping the rhythm of a cosmic drum. Furthermore, Jadine and Son, as Oshun figures, attempt to communicate in the percussive language alluded to by Benítez-Rojo. The emphasis in the novel on Son's sexual prowess also emphasizes his roles as Brer Rabbit and Legba, known in folklore for their sexual proclivities.
36. I borrow from King the allusion to Michael as Christ at the Christmas communion (110). If, however, as Edelberg argues, Michael functions instead as God, then Son also may be regarded as a Christ figure psycho-spiritually representing God's wrath and love. Bjork argues that "Son is, as savior, reborn into this fallen paradise in order to supplant a distorted, individuated dream with his own dream of past communality" (121). Coser states, "In this novel, the Christmas dinner is

the carnivalesque ritual that allows hierarchy and rule to be overturned, hidden emotions to be brought to surface, and repressed anger finally to be expressed” (107). She later adds that, appropriate to the season, “[. . .] a black Son [Christ figure] ‘is born’ at Christmastime there to shake their complacency and rearrange their lives” (113). Fishman punctuates this by noting that the name of Son’s folk community, Eloë, signifies on Elohim, one of Christ’s names (34-35). Using the Christian image of the horseman of the apocalypse, Harding and Martin refer to Son as the “black archangel proclaiming in withering anathema the Apocalypse of the whites dying of their own corruption [. . .]” (134). This relates well with the image of Son later being possessed by the island’s mythic horsemen.

37. Badt says of this scene that Valerian, as omnipotent ruler, “responds to their ‘sin,’ their desire, by re-asserting the Law: A black person has no right to want” (573).
38. Chaos theory, the basis for Benítez-Rojo’s theories of the Caribbean, is applicable here. If, as the theory holds, the so-called paradoxes of order and disorder are generative complements rather than exclusive antitheses, then the disorder that seems to have visited Valerian’s estate unexpectedly was always present and merely waiting for a catalyst (Son) to make it known.
39. King discusses Oshun’s colors as they relate to Son and Jadine (152, 157-158, 162-163). Lange also views as significant Morrison’s choice of colors. She states that green is usually associated with “feelings of tranquility” (173), which may also be connected to the goddess, as she is known for her tranquil waters. Those waters may be upset, however, if the goddess is offended, as seen in the actions of Jadine and Son. She equates the color red with warnings and disaster (173, 176), and she sees it as a symbol of capitalism (Valerian’s red candies). Lange views yellow as a pessimistic color, yet she fails to notice its connection with Oshun. She does say, however, that “yellow can overpower blue and white,” but that it is “not as strong as red” (178-179). If, in the context of the novel, one regards the last three colors as representative of the American experience and the first as the African experience, then Lange is not entirely correct. For example, when Valerian and Son confront each other with regard to the status of the native servants, Son proves to be the stronger figure. The same may be said of the interaction between Son and Jadine: While Jadine, as a flawed Oshun figure, may have been overpowered by capitalistic sensibilities, Son remains true to his character, despite the temptation posed by Jadine, Valerian’s creation. Ironically, two representatives of the color yellow tempt each other; and what causes Son’s temporary lapse is the fact that Jadine is literally and metaphorically losing her color, as she allows herself to be seduced by a white world and encourages Son to follow suit.
40. As with Cuney, these women also may be viewed in terms of Braxton’s “outraged mother figure” and Wright’s diasporic mother figure.
41. In this rare and pivotal instance, Ondine, who before had ignored her necessary role as a mother figure, may be viewed as a flawed, though not entirely failed

“outraged mother figure” who finally seeks to redeem herself and Jadine. While O’Reilly claims that Ondine’s words appear to have come too late to empower Jadine through a black cultural motherline, I argue that their very utterance will embed Jadine’s consciousness with a new perception of an alternate avenue of empowerment than the one she has been seeking.

42. Stressing that the individual cannot function properly alone, Morrison states that “there should be a quality of adventure [individual] and a quality of nest [communal]” (Taylor-Guthrie 105). If Jadine fused these qualities together, she would be whole. However, because she chooses to reject the latter in favor of the former, she will never find a “safe harbor,” although she thinks that she is it.
43. Pringle’s discussion of Jadine’s search for identity explores these oppositions in relation to Jadine’s move from place to place. King also analyzes Son and Jadine’s varying ideologies (71-75). Hawthorne relates these antagonistic viewpoints to DuBois’s theory of double-consciousness, which, she suggests, may be healed by a unity of visions, or what she refers to as “double-vision.” Finally, Coleman argues that the lack of resolution of these two arguments makes the novel a failure, because it leaves unclear “what their failure to achieve positive union means” and does not show “Black characters successfully integrating and living by clearly defined Black folk values in the context of a white world” (72). I am more inclined to agree with Moffitt’s stance that Jadine and Son’s viewpoints reflect the “complexity that comes with multiple visions” (12).
44. If Jadine is viewed as a pornographic object that infects admirers with a sexual disease, then Son’s blindness may be regarded metaphorically as a symptom of the disease. Though not mentioning the sexual aspect, Traylor states that “Jadine is the disease of disconnection, whose malignancy causes a slaughter of reality” (146).
45. Paquet describes Therese as “the archetypal earth mother by virtue of her ‘magic breasts’” (508), again a sign of nourishment. Like Cuney and the women in Jadine’s dream, she too symbolizes the diasporic mother and the “outraged mother figure,” determined to guide and to save a lost son/Son from destruction.
46. The term “phallic” is appropriate here, since Jadine and Margaret each fear that Son may be capable of sexual violence; and, ironically, they are right. Representing male potency and communal power, Son also identifies well with the transcendent horsemen, who embody this term.
47. In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” Morrison states that the ending of the novel, which ends as the tar baby tale does, is a “determinate ending that follows an untrustworthy beginning” (395). Son, who had felt he was safe as he came ashore on Isle des Chevaliers, was made vulnerable in the course of his time with Jadine. Apart from her, he now may run confidently and on his own terms (turf), as Brer Rabbit does. The inclusion of the tale also reveals the reality of the pursuit by

Afro-Americans of material over cultural values: some escape its destructive effects; some do not.

48. While she ultimately concludes that Jadine rejects the viewpoints of the ancestor figures whom she has encountered, Moffitt does concede that Jadine's decision to return to Europe to "tangle" with the African woman in yellow and the other "diaspora mothers" (*Tar Baby* 290) "suggest mixing, if in a more combative way than blending" (23). I concur with Coser that Jadine returns to Europe both to become independent and to confront the African woman in yellow in order to "become a more complete human being as she welcomes the African in herself" (115).

Chapter Four

1. For specific examples of liberation theology, see Cone, Batstone, Thomas, and Aquino.
2. Kumina is a BaKongo spiritual practice that allows its practitioners to return to Africa through spirit possession, induced by the beating of drums (Austin-Boos 7). Dianne Stewart discusses the ways in which Jamaican Kumina approximates the practice of womanist theology within the context of the Caribbean.
3. I borrow this term from Neil ten Kortenaar. In "Foreign Possessions," he posits that "Ella, the voracious reader, had no indigenous narrative to balance her love of British texts" (65). As I stated, I disagree with his conclusion and argue that Ella's native text is present in her life; it is merely skewed by her marginal status and imperial education.
4. Dianne Stewart characterizes myal spirit possession as the "most powerful manifestation of ancestral possession" in the neo-African religious context of Jamaica. She goes on to say that myal "influenced the Native Baptist and Revival Zion traditions of Jamaica, and apparently influenced the Kumina tradition as well" (71). Joseph Murphy, in *Working the Spirit*, differentiates myal from spirit-thievery by stressing how the former "might be seen as a force for social integration, bent on the exposure of [spirit-thievery] and defusing it with the power of communal values expressed in public ceremonies" (120).
5. Heather Smyth recognizes the importance of the initial communication, through the myal spirits, between Ole African and Maydene. She argues that Ole African "represents the anancy stiltman" of African folklore. Maydene kneels before him and prays when she first encounters him. Their positions "recall the twin figures of the limbo dance," which compromise a neo-African "creative accommodation" that exemplifies the "cross-cultural syncretic energies of the Caribbean" (8).
6. Smyth notes that "Brodber's decision to include Maydene in the group of healers indicates a commitment to heterogeneity that challenges the Manichean binaries

of victim-victimizer” (9). It is important to add that, in spite of her British background, Maydene accepts the promptings of the myal spirits but recognizes and defers to those who, unlike her, possess greater knowledge and have experienced more pervasive forms of oppression.

7. This phrase “caution[s] against interpretive closure” (Smyth 10) and also points to the polyphony and polyvalence of communal discourse, in that the missing pieces inherent in everyone’s stories contribute to communal stability. Collette Maximin rearticulates this point in terms of the dialogism of Brodber’s novel. Tabish Khair views the novel as representing the unification of “all the ‘halves’ severed by colonization” (122).
8. Miriam DeCosta-Willis states that the mask “charts the intimate terrain of Rebeca’s consciousness: the tension between her desire for sexual fulfillment and her longing for social acceptance.” It “represents her division into subject and object; it signifies the psychic split between her inside self—the vulnerable, interior, hidden self—and the outside self, the façade that she presents to the world” (218). In this sense, it is very much like the mirror in which Rebeca is so invested.
9. Rahier explores the racial construction of women in Ecuador, particularly in terms of the contradictions inherent in the Miss Esmeraldas Contest.
10. Again, Rahier makes this point in terms of the “racial/spatial order” of Ecuador.

Chapter Five

1. I purposely appropriate the term “mulatta” from historical and literary discourses of passing and race-mixture in the Americas in order to acknowledge its use in national constructions and to redefine it connotatively in terms of a diasporic subjectivity that accepts its difference and uses that very difference to resist the seemingly negative implications of racial mixture inherent within national narratives.
2. Contact zones, according to Mary Louise Pratt, are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths [the various color lines] as they are lived out across the globe today” (4).
3. Roberta Salper and Vera M. Kutzinski note that the mulatta in Latin American letters is implicated in Latin American nationalism but is represented as voiceless and lacking in agency. Suzanne Bost and Teresa C. Zackodnik have recently examined the ways in which the figure of the mulatta has been used to critique the color lines in various areas of the Americas. However, none of these studies offer

a view of the border space of the color line in terms of the connotations I emphasize here.

4. Daphne Simeon and Jeffrey Abugel's study of depersonalization disorder and Andrew Sims's chapter on depersonalization offer more in-depth explanations of these terms.
5. Followers of Brazilian social theorist Gilberto Freyre coined the term "racial democracy" in order to describe Freyre's theory of a modern Brazilian nation based on miscegenation, patriarchy, and a hierarchy of racial spaces. Jeffrey Needell points to the origins, significance, and limitations of Freyre's racial theories. Frances W. Twine's work pointedly discusses Brazil's racial democracy in terms of a virulent racism.
6. For an in-depth treatment of the racial theories of the Schuylers and of the life of Phillipa Schuyler, see Kathryn Talalay's biography of the child prodigy.
7. For specific discussions of the mapping of racial spaces in Canada, see Katherine McKittrick's chapter on Black Canada, Rinaldo Walcott's *Black Like Who?*, George Elliott Clarke's "Honouring African-Canadian Geography," and Linda Peake and Brian Ray's article on the links between Canadian geography and social justice.
8. Craig MacLaine, Michael Baxendale, Geoffrey York, and Loreen Pindera focus on the factors leading up to the Oka Crisis and its legacies. Gerald Alfred and Alanis Obomsawin provide excellent background information on Mohawk political organization and historical resistance to the nation.
9. McWatt admits to her purposeful allusions to *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in her novel:

The allusions to *Jane Eyre* stem originally from a family fascination with the fact that my mother's maiden name is Eyre. She always thought she had some spiritual connection to Jane, even though she's a fictional character. I was influenced by my mother's deep psychic eccentricity. I did my Master's thesis on *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, exploring the north/south, white/colour issues and power dynamics inherent in Rhys's study of Bronte's first Mrs. Rochester. Then through fiction, Gerald became like my Bertha Mason – misunderstood, trapped, unable to survive, in a colonial context and finding madness almost as a solution for survival. (Cook)
10. Schwarz's article is also appealing for its focus on George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*. I believe that McWatt signifies on the title of Lamming's novel. Daphne's father sought to get out of his skin in order to escape the color line. But, like G in Lamming's novel, Daphne ultimately embraces the castle of her skin as a signifier of her mixture and of her transnationality. Toni Morrison's

influence is also present in the title of the novel. Morrison's Jadine from *Tar Baby* desires to get out of her skin, to escape race and the diaspora. Again, Daphne chooses differently.

11. This excerpt clearly signifies on the final scene of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Morrison's narrator states that Milkman Dead realizes that "[i]f you surrender to the air, you could *ride* it" (337). While Milkman chooses death as an act of agency, Daphne gives herself agency by choosing life within the "hum" that resonates from her hyphenated identity.

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