

WRITING HYBRIDITY:
IDENTITY, DIALOGICS, AND WOMEN'S NARRATIVES IN THE AMERICAS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the concept of “hybridity” and critically engages with the intellectual and political discourses that have attempted to define its meaning from the time of the Spanish Empire to the postmodern era. As a phenomenon resulting from cross-cultural encounters, hybridity has always posed a danger to fixed categorizations of identity, and thus a variety of discourses of hybridity have surfaced across different traditions in order to control its meaning. After the arrival of the Spaniards to the Americas, the need to restrain cultural mixture and therefore define “hybridity” was pressing. Thus, the discourse of *mestizaje* appears first to differentiate Spaniards from non-Spaniards, and later to give a fixed national identity to Spanish America and its people. Similarly, in the French Caribbean, *creoleness* put limits on the otherwise fluid interaction of African, native, and European peoples. More recently, postmodernist notions of hybridity assume that cross-cultural encounters cause individuals to live in a state of uncertainty, making “hybridity” a synonym of liminality and constant in-betweenness. This dissertation argues that three women writers, Toni Morrison, Rosario Ferré, and Marysé Condé, reevaluate those theories of hybridity challenging the claim that hybridity have provided a site of resistance to hegemonic and monologic forces. In contrast, their novels redefine hybridity, emphasizing its narrative quality and therefore maintaining the openness of individual identifications. They share with Mikhail M. Bakhtin the idea that hybrid consciousness evolves as a kind of narrative. Thus, these three writers rescue “hybridity” from the realm of theory and cultural generalizations, and realign it with forms of storytelling that construct stories of self through the discourses of others. Hybridity is presented as an artistic expression that at once controls and incorporates others’ discourses into single texts that tell the stories of female characters who have achieved hybrid consciousness.

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CHAPTER 1

HYBRIDITY: DEFINITIONS, VARIATIONS, AND MONOLOGIC DISCOURSES

1.1 Introduction

It is, therefore, a source of great virtue for the practiced mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.¹

Cross-cultural interaction began to influence human affairs from the earliest days of history. Trade, migration, empire-building, evangelization, forced removal and other human activities motivated cross-cultural encounters since no civilization or human group has ever lived in complete isolation or self-containment.² These interactions between different peoples have had tremendous social and cultural repercussions later in modern times. In fact, it is no coincidence that the markers of the beginning of the modern era are Christopher Columbus's voyages to the Western Hemisphere and the resulting conscious appearance of ethnic and cultural identities within larger intercultural contexts. Thus, hybridity, as the central concept of this dissertation, is understood as the phenomenon resulting from the encounter of different people. In its more general and static sense hybridity would point to the cultural, "racial,"

¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) 101.

² For an in-depth study of cross-cultural interactions before Modernity see, Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters. Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1993) 19.

political, and religious *mixture* that such encounters provoke. However, if one emphasizes the process, which involves the communication of beliefs and negotiation of values across cultural boundary lines, hybridity becomes a difficult experience to understand and a more elusive concept than the mere idea of mixture. Moreover, hybridity takes on a different aspect when examined from the viewpoint of the individual rather than society. At the very least, cross-cultural encounters and the resulting phenomenon of hybridity challenge the stability of all parties involved in the exchange. National, cultural, and individual identities are redefined due to the penetration and/or collapse of boundaries. Moreover, whether hybridity is studied from an individual or a social perspective, it always takes place within specific political, social, and economic contexts, bringing into play a struggle for the control of the meaning of the word in order to seize or maintain the power to reestablish the boundaries of self-contained identities.

As early bases of the notion of hybridity, the classical Greek ideas of barbarism and syncretism bring to the fore the political and power anxiety that cross-cultural encounters motivate. The Greeks have always—since Homer—ascribed inferiority, even inhumanity, to the cultural Other. Indeed, the term “barbarism,” during the fifth century BC and as result of Alexander the Great’s bellicose contact with those considered Barbarians, mainly Persians, was marked with substantial connotations of cultural inferiority. Described as morally corrupt, effeminate, unsophisticated, unintelligent, savages and predisposed to a life of servitude, the barbarians came to represent the antithesis of the Greek, maintaining clear boundaries between the Greek “self” and the “other.” According to Edith Hall, in the context of Greek tragedy, the vices attributed to the barbarian helped define the nature of Greek morality.³ Therefore, barbarism, as a term, did not refer to any substantial reality when describing particular

³ Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 122.

individuals or communities rather, it served predominantly to draw the boundaries that enclosed the constituent ideals of Greek identity—democracy, modesty, restraint, and reason—in direct opposition to non-Greeks. Euripides, especially interested in the close contact of Greek and non-Greeks and the resulting condition of foreignness, became the model of Greek thinking as it pertained to cross-cultural interactions. The Phrygian, in his *Orestes*, is the stereotypical barbarian character, drawn in direct opposition to the “pure” ideal of the Greek. In that way, as Timothy Long asserts, in Euripides, “barbarian” was “as much an ethical description as a national designation”⁴ which precluded, at least ideologically, the possible mixture of the Greek self with others, despite their continuous cultural contact.

Even more significant than the semantic change of the term “barbarian” to illustrate the control to which cross-cultural encounters have been subjected is the classical meaning of the word “syncretism.” As an early precursor of hybridity, its coiner, Plutarch, never used it to refer to reconciliation of mutually foreign elements. On the contrary, the first use of “syncretism” was reserved to emphasize “fraternal love” when threatened by a common enemy.⁵ Similarly, Erasmus revived the word in a letter to Melanchthon in 1519, urging concord despite the difference of opinions within the Humanist movement. Thus, in its original sense, “syncretism” did not refer to the incorporation and/or adaptation to foreign cultural elements. Quite the opposite, syncretism was used, like barbarism, to clearly delineate the boundaries between self and others due to the potential threat that unregulated contact might have posed to the coherence of the group.

⁴ Timothy Long, *Inventing the Barbarian in Greek Comedy* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) 132.

⁵ Plutarch uses the word in his essay, *De fraterno amore*, collected in *Moralia*, Volume 2. William Clark Helmbold, *Plutarch's Moralia In Fifteen Volumes*. Reprinted (London: Heinemann, 1957) 19.

Indeed, the modern meaning of syncretism as the mixture of heterogeneous and incompatible elements, mostly in religion, first occurred in the seventeenth century when a group of Lutherans led by George Calixtus sought to harmonize the different Protestant communities, and subsequently all Christendom. His vision was universally rejected, and while Calixtus' syncretism might have been used in the classical Plutarch's sense, the extreme reaction to his proposition injected a different nuance to the word, coming to signify the union of incompatible forces. Thus the Jesuit Voit Elber stated that the principles advocated by Calixtus meant the union not of people, but of different religions.⁶ This is the meaning that later in the late eighteenth century the word "hybridity" assumed. Without the religious connotations that syncretism acquired, but still meaning the union of utterly incompatible elements, which Plutarch himself would have censured, hybridity took on its biological origins, as Robert Young has noted.⁷ Thus, by 1861, the Oxford English Dictionary records that hybridity was used to denote the crossing of people of *different* races. It is not surprising, then, that in the nineteenth century, at the zenith of cross-cultural "exchange," motivated by colonialism on the one hand and nationalism on the other, hybridity emphasized both the biological and cultural anxieties that cultural interaction and mixture brought forth. Therefore, like "barbarism" and "syncretism" centuries earlier, "hybridity," in its cultural and "racial" sense, can only be understood as an official reaction against the heterogeneous, for it was, and still is, assumed to cause instability and change. Coherence and fixity are thus juxtaposed to the idea of hybridity, implying that the latter is the result of an undesirable crossing of cultural and racial borders. Thus, because cultures are said to be homogeneous, more as a political and cultural reaction to the foreign and diverse, than because they are so in factual terms, hybridity developed in the nineteenth century

⁶ Quoted in K. Rudolph, *Humanitas Religiosa* (Stockholm, 1979) 95.

⁷ See Robert Young. *Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995) 6.

the contemptuous rapport that Gobineau was able to convey in his theory of amalgamation. As summarized by Robert Young, “miscegenation produced a mongrel group that made up a ‘raceless chaos,’ merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigor and virtue of the pure race with which they come into contact.”⁸ Gobineau’s highly negative characterization of cross-cultural interactions exposes the problems that the nineteenth century unprecedented contact and exchange of cultural material posed to the safeguarding and justification of colonial enterprises. Purity and homogeneity are thus held as emblems of power and, as in classical Greece, self-containment and fixity are the cultural values sought to confront the threat of those deemed foreign, devious, and corrupt.

However, the notion of hybridity, at least as it developed across the Americas, cannot be fully understood if considered as a term with a pure Western trajectory. That is, hybridity was culturally hybridized in the Iberian Peninsula well before the nineteenth century. The designation of people as *mozarabes*, *moriscos*, or *mudéjares* is indeed testament of the amount of trans-culturation that occurred among the large populations of Christian descendants from Hispano-Romans and Visigoths while living alongside Arabs, Berbers and Jews from 711 to 1492 and after.⁹ More specifically, in the al-Andalus, a hybrid cultural model of relatively positive connotations known as *convivencia*, literally the cohabitation of people of different

⁸ Young 18.

⁹ The Oxford English Dictionary records the word “Mozarabe” in English Mozarab as “in Spain under Muslim rule (from the 8th to the 15th centuries) a person who continued to practise Christianity but who also adopted many aspects of Islamic culture, including language, and owed allegiance to the Moorish king. Large Muslim cities such as Toledo, Cordoba, and Seville contained separate enclaves of Mozarabs who formed wealthy communities ruled by their own officials and subject to their own (Visigothic) legal system. They also maintained their own churches, bishoprics, and monasteries and developed their own liturgy.” Also “Morisco” as “A Moor; any of the Moors in Spain who were converted to Christianity, or their descendants, who remained in Spain until their expulsion in 1609-14.” Finally the Mudéjar is described in the OED as “Any of the subject Muslims who, during the Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Moors in the 11th to 15th centuries, were allowed to retain Islamic laws, customs, and religion and to live in their own quarters in return for owing allegiance and paying tribute to a Christian monarch.” *OED* (Oxford University Press) <http://dictionary.oed.com> .

religions, “races,” and cultural backgrounds in close quarters, allowed for a rich interchange of artistic and cultural forms that lasted since the arrival of Islam to the Peninsula in 711 and until the expulsion of Jews and Muslims in the significant year of 1492, when Columbus started another chapter in the history of cross-cultural encounters. Thus, while it is impossible to speak of a unique, pure, and single shared identity among the inhabitants of Spain before and after they arrived in the Americas as a result of centuries of *convivencia*, ideological imperialism masked the complexity of their hybridity to base authority on purity of lineage and race. This practice, however, was not unique of European Christians kings. Indeed, the very first caliph, the orphan Umayyad who arrived in the Iberian Peninsula to restore his family’s power on the other side of the Mediterranean, also went to great lengths to legitimize his authority by establishing direct male lines of connection with the royal family of Damascus, capital of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁰ Thus, in the cultural and political narratives of Spain, whether under Muslim or Christian domination, hybridity was always controlled and masked under a narrative of purity. However, in practice, the cultural reality was more complex. At the individual and social level, gendered conceptions of new cultural configurations countered the official rhetoric of purity. In other words, women introduced alternative and mixed cultural habits into the process of cultural transformation of Spain and by extension, of the Americas.¹¹ That is, women, excluded from official narratives, led the social and individual hybridization of the population through the practice of different processes of transformation and adaptation. Thus, it is not surprising that two different narratives of identification have surfaced to characterize Iberian culture. On the one

¹⁰ D. Fairchild Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in al-Andalus” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34:1 (Winter 2004): 78.

¹¹ Ruggles argues that although the caliphs traced their lineage to the ancient Syrian Umayyads family of Damascus, their mothers were Christian women from the North who were allowed to maintain their religion even when they were expected to teach their children Muslim customs, culture, and religion. See Ruggles 69, 75.

hand, the essence of Spain is said to be European, Christian, and white, an essence that was finally restored after the expulsion of the foreign other—Muslims, Jews, and the admixture resulting from contact. On the other hand, Spain is seen as the site of intermingling of all kinds of cultural influences giving way to hybrid and fluid forms of identifications that have facilitated the exchange of ideas between East and West, the Muslim and Judeo-Christian world, and finally between Europe and America.¹²

The remainder of this work is an attempt to trace these two ways of understanding hybridity in the cultural history of the Americas. Thus, the following pages examine how the former view has predominated and influenced the rhetoric of cross-cultural encounters in the Americas from the times of the Spanish Empire to the postmodern era. Consequently, hybridity, including its Spanish and French forms—*mestizaje* and *creoleness*—has been construed as the official narrative that describes and settles the results of cross-cultural exchanges by putting an end to an otherwise ongoing process of transformation. However, the latter view survives in the fiction written by women keenly attuned to the cross-cultural character of the American experience. Specifically Rosario Ferré, Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, continue the tradition of countering the official, cultural narratives of hybridity by emphasizing the individual process of change and narration of self-identifications over the official, social, and theoretical narratives aimed to control the unpredictable phenomenon of culture transformation. *Mestizaje*, *creoleness*, and postmodern theories of

¹² For a discussion of Spanish Medieval historiography and the two ways of characterizing the identity of Spanish culture, see Thomas Glick and Oriol Pisunyer, “Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept in Spanish History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11 (1969): 136-54. A more recent study of hybridity in Spain can be found in Maria Rosa Menocal, “Visions of al-Andalus,” *The Literature of the Al-Andalus, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 1-24. Historically, Américo Castro was the first major scholar to explore the influence of centuries of *convivencia* on Spanish society. The next section of this chapter relies heavily on Américo Castro, *The Spaniards. An Introduction to Their History*, trans. Willard F. Fing and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

hybridization are, for these writers, extensions of the historical and cultural discourses that have sought to fix the interaction of foreign elements into absolute categories of identification. Thus, their discourses still reduce hybridity to a grand narrative that values what Michael Palencia-Roth has called “the monologic hegemony of a single voice.”¹³ Mestizaje and creoleness are discourses meant to give a national, homogeneous model of identity to the peoples of the Caribbean and Spanish America. Similarly, the postmodern hybrid is said to stay in-between, in a third space, in a state of liminality. These are spacial and psychological designations as stifling and static as any national or racial categorization. As opposed to the monologic, the women writers featured in this dissertation remain committed to the dialogic, underscoring fiction and storytelling, rather than abstract cultural theory, to describe the unending processes of individual formation in contexts of cross-cultural contact throughout the history of the Americas.¹⁴

1.2 The Spanish Empire: *Limpieza de Sangre* and Mestizaje.

“How many people there must be in the world who run away from others because they don’t see themselves,” says the hero of the picaresque novel *El Lazarillo de Tormes* as he tells the reader about his black step-father and the fear that his mulatto half-brother experiences when he sees his father’s otherness.¹⁵ This perceptive reflection of the *pícaro*, according to the

¹³ Michael Palencia-Roth, “Universalism and Transversalism: Dialogue and Dialogics in a Global Perspective,” *Cultural Diversity and Transversal Values: The East-West Dialogue on Spiritual and Secular Dynamics* (Unesco, 2006) 38.

¹⁴ I refer here once again to Palencia-Roth’s juxtaposition of the dialogical and the monologic as conceived by Bakhtin in *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1981), 269-275. See Palencia-Roth, “Universalism and Transversalism” 38.

¹⁵ From the following episode in the novel: “My widowed mother, finding herself without a husband or anyone to take care of her ... decided to come to the city. She rented a little house and began to cook for some students ... She and a black man—one of those who took care of the animals—got to know each other. Sometimes he would come to our door and wouldn’t leave until the next morning ... At the beginning, I didn’t like him. He scared me because the color of his skin and his ugly face. But when I saw that with him around the food got better, I began to like him a lot ... So with his visits, and as the relationship continued on, my mother gave me a pretty little black bother whom I bounced on my knee

controversial scholarship of Américo Castro, might serve to characterize the essence of Spanish society and the underlying principle of the consolidation of the Spanish empire.¹⁶ Fourteen hundred ninety-two brought the unification of Spanish territory under a Christian political establishment, the expulsion of “infidels”—Jewish and Muslims—from the newly “re-conquered” territory, and the launching of the New World adventure. It also marked the beginning of the Spanish desire for a unified and homogeneous culture. However, unity could only be forged rhetorically. Indeed, the Iberian Peninsula was divided on the political level into separate Christian and Muslim kingdoms. Within them, three different castes formed a society of coexisting Christian, Jewish, and Muslim citizens. These three cultural groups lived together, depending on each other, though not always in total harmony. “Spain,” Castro affirms, “has been what it seems to me a splendid ensemble of humanity woven together out of three coexisting castes and, at the same time, radically split. It was divided into three castes, three beliefs, into

and helped get warm. One day I remember that as my father was playing with the little one, the child noticed that my mother and I were white, while his father was not, and scared of him, the child run towards my mother pointing his finger at him saying: ‘Mama, the bogeyman’ ... Even though I was still a young boy, I thought about that word my little brother had used, and said to myself: “ How many people there must be in the world who run away from others because they don’t see themselves.” Anonimous. *La vida del Lazarillo de Tormes*, Antonio Rey Hazas ed. (Madrid: Castalia Didáctica, 1989) 66-67. My translation.

¹⁶ Américo Castro argues in *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History* that Spanish historiography has created the myth of the “eternal” Spaniard. That is, the belief that Spanish people are as ancient as the first inhabitants of the Peninsula and that their character can be traced back to Romans, Iberians, and Celtiberians ignoring eight centuries of Jewish and Muslim influence. He states, “ Conventional Spanish historiography builds on the supposition that *blood*, in its transition down the generations, *determines* the *essential* constitution of Hispanic man, the Spaniard ... We are gratified to know that we are eternal, superior to all those people who have trod the sacred soil of Spain, for all of them—Romans, Visigoths, Arabs—stopped being what they were and in the final analysis were incorporated into the everlasting Spanish essence—The Caves of Altamira, the heroism of Numantia, Trajan and Theodosios, Seneca and Lucan, Isidore of Hispalis, the grandeur of Cordova under the Caliphs, the thought of Averroës and Maimonides, the extraordinary figure of Ibn Hazm, the totality of Arabic and Hebraic literature; everything is poured into the undivided state of the Spaniard’s patrimony. The gaps them become less disturbing, and we evade the anguished problem of asking ourselves in all rigor the fearful question: “But in reality what and who are we?” Américo Castro 25. My discussion on the connection between the rhetoric of Spanish empire and mestizaje as interrelated discourses that aim to unify and homogenize radical heterogeneous societies is informed by Américo Castro’s scholarship and analysis of Spanish history.

three antagonistic ambitions, in a long series of ruptures and accords.”¹⁷ Thus, to assert and secure the imperial hold, the system sought as a requirement the complete assimilation of the Other into a homogeneous culture. What had been a ternary society had to become unitary and cohesive. That is, Christians aspired to constituting themselves as pure despite of the heterogeneous society that until that moment had conceived the interweaving of the three castes legally and morally advantageous.¹⁸

Américo Castro cites the example of Ferdinand III the Holy’s epitaph in the cathedral of Seville to illustrate the change from a relatively tolerant society to a more intolerant, homogeneous and unified one. The epitaph is written in four different languages—Latin, Castilian, Arabic, and Hebrew—a customary thing in thirteenth-century Castile. Castro notes the variation that the Latin text presents when compared to the other three. The Latin version shows the power of the Church and its universal mission with respect to the three castes, while Castilian, Arabic, and Hebrew epitaphs express the policy of peaceful coexistence supported by Alfonso X, who was clearly in disagreement with the clergy. Thus, the Latin version exalts the memory of the king for having crushed and exterminated (*contrivit et exterminavit*) the shameless impudence (*proterviam*) of the Muslims who occupied Córdoba and Sevilla. In contrast, the aggressive language of the Latin version does not appear in the three versions likely to be read by the masses, Castilian, Arabic, and Hebrew. Moreover, the reference to the city of Sevilla as “head of Spain” in the Castilian text, “head of all al-Andalus,” in the Arabic, and just “medina” in the Hebrew illustrates a tolerance of differences and a relative comfort living with contradictions.¹⁹ Yet that situation was destined to change, perhaps foreshadowed by the Latin

¹⁷ Castro 204.

¹⁸ This type of society is referred to as “convivencia”: the coexistence of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Medieval Spain. See Castro 584.

¹⁹ Cited in Castro 60-61.

text and its connection to the Christian caste. Latent longing for preeminence among the castes resulted for historical reasons in the dominance of one of them. That is, common life among the three original castes, coexisting in relative tolerance and awareness of each other ended when the Christian section of the population became desirous of affirming themselves as a single people against the other two, claiming the territory as an extension of their identity.

The aggressive epitaph, in Latin only, of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in the Royal Chapel of Granada shows this change in policy by the end of the 15th century:

Destroyers of the Mohammedan sect and the annihilators of the heretical obstinacy (i.e. of the Jews), Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, husband and wife undivided in opinion, called the Catholic, lie enclosed by this marble tomb.²⁰

In 1252 all castes paid homage to the king in their own language and with distinct voices. Yet, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, just one voice rises against the others, trying to erase their existence by seeking order, symmetry, and uniformity. Spanish life and history is thus reduced to a myth of totality in which an extreme preoccupation over lineage and caste becomes dominant over all other considerations. Who has the right to be a Spaniard and who should be excluded consume the Christian caste in opposition to the other two, which, nonetheless, are still prominent elements of society. Américo Castro concludes,

In the formative epoch of the Spanish consciousness, the feeling of caste was a stimulus inciting people to prove their worth, something like a feeling of “noblesse oblige”; later however, what had been the motivation became the goal, that is to say, one did not aspire to be heroic, intelligent, or industrious in order to rise as a member of the Christian, Jewish, or Moorish caste, but all effort was concentrated in the eagerness to be counted as a member of the caste that had come to stand alone—the caste of the Old Christians in

²⁰ Quoted in Castro 205.

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the only sovereign and valued caste. Such was the upheaval that shook Spanish life, the change of direction that become visible, expressed and given concrete form in imperial prowess.²¹

Thus, Spaniards began understanding themselves as a single and unitary entity without external elements of “impurity,” simultaneously rejecting and assimilating those elements from the core of society. However, the desire for a unified empire formed upon the Western tradition of universality and sustained by the Catholic Church could only maintain its integrity officially. Unofficially, the existence of differences of faith, race, and culture, combining aspects of Latin, Hebraic, and Islamic traditions, threatened all appearances of coherent totality and gave rise to a radical insecurity. Thus, the concern for being “pure of blood” (*limpio de sangre*) started disturbing Christian Spaniards from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Indeed, the establishment of the Inquisition in 1478 was part of this growing concern. Ironically, the system of collective and individual evaluation based on blood, purity, and lineage represented by the institution of the Spanish Inquisition was, according to Américo Castro, adopted by Spaniards from the Jewish tradition.²² This illustrates the symptomatic anxiety of the Spaniard regarding what José Piedra has called “Spanish own racially ill-defined origins.”²³ In other words, the impossible separation of “impure” elements from the very fabric of Spanish society accounts for its constant suspicion and mistrust. Thus, “it is not a paradox,” as Américo Castro insists, “that Spanish society grew more and more fanatic in its Christianity as more and more Jews [and Moriscos] disappeared or were Christianized.”²⁴ If the cultural mixture of Hispano-Hebrews and Hispano-Arabs was not only seen as normal but necessary before the fifteenth-century, by the

²¹ Castro 207.

²² See Castro 67-71.

²³ José Piedra, “Literary Whiteness and the Afro-Hispanic Difference,” *New Literary History* 18.2 (Winter 1987): 307.

²⁴ Castro 78.

end of that period, Spaniards did not tolerate contact. However, by then, not only was the general population thoroughly mixed, but even Christians of royal descent, like the mother of Ferdinand the Catholic, had Jewish blood.²⁵ In this context, it was no longer possible to recognize anything that was pure. Indeed, unlike most Western traditions that construct purity of lineage on phenotypic features, Spanish society had to rely on a metaphorical conception of blood as sign of authenticity and legitimacy. The creation of an organic and seemingly pure unity of the empire under a Christian tradition was therefore more a rhetorical and judicial matter than an actuality. Yet, those who came to find themselves in the advantageous position of belonging to the Christian caste defended their position with a fury directly proportional to their desire to get away from their origins. Then, centuries of inter-cultural Judaic, Islamic, and Christian interaction ended when the latter component of that mixture found itself guiding the destiny of a whole empire, and chose to articulate its history upon the Western drive to homogenization.²⁶ Thus, the Spanish empire had to shed its internal differences in order to forget, like the brother of the pícaro in *El Lazarillo*, what it really was. For that purpose, “el cristiano viejo,” the Old Christian citizen, came to signify the purity, legitimacy, and quality of the “authentic” Spaniard as opposed to those of impure descent who could only aspire to such a title by *autos-da-fé*, the official, rhetorical process to assimilate excessive otherness within the Spanish empire.²⁷

²⁵ John II of Aragón took Doña Juana Henríquez, the daughter of Don Alonso Henríquez of Jewish lineage on his mother’s side, as his second wife, so their son Ferdinand the Catholic turns out to be Jewish on his mother’s side. Example cited in Castro 72-73.

²⁶ As opposed to the Islamic model of *convivencia* among Jews, Muslims, and Christians as the cultural model introduced and practiced in Al-Andalus. See Castro, 62.

²⁷ Antonio de Nebrija defines “casta” as “good lineage.” According to Covarrubias “caste means noble and pure lineage Those who are of good lineage and caste we call “castizos.” See Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Pamplona, Spain: Universidad de Navarra , 2006). In colonial Spain the term “castizo” evolved to refer to the child of a mestizo and a Spaniard, considered a Spanish citizen and the closest to the Spanish model in the caste system of 18th-century New Spain. See Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) 58.

Spanish concerns with *limpieza de sangre* (purity and quality of blood) and Christian authenticity were strongly rooted in the premise that heterodoxy came with blood descent. Thus, it was not enough to convert to Christianity, but an untainted bloodline was necessary to fit the model of Spanishness.²⁸ A Christian of Jewish or Moorish decent not only faced prejudice, but also extreme suspicion of disloyalty to the Crown, and as a result, institutional discrimination. For this reason, an insidious distinction between “Old Christians” and “New Christians” appeared. The former were considered model Spaniards—trustworthy and devoted to the king—while the latter, the “New Christians,” were said to be tainted and therefore liable to rebel against the order imposed by Spanish institutions. Norman Roth believes that this ideological and religious distinction between “Old” and “New” Christians already has modern racial dimensions.²⁹ The suspicion and hatred was directed towards the people, not the religion, and so this carried over to the *conversos* or new Christians. Roth adds, “it was not that the conversos were not ‘good Christians,’ for in fact everyone knew they were, but that inherent characteristics corrupted them (‘Jewish blood’), and through them would corrupt all of Christian society.”³⁰ However, the concept of modern racism alone is not sufficient to explain the Empire’s discourse against otherness. Indeed, the model of Spanishness was based on an ideology that had been

²⁸ “The common Spanish idea of blood as a vehicle initially of religious faith and later as a mark of social condition is probably related to medieval physiological theory according to which the mother’s blood fed the child in the womb and then, transformed into milk, fed the baby outside the womb as well ... The origin of the idea of purity of “clean blood” actually dates from the emergence of the issue of religious purity in the fifteenth century.” See Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, “Ethnic and Gender Influences on ‘Spanish’ Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 4.1(1995): 160.

²⁹ I am suggesting that indeed this is the racial ideology that was introduced into the Americas as the Spanish Empire spread through the Western Hemisphere. Thus, a combination of classical, religious, and 19th century racial theories, as opposed to just the latter as most studies considered, inform the discourse of otherness from the time of empire, colonization, independence and even modern times in the Americas.

³⁰ Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 230.

informed by an ancient system of categorization and valorization of the Other.³¹ Christian cosmology and classical philosophy, specifically Aristotelian thinking, gave the Spanish empire the basic concepts to define the Other against the nation and its empire. Spanish affirmation of its own identity was thus influenced by a relentless defense of the established order as an absolute value. To preserve and secure that order, a process of delimitation and exclusion was set up as the previous condition to control otherness and maintain stability within the “Spanish” self.

Catholic Christianity came to constitute the first starting point for a radically exclusionary definition of the Spanish nation. The word “Catholic” comes from the Greek “*kata*,” meaning “all embracing,” and “*holos*” meaning “the whole.”³² This etymological universality of Christianity, which allows for the incorporation of the Other by means of conversion into its unitary system of faith and understanding of the world, very easily created a distinction between “brothers” and “others.” That is, the Christian union of all human kind into a single brotherhood encouraged the hostility against the infidel. In the case of the Spanish empire, the Christian doctrine that “all men are brothers,” or “all human beings are siblings,” turned into the doctrine that “only brothers are men, all ‘others’ are enemies and may as well be treated as such.”³³ In addition to Christian cosmology, the Aristotelian concept of civilization versus barbarism also served as ideological framework to justify Spanish domination and assert a

³¹ For a detailed explanation of classical and medieval influences in Spanish accounts of other cultures see, Michael Palencia-Roth, “Mapping the Caribbean. Cartography and the Cannibalization of Culture,” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* vol. 3. Ed. A. James Arnold (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992) 3-29.

³² *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* Tenth Edition (Springfield, Mass., 1993) 307.

³³ Marc Shell, “Marranos (Pigs), or From Coexistence to Toleration,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991): 307.

homogeneous Spanish identity against the multiplicity of others within the boundaries of the empire.³⁴

In the Spanish case, the unique identity of the national character in opposition to its others—the Spanish logos—was established around the purity of the untainted Christian elite who, according to Sepúlveda, was the only one capable to lead others to a “civilized” and superior life.³⁵ As an example, Governor Ovando of Santo Domingo was instructed to encourage “some Christians [i.e. Spaniards] marry some Indian women and some Christian women marry some Indian men, so both parties can communicate and teach each other and the Indians become *men and women of reason*.”³⁶ With this rhetoric of Christianity as the only possible way to a civilized, ordered life, the Spanish empire constituted itself by adapting ancient cosmology and the concept of Christian universality to the needs of its colonial empire. In this way, it secured a fictional homogeneity of the nation against the heterogeneity of its empire. Therefore, metropolitan notions of Christian purity, the Spanish concept of *limpieza de sangre*, and the discourses against Jews and Arabs in the Iberian peninsula surfaced in Spanish America in order to safeguard the boundaries of Spanish Christian identity. More importantly, they helped to mark the colonial population with the same mechanisms of exclusion that Jews and Muslims had previously been subjected to in the peninsula.

³⁴ Christian ideology versus Aristotelian Philosophy caused a debate about colonial policies within the Spanish empire embodied in the argument maintained by Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in Valladolid between 1550 y 1551. For an article that reconstructs the opposing views put forward in this famous debate see, Herbert Frey, “La mirada de Europa y el “otro” indoamericano,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 59.2 (April-June, 1996): 53-70.

³⁵ See Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Democrates Alter* (Madrid: Losada, 1963) 34.

³⁶ Richard Konezke, *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamerica*, 1493-1810 vol. I (Madrid: Instituto Jaime Balmes, 1953) 12-13. My translation, my emphasis. While this policy encouraged cross-cultural marriages, its ultimate goal was homogenize the population by conversion to Catholicism as the only possible way to attain “reason.”

Indeed, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between race and religion in early modern Spain is important for the historicization of racial ideologies as they were formed in the colonial context of the Americas. Racial and social categories were created and informed by the same metropolitan ideas about conversion, genealogy, and “blood mixture” that had permeated Spanish society since *convivencia*. Spanishness was then largely determined by its purity and presumed “untainted” relationship to the Catholic Church. That is, the epistemological identity of the Spaniard was interlocked with the “imagined” identity of the non-Spaniards, in the case of the American colonies, Indians, Black Africans, and people of mixed-ancestry. That is, the Spaniard’s positive self-definition as “pureblooded” and “old/true” Christian was deployed in tandem with the perceived negative traits of those others of impure/mixed blood, new Christians. Thus, the identities of both Spaniards and the rest of socio-racial groups within the Empire were constructed within a positive/negative paradigm. These identities were inseparable, entangled, and yet as unstable as were those of Muslim, Jewish, and Christians before 1492. Legal formulas and procedures were put in place in order to determine *limpieza* status and made genealogy and filial relationships central to the formation of a stratified system of identities in the Americas. These formulas and procedures promoted, as they had already done in the metropolis, an obsession with origins that laid the groundwork for the development of particularly strong links among religion, race, and the later formation of the “nation” as a genealogical fiction. Thus, Spanish notions of purity and impurity of blood, albeit its fictional, political, and ideological nature, became the official practice of shaping social order and of understanding “difference” in the New World.

Indeed, from its beginning in the sixteenth century Spanish colonial society was conceived in terms of division. According to Mörner, the crown pursued a tenacious policy to

separate its Indian subjects from the negative influences of others.³⁷ Religious differences among the indigenous populations of the Americas placed the Indians in the category of “pagans,” and therefore perfect candidates to be converted. This notion produced a vision of the “Indies” as a privileged space of purity, where Indians could be instructed in all matters of the Catholic doctrine without the “negative” effects that the Jewish and Muslim credos had in the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, it is not surprising that *limpieza de sangre* requirements were implemented immediately as a fundamental requisite for those who wanted to venture into the colonial world. Thus to prevent impurity, the crown prohibited untrustworthy converts from going to the Americas well before the Inquisition was formally established in the New World.³⁸ However, old Christians proved to be poor examples for the Amerindians, according to missionaries like Bartolomé de Las Casas.³⁹ As a consequence, a strict social and physical separation between Spanish and Indians was also implemented: the República de españoles and the República de indios. Yet, this dichotomous model of social organization was difficult to maintain and soon was undermined by the daily intermingling of people as a quintessential part of colonial life.⁴⁰ In fact, the sexual contact between Spanish men and Indian women started from the very first stages of the process of discovery and conquest, resulting in a third sector of the population considered

³⁷ Mörner 45.

³⁸ The first edict forbidding the arrival of “impure” people was issued in 1523. María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008) 128. Various other decrees targeting Jews, Muslims, conversos, moriscos, Gypsies, heretics, and the descendants of those categories were to follow. See the 1539 order by Charles V banning Jews, Moors, and *conversos* and the children and grandchildren of people who had been burned or reconciled from going to and residing in Spanish America. See Konetzke 192-193.

³⁹ See Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Tratado de las Indias* (Lima: Grupo Editorial Huaca Prieta: Editorial Bracamoros, 2005).

⁴⁰ See Magali M. Carrera’s discussion of the role of the market place, Plaza Mayor, in Mexico city as a place of encounter and interaction of the two republics in *Imagining Identity in New Spain. Race Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) 34-35.

of mixed-ancestry. As early as 1514 the Crown encouraged the regulation of these sexual encounters, forced or otherwise, between Spanish and Indians through marriage,

...if the natives of these Castilian kingdoms who now live in the island of Hispaniola would marry native women of that island, it would be very useful and advantageous to the service of God and ours, and also for the people of that island, I having taken into consideration those marriages and the good that would come from them, hereby grant permission to all natural people from these Kingdoms to marry freely any native woman of that island without incurring any penalty whatsoever.⁴¹

In the early period, however, the children from these unions were considered Spaniards since what mattered most were the status of the father and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the child.⁴² In fact, the category of “mestizo” does not appear until 1544, and continues being very rare throughout the sixteenth century.⁴³ The lack of a specific category for the issue of these unions presupposed the incorporation of mixed children into the *República de españoles* in order to lessen demographic imbalances as well as to cultivate their loyalty to Spain.⁴⁴ It would be relevant to underscore at this point that the relative tolerance of mixed-cultural children in the first stages of the colonizing project resembles Spanish policies of *convivencia* during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as it pertained to the social and political relationships between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Peninsula. However, just as in Spain two centuries earlier, by the end of the sixteenth century, that political strategy of tolerance to mixture and cross-

⁴¹ Konetzke, *Colecciones* Vol.I, 61. “... si los naturales destes Reinos de Castilla que residen en la Isla Española se casasen con mujeres naturales desa isla, sería muy utile y proveihoso al servicio de Dios y nuestro y conveniente a la población de dicha isla, y yo habida consideración a lo susodicho y al bien y provecho que dello redundá, por la presente doy licencia y facultad a cualesquier personas naturales destes dichos Reinos para que libremente se puedan casar con mujeres naturales desa dicha isla sin caer ni incurrir por ello en pena alguna.” My Translation.

⁴² Martínez 144.

⁴³ Martínez 144.

⁴⁴ Mörner, 41 and Martínez 145.

cultural relationships in the Americas ended for economic, political, and demographic reasons.⁴⁵ As a consequence, the discourse of ancestry and purity of blood was once again deployed to further separate, organize, and control blurred social and racial boundaries. Moreover, it served to appease the anxiety that the economic advancement of people of mixed-ancestry provoked in the Spanish elite. For example, in Mexico City, as a result of an Indian revolt pupported by all elements of the population against the Spanish elite, the upper class intellectual Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora expresses his disgust for the social reality of a population that had become “too sundry,” “composed of Indians, of Blacks both locally born and of different nations in Africa, chinos, mulattos, moriscos, mestizos, zambaigos, lobos, and even Spaniards.” “We live,” he adds, “among such a populace while we take pride in our greatness. If only this truth, very much of our detriment in the present situation, would have never materialized! ...”⁴⁶ Also, the Augustinian Friar Nicolás de Witte conveys the same concern about mixture, for it had become difficult to maintain order in such circumstances. The land, he said,

is engendering and is being populated by a mixture of evil people. For it is clear that this land is full of mestizos, who are so badly inclined. It is full of black men and women who come from slaves. It is full of black men who marry Indian women, from which come mulattos. And it is full of mestizos who marry Indian women, from which come a diverse casta of infinite number, and from all of these mixtures descend other diverse and not very good mixtures.⁴⁷

It is at this period of social anxiety when a specific racial nomenclature began to surface as a means of imposing order and maintaining a hierarchical social structure. Labels to

⁴⁵ Mörner, 25-33 and Martínez, 146.

⁴⁶ Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, “Alboroto y motín de los indios de México, 1692 ” *Seis obras*, ed. William G. Bryant (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1984) 113, 119-120. My Translation.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Martínez 162.

categorize the different and multiple groupings of the population became common in a system that returned to the idea of three distinguishable and homogeneous social groups—Spaniards, Indians, and Blacks—whose mixture would present a problem for the maintenance of the alleged purity of the three “natural” categories.⁴⁸ Thus, the term *mestizaje* appears in the sixteenth century in order to connote the mixture and, therefore, impurity of those whose blood became “polluted” as a result of exogamy.⁴⁹ The term *mestizaje* was thereby construed within the discourse of empire to allude to an ideology of social order that privileged the ideal of a pure origin represented in the Spaniard as “the untainted” individual. *Mestizaje* was thus based on old religious standards and modern Western racial theories, which had already appeared by mid-seventeenth century. Those who came from mixed blood and ancestry were referred by the umbrella term of *castas*, a system centered on the idea of “degeneracy.”⁵⁰ That is, this system presented a neat, stratified classification of racial and social groups aimed to emphasize the purity, hence superiority of the Spaniards at the top of the pyramid, and the Blacks at the very bottom, embodying the regression in which humanity would fall due to cultural and racial “descent.”⁵¹ In between Spaniards and Blacks slaves, a multiplicity of different categories with a

⁴⁸ As already indicated in this chapter, Américo Castro points out that Spanish society of the 14th century also became strictly segregated into three main castes: Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Interestingly enough, in the New World the old Christian category was intimately associated with the Spaniards, the Muslims with the African slaves, and the Indians with Jews as one of the lost tribes of Israel.

⁴⁹ Etymologically, *mestizaje* comes from the late Latin “mixticious” and “miscere” which in English derives into “mix” and Spanish, “mezclar.” More importantly, the connotative meaning of the term further implies the impurity of the by-product, from a genuine and more valued original.

⁵⁰ I borrow here Anne McClintock’s words, “the poetics of degeneration [implied in the *castas* system and idea of *mestizaje*] was a poetics of social crisis.” See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 46.

⁵¹ Mörner points out that “though legally superior to the mixed people, especially those of African descent, the Indian’s social position was the most inferior.” See Mörner 60.

particular nomenclature appeared to allude to numerous combinations of people in the New World.⁵² Yet, this system did not have a mere biological basis. As Mörner points out,

The Spanish American Society of Castes ... was created by transferring to the New World the hierarchic, estate-based, corporative society of late medieval Castile and imposing that society upon a multiracial colonial situation. This colonial reality was characterized first, by the dichotomy between conquerors and conquered, masters and servants or slaves, and, second, by the miscegenation between these opposite groups.⁵³

For this reason, we find examples of genealogical information at the end of the seventeenth century that combine old Iberian notions of *limpieza de sangre* and the increasingly predominant discourse of natural racial belonging. For example, Cristóbal Ruiz de Quiroz adamantly tries to prove his pure Spanishness as a vital requisite to be part of the administrative or religious elite. He demonstrated that he descended from a “clean caste and generation, without the trace of mixture of Moors, mulattos, blacks, Jews or the newly converted to the Holy Catholic faith.” Similarly, Pedro Serrano contended that his ancestors had not been tried by the Holy Office and

⁵² The terminology and number of classifications varies significantly from region to region. Mörner offers the following list from eighteenth-century New Spain:

1. Spaniard and Indian beget mestizo
2. Mestizo and Spanish woman beget castizo
3. Castizo woman and Spaniard beget Spaniard
4. Spanish woman and Negro beget mulatto
5. Spaniard and mulatto woman beget morisco
6. Morisco woman and Spaniard beget albino
7. Spaniard and albino woman beget torna atrás
8. Indian and torna atrás woman beget lobo
9. Lobo and Indian woman beget zambaigo
10. Zambaigo and Indian woman beget cambujo
11. Cambujo and mulatto woman beget albarazado
12. Albarazado and mulatto woman beget barcino
13. Barcino and mulatto woman beget coyote
14. Coyote woman and Indian beget chamiso
15. Chamiso woman and mestizo beget coyote mestizo
16. Coyote mestizo and mulatto woman beget ahí te estás

See Mörner 58.

⁵³ Mörner 54.

that they were pure Old Christians, “clean from the races of moriscos, Jews, blacks and mulattos.”⁵⁴

As it pertains to the Indians, if they had been considered “pure” of Muslims and Jewish traditions in the first stages of the colonizing project, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, anxieties over the lack of well-established social and racial boundaries fed Spanish interest in determining the origins of the Indians and in studying theories about the pre-Columbian inhabitants. These theories sometimes led to the conclusion that Indians descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel.⁵⁵ Idol worshipping, ritual sacrifices and the practice of cannibalism were presented as evidence that linked the two groups. These discourses had obvious consequences for the social status of Indians and their descendants, the community of mestizos. In a 1576 letter to the Suprema, Mexican inquisitors considered the connection between Indians and Jews to be the reason for not letting Indians and their descendants hold any position in their institution:

Because many things that happened to these [Indians] were announced for the Jews by their Prophets; and also because they see the name Indio, and presume that it has been altered, and that the N should be joined at the bottom so that it says Judio. These rumors and general thinking and assumptions, together with the vileness and baseness and depraved customs of the descendants of these [Indians], seem sufficient reason not to admit them into the offices of the Inquisition nor to any other ministerial post, and if the contrary was done it would come as a great surprise and shock.⁵⁶

Anti-Semitic rhetoric along with the discourse of idolatry and cannibalism then played a crucial role in the lowering the social status of Indians, and above all, mestizos, as descendants of the

⁵⁴ Both examples cited in Martínez 163-164.

⁵⁵ See Richard H. Popkin, “The Rise and the Fall of the Jewish Indian Theory,” *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*, eds. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan, and Richard H. Hopkin (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989) 63-82.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Martínez 149.

latter. Their purity, and therefore, their loyalty to the Crown was underscored as the reason to restrict them from getting positions of authority and to curb their increasing power in benefit of Old Christians, “pure” Spaniards. These legal restrictions succeeded in making mestizos not only second-class citizens, but also a despised community by the Spanish elite. In the 1570’s, royal decrees prohibited them from carrying arms, from becoming public notaries, caciques, and municipal magistrates, and from holding the title of Protector of Indians.⁵⁷ They became “effeminate and pusillanimous,” “badly inclined and bothersome.”⁵⁸

Beneath the mestizos as a category, however, were the mulattos and blacks. If mestizo blood was considered redeemable after two generations of mixture with Old Spanish blood, African ancestry was marked by slavery and thus forever tainted. Spaniards justified enslavement in religious terms by associating blacks with Muslims infidels who were captured in “just wars” and therefore subjects to be enslaved. Moreover, the form in which Africans were incorporated into the sociopolitical order of Spanish America also played a crucial role in determining their status at the bottom of the social scale. While Spanish political ideology expected slaves to become Christians, the responsibility for their conversion fell on their owners. That implied that conversion was involuntary and not trustworthy. Another reason why African slaves were not considered loyal to the Crown was on account of their “foreignness.” Their African origins were thought to preclude any attachment to the Spanish territories, therefore they were considered more likely to revolt and side with Spanish enemies.⁵⁹ Consequently, people of African ancestry were not able to claim purity of blood because they could not establish that they were Old Christians. By definition, blacks were considered impure for their connection to

⁵⁷ Mörner 43.

⁵⁸ Gregorio García, *Origen de los indios del Nuevo Mundo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981) 73. Also see Konetzke, I, 427, 513, 562, 498, 499. My translation.

⁵⁹ On Spanish notions of blackness and slavery before and during the expansion to the Americas, see James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *WMQ*, 3^d Ser., 54.1 (1997): 143-166.

slavery and their origins. This permanent stain resulted in the denial of all sorts of rights based on birth within the established Spanish hierarchy of blood. Such a discourse against blackness molded by Old World religious life and conflicts was reflected in *casta* nomenclature itself. The category of mulatto—referring to children of Spaniards and blacks or anyone with partial African ancestry—comes, according to Covarrubias, from the term “mule.”⁶⁰ The meaning indicates the nature of the mule as a “third species,” a cross between a horse and a donkey, which was thought to be infertile. María Elena Martínez suggests that the choice of this term is intimately related to the low status of *conversos* in Old Spain. She points out that the word is reminiscent of the “Prophet Muhammad’s fabled animal, which was neither horse nor mule, and in fifteenth-century Spain, it was used to convey that the New Christians were neither Jews/Muslims nor Christians but a kind of unnatural or third species, one that presumably had difficulties reproducing.”⁶¹ The ideological discourse that connected Muslim infidels in the Iberian Peninsula with people of African ancestry in the Americas becomes even more apparent in the next *casta* category referring to the children of Spaniards and mulattos as *moriscos*. This term had served to designate specifically Muslims converts to Christianity. Therefore, its cultural baggage in the eyes of the Spanish elite underscored the religious infidelity and deceitfulness the African and its descendants, justifying their status as natural slaves and their relegation to the bottom of the social hierarchy with little or no possibility of advancement.⁶²

⁶⁰ Covarrubias 768.

⁶¹ Martínez 164.

⁶² As free individuals, blacks were able to purchase the status of “purity” from the Crown, but they could not prove it through their bloodlines. Individual meritorious deeds, such as military service, that demonstrated their deep loyalty to the Christian faith and their masters enable them to buy “documentos de gracias al sacar” mentioned by Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essays of the Kingdom of New Spain* (London, 1814) 246-247. Also see, Lyle N. McAlister, “Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 43.3 (August 1963): 355.

In this way, the Spanish empire redeployed the discourse of *pureza de sangre* in order to create an illusion of order out of an increasingly confusing social structure, in which an excess of differences produced anxiety over the impossibility of controlling them. The ideology of mestizaje, then, as constructed in Spanish America was never originally intended to celebrate diversity or to accept the other as an integral part of society. On the contrary, mestizaje and its manifestation in the castas system constituted a tool for the Spanish elite to identify its “others” preventing them from enjoying social mobility while, at the same time, asserting its own identity as a racially privileged group. Yet, the *castas* system failed to work as intended since its effort to create institutional exclusivity on the basis of blood purity was going to be challenged as the colonial period came to a close at the hands of the criollos and their use of mestizaje as a political weapon to achieve independence.⁶³

1.3 Mestizo Nations of Spanish America: Simón Bolívar, José Martí, and José Vaconcelos.

The category of “Spaniard” in the New World was not as homogeneous as it claimed to be. The principal sense of division among Spaniards was between those who were born or raised in the Americas, the criollos, and those born in the Iberian Peninsula, the peninsulares.⁶⁴ The tension between these two factions surfaced in the context of the growing competition over public and religious offices as the families of the conquerors and first colonists experienced a relative socioeconomic decline since the second part of the seventeenth century.⁶⁵ Peninsular

⁶³ I prefer the use of the Spanish word “criollo” in this context, instead of its translation in English, from the French, “creole,” since the latter carries a culturally specific meaning and theoretical baggage that don’t apply to the Spanish term. Please see the section on creoleness in this chapter.

⁶⁴ For a study on the definition of “Spaniard” as a social category based on migration policies and citizenship requirements in the Spanish empire, see Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2003) 43-64.

⁶⁵ J. I. Israel, *Race, Class and Politics in Colonial Mexico* (London: Oxford UP, 1975) 79.

Spaniards were favored to hold high office in church and state, while criollos were discriminated against as inferior for not having been born on European soil. Indeed, the peninsular prejudice against Spanish Americans coincided with the beginning of European theories of colonial degeneration. These theories evolved around the idea that the American climate made people lazy, unstable, superstitious, and prone to a series of vices, including lasciviousness and lust.⁶⁶ The cosmographer Juan López de Velasco, for instance, writing in 1570 declared that Spanish Americans were distinctly darker in skin color compared to Europeans, and that they would eventually become indistinguishable from Indians, even if they were to avoid mixing their blood with theirs. He also thought that the brain and mind would degenerate under the physical and climatic conditions of the New World. Criollos would therefore become progressively more barbarous and stupid.⁶⁷

Criollos, however, did not tolerate racial discourses of inferiority, for they legitimized the social order and power that the peninsulares enjoyed. Indeed, Anthony Pagden argues that, “the criollos’ identity, their pride in all that separated them from the Old World Spaniard, the *gachupín*, was in part a necessary response to the persistent hostility and undisguised contempt on the part of the metropolitan authorities.”⁶⁸ Criollos answered peninsulares’ charges with a patriotic discourse that attempted to construe Spanish American nativeness separate from Castile prescriptions. Criollos contended that their ties and knowledge of the land and its people entitled them to a series of “native” rights that European Spaniards should not have had for being “foreigners.” This conflict between criollos and peninsulares gave rise to the beginning of a

⁶⁶ On European theories of colonial degeneration due to climate, see Bernard Lavallé, *Las promesas ambiguas: Criollismo colonial en los Andes* (Lima: Instituto Riva-Agüero de la Pontífica Universidad Católica de Perú, 1993) 45-61.

⁶⁷ These ideas were shared by others peninsulares in the sixteenth century like Motolinía and Mendieta.

⁶⁸ Anthony Pagden “Identity Formation in Spanish America” *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World 1500-1800*, Ed. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987) 57.

distinctive criollo identity that identified with the land as form of proto-national consciousness. Yet, their constitution as an independent group depended on their ability to differentiate themselves unequivocally with respect to European Spaniards beyond claims on the land, since citizenship was established as much by place of birth as by blood according to Castilian legislation.⁶⁹ With that intention, criollos created a vision of American patriotism based on a discourse about the New World that underscored mestizaje as the essence of an American national consciousness. Equality and racial fraternity would constitute the specificity of Spanish America against the discriminatory systems typical of the European and North American nations. Mestizaje, then, went from being a social reality to be controlled by means of racial categorizations to become an ideological narrative that created a collective national consciousness among criollos. Mestizaje helped explain the social and cultural character of Spanish America as an independent territory in order to claim national sovereignty by the criollo elite. Yet, as Magnus Mörner points out, the rhetoric of nationalism in Spanish America was strikingly ambivalent when it had to face the socio-racial consequences of adopting mestizaje as the ideology that defined its uniqueness.⁷⁰ The main dilemma stemmed from the adoption of the notion of mestizaje to claim cultural and political independence from the “mother” country, while following nineteenth century models of nationalism in Europe, for they strongly emphasized homogenization and the exclusion of difference.

Thus, as the foundational theme in the Americas, mestizaje became a recurrent trope linked to a desire for an authentic Spanish American identity. Mestizaje, as the condition of the American character, was thus designed, paradoxically, to promote cultural sameness. In other words, the notion of a unique Spanish American character and culture depended on an identity—

⁶⁹ Pagden 65.

⁷⁰ Mörner 82.

the mestizo one—that had to diffuse racial, linguistic, and cultural differences in order to be viable as a narrative of nationalism. In this sense, mestizaje, resembles the rhetoric of *limpieza de sangre* used by the empire. Similar to the model of Spanishness, the mestizo becomes a monologic cultural paradigm of ethnic and racial authenticity. The mestizo, in this sense, is the static conception of a mixture from original essences—European and Other—which fossilizes into the “nature” of Spanish America. Then, the rhetoric of mestizaje in nineteenth century Spanish America becomes concerned with nation-building, homogeneity, collective consciousness, and the integration of marginalized groups into a mainstream society formed after dominant conceptions of national models that silenced the diversity, antagonisms, and contradictions existing in the subcontinent.

Simón Bolívar, José Martí, and José Vasconcelos are the major advocates of this ideological version of mestizaje. Their texts are considered the pillars of Spanish American identity. Indeed, Simón Bolívar is the first one to capitalize on the “in between” nature of Americans. As a member of the criollo elite, Bolívar defines mestizaje in both political and ethnic terms, emphasizing its uniqueness as the American condition. In a letter responding to the governor of Jamaica from 1815, he explains:

We are a small human race of our own. We inhabit a world apart, separated by broad seas ...neither Indian nor European, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of this country and the Spanish usurpers. In short, though Americans by birth we derive our rights from Europe, and we have to assert these rights against the rights of the natives, and at the same time we must defend ourselves against the invader. This places us in a most extraordinary and involved situation.⁷¹

⁷¹ Simón Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar* Vol. I 1810-1822, ed. Harold A. Bierk, Jr., trans. Lewis Bertrand. (New York: Colonial Press, 1951) 110.

Four years later, at the inauguration of the second national congress of Venezuela in Angostura, Bolívar reiterates “mixture” as the distinguishing characteristic of Spanish American people as opposed to those from the Old World:

we, on the contrary, do not even retain the vestiges of our original being. We are not Europeans; we are not Indians; we are but a mixed species of aborigines and Spaniards. Americans by birth and Europeans by law, we find ourselves engaged in a dual conflict: we are disputing with the natives for titles of ownership, and at the same time we are struggling to maintain ourselves in the country that gave us birth against the opposition of the invaders.⁷²

A few pages later, Bolívar concentrates more specifically in the ethnic mixture of Spanish America. In this instance, however, he notably leaves out the Indigenous population. They represent a political challenge to the “natural” rights to the land claimed by criollos. Instead, Bolívar includes the African as the other component of the blend,

We must keep in mind that our people are neither European nor North American; rather, they are a mixture of African and the Americans who originated in Europe. Even Spain herself has ceased to be European because of her African blood, her institutions, and her character. It is impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy where we belong in the human family. The greater portion of the native Indians has been annihilated; Spaniards have mixed with Americans and Africans, and Africans with Indians and Spaniards. While we have all been born of the same mother, our fathers, different in origin and in blood, are foreigners, and all differ visibly as to the color of their skin: a dissimilarity which places upon us an obligation of the greatest importance.⁷³

⁷² Bolívar 176.

⁷³ Bolívar 181.

Here Bolívar underscores mestizaje as the complex process that created a great diversity in the people of the Spanish American territories. In fact, according to Bolívar, not only is the unique condition of Spanish America with regards to the rest of the nations what entitles Spanish American autonomy, but also its “dissimilarity” what makes independence even more necessary. As Magnus Mörner points out, for Bolívar, “miscegenation formed the very basis for the Spanish American peoples’ national existence.”⁷⁴

Yet, Bolívar’s sense of obligation to “fashion” America “into the greatest nation of the world” due to its “natural” mestizaje is not free of challenges for criollo leaders like himself.⁷⁵ Just like the empire earlier in the colonial period had feared an excess of racial differences and had felt compelled to control the social “disorder” by means of a neat system of racial designations, Bolívar also worried about excessive cultural and racial heterogeneity. Racial and cultural diversity, he worried, could potentially destroy his vision of a unified Spanish America. Bolívar’s ambivalence towards Spanish American diversity is revealed in a more somber characterization of the situation as he describes it in a letter to General Santander in 1826, Bolívar says:

We are very far from the wonderful times of Athens and Rome, and we must not compare ourselves in any way to anything European. The origins of our existence are the most impure. All that has preceded us is enveloped in the black cloak of crime. We are the abominable offspring of those raging beasts that came to America to waste her blood and to breed with their victims before sacrificing them. Later the fruits of these unions commingled with slaves uprooted from Africa. With such physical mixtures and such

⁷⁴ Mörner 87.

⁷⁵ Bolívar 110.

elements of morale, can we possibly place laws above heroes and principles above men?⁷⁶

Bolívar's disillusionment stems from his fears of a revolt of people of color against the criollo elite. "Legal equality," he continues, stating to General Santander, "is not enough to satisfy the spirit of the people who want absolute equality, both in the public and the domestic sphere.

Later, they will request 'Pardocracy' which is their natural and only inclination before exterminating the privileged class." Due to these concerns, Bolívar feels the necessity to temper his discourse on mestizaje. That is, while cultural and racial mixture as the unique condition of Spanish America grants the latter the right to autonomy from foreign nations, excessive racial and social differences among its own people present a problem to the ruling class. For that reason, in "Racial Harmony in the Mixed Society of the New World, and Other Thoughts in Jamaica," a draft written around the same time that his famous letter from Jamaica, Bolívar clearly states that the main obstacle to independence "lies in the difference between the races that make up the people of this immense country."⁷⁷

Racial and social differences in the population become then a potential liability for Bolívar's struggle for independence. The discourse of mestizaje is thus carefully reduced to a narrative of harmonious interaction among the different racial and social groups, which is intended to maintain the same social structure introduced by the colonizers on behalf of the white minority. For the latter to remain in power, Bolívar turns to 18th-century claims of rational, therefore racial, superiority. He justifies criollo prominence despite their reduced numbers by underscoring their "intellectual qualities which confer on them relative equality and an influence which might seem excessive to those who have not been able to judge for themselves of the

⁷⁶ Cited in Mörner 87-88.

⁷⁷ Simón Bolívar, *The Hope of the Universe*, trans. J. L. Bastardo (Paris: UNESCO, 1983) 118.

moral situation and material circumstances in South America.”⁷⁸ The Indian, on the other hand, “is so peace-loving by nature that he desires only rest and be left alone,” which disqualifies him to be the leader to prevail over foreign powers. The African slave, in turn,

vegetates in complacent inertia on his master’s estate, enjoying all the benefits that accrue from being part of such an establishment, as well as a considerable degree of freedom . Since religion has taught him that to serve is a sacred duty, and since all his life he has lived in this state of domestic dependence, he feels he is leading a natural life, as a member of his master’s family, whom he loves and respects.⁷⁹

Mestizaje, in this context, is reduced to a narrative of ideal interaction of people living presumably in great harmony with no “threat of hostility between races,” given the fact that all of them are assigned different roles according to their nature.⁸⁰ Criollos rule because of their intelligence, Indians follow because of their passive friendliness, and the “happy” slaves live off their masters as members of their own families. In this way, internal conflicts, tensions, and differences are minimized in the name of political independence. Thus, Bolívar’s discourse of mestizaje is not geared to opposing race-based discrimination. Instead, it champions a utopian harmony of racial mixture that diffuses differences in order to rally Spanish Americans around their right to independence.

José Martí, like his mentor Bolívar, became an ardent supporter of this kind of utopian mestizaje. The ideal of racial unity and cooperation guarantees, for Martí, the final independence for Spanish America. Yet, if Bolívar had feared that racial conflict could preclude sovereignty and prompt national disintegration, José Martí dismisses that possibility by proclaiming that in Spanish America, particularly in Cuba, there is “no racial animosity, because there are no

⁷⁸ Bolívar, *The Hope of the Universe* 118.

⁷⁹ Bolívar, *The Hope of the Universe* 120.

⁸⁰ Bolívar, *The Hope* 120.

racess.”⁸¹ Despite Martí’s apparently ahead-of-its-time statement, his ideas do not stem from a postmodernist understanding of race as a social construct, but from a heightened sense of nationalism. “In Cuba” he affirms,

there is no fear of racial war. Men are more than whites, mulattos or Negroes. On the field of battle, dying for Cuba, the souls of whites and Negroes have risen together into the air. In the daily life of defense, loyalty, brotherhood and shrewdness, Negroes have always been there, alongside whites.⁸²

Thus, Martí aims to unify all the different cultural elements coexisting in Spanish America in the name of a cohesive national identity. That is, by invoking its cultural and racial *mestizaje*, Martí finds a way to reconcile European monologic paradigms of nationalism with the racial and cultural heterogeneity of Spanish America. *Mestizaje*, for Martí, becomes the sign of a unique and similar heritage for all Spanish American people, their identifying mark, by virtue of which the nation can be defined and consolidated.

In effect, his most famous essay, entitled “Our America,” argues that the problem of the subcontinent lies in an excessive reliance on foreign philosophies and ideas that do not apply to the American reality, which is, according to him, a *mestizo* one. He says,

To know one’s country, and to govern it based on that knowledge, is the only way to free it from tyrannies. The European university must yield to the American university. The history of the America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught one side out, even if the archons of Greece are not taught at all. Our Greece is preferable over the Greece that is not our own.⁸³

⁸¹ Deborah Shnookal and Mirta Muñoz, eds., *José Martí Reader: Writings on the Americas* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1999) 119.

⁸² Shnookal 161.

⁸³ Shnookal and Mirta Muñoz 124.

Martí attempts to articulate an archetypical American identity. The “new” mestizo is the ideal man, whose racial and cultural uniqueness makes him the essence of an authentic Spanish American.⁸⁴ Moreover, in his essay “Madre América,” he considers Spanish America as a “hybrid and original land” where “the new American has cleared the path and he is inviting the youth of the world to pitch their tents in his fields.”⁸⁵ In other words, Martí sees the mestizo and the hybridity of the American land as a force with the potential to correct the artificiality and corruption of the West. Ironically, this conception of mestizaje refurbishes the utopian image of the New World as presented by sixteenth century European philosophers like Montaigne who conceived the natural and purity of the newly- discovered lands as preferable to the sophistication of the so-called “civilized” world.⁸⁶ This utopian project of regeneration through the idolization of the American land and men allows for a positive, yet symbolic representation of mestizos as youthful, vigorous, and full of potential. Thus, Martí tries to free Spanish America from negative articulations of its identity as a degenerated and diluted version of Europe due to its mestizaje. Martí legitimizes the hybridity of Spanish American culture in the world using the discourse of mestizaje to create a self-image that would represent *lo americano*, its authenticity, and therefore consolidate *lo nacional*, with the mestizo as a symbol that would constitute national consciousness.

Thus, mestizaje, for Martí, is a fusion of cultural diversity into a new reality, not a confrontation that links the different cultural groups of Spanish America and transforms one

⁸⁴ Martí departs from Bolívar here since he considers criollos to be “inauthentic,” for they still favored European culture and taste over an American one.

⁸⁵ Shnookal and Mirta Muñiz 116.

⁸⁶ See Michel de Montaigne, “On the Cannibals” *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003): 228-242. It is important to note that Montaigne also acknowledges the cruelty of the native peoples of the Americas. In his essay “On Coaches,” he concludes that any regeneration of Europe through the youth and vigor of the newly found Americas is unlikely to happen. See Montaigne “On Coaches” 685-699.

another. Indeed, Martí's vision is one of homogenization and cultural unification. He never conceived Spanish America as a place in which different groups would coexist and transform one another. Instead, Martí endorses the progressive acculturation and education of indigenous people and the African population. According to him, they are "stuck." This reveals, despite his endorsement of *mestizaje*, an ethnocentric conception of civilization and progress. In "Nuestra America", Martí, reiterates that

It would have been the mark of genius to couple the headband and the professor with the founding fathers' generosity and courage, to *rescue* the Indian, to *open a place* for the competent Negro, to fit liberty to the body of those who rebelled and conquered for it.⁸⁷

In order to achieve "brotherhood," Martí proposes the integration of the Other into the national culture by means of education. Instead of being marginalized for their "ignorance" and "superstitious" behavior, Indians and Blacks need to be educated in order to be included in the nation.

Thus, [the Indian] educated by teachers of their own race and fond of his productive work on the ground definitely his, and helped, rather than bloody mocked by their conquerors may, with secure peace, with the pleasures of ownership, with reconciliation of their race and civilized life, with the elevation of the educated mind, remain as a useful, original and picturesque element in the society that interrupted the course of their civilization and snatched their territory.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Shnookal and Mirta Muñiz 126. My emphasis.

⁸⁸ *Obras Completas*, Enero 1888, 341-342. "Así, [el Indio] educado por maestros de su propia raza y encariñado con su labor productiva en tierra definitivamente suya, y ayudado, en vez de burlado sangrientamente por sus conquistadores podrá, con paz segura, con los placeres de la propiedad, con la conciliación de la vida de su raza y la vida civilizada, con la elevación de la mente instruida, permanecer como elemento útil, original y pintoresco del pueblo que interrumpió el curso de su civilización y le arrebató su territorio." My translation.

Martí thus adopts a paradigm of national and universal consciousness that resembles modern liberalism and “humanitarian” philosophies. In the name of progress and civilization, the cultural differences of the indigenous population become exotic attributes, “original and picturesque.” Yet, the reduction and restriction of those differences is always desirable as a sign of cultural progress. Thus, if Martí does not believe that people are biologically inferior because of their race, he certainly ascribes to the humanist idea that some cultures are underdeveloped. That is, they are on their way to achieve the cultural and civilizing development of those considered more advanced and therefore better. Pierre-André Taguieff compares this type of attitude towards cultural and racial differences with an overt racism.⁸⁹ While the latter tries to alienate the Other through separation or extermination, Martí’s approach consists in erasing the mark of difference in the Other through a psychological acculturation by means of a supposedly “tolerant” education that promotes a “neutral,” non-cultural specific, set of values. Both types of racism, according to Taguieff, offer a negative conception of diversity since they idealize national homogeneity. In particular, Martí’s ideas are labeled as “masked ethnocentrism” or “humanist imperialism.”⁹⁰ They insist on the unity of the human experience, thereby avoiding and denying the existence of diversity within a given cultural group to preserve unity and avert prejudice. Mestizaje means, in this context, the result of a complete and utopian synthesis of previously dissenting elements into a total and harmonious union. This paradigm avoids the tension and conflict inherent in the diverse cultural realm of Spanish America in order to overcome the challenge that diversity poses to the nation. Thus, the concept of mestizaje offers a supposedly coherent cultural identity to all—whites, blacks, indios, mestizos, criollos—

⁸⁹ Pierre-André Taguieff, *La force du préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988) 29-30.

⁹⁰ Taguieff 37.

precluding cultural clashes and condemning disagreements as prejudices, in the case of the privileged class, or treachery, if they come from the historically subordinate groups.

Martí's rendition of *mestizaje* as Spanish American idiosyncrasy finds its major apologist in José Vasconcelos. He argues that *mestizaje* is not only the defining characteristic of the American subcontinent, but also the future of a universal consciousness. In this sense, Vasconcelos places Spanish America at the center of the historical discourse for having acquired a cultural model meant to transcend the national project to attain a universal dimension. Thus, in *The Cosmic Race* (1925), Vasconcelos attempts, as Bolívar and Martí had previously done, to re-conceptualize *mestizaje*, giving it a messianic mission in the world as a progressive and beneficial model of culture for the rest of the world.

Vasconcelos believed that Spanish American civilization was “the chosen one ... to transform mankind into a new type” that would integrate and consolidate “the Black, the Indian, The Mongol, and the White” into “a fifth universal race, the fruit of all previous ones and amelioration of everything past.”⁹¹ This *mestizaje* was in direct opposition to the North American cultural paradigm, which, in Vasconcelos's view, did not have “in [its] blood the contradictory instincts of a mixture of dissimilar races.” In contrast, Spanish America was destined to be “the cradle of a fifth race into which all nations will fuse with each other to replace the four races that [had] been forging History apart from each other” to that day.⁹² Following the harmonious and enthusiastic impulse of Martí, *mestizaje* was to be capable of “true brotherhood and of a truly universal vision” since “the definitive race, the synthetical race, the integral race [had to be] made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples.”⁹³ This emphasis

⁹¹ José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*, trans., Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 17, 9.

⁹² Vasconcelos 18.

⁹³ Vasconcelos 20.

on harmony and homogeneity was, in part, a response to official discourses that considered miscegenation the chief evil of Spanish America. His defense of mestizaje, he claimed, was intellectually, morally, and biologically grounded. Therefore it was capable of rejecting the assumed superiority of the white race on which its imperialistic claims were based.⁹⁴

The doctrine of sociological and biological formation we propose in these pages is not a simple ideological effort to raise the spirits of a depressed race by offering it a thesis that contradicts the doctrine with which its rivals wanted to condemn it. What happens is that, as we discover the falsity of the scientific premise upon which the domination of contemporary power rests, we also foresee, in experimental science itself, orientations that point the way, no longer for the triumph of a single race, but for the redemption of all men.⁹⁵

Paradoxically, Vasconcelos did not do so much to challenge racial discourses as to reformulate them. Alan Knight points out that his ideas reproduced many of the racist assumptions of Western European thought, and thus allowed for the continuation of racial paradigms.⁹⁶ Indeed, in defining the Spanish American race, Vasconcelos perpetuates the historical and civilizing discourse that generated and facilitated the conquest of the Americas. Thus, he not only underscores the necessity of the Spanish cultural tradition to conclude the process of mestizaje, but also points out to the preeminence of Christianity in the promotion of civilization in the Americas. “We shall not be great” he says “as long as the Spaniard from America does not feel as much a Spaniard as the sons of Spain ... This is the way we have to act, if we are to allow the

⁹⁴ Vasconcelos was opposed to the ideological dependence that North American imperialism was trying to impose in Spanish America. Such resistance was considered an attempt to “mentally decolonize the subcontinent.” Vasconcelos 34.

⁹⁵ Vasconcelos 35.

⁹⁶ Alan Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910-1940” *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, ed., Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 86-87.

Iberian culture to finish producing all its fruits.”⁹⁷ Since Vasconcelos formulates Spanish American mestizaje in direct opposition to Anglo-saxon models of culture, he also ends up embracing formulations of culture based on negation and opposition, and therefore he reestablishes the dualism, “us vs. them.” Vasconcelos expresses this paradigm of culture explicitly in *Indología*:

... we should try to define ourselves and mark, without any spirit of discord, our differences. It is a poor procedure to begin to define something by what it is not, but at the end of the day, we cannot help but to employ it when it comes to matters still reportedly changing, unfixed, immense, in these cases no element of determination is useless.⁹⁸

Clearly, Vasconcelos does not support an inclusive identity for Spanish America. A definition of one’s identity by negation always assumes the existence of an ultimate opposite culture against which to form itself. In the *Cosmic Race*, Latinos are opposed to Americans, and Vasconcelos privileges the first element. That confirms Rubén Ríos Avila’s observation that Vasconcelos’s *Cosmic Race*, his idea of mestizaje, “is another name for Hispanism.”⁹⁹ Indeed, as Basave Benítez affirms the brand of mestizaje endorsed by Vasconcelos never was evenhanded, unbiased, and inclusive. After all, Vasconcelos thought that Spanish America owed its best features to the contribution of white Europeans,

⁹⁷ Vasconcelos 11. Vasconcelos points out that “a religion such as Christianity made the American Indians advance, in a few centuries, from cannibalism to a relative degree of civilization.” He also praises Spanish conquistadors for their valor and “creative genius.” Vasconcelos 5, 13.

⁹⁸ José Vasconcelos, *Indología. Una interpretación de la cultura iberoamericana* I. (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1927) 12. “... tratemos de definirnos a nosotros mismos y marquemos, sin ningún ánimo de discordia, las diferencias. Pobre procedimiento es comenzar a definir una cosa por lo que no es; pero al fin y al cabo no puede dejar de emplearse cuando se trata de asuntos todavía informes, cambiantes, inmensos; en tales casos ningún elemento de determinación es inútil ...” My translation.

⁹⁹ Rubén Ríos Ávila, *La raza cósmica: Del sujeto en Puerto Rico* (San Juan, PR: Ediciones Cajellón, 2002) 155.

Abundance of love ... permitted the Spaniards to create a new race with the Indian and the black, profusely spreading white ancestry through the soldier who begat a native family, and Occidental culture through the doctrine and example of the missionaries who placed the Indians in condition to enter into the new state, the stage of world One. Spanish colonization created mixed races, this signals its character, fixes responsibility, and defines its future.¹⁰⁰

In this sense, *The Cosmic Race* does not distance itself from other projects of eugenics or blanqueamiento (whitening) that had taken place in the colonized world since the 19th century. Nor is Vasconcelos more open to cultural differences and contradictions than Bolívar and Martí were. He rejects the idea that the fusion of different races was going to be carried out by a “process of anarchic hybridization.” In fact, he predicts that “the traits of the white race will predominate among the characteristics of the fifth race” since as he sees it, “the superior traits of culture and nature will have to triumph, but that triumph will be stable only if it is based on the voluntary acceptance by conscience and on the free choice of fantasy.”¹⁰¹ The “supremacy” of the white race will then be the choice that Spanish America will make in order to assimilate and cancel difference and dissent. Thus, mestizaje and its universalizing mission, according to Vasconcelos, is, after all, another monologic narrative of cultural progress led by Western ideals. *The Cosmic Race*, instead of being a visionary portrayal of the future, results in a typical modernist exercise of bringing the margins within the cultural centers. Spanish America is rewritten, so it can be accepted as a legitimate nation, despite its heterogeneity and non-Western

¹⁰⁰ Agustín Basave Benítez, *México mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enríquez* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992) 133. Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race* 17.

¹⁰¹ Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race* 25-26.

elements, as a “new humanity with the best of all its cultures ... harmonized and ennobled within the Spanish mold.”¹⁰²

In this sense, Spanish America racial discourse has remained almost unaltered since the time of Spanish imperialistic projects, despite Bolívar, Martí and Vasconcelos’s efforts. The inherent contradictions and civilizational clashes that the cultural phenomenon of mestizaje brought about were set aside in order to secure a uniform identity for the people of both the Iberian peninsula and Spanish America. Mestizaje becomes a discourse that encourages collective identity and seeks the reconciliation of antagonistic cultural elements. If the rhetoric of empire offered the illusion of similarity against the fear of disintegration due to the excessive otherness within the empire, mestizaje was ultimately reduced to supporting equivalent ideals of similarity and sameness. That is, mestizaje ended up unifying, naturalizing, and essentializing Spanish American culture, arranging in a coherent way what otherwise is seen as its excessive diversity. Simply put, mestizaje is the signifier of an elusive Spanish American collective consciousness. Thus, it is hard to believe that the discourse of mestizaje has been re-appropriated in the twentieth and twenty-first century as a hallmark for cultural and racial inclusiveness. In fact, the historical analysis of mestizaje reveals a pervasive suppression of historical and cultural differences in the name of imperialistic and nation-building projects whose aim was to create biological and cultural equals while rejecting impossible Others. Similar to mestizaje, creoleness, the subject of the following section, is another manifestation at the beginning of the twentieth century of a monologic discourse that ultimately reduces hybridity in the context of the French Caribbean to a single narrative of nationality, purity, and cultural belonging based on race, language, and an essentialized experience said to be typical of all French Caribbean people.

¹⁰² José Vasconcelos, *Prometeo Vencedor: Tragedia moderna en un prólogo y tres actos* (Mexico City: Lectura Selecta, 1920) 41.

1.4 Modernism and Creoleness in the French Caribbean: Edouard Glissant and the Creolist Movement.

Beginning in the early part of the twentieth century, the *Négritude* group—the Senegalese, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Martinican Aimé Césaire, and the Guyanese, Léon Damas—responded to colonial hegemony with a pan-African identity. They believed in a shared black heritage among the members of the African diaspora. Africa became the “home” of the displaced community who dreamed of a return to their original land, identity, and people. *Négritude* continued to have a certain influence in the Caribbean since the presence of African cultures is manifested in all aspects of every day life in the region. Yet, around the middle of the century, many Caribbean intellectuals became opposed to *Négritude* as a theoretical discourse. They argued that *Négritude* was just a nostalgic ideology that still stereotyped individuals through a racial rhetoric taken directly from the hegemonic ideology that oppressed colonized people in the first place.¹⁰³ Moreover, Africa was questioned as a mythical place of origin for it could not account for the specificity of Caribbean people.

Edouard Glissant led the criticism against the *Négritude* movement and offered, instead, the notion of *Antillanité* as the means to differentiate Caribbean identity from *Négritude*'s

¹⁰³ For background information in the *Négritude* movement please see, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude & Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Peter Thompson, “Négritude and Changing Africa: An Update” *Research in African Literatures* 33.4 (Winter, 2002). Peter Thompson, *Négritude et nouveaux mondes -- poésie noire: africaine, antillaise et malgache* (Concord, Mass: Wayside Publishing, 1994) For primary sources please see, Aimé Césaire *Return to My Native Land* (Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1997). Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1972). Damas Léon-Gontran, *Poètes d'expression française* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1947) Diop Birago, *Leurres et lueurs*. (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960) Léopold Sedar Senghor, *The Collected Poetry* (University of Virginia Press, 1998) Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Ce que je crois* (Paris: Grasset, 1988.) For an attack to *Négritude* in a manifesto style, René Depestre *Bonjour et adieu à la négritude* (Paris: Laffont, 1980, 1989). I am not concerned in this study with *Négritude* since it never claimed “hybridity” or any other form of cultural mixing as integral part of their identity. My intention in mentioning *Négritude* in this section is to contextualize Creoleness as a discourse that stems from, and yet opposes *Négritude* in the overall attempt to find a common identity in the Caribbean region.

concerns with a remote origin in Africa.¹⁰⁴ For Glissant, the problem of Caribbean people was that they had always rooted their identity in a foreign region, whether it was Europe or Africa. Thus, he became one of the first major Caribbean writers to break with this tradition. “Diversion,” as he called it, was the Caribbean obsession with finding a single place of origin in the Old World.¹⁰⁵ As an alternative to foreign models, Glissant sought to articulate a Caribbean identity unique to the region. In order to achieve that goal, he proposes “reversion” as the desired cultural practice. “Reversion” is the “return to the point of entanglement [the Caribbean]; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization.”¹⁰⁶ For Glissant, it is essential to concentrate in the new diasporic space as opposed to the sites of departure—Europe and Africa—to find the Caribbean “reality.”¹⁰⁷ In fact, the geographic place is precisely what distinguishes the Caribbean experience and enables a collective identity.¹⁰⁸ Territory and community are, then, at the heart of Glissant’s caribbeanness. This emphasis echoes “nativist” discourses of identity that, informed by modernist notions of culture, essentialized the group instead of capitalizing in its diversity.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Michael Dash translates *Antillanité* as creoleness. I’ll use the term creoleness for the sake of consistency and because its historical and semantic affinities with *mestizaje*. While both terms appeared as result of the cross-cultural and social contact between Europe, Africa and the people of the Americas, their current meaning has been reduced to a discourse of national and territorial consciousness that privileges homogeneity over the cultural heterogeneity of its historical origins.

¹⁰⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Michael Dash trans. (Charlottesville: U. Press of VA, 1989) 24.

¹⁰⁶ Glissant 26.

¹⁰⁷ Glissant 222. Edouard Glissant, *L’Intention poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) 149.

¹⁰⁸ Glissant stresses that “the creative link between nature and culture is vital for the formation of a community.” Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 63.

¹⁰⁹ The word “nativist” is used here to refer to an early form of nationalist writing. See Boehmer Elleke, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 9. Other uses of the term can be found in Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 47-73. Michael Dash analyzes Glissant’s “creoleness” as a product of postmodernist and deconstructionist practices. He asserts that “Glissant is a natural deconstructionist who celebrates latency, opacity, infinite metamorphosis.” See Michael Dash “Introduction” in Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, xii. I see Glissant’s theory as trying to walk in-between the essentialist notions of modernist cultural consciousness and postmodernist celebration of multiculturalism.

The Western colonizing project had used the Enlightenment desire for knowledge as a tool to homogenize and totalize the human experience under a European cultural patronage. Europe's reliance on reason to maintain the myth of progress created a hierarchy of cultures that, in turn, encouraged cultural assimilation. The result was a universalizing view of the world that alienated colonized people, devaluating their way of life. In opposition to Enlightenment, Modernism appeared to demand a cultural transformation that rejected the universalism of Western values. In its place, the multiplicity of experiences manifested in the modern world should be acknowledged and celebrated as a progressive way of thinking about life and art. Post-colonial writers built on Modernist mistrust of orthodoxy. They created positive representations of colonized people and their values with the hope of asserting cultural liberation from European assimilating practices.¹¹⁰ Thus, the creation of an alternative cultural identity for the colonized was seen as imperative to break free. However, Glissant, like his predecessors from the *Négritude* group, thought that cultural assimilation had alienated Caribbean people to the point of being defenseless to face foreign influences on their own. Michael Dash confirms that, "the image of the Martinican as a happy zombie, as a passive consumer, is pervasive in *Caribbean Discourse*."¹¹¹ Glissant asserts that

the French Caribbean people did not relate even a mythical chronology of this land to their knowledge of their country, and so nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness.¹¹²

For that reason, Martinicans, according to Glissant, needed writers to tell them who they are. A collective memory was an urgent need for the Martinican community if oblivion was to be

¹¹⁰ Elleke Boehmer 129.

¹¹¹ Michael Dash "Introduction" *Caribbean Discourse* xvii.

¹¹² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 63.

avoided.¹¹³ Indeed, Spivak argues that the construction of a collective identity—despite the essentializing risks that the practice entails—is a strategy to organize those who have been oppressed to fight for their own liberation.¹¹⁴ For that reason, Glissant focuses on the Caribbean land to find the essence of Caribbean subjectivity.

The second reaction, which proceeds from the first [*Négritude*] conceives for the entire Caribbean region the convergence of re-rootings in our true place. It is what I call the theory of Antillanité.¹¹⁵

Yet, the insistence on “re-rooting” in “our true place,” endorses an essentialist conception of identity that sacrifices the individual to the community. “The question we need to ask in Martinique”, Glissant stresses, “will not be for instance: “Who am I?” ... but rather: Who are we?”¹¹⁶ Thus, Glissant’s caribbeanness follows modernist models of identity, for it desires to build a collective cultural nationalism in the French Caribbean. If *Négritude* was criticized for constructing a black identity based on essentialized notions of race—black soul, black epistemology, and black aesthetic—originating from a connection with Africa, Glissant seeks the same cultural unity, but as it emanates from the Caribbean land. Both theories endorse a politics of identity and collective consciousness geared towards articulating their history of oppression, their unique ethos, and their distinctive aesthetic. Glissant concludes, “we need to develop a poetics of the “subject” if only because we have been too long “objectified” ... the collective “we” becomes the site of the generative system and the true subject.”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Michael Dash “Introduction” *Caribbean Discourse* xix.

¹¹⁴ See Gayatri Spivak “The Problem of Cultural Self-representation” *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Sarah Harasym ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 51.

¹¹⁵ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 182.

¹¹⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 86.

¹¹⁷ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 149.

So, what constitutes the “true” Caribbean subject for Glissant? Paradoxically, Glissant finds the collective uniqueness of the Caribbean people in the modern notion of heterogeneity and multiculturalism. Indeed, homogeneity and heterogeneity work together in Glissant’s theory as its motto “unity in diversity” suggests.¹¹⁸ Hence, his theory does not transcend the limitations of stasis and essence associated with theories of genealogy and cultural purity. Caribbean hybridity, as theorized by Glissant, becomes essentialized, in the name of unity, as marker of difference. Similarly to the way *mestizaje* was used as the distinctive mark of Latin-American people, Glissant recognizes as truly Creole only those Caribbean individuals who were directly subjected to forced relocation by the slave trade:

There is a difference between the transplanting (by exile and dispersion) of a people who continue to survive elsewhere and the transfer (by the slave trade) of a population to another place where they change into something different, into a new set of possibilities. It is in this metamorphosis that we must try to detect one of the best kept secrets of creolization.¹¹⁹

The physical and psychological adaptation to the Caribbean land accounts, according to Glissant, for Caribbean people’s ontology and distinct way of understanding the world. Then, if the Caribbean land begets cultural sameness, Caribbean people’s essence stems from their creolization, which is “the phenomenon of encounter and synthesis” of cultures in the New World.¹²⁰

Thus, Glissant’s vision of the Caribbean world is by no means influenced by postmodernist and deconstructionist thinking. Even though creolization is premised on a form of identity that Glissant calls, “*identité-rhizome*,” borrowing the term from French philosophers

¹¹⁸ See note 13.

¹¹⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 14.

¹²⁰ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 220.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.¹²¹ Rhizome identity is supposed to be plural and multiple. In that sense, Caribbean identity is indeed the product of mixture and multiple origins as opposed to the purity and exclusivity demanded by “single root identities” of totalitarian discourses. However, Deleuze and Guattari insist on a de-territorialized, nomadic, non-dichotomous reality to be symbolized by the rhizome, while Glissant’s proposes the opposite. As we have already seen, “remaining where you are”—the Caribbean space—is fundamental for Glissant.¹²² If the constant movement of the rhizome symbolizes resistance to regulation by the nation and to all forms of normalizing powers for Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant is not interested in the destruction of the Caribbean nation. On the contrary, his theory resembles a more conservative multiculturalism in which groups are allowed self-identity while difference is tolerated as long as the borders within and outside of the group continue to be recognized.

“Diversity,” for Glissant, gives the Caribbean people an internal logic of identity that establishes national consciousness. Moreover, the intellectual and the leader have “to impose a total, transcendental meaning on the surrounding flux.”¹²³ Thus, multiplicity fossilizes to become

¹²¹ Glissant mentioned Deleuze and Guattari’s “Rhizome” as one of the influences in the elaboration of his theory of Creolization. See Edouard Glissant, “La Poétique d’Edouard Glissant,” *Antilla* 416 (Janvier 1991): 29-32.

¹²² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 139. “Remaining where you are” is for Glissant more a matter of consciousness than a physical presence. Indeed, Glissant spent most of his life out of the Caribbean. After leaving Martinique in 1946, Glissant did not return until 1965. The choice of Maryse Condé to establish the difference between the monologic conception of Creoleness and a more open and dialogic understanding of cross-cultural negotiation within the context of the French Caribbean might not be apparent, since Glissant and Condé’s trajectories are quite similar. They both left the Caribbean as teenagers, both went to France to pursue Doctorate degrees, and both taught in the US and abroad for most of their adult lives. However, while Glissant and later the Creolist required the “return” to the French Caribbean as the only setting in which Creole novels should take place, Condé challenges that territorial mandate, setting her novels in other places beyond the French Caribbean landscape. Africa, the West Indies, Europe, and The United States are all settings, she contends, as equally appropriate for a Creole writer as herself. See a discussion of Condé’s challenge to Glissant and the Creolists in pages 133-141 of this dissertation.

¹²³ Michael Dash, “Introduction” xvii. Also, see Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 63-65.

the marker of difference in the Caribbean being, reifying the borders of the nation and prescribing an identity to those who what to belong to it. Glissant categorically asserts,

He [the Caribbean man] can conceive that synthesis is not a process of bastardization as he used to be told, but a productive activity through which each element is enriched. He has become Caribbean. . . .The notion of Caribbean unity is a form of cultural self-discovery. It fixes us in the truth of our existence, it forms part of the struggle for self-liberation.¹²⁴

Such a model of identity does not accomplish the destruction of the dichotomous and dialogic encounters of cultures. For the notion of culture in Glissant is still founded on the idea that cultures are separated by virtue of a singular homogenizing mark. His interest, then, is not to destroy homogeneity by means of hybridity, but to establish hybridity as the distinctive mark that would allow the Caribbean to be part of the world, one nation among the rest. In his article, “Métissage et créolisation” he explains,

J'appelle créolisation cet enjeu entre les cultures du monde, ces conflits, ces lutes, ces harmonies, ces disharmonies, ces entremêlements, ces rejets, cette repulsion, cette attraction entre toutes les cultures du monde.¹²⁵

His image of the world expresses a non-hierarchical, de-centered group of cultures, each one singular, but not alienated from one another. “In any case,” he concludes, “the result is a new conception of the nation. The nation is not based on exclusion; it is a form of disalienated relationship with the other, who in this way becomes our fellow man.”¹²⁶ In this sense, he creates another dichotomy between non-hegemonic cultures, which accept difference and synthesis, yet

¹²⁴ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 8.

¹²⁵ Edouard Glissant, “Métissage et créolisation” *Discours sur le métissage, identités métisses: enquête d’Ariel*. Sylvie Kandé ed. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999) 50.

¹²⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 250.

maintaining their autonomy, and those others with dominating, universalizing agendas. That is, Glissant recycles the old binary opposition—colonizer versus colonized—into a new binary system premised on the idea of hybridity as the homogenizing principle of the creolized nations, the colonized, versus the universalizing drive of the non-creolized, the colonizer. His theory does not transcend the “period of revolt” as Memmi thought was required to end colonization.¹²⁷ Even though he privileges the colonized side of the binary for their ability to creolize, he does not destroy the myth of a natural separation of cultures, nations, and their internal homogeneity. He clearly favors the possibility of mixture among them while reifying the boundaries that separate one from the other. Indeed he claims the need of “each group to assert itself; that is, the need not to disappear from the world scene and to share in its diversification.”¹²⁸ Clearly, Glissant’s theory of creolization does not end with the binary system and therefore with the myth of pure opposite cultures. His notion of identity is understood in relation to the rest of the nations in the world. Thus, Glissant never explores the complexity of human identity at the level of the individual. He is content with a “collective effervescence” that utilizes “creolization” as an “ideologeme” to advance an identity politics for the Caribbean national, ethnic, and political agenda.¹²⁹

While Glissant’s theory of creoleness is elusive, his disciples—Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant—categorically articulate the authenticity of the Creoles in their manifesto, *In Praise of Creoleness*. Their portrayal of a Caribbean identity moves from Glissant’s description of a collective multiplicity to a prescription of principles devised to turn Caribbean consciousness into a new “totality.” Thus, the Creolist discourse takes a step backwards from the plural, dynamic, and ever-changing notion of hybridity. They compromise

¹²⁷ See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) 140, 141.

¹²⁸ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 99.

¹²⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 236.

the fluidity and complexity of the Caribbean individual by pinning down his or her identity to a single language, a single heritage, and a single history. That is, they reduce it to another narrative of purity and truth: a monologic discourse of authenticity.

The publication of *Éloge de la Créolité* in the late 20th century presented itself as a “revolutionary” break with *Négritude* and as an improvement to the opacity and difficulty of Glissant’s work.¹³⁰ Their dissatisfaction with previous attempts to define an identity for the Caribbean region makes the Creolists the third generation of writers to look for a unique aesthetic expression for the cross-cultural interaction that had taken place in the Caribbean. Their approach advocates a search for the Creole essence as the only way to achieve an “interior vision” that would give coherence to the people of the Caribbean. Thus, they articulate Creoleness from a clearly essentialist standpoint. Their manifesto establishes the characteristics that would qualify one as “Creole.” In this sense, the Creolists disassociate themselves from Glissant’s ambivalence to assert a discourse of authenticity by which creoleness can be measured. According to the Creolists, Caribbean identity should be based solely on linguistics, history and territory.

As in any manifesto, the mission of *Éloge de la Créolité* is to define and prescribe creoleness, which they consider a “yet unlabelled degree of authenticity,” to the Caribbean people.¹³¹ As they proceed to label it, creoleness is announced to the world by means of a violent and defensive negation that requires the severance of any historical and cultural ties with others:

¹³⁰ Even though the Creolists recognize Césaire’s *Négritude* as the discourse that “gave Creole society its African dimension.” They also reject *Négritude* for its preference of another foreign land—Africa—as the source of identity for the Caribbean people. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité*. M.B. Taleb-Khyar trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 82. For a discussion of Glissant’s influence in the Creolists’ thinking, see Jean Bernabé et al, *Éloge* 82-87.

¹³¹ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 80.

Neither European, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles. This will be for us an interior attitude—better, a vigilance, or better, a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world.¹³²

While Glissant sought to re-root the Caribbean consciousness in the new diasporic space yet acknowledging the multiplicity of influences and welcoming friendly interactions with the other nations, Creolists demand exclusivity and isolation. Thus, their excessive distrustfulness leads to an ethnocentrism whose aim is two fold: to assure an unconditional alliance to the Caribbean territory and to reduce the complexity of the Caribbean to a fixed and coherent self.

Creoleness is for the Creolists the “truth” to be accepted by Caribbean people since they still lack a firm understanding of who they are. Similarly to DuBois, the Creolists reject what they consider to be a “terrible condition,” the constant measurement of oneself “with the eyes of the other.”¹³³ For them, “it is a question of descent into oneself, but without the Other, without the alienating logic of his prism.”¹³⁴ This isolation implies a refusal of further change as well as a desire for consolidation. They accepted the mixture resulting from the cultural confrontation at the time of slavery, but the fusion needs to be finally fixed like the pieces of a “mosaic.”¹³⁵ The metaphorical use of the term “mosaic,” along with numerous other allusions to purity, center, essence, and authenticity, reveals their desire to become whole and legible.¹³⁶ No other statement

¹³² Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 75.

¹³³ W.E.B Dubois uses almost the same words to refer to the condition of people of African descent in North America: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” W.E.B Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 8. Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 76.

¹³⁴ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 42.

¹³⁵ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 89.

¹³⁶ *Éloge de la Créolité* has never been read as an essentialist piece. However, the language used to describe the character of the Caribbean people suggests the presence of an ultimate reality, an essence, embodied in the Caribbean self and shared by all members of the community. Indeed, not only is there an essence to be found in the Caribbean individual, but also this essence needs to be isolated to become immutable and thus specific to the area. In the following citations, I highlight some instances of

expresses such urgency for the Creolists that their desire “ to perfect the collective voice ...because we want to take part of it and listen to it until the inevitable crystallization of a common consciousness.”¹³⁷ Creoleness must take an ultimate shape as the essence of all Caribbean people. Thus, the notion of hybridity as the ever changing and fluid identification necessarily takes on a fixed form in the discourse of creoleness. Hybridity—the phenomenon that originated in the slave plantation of the New World—must yield to creoleness, an organized discourse of essentialized identity that turns into a monologic narrative that describes the “pure” Caribbean ethos. Accordingly, the manifesto states “creoleness is the ‘*world diffracted but recomposed*’, a maelstrom of signifiers in a single signifier: a totality.”¹³⁸

Indeed, for the sake of collective identity, the Creolists do not hesitate to dictate the signposts to form and measure Creole authenticity. They go as far as to offer a numeric listing of the elements necessary to convey the lived reality of Caribbean people. That is, the Creolists prescribe the “quintessential” tenets of Creole expression. First and foremost, the “true” Creole reveals and valorizes every aspect of life in the Caribbean. In particular, the “true” Creole should revere Creole languages as the best means to express, preserve and affirm cultural collectivity. According to the Creolists, Creole orality begets coherence and uniformity across the land, becoming the vehicle to transmit the very Creole culture that they propose. They affirm,

To return to it [oral tradition], yes, first in order to restore this cultural continuity (that which associate with restored historical continuity) without which it is difficult for

essentialist remarks in italics: “A visionary of *our authenticity*, Gratiant soon placed his scriptural expression on the poles of both languages, both cultures ...” 78. We had yet to wash our eyes, to turn over the vision we had of *our reality* in order to grasp *its truth*: a new look capable of taking away *our nature* from the secondary ... edge so as to place it again in the center” 85. “Creoleness is [an] interactional or transactional *aggregate* ...”87. “We declare that Creoleness is the *cement* of our culture ...” 87. Creoleness is a “*preserved diversity*” 89. “And those writers who tried to kill it in themselves, or in their writing, lost without their knowing, the best chance for their repressed authenticity: Creoleness” 106.

¹³⁷ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 40.

¹³⁸ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 88.

collective identity to take shape. To return to it [oral tradition], yes, in order to enrich our enunciation, to integrate it and go beyond it. To return to it, so as simply to invest the primordial expression of our common genius.¹³⁹

Then, creoleness represents the linear re-organization of the historical “disorder” resulting from the cross-cultural clash that took place in the plantation systems.¹⁴⁰ At its center, Creole language becomes the essential dimension of a coherent construction of identity for all those, and only those, who 1) speak Creole, 2) experienced slavery directly or indirectly, and 3) comply with Creolists’ vision of what is to be Caribbean. Hence, the Creolists construct a notion of a homogeneous form of identification—creoleness—that serves to mark groups off from one another in essential ways. The discourse of creoleness naturalizes the continuum of a language (Creole), a race, (Black and descendants of slaves), a geography (the francophone Caribbean) and history (the plantation system during the period of slavery) to form a closed, fixed identity group designed to exclude rather than include malleable forms of identification.¹⁴¹

So closed and exclusive are the Creoles, that the Creolists draw geographical borders to identify only Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, Haitians, the people of the Seychelles, of Mauricius,

¹³⁹ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 97.

¹⁴⁰ For Creolists the severance of any connection with other cultures goes as far as denying ancestral roots outside the Caribbean. Creoleness is directly associated with the homeland—the Caribbean—and its historical circumstances—slavery and plantation systems: “Our Créole culture was created in the plantation system through questioning dynamics made of acceptances and denials, resignations and assertions. A real galaxy with the Creole language as its core ...” Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 95.

¹⁴¹ The use of French Creole as the means to create collective consciousness within the Caribbean is one of Condé’s major departures from Creolist’s prescriptions. Condé’s, *Moi, Tituba* is written in standard French, but Tituba, as a Barbadian, is not Francophone. Moreover, in her journey, she never encounters French speakers. English, in the novel, is unquestionably the vehicular language. Thus French, as the language of narration, and English, as the characters’ language, are not problematized in Condé’s work to emphasize the effects of forced colonization and therefore the linguistic alienation of the colonized. On the contrary, the fluidity in which these two languages seem to interact, however unrealistically, emphasizes Condé’s more flexible attitude toward languages in general. The ability to adapt to and communicate effectively in the language of the Other is, in the best Bakhtinian tradition, the most literal manifestation of a consciousness capable of hybridity.

and Réunion as “true” Creoles. Excluded, as merely Caribbean or American, are those whose cultures are considered adapted to the land, but kept pure, “with no real interaction with other cultures.”¹⁴² Surprisingly, that list of non-Creoles includes the Hindus from Trinidad, Argentinians, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans.

Hence, if creoleness was designed as “an annihilation of false universality, of monolingualism, and of purity,” its manifesto says otherwise.¹⁴³ Creoleness, as theorized by Creolists, is not necessarily anti-essentialist. On the contrary, a particular language, origin, and history qualify one as a Creole. Consequently, a hierarchical system appears that privileges a geographical, political, and cultural agenda, making some more creolized than others. So much so that those Caribbean people who do not speak Creole, do not follow the precept of creolesness, or do not create a self identification directly and exclusively influenced by colonization and the plantation system are cast off and condescendingly look down upon for having lost their “true” identity.¹⁴⁴

As the twentieth century came to an end, postcolonial theory became entirely compatible with postmodernism. Both seemingly attacked the tyranny of certainty, the relationship between language and power, and those narratives that legitimized people’s identities. Yet, as we have seen, the discourse of mestizaje and creoleness also generalized and essentialized the identity of Caribbean and Latin American people. Similarly, hybridity in postmodern contexts has lost its historical and textual connections in order to be celebrated as a contemporary phenomenon that disjoins the subject. Thus, the postmodern conception of hybridity, as much as nineteenth and twentieth century theories of national identification in the Caribbean, becomes another model of

¹⁴² Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 91

¹⁴³ Jean Bernabé et al., *Éloge de la Créolité* 90.

¹⁴⁴ Jean Bernabé and Serge Domi, “Entretien avec Jean Bernabé,” *Carbet: Revue martiniquaise de sciences sociales* (1984): 61-63.

subjectivity that is said to be the condition of the modern hybrid subject, and his or her only means to subvert the master's text. Conceived in that sense, hybridity neither transcends monologism nor ends the reliance on a single, theoretical voice to describe what otherwise is a confluence of voices engaged in a cross-cultural and aesthetic process of individual transformation.

1.5 Postmodernism and Hybridity: Homi K. Bhabha's Constant Ambivalence.

"Hybridity," Bhabha states, reveals a preoccupation with "how newness enters the world."¹⁴⁵ Thus, contemporary cross-cultural encounters have provided the contextual ground for postmodern discussions of hybridity, which have readily adopted Bhabha's work as an innovative model to understanding the world. Indeed, terms like ambivalence, liminality, third space, in-betweenness and mimicry are now staples in the vocabulary of postmodernism and post-colonialist academics. However, as I have pointed out already in the previous sections of this chapter, hybridity itself is hardly a "new thing," historically or theoretically. Similarly, Bhabha's formulation is not completely "new." He grounds his conception of hybridity in a heavy combination of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, using mostly Derrida, Lacan, and even Freud to analyze power relations and cultural identifications between the colonizer and colonized.

Bhabha's starting point is Edward Said and his pioneering work *Orientalism* (1978). In "Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," an essay not included in his most famous compilation of work, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha identifies a problem in

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Deborah A. Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong "Theorizing the Hybrid" *Journal of American Folklore* 112.445 (1999) 242. Also see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 7.

Said's theory.¹⁴⁶ That is, as Eleanor Byrne notes, Bhabha considers Said to be “not post-structuralist enough” for conceptualizing a binary opposition between the discourse of the “West” and/about the “East” as a fixed system of representation that is left un-problematized.¹⁴⁷

Bhabha poses his criticism directly, arguing that,

where the originality of this account loses its inventiveness, and for me its usefulness, is with Said's refusal to engage with the alterity and ambivalence in the articulation of these two economies which threaten to split the very object of Orientalist discourse as a knowledge and the subject positioned therein. He contains his threat by introducing a binarism within the argument which, in initially setting up an opposition between these two discursive scenes, finally allows them to be correlated as a congruent system of representation that is unified through a political-ideological intention which, in his words, enables Europe to advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient ... There is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser which is a historical and theoretical simplification. The terms in which Said's Orientalism are unified—which is, the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power—also unifies the subject of colonial enunciation.¹⁴⁸

Yet, despite Bhabha's criticism of Said's work, he finds in it the key to develop his own *oeuvre*.

Ambivalence, a central concept for Bhabha's theory of colonial discourse, is a development of Said's idea of “vacillation,” which Bhabha considers a “forgotten” and “underdeveloped” point in *Orientalism*.¹⁴⁹ For Said,

¹⁴⁶ Homi Bhabha, “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” in Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley, eds. *The Politics of Theory* (Essex: University of Essex, 1983): 194-211

¹⁴⁷ Eleanor Byrne, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2009) 64.

¹⁴⁸ Bhabha, “Difference” 199-200.

¹⁴⁹ Bhabha, “Difference” 201.

certainly neither of these Orientals was purely one thing or the other: it is their vacillations, their tempting suggestiveness, their capacity for entertaining and confusing the mind, that are interesting.

What gives the immense number of encounters [between East and West] some unity however is the vacillation I was speaking about earlier. Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things.¹⁵⁰

Along with the image of “vacillation,” rewritten by Bhabha as ambivalence, Said’s passage certainly contains the seed for the rest of Bhabha’s work: the acknowledgement that colonial discourse is never pure, the suggestion of an in-between or liminal space that at once controls and rejects the Other and finally the introduction of the psychological dimension in cross-cultural encounters as predicated by a mixture of fear and fascination that is regulated by power. Thus, Bhabha’s account of hybridity stems from a profound ambivalence towards otherness as object of desire and derision. As Robert Young puts it, Bhabha’s analysis of colonial discourse is “founded on an anxiety” and his concern “is to demonstrate [the] ambivalence in colonial and colonizing subjects by articulating the inner dissention . . . structured according to the conflictual economy of the psyche.”¹⁵¹ It is, then, by marrying deconstructive methods of analyzing discourse and psychoanalysis that Bhabha finds a possibility of subverting the colonial order and

¹⁵⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979) 58.

¹⁵¹ Robert Young, “The Ambivalence of Bhabha,” *White Mythologies: Writing, History, and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 145.

therefore exposing what he considered the major flaw of Said's work, "the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer."¹⁵²

In this way, the French thinker and linguist, Jacques Derrida, and his theory of language, *différance*, are the pillars Bhabha uses to construct his formulation of hybridity. Bhabha turns to Derrida's theory for being "an anti-epistemological position that ... contests Western modes of representation."¹⁵³ If we are to recall Derrida's premise, *différance* is the sign that describes and performs the way in which a single meaning of a concept (text) arises as the repetition and effacement of other possible meanings, which are themselves only deferred, left over, for their possible activation in other contexts.¹⁵⁴ This conception of language is appealing to Bhabha because it reveals that things can only be by virtue of differing, and therefore, that at the heart of existence there is *différance*, not essence. Moreover, if there is no essence or unity, nothing is its being, and no ultimate "truth" can be itself beyond contingency. *Différance* creates as well the idea of "trace" in the sign. If the word does not mean by itself, but by differing, what it differs from, despite its absence, is part of the presence of the sign.¹⁵⁵

Bhabha calls this play of absence and presence, "the idealistic quest for meaning" in Western discourse, and he asserts that it allows for an anti-ethnocentric rhetoric that challenges the representation of otherness while it deconstructs the logocentric order of the West and exposes its epistemological limitations. In "Cultural otherness," Bhabha says,

functions as the moment of presence in a theory of *différance*. The 'destiny of non-satisfaction' is fulfilled in the recognition of otherness as a symbol (not sign) of the presence of *signifiante* or *différance*: otherness is the point of equivalence or identity in a

¹⁵² Bhabha, "Difference" 200.

¹⁵³ Bhabha, "Difference" 195.

¹⁵⁴ See Jacques Derrida, "différance" *Critical Theory Since 1965* Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle eds. (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986) 125.

¹⁵⁵ See Derrida, "Différance" 126.

circle in which what needs to be proved (the limits of logocentricity) is assumed (as a destiny or economy of lack/desire) ... The place of otherness is fixed in the West as a subversion of Western metaphysics and is finally appropriated by the West as its limit-text, the Anti-West.¹⁵⁶

As in any other system of meaning constituted as a weave of differences, displacements, slippages and deferrals of meaning, *différance*—otherness, in the post-colonial context—enters the Western discourse to disrupt the idea of unity or “the historical identity of [Western] culture as a homogenizing force.”¹⁵⁷ That is, Bhabha’s conception of the Other within Western discourse functions essentially as Derridean *différance* in another context. Deployed in this way, otherness can subvert the meaning, truth, certainty, and coherence of the colonial “kingdom,” and therefore challenge its power and control.¹⁵⁸

Bhabha argues, against Said, that colonial discourse is not *entirely* possessed by the colonizer.¹⁵⁹ Two of his most famous articles, “Sly Civility” and “Signs Taken for Wonders,” thus develop the work of *différance*, or its deployment as otherness in situations of colonial authority, in order to prove its destabilizing effects. “Sly Civility” establishes the colonial world as an “irredeemable act of writing,” in which the colonizer depends on the Law to impose the demands of order and empire.¹⁶⁰ Yet, as Robert Young notes, the discourse of the West “may appear hegemonic, but it carries with it a hidden flaw,” especially when it reaches the space of the colonial.¹⁶¹ As the Western practice of writing requires a process of displacement from the

¹⁵⁶ Bhabha, “Difference” 195.

¹⁵⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 37.

¹⁵⁸ Derrida affirms about *différance*, “it governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority ... there is no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.” Derrida, “Différance” 132.

¹⁵⁹ My emphasis. Please see note 146 and 147.

¹⁶⁰ Homi Bhabha, “Sly Civility” in *The Location of Culture* 93.

¹⁶¹ Robert Young, “The Ambivalence of Bhabha” 143.

point of enunciation—Western control—to the site of address—the colonial recipient—,in the transfer, the sign loses its supposed mimetic qualities. Distortion and dislocation result as consequences of the displacement and repetition of the sign since *différance*/otherness works to defer and differ its meaning. Through the slippage, Bhabha, argues, the discourse of the West fails to assert its control, and thus a new relational system between colonizer and colonized appears.¹⁶²

Thus, Bhabha suggests, following this argument, that the colonizer does not “entirely possess” the sign either at its origin and much less once it arrives its destination, manifesting the unsteadiness of power in the colonial context. Hybridity then makes its appearance as a “sign” of the instability of the colonizer’s authority with the potential of subverting it.¹⁶³ Thus, according to Bhabha,

It [hybridity] reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses of authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.¹⁶⁴

Most of Bhabha’s critics, starting with Robert Young, find a problem with hybridity as an analytical tool precisely at this point of Bhabha’s conceptualization. Seen as a sign, and therefore merely as product or an effect of discourse, hybridity lacks agency in Bhabha’s theory. With the claim of resistance and intervention, Young notes that “the problem of agency” is evident.¹⁶⁵

Who intervenes or exerts resistance in the name of the colonized? Or, as Young explicitly puts it, “Who is ‘we’?” and “when do ‘we’ do what we do?” as a response to Bhabha’s claim that “when

¹⁶² Homi Bhabha, “Sly Civility,” *The Location of Culture* 95, 97.

¹⁶³ “Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power,” Homi Bhabha “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985) 154.

¹⁶⁴ Bhabha “Signs” 154.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Young, “The Ambivalence” 149.

the words of the master become the site of hybridity ... then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain.”¹⁶⁶ While I agree with Young’s observation, I believe that the problem runs deeper. It is not only that the use of “we” would require a return to unified individual or collective agency, a notion that Bhabha rejects elsewhere. Yet, and more importantly, in Bhabha, the discursive and the psychological overlap and eventually collapse.¹⁶⁷ That is, ambivalence in Bhabha is made to function at two different levels: as a feature of discourse in a Derridean sense, and also as a psychological disposition of the colonizer that eventually gets transferred to the colonized through mimicry. The epistemological and the ontological dimension thereby fuse, resulting in a trap that ultimately renders Bhabha’s conception of hybridity impracticable as a concept that may describe the formation of alternative imaginary subjectivities outside the barren repetition of Western discourse. That is, Bhabha’s theory ultimately reduces hybridity to another universal, monologic model. In this case, the hybrid is destined to live in a state of uncertainty. Hybridity becomes a synonym of liminality, constantly in between identifications, and as such, hybridity does not allow the subject to materialize as anything other than a specter.

If Bhabha departs from Derridean order to criticize Said at the level of the discursive, he theorizes the ontological dimension through Lacanian psychoanalysis and finds fault with Frantz Fanon for “turn[ing] from the ambivalences of identification to the antagonistic identities of political alienation and cultural discrimination.” Bhabha adds, “[Fanon] is too quick to name the

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Robert Young, “The Ambivalence” 149.

¹⁶⁷ Bhabha rejects the Western conception of identity represented by the a “transcendental ego.” As posited by Descartes, this notion of the subject supposes that thinking is to be equated with being and that its very essence is an undivided, self-controlling consciousness. Bhabha challenges this notion of the “individual” as a “universalist aspiration of civil society.” See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 10.

other, to personalize its presence in the language of colonial racism.”¹⁶⁸ Yet, Bhabha first praised Fanon for exploring the psychological dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized and thus for suggesting that colonial relations are dynamic and shifting. Therefore, Bhabha argues that the ambivalence produced by *différance* at the level of discourse also occurs when referring to the process of identification in colonial contexts. Indeed, the instability manifested through the ambivalence produced by *différance*/otherness at the level of the discursive creates, according to Bhabha, a “mental inclination, a frame of mind” in the colonizer who strives to regulate otherness/*différance* to maintain power.¹⁶⁹ Bhabha asserts that “domination is achieved through a process of disavowal that denies the *différance* of colonial power—the chaos of its intervention as *Entstellung*, its dislocatory presence—in order to preserve the authority of its identity.”¹⁷⁰ The psychological dimension of the colonial relation as it becomes regulated by a differential economy of power is explained in Bhabha’s theory by means of the Freudian fetish/stereotype and the Lacanian mirror stage. Bhabha uses these psychological models to illustrate the works of colonial identifications since they register the internal logic of repetition and erasure at the ontological level, resembling *différance* in Derridian discourse. Bhabha states,

My anatomy of colonial discourse remains incomplete until I locate the stereotype, as an arrested, fetishistic mode of representation within its field of identification, which I have identified in my descriptions of Fanon’s primal scenes, as the Lacanian schema of the Imaginary. The Imaginary, as you probably know, is the transformation that takes place in the subject at the formative mirror phase, when it assumes a discrete image which allows it to postulate a series of equivalences, sameness, identities, between the

¹⁶⁸ Homi Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity. Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative” *The Location of Culture* 60.

¹⁶⁹ Bhabha, “Signs” 151.

¹⁷⁰ Bhabha “Signs” 153.

surrounding world. However, this positioning is itself problematic, for the subject finds or recognises itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational. This is the basis of the close relation between the two forms of identification complicit with the imaginary –narcissism and aggressivity. It is precisely these two forms of ‘identification’ that constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercised in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or mask it. Like the mirror-phase ‘the fullness’ of the stereotype—its image as identity—is always threatened by ‘lack.’¹⁷¹

Bhabha suggests that the instability evidenced in colonial discourse produces an effect in the psychological economy of the colonizer. Insecure in his ability to assert power, the colonizer needs strategies that fix and control the colonized through means of representation. As such, the regime of the stereotype presumes a signification of difference and therefore the containment of slippage while subjectifying otherness. Bhabha interprets the stereotype not so much as evidence of the colonizer’s power to control but, quite the contrary, as a form that exposes the lack of presence and the myth behind the justification of power and thereby the anxiety in the colonizer’s psyche while confronting the colonized Other. Thus, even though when the stereotype is meant to reject, or disavow, *différance*, it constantly undoes itself by revealing the ambivalence within its own psychological economy. Bhabha asserts that the stereotype constitutes a form of knowledge that ‘vacillates between what is “always ‘in place’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.”¹⁷² In order to deal with this anxiety, the stereotype, like the fetish, uses a metonymic—part for the whole—structure that seemly gives

¹⁷¹ Bhabha, “Difference” 204.

¹⁷² Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question” *The Location of Culture* 66.

control but simultaneously reveals the conflict that the revelation of lack of wholeness and power presents to the colonizer. Bhabha concludes,

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it ... The stereotype then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of similar fantasy and defence—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour, and culture.¹⁷³

Identification with this stereotype, however, requires yet another strategy of power based, according to Bhabha, on the Lacanian mirror stage and its scopic dimension. In Bhabha’s theory, the discursive—stereotype—turns into an image of identity that, like the image on the mirror, transforms the subject as he assumes that image to be a coherent representation of self.

Moreover, in the colonial context, the demands of identification with the stereotype require the subject to identify himself in terms of what he is not—the other. This, in turn, undermines, once again, the notion of an original identity since the latter intrinsically depends upon a relationship with its confrontational Other for its constitution. The colonial practice of mimicry results out of these processes of subjectification and identification as the epistemological and the ontological collide in the realm of the colonial subject.

Mimicry, Bhabha asserts, is one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.¹⁷⁴ Mimicry shows the narcissistic and aggressive tendencies of the colonizer by means of an imposition of iteration upon the colonized that should validate and

¹⁷³ Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question” *The Location of Culture* 74-75.

¹⁷⁴ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” *The Location of Culture* 85.

recognize the authority of the colonizer in order to ease his anxiety about otherness.¹⁷⁵ Mimicry, in this sense, requires the colonized subject to adopt and to internalize the values, norms, and culture of the occupying power.¹⁷⁶ It follows that for mimicry to work, the colonized first needs to be objectified by means of the stereotypical discourse. Then, Bhabha assumes that the colonized fully adopts the stereotype as an image of identification in order to reject it, later on, for a repetition of the colonizer's culture, because the colonized accepts, as Bhabha seems to suggest, that only the latter carries the promise of a civilizing reform. Thus, mimicry creates, Bhabha says "authorized versions of otherness:" subjects that are "white, but not quite."¹⁷⁷ The affective, ideological, ontological, and epistemological spheres work together, according to Bhabha, in order to create a crucial distinction between being Western and Westernized, or colonizing and being colonized. This distinction becomes the basis on which colonial control depends because it does not allow, according to Bhabha, a clear oppositional line that separates "us vs. them." That is, Bhabha suggests that there is no clear colonial subject since both colonizer and colonized are caught inside the Lacanian schema of the imaginary: they depend on each other for their constitution in the imaginary as fantasies, partial knowledges, and double images.¹⁷⁸

Under these circumstances, one would think that the colonized does not have a chance to establish a counter-discourse to fight the system of alienation set up by the colonizer. Yet, Bhabha argues that his theory allows for a strategy of subversion that, once again, is based on psychological ambivalence and insecurity. Bhabha declares, quoting Lacan, that "mimicry is like

¹⁷⁵ Homi Bhabha, "Sly Civility" *The Location of Culture* 98.

¹⁷⁶ This form of control as understood by Bhabha is similar with the logic of the panoptical gaze of power elaborated in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1975).

¹⁷⁷ Robert Young, "The Ambivalence of Bhabha" 147.

¹⁷⁸ Homi Bhabha, "Difference," 75 and "Signs" 16, 152.

camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part metonymically.”¹⁷⁹ That is, since colonial mimicry is meant to reform the Other, while at the same time maintaining a visible difference between the colonized and the colonizer, mimicry also produces a psychological slippage that threatens the power of the colonizer.¹⁸⁰ According to Bhabha, the emulation of the civilizing behavior is always and necessarily “incomplete” and “virtual” since to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English.¹⁸¹ Then, mimicry, unlike mimesis, requires a double and contradictory task as a result of the interaction between narcissism and power. In his desire to civilize but also maintain control, the colonizer reveals himself as an impossible, always partial, model whose ambivalence, according to Bhabha, also disrupts his authority.¹⁸²

The gap between the demands of power and colonial narcissism then creates a space for contestation. In his own words, “hybridity unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.”¹⁸³ In this sense, hybridity does have the ability to question colonial power and discourse. However, hybridity does not solve or change the condition of “the discriminated.” Indeed, Bhabha concedes that tensions are not resolved by means of hybridity, nor a new reality of “cultural relativism,” which would make a more congenial multicultural society, would ever appear as a consequence of hybridity.¹⁸⁴ Hybridity for Bhabha is the result of ambivalence, excess, and inconsistency in the context and demands of power and colonization. In that sense, hybridity only works within the parameters of mimicry.

¹⁷⁹ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” in *The Location of Culture* 90.

¹⁸⁰ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” *Location of Culture* 86.

¹⁸¹ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” *Location of Culture* 86, 87.

¹⁸² Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” *Location of Culture* 89.

¹⁸³ Bhabha, “Sings” 154.

¹⁸⁴ Bhabha “Signs” 156.

That is, for the colonial subject to exert some sort of resistance, he has to emulate, mimic, and be subject to the Lacanian model of selfhood. Hybridization occurs as the master text is repeated creating a “mutation” that might challenge authority, but still depends on it for its formation.¹⁸⁵ Thus, Bhabha’s hybrid is caught within “the ruse of recognition,” despite the mockery that mimicry might make of the master narratives of identification.¹⁸⁶ Seen in this way, resistance is less than “spectacular” in Bhabha’s account.¹⁸⁷ It also relegates the subject to invisibility for the sake of the colonizer’s paranoia.

Indeed, Bhabha prefaces *Sly Civility* with Freud’s description of paranoia hinting at the psychological reprisal of colonial hybridity:

In the native refusal to satisfy the colonizer’s narrative demand, we hear the echoes of Freud’s sabre-rattling strangers, with whom I began this chapter ... The refusal to return and restore the image of authority to the eye of power has to be reinscribed as implacable aggression, assertively coming from without: *He hates me*. Such justification follows the familiar conjugation of persecutory paranoia. The frustrated wish ‘I want him to love me,’ turns into its opposite ‘I hate him’ and thence through projection and the exclusion of the first person, ‘He hates me.’¹⁸⁸

If paranoia is for Bhabha the ultimate “revenge” enabled by hybridity, this strategy of resistance forces the colonized to be forever trapped within the system of colonial power. The colonized necessarily becomes the trace of Derridian *différance* in the colonial context of identifications.

¹⁸⁵ Bhabha, “Signs” 153

¹⁸⁶ Bhabha asserts that “Such a process is not the deconstruction of a cultural system from the margins of its own aporia nor, as in Derrida’s “Double Session,” the mime that haunts mimesis. The display of hybridity—its peculiar replication”—terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery.” Bhabha, “Signs” 157.

¹⁸⁷ Bhabha proclaims at the end of “Signs Taken for Wonders” that, “To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance.” Bhabha, “Signs” 162.

¹⁸⁸ Bhabha, “Sly Civility” 99,100.

That is to say, the subject is denied a sign of representation, for he is to remain invisible, difficult to apprehend, and as such, frightening, menacing for the colonizer. Thus, the colonized is reduced to be the cause of the colonizer's paranoia. His/her main feature is the impossibility of apprehension, for he/she is necessarily absent and invisible.

In place of that 'I' ... there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot 'see me', a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the Self. The elision of the eye, represented in a narrative of negation and repetition – *no ...no...never* -insists that the phrase of identity cannot be spoken, except by putting the eye/I in the impossible position of enunciation.¹⁸⁹

It is no surprise that Bhabha gives this empty, duplicitous, menacing "I" the sinister appellative of "Evil Eye."¹⁹⁰ Yet, as disturbing as this "evil eye" might be for the colonizer for its capacity to produce hybridity, its constitution as a trace, an invisible, "missing person"—"nothing in itself"—is more damaging for the colonized subject.¹⁹¹ Thus, subversion in Bhabha comes at the cost of any possible or alternative textual conditions of representation for colonized subjects, since they need to occupy and "speak" from the site of in-betweenness, non-existence, in order to hybridize the master's discourse and cause his paranoia. This is the reason why Fanon, according to Stuart Hall, departs from Lacan. He refuses to accept the Lacanian model for being a universalizing discourse of identity formation that is said to work for all identities, subjecting individual consciousness to a general mechanism of self-identification. Hall notes that for Bhabha, "living in ambivalence is the political consequence of a Lacanian theoretical position." Fanon, on the other hand, considered that this radicalization of the "mirror stage" would cause a

¹⁸⁹ Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity" 47.

¹⁹⁰ Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity" 52.

¹⁹¹ "The evil eye—like the missing person—is nothing in itself; and it is this *structure of difference* that produces the hybridity of race and sexuality in the postcolonial discourse." Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity" 53.

“pathological condition.” Thus, Hall concludes “Fanon cannot, politically, live with the ambivalence since it is killing him.”¹⁹² Nonetheless, Bhabha considers Fanon’s attitude “banal” and “beatific” when at the conclusion of *Black Skins, White Masks* Fanon proclaims, “I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness.”¹⁹³ While Fanon sees the potential of the Lacanian model for considering the idea of identity as never an a priori nor a finished product, his reaction against Lacan’s overemphasis on the symbolic order as a determinant of one’s identity echoes Julia Kristeva’s own criticism of Lacanian theory.¹⁹⁴ It follows that Bhabha’s radical deployment of Lacan in the context of colonialism may be subject to the same critique.

In “Nom de mort ou de vie,” originally published in *Retour à Lacan?*, Kristeva exposes the limitations of Lacan’s attempt to interpret the unconscious as a linguistic system.¹⁹⁵ She calls into question the relevance of his project to certain signifying practices and underscores the devastating consequences of a radical awareness of the “mirror stage,” for its splitting effect on the ego would result into the “pathological condition” Fanon referred to and Kristeva understands as a form of psychosis.¹⁹⁶ Namely, she characterizes as borderline cases those who, as Bhabha proposes, accept the splitting of their “self” as a condition of being. These subjects Clément asserts are “on the fringes of madness.”¹⁹⁷ Just as Bhabha characterizes the “evil eye/[I]” of the mimic man—with no presence of identity behind its mask—the discourse of

¹⁹² Stuart Hall, “The After-Life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why Black Skin, White Masks?” *The Fact of Blackness*, ed. Alan Read (London: ICA; Institute of International Visual Arts, 1996) 30.

¹⁹³ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Introduction by H.K. Bhabha (London: Pluto, 1986) 232.

¹⁹⁴ For an in-depth study of Kristeva’s objections to Lacan, see Shuli Barzilai “Borders of Language: Kristeva’s Critique of Lacan” *PMLA* 106.2 (Mar., 1991): 294-305.

¹⁹⁵ Julia Kristeva, ‘Nom de mort ou de vie’ translation by John Lechte in *Writing and Psychoanalysis: A Reader* Ed. John Lechte (London: Arnold, 1996) 108.

¹⁹⁶ Kristeva 106, 107.

¹⁹⁷ Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 55.

borderline subjects, Kristeva notes is constituted entirely by “abjection.” Kristeva understands this feature as a radical collapse and/or absence of the boundaries that constitute the subject. Abjection, she notes, is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.” She concludes, “abjection is above all ambiguity.”¹⁹⁸ This ambiguity, or in Bhabha’s terms, ambivalence, is what he sustains that typifies the colonial subject. A man that becomes “his alienated image; not self and Other but the Otherness of the self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity.”¹⁹⁹ This conscious ambiguity, Kristeva continues, results in the collapse of self-limits.²⁰⁰ The colonial subject—the evil eye/I—is neither subject nor object, neither inside nor outside, neither here nor there. As Bhabha has it, he “speaks from where it is not” in order to “subvert the satisfaction of the racist, masculinist gaze that disavowed her presence, by presenting it with an anxious absence . . .”²⁰¹ Therefore Kristeva argues that in expelling the “I,” the subject ceases to be. Citing the example of Hamlet as a borderline subject, Kristeva asserts,

Father or son, meaning or non-meaning, to be or not to be? Just when I prove the meaning—as, simultaneously, actor, author, stage director—I completely disappear(s).
I—subject of the meaning, of the Whole meaning—am (is) the mad—or dead—
subject.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity” 44.

²⁰⁰ It is not clear whether Bhabha considers the colonial subject to be aware of his ambiguity and therefore a conscious challenger of the master’s discourse. While in “Interrogating Identity,” his examples seem to point out to a conscious intervention of the colonial man into the discourse of the master, in “Signs Taken for Wonders” the natives said not to know the extent of “hybridization” their questioning causes. Yet, other critics understand that ambivalence in Bhabha is only within the discourse of colonial power. Thus, neither colonizer nor colonized have control over it. Robert Young deals with this issue more extensively in “The Ambivalence of Bhabha” 148-150.

²⁰¹ Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity” 47.

²⁰² Kristeva, “Nom” 106-107.

In this radical awareness of the works of what Kristeva calls the Lacanian triad—real/symbolic/imaginary—the subject is trapped. In other words, Bhabha’s hybridity, as the borderline, liminal space, where the sovereignty of the sign is threatened and where something wild, something irreducible to language, emerges, is indeed a ruse. The hybrid, like the borderline patient, in his ambivalence is “trapped in the mimetic oscillation, being simultaneously the same and other, because [he is] on either side of the mirror.” He is asked to lose all references to absolute and divine Truth since for Bhabha, “the access to an image of identity is only possible in the negation of any sense of originality” (51). Thus, Bhabha’s hybrid will eventually get lost in semblances and masks, “battling for a power without any place.”²⁰³ Consequently, the status of Bhabha’s mimic man as an anomaly or deviation never changes. Moreover, the possibility of hybridization as a way to overcome the linguistic and cultural alienation of the colonized in Bhabha’s theoretical framework only goes so far as to discover himself as sign of lack and difference, since being completely aware of his necessary condition as an object traps him in the language of the master; Bhabha gives him no chance to speak on his own. Derision and psychotic mocking become the way, for Bhabha, to get back at the master text in order to destroy its authority. This practice, analogous to the most sardonic satire, does not end the hierarchical structure of power but subverts it, maintaining thus the Manichean confrontation between monologic discourses.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Kristeva, “Nom” 114, 115.

²⁰⁴ It is important to distinguish Bhabha’s mockery from the Bakhtinian concept of “carnival” or “carnivalization.” In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin underscores that no one is excluded from the laughter of carnival, “including the carnival’s participants.” While the negative satirists mock from above, carnival laughter emphasizes the equality of all in what he calls “gay relativity.” M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1968) 10, 11.

CHAPTER 2

BAKHTIN'S RESURRECTION OF THE SUBJECT: DIALOGISM AND WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

For I am persuaded that faced with the fundamental choice 'to be or not to be', the exact statement of my position would be this: to propose or not to propose theoretical fictions in order to expand the limits of the signifiable and push back the frontiers of ghosts, visions, experiences of possession ... An endless enterprise, in fact, which could be characterized as follows: language is what makes me be more and more by way of non-being. The more I happen not to be, the more I reach being. I am never *more* than the place where I was not, but there it was already speaking, 'before me'. *Wo Es war soll Ich werden*. There, where it was speaking me without my being there, I must come to speak as if I were not.¹

2.1 M.M. Bakhtin and the Constitution of Hybrid Subjectivities

By the 1920's, Mikhail Bakhtin had begun his life-long project of deconstructing traditional Western epistemology along with its claims of universal knowledge. His work granted him the title of visionary of contemporary cultural movements, namely poststructuralism and postmodernism. Indeed, he sought to de-center any knowledge based on transcendentalism and phenomenology, criticizing their premise as the legacy of rationalism, objectivism, and abstraction that characterized Western philosophy. His critique focused on the disconnection between epistemological and ontological knowledge in the Western world. In his earliest works Bakhtin refers to this division as "fatal theoreticism," expressing in this way his disapproval:

¹ Kristeva, "Nom" 115-116.

It is an unfortunate misunderstanding to think that truth can only be the truth that is composed of universal moments; that the truth of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable and constant in it. Moreover, that which is universal and identical (logically identical) is fundamental and essential, whereas individual truth is artistic and irresponsible, i.e. it isolates a given individuality.²

Bakhtin's fight stands against constructed systems of knowledge that claim the capacity to name essential truth—presence—outside of history. Specifically, he challenges structuralism and its conception of language as an abstract set of rules immune not only to its speakers but also to the time and space in which “language” occurs. Saussure, as the main exponent of structuralism, conceived language as a set of two opposing codes: the synchronic and the diachronic. The first one refers to the logical system of rules that govern the language of a given collectivity. The second one, dismissed as the mere instance of the first, is deemed as disorganized and chaotic, and therefore necessarily subdued by the “rationality” of the synchronic:

The synchronic phenomenon can have nothing in common with the diachronic ...

Synchronic linguistics will be conceived with the logical and psychological relations that bind together coexistent terms and form a system such as these relations are perceived by one and the same collective mind. *Diachronic linguistics*, on the contrary, must study

² M.M. Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Vadim Liapunov trans. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993) 27, 37. His earliest works are produced between 1919 and 1921.

relations binding successive terms together, which relations are not perceived by the collective mind and replace one another without forming a system.³

Bakhtin criticizes Saussure's notion of language on two fronts. He considers that privileging the synchronic as an essential, ultimate truth of language is a deceptive and artificial construct. He counters that "the speaker's subjective consciousness does not in the least operate with language as a system of normatively identical forms. That system is merely an abstraction arrived at with a good deal of struggle and with a definite cognitive focus of attention."⁴ He also objects to language as divorced from "life," and therefore having no bearing on the ontological dimension of the subject. Saussure's idealistic version of language, according to Bakhtin, "does not correspond to any real moment in the historical process of becoming."⁵ Thus, language and being—epistemology and ontology—become intertwined in Bakhtin as elements of a process that understand "presence," not as an essential, material kernel of knowledge, but as a dialogized narrative of multiple consciousness. Words, according to Bakhtin, form subjects. Yet, in turn, language is created by the "speaker" and the "understander" as part of a creative process that, far from being a mere repository of knowledge, becomes the semiotic material of inner life.⁶

Consequently, Bakhtinian thought on subjectivity, art, and life treads the difficult path between rigid theories of essential truth, which tend to create determined subjects, and the

³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: MacGraw Hill, 1966) 129.

⁴ M.M. Bakhtin and Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973) 67.

⁵ Bakhtin, *Marxism* 66.

⁶ Bakhtin, *Marxism* 69-70.

impossible indeterminacy and fluidity of the postmodern individual.⁷ His criticism of these theories focuses on the excessive importance that they give to the signs in relation to one another and to the arbitrariness of language towards its referents, whose “reality” is ultimately questioned. Bakhtin shifts the attention to individuals and their relation to the words. Thus, he worries about the fact that the linguists’ interest “is not the relationship of the sign to the actual reality it reflects nor to the individual who is its originator, but the *relationship of sign to sign within a closed system* already accepted and authorized.”⁸ Indeed, for Bakhtin, words display a reciprocal relationship with the individual in a creative act that underscores the interplay between language and individual consciousness. Furthermore, words are charged with “ideological meaning.” That is, words reflect a social system of thought created outside the individual through experience and interaction with others. Experience becomes the “actual reality” of which “ideological meanings” are formed. Ideology, then, is not the individual property of a person, but the language that a social unit shares and actively shapes. However, ideologies are always in flux as they exist in relation to other social units and require translation and negotiation to be processed by individuals. That is, no two individuals ever entirely coincide in their experience and/or belong to the same set of social units. Bakhtin explains it lucidly in the following excerpt:

The word is not a material thing, but rather the eternally mobile, eternally changing medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates towards a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one

⁷ I include within the former group theories of hybridity that, like in the case of *mestizaje* and *creoleness*, reduce the individual to a prescribed model. The second group always uses Bhabha’s understanding of the colonized as an in-between subject relegated to invisibility and mimicry as they only way to subvert the master’s discourse. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

⁸ Bakhtin, *Marxism* 57-58.

generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered.

When a member of the speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of the other, uninhabited by others' voices. Nor he receives the word from another's voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretation of others. His own thought finds the word already inhabited. Therefore the orientation of the word among words, the varying perception of another's word and the various means for reacting to it, are perhaps the most fundamental problems for the metalinguistic study of any kind of discourse, including the artistic.⁹

In Bakhtin's model, the word is in a constant struggle to be heard among other words striving to show their particular worldviews. He characterizes this environment as dialogic. Yet, while the word is understood as materially present and limited by the interaction and challenges it encounters in other words, it is also viewed as an image representing the character of its originator in a narrative discourse that bears ideology. The thoughts, ideas, and ideological tendencies of one's mind are exteriorized and discursively depicted through an image created by the language one uses. Language, then, narrates consciousness. In this sense, "the domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present ideology is present, too. Everything ideological possesses semiotic value ... The word is

⁹ Bakhtin, M.M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Caryl Emerson, ed. and trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963) 202.

the ideological phenomenon par excellence”¹⁰ It follows that, for Bakhtin, the word cannot be studied or understood in a vacuum. Words are intrinsically linked to the voice that speaks them.¹¹ Bakhtin’s model of subjectivity, then, consists of two simultaneous and intrinsic events: one, the word’s drive to acquire meaning, and two, the word’s display of its speaker’s image. In sum, Bakhtin reconciles the social dimension of language with the subjective by positing an individual engaged in the social construction of ideologies in dialogue with others, while simultaneously internalizing that interaction to constitute, through and by language, his/her own psyche. This ability to create a unique discourse out of an amalgam of multiple interactions from a multiplicity of positions and in and out of the subject is understood by Bakhtin as the art of “finding-oneself-outside-of.” Indeed, Bakhtin conceives the psyche as a “boundary” or a “self-conscious threshold” between the social and the individual.¹² It is precisely this “extraterritorial status” of consciousness that makes possible the creative act of authoring one “self” through “others”:¹³

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*) ... The very being of man (both external

¹⁰ Bakhtin, *Marxism* 10, 13.

¹¹ As discussed at length in the previous chapter, the main criticism of Bhabha’s work is the problem of “subjectivity.” The English book and its influence on the natives and, in turn, the natives supposedly hybridization of the English book is always understood and explained in general, abstract, even psychological terms but never as it refers to particular, concrete individuals. Hence, Bhabha never offers a viable theory of subjectivity that may describe the processes and strategies by which the colonized individual incorporates, changes, disposes, and originally creates a narrative of “self” beyond the imposed repetition of the dominant culture as it is described in the mimic man. For a discussion of Bhabha’s theory see pages ... of this dissertation. This particular problem is even more acute in theories of mestizaje and creoleness. The subject, in those theories of hybridity, becomes a universal model of authenticity that is not connected in any way to particular individuals and their cross-cultural experiences.

¹² Caryl Emerson and Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan both refer to the same trait in Bakhtin’s thought using those two different terms respectively. See Caryl Emerson, “The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (December 1983): 249. Also, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, “Borderlines and Contraband: Bakhtin and the Question of the Subject,” *Poetics Today* 18.2 (Summer 1997): 257.

¹³ Bakhtin, *Marxism* 39.

and internal) is the *deepest communion*. To *be* means to *communicate* ... To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary: looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another ... I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another.¹⁴

As Caryl Emerson notes, Vygotsky summarizes Bakhtin succinctly by saying that the Word is the significant humanizing event. That is, one creates an identity through the words one has learned and fashions one's own voice—his/her inner speech—through the selective appropriation of the voices of others.¹⁵ Bakhtin does not think of language as the source of alienation or a sign of the inherent lack of subjectivity.¹⁶ Instead, Bakhtinian thought reevaluates language as the means to create, narrate, or craft one's own life—subjectivity—through words.

Indeed, one of Bakhtin's major philosophical tendencies is to mix the aesthetic realm with other traditionally separated domains like science, life, and philosophy, or what he calls the "three domains of human culture."¹⁷ Language offers the potential creativity to access a kind of truth—dialogical and multiple—that rational discourses cannot achieve. "The [literary] work and the world represented in it" Bakhtin says, "enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation."¹⁸ Yet, the connection between language art and "the world" goes beyond mutual influence to become intertwined as one thing. As it pertains to the idea of identity, Bakhtin's "Author and Hero in Aesthetic

¹⁴ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 287.

¹⁵ Emerson, "The Outer Word" 255.

¹⁶ Thus, Bakhtin's conception of language as it relates or influences the individual does not have the negative tone of Derrida's or Bhabha's.

¹⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays*, Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990) 1.

¹⁸ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 254.

Activity” is a case in point. The “hero,” traditionally used as a fictional conception of the human being is interchangeably used with the “I,” while “the author” takes the part of the “other” with the same disregard for any kind epistemological distinction. In fact, the essay ends up reading more like a treatise in subjectivity than as a work on the theory of the novel. Therefore, for Bakhtin, the ontological dimension of the character in a work of fiction is constructed analogously to that of the living subject. Aesthetic theory blends into a philosophical theory of subjectivity whose central idea is that language, in the form of human communication, is inherently dynamic. It has the ability to bridge the only gap that exists—that between the world of the other and one’s own consciousness—through an aesthetic and responsive discourse endowed by the gift of creating new meanings. Thus, language, for Bakhtin is not the cause of one’s alienation. Indeed, Bakhtin removes the negativity assigned to the function of language in the construction of the human being that Derrida and later the Lacanian model had introduced. For the latter couple of theorists, language expresses what can never be said. However, for Bakhtin, the division between the inner and the outer world is the drive that pushes the self to fulfill his “task” of making meaning in time and space. As Caryl Emerson notes, “for Bakhtin the healthy individual in life is the one who can surmount—not deny—the gap, who can break down the barriers between inner and outer [world/words]” as part of the development of one’s consciousness.¹⁹ In such cases, language and selfhood are intimately connected as projects that constitute one another in the logosphere.²⁰

¹⁹ Emerson “Outer World” 258.

²⁰ The space where meaning occurs as a function of the constant struggle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart and in motion that increase difference and tend toward the extreme of life and consciousness, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere to stay in place, and which tend toward death and brute matter. See, Michael Holquist, “Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin’s Trans-linguistics,” *Critical Inquiry* 10.2 (December 1983): 309.

This ability to “make-meaning” of one’s self and of the outer world requires a dialogic internalization of language that allows for a different, more productive interaction with monologic narratives. It also provides access to the internal processes by which individuals in the context of cultural confrontation might develop alternative, textual conditions of existence, that is, hybrid identities, in Bakhtinian terms. Opposed to “repeating” the master’s text, “retelling [it] in one’s own words” is the other option and a more preferable one, for it constitutes a more reflective process of transmission and appropriation of discourses.²¹ Moreover, “retelling,” instead of “repeating” underscores the struggle against the authoritative word and the resistance to assimilating that word “as is,” without questioning it. This process, in Bakhtin’s words, “takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming.” That is, when authoritative discourses are dialogized and relativized as part of an internal process of conscious ideological growth, the monologic text is transformed into what Bakhtin refers to as an “internally persuasive discourse.” Its main feature is its hybrid nature, “interwoven with ‘one’s own word’ ... half ours and half-someone else’s.” Thus, it stands in a constant state of tension, negotiation, and flux. “Such discourse” Bakhtin affirms, “is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness.” Indeed, while it starts out as the word of another, in competition with other words that have already been internalized, the process brings about the contact, negotiation and individual assimilation of different words that, once made one’s own, become part of a life-long ideological becoming that is never whole nor monologic.²²

Consciousness and identity, long with their exteriorization in language, come about, for Bakhtin, in the works of such a process, “the genuine life of the personality is made only through a

²¹ I want to establish a contrast here with Bhabha’s theory of mimicry, which requires the internalization of the master’s discourse. See pages 65-72 of this dissertation.

²² Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 345.

dialogic penetration of that personality during which freely and reciprocally reveals itself.”²³

This conceptualization of identity has various implications when compared to other theoretical formulas. First, it does not let the ambiguity and indeterminacy of language “erase” the subject. In fact, language is confronted with more language. For Bakhtin, the “I” must be externalized both for itself and for the other. A failure to do so, means to remain in isolation, which results in the “loss of one’s self.”²⁴ Articulation of the inner self is therefore imperative to fight alienation. Yet, the dialogized narrative we create of our “selves” is only possible through the recognition that aesthetics permeates our discourses of identity. As Kristeva affirms, overtly acknowledging Bakhtin, what overcomes the awareness of loss and “relieve[s] psychosis” is fiction. Hybrid narratives such as Dostevsky’s, Kristeva concludes, bring about a “resurrection of the subject, that is, the subject’s accession to the place of the Father through the intermediary of language.”²⁵

Indeed, for Bakhtin, if we are to break free from the external word and monologic narratives, the “I” must function as an author, a narrator, of his own identity adopting a “responsive” voice that uses, abuses, changes, discards, and redistributes external words. The “orchestration” of the outer world in one’s own unique voice allows the hybrid to give to words new life and meaning. This is indeed what a hybrid subjectivity does: “the substantial environment, which mechanically influences the personality, ... reveal[s] potential words and tones” that are transformed into a word, our own.²⁶ There we find the second and third implications of Bakhtin’s theory of subjectivity: The subject, exercising the creative act, can always find “ever newer ways to

²³ Bakhtin, *Problems* 59.

²⁴ Whereas the “I” necessarily disappears or is made invisible, since, according to Bhabha, articulating it means to fix it, causing its alienation. More to the point as it relates to Bhabha, “absolute death (non-being)” Bakhtin adds, “is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered.” See Bakhtin, *Problems* 287.

²⁵ Kristeva, “Nom” 115.

²⁶ Bakhtin, “Towards a Methodology of the Humanities” in *Estetika solvesnogo tvorcestva* (Moscow, 1979) 367. Translated by Michael Holquist and quoted in Holquist “Answering as Authoring” 318.

mean.” Thereby he/she can also constitute herself as a subject, among subjects, stepping out of the suffocating realm of objectification:

This process—experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons—becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun, where someone is striving to liberate himself from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification, or is striving to expose the limitations of both image and discourse. The importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse.²⁷

In sum, a hybrid identity is created through the interaction between the outer and the inner domains. It has the life-long task of creating and recreating itself as a meaningful “I,” through an aesthetic discourse, much like the novelistic one, whose unity is acquired in time and space by weaving external discourses into the inner voice of the self. The hybrid individual approaches the world with an aesthetic eye, giving new forms and meanings to it, fully aware and precisely because language is indeed hollow, arbitrary, and unstable. De Man seems to share this view in detriment of the more pessimistic approach to language: “Consciousness does not result from the absence of something, but consists of the presence of nothingness. Poetic language names this void with ever-renewed understanding ... and it never tires of naming it

²⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 346, 348.

again.”²⁸ Then, authorship, as the distinctive feature of a hybrid consciousness underscores the narrative behind the subject it attempts to define. In other words, identity, seen in this light, can never be mistaken for Truth, or for a single and finished product. The subject understands that the sign he/she imagines herself to be in a given time and space is not metonymical or a distorted version of self. It is a fiction, a story, and as such cannot contain the subject in its entirety or in its complexity. Like a novel in a Bakhtinian sense, the narrative of one’s identity is always yet-to-be-fulfilled. That is, it is oriented towards the future. Bakhtin emphasizes that “the definition given to me lies not in the categories of temporal being, but in the categories of the *not-yet-existing*, in the categories of purpose and meaning, in the meaningful future, which is at odds with anything I have at hand in the past or present. To be myself for myself means yet becoming myself.”²⁹ Thus, if “being” means to be in the unending process of becoming, the subject cannot contain in a given instance of his/her own narrative of identity the “inner, world-exceeding activity” in which he/she is constantly engaged. “In a human being” Bakhtin affirms, “there is always something that only he himself can reveal . . . something that does not submit to externalizing secondhand definition.”³⁰ Thus, the “I” produced in the narratives of hybridity is, as Michael Holquist notes, a self-conscious mask.³¹ The difference between this mask and that of the mimic man is its flexibility for being authored by its own self, rather than imposed by the discourses of others. Lastly, hybrid identification cannot be confused with an isolated self-fashioning. The narrative of a hybrid consciousness is necessarily grounded and constrained by

²⁸ Paul de Man, “Criticism and Crisis,” *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: U of Minnesota P, 1971)18.

²⁹ M. Bakhtin, “Notes from 1970-71,” *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986) 357.

³⁰ M. Bakhtin, *Problems* 20.

³¹ Michael Holquist, “From Body-Talk to Biography: The Chronobiological Bases of Narrative” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1 (1989) 23.

the time and space of the other; but its freedom comes from its aesthetic ability, its capacity to transcend *in dialogue* the master texts.

2.2 Hybrid Voices: Rosario Ferré, Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison.

If we take into consideration Bakhtinian theory and his notion of subjectivity, it might be easier to understand Fanon's plea "to recognize the open door of every consciousness."³² Like Fanon, Bakhtin wishes to "open the door" to the consciousness of every individual, so identities are not reduced to monologic narratives of national and/or psychological dimensions. In their place, individual and fluid stories of individual formation and transformation, grounded on the dialogic processes of cultural contact should be considered as alternative ways of writing "selves" into beings. Akin to Fanon and Bakhtin, the women writers featured in this dissertation choose to explore individual consciousness as they encounter others in dialogic terms. Thus, while the theories of hybridity produced in the intellectual and political realms of the Americas have concentrated in creating universal, monologic models, Rosario Ferré, Maryse Condé, and Toni Morrison challenge these narrow definitions, and show other options to understanding the consciousness of the hybrid without reducing it to a general model. Their novels emphasize the narrative quality of hybrid identifications; therefore, they succeed in maintaining the openness and the unending process of a self-development that is committed to a cross-cultural dialogue and that does not prescribe a single, monologic pattern of hybridity.

³² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 232. Also, see pages 92-95 of this dissertation on Bhabha's criticism of Fanon and his departure from Lacan.

Rosario Ferré, among other Latin American writers and scholars, rejects *mestizaje* as an inadequate notion to define the Spanish Caribbean.³³ Her novel, *Maldito amor*, emphasizes the imperialistic and nationalist origins of the ideology of *mestizaje* and challenges its totalizing rhetoric with a number of stories that underscore Spanish America's diverse social, gender, and racial perspectives. Thus, Ferré demystifies the assumption of a Latin American nation by describing the rhetoric of nationalism to be as oppressive as colonialism. She takes issue with the characterization of national identity in Spanish America, and, more specifically in the Spanish Caribbean, as homogeneous. Instead, Ferré opts for a Bakhtinian sense of hybridity, which is strikingly distinct *mestizaje*, and incorporates multivoicedness and heteroglossia as better paradigms to understand Caribbean identity. Yet, while Cornejo Polar calls for “another theoretical device ... to explain the sociocultural situations and discourses in which the dynamics of the multiple intercrossings *do not* operate in a syncretic way,” Ferré offers a novel, which focuses precisely on the “conflicts and alterities” glossed over by the narrative of *mestizaje* and gives voice to the silenced polyphony of the New World.³⁴ In light of her rejection of the discourse of *mestizaje*, Rosario Ferré challenges the notion that it is possible to find a unified national character, an essence, in Spanish America. Instead, Ferré underscores the conflicts that *mestizaje* had traditionally diffused. Polyphony takes the place of *mestizaje*, and Bakhtinian

³³ Cornejo Polar criticizes the application of European paradigms to the reality of Spanish America. He asserts that “to assume that there is a non-conflicting point seems to be the necessary condition to think of and imagine the nation as a more or less harmonious and coherent whole, a point which continues to be a curious a priori in order to conceive (even against the painful evidence of profound disintegrations) the mere possibility of a ‘true’ nationality.” Antonio Cornejo Polar, “Mestizaje, Transculturation, Heterogeneity,” *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004) 117.

³⁴ Cornejo Polar 117.

hybridity becomes a more appropriate theory to understand the “profound and disturbing conflictiveness” of Spanish America in Ferré’s work.³⁵

Creoleness is analogous to *mestizaje* in Maryse Condé’s cultural context of the French Caribbean. And as we have contended with *mestizaje*, creoleness has turned into another monologic narrative that dictates Caribbean identity to all Caribbean people. It is based on an essential core, enclosed in a geographical area, tied to a tradition, and shaped by patriarchal agendas. Creoleness, Hal Wylie affirms, has moved “from description to prescription.”³⁶ Thus, Maryse Condé would agree with Ferré that creoleness, as much as *mestizaje*, is a narrative of national formation around an *essentialized* notion of diversity. Therefore it does not account for the process by which individuals—Caribbean or not, in the region or abroad—develop hybrid consciousness. In response to creoleness as a manifesto of French Caribbean identity, Maryse Condé, like Ferré, substitutes discourses of origin, territory, and collective identity with narratives of personal identification. Thus, she responds to naturalizing notions of identity with fictionalized accounts that challenge authority and stretch the boundaries of identity to those of the imagination. Indeed, Françoise Lionnet characterizes Condé’s work as a wonderful example of setting in fictional form issues dealt with in literary theory.³⁷ Thus Condé, along with all the writers in this study, practices what I would like to call “fictional theory.” Yet, Condé’s conception of identity transcends Ferré’s heteroglossia as an alternative way to describe the Caribbean. For her, individual “identity” should also be conceived as a novel, in the Bakhtinian sense. That is, out of the conflict presented by polyphony, a concrete voice rises to transcend the

³⁵ Cornejo Polar 119.

³⁶ Hal Wylie “Métellus, diasporism and créolité” *Penser la Créolité*, Ed. Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Karthala, 1995) 261.

³⁷“... Maryse Condé nous offer une brillante démonstration de sa mise en pratique *narrative* des questions théoriques ...” See Françoise Lionnet, “Traversée de la mangrove de Maryse Condé: vers un nouvel humanisme antillais?” *The French Review*, 66.3 (February 1993): 475.

historical and official narratives represented in the discourses of mestizaje and creoleness. This voice, embodied by Condé's main character, Tituba, is "intentionally" hybrid, and thus detached from monologic forms of identification. Tituba writes herself as a transgressor of the boundaries of territory, language, and race that have determined her personal identification both in the Caribbean and abroad.

Finally, Toni Morrison shares with Ferré and Condé the aversion for authoritarian and dogmatic languages that exclude and essentialize other voices. Similarly, Toni Morrison's novels are concerned with the process of storytelling and its influence on subject formation. Morrison considers the human capacity for telling stories to be crucial to the survival of individuals. Thus, not only does she agree with the "belief that narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness," but she goes further to consider language as a generator of meaning and therefore human life.³⁸ It might suffice for now to refer to her Nobel Prize Lecture in which she asserts that

Word-work is sublime [...] because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference - the way in which we are like no other life.

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.³⁹

Toni Morrison sees narration as the process by which we re-evaluate notions of truth, and chief among these notions is the conception of individual identities and self. Indeed, as some of the critics have affirmed of Morrison's authorial voice, her "narrators become indistinguishable

³⁸ John Louis Lucaites and Celeste M. Condit "Re-constructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective" *Journal of Communication* 35.4 (Autumn 1985): 90.

³⁹ Toni Morrison "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993". Nobelprize.org. 23 Jan 2011 http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/3.

of the story itself.”⁴⁰ Thus, in this study, Morrison represents the necessity of hybridity as a mechanism of survival in the face of monologic narratives of identification. If Ferré offers polyglossia and dialogics as alternatives to monologics and Condé shows the formation of a voice that transcends rigid conceptions of identity, Morrison warns of the dangers to conform to postmodern theorizations of hybridity that, as we have argued, encourage the individual to remain in a constant state of ambivalence as the only way to subvert the master texts. While in itself, this call reduces the notion of hybridity to a single possibility, the dangers of this practice out-weigh any potential benefits available to those who can remain in a state of liminality. Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, points that out by contrasting two characters—Claudia and Pecola. While the novel shows the formation of Claudia’s “I” within the polyphonic and dialogic structure of a system of oppression, much like Condé’s character Tituba, Pecola fails to do the same. She gets caught in the position of object. Thus, she is never able to return the gaze. Pecola’s mimicry of white culture, thereby, subjects her to a liminal reality that never quite distorts the master’s text, but it condemns her to live in a constant psychotic doubleness. Repetition, mimicry, and slippage of meaning do not give way to a productive hybridity, as postmodern discourses suggest. For Morrison, hybridity is a story whose central character is the self who authorizes her voice as it engages in the act of remembering, interpreting, narrating and giving meaning to one’s self and others. The failure to do so or, in other words, the adoption of a monologic identity imposed from the outside relegates the victim of master discourses to be the object of inferiority and the ultimate reference to otherness. Thus, Morrison’s objective is, as Claudia observes, not to tell “why” that happens, but “how” to avoid it.⁴¹ One of Maxine H. Kingston’s characters says it best when she succinctly explains how to escape insanity: “ ‘the

⁴⁰ Jill Matus, *Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester & New York: Manchester UP, 1998) 124.

⁴¹ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (Plume, 1994) 6.

difference between mad people and sane people’: ‘Sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over’.”⁴²

2.3 Fictional Theory and the Dialogical Alternative

Bakhtin’s theoretical premises—first, there is no single voice and second, discourses of and for the other constitute the discourses of self—are analogous to Ferré, Condé and Morrison’s approach to subject formation and representation of identities. The women writers of this dissertation understand identity as the dialogic text that results of a conscious formation of self. That is, their poetics of hybridity is the narrative resulting from multiple encounters with centripetal, homogenizing, and essentializing forces that strive to effect closure on one’s identity. Whether it is modern, local or influential intellectuals, the nation, or imperialism that exert those forces on the individual, the writers featured in this dissertation are opposed to the idea of a forced internalization of a given narrative of identity. Instead, they advocate that self-identification and narrative become intertwined in one’s consciousness to create a hybrid sense of self. Whereupon, art and life turn into one unit in the hybrid individual since hybridity emerges as a self-generating ability. That is, hybridity is the “art of becoming” through a personal narrative that changes as one’s life unfolds as the result of polyphony and heteroglossia. Thus, I emphasize Bakhtin’s notion of “orchestration” as the key to understand cultural hybridity in the novels of these women writers. “Orchestration,” as the means to transcend the confrontation with monologic narratives, suggests a never-ending project of attempting to complete one’s self out of polyphony. Identity, if understood through the lens of orchestration, becomes a life-long, self affirming and authenticating process in which encounters with others

⁴² Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage 1989) 159.

are sought and valued as the basis of hybrid consciousness. Thus, theories of identity would always remain developing and incomplete.⁴³ Seen in this light, it is only appropriate that any theorizing of personal identity should be done in a fictional format. This approach does not make theory less valuable for being fictional, but less prescriptive and totalitarian. In theorizing through fiction, Ferré, Condé and Morrison privilege “unfinishedness” over completion, and openness over closure—dialogic narratives versus monologic ones. Indeed, Bakhtin claims that one creates oneself through one’s own use of language. However, the other’s language is formative of the self since an utterance is formulated only in the light of another’s speech.⁴⁴ The art of the hybrid consciousness resides then in the ability to give form to one’s self out of the intersections with others. We can conclude that hybridity will be understood, as I proceed to analyze the following novels in detail, as the ability to say “I am me” in someone else’s language, and in my own language, “I am other.”⁴⁵ But to transcend dialogism and experience fluidity—hybridity—one needs the creative ability to imagine one’s self through change. That is the difficult task of the hybrid consciousness. In words of Maryse Condé, “those who change are the ones who want to be. To become what we want to be, and to establish ourselves as what we want to become is very hard.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Bakhtin declares the novel “the genre of becoming.” Likewise, Georg Lukács affirms that “the novel, in contrast with other genres whose existence resides within finished form, appears as something in process of becoming.” See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 3, 22. Also Georg Lukács *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971) 72-73.

⁴⁴ See Bakhtin, *Problems* 284.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 315.

⁴⁶ “ce qui change c’est ce qu’on veut être. Devenir ce que nous voulons être, et nous imposer comme ce que nous voulons être est très dur.” My Translation. See Dawn Fulton, “Respecter l’étrangeté de l’autre: entretien avec Maryse Condé” *Dalhousie French Studies* 76 (2006): 152.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY AND STORIES OF MESTIZAJE IN THE SPANISH CARIBBEAN:

Rosario Ferré's *Sweet Diamond Dust*

Indian, white and black are the three pure colors of the human palette of the Indies. In the course of time, they were combined in all sorts of proportions. Since in addition to purely physical mixtures, life itself was mixing and adding the human types and their compounds in constant collaboration, we can say that the class of the Indies and the truly representative type of its life was the man of mixed blood—meztizo or mulatto. Regardless of any statistics, the soul of Indies is therefore in essence a mestizo soul.¹

3.1 Contemporary Cultural Criticism of Mestizaje's Colonial and Nationalistic Roots

Mestizaje is often used in contemporary criticism as a synonym of hybridity, creoleness, syncretism, multiculturalism and of any other critical term referring to identities formed as a result of culture encounters. However, as Walter Mignolo points out, this terminology is too frequently deployed without paying attention to the imperial and colonial discourses that constructed the cultural parameters of these concepts. “It is confusing” Mignolo says, “when ‘hybridity,’ ‘mestizaje,’ ‘space-in-between,’ and other equivalent expressions become the object or subject of reflection and critique of post-colonial theories, for they suggest a discontinuity between the colonial configuration of the object or subject of study and the postcolonial position

¹ Salvador de Madariaga, quoted in Mörner 8. “Indio, el blanco y el negro son los tres colores puros de la paleta humana de las Indias. En el curso del tiempo, se fueron combinando en toda suerte de proporciones, y como, además de las mezclas estrictamente corporales, la vida a su vez fue revolviendo y mezclando los tres tipos humanos y sus compuestos en constantes colaboraciones, puede decirse que la clase de las Indias y el tipo verdaderamente representativo de su vida fue el hombre de sangre mixta—meztizo o mulato. Sean cualesquiera las estadísticas, el alma de las Indias es, pues, en su esencia un alma mestiza.” My translation.

of the locus of theorizing.”² Rosario Ferré takes Mignolo’s warning to heart and offers a historical and critical overview of the discourse of mestizaje, emphasizing its connection to imperial and national projects in Spanish America. As a preliminary standpoint, she would agree with Jorge Guzmán that mestizaje should be understood “as a characteristic of the Latin American semiotic system, and only in secondary terms as a topic related to genetics, that is, something which has to do with the form and color of our bodies.”³ Thus, as a cultural reference, rather than a biological one, Ferré objects to the discourse of mestizaje for it became the ideological and discursive reaction to the racial, social, and economic differences that the contact between Europeans, Ameridians and Africans produced in the New World. At times, the contact was considered productive, other times, regressive; yet its generated differences were always a source of anxiety when it came to define American reality and the identity of its people. The problem with mestizaje is that it becomes the trope of an “authentic” American identity against European and North American models. “Lo americano,” that which constitutes the “genuine” Spanish American, is mestizo, distinguishing it from other people and cultures that are said to be pure. Thus, if the mestizo is not in itself a pure racial category, its deployment as a narrative of collective identity is as monologic as any other racial or national claims of purity.

Thus, mestizaje cannot be considered a synonym of multiplicity and syncretism, even though contemporary studies since the 1980s have appropriated the word to underscore the plurality of cultural identities.⁴ In fact, mestizaje promotes the idea of a universal ontological

² Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) 94.

³ Jorge Guzmán, *Contra el secreto profesional. Lectura mestiza de César Vallejo* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1990) 21. My translation.

⁴ For example Françoise Lionett in “The Politics and Aesthetic of Métissage” asserts that mestizaje is the “fertile ground of our heterogeneous and heteronomous identities as postcolonial subjects.” She understands mestizaje as a subversive tool that allows individual and nations transcend discourses of

condition. In that sense, mestizaje is the mark around which a chaotic multiplicity is organized into a form of identification that is still monologic. That is, Spanish America attains a strong, collective coherence under the name of mestizaje. Mestizaje becomes, then, the discursive system that unifies, naturalizes, and essentializes Spanish American culture. It creates the illusion of harmony. Antonio Cornejo-Polar affirms that mestizaje is a “conciliatory and comforting utopia that seems to gather into one unique torrent the many rivers that converged in this physical and spiritual geography we call Latin America.”⁵ Therefore, mestizaje, though it may recognize heterogeneity, deploys an enticing rhetoric of inclusion and integration that ultimately fixes the individual into a dominant paradigm of cultural identification. Rosario Ferré links this notion of mestizaje to earlier forms of colonial domination that stressed cultural sameness by means of identification with a unique Spanish model. These discourses, as we have already discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, offered the potential of belonging to a syncretic unity, while establishing a system of exclusion that guaranteed the well-being of myths that privilege pure origins and authentic ontological elements.

José Piedra offers an analysis of the notion of hispanidad as “a grand metaphor for unrealized promises of universal harmony” during colonization.⁶ As a Spanish cultural weapon

racial and cultural purity based on essentialized notions of identity. See Françoise Lionett, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, and Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1989) 8.

⁵ Antonio Cornejo-Polar, *The Multiple Voices of Latin American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California P, 1994) 23.

⁶ José Piedra’s article is devoted exclusively to the analysis of colonial times. For that historical period, I have preferred the use of the term Spanishness. Yet, the contemporary meaning of “Hispanidad” is a case in point if one wishes to understand the connections between colonial rhetoric and mestizaje. El Día de la Hispanidad, on the 12th of October, is a national holiday in Spain in honour of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas and the subsequent colonization of American territories under the Spanish empire. It is also a holiday in other Spanish-speaking countries, yet celebrations of the concept of Hispanidad has been replaced by “El Día de la Raza,” the day of the race, supposedly the mestizo one. However it is not clear what race is being celebrated since the festivity was created for the first time in 1914 as the “Fiesta de la Raza Española,” the celebration of the Spanish Race, by the Spaniard Faustino Rodríguez San Pedro as President of the Ibero-American Union, in order to commemorate the bond between Spain and Latin America. While the name has been criticized by many, Latin American countries have not replaced it,

for the formation and consolidation of empire, spanishness championed a great and inclusive collectivity by the imposition of cultural and religious homogeneity. “Spain’s own racially ill-defined origins,” José Piedra argues, called for a rhetorical unification of the multiplicity of faiths, languages, origins, and races that formed Spain and its later empire. The integration and assimilation of ethnic groups in a unified imperial project was deemed necessary for the viability and integrity of the system. José Piedra concludes that “the final result was an ‘impure,’ but unified empire, combining aspects of the Latin, Hebraic, and Islamic models. The fact that the ‘impurity’ of the system was not officially accepted only served to strengthen the imperial hold. Furthermore, it would offer outsiders a false sense of accessibility and a similarly false hope of equality within Spain’s implicit, unofficial heterogeneity.”⁷ Thus, the Spanish paradigm of culture became the official channel and paragon of assimilation that required the shedding of blatant differences in exchange for a place in the structure designed and led by the Spaniards. Spanishness was accepted as a unifying principle that once disseminated among elements of otherness within the borders of the empire “transformed into a unified discourse of Others within the Spanish Imperial self as Spain subjected the ‘blood,’ ‘faith,’ and ‘letters’ of previous settlers on the peninsula as well as Native Americans and African slaves in the New World to a bureaucratic test of integrity.”⁸ José Piedra affirms that the system was never intended to accept differences. On the contrary, spanishness established itself as a “companion of the empire”⁹ in the assimilation of otherness by creating a model of the Spanish self that rejected multiplicity

indicating the connections and ambiguities resulting from the rhetoric of Spanish Empire and the Latin American nationalist movements. See Piedra 303-32, 308.

⁷ Piedra 304

⁸ Piedra 307.

⁹ I refer here to Antonio de Nebrija as he considers the Spanish Language as the tool to unify the character of the Spanish Empire, Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 3.

and adhered to a rhetoric of sameness, which became the authentic gauge to determine degrees of closeness to the model.

Mestizaje functioned the same way when the nineteenth century movements for independence adopted it as the rhetoric of collective assimilation of the former colonies. While it still stressed cultural bonds that were predominantly Spanish, the rhetorical unity of nationalism encouraged a syncretism between whites, blacks, and natives to define itself against not only European but also North American models. Mestizaje was essentialized. It reconciled antagonistic elements by diffusing the differences in favor of an imagined and unified community to be identified as a distinct Spanish American nation. Magnus Mörner affirms that mestizaje “has become a symbol of nationality [and] cult” in the collective consciousness of the New World.¹⁰ Similarly, Luis Duno Gottberg in his study of mestizaje as it pertains to Cuba explains,

We cannot forget, then, that the nation, as an imagined community, is an abstraction that is defined by/in the fight with social subjects that cannot be reduced to such category.

Also, the discourse of mestizaje is perhaps its *locus amoenus* in the case of Latin America. The mestizo nation is a construct that, while calling for reconciliation of differences, is constituted through the internal conflict and tension that fail to resolve the real contradictions of society.¹¹

¹⁰ Mörner 148,149.

¹¹ Luis Duno Gottberg, *Solventando las diferencias. La ideología del mestizaje en Cuba* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2003) 27. “No podemos perder de vista entonces que la nación, en tanto a comunidad imaginada, es una abstracción que se define por/en la pugna de sujetos sociales irreducibles a dicha categoría y que el discurso del mestizaje es quizás su *locus amoenus* para el caso latinoamericano. La nación mestiza es un constructo que, apelando a la conciliación de las diferencias, se constituye a partir de un conflicto y una tensión interna que no alcanza a resolver las contradicciones reales de la sociedad.” My translation.

As the self-conscious and distinct discourse of the Spanish American community, mestizaje is a monologic narrative, which shares the same pretense of purity, authenticity, and homogeneity that discourses of culture and race did during colonization. Indeed, in order to be considered the distinct mark of a unique American identity, that is, the mixture of Spanish and Other, mestizaje must accept as true the purity and uniformity of Spanish culture, as it was claimed in the rhetoric of empire. Mestizaje, then, when considered from the historical perspective of its construction, does not challenge the static conception of cultural essences or the binarism that perpetuates myths of authentic and pure origins. Consequently, as Amaryll Chanady asserts, “the valorization of *mestizaje* is hardly synonymous with the celebration of diversity or that of the continual renewal and interaction of diverse strategies of identity construction that would subvert monolithic paradigms and practices.”¹²

The search for the essence of the Spanish American nation necessarily invokes a notion of mestizaje that is homogenizing, essentialist and totalitarian. In this context, mestizaje presupposes a harmonious relationship among the three main groups: Amerindian, European, and African. Moreover, this harmony seems to be facilitated by the adherence to a criollo ideology, which favored the preservation of a Spanish cultural past as opposed to a North American industrial imperialism. The essentialization of the Spanish American collective consciousness under the badge of mestizaje silenced, paradoxically, the multiple voices of the nation from class, racial, gender and ethnic standpoints. As Benedict Anderson points out, the Spanish American nation, when envisioned by the criollo elite becomes a “deep, horizontal

¹² Mararyll Chanady, “The Formation of National Consciousness in Latin America: Mestizaje and monolithic Cultural Paradigms” *Latin America as its Literature*, Ed. María Elena de Valdés (Whitestone, NY: Council on National Literatures, 1995) 179.

comradeship,” which obscures its internal cleavages, since it is imagined from a fixed location, within a firmly bounded space and based on a strict criollo ideology.¹³

Contextualizing mestizaje within its colonial and nationalistic references, poststructuralist thinkers like Antonio Cornejo Polar question the very existence of a unified national character in the Latin America.¹⁴ He critically states that,

to assume that there is a nonconflictive meeting point seems to be the necessary condition to think of and imagine the nation as a more or less harmonious and coherent whole, a point which continues to be a curious a priori in order to conceive (even against the painful evidence of profound disintegration) the mere possibility of a “true” nationality.¹⁵

The nationalist discourses that—as in the case of mestizaje—look for an essence to define, fix, and preserve cultural character present several problems for these contemporary intellectuals. First, they reduce the internal diversity of the nation into a collective imaginary that becomes as oppressive as previous and current forms of colonialism, since excessive otherness is either excluded or required to conform in order to be part of the definition of the nation. Second, they set up an artificial binary between themselves and others—mestizo nations vs. pure ones, whether they are European or Anglo Americans—reifying the myth of pure opposites. Finally, they tend to idealize a pre-industrial, rural past under Spanish colonization as a “racial paradise”

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) 7.

¹⁴ Others poststructuralist thinkers who have raised concern about the idea of mestizaje are Rita de Grandis, “Incursiones en torno a Hibridación. Una Propuesta para Discusión: De la Mediación Lingüística de Bajtin a la Mediación Simbólica de García Canclini” *Revista de Crítica Literaria* 23.46 (1997): 37-51. Catherine Poupeney-Hart “Mestizaje: “I Understand the reality, I just do not like the word.” Perspectives on an Option” *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*. Ed. Rita de Grandis and Zilá Bernd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 34-56. Also, Néstor García Canclini “The Hybrid: A Conversation with Margarita Zires, Raymundo Mier, and Mabel Piccini” *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 20.3 (1993): 77-92.

¹⁵ Cornejo Polar 117.

to demonize, what they consider to be, the industrial and utterly racist capitalism of the United States.

Rosario Ferré is not among the thinkers who explicitly denounce *mestizaje*. Yet, she writes fiction that rejects notions of cultural identity or nationality that reduce diversity to an official narrative of racial harmony. Her native Puerto Rico serves as a case study to underscore in this chapter the relationship between colonialism, nationalism and the discourse of *mestizaje* in Spanish America, and more specifically in the Hispanic Caribbean. Ferré's novel, *Maldito amor* denounces the official discourse of *lo americano* as *mestizo* for it perpetuates the liberal and humanistic myth of racial democracy, idealizes the Spanish colonial past, consecrates the Spanish language, and bolsters the cult of *La gran familia*, which is the Puerto Rican way to accept Martí's conviction that there is no racial animosity in the Caribbean because the nation is color blind.¹⁶ Thus, Ferré challenges formulations of cultural identity that use the exclusive and standard paradigm of territorial, linguistic, historical, and racial criteria. That is, the fixed location from which the cultural identity of the nation is formulated, be it from a racial, criollo, male and/or any other privileged space. According to Rosario Ferré, *mestizaje*, as formulated by the intellectual and political rhetoric of Spanish America, does not truly acknowledge the dispersion, fragmentation and confrontation of the diverse cultural realms of the Spanish Caribbean. In *Maldito amor*, Rosario Ferré replaces the harmonious image of the nation with a new vision that emphasizes the profound conflictiveness of Caribbean society. Thus, her notion of cultural identity is not bound to narrowly defined models of citizenship and nationality. On the contrary, the voices of her characters challenge and transgress the boundaries of territory, language, race, and ethnicity established by a standard view of the nation.

¹⁶ See section on José Martí in this chapter, pages 39-43.

3.2 Denouncing Official “Harmony” and the Silencing of the Other

Maldito amor narrates the story of a family of Puerto-Rican landowners as an allegory of the history of Puerto Rico from its epic/mythical origins to the transnational present. Echoing the national romances of nineteenth century Latin America, the De La Valle family in *Maldito amor* is the stage that serves to explore the problems of cultural identity in the Hispanic Caribbean. Yet, *Maldito amor* demystifies the idealization of history, racial, and class harmony that these novels conveyed. Doris Sommer defines the national romance as love narratives that developed during the period of national consolidation of the Latin American countries. They typically feature lovers whose different social and racial backgrounds force them to “imagine their ideal relationship through an alternative society,” which foretells the harmonious and prosperous future of the nation as a homogeneous and egalitarian family.¹⁷ She adds that the plots of these national romances were intended to control the racial, regional, economic, and gender conflicts that could prevent the smooth development of the incipient nations. “After all,” Sommer stresses, “these novels were part of a general bourgeois project to hegemonize a culture in formation. It would ideally be a cozy, almost airless culture that bridged public and private spheres in a way that made a place for everyone, as long as everyone knew his or her place.”¹⁸ In this way, nineteenth century romances used the old ideal of Spanish America championed by Bolivar and later Martí, in which homogeneity and harmony were the necessary factors to legitimize the power of the criollo elite in order to form viable nations. Thus, their discourse created a paradigm of harmony that erased the historical conflicts. They postulated a peaceful coexistence, which ignored the lives and voices of those in the periphery. Indeed, Díaz Quiñones affirms that for these official histories, the discourse of mestizaje becomes the best proof of a lack of racial

¹⁷ Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 18.

¹⁸ Sommer 29.

prejudice and conflict among the multiple sectors of Spanish American societies.¹⁹ In *Maldito amor*, Ferré dismantles the official historical discourses that, like mestizaje, strengthen the myth of the Hispanic Caribbean as a racial utopia. The novel, then, “undertakes the task,” as Lee Skinner affirms, “of questioning the privileged nature of historical discourse and embarks upon a thorough interrogation of both traditional and contestatory history.”²⁰

Ferré’s trial of official narratives opens with a description of the Guamaní region in Puerto Rico from the perspective of a member of the patriarchal oligarchy of the island, Don Hermenegildo. His project consists of writing a history of the De la Valle family in an omniscient voice that sings the glories of former times in which the heroes of Puerto Rico, like Ubaldino De la Valle, fought to save the nation from the political and commercial interest of North American fierce capitalism. His text is embedded in quotation marks, indicating that it belongs to a larger discourse about the past of the island and its mythical, now vanished, paradise. Don Hermenegildo’s account follows the model of national romances for it idealizes the unions between the Spanish oligarchy and hacendados with criollas and jíbaras, Doña Elvira and Doña Laura respectively. The heroes, in turn, become the sign of national progress and establish themselves as authentic Puerto Ricans, claiming to be the leading members of the ethnic complexity of the “gran familia puertorriqueña.” In this way, Don Hermenegildo constructs a totalizing narrative of a mythical time and place in the past of Puerto Rico that can be characterized as “epic” in a Bakhtinian sense.

¹⁹ Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, “Tomás Blanco: Racismo, historia, esclavitud,” *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*, by Tomás Blanco (Rio Piedras, PR: Ediciones Huracán, 1985) 63.

²⁰ Lee Skinner, “Pandora’s Log: Charting the Evolving Literary Project of Rosario Ferré” *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 29.3 (October 1995): 464.

“In the past the people of Guamaní used to be proud of their town and their valley,” says Don Hermenegildo as he starts his historical account.²¹ According to Bakhtin, the authorial position from which the epic world is narrated corresponds to “a man speaking about a past that is to him inaccessible, the reverent point of view of a descendant.”²² Don Hermenegildo is indeed that man. He looks at the past of Puerto Rico with an “absolute epic distance” in order to recreate and establish the remote beginnings of the Puerto Rican nation from a criollo standpoint.²³ Thus, he presents an idyllic and paradisiacal picture of the island in which everything is in perfect order and valued to its maximum exponent. “Sparkling clean streets,” “a bird of paradise,” the most beautiful,”—the nation is represented in its essential goodness and in a primordial state, still uncorrupted by foreign elements.²⁴ However, Don Hermenegildo’s absolute voice is charged with ideological baggage. In fact, as Bakhtin might note, the “absolute past” used in epic narratives is “a specifically evaluating (hierarchical category). In the epic world view,” he adds “‘beginning,’ ‘first,’ ‘founder,’ ‘ancestor,’ ‘that which occurred earlier’ and so forth are not merely temporal categories but *valorized* temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree.”²⁵ Puerto Rico is thus described from the point of view of the privileged criollo landowners who, like Don Hermenegildo, considered themselves to be the heirs and keepers of a tradition threatened by foreign elements. They become the founders, fathers and ancestors of everything that is worth preserving in the island, separating themselves from other

²¹ Rosario Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* (New York: Plume, 1996) 3. To be consistent and to facilitate the reading all the references to *Maldito amor* will be taken from *Sweet Diamond Dust*, the translation that the author herself offered of her original novel. Rosario Ferré, *Maldito amor* (New York: Vintage Español, 1998).

²² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 13.

²³ Bakhtin talks about three constitutive features of the epic: (1) a national, absolute epic past, (2) national tradition, not personal experience (3) absolute epic distance separating the epic world from contemporary reality. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 13.

²⁴ Ferré 3. Bakhtin adds, “everything incorporated into this past was simultaneously incorporated into a condition of authentic essence and significance” Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 16.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 15.

classes, races, and cultures by the same epic distance attributed to the past.²⁶ In this regard, Don Hermenegildo states,

And it wasn't just the lushness of our valley that made us feel proud and content ... At that time Guamaneños of the upper crust all belonged to the same clan. There were blood ties among the most distant families, and we always gave one another financial and moral support ... Our sons studied in Europe and our daughters were taught the sacred virtues of home. Our social and cultural activities were always in the best of tastes ... Vulgarity and mediocrity were banished from our mist, ... We played only classical music in banquets and balls, and our daughters floated gracefully like gauze gardenias on the waves of the 'Blue Danube,' ... It was, no doubt about it, an innocent, guiltless world, and it is thus that our great Gautier Benítez immortalized it in his poems, it was thus that our great Morel Campos sang of it in his *danzas*.²⁷

Don Hermenegildo's discourse, representing the voice of the Puerto Rican oligarchy, detaches itself from the rest of Puerto Rican society. His main interest is to organize the world according to his social vision in order to present an apparently seamless society led by the "legitimate" owners of the land, the white criollos. Thus, his narrative focuses on the creation of a myth in which Puerto Rican society is portrayed living in total harmony and understanding with one another as long as they are led by the old dominant class. His discourse is thereby legitimized and becomes the official narrative of Puerto Rican history. Under this guise, the authentic Puerto Rican becomes the "innocent," "guiltless," pure-blooded Spanish criollo who, unlike the Spaniard, is benevolent towards other races and without prejudice. More importantly, the authentic Puerto Rican is completely opposed to the threatening North American who, as Don

²⁶ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 15.

²⁷ Ferré 7.

Hermenegildo points out, has turned the paradisiacal island into “a hell, a monstrous whirlpool from which the terrifying funnel of Snow White Sugar Mills spews out sugar night and day toward the north.”²⁸

However, the epic discourse, as Bakhtin notes, would not be completely forged if it lacks the ability to generate a strong national tradition. For that reason, Don Hermenegildo’s ultimate goal is to institute a hero to embody the official national history. Ubaldino de la Valle, the son of a criolla educated in Europe and a Spaniard, becomes the emblem of the true Puerto Rican nationhood, according to Don Hermenegildo. Following the most typical epic tradition, he is always mentioned followed by an epithet, “Guamani’s most eminent statesman,” “our gallant political leader and patriot.” He comes to incarnate the goodness, the pedigree, and the nativeness of the heroes in national romances. As Don Hermenegildo explicitly states,

every country that aspires to become a nation needs its heroes, its eminent civic and moral leaders, and if it doesn’t have them, it’s our duty to invent them. Fortunately this not the case with Ubaldino, who was truly a paragon of chivalrous virtue, and whose story I have already begun to relate in my book.²⁹

Don Hermenegildo’s notion of nationhood is essentialist. He creates the “true” Puerto Rican from a single and fixed—male, criollo, bourgeois—ideology. In this sense, the official national discourse becomes, as Bakhtin claims about all epic discourses, hermetic. That is, “it is closed as a circle; inside everything is finished ... There is no place ... for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy, [or] evaluation.”³⁰ Thus, it cannot be relativized by personal experience, dissent, or conflict. In sum, the official historical discourse about Puerto Rican nationhood is monologic: only one voice is heard and the others are ignored or assumed to agree with the official one.

²⁸ Ferré 7.

²⁹ Ferré 24.

³⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 16.

Hence, as Apter-Cragolino states in “De sitios y asedios: La escritura de Rosario Ferré,” Don Hermenegildo’s version of Puerto Rican history is an idealization of the past of Guamaní. That idealization silences the racist and exploitative nature of the sugar plantation owners replaced by the North American monopoly of the industry.³¹ Indeed, in Don Hermenegildo’s account, class and race issues surface from the very beginning of the novel in the marriage of Doña Elvira de la Valle and Don Julio, parents of Don Hermenegildo’s hero. Doña Elvira belongs to a family of plantation owners and typifies the traditional criolla: educated in Europe, innocent and virtuous. She is known as “Doña Elvira of the four Ds: Del Roble, De la Cerda, De la Valle, and De Juan Ponce de Leon,” manifesting the rank and purity of lineage she enjoys among the members of her class. Don Julio Font, on the other hand, is known to be a Spaniard who makes a living importing goods into the country until he marries Doña Elvira and takes charge of the De la Valle plantation. At the beginning of their romance, Don Julio is portrayed as a courtly love hero patterned after those in European epic romances. Yet, the moment he becomes a plantation owner he turns into a racist, vulgar and greedy administrator.³² Not only does he abuse his wife, but, according to Don Hermenegildo, he also terminates the good relationship that, for generations, the De la Valle family had maintained with their workers. In Don Hermenegildo’s eyes, Don Julio is blinded by the power and status that he has acquired through marriage. He becomes egocentric, authoritarian and arrogant to the point of disinheriting his own son, Ubaldino.

³¹ “La historia es la idealización nostálgica del pasado de Guamaní en la isla de Puerto Rico. Dicha idealización silencia el carácter racista y explotador de la clase azucarera desplazada por el monopolio norteamericano.” Aída Apter-Cragolino “De Sitios y Asedios: La Escritura de Rosario Ferré” *Revista Chilena de Literatura* 2.42 (1993): 29.

³² Don Julio meets doña Elvira in a “paso fino” exhibition, a horse show. After being granted the first prize, don Julio hands the blue silk bow that acknowledged his dexterity at the horse to doña Elvira, praising her beauty and begging her “to keep it safe for him until they should meet again.” Ferré 9.

Don Hermenegildo's characterization of Don Julio evokes the historical plight between criollos and Spaniards during Spanish colonization. Criollos resented Spaniards for their claims to the land and its administration; they felt themselves to be the proper sons and heirs of the Americas, and therefore disinherited by Spaniards. As a consequence, Don Hermenegildo's historical account aligns itself with a purely criollo ideology that demonizes Spaniards as brutish, racist, and greedy conquistadors who imagined themselves as better caste than criollos for having been born in Spain.³³ His narrative, then, adopts the discourse of mestizaje or "la gran familia," as it is referred to in Puerto Rico, in order to distinguish the goodness, nobility, and gentility of the criollo heroes, and thus assert their legitimate right to be in charge of the nation against Spanish or North American claims. If Spaniards are portrayed as abusive and "traitors," the newcomers, the Americans, are no better. Their arrogance and sense of "manifest destiny" annihilate criollos and other races alike.³⁴ Don Hermenegildo chronicles a dialogue between Don Julio and Mr. Irving, the president of the American banks on the island, in order to criticize the competitive drive of both empires to possess the land. Mr. Irving asserts, "we [North Americans] brought to your island the progress of the twentieth century. The progress of the nineteenth century undoubtedly belongs to you [the Spaniards]" To which Don Julio responds,

There's really little difference between your type of protectorate [American] and ours [Spanish]. I totally agree with you that a country as small as this one can't be without a

³³ See my discussion of the caste system and the differences between Spaniards and criollos in the Americas in the first chapter, pages 26-28.

³⁴ Manifest Destiny was a term used in the 1840s to justify the United States' westward expansion into such areas as Texas, Oregon, and California. There was a widely held underlying belief that Americans, the "chosen people," had a divinely inspired mission to spread the fruits of their democracy to the less fortunate (usually meaning Native Americans and other non-Europeans). Manifest Destiny was later applied to American interests in the Caribbean and the Pacific, sharing much with the practice of imperialism. See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981) and Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

mentor; and Spain, our mother country, was the great protector of the derelict nations of this continent, all through the nineteenth century. Your country is to be admired, because it's doing the same thing today.”³⁵

To resist both empires, Don Hermenegildo seeks to seize power for those he considers to be the “true” heirs of the nation. From his standpoint, criollos are not only devoid of prejudice, but also care for the land and its people. They are generous and altruistic. In sum, their ability to empathize with the Puerto Rican other—slaves, farmers, and lower classes and castes—has served them to maintain their supremacy above Spaniards and North Americans. Thus, Don Hermenegildo endorses a highly structured society in which criollos are shown as father figures at the head of the Puerto Rican family. The Puerto Rican family, albeit heterogeneous, maintains its order and peace thanks to the benevolence of the higher class who knows what is best for the entire community,

The De la Valle were used to fealty and took for granted the loyalty of their tenants; in fact, thanks to the situation they had always lived like counts. But they have also maintained, through their sense of fidelity and retribution, a delicate balance between vassal and lord. For this reason, their servants and laborers worshipped them and had remained faithful even through the worst of crises. The De la Valles, for example, were godfathers to all their dependents' children and would always be present at their christenings, weddings, and wakes, which they attended dressed in all their finery and surrounded by an aura of stateliness, during which they traditionally bestowed their largesse, handing out large bags of coins and brightly wrapped gifts.

Don Hermenegildo's description of the De la Valle family exemplifies the congeniality that it appears to characterize the diverse social structure of Puerto Rico under a criollo hegemony.

³⁵ Ferré 32.

Hence, mestizaje takes the shape of a national discourse in which all members of the Puerto Rican society need to gather as a “gran familia” to fight against imperialism under the leadership of the criollo oligarchy. Thus, relying on a paradigm of harmony, Díaz Quiñones states, “the criollos affirmed their supremacy and erased the conflicts and histories of the subalterns by postulating a peaceful coexistence.” Mestizaje becomes, to use once again the words of Díaz Quiñones, a form of “condescending altruism” that established the essential order and nature of Puerto Rico from a single standpoint.³⁶ Mestizaje, then, as part of the patrician discourse of the criollos, is a monologic narrative of racial harmony that grants the necessary homogeneity and peace for the nation to develop. Puerto Rican racial heterogeneity is therefore silenced and reduced, in the criollo discourse, to an idyllic harmonious society that is able to maintain its coherence through a common Spanish culture and the benevolence of a criollo ruling class that cares, unlike Spain or North America, for the wellbeing of other less-favored Puerto Ricans as long as they recognize and maintain the essential and fixed order of the nation.³⁷ Therefore, the discourse of mestizaje is, using once again Bakhtinian nomenclature, epic. When mestizaje becomes a narrative that bolsters national consciousness within the official history of the island, the discourse is completely “closed” to reevaluation and contingency. It also fixes and reduces the cultural identity of the nation to a predetermined set of values dictated by a selected few in charge of keeping the order and union of the community intact, precluding any possibility of contradiction or dissent. In this sense, mestizaje, in *Maldito amor*, is denounced as closed,

³⁶ Díaz Quiñones 36.

³⁷ Tomás Blanco, a prestigious Puerto Rican intellectual and member of the criollo oligarchy, writes in *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*: “Nuestra cultura general es blanca, occidental, con muy pocas y ligerísimas influencias no españolas.” That is why, he affirms, we have achieved a high degree of “civilizada convivencia social. La población de color esta completamente hispanizada culturalmente.” Tomás Blanco, *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico* (Rio Piedras, PR: Ediciones Huracán, 1985) 131, 132, 133. (The reason why we have achieved a high degree of civilized social coexistence is because our culture in general is white and Western, with really few and slight influences that are non-Spanish. The population of color has been completely hispanized.)

monologic narrative that, far from being inclusive, fluid, and open to change, and conflict, requires the subject to conform under the pretext of national reconciliation and consolidation.

3.3 Polyphony: The End of the Myth

Don Hermenegildo's monologic description of Puerto Rican society in *Maldito amor* is immediately challenged. As Bakhtin asserts, the "unfreedom of the subject" as a consequence of epic—absolute—narratives is "overcome only with the arrival on the scene of an active polyglossia and interillumination of languages."³⁸ That is precisely what happens in *Maldito amor*. Titina, the long-time black servant of the De la Valle family, is the first in a series of voices to "arrive" in the narrative in order to discredit Don Hermenegildo's official text. She provides a different version of the story, filled with mundane details that demystify and relativize the authority of the epic narrative. Thus, Titina anchors her tale in a definite time and space, not in some remote and primeval paradise as described by Don Hermenegildo:

Yes, it's been five years since Niño Ubaldino promised us the cottage we've always lived in, since we began working for him thirty years ago, and that's why we've come to see you today, Don Hermenegildo."³⁹

In this sense, when Titina enters the story she disrupts the harmony of the official discourse and opens the narrative space for herself and for other members of the family—Aristides, Laura, and Gloria—who were previously silenced in Don Hermenegildo's text. Thus, the national hero, Don Ubaldino, and his family immediately lose their status as an exemplary model of order for the Puerto Rican nation. They become, instead, a scale model of a nation in constant battle over old notions of purity of blood, authenticity, origin, race, and new demands of assimilation to foreign

³⁸ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 17.

³⁹ Ferré 16.

forms of government and culture under American tutelage. That is, Don Hermenegildo's text glossed over the contradictions, disputes and frictions to endorse the myth of the "gran familia" in complete harmony thanks to the leadership of criollos like Don Ubaldino. Yet, the different voices that "arrive" to contradict Don Hermenegildo extend the narrative space to reflect the more realistic confrontation of perspectives generated by the diverse number of personal interests, cultural identifications, and standpoints resulting from the long history of colonization of the island.

Thus, Titina's speech, as mentioned before, is the first to speak against the racial and social harmony depicted by Don Hermenegildo. She is the daughter of a former slave of the De la Valle Family. That is, she belongs to the lower Puerto Rican class, the subalterns. However, Titina's voice has the power to reveal the ideological nature of Don Hermenegildo's discourse by exposing another side of the story since she has insider knowledge about the family affairs. That knowledge demystifies the heroes and deconstructs the order that has sustained the patrician discourse of blood purity, identity, and racial distinctions. Indeed, her story makes clear that race is at the heart of the battle for power both inside the family and, to a larger extent, in Puerto Rico.⁴⁰ Thus, as Titina talks to Don Hermenegildo, she demotes his "gallant political leader and patriot" to Niño (little) Ubaldino, blurring the lines between criollos and slave servants and showing the artificiality of the caste system still responsible for the differences among social classes in Puerto Rico:

I call him Niño Ubaldino because he grew up suckling a black woman's milk, yes sir, Ubaldino grew up hanging from our mother's tit, Encarnación Rivera, a freed slave. At times I even ate off of his plate, licked the egg custard that was his favorite dessert from

⁴⁰ "... el conflicto racial es el centro de la problemática de poder que se registra en Guamaní-Puerto Rico." Dolores Flores Silva, "Puerto Rico: Una perspectiva histórica a través de la ficción ferretiana" *A Journal of the Céfiro Graduate Student Organization* 3.2 (Spring 2000): 57.

his own silver spoon. You simply have to try this, Titina, so you'll know what a bit of heaven tastes like, so you'll know how much I'll always love you, he'd say. That's the reason we stayed in the house, catering to the family for thirty years for a miser's pay; although of course the cottage in the garden and Ubaldino's promise had always been at the back of our minds.⁴¹

However, Titina's hopes to inherit the back cottage are frustrated by Don Ubaldiño's second son, Arístides, who always felt ousted for being the *segundón* and, according to Spanish tradition, second to inherit the sugar mill and plantation. But, ultimately, his plans to destroy the will are due to his mother's decision to leave everything to Gloria, his mulatto sister-in-law, and her son, Nicolasito. Thus, although Titina still regards Ubaldino as "an honorable man," she does not trust those who belong to his class, namely Don Hermenegildo and Arístides, because as she herself puts it, the "educated gentry are geese of a feather, and will always flock together."⁴² Titina's words show that color and class are still intimately related to the social struggle for power and status in the Caribbean island as a result of the old caste system. Indeed, Don Hermenegildo chooses to ignore Titina's account and to "forget these (the family's) unhappy events" in order to preserve Don Ubaldino's honor.⁴³ Thus, he resorts once again to his epic discourse romanticizing Titina's plight and undermining her voice just as he was able to essentialize the history and identity of the island:

She [Titina] must be at least seventy-five years old, but her hair is jet black as ever, not a single silver ringlet to sadden her temples. Titina, the De la Valle's immortal servant, Guamaní's last slave; Titina, the timeless one.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ferré 19.

⁴² Ferré 22,17.

⁴³ Ferré 24.

⁴⁴ Ferré 25.

However, Titina's account leaves an indelible mark on Don Hermenegildo's story. With her voice, Don Hermenegildo's authority diminishes and the official text is discredited, opening the way to alternative and disparate views about the family history. These stories will ultimately shatter and expose the irony in Don Hermenegildo's description of Puerto Rican society as a "gran familia," as if different classes, races, and genders would live in perfect harmony and peace, thanks to the good judgment of criollos at the head of the island's patriarchy.

If Titina starts the process of decomposing the myth of harmonious coexistence among classes and races, Arístides's testimony follows Titina's version of the story, contradicting the latter and contributing to the improbability of Don Hermenegildo's text. Unlike his father, Ubaldino, Don Hermenegildo and even Titina, Arístides, the second son of the De la Valle family, favors the United States to assume economic and political control of the island. This political disagreement with his parents and with the old criollo oligarchy increases the resentment he feels towards his family when, still entrenched in the old Spanish ways, they choose his brother, Nicolas, as the sole heir of the plantation. Nicolas has been educated in Europe, therefore he was considered a traditional criollo. Yet, Arístides thinks of himself as better suited than his brother to continue running the family sugar business given the new political situation of the island under the control of American interests. Emphasizing the political and cultural differences between himself and his brother, Arístides tries to convince Don Hermenegildo of his right to control the destiny of the mill,

While Nicolás read Montaigne, Kant, and Hegel in French, dressed in his shiny top hat and tails and promenading himself along the carefree cafés of the Champs Elysées, I learned to speak English without an accent at our university and became imbued in the ancient skills of the land ... The secret of the business, as I learned at school, was

modernization, frugality, and friendship: becoming an ally of our American neighbors.

For this reason I studied English assiduously, until I learned by heart the names of all the machinery at the mill in that barbarous tongue. My efforts finally began to pay off when I began to dream in English.⁴⁵

With Arístides's ability "to dream" in English also comes his total engagement with American cultural practices. Indeed, he defines himself as "efficient" and "practical," a "different type of hero."⁴⁶ His interest lies in maximizing the profits of the family business, while ignoring the preservation of Spanish cultural values. Moreover, his attitude towards racial prejudices also shows a different nuance. If criollos saw themselves as guardians of the moral and economic practices of the lower "colored" classes in order to preserve the order and identity of the nation, Arístides sees the black workers as an economic liability for the mill. Even when he suspects that some might be his own half-brothers, he does not feel any sense of attachment or responsibility, so he gets rid of them to be replaced by machinery:

I ordered many of our cane laborers, who I suspected were illegitimate sons of our father, to be fired unceremoniously. They were easy to recognize because they all looked vaguely like him, except duskier in skin and sullen in countenance, because of their hawk-bridged noses, raging bull's necks, and barrel chests. In this way I freed the company of a number of unnecessary expenses, as Father had always insisted on clandestinely taking care of their families, and cut the risks of claim to our inheritance down to a minimum.⁴⁷

In this aspect, Arístides's voice satirizes Don Hermenegildo's discourse of national identity and challenges the old criollo order that helped sustain a highly hierarchized society based on old

⁴⁵ Ferré 40.

⁴⁶ Ferré 39.

⁴⁷ Ferré 43.

Spanish fantasies of blood purity. The mark of social distinction for Arístides is money, and his notion of “heroism” has more to do with being a successful businessman than with national and political aspirations. Thus, Arístides’ interest in telling his version of the story is driven by resentment towards his family. He thinks that they have failed to understand that the United States’ cultural and economic system is the only possibility for the island to progress, and therefore he is the only son capable of running the mill successfully, for he has adapted to the American way of life.

However, Arístides’ more effective challenge to Don Hermenegildo’s official narrative of national heroism and harmony comes with the introduction of Gloria. She is indeed the center of the family battle and the character that motivates the collision of the different family interests and stories. Ironically, she is a mulatto. That is, in the official discourse of mestizaje represented by Don Hermenegildo’s story, mulattos embodied the lack of prejudice and racial harmony that the Caribbean islands enjoy.⁴⁸ However, Gloria represents in *Maldito amor* exactly the opposite. Her character is built through contradictory and opposing perspectives that change over time according to personal interests. Thus, far from being a symbol of harmony, Gloria’s different characterizations are the result of the variety of different perspectives, traditions, interests, and ideologies represented by every member of the family. For Don Hermenegildo, Gloria is merely a rumor. For Titina, Gloria is the only legitimate heir. Arístides, on the other hand, changes her image according to his personal and sexual interests. In the beginning, she is highly sexualized as “one of those mulatto beauties who are used to stopping traffic.” But as their sexual liaison fades, he forbids her to sit at the table with the rest of the family for belonging to the “improper

⁴⁸ According to Arcadio Díaz Quiñones in the official discourse mestizaje is the best way to prove the lack of racial prejudice in the island, and indeed the mulatto becomes the embodiment of national reconciliation and peaceful racial coexistence. “Para el discurso dominante, el mestizaje es la mejor prueba de la ausencia del prejuicio racial. El mulato encarnaría, según la formulación más generalizada, la reconciliación y la convivencia.” Díaz Quiñones 63.

gentry.” Morally, she is also transformed from a submissive lover, “eager to please me [Aristides] in every way” to an “ambitious hussy” who needs to be left out of the will.⁴⁹

Rosario Ferré has privileged a gender over a racial analysis of Gloria’s character.⁵⁰ She points out in “Sobre el amor y la política” that the political situation of the island parallels the condition of women under a patriarchal system. There is always going to be a battle between what women are and the image and roles that the family imposes on them. Similarly, in *Maldito amor* colonialist projects are akin to gender colonialism since women, like the colony, are required to live a fragmented life dependent on the patriarchal/colonial order.⁵¹ While it is true that Gloria’s fragmented image is the result of gender and sexual objectification, race is also a factor. In fact, as early as 1492, the diaries of Columbus, Margarita Zamora argues, already represented America as “a conceptual model of otherness” in which inscriptions of race and gender were attributed to its native inhabitants to serve the project of colonialism.⁵² Thus, the non-white woman was made to symbolize the continent itself and so rendered insistently *open* to union, willingly or not, with the old world.⁵³ It follows that in *Maldito amor*, Aristides’ desire to

⁴⁹ Ferré 41, 78, 41, 35.

⁵⁰ See Lourdes Martínez Echazábal, “Maldito Amor: Hacia una nueva hermenéutica de la historia” *La Torre* 3.11(July-September1989): 493-503. Also, Julio Ortega “Rosario Ferré y la voz transgresiva” *Reapropiaciones: Cultura y nueva escritura en Puerto Rico*, Ed. Julio Ortega (Rio Piedras: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1991) and Carmen I. Pérez Marín, “De la épica a la novela: La recuperación de la voz en *Maldito amor* de Rosario Ferré” *Letras Femeninas* XX 1.2 (1994): 35-43.

⁵¹ “... en *Maldito amor* el colonialismo de estado se encuentra emparentado a lo que podría llamarse el colonialismo de la mujer, que vive una vida fragmentada y dependiente del order patriarchal.” Rosario Ferré “Sobre el amor y la política” *El coloquio de las perras*, Ed. Rosario Ferré (Rio Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1990) 109.

⁵² Margarita Zamora, *Reading Columbus* (Los Angeles: University of California P, 1993)157. Also see Rebecca Faery, *Cartographies of Desire. Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999)

⁵³ One of the most famous representations of America as a non-white woman is Theodor Galle’s engraving after a drawing by Jan van der Straet dated in 1575. In it, Amerigo Vespucci is represented meeting America embodied as a nude exuberant woman seemingly receptive to a sexual encounter with him. For a discussion of the engraving see Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) xxv-xxvi and Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and The Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Routledge, 1986) 1-2.

uncover and possess Gloria's mulatto body parallels the colonial desire to explore, seize, and control the American land. Moreover, her presumed absolute control of the future of the plantation prompts every member of the family to appropriate her image to suit individual interests and social ideologies. Therefore, Gloria's fragmented representation is the result of the battle for power among the variety of fractions and interests to possess and control the land. As Gloria becomes more powerful, she is also more dangerous, and her image deteriorates from being sexually compliant to threatening. At which point, Aristides degrades her as a "scheming, ambitious hussy."⁵⁴

Similarly, colonial projects geared towards controlling the identity and thus the power over colonial subjects always insisted on the differences between themselves and their "negative others."⁵⁵ That is, while natives were beautiful, they were also "morally deficient," and therefore inferior.⁵⁶ Gloria's representation echoes in *Maldito amor* the history of appropriation and interpretation of the "racial other" under the dominance of the colonial white. Her *mulatez* as a symbol of the cultural and racial diversity of America, and particularly the Caribbean, constitutes a positive sign as long as it stays fixed. Gloria's mestizaje is desirable when, and only when, it signifies that *lo americano* might be racially diverse but unified and coherent under the moral guidance of old and new colonial ideologies still based on the racial and cultural superiority of purity. In contrast, her mestizaje becomes threatening when it is appropriated by others to signify multiplicity, variety, and friction. When it becomes the sign of uncertainty, it becomes difficult

⁵⁴ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 35.

⁵⁵ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg "Subject Female: Authorizing American Identity" *American Literary History* 5.3 (Fall 1993): 485.

⁵⁶ Zamora 162-167. Also see the parallel discussion about the history of the mestizos under Spanish rule in this chapter, pages 18-25. Amerigo Vespucci also makes reference to the lack of morality and excessive licentiousness of native women in his famous letter dated in 1503. For a modern example of this kind of discourse see Octavio Paz and his discussion of La Malinche in *El laberinto de soledad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981) 90-91.

to control. Thus, Don Hermenegildo's story glosses over, ignores, and silences her. Titina, on the other hand, considers her an ally from a racial and class standpoint, forcing Don Hermenegildo to acknowledge Gloria as an integral part of the De la Valle family. Yet, for Arístides, Gloria's threat lies in her ability to change the identity of the mill. That is, while he favors the Americans as legitimate owners of the plantation since their business and social contact with the criollos had kept the plantations in the hands of pure-blood families, he opposes his mother's decision to leave the mill to Gloria for she is a black woman. That is why he triumphantly proclaims that, "[in] this way no De la Valle will ever marry a Black woman again." His bigger concern, nonetheless, is his family honor. "No sir," Arístides assures Don Hermenegildo, "we won't let her loose her pack of lies upon the town, trying her best to ruin us, to throw her insults at us."⁵⁷ Gloria's story would tarnish the family's reputation and expose their "questionable" origins and affairs, shattering completely Don Hermenegildo's epic and Arístides' future as a new criollo landowner under the auspices of North American capital.⁵⁸ Thus, Gloria's knowledge and voice become a threat to the myth of racial harmony and paradise that both Don Hermenegildo and Arístides, as members of the old and new oligarchy of the island, are interested in preserving, the former for national and the latter for economic reasons. But Gloria can no longer be muzzled. That is, her image cannot be controlled by a discourse that fixes her as a sexualized symbol of the racial amalgamation and cultural mestizaje of the land geared to the formation and consolidation of nationhood. On the contrary, at this point in the novel, Gloria's voice is threatening to appear. Indeed, Gloria's potential to represent herself, to tell her own story, defies

⁵⁷ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 79, 35.

⁵⁸ In the 1930's and 40's the new criollo oligarchy had formed a coalition with North-American banks and investing firms serving as their liaison in the island to continue the exploitation of lower classes that worked at minimum salaries and with no protections in the same plantations that had worked under Spanish rule and the old criollo system. See Rubén del Rosario, *Ser puertorriqueño y otros ensayos* (Puerto Rico: Centro Gráfico del Carmen, 1989) 84.

the deceptive and incomplete narrative of *mestizaje* as a base for national identity and economic progress.

However, Gloria does not speak immediately in *Maldito amor*. Before her narrative, yet another voice surfaces, adding a new dimension to the story. Laura, the De la Valle's matriarch, takes the stage, realizing Don Hermenegildo and Arístides' biggest fears: the complete demystification of the family's honor by denouncing their less than pure origins. Laura de la Valle is Ubaldino's wife, but unlike the rest of the family, she does not belong to the old criollo oligarchy of Puerto Rico. She is the daughter of an Italian immigrant who settled in the mountains of the interior of the island. Laura's foreign origins prompt her to tolerate the Americans, although she utterly detests the servile attitude that young criollos, like her son, Arístides, have adopted towards the newcomers. However, her story is driven by something else. "My last name" she reports to Don Hermenegildo,

wasn't patrician enough for a De la Valle ... Doña Elvira and Doña Estefana [Ubaldino's aunts and surrogate mothers] were always very conscious of what they called the privileges of their caste. They would have preferred a Cáceres or an Acuña, with a coat of arms sparkling on her little finger, but they have to make due with plain Laura Latoni as consort for their prince.⁵⁹

Laura's account of the family history condemns the discriminatory and racist ideology of the De la Valles, whose obsession with blood purity leads them to proclaim their parentage with the daughters of El Cid.⁶⁰ Indeed, her narrative disparages the pretentiousness of the upper classes of

⁵⁹ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 66, 69.

⁶⁰ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 70. Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, known as El Cid Campeador, was a Castilian nobleman, a military leader and diplomat who, after being exiled, conquered and governed the city of Valencia. Rodrigo Díaz was educated in the royal court of Castile and became *alférez*, or chief general, of Alfonso VI, and his most valuable asset in the fight against the Moors. He is considered the national epic hero of Spain.

the island towards those of black or non-Castilian origins. For this reason, Laura creates a sympathetic portrayal of Gloria on account of her race and class. At the same time, Laura contradicts Arístides' story by stating that Gloria's modest means had helped her get "a good head on her shoulders," adding that they "became good friends" since they both laughed at the "fops" of Guamaní's society. Moreover, Laura is indebted to Gloria for having revealed to her the ultimate secret of the family, which Laura discloses with pleasure to Don Hermenegildo:

So that had been the secret, the unmentionable mystery that had made the aunts send their niece to live in the country when she married Don Julio ... The refined Doña Elvira, educated in Paris amid silk cushions, had married a black man! ... As a close friend of Ubaldino you'll probably hate me for mentioning it, for spelling out in all the letters of that alphabet that death will soon root out from my tongue the fact that his father, Don Julio Font, was a black man. But such is, after all, the role of death: she evens us out at the last, and forces us to admit that we are all born equal innocent of race and caste. In this country the splendors of nobility and purity of lineage are no more than a fool's frippery, roisterings from a jester's cap.⁶¹

Laura's empathy for Gloria, then, is based on an ideology that censures the role that race and origin have played in establishing class differences throughout the history of the inland. Thus, her controversial decision to give the plantation to Gloria and her son, Nicolasito, upon her death, ignoring her own children's claims, is meant to vindicate the low castes against the alienation and exclusion from the land that they had suffered at the hands of the hacendados.

Furthermore, Laura's concerns about the rights of the lower classes have a transnational dimension, especially in the English version of novel. Laura foresees a future where the land itself won't be as important as the port of the island, since the latter would serve to unite the

⁶¹ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 74.

northen with the southern part of the continent. English and Spanish, according to her vision, would merge, and “change” would become the identity of Puerto Ricans, a nation in a continuous back and forth between the mainland and the island.⁶² She concludes,

Through a chink in our tropical moss the North will talk to the South and the South will talk to the North, and one day they will finally understand each other. And so I have instructed Gloria to sell our land progressively, piece by piece, to aid those who have already begun to emigrate to the mainland by the thousands, fleeing from the hell of the sugar plantation, to lend the honest effort of their arms and legs to other harvests more generously repaid; as well as to those who will undoubtedly return, perhaps after spending half their lives reaping California grapes, or driving a taxi through the cement jungle of New York, but with enough money in their pockets to buy a piece of their lost paradise back.⁶³

Migrants become part of Laura’s discourse since they are forced to leave their land due to the restrictions that both colonizing powers, Spain and later the United States, imposed on their ability to own it. Thus, the old discriminatory ideology of blood purity that Laura so much detests is linked in her narrative to a present moment of migration and deterritorialization of identity. While the island oligarchy, represented in the novel by Don Hermenegildo and Arístides, intended to keep the land in the hands of a few criollos and sought to preserve their strong national identity based on traditions of racial purity and Spanish heritage, Laura wants to sell the land “piece by piece” to those other Puerto Ricans who never really had access to it due to their race and/or class. In this way, the national territory would belong to a variety of

⁶² For an extensive discussion of Puerto Rican identity as a nation in flux see Jorge Duany “Nation on the Move: The Construction of Cultural Identities in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora” *American Ethnologist* 27.1 (Feb 2000): 5-30.

⁶³ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 76-77. There is no direct referent of this passage in the Spanish edition of the novel.

individuals not only with different racial backgrounds, but also with different experiences of migration. Her vision for Puerto Rico, then, is aligned with a modern paradigm of transnational identifications that reconfigures the idea of “paradise” under the liberal ideology of multiculturalism.⁶⁴ Laura desires that multiple cultural and racial divisions, for the sake of diversity, replace the cultural and economic monopoly exercised by criollos, thus putting an end to the history of colonialism and ideologies of purity on the Caribbean.

Moreover, besides her multicultural reverie, Laura’s discourse is infused with a distinct feminist tone. Laura painfully relates her version of the family story to Hermenegildo, with little hope that he would understand her position. She asserts:

You’ll never be able to understand the reason, Don Hermenegildo, because in order to do so you’d have to be a woman and you’re a man, and men are always so painfully unaware of the differences between us ... Death is a woman, and for that reason she’s courageous and just, and never makes distinctions between mortals.⁶⁵

Laura’s sense of justice and faith in a multicultural future for the island rests in a heightened gender awareness, which ultimately seals her alliance with Gloria across racial and class lines. However, Gloria’s body—her gender, race, and class signification—still determines Gloria’s role in Laura’s feminist discourse. In other words, Gloria and her mulatez do not cease being a symbol of racial harmony in the Caribbean, according to Laura’s narrative. That is, if the masculine discourse sexualized the body of the native woman as a sign of receptiveness to colonization, and later dismissed her excessive licentiousness as a sign of otherness, Laura’s feminist discourse responds with a narrative that erases the negativity of Gloria’s sexuality in

⁶⁴ For a collection of scholarly articles examining the concept of “multiculturalism” see, David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Multiculturalism. A Critical Reader* (Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1994).

⁶⁵ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 64.

order to read in “her” lack of sexual prejudice a hybrid future for the world. Thus, in Gloria’s body, or as Laura specifies,

... in her cunt, both races, both languages, English and Spanish grew into one soul into one wordweed of love. She is the priestess of our harbor; Pythia of our island future; of a time when a scanty, meager land that for centuries had condemned us to immobility and backwardness will ultimately have no importance and where our souls, our very lives will be determined by transformation and daring, in other words, by change.⁶⁶

Indeed, Laura sees Gloria as Pythia, a powerful, sexually liberated, independent woman who embodies the future of the Caribbean. There is no doubt that her discourse is well intended, but she still essentializes and reduces Gloria to a symbol that fulfills her own desires. Gloria becomes a sign for the multicultural, hybrid, and feminist model that Laura envisions. Thus, Laura’s narrative may be a tolerant one, in which issues concerning the so-called “subalterns”—women, migrants, and lower classes—are addressed. In fact, she is extremely successful at defying the complete authority of previous stories as told by Don Hermenegildo and Arístides, bringing attention to their lack of empathy for others and their patriarchal design. However, Laura’s discourse does not allow Gloria to speak or act on her own account, but according to the ideological prescriptions Laura’s feminist and multicultural agenda.

3.4 Gloria’s Voice and Heteroglossia: The Spanish Caribbean as a Site of Conflict

“I knew it, Titina” Gloria finally says, reprimanding Titina for her gullibility. “I told you so a hundred times, how stupid of you to believe in them, to insist on being faithful to the family ...”⁶⁷ At last, the novel concludes with Gloria’s voice. Yet, her words are not like those of the

⁶⁶ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 76.

⁶⁷ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 81.

other characters. They clearly break with the paradigm of ideological discourses that dominates the first seven chapters of the novel. First, she does not talk directly to Don Hermenegildo, as the rest of the characters do. Indeed, her only audience is Titina. Therefore, she does not participate in the confrontation of voices that has dominated the narrative space of the novel until this point. Second, her narrative does not tell a new version of the family history. Thus, she does not offer another claim to the truth. Instead, Gloria is conscious of the narrative process that created the different discourses and representations of her persona. In so doing, she recognizes the partiality and incompleteness of the other voices, while rejecting their assertion of truth. “Don Hermenegildo” she declares “will never be able to finish his novel. He is probably ... inventing new lies, new ways of twisting around the story he heard from the lips of the protagonists of this tasteless melodrama.”⁶⁸ *Maldito amor*, then, is not an example of the postmodern world as some critics, following Linda Hutcheon’s study, have argued. The disintegration of a central Truth does not give way to many peripheral ones in the novel.⁶⁹ Gloria’s voice only manifests the limitations and incompleteness of the other voices. In addition, she emphasizes that the superposition of different narratives does not lead to the truth, either. That is why she does not offer her own version of the family’s story. In its place, she let confusion, conflict and division reign over the coherence of an additional narrative geared towards totality as the ones already offered by Don Hermenegildo, Arístides, and Laura. In fact, to articulate another discourse is to enter the ideological battle sustained by the rest of the characters and submit to the shortcomings of absolute narratives. Gloria, as Don Hermenegildo reports,

⁶⁸ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 82.

⁶⁹ See Susan Divine, “La Meta-historia de Puerto Rico en *Maldito amor* de Rosario Ferré” *Divergencias. Revista de estudios lingüísticos y literarios* 2.2 (Autumn 2004): 79. Also see Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002) 95.

didn't say a word [after Laura's death]. She slid her hand brazenly under the lace pillowcases and took out Laura's will from under them. Then she slowly, deliberately tore it in half and threw it into the wastepaper basket, before walking out of the room without looking back.⁷⁰

Clearly, Gloria's voice is not marginal nor does it aspire to take a central position. Rather, her narrative detaches itself from the multiplicity of discourses to transcend them, achieving its own autonomy and integrity outside the framework of heretoglossia. Thus, in Bakhtinian terms, hers is a hybrid voice, arising from and out of the confrontation of opposing discourses, but free from the limitations and boundaries that their totality demands. In other words, Gloria achieves an external perspective as a result of "a multi-language consciousness."⁷¹ As Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat asserts, echoing Bakhtin himself, Gloria's voice was "already implicit in the other voices."⁷² That is, the intrinsic partiality and contingency of a discourse that competes to gain power beget other narratives that, in turn, rely on their predecessors to construct their own authority. Don Hermenegildo, Aristides and Laura's discourses depend on each other to exist since it is their constant competition to gain authority over each other that motivates their formation, but it also makes them "suspect" of their "partial positions."⁷³ Due to Gloria's potential to counter what has been said, her narrative is the product of that contingency, as well. However, her voice, unlike the others, is sensitive to the mutual dependence inherent in all discourses, including her own. As if the other stories were narrative mirrors, Gloria is conscious

⁷⁰ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 80.

⁷¹ First characteristic of the novel according to Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 11.

⁷² Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, "La "Loca del desván" y otros intertextos de *Maldito amor*" *MLN* 109.2 (March 1994): 292. According to Bakhtin, the presence of the other person's word defines the concept of the dialogical word, where the intention of the one speaker is penetrated by that of the other, yielding "an intersection of two consciousness." Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 289.

⁷³ Lois Parkinson Zamora also makes reference to this point in "The Usable Past: The Idea of History in Modern U.S. and Latin American Fiction," *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* Ed. Gustavo Pérez Firmat (Durham: Duke UP, 1990) 208.

of her various and refracted representations. In that sense, she looks from the outside. That is, she does not partake in the battle of monologic discourses because her ability to recognize the multiplicity of voices that construct her narrative, her “multi-language consciousness,” allows her to break with the bonds that any narrative of absolute authority may impose on her. Moreover, Gloria’s freedom, her detachment from monologic discourses, helps to relativize the rest of the narratives, to show their shortcomings, and to reveal their ideological basis—their partiality and contingency. It is this “interillumination” of languages, using Bakhtinian terminology, once again, that prompts the destruction of absolute discourses.⁷⁴ Accordingly, Gloria exclaims to Titina in the English version of the novel,

Facts have a strange way of facing down fiction, Titina, and if Don Hermenegildo’s aborted novel was to have been a series of stories that contradicted one another like a row of falling dominoes, our story, the one we’ve taken the authority to write, will eradicate them all, because it will be the only one in which word and deed will finally be loyal to each other, in which a true correspondence between them will finally be established.⁷⁵

Indeed, Gloria’s words are destructive. Don Hermenegildo, Arístides and Laura’s competing and unitary truths implode, literally and figuratively, as a result of the exposure. Thus, Gloria’s story, as she herself points out, is unique since it is the only one with the capacity to obliterate monologic narratives in favor of a more dialogized heteroglossia. Hence, the novel’s apocalyptic ending acquires meaning. Gloria rejects the will and steps out of the plantation to see it burn in the fire she herself has lighted with Titina’s help. Fire functions at the end of the novel as a metaphor of destruction, but more importantly of purification. Etymologically, “apocalypse,” from the ancient Greek, *αποκάλυψις*, means “revelation,” “to uncover,” “to

⁷⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 17.

⁷⁵ Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust* 82.

disclose.”⁷⁶ Gloria’s narrative does not offer the Truth, since the accumulation of testimonies, as it has been mentioned, does not necessarily grant a better access to the “real” story. Yet, what she does “reveal” is the way in which people lie. That is, she shows how social and historical conditions inevitably shape the stories being told. In turn, these stories impact the formation and transformation of identities. Therefore, the fire not only uncovers “the monologic language of the powerful as an illusion” or a lie, but it also destroys and purifies the narratives of pure genealogical lines that had legitimized authority since the beginning of the Christian unification of power in the Peninsula up to the moment of national consolidation of the territories colonized under the Spanish empire.⁷⁷ Then, the ending, although violent, is open. The fire clears the way for a future in which a more realistic representation of the people of the island will be rendered. However, the end is also circular, as many other apocalyptic narratives are in the twentieth century.⁷⁸ Gloria’s story, the one she has “taken the authority to write,” is the novel as a whole, and as such, already contains the voices of the different social groups of the island and their eternal—past, present, and future—confrontation.

In other words, *Sweet Diamond Dust* is a metanarrative. It dismantles the discourse of mestizaje used by the Spanish empire and later by criollos who sought to establish a collective consciousness as the only viable way to construct the Latin American nation. Simultaneously, the novel already reflects the fragmentation and diversification of voices in discord as a more adequate representation of reality. Beatriz Urrea agrees. Ferré’s characters show “a conflictive

⁷⁶ "Apocalypse." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. 1996. *Encyclopedia.com*. <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

⁷⁷ Finke has called this practice “dialogic criticism.” See Laurie A. Finke, *Feminist Theory, Women’s Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992)17.

⁷⁸ Notably García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. For a study of the circularity and the use of apocalypse as a literary trope in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, see Michael Palencia Roth, *Gabriel García Márquez, La línea, el círculo y las metamorfosis del mito* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983) 112-128.

pursuit” of Puerto Rican identity that gets “projected to the level of the nation.”⁷⁹ In that sense, Rosario Ferré offers what I would call a “novelization of identity,” understanding “novelization” in Bakhtinian terms. Then, hybridity is constituted (by a subject) as an open-ended narrative, in constant development, multi-linguaged, and consciously self-produced out of heteroglossia and polyphony. More importantly, it is never harmonious.⁸⁰ Thus, Rosario Ferré aligns with Latin American scholars like Cornejo Polar who conceive national identities as multiple, conflictive, and contradictory, instead of coherent and complete.⁸¹ Hence, they argue for a hybrid identity, rather than a mestizo one, since the latter is created by absolute narratives of identification under the impositions of empire and nationhood. That is why the last lines of the novel underscore “memory” and “remembering” as crucial elements to develop a hybrid consciousness, and add to it its last characteristic: its circularity. Taken from a dance by Juan Morel Campos, Gloria sings at the end of the novel,

Your love is a bird which has found its voice

Your love has finally nested in my heart;

Now I know why it burns

When I remember you.⁸²

Remembering the historical and social circumstances that create monologic narratives facilitates the detachment of the hybrid voice from the absolutism of national identifications. As Ernest Renan claims, “forgetting, I would even go so far to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the

⁷⁹ Beatriz Urrea, “El cuerpo femenino: Identidad(es) problematizada(s) en dos cuentos de Rosario Ferré” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 22.43-44 (1996): 280.

⁸⁰ Bakhtin affirms that, “the novel gets on poorly with other genres. There can be not talk of a harmony deriving from mutual limitation and complementariness” *The Dialogic Imagination*, 5.

⁸¹ See note 290

⁸² Ferré, *Sweet Diamond Dust*, 85. There are other references to remembering and forgetting in pages 83 and 84.

creation of a nation.”⁸³ “Now I know why,” “ya sé por qué” in the Spanish version, points out to the appearance of a historical consciousness that allows to relativize and transgress the hermetic self that discourses of mestizaje vis-à-vis racial purity endorse. Indeed, Ferré insists that fiction lies sometimes simply to lie and that the revisionary task is to resurrect the ghosts in order to expose lies as the basis for the construction of national identity.⁸⁴ On the same note, Mignolo and Américo Castro reminded us to be historically aware and cautious of de-historicized narratives of collective identification as in the case of mestizaje because, in Ferré’s own words, “all they tell is gossip, lies, shameless slander; however, it’s all true.”⁸⁵ In light of this genealogy of mestizaje, Rosario Ferré’s novel *Maldito amor* challenges the notion that it is possible to find a unified national character, an essence, in Spanish America. Mestizaje is a “lie.” As a totalizing, monologic discourse geared to promote a homogeneity that does not exist, mestizaje has *truly* silenced the voices of those deemed as Other. *Maldito amor* emphasizes, instead, the multiple stories of the diverse and conflicting social, gender, racial and class communities of the Caribbean. In other words, Ferré underscores the conflicts that the rhetoric of mestizaje had traditionally diffused. Polyphony replaces mestizaje, and Bakhtinian hybridity becomes a more appropriate theory to understand the “profound and disturbing conflictiveness” of Spanish America.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ernest Renan “What is a Nation?” *Nation and Narration*, Ed. Homi Bahbha (New York: Routledge, 1990) 11.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Gutiérrez Mouat 287.

⁸⁵ My own translation from the “Preface” of the Spanish edition of Ferré, *Maldito amor* 14.

⁸⁶ Cornejo Polar, “Mestizaje, Transculturation, Heterogeneity” 119.

CHAPTER 4

THE ART OF THE HYBRID CONSCIOUSNESS:

Maryse Condé's *Tituba*

4.1. Creoleness: Subverting the Old vs. New World Binarism

In a letter dated on April 2nd, 1567, García de Castro gives the first account of the word “creole.” He says: “Because Spaniards have left behind many children, this land is full of criollos, those who have been born here, and they have not known a king, nor they ever think they will.”¹

Some years later, El Inca Garcilaso explains:

Creole is a name that black slaves invented It means, among Black slaves, to be born in the Indies; they invented it in order to establish differences between those who come from here, born in Guinea, and those who are born there [America].²

These two different meanings of “creole” explain the confusion that the term still generates in the Americas, especially in the Caribbean region.³ Its root comes from the Latin verb “creare”—to give life, to create, to rear, to breed. Therefore, regardless of race, ethnicity, or status, “creole” came to describe individuals born and reared in the New World with strong ties to their parent’s country of origin, whether it was Europe or Africa. The conflict between the Old and the New

¹ José Pérez, *Esprit Créole et conscience nationale* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980) 15. “...porque los Españoles ...an dexado muchos hijos por manera que esta tierra está llena de criollos que son estos que acá an nacido, y como nunca an conocido al rrey ni esperan conocello.” My translation.

² Quoted in Joan Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana* (Bern: Francke, 1954), 943. The source dates from 1602. “[Creole] es nombre que inventaron los negros ... Quiere decir entre los negros, nacido en Indias; inventáronlo para diferenciar los que van de acá [East side of the Atlantic], nascidos en Guinea, de los que nascen allá [America].” My Translation.

³ Almost every etymological entry of the word “créole,” in French, “criollo” in Spanish, and “crioulo” in Portuguese agrees that the word originates from the Portuguese referring to the slaves already born in the American continent. However, the meaning of the term was extended to include children of Europeans born in the Americas. See Corominas 943-944.

World conveyed in the term “creole” explains the interest that discourses about cultural hybridity in the French Caribbean have generated. El Inca Garcilaso continues his explanation of the term characterizing the nature of the relationship between New and Old World people:

Those who are born in Africa think that they are better people and of better quality for having been born in their country, but these parents get offended if people call their children criollos, for having been born in a foreign land.⁴

Thus, creole, far from carrying a denotative reference to origin, expressed the tension between the culture of ancestors born in the Old World and the new generation of individuals born in a new place of residence, the Americas. The New World was considered a false and foreign source of cultural identity for being the site of encounter among numerous other cultures. Garcilaso’s account not only confirms the long history of cultural transference that has taken place in the Americas, but also shows the anxiety over the term “creole” for suggesting the lack of quality, authenticity, and value of those individuals exposed to a new territory in which numerous cultures converged. Instead, a single place of origin in the Old World was preferred as a symbol of superior worth over the “diluted” cultural identity that America offered to those who were born in the “New Land.”

The tension between the Old World as authentic while the multiplicity of cultural influences in the New World was scorned has continued being a source of debate and conflict. Those born in the Americas had to overcome the inferiority that the history and ideology of colonialism imposed on them. As a result, discourses meant to rehabilitate diversity and cultural syncretism, against purity and uniformity have proliferated in the academic world. Creoleness and the process by which one experiences such identification—creolization—have been at the

⁴ Corominas 943. “...[those who were born in Africa] se tienen por más honrados y de más calidad por haber nacido en su patria, que no sus hijos, porque nacieron en la ajena, y los padres se ofenden si les llaman criollos.” My translation.

center of the discussion about New World identities. As already indicated in Chapter One, at the head of this discussion French West Indian intellectual such as Glissant, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant sought to describe the process of transformation that affected people's ontology in the colonized areas. Their quest is informed by a desire to valorize and affirm their syncretism and thus to participate in the process of articulating a Caribbean identity. Creoleness, in this sense, still stresses the difference between the original colonists, who valued single origin and purity, and the colonized, who came to represent diversity. Indeed as Ulrich Fleischmann explains, the term creole fails short of purging,

the deeply rooted anxieties which appear when ethnic or racial 'mixing' is at stake.

Everything that is termed 'creole'—people, cultures, languages—relates to an everlasting memory of old sins: the contact with the 'Other' that destroyed aboriginal innocence

...Being Creole recalls those first encounters that became transgressions of a divine order. They result in ontological evil: pollution of the pure, disorder, treachery, infertility, and death—forms of 'disorder'...⁵

Creoleness, as theorized by Glissant and later by the Creolists, is not analogous, then, to Maryse Condé's notion of hybridity. Ultimately, creoleness re-organizes the disorder around a community and a land whose essence is established through diversity and multiculturalism as the collective sensibility of Caribbean people.⁶ In that sense, creoleness is, at best, an ambivalent theory that valorizes mixture while creating a cultural nationalism to face exterior forces. It marks borders of exclusion and reproduces the binaries: Creole vs. non-Creole, diverse vs. homogeneous. Like the false multicultural liberalism that proclaimed the end of the binaries a

⁵ Ulrich Fleischmann, "The Sociocultural and Linguistic Profile of a Concept," *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean*, Ed. Gordon Collier & Ulrich Fleischmann (New York: Rodopi, 2003) xix-xx.

⁶ Léon-François Hoffmann, "Creolization in Haiti and National Identity" *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures*, 5.

little too soon, creoleness celebrates its difference from an essentialist and dual standpoint.⁷ “Diversity” becomes the marker of exclusion and it is dialectically opposed to an imagined homogeneity in the “other.” Thus, creoleness is not synonymous with hybrid consciousness, but rather another monologic narrative of cultural identification with reductive and prescriptive norms. As such, it requires the individual to be a member of a collectivity. It demands the expression of his/her diversity. It territorializes itself in the Caribbean land while it asserts its historical roots in the plantation system. If we understand cultural nationalism in Said’s words as “an assertion of belonging,”⁸ Creoles can measure their authenticity by the depth and the density of their diversity, their attachment to the Caribbean land, and the constant resistance to the “other.” In this manner, creoleness reproduces the colonizer’s rhetoric of exclusion and alienation by privileging a geographical, political, and cultural agenda to construct a national ethos—the one true self of the Caribbean people: their diversity.

Identifying with creoleness means to fossilize “hybridity” as an object of Caribbean representation directly opposed to Western homogeneity. So, creoleness, in Maryse Condé’s work is not an adequate theory to understand a hybrid consciousness. Indeed, it fails to provide a radical critique of the rhetoric of cultural roots and belonging that has characterized the conceptions of identity conceived by colonizing projects. As Dirks affirms, “colonialism is what culture is all about.”⁹ Creoleness creates a conception of cultural identity in the Caribbean that assigns common roots, a single belonging, and an essence to a whole community. As a result, the

⁷ Multicultural liberalism as a cultural trend euphorically proclaims the end of discrimination and the beginning of an era of tolerance in which people are included into the national ethos despite of cultural, racial, or ethnic, differences. For a critique of multiculturalism see, E. San Juan, Jr., “The Cult of Ethnicity and the Fetish of Pluralism: A Counter hegemonic Critique,” *Cultural Critique* 18 (Spring 1991): 215-229.

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2000) 176.

⁹ Dirks 6.

Creolists motto, “unity in diversity”¹⁰ reduces the concept of “diversity” to an “ideologeme”¹¹ that provides homogeneity to the Caribbean people in the most typical colonizing style. In sum, even though West Indian intellectuals tried to dismantle universal narratives of oppression, their quest reaffirmed the notions of origin, race, culture, and collective consciousness that had helped built “the master’s house.”¹²

4.2 Movement, Change, and the Freedom of Being an Individual

Maryse Condé’s understanding of hybridity as a form of identification is far more fluid and subtle than the Creolists’ explanation of creoleness. They ultimately congeal individual reality into a collective and fixed category. Condé rejects any definition of hybridity that ignores the complexity of the human identity at the individual level. Reducing and simplifying the individual to a collective, all-encompassing rhetoric means to give in to the tyranny of authoritative discourses—to monologic narratives. Thus, she is directly opposed to manifestos of identity such as *Éloge a la Creolité* for adding cultural labels and reifying the myth of separateness among “Americans,” “Caribbeans,” “Creoles” “Europeans” “Argentinians” etc.¹³ Instead, Maryse Condé seeks to reveal the impossibility of categorizations by making the

¹⁰ “Diversité au sein de l’unité” quoted in Derek O’Regan, *Postcolonial Echoes and Evocations. The Intertextual Appeal of Maryse Condé* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006) 184. Also quoted as “unity within diversity” in Moudileno 240.

¹¹ The concept of the ideologeme was originally introduced by Bakhtin in his early writing on novelistic discourse, and later appropriated by Kristeva and Frederic Jameson among others. I use it here in the Bakhtinian sense: “an inseparable element of the unified ideological horizon of the social group.” See M.M. Bakhtin and P.M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1985) 21. Also see, Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1980).

¹² Audre Lorde captures this problem by stating that “the master’s tools can never dismantle the master’s house.” See Audre Lorde, *Zami, Sister Outsider, Undersong* (New York: Quality Paper Back Book Club, 1993) 110-13.

¹³ See Bernabé et al.90-92.

individual the focal point. This technique reveals that there is no definite truth commensurate to all, challenging any attempt to categorize humanity. In response to *Éloge* and to the fixity of its proposal, Maryse Condé responds:

The literature of our late Twentieth Century ignores these changes, these mutations and the re-definitions of identity. In the meantime, the Creolist conveniently forget and defend a definition of the Caribbean that is worthy of the time when Creole Lady Nugent visited Jamaica (around 1839). Paradoxically, to convince themselves of the 'authenticity' of the image of their homeland still in their writings, they pride themselves for being successful within the literary circles of the Hexagon, always looking for new exoticisms. 'The interactional or transactional aggregate', which, as everyone acknowledges, is the basis of Caribbean cultural phenomenon is not as lava solidified on the flank of a volcano. It is a constant magma ... The Caribbean writer is not more native-born and therefore more Creole if he is understood in the context of the Eighteenth Century ... and *In Praise of the Creoleness*. Are there not multiple versions of Antillanité? New meanings of creoleness?¹⁴

Thus, Condé challenges all essentializing notions of identity that demand authenticity. For her, practicing hybridity means to resist fixed paradigms of identity whether they are the product of

¹⁴ Maryse Condé, "Chercher nos vérités" *Penser la Créolité*, Ed. Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Karthala, 1995) 308, 310. "La littérature de notre fin de XX siècle ne tient aucun compte de ces bouleversements, de ces mutations et de ces redéfinitions d'identité* ... Néanmoins, ils [Creolists] l'oublie commodément et défendent une définition de l'Antillais, de l'être créole digne du temps où Lady Nugent visitait la Jamaïque (autour de 1839). Paradoxalement, pour se convaincre de 'l'authenticité' de l'image de leur pays natal continue dans leurs écrits, ils s'enorgueillissent de faire recette dans les milieux littéraires de l'Hexagone, toujours à la recherche de nouveaux exotismes. 'L'agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel' qui, chacun le reconnaît, est à la base du phénomène culturel antillais n'est pas solidifié comme une lave au flanc d'un volcan. C'est un constant magma ... L'écrivain antillais n'est plus natif-natal et donc n'est plus créole au sens où on l'entendait au XVIIIe siècle ... et dans l'Éloge de la créolité. N'y a-t-il pas des versions multiples de l'antillanité ? Des acceptations nouvelles de la créolité?" My translation.

colonial legacy or the prescription imposed by the Antillean intelligentsia. They both fail to recognize that identity is a fluctuating concept. It is bound neither by historical constructs nor by geographical limits. Her conception of identity seeks to establish new and heterodox links among the traditionally labeled “disparate” groups, reflecting her desire to enter into relation with the culturally and racially marked as “Other.” Hence, Condé leaves the notion of hybridity in a constant evolving state. That is, identity is forever in transit, and becomes hybrid only as a result of a conscious and individual act of creative power. Hybrid identification is an alternative text: a discursive production characterized by its capacity to incorporate a multiplicity of voices into a single and personal narrative of identification.

Hence, hybridity in Condé’s work is not equivalent to creoleness, or the process of creolization as explained by Glissant and the Creolists. Their projects prove to be monologic, too rigid to be considered an alternative model of identification. They become more prescriptive than descriptive, and more exclusive than inclusive. They fabricate an image of unity that does not correspond to the Caribbean reality. For Condé, the cultural harmony promoted by these discourses created the Caribbean stereotype of an egalitarian Créole community when, in reality, prejudice based on gender, color, class, and national origin continued to exist. Creoleness represents a myth of belonging to a community united under the banner of syncretism and driven by a desire for national and cultural order. For that reason, creoleness is not interested in understanding the internal processes of individual adaptation to environments of violent cross-cultural encounters. Condé adds,

One may simply say that they [the Creolists] were inspired by a theory of social realism which was favored in some quarters, since the victorious Soviet Revolution had heralded what seemed to be the dawn of a new era for the oppressed all over the world ... 1.

Individualism was chastised. Only the collectivity had the right to express itself. 2. The masses were the soul producers of beauty ...3. The main, if not the sole, purpose of writing was to denounce one's political and social conditions, and in so doing, to bring about one's liberation. 4. Poetics and political ambition were one and the same. ¹⁵

Condé's distrust of discourses of harmonious collectivity of any kind leads her to focus on individual voices as a way to transcend fixed categories and traditional binary positions like black vs. white, master vs. slave, male vs. female, colonizer vs. colonized. Her approach does not simply offer another identitarian manifesto. For Condé, the arrogant and violent announcement, "we proclaim ourselves Créole,"¹⁶ tramples individual experience in favor of a mythical unison. Thus, she challenges fixed categorizations and universal proclamations by offering a multiplicity of inward visions that do not quite fit the model. As Marie-Agnès Sourieau underlines, "if for the authors of *In Praise of Creoleness*, "creoleness is the world diffracted but recomposed," in the novel[s] of Condé, creoleness is the world diffracted but decomposed."¹⁷ Indeed, Condé considers the fusion between the "I" and the "We" impossible in the context of increasingly complex, diverse, and dynamic cultures such as the Caribbean. In opposition to traditional forms of categorizations, the individual affirms himself or herself against collective forces and prescriptions. Thus, Condé asks:

¹⁵ Maryse Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," *Yale French Studies* 83.2 (1993): 123.

¹⁶ Berbabé et al. 75. "Nous nous proclamons Créoles." My translation.

¹⁷ Marie-Agnès Sourieau, "Traversée de la Mangrove. Un Champ de pulsions communes," *Francofonia* 13.24 (1993):112. "si pour les auteurs d'*Éloge de la créolité*, 'la créolité, c'est le monde diffracté mais recomposé', dans le[s] roman[s] de Condé, la créolité, c'est le monde diffracté mais decompose." My translation.

Why despise in literature the individual adventure? Why confine the writer to a function that he may be unable to perform? Why enact rules? [...] There is nothing else but the sincerity of an internal vision.¹⁸

Condé understands culture as the meeting place of multiple voices that are oppositional, and yet not mutually exclusive. In place of an ideal, harmonious, and collective narrative of cultural identification, Condé offers glimpses of culture through the interior vision of those who participate in it despite the possible conflicts, tensions, oppositions, and ambiguities that this variety might generate. She focuses on the rifts and disfunctions of culture to refute, in her own words, “the hegemony of knowledge of conquest and domination. Knowledge is only partial. If it is truly profound, it must be partial.”¹⁹

Maryse Condé’s aversion to totalizing models is ultimately influenced by a concern about representation and the objectifying power that discourses of identity exert upon individual consciousness. Exterior images of identity create a stereotypical portrayal of society and impose on the individual a mythical fixity. These images are restrictive and barren, resisting change. In other words, she disrupts the existing order of representation by emphasizing the multiplicity of individual positions, the complexity, and the contingency of any given situation. It is in this instability and confusion that she finds the potential for new meanings. Therefore, change becomes an integral component of her discourse. Condé states in her essay “Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer,” “In a Bambara myth of origin, ... Disorder meant the power to create new objects and to modify the existing ones. In a word, disorder meant

¹⁸ Maryse Condé, “Reprendre la parole: Pour une littérature du refus,” *Notre Librairie* 35-36 (1977): 110. “Pourquoi mépriser en littérature l’aventure individuelle? Pourquoi cantonner l’écrivain à une fonction qu’il est peut-être incapable d’assumer? Pourquoi édicter de règles? [...] Il n’y a que la sincérité à une vision intérieure.” My translation.

¹⁹ Fulton 152. “Cette hégémonie du savoir de la conquête et de la domination. Le savoir ne peut être que partiel. Si on veut qu’il soit profond, il faut qu’il soit partiel.” My translation.

creativity.”²⁰ In this context, Condé’s characters are not only multiple, different, but also unstable within themselves—open to change. They don’t attempt to organize the natural chaos existing in the exterior world into patterns and models. Instead, they thrive on complexity, instability, and dynamism since an interior creative force surges in them to produce a single and personal order out of chaos. They undertake personal, social, and cultural journeys that transgress established boundaries. In a word, they become nomads twisting and weaving through time and space in an endless act of becoming in search of a personal and social identity.

Indeed, nomadism, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense, shapes Conde’s poetics of diversity and hybridity. The nomad’s way of life is characterized by movement, which contrasts the rigid and static boundaries imposed by any monologic narrative of identity. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points etc). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo.²¹

The nomad is, thus, a conscious way of being in constant movement between points, resisting and challenging systems of organization that restrain the passages of encounters with others in

²⁰ Condé, “Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer” 130.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1987) 380.

transit. As Madeleine Cottenet-Hage and Lydie Moudileno affirm, Maryse Condé's fondness of mobility "insistently manifests [its] denial of settlement in all its forms."²² Like George Lamming, Condé considers the "pleasures of exile" and movement healthy, "salutaire."²³ To contrast Glissant and the Creolists, she does not rely on the homeland to (re)gain an identity. Condé deems migration as the process that allows for an identity no longer defined by a single location or by one's belonging to a group. The lack of a specific place to call home in Condé, as Karin Schwerdtner notes, challenges the universal reliability of origin, nationality and family as the only principles on which an identity can be based.²⁴ In this sense, Condé adheres more closely than Glissant to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "rhizomatic identity." If Glissant was inspired by the plural and multiple nature of the rhizome as a model of culture and identity for the Caribbean, he never favored the nomadic system of growth and propagation that it requires. Instead, he insisted on remaining in the native land to achieve collective identity around the idea of the diversity already present in the Antilles.²⁵ Condé, on the other hand, embraces the rhizome, to its fullest extent, as a metaphor of a new form of identity. Identity stops being something inherited or constructed on the basis of an affiliation to a socially or geographically prescribed group. Instead, identity evolves in relation to the on-going movement through social and geographical spaces. Moreover, it emerges as a result of the encounters with others, which these spaces provide.

Yet, the rhizomatic nature of Condé's fiction is not limited to space, but it also applies to her conception of time and history. Rather than narrativize history in a chronological order, the

²² Madeleine Cottenet-Hage and Lydie Moudileno, eds., *Maryse Condé: Une nomade inconvenante* (Guadalupe: Ibis Rouge, 2002) 11. Condé's mobility "manifeste avec insistance [son] refus de la sédentarisation sous toutes ses formes." My Translation.

²³ Interview with Maryse Condé in *autrement* 41 (Sept 1989): 103.

²⁴ Karin Schwerdtner, "Wandering, Women and Writing: Maryse Condé's *Desiderada*" *Dalhousie French Studies* 73 (2005): 135.

²⁵ See section on Glissant in this dissertation.

rhizomatic model presents culture and history as a map with a wide array of connections and influences with no specific beginning or end. Deleuze and Guattari explains:

The rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing* ... What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields ... The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification ... Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways; ... as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back “to the same.”²⁶

Just like the rhizome, Condé’s distinct use of time shows a desire to escape “the traditional terms under which the history of West has been written and the historians have judged.”²⁷ That is, instead of relying in a purely Western chronological conception of time geared towards the objectification of events, she partakes of a mythical consciousness of time and history which, as opposed to Western historiography, unites subject and object in a symbiotic relationship in which history becomes a reciprocal experience.²⁸ In this sense, her portrayal of time does not coincide with Glissant’s either. Glissant sees the past and history of the American continent as “obscure,” impossible to reclaim. For that reason, he calls for an “irruption into modernity,” partaking, perhaps reluctantly, of the chronological construction of time traditionally imposed by the

²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari 12.

²⁷ Carla L. Peterson, “Le Surnaturel dans *Moi, Tituba sorcière ... Noire de Salem* e *Maryse Condé et Beloved* de Toni Morrison” *L’œuvre de Maryse Condé*, Ed. Nara Araujo (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996) 102. “les termes traditionnels selon lesquels l’Histoire de l’Ouest est écrite et l’historien porte jugement.” My translation.

²⁸ See Michael Palencia-Roth, *Gabriel García Márquez* 9.

Western tradition.²⁹ For Condé, history, truth, and identity are as Lydie Moudileno asserts about her characters, “always in movement.”³⁰ Her concept of time, then, cannot be bounded to a chronological progression with beginning and end. Just like the rhizomatic map, her concept of time and history is at once cyclical and contrapuntal, with “lines of flight” that combine present, past, and future in order to achieve a more reliable and complete, albeit chaotic and uncertain, source of knowledge.³¹

In the chaotic and constant spacio-temporal movement is precisely where, as we have mentioned earlier, a source of creative power lies for Maryse Condé. She is certain that “exile feeds the imagination.”³² Psychological, spacial, and temporal wandering add up to reveal a personal identity as it develops through the journey, instead of accepting socially prescribed scripts according to a static sense of time, place, community, gender, and language. In this sense, the narrative, as an “act of becoming,” seems to be similar to the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Yet, the hero of the *Bildungsroman* strives to root himself, to find himself a place in society. Condé’s understanding of becoming compares more closely to the experience of the “pícaro.” The picaresque genre understands “becoming” as an endless act in a continuous wandering space in

²⁹ Glissant states in “The Novel of the Americas”: “I think that the haunting nature of the past (it is a point that has been widely raised) is one of the essential points of reference in the works produced in the Americas. What “happens,” indeed, is that it is apparently a question of shedding light on chronology that has become obscure, when it is not completely effaced for all kinds of reasons, especially colonial ones ... In European literature an intimate relationship with landscape is primarily established. From this has evolved a stylistic convention that has for a long time focused on meticulous detail, exposition ‘in sequence,’ highlighting harmony ... Space in the American novel, on the contrary (but not so much in the physical sense), seems to be open, exploded, rent ... But what we have in common is the irruption into modernity. We do not have a literary tradition that has slowly matured: ours was a brutal emergence ... Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 144 - 146.

³⁰ Lydie Moudileno, “Le Rire de la grand-mère: Insolence et sérénité dans *Desirada* de Maryse Condé” *The French Review* 76.6 (2003): 11-57. “toujours en mouvement.” My translation.

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari explain: “Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc ..., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome.” Deleuze and Guattari 9.

³² Marie-Agnès Sourieau, “Entretien avec Maryse Condé: de l’Identité Culturelle” *The French Review* 72, 6 (1999): 1091. “l’exil nourri l’imaginaire.” My translation.

which the protagonist embodies the antithesis of a bourgeoisie ideal. The picaresque tradition emphasizes loss of roots and dwelling, and it does not celebrate movement as always upward bound with a certain happy ending, an epiphany. On the contrary, the wanderer is always an outsider, destined to suffer due to his/her difference. Thus, Condé does not propose an easy celebratory cosmopolitanism. Migration and movement is revealed as a particularly agonizing experience; yet the only way, as Moudileno asserts, “to attain the necessary distance for the subject's autonomy.”³³

Thus, identity reveals itself as the construction of the subject “I” as it narrates its journey. Movement means pain and suffering. But more importantly, movement begets a sense of self-affirmation that leads to self-expression: the possibility of attaining a personal voice. In this regard, Maryse Condé’s poetics of identity partakes of Bakhtinian’s understanding of the relationship among speaker, author, and language. Just like Condé, Bakhtin reveres heterogeneity as the force that infuses energy into language. This energy is always in constant struggle. The human being acts in the mist of the struggle against different forces, and strives to ascertain meaning resulting from such tension.³⁴ In that sense, “we must all, perforce, become authors,” according to Michael Holquist. He explains explains this idea in Bakhtin’s theory of language:

³³ Lydie Moudileno, “Le rire de la grand-mère,” 1158. “Consomm[er] la distance nécessaire à l’autonomie du sujet.” My translation

³⁴ Bakhtin describes language as, “never unitary ... Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal ideological and social believes systems, within these various systems ... are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound. Literary language—both spoken and written—... is itself stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system, that is, in the forms that carry its meaning. All languages ... are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meaning and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people—first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels. As such, these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia.” Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 288, 292.

To use the stuff of signs to represent the world is to use language as an analogue for social relations as the reality of nature. Insofar as we wrest particular meanings out of general systems, we are all creators: a speaker is to his utterance what an author is to his text. That anyone who speaks thereby *creates* is arguably the most radical implication of Bakhtin's thought.³⁵

That "we are all creators" is key to understanding hybridity as a new conception of identity. Movement and migration furnish knowledge and wisdom. The encounter with others develops the critical, reflective and creative consciousness that is necessary to transcend parochial scripts of identity based on the traditional determinism of nationality, gender, territory. Thus, authorship, as the distinctive feature of consciousness, allows for an autonomous voice. To get a voice is for Bakhtin to reveal authorship, and with it, a personal ideology that stand independently from monologic narratives.

Maryse Condé's path towards self-definition is writing and storytelling. Consequently, to acquire an identity, one must create fiction. She validates this point in an interview: "When you try to tell the truth about your life, you realize immediately that your truth is fiction and that you are fabricating a reality, a somewhat imaginary life. Nonetheless, the desire to be autobiographical is real."³⁶ A life story, then, is not a manifestation of Truth, but a version compiled by the individual who has experienced the events selected in the story. Identity becomes an act of creation, and as such it can be compared to a novel in the Bakhtinian sense. Both narratives are informed by a diversity of individual voices that represent particular points of view about the world. Bakhtin characterizes the novel, "as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically

³⁵ Holquist, "Answering as Authoring" 314-315.

³⁶ Robert H. McCormick Jr. "Desirada: A New Conception of Identity. An Interview with Maryse Condé" *World Literature Today* 74.3 (Summer 2000): 525

organized.”³⁷ These voices are in constant struggle with one another, since some aim to impose monolithic perceptions of truth, while others tend to challenge the homogenizing tendencies.³⁸ Heteroglossia, a term coined by Bakhtin to convey this tension, is the feature valued in the narratives of hybridity, as we have already seen in Rosario Ferré’s *Maldito amor*. Indeed, the hybrid is not after resolution. Instead, hybrid subjectivity positions itself independently in the mist of the struggle among the multiplicity of social positions encountered in its constant movement across boundaries. Yet, it is at this intersection of diversity and contradiction that a hybrid consciousness is forced to appropriate, transform and regenerate the discourse of identity: it becomes creative. Thus, the articulation of a hybrid self depends on the ability to negotiate objectifying and monologic social discourses of identity. This ability works toward the formation of the self, but it also helps to transcend a dialogic interaction with the Other in order to incorporate oppositional discourses into one’s own narrative. As we mentioned above, identity is created through one’s use of language to narrate life experiences. However, such narration derives from the multiplicity of oppositional voices that the self encounters. In this sense, not only does the self require the presence of the other, but it also needs to assimilate the other’s language to create its own. Through this complex discursive process, the oppositional differences between self and other are blurred and demystified by one narrative being assimilated and incorporated as part of the other. Bakhtin summarizes this process as the ability of “saying ‘I am me’ in someone else’s language, and in my own language, ‘I am other’.”³⁹

Hence, hybridity, as conceptualized by Maryse Condé, does more than displaying diversity and heteroglossia. Condé’s hybrid consciousness artistically combines and integrates the chaotic multiplicity into a unifying narrative of self. Bakhtin affirms that it is out of diversity

³⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 262.

³⁸ See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 270-273.

³⁹ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 315.

that the author “constructs his style, while at the same time he maintains the unity of his own creative personality.”⁴⁰ Therefore, hybridity stems from one’s creative ability to control and arrange diversity into a unique and single story that constitutes self-expression. Identity becomes “‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions.”⁴¹ However, this narrative is never finished, nor does it become a model for future products. Identity, like a novel, is a continuous “act of becoming,” and each new individualized text further extends the diversity of voices and social positions available.⁴² This ongoing process of self-affirmation through the articulation of a narrative that incorporates the multiplicity of discourses of others into a “unique artistic system” and “a higher unity” is the art practiced by a hybrid consciousness.⁴³

Hybridity, in this sense, is not a form of identification that exists as an absolute and outside of language. Neither is it simply a written story. Bakhtin uses music as a metaphor that blurs the boundaries between written language and oral language. He refers to hybridity as the “orchestration” of diversity into a narrative, whether written or spoken, that exists as a cultural form more in the minds than in the bodies of subjects who consciously arrange their selfhood in a process remarkably similar to novelization or storytelling. The intentional hybrid writes herself out of and against others’ discourses attaining a single voice, yet multiple and sometimes contradictory. More importantly, the artistic and conscious arrangement of multiplicity into a

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 298.

⁴¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 293.

⁴² Bakhtin opens his essay, “Epic and Novel” pointing out the unlimited malleability of the novel, “The study of the novel as a genre is distinguished by peculiar difficulties. This is due to the unique nature of the object itself: the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted ... The generic skeleton of the novel is still far from having hardened, and we cannot foresee all its plastic possibilities.” Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 3.

⁴³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 299.

narrative of self, despite its difficulty, grants freedom from monolithic, reductive, and authoritative discourses of identity.⁴⁴ That is, it refuses to subscribe to fixed paradigms of identity that are inherited. In fact, hybridity exposes the absolutism of any monologic narrative, since it is able to relativize the so-called determinisms of origin, whether they are, for example, national, sexual, or racial. These external discourses are set up against each other dialogically, while the narrative voice transcends the opposition attaining a distance from the discourses that objectify and reduce individual consciousness.⁴⁵ The result is a new conception of identity that understands otherness, not as an unsurmountable source of difference, but as “contingent, external, and illusory.”⁴⁶ For that reason, the self is able to transcend polarized narratives of identity in order to construct one that partakes of diversity while appropriating the discourse. The result is the artistic creation of new and alternative forms of identification. Condé quotes Maurice Blanchot from the *Le Livre à venir* in the nature of literature, “the essence of literature is to escape any fundamental determination, any assertion which could stabilize it or fix it. It is never already there, it is always to be found or invented again.”⁴⁷ Identity, like literature, can achieve this freedom if it becomes hybrid by encountering the Other and incorporating his or her narrative into a story of self, extending, thus, the limits of selfhood to those of one’s own imagination. Condé concludes one of her interviews restating, “I just want the freedom to be

⁴⁴ Bakhtin states that “the importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse.” Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 348.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 299.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 365.

⁴⁷ In Condé, “Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer” 134.

myself ... But it is a quest for freedom rather than systematic challenge.”⁴⁸ This is the spirit of Condé’s second novel, *Moi, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*.

4.3 Tituba’s Art, Tituba’s Magic: Her Hybridity

If the reader of Condé’s *Moi, Tituba sorcière ... Noire de Salem* is looking for a radical feminist text, an unequivocally condemnation of colonial slavery through racial hatred, a sympathetic account of a victimized slave’s narrative or a postcolonial, nation-building novel, the text fulfills none of those expectations.⁴⁹ Condé’s work seeks to accomplish just the opposite. That is, *Moi, Tituba* reveals all ideologies, whether they inform colonialism, négritude, creoleness, antillanité, feminism, or ethnic nationalism, as restricting narratives of identity that limit individual consciousness and representation. Similarly to Ferré’s *Maldito amor*, Condé’s novel, questions these dominant discourses by establishing a dialogical “fight” among them.⁵⁰ In that way, the limitations of prescribed ideologies is brought to light and criticized. However, amid the multiplicity of competing discourses, the novel offers a main character, Tituba. She, I argue, represents the transcendence of what Bakhtin refers to as heteroglossia—the tension among different world-views—sketching an alternative narrative of identity in which multiplicity, inclusion, and constant change constitute what I have called throughout this chapter

⁴⁸ Lydie Moudileno, “Entretien: Moi, Maryse Condé, libre d’être moi-même,” *Women in French Studies* 10 (2002): 126. “Je veux simplement la liberté d’être moi-même ... Mais c’est une recherché de liberté davantage que de contestation systématique.” My translation.

⁴⁹ The French title of Condé’s novel has the word “Noire” capitalized, even though French orthographic rules would require the word to be in lower case. Despite possible editorial mandates, the meaning of “Noire,” along with “sorcière,” will be culturally negotiated and redefined in the course of the novel. Thus, the “improper” French orthography and the ellipsis between the two words might indicate the reflection that silence, omission, and irreverence prompt in the reader, opening a space for redefinition unfinishedness, and dialogism.

⁵⁰ See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 360.

the art of the hybrid consciousness.⁵¹ Tituba's ability to transcend the "fight" and create her own subjectivity is, nonetheless, possible through a constant contact with those deemed as her others, transgressing cultural, social, racial, and religious boundaries. Thus, hybridity in the text stands for an act of self-narrativization that unfolds as the encounters with others provide the material to construct one's independent self.

Moi, Tituba tells the life story of a woman born in Barbados during slavery. Her mother, a slave, raped in the Middle Passage by a white sailor, is later hanged for stabbing her master in order to avoid being raped again. Tituba, orphaned by the age of seven, is adopted by Man Yaya, who teaches her the art of traditional healing, the language of nature, and "the upper spheres of knowledge."⁵² As she grows older, Tituba moves from the countryside of Barbados to the city of Bridgetown and, from there, to the village of Salem, Massachusetts. There, she is accused of leading the well-known witchcraze among the Puritan community of New England. She is jailed seventeen months for being a witch. But, after a series of removals, Tituba ends her days back in Barbados, hanged like her mother at the hands of the landowners for all her "crimes, past and present."⁵³

Despite the fact that some elements in the plot of the novel are based on documented events and Tituba herself is a historical character, Condé states in her interview with Ann Armstrong Scarboro that she was never able to "discover anything factual about her."⁵⁴ Jane Moss argues, in contrast, that "historians and writers have not forgotten Tituba: she figures in all the contemporary accounts and as early as 1700 in *New Wonders of the Invisible World* [and in]

⁵¹ For a definition of "heteroglossia" and "dialogism" see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 269-275.

⁵² The quotations in the text are taken from Richard Philcox's translation of Condé's novel, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière ... Noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986). Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Richard Philcox (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994) 10.

⁵³ Condé, *I Tituba* 172.

⁵⁴ Ann Armstrong Scarboro "Afterwood" in Condé, *I, Tituba* 199.

Robert Calef's response to Cotton Mathers's 1692 official version of the trials *Wonders of the Invisible World* ...⁵⁵ Along with early historical accounts, Tituba also appears in Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, and is the victim of Ann Petry's novel, *Tituba of Salem Village* among other literary works. However, in all these accounts, if Tituba plays a significant role at all, she is merely the object to be talked about or spoken for. Such silencing in history intrigued Condé to the point that she decided to "write her story out of dreams."⁵⁶ In this sense, Condé's frustration with the absence of knowledge about Tituba gives her the opportunity to raise questions about the nature of identity, representation, and truth in her novel.

Both Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault have drawn attention to the power of language and representation to ascertain the world around us. Heidegger asserts that "man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is." Similarly, Foucault considers language to be a tool that grants power to those who control, select, and organize discourse in society.⁵⁷ Condé's approach to the character of Tituba echoes Heidegger and Foucault's notion of language as power. Condé reacts against the historical and fictional accounts that have kept Tituba silent and therefore powerless to define her identity and control her own representation. In this way, the historical character of Tituba becomes fictional since it can only be (re)created through imagination. However, Condé prefaces her novel establishing roles for both herself and her character: "Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations

⁵⁵ Jane Moss, "Postmodernizing the Salem Witchcraft: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," *Colby Quarterly* 35.1 (1999): 9.

⁵⁶ Armstrong Scarborough, "Afterwood" 199.

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) 115-154. Also see Michel Foucault, "Discourse on Language," *Archeology of Knowledge*, A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 215-37.

she told me things she had confided to nobody else.”⁵⁸ Introducing the narrative as conversation between Condé and Tituba reverses the traditional function of the writer as the active controller. Instead, Tituba takes that position herself. Having the power to tell her own story through the writer, Tituba is no longer just the object of representation, but a speaking subject who can assert a self-ascribed identity. Moreover, that position allows Tituba to talk about the invisibility and judgement to which Western historiography has condemned her:

It seemed that I was gradually being forgotten. I felt that I would only be mentioned in passing in these Salem witchcraft trials about which so much would be written later, trials that would arouse the curiosity and pity of generations to come as the greatest testimony of a surperstitious and barbaric age. There would be mention here and there of “a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing ‘hoodoo.’” There would be no mention of my age or my personality. I would be ignored. As early as the end of the seventeenth century, petitions would be circulated, judgments made, rehabilitating the victims, restoring their honor, and returning their property to their descendant. I would never be included! Tituba would be condemned forever!⁵⁹

The symbiosis of writing and storytelling as a discursive strategy in *Moi, Tituba* re-appropriates the past, creating a personal history. This fictional autobiography not only narrates the process of subject formation and self-recognition, but also highlights the discrepancies between her historical, official representation and the internal creation of her own self. Domna Stanton asserts in her study on female autobiography that, “the ‘graphing’ of the ‘auto’ [is] an act of self-

⁵⁸ Condé, *I, Tituba* vii.

⁵⁹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 110.

assertion that denie[s] and reverse[s] Tituba's negative status. This 'autograph' gives the female "I" substance through the inscription of an interior and an anterior."⁶⁰

However, one runs into the problem of authenticity as a result of the blurring of storytelling and writing, history and fiction in the novel. Some critics, like Jane Moss, immediately reject the legitimacy of Tituba's voice, "As readers," she states, "we are so moved by Tituba's plight that we are willing to believe her and we accept at face value the claim that Condé is filling this gap in history. The problem is that the righteous indignation that we feel is betrayed by [historical] evidence." Others, fond of the pseudo-autobiographical format of the novel, are confident to proclaim that, "this narrative device, coding the narrator as "scribe" and as confidant, ostensibly certifies the authenticity of the text." Others go as far as to pair up Tituba's voice with Guatemalan Nobel Prize Laureate, Rigoberta Menchú. Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi states: "Seen from this perspective, Tituba's life story, even if it is a fictional one, assumes a value and a meaning comparable to Rigoberta Menchú's testimonial *I, Rigoberta Menchú*."⁶¹ Maryse Condé herself asserts in an interview that *Tituba* "is not a historical novel," and she adds, "Tituba is just the opposite of a historical novel."⁶² Based on Condé's own word, the argument of authenticity is not a productive one in the context of this novel. Condé is not interested in facts, but in discourses and the process in which they constitute subjectivities.

However, it is important to note that the demands for authenticity in the early New World *crónicas*, and later, in slave narratives seem to endure in the contemporary literature written by

⁶⁰ Domna Stanton, 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?' *Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, Ed. D.C. Stanton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 14.

⁶¹ Moss 9. Patrice J. Proulx, "Inscriptions of Female Community and Liberation in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière*" *Ecrivaines françaises et francophones: Europe plurilingue* (March 1997): 148. Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi, "Giving Voice to Tituba: The Death of the Author?" *World Literature Today* 64.4 (Autumn 1993): 754.

⁶² Armstrong Scarborough, "Afterword" 201.

women of color in Latin America and the Caribbean. Lata Mani affirms that “third world” literature is judged based on a “repressive tolerance, a desire for ‘true’ knowledge and a demand for authenticity.”⁶³ Condé challenges these expectations of Truth by rejecting the possibility of an essentialized identity for all women. Tituba is characterized early on in the novel as the daughter of “will and imagination.”⁶⁴ Her origins, as the product of rape and racial violence, do not determine her subjectivity. Instead, her ability to form a text about herself is what constitutes her identification beyond any possible references to chronological, recorded events. Condé insists,

I wanted to show that there is no Truth. Everyone recounts his/her life, life history, differently. It is not possible to find an objective reality ... Because everyone lies. Not in a conscious or malicious way. Because, ultimately, to tell a story is to embellish it, to fabricate it according to one’s tastes and desires, to create fiction.⁶⁵

Therefore, the question that *Moi, Tituba* poses is not whether her autobiography is more reliable than the historical accounts. Condé turns the argument around and shows the amount of invention that all discourses require whether they are labeled as historical, autobiographical, fictional, or factual. Tituba’s life story, then, serves not so much to fill in the blank spaces of a lost history, as Glissant proposes. Rather, it helps us to re-imagine history, questioning the past as it was told through Western notions of Truth. In order to achieve that effect, Condé’s Tituba juxtaposes her view of the world with the apparent rationality of Puritan America.

Michael Palencia-Roth discusses in the introduction to his book on Gabriel García Márquez the differences between “conciencia mítica”(mythic consciousness) and “conciencia

⁶³ Lata Mani, “Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multicultural Reception,” *Inscriptions* 5 (1989): 2.

⁶⁴ Condé, *I, Tituba* 6.

⁶⁵ McCormick 520.

científica”(scientific consciousness).⁶⁶ The main difference between these two ways of seeing and experiencing the world lies in the way mankind interacts with people and nature. All components of reality are active and changeable. They communicate and act along with human beings in a world seen through a “conciencia mítica.” However, the “conciencia científica” understands the world as a dichotomy in which men are the only subjects—able to act—versus the rest of reality that becomes objectified and therefore deemed Other. The Western tradition has relied on the latter form of understanding the world to ensure colonial order and its legitimization, even though the Puritan world believed as much in the presence of the supernatural as Tituba does. Yet, Toni Morrison explains that the West discredits the alternative cosmology, “not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by a discredited people, information dismissed as “lore” or “gossip” or “magic” or “sentiment.”⁶⁷

Tituba, at the beginning of the novel, sees the world exclusively through the eyes of a “conciencia mítica,” knowledge that Mama Yaya passes on to her:

Mama Yaya taught me about herbs. Those for inducing sleep. Those for healing wounds and ulcers. Those for loosening the tongue of thieves ... Mamma Yaya taught me to listen to the wind rising and to measure its force as it swirled above the cabins it had the power to crush. Mama Yaya taught me the sea, the mountains, and the hills. She taught me that everything lives, has a soul, and breathes. That everything must be respected.

That man is not the master riding through his kingdom on horseback.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Palencia-Roth “Introducción,” *Gabriel García Márquez* 18-19. The following discussion of these two ways of understanding reality is informed by Palencia-Roth’s definition of “conciencia mítica” and “conciencia científica” in the introduction of his book.

⁶⁷ Toni Morrison, “Memory, Creation, and Writing,” *Thought* 59.235 (1984): 388.

⁶⁸ Condé, *I, Tituba* 9.

However, she encounters the other world for the first time when she has to trespass “the boundaries [she] had set up for [herself].”⁶⁹ She notices that slaves fear her connection with Man Yaya. She exclaims, “the terror of these people seemed like an injustice to me ... I was born to heal not to frighten ... From that day on I drew closer to the plantations so that my true self could be known.”⁷⁰ Her relatively lack of contact with the slave/colonial system leads her to think that others will see her differently, yet once she ventures into the white man world, Tituba realizes otherwise. Susanna Endicott, Tituba’s first mistress, dismisses Tituba as an object due to her blackness. The white world has the ability to objectify Tituba to the point of making her an object. White people are the only subjects. That is, they are the only ones who speak and act. Tituba experiences her degradation to an object as she witnesses Susanna Endicott’s conversation with some ladies from town. Extremely offended, she exclaims:

It was not so much the conversation that amazed and revolted me as their way of going about it. You would think I was not standing there at the threshold of the room. They were talking to me and yet ignoring me. They were striking me off the map of human beings. I was not being. Invisible. More invisible than the unseen, who at least have powers that everyone fears. Tituba existed insofar as these women let her exist. It was atrocious.⁷¹

The contrast between Tituba’s own voice and the objectification to which she is subjected is a powerful narrative strategy to reject and expose the devalued status assigned to her by others in the novel. Yet, the major collision between Tituba’s consciousness and the characterization that colonial America makes of her relates to the notion of witchcraft in the Western world. Tituba’s knowledge of nature, the laws, secrets, and keys of the universe grants her power to counteract

⁶⁹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 11.

⁷⁰ Condé, *I, Tituba* 12.

⁷¹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 24.

objectification and dehumanization. Michael Palencia-Roth writes, “the powerful man who possesses knowledge tends to be the wizard or the old, wise man, who controls nature and the universe through words, formulas, or the magic act.”⁷² Nonetheless, Tituba’s wisdom and her skin color condemn her to be a “witch” in the Western world. If she was feared among the slaves, and objectified by her mistress in her home land, once she is among the Puritan society of New England, Tituba becomes the personification of evil—the “natural” consequence of her otherness:

In Bridgetown Susanna Endicott had alresdy told me that she was convinced my color was indicative of my close connctions with Satan. I was able to laugh that off, however, as the ramblings of a shrew embittered by solitude and approaching old age. In Salem such conviction was shared by all.⁷³

Tituba’s stigma dominates others’ representation of her throughout the novel. Nevertheless, she does not recognize herself as a witch, when the appellation is used to describe her knowledge. She challenges the meaning the first time she hears it from the lips of her future husband, John Indian:

What is a witch? I noticed that when he said the word, it was marked with disapproval. Why should that be ? Why ? Isn’t the ability to communicate with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others and heal, a superior gift of nature that impires respect, admiration and gratitude ? Consequently, should’t the witch (if that’s what the person who has this gift is called) be cherished and revered rather than feared?⁷⁴

⁷² Michael Palencia-Roth, *Gabriel García Márquez* 20. “El conocedor poderoso suele ser el mago o el viejo sabio, quien controla la naturaleza y el universo por medio de la palabra, la formula o el acto mágico.” My translation.

⁷³ Condé, *I Tituba* 65.

⁷⁴ Condé, *I, Tituba* 17.

Tituba's response to the pejorative meaning attributed to powers that no one else seems to understand questions the absolute value that the term "witch" has in the West. At the same time, Tituba starts re-defining the epithet to reject the negative connotations it carries. In fact, in *Moi, Tituba* the disparity between the negative and categorical discourse of the colonial white world and Tituba's positive alternative changes established notions of truth, validating Tituba's voice as commendable. Condé confirms in *La parole des femmes* Tituba's approach, "the sorcerer is not an evil element ... but the intermediary between the visible and invisible world."⁷⁵ Later in the novel, Tituba offers an even more denotative meaning of "witch," finalizing her redefinition of the term. That is, Tituba successfully subverts the negativity that has always been projected onto her to pin it down instead on the use that others make of it. Tituba concludes that the meaning of "witch" changes, "everyone gives that word a different meaning. Everyone believes he can fashion a witch to his way of thinking so that she will satisfy his ambitions, dreams, and desires ..."⁷⁶

In this manner, witchcraft has a two-fold function in the novel. First, Tituba's knowledge defines her identity. Second, witchcraft is the source of a counter-discourse that denounces narratives of absolute truth. Indeed, despite her constant negative representation as a witch, Tituba fully embraces her knowledge and never uses it with harmful intentions. Following Man Yaya's counsel, "Don't pervert your heart! Don't become like them! Is this the price to pay for freedom?"⁷⁷ Indeed, Tituba's nature is throughout benevolent and, to a certain extent, naïve. Yet, the truly subversive nature of Tituba's "sorcery" resides in its power to disrupt and destabilize Western discourse. As Angela Davis points out in the foreword of the English edition of *Moi*,

⁷⁵ Maryse Condé, *La Parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1979) 54. "la sorcière n'est pas ... un élément maléfique, mais ... l'intermédiaire entre le monde visible et celui de l'invisible." My translation.

⁷⁶ Condé, *I, Tituba* 146.

⁷⁷ Condé, *I, Tituba* 162.

Tituba, Tituba's revenge consists on her ability to call into question what Western reality assumes to be factual. Thus "when Tituba takes her place in the history of the Salem witch trials, the recorded history of that era—and indeed the entire history of the colonization process—is revealed to be seriously flawed."⁷⁸ Then, Tituba's centerstage position allows her to show the inaccuracies of history. She exposes the careful and intentional construction of cultural, racial, and national narratives out of which subjectivities emerge and are imposed on individuals. Her cosmology, and more importantly her ability to voice it, discredits the Western ideology of a unified, pure, and absolute authentic value to any claims of truth.

While Tituba's knowledge is considered Western witchcraft, what Man Yaya really teaches Tituba is the art of hybridity. Hybridity defines Tituba's identity and ultimately ensures her survival. Cross-breeding, making substitutions, transforming, and adapting form part of Tituba's abilities and inform her distinct subjectivity. The most explicit manifestation of Tituba's art, and a metaphor of her own hybrid consciousness, is her talent to identify and create hybrid plants to heal: "Under her [Man Yaya] guidance, I attempted bold hybrids, cross-breeding the *passiflorinde* with the *prune taureau*, the poisonous *pomme cythère* with the *surette*, and the *azalée-des-azalées* with the *persulfureuse*. I devised drugs and potions whose powers I strengthened with incantations."⁷⁹ Once she is in New England and cannot find the same herbs due to the different climate and terrain, she decides "to make substitutions. A maple tree whose foliage was turning red would do for a silk-cotton tree. Glossy, spiny holly leaves would replace the Guinea grass. Yellow, odorless flowers would do for the *salapertuis* ... My prayers did the rest."⁸⁰ Nevertheless, her hybridity transcends biological and botanical dimensions. Unlike many critics who claim that Tituba's abilities "reside in the mixed-race status of the protagonist,"

⁷⁸ Angela Davis, "Foreword" in Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* x.

⁷⁹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 11.

⁸⁰ Condé, *I, Tituba* 45.

Tituba's hybrid consciousness is possible, instead, due to her distrust of absolute identifications.⁸¹ Indeed Abena, Tituba's mother, rejects her because she sees in Tituba only the white sailor who raped her. Abena never recovered from the "pain and humiliation."⁸² Yao's attitude towards Tituba is different. Immediately, Yao conceives Tituba as his child and challenges anyone who dares to say otherwise.⁸³ Yao's imagination invents her name, Tituba, and creates for her a different reality that transcends the violence of a bi-racial regime. Likewise, Man Yaya's teachings go beyond botanical cross-breedings. She understands the necessity to be fluid in response to her others. Indeed Man Yaya recommends, "si tu arrives au pays des culs-de-jatte, traîne-toi par terre!" As opposed to the constant opposition of a binary, asymmetrical system, Man Yaya teaches Tituba an alternative way of seeing the world in which everyone occupies a subject position, and therefore people continuously change and transform each other.⁸⁴

Thus, Condé's Tituba challenges all essentializing notions of identity that claim or demand authenticity. The alternative to such forms of identification is a paradigm of identity that focuses on fluidity, change, and inclusiveness towards others. In that sense, Tituba's identity is not based on her genealogy (the offspring of rape), her homeland (Caribbean), gender or race (Black woman). While those elements are important, they are external narratives of representation that ultimately have the power to objectify and fix the individual. In its place, Tituba opts for the narrativization of her own identity as a way to transcend monologic

⁸¹ See O'Regan 99.

⁸² Condé, *I, Tituba* 6.

⁸³ Condé, *I, Tituba* 5.

⁸⁴ Condé, *Moi, Tituba* 88. The French idiomatic expression shows the ability to adapt better than the translation in the English version of the novel, "When you get to the blind man's country, close both eyes." See Condé, *I, Tituba* 54. Michael Palencia-Roth attributes this way of seeing the world to a "conciencia mítica," as opposed to a "conciencia científica" that considers reality as a relationship between " 'Ich-Es' (yo-eso): ... sujeto-objeto para la ciencia." See Palencia-Roth, *Gabriel García Márquez* 19.

discourses and to secure a subject position for her individual consciousness. Yet, Tituba's identity is not created in a vacuum, either. As she rejects traditional forms of identification, she forms her "self" with and through the discourses of others. Indeed, she realizes that others try to impose an identity on her. Yet, she uses her ability to narrate her self-story to reveal the ways in which she have shaped others. The formation of Tituba's identity requires, then, a reciprocal relationship between subject positions, in which a dialogical interaction is established to create a more fluid and inclusive self-creation. Nonetheless, as Bakhtin reminds us, and it is evident in the novel, the dialogical dynamic of polyphony does not lack in violence and tension. That is, the multiplicity of discourses, embodied in the array of characters that Tituba encounters in her lifetime, "fight" and viciously compete with each other to be the ones to define Tituba's identity. Yet, Tituba's ability to escape and transcend heteroglossia, to create her own voice among such multiplicity, constitutes her hybridity. Thus, in *Moi, Tituba*, hybridity does not derive from biological racial mixing or from pure multiplicity. Hybridity is the art of narrativizing one's subjectivity out of the connections and contacts that an individual establishes with others. Recognizing one self as hybrid necessitates the incorporation of others' narratives into the one that we make of our own selves. Bakhtin considers this hybrid voice "a unique artistic system," which is "deliberate" and attains a "higher" unity for being able to go beyond the fixity and barrenness of absolute discourses.⁸⁵

Therefore, Tituba constructs a "higher" voice by transgressing physical, temporal, racial, and cultural borders in order to encounter her others. Then, in *Moi, Tituba* migration means transformation into what Bakhtin calls a "conscious hybrid."⁸⁶ As Tituba journeys further and further away from her homeland, her self-awareness also increases, challenging formulations of

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 263.

⁸⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 366.

identity based on geographical and group belonging. Tituba moves from a relatively isolated life in the outskirts of a plantation where she is free, yet naïve and unaware of the influence that others will inevitably have on her, to a different life in city of Bridgetown. There, she becomes a slave by choice. Her first significant encounter with a man—John Indian—turns into Tituba’s first major awakening. Already a young woman, Tituba falls in love with John Indian, which presents her with the dilemma of leaving her lonely freedom for the love of a man and bondage. “I don’t want to return to the white man’s world,” she complains to the spirit of Man Yaya. To which Man Yaya responds, “There’s no way of escaping it.”⁸⁷ From that moment, Tituba realizes the impossibility of eluding the effect of others. Indeed, she recognizes it as the only way to find her own self. Thus, she reflects on her condition:

The slaves who flocked off the ships in droves and whose gait, features, and carriage the good people of Bridgetwon mocked were far freer than I was. For the slaves had not chosen their chains. They have not walked of their own accord toward a raging, awe-inspiring sea to give themselves up to the slave dealers and bend their backs to the branding iron. That is exactly what I had done.⁸⁸

This pattern of movement and self-recognition will continue throughout her life. John Indian awakens her sexuality. Later in North America, she learns about exile and bigotry. Abigail and Mrs. Parris teach her about the differences among women despite common elements of oppression. Hester introduces her to the history of the Puritan community, inequalities between men and women and about feminism. Benjamin Cohen d’Azevedo opens her eyes to the persecution of Jews. Back in Barbados, Christopher reveals to her the un-heroic face of *marronnage*, and Iphigene shows her about the courage and self-sacrifice of rebellion.

⁸⁷ Condé, *I, Tituba* 19.

⁸⁸ Condé, *I, Tituba* 25.

Along with geographical migration and conscious transformation, *Moi, Tituba* also establishes a narrative time more appropriately suited to a hybrid consciousness. Tituba tells her life-story in a relatively coherent chronological order. However, the narrative also presents us with a different way of reading time that links present, past and future in a temporal movement that mirrors a spiral rather than a line. As we have already seen, the narrative is introduced by making reference to a conversation between Tituba and Maryse Condé. This narrative device underlines the circular nature of storytelling. In fact, the *re*-telling of the story becomes more important for Tituba than the telling of the succession of events themselves. Indeed, one can say that the end of the story is implied in the beginning. Tituba, as a historical character, has already passed away, and the second epigraph of the novel foretells Tituba's life and death, "Death is a porte whereby we pass to joye; Lyfe is a lake that drowneth all in payne." Moreover, in the epilogue Tituba confirms that her "real story starts where this one leaves off and it has no end."⁸⁹ Then, the circular frame of the narrative undermines the chronological order of events and their meaning as conveyed in the story. In that sense, the novel emphasizes the state of "becoming" in time, defined by Paul Ricoeur as the indefinite extension of duration both backward and forward, both cohesion and change.⁹⁰ He adds,

by reading the end into the beginning and the beginning into the end, we learn to read time backward, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, the plot does not merely establish human action "in" time, it also establishes it in memory. And memory in turn repeats—re-collects—the

⁸⁹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 175.

⁹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn, 1980): 181

course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end.⁹¹

In the novel, Tituba's constant movement towards "becoming" as she encounters the discourses of others is more important, as a source of meaning, than the events that lead her to the end. Then, the function of the narrative is to establish recollection through storytelling as the means of "going back" to the possibilities in which the narrative constitutes Tituba's hybridity in the stretch of time suspended in between her beginning and end. Indeed, Tituba goes back to re-tell her story, so she can arrange a voice for herself. Moreover, Maryse Condé, as the recipient of that story, retrieves the information herself adding new dimensions to Tituba's voice until it reaches a new recipient who, in turn, will do the same. Thus, the narrative of Tituba's voice continuously grows and changes in contact with others, combining the three qualities of time—past, present, and future—since each narrativization requires a return to the past, to reformulate the story in the present, and to bring it forward to the possibilities of the future. Hybrid consciousness in *Moi, Tituba* is, in fact, an act of constant becoming beyond the restrictions of a chronological order of time. Simply going back to the past to tell Tituba's adventures does not establish Tituba's hybrid consciousness. Using Ricoeur's words once again, "it is itself the spiral movement that brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities that the narrative retrieves" that enables Tituba's constant change as fundamental characteristic of her hybrid consciousness.⁹² In this sense, Tituba's "real" story—her hybridity—does not end with the novel itself, but continues with each reader and storyteller that in the future turns back to the past to add new meanings to her voice. Tituba's interaction with others, allowing her constant transformation, continues combining the circular nature of the storytelling and the linearity of the

⁹¹ Ricoeur 183.

⁹² Ricoeur 186.

creativity that each recipient of the story uses to project new meanings of Tituba's past into the future. Hybridity, then, is constantly changing since Tituba's identity is forever in transit and depends on individual acts of creative power to continue being formed.

Rendering Tituba's identity in a state of becoming also associates Tituba with the traditional quest of epic heroes. However, Tituba's actions are not heroic in the classical sense of the word. She is never the "head" of a state, the representative of a people, or the inspiration of many. Yet, she does need to pass a series of obstacles and face her destiny becoming someone new in the process. Condé herself describes Tituba as a "mock-epic" character, an anti-heroine who relates more closely to the picaresque tradition than to the *Bildungsroman* per se. Antonio Rey Hazas describes the character of the *pícaro* in his introduction of a modern edition of *El Lazarillo de Tormes*:

He is a character opposed to the moral and social concept of honor. His behavior is always against honor, and therefore anti-heroic ... the *pícaro*'s anti-heroic attitude implies the picaresque novel's critique of the superficial concept of honor, based on fake appearances and external pretense, money and heritage. Simultaneously, the anti-heroism of the picaresque novel shows a longing for freedom ... a desire to go over the rigid social and moral barriers of the times to defend human independence.⁹³

Eventhough there are obvious differences between the Spain of the Golden age and the American colonies, Tituba, like the *pícaro*, awakens from a period of innocence into one of adversity. The world treats her as an outcast. Throughout her journey from master to master, the variety of

⁹³ Antonio Rey Hazas, "Introducción," *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (Madrid: Castalia, 1989) 34. "[Es] un personaje opuesto al concepto moral y social de la honra. Su postura es siempre anti-honrosa, por lo mismo que es antiheroica ... la actitud deshonrosa del *pícaro* implica la crítica de la novela picaresca contra la concepción superficial del honor, basada en las falsas apariencias y oropeles externos, dinero y herencia de sangre. Simultáneamente, el antihonor picaresco supone un anhelo de libertad ... un afán de saltar por encima de las rigurosas barreras socio-morales de la época, en defensa de la independencia humana." My Translation.

characters whom Tituba encounters represent the different socio-cultural discourses that help form Tituba's hybridity. Yet, they also compete with one another to control Tituba's identity and ultimately her representation. However, Tituba's voice is able to expose them as fixed and artificial forms of identification. They confine the freedom of individual consciousness. Thus, Tituba transcends them to maintain her independence.

John Indian is one of the most significant characters in the novel since he represents the famous literary figure of the trickster. He embodies a discourse of resistance that insists on the possibility of using and manipulating the very system of oppression in order to survive.⁹⁴ His biological drives, well-endowed physique, and abundance of words intoxicate the young and impressionable Tituba at the beginning of the novel. As her husband, he takes upon himself to teach Tituba how to live as a slave. Thus, he urges Tituba to play the part of the slave to survive. "Repeat, my love! What matters for the slave is to survive. Repeat my angel! You just need to pretend. Repeat!"⁹⁵ Yet, throughout the novel his character becomes discredited. He cannot effectively fight oppression because he does not have an autonomous to challenge the system. He consciously plays the roles that the dominant discourse has imposed on him in order to ease his situation, no matter the cost. In doing so, he accepts his condition of slave, maintaining the status quo:

John started to hop from one foot to another and in a whining, humble voice, like a child asking for a favor, he pleaded: "Mistress, when a nigger takes a wife doesn't he deserve

⁹⁴ The figure of the trickster in African-American literary criticism has become an example of the possibility of overcoming the system of oppression from within. Audre Lorde states that "the master's tools never dismantle the master's house." Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues otherwise in *The Signifying Monkey*. He uses the topos of the trickster in the African and African American oral tradition to prove that the "master's house" can be "dismantled" using his "tools" if they are used in a new and unconventional way, specifically pointing out to the double-voiced and indeterminacy of the Trickster's use of the oppressors language as a subversive mechanism. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁹⁵ Condé, *I, Tituba* 25.

two days rest? Doesn't he, Mistress? ... Susana Endicott suddenly softened her tone. "Be off with you and report back to me on Tuesday." In the same comical and exaggerated way, John insisted: "Two days, Mistress! Two days!"⁹⁶

In order to obtain his limited privileges, John Indian has to embody the discourse that oppresses him. In the process, he loses his personal voice. Pascale Bécél agrees, "John Indian's motto is survival through compliance with the plantation system."⁹⁷ Yet, the role of the trickster has traditionally been to dismantle the dominant discourse from within. Indeed, in *Moi, Tituba*, John Indian might be consciously appropriating and benefiting from his own ridicule; however his voice is established as a mere reaction to the language of power. He is not capable of finding a unique space to articulate his own subjectivity independently from the dominant discourse. That is, he is not able to distinguish his voice from that of the oppressive other. During Carnival season, Tituba feels uncomfortable with the noise and excessive promiscuity. John Indian responds,

Don't put such a face, or my friends will think you're condescending. They'll say your skin is black, but you are wearing a white mask over it ... They expect niggers to get drunk and dance and make merry once their masters have turned their backs. Let's play at being perfect niggers."⁹⁸

Ironically, his words remind one of Fanon's famous *Black Skin, White Masks*. Yet, in this case, John Indian is the one who becomes alienated by his own distortion of the other's discourse.

Later in the novel, Tituba confronts him: "You are like a puppet in their hands. I'll put this string and you pull that one ..." John Indian defends himself:

⁹⁶ Condé, *I, Tituba* 21-22.

⁹⁷ Pascale Bécél, "Moi, Tituba Sorcière ... Noire de Salem as a Tale of Petite Marronne," *Callaloo* 18.3 (1995): 611.

⁹⁸ Condé, *I, Tituba* 32.

“I wear a mask, my tormented wife. Painted the colors they want. Red, bulging eaves?
‘Yes, Massa!’ Thick, black lips? ‘Yes, Myssy!’ The nose flattened like a toad? ‘At your
service, ladies and gentlemen! And behind all that, I John Indian, am free.’⁹⁹

Yet, it is clear that John Indian’s freedom is shallow, if it exists at all. The “mask” he
complacently wears only serves to secure the system and to comfort those who put it in place as
a reassurance of its normality and authenticity. Moreover, his performance fixes him into the role
he is expected to play. As for his consciousness, he is trapped in the same totalizing discourse he
claims to dupe, “you believe that some of them can respect and love us. How mistaken you are!
You must hate without distinction!”¹⁰⁰

If Tituba defies indiscriminate antagonism and de-humanization as the means to resist
oppression, she also rejects the unconditional glorification of Antillean heroism as conveyed by
marronnage. In *Moi, Tituba*, the character of Christopher depicts a selfish maroon leader,
undermining in this way the sacrosanct image of this quintessential hero in the Caribbean. Thus,
Christopher’s preoccupation has less to do with the precarious situation of the plantation slaves
than with his own narcissistic obsession with becoming immortal like the mythical figure of Ti-
Noël. He asks Tituba to use her powers to make him invincible. Added to his self-centered
motivations, his chauvinistic pride promises Tituba “everything a woman desires” in exchange
for her services. Tituba defiantly responds, “Meaning what?”¹⁰¹ Her skepticism and inability to
make him immortal lead Christopher to expel Tituba from the camp and ultimately to betray her,
causing her death. Christopher thus becomes in the novel the antithesis of what *marronnage*
represents for Glissant: “The fundamental cultural opposition to the new order imposed on the

⁹⁹ Condé, *I Tituba* 74.

¹⁰⁰ Condé, *I, Tituba* 74.

¹⁰¹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 146.

slave ... a clear example of the systematic opposition, of total refusal.¹⁰² In *Moi, Tituba*, the challenge to the nobility assigned to the male maroons as avatars of resistance is motivated less by a desire to instigate any confrontation with the canon of Caribbean literature than by a constant preoccupation with destabilizing monologic narratives of truth of any kind. In an interview with Françoise Pfaff, Condé explains her portrayal of maroons as traitors:

It's a fact known to anyone who studies the history, but people don't like to stress that. They prefer to talk about the first phase of the maroons's history, their rebellion. I like to shed light on what people want to hide, and I consider it more important ... If I tell you a story, you have to continue to the bitter end and say that there are two sides to it: one noble and one much less so. In the final analysis, the story of the Jamaican maroons offers a valuable reflection on present times and on power—to see that people who have done everything to gain freedom may be ready to sacrifice others to keep it.¹⁰³

Through a less than honorable representation of Christopher, *Tituba* reveals another side of the maroon reality obscured by a discourse of resistance that has romanticized the run-away male slave as the paragon of Antillean heroism. Thus, John Indian and Christopher characterize in the novel two different ways of challenging the domineering power of the other. On the one hand, John Indian struggles to survive manipulating the system from within, and wants to impose the same on *Tituba*. Christopher, on the other hand, escapes the system in order to create and maintain at all costs his own realm of influence and reputation. *Tituba* denounces both discourses as flawed modes of resistance through a compassionate, yet negative representation of the characters. John Indian is never able to discern an autonomous and unified consciousness to call

¹⁰² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 179-180. “L’opposition culturelle fondamentale au nouvel ordre impose à l’esclave ... un exemple incontestable d’opposition systématique, de refus total.” My translation.

¹⁰³ François Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) 50.

his own out of his constant double-voiced discourse. Christopher is ultimately unable to realize his cause for what he becomes consumed by dreams of immortality. He is so eager to emulate the mythical past of his predecessor, Ti-Nöel, that he is willing to ignore the cause to settle for a self-serving narrative of invincibility. In this manner, he bolsters the system of oppression for the rest of the plantation slaves. The discourse of the trickster and the maroon are effectively weakened by Tituba's critical approach and desire to maintain her distance from monologic discourses of honor, heroism, and resistance. By the same token, Tituba challenges militant feminism as another narrative that may limit individual consciousness.

At first look, *Moi, Tituba* might appear an anti-patriarchal narrative due to the negative representation of some of the male characters discussed above, Samuel Parish, John Indian, and Christopher. However, there are more sympathetic portrayals of men—Yao, Benjamin Cohen, Deodatus—than there are of women. Apart from Man Yaya, Tituba's encounters with other women are characterized by hatred, betrayal, rejection, suspicion, and jealousy. Abena rejects Tituba and deprives her of any maternal affection. Susannah Endicott, Tituba's first mistress, loaths and debases Tituba while under her service. Elisabeth Parris seems to establish a genuine friendship with Tituba after both are hit by Samuel Parris on board of the *Blessing*. "This blood sealed our alliance," Tituba assumes that experiencing a similar form of male oppression would constitute a durable bond. Nevertheless, she soon realizes that women are not the same despite suffering under the same patriarchal establishment: "We did not belong to the same universe, Goodwife Parris, Betsey, and I, and all the affection in the world could not change that."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Elisabeth Parris is quick to accuse Tituba of being responsible for her child's sudden attacks of hysteria. Tituba attributes Elisabeth's betrayal to jealousy, which seems to Tituba an impossible obstacle to overcome among women. She reflects, "in the twinkling of an

¹⁰⁴ Condé, *I, Tituba* 63.

eye, all that had been forgotten and I had become the enemy. Perhaps, in fact, I had never ceased to be one and Goodwife Parris was jealous of the ties I had with her daughter.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the novel’s first impression as a narrative of all-man hatred and collective action to attain women empowerment needs to be discarded in order to find a more subtle discourse.

Michelle Smith argues that “the most dangerous trap the novel lays for seekers of female solidarity is the appearance of Hester Prynne in the Ipswich prison,” where Tituba is incarcerated on charges of sorcery.¹⁰⁶ In an obvious intertextual wink, Condé sets up an encounter between a character somewhat similar to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous Hester Prynne and Tituba. Yet, Hester in *Moi, Tituba* turns out to be a more radical feminist than the resilient, yet acquiescent woman of *The Scarlet Letter*.¹⁰⁷ Hester is in the Ipswich prison charged with adultery when she meets Tituba. They automatically establish a bond that proves to be more durable than any other relationship that Tituba has had in the story. Nevertheless, their outlook regarding love, men, and womanhood is widely divergent. Hester embodies a Western feminist credo that sounds unreasonably extreme for Tituba. The first of their misunderstandings comes from Hester’s pre-assumed notions about Tituba’s culture. Tituba proudly tells Hester her name as a way to introducing herself. Hester repeats it “with delight” as it had a rare mixture of exoticism and female independence. However, she becomes disappointed when Tituba informs her that her father had given it to her. Hester exclaims, “you accepted the name a man gave you? ... I was hoping that at least some societies were an exception to this law. Yours, for example!” Tituba

¹⁰⁵ Condé, *I, Tituba* 71.

¹⁰⁶ Michelle Smith, “Reading in Circles: Sexuality and/as History in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*,” *Callaloo* 18.3 (1995): 603.

¹⁰⁷ While it is tempting to assume that Condé’s Hester is Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, one should be cautious of making that mistake. While Condé has admitted to having read Hawthorne’s novel, she never uses Prynne as her character’s last name. Hester Prynne never conceived from her husband, whereas Condé’s Hester aborts four of her children. Finally, Hester Prynne accepts her punishment, while Hester commits suicide in a jail cell.

responds amused at Hester's ignorance, "perhaps in Africa where we come from ... But we know nothing of Africa any more and it no longer has any meaning for us."¹⁰⁸

Abortion is another topic of contention. While Tituba is still conflicted by her decision to have spared her child of a life of misery under bondage, Hester confesses her success at having aborted four children. She explains that she would have found impossible to love them due to her hatred for her husband. Moreover, Hester seems to give priority to gender over race as a form of discrimination. She firmly believes that "life is too kind to men, whatever their color."¹⁰⁹

Ironically, when Tituba learns that Hester likely punishment for adultery would be to wear a scarlet letter braided on the chest of her dress, she exclaims, "Is that all they do?"¹¹⁰ By that time Tituba has been already gang raped by the ministers as a way to force her to confess, highlighting Hester's lack of awareness about the difference that race and gender, together, make in the face of bigotry. Yet, the most important disagreement between Hester and Tituba has to do with sexuality. Tituba has described herself as an overt sexual being who cannot do without heterosexual sex. Hester, on the other hand, expresses a desire for a world devoid of men and governed exclusively by women, "I'd like to write a book where I'd describe a model of society governed and run my women! We would give our names to our children, we would raise them alone." Alarmed, Tituba points out to the fact that men would be needed to have children and that they would have to stay a while because, as she jokingly adds, "I like to take my time." Immediately, Hester adds "You [Tituba] are too fond of love," which seems to disqualify her to be a feminist in Hester's eyes.¹¹¹ Hester's androphobia and radicalism, despite an obvious

¹⁰⁸ Condé, *I, Tituba* 95-96.

¹⁰⁹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 100.

¹¹⁰ Condé, *I, Tituba* 98.

¹¹¹ Condé, *I, Tituba* 101. The word feminist, "féministe," did not exist in 1692. Condé might have consciously used the linguistic anachronism to emphasize contemporary "Feminism" as a form of

affection between the two women, prevents Tituba from partaking of Hester's feminist discursive agenda. Tituba chooses to distance herself once again from totalizing discourses, pointing out the evident incongruities that monologic narratives present. Tituba prefers her inconsistency and ambiguity—she defies patriarchy but cannot live without men's love and sex—to engaging in a counterproductive and dangerous discourse that would ultimately alienate her “self.”

The array of characters in *Moi, Tituba* exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia. Their utterances are designed to express certain ideologies that struggle to dominate each other as they already dominate the characters through whom they are voiced. In that sense, these characters, unlike Tituba, are trapped in single, monologic narratives. Tituba, in contrast, consciously fights to maintain an individual consciousness by creating and recreating her voice through each encounter. Tituba's voice remains active. That means, according to Bakhtin, that Tituba's voice possesses the creative ability to “discover [herself] already surrounded by heteroglossia ... [and] must actively orient [herself] ... must move and occupy a position for [herself] within it.”¹¹² Thus, while Tituba guides her voice among the multiplicity of social ideologies present in the novel, she reveals a concomitant ideology that constitutes her own authorship: her ability to present herself with a vigorous assertion as she does in the title of the novel: “Moi, Tituba.” In contrast, the other characters remain stable. They never attempt to coordinate their voices with those of the others. They embody predetermined discourses that do not allow for creativity, fluidity or inclusiveness. Their identities are fixed and naturalized by the seemingly indisputable nature of the narratives they come to represent.

monologic discourse. Overall, Condé is not as interested in historical accuracy as she is in questioning the authority of monologic discourses.

¹¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 294.

After all, Man Yaya is right when she keeps reassuring Tituba, “out of them all, you’ll be the only one to survive.”¹¹³ Creativity, also a characteristic of the *pícaro*, is the only way to live on.¹¹⁴ Of course, her character dies at the end of the novel, but Tituba’s voice, as we have already stated, continues transforming and creating itself through storytelling. Michael Holquist indicates that the most radical implication of Bakhtin’s thought is that “anyone who speaks thereby creates.”¹¹⁵ Thus, Tituba surmounts the monologic and barren ideologies presented in the novel by creating her own voice and identity through the appropriation and adaptation of those narratives into her own story of self. This creative ability constitutes Tituba’s hybrid consciousness. Not only does she welcome the diversity and the tension derived from it, but she can hardly dominate her desire to encounter her others. Moments before meeting Hester, she chastises herself, accepting her disposition of making friends despite the circumstances.¹¹⁶ It is out these encounters that Tituba establishes her voice since they assist in the on-going process of “writing” herself. Tituba incorporates, or to use Bakhtin’s word, “orchestrates” their ideologies into her consciousness, maintaining at the same time her own unity and identity.¹¹⁷ In that sense, Tituba embodies the transcendence of heteroglossia into hybridity as defined by Bakhtin, “it’s the mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter ... that is intentional [and] artistically organized.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Condé, *I, Tituba* 85.

¹¹⁴ Antonio Rey Hazas states that the *pícaro* faces a hostile world in which “tendrá que aguzar su ingenio, si no quiere perecer,” “Introducción,” *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* 36.

¹¹⁵ Holquist, “Answering as Authoring” 315.

¹¹⁶ Condé, *I, Tituba* 95.

¹¹⁷ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 299.

¹¹⁸ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 358, 366.

Paradoxically, Tituba's hybridity imposes on her a painful and radical form of solitude.¹¹⁹ As Condé affirms, "[Tituba] lacks a sense of community."¹²⁰ Although Tituba is constantly meeting and serving new people, she necessarily remains alone. Her only regular companions are the spirits of her ancestors who mysteriously guide her through her trials. But, to be able to ascertain her unique voice, Tituba needs to maintain a distance from the discourses she encounters. In other words, her hybridity, although formed in dialogue with others, is internally and independently created as opposed to external narratives of identification that require no coordination for being fixed and externally imposed on the individual. This allows Tituba's voice to free itself from the controlling authority of universal narratives. Moreover, Tituba's voice also has the power to reveal and challenge the fixity and artificiality of monologic discourses. She exposes the bigotry inherent in the Western discourse of witchcraft, the flaws of the historical accounts that choose to subdue her voice, the Manichean structure of slave society whose survival is contingent on the immutability of racial divisions, the ineffectiveness of a mere double-voiced rhetoric that maintains the black-versus-white paradigm, the reliance on myths as a way to escape reality and entrench in a self-centered view of the world, and finally the unreasonable demands of ideologies that blind and undermine the self. In a word, hybridity opens an arena in which different discourses interact with each other while they expose their contingencies, tensions, ambiguities, gaps, and flaws. At the same time, another, independent voice is forming out of the energy created by such dialogic interaction. Bakhtin calls this new voice "hybrid" since it is an "artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another [whose] goal [is] the illumination of one language by means of another,

¹¹⁹ Loneliness is also an imperative in the life of the *pícaro*. As a figure who criticizes the socio-political establishment, he needs to maintain an independent and exclusive point of view as he describes his reality. See Antonio Rey Hazas, "Introducción," 36.

¹²⁰ Fulton 150. "[Tituba] n'a pas les sens de la collectivité." My translation.

the carving-out of a living image of another language.”¹²¹ Tituba’s ability to create her own voice through and while she “illuminates” those of others forces her to remain detached, alone, and therefore free from unitary and monolithic discourses of self.

However, it would be inconsistent with a hybrid form of identification to claim that any given voice like the one orchestrated by Tituba constitutes an ideal of conduct. Accordingly, Maryse Condé asserts that she is “not interested in giving models” to people. In fact, she warns us “not to take Tituba too seriously.”¹²² Tituba is after all depicted as a human being: flawed, naïve, fearful, oblivious, and selfish at times. Indeed, she, like the *pícaro*, is an anti-heroine. The irony implied in presenting the subversion of an exemplary character as the embodiment of hybridity is nonetheless completely appropriate. Hybrid consciousness as we have already stated is necessarily in constant transformation. To be able to transform, the character of Tituba also needs to maintain a distance from her own discourse of “self”—don’t take herself too seriously—otherwise, it would become fixed and monologic once again. Parody allows such distance, that is freedom even from the text we call “our self.” By the end of the novel Man Yaya asks, “you talk about freedom. Have you any idea what it means ?”¹²³ Obviously, the novel does not give us an answer. However, a partial understanding of freedom as implied in the novel has to do with what I have described throughout this chapter as the art of hybrid consciousness. That is to say, to achieve human independence from any kind of prescriptive and restrictive narratives of self, one needs the ability to see identity as a text in constant change. This text is formed and informed by others, but we cannot fall into the trap of promoting it as a natural and incontestable representation of our absolute Truth. To conclude, let me borrow Elisabeth Wilson’s words:

“We, the peoples of the Caribbean, have previously been trapped by the myths created by others.

¹²¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 361.

¹²² Armstrong Scarborough 200, 212.

¹²³ Condé, *I, Tituba* 162.

Condé warns against the danger of us falling into the trap of fictions that we created about our own selves.”¹²⁴ Although these words are about Condé and refer to Caribbean culture, they can be applied equally to all humanity.

¹²⁴ Elisabeth Wilson, “Sorcières, sorcières: ‘*Moi, Tituba, sorcière ... Noire de Salem*’ révision et interrogation,” *L’œuvre de Maryse Condé. Questions et Réponses à propos d’une Écrivaine Politiquement Incorrecte*, Ed. Nara Araujo (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996) 113. “Nous, peuples de la Caraïbe, nous avons autrefois été piégés par les mythes créés par d’autres. Condé nous met en garde contre le danger de nous prendre au piège des fictions que nous aurons nous-mêmes créées.” My translation.

CHAPTER 5

MADNESS AND THE POSTMODERN HYBRID:

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*:

“Fantasy is not a simple turning of one’s back on “reality” but a way, however devious, strange and explosive, of coming into contact with it; indeed, in part constructing it.”¹

“Fiction is not random and narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.”²

5.1 Ambivalence as a Trap: Transcending the Master Discourse

Bhabha asserts that “the end of grand narratives licenses the production of new histories by those previously silenced.”³ His agenda, heavily influenced by postmodern precepts, attacks the tyranny of Truth and tries to dismantle the relationship between language and power. Thus he understands hybridity, or in its active form, hybridization, as the process that enables the disruption of the binary between the colonial self and other. Hybridity is for Bhabha the ambivalence that distorts the authority of Western logic and the postmodern condition that allows for a re-appraisal of the dominant word by writers who, like Toni Morrison, have emerged from once oppressed cultural groups. Yet, as already analyzed in chapter two, Bhabha’s understanding of hybridity promises more than it delivers. Bhabha’s hybridity fixes the

¹ Clifford Geertz, “Making Experiences, Authoring Selves” Eds. Victor W Turner and Edward M. Bruner, *Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 376.

² Toni Morrison, “Nobel Lecture” (December 7, 1993) 2
http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993

³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 4-5.

colonized as an ambivalent man.⁴ That is, subversion in Bhabha's terms is only possible as long as the colonized repeats and mimics the colonizer's culture in his "civilizing" mission. In this sense, Bhabha sees imitation as an opportunity for the colonized to form a counter-discourse that subverts the identity imposed on him, returning a gaze that has grotesquely distorted the displaced image of the colonizer's self.⁵ Yet, this paradigm creates a trap, keeping the colonized and the colonizer tethered. Thus, the colonized is conceived to be in a constant in-between location; from there, he disrupts Western epistemology, assuming, in that way, that his postmodern hybridity is productive and politically subversive. While Bhabha's theory might help to understand the psychological economy of power, control, and cultural imposition as exercised by the colonizer, it does little to describe the process by which the colonized constructs his/her subjectivity outside the binary of colonial order. The hybrid for Bhabha does not exist outside, but in-between the polarity of colonizer and colonized. The colonized individual, then, is forced to live at the point of ambivalence, within the "folds" of the master text. This hardly idyllic situation prevents the colonized from ever achieving an aesthetic independence. Moreover, Bhabha's theory begs the question of whether the "subject" can keep his/her sanity, being an ambivalent shadow, "always the split screen of the self and its doubling."⁶ Indeed, Toni Morrison herself rejects this "borderline experience" to which the colonized is relegated by

⁴ It is important to notice that Bhabha's work only concerns itself with the male experience, which has regenerated multiple critiques of his theory including that of Ania Loomba in "Overworlding the 'Third World'": "Despite Bhabha's hybridity thesis, the colonial subject in his work is remarkably free of gender, class, caste or other distinctions. Other historians of colonial discourse, alert to all of these, and sensitive also to postcolonial politics, arrive at a very different notion of interaction and locate subaltern resistance within a population which cannot be homogenized even by virtue of its common subjection to colonialism." See Ania Loomba, "Overworlding the 'Third World'" *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991):183.

⁵ Homi K Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985):154.

⁶ Bhabha, "Signs" 156.

postmodern accounts of hybridity, for the voice that results from such entrapment is psychotic.⁷ Thus, Bhabha's conception of hybridity is not a functional analytical tool to understand contemporary narratives of subject formation under conditions of asymmetrical power relations. His theory of hybridity once again builds a universal and monologic paradigm that not only homogenizes a vast and varied number of individuals, but also assumes that from a position of ambivalence the colonized can look back. I agree with Ania Loomba when she asserts that there must be a different way of understanding hybrid subjectivities beyond the strategic essentialism proposed by Benita Perry and the radical indeterminism of Bhabha's postmodernism.⁸ In fact, there is. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* offers a critical evaluation of postmodern hybridity and a direct challenge to Bhabha's ambivalence as a productive site of subversion.

5.2 Auto-ethnography: Writing the Self out of Objectifying Discourses

Toni Morrison and Bhabha's conception of hybridity seem to correlate since they share concerns about language and its relationship with truth. However, Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, puts into practice narrative strategies that make possible the consolidation of speaking subjects outside the binary schema—colonizer/colonized—and cultural confrontation. It also exemplifies the catastrophic consequences of failing to ascertain a voice in such circumstances. Madness, as Kristeva asserts, is the result of invisibility and, more importantly, of inarticulateness and mimicry. Thus, the main characters in the novel, Claudia and Pecola, are seemingly opposed—the former acquires a voice while the latter loses it. Thus, more akin to Bakhtin's theory of hybridity and radically opposed to Bhabha's, the novel is ultimately the story of Claudia and her "ideological becoming."

⁷ See Julia Kristeva, "Nom de mort ou de vie," *Writing and Psychoanalysis: A Reader* Ed. John Lechte (London: Arnold, 1996) 106, 107.

⁸ Ania Loomba, "Overworlding the 'Third World'" *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991):172.

Bakhtin's preference for the language of literature, as a medium that can better access a sense of truth, is opposed to theory, which, according to Bakhtin, maintains the "legacy of European 'rationalism,' and therefore "understands truth monologically." Truth can only be perceived in dialogue and communication, since truth resides in the multiplicity of voices and points of views that concern themselves with a given issue.⁹ Toni Morrison echoes this already well-known principle in Bakhtinian thought, despite the fact that a good portion of her work has been devoted to theory rather than exclusively to fiction. Yet, her objection to theory has more to do with monologic discourses that exclude other people's voices, than with the practice of critical analysis per se. Her now famous statement about the relationship between the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Scientific Racism reflects her concern with claiming scientific truth in order to silence others.¹⁰ Thus, it is no coincidence that Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, a collection of her major critical essays, centers on the analysis of American literature from a dialogical perspective, emphasizing the role of peripheral voices, or completely silent ones, in the construction of the "classic" American hero. Morrison acknowledges what Bakhtin affirms elsewhere: the self needs the other to construct its identity. Therefore, her project as a fiction writer in Bakhtin's words is to increase American culture's "awareness of itself and its language, [to] penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and

⁹ See Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson "Extracts from a Heteroglossary" *Dialogue and Critical Discourse. Language, Culture, Critical Theory*, Ed. Michael Macovski (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 266.

¹⁰ In "The Site of Memory," Morrison states: "One has to remember that the climate in which they (slaves) wrote reflected not only the Age of Enlightenment but its twin, born at the same time, the Age of Scientific Racism. David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, to mention only a few, had documented their conclusions that Blacks were incapable of intelligence." Toni Morrison, *Inventing the Truth, The Art and Craft of Memoir*, Ed. William Zinsser (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995) 189.

literature and deprive it of its naïve absence of conflict.”¹¹ This process of de-centralization starts in Toni Morrison, as in Bakhtin, by paying careful attention to language as the site of negotiation of meaning. That is, power is contested in words. For the occasion of her Nobel Lecture in 1993, Morrison chooses to speak about “language” as her central motif, underscoring the urgency to use language creatively in order to “reject, alter and expose” those other “oppressive” languages—sexist, racist, theistic—that “do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.”¹² For Morrison, dialogism should replace monologic claims of truth, acknowledging that language cannot express the totality of meaning. That in itself should be the drive and opportunity to imagine distinct forms of existence:

The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers ... It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie ... It is the deference ... that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never “pin down” slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable ... Word-work is sublime ... because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures difference, our human difference- the way in which we are like no other life.¹³

Walter R. Fisher has reconstructed the pre-Socratic conception of logos as encompassing all forms of human expression and communication. Story, reason, conception, rationale, and discourse came, according to Fisher, under the purview of logos.¹⁴ Morrison finds in this conception of language a more flexible understanding of the world since it allows for different kind of voices and stories to interact, counteracting monologic representations of Truth. Mythos

¹¹ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 368.

¹² Toni Morrison, “Nobel Lecture” 2.

¹³ Morrison “Nobel Lecture” 3.

¹⁴ Walter R. Fisher, “The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning” *Journal of Communication* 35.4 (Autumn 1985): 74.

and logos regain an equal playing field in regard to knowledge and reality. More importantly, they re-unite to revise and de-centralize master-narratives and their tendency to suppress dialogism.¹⁵ “Words like ‘lore’ and ‘mythology’ and ‘folk tale’”, Morrison says, “have very little currency in most contemporary literature. People scorn it as discredited information held by discredited people. There’s supposed to be some other kind of knowledge that is more viable, more objective, more scientific. I don’t want to disregard that mythology ... I want to take it head on and look at it. It was useful for two thousand years.”¹⁶ However, the use of language and narration is not for Toni Morrison, in accord with Bakhtin, an anonymous exercise. As Holquist asserts about Bakhtin, the omnipresent question of his work is: “Who is Talking?,” since for Bakhtin, Holquist adds, “narrative as it organizes most information, whether in scientific tracts or literary texts, seems to give itself as a writing about life.”¹⁷ Words, for Bakhtin, always come “accentuated” by people’s ideologies and represent in turn the character of the individual, his or her identity. However, meaning can always be negotiated by those who are actively engaged in discourse. That would be in fact “the fundamental indicator” for Bakhtin of “ethical, legal, and political human beings.”¹⁸ The “speaking person” grows as he/she challenges and re-establishes the boundaries of other people’s discourses, resulting in a narrative of his or her identity.

¹⁵ Caryl Emerson mentions this return to the original sense of logos in Bakhtinian thought . See Caryl Emerson, “Outer Word and Inner Speech,” 248. Toni Morrison makes reference to the use of myth and folklore in her work. Yet, it is important to note that African American cosmology is as predominant in her work as Classical Greek mythology. Two studies that look at Morrison’s work from these two perspectives are Elizabeth T. Hayes, “ ‘Like Seeing you Buried’”: Persephone in the *Bluest Eye*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the *Color Purple*” *Images of Persephone. Feminist Readings in Western Literature*, Ed. Elizabeth T. Hayes (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994) 170-195. K. Zaudity-Selassie, *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

¹⁶ Charles Ruas, “Toni Morrison” *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 113.

¹⁷ Michael Holquist, “From Body-talk to Biography: The Chronobiological Bases of Narrative” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1 (1989) 33.

¹⁸ M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 349-350.

Holquist refers to this particular narrative as “the text which we call our self.”¹⁹ Similarly, Toni Morrison is interested in the way that storytelling determines subject formation. That is, the way in which the stories we tell “create us” as they are being created.²⁰

Thus, art is for Morrison, as it is for Bakhtin, the medium through which we have to face the world and bridge the gap between ourselves and others. Certainly, art is an element of survival in contexts of absolute repression.²¹ She asserts that “the slaveholders have won if this experience is beyond my imagination and my powers. It’s like humor: you have to take the authority back ... They were inventive and imaginative with cruelty, so I have to take it back—in a way that I can tell it. And that is the satisfaction.”²² For that reason, it is absolutely necessary to create texts about our selves that take control of external definitions of individual identities. The crucial importance of such a task for Morrison is encapsulated in the epigraph she chooses to introduce her sixth novel, *Jazz*. Taken from an ancient group of codices entitled “Thunder, Perfect Mind,” found in a cave close to the town of Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt, the message is almost uncannily similar to the intellectual contention between Saussure and Bakhtin thousands of years later:

I am the name of the sound,

And the sound of the name.

I am the sign of the letter

¹⁹ Michael Holquist, “Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin’s Trans-linguistics” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (December 1983): 315.

²⁰ Toni Morrison, “Nobel Prize Lecture” 4.

²¹ So it is for Bakhtin if we take into account that his writing about the subject was done while he was in prison or exiled to the eastern province of Kazakhstan, Russia. See Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 143.

²² Gail Caldwell, “Author Toni Morrison Discusses Her Latest Novel *Beloved*” *Conversations* 245.

And the designation of the division.²³

The text alludes to the gap between the signifier “I,” as a sound and graphic, and the “I,” as a signified, the “self.” The “division” of the two can only be bridged, as Bakhtin suggested, by “designation.” That is, the narration of the “I” is the only possible way of connecting signifier and signified due to the arbitrariness of signs. The responsibility of the individual is, then, to “designate” the meaning of his/her “self” through a narrative that would close the gap, momentarily, between the signifier, “I” and the signified, “self.” Thus, the “I” would be able to speak as a subject rather than an object.

This premise is not a new concept in the African American tradition. Slave narratives, a fundamental influence in the work of Toni Morrison, were written to infuse humanity in the “I” of the slave by means of a narrative that combined logos and mythos, story and literacy. The slaves/authors used the signature, “written by himself” or “herself,” to both “authorize” and to “authenticate” their selves as human beings. Indeed, the audience of slave accounts did not doubt their experiences as slaves as much as their humanity, their intelligence, their ability, their literary, and their right to freedom.²⁴ The “I” of these texts is created and defined in the text itself; the author takes control of his/her own definition. Yet, these narratives were short of details about the slaves’ “interior life,” according to Morrison.²⁵ The subjectivity of the narrator in these stories is overshadowed by his/her responsibility to the community and the practical purpose to convince the white audience of the moral rightness of abolition. Yet, these narratives evolved at the hands of Zora Neale Hurston. Her line of life narrative, auto-ethnography, as Alice

²³ For an analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and its conceptual relationship with *The Nag Hammadi Library* and Bakhtin, see Justine Tally, *The Story of Jazz. Morrison’s Dialogic Imagination* (Hamburg: Forum for European Contributions in African American Studies, 2001).

²⁴ Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory” 189. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the roots of “authorize” and “authenticate” come from the Latin “*auctor*” “to originate” and “to promote.”

²⁵ *Ibid*, 191.

Deck calls it, consists of an “intricate interplay of the introspective personal engagement expected of an autobiography and the self-effacement expected of cultural descriptions.”²⁶ This particular combination manifests a commitment to personal narratives while it rejects the pitfalls of “ragged individualism” on one side, and the communal self-abnegation, on the other. Thus, as Deck states, the polyphonic and dialogic structure of these accounts avoid “a monolithic observing self in favor of one that narrates from the multiple potions of personal anecdotes, generalized descriptions, and personal irony.”²⁷

Here lies the appeal of Bakhtin’s thought to the study of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Life, experience, art, narration, and community combine to conceive identity as a fiction of the self.²⁸ Yet, we should understand fiction here not as the invention of any random narration. As Bakhtin reminds us, discourses of the self are always tied to the interactions with and responses to others. They are “crafted” out of the relationships of power among different languages and the internalization of such discourses into a personal voice that becomes the sign of the self. Hybridity, then, manifests itself in the narrative as the voices of others become “orchestrated,” transcending monologism. In order to do that, the “I” must be conceived as an object that confronts the outside world with a self-referential discourse. Indeed, Bakhtin’s famous quote, “the author becomes another in relation to himself” means, as it relates to Morrison’s conceptualization of identity, that while the “I” is never conceived in isolation, it is not essentially identified as a metonymy of a particular culture or becomes whole.²⁹ Hybridity

²⁶ Alice A. Deck, “Autoethnography: Zora Neale Hurston, Noni Jabanu, and Cross-Disciplinary Discourse” *Black American Literature Forum* 24.2 (Summer 1990): 238.

²⁷ Deck 238, 239.

²⁸ Bakhtin’s project as summarized by his two major critics is to “fuse the three great subjects of Western metaphysics -- epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics -- into a single theory of the deed.” Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* 57.

²⁹ M. Bkhtin, *Art and Answerability*. Early Philosophical Essays. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990) 15.

depends on the integration of different discourses within the self, yet it also recognizes the other, not as an object of discourse, but as a subject, and as such, she can invent as much as she is invented. Then, the “I” author(s), as much as it is authored, creating a labyrinthine exchange of roles between object and subject that allows for a more dialogic interaction between independent yet responsive subjectivities.³⁰ Jorge Luis Borges asks, “Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of Quixote and Hamlet is a spectator of Hamlet?” His answer: “These inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious.”³¹ And we are, or should be, according to Bakhtin, since it is only through the on-going process of authoring oneself that the relationship between subject and object is problematized, opening the possibility of “writing back,” as the first steps to begin “decolonizing the mind.”³² Therefore, it is not clear whether the *Bluest Eye* is the story of Pecola or the story of Claudia or neither; and that should not be a surprise. As I suggested, within the Bakhtinian philosophical framework, subject and object blur, informing each other as they constitute themselves. This doubleness is also embedded in the title. The use of the word “eye” refers to the trope of “seeing” as a way of creating the other as an object. However, its homophone “I,” designating Claudia, tells the story of Pecola and the community of individuals

³⁰ Michael Holquist underscores that “dialogism is the name not just for dualism but for a necessary *multiplicity* in human perception. This multiplicity manifests itself as a series of distinctions between categories appropriate to the perceiver on the one hand, and to whatever is being perceived on the other.” Holquist, “From Body-Talk” 16.

³¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Partial Magic in the Quixote” *Labyrinth: selected stories and other writings*, Ed. Ronald A. Yates (New Directions, 2001) 196.

³² I make reference here to two major studies in post-colonial thought in order to relate Bakhtin’s theories and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* with the seemingly distanced field of post-colonial studies. Ngugi Wa Thiongo *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Studies in African Literature Series. (London: Heinemann, 1986) and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

to which they belong. As Claudia narrates other people's stories, her identity is being formed, acquiring in the process a hybrid consciousness that escapes objectification.

5.3 Claudia's Inner Speech and the Necessity of Dialogizing Our Identities

Morrison introduces the novel by making reference to the teaching of reading and writing through storytelling, showcasing the problems of perception, definition and meaning that permeate her entire work.³³ The 70's story of Dick and Jane—their suburban house, their dog, a cat, and a “very nice” mother and “a big and strong” father—serves not only as the primer to American consciousness, but also as a discourse that excludes from the American community anyone who cannot image himself or herself through the story.³⁴ Thus, what seems a fairly innocent tale of a “happy” family turns into a lethal form of control of the American symbolic order. Thus, the novel emphasizes the power of controlling the means of representation. It also shows the emptiness of the sign as a source of signification. Through the repetition of the same discourse three times, the primer is distorted to the point that loses its meaning and power, becoming an empty signifier. This exercise forecasts the destiny of those characters in the novel that fail to recognize the arbitrariness of the sign and internalize it, becoming victims of the Word and the stories of others. Claudia represents the alternative to accepting monologic forms of representation that exclude and relegate the other to the position of a subject. Her drive is the deconstruction of monologic discourses in order to find the source of their power. Thus, early on, she realizes that power does not come from any particular, concrete reality and that the language imposed on her by adults and society does not suit her. That is, Claudia becomes dissatisfied with the language of the other; it is meaningless to her. As a result, her voice starts a process of

³³ Cynthia A. Davis “Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction” *Toni Morrison*, Ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Publications, 1990) 7.

³⁴ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (Plume, 1994) 3.

dialogizing the master text that ultimately re-names and re-defines reality according to her own perception, causing monologic narratives to lose grip on her subjectivity.

Indeed, Claudia's house is not as nice as Dick and Jane's. Hers is "old, cold, and green." In fact, Claudia's world is described in direct opposition to the one that appears in the preface. The cat and the dog are substituted by roaches and mice, and adults "issue orders" without taking into consideration the feelings and opinions of the children in the house.³⁵ Such an environment, if judged by the "healthy" and "moral" life set in the primer as a standard of living, is negligent for it does not share the values of the white American middle-class. Economic hardships are paired with a sense of moral impoverishment that seems to be the cause of depravity. Sickness and vomiting, then, are fitting metaphors for their apparently unwholesome lives. When Claudia come home after collecting coal for the house warmth on a cold winter day, she gets sick and is yelled at, almost insulted, by her mother, " ' Great Jesus. Get on in that bed. How many times do I have to tell you to wear something on that head? You must be the biggest fool in town.' "

Claudia, full of remorse, describes the way she feels,

I lie down in my underwear, the metal in my black garters hurts my legs, but I do not take them off, for it is too cold to lie stockingless ... No one speaks to me or asks how I feel. In an hour or two my mother comes. Her hands are large and rough and when she rubs the Vicks salve on my chest, I am rigid with pain ... I am covered up with heavy quilts and ordered to sweat, which I do—promptly.

Later I throw up ... My mother's voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia. She wipes it up as best she can and puts a scratchy towel over the large wet place. I lie down again ... My mother's

³⁵ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 10.

anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but my sickness.³⁶

Claudia's description of her sickness and her mother's "insensitive" reaction to her catching a cold might be surprising to the reader; it lacks the condemnation that one would have expected from the "nice" middle-class mother featured in the preface. However, if we read this scene through Bakhtin, we might be able to understand Morrison's aesthetic strategy. Her writing is not governed by middle-class decorum. Instead, the references to the body, its sweat and the orifices that allow the "puke" to be expelled, remind us of Bakhtin's notion of "grotesque realism" and his work on *Rabelais* as supreme example of this aesthetic. "The essential principle of grotesque realism" Bakhtin writes "is degradation."³⁷ While Claudia's narrative voice is not as humorous as that of Rabelais in *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, her focus on the body and its "degradation" from a physical and psychological standpoint are not considered negative. That is, the puke is not gross, and the mother's reaction to Claudia's sickness is not cruel. On the contrary, the body is conceived as a locus of value and regeneration since its materiality and anarchic nature contrast with the serious rigidity of monologic discourses. As such, it has the power to relativize everything that is official, sacred, elevated and that claims perfection and finishness. Thus, as Bakhtin says, "[the body] offers a liberation from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" from "external censorship" and even "from the great interior censor."³⁸ Telling the story focusing on the body as a human common denominator shows an anti-authoritarian aesthetic that is able to expose the futility of monologism. It also grants a sense of personal affirmation that renders any comparison with the Dick-and Jane story pointless. Certainly, the more Claudia speaks about her experience, the more the preface loses the power to exclude her. In turn she gains the ability

³⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 10-11.

³⁷ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana U.P, 1984) 19.

³⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 34, 94.

to give universal symbols and language different intonations and meanings. “Motherly love” in the *Bluest Eye* is forever transformed from the middle-class white values instilled by the story in the primer to a love that for Claudia is “thick, sweet and dark.” In fact, the apparently antithetic terms “love” and “pain” join in Claudia’s language to signify motherhood and those hands that “don’t want [her] to die.”³⁹

An even more poignant example of the body as a locus where struggles over meaning are disputed and resolved with new directions is Claudia’s hatred for dolls. While children and adults alike seem to rejoice looking at the “blue-eyed Baby Doll” as a symbol of supreme beauty, Claudia cannot understand where the value of “the thing” actually lies. Her instinct leads her to deconstruct the sign, literally. That is, she looks inside the plastic body of the doll with the hope of finding the source of its power:

I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured ... I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around ... remove the cold and stupid eyeball ... take off the head ... crack the back ... and I could see the disk with six holes, the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundness.⁴⁰

Claudia finds nothing. That is, she finds that there is no substance, no essential meaning in the thing itself. Nothing makes her beautiful. Thus, she discovers at a tender age what Saussure calls

³⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 14.

⁴⁰ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 20-21.

arbitrariness of the sign and what Derrida terms to be the absence of presence. She also notices the social currency of the sign, which she does not accept readily “as is” or “just because.” Instead, and despite her family, the larger community, and the overall social structure, Claudia starts a process that dialogizes the symbols of monologic languages, especially those that impose their influence on her. Thus, dialogism renders her a subject involved in the re-generation and generation of discourse. The authoritative text—“the word of a father, of adults and teachers”—demands an unconditional alliance that Claudia is not ready to give.⁴¹ The development of her consciousness is based on what Bakhtin calls a practice of creating an “innerly persuasive” discourse that, while it is not directly opposed to the “authoritative” one, struggles with it in order to gain power over and demystify its privilege. The result is Claudia’s voice. A voice that is informed by a complex array of discourses that Claudia has to learn as a member of a society, but that she herself has analyzed, organized, responded to, supplemented. Thus, Claudia is not baffled with the love that everyone seems to profess for blue-eyed dolls. She also knows that the same affection is “transferred” to white girls, and so is her hatred.

The indifference with which I could have axed them [white girls] was only shaken by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, “awwww,” but not for me? The eye slide of black women as they approached them on the street, and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handled them ... When I learned how repulsive this disinterested violence was, that it was repulsive because it was disinterested, my shame floundered about for refuge. The best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I

⁴¹ M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 342.

learned much later to worship her, just I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement.⁴²

Since Claudia learned by dismembering the dolls that there was no essential reason to consider them superior in their beauty, she concludes that white girls' power must be "magical." She cannot see the magic, but she can feel it in others. Yet Claudia's hatred and consequent violence is different when it is directed to real girls. Yet, she understands that the objectification she makes of the doll by examining it, dissecting it, dismembering it should not be transferred to human beings. Indeed, such "disinterested violence" toward other girls is shameful, for Claudia. Then, her discourse changes as a result of her struggle with the outer language and her inner word, finding a temporary settlement in "fraudulent love." Some critics have found this change "devastating" or at least not as "appropriate" as her first reaction, "pristine sadism."⁴³ Yet, both Claudia's "hatred" and "love" share the same characteristic—they are "fabricated," "fraudulent,"—in a fictional sense. That is, both emotions are created. They are produced as a reaction to something that Claudia has already found out non-existent, imaginary created in and by language. Thus, Claudia has discovered the "magical secret," which the dominant culture controls: the ability to name, define, and create the meaning of things. Her love or hatred is towards the image that the authoritative voice imposes and that she has learned to dialogize, to objectify in order to "play with it." Then, her "love" or "hatred" for cleanliness as much as whiteness becomes a conscious "adjustment" to a discourse that has already lost its aura; therefore, it continues being subjected to the same irreverence that Claudia shows for the dolls. This complexity in Claudia's voice is typically hybrid in Bakhtinian terms. Claudia's

⁴² Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 22-23.

⁴³ See Donald B. Gibson, "Text and Countertext in the Bluest Eye" *Toni Morrison Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993) 162 and Davis, "Self, Society, and Myth" 11.

consciousness is not in between or marginal.⁴⁴ Hers is a unique and concrete voice that has materialized as “half-[hers] and half-someone else’s.” However, “it is not *finite*,” either, because it continues creating, examining, and changing meaning for as long as her life and narrative continue.⁴⁵

Claudia’s voice contrasts in the novel with other characters’ narratives. Namely, the Breedloves represent the antithesis of the Dick-and-Jane family. “They were poor and black” and “they believed they were ugly,” Claudia says to introduce them. While the section is devoted to the Breedloves, Claudia’s narration still shows her ability to understand what other people do not: in this case, that blackness and beauty are not biological, essential terms, but part of a dominant discourse geared to objectify and marginalize designated groups of people. Thus, as Claudia affirms, while their poverty “was not unique”—Claudia is poor, too—their “ugliness” is. She adds, “no one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly ... [They] wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them.”⁴⁶ Claudia knows that blackness and beauty are discourses used by others. They need to be dialogized, altered to suit her own voice, in order to fulminate their authority. Claudia’s strategy—skepticism, dissection, examination, incorporation into her inner voice and later articulation—is not present in the development of the individual consciousness of the members of the Breedlove family. In place of hybridization, they accept their objectification, undermining any chance to take control of the discourse that oppresses them. Claudia explicitly reports,

⁴⁴ So contends Michael Awkward in “‘The Evil of Fulfillment’: Scapegoating and Narration in *The Bluest Eye*” *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. K.A. Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993) 183-184. Note that Bhabha makes a similar argument when describing hybridity. I will discuss that later as I compare Claudia’s voice with Pecola’s.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 345, 346.

⁴⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 38.

The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes,” they had said. “You are right.” And they took their ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it.⁴⁷

It is appropriate at this point to recall Bhabha’s theory of objectification. The discourse of the stereotype is a strategy of power that assigns rigid roles to those considered “other” in order to appease the anxiety of the master’s psyche. According to Bhabha, there is no real base to the stereotype, hence the constant need of repetition. Yet, the discursive strategy of the stereotype does have real and devastating consequences for the people who are objectified by it. *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates these consequences by portraying characters who succumb to the power of the stereotype. One of those characters is Pauline Breedlove, Polly. If the beginning of Pauline’s life was somewhat “lovely,” the novel points out once again directly to her body, primarily to a cavity in her front tooth and a crooked foot, as metaphors of the external circumstances that come to determine in physical ways someone’s life. Like her fallen tooth or her crooked foot, Polly’s life is characterized by isolation and powerlessness. To compensate, she delights in taking control of the world around her, significantly ordering and counting things. Ironically, it turns out the other way around. As she moves North with her husband, Pauline feels how people reject her for her appearance. In the eyes of others, she becomes an object to be classified as unrefined, Southern, and ignorant. Consequently, the narrator says, “She merely wanted other women to cast favorable glances at her.”⁴⁸ Yet, straightening her hair, wearing high heels or putting make-up does not quite help her get the look required to be accepted. She still feels as

⁴⁷ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 39.

⁴⁸ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 118.

“no-count.”⁴⁹ Pressured by the white and the black world alike to become the image they think she should be, she takes refuge in the darkness provided by movies. That is, while her self is shadowed by the dark that covers the audience in the theater, she progressively replaces it with the illuminated image of the white world projected on the screen. Thus, she ends up not only being subjected to the stereotype but accepting an image of otherness that causes her final reification as object to be rejected not only by others, but now by her own self. This completes in Polly the process of objectification by means of the discursive and scopic strategies that, according to Bhabha, show a debilitating ambivalence in the master’s text. While that might be the case in Bhabha’s theory, Polly is never able to return the gaze:

She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen. There at last were the darkened woods, the lonely roads, the river banks, the gentle knowing eyes. There the flawed became whole, the blind sighted, and the lame and halt threw away their crutches ... It was really a simple pleasure, but she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate.⁵⁰

Having accepted a new set of “foreign” values dictated by the way white people see the world, Polly “settled down to just being ugly.”⁵¹ Moreover, to counteract her “ugliness,” she also takes on the role of the “perfect servant,” a job that gives her “second-hand” power and perpetuates the hierarchical structure of objectification that the master discourses create.

[In the Fishers’ house] she could arrange things, clean things, line things up in neat rows ... She reigned over cupboards stacked high with food that would not be eaten for weeks, even months ... The creditors and service people that

⁴⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 117.

⁵⁰ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 122.

⁵¹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 123.

humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers. She refused beef slightly dark or with edges not properly trimmed ... Power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household.⁵²

The little power Polly may attain as “a good servant” in the value system of the master, she holds over whom she considers her inferiors, even when those are, in the case of Polly, her own family. Thus, her “goodness” is inflated by her husband’s shortcomings and her family’s needs. Moreover, she finds in the language of Christianity the perfect channel to validate her self-righteousness:

She took on the full responsibility and recognition of breadwinner and returned to church ... She came into her own with the women who had despised her, by being more moral than they; she avenged herself on Cholly by forcing him to indulge in the weaknesses she despised ... she stopped saying ‘chil’re’n’ and said “childring” instead ... holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross.⁵³

Polly needs to create and constantly make “otherness” a reality in order to reinforce her “goodness” and “superiority.” Thus, if we accept mimicry as a process of transformation in which the subject assumes the image as a coherent representation of self, Polly has become a mimic woman. Or better yet, an “authorized version of otherness,” in the form of a “good” servant—the counterpart of the “good native,” or “the good savage,” depending on the historical and cultural context of the many different instances of colonization.⁵⁴

⁵² Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 127-128.

⁵³ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 126.

⁵⁴ As I noticed previously in the section dedicated to Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, Bhabha’s mimicry, as stated by Young, creates “authorized versions of otherness,” “white but not quite.” See pages 89-95 of

Unlike Polly, Geraldine does not consider herself “ugly.” On the contrary, “brown, narrow, and tall,” she is closer to the Western ideal than Polly.⁵⁵ Yet, just like her, Geraldine has internalized the norms, culture, and values of the dominant culture in an attempt to “civilize” anything in her and around her that remotely might be associated with “otherness.” For that reason, she zealously guards her behavior, making sure “to get rid of the funkiness . . . of passion, of nature. The funkiness of the wide range of human emotions.”⁵⁶ Her fight is against the stereotype of blackness because of her firm belief of belonging to a “higher breed.” In this sense, Geraldine is a prisoner of her body, obsessively watching over it so that it does not exceed the rigid form she has imposed upon it. Thus, she strives to attain the physical and moral ideal of Western perfection. She is not the only one subjected to this self-imprisonment, but her son too is not allowed to play with black kids, only white ones:

White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable.

Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the

this dissertation. The figure of the “good native” is delineated in the context of Indian colonization by Macaulay in “Minute on Indian Education.” He envisaged creating, “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” The Minute is based on an idea that English education is not just superior in “science”, but would also inculcate the superior morals that were responsible for making the English superior. See Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education,” (2 February 1835) *Macaulay, Prose and Poetry*, selected by G. M. Young (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957) 729. The myth of the “good savage” is used by Columbus in his observations of natives in the Americas and later interaction with them in the context of conquest and colonization. The “noble savage” was considered naturally good, a nice-minded aboriginal, able to accept the Christian god. “Good savages” were also considered useful, obedient people, most likely to be easily exploited by the Spaniards. The Cannibals were considered the opposite of the “Good savage.” For an essay on the origins of the myth and its development in Caribbean literature see Michael Palencia-Roth, “Mapping the Caribbean. Cartography and the Cannibalization of Culture” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* Vol.3 A, James Arnold ed. (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992) 3-29.

⁵⁵ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 81, 82.

⁵⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 83.

former group: he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool.⁵⁷

Both Polly and Geraldine are consequences of a system of oppression that imposes mimicry on the Other. They no longer try to find ways to image themselves differently and in their own language. Instead, they accept, embody, rather, the objectification of their beings, losing any ability to speak other than through the master's language. Moreover, they play a role in the reaffirmation of the narcissistic demands of the "authoritative language," by accepting it and modeling themselves after it to the point of invisibility. When Polly goes to give birth to a hospital and the doctor refers to her as a "horse," to "teach" his medical students the "fact" that black women deliver with "no pain." Polly remarks, "*They never said nothing to me. Only one looked at me. Looked at my face, I mean. I looked right back at him. He dropped his eyes and turned red. He knowed, I reckon, that maybe I weren't no horse foaling. But them others. They didn't know.*"⁵⁸ Polly does look back, but her look does not disrupt or disturb anyone but a student who only looks at her face and flushes. Her gaze is by no means "radical." Her body serves as the object that keeps sanctioning the powerful discourse of the other. Her final reflection about this experience is even more poignant, as it refers to her lack of voice but the presence of pain, which while it is there as it is in the horse, nobody sees because they don't have the language to express it.

That doctor don't know what he is talking about. He must never seed no mare foal. Who say they don't have no pain? Just 'cause she don't cry? 'cause she can't say it, they think

⁵⁷ Morrison *The Bluest Eye* 87.

⁵⁸ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 125.

*it ain't there? If they looks in her eyes and see them eyeballs lolling back, see the sorrowful look, They'd know.*⁵⁹

Hybridity does not result, as Bhabha asserts, out of the psychological ambivalence of the master's psyche. Nor does it contest or subvert his authoritative discourse. Indeed, hybridity can never be a product of repetition of a barren language such as the master's text. Hybridity necessarily amounts to another language. That is, in the mere repetition of the values and the language of the dominant culture there is no room to express oneself differently and be heard or seen as a subject. On the contrary, mimicry requires the objectification of others in order to secure everyone a place in the scale toward the ideal. For Geraldine, that scale is clear. Knowing herself in a better position, she further deepens the hierarchy established by the dominant language by signifying the border between "colored" and "niggers." Thus, the most vulnerable, in the case of the *Bluest Eye*, Pecola, the youngest of the Breedlove family, get caught in the system with no means of escaping its pervasiveness and sadism.

Pecola, Pauline's daughter, is born within the system that condemns her to be "ugly."⁶⁰ For Geraldine, she is the embodiment of the "nigger," "a nasty little black bitch."⁶¹ Then, Pecola's response to Western standards and behavioral codes is more primal, pre-linguistic, than the ones displayed by Polly and Geraldine. Probably because of that, it is even more damaging. Pecola obsessively drinks milk out of a Shirley Temple cup with the hope of a transformation into the object everyone desires: the image of the little white girls/dolls that Claudia despises.

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of

⁵⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 125.

⁶⁰ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 126.

⁶¹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 92.

those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We musn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes ... Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people."⁶²

Nevertheless, Pecola tries to find familiar ways to identify with personal experiences to create a language of her own. For example, she cherishes the beauty of dandelions, even when everyone scorn them for being "many, strong, and soon."⁶³ Yet, she is unable to translate and possess their potential to signifying differently in order to "illuminate" the language of the other, to make hers hybrid. Her language remains monologic. She can only see through a set of "blue eyes." The tipping point of her commitment to monologism and firm desire to transform her body is when she becomes conscious of her invisibility. The white immigrant clerk at the corner store senses,

that he needs not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant store keeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little back girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary.⁶⁴

Significantly, after that scene, the dandelions, that she once thought as pretty, "*are* ugly" now. "They *are* weeds." She no longer tries to dialogize outer and inner language. She immediately accepts the exterior, authoritative language without question. Significantly, at that moment, she loses her internal compass, the beginning of what could have been her inner persuasive

⁶² Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 46-47.

⁶³ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 47

⁶⁴ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 48.

discourse, and “trips” on the “familiar” sidewalk crack in her way back home.⁶⁵ Then, language is replaced by anger as “a reality and presence” and her downfall starts to unfold. Unlike Claudia, she fails to see the emptiness of the symbol and the futility of pursuing it. She loses, early on, the ability and strength to create new symbols. Instead, she firmly believes that by literally consuming those that are already created for her, she will finally become one of them:

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane.⁶⁶

Her objectification along with that of others in the novel, starting with her own mother, Pauline, Geraldine, children at the school, Moureen etc., complete Pecola’s transformation into the ultimate other. Her community and the larger society, so dependent on exclusion in order maintain the hierarchical order, send Pecola to the very bottom of the scale. Poor, black, dirty, ugly, young, and female, Pecola is the perfect scapegoat. She represents that Other “worst” than me. The one who everyone despise and keep down their own sake, for the uplifting of one’s status depends on the further pushing of others down and away from the center of society.

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us—all who we knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her

⁶⁵ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 50.

⁶⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 50.

inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silent our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength.⁶⁷

Mimicry, practiced, in different degrees, by all members of society, does not provide a realistic chance at subversion. Indeed, the gaze, which Bhabha assures could hybridize the master text, is returned by very few, if any. On the contrary, mimicry exacerbates the difficulty of attaining individuality for those who are pushed down to the bottom, since people's glances are not directed toward the master, but to those who are the most vulnerable. Certainly as Cynthia A. Davis affirms, being subjected to master discourses and the gaze of the other is “an inescapable ontological experience.”⁶⁸ People like Pecola, who cannot find a way to get out the pervasive system, disintegrate.

Thus, when Pecola is subjected to the ultimate taboo in Western society—incest—she is positively rejected by everyone. Consequently, she does the only thing she knows: she asks for blue eyes in a desperate and instinctual attempt to flee from her own self. That is, if she were able to change her body, she would change her existence, her experience, her whole being, with it. Soaphead, a mimic man himself, having been subjected to the pressures of Colonialism in the Caribbean, understands Pecola's plight:

Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty ... Of all the wishes people had brought him—money, love, revenge—this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most

⁶⁷ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 205.

⁶⁸ Cynthia A. Davis 8.

deserving of fulfillment. A little back girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of blackness and see the world with blue eyes.⁶⁹

The “evil of [its] fulfillment” is indeed devastating.⁷⁰ After the visit to Soaphead and the working of his “magic,” Pecola starts hallucinating a self with blue eyes, and another who sees them. Thus, Pecola splits, entering a psychotic stage that destroys her ego, precluding any possibility of ever becoming a “speaking subject.” Pecola enters what Kristeva calls a “borderline” state, in which one becomes both “actor,” involved in life, and “spectator,” observer of life.⁷¹ Both positions are unstable and fluid within the “self” and disconnected from others. Then, a splitting occurs that is accepted as a condition of being. The subject loses its limits becoming within itself subject and object, an ambiguous entity without a stable “I” from where to speak. Significantly enough, the next time we hear from Pecola in the novel, she is looking at herself in a mirror and two indistinguishable voices speak back a forth,

I'd like to do something else besides watch you stare in that mirror.

You are just jealous.

I am not.

You are. You wish you had them.

Ha. What would I look with blue eyes?

Nothing much.

If you're going to keep this up, I may as well go off by myself.

No. Don't go. What do you want to do?

We could go outside and play, I guess.

But it's too hot.

⁶⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 174.

⁷⁰ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 204.

⁷¹ Kristeva, “Nom,” 106-107.

You can take your old mirror and look at yourself up and down the street.

Boy! I never would have thought you'd be so jealous.

Oh. Come on!

You are.

Are what?

Jealous.

O.K. So I'm jealous.

See I told you.

No. I told you.

...

Pecola's ambiguity or "unbeing," as Toni Morrison herself calls her state, resembles what Bhabha refers to as hybrid.⁷² He endorses an ambiguity that requires not only invisibility, but also indeterminacy and complete instability, all in order to cause paranoia in the master's psyche. Bhabha's "evil eye/I" is for Toni Morrison the "bluest eye/I." Far from being able to return the gaze, Pecola ceases to exist, having no voice, language, and experience of a concrete body to host her subjectivity. Hence, mimicry as a practice that may result into hybridity, as Bhabha contends, is not a practical way to challenge and subvert authoritative and oppressive discourses, for Toni Morrison. The risk of getting caught in the trap of monologic discourses, because they do not require constant struggle with society, is too great. Moreover, repetition, as the basis for mimicry, not only demands to be complicit with hierarchical structures of power, but also precludes the origination of new meanings with which one can fight back.

⁷² Toni Morrison, "Afterword," *The Bluest Eye* 215. Kristeva uses the same word "unbeing" to criticize the state Lacan called *désêtre* as an ideal moment in which the subject becomes conscious of the fact that "he is nothing other than its language." Bhabha uses Lacan to model his theory of colonial subjectivity and state of hybridity as that moment when the colonial subject also becomes conscious of his "doubleness" and use it against the master's psyche and the master's text. See Kristeva, "Nom" 114.

Morrison shows other characters who live according to different principles and outside the standards of the dominant culture. Miss Marie, Poland, and China are prostitutes. They rent above Pecola's storefront apartment, and, unlike the rest of the community, do not "despise" her. On the contrary, they tell her stories, give her clothes, and acknowledge Pecola with "fond" epithets. The prostitutes are the only ones who show Pecola any kind of affection. For that reason, the three prostitutes enjoy a sympathetic portrayal in the novel.⁷³ Moreover, the prostitutes are also important in the novel because they categorically reject any discourse that would "validate" prostitution under the eyes of the dominant culture. So while in the novel Miss Marie, Poland and China are the most humane of the characters with Pecola, they remain "whores" for the rest of society. Indeed, they do not challenge, they embrace, rather, the meaning of the word, to its fullest extent. Thus, they enjoy the work they do and who they are without regret, apology, or ameliorating circumstances.

They do not belong to those generations of prostitutes created in novels, with great and generous hearts, dedicated, because the horror of circumstance ... Nor were they from that sensitive breed of young girl, gone wrong at the hands of fate, ... Neither were they the sloppy, inadequate whores who, unable to make a living on it alone, turn to drug consumption and traffic or pimps to help complete their scheme of self-destruction. They were not young girls in whore's clothing, or whores regretting their loss of innocence. They were whores in whores' clothing, whores who had never been young and had no word for innocence.⁷⁴

Morrison's prostitutes reject all the possible ways in which their profession would be "acceptable" for society. Thus, they enjoy freedom from the suffocating language of official

⁷³ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 50, 51.

⁷⁴ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 56-57.

recognition and authorization. Indeed, that might be the reason why they see Pecola under different eyes. However, their freedom comes from a complete and conscious removal from society. That is, if they are not defined by it, they are yet limited by their hatred toward everyone who belongs and partakes of the system. The narrator emphatically explains, “these women hated men, all men, without shame, apology or discrimination. They abused their visitors with scorn grown mechanical from use. Neither did they have respect for women, who, although not their colleagues, so to speak, nevertheless deceived their husbands ... it made no difference.”⁷⁵ In this manner, the prostitutes, despite their amiable interaction with Pecola, do not seem to provide a successful model to resist objectification since their alternative is to be marginal. Similarly, Soaphead Church shows some understanding to Pecola’s predicament. His empathy derives from his formal knowledge, books, and from the conviction that whiteness is superior. Thus, being himself of mixed-blood and an intellectual, he feels above and beyond humanity. His profession, though degraded over the years from being a priest, a psychiatrist, a sociologist, caseworker, physical therapist, to end up as a “Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams,” gives him “numerous opportunities to witness human stupidity without sharing it or being compromised by it.”⁷⁶ Thus, he considers God his only equal addressee. His complaints and challenge to God for the system He allows seem relevant. Yet, his misanthropy disqualifies him to be a respectable and sympathetic candidate to emulate when trying to navigate among the swaying pressures of everyday life.

There is yet one other character who is described as positively “free.” However, his freedom turns out to be the most dangerous way to escape the demands of society. Cholly, Pecola’s dad, is a difficult character to analyze. While Morrison does not justify his actions,

⁷⁵ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 56.

⁷⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 165.

specifically the rape of his daughter, she does not allow easy judgment. Part of the reason is the recognition of his victimhood. After a life characterized by abandonment, reproach, racism, and continued oppression, his “ugliness” stems from the abusive treatment he has received at the hands of others. Cholly “reacted to [his children,] and his reactions were based on what he felt at the moment,” the narrator explains.⁷⁷ Thus, what Cholly felt that ignominious Saturday afternoon was a mixture of tenderness and impotence, even love. If the prostitutes and Soaphead understand and sympathize with Pecola, Cholly is reported to love her in the only way he knows, for as the narrator also tells us, “love is never any better than the lover.”⁷⁸ Cholly’s characterization as a “free” man is even more troubling:

Only a musician would sense, know without even knowing that he knew, that Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman. Free to take a job, free to leave it. He could go to and not feel imprisoned, for he had already see the furtiveness in the eyes of his jailer ... He was free to live his fantasies, and free even to die, the how and the when of which held no interest for him. In those days, Cholly was truly free. Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him.⁷⁹

The nature of Cholly’s freedom is his existence beyond language. That is why only a musician would have understood his emotions. He is not tied to language constraints and therefore “dangerously free” from the judgment of other human beings. Alone, not lonely, his disconnection from society allows him to manifest his “love” or “hate” for Pecola in any way he

⁷⁷ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 38.

⁷⁸ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 206.

⁷⁹ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 159-160.

feels at a particular. Thus, while the prostitutes and Soaphead hate humanity, Cholly's language simply does restraint any of his emotions. His physical sensations are the only instincts he knows how to follow. Consequently, his actions speak for him. But, the freedom he achieves from dominant discourses is the most destructive for any kind of subjectivity.

Bakhtin tells us that "two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence."⁸⁰ Toni Morrison agrees. The above mentioned characters, despite their independence from the domineering discourses of others, do not engage in the necessary and always unfinished dialogue in which the discourse of one's self is interpenetrated by others. Isolation reduces the subject as much as objectification. Indeed, Toni Morrison relates in one of her interviews that black people considers those who *can* see others as morally superior.⁸¹ That is, Morrison, as Bakhtin, affirms an existential irreducibility of the other. Someone else's "I" needs to be recognized as another subject.⁸² The significance of this imperative is that characters are not explained by an authorial voice, but they themselves reveal who they are when subjected to the extreme pressures of society. "It's important to me," Morrison says, "that the interior life of each of those characters be one that you could trust, one that felt like it was a real interior life; and also be distinct one from the other, in order to give them—not 'personalities,' but an interior life of people that have been reduced ..."⁸³ The result is a polyphonic narrative in a Bakhtinian sense: a plurality of independent voices, consciousness and subjects.⁸⁴

Behind all those voices there is yet another story, which is Claudia's struggle over narrative authority. Claudia affirms, "we had defended ourselves since memory against

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 252.

⁸¹ Thomas LeClair, "The Language must not sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," in *Conversations* 127.

⁸² Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 10.

⁸³ Marsha Darling "In The Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison" *Conversations*, 253.

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, *Problems* 6.

everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, all gestures subject to careful analysis.”⁸⁵ Claudia is the antithesis of Cholly, and contrasts in different degrees with the characters that populate the novel. Indeed, her voice is the one that makes the effort to negotiate her way through the multiple languages that the novel presents. Even when Claudia does not understand at times, she is “careful to listen for truth in timbre.”⁸⁶ She shows respect and understanding for the character’s subjectivities, however, she offers more than that. She offers the narration of their subjectivities, or the aesthetic discourse that translates others’ consciousness into her inner speech. In doing so, hers becomes a hybrid voice, oriented towards someone else’s discourse, but that suggests a narrative authority that goes beyond that of the other characters’.⁸⁷ Thus, even though Claudia allows others to talk by themselves, like Polly, Cholly or even Pecola, what the reader hears is Claudia’s inner speech, her subjectivity. In that sense, Claudia partakes of the tradition of authoring one’s self by re-telling stories, to use Bakhtinian language, or storytelling, elsewhere. Claudia’s subjectivity emerges from the stories and through the re-telling of her story: the novel itself. As Morson concludes, it is possible to say that Bakhtin devised a novelistic theory of the psyche.⁸⁸ Certainly, *The Bluest Eye*, the novel itself, is the sign of Claudia’s consciousness turned into a hybrid identity by re-telling the story of others, specifically Pecola’s, in relation to herself. The critics seem to agree that the novel’s narrative point of view deploys a combination of omniscient and first person narration.⁸⁹ If we continue relating it to Bakhtinian thought, the novel constitutes instead the narration of Claudia’s meta-language. That is, Claudia narrates the way her inner self has been formed and continues

⁸⁵ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 191.

⁸⁶ Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 15.

⁸⁷ Referred to as doubled-voiced or hybrid by Bakhtin in *Problems* 199.

⁸⁸ Morson, “Extracts from Heteroglossay” 269.

⁸⁹ See Lynne Tirell, “Storytelling and Moral Agency,” *Toni Morrison’s Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, Ed. David Middleton (New York: Garland, 2000) 15.

forming out of other people's words. First person, third person (as oneself) and omniscient narrator are fused together by a narrative authority whose purpose is to "take refuge in [telling] how" one escapes destruction while still engaged with society by means of language negotiation and narration. That is how the division between I/other becomes fluid, informing each other as they form with each other's help. Similarly the temporality of the novel is not rigid or stable. A mixture of past, present and future framed by the circular movement of seasons infuses a sense of openness to the narrative and therefore to Claudia's self. While the past is revisited in the stories, it is not constituted as a source of origins. Cyclical time does not allow such reification. Instead, both past and present are re-evaluated to spring into a future that is always on the process of becoming.

And now when I see her [Pecola] searching the garbage—for what? The thing we assassinated? I talk about how I did not *plant* the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the hearth, the land of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year ... and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim has no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it does not matter. It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage, and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late.

The novel, just like Claudia's hybrid consciousness is narrated out of a sense of unfinalizability. While Pecola's story has tragically ended, the narrator has penetrated the "unyielding language."⁹⁰ That is, her knowledge has allowed her to narrate from the future where a better outcome has already materialized. In "Author and Hero," Bakhtin's affirms that for the "I," "memory is memory of the future; for the other—it is memory of the past."⁹¹ That is, past

⁹⁰ Toni Morrison, "Nobel Lecture," 2.

⁹¹ Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability* 125.

discourses and stories from which Claudia's voice is born are finished. Yet, those very same discourses have shaped her, and will continue shaping her. For as long as she keeps dialogizing the voices of others, hers will never arrive to an end. Thus, her voice touches past, present, and continues into the future more like a spiral than a predetermined arrow. In that sense, the constitution of Claudia's hybrid self, like the future, is never whole or fixed. It retains for oneself "the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words." This "loophole" in the word of the self means that our stories are indeed merely an aesthetic construction, a novel, in a Bakhtinian sense.⁹² Their hybridity grants them freedom, for they are open-ended, like the subject that they imagine. To conclude, I will make reference to possibly the most famous "mad" character in World Literature, Don Quixote. Far from being crazy, Don Quixote is free because he is capable of making "all the fables and fantastical tales" as true "as the most authentic Histories."⁹³ He dialogizes epic narratives and turns them into his own stories. Similarly, Claudia's freedom, her hybridity, is the freedom of Don Quixote. Far from being in a maddening state of in-betweenness, like Pecola, she is capable of liberating herself from the authoritative narratives, such as "Dick-and-Jane," making them another story among the many she dialogizes. Then, Toni Morrison suggests that real madness affects those who take on one single story and make it History, accepting in it an epic, monologic quality, repeating it over and over until they believe its complete and utter nonsense.

⁹² Bakhtin, *Problems* 233. Also, Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability* 109.

⁹³ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (Barcelona: Editors, 1995) 20. My translation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: WRITING HYBRIDITY

For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.¹

This dissertation has explored the concept of hybridity illustrated by contemporary texts written by women of color in the Americas. My aim has been two-fold. First, I introduced “hybridity” as a social and individual phenomenon resulting from the encounters among different cultures, tracing its origin to the very beginning of human existence. But immediately my interest focused on the cultural and political appropriations of the phenomenon of hybridity in the Americas from the time of the Spanish empire to the postmodern era. The discourses of mestizaje, creoleness, and liminality were historically and culturally situated in order to examine the politics of conquest and domination implicit in the terms and their linkage to ideological assumptions of the Other created by Eurocentric dominations. Therefore, I argued that mestizaje, creoleness, or postmodern fragmentation are not narratives that can be used to satisfactorily explain the process by which an individual develops a hybrid consciousness. Indeed, hybridity, as it has been deployed by the sociopolitical discourses of mestizaje, creoleness, and postmodernism, has retained the drive to monologism. These narratives end up reducing cross-cultural dialogue to another national, cultural, racial and/or psychological model of identification. That is, they counter the Western tendency to essentialize with their own ways to circumscribe and flatten identities. Thus, if the rhetoric of empire sought to legitimize an Eurocentric way to look at the Other, these discourses retain the Western mode of universal representation. They just overturn the binary, understanding “hybridity” as nationalism, inverse racism, indigenism, or constant in-betweeness. Ironically, these terms are invoked in cultural

¹ Theodore Adorno, *Mimima Moralia* (London: Verso, 1978) 87.

and literary studies to proclaim the end of absolute narratives and the beginning of a fluid and fragmented subject. An emblematic example is Gloria Anzaldua 's *Bordelands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. A new mestiza consciousness is for Anzaldua, one of "crossing over," "perpetual transition," "plural personality."² While I am certainly aware of the difficulty to dispense with the cultural baggage of language, I have contended, as my second aim, that the women writers featured in my dissertation pursue a definition of "hybridity" outside the terms of dominant, theoretical discourses. They are profoundly committed to dialogism. In the words of Peter Hitchcock, they "reassert the sign as a site of struggle" rather than working on re-appropriations or redefinitions.³ That is, while they reject the use of mestizaje, creoleness, or postmodern liminality for being an extension of imperialistic and colonial discourses, their fiction is a conscious project to examine and revise the ideological assumptions that have governed the question of identity as a totalizing and monologic discourse.

Therefore, theirs, I contend, is a more successful strategy to understand the ways in which individual identities are formed in contexts of cross-cultural confrontation. By engaging in what one can call provisionally "theoretical fiction," Rosario Ferré, Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison do away with the split between theory and fiction, doing both simultaneously. Thus, the novels counter official, cultural, and theoretical narratives of hybridity by exposing how any discourse with the authority to name the Other ends in a single voice. Yet, at the same time, the novels are meta-narratives. They articulate their conception of identity as a result of cross-cultural encounters based on a process in which dialogism and narration are the main means to develop self-consciousness. Thus, unlike the political and cultural narratives of hybridity, the novels' commitment to dialogism resurrects the subject. In *Discerning the Subject*, Paul Smith

² Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987) 77-91.

³ Peter Hitchcock, *Dialogics of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 5.

argues that in cultural and political theories the “ ‘subject’ [has been] removed almost entirely from the political and ethical realities in which human agents actually live.”⁴ Ferré, Condé, and Morrison outline subjects whose agency derives from their ability to create themselves out of dialogism and storytelling. That is, the individual becomes a subject when she develops a hybrid consciousness by means of the identification, evaluation, appropriation and incorporation of others’ discourses into the narrative of one’s self.

Consequently, Rosario Ferré, Maryse Condé, and Toni Morrison challenge and redefine previous theoretical discourses, engaging in the dialogue from a different standpoint. That is, their novels object to previous discourses of hybridity. Yet, they do not offer an alternative theoretical model. They articulate conceptions of identity that are the result of cross-cultural encounters negotiated by dialogism and narration as the main means to develop a self. Bakhtin’s theory of “the intentional hybrid” in the novel has been particularly useful to analyze the novels’ processes of identification. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin explains that hybridization is the “mixing of two languages within the boundaries of a single utterance ...that is deliberate.”⁵ Moreover, if we understand Bakhtin’s notion of language to be a “specific world view,” and polyphony to be the encounter of multiple world views in the novel, the deliberate orchestration of languages within “a unique artistic system”⁶ is the notion of hybridity that the novels apply to the individual’s development of consciousness. Personal identity is thus understood in the novels not as a finished, monologic product outside language, but as a production of it. Then, individual identity is indeed a novel, a story. It uses language to form itself and develops as inner experience meets the social world, responding “to signs with signs.”⁷ The authors’ firm

⁴ Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988) xxix.

⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 358.

⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 299.

⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 11.

commitment to dialogism concedes that a single consciousness cannot be generated in isolation, but it needs another consciousness against which to form itself: “the principles of giving a form to the soul are the principles of giving a form to inner life *from outside*, from *another consciousness*.”⁸ As a result, the novels emphasize writing and storytelling as the way to “craft” individual identifications that are always engaged in cross-cultural dialogue.

Therefore, unlike the political and cultural theories of identity, these narratives do not look for a fixed “self” as an expression of a lost origin, an essential core or a representation of a national collective. They find identity in the “inner” voice, which, by virtue of “orchestration,” in Bakhtin’s terms, or story-telling elsewhere, becomes hybrid, intentionally incorporating the polyphony that is particularly evident in contexts of cross-cultural confrontations. Indeed, heteroglossia becomes the driving force of the narratives. Yet, the narrators of the novels do not simply dwell on it, as postmodern theories of hybridity seem to argue, but “welcome” it as a means to create “the unity of [their] own creative personality and the unity of [their] own style.”⁹ Thus, the narrators’ hybridity stems from their ability to arrange and control these multiple and bipolar voices into their own unique systems: a single utterance that constitutes their own story and self-expression.

There are several implications here that distinguish the novels’ conception of hybridity from its theoretical and cultural counterparts. First, the novels conceive a unified, coherent subject, rather than a multiple and fragmented one. Yet, that subject does not have an essential core, nor is fixed, or has unique origin. Its awareness, as constituted through and out of language, allows for the movement and constant development of self-representation. Also, the novels emphasize the complex dynamics between binaries—man/woman, black/white, inside/outside—

⁸Bakhtin, “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” in *Art and Answerability* 101.

⁹Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 298.

without ever resolving the tension. Thus, hybridity is not to be considered a mixture of opposites or a solidification of multiple narratives. On the contrary, hybridity challenges the notion that pure opposites exist in the first place. Finally, the articulation of a hybrid identity out of heteroglossia contrasts with monologic discourses, exposing their limitations as viable forms of personal and individual representations. Indeed, the narrators, as Bakhtin affirms in reference to words, are situated “on the borderland between self and other.”¹⁰ They are caught between authoritative representations of self-identity and un-privileged, often oppositional, and still monologic alternatives. Thus, their articulation of a hybrid self depends on the main characters’ learning to dialogize and transform opposing unitary discourses into narratives of self. In turn, these narratives combine the plurality of voices into one personal story that at once “fights” and generates new meaning, attaining a “heteroglot” voice in the process. In sum, the hybrid subject attains unity and agency because of her dialogism.

Yet, this understanding of hybrid identity as “orchestrated” in language out of polyphony and heteroglossia still faces the problem of legitimization. This problem is overcome in the novels through language, as well. Self-narration becomes a performative speech act when contrasted with monologism. That is, a hybrid awareness of one’s self challenges monologic discourses of identity because they are denounced as external, finished narratives imposed in the name of power. Moreover, the quest for self-representation is motivated by a reflection on the characters’ voicelessness, self-erasure, sense of worthlessness and up-rootment as a consequence of others’ “authoritative” discourses.¹¹ Thus, their storytelling allows for a metamorphosis into speaking subjects, attaining freedom as the narrative progresses. Bakhtin regards this as a crucial step in the development of hybrid consciousness:

¹⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 293.

¹¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 344.

The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse.¹²

These characters are not hybrid by virtue of their liminality or their never-ending state of in-betweenness. Hybrid consciousness in these novels is indeed unified into a single utterance, a single consciousness whose radicalness resides in a deliberate exposure of the limitations of unitary, authoritative discourses. The characters' freedom stem from "never having to define oneself in [one] language, the possibility of translating one's own intentions from one linguistic system to another, of fusing 'the language of truth' with 'the language of the everyday' of saying 'I am me' in someone else's language, and in my own language, 'I am other'."¹³ This freedom of representation restores the complexity and yet the wholeness of the "self" since it enables the narrators' escape from unitary and monologic discourses of national, sexual, racial, class or gender representations. The limitations of multiple monolithic languages are revealed through the ability of the hybrid consciousness to arrange them into a single narrative in which heteroglossia serves as the force that relativizes and breaks the bonds of any language's absolute authority. The goal of the hybrid consciousness is then achieved in all the novels. As Bakhtin puts it, "the illumination of one language by means of another"¹⁴ is possible through the artistic quality of the narrators' hybrid consciousness that is capable of orchestrating a multiplicity of languages into a unified narrative, yet multiple and sometimes contradictory. The narrators are

¹² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 348.

¹³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 315.

¹⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 361.

hybrid for their ability to overcome their otherness, which they expose as “contingent, external, and illusory.”¹⁵

However, mastering the “art” of hybridity is not easy. It requires a constant critical engagement with the languages and discourses embodied in the portraits of the different characters, attitudes, ideologies, and behavior that the narrators encounter in their journeys. For the authors and Bakhtin himself, this process demands an active and conscious positioning on language.¹⁶ In other words, the protagonists have to learn to negotiate (dialogize) several languages into their own narrative in order to recognize and expose their limitations while creating a personal system that grants them a voice, a home, and a story which they keep developing and revising to survive. Thus, learning to dialogize monologic narratives is as complicated as it is necessary. The successful narrators in the novels—Tituba, Claudia, and Gloria—rely on the act of writing and storytelling to confront monologic narratives on their own turf. The narrative is the medium by which their hybridity exerts control and enables the conscious relativization and dialogization of societies’ distorted sense of hierarchized identities based on color, gender, sexuality, nationality and class. The narrators know that they cannot simply discard authoritative and alienating narratives of identity; yet they show the limitations and restrictions that those narratives impose on the subject while revising and incorporating them into personal systems of recognition.

Thus, hybridity becomes the stabilizing element that keeps the main narrators attached to a personal voice, while monologic languages battle for control and erase the subjectivity of other characters who cannot dialogize their subjectivities. Pecola, in particular, but also Laura, Titina, John Indian, or Hester to name a few, are dominated by monologic discourses. Thus, they

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 365.

¹⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 295.

become the victims of heritage, history, theory, and culture. They go mad, disappear, die, or self-destruct. These characters do not attempt to coordinate the multiple discourses into their own system. Like the Bakhtinian peasant, they are not able “to regard one language through the eyes of another.”¹⁷ They are incapable of hybridity. Instead, they surrender to unitary, monologic discourses, which rigidly control their sense of self, until the fixity of a single, authoritative voice disintegrates their consciousness.

To conclude, language and storytelling are central to understand the notion of hybridity in the writing of these women across the Americas. Bakhtinian theory provides the tools to explain the novels’ challenge to other approaches on hybridity that had come short of providing a thorough explanation of the voices represented in these narratives. Thus, *Writing Hybridity* revisits the concept of hybridity to study the contribution that Ferré, Condé, and Morrison, among other women writers, have made to the subject. To go beyond an understanding of hybridity as a mere mixing of opposites, or a constant state of in-betweenness, syncretism, or diversity, we, as the novels and Bakhtin testify, need to search for the self in the discourse of the other. Hence, hybridization is ultimately the control of heteroglossia through the artistic expression of one’s self. An individual identity is found in language after the realization that “self” achieves its individuality transcending its polarized relationship with the “other” in and through discourse. The key to understanding hybridity in these narratives lies, then, in the underlying message of Bakhtin’s entire *oeuvre*, as it is summarized by Michael Holquist, “our ultimate act of authorship results in the text which we call our self.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 296.

¹⁸ Holquist, “Answering as Authoring” 315.

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