

# **Breaking The Silence**

**First-Wave Anglophone African-Caribbean  
Women Novelists and Dynamics of History,  
Language and Publication**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis identifies and historicises an emergent tradition of Anglophone African-Caribbean women's fiction, analysing the silence(s) broken through publication. I argue that voicelessness relates to dominant traditions of being 'spoken for', characterised by representations of African-Caribbean women as bodies without minds. Exploring meanings of 'Relation' (Glissant, 1997) replicated in first-wave novels, particularly in selected texts by Erna Brodber, Merle Collins, Zee Edgell, Beryl Gilroy and Joan Riley, I develop, in the intersections of feminism(s), Foucauldian theory, hermeneutics and narratology, carnivalised strategies for reading the silence-breaking texts while privileging meanings drawn from within the culture.

Part One explores through Black female figures in portraiture, poetry, fiction, and autobiography, the historical constructions of African-Caribbean womanhood, the processes of silencing and the first claiming of authorial voice. Engaging with pre-Emancipation testimonies from enslaved women, I argue the relationship between the distortions of plantation culture and the institutionalising of silence and, focusing on the years between Mary Prince's slave testimony (1833) and Sylvia Wynter's *Hills of Hebron* (1962), I address questions of the changes allowing publication of the first African-Caribbean woman's post-slavery novel.

Part Two focuses on a reading of African-Caribbean texts concerned with a traumatic and silenced past, and investigating meanings of creolisation within the texts, I develop a carnivalised discourse. This discourse deriving from a dialogic, cross cultural tradition is inclusive of women's poetic voices, such as M. Nourbese Philip's, and specifically addresses issues of reading. Particular attention is paid to tailoring feminist literary theory attentive to meanings of 'Relation' and critical silence. Borrowing notions of voice and the construction of gender from Lanser's narratology (1992), I conclude by stressing the vital importance of attending to the theorising internal to the works of African-Caribbean women writers themselves.

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In this far off island place  
witnessing what we could not speak  
know your children have kept faith

(from 'Saraka')

## PREFACE

WHEN IT WAS BORN, THE MOTHER HELD HER NEWBORN CHILD CLOSE; SHE BEGAN THEN TO  
LICK IT ALL OVER. THE CHILD WHIMPERED A LITTLE, BUT AS THE MOTHER'S TONGUE  
MOVED FASTER AND STRONGER OVER ITS BODY, IT GREW SILENT - THE MOTHER TURNING  
IT THIS WAY AND THAT UNDER HER TONGUE UNTIL SHE HAD TONGUED IT CLEAN OF  
THE CREAMY WHITE SUBSTANCE COVERING ITS BODY.

### Discourse on the Logic of Language<sup>1</sup>

English  
is my mother tongue.  
A mother tongue is not  
not a foreign lan lan lang  
language  
/anguish  
anguish  
- a foreign anguish.

English is  
my father tongue.  
A father tongue is  
a foreign language,  
therefore English is  
a foreign language  
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother  
tongue  
my mammy tongue  
my mummy tongue  
my momsy tongue  
my modder tongue  
my ma tongue?

I have no mother  
tongue  
no mother to tongue  
no tongue to mother  
to mother  
tongue  
me

I must therefore be tongue  
dumb  
dumb-tongued  
dub-tongued  
damn dumb  
tongue

### EDICT I

Every owner of slaves  
shall, wherever possible,  
ensure that his slaves  
belong to as many ethno-  
linguistic groups as  
possible. If they can-  
not speak to each other,  
they cannot then forment  
rebellion and revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Nourbese Philip, 'Discourse on the Logic of Language', in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, London, 1993, pp.30 and 32 (hereafter *Tongue*).

THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD'S MOUTH - GENTLY FORCING IT OPEN;  
SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE, AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN,  
SHE BLOWS INTO IT - HARD. SHE WAS BLOWING WORDS - HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS,  
THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE - INTO HER DAUGHTER'S  
MOUTH.

But I have  
A dumb tongue  
tongue dumb  
father tongue  
and english is  
my mother tongue  
is  
my father tongue  
is a foreign lan lang lang  
language  
l/anguish  
anguish  
a foreign anguish  
is english -  
another tongue  
my mother  
    mammy  
    mummy  
    moder  
    mater  
    macer  
    moder  
tongue  
mothertongue  
  
tongue mother  
tongue me  
mothertongue me  
mother me  
touch me  
with the tongue of your  
lan lan lang  
language  
l/anguish  
    anguish  
english  
is a foreign anguish

## EDICT II

Every slave  
caught speak-  
ing his native  
language  
shall be  
severely pun-  
ished. Where  
necessary,  
removal of the  
tongue is  
recommended.  
The of-  
fending organ,  
when re-  
moved, should  
be hung  
on high in a  
central place,  
so that all may  
see and  
tremble.

# Introduction: 'That Silence; Those Differences'

That body might become tongue  
Tempered to speech  
And where the latter falters  
Paper with its words  
the crack of silence.<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis I address the issues of historiography, conditions of literary production and critical practice impacting upon first-wave novels by anglophone African-Caribbean women writers. While writing by Sylvia Wynter (1928- ) and Merle Hodge (1944- ) are of particular interest for their pioneering novels in the decade beginning 1962, I also explore fiction by Erna Brodber, Merle Collins, Zee Edgell, Beryl Gilroy, and Joan Riley published in the 1980s and 1990s. These authors are important to the thesis by virtue of publications, two or more novels, and the relative critical silence characteristic of the reception of their texts. The recency of this publication is indicated in Brenda Berrian and Aart Broek's *The Bibliography of Women Writers From the Caribbean* (1989) which refers to thirty-eight anglophone novelists.<sup>2</sup> Nearly forty per cent of these, mainly of African-heritage, including those listed above, were first published during the 1980s. Despite belonging to the region's majority African-heritage population, black women writers had been largely silent as fiction writers. The distinctive wave of literary production evident in the 1980s marks a significant development, crucial to which is publication of the novel.

Before I embark on an outline of my material and argument I would like to make a prefatory declaration about writing myself visibly into this thesis . This I do on the basis of being an African-Caribbean woman, a creative writer, and someone actively engaged in the field of silence-breaking by virtue of wide ranging initiatives undertaken

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<sup>1</sup> Philip, p.72.

<sup>2</sup> Brenda K. Berrian and Aart Broek, *Bibliography of Women Writers from the Caribbean*, Washington, 1989, pp.26-31.

with Caribbean women in the UK during the last decade. I refer to the organising of conferences on Caribbean women's writing, the publication of critical papers and the editing of collections of creative writing, mainly by African-Caribbean women.<sup>3</sup> I continue, also, to edit the magazine, *Mango Season*, which focuses on Caribbean women's writing.<sup>4</sup> Together with the coordinating of reading events with the Caribbean Women Writers' Alliance (CWWA), I have contributed to changing perceptions and an increased visibility of African-Caribbean women as writers in the UK from the mid 1990s. Such action constitutes feminist praxis, specifically transformative praxis, crucially linked to the theoretical undertaking developed in my thesis. At the same time, this activity signals a serious limitation with which this thesis contends. It is not only the dearth of critical writing, though that is sufficiently problematic, but also the sheer invisibility of African-Caribbean women as producers of fiction which has been a source of difficulty, particularly in the early 1990s. As a result, my involvement has contributed to crucial groundwork in terms of the production of critical and creative material linked directly to this thesis. Like the postmodern feminist Rosi Braidotti, therefore, I declare my positionality which derives from a particular 'existential condition'.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to my stance is a creative tension, between, in feminist ontological terms, a rural, African-heritage, Eastern Caribbean woman 'self', simultaneously a creative writer; and a 'western'-based, academic and critic. This 'being', related to differentiated and, at times, opposing cultures, is predisposed to, at least, a double-voiced discourse and pluri-vocal method of enquiry.

The lack of literary representation in terms of longer fiction is examined in this study through African-Caribbean women's relationship with the dominant British culture to which this emergent literature is related. The engendered silence(s), implicit in English cultural representation of the African/Caribbean woman as body without mind and as

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to conferences held in 1994, 1996 and 1998, and the most recent anthologies: *Another Doorway*, London, 1998, and *Voice, Memory, Ashes*, London, 1999, the latter co-edited with Jacob Ross. Both collections arose from workshops and readings with CWWA which I founded in 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *Mango Season* is published three times annually.

<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, New York, 1994, p.1.

primitive 'other', in collusion with conditions of slave and post-slavery survival in the British West Indies is the focus of Part One. I interrogate the legacy of literary voicelessness and historicise the African-Caribbean woman's figurative 'removal of tongue'.<sup>6</sup> I build also towards establishing the body of texts as post-slavery texts. In Part Two, I explore the issue of creolisation firstly through the language of the writing and secondly through theoretical formulations attentive to cultural meanings within the texts. To this end, I develop and apply the notion of carnivalised theory.

### **African-Caribbean Women's Fiction and Its Reception**

A primary concern of the study is the critical reception of the first-wave novels. The first studies emerged at the fin de siècle from American conference proceedings. Selwyn R. Cudjoe's *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays From the First International Conference*, and *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature* edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, were both collections published in 1990, and which heralded Caribbean women's writing.<sup>7</sup> With approximately half of Cudjoe's women contributors, poets and writers of fiction, Cudjoe's publication testifies through the novelists included, Gilroy, Brodber and Hodge, among them, to a breaking of silence and a newly acquired authority. Cudjoe's collection, inclusive of autobiographical writing, fiction and criticism presented in 1988 at the first conference to celebrate Caribbean women's writing, also seeks to represent a multilingual Caribbean. This marked the beginning of a pattern of critical reception initiated by US-based academics which won support by funding from their respective academic institutions. Cudjoe writes of the background to the conference:

On April 16, 1988, the Black Studies Department of Wellesley College brought together more than fifty women writers and their critics, primarily from the English-speaking Caribbean, to talk about their work. For the first time since their ancestors came to the New Worlds in the sixteenth century these women and men were able to come together to talk about their writings.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Philip, p.32.

<sup>7</sup> Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, Massachusetts, 1990; and Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Trenton, New Jersey, 1990 (hereafter *Kumbula*).

<sup>8</sup> Cudjoe, ed., p.5.

Notably, the group comprised mainly anglophones whose literary history, far from being well established, includes a large number of writers first published in the eighties. If the reception, in a 'Black Studies Department', was significant for the writing, race as literary preoccupation soon became subsumed as critical attention turned to diversity and inclusion within a Caribbean-wide body of literature. While such practice facilitated, for example, the crossing of language boundaries, anglophone African-Caribbean women's production, as a specific body, received little critical attention.

*Kumbla* offers a collection of papers indicative of a range of genres. Unlike Cudjoe's, Davies and Fido's selection of criticism and autobiographical writing structures debate about the new literature in terms of a womanist/feminist consciousness. They point, too, to literary activities which cast the 1988 conference as a logical development point within a range of international events welcoming of newly-published black voices.<sup>9</sup> They cite, for example, locations of key earlier conferences, in Michigan and Nairobi, as enabling a focus on the emergent literature.<sup>10</sup> While the significance of such space for the reception of texts by Black writers cannot be underestimated, the event profiled the emergence of a particular group, African-heritage women. Factors of numerical significance within the region's population, racial identity linked to stratification, and a lengthy silence finally broken are crucial to an understanding of this. In the 1990s, subsequent US-led conferences held in Trinidad, Curaçao, and Miami gave rise to the critical collections: *Winds of Change: the Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars* (1998), edited by Adele Newson and Linda Strong-Leek, and *The Woman, The Writer and Caribbean Society* (1998), edited by Helen Pyne-Timothy.<sup>11</sup> These conference proceedings sought to reflect the diversity representative of the Caribbean as well as to comment critically upon a range of genres including poetry, short stories and novels.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Adele Newson and Linda Strong-Leek, eds., *Winds of Change: the Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*, New York, 1998 ; Helen Pyne-Timothy, ed., *The Woman, The Writer and Caribbean Society*, Los Angeles, 1998.

Comparatively, the UK, a powerful source of influence upon anglophone African-Caribbean culture through Imperial slavery and colonialism, and home to a highly visible Caribbean population since the post-war Windrush era, provided no focus for reception of the literature. Out of this context of UK silence, came the first critical collection focusing upon Caribbean women's writing, *Framing The Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing* (1996).<sup>12</sup> The text, like those earlier, sought to reflect the diversity of writers, languages and genres within the region, and aimed at widening the critical debate by addressing issues within one of the principal diasporic locations which the UK had become for Caribbean peoples. Central to the first London conference, was concern about the process by which new readers are given access to the literature. This issue became the basis on which the collection was structured. If *Framing* broke with tradition by signalling a potentially interested UK readership, *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English* (1999), edited by Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale, which followed, indicated further shifts.<sup>13</sup> Firstly, the essays focus exclusively upon fiction. Secondly, the concern of the text lay clearly with West Indian fiction, and thirdly, the brief literary-autobiographical section opening the text served effectively as a prologue to the considerably more substantial critical debate. So, the final decade of the millennium had gradually seen the initial breaking of critical silence in the UK in respect of Caribbean women's literature as a body of work.

What had happened to black women's voices in the UK before this? Their silence was not unnoticed. South African novelist, Laurretta Ngcobo (then resident in London), in *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (1987), drew attention to authors, among them African-Caribbean heritage poets, Valerie Bloom, Grace Nichols and Amryl Johnson.<sup>14</sup> Ngcobo's text acknowledged the need for critical study and offered itself primarily as a sampler of writing rather than theoretical debate. Included as contributors in Ngcobo's book were collaborative writers: Beverley Bryan, Suzanne Scafe and Stella

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<sup>12</sup> Joan Anim-Addo, ed., *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing*, London, 1996 (hereafter *Framing*).

<sup>13</sup> Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale, eds., *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*, London, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Laurretta Ngcobo, *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain*, London, 1987.

Dadzie. The three writers had two years previously co-published *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (1985), a ground-breaking text concerning British experience.<sup>15</sup> The collective wrote of the newness of black women's writing mainly from the US, at the time, and of the remoteness of the *idea*, in Britain, of black women's writing. Not surprisingly, therefore, in Suzanne Scafe's *Teaching Black Literature* (1989), the Caribbean woman writer is singularly absent.<sup>16</sup> Scafe's argument is nonetheless pertinent to this thesis in that she shares a questioning concern with the marginalisation of black literature and the need for appropriate critical reading of the texts.

Like the UK, the West Indian context represents a site of critical struggle, having inherited in the sixties and seventies independence era, an education system characteristically colonial and reflective of 'a mercilessly maintained racial hierarchy'.<sup>17</sup> It has to be acknowledged at the outset that an important male intellectual tradition was carved out of the West Indian colonial school tradition. C.L.R. James (1901-1989), for example, one of the giants within that tradition, in referring to his personal 'war' in pursuit of cricket, lists alongside friends and family he was obliged to challenge:

some eight or nine Englishmen who taught at the Queen's Royal College, all graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, the Director of Education and the Board of Education, which directed the educational system of the whole island.<sup>18</sup>

The composition of this group gives a powerful impression of the 'hierarchy' within the local colonial structure. In this elitist, colonial context, James has claimed that teaching from the canon was vital to notions of intellectual freedom and racial advancement. Various problems arise from this, as is illustrated through James's father, who, though an able teacher readily prepared to recommend the classics to his son, was himself 'no reader'.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, James's mother, Bessie, 'one of the most tireless'

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<sup>15</sup> Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, London, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Scafe, *Teaching Black Literature*, London, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Ann Arbor, 1997, p.65.

<sup>18</sup> C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, London, 1964, p.30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26. See also Henry Paget, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, New York and London, 2000, p.50 for a critique of James's 'enmeshment in European thought'.

readers of novels, viewed from a classicist perspective, is 'indiscriminate' in her reading habits.<sup>20</sup> Logistically, also, the gendered system which produced, on the one hand, James and his father, professionals; and on the other, Bessie and the 'sewing and needlework' aunts, domesticated women, did not vanish with the various Independence declarations. The fiction examined here shows Caribbean teachers of literature steeped in and orientated towards canonical textual practice which readily assumes racial meanings. James, writing of the 1920s, states, 'the race question did not have to be agitated. It was there.'<sup>21</sup> Firstly, English 'canonical' texts placed on the curriculum in the Caribbean can become 'colonial' texts. That is to say, they become representative of British superiority reinforced by institutions such as the educational systems founded in the colonial era.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, a prevailing aesthetic exclusivity linked to race and gender, deriving from colonialism, also readily impacts upon the literature. In the light of this, the critical reception of African-Caribbean women's fiction raises several questions, not the least concerning processes, albeit in a post-nationalist and post-Black Power era,<sup>23</sup> for regional reception of the writing.

In *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction* (1993),<sup>24</sup> one of the first, single-authored theoretical volumes treating Caribbean women's fiction, Evelyn O'Callaghan, author and faculty member of the University of the West Indies (UWI), recalls that beginning her study of West Indian women's fiction in the 1970s, she mistakenly believed there was only Jean Rhys (1890-1979).<sup>25</sup> What is the nature of the power dynamics which makes possible such lack of information to interested readers and by what process does Rhys's writing, in contrast, come to be so well known?

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<sup>20</sup> James, p.26.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>22</sup> James reflects: 'It was only long years after that I understood the limitation on spirit, vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate and learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching the distant ideal - to attain it was, of course, impossible; (ibid., p.38)'

<sup>23</sup> Orde Coombs, ed., *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, New York, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*, London, 1993 (hereafter *Version*).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.1. Sylvia Wynter and Merle Hodge were at that time already published.

Attesting to the resistance of her recently indigenised 'academy' to the teaching of women's writing, O'Callaghan notes that in 1991 her teaching included the first such course in her department. *Woman Version*, like much of the critical writing, arose from pedagogic interest.<sup>26</sup> She foregrounds the syncretic nature of Caribbean culture and writing, and is concerned, therefore, to 'deliberately cannibalize and mix' theoretical approaches to the literature.<sup>27</sup> As a result, various theoretical shifts are negotiated in the process of reading novels by authors among whom are Phyllis Shand Allfrey, Brodber, Edgell, Hodge and Miriam Warner-Vieyra. O'Callaghan's position is nevertheless that of postcolonial feminism, which, with her plural emphases, she claims transcends 'opposed factions (colonizer/colonized, male/female, black/white)'.<sup>28</sup> O'Callaghan's project has, however, no specific concern with African-Caribbean women's writing as a body of texts and while her work is interesting, it is of limited application to this study.

Myriam J. A. Chancy's *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (1997), located within radical feminist discourse and centrally concerned with novels' rewriting of history, comes closer to engaging with issues directly related to those women at the bottom of the 'racial hierarchy'.<sup>29</sup> Her work concerns primarily 'we - women of the African diaspora'.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in order to innovate, Chancy challenges 'a world that cannot face its own social stratifications ... deeply embedded in matrices of difference that we deny exist in order to pursue a unitary truth, a unified social consciousness'.<sup>31</sup> Chancy's critical impetus towards an understanding of whether women redefine Haitian culture in fiction rests upon a reading of the novels as 'a literature of revolution'.<sup>32</sup> However, her text, by its attention to Haiti's *national* literature is effectively concerned with African-Caribbean women's novels. In addition, at the heart of Chancy's thesis is a challenge to

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<sup>26</sup> O'Callaghan, p.12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Myriam J. A. Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, New Jersey, 1997 (hereafter *Framing Silence*).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.172.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.6.

'critical-literary rhetoric' itself, characterised in the text as 'commercial discourse'.<sup>33</sup> Chancy identifies her theoretical pursuit as the charting of 'ideological innovation' rather than 'aesthetic or linguistic ones', an exploration which is 'double-voiced' in its privileging of Afrocentric critical voices as well as autobiography.<sup>34</sup> Chancy's exploration is distinctive also in its concern with the breaking of silence which the novels represent and consequently with the foregrounding of novels 'most silenced'.<sup>35</sup> I share her concern with silence and the need to challenge 'critical literary rhetoric' itself. My thesis, with its regional rather than national focus, takes for granted the cultural diversity of the body of anglophone literature though my specific concern is with fiction by African-heritage writers. The interest lies in *difference* so that I address, rather, the issue of black women's silence and the impact of slavery on the literature; its production and reception.

I have chosen not to consider the range of critical texts concerning the literature of the region which largely ignore women's literature or consign the texts to the margins of critical commentary since they offer little that is valuable to my enquiry.<sup>36</sup> The present study is instead focused on selected Anglophone African-Caribbean authors whose literary products both break the prevailing pattern of literary silence pertaining to African-Caribbean women novelists and are received in relative critical silence. The nature and scope of this thesis therefore limits the discussion necessarily. Jamaica Kincaid and Earl Lovelace, for example barely figure in this current research. While this is regrettable, my thesis, already broad in scope, aims to highlight the UK context, a persistent site of silence and writing which has received little critical attention. Similarly, lack of space does not allow a comparative focus upon, for example, African-Caribbean men's fiction.

This thesis represents new ground, for while the work of individual African-Caribbean novelists, principally Kincaid,<sup>37</sup> has begun to attract critical attention, African-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>36</sup> See also O'Callaghan, p.2.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Moira Ferguson, *Where the Land Meets the Body*, Virginia, 1994

Caribbean women's writing, as a corpus of literature has not been theorised.<sup>38</sup> Two main questions frame my thesis. The first asks about the nature of the relationship between the silence-breaking texts and British historiography. I adopt here Paul Hamilton's definition of historiography as 'the way history is written and the literary criticism this invites'.<sup>39</sup> The second addresses how a literature thus contextualised might be read so as to access its many meanings. Responses to these related interrogations serve to divide this thesis into Parts One and Two. In addition, my focus upon anglophones signals a specific historical relationship, since the Caribbean, a multilingual, multiracial and multicultural region, lays claim to a body of literature in Dutch, French, Spanish, and Creoles of the region as well as English, all languages directly linked to a complex colonial past. Fiction by anglophone African-Caribbean women, an increasingly large part of the corpus of the region's literature, re-writes the relationship with Britain founded upon imperial slavery and colonialism.

If, in the light of this history, dating back to the sixteenth century, the anglophone African-Caribbean woman's fictional voice has only recently broken through the silence of British literary publication constraints, the corresponding critical voice breaking through English academic silence remains even more of a rarity. In an audacious attempt to articulate through the last two, my aim is to achieve an understanding of the former. Why audacious? Francophone African-Caribbean novelist Maryse Condé's metafictional short story, 'Three Women in Manhattan', highlights the African-Caribbean woman's writing project by profiling it as the yearning of the protagonist, Claude, an illiterate immigrant Caribbean woman whose first task is yet to learn, in a context at best unresponsive to her needs, the writerly language that is *not* her mothertongue.<sup>40</sup> The dream of Condé's self-taught, raw and naïve protagonist, Claude, 'To write! To put her hips, her sex, her heart, into motion in order to give birth to a world inscribed in her

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<sup>38</sup> Rhonda Cobham Sander and Alison Donnell both have written doctoral theses in the UK, on poets such as Una Marson (see bibliography).

<sup>39</sup> Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*, London, 1996, p.26.

<sup>40</sup> Maryse Condé, 'Three Women in Manhattan', in Carmen Esteves and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds., *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam*, New Jersey, 1991.

obscurity' is no sooner articulated than the overwhelming odds against such a task rise to chastise the very thought of the act, hence its summation: 'To think that she'd had such audacity!'<sup>41</sup> The articulation in this project simultaneously echoes Claude's and historicises it.

Slavery is central to the historical context out of which meanings of silence are posited. Édouard Glissant's theoretical formulations concerning African-Caribbean culture and its 'Relation' to a wider world is of special significance to this thesis. He writes:

Peoples who have been to the abyss do not brag of being chosen. They do not believe they are giving birth to any modern force. They live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies.

...Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange.<sup>42</sup>

Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997) brings together a theory of Caribbean history and poetics central to which is an understanding of the nature of the international links, forged through slavery, with African-Caribbean people. Therein lies the concept of 'Relation'.<sup>43</sup> He proposes that Relation is made up of 'shared knowledge',<sup>44</sup> that it is 'spoken multilingually',<sup>45</sup> and that despite ourselves, 'the Other is within us' with the result that we are all 'actors' in Relation.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, he warns that 'Relation' is not a 'mere abstraction' which might replace notions of 'the universal'.<sup>47</sup> In the Caribbean, he states, 'Relation presents itself most visibly'.<sup>48</sup> Though in the writing Glissant does not seek to account for gender, his view of 'Relation' as 'shared knowledge' is important to my own work. This is because of the way in which Atlantic slavery effected 'Relation', as I understand Glissant. Born in Martinique, he makes reference to a francophone

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>42</sup> Glissant, p.8.

<sup>43</sup> Glissant's translator, Betsy Wing, acknowledges that his ideas, perhaps due to his insistence upon the use of a creolised coding, are difficult to translate. Perhaps the closest English approximation to 'Relation' is 'relationship' but it is important to signal that more than this is indicated. See translator's note, pp.xix-xx.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Caribbean. The textual presence of both francophone Glissant and the Cuban poet Nancy Morejón are important to the contextualisation of this thesis within a wider, multilingual Caribbean.

### Theoretical Connections

I want to suggest in the theoretical connections I make, concern about the non-viability of any single theoretical stance extant in relation to African-Caribbean women's writing. Certainly, my position has been informed by collaborative work with writers, as well as academics in the field, and close 'reading' of their responses to literary criticism (see Chapter Five). At the same time, the inescapably hybrid nature of the texts produced by African-Caribbean women, alongside authors' views on both process and product, gleaned from interviews conducted since 1994,<sup>49</sup> produces its own rationale for a theoretical mix evocative of the culture and its literary artefacts. Such a 'mix' suggests plurality and a drawing upon 'bits and pieces' from the relevant though disparate cultural sources. Perhaps for this reason, O'Callaghan, similarly involved with Caribbean women's writing, also favours a theoretical plurality, and Boyce Davis and Fido have been constrained to maintain the womanism/feminism tension in their theoretical perspectives.

A keen awareness of the historical forces which make resistance a necessity strengthens my appreciation of the theoretical flexibility vital to the reading of the novels.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the absence of African-Caribbean women's voices as critical commentators, those nearest culturally to the literature, must needs be addressed. My approach is therefore polyvocal, polyphonous, and draws upon various theories and theorists. That this might suggest a Caribbean carnival of theory is amplified in the overarching notion of Carnivalisation which I develop. In the spirit of this, I draw fundamentally on Glissant's idea of 'Relation' even as I invoke critics of Enlightenment,

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<sup>49</sup> See *Mango Season*, Volumes 2-13 dating from Summer 1994 to the present. Authors views from these volumes are cited throughout this study.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Jeannette B. Allis, 'A Case for Regional Criticism of West Indian Literature', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28 (March-June 1982), 1-11, for justification of resistance by West Indian literature generally to a perceived threat of theoretical annexation.

Michel Foucault and Hans Georg Gadamer. Like Glissant's 'Relation', I attempt to represent theoretically a complex interweaving, 'une toile mètisse'. Our poets, particularly African-Caribbean women, present an important part of this weave. If in the tradition of poetics as 'implicit body' of African-Caribbean philosophy, commented upon by Henry Paget,<sup>51</sup> these strands constitute the substance of the weft, then my own womanist/feminist stance and threads of feminist narratology as proposed by Susan Lanser, though less prominent, also feature in this carnivalised approach.

'Literary silence' refers in this context to the lack of published fiction, specifically the novel, by African-Caribbean women, prior to Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron* (1962).<sup>52</sup> Part One mobilises the ideas of Glissant, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Michel Foucault, in order to address the history of silence and in so doing contributes a basis for the development of dialogic strategies of literary interpretation privileging African-Caribbean women's theorising. A concern is the unreliability of practice grounded in the Enlightenment tradition which I examine in Chapter One alongside instances of 'Relation'. The silent period is explored initially through disparate Enlightenment texts. I draw on Foucault's writing of 'Enlightenment' as 'not merely the process by which individuals would see their own personal freedom of thought guaranteed' but also 'when the universal, the free, and the public uses of reason are superimposed on one another'.<sup>53</sup>

I draw selectively from the work of Foucault and take as a starting point for analysis of plantation labour, his account of ways in which human beings have historically been the subject and object of power relations. Specifically, I am interested in Foucault's notion of the 'political technology of the body' developed in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1991).<sup>54</sup> Foucault's analysis of the power relations of the subjugated prisoners of the nineteenth century, from my reading, resembles aspects of

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<sup>51</sup> Paget, p.248.

<sup>52</sup> Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron*, Essex, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed., Patricia Waugh, London, 1992, p.99.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, 1991 (hereafter *Discipline*), p.24.

slavery more typical of the Caribbean of the Enlightenment period. This allows an important adaptation to an understanding of relations both during slavery and in more recent post-slavery times impacting upon the literary silence of African-Caribbean women writers. Foucauldian discourse has already been fruitfully developed for feminist theory by other historicist feminists such as Braidotti, even though Foucault's own work has at times been criticised for its lack of concern with gender issues.

I address also the issue of African-Caribbean women's invisibility to theorists grounded in the dominant traditions, and the place of such practice in critical debate concerning the texts. Further, I make a case for destabilising hegemonic discourses through amplification, in the quest for meaning, those women's voices casually silenced by history. In the reorientation of critical practice which I propose, notions of plurivocality, carnival, creolisation and oral tradition become central to the debate. I attempt to establish a new visibility by profiling Caribbean women's poetics as theory. For many such poets, 'the crossroads' is of particular significance and a theoretical junction is what I propose.<sup>55</sup> My thesis is that in order to understand both the literature and its critical reception, an historicising of the contemporary text is vital alongside textual exploration which is dialogic and privileges meanings drawn from within the culture. By this process, meanings of race, gender, class and power are read in the exploration of silence-breaking texts.

Since African-Caribbean women's thought is largely *not* represented in the range of prevailing literary discourses, several difficulties present themselves.<sup>56</sup> I have foregrounded in Chapter Two, for example, a 'Sister Goose' scenario which at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains, in large measure, applicable. Unlike Sister Goose, I am aware of the power dynamics involved in seeking to represent the critical-theoretical space as one open to dialogue with African-Caribbean women. To

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<sup>55</sup> In addition, see Sylvia Wynter, 'Afterword: Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the "Demonic Ground" of Caliban's "Woman"', in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, eds., p.356.

<sup>56</sup> See Deborah E. McDowell for some of the difficulties encountered by black women in the USA, McDowell, 'Recycling: Race, Gender and the Practice of Theory', in robyn r. warhol and diane price herndl, eds., *Feminisms: An Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Basingstoke, 1997 (hereafter *Feminisms*).

undertake the task of representing those voices in such a context is daunting, for the cultural investment in dominant theories is always high. Nonetheless, and despite the likely assumption that Caribbean literature is postcolonial literature, this thesis engages very little with postcolonial theory. Its theorists, which I describe in more detail in Chapter Four, have demonstrated little concern with dialogue acknowledging race and its related inequalities affecting literary production and reception. Indeed, for a theory equivocally interested in colonialism, postcolonialism appears remarkably resistant to readings of post-slavery, the integral part of slavery in colonialism within the Caribbean context, and consequently in its literature. For these reasons, postcolonialism contributes little to the interpretive task in hand which specifically seeks to read post-slavery texts.

In the absence of powerful interpretive voices from within the culture, the pattern of reception in response to African-Caribbean women's fiction has added to a paternalistic or perhaps maternalistic tradition of being spoken *for*. Commented upon by Caribbean writer-critics such as Merle Collins,<sup>57</sup> the tradition links to early practice investigated by USA critic, Moira Ferguson.<sup>58</sup> In *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1760-1834* (1992), Ferguson traces a history of British women writers in response to slavery. She notes that often with positive intentions, 'white women's writings invariably identified slaves as the coloniser's other'.<sup>59</sup> Further, the writers 'gained authority' by representing 'the other' 'as a composite stereotype', a practice true of both pro-slavery and anti-slavery discourse.<sup>60</sup> By this process, the African-Caribbean enslaved, for example, became a known category, the better for being silenced and not in a position to challenge the widespread assumptions. This hegemonic issue is challenged here as one urgently requiring redress, hence my interest in critical debate which is dialogic with hitherto absent African-Caribbean women's theoretical voices.

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<sup>57</sup> Merle Collins, 'Framing the Word: Caribbean Women's Writing', in Anim-Addo, ed., pp.4-5.

<sup>58</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1760-1834*, New York and London, 1992, p.302.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.303.

For this purpose, I contend that our poets are our theorists.<sup>61</sup> In the feminist tradition such as that of Audre Lorde, for example,<sup>62</sup> by invoking the personal 'I', I simultaneously seek to credit certain personal sources of knowledge consistent with critical reflection. The theme of silence is present in the writing of many African-Caribbean women poets, particularly M. Nourbese Philip's collection, *Tongue* (1993), which runs as a leitmotif throughout the thesis.<sup>63</sup> I also cite in epigraphs Grace Nichols, Olive Senior, Una Marson, Louise Bennett and Lorna Goodison, in an attempt both to 'frame' the critical discourse and to invoke a dialogue.

In *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1977), Gadamer presents as his thesis: 'the thing which hermeneutics teaches us is to see through the dogmatism of asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing natural "tradition" and the reflective appropriation of it'.<sup>64</sup> The possibility opened up by the notion of 'reflective appropriation' shapes my enquiry and the carnivalised discourse which I develop. In addition, the concept of 'play' is crucial to Gadamer's quest for fluidity and flexibility in seeking meaning. He theorises about understanding as 'itself a linguistic event, a game with words'.<sup>65</sup> Being 'drawn into an event of truth' through such play, by Gadamer's analysis, is critical to the process by which texts may be understood. The process is 'typically differentiated from scientific truth-telling, those of aesthetic and historical consciousness' in order to 'restore to them a truth-telling function'.<sup>66</sup> Gadamer's concern with the two concepts: play 'in the case of aesthetics', and 'tradition' in the case of history, is similar to my own, since, as I hope to illustrate, the dialogue with the past, important to Gadamerian thought is significant to first-wave African-Caribbean women's novels. Further, 'the common truth represented in tragedy' may be examined in the tragedy of

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<sup>61</sup> An argument I have proposed in lectures given on 'theoretical containment' and African-Caribbean women writers and about which I have had a rich dialogue particularly with Giovanna Covi.

<sup>62</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, California, 1984.

<sup>63</sup> See also, for example, Grace Nichols, *I IS A LONG MEMORIED WOMAN*, London, 1983. Many of the poems assume silence on the part of the anonymous black women subjects.

<sup>64</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge, Los Angeles and London, 1977, p.28.

<sup>65</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, 1981, p.446.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Atlantic slavery which has had profound implications including those for women's literary production. While Gadamer claims to show the significance of 'our' relation to the past, I am interested to show that the African-Caribbean woman's relation to a British 'past' is highly differentiated and has produced a highly differentiated present. Atlantic slavery is a key to understanding this and its implications for African-Caribbean women's literary production. Further, 'tradition and prejudice', key to *that history*, continue to play a part in the reception of African-Caribbean women's literature, if Gadamer's formulation that 'prejudices constitute our being', may be believed.<sup>67</sup> I argue that the dearth of critical discourse including African-Caribbean women, particularly from English sources, given the 'past' connection, reflects Gadamerian concerns as well as those of African-Caribbean women writers.

Gadamer's hermeneutics have been criticised on the basis of his assumption that entering the theoretical dialogue is easy.<sup>68</sup> I propose to underscore the difficulties particularly for African-Caribbean women who are mainly *not* grounded in western philosophical traditions and who remain absent from UK ivory towers. At the same time, I foreground a shared African-Caribbean epistemology which constitutes, within the culture, critical practice that is currently not recognised as such and which points to traditions of cultural difference conceptualised by Glissant as follows:

What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter, a shock (in Segalen's sense) a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry.<sup>69</sup>

By invoking African-Caribbean women's critical voices from such a tradition, I engage with 'hermeneutical reflection'<sup>70</sup> seeking to alter both the quality and the outcome of the interpretive process brought to bear upon the post-slavery texts examined here.

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<sup>67</sup> Gadamer, 1977, p.9.

<sup>68</sup> S. Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, New York, 1992, p.21.

<sup>69</sup> Glissant (p.34) argues that if *métissage* is a meeting of 'two differences', '*creolization*' is 'limitless *métissage*'. See translator's note for 'errantry' which carries overtones of 'sacred mission', pp.xv-xvi.

<sup>70</sup> Gadamer, 1977, p.93.

In Part Two, I explore issues of creolisation, firstly in the language of the texts and secondly through development of carnivalised critical strategies which privilege African-Caribbean women's theorising. Concern lies also with explicating a literature contextualised in meanings of slavery and post-slavery dependence, even for publication and reception of its cultural artefacts. Particular attention is paid to the specifying of feminism(s) attentive to meanings of 'Relation' and critical silence. Borrowing from narratology, I foreground the theorising internal to the novels and their construction of gender. Two differentiated discourses are set at play. One, broadly delineated as feminism(s), is formal, validated and visible to a powerful minority. The other, which I refer to as creolised 'folk discourse' may be described as informal, that is, not recognised in the western academic sense, as theoretical. The latter, creolised 'folk discourse', is validated by a culture which from its inception has been perceived as low status. Further, it is largely invisible to powerful theorists and critics.<sup>71</sup> Through the dialogic space opened up by the discourses, I propose to redirect aesthetic interpretation of African-Caribbean women's texts. The interpretive exploration developed here engages, therefore, with a hermeneutic means of enquiry which foregrounds sources of African-Caribbean women's critical energy. While poetry is significant to this, I draw, too, upon folklore, the wisdom of ancestral figures and so on, alongside a womanism/feminism which, significantly, as Sylvia Wynter writes, 'expresses the paradoxical relation of Sameness and Difference'.<sup>72</sup> Womanism/feminism, important to my stance, draws upon the thinking of Alice Walker.<sup>73</sup> Walker's concern, arising from the experience of a people whose endurance of Atlantic slavery ended in the latter half of the nineteenth century, is echoed in her preference for womanism to feminism.<sup>74</sup> Notably, survival, an abiding preoccupation during the era of chattel slavery, continues to be an issue in post-slavery

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<sup>71</sup> Glissant's formulations on creolisation and 'Relation' in addressing issues of history, memory and language also begin to theorise African-Caribbean folk culture.

<sup>72</sup> Sylvia Wynter, in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, eds., p.356.

<sup>73</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of My Mother's Gardens*, London, 1984, pp.xi-xii. See also Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, p.107.

<sup>74</sup> Walker, 1984, p.xii.

times.<sup>75</sup> This single factor marks an historical difference between black and white women's expectations and consequent preoccupations with the self and its immediate reflection. Carriers of the burden of family during slavery as a consequence of the deliberate break up of black families by slave owners, black women privilege other needs, such as 'wholeness', in the early post-slavery period.<sup>76</sup> The experience of slavery which ended in the 1830s for the West Indies but, for example, not until 1865 in the USA, engenders such preoccupations. So does the aftermath of slavery, particularly racism and its impact upon survival. In comparison, the priorities of a comparatively privileged group, white women, has made for problematical encounters with feminism for black women, as much of the earlier USA debate has indicated.<sup>77</sup> Knowledge of having survived the traumas of slavery offers a benchmark in comparison to which Walker's 'wholeness' is a reminder of the contradictions inherent in feminism for black women.

Since the 1990s, the non-monolithic nature of feminist theory has been emphasised.<sup>78</sup> Feminist theory has adjusted to charges such as Walker's and while Walker was rightly oppositional in the 1980s, feminist theory of a later period perceives itself as informed by 'multiplicity'.<sup>79</sup> The notion of feminism(s) integral to this thesis is one which, as explicated by robyn warhol and diane price herndl in *Feminisms* (1997), insists upon acknowledgement of the 'multiplicity of perspectives and approaches'.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes signifying competing voices, at times contestatory, feminism(s) highlights a plurivocality that is alert to commonalities and *differences* and as such informs literary theory and criticism.<sup>81</sup> I draw upon this 'multiplicity' to accommodate to the carnivalised range of theoretical models. Claude Lévi Strauss's notion of the *bricoleur* offers an

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<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, p.250, for note on 'spiritual survival'.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> See, Valerie Smith, 'Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the Other', in warhol and price herndl, eds., p.312. See also Jacqueline Bobo, ed., *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, Massachusetts, 2001.

<sup>78</sup> warhol and herndl, p.ix.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.ix.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

important means of rationalising this type of theoretical negotiating.<sup>82</sup> So does Glissant's *djobbeur*, a creole variant habituated to the use of 'bits and scraps',<sup>83</sup> for, as I clarify in Chapter Five, such a process of 'bits and pieceness' characterises Caribbean carnival which itself informs this thesis.

Finally, my close reading of the texts draws upon narratology, the study of the nature of narratives, particularly as argued by USA feminist narratologist, Susan Lanser who addresses the critical issue of 'women as both producers and interpreters of texts'.<sup>84</sup> Alongside this, Sylvia Wynter's influential paper, 'Novel and History, Plot and Plantation' contributes to my interrogation of African-Caribbean women's literary production and its relation to plantation culture.<sup>85</sup> Though not focused on gender, Wynter's essay offers a crucial analysis which parallels the plantation system of specific interest to Part One of this study, with the struggle within the 'indigenous' system to which it gives rise. Both become dependent upon 'external forces'.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, she links the resistance which becomes written into the texts deriving from this system with its history and economic context.

## Parameters

Chapter One explores the powerful pre-text to African-Caribbean women's writing by examining specific, though disparate, cultural remains representative of the archaeology of a Caribbean past in relation to British culture. In effect, these are instances of 'Relation'. The significance of a crucial first audience for these 'texts' is assessed alongside patterns of silence prior to publication. In addition to Johann Zoffany's portrait of Dido Elizabeth Lindsay and Lady Elizabeth Murray,<sup>87</sup> I examine texts by writers as varied as William

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<sup>82</sup> Claude Lévi Strauss, *The Savage Mind (La Pensée Sauvage)*, trans. George Weidenfeld, London, 1966, pp.17-18.

<sup>83</sup> Glissant, p.69.

<sup>84</sup> Susan S. Lanser, 'Toward A Feminist Narratology', in warhol and price herndl, eds., p.676.

<sup>85</sup> Sylvia Wynter, 'Novel and History, Plot and Plantation', *Savacou*, 5 (1971), 95-102.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>87</sup> Johann Zoffany (c.1733-1810), *Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Lindsay and Lady Elizabeth Murray*, oil on canvas, c.1779, collection of the Earl of Mansfield, Scone Place, Perth.

Dunbar (c.1465-1530), Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Edward Long (1735-1813), Janet Schaw (1737-1801), Olaudah Equiano (c.1745-1797) and Ignatius Sancho (c.1729-1780). Central to the historical context out of which meanings of silence are examined is Enlightenment and its coaxial, Slavery. I attempt to tease out the implications of these in relation to African-Caribbean existence both for the dominant British culture and for African-Caribbean literary production and reception. The question of how these texts are read within the culture out of which they derived is explored in a dialogic discourse.

Drawing on the material in Chapter One, I bring into play in Chapter Two the nineteenth-century testimonies of slave women on plantations in English slave colonies in Berbice and Demerara. I explore 'The gift of speech' signified by these testimonies. I also set up, through a selected 'Sister Goose' narrative, an analogy between past and present conditions of reception of the testimonies and the later literary product. I examine, too, the word-body connections indicated in the testimonies and the issues of survival and maternity they raise. I argue that the nature of the testimonial discourse and its particular framing of the African-Caribbean voice relates to future publication silence. Two nineteenth-century publications by African-Caribbean women are examined: Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831), and Mary Seacole's *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole* (1857).<sup>88</sup> The texts highlight the absence of 'early' writing by African-Caribbean women and the varying degree of masking of a context of collective trauma and its aftermath, exacerbated by specific gender issues. Overall, I attempt to situate issues concerning the lifestyles of African-Caribbean women through notions of (dis)embodiment.

Chapter Three contextualises African-Caribbean women's desire for change from voicelessness to authority in the immediate post-Windrush years from 1948. Interrogating the change which allowed publication of the first novel, I explore cultural sources of creativity, particularly oral culture and I examine Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso*

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas Pringle, ed., *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, London, 1831 (hereafter *Mary Prince*); Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee, eds., *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, Bristol, 1984 (hereafter *Adventures*).

*Sea* (1968)<sup>89</sup> and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Bridge of Beyond* (1982)<sup>90</sup> which re-member the post-emancipation years. In considering what is revealed of the creative African-Caribbean woman's mind at work in the impoverished and difficult period immediately after slavery, particular attention is paid to oral culture as a bridge to published fiction and also to issues of location and publication. I indicate the involvement of African-Caribbean women with print culture and assess the meanings in terms of assertion of the mind in this differentiated encounter with the metropolitan diaspora.

In Chapter Four, the beginning of Part Two, I engage with fiction writing as a corpus. I expand upon my central argument about the reading of the body of African-Caribbean women's writing by first examining creolisation within the language of writing. I draw on narratology, especially, to explore the opening sections of Collins's *Angel* (1987), Brodber's *Myal* (1988) and Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1982).<sup>91</sup> I explore, also, a concern with African-Caribbean women's reality and its relation to fictional representation. I make explicit an 'insider' perspective which draws upon a theoretical position developed by Kamau Brathwaite (1930-) writing about Caribbean cosmology. I argue that 'insider' insight allows crucial access to the dynamics of cultural production and the transformative action involved in much publication. I attempt, also, to identify elements which may render the novels particularly opaque to interpreters and I question the extent to which the scant critical attention received by the texts may be linked to the perceived obscurity of the specific Creole world or to power relations within the wider diaspora.

I develop within Chapter Five, carnivalised theoretical strategies for the reading of the texts in the light of the concerns of writers and critics with the prevailing theoretical positions. Out of the resistance signalled by critics such as Boyce Davies (1994) and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (1998), writing from within the culture and concerned with issues of theoretical containment, I propose an approach to theory which is grounded

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<sup>89</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, London, 1968.

<sup>90</sup> Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Bridge of Beyond*, trans. Barbara Bray, London, 1982.

<sup>91</sup> Merle Collins, *Angel*, London, 1987; Erna Brodber, *Myal*, London, 1988; and Zee Edgell, *Beka Lamb*, London, 1982.

in Caribbean carnival praxis, a counter-hegemonic practice involving Brathwaite's notion of invention and re-invention from the material available.<sup>92</sup> In addition, in contextualising meanings of feminism(s), I develop the question of alternative readings, which I understand to be implicated in critical resistance. I address the extent to which interpreters find themselves in a position to foreground critical approaches valuing black women's intellectual traditions and specifically those of African-Caribbean women.

Chapter Six deploys the theorising within Collins's *The Colour of Forgetting* (1996), Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996) and Edgell's *The Festival of San Joaquin*, (1997).<sup>93</sup> I draw attention to the ways in which the texts construct gender. My concern with the theorising text is developed from Valerie Lee's 'Testifying Theory: Womanist Intellectual Thought'.<sup>94</sup> Lee questions what happens to black women's literature when it is 'subjected exclusively to critical approaches' not foregrounding 'black women's experiences and intellectual traditions'.<sup>95</sup> She indicates also a concern with students' access to black women's theorising. While Lee's essay reflects upon the Afro-US situation, her preoccupations underline my own interest in African-Caribbean women's writing and contribute to the carnivalised process formulated in the previous chapter. In effect, I read the texts by the carnivalised strategies suggested so as to reveal the role played by collective memory, representation of women's experiences and, for example, post-slavery meanings in Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985), a text highly consistent with the testimonies of the nineteenth-century women examined in Chapter Two.<sup>96</sup> Crucial to the reading process is an elucidating of meanings from the theorising text. I conclude by locating within Sylvia Wynter's notion of a necessary 'second counter-exertion', my contribution to the critical silence-breaking. I point also to the work as a beginning which further opens much needed critical debate specifically upon the body of African-Caribbean women's writing.

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Kamau Brathwaite, 'Notes on Caribbean Cosmology', *River City*, 16 (1996), 1-17.

<sup>93</sup> Merle Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting*, London, 1996 (hereafter *Colour*); Erna Brodber, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, London, 1980 (hereafter *Jane and Louisa*); Beryl Gilroy, *In Praise of Love and Children*, Leeds, 1996 (hereafter *Praise*); Zee Edgell, *The Festival of San Joaquin* (hereafter *Festival*), Oxford, 1997.

<sup>94</sup> Valerie Lee, 'Testifying Theory: Womanist Intellectual Thought', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 6, 2 (Autumn 1995), 200-6.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging*, London, 1985.

# **Part One**

## **History**

## Chapter One

# Touching the African-Caribbean Woman's Body: Myth, Meaning and Silences of the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century

From the sixteenth century my suffering dates  
and I hardly knew it  
because that nightingale  
always sings in my suffering.<sup>1</sup>



Johann Zoffany (1734/5-1810), *Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Lindsay and Lady Elizabeth Murray*, oil on canvas, c.1779, collection of the Earl of Mansfield, Scone Place, Perth.

The portrait of Dido Elizabeth Lindsay and Lady Elizabeth Mary Murray of circa 1779, (see fig.1 above) by Johann Zoffany shows a richly textured painting of two young

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Morejón, 'Looking Inwards', *Black Woman and Other Poems (Mujer negra y otros poemas)*, trans. Jean Andrews, London, 2001, p.119.

women, each handsomely attired in a gown of expensive fabrics.<sup>2</sup> One figure is defined by her 'English rose' appearance; the pinks and whites reflected in her elegant clothing, her cheeks and the dainty flowers adorning her hair. The other wears a more simply styled dress, a plumed turban and one string of pearls to her companion's two. One female bears an open book as if interrupted from her reading, the other holds a tray of luscious fruit. Her left index finger rests near her lips. One woman is black; the other is white. The painting, principally through juxtaposition of race, renders its two subjects in an ambiguous relationship to each other as indicated in their attire, postures and gestures. What meanings are to be made of the tempting black woman figure? What might we understand by the more demure white woman's reading while the black woman does not? Zoffany's image is of symbolic concern to my thesis which engages with the reading of representation of black women, issues of 'Relation' signified, and cultural perception. Who is reading whom, by what means and to what effect? What are the meanings of the black woman's silence?

Of specific historical significance to the anglophone Caribbean, or West Indies, as it was known, is the eighteenth-century Enlightenment context of Zoffany's work. In 1713, Britain finally won the much coveted contract to import slaves to the Spanish Caribbean. As a result, Britain, already involved in Atlantic slave trafficking since the late sixteenth century, became, by the mid-1700s, 'dominant in the Atlantic commerce in slaves'.<sup>3</sup> This increasing involvement in the slave trade, particularly from the seventeenth century to its eighteenth-century heyday, may be said to parallel the Enlightenment movement in much of Western Europe, with its ideals of the 'exercise of reason' as a route to human progress.<sup>4</sup> Among texts of the period, few representations of the dominant Enlightenment ideology involving African-Caribbean heritage women exist. I use the term 'text', here, to include the printed word as well as the visual image

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<sup>2</sup> Johann Zoffany (1734/5-1810), *Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Lindsay and Lady Elizabeth Murray*, oil on canvas, c.1779, collection of the Earl of Mansfield, Scone Place, Perth.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*, London, 1997, p.264.

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton, p.43.

such as Zoffany's which is important here on several counts.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, Zoffany's is a rare 'text' of the period which reveals a black woman in close proximity to a book. It depicts the 'silenced' African heritage woman prior to the nineteenth century. By 'silenced', I mean the black woman's non-representation as person *of mind*, but rather, as body *not* in touch with reason for the reading process involves engagement with reason. Questions which arise include: in whose interest is Dido portrayed as *not* the one who reads? Secondly, what is the significance of Zoffany's representation of Dido, and the suggestion of characteristics such as sensuality and exoticism which 'speak for' her?

I acknowledge that women were commonly spoken for during this period, a subject developed by Vivien Jones in *Women in the Eighteenth Century* (1990).<sup>6</sup> Central to Jones's thesis is the argument that the 'dominant ideal of femininity' was powerfully constructed through a specific type of representation, particularly that of 'conduct literature'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed Jones cites, as example, from 'A Dissertation on Chastity' (1740), from which the following is directly applicable to the white woman figure in Zoffany's portrait: 'like a rose in June, with all her virgin graces about her - sweet to the sense, and lovely to the eye'.<sup>8</sup> Implicit in such 'conduct literature' tradition is that of being *spoken for*. Jones argues, though, that white femininity as constructed by the dominant literature is undermined when different texts are examined, particularly those by writing women of the period. I am similarly interested to juxtapose missing voices, those of writing black women, albeit mainly of a later period, in relation to dominant texts. So, while Zoffany's image may be read as reproducing 'dominant cultural representations of sexual difference', my specific interest lies in the representation of the African-Caribbean woman.<sup>9</sup> While like Jones I am interested to insert women into the discourse of the period, my particular focus is African-Caribbean women who have been singularly absent from this discourse. Additionally, alert to Jones's warning of the reproductive

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<sup>5</sup> For similar use of 'text', see, for example, Martin Montgomery, Alan Durant, Nigel Fabb, Tom Furniss and Sara Mills, *Ways of Reading*, London, 1992, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> Vivien Jones, *Women In the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

nature of 'dominant' representations of femininity, I wish to extend the awareness which she signals so as to include racial difference.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, I am concerned to engage with the tradition which came to be developed, particularly among women of a later period to *speak for* black women.<sup>11</sup>

Zoffany's master text, in its patriarchal construction of the female, simultaneously renders the white female as reader and the black as 'other'.<sup>12</sup> The latter's dark skin valorises her non-reader status. The tray she bears alludes to her status as one who serves even as the evocative plumed turban and the fruit signal an imagined exoticism. The art historian, Marcia Pointon, notes the 'relationship of unequal parties in contention for power' in portraiture.<sup>13</sup> In Zoffany's text, Dido's figure indicates its power to hold the male gaze. At the same time, the white woman's touch is ambiguous since it may be read *alter/natively* as a pushing away, a keeping at arms length or, a relative closeness in the context of knowledge of ontological difference. Dominant knowledge, exemplified in the writing of David Hume, at best 'suspected the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites'.<sup>14</sup> A black woman like Dido, rescued from a primitivist state conditional upon her African heritage is 'unequal' in relation to Enlightenment ideals, a shadow of her white counterpart.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, in her representation, the Turkish style commented upon by Pointon, Dido bears the ready signifiers of the exotic in contrast to the white female subject. One way of decoding the visual text is to assume that the white subject's reading carries meanings of intelligence, knowledge and Enlightenment in contrast to the black 'other'. To read the juxtapositions within the painting, there is need for an awareness of meanings which resonate through contrasts and connections both present

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Similar to Jones's concern with 'conduct literature', my concern is with the rhetoric of slavery which, in the absence of African-Caribbean voices, succeeded in its 'fixed' construction of black womanhood.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other', in Peggy Kamuf, ed., *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, New York and London, 1991, p.200.

<sup>13</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Hanging The Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven, 1993, p.184.

<sup>14</sup> David Hume, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Political*, London, 1748, p.123.

<sup>15</sup> Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*, New York, 1995, pp.88-9. Gerzina's argument that Dido occupied a lower status than her cousin within the household is compounded by knowledge that this was the home of Lord Mansfield, whose judgement, in 1772, in the Somerset case, was vital to the black population of eighteenth-century Britain.

in and beyond the text. Yet, defying the most astute reading of the painting, the two women are actually cousins living together.<sup>16</sup>

Gretchen Gerzina's *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (1995) indicates that Dido's parents were a woman 'taken prisoner' from a Spanish ship and Sir John Lindsay, a naval captain, uncle to Lady Elizabeth in the painting.<sup>17</sup> This information is substantiated by Gene Adams who indicates Dido's birth as 'c.1763 and that she was the natural daughter' of Sir John Lindsay.<sup>18</sup> She also had a brother, John, provided for in her father's will.<sup>19</sup> While it is not known whether the cousins were aware of their relationship, the likelihood is that this was a family secret. Dido's status in the household appears to have been firstly, as playmate and later 'a kind of personal attendant'.<sup>20</sup> As in Zoffany's painting, if Lady Elizabeth suggests chastity, then Dido evokes desire as presumably her mother had done.<sup>21</sup> Dido's pointing to the region of her lips, juxtaposed against the luscious, tempting fruit, resonates with meanings inappropriate in the depiction of her cousin. Furthermore, the act of holding a book would detract from Zoffany's meanings in representing Dido. Adams, for example, assesses the portrait as indicative of a typical eighteenth-century upper-class attitude to black slave children'.<sup>22</sup> Contemporary diarist, Thomas Hutchinson, assumed Dido to be 'a sort of Superintendant over the dairy, poultry yard, etc, which we visited'.<sup>23</sup> Could Dido read? Circumstantial evidence suggests that she did, despite her representation in print and portrait which appear to conform to prevailing notions of Africans believed to be rescued from a primitive state, as intellectually inferior.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Gene Adams, 'Dido Elizabeth Belle: A Black Girl at Kenwood, *Camden History Review*, 12 (1984), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>21</sup> 'Dido' alludes also to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in which the Queen of Carthage kills herself, a casualty of her lover's cruel destiny. I am speculating that an oblique reference to the tragic circumstances of her mother's fate may also be found in Dido's naming.

<sup>22</sup> Adams, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Orlando Hutchinson, ed., *The Diary and Letters of His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson*, London, 1886, p.276.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, London, 1984, pp.150-53, for discussion of the role played by John Locke, David Hume and T. Osborne in making 'respectable' the notion of black inferiority. See also, Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1989, p.130.

Literary and visual texts figuring black womanhood from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century are characterised by disparity. While the selection of texts examined within this chapter necessarily reflects this pattern, sources from the period allow a crucial historicising of the literary silence of African-Caribbean women. Indeed, Anglophone African-Caribbean womanhood appears to begin in the mythologies of Britain of the period.<sup>25</sup> The search for textual evidence of black women's presence necessarily leads, as poet and novelist, Merle Collins indicates, to a point 'after the beginning', for the historiography of Atlantic slavery, a critical source of Caribbean culture, is largely silent about African-Caribbean women.<sup>26</sup> Verene Shepherd's *Engendering History* (1995) seeks not only to redress the balance rendering the hitherto invisible African heritage woman visible within Caribbean historiography, but also, beyond the 'retrieval phase', to apply gender analysis to that history.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it is from the vantage point of the 1990s, in the wake of feminism(s), and an active academic interest in women's history, gender analysis, and the articulation of black subject positions that such 'engendering' has been possible. Also, it is from this perspective that I undertake a reading of Eurocentric texts which served as material of the powerful *pre-text* to African-Caribbean women's writing, effectively construction the dominant version of black womanhood. The contribution of this *pre-text* to the regulating and maintenance of literary silence may be gauged by the 'writing back' texts of African-Caribbean heritage women. How the *pre-text* proved to be so powerful is explored through literary, visual and historical texts from the sixteenth to eighteenth century Britain offering representations of African heritage women. In so doing, I am attempting, also, to construct a model of black womanhood of the period and the silence attendant upon this.

The questions upon which this chapter turns are how has African/Caribbean women's identity been constructed and how has this informed literary silence?

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<sup>25</sup> I use 'mythologies' in the Barthesian sense: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (first publ., 1972), trans. Annette Lavers, London, 1993, pp.148-9.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, London, 1995, p.17.

<sup>27</sup> Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey, eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, Kingston and London, 1995, p.xvi.

Specifically, I am interested to highlight the nature of the dominant construction of black womanhood in British society, since in relation to the anglophone or English-speaking Caribbean, this is as near to the 'beginning' as is possible. In the 'shared knowledge' of dominance lies clues indicative of that which functions so as to resist texts by African-Caribbean women of the twentieth century. How may we reconcile the *pre-text* of black womanhood established by British society with literary silence by African-Caribbean women?

### **Mythologies of African/Caribbean Womanhood**

Zoffany's image foregrounds a distinctive embodiment of the black woman to be found in textual configurations drawn, for example, from poetry and history. While these present, in some measure, archaeological findings, the sparse remains of a history all but lost, they also offer a nuanced construct of the powerful Eurocentric imagination. Like Zoffany's, such embodying may be read as carrying benign connotations. Equally, white representation may be deployed to a more hostile purpose.<sup>28</sup> Among the 'writing back' texts which explore white representation of black characters and which can usefully enter this dialogic exploration is Toni Morrison's *Playing In The Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992).<sup>29</sup> Though Morrison is concerned with American fiction and with a more substantial black presence in the literature, her analysis can be used to approach the 'real or fabricated Africanist presence', which are my concerns.<sup>30</sup> Morrison stresses that her analysis constitutes reading 'as a writer', a process of particular interest here, in the light of both a shared history and writer-impulse. Like Morrison's text, the African-heritage writings cited in this thesis, reinterpret creatively or propose critical ideas - a process of 'writing back' which contributes richly to readings of the Anglocentric texts. Referring to white writers articulating an Africanist presence, Morrison draws attention to 'the signs, the codes, the literary strategies designed to accommodate this

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<sup>28</sup> Fryer, p.150.

<sup>29</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, London, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

encounter'.<sup>31</sup> She warns also of the 'demonising and reifying' which is indicative of the process of construction.<sup>32</sup> I borrow Morrison's use of the term 'voiceless' to refer to the lack of expression, or voice, allotted to the shadowy and stereotypic black figures as represented by white American writers.<sup>33</sup> *Playing* enquires into ways in which blackness is constructed in the 'literary imagination' of white American writers and Morrison's subtitle, 'Whiteness and the Literary Imagination' underscores this. Her investigation of literary and mythological constructions matches my own enquiry, and I am interested to apply Morrison's readings to African-Caribbean women whose publication history differs markedly from that of African-Americans.<sup>34</sup>

This thesis, in seeking to raise African-Caribbean women's voices, requires a plurivocality at odds with preferred academic practice indicating a neat, fixed theoretical position. African-American critic Valerie Lee similarly keen to develop theoretical positions inclusive of black women's voices argues for 'multiple voicings'.<sup>35</sup> I am interested in such practice, akin to Caribbean carnival practice, so as to release African-Caribbean women's voices which will, in turn, inform critical analysis. Specifically, concern rests with a coexistence or fusion of African and European cultural forms characterised by the riotous voices of Caribbean carnival, its plurivocality, as well as its subversive critical commentary.<sup>36</sup> The carnivalised discourse offered in the reading of the varied texts by Dunbar, Long, Sancho and other writers privileges race and gender.<sup>37</sup> In part, the writing of gender which I bring to these texts is informed by my personal, individual struggle to claim a literary voice, a journey which has led to the writing of historical texts such as *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham* (1995), rendering a

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>33</sup> Morrison refers to fiction writers.

<sup>34</sup> Publication by Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, London, 1773, and Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig*, Boston, 1859, attest to this.

<sup>35</sup> Lee, 203.

<sup>36</sup> See, Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Oxford, 1971, pp.229-31, for an examination of the beginnings of carnival in slave society.

<sup>37</sup> My interest in the various writers lie in their representation of African/Caribbean womanhood.

local historical black presence in Britain more visible.<sup>38</sup> In addition, my literary writing such as *Haunted by History* (1998)<sup>39</sup> and libretto, *Imoinda*, first performed in 1998,<sup>40</sup> address issues central to which is the absent voices of African-Caribbean women. A similar literary journey is taken by poet and author M. Nourbese Philip whose poetic and prose theorising purposely threads this study as both leitmotif and griot's chant. In the theoretical arguments developed here, which are grounded in experience as an African-Caribbean woman writer operating within a network of such writers, I am especially interested to demonstrate the dominant British construction of a gendered, racialised identity as part of a process impacting upon literary production by African-Caribbean women. Further, I am proposing that this identity, imposed by the dominant culture, like that of Dido's, mutates in ways relative to historical specificities, particularly those of location and period.

Within the context of the pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment periods, for example, the African heritage woman taken from and living outside of Africa remains a shadowy figure. As Guyanese author and essayist, Beryl Gilroy notes: 'In the end we remember that in centuries past even conversation was gendered, formal, functional, class specific and territorial .... Slaves by virtue of sporadic/endemic or calculated bursts of self-indulgent plantocratic terror knew that silence was also a life preserver'.<sup>41</sup> In contradistinction to the pattern pertaining to women generally, a differentiated silence, preserving of life itself, appears to apply to those women whose status derived from that of 'slave'. By this analysis, silence linked to survival is specific to the very genealogy of African-Caribbean womanhood, itself a product of trans-Atlantic slavery. Within this genealogy, there may be discerned the silence of traumatic cultural dislocation, indicative of the severance of mothertongue.

Probably the earliest anglophone text offering a configuration of black womanhood is the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century poem, 'Of Ane Blak-Moir'

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<sup>38</sup> Joan Anim-Addo, *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham*, London, 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Joan Anim-Addo, *Haunted by History*, London, 1998.

<sup>40</sup> Libretto showcased at The Oval House Theatre, London, 19 June 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, London, p.95 (hereafter, *Leaves*).

by the Scottish poet, William Dunbar, which follows:

OF ANE BLAK-MOIR

Lang heff I maed of ladyes quyhytt,  
Nou of ane blak I will indytt,  
That landeth furth of the last schippis;  
Quhou fain wald I descryve perfytt,  
My ladye with the mekle lippis.

Quhou schou is tutte mowitt lyk an aep,  
And lyk a gangarall onto gaep;  
And quhou hir schort catt nois skippis  
And quhou scho schynes lyk only saep;  
My ladye with the mekle lippis.

Quhen schou is clad in rich apparrall,  
Schou blinkis als brycht as ane tar barrell;  
Quhen schou was born, the son tholit clippis,  
The nycht be fain faucht in hir querrell:  
My ladye with the mekle lippis.

Quhai for hir saek, with speir and scheld,  
Preiffs maest mychttelye in the feld,  
Sall kis and withe hir go in grippis;  
And fro thyne furth hir luff sall weld:  
My ladye with the mekle lippis.

And quhai in feld receaves schaem,  
And tynis thair his kynchtlie naem,  
Sall cum behind and kis her hippis,  
And never to uther confort claem:  
My ladye with the mekle lippis.<sup>42</sup>

Few textual representations of African heritage women have survived from the early Renaissance period which parallels the beginnings of British expansion, through trade, involving contact with Africa. 'My ladye with the mekle lippis' is the characteristic Eurocentric construction of the African woman who, once removed from Africa not only loses her name in the tradition of her coloniser, but is also remade as in Dunbar's poem, in the carnivalesque activities of the court, as sexual, bestial creature.<sup>43</sup> 'Blak-Moir' is in effect a depersonalised descriptor of the woman utilising the term prevalent

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<sup>42</sup> From *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed., W. Mackay Mackenzie, Edinburgh, 1970, pp.66-7.

<sup>43</sup> I differentiate between carnivalesque, meaning like carnival (with Bakhtinian connotations of the profane and the sacred) and carnivalised, meaning made into a carnival (Caribbean-style, central to which is creolisation).

at the time, namely, 'black-a-moor' or 'black moor'. It is in her thick lips, characteristically *not* a sign of European beauty, that the poet locates the essence of the black woman hence the regular refrain which closes each stanza. In this poetic encounter, the black woman has been made into a fetishised object whose 'mekle lippis' reinforces the ambiguous desire/repulsion of the one who gazes. A particularised writing of the myth of the black woman as exclusively body features in this racialised discourse. Yet it is useful to bear in mind Philip's analysis of the black woman as 'unmanageable' for Dunbar's text prefigures this unmanageability which, in the Eurocentric imagination, is located in the bestiality attributed to the black woman's sexuality.<sup>44</sup>

'Of Ane Blak-Moir', which appears to offer a narrative focusing upon a specific black woman, 'Ane', is believed to be factually based on the presence of black women in the Scottish court of James IV in 1507.<sup>45</sup> The reading of the text by Gerzina, in a chapter devoted to black women, and premised upon the poem as documentary evidence, is scathing about Dunbar's 'unflatteringly' figured black woman, 'Ann'.<sup>46</sup> This is an important misreading of the poem. The *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (1931-37) confirms that 'ane' is equivalent to the indefinite article 'a'. This means that any specificity interpreted in the capitalised 'Ane' refers to the status of the word in the title rather than the name of a person.<sup>47</sup> The title of the poem refers, therefore, to *a* (or one) black person. No individuality is signalled in the title, nor is gender.

Dunbar's poem stands alone as a literary text of this period, depicting a displaced African woman located, generally, 'in the west'.<sup>48</sup> While the reason for her presence in Scotland is not stated in the poem, the black woman's function, clearly delineated in the text is specific to the entertainment at the tournament which is the backdrop of the poem. She is, in this instance, not only visibly crucial to the spectacle; she is physically

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<sup>44</sup> M. Nourbese Philip, 'Managing the Unmanageable', in Cudjoe, ed., p.298.

<sup>45</sup> Fryer, p.3.

<sup>46</sup> Gerzina, p.69.

<sup>47</sup> Sir William A. Craigie, *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue from the Twelfth Century to the End of the Seventeenth*, originally published (in fascicles), Chicago, London and Oxford, 1931-30, (2nd impression, 1974), pp.76-8.

<sup>48</sup> Scholars agree that dates for Dunbar's texts are imprecise.

present in order to be handled or touched as an active part of the festive programme for the ladies and gentlemen of the court. 'Of Ane Blak-Moir' is of significance not merely because of the historical indication it offers of the black presence in Scotland and Britain. Dunbar's 'Africanist presence' also renders visible the albeit nameless black woman subject of the poem which, for a text of its period, merits particular attention, if only in the mythology it reveals. This representation of African womanhood, like that of Zoffany's, is one which is doubly framed: firstly, by 'western' or 'white' eyes and secondly by the male gaze. Caribbean critic Patricia Mohammed stresses the part played by 'sexual difference' which, she argues, is 'deeply embedded in subterranean aspects of a culture, in mythology and rite'.<sup>49</sup> The danger, she warns, is that these are 'least amenable to change'.<sup>50</sup> If Mohammed may be believed, the 'mythology and rite' of the culture, illustrated in the text, underscores an understanding of sexual and racial difference which resonates throughout the poem, particularly when read in the context of a much later period, and by a black woman similarly positioned outside of the text by virtue of being of the same group as the objectified 'other' of the writing.

'Of Ane Blak Moir' highlights markers for black female identity that are synonymous, in the first instance, with voluptuousness. In that the identity given is generalised, the single recurring line, 'My ladye with the mekle lippis', that is, the thick lips, is an example of the 'code', 'sign', 'literary strategy' which Morrison addresses. The poet's strategy reinforces through repetition the monochromatic identity ascribed to 'Ane Blak-Moir' or black women generally and establishes an identity fundamentally and erogenously linked to zones of the body, 'lippis' and 'hippis', waiting to be claimed sexually. Sexual availability is, then, an important feature of the black woman's ascribed identity. Winners of the jousting contest, the setting for the poem, may claim her physically and in public. They 'sal kis and with hir go in grippis' that is, embrace and kiss her. On the other hand, any loser, he who 'receaves schaem' is, in defeat, denied

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<sup>49</sup> Patricia Mohammed, 'Writing Gender into History: The Negotiation of Gender Relations among Indian Men and Women in Post-Indenture Trinidad Society, 1917-47', in Shepherd et al, p.25.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

her lips. Instead of a frontal claim, he 'sall cum behind and kis hir hippis'. Thus the rules of encounter with the black woman are clarified in the poem; winners or losers have a physical claim to her body marked by touch upon lips or hips. The black woman is, therefore, to be taken frontally and from behind so that she is circumscribed by the male gaze, which, like the later twentieth-century cinematic, sexual gaze upon the female subject, is discussed as a problematic one.

Feminist film theory, notably in the writing of Teresa de Laurentis, takes issue with female subject formation and dominant patterns of patriarchy. Laurentis's interest lies with 'the representation of woman as spectacle - body to be looked at, place of sexuality, and object of desire - so pervasive in our culture'.<sup>51</sup> Two points highlighted by Laurentis are of concern to my argument: firstly, the process 'in which the subject is continually engaged, represented and inscribed in ideology' and secondly, the pervasiveness of this practice, 'well before and beyond the institution of cinema'.<sup>52</sup> Each of these holds in relation to the sexual gaze of Dunbar's text so that the addressee of the poem is expected to appreciate this representation as spectator and reader. Similar to Laurentis's cinematic concerns, I argue that Dunbar's black woman, like Dido, 'is placed within and read from, the encompassing context of patriarchal ideologies'.<sup>53</sup> A crucial difference lies upon an underlying acceptance of the rules, by the white male, not only in the black woman's acquiescence but in the ambiguity concerning her appeal/repulsion. Further, acquiescence is premised upon reducing the black woman's body to the sexual signifiers of lips and hips, and to being claimed by males for whom the ritual is both meaningful and gratifying. Silence is integral to this acquiescence.

It may be argued that this portrayal of the black woman offers an evocation of innocent fun to readers. In the first instance, the bestialising imagery, of 'toad' and 'cat' is compounded by that of the 'tar barrel' which was used in Dunbar's day to roll out

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<sup>51</sup> Teresa de Laurentis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema*, Bloomington, 1984, p.4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

and set fire to renegades expelled from their village community.<sup>54</sup> These included women considered dangerous. So, not only is the black woman caged by the gaze of the white male, she is also confined by the threat of an ignominious end should she fail to please. The black woman's destiny is, however, symbolically unavoidable, since the tar or black pigmentation of her skin is incorporated in her black body. In Dunbar's text, the black woman's body, located in the West, is a body contained. Further, to cite Morrison's observation, much depends on who is reading the text.<sup>55</sup> 'Ane Blak-Moir' is, however, inescapably, the 'other'. Her very presence, as spectacle linked to foreignness, is indicated in the third line of the opening stanza by having landed 'furth of the last schippis'. The specificity of the black woman's otherness, stated in the title and resonating in the first verse when she is referred to as 'ane blak', is elaborated upon in the second stanza in which she is described as thick lipped, 'mekle lippis', who moves like an ape 'tutte mowitt lyk an aep', 'like a toad to touch, with a cat-like nose and skin like a gleaming tar barrel'. The animal imagery of the poem serves to heighten the grotesque figuring of the black woman whose sensuous appeal, both repugnant and alluring, is such that the reader might also 'touch' the subject so vividly depicted.

Dunbar's black woman set among the white crowd represents to the ladies and gentlemen of the court of James IV, a particular kind of 'playing in the dark'. Morrison pinpoints her concern with such textuality as 'the shorthand, the taken-for-granted assumptions that lie in their usage' of black images and people.<sup>56</sup> Dunbar's bestialising, read in the figuring of the black woman, indicates a racialised poetics accessible to its intended audience.<sup>57</sup> The implied white reader of the poem, through shared cultural understandings, is unlikely to be pushed into a 'doubled' estrangement. I mean, by this, that if, as Judith Fetterley argues, women readers are estranged through the 'pervasive male bias' of texts, a process of immasculation which constructs the reader

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<sup>54</sup> See Sir Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet* (first pubd 1824), ed., G.A.M. Wood and David Hewitt, London, 2000, p.99, for a later reference to such an exit. The character Steenie is threatened that he would, with 'the help of a tar-barrel and a torch' to be sent to the Devil.

<sup>55</sup> Morrison, p.5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

as male, then black women readers are doubly estranged by being positional in relation to the text as both white and male.<sup>58</sup> For this thesis, such a 'doubled' estrangement is important.

When Dunbar's knights at arms 'with speir and scheld,' joust for the black woman's favours, the reward for the winner is also qualitatively different from that traditionally associated with the chivalric code and the favours conferred by a 'white lady'. This is because, despite the factual basis suggesting that James IV himself, in costume as a black knight, jousting for the favours of a black woman,<sup>59</sup> the difference lies in the configuration of Dunbar's textual black woman as fetishised spectacle, both grotesque and sexual, to the white male gaze and implicitly, the crowd of onlookers. What might the white male signify to a black female figure such as Dunbar's? While response to such a question can only be conjecture, articulations of the gaze of a later historical period suggest an interpretation of white male behaviour in early encounters as inexplicable devilry. Nigerian-born, Olaudah Equiano (ca.1745-1797), for example, enslaved and taken aboard ship in the eighteenth century reports that he believed himself to be in a 'world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me'.<sup>60</sup> The black woman's returning gaze, even as she is being made the spectacle is likely to have held some of the meanings suggested by Equiano whose writing is examined below.

Dunbar's 'symbolic figuration' of black womanhood offers its audience a Eurocentric construction that is at once exotic and utterly fabricated. African-American cultural theorist bell hooks argues, for example, that such iconography is the product of sexism and racism offering the black female body as 'the quintessential symbol of a 'natural' female presence that is organic, closer to nature, animalistic, primitive'.<sup>61</sup> The anonymity of the black woman is significant since what resonates with the narrator and addressee is her blackness. For example, she is said to 'blink als brycht as any tar

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<sup>58</sup> Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, Bloomington, 1978, p.xii.

<sup>59</sup> Fryer, p.3.

<sup>60</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, the African: Written by Himself*, London, 1789, p.70, Volume 1. All references unless stated otherwise are to this volume.

<sup>61</sup> bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*, Boston, 1991, p.153.

barrel' when richly dressed, a supposed feature inviting collusion in mirth. But what insight can the narrator have into her character who fails our credibility at the fundamental level of naming the black woman when the exotic creature newly arrived off the ship bears a name, unknown to the narrative, which is culturally appropriate and literally offers the black woman's genealogy.<sup>62</sup> The absence of naming of the black woman, therefore, signals to the contemporary reader and the African heritage reader, in particular, the fabrication that is being offered in this configuring of black womanhood. Such figuration, from a perspective profoundly unfamiliar with the object being viewed, serves not only to construct a masked object of sexual desire but a mere shadow of the woman herself, so that the recurring line, 'My ladye with the mekle lippis' signifies primarily the observer's erotic anticipation.

Why has this 'shadow' been constructed? The verbal signals in the text are charged with meanings which typify a particularised western response to the black woman that has resonated in more recent times and may be read between the lines of textual silence lasting until the later twentieth century. Ziggi Alexander whose research has brought the writing of nineteenth-century Jamaican, Mary Seacole, to contemporary readers, stresses the impossibility of not situating such a discussion within the British 'value system'.<sup>63</sup> In 'Ane Blak-Moir', Dunbar's evocation of the black woman as sexual 'other' is locked into a similar value system. Further, the text illustrates a construction of the black woman's identity which equally serves Dunbar's textual Renaissance court as well as West Indian planters of the Enlightenment period and later still, post-Emancipation missionaries. This myth will subsequently take on literary implications in such historical texts as Edward Long's,<sup>64</sup> as well as fiction, explored below. Varieties of the myth would come to underscore constructs of African-Caribbean womanhood in everyday circumstances far removed from the joustings at court.

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<sup>62</sup> Naming practice in the Ashanti tradition, for example, indicates a person's biography, through a series of names, given and earned. See, Rattray, Capt. R.S., *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, Oxford, 1927, p.62.

<sup>63</sup> Ziggi Alexander, 'Let it Lie Upon the Table: The Status of Black Women's Biography in the UK', *Gender and History*, (Spring 1990), 23.

<sup>64</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or, general survey of the antient and modern state of that island: with reflections on its situations, settlements, inhabitants, climate, products, commerce, laws and government*. London, 1774.

The appearance of Dunbar's 'Black Moir' outside of Africa, on the Scottish side of the Atlantic, may be read as the first sign of 'Western' 'political investment' in the black woman's body.<sup>65</sup> The notion of 'political investment', conceptualised by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926-1984),<sup>66</sup> further illuminates my argument and accounts for silence(s). I employ Foucault's term as a means of specifying issues related to debate about the African-Caribbean woman's body which resists treatment as mere abstraction. He argues as follows:

But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use.<sup>67</sup>

It is Foucault's analysis of punitive European society and its relation to power, the research material of which derived from enquiry into spectacle qualitatively different from that of royal courts, that is of interest to the argument being developed. Why? This is because in order to explore more fully the *pre-text* indicated by literature such as 'Ane Blak-Moir', it is necessary to follow the gaze and with it a shifting setting, from Europe to the Caribbean and back again, to appreciate the literary history of the African-heritage Caribbean woman.

Foucault's theoretical concern with punishment and judicial power involving the white male body in European prisons, lends itself to the brutal excesses of eighteenth century history touching the black woman's body. Foucault's study, *Discipline* (1977), presents an historicised analysis - of which I am highly selective - of the treatment of the body of the condemned, during the period prior to penal reform limiting physical abuse as punishment. The physical abuse symptomatic of Foucault's disciplinary treatment bears an uncanny resemblance to slavery and its punishment of the body,

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<sup>65</sup> The term is borrowed from Foucault, 1991, p.25.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp.25-6.

including that of the woman's.<sup>68</sup> Remarkably, in the light of the physical excesses typifying Caribbean plantation realities of the eighteenth century, Foucault writes of the same period in Europe as one when the 'gloomy festival of punishment is dying out' and of the 'disappearance of punishment as spectacle'.<sup>69</sup> One might speculate that Europeans, taking such practice to the Caribbean justified the maintenance of precisely those conditions being eroded in Europe. In any event, at this time, the mass of African-Caribbean women's bodies were condemned by and through the institution of slavery, so that factors of time and place, historical period and location, play a significant part in the making or breaking of silence attendant upon the woman's presence. A parallel lies also with Foucault's interest in the theorising of punishment of the body that is simultaneously desired and repulsed for therein lies a further similarity with African-Caribbean women. So, while the main focus of *Discipline* is with the penal system, Foucault's insight holds true also for the institution of Atlantic slavery.

'Political investment', in relation to the African-Caribbean woman's body, is characterised in any period up to and including the 1830s by a combination of indicators of power such as marking, training, torturing and coercing. A key factor, insignificant to Foucault's analysis, is the impact of location, which is of particular importance to the African-heritage woman and mediates the emission of 'signs' of political investment in her body, including different registers of voicelessness.<sup>70</sup> If women formed the substantive portion of the unskilled labour force, in terms of field labour on Caribbean plantations, as Barbara Bush indicates, then this represented a crucial level of 'political investment' and attendant bodily abuse.<sup>71</sup> How such labour affected women as mothers is explored in Chapter Two. In Philip's 'Discourse on the Logic of Language', the fifth of

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<sup>68</sup> Adrienne Chambon has suggested in conversation that there are several Foucaults each perceived differently by scholars from varying fields and whether he is studied in translation or in the original French of his writing. It is Foucault's concern with the 'political investment' of the body read in translation which illuminates this exploration.

<sup>69</sup> Foucault, p.9.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838*, Kingston, Bloomington, Indianapolis and London, 1990, p.38.

nine poem cycles within the collection, there is a framing through the poetic lens of two slave edicts of crucial significance to the actual silencing of African-Caribbean women.<sup>72</sup> The first enforced a Babel effect by ensuring that slaves ‘belong to as many ethno-linguistic groups as possible’<sup>73</sup> while the second threatened ‘removal of the tongue’. The latter, according to Philip, is ultimately key to an understanding of African-Caribbean women’s silence during Atlantic slavery epitomised for anglophones by eighteenth-century slaving activities. By this analysis, the legal or quasi-legal context of this ‘age of reason’ so rationalised the status of Africans, that both edicts served, not only to structure the language situation in which the Africans found themselves, but also to shape perceptions of Africans outside of Africa in the light of absence of the African’s word.<sup>74</sup> In short, the quality of the adapted language or, its counterpart, silence, in a highly coercive context, featured as identity markers of the African-heritage person in the Caribbean or in transit. The mother’s role in passing on the mother tongue, in this context, becomes highly charged since ‘removal of tongue’ figures at best, ‘language death’.<sup>75</sup>

If ‘removal of tongue’ is characteristic of African-Caribbean experience, texts figuring African-Caribbean womanhood carry the possibilities of representing the enforced silence of the characters observed, as well as the silence integral to the Anglocentric imagination.<sup>76</sup> The significance of location in relation to perception is further stressed by American poet and radical feminist, Adrienne Rich. Theorising the politics of location, Rich indicates a growing appreciation of the body in terms of how it sees and of the limitations of seeing dependent upon its racial and gendered location.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Philip, p.30 and p.32. (See also my ‘Preface’, pp.6 and 7).

<sup>73</sup> Philip, p.30.

<sup>74</sup> Morrison provides another angle on this argument in her statement: ‘racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment’. See *Playing*, p.63.

<sup>75</sup> The language death of Twi-Asante may be cited as an example. See Mervyn C. Alleyne and Beverley Hall-Alleyne, ‘Language Maintenance and Language Death in the Caribbean’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28, 4 (1982), 58-9.

<sup>76</sup> Ferguson indicates that while seeking to ameliorate slavery, abolitionists established their particular stereotype of black people. This ‘speaking for’ further circumscribed black women as figures capable of voice.

<sup>77</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry*, London and New York, 1986, p.215.

This has implications for writers, for example, so that in relation to Dunbar and Long, it is appropriate to ask how does the white male body see?<sup>78</sup> Rich stresses the importance of recognition of 'the geography closest in - the body',<sup>79</sup> where it is located and how it shapes perception of the world. It is through this awareness that she acknowledges that 'the white eye' does not see 'from the centre'.<sup>80</sup>

How location impacts upon the silence of black Caribbean women is directly related to the ontological question of when the African-Caribbean person became identified as such.<sup>81</sup> Little is revealed in Dunbar's text of the woman's experience of travel. It is sufficient that she is black, a woman and a recent arrival. Disembarkation itself, in this period, signifies the possibility for Africans, whether in the 'old' world or 'new'; to be made to land at any port of a new master's choice. For the African, where the 'schippis' calls is of little consequence in the sense that it is not determined by any will other than the master's, a situation indicative of the inequitable power relations involved.<sup>82</sup> What becomes significant later on, in the 'new master/newly transported African' equation, is what I have called the 'Caribbean likelihood factor', itself linked to the 're-sale factor'. It is the latter which, for Africans landed in Europe, determined how little Caribbean experience, or correspondingly, how much, they would come to know, a reality verified in historical research exploring the black presence in areas of south east London.<sup>83</sup>

The actual construction of Africans as slaves was fundamentally linked to economic conditions and specifically European determination for the cheapest possible

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<sup>78</sup> At the same time, one might wish to add particular qualifiers. There is no attempt here to set up monolithic categories.

<sup>79</sup> Rich, p.212.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.226.

<sup>81</sup> While the creolisation process is significant to this debate, it is useful to take Morejón's 'Sixteenth Century' as a critical date.

<sup>82</sup> The master's will determined life or death singly or en masse as in the case of the slave ship *Zong*. See, for example, Anim-Addo, 1995, p.57.

<sup>83</sup> I refer principally to the areas of Deptford, Lewisham and Greenwich.

labour. Yet, the slave construct came to be central to European perceptions of Africans.<sup>84</sup> The economic imperative upon which slavery rested made it possible, even necessary, for Africans to be perceived as chattel property equated in law with 'removable personal property' such as domestic or dumb animals. In contrast to the European constructed as 'master', the status of the African of the period was enshrined in law and devoid of rights and obligations. This legal 'removal of tongue' ensured that speech, as publication, would not be heard other than by means of patronage which few of the enslaved enjoyed. My argument is that silence was, therefore, a crucial part of the political investment in the enslaved body.

I wish to emphasise that the peak of the Enlightenment period was the eighteenth-century heyday of British involvement in colonial slavery. Foucault suggests on the subject of Enlightenment: 'We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment'.<sup>85</sup> Such a direction has not been explored in relation to 'historically determined' black people present in Enlightened Europe. Further, to illustrate the 'double consciousness' in action, I am aware that neither Foucault, in this instance, nor any of the Eurocentric philosophers cited here, is addressing me, a black woman reader/critic, or that I am included in the plural 'we' used. It is such inclusion/exclusion which necessitates the doubled discourse and the foregrounding of black women's voices in this thesis. Nonetheless, the black presence in Enlightenment Britain included the African-Caribbean presence essentially identified by a 'chattel' status as dumb, 'removable property'. How do 'we' proceed with the analysis suggested by Foucault? What is the central influence of historical determinism which so shaped the identity of Africans of the era? Foucault's own admonition is important here: 'We must never forget that the Enlightenment is an event, or a set of events and complex historical forces, that is

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<sup>84</sup> Rewriting such as Olive Senior's 'slaving in the cane rows/ for your sugar' subverts the anglocentric perception which by its very nature stripped the African-heritage person of the period of all rights, including that of speech and concomitantly bound her/him to a central obligation of silence and servitude to a master or indeed a series of masters and mistresses. See Senior, 'Meditation on Yellow', *Gardening in the Tropics*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1995, p.2.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in Waugh, ed., p.103.

located at a certain point in the development of European societies'.<sup>86</sup> That 'certain point' also coincided with, and more contentiously, was facilitated by slavery.

Foucault warns also against 'the too facile confusions between humanism and Enlightenment'.<sup>87</sup> A problem is that the confusion is most pronounced when grappling with ways of reconciling the radically differentiated experiences of groups, those from European societies, 'masters', and those from African societies, 'slaves', living within the same period, in the same community and on terms dictated by those believing themselves, as a group, to be enlightened. Anomalies arising from such a context serve to underscore the Eurocentricity of the Master discourse. For the black presence, part of the 'complex historical forces' in operation was the mercantilism of the period which readily justified a place for the forced transportation of Africans as slave labour at Europe's behest. Mercantile realities of a period, which came to be dependent on Britain's wealth produced by sugar and the labour of Africans promoted as bestial, justified a chattel or silenced identity more pronounced for African-Caribbean women who would be spoken for or, written about, well into the twentieth century.

### **Absent Presence: The Black Woman in Early English Narrative**

How does 'political investment' relate to the absence of the black woman in early English narrative? The tradition in which white women 'speak for' black women is analysed by Ferguson who argues that white British women 'constructed a colonial discourse' about Africans and slaves which, while empowering the writers, damaged 'future race relations' and, I would add, perceptions of black women. Ferguson writes of 'Eurocentric constructions' which were 'integral to women's anti-slavery polemics' and which effectively barred issues of race, gender and class equality.<sup>88</sup> Since African-Caribbean women during Atlantic slavery were, with the exception of Mary Prince, denied a public voice, the women's discourse of slavery effectively 'spoke for' black

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ferguson, p.6.

women.<sup>89</sup> Ferguson notes as significant to the beginnings of the anglophone fictional tradition of being ‘spoken for’ in the seventeenth century, the writer Aphra Behn (1640-89). Behn, in *Oroonoko, the Royal Slave* (1688) declares herself ‘an eye witness’ to much of the events which took place in Surinam, the setting for the narrative.<sup>90</sup> She indicates, as Ferguson highlights, a younger Behn as narrator. Two African lovers, one a prince called Oroonoko and the other, a general’s daughter, Imoinda, are central to Behn’s narrative. Imoinda’s preference, in love, for the prince and not the king leads to the pair being sold into Atlantic slavery. Ferguson assesses, however, that Behn ‘generated a paradigm for British colonialist discourse’.<sup>91</sup> From Behn’s account, a portrayal of ‘the ebony Prince’ with uncharacteristic African features: a Roman nose and fine mouth ‘far from those turn’d Lips which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes’ was born and given to popular English imagination.<sup>92</sup> Thereafter, Oroonoko’s story would be the material of theatre for at least the following century, with periodic revivals to the present day.<sup>93</sup> Ferguson argues that the features of Behn’s model: a ‘classbound perspective’, self interested impetus to the narrative, together with an acceptance of the institution of slavery itself and denial of full humanity, would serve as the basis of much subsequent racialised discourse.<sup>94</sup>

*Oroonoko* has been subject to extensive critical attention. Firdous Azim, for example, in *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1993), makes the case, in the wake of feminist interpretation, for the text as the first English novel.<sup>95</sup> Azim’s concern with the text as primarily that of ‘the subject/object dichotomy in the narrative, the status of the black man and the manner of his entry into the field of representation’ contrasts with my concern with the location of the prince’s lover, Imoinda, and the silencing of the black

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<sup>89</sup> This is unlike the situation for men who had also known Caribbean slavery as the writing of Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano illustrate.

<sup>90</sup> Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, the Royal Slave, a True History*, London, 1688 (hereafter *Oroonoko*). See also *The Rover and Other Works* edited by Janet Todd, London, 1995.

<sup>91</sup> Ferguson, p.27.

<sup>92</sup> Behn, p.20.

<sup>93</sup> Fryer, p.145.

<sup>94</sup> Ferguson, p.46.

<sup>95</sup> Firdous Azim, makes the case in the wake of feminist interpretation of Behn’s *Oroonoko* for the text as the first English novel. See *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, London, 1993, p.35.

woman at the heart of Oroonoko's narrative.<sup>96</sup> That Behn fully engaged with her male protagonist, Oroonoko, who himself is legitimised as the subject of literary attention by virtue of his royal status, is readily evident in descriptions of his physical presence in the text, as several commentators have noted.<sup>97</sup> To match Oroonoko, Behn reinforces Imoinda's suitability, first by persuasion, 'most certainly, there are beauties that can charm of that colour'.<sup>98</sup> The second measure of suitability confirms Imoinda's physical appeal, 'I have seen an hundred white men sighing after her'.<sup>99</sup> Azim suggests and I would reiterate, that in Behn's portrayal of Imoinda 'dismissal and effacement' may be all too readily discerned.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Imoinda, a significant first fictionalised black woman character, is drawn so as to be a mere shadow of black womanhood, quite unlike the figure upon which she is based, who defies tribal laws and the wrath of an all powerful King to be with her lover. Rather, Behn's Imoinda is without agency, functioning mainly as device in the narrative, a point which appears to have been of slight interest to feminist re-readings of the text. Indeed, Azim refers to this slight as 'another act of suppression'.<sup>101</sup> Similar parallels may be drawn with Dido in Zoffany's painting though in Behn's text, the black woman represents a more 'shadowy' presence. Behn's narrative, then, touches the body of Imoinda but little of her character, leaving too many questions unanswered. How may the circumstances be assessed which lead to the breaking of family and community taboos which Imoinda undertakes in order to be with Oroonoko? It is such questions and the lack of substance in the portrayal of Imoinda's character which has led to my rewriting, *Imoinda*, referred to above, since reading Behn's text.

Ferguson's analysis of the paradigm 'generated' by Behn demands extension in the light of my concerns.<sup>102</sup> If Behn's *Oroonoko* is indicative of a dominant pattern by

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>97</sup> Azim, for example, notes the narrator's impatience to westernise Oroonoko's 'beauty', p.48.

<sup>98</sup> Behn, p.15.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>100</sup> Azim, p.51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ferguson, p.27.

which African heritage people are viewed, it is important to note the figuring of the black woman within that discourse, for patterns of black women's silence which came to be taken for granted are located in the gross objectifying symptomatic of this paradigm. Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* bears the date, 1668, which predates Behn's *Oroonoko*.<sup>103</sup> Like Behn's, Neville's brief sketch, similarly dismisses its black woman character. Unlike Behn's, Neville's 'Negro' woman character functions as sexual stereotype more familiar in eighteenth-century historical literature of the Caribbean.<sup>104</sup> In so far as this 'Negro' may be viewed as a character, she functions as one of the narrator's concubines who acts upon her sexual desire. Thus, she 'longed also for her share' of sexual activity, therefore, 'got close' to the sleeping narrator who 'satisfied' himself.<sup>105</sup> In this prose sexual fantasy, the narrator relates his story, that of a man marooned upon an island with four women, one of whom is the 'Negro'. He sires the first generation of islanders with these women and fantastically his 'negro' produced for him 'a fine White girl'.<sup>106</sup> A problematic text in many respects, Neville's narrative does not locate itself as West Indian. Like Columbus, the group of castaways were voyaging to the 'East Indies'. Similarly, the presence of the black woman is not contextualised within a creolised discourse. Yet, among the early critics concerned with West Indian literature Wylie Sypher argues, 'the 'creole' is a not-inconsiderable literary figure' of the eighteenth century.<sup>107</sup> If so, where are the corresponding black woman literary figures to be found? Sypher routinely uses the terms 'West Indian' and 'creole' to refer to the white West Indian whose character, he acknowledges, is shaped by plantation life.<sup>108</sup> Where is the African-Caribbean creole woman?

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<sup>103</sup> Henry Neville, *The Isle of Pines or, A Late Discovery of a Fourth Island in Terra Australis Incognita* is catalogued in the British Library as Pine, George pseud. [i.e. Henry Neville].

<sup>104</sup> See for example, Long.

<sup>105</sup> Neville, p.11.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>107</sup> Wylie Sypher, 'The West Indian as a 'Character' in the Eighteenth Century, *Studies in Philology*, 36, (July 1939), 503.

<sup>108</sup> Sypher, 515, gives a footnote reference to 'Afric creole'.

The 'lady of quality' Janet Schaw's eighteenth-century journal is illustrative of dominant perceptions of black women and the black family.<sup>109</sup> Schaw visiting Antigua acknowledges, for example, the false impression arising from her initial gaze upon black children: 'what I took for monkeys were negro children, naked as they were born'.<sup>110</sup> She adds to the implicit animal comparison: 'the black women wear little or no clothing, nothing on their bodies and they are hardly prevailed on to wear a petticoat'.<sup>111</sup> Schaw's concern with clothing as indicative of propriety is satisfied only when she writes of 'Negroes in joyful troops ... universally clad in white muslin ... women in jackets and petticoats'.<sup>112</sup> Benign slavery has, in this example, rescued the 'negroes' from nakedness and its implicit association with savagery and the primitive state. Schaw, like Neville, above, writes also of the sexual proclivity of black women. She states: 'the young black wenches lay themselves out for white lovers, in which they are but too successful'.<sup>113</sup> In relation to such success, she notes, 'they become licentious and insolent past all bearing'.<sup>114</sup> Such familiar diatribe of the period espousing knowledge of the 'nature' of Negroes compliments at times a more oblique configuring of black womanhood. While Schaw renders 'Negroes' as species - 'the brutes' who 'feel no pain beyond the present moment'- she deftly adds to pro-slavery mythology.<sup>115</sup> How might such mythology be understood? Semiologist analysis suggests the importance of 'the tri-dimensional pattern' of 'signifier, the signified and the sign' to be found in myth.<sup>116</sup> Applied to Schaw's mythical language, which targets black women and focuses on the separation of family, specifically 'infant from mother', much is revealed of the way in which myth functions. Schaw's account concerns slaves 'for market', about to be sold;

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<sup>109</sup> Schaw, Janet, *Journey of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal in the Years 1774 to 1776*, ed., Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews, New Haven, 1921.

<sup>110</sup> Schaw, p.78.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.107-8.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, London, 1993, p.114.

to face a new plantation regime and separation:

The husband was to be divided from the wife, the infant from the mother; but the most perfect indifference ran thro' the whole. They were laughing and jumping, making faces at each other, and not caring a single farthing for their fate.<sup>117</sup>

The 'signifier' by this analysis is a black family clowning, apparently indifferent to their fate. The 'signified' is black fecklessness/ lack of mind/ inferiority, while the 'sign', drawing on Roland Barthes's analysis, the equivalent to the signified perceived through the signifier, is, in this case, the slave-selling scene through Schaw's account. Barthes highlights the 'double function' of myth as meaning and imposition and stresses 'the relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relation of deformation'.<sup>118</sup> In Schaw's example, 'deformation' is evident at a textual level since the 'laughing', 'jumping' and 'making faces' cannot be equated with indifference but a more positive emotion, akin to joy. Schaw seeks, by indirect figuration of the mother as uncaring in such extreme circumstances, to substantiate a characteristic perception of African-Caribbean women.

Distorted knowledge informs Schaw's text and Ferguson's insight applies that 'author-agitators', such as Schaw, 'retained the view of slavers'.<sup>119</sup> In the face of such an orthodoxy, writers could be confident that their views would not be challenged by speaking black women subjects. African-Caribbean women would remain largely without voice and writers hearkening to the voice of power and unreason of the pro-slavery era were confident of this. The silence of African-Caribbean women as indicated in the limited writing configuring the black female presence may be read as a manifestation of varying aspects of the 'technology of power' which kept the brutal slave system intact.<sup>120</sup> Along with reductivist categorising as slave, there followed denial of rights, including the right to give voice. The severity of the penalty for speech in the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ferguson, p.4. While Schaw's work did not reach a wide audience until publication in 1921, several copies of the journal were in circulation prior to its 'discovery'.

<sup>120</sup> Foucault, p.23.

context of Caribbean slavery, widely explored in Philip's text, ensured silence. Having denied his subject the right of speech by the edicts which Philip cites, the slaver assumed the right to any necessary voicing on behalf of the enslaved. Pro-slavers, as well as anti-slavers, Ferguson argues, assumed the right to speak for the slave. In so doing, they projected an identity upon the early African-Caribbean female that is both fabrication and anglocentric preoccupation. J. B. Moreton's anti-slavery *Man as He Is* (1792) proffers views similar to Schaw's on black women's sexual mores.<sup>121</sup> A difference is that Moreton places such views in the mouth of a sympathetic black male character who states: 'de poor black women tink it honour to be taken notice of by white man, especially masters'.<sup>122</sup> Other than the caricatures cited, the black woman figure of the eighteenth century appears to be largely absent. The near exclusion of black female West Indian characters is all the more problematic in the light of Sypher's assertion that 'the West Indian is as important in social as he is in literary history'.<sup>123</sup>

By slave autobiographical accounts, the meaning of re-sale, far more traumatic than intended by Schaw, was such that it served as a high-ranking punitive practice for regulating silence. The re-sale factor, a signifier of Caribbean-based slavery, is illustrated, for example, in the life of Olaudah Equiano, whose own re-sale into slavery served to drastically alter both his fortunes and life as recounted in the autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Equiano's narrative illustrates distinctions between possible and actual experience of everyday realities for the enslaved African. Born in Nigeria, and transported into Caribbean slavery as a boy, Equiano was taken to England via the Caribbean before being re-sold into Caribbean slavery. I have written elsewhere of Equiano as one who 'forgot that he was a slave' for, in public service to a master on board ship, Equiano enjoyed a lifestyle which appeared to differ little from that of his fellow sailors.<sup>124</sup> The pattern changed radically, however, when,

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<sup>121</sup> J. B. Moreton, *Man as He Is*, London, 1792.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.211-12.

<sup>123</sup> Sypher, 504.

<sup>124</sup> Anim-Addo, 1995, pp.51-2.

peremptorily re-sold on to a ship sailing down the Thames, Equiano found himself at the start of a journey back to the West Indies, a crucial meaning of which was adaptation to unrelenting West Indian plantation labour.<sup>125</sup> Equiano's narrative illustrates an often unstated truth about African-heritage people in the West prior to enactment of the British Emancipation Act of 1833, that is, the fact of purchase as chattel, however genteel the particular circumstance of slavery. So, Dunbar's black woman, for example, though involved with the royal court, was in all probability, the subject of chattel negotiation, or paid for. The pattern indicates that when such 'pets' were no longer suitable, few choices awaited them including that of re-sale to the Caribbean.

Re-sale, an indicator of the enslaved's economic use, differentiating the function of the black woman's body located in the Caribbean, simultaneously diminishes any perception of the exoticism attached to either Dido or Dunbar's figure. Mohammed writing of Indo-Caribbean relationships suggests that 'to write gender into history, the historical construction of masculinity and femininity or the construction of gender identities must itself be posed as a problem'.<sup>126</sup> In line with this analysis, a concern here lies with figurations, overwhelmingly the constructs of the male imagination. Mohammed highlights from a feminist perspective the contribution which historical circumstance lends to the problematic of gender construction and argues along with Bridget Brereton and E. Fox-Genovese for a focus upon historical variables rather than an exclusive examination of patriarchy in order to illuminate sex and gender differences *in context*. The significance of this point lies in the divide it marks between feminists of different persuasion, so that Mohammed's thesis draws support from the work of post-modernist feminist Theresa de Laurentis whose theorising on the 'technology of gender'<sup>127</sup> borrows in turn from that developed by Foucault.<sup>128</sup> Whereas

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p52.

<sup>126</sup> Patricia Mohammed, in Shepherd et al., eds., p.20.

<sup>127</sup> Theresa de Laurentis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987.

<sup>128</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Harley, London, 1988.

Foucault's theory of concern to de Laurentis is that of the historicising of sexuality, de Laurentis's preoccupation is with the shifting dynamics of gender in terms of its construction and deconstruction. It is Mohammed's concern with the historical specificity of gender relations that I share and seek to develop in relation to the shifting historically constructed identities of African-Caribbean women and the literary products arising from this.

By the eighteenth century, early myths were already consolidated within writing purporting to be factual. Edward Long's 'history' offers an example of such supposedly factual / scientific narrative substantiating myth so as to provide a particularised construct of the Anglocentric imaginative representation of black womanhood that was infrequently challenged. Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774) purports to be informed about the black woman. Whereas in Dunbar's text, the danger in the black woman's body is essentially sexual and bestial, for the historian Long, the threat is both wider and more domestic. The black woman's body threatens the white family itself. The juxtaposition of sexuality and history, interesting enough of itself, is further complicated in Long's historical writing by what appears to be a concern with biology. In a chapter entitled 'Of The Inhabitants', Long addresses the subject of 'Creole ladies', white women born locally.<sup>129</sup> In commenting upon the habits and customs of the 'Creoles', Long censures the mothers among them for a habit he finds 'to their discredit':

They give them up to a negro or mulatto wet nurse, without reflecting that her blood may be corrupted, or considering the influence which the milk may have with respect to the disposition, as well as health, of their little ones.<sup>130</sup>

Further, the basis for concern about the threat posed by black women to the white family is couched in the language of statistical probability. Long argues, therefore, that however meticulous the white parent may be in the process of selecting a black wet-

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<sup>129</sup> Creole is used both to indicate birth within the Caribbean region and to refer to the contact language which evolved there.

<sup>130</sup> Long, p.276.

nurse locally, 'it is a million to one but she harbours in her blood the seeds of many terrible distempers'.<sup>131</sup>

Long's phenotypical black woman, referred to as a 'quasheba' is African-Caribbean, that is, with actual known experience of residence in the Caribbean. Later evidence such as Mary Prince's testimony, the only West Indian woman's slave testimony published, attests to the reality of random movement patterns and consequent changes in residence as likely to be cross-Atlantic as cross-Caribbean.<sup>132</sup> Within this movement lies a further problem, for while the texts are disparate, the context may be described as unstable. I refer here to movement through re-sale which might be inter-regional or intra-regional. So, for example, while 'Ane Blak-Moir' is not referred to as African-Caribbean, everyday historical knowledge confirms the ready possibility of such Caribbean experience for such an African heritage woman once removed from Africa. To become African-Caribbean, then, is notionally related to length of stay in the Caribbean which for the purposes of this thesis and in the absence of extensive records of black women's lives during this period, is signified in the triangular journey and its enforced 'circular nomadism'.<sup>133</sup> The status of slavery which served to randomly enforce country of abode, length of residence there, frequency of movement to the Caribbean and so on also determined the quality of labour demanded of the woman's body, whether as field hand on a plantation, or as slave-concubine. In contrast, therefore, to Dunbar's black woman, Quasheba's body, based in the Caribbean, is marked out for labour, very likely in the field, and the procreation of additional labourers through her offspring.

Long's bodily location, by Adrienne Rich's schema, as white, male planter, allowed him to know and dismiss with contempt the African naming, 'quasheba',<sup>134</sup> reinforcing his power to name the enslaved, the African-Caribbean, at will. How the myth alters appears to relate to location from European soil to the Caribbean, and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Moira Ferguson, ed., *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, London, 1987.

<sup>133</sup> See Glissant, p.12 for discussion of 'circular nomadism'.

<sup>134</sup> From the Akan naming system indicating the daughter of Kwesi/ Kwasi.

changes in perception of the woman's body. Long's black woman, projected as threat to the white family and its innocence, is demonised relative to this. Elaborating further upon the nature of the health hazard posed by the black woman, Long states, 'there is scarcely one of these nurses who is not a common prostitute'<sup>135</sup> an irony all the greater since Dunbar's text had earlier set up the black woman to function in a role different only in degree to that of prostitute. Long, in offering statistical support for his historical construction of the African-Caribbean woman as prostitute, proposes, by comparison, an idealised choice for the white family, 'a healthy labourer's wife' who is white, and who in the 'right' circumstances, that is, in England, would be the white mother's choice of wet nurse.<sup>136</sup> Long's 'historical' discourse offering an interpretation of the black woman in a particularised location, Jamaica, makes evident a substantive change in meanings accrued to black womanhood, from exotic sexual object to common prostitute. Assumptions of knowledge of the black woman's sexual appetite is implicit in both versions of the myth. In terms of audience, Long's larger claim to historical knowledge, in contradistinction to a poem or travel writing, is also set to impact upon a wider audience. This knowledge of 'Reason', however, equally serves the purposes of distortion and deformation.

While there is continuity in the pattern of perception of the black woman's body in the Caribbean as in Britain, there is similarity and a particular relation within difference. In part, such adjustable identity reflects the planter's mercantile needs, for the woman's body as physical labour relates to location. The servicing as domestics in Britain does not compare with labour in the field and the threat of such labour implied in re-sale. The change, relative to the black woman's altered function as labourer is firmly located in the geographical space of the Caribbean where the black woman's body represents a seriously contested site of conflict. In this space, demands are made upon her body for labour for whites and sexual gratification for others, black and white. As her functions multiply, therefore, so does the threat her body is perceived to

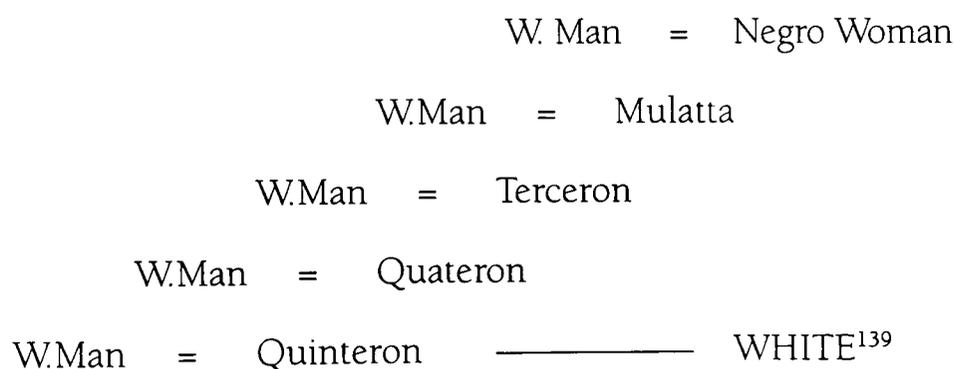
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<sup>135</sup> Long, pp.276-7.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.276.

hold. Built into the myths, historical and literary, was silence of varying degree, depending upon her location, whether in Britain or the Caribbean. While documentation of the period confirms the presence of African-Caribbean women located at times in the Caribbean, or, alternatively, in transit in Britain,<sup>137</sup> few such women's lives are documented.

Long, himself a member of the plantocracy and aware of the 'political investment' in the African-Caribbean woman's body upon which the Jamaican economy substantially rested, invests in the myth according to his personal and group location. In Long's Jamaica, the meaning of a black body is clear-cut. It is a body that labours and this is the underlying assumption of Long and his fellow pro-slavery lobbyists. In order to ascertain the central function of African people, the provision of labour, the branding, training, torturing and varieties of coercion, of which Foucault speaks are, therefore, institutionalised within Caribbean society. To ensure the separation of the races, a complex stratification system is put into place which seeks to codify degrees of blackness among the offspring of black and white. Long illustrates, for example, the complexity of the situation of enforced concubinage, or, in contemporary terms, sexual abuse, rife in plantation life, in the following diagram. This represents a section of the racial mapping inherited from the Spanish and perpetuated by English colonisers.<sup>138</sup> A mixture of Whites and Blacks were designated castes as follows:




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<sup>137</sup> See, for example, Joan Anim-Addo, *Sugar, Spices and Human Cargo*, London, 1996, p.52.

<sup>138</sup> Long, p.260.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. Herein may be found a crucial source of shadism and the regional preoccupation of 'lightening down'.

Long fastens upon this sign of difference at its source: the black woman's body, so that 'history' becomes a biological project specially concerned with the black woman's role as procreator; the litmus test being the black woman in liaison with a white male which equates the woman with a 'common prostitute'. The woman's assumption, the use of her body for her own gain, is the source of Long's vehemence, for in the planter's grand design there is no allowance for this, whether through sexual labour or any other. Long therefore presents the white male, at the height of Atlantic slavery, incredibly, as victim of the scheming black woman's body and ironically enslaved to her wiles, reduced to 'the abject, passive slave' recipient of the black woman's 'insults, thefts and infidelities'.<sup>140</sup> The inversion is of the master enslaved and a consequent victim of the black woman's body. The slave's version is a radically different narrative, as indicated in slaves' testimonies attesting to the unwanted sexual attention of planters and their agents including that of the sexual abuse of the wives and daughters of slaves as examined in Chapter Two. The equivalent to 'Ane Blak-Moir', in the Caribbean context is referred to, equally satirically, as 'some black or yellow quasheba' so that Long berates the white men who only too willingly 'riot' in her 'goatish embraces'.<sup>141</sup> Through this hostile gaze, the bestial qualities of the black woman established in the earliest version of the myth is clearly maintained. Moreover, despite this element of continuity, the Caribbean plantation location, in Long's discourse, prioritises demands for labour in the fields, above sexual labour and in the process, the figuration of the black woman is skewed so as to become a sign of threat and possible financial chicanery.

Long's 'history' elaborates two other elements of the threat posed by the black woman's body and its effect upon the society. He is concerned with the whittling away of the personal fortunes of white fathers in legacies they may be tempted to leave their offspring of mulatta and other castes.<sup>142</sup> That this is not merely a personal concern but one of widespread or national significance is corroborated by the passage of a bill, in

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<sup>140</sup> Long, p.260.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.327.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.323.

1762 limiting the amount of real or personal estate made by white persons to Negroes and the issue of Negroes.<sup>143</sup> So it appears that the dangers within the black woman's body are extensive enough to require recourse to the law. The reason for this, by Long's assessment and the country's legislative concerns, is that through her offspring, the black woman threatens the very balance of relations which the white minority plantocracy seeks to maintain. Secondly, and possibly the lesser evil in the 'dangerous liaisons' offered by African-Caribbean women, there is the threat to the institution of marriage itself and a type of social stability premised upon notions of racial purity. That is to say, according to Long, the black woman's body threatens to erode the very foundations of the grossly unequal black-white power relations by virtue of its sexual practice and its appeal to the white male.

The portrait of the African-Caribbean woman as mistress / prostitute characterises the relationship she offers as thoroughly parasitic, involving not only the black woman's role as 'chief leech' but also allowing her real lovers, presumably black, ample opportunity similarly to bleed the sexually enslaved and vulnerable white male. Long suggests that deception is central to such relationships with the black woman herself unparalleled in her manifestations of the peculiar art. He sums up:

The quintessence of her dexterity consists in persuading the man she detests to believe she is most violently smitten with the beauty of his person; in short, over head and ears in love with him.<sup>144</sup>

And the black woman's perceived motive? Long is explicit in pointing this out as the acquisition by stealth or deception or both, of the legitimate property of the naïve white male.

How are black women *alter/natively* perceived? Equiano's experience as slave located him in a position relative to fellow Africans, allowing a gaze differentiated from both that of Dunbar's narrator and Long. The innocent slave owner of Long's projection, also demonstrated a hold on the African's body which made such trans-Atlantic

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p.331.

movement as that of Equiano perfectly possible at a time when global populations typically lived within a small radius of the home of their birth. Introducing his autobiography, Equiano wrote addressing the Lords and members of the House of Commons in a suitably humble tone as befitted an African writing at that time, and he referred to himself as an 'unlettered African'.<sup>145</sup> Equiano says nothing of the fact that Africans of the period were not supposed to be lettered and that this was discouraged. Notably Equiano's written words were framed not as 'history', like Long's or, as poetry, like Dunbar's, but as simple narrative. Equiano observed black women:

While I was on this plantation, the gentleman to whom I supposed the estate belonged, being unwell, I was one day sent for, to his dwelling house to fan him: when I came into the room where he was, I was very much affrighted at some things I saw, and the more so as I had seen a black woman slave as I came through the house, who was cooking the dinner, and the poor creature was cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines; she had one particularly on her head, which locked her mouth so fast that she could scarcely speak.<sup>146</sup>

Equiano's representation of black women cannot rely on the 'metaphorical shortcuts' shared by Dunbar and Long.<sup>147</sup> Like Morrison, Equiano shares, instead, an awareness of being 'a black writer struggling with and through' a powerful language.<sup>148</sup> He simultaneously reveals twin aspects of the white master's pleasure, that is, in the black boy's fanning and the punishment of the black woman's body in order to render her voiceless. While Equiano later comes to recognise the muzzle that the black woman, like an animal, must wear, he witnesses in the contrivance no 'hidden sign' but rather, the reverse, a powerful warning of the dangers lurking in the black woman's voice; perhaps even in her mouth. The unnamed woman's body is free but her voice is muzzled for she has more to say than is imagined by anglocentric writers. Further, though her master wishes her silent, she has insisted on voicing which must be punished. This insistence amplifies a resistance on the part of the African-Caribbean woman to the

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<sup>145</sup> Equiano p.iv.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.91.

<sup>147</sup> Morrison, p.xii.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

taking, in silence, of the labours of her body. As a result, she is muzzled and rendered doubly shackled: firstly, by the demands of her labour and secondly, by enforced silence.

In this differentiated construct of black womanhood, there is the expectation of the observer from a shared culture, the boy Equiano, that the black woman would speak, whether bidden or not and that her motivation is not one dimensional, hence his surprise at her being muzzled. The body muzzled is itself not silenced. It 'speaks' its pain to a fellow African; it speaks defiance to the slave master. What is at issue is voicelessness which is denied, for the enslaved woman would surely speak, if not restrained and what she would say is unlikely to be well received. Hence, she is cruelly subjected to muzzling. It may be argued that the muzzle which is the 'iron machine' of Equiano's observation is a contrivance equally used to silence white women or bears or dogs. While this is true, it is precisely the ordinary, common humanity that is missing from Long's and Dunbar's representation of the black woman. She appears, by Equiano's account neither beast nor demon, but a 'poor creature', who is vulnerable and whose plight evokes his sympathetic response. Thus, Equiano's representation challenges and undermines the 'otherness' of what is revealed in the two writers by their responses to the female African presence.

Labour demands characteristic of an era such as the eighteenth century, and a location such as a Caribbean slave plantation serve to frame the black woman's body differently. The differentiated circumstances, particularly that of location determines Dunbar's blackamoor's 'economic use' as it does Long's 'quasheba'. Consequently, signs of the former's usage are played upon textually without the rancour of later plantation based writing similarly seeking to represent black women's sexuality. Further, while the blackamore is isolated, she is also embraced, so that a level of ambiguity operates even as it cuts her off and dismembers her from her own traditions, values and modes of expression. Nor does the black woman have access to the language of those who have invested in her body. Her utterances will not be heard; she is in effect, silenced. In the West Indies, however, the conditions of dislocation further deteriorate while silence

remains. In addition, the embrace of the white male abroad, open and public as in the context of the court, becomes secret and illicit sexual behaviour requiring legislation in the Caribbean.

### **Patronage and Voice**

Unlike Equiano, who achieved publication, black women rarely enjoyed the type of patronage facilitating the breaking of publication silence. Like Equiano, Ignatius Sancho (ca.1729-1780) gained publication. Reflecting the patronage Sancho received, the *Letters of Ignatius Sancho*, posthumously published in two volumes in 1782, are addressed to a white audience of friends and acquaintances including the writer and clergyman Laurence Sterne.<sup>149</sup> Sancho, by many accounts born on a slaveship bound for the Caribbean, was fortunate never to have endured West Indian slavery at first hand.<sup>150</sup> Rather, Sancho grew up in Greenwich after having been given as a present while still an infant, to some sisters resident there. It is through Sancho's gaze that another and contrastingly different figure of eighteenth-century African-Caribbean womanhood emerges. The woman who may be read between the lines of Sancho's letters is his wife, Anne. Unusually for that period, Anne earned the description, 'a very deserving young woman of West Indian origin', in the preface, by Joseph Jekyl Esq. MP, to Sancho's *Letters*.<sup>151</sup> Such an acknowledgement of personhood in reference to black women was rarely found in print. While Sancho himself freely refers to his wife, Anne, as a West Indian, the term was more usually reserved for white creoles.<sup>152</sup>

Though several voices of Ignatius Sancho may be discerned through the letters; those of artist and anti-slavery activist, for example, it is the voice of Sancho, the husband and family man, which allows access, albeit limited, to his wife. Anne is referred to by

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<sup>149</sup> Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African. In Two Volumes. To Which Are Prefixed, Memoirs of His Life*. London, 1782. All references are to the second edition of 1783 (hereafter *Letters*).

<sup>150</sup> See, for example, Anim-Addo, 1995, pp.47-8.

<sup>151</sup> Sancho, Preface.

<sup>152</sup> Long, for example, used the term 'West Indians' synonymously with planters and used 'Creoles' for Natives, White and Black. Slaves also indicated the status of the majority, equated with chattel and *not* persons.

various terms of endearment throughout. For example, she is called 'Dame Sancho',<sup>153</sup> 'my dear Mrs Sancho',<sup>154</sup> and 'my best half',<sup>155</sup> 'beloved wife'.<sup>156</sup> In a letter dated 20 October, 1769, Sancho expresses his relief that Anne, 'my sometimes low spirited love' is recovering from a recent bout of illness; his 'best half', he reports, is 'greatly mended'.<sup>157</sup> Occasionally, too, Anne Sancho's voice comes through reported greetings to a correspondent and friend of the couple. For example, in a letter of 31 August, 1770, Sancho, then an expectant father, adds that 'Mrs Sancho is pretty well, pretty round, and pretty tame! she bids me say, Thank you in the kindest manner I possibly can - and observe, I say, thank you kindly'.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, Anne Sancho 'instructs me' to send her best wishes to friends.<sup>159</sup> So, evidently Anne, far from being a silent figure, has her say and is heard.

Anne, revealed by Sancho, is a woman loved and one who loves in return in so far as this may be discerned from the letters. In his letter dated 8 November, 1772, Sancho confesses, 'I am heartily tired of the country; the truth is - Mrs Sancho and the girls are in town; - I am not ashamed to own that I love my wife - I hope to see you married and as foolish'.<sup>160</sup> Indicating love that is reciprocated, Sancho suggests, for example, that 'Dame Sancho would be better if she cared less. I am her barometer. If a sigh escapes me, it is answered by a tear in her eye. I oft assume a gaiety to illumine her dear sensibility with a smile - which twenty years ago almost bewitched me: and mark! after twenty years enjoyment - continues my highest pleasure'.<sup>161</sup> Unlike the black woman figured by Dunbar, or Long's 'quasheba', Anne Sancho is a credible, and rounded person far removed from the demonised or bestialised black woman stereotype. Rather,

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<sup>153</sup> Sancho, p.20 and p.86.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p.85 and p.22.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.78.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., pp.31-2.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., pp.157-8.

she is constructed, from within the culture, as a loving and loved figure secure at the heart of her family.<sup>162</sup>

While it may be contended that Sancho's Anne represents an idealised figure of marital love, what is germane here is that this apparent commonplace is significantly absent from the literature. Anne is portrayed in direct contrast to the black West Indian women whose portrait Long freely submitted. Sancho, for example, refers to Anne in an undated letter, as 'the only intrinsic net worth, in my possession ... who I can compare to nothing so properly as diamond in the dirt - But my friend that is Fortune's fault, not mine - for, had I power, I would case her in gold'.<sup>163</sup> So, Sancho holds his wife in the highest regard despite the 'dirt' of the social and racial context of the period. He writes on 17 September, 1777, 'she is good - good in heart good in principle - good by habit - good by heaven!'<sup>164</sup> Unlike the compulsively scheming black woman of Long's 'history', Sancho presents an essentially 'good' woman valued for many positive attributes. Further, in contradistinction to the sexual deviants, Sancho, championing Anne, boasts that her 'virtues outnumber my vices and I have enough for any one mortal'.<sup>165</sup> Anne's identity is fixed, therefore, in Sancho's portrayal, as devoted wife, companion and mother: a loving and virtuous black female figure not only absent from the literature of the period but also without the patronage to enable the telling of her own story.

Had Anne known slavery? Her presence in eighteenth-century London as a black 'West Indian', suggests experience of the slave's body, bought and touched in manifestations of ownership: branding, whipping and dismembering, for example.<sup>166</sup> The bodies of slave women observed by Equiano were privy to sexual assault and rape, all part of the meaning of a 'punishment body relation' paradigm experienced by black

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<sup>162</sup> The couple had six children, referred to variously by Sancho as 'the brats', 'chicks' and 'Sanchonettas'.

<sup>163</sup> The letter is undated, possibly 1775, pp.64-5.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.205.

<sup>165</sup> See Vol.2, letter dated 13 June, 1780, p.184.

<sup>166</sup> See Vincent Carreta, ed., *Unchained Voices*, Kentucky, 1996, p.101, n.i. Ann Sancho died 'at the age of 84'.

women. On board ship, for example, he recalls: 'it was almost a constant practice with our clerks, and other whites, to commit violent depredations on the chastity of the female slaves'.<sup>167</sup> Yet by Long's contrasting account, 'chastity' was not a concept associated with 'slave' women. Equiano however gives an account which belies Long's and indicts the behaviour of the white men he has observed. He writes of fellow sailors:

I have known our mates to commit these acts most shamefully, to the disgrace, not of Christians only, but of men. I have even known them gratify their brutal passion with females not ten years old.<sup>168</sup>

Contradicting Long's negrophobic account, Equiano points to the indiscriminate sexual behaviour of white males who prey on children and women alike. In addition, he offers insight into the distortions in black male/female relationships which occur as a direct result of the power which the slave owners held over the African-Caribbean person's body. For example, Equiano reports that in order to undermine such a hold, slaves would rather take wives from plantations miles away and see less of them. The source of this apparent self-denial lay in the planter's practice of abusing male/female relationships between the enslaved by insisting that the male partner undertake the master's or mistress's flogging of his partner.

The processes of signifying ownership or chattel status, as Equiano indicates, mitigates against the African-Caribbean woman not only because of the varieties of punishment to which she is subjected as a slave but also by the nature of the sexual abuse to which she is prey. Partly as a result of this, the African-Caribbean woman located in the Caribbean is neither Dunbar's exotic or Long's 'prostitute'. Each figuration unreliably offers 'shadow' rather than substance of the African-Caribbean woman. Set against the real horrors of plantation life, Anne Sancho's position as happily married in London is fortunate, albeit within the confines of family and attendant domesticity.

If 'deserving' Anne and African-Caribbean women like her, resident in the west, can only be 'spoken for', then one might gauge the all pervasiveness of black women's

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<sup>167</sup> Equiano, p.205.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.206.

voicelessness of the period. Black men like Sancho achieved a published voice from a location outside the Caribbean. By this means, even Anne fleetingly achieves effective co-writer status for a number of the letters such as one written from Charles Street, London: on 14 December, 1775, after the birth of their only son and signed 'obliged and grateful friends, Anne and I. Sancho'.<sup>169</sup> Another, from the same address five years later is similarly signed 'Anne and Ign. Sancho'.<sup>170</sup> Later in November of the same year, there is a passing reference to 'Mrs Sancho, who *reads*, weeps and wonders, as the various passions impel'.<sup>171</sup> The reference is important to any impression of African-Caribbean womanhood of the era and to this thesis since it confirms that Anne Sancho is not only a person of the positive virtues suggested by her husband but she is also literate. She reads and writes for like Dido, Anne's world includes books and writing.

The case of Long's 'Miss Fulvia' further demonstrates the locational constraints upon African-Caribbean women and offers a development of issues of difference between gendered identity constructed in relation to the African-Caribbean woman based in Britain and in the Caribbean. 'Miss Fulvia' is the reference Long uses to satirise the female offspring of black women and white slave masters and for whom there are educational aspirations.<sup>172</sup> Dido is such an offspring. That Long's history concerns itself with such matters is perhaps surprising to readers of a much later period but reveals a location-specific planter's 'gaze', within which the tension between the sexually motivated white male and the labour motivated planter may be discerned. A problem is that the gazers may be the same people so that to some extent it is the family secret or 'Dido factor' which the historian's elaboration of the regional mythological meanings seeks to distance. For example, Long offers the following description of 'mulattos':

The mulattos are in general well shaped .... The girls arrive very early at the age of puberty; and from the time of their being twenty-five, they decline very fast, till at length they grow horribly ugly. They are lascivious.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Sancho, p.90.

<sup>170</sup> See Vol.2, p.162.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., pp.220-21.

<sup>172</sup> Long, p.335.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

Though Dido is a 'mulatto', Long's figuration bears little resemblance to the one drawn from the flesh. That he singles out from the mulatto group of women, 'Miss Fulvia', the educationally aspiring female whose life pattern is so deterministically set out above, reflects the same concern to preserve the status quo to the exclusive benefit of the minority white population. There is also a seeking to limit patronage, whether or not familial. It is Miss Fulvia's mind which is ultimately problematic by Long's thesis, one to which Equiano's descriptor, 'orang-utan philosophers' applies.<sup>174</sup> For Long, Miss Fulvia's fundamental defect lies in her racial tainting, part of the putative chain determining her intellectual potential which he attempts to illustrate thus:

The Negroe race consisting of varieties will then appear rising progressively in the scale of intellect, the further they mount above the orang-utan and brute creation.<sup>175</sup>

The Anglocentric assumption of *lack of intellect* is significant since its argument firstly precludes intellectual activity among the offspring of African slaves including, of course, that of reason and thought giving rise to the creation of written texts. Secondly, the argument is offered with a pseudo-scientific rationale that is attractive to those, like Long, interested to preserve the racial hierarchies institutionalised by Europeans in the Caribbean. Finally, this argument resurfaces, variously modified, in Eurocentric literature well into the twentieth century.<sup>176</sup> Together with patriarchal reasoning ascribing subject positions to women, the complex effect of Long's 'orang-utan' thesis is implicated in black women's publication silence. The mind/body dialectic central to Eurocentric thought in relation to black people constructs the black woman as only body. It is this construction which appears to account for the paradoxical centrality and invisibility of the black woman's body. That she is both attractive and repulsive can be partly explained by her being understood as purely body.

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<sup>174</sup> Fryer, p.108.

<sup>175</sup> Long, p.371.

<sup>176</sup> Such literature is particularly pernicious where limited budgets and dependency upon an external book market determine what is taught. See, for example, Collins' *Wide World Geography Reader, Book VIII. The British Empire*, London and Glasgow, p.112, date unknown but used in schools during the first half of the twentieth century.

Black male writers, like Equiano, supported by patronage, demonstrated the falsity of the 'lack of mind' premise in relation to black men, though not necessarily to the satisfaction of 'orang-utan philosophers'. Their publications indicated to a sceptical world that intellectual activity culminating in a literary product was also possible for black men. Yet they were published far from the plantations, since the powerful West Indian planter's 'gaze' functioned like an 'eye of power' to ensure voicelessness as well as control of the body. Interviewed about the Panopticon as the 'eye of power' Foucault's response illuminates not only the history of the medical gaze<sup>177</sup> but also my preoccupations here:

Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself.<sup>178</sup>

While, in terms of punitive conditions and racial meanings, differences exist between the medical gaze and that of the planter's, a shared concern with 'the eye of power' may be identified. Indeed, it is within such an 'eye' that much plantocratic control over the African's body rested. The planter's gaze informed Long's authority to comment randomly upon the lives of the black population. An analogy may be drawn of Jamaica, and by generalisation, the Caribbean, as essentially a plantation, an historical and social structure for the production of wealth for white masters. Singlemindedly, the regional location disregarded literary production, particularly that involving the enslaved or those designated as labour. The West Indies, therefore, and indeed Britain, continued thereafter to be largely unreceptive to literary aspirations of Miss Fulvia and Miss Quasheba who, in any event, were burdened with the primary concerns of survival.

The case of Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784), located then in Boston, in colonial America, illustrated the extraordinary circumstances of an enslaved black woman and the 'technology of power' which allowed her to become an acclaimed young poet. The

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<sup>177</sup> Foucault explains in interview that an interest in the institutionalisation of the medical gaze led him to Bentham's Panopticon. See, Colin Gordon, ed., *Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge*, London, 1980, p.146

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

process of becoming a slave encoded changes in domicile patterns dependent upon slavers, merchants, masters and mistresses. It meant also the 'gaze', before the moment of capture and thereafter; while for those born enslaved, the gaze became a lifestyle feature and with it the 'interiorising' suggested by Foucault. Phillis Wheatley at the age of about eight years learnt the gaze of slavers on land and sea as she was taken captive from West Africa to North America. Yet, she gained the support of her master and prestigious patrons enabling publication of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* of 1773.<sup>179</sup> That her reputation as a poet became widely known may be gleaned from Sancho who wrote on 27 January, 1778:

Phillis's poems do credit to nature and put art - merely as art - to the blush. It reflects nothing either to the glory or generosity of her master - if she is still his slave - except he glories in the low vanity of having in his wanton power a mind animated by heaven - a genius superior to himself.<sup>180</sup>

Wheatley, by virtue of the powerful apparatus of slaveholding and despite the 'gaze' held simultaneous claims to being both slave and poet. Documentation of purchase signified her slave status while a list of Enlightened Boston male officials confirmed, with their signatures for the public gaze, the authenticity of her poetry. An outcome of such patronage was the publication of Wheatley's collection.

Sancho commented upon the gesture verifying Wheatley's poetic ability: 'The list of splendid - titled - learned names, in confirmation of her being the real authoress - alas! shows how very poor the acquisition of wealth and knowledge is - without generosity - feeling - and humanity'.<sup>181</sup> The 'attestation' upon which Sancho focuses lists some of Wheatley's patrons though not the process by which she became a poet while remaining a slave and in a tongue which was her third or fourth language. In comparison, African-Caribbean Francis Williams (ca. 1700-1770), with whom Sancho shared a patron,<sup>182</sup> made poetic claims which elicited the response from the

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<sup>179</sup> Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, London, 1773.

<sup>180</sup> Sancho, pp. 175-76, Vol. 1.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. The name of Governor Thomas Hutchinson of Boston headed the list. See my earlier note 23.

<sup>182</sup> See Anim-Addo, 1995, p. 48.

Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, 'tis likely [Williams] is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly'.<sup>183</sup>

While the planter's gaze affected all Africans, factors of location and patronage also played their part in the maintenance of silence. For 'genius in bondage' Wheatley, these were important considerations.<sup>184</sup> Legally shackled to her master, Wheatley, by publication, challenged prevailing notions of Africanness as well as African womanhood particularly through her engagement with poetic form rather than autobiography. Unique for her time, Wheatley not only engaged with the master discourse but gained recognition of her mind and body. How did she gain patronage? Wheatley's themes were appropriately Christian so that her writing challenged the *pre-text* and its figuring of black womanhood. Within the parameters allowed, Wheatley, in circumstances differentiated from those of her labouring sisters, found the means of subverting the prevailing notions limiting the possibilities available to the black woman's body and significantly, that of the slave.<sup>185</sup>

If Wheatley's writing successfully challenged the powerful *pre-text* to black women's discourse, that is, of pro-slavery and anti-slavery writing unable or unwilling to configure black women as individuals capable of voice, it altered little for African-heritage Caribbean women. While Wheatley's impact upon an African-American women's writing tradition is important, African-Caribbean women continued to be firmly held in the gaze which insisted upon silence. The crucial meaning of this for a reading public was that of reinforcing and confirming stereotypes through aesthetic knowledge, literature and painting, as well as more 'objective' knowledge, such as 'history'. Eurocentric orthodoxy in the belief of superiority over Africans could be demonstrated in the absence of African-Caribbean women's represented thought, through 'the white eye'. At the same time, this masked an actual silence that was the

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<sup>183</sup> Hume, p.123.

<sup>184</sup> Sancho, p.176.

<sup>185</sup> Wheatley refers to her exceptional circumstances in a letter to her friend, Obour Tanner, dated 21 March, 1774, when she writes of the death of her mistress as 'loss of a parent'. See, Julian D. Mason, Jr, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, Chapel Hill, 1966, p.107.

product of Anglocentric culture, in collusion with the mercantilism of Atlantic slavery, underscoring the African's will to survive.

Slavery and its coaxial, Enlightenment, represented different cultural frames for the same historical era constructing African-heritage people, specifically women, as silent. Nor was this merely an ideal of femininity. The very silence presented and indicated as proof of lack of mind, informed the culture which would receive African-Caribbean women's literary writing in the twentieth century. While by virtue of patronage, African/Caribbean men negotiated a route through this impasse, as did African-American Phillis Wheatley, African-Caribbean women remained without published voice. My argument is that the hostility of the African-Caribbean context accounts for the absence of literary writing of the period.<sup>186</sup> In addition, Anglocentric figurations of African-Caribbean women as silent bodies served a particularly distorting function which, compounded by the apparatus of power which slavery held over the black woman's body, ensured the silence of lack of publication. Slave women's testimonies of this power are explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>186</sup> I am suggesting that African-American culture was less hostile. This appears to have been related to greater absentee landlordism in the British West Indies and a system of management which left slaves at the mercy of managers without a primary interest in them. Their slaves were somebody else's property. Ragatz argues that the prosperity of the mid-eighteenth century set in motion a chain involving education, migration and inheritance which fuelled absenteeism. See, Lowell Joseph Ragatz, 'Absentee Landlordism in the British Caribbean, 1750-1833', *Agricultural History*, 5, 1 (January 1931), 7-8.

## Chapter Two

# Sister Goose's Sisters: Voice, Body, Testimony and Nineteenth-century Publication

word  
adding search to reach  
wind to spool  
to twist  
of thread along the Black  
stretch of ever  
into Silence  
that mocks the again in know  
the word discovers  
Word  
mirrored  
in Silence<sup>1</sup>



William Blake, *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*,  
line engraving after the author's drawing, 1793.



Eloi peoples, Nigeria, *Maternity Figure*, wood,  
19th century, Horniman Public Museum and  
Public Park Trust, London.

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M. Nourbese Philip, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*, Ontario, 1991, p.39.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century as anti-slavery action and rhetoric gave way to legislation seeking to ameliorate the living conditions of the enslaved, a new power came to be discovered in the slave's spoken word set to paper.<sup>2</sup> Abolition had become a national issue in Britain, since, following the death of Pitt the Younger in 1806, the coalition government included the 'influential abolitionists', Lord Grenville and Charles James Fox.<sup>3</sup> The part played by the print media, crucial to the national debate concerning slavery, intensified as periodicals such as the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* began to publish its view of parliamentary-related action.<sup>4</sup> Concomitantly, through the pages of this subscriber-publication, plantation life began to assume reality for British readers and the testimonies of slaves, including those of women, began to be heard. The first-published testimonies of anglophone African-Caribbean women, explored in this chapter, and selected from the 'Proceedings' ordered to be printed by the House of Commons in 1825, indicate, however, another crucial factor concerning the breaking of silence.<sup>5</sup> In Chapter One, I discussed the ways in which the pre-text of difference related to race was established, and the various systems and mechanisms by which the African-Caribbean woman was constructed as voiceless. In this chapter, I shall emphasise how the initial cracks through the silence, courtesy of the 'gift of speech' experienced by the enslaved women, carried their own peculiar constraints and caused repercussions. The conditions and motives of publication, significant to the word-body connections indicated within the testimonies explored in the following pages, also point to meanings of depersonalisation. African-American critic Hortense Spillers, distinguishing 'between 'body' and 'flesh', argues, in relation to slave bodies, that 'in a

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<sup>2</sup> I have written elsewhere about the conditions contributing to the 'groundswell' of antislavery action. See Anim-Addo, 1995, pp.49-50.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.59-60.

<sup>4</sup> I take as a key signifier of the material culture of nineteenth century African-Caribbean woman's experience, selected Anti-Slavery reports of the era central to which is the 'gift of speech'. References throughout this chapter are taken from *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* (hereafter *Anti-Slavery*), Vol. 1, 1825-27, London, The Anti-Slavery Society, 1827.

<sup>5</sup> I refer to Parliamentary 'Papers Relating to Slaves in the West Indies: Record of Proceedings of Fiscals of Berbice in Disputes between Masters and Slaves', London, 1825. Hereafter, *Proceedings*.

sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh”<sup>6</sup> This ‘primary narrative’ underscores the notion of depersonalisation which Sister Goose and the plantation women, below, experience.<sup>7</sup>

### A Sister Goose Scenario

Philip’s ‘word mirrored in silence trapped’, above, is poignantly illustrated through the case of Rosa (Roosje), a slave woman on the Plantation L’Espérance, in Berbice, whose testimony was documented on 10 June, 1819.<sup>8</sup> Finally allowed speech, the slave woman’s horrific story focuses upon her ‘flesh’ and its abuse on the plantation:

At eleven o’clock our work was examined and the manager directed the driver, Sondag, to flog us; it was done with the whip doubled. When Sondag, the driver, came to me, he said to the Manager, this woman is rather big with child, the manager replied give to her till the blood flies out. I was flogged with the carracarras. This happened on Friday. I went to the field on Saturday. I told the driver I could not work as I had a pain in my loins he directed me to go to the manager. I did go, and was sent to the hospital, remained there a day, the doctor examined me and said there was nothing the matter with me, and that sitting down was not good. I went to the field, was put upon a row with another to help me, on Sunday evening I miscarried, I was five months gone with child, the labour was heavy, the midwife had to force the child from me, the child was dead, one eye was out, the arm broken, and a stripe visible over the head, which must have been done by the whip doubled. The doctor came to attend me on Monday morning the child was not seen by him, it was buried, he prescribed for me, the child was seen by Ariaantje, Claartje, and Mary Anne. I was assisted by Sister Claartje, the regular midwife, Mary Anne, did not attend me, as I was taken suddenly, she was sent for, however, and saw the child.<sup>9</sup>

Rosa’s testimony, like Philip’s narrator’s ‘that was all I had - birth, death and in between silence’ tells of a particular historical reality, that of an African-Caribbean woman.<sup>10</sup> For her, plantation existence is marked by whipping, the severity of which is signified in ‘the whip doubled’. The gender specific mark, that of pregnancy, or ‘being big with child’ which the woman also bears, is disregarded.<sup>11</sup> Pregnancy secures no specific

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<sup>6</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: an american grammar book’, in Warhol and herndl, eds., p.386.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.387.

<sup>8</sup> *Proceedings*, pp.25-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, pp.233-4 . The complaint was levied against Mr. Grade, the manager.

<sup>10</sup> Philip, 1991, p.43.

<sup>11</sup> See, Jeffner Allen, ‘Motherhood: the Annihilation of Women’, in Joyce Treblicott, ed., *Mothering : Essays in Feminist Theory*, NJ, 1984, cited in Boyce Davies, pp.315-330.

maternal consideration. Rather, it provokes the graphic and malicious direction - 'give to her till the blood flies out'. Consequently, when she gives birth prematurely, her stillborn offspring is grossly disfigured. Yet, that historic moment of flogging affords Rosa a choice of silence or speech against her oppressors. Moreover, the process of gaining access to the printed word, is for her, one which carries twin possibilities: further punishment, or empowerment giving rise to change, for Rosa's word is political. It is linked to a politically invested body and further, her testimony speaks to the narratives of Abolition. The speech which Rosa is allowed is also constrained, for it is permitted only within the terms of a 'complainant'.

In order to substantiate claims by the anti-slavery lobby made on behalf of black subjects of Atlantic slavery in the Caribbean, black women were first allowed voice, specifically to speak of their condition. Documentation of enslaved women's experiences was concerned, too, with the natural growth of slave labour, that is, the biological products of enslaved mothers as opposed to imported slave labour. In Foucauldian terminology, a specific form of 'biopower' or 'total control and manipulation' was the concern of the age. The slave woman, source of natural growth of the slave population, was central to this. Yet, there lay in the gap between the liberal rhetoric of biopower and the practice of the pro-slavery lobby a contradiction since perceptions of total control of the body of the enslaved included control of the tongue.

Following the 1807 Act, with Africans no longer allowed to be legally transported as labour to British Caribbean colonies, the relative well-being of the enslaved woman and her reproductivity became crucial.<sup>12</sup> At this historic moment and through the pen of the planters themselves in dual, conflicting roles of judge/jury, aggressor/mediator, slave master/repository of justice, the direct cries of African-Caribbean women are heard for the first time.<sup>13</sup> While the women's situation warranted formal complaints, the act of complaining, allowed as a hard-won reform, was in this context audacious.

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<sup>12</sup> For discussion of the passage of the Slave Trade Act, see Anim-Addo, 1995, p.60.

<sup>13</sup> The Fiscal was himself a planter. See *Anti-Slavery*, p.48. Only three colonies had Fiscals or 'guardians' of the slaves.

The quasi-legal situation for recording complaints, familiar enough in Atlantic slavery as justice for the enslaved, is signified in the African-American traditional tale of 'Sister Goose'. It is necessary to retell the story, since I know of no written version of the narrative and came to it through oral storytelling:

*Sister Goose swimming at dead of night in a huge nearby pond shimmering under the moonlight is observed by Bra (Brer/ Brother) Fox. As Sister Goose gets closer to the edge, Bra Fox can no longer contain his appetite for her and communicates to her his intention to 'eat you up bones an' all for dinner'. She protests her freedom and in the light of this, she contests his right to eat her. In the process, she invokes the law which she understands to be a means of protecting her right to swim in her own environment without expecting to be eaten by anyone who happens to come across her. Admirably reasonable, Bra Fox agrees to Sister Goose's declared intention to take her case against him to court. He adds only that he will follow her to court and wait until she completes her own project. Following that, he intends to accomplish his own project of eating her up. Entry to the court is allowed to Sister Goose by officials who are foxes. Ushers, court scribes, jury, lawyers and judge, indeed the entire apparatus of the system is manned by foxes. The verdict of the court is given in favour of Bra Fox who, having waited for Sister Goose to see the legal process in action, promptly eats her for his dinner.<sup>14</sup>*

Just as Sister Goose in the traditional tale is wronged by a fox, yet is obliged to take her plea for justice to a court where all the officials are foxes, so too, too, were wronged slave women like Rosa obliged to complain to slave-owning officials. It is within this 'sister goose situation' that black women's voices were allowed to penetrate the institution of slavery and to leave a record of the conditions of that period of enforced silence. As a mirror to that 'gift', the tale of Sister Goose offers a pertinent Afrocentric interpretation, for, if the complainants were not challenged by the Fiscal/ planter himself, the 'Sister Goose' of the plantation stood to have her testimony contested by any number of 'foxes':

The evidence of J H. Eenhuys assistant surgeon, to Dr Westerveld, practitioner and medical attendant of plantation l'Esperance, states, that he visited the woman Rosa (Roosje) early in the morning of the 14th March: she informed me she had miscarried the evening before, I examined and prescribed for her. A few days previous to this occurrence, I saw Roosje in the sick house, she was complaining and pregnant. I thought between three and four months gone with child. I experience that many women miscarry *from not taking exercise*, and contracting lazy habits: thinking this was the case with her, I directed her to take exercise. I did not see the child, I believe it was buried. I enquired if she had been delivered of the after birth, and being informed by the midwife and an old woman she had, I directed something for Roosje and went away (my italics).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I first heard this tale told by a Guyanese storyteller, Tuup, at the Barbican, London, 7 December, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.234.

In part, the contradiction for colonists, whether planters or merchants, resided in the increasing demands upon them to be seen to be operating within the limits of the slave reforms. The conditions of Rosa's enslavement appears, therefore, almost liberal in its provision of a 'sick house' and medical staff, yet her version of reality belies liberal practice. Rosa receives not medical treatment but affirmation of the planter's demands for her labour and his perception of the slave woman as lazy and malingering. In addition, the diagnosis, laziness, is a persistent stereotype of the enslaved African. The quasi-medical opinion, that many slave women 'miscarry from not taking exercise, and contracting lazy habits', is itself suspect since the practice of 'lazy habits' is not easily achieved in slavery. To the contrary, 'exercise', as practice, seems more appropriate to over indulged masters and mistresses whose life-styles contrast with the hard labour endured by enslaved women such as Rosa.

Evidence by Sondag, 'driver', states that the women were engaged in the picking of coffee. They had not supplied the expected quota. 'The quantity required was not got'.<sup>16</sup> 'Sondag's evidence attests to the motive for the punishment of the women.

The overseer told me, by order of Mr. Grade, the manager I was to range the women out on the plankier, and told me to begin and flog them from one to another, I began and went on till I came to the woman Rosa (Roosje). I gave them about twelve or thirteen stripes with the Whip doubled inflicted at breakfast time, at eleven o'clock. On coming to Roosje, I observed to the manager that this woman was pregnant, the manager said go on, that was not my business. I did so, she did not get more than the rest, I did not flog her with a carracarras. It had broken before I came to her she received her punishment with the whip doubled on coming ... o'clock I did not see the child. Claartje told me the child was in \_\_\_\_\_. The question being put to him, 'Whether the manager on his (the driver's) representation, that Roosje was pregnant had made use of the words *never mind flog her till the blood comes*' he replied, 'yes he did'.<sup>17</sup>

If not actually a 'fox' of the Sister Goose analogy, Sondag indicates, in the extreme desire to punish, his representation of the interest of the foxes. Presenting his involvement as dutiful response, he highlights the hierarchical nature of the plantation.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Punishment for this offence was severe in British colonies. For example, in the 'Emile Torday and the Arts of the Congo Exhibition' at the Museum of Mankind, London, 1990, a photo exhibited showed African rubber workers whose hands had been chopped off as punishment for failing to achieve the quota.

<sup>17</sup> *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, p. 234.

Furthermore, the rebuff he receives - 'that was not my business' - shows also how the manager is fully incorporated into the system or 'episteme' in Foucauldian terms, for action against the slave requires only the autocratic planter-agent's word. Contrastingly, the evidence of Jonas, Mary Anne, Ariantje, George and Caartje, corroborate Roosje's statement. So does the evidence of 'the Negro woman Mariana', taken from the Fiscal's *Proceedings*.<sup>18</sup>

I was sent for in the night to come to Rosa, who was taken in labour (trouble had come) I went she was not yet delivered, I assisted another woman to deliver her. The child's arm was broken, one eye out bruised and sunk in the head. It was a fine malechild quite formed in every respect perfect thinks the child was more than five months from its perfect form and appearance Claartje and George reported it to the manager that Roosje had miscarried and given no directions respecting it. I had buried it. The child was seen by the father and mother, and two other women, Caartje and Ariantje. Roosje told the doctor the state the child was in He replied 'I suppose you have been eating green pines.' Roosje denied it, saying, it was from the flogging she got.<sup>19</sup>

The doctor's 'green pines' assumption betrays both a lack of ethics in the Hippocratic sense and an expectation that the slave woman has little concern about either her body or its offspring. This may be differentiated from Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies' which require the exercise of 'a subtle coercion'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Foucault conceptualises such discipline in relation to 'docile bodies' as 'different from slavery because they were not based on a relation of appropriation of bodies'.<sup>21</sup> I am suggesting that appropriation of the African-Caribbean woman's body not only legitimised the view of her which came to be established as exclusively body. This perspective also insisted upon an embodiment so profoundly disrespectful it may be thought of as (dis)embodiment. Within this notion prefixed from black slang, 'to *dis*', as well as the emphatic and indigenous '*dis*', meaning 'this', I seek to encapsulate the idea of utter disrespect while simultaneously underscoring meanings such as that of Spillers's 'flesh'.

Notwithstanding the network of black women providing mutual maternal support on the plantation, Ariantje's statement indicates, notably, that in the brutal

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<sup>18</sup> *Proceedings*, pp.26-27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.137.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

circumstances, Rosa's offspring, too, is reduced to flesh. She confirms the stillborn child as having 'the eye out, the head broken'. Challenged about why she had maintained her silence despite access to authoritative figures such as 'the manager, the doctor or the Burgher officer,' Ariantje's response is reputedly that 'it was not her business'. To what extent might this be an internalising of dominant values or, alternatively a standardisation of response? The statement certainly echoes that of the driver's. Similarly, from the evidence of Claartje, Roosje's sister, the breaking of silence appears not to be a personal priority. Claartje confirms:

The child was born dead. It was a male perfect, the arm was broken, one eye bruised and hurt. It could be seen it was done with the whip and the hand broken. The father reported its death. [The] manager said to bury it. The father dug the grave. Marianne took it out. *She* did not tell the manager of the state of the child, thinking Marianne would do it. George mentioned it to Mr Grade, does not know what he said.<sup>22</sup>

The evidence of George, Roosje's husband and father of her seven children, corroborates her statement of the events, while the large number of statements suggest evidence painstakingly collated. Indeed, the system of slavery itself seems, through the various testimonies, to be on trial. Attention to the numerous witnesses suggests, too, a system which belies the claims of the anti-slavery lobby of an absence of consideration for slaves. Why, then, have I suggested the 'Sister Goose' analogy? In part, it seems appropriate to draw critically upon folk wisdom and cultural meanings to analyse the (*dis*)embodiment which the women suffered, and to juxtapose this against a context allowing ample scope for an elaborate facade of justice, empty bureaucratic exercises and the protection of those opposed to changing the balance of power. It is also important to appreciate the social structure already well established for upholding the values of the plantation.

The 'gift' of speech also designates the conditions of speech. African-heritage people, in the relative privacy of their chattel homes had access to a vernacular distinguished by its markers of 'contact' with 'many ethno-linguistic groups' and

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<sup>22</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.235.

European forms.<sup>23</sup> Yet, this creolised tradition was itself relatively new for its speakers. Indeed, the Caribbean creole tradition was in the process of being established. I wish here to stress the severe rupture which affected cultural traditions including that of language. Frantz Fanon, Caribbean cultural critic and psychiatrist, theorises that following 'the death and burial of its local cultural originality', a colonised people needs accommodate to the coloniser's language.<sup>24</sup> Out of this reality creole language evolved.

Philip's *Tongue*, explores in experimental and predominantly poetic sections the use of language and particularly 'the Caribbean demotic'.<sup>25</sup> The 'many ethnolinguistic groups' to which she refers is crucial to the notion of an African-Caribbean vernacular in the making.<sup>26</sup> I have selected the term 'vernacular' in order to emphasise this relatively early period of the language when incoming West Africans brought to the region the language systems which would represent a particular dynamic in the creole being developed. At the same time, the linguistic diversity of the Africans allows insight into the microcosmic make-up of individual plantations. The multi-lingual complexity which Philip flags is only one of several factors contributing to the vernacular. She shows that the enslaved is forced into a situation where communication is made as difficult as possible. The punitive strategy, that of 'removal of the tongue', takes its place within a hierarchy of physical punishments, even as it is specifically linked to 'voicing' on the part of Africans. It is at the same time at the heart of the making of a linguistic environment giving rise to complex attitudes to 'the vernacular' in the process of becoming the mothertongue.

Within the concept of the creolised vernacular, therefore, some tension may be discerned. Professor Maureen Warner-Lewis in *Guinea's Other Suns* (1991), highlights a range of tensions between Africans new to the region and those born there or

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Mervyn C. Alleyne and Beverley Hall-Alleyne, 'Language Maintenance and Language Death in the Caribbean', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28, 4 (December 1982), 55.

<sup>24</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markman, London, 1986, p.18.

<sup>25</sup> Philip, 1993, p.84.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

creolised.<sup>27</sup> Warner-Lewis points to 'outsider' perception of the newly arrived Africans, the differences in names, customs and spoken languages. The term 'African-Caribbean', in this light, whether referring to the nineteenth century or earlier periods of Atlantic slavery is one that is problematic. It masks a more heterogeneous social situation than may be readily appreciated. For the purposes of this chapter, with its focus upon the oral, it may be useful to consider the process of voicing for Rosa and her fellow witnesses as a complex and dangerous linguistic process and a complex social encounter. Linguistically, the enslaved, cautiously referred to as Anglophones, are, with varying degrees of success, being coerced into utilising English as a common language. They represented, in actuality, 'many ethno-linguistic groups' of Africans in varying degrees of indigenisation within the region. It was upon this linguistic base that English lexis became eventually overlaid. The foreign-sounding names of the slave informants, for example, Rosa/Roosje betray contact with European groups other than English. Given that the testimonies were collected in a former Dutch colony it is likely that the Africans had previously been obliged to speak Dutch. My usage of 'vernacular' allows perception of the language situation inclusive of African languages, Creole, and an approximation of 'standard' English (SE). Two key features of this vernacular are the diversity already mentioned, but also the emotionally charged circumstances marking the loss of an original mother tongue. It is this linguistic situation to which the African-Caribbean writer is heir.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, in *Acts of Identity* (1985), point to the varieties of Creole in English-speaking territories today and trace the origin of these to the various competing linguistic influences in the history of the region.<sup>28</sup> They argue that the cultural linguistic diversity of even the English-speaking Caribbean alone remains complex well into the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> The enslaved Africans, having been drawn from

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<sup>27</sup> Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidad Culture*, Massachusetts, 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Le Page, R. B. and Andrée Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity: Creole Based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity*, Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, 1985, pp.41 and 49.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

different linguistic areas and finding themselves in a situation requiring the processing of European languages were engaged in a complex linguistic task. Moreover, there is no evidence that such an 'oral word' was the product of any easy process. If the plantation was, in effect, a language laboratory, it represented a type of containing of the word, which, in the giving of testimony cannot be equated with an African mothertongue since the creolised vernacular was acquired as a product of coercion, in circumstances as extreme as that of which Rosa tells. In addition, the words uttered by the women giving testimony against the conditions of their labour were subjected to another form of containment, that of the scribal mode undertaken by their white masters.

What light does the Sister Goose story throw upon the 'gift' of voice central to my argument? There are two areas of particular interest: the consensual aspect contextualised in legal reforms and the charade element which relies upon the strategic placement of agents of the dominant status quo. The 'gift' of speech to slaves was hotly contested through pro-slavery literature. Slaveowners and particularly wealthy and powerful plantation owners, the primary 'agents', resisted reforms allowing any erosion of their power over the bodies of the enslaved people purchased. The power of the pro-slavery lobby within the Caribbean region and abroad, typified in London by the 'rich and powerful' West India lobby, had become almost legendary. As a consequence of their power and in order to bring into effect even the limited voicing allowed through the testimonies, the change required status through the law. Even unwilling plantation owners, as a result, were subject to the limited voicings effected by these reforms and their real or imagined implications.

### **African-Caribbean 'speaking as a woman'**

I told my master I did not want to stop with them, but remain in the barracks till he sold me. He says, 'you want to stop in the barracks do you; I will give you barracks on your arse! I was laid down and tied to two stakes and he observed he would flog, and then sell me. I was severely flogged with the cartwhip.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Proceedings*, p.14

Minkie's statement indicates little of the cowed slave one might expect, but rather, a clear, decisive subject. She had claimed agency, first through communicating her intention and secondly through following this up by positioning herself 'in the barracks'. Her decision and action appear calculated to move her 'master', in turn, to action and even as she 'exhibits her posteriors' to show how lacerated her flesh is as a result of the beating, there is a sense that she had been willing to endure that much to be rid of him.

We are too much punished; we have no time to get our victuals; we have every night got work, whether the mill is going or not. Sunday night even is not excepted, when we must bring firewood from the canal mouth.<sup>31</sup>

The complaint of the 'negress Zebith', described as the 'property of JF Schwartz' in October, 1823, states:

Mr. Schwartz bought me at Vendue from Betsy Smithson. One day master went to Itheca; Mr. Wolf's children were at master's; a girl came to mind these children; this girl struck my child; I heard it cry, and inquired who had done it; this girl said it was she; I told her if she did it again, I would strike her; she went up to Schwarz's wife, Aminiba, who came down, took my child by one hand and made this girl flog the child with a stick; I held the stick and begged her not to do so, as I had not offended her.<sup>32</sup>

'In feminist theory one speaks as a woman', writes post-modernist, USA feminist, Rosi Braidotti.<sup>33</sup> The question flagged in this thesis and signalling a critical divide is: what happens in feminist practice? The reality of African-Caribbean womanhood indicated in the women's testimonies, given individually and in groups, attest to the practice which would shape their action in a context leaving little space for theory. The following are taken from accounts given by women in Trinidad in a period similar to that of the Berbice slave women. Contained in official scribal mode, it is difficult to discern actual speech acts of individual women. The testimonies of such witnesses also highlight the specificity of African-Caribbean womanhood and its necessary concern with survival, a specificity which would carry implications for difference into the twenty-first century.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.63.

<sup>33</sup> Braidotti, p.4.

Laura's testimony documented on 4 June, 1819 states:

A Negro woman, named Laura, belonging to the plantation Reliance, with a very young child at the breast, complains that she is not allowed to take her child to the field to give it the breast now and then, but is obliged to leave it with an old woman at home. When she steals from her work to the child, and is discovered, the manager flogs her. *She brought this child into the world at great pain*, it is of a weakly constitution, and requires a mother's care, which she is not allowed to bestow. The manager does not deny any of the above facts, only says, that the women with young children are not required to come out till half past six in the morning, and they quit the field at half past ten, return to the field at half past one, and leave it at half past five (my italics).<sup>34</sup>

The observation that 'she brought this child into the world at great pain' indicates an approximation to colloquial speech similar in tone to Mariana's 'trouble had come'. As with Rosa's horrific testimony, it cannot be assumed that Laura's 'pain' refers literally to the pain of childbirth. The slave woman's lot, gleaned from the testimonies, indicates that the reference might as easily relate to the pain of death as in a still birth or the pain of traumatic conditions of birth. In both instances, the 'speaking as a woman' is evoked by concerns of the slave woman as mother. Another slave mother, Meitje, complained that on reporting to the hospital with her sick child, 'instead of getting physic, she received a flogging. She is still sick and has come to complain'.<sup>35</sup>

Issues of revolt, control and resistance arise in discussion of the discourse of slavery. What were the women slaves resisting? Reforms brought into effect following the House of Commons motion put by George Canning, MP, on 15 May 1823, were concerned that the British slave colonies:

- provide religious instruction for the slave population
- put an end to markets and *labour for slaves on Sundays*
- admit the testimony of slaves in courts
- legalise the marriage of slaves and give protection in their enjoyment of conubial rights
- protect slaves in their acquisition of property
- remove obstructions to manumission and grant powers assisting slaves in the powers to redeem themselves
- prevent separation of families by sale etc
- prevent seizure of slaves detached from plantation of owners

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<sup>34</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.39. See also, *Proceedings*, p.24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

- *restrain powers of abuse*
- *abolish degrading corporal punishment of females*
- abolish the use of the drawing-whip in the fields
- establish savings Banks for use of slaves (my italics).<sup>36</sup>

Of the twelve areas listed, the women's testimonies cited cluster mainly around two; the restraint of powers of abuse and corporal punishment of females. A further two areas may be included, namely Sunday labour for slaves and the use of the drawing whip. So, their complaints referred to, at most, only a third of the most pressing concerns of reformers, that is, the four areas italicised above. This is despite the actual conditions of existence so brutal as to have caused parliament to implement urgent reforms allowing the slave women to speak. At the juncture of 'epistemic violence' and hard-won though limited access to speech in the anti-slavery era, the enslaved may 'speak as a woman'.<sup>37</sup> In my reading between the lines of the testimonies, identity concerns are uppermost. In part, the writing project of African-Caribbean women treats precisely such reading. I have, for example, attempted to illustrate how Philip's poetry engages with the many silence(s) of African-Caribbean women through a re-writing of history as in *Livingstone*, and a re-membering of the African-Caribbean women's historical presence such as in *Tongue*. And through my own writing, I have similarly engaged with history, dialogising with 'silence/not the silver singing/ silence that reassures/but a blue purple wailing chasm/ eerie with the stuff of nightmares'.<sup>38</sup>

June D. Bobb notes that 'from its very beginnings, Caribbean poetry has engaged the chaos and violence of the history that has given it birth'.<sup>39</sup> In developing my thesis, I draw substantially upon poetry, particularly that of African-Caribbean women, written from a position within the culture where the struggle continues to engage with literary dialogue in the development of an '*alter/native account*'.<sup>40</sup> Like Bobb, I recognise that 'the experience of Caribbean people has been built on suppression and silence, but a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp.129-130.

<sup>37</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, London and New York, 1987, p.200.

<sup>38</sup> Anim-Addo, 1998 a, p.12.

<sup>39</sup> June D. Bobb, *Beating A Restless Drum: The Poetics of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott*, New Jersey, 1998, p.17.

<sup>40</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, 'Caliban's Guarden', *Wasafiri* 16 (1992) +

silence under which the “word” has been carefully preserved’.<sup>41</sup> If, as Henry Paget argues in *Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (2000), such ‘word’, as (male) philosophical thought, has enjoyed a particularly ‘low level of visibility’, it can be appreciated that African-Caribbean women’s ‘word’, as theory, has been given little scope for development in an academic space.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, African-Caribbean women’s theorising is richly present in the poetics foregrounded here. The access which poetry provides into a rich cultural history and the insistence upon a polyvocal, plural presence, add to the theoretical synthesis crucial to this study. Similarly, Morrison’s analysis of the process of African-heritage writing as rooted in ‘a kind of literary archaeology’ dependent upon exploration of ‘what remains were left behind’, contributes substantially to the development of my thesis in that it facilitates a treatment of the fragments which map the literary history I am attempting to explore.<sup>43</sup>

The maternal presence is important to the ‘plural presence’ and may be identified in the literature as survival imperative which insists upon a consideration of subsequent generations. That this comes to be written into the published texts is true of the nineteenth century but also of contemporary texts. The figures of Rosa, Laura, Susanna and Zebith emerging from their testimonies, reveal speech controls broken through compulsions of maternity. It is this concern which threatens the depersonalisation project of their white masters and mistresses bound upon perpetuating slavery. As a result, the maternal comes to function as threat to the colonial order. Laura’s words about the birth of her child ‘at great pain’, like Rosa’s, insist upon a recognition which the planter or his agent wishes to deny. In the racialised battle for complete control of the enslaved’s body, maternity is read as affront, resistance and contradiction warranting further and exemplary punishment. For the slave owners, control of the body is at issue. For the slave woman the maternal self is threatened, a status resonant of cultural memories of the West African woman as matriarch. Ifi Amaduime, exploring issues of

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<sup>41</sup> Bobb, p.40.

<sup>42</sup> Paget, p.248.

<sup>43</sup> Toni Morrison, ‘The Site of Memory’ in William Zinser, (ed.), *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, Boston, 1987, p.112.

African women, status and power in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987), writes of maternity as 'sacred to the traditions of all African societies'.<sup>44</sup> For this reason, she argues, 'the earth's fertility is traditionally linked to women's powers'.<sup>45</sup> My argument is that a transgression of this 'sacred link' occurred which could ill be tolerated despite the gross punitive consequences on the plantation. So, removal of the figurative 'muzzle' in the differentiated climate following the Slave Trade Act, allowed black women to speak out as mothers. Amaduime refers to the 'centrality' of the cultural belief in women 'as producers and providers', a state viewed with 'reverence'.<sup>46</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that such cultural memories of the status of motherhood and children as wealth contributed to the revolt subverting the containment of African-heritage women in the Caribbean plantation context.

French philosopher, Julia Kristeva's treatment of 'women's time', though focused on European women, contributes towards the development of my argument. Kristeva refers to the 'double problematic: that of their identity constituted by historical sedimentation, and that of their loss of identity which is produced by this connection of memories'.<sup>47</sup> What might constitute the 'historical sedimentation' of the African-heritage plantation women? Arguably the most pervasive image of African womanhood, readily found in western museums, for example, is that of the African woman as maternity figure. The '*Maternity figure*' carving from the Eloi people of central Nigeria, is one from the iconography of a later period, circa 1900 (See fig.3 above).<sup>48</sup> This 'Eloi' figure portrays a central female adult with prominent breasts suckling a smaller figure while two others rest against her back and on her shoulders. She is wider than an individual and depicts Woman as a powerful figure representing life itself. Furthermore, as the literature indicates, men and women alike worshipped the figure so as to ensure fertility. Such popularly represented cultural memory of African womanhood, I suggest,

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<sup>44</sup> Ifi Amaduime, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, London, 1987, p.191.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford, 1986, p.189.

<sup>48</sup> See Joan Anim-Addo, 'Another Doorway? Black Women Writing the Museum Experience', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 10 (1998), 93-104.

lies at the root of the testimonies against denial of rites of motherhood by the African-Caribbean slave women.

Planters' actions constituted an attack upon maternal identity foregrounded in the testimonies of the women. The African-heritage women's elevated understanding of maternal identity, markedly at odds with the planter's perceptions, gave rise to speech. To cite Kristeva again:

For this memory or symbolic common denominator concerns the response that human groupings, united in space and time, have given not to the problems of the production of material goods... but, rather to those of reproduction, survival of the species, life and death, the body, sex and symbol.<sup>49</sup>

Kristeva's 'double problematic' may be applied to the dilemma of the slave women whose bodies were taken over for the purposes of production in the imperial mercantile project but who engaged in no contractual agreement. Yet, the social position of the woman required of her 'the production of material goods' which were neither her primary interest nor preoccupation. In the historical moment of reform enabling testimony, the African-heritage Caribbean woman found herself, ironically, (re)producing the material goods, the chattel desired by the planters no longer allowed to import slaves. The women's accounts of tortuous conditions serve as stark reminders that the production in hand, that demanding their labour in the field, was not in their interest. On the contrary, they found themselves ensnared into unrelenting labour and physical abuse at a moment when the economics of slavery pointed to the crucial role of women as (re)producers of labour.

The 'memory or symbolic denominator' signifying African womanhood, that of maternity figure, reasserts its primacy, rather, during the slave woman's condition of maternity so as to make speaking as a woman an imperative. The women therefore seize the facility offered through the reforms signified in the imperial 'gift' of speech. With Meitje, on the 'Gelderland' Plantation, they complain, for example, that they are not able to weed 'in consequence of carrying their children on their backs'. This culture-

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<sup>49</sup> Moi, p.189.

specific weighting signals West African traditions of mother-child bonding which assume the literal binding of the infant to the mother and vice versa. The material condition of maternity is comparable in significance for mother and child to the process of breast feeding and consequent weaning and may be seen as an extension of this process. In the circumstances of a mother socialised to having her offspring tied to her back over a period of years, the women's meanings are not merely about proximity but also about possible loss: of closeness, of contact through carrying, of tactile sensing of the child-mother bond.

Laura, from the 'Reliance' plantation, with her baby still 'at the breast,' complained that she was not allowed to take her child to the field where the infant might be suckled. Instead, she was required to leave her child with an old woman. Laura's particular concern, arose, she claimed, from a difficult birth. Her voice may barely be discerned in the extract which states 'She brought this child into the world at great pain, it is of a weakly constitution, and *requires a mother's care, which she is not allowed to bestow*'.<sup>50</sup> In the circumstances, Laura's periodic return to check on her baby, was discovered and she was flogged. That the African-Caribbean woman perceived her body as essentially reproductive, represented an oppositional stance to those who held her enslaved for her productive capacity. The 'double problematic' lies in this. Miscarriages induced by physical assault, prohibition of the succouring of one's offspring and much more besides are to be found in the women's testimonies to the condition of their maternity over and above the everyday atrocities of slave existence. Testimonies to the quality of life they endured as expectant or actual mothers were given, overwhelmingly, as single voicings, though groups such as that from Prospect plantation submitted as part of their catalogue of complaints, the brutal treatment of women in a maternal state. Denial of the women's cultural knowledge as maternity figures, I further suggest, over and above the barbarities of slavery, produced a crisis of identity which impelled

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<sup>50</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.39.

public speech. Both maternal identity and loss of identity became critically at issue in the woman's struggle to reclaim her body for primary purposes of significance to her.

Among the many instances of slave women as mothers and complainants, the account of Rose, from Trinidad, represents a compilation of grievances of which the loss of a child constitutes only a part. Unlike the other women cited, Rose's testimony does not maintain a central focus upon her loss of child. Rather, she catalogues loss of husband and child, ill treatment from the manager, being made to return to work too soon after the death of her child and related punishments. Embedded in Rose's testimony is one of the touchstones for speech, that is, violence linked to the maternal condition. Yet, the violence perpetuated upon slave women represents not only the violence of men upon the black woman's body. Jenny, for instance, gave testimony that her mistress, Elizabeth Atkinson, 'beats her unmercifully and kicked and trampled on her belly, locked her in the stocks, and beat her on the back. In half an hour she miscarried'.<sup>51</sup>

Reports from sympathetic informants about anonymous slaves were an important alternative source concerning African-Caribbean lives. One story, under the rubric 'brief sketch of colonial slavery', tells of an episode or series of episodes which occurred in Kingston, Jamaica. The narrator, a missionary,<sup>52</sup> tells of a slave master who 'exercised his barbarities on a Sabbath morning while we were worshipping God in the chapel; and the cries of the female sufferers have frequently interrupted us in our devotions. But there was no redress for them or for us'.<sup>53</sup> The narrative merits reproduction in its entirety as it offers several interesting features as follows:

This man wanted money; and, one of the female slaves having two fine children, he sold one of them and the child was torn from her maternal affections. In the agony of her feelings she made a hideous howling, and for that crime was flogged. Soon after, he sold her other child. This 'turned her heart within her' and impelled her into a kind of madness. She howled night and day in the yard; tore her hair, ran up and down the streets and the parade, rending the heavens with her cries, and literally

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.41. Jenny's mistress was 'coloured' and this case serves also as an important reminder that while not all masters and mistresses were white, violence was central to the pyramidal plantation order. See also Glissant, p.64.

<sup>52</sup> He is identified as Mr. Gilgrass, a 'pious missionary'. See, 'The Necessity of Abolishing Negro Slavery, Edinburgh, 1826, p.12 (hereafter, *Necessity*).

<sup>53</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.2.

watering the earth with her tears. Her constant cry was, *'Da wicked Massa Jew, he sell my children. Will no Buckra Massa pity Negar? What me do? Me no have one child!'* As she stood before the window, she said, lifting up her hands towards heaven, 'My massa do, my massa minister, pity me! My heart do so' (shaking herself violently) *'my heart do so because me no have no child. Me go to massa house, in massa yard, and in my hut, and me no see 'em.'* And then her cry went up to God (my italics).<sup>54</sup>

While the fine distinction made by the slave woman between 'wicked Massa Jew' and 'Buckra Massa' points to a layered racialised Caribbean context, it is the woman's voicing that is of particular interest here. Syntactically and lexically, the italicised words representing the slave woman's voice bear a ring of authenticity.<sup>55</sup> A combination of her words and her actions are, however, interpreted, even by her benign observer as 'a kind of madness'.<sup>56</sup> In this instance, 'speaking as a woman' impelled by maternal trauma, empowered the apparently silent slave woman to disrupt the silence imposed upon her; itself behaviour open to interpretation as 'madness'. The language of reason and the spirit of Enlightenment in this benign testimony casually points to indicators of (justifiable) madness on the part of the slave woman, for example, her 'hideous howling', the tearing out of her hair as well as her running up and down the street. While these symptoms may also be interpreted as signs of extreme distress, it is appropriate to recall Morrison's point concerning the postmodern problems of nineteenth-century black women and the use of strategies such as madness.

In comparison, the master's behaviour though presented as cruel, is not coded as possible madness. Rather, his acts may be read as extreme mercantilism which appears to be suggested in the reference to the slave master's Jewishness and which is reinforced in the bald statement, 'This man wanted money'. Madness is not ascribed to the master's behaviour, that is, the flogging he administers to the grieving woman. Rather, the slave's behaviour incurring the flogging is couched in legal though possibly ironic terms. She had committed a 'crime' against her master. He had 'impelled her into a kind of madness' but his own behaviour, neither the flogging nor the selling of a woman's children, is signified as irrational or 'madness' within the rational culture sanctioning such behaviour.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), draws out the inherent contradiction in the operation of perceived madness 'at the very heart of reason and truth' as the anti-Slavery narrative unwittingly illustrates.<sup>57</sup> The 'master' narrative decides on the framing of reason and madness. Yet, it is the master's behaviour which induces madness in the 'other' for the shared culture of master and narrator is indicated in the narrative.

Morrison's 'literary archaeology' paradigm, referred to above, underscores my own use of fragments of material culture in analysis of the writing of the African-Caribbean woman's past. Christopher Tilley, writing about material culture notes that contemporary archaeological analysis, is concerned with 'a more fully self-reflexive position involving consideration of what is involved in writing the past'.<sup>58</sup> The slave master's behaviour within the 'shared system of signification' indicative of the text, is coded not just differently, but within the boundaries of reason and the law, for the legal framework operative in the Caribbean region allows him the right to flog his slaves irrespective of their gender or maternal condition.<sup>59</sup> How might this be read as a 'shared system of signification' by the African-Caribbean women whose testimonies are outlined above? To present-day readers it may seem evident that the power imbalance in the situation as described is skewed in favour of the plantation owners. Yet, the practice of slave complainants developed as a humanistic 'gift' from those operating within the boundaries of reason in order to counter the excesses of a mercantile system determinedly treating people as c[h]attle. In the dominant discourse of slavery, the master cannot be deemed mad, nor the system. Only by overthrowing that discourse might we, from a new location suggest that either master or system is 'mad'. Anti-slavery discourse, in comparison, and its consequent 'gift' of speech appears, therefore, to be humanistically determined, based in reason and demonstrable truth. Yet, a view from the margins of such a culture, or one similarly generic, suggests a reading such as that of the 'Sister

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<sup>57</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard, London, 1989, p.14.

<sup>58</sup> Christopher Tilley, 'Interpreting Material Culture', in Susan M. Pearce, ed., *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, London, 1994, p.67.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

Goose' fable. In the tale, therefore, the 'transforming, storing or preserving' of 'social information' to which Tilley refers becomes evident.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the fable supplies a missing interpretation familiar to victims of mercantile madness.

### **Containing the Body That Resists**

The discourse of anti-slavery allowed African-Caribbean women a limited voicing and, like Sister Goose, they engaged, in the process, with 'foxes' in order to be finally heard. Olive Senior, in *Working Miracles* (1991), which documents the research project, 'Women In The Caribbean', points to the social status of the slave woman 'at the bottom of the economic and social system'.<sup>61</sup> Numerically, African-Caribbean women constituted a significant labour force and Senior suggests that 'the majority worked as unskilled labourers'.<sup>62</sup> Senior's evidence for this is convincing. She states: 'Field slaves were grouped according to strength and endurance not according to sex. The evidence so far shows that women contributed the largest proportion of field slaves'.<sup>63</sup> Senior cites analysis of a Jamaican plantation in which seventy out of one hundred and sixty two women worked in the fields compared to twenty-eight men from a possible one hundred and seventy-seven. While the example refers to a late eighteenth-century plantation, Senior also cites Lucille Mathurin's research indicating that within the nineteenth century in Jamaica, 'not only were the majority of Jamaican black women labourers in the field, but the majority of Jamaica's labourers in the field were black women'.<sup>64</sup> Further, Senior indicates findings of a ratio of twenty five to fifty per cent of men engaged in skilled labour compared to a hundred per cent unskilled female labour in the plantation fields. In the light of this, it may be assumed that the 'gift' of speech represented an important gain for the majority unskilled labour force of black women.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.70.

<sup>61</sup> Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean*, Barbados and London, 1991, p.106.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Research by Barbara Bush corroborates this. See, Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*, Kingston, Bloomington and London, 1990, p.36.

<sup>64</sup> Lucille Mathurin, 'Reluctant Matriarchs', *Savacou* 13 (1977), 3.

The charade element operated to undermine and negate the possible gains the women would achieve. Officials acting as agents of the plantations whether as drivers, overseers, doctors or managers and those operating as agents for the legal colonial apparatus, often the same people, played parts which situated the reform as charade allowing the enactment of roles negating the women's voicing. Such action served to counter the women's potential power, initially through roles as aggressor, but also through use of the slave system itself. The slave women's speech did not allow the facility in Spivak's terms, to 'answer one back'.<sup>65</sup> The 'gift' was, in effect, an imperial contract requiring speech in the master's tongue. It constituted the woman as complainant or troublemaker in her representation of self while the slave master and his agents, the 'foxes' had the final word.

As the large numbers of 'invisible' women comprised the least powerful subgroup of slaves, unskilled labourers, they were at times driven to complain as groups. On 17 November, 1823, for example, a complaint from ten women belonging to the same plantation stated:

The governor, our master, when he purchased us, gave us a task of one hundred trees to be weeded and cleaned, with this we were satisfied: the manager however, says this is no work, we shall not have task-work, he gives each Negro a row of trees, if we do not finish work given us, we are made to do it on Sunday, the manager had the driver locked up in the stocks. We are content and happy when our master comes, who talks and laughs with us, but as soon as he goes off the estate we are unhappy. We have no time to eat, nor to cook, we have no eleven o'clock, we are not wrought by task. Our master gave us spoons, the manager is dissatisfied with this, he says the governor is too good, he minds us as if we were children, he says he cannot flog us because that can be seen, but he will punish us with work. if any of the women be pregnant, no attention is paid to them, they are wrought as hard as the others, for that reason there are no children. Manager says he does not come to mind children. The rows given us have each sixty trees, the bell is rung, but we cannot leave the field, because if the work given us be not finished, we are punished. The punishment is we are to finish our work on Sunday. We all have wrought on Sunday, not one Sunday, but everyone that any field work is left undone.<sup>66</sup>

I have implied a uniform cross-identification between slave master and his agents. The 'task work' group's narrative illustrates that such an assumption is simplistic. In the

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<sup>65</sup> Spivak, p.130.

<sup>66</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.42.

West Indian or English-speaking context, the absence of the plantation owner provided a particular aggravation of the circumstances of slavery. The 'absentee' owner's plantation became a space of licence allowing brutal excesses in terms of physical abuse, punitive and sexual. For this reason, I am using 'absentee landlord' as a metonymy for the most punitive plantation excesses. In comparison, the task workers' case appears to be a mild one. Further, their master's status carries weight enough to allow them the role of complainant, thus enabling their critique of the slave system to be heard. Their master's ideological position, symbolised in the giving of spoons to his slaves, is a signifier not lost on the manager who declares the governor 'too good'. Not allowed, by the 'good' owner, to mark the slaves through flogging, the manager secures additional punishment for the rebellious women through extra work which consumes their Sundays, the only day not allocated to field labour. The driver's implicit collusion with the women does not deter the manager from his project of punishment. As a result, the women, while indicting the manager, affirm the ideal of anti-slavery reform in the statement, 'We are content and happy when our master comes, who talks and laughs with us, but as soon as he goes off the estate we are unhappy'. That is to say, they give in return, a gift to the pro-slavery lobbyists. They declare themselves happy as blacks within the system of slavery but for the excesses of the punitive manager.

In contrast, women from the Prospect plantation, complained of 'bad treatment' in their 'absentee owner' situation. The manager, Paterson, they state, 'overworks' them and allows them 'no time to eat'.<sup>67</sup> Their testimony continues:

We are now planting and supplying canes. The ground is dry we are obliged to throw water on the beds before we can chop the earth.... We are too much punished, we have no time to get our victuals, we have every night got work, whether the mill is going or not. Sunday night even is not excepted, when we must bring firewood from the canal mouth. Tuesday night we had to carry corn from the great house to the horse stable loft. We were employed at this work till near morning. We carry home wood on Sunday as on any other day. if any of us go out on Sunday, we must be back in time to bring home grass and firewood for the kitchen. After that we must still go to the canal for firewood for the engine.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-3.

The everyday detail of the women's lives differ substantially from the previous group's. Instead of 'weeding', they are 'planting and supplying canes', the very business of the mercantile project for which their labour is so essential. The shadow of the cane mill is a palpable presence whether, 'going or not', that is, being fed the seasonal canes that would make sugar, or not. In addition, the women function generally as c(h)attle in the carrying of supplies such as firewood and grass.

At the heart of the group's complaint is a specific episode the account of which, in the original, is given in reported rather than direct speech:

The work they had done the day before was reported to the manager at noon by the driver. The manager was unable to go himself from indisposition, but he ordered the driver, when they returned to the field at one 'o clock, to go out and flog each of the strong women. The women expostulated with him, shewing him the extreme hardness of the ground, which they had to moisten before they could dig it, observing, that if the cane plant were not well put in the manager would again order them to be punished for that. The overseer coming up at the time, repeated the managers order, and six of them were laid down and punished with twelve lashes each.<sup>69</sup>

An interesting feature of this case is that the women were flogged for their strength. While this appears to be the type of bizarre and arbitrary behaviour which the madness of Atlantic slavery normalised, an alternative reading suggests that the manager perceived the women as insurgents. The 'strong women', are the natural leaders of the group and consequently deserving of exemplary punishment. Kristeva writes:

But when a subject is too brutally excluded from this socio-symbolic stratum; when, for example, a woman feels her affective life as a woman or her condition as a social being too brutally ignored by existing discourse or power (from her family to social institutions); she may by counter-investing the violence she has endured, make of herself a 'possessed' agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration.<sup>70</sup>

The 'possessed agent' of Kristeva's description may be discerned in this reading but what is to be made of the fact that the role is ascribed to the women rather than self selected? It is fear of the strong women which seems to be implicated in the manager's

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>70</sup> Moi, p.203.

punitive action. Slave rebellion occurred regularly and while few accounts survive of female slave insurgents, Nanny of the Maroons gained a particular notoriety.<sup>71</sup> Significantly, Nanny is a critical figure in the writing of poets such as Lorna Goodison and Olive Senior.<sup>72</sup> Where slave women predominated as numerically the most oppressed group, doubtless, they were involved in many rebellions, a factor with which plantation managers would have been well acquainted.

Space and containment figure repeatedly in the women's accounts of the struggle over their bodies. This is different from the physical restraint of the woman's body in terms of time and space figured literally in the 'Eloi' wooden carvings of Mother and Child. From a specimen of sixty extracts, the following named women emerge, all punished by confinement in the stocks: Cannette of Mt. Pleasant plantation 'did not throw grass', a misdemeanour which warranted ten hours in the bed stocks.<sup>73</sup> Rose Desiree, of the same plantation, 'for coming after three o'clock in the afternoon shift to the field', was given nine hours in the bed-stocks. At Union plantation, Catherine Bevarley 'for being insolent and using insinuating language while throwing grass in the yard', was 'confined her two nights and a day in the stocks'. Similarly, Nelly Grevious, 'for going out of the hospital at night, she being there as an invalid, was confined for one night in the stocks'. Sally Nightingale, of Beausejour, for 'neglecting grass twice' had two days confinement while for Fanny of Montrose, for 'idleness and false complaint of having a pain in her belly' was confined in the stocks for two days and two nights. Zabeth Robertson of Ross Park, on the other hand, 'for not working her row with the rest of the gang as she ought to do' was in the stocks during her noontime and again, 'for not working her provision ground on the day given by me' was confined to the dungeon for one night. Such punishment, sanctioned by male and female planters,

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Hilary Beckles, 'Sex and Gender in the Historiography of Caribbean Slavery', in Shepherd, et al., p.137.

<sup>72</sup> See for example, 'Nanny' in Lorna Goodison, *I Am Becoming My Mother*, London: New Beacon, 1986, pp.44-5.

<sup>73</sup> 'The Slave Colonies of Great Britain or a Picture of Negro Slavery drawn by the Colonists Themselves', London, 1825, p.88 (hereafter, *Picture*).

informs the social division between black and white women on the plantations and within the wider society.

The arbitrary nature of the punishments is reflected in the varying degrees of confinement whether in the stocks, or imprisonment in a dungeon. Francoise Negui, of Chaguaramas 'manquant a la priere' (en prison et au tae sic 6 heures), that is, missed prayers and was imprisoned. In an age when English slave plantation owners resisted giving their slaves religious instruction and when women's punishment included completion of tasks of labour on Sunday, the day of worship, Francoise was imprisoned for missing prayers. Similarly, on another estate, Plein Palais, Margarete, found guilty of missing prayers, was punished with a night in the stocks. Francoise Masson, from Chaguaramas, described as having chosen not to work at all for three days, was imprisoned for twenty-four hours. She was six months pregnant, 'being gone only six months', and the proprietors' argued that she had been given 'light work'.

Another woman, Boco Louise, in a post-natal state, having had a still birth five weeks earlier, refused to go to work, for which she endured twenty-three hours in the stocks.<sup>74</sup> Amy Distiller, of Sevilla, on the other hand, 'for refusing to work and telling a falsehood on the overseer' was imprisoned in the stockhouse for eight days.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, Valere Gine of Chaguaramas 'faisant le malade', for pretending to be sick, earned fifteen lashes.<sup>76</sup> Such punishments, an everyday feature of plantation existence are to be contextualised within an age of imposed and fiercely-contested reforms in the British-held slave colonies. The obligation to record the punishments almost certainly altered the punishments themselves, so that confinement seemed more appropriate for women particularly as momentum gathered among anti-slavery activists against the practice of flogging women.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.117.

<sup>77</sup> Indeed the governor of St Lucia was at a loss for a substitute to the cart-whip. See *Necessity*, p.18 and *Picture*, p.115.

The whip as a symbol of Atlantic slavery is found throughout the literature of African peoples in the aftermath of Atlantic slavery.<sup>78</sup> While the phallic symbolism of the whip cannot be disregarded, what specific significance is indicated by the use of the whip on black women? The (slave)driver's evidence in respect of the gruesome case of Rose confirms 'twelve or thirteen stripes with the whip doubled' since the manager's white male power was at issue, and, determined to prove this ultimate power over the women's bodies, he has them whipped regardless of the physical or emotional cost to them, or the cost to the owner. Excessive flogging of the slave women masked an unspoken dimension in the relationship between white male slave masters, their agents and the enslaved African women. Mastery signified through the whip was also sexual mastery in a period defined by the understanding that 'we breed both Negroes, Horses and Cattle'.<sup>79</sup> Sexual mastery leaves an additional mark upon the woman's body in pregnancy and maternal labour.

That little is known about the sexual abuse of black women in Atlantic slavery may be appreciated within the context of the social framework of the period. One of the twelve reforms mentioned above addresses the need to 'admit the testimony of slaves in courts'. This indicates the enormity of the difficulty, for the socio-legal fabric of the region was, in the nineteenth century, at the beginnings of assuming personhood for African-heritage peoples. In addition, the 'charade element' of the behaviour of the white slave-holding population generally ensured that action in response to reforms moved, at best, slowly. As a result, some three years after the reform date, 1823, only three geographical areas had begun to enact the admission of a slave's evidence in court. In this context, Sister Goose might have had an inordinate wait for her trial. Nonetheless, the following account is taken from *The Public Advertiser*, Kingston, 2 April, 1825. The narrative relates to 'a poor abandoned black girl who had, for the worst purposes been invited to the prisoner's house by his own brother, [and who] was

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<sup>78</sup> See, Merle Hodge, 'The Shadow of the Whip', in Orde Coombs ed., p.111.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in Bush, p.121.

so cruelly beat by the prisoner, that 2 medical men declared the girl's life had been in great danger'.<sup>80</sup>

'The worst purposes' alludes to sexual behaviour not sanctioned by a society tolerant of the sexual abuse of black women among its highly mobile population comprising sailors, plantation contract employees as well as the more settled immigrant population. It appears, therefore, that excessive sexual depravity is being referred to in the report, as well as the black girl's cruel beating for the men's sexual pleasure, not satisfied with penetration of the black girl, also included their mark (of the whip) upon her body. While the whip, metonymic of white mastery of the black body assumes a particular sexual significance in relation to the black female, the question arises: how young is a 'poor abandoned black girl' in such a society? It is unlikely that an adolescent is being referred to here, but a figure whose child-like innocence is so evident that the case stands in a court despite the slaveholding 'foxes' for whom notions of justice for slaves is a novelty imposed from the metropolitan capital. Yet, despite this, the court was sufficiently convinced of the girl's innocence to sentence 'the prisoner' to a month imprisonment. Foucault's observation on the sexual conduct within various societies provides a useful starting point in an exploration of the 'absentee' Caribbean plantation. Foucault's comment rings meaningfully in this context: 'It may well be a trait common to all societies that the rules of sexual conduct vary according to age, sex and the condition of individuals, and that obligations and prohibitions are not imposed on everyone in the same manner'.<sup>81</sup>

If there were minimal 'obligations and prohibitions' in relation to the black woman's body in the Caribbean, the case of the unnamed black girl indicate that these were, by and large, non-operative prior to early nineteenth-century reforms. Even 'prohibitions' against the wilful killing or mutilation of slaves proved difficult to enforce. Historian, Elsa Goveia suggests in relation to slave women, that mastery, including

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<sup>80</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, Kingston, April 2, 1825, cited in *Picture*, p.83.

<sup>81</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*. Volume 2, trans. Robert Hurley, London, 1988, pp.59-60.

sexual mastery was all.<sup>82</sup> Similar to the case of classical ethics analysed by Foucault, standards of sexual morality in the English-speaking Caribbean were tailored to one's way of life.<sup>83</sup> In relation to black women as in all else, this was determined by the master's will. In turn, mastery was exemplified by domination, while 'obligations' held by slave masters took as their reference his race, caste and immediate family. Yet, 'family' was regularly betrayed in the exercise of sexual domination between slave master and the enslaved African woman.

Afro-Cuban poet, Nancy Morejón in the poem, 'Amo a mi amo'/'I love My Master' explores the stereotypical slave master/slave woman relationship, in which there is an occasional material generosity indicating possible mutuality within a relationship.<sup>84</sup> As Conrad James's analysis of the text stresses, the seeming docility in the language of the slave woman serves rather to underscore 'the violence of slavery as an institution as well as toward highlighting the modes of resistance employed by the African woman against her enslavement'.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, a poem which begins and is entitled 'I love my master' ends with images of the slave woman's 'belly slashed by his immemorial whip' and her empowering fantasy of seeing 'myself knife in hand/ slaughtering him as I would a beast'.<sup>86</sup> In the final lines of the poem, the woman invokes 'the bells' of the sugar cane mill, which tolls the demands upon her body for labour juxtaposed against the sexual demands upon that body. It also marks ordered time, experienced as enslaved time.

Barbara Bush's historical research highlights the taking of slave women as concubines by their masters on the plantation and in proximity to the master's nuclear family.<sup>87</sup> An additional tension resulted, therefore, in the relationship between African-

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<sup>82</sup> Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century*, New Haven, p.352.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, 1988, p.60.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>85</sup> Morejón, pp.146-5.

<sup>86</sup> Conrad James, 'Patterns of Resistance in Afro-Cuban Women's Writing: Nancy Morejón's 'Amo a mi Amo'', in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, p.162.

<sup>87</sup> Morejón, p.149.

<sup>88</sup> Bush, pp.111-2.

Caribbean women and their slave mistresses. For a lengthy period during and after slavery, the prevalence of children fathered by white masters and enslaved black women gave the Caribbean its distinctive demographic character a theme variously treated by Long and Bush.<sup>88</sup> The testimony of the slave woman, Susanna, concerning the punishment of her daughter, Eliza, 'in the employ of His Excellency the Governor', raises a different problem, that of the slave mother aware of her daughter being abused:

Mr. Walker ordered her daughter, as well as other young women under his charge, to sleep every night in his house .... Monday night last she did not come for which reason Mr. Walker arrested her ... kept her the whole night in confinement and sent her this morning, with her hands tied, to the colony hospital, to put her in the stocks: That as a mother, the behaviour of Mr Walker towards her daughter affects her very much.... That Mr. Walker is in the habit of locking up several young women.<sup>89</sup>

Though Susanna, an enslaved woman, dares not be too explicit about Mr. Walker's 'habits', she claims a mother's right to state their effect upon her. It is useful to bring to bear upon her speech act, Glissant's insight into creole narrative as an 'act of survival' 'striving to express something it is forbidden to refer to'.<sup>90</sup> In this light, I suggest that Susanna, like so many of the mothers, are mindful of the silence recently broken by reform and of the severe punishment which might yet be incurred, either for themselves or for members of their family, if self censorship is flouted.

### The Depersonalised self

The depersonalised status imposed upon her and related to the colonisation of her body was of particular importance to the African-Caribbean woman who, least likely to be perceived as skilled labour, was also identified, like 'Ane Blak-Moir', as 'bed-bait'.<sup>91</sup> Further, by the nineteenth century, depersonalisation, an adjunct of mercantilism,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp.110-7.

<sup>89</sup> *Proceedings*, p.43.

<sup>90</sup> Glissant, pp.68-9.

<sup>91</sup> See, June Jordan, 'The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America Or Something Like a Sonnet For Phillis Wheatley', Joanne Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin (eds.), London, 1990, p.22. Jordan expands upon Prince's articulation of the de-personalising gaze and the double reading of its meaning, particularly 'to be bed bait; to be legally spread legs for rape by the master's son/ the master's overseer/ the master's visiting nephew' and 'to be 3/5ths of a human being at best'.

was informed by racism, which, defined by poet Audre Lorde, is 'the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance, manifest and implied'.<sup>92</sup> Being African, with implications of savagery and chattel status, the slave woman might, with impunity, be subject to the worst excesses of that society. While depersonalisation was not gender but race-specific, and experienced by both black men and women, the extent of the slave woman's domination relates also to the sexist practice to which I have already referred. In addition, slave practice, for financial gain, split families. This, too, impacted heavily upon women for, as a result of the social structures allowed to slaves, the burden of family responsibility fell heavily on the unsupported female at the mercy of sexist practice. Complex kinship patterns developed and flourished dependent upon a system of 'othermothering' adopted by women in their adjustment to the prevailing social conditions.<sup>93</sup> The legalising of the marriage of slaves also constituted hard won reform.<sup>94</sup> So was the need to 'give protection in their enjoyment of connubial rights' since, prior to this, the enslaved was generally not allowed marriage and any consequent right to the setting up of home or family together.<sup>95</sup> Along with the imperial 'gift' of voice, the conditions of reform seemed set to achieve a status for the enslaved which countered prevailing notions of chattel therefore less than person.

On the Caribbean plantation, at the heart of the worst excesses of slavery, access to a published voice was rare for black people.<sup>96</sup> While this lack of voice appeared to be consistent with the depersonalised status of slaves and belief in the lack of intellectual ability of Africans, the tradition of being 'spoken for' became more firmly established

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<sup>92</sup> Lorde, p.124.

<sup>93</sup> 'Othermothering', Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, London and New York, 1990, p.119. Collins defines 'othermothers' as 'women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities'. This not only provided invaluable support but undermined and resisted a system designed to destroy family life.

<sup>94</sup> See *Anti-Slavery*, p.266. Among 22,000 slaves in Berbice, no marriages were reported. This may be understood relative to slave conditions discouraging of marriage. For example, following reforms, marriage in Grenada was allowed where slave owners were required to give their consent and the clergy to determine whether the enslaved understood the marriage vows.

<sup>95</sup> *Anti-Slavery*, p.180, reports that marriage for slaves has been legalised only in the Bahamas and is permitted in Grenada.

<sup>96</sup> The case of Francis Williams illustrates this.

as pro-slavery and anti-slavery rhetoric jostled for pre-eminence. Yet, the plantation, though presenting itself to the enslaved as 'enclosed space', a sealed world 'defined by boundaries whose crossing was strictly forbidden', and despite its success in suppressing the slave's voice, was an entity of 'Relation'.<sup>97</sup> As Glissant stresses, the plantations 'are dependent, by nature, on someplace elsewhere'.<sup>98</sup> Travel and travellers to and from the 'mother country' to the plantations were indicators of this. Thus, Bermuda-born Mary Prince 'suggested', in London, the writing of her story, 'that good people in England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered'.<sup>99</sup> As a result, the *History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831), 'taken down from Mary's own lips', came to be published.<sup>100</sup> The timing of this publication coup for an illiterate West Indian slave woman voice was critical, as indeed had been the case for the slave women who gave the partial testimonies examined above.

Mary Prince's account, like Rosa's, in the terms of Braidotti, may be deemed an 'alternative account', or more appropriately, an (*alter*)native account.<sup>101</sup> Braidotti's concern with elaborating 'alternative accounts', to learn to think differently about the subject, to invent new frameworks' is one I share.<sup>102</sup> Exploring the 'bodily roots of subjectivity', Braidotti has developed an articulation of 'nomadism' which appears applicable to the highly mobile lifestyle of Atlantic slaves.<sup>103</sup> The notion of nomadism in relation to enslaved people arguably detracts from the coercion integral to enslavement. Slaves must follow their masters, as both maroonage and the Atlantic slave codes confirm. Nonetheless, it is the movement, trans-Atlantic or across plantations which I wish to highlight. Further, Braidotti's theorising consciously evokes the myth of the nomadic subject with the distinction between nomadism and deportation clearly delineated. For slave subjects of the Caribbean, it may be argued that an enforced

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<sup>97</sup> Glissant, p.64.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Pringle, ed., *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself, with a Supplement by the editor, to which is appended the Narrative of Asa-Asa, A Captured African*, London and Edinburgh, 1831, p.iii, (hereafter, *History*).

<sup>101</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, New York, 1994, p.1.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.3.

'nomadism' was the case and though Braidotti asserts that a post-modern framing of 'critical consciousness' is necessarily part of her conceptual framework, the notion is relevant to the period of Atlantic slavery. Black women writers such as Morrison and Philip have commented on ways in which slavery catapulted black people into a peculiar post-modern type of existence. This is based upon an analysis of black women's resistance relative to the cultural parameters of Modernity/Enlightenment, as Morrison explains in interview with Paul Gilroy:

modern life begins with slavery.... From a woman's point of view, in terms of confronting the problems of where the world is now, Black women had to deal with 'post modern' problems in the nineteenth century and earlier.<sup>104</sup>

So, though the nineteenth century is not usually thought of as a post-modern moment, Morrison's position is that issues such as that of 'dissolution', the need to 'reconstruct' stability and to assume types of 'madness', for example, constituted survival strategies which made of the slave woman, 'the truly modern person'.<sup>105</sup> Braidotti's 'nomadic subject' similarly 'resists settling into socially coded modes of thought' as does Prince's testimonial discourse which seeks out new forms of resistance.<sup>106</sup> Similarity lies in the 'political fiction' Prince is interested to explore but also in the resisting 'critical consciousness' identifiable in her narrative.

Prince's *History*, examined as narrative, highlights not only her 'insistent assertion of herself as subject'; it also addresses the question of how the text functions to construct the narrator, Prince, and the 'speaking, acting, thinking' subjects she presents.<sup>107</sup> Prince notes, for example, that her 'harsh, selfish' master was not only 'dreaded' by the slaves but also by his wife who 'was herself much afraid of him', so that slaves and wife together comprise the 'we' in dread of his return 'from sea'.<sup>108</sup> It is within this context that Prince establishes, albeit fleetingly, a home and family life which is subsequently

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<sup>104</sup> Toni Morrison cited in Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts*, London, 1993, p.178.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Braidotti, p.5.

<sup>107</sup> Ferguson, 1992, p.282.

<sup>108</sup> Pringle, p.1.

broken through her sale and that of her sisters. Therein lies, in direct contrast to 'Anglo-Africanist givens', Prince's personalisation project.<sup>109</sup> Her mother, for example, is constructed as a reflective person. Preparing the girls for the auction block, she comments, 'see, I am shrouding my poor children. What a task for a mother!'<sup>110</sup> In addition, she addresses 'Miss Betsy' with the statement, 'I am going to carry my little chickens to market'.<sup>111</sup> She also 'called the rest of the slaves to bid us goodbye' and negotiates with Mary's father after hiding the young runaway.

Dominant images of the Caribbean slave family such as that of Schaw's examined earlier are countered in Prince's *History*. Her slave auction scene, presents the mother and children as follows:

Our mother, weeping as she went, called me away with the children Hannah and Dinah, and we took the road that led to Hamble Town, which we reached about four o'clock in the afternoon. We followed my mother to the market-place, where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall and our arms folded across our breasts. I, as the eldest stood first, Hannah next to me, then Dinah; and our mother stood beside, crying over us. My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breasts, but I could not keep it still, and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body. But who cared for that? Did one of the many by-standers who were looking at us so carelessly, think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones? No, no! <sup>112</sup>

The 'heart of the negro woman', her anguish, Prince suggests is not discerned by the white gaze of the onlookers. Rather, depersonalised bodies of the slave woman and the orderly row of slave girls are perceived.<sup>113</sup> Meanings of slave motherhood, on the other hand, lie in preparation of her children, if allowed, for familial separation, through sale, a first stage of which is physical handling by white men. Would the careful folding of arms have been equally appropriate had the children for sale been boys? The auction, by Prince's testimony, was attended by white men at whose hands she and her younger sisters were required to submit 'in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb'.<sup>114</sup> Prince's mother's advice to her daughters on parting, to 'keep a good heart'

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<sup>109</sup> Ferguson, 1992, p.304.

<sup>110</sup> Pringle, p.3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Pringle, p.4.

<sup>113</sup> Jordan, p.22.

<sup>114</sup> Pringle, p.4.

and do their duty to their masters betrays the internalisation of oppressive practices of slavery which produced 'good', that is, compliant slave women who in turn prepare their offspring to be equally compliant. Yet, such maternal behaviour may equally be read as an important survival strategy.

Disregarding her plantation status, the mother, in Prince's construction of gender, figures as one who cares so much about her children that she is prone to being 'gone from her senses' with worry.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, Prince, speaking out to her slave master, observes, 'but mothers could only weep and mourn over their children; they could not save them from cruel masters'.<sup>116</sup> The girl, Prince, finding more warmth in the stones and timber of her new master's home than in the masterly gaze she encounters, turns to 'othermothers' such as Hetty who earns the kinship title, 'Aunt'.<sup>117</sup> But Hetty, 'tasked to her utmost',<sup>118</sup> was liable also 'to be stripped, to have her flesh laid open by the whip' and finally, her body swollen, to die on a kitchen mat.<sup>119</sup> Substitute kinship, a feature of resistance adopted in slavery, simultaneously compensated for some of the destructive impact of slavery on the black family though invariably one relied upon the 'Self'. While Prince constructs the self as vulnerable to abuse, brutal excesses and destined, at best, for 'work-work-work', she indicates the self as one who observes, questions and understands.<sup>120</sup> She hears the 'buckra's' logic and comments, for example, 'as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts'.<sup>121</sup> She also notes events mentally and assumes the courage to speak out. The Self is one who holds a different world view marked by race: 'Oh the Buckra people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection. But my heart tells me it is far otherwise'.<sup>122</sup> That Prince presents herself as a thinking subject is evident, but I wish to make the larger claim that the narrator's personal project can be traced within the text, and that there is more 'plot' to this narrative than might at first appear.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>117</sup> Hill Collins, p.119.

<sup>118</sup> Pringle, p.7.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> See also, Hilary Beckles, *Afro-Caribbean Women and Resistance to Slavery in Barbados*, London 1988.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.9.

During Prince's period on Turks Island, 'going from one butcher to another',<sup>123</sup> she discovers the power in her own words, a point which approximates, to her, 'at last', defending herself, 'for I thought it was high time to do so'.<sup>124</sup> Thereafter, having 'felt a great wish to go there', she negotiates herself into the service of Mr Woods. Emphatic on this point, she states: 'It was my own fault that I came under him, I was anxious to go (to Antigua)'.<sup>125</sup> Having achieved her goal, in Antigua Prince stands up to Mrs. Woods, stating: 'I knew that she would not give me leave to go. But I felt I must go'.<sup>126</sup> In the meantime, Prince marries without her master's permission who, as might have been expected, 'in a great rage' whips her, upon which she pronounces: 'I thought it very hard to be whipped for getting a husband'.<sup>127</sup> But Prince had married a free man. If getting herself moved to Antigua was a crucial first step, marriage to a free man was an important second. Having married, she wanted to buy her freedom but the Woods refused. When the opportunity arose to travel to England, Prince, in true trickster tradition, explains: 'My husband was willing for me to come away, for he had heard that my master would free me - and I also hoped this might prove true'.<sup>128</sup>

I contend that Mary Prince's 'agency' and the 'plot' of her narrative hinges on this hope. Why? Though the plantation system constructed itself as 'enclosed space', slaves like Prince, experienced it differently, as 'circular' nomadic space.<sup>129</sup> So had Grace James, also from Antigua, whose case was ordered to be printed in 1826. James, had similarly challenged the system of slavery through travel in 1822-23, to England. Following her return to the plantation with her mistress, James's 'petition' stated:

that when her mistress was about to return to this island, she was induced to accompany her as a servant, considering that by her residence in England, she had acquired a right to freedom which had been vested in her, and relying upon the positive promise of her mistress that she should ever be considered as free.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Glissant, p.12.

<sup>130</sup> See, Editor's 'Supplement', p.12. See also, 'A Copy of any information which may have been received by His Majesty's Government, respecting the case of a person residing in the island of Antigua, named Grace James, claiming to be free', House of Commons, 2 May 1826.

In the circumstances, I suggest that Prince, in England in 1828, was cognisant of precedents such as that of Grace James.<sup>131</sup> It is important to be aware, for example, of the size of the island. Prince's movement and her marriage to a free man 'a carpenter and cooper' by trade whose employment links him to the docks area and customs house where James presented herself to complain and was 'ordered to be seized'. Further, Prince's narrative, reveals an almost single-minded preoccupation with 'freedom'. When, after a quarrel about washing, she asks again to purchase her freedom, it becomes clear that the question of 'freedom' is crucial for Prince herself, her master and mistress. For example, Prince states: 'she said she supposed I thought myself a free woman, but I was not'.<sup>132</sup> Prince's subsequent visit to the Anti-Slavery Society indicates a clarity of purpose. It is 'to inquire if they could do anything to get me my freedom'.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, Pringle's 'Supplement' indicates not only the strategies to which the Woods resorted to block Prince's insistent demands for freedom, but also that the couple, like Prince, believed that she had a claim to freedom. Indeed, Prince took to the Anti-Slavery Society her master's letter stating that she travelled from Antigua 'at her own request and entreaty' and 'that she is consequently now free'.<sup>134</sup>

As a slave, Prince's life precludes literacy, and though she declares herself 'not a stranger to book learning',<sup>135</sup> her oral testimony had to be transcribed. By this process and only through a scribe and gatekeeper was publication possible. This single permissive function allowing Prince a public voice was a facility not available to her in the Caribbean. Yet, Prince's testimony went into three editions within its first year of publication. Twentieth-century African-Caribbean writer Merle Collins comments:

In the beginning was the word, and the word was powerful but the really powerful word voiced every day when women in particular argued on the estates was not heard

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<sup>131</sup> Pringle, p.24.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.2.

on the streets of England. The important Caribbean word to England and the anti-slavery agitators of the time was the word first captured on paper by white women speaking for the legally voiceless.<sup>136</sup>

Collins underscores Prince's physical location in England immediately prior to publication. Equally significant to the process of publication was the anti-slavery context, the motive for publication and its possible distortions and omissions. Collins refers also to Prince's 'representative' status as a writer since no other West Indian slave narrative has been known to be published. A question posed by Collins, concerns whose voice is telling Prince's story and is significant to the brief literary history of Anglophone African-Caribbean women writers.<sup>137</sup> Despite this, Prince's narrative marks an important breaking of silence.

Ferguson's *Colonialism and Gender Relations* (1993), has brought to light two African-Caribbean women born also in Antigua and writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>138</sup> The Hart Sisters, Elizabeth Hart Thwaites and Anne Hart Gilbert undertook roles as educators and Christian leaders prominent among local black Methodists. Their writing includes histories of Methodism as well as poetry and hymns offering a different perspective on slave existence central to Prince's narrative. Ferguson cites, for example, from Hart Thwaites's correspondence, 'We have ten girls learning to write'.<sup>139</sup> On the subject of women slaves and their problematic relationships in concubinage with white men, Hart Thwaites states: 'It is mostly the case that when Female Slaves are raised to wealth, and consequently (may I not say respectability) it is by entering into that way of Life, that cause women in another sphere to fall into disgrace and contempt, I mean concubinage'.<sup>140</sup> The predominantly moral and religious preoccupations of the Hart sisters raise different questions concerning access to publication. Their writing, arising from missionary work among African-Caribbean people is legitimised by its Christian perspective. In addition, their work allowed them

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<sup>136</sup> Collins, in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, p.5.

<sup>137</sup> Pringle, p.1, insists that there was great attention to 'Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology'.

<sup>138</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid: East Caribbean Connections*, New York, 1993.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

patrons within the church and the anti-slavery movement. As Ferguson points out, under the guise of missionary work, the two sisters undertook innovatory practice in the setting up of schools exceeding the boundaries that white missionaries were prepared to cross. In this pre-Emancipation period, such work by black women would not have been possible without the support of white allies and/or patrons. Elizabeth and Anne Hart's marriages to white missionaries Charles Thwaites and John Gilbert doubtless played an important part in the patronage allowing them a public voice. That their marriages met with opposition is commented upon by Charles Thwaites who wrote: 'It is proper to observe, that if I had determined upon seducing and degrading the object of my regard and esteem, I should have been considered by the ungodly aristocracy of the country as having acted quite properly, and incurred reproach from them, as she was a woman of colour'.<sup>141</sup> Despite this, the sisters were better placed for religious patronage in support of their writing.

The similarities with Phillis Wheatley and the entering into 'family' circumstances cannot be ignored. Perhaps, even more explicitly, the civilising project was central to the goals of the Hart sisters, as Anne Hart Gilbert wrote:

The great civilisation of the Slaves, their gradual emergence, from the depths of ignorance and barbarism, has imperceptibly had an over-awing effect upon the System of tyranny & cruel oppression that was formerly exercised over them with little or no restraint when they differed in so few respects from the Beasts that perish; And as a natural consequence, those that are set over them feel more cautious in dealing with rational creatures than they did with beings imbruted in ev'ry way both body & mind.<sup>142</sup>

Anne and Elizabeth Hart, 'rational creatures' found public voicing within audiences concerned with Christian religious matters and the anti-slavery movement. In doing so, they also subscribed to the dominant discourse of 'rescue' from ignorance and barbarism.

Mary Seacole's *Adventures* (1857), offer a radically alternative history little concerned with moral themes.<sup>143</sup> Published twenty-six years after Prince's testimony,

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>143</sup> Critical attention for Seacole's text, an important 'first' autobiographical work, is long overdue.

Seacole's writing is neither religious nor a slave testimony but an extraordinary autobiographical text. Mrs Seacole's self identification as from 'the Creole race' signals her privileged 'mulatto' (legal term) status.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, Seacole flags as significant to her credentials, 'the good Scotch blood coursing in her veins'.<sup>145</sup> *Adventures* opens up the world of a privileged caste relative to the majority slave population and signals intertextual links with adventure and travel stories such as that of Moll Flanders, far removed from the slave narrative form.

Mrs Seacole informs her readers in the opening page that she was born in Jamaica to a free black woman and a Scottish soldier, thus invoking the racial hierarchy historicised by Long and of singular importance to plantation realities. Remarkably for its time, the focus of Seacole's writing is her travels to the Crimea where she administered to the wounded and maintained the 'British Hotel', offering nursing and support services to the military men serving there.<sup>146</sup> Medicinal skills learnt from her mother, as well as her domestic and business skills earned Mrs Seacole enormous respect from the army officers. It is this audience Seacole addresses and indeed, the editors of her 1984 edition warns 'there are times when the author's voice assumes the tone of an English gentleman, that is reflecting the prejudices and mores of the class to whom the book was directed'.<sup>147</sup> Curiously, Seacole presents racialised responses to the reader, as if they are surprising to her. For example, describing a visit to London, she writes: 'Strangely enough some of the most vivid of my recollections are the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion's complexion. I am only a little brown - a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much; but my companion was very dark, and a fair (if I can apply the term to her) subject for their rude wit'.<sup>148</sup> Seacole's authorial voice resists easy classification. Her reflective passages are startling for the way in which they can disorientate the reader. She writes, for example, 'I never

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<sup>144</sup> This usage of 'Creole' assumes racial significance.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.58.

thought too exclusively of money, believing rather that we were born to be happy, and that the surest way to be wretched is to prize it overmuch'.<sup>149</sup> Two decades after the abolition of slavery, who does Seacole include in the generous 'we' of the statement? Such direct addresses throughout the text suggest a certain determined independence of spirit or complex subject positions of the writer or both. In any event, Seacole's writing displays a confidence about her reader and justifiably so, for her allies and patrons were well placed in the military world. Patronage, for her, too, was significant to publication as indeed was location. For the enslaved, the breaking of silence through publication occurred only at a historical moment of interest to a white public and through the safety of the slave's voice speaking through white subjects. In consequence, the published text was required first to be verified and seen to be true to the civilising paradigm. While for free black people in the Caribbean, an alternative route was occasionally the Christian, religious writing supported by patronage. Seacole's text breaks this mould in so far as it also offers a voice of the exotic whose patronage, not primarily moral or religious, is differently derived.

The texts examined in this chapter are symptomatic of the constraints within which African-Caribbean women came to be published. I have sought to show that while the silence induced by plantation life suggested an absence of narratives, the enslaved women's silence was also primarily that of voices repressed by a socio-legal system with an obsessive mercantile interest in the black woman's body. That body, allowing possibilities for colonisation additional to those explored in Chapter One, became, too, the site of multiple oppression and (*dis*)embodiment until the 'gift of speech' reforms enabling a partial voicing as complainant. Notwithstanding these constraints, patronage allowed additional opportunity for voicing, particularly in relation to content that was either religious or anti-slavery and required an approved voice through whom the black woman spoke.

Inherent in the manner of initial publication silence-breaking were conditions which might come to be associated with cultural production of African-Caribbean women. Firstly, there was the expectation that the black woman subject would 'speak through' or be spoken for. Secondly, the role of patronage constituted a significant hurdle as did location and the opportunities it offered for publication. Thirdly, the issue of 'permission' needed to be negotiated. In the next chapter, I explore further such constraints on silence-breaking publication including that of fiction writers.

## Chapter Three

# The Emergence of African-Caribbean Women Novelists

Help me now to turn my anguish  
Into treasures that remain<sup>1</sup>



Joan Anim-Addo, *Caribbean women writers: Opal Palmer Adisa, Merle Hodge and Merle Collins* (Florida), photograph, 1996, London.

The plantation system, I have argued thus far, and its widespread support structure, so constrained African-Caribbean women's lives that the claiming of literary authority proved highly problematic. The question of how women broke with this pattern may be explored initially in terms of opportunities for development of the literary imagination, including those presented through a specific 'circular nomadism' of the 'post-Windrush' decades of the twentieth century. My aim here is to advance the notion

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<sup>1</sup> Una Marson, 'Pilgrimage', *The Moth and The Star*, Kingston, 1937, p.67.

of 'Relation' with Britain and the breaking of silence. A key to this 'crack of silence' lies in the years between Seacole's text and Sylvia Wynter's sole novel, *The Hills of Hebron* published in 1962. These years constitute a significant period of publication silence during which anglophone African-Caribbean women increasingly gained access to educational skills and experiences necessary to subsequent authorial assertion.<sup>2</sup> In addition, as Rhoda Reddock pinpoints, the Caribbean nationalist movements of the early decades of the twentieth century facilitated an important voicing by black women.<sup>3</sup> Such foundations would give rise to later publication 'treasures' challenging stereotypical meanings of black womanhood constructed by Atlantic slavery. To this end, and in order to claim literary authority, African-Caribbean women had to become engaged with a re-presentation of 'Self' as mind as well as body.

Glissant argues: 'We could mark out three moments: literary production - first as an act of survival, then as a dead end or a delusion, finally as an effort or passion of memory'.<sup>4</sup> As categories, this differentiation is useful and appropriate to my discussion of literature of the Caribbean. In appropriating these, I would like, however, to propose Glissant's 'moments' as modes of 'literary production' deriving from plantation culture. Survival mode would include the orality which Glissant addresses but also the testimonies as I have explored them, while delusion mode refers to the 'elitist' fantasies expounded upon by Glissant.<sup>5</sup> The third, memory mode, is essentially post-plantation. In effect, the latter marks the beginnings of African-heritage writing in the region.

While the literature of the region is characterised by discontinuity as Glissant envisages it and as I indicate in Chapter One, a developmental outline is nonetheless

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<sup>2</sup> For changing access to literacy skills, see, for example, Marlene Hamilton, 'The Availability and Suitability of Educational Opportunities for Jamaican Female Students: An Historical Overview', in *Gender: A Caribbean Multi-Disciplinary Perspective*, eds., Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Barbara Bailey, and Christine Barrow, Kingston and Oxford, 1997, pp.133-43.

<sup>3</sup> Rhoda Reddock, 'Feminism and Feminist Thought: An Historical Overview', in *Gender in Caribbean Development*, Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd, eds., UWI, Mona, 1988, pp.66-67.

<sup>4</sup> Glissant, 1997, p.68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70.

valuable. In relation to women's writing, beginnings may be located in Glissant's 'delusion' mode. He writes:

The colonists and the Planters, as well as the travellers who visited them, were possessed of the real need to justify the system. To fantasize legitimacy. And, of course, this is why, unlike what happened in the oral texts, the description of reality would turn out to be indispensable to them - and irrefutable in their terms.<sup>6</sup>

By juxtaposing one such traveller's tale against a distinctive African-Caribbean narrative featuring the 'tales, proverbs, sayings, songs' which Glissant describes, I intend to begin a 'piecing together'<sup>7</sup> of the silent years between Seacole and Wynter. The intervening post-Emancipation years, written by Caribbean women, provide vital means whereby the nurturing of creativity leading to publication of fiction may be explored. They indicate, I suggest, indigenous forms and concerns significant to the creative imagination and women's fiction. Jean Rhys's *Sargasso* (1966)<sup>8</sup> and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Beyond* (1982)<sup>9</sup>, two complementary texts in terms of content and narrative stance, figure the post-emancipation years while foregrounding the voicedness of African-Caribbean women.

### **The Years Between**

The paucity of documented literary history concerning African-Caribbean women writers is stunning to say the least, but texts by Rhys and Schwarz-Bart are helpful for their portrayal of the post-emancipation years and their focus upon the African-heritage female. As late as 1931, three decades before Wynter's novel, the writing which headed the fiction section of the *Handbook of Jamaica*<sup>10</sup> was Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The term is borrowed from Nadine Gordimer, *Writing and Being*, Massachusetts and London, 1995, p.22. Gordimer offers insight into a latter day silencing within the apartheid context of South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> See Kathleen J. Renk, *Caribbean Shadows and Victorian Ghosts*, Charlottesville, 1999, p.116. Renk suggests that *Sargasso* comments on the 'colony' as 'corrupted garden' or 'place of madness'.

<sup>9</sup> See Pyne-Timothy, ed., pp.73-4 for an African world view analysis of *Beyond*.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Cundall, *Handbook of Jamaica*, 1931, Kingston and London, 1931.

(1833).<sup>11</sup> Scott's 'traveller's tale', a loosely picaresque text, set mainly in the Caribbean, is no exception to the Africanist discourse representative of Glissant's 'delusion' mode explored in Chapter One, in its cursory treatment of the black female character. A section entitled 'Scenes in Jamaica,' affords Scott ample scope for highlighting black 'characters'. More accurately, Scott sketches caricatures such as the coffin bearers, who, carrying a coffin on their heads, earn the authorial commentary, 'A negro carries everything on his head, from a bale of goods to a wine glass or tea cup'.<sup>12</sup> In like vein, Scott represents a black servant as 'chin pointing', thereby illustrating, 'a negro always points with his chin'.<sup>13</sup> Lucy K. Hayden writing of Scott's narrative, first published during the year of the Emancipation Act, 1833, takes issue with his representation of black characters.<sup>14</sup> Hayden's critique focuses upon stereotyping. She states: 'Books like *Tom Cringle's Log* actively and persistently perpetuated the prejudice that blacks in the Caribbean were inferior'.<sup>15</sup> Hayden stresses that Scott is preoccupied with the Negro 'as species'. To take Hayden's point further, I would suggest that this racist view implies also a *lack* of mind upon which inferiority is based.<sup>16</sup>

Scott, as author, assumes, firstly, a superior knowledge of the 'negro', to which the 'negro' is himself not privy. Further, by a process conflating assumed cultural or biological traits, including that of lack of mind, Scott appears to be offering to readers the whole 'action' or behaviour of the 'species'. The outer appearance which reinforces stereotype becomes, as a result, significant, hence the presence of Scott's chin-pointing character, Jupiter. Since part of the desired effect sought by the text is the enhancement of its comic dimension, black gesticulatory behaviour serves two key functions, firstly, as caricature and secondly, as pro-slavery propaganda. For example, the text makes a

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh and London, 1833. References are to the second edition, 1834.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>14</sup> Lucy K. Hayden, 'The Caribbean Presence in *Tom Cringle's Log*: A Commentary on Britain's Involvement in Slavery and the Slave Trade', *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 6, 3 (Autumn 1988), 311.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

quasi-pastoral shift from the chin pointing 'baboon' antics of Jupiter, the black servant, in an exchange with the protagonist as follows:

'Oh, me tink you call for Jupiter.' I looked in the baboon's face - 'Why if I did; what then?'<sup>18</sup>

to,

I had been exceedingly struck with the beauty of the negro villages on the old settled estates.<sup>19</sup>

and

While I was pursuing my ramble, a large conch-shell was blown at the overseer's house, and the different gangs turned into dinner; they came along dancing and shouting and playing tricks on each other in the little paths, in all the happy anticipation of a good dinner.... 'And these are slaves,' I thought, 'and this is West Indian bondage! Oh that some of my well meaning anti-slavery friends were here, to judge from the evidence of their own senses.'<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the familiar Africanist discourse, Scott's text, limited in the attention it pays to black women, also presents an offensive caricature of black womanhood. The sleeping Nancy is likened to a drunken 'snoring' sentry,<sup>20</sup> and viewed from a distance, even her husband mistakes her for 'De debil'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, he only recognises her at close quarters: 'No, my Nancy it is, sticking in the mud up to her waist'.<sup>22</sup> This belated recognition allows the 'sable heroine', to be tugged out of the mud and dumped 'for ballast' into the canoe, a device which allows the real hero to escape.

In contrast, Schwarz-Bart's *Beyond*, re(members) the post-Emancipation years. 'The act of re(membering)', writes June D. Bobb, 'addresses the African's violent separation from the original body'.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, cognisant of the gaps in plantation history, specifically in relation to African-Caribbean women, Schwarz-Bart engages in an important 'reconnection to the original body and the creation of an identity out of

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<sup>17</sup> Scott, p.195.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.203.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.263.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.269.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Bobb, p.38.

the ruins of the past'.<sup>24</sup> Such 'literary archaeology' becomes crucial since it addresses an absent body of writing critical to the sense of self. Glissant explains this process in terms of a 'creative maroonage' which begins 'to form the basis for continuity'.<sup>25</sup> Schwarz-Bart's text presents 'continuity' through three generations of black women whose stories are narrated by third generation, Telumee Miracle. Unlike her grandmother, Telumee has not experienced slavery. Telumee's narrating voice is important to my argument firstly because it is a speaking or silence-breaking voice in the sense of telling the woman's story. Secondly, it is long memored, for Telumee looks back upon ancestral lives from the vantage point of her 'role as an old woman'.<sup>27</sup> Thirdly, the text suggests the active mind of the African-Caribbean woman, one which synthesises a rich oral culture as the narrator demonstrates. Schwarz-Bart's narrative illustrates an insistent metaphorically articulated urging, rooted in the culture, through which mothers and 'othermothers' exhort and support their daughters to overcome and to achieve. Glissant writes of this type of 'survival' text:

Almost never does one find in them any concrete relating of daily facts and deeds; what one does find, on the other hand, is a symbolic evocation of situations. As if these texts were striving for disguise beneath the symbol, working to say without saying.<sup>27</sup>

Schwarz-Bart's Telumee is exhorted, for example, to be 'like the drum with two sides' and keep one side out of reach of those who would do harm.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, she is advised, 'Every day you must get up and say to your heart: 'I've suffered enough, and now I have to live, for the light of the sun must not be filtered away and lost without an eye to enjoy it'.<sup>29</sup> Such 'every day ideas', representative of the wisdom of grandmothers in the text, are less about what appears to be 'poetic' writing, but have, rather, as a basis, the creolisation of which Glissant writes and its characteristic bursting forth of 'snatches

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Glissant, p.71.

<sup>26</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.168.

<sup>27</sup> Glissant, p.68.

<sup>28</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.39.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.119.

and fragments'.<sup>30</sup> 'The storyteller', Glissant emphasises, in such a context, 'is a handyman, the *djobbeur* of the collective soul'.<sup>31</sup> Schwarz-Bart's examples support my argument that a concern with the 'folk' and the region's oral culture itself becomes pivotal to first-wave literary production and the African-heritage woman's theorising embedded therein.<sup>32</sup> Theorising of this nature is readily overlooked, particularly when texts are examined through cultural emphases not sensitised to collective or folkloric values. An awareness of such cultural blindspots within dominant critical scrutiny and a concern with means of countering their effects have been an important focus of regional criticism and are pivotal to the argument of this thesis.<sup>33</sup>

The mind of the black woman, represented through 'everyday' utterance, above, cannot be ignored. Indeed, Schwarz-Bart, an African-heritage novelist from Guadeloupe, reveals in her exploration of women characters in *Beyond* much that is useful to this discussion. For example, Telumee states: 'I have *moved my cabin* to the east and to the west; east winds and north winds have buffeted and soaked me; but I am still a woman standing on my own two legs, and I *know* a Negro is not a *statue* of salt to be dissolved by the rain'.<sup>34</sup> The temporal setting of the novel, signified in Telumee's notion of the mobile cabin, a transitory home, is also the legacy of enslavement representative of the experience of black families. The *moving* cabin is thus a metaphor for the post-Emancipation era and post-slavery survival. Notably, while acknowledging difficult living conditions in the cross-winds of change, Telumee claims self knowledge and appreciation of herself not as an inanimate object (statue); nor as one without history, or unable to leave behind a trace of her passage on earth; and neither as the creation of slave owners. Rather, she contests all of these 'as a woman'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Glissant, p.69.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, p.15.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Jeanette B. Allis, 'A Case for Regional Criticism of West Indian Literature', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28 (March-June 1982), 1-11.

<sup>34</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.172.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Schwarz-Bart's 'moving cabin' is representative also of a reality substantiated in Seacole's *Adventures*.<sup>36</sup> Seacole gives, for example, a partial account of the cholera epidemic which 'swept over the island of Jamaica with terrible force' and drastically affected the region in the 1850s.<sup>37</sup> In such an account, there is a view of the material circumstances of those 'years between' in which African-heritage people adopted a type of nomadism in the wake of Emancipation. This involved movement away from plantations to alternative means of employment including that available across the Caribbean region and beyond. The 'moving cabin' crosses not just Schwarz-Bart's Guadeloupe but the region. Such 'terrible disease' formed part of the backdrop to the 'years between'.<sup>38</sup>

Analysing Schwarz-Bart's text, Caribbean critic, Beverley Ormerod foregrounds the unmistakable themes of struggle and survival central to *Beyond*.<sup>39</sup> The text, set in French colonial Guadeloupe, foregrounds the conditions common to the region despite a difference in Emancipation dates.<sup>40</sup> Mary Seacole, in comparison, writes of being 'related' and 'proud of the relationship' to 'bodies America still owns', that is, who were still enslaved.<sup>41</sup> Post-Emancipation existence as drawn by Schwarz-Bart, indicates the stark realities of dislocation, disinheritance and the daily battle to secure basic necessities of food and shelter. The powerful survival ethic which may be read in first-wave fiction developed out of this condition. Historical illustration of events which fuelled this imperative distinguishes the period as one of ferment and change.<sup>42</sup> The resulting

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, p.62. Seeking to follow her brother to the Isthmus of Panama, Seacole also followed a trail of the cholera epidemic of which she had already sufficient experience in Jamaica to be considered a consultant in the crisis.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>39</sup> Beverley Ormerod, *An Introduction To The French Caribbean Novel*, London, 1985.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, WEF Ward, *The Royal Navy and the Slaves*. New York, 1969, p.229. Emancipation dates differ according to the statutes of individual European colonial powers. In the French colony of Guadeloupe, slavery was abolished in 1848 whereas for Cuban slaves, abolition was two decades later in 1869.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, p.67.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Anthony, *Profile Trinidad: A Historical survey from the Discovery to 1900*, London and Basingstoke, 1975. Characteristically, for example, planters adopted a policy of recruiting essential labour as far afield as India rather than paying those whose labour had been free while enslaved. This added to the crippling insecurity among the African-heritage population and further tested the group's ability to survive. Indentureship of Indians from the Indian sub-continent to the West Indies, beginning in 1845, was established and developed as a deliberate strategy to staunch demands of the ex-slave population for post-emancipation conditions qualitatively better than that of slavery.

material poverty would ensure the 'moving cabin' as figuration continuously into the twentieth century. Telumee alludes to this struggle in the metaphorical buffeting and soaking of the 'east and north winds' characteristic of local circumstances. Additional insecurity for black folk also followed when, planters confronted with the economic instability of post-slavery labour conditions, opted to return to Europe, leaving the African-heritage plantation workers, hitherto coerced into maximum dependence, with little alternative but to desert the estate or plantations they knew. Yet, if Rhys's *Sargasso* 'narrates the post-emancipationist subversion by Jamaican and Dominican communities of gender and colonial relations', as Moira Ferguson argues, the text nonetheless offers an indigenised planter perspective that is counterpart to this discussion.<sup>43</sup>

Jean Rhys, (1890-1979) in *Sargasso*, like Schwarz-Bart, in *Beyond re(members)* through her fiction, the post-Emancipation period which readers encounter in Seacole's text. In both novels, the living conditions of African-heritage women are exposed as not conducive to literary production. Rhys's most developed black woman character, Christophine, for example, who entered the protagonist's family as a wedding gift (a slave) to Antoinette's mother, is, even in the wake of slave Emancipation, preoccupied with maternal, emotional and material service to her mistress. Rhys's novel, like Schwarz-Bart's, is peopled with characters attempting to come to terms with changes in the wake of Emancipation. Yet, in Rhys's text, the survival imperative for her black characters is not central. A white Creole,<sup>44</sup> Rhys makes accessible a point of view informed by plantocracy ideology which enforced the silence of interest to this thesis.

The post-1850s period represented in *Sargasso* is, for the white population, partly one in which the planters await 'compensation' for the loss of their slaves.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> There are many insightful studies of Rhys's work. Jean D'Costa, 'Jean Rhys', in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, Connecticut, 1986, pp.390-404 is an important foundational contribution. See also, for example, Kathleen Renk, 1999, for an important reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* alongside other Caribbean writers including Erna Brodber. My emphasis in this context is, however, specifically on the planter perspective articulated in the text and is not intended to detract from existing analyses or indeed from the complexity of Rhys's text.

<sup>44</sup> The term 'Creole' enjoys multiple usage within the literature. It is used capitalised in Chapter Four to refer to the contact languages which developed in the region.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Mary Butler, "'Fair and Equitable Consideration": the Distribution of Slave Compensation in Jamaica and Barbados', *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 22, 1 and 2 (1988) 138-52.

Uncertainty about this prompts, for example, the suicide of Rhys's Mr Luttrell in the opening page of the text. The same period would challenge African-heritage people's knowledge of the self. In contrast to Rhys's Mr Luttrell, the African population, for its survival, must know itself, as Telumee does, to be no 'statue of salt', that is, able to survive despite conditions calculated to negate survival. Telumee's knowledge, rooted in experience of having survived slavery, challenges and resists the oppositional definition, 'statute of salt' which by virtue of its whiteness, manufactured quality and structural prominence calls into question dominant perceptions of the 'Negro'.

'Now we are marooned ... what will become of us?' is the worry of Antoinette Cosway, the mother of Rhys's protagonist in *Sargasso*.<sup>46</sup> The source of fears of maroonage articulated by the white community is substantiated throughout the long history of Caribbean-wide African rebellion from the beginnings of slavery.<sup>47</sup> The response to such harsh and testing conditions are indicated in historically-documented uprisings, even after Emancipation, such as the notorious Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 which was brutally quelled. During the process, which I have written of as 'our will to construct our own crosses',<sup>48</sup> hundreds of the African population were executed.<sup>49</sup> Uprisings like Morant Bay signalled both a dynamic survival impulse and the fear, by planters, of 'maroonage', as indicated in Rhys's text. While on Rhys's Coulibri Estate, the 'bayside' African-heritage girls who provide services such as washing and cleaning for the Great House continue to be coerced into working for no financial reward, there persists the external threat of 'maroonage'. This is despite the domestic situation in which the ex-slaves bring gifts of fruit and vegetable to the plantation from their meagre subsistence.<sup>50</sup> Christophine, the 'blue-black' faithful slave of the family, has neither the financial means to support the household, though she does; nor can she financially

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<sup>46</sup> Rhys, p.16.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Beckles, 1988, p.38.

<sup>48</sup> See my 'Paul Bogle Remembered', London, 1998, pp. 23-4.

<sup>49</sup> Fryer, p.177-8, catalogues the atrocities led by Governor Eyre in a '30-day rampage' as follows: killing 439 black people, flogging at least 600 others' (some flogged before being put to death) 'dashing out children's brains, ripping open the bellies of pregnant women and burning over 1,000 homes of suspected rebels'.

<sup>50</sup> Rhys, p.18.

reward the black work force that wait upon them. As an object or a gift of her white owners, can she really enter the discourse later to become subject?<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Rhys's narrator, Antoinette, suggests that it is the 'terror' engendered by Christophine which brings blacks back to the estate to service their former masters. The notion is problematic in its easy attribution of the behaviour of black servants to 'obeah' and the meanings this holds for white Creoles.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, in the face of complex socio-economic difficulties, one survival strategy was that of remaining in the service of former slave masters thereby securing a familiar means of living. It is this pattern, for example, which Antoinette's mother recognises in her former slaves, Godfrey and Sass, who remain in order to secure the basic food and shelter which the plantation offers.<sup>53</sup> Yet, while the white population fear being marooned, from the beginnings of African-Caribbean existence, a steady stream of the black population felt compelled to impose maroonage upon themselves, as in *Beyond*, in order to function as persons with a modicum of free will.

The opening of *Beyond* resonates with the hopes of the recently-freed slave (who will not be compensated) even as it celebrates, in the old African-Caribbean woman's tale, the triumph of African survival despite the barbarity of Atlantic slavery. With its central focus upon generations of women of the Lougandor family, the life of Minerva Lougandor first emerges. Minerva, a 'fortunate woman freed by the abolition of slavery from a master notorious for cruelty and caprice', responds to emancipation by removing herself far away from the plantation.<sup>54</sup> L'Abandonnée, a space of refuge furthest away from plantation existence becomes the place of safety for Minerva and numbers of other fleeing Africans. It is from this base of ambiguous comfort, since both the emancipatory space and its inhabitants are abandoned, that the Africans begin to forge a new existence. It is from this place of exposure to natural hostilities far

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<sup>51</sup> See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, London, 1972, p.101.

<sup>52</sup> Rhys, p.18.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>54</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.2

removed from the vagaries of plantation life, that the Negro must first show herself, as does each of the Lougandor women, to be 'no statue of salt'.<sup>55</sup>

Telumee's figurative language, drawing substantially upon oral culture, reveals the thinking mind of Schwarz-Bart's black female characters. It is here we see that anguish becomes, indeed, 'treasures that remain'.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the text is illustrative of an oral tradition which functions so as to sustain the community through a consciousness founded upon folk wisdom. Queen-Without-a-Name, Toussine, nurtures Telumee, her granddaughter *spiritually* upon this rich culture.<sup>57</sup> When the women's talk, as they launder their family's clothing at the river, turns to stories of despair and nihilistic accounts of the conditions of their lives, Toussine urges her granddaughter away from the crowd and warns: 'They're only big whales left high and dry by the sea and if the little fish listen to them, why, they'll lose their fins!'<sup>58</sup> This culture which so distinctively engenders its young also has the 'storyteller', so vital to the 'collective soul', as a grandmother or wise old woman.

Toussine's concern that her granddaughter retains her 'fins' is at the same time a concern with spiritual growth, direction and stability for which she prepares her. The old woman's nurturing includes the setting up of a network of women's support, albeit one not explicitly identified as such in the novel. Toussine refers to her perception of her granddaughter and the vision emanating from this, as 'a dream'.<sup>59</sup> It is this 'dream' which she invites the ancestral, wise woman, Ma Cia, to share when she introduces Telumee. At the same time, Toussine creates the opportunity for Telumee to become firmly rooted in her history. This is indicated in the girl's question, 'Ma Cia, dear, what is a slave, what is a master?'<sup>60</sup> and the characteristically philosophical response with

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.172.

<sup>56</sup> Una Marson, 'Pilgrimage', *The Moth and The Star*, Kingston, 1937, p.67.

<sup>57</sup> See, Danielle Taylor-Guthrie, ed., *Toni Morrison*, Jackson, 1994, p.253 . Morrison discusses *Beloved* and the 'inwardness' absent from slave narratives.

<sup>58</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.30.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.37.

which Ma Cia contributes to Telumee's nurturing. If material poverty crushed the bodies of the African peoples, nonetheless, out of the selfsame conditions a rich spirituality urged survival. For this reason, Toussine declares her liking for the girl's 'questions'<sup>61</sup> which positively solicit her teaching. In response, Toussine's graphic use of 'spider's web' imagery and its connected threads equated with strands of knowledge linking the community helps Telumee, the young woman, better to comprehend her life.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Telumee is able to walk 'unself-conscious and assured'.<sup>63</sup>

The 'spider's web' connects, in turn, with the Ananse tradition, folk culture brought from West Africa by the enslaved people. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, discussing in an interview the centrality of the oral tradition to Igbo culture highlights its significance. He stresses 'the seriousness with which language has to be treated, if it is the only vehicle you have for conveying your meaning, for reflecting'.<sup>64</sup> This capacity for *reflection* permeates the use of metaphors foregrounded by Schwarz-Bart's, Telumee. The common two-sided drum from West African culture, widely and colloquially referred to as the 'talking drum', a vital and effective means of communication was periodically suppressed in colonial West Africa and banned in the Caribbean during the period of Atlantic slavery. It is such a drum that Telumee is exhorted to be like, for life's 'bang and thump', the beating that is a condition of African-Caribbean existence, is taken as inevitable by her nurturers. It is the possibility of keeping a space in reserve, 'the underside always intact', which would allow for the necessary spiritual growth reflected upon in Ma Cia's suggestion.<sup>65</sup>

Achebe's discussion focuses at the outset upon the power of story and what it 'does to the mind' of the child being socialised within a culture which privileges the oral tradition. Acknowledging a complex interaction, he suggests the coexistence of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>64</sup> Rob Baker and Ellen Draper, 'If One Thing Stands, Another Will Stand Beside it: An Interview with Chinua Achebe', *Parabola* 17, 3 (1992) 19-27.

<sup>65</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.39.

two worlds which the child comes to inhabit: the world of the story and the real world.<sup>66</sup> The 'oral tradition' is defined by Achebe as 'really a complex of everything - all the language arts from fiction to history to politics'.<sup>67</sup> Exploration of the oral tradition aesthetic within the literature of African-heritage writers confirms the significance of this dynamic within the written literature. For example, in relation to women's literature, Gay Wilentz's *Binding Cultures* (1992) examines texts by Toni Morrison and Ama Ata Aidoo to foreground cultural commonalities related to heritage and central to which is a shared oral tradition.<sup>68</sup> Achebe, however, whose own writing integrates aspects of Igbo oral tradition, makes an interesting distinction between men's storytelling and women's; between the public sphere for storytelling and the private.

I suggest that the gender division which Achebe perceives with regards to Igbo writing is further complicated in the African-Caribbean tradition by the disruption central to African-Caribbean culturisation of the period. I discuss this in a paper focusing upon 'The Intersections of the Oral and Literary Traditions'.<sup>69</sup> In the essay, I examine devices and techniques of oral culture, particularly in African-Caribbean oral tradition utilised in the work of Merle Collins. I would like to develop this further to suggest that family patterns subverted by slave cultural practice in the Caribbean served to drive storytelling into the private domestic space so that it emerges significantly in the wisdom of elder African-Caribbean women, the grandmother figures of many texts. Such a character is Ma Cia who sums up slavery as follows: 'Long ago', she said, 'a nest of ants that bite peopled the earth, and called themselves men. That's all'.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, she states, 'For a long time now God has lived in the sky to set us free and lived in the white men's house at Belle-Feuille to flog us'.<sup>71</sup> By Achebe and Onwuchekwa Chinweizu's

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<sup>66</sup> Baker and Draper, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>68</sup> Gay Wilentz, *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992.

<sup>69</sup> Joan Anim-Addo, 'Woman-Centred Narratives in the Intersections of the Oral and Literary Traditions', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 26 (1996), 49-62.

<sup>70</sup> Schwarz-Bart, p.38.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

distinction, Ma Cia's tale is not orature since it is not the formalised oral event located in the public space, in which men figure. The more everyday space of oral culture is the home, women's space.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Chinweizu's use of the term, 'orature' focuses exclusively upon the public performance dimension of oral culture. This has limited application to the Caribbean context. My argument is that the practice of the African-Caribbean oral tradition has withstood severe fracture through the 'cultural imposition' inherent in Atlantic slavery.<sup>73</sup> In the changed circumstances, women have become significant storytellers and culture bearers, though this is not evident in public performance. An example of distortion resulting from such imposition and one which continues to be topical is that involving change in the mythical Ghanaian folk figure Ananse, the sky god, who survives the triangular slave passage and re-emerges as the 'criminalised' Ananse (Anancy) of the Caribbean.<sup>74</sup> I refer to the suppression of cultural practice related to West Africa, the ancestral homeland of the enslaved and the corresponding imposition of European mores. Maureen Warner-Lewis, for example, reveals just how dynamic aspects of African culture have been, despite attempts to suppress it, in Trinidad and, by extension, in the Caribbean.<sup>75</sup>

With the imposition of changes in West-African family patterns, and the African-heritage Caribbean woman's consequent new-found role as head of households in which fathers are absent,<sup>76</sup> the transmission of cultural information fell significantly to women. I am suggesting that if Achebe and Chinweizu are reliable sources concerning the separate roles of the male and female in West African storytelling, then another locus of historical change is indicated for the African-Caribbean woman in her function as agent of cultural transmission specifically the oral tradition. In this re-imagined space explored by Simone Schwarz-Bart, women play a key role specifically in the giving of

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<sup>72</sup> Baker and Draper, 204. Achebe, asked to comment on women's stories in Igbo culture, differentiates between women's storytelling as folktales and men's as history.

<sup>73</sup> Fanon, p.193.

<sup>74</sup> Gilroy, 1998, p.178.

<sup>75</sup> Warner-Lewis, pp.175-76, for example, discusses 'spiritual beliefs'.

<sup>76</sup> Senior, 1991, p.8.

support from one generation to the next, a role with particular significance in slavery as Prince's narrative demonstrates. In this role, a crucial source for the breaking of the African-Caribbean woman's silence is located. The cultural grounding of this 'break' is significant as Telumee Miracle, for example, in her 'woman-as-culture-bearer' role, affirms. In the triumph of telling her story, testimony becomes central. Furthermore, such testimony attests to creative adaptation in the Caribbean context with its constant and traumatic changes.

Post-emancipatory changes, overshadowed by the struggle for survival in *Beyond*, include a small school housed in a stable which Telumee Miracle attends. Such small beginnings also housed the future source of imperialistic challenge to the storage and transmission of cultural information held by African-Caribbean people. In this institutionalised context, the *mind* of the African-heritage Caribbean female is assessed and further silenced, for that space is simultaneously one of literate growth and cultural imperialism. Outcomes of this struggle will rely upon the suppression of the oral tradition and the ascendancy of the scribal tradition among the majority population. Yet, African culture, disparaged in the schoolroom, survives in marginal spaces as does the oral tradition in the home location. Out of the tension between competing cultural forces a literary tradition begins to emerge in which the African-Caribbean woman features. This is further explored in the texts examined in Part Two of this thesis.

A critical, though problematic historical moment occurred in the period 1845-1866, when there was greater access to schooling in British colonies.<sup>77</sup> During the early nineteenth century, the earliest schools such as those set up by the Hart sisters and referred to in the previous chapter, catered mainly to the needs of freed blacks.<sup>78</sup> Schools such as that which Telumee is privileged to attend offered basic literary skills to the minority African-heritage children whose circumstances allowed them access. Millicent

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<sup>77</sup> Millicent Whyte, *Short History of Education in Jamaica*, London, 1977, pp.28-9.

<sup>78</sup> It should, perhaps, be stressed that precise dates and figures are not available for historical details such as this in relation to the African-Caribbean population in the region. Changes came about in a piecemeal fashion in the various islands and territories, indicative of the history of slavery in the region. Anglophone provision for ex-slaves was met by missionaries following the Negro Education Grant in 1835.

Whyte's *Short History of Education in Jamaica* (1977) indicates that by 1892, provision was made through the Secondary Education Law of that year for wider access to secondary school.<sup>79</sup> Jamaican author Claude McKay (1889 -1948) would have benefited from such reforms. Journalist and historian C.L.R. James, born just over a decade later in Trinidad, won a scholarship to secondary school at the age of ten. In the same year, 1911, with Jamaica a Crown Colony, inspection revealed that girls were not being granted scholarships to higher education, despite their attendance at single sex and mixed secondary schools.<sup>80</sup> Taking Jamaica as an example, it appears that within the earliest established system, differentiated pedagogic practice and views about the role of women prevailed so as to limit the educational development of girls and women. This practice would have implications for the literacy of African-heritage girls. Despite this, out of the 'years between' published African-Caribbean writing women would emerge and with them an authorial tradition. At the same time, increasing demands for education would give rise to greater access to literacy and a concern with creative writing from the perspective of an African-Caribbean woman.

### **Asserting the Creative Mind: Writing African-Caribbean Women in the 'age of woman'**

This is the age of woman: what man has done, women may do', wrote Una Marson (1905-1965), 'first woman editor-publisher' of Jamaica.<sup>81</sup> Marson, in May 1928, made her womanist assertion as she launched the island's 'first women's' magazine, *The Cosmopolitan*.<sup>82</sup> Honor Ford-Smith draws attention to the racial significance of this publication when she notes its role as the voice of the (black) Jamaica Stenographers' Association 'beginning to organise themselves within the anti-colonial struggle to work in establishments dominated by white clerical staff'.<sup>83</sup> This is important for the indication it offers to the African-Caribbean 'woman writer's project'. For first-wave women writers,

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<sup>79</sup> Whyte, p.49.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson 1905-1965*, Manchester, 1998.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>83</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, 'Una's Achievement: Her Life', *Sistren*, 15, 3 and 4 (1993) 26-7.

this project, though not monolithic, includes a collective dimension not easily separated from the individual. Further, from Delia Jarrett-Macauley's biographical account of Marson, a picture emerges which I wish to link with Schwarz-Bart's post-emancipation 'small school house'. Marson, born during the seventh decade after Emancipation, owes her literacy to access to the schoolhouse facilitated by her father's initial training as a teacher and subsequent position as a Baptist minister.<sup>84</sup> I am not seeking to detract from Marson's ability but, rather, to stress the church's role in elementary educational provision at that time. Marson, 'one of the few black scholarship winners' was rare in achieving this distinction indicative firstly, of post-elementary success for a black pupil and secondly, for a black girl.<sup>85</sup> She was 'unquestionably' a minority black girl at the prestigious Hampton School modelled upon an English public school system.<sup>86</sup> From these beginnings, Marson came to champion not only the national cause but also women's cause nationally. Stunningly, this foremother, by the age of twenty-seven, had cleared herself a distinctive literary path in her homeland, Jamaica. At that point, her achievements included not only that of founder-editor of *The Cosmopolitan*; but also, she was author of two volumes of poetry: *Tropic Reveries* (1930),<sup>87</sup> and *Heights and Depths* (1931).<sup>88</sup> She was, too, the playwright of *At What A Price*, a first play staged at the Ward Theatre, Kingston, in June 1932.<sup>89</sup> How was this possible and why were these concerns uppermost for the young black woman?

The process of creative writing demands a high level of literacy, and as Caribbean writer, Wilson Harris comments:

As an imaginative writer I work with narrative which I revise by scanning each draft carefully and looking for clues which lodge themselves in the draft, clues that may appear to have been painted by another hand. It is as if, when one writes, one puts things into the draft which one was not conscious of placing there, then when one comes back and scans the draft closely, suddenly one is aware of those clues.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, p.3. Access to religion and to education in anglophone countries were inextricably linked.

<sup>85</sup> Ford-Smith, 1993, p.26.

<sup>86</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, 'Una Marson, Black Nationalist and Feminist Writer', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 34, 3 and 4 (1988) 22-37.

<sup>87</sup> Una Marson, *Tropic Reveries*, Kingston, 1930.

<sup>88</sup> Una Marson, *Heights and Depths*, Kingston, 1931.

<sup>89</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, p.43.

<sup>90</sup> Wilson Harris, Michael Gilkes, ed., *The Literate Imagination*, London and Basingstoke, 1989, p.19.

Harris's description of drafting, revising and honing tells only part of the complex process of literary production. African-heritage West Indian girls with less access to Further and Higher Education would become sufficiently literate to undertake such a process, as women, well after their brothers had gained access to publication.

Marson's privileged secondary education allowed also a liberal arts grounding. The product of an education system which looked to England for its cultural icons as students of Empire had been schooled to do, Marson's writing reflected those values even as it showed signs of resistance to them. Biographer Jarrett-Macauley writes:

By any standards the range of her achievements at twenty seven was considerable. She had now tried her hand at three literary genres - poems, short stories and plays - and won local recognition for her 'talent, executive ability and courage', a combination which, it was confidently predicted in the press, would take her far.<sup>91</sup>

Though I have chosen to foreground Marson, the poet, she was, as Jarrett-Macauley states, a dramatist and fiction writer, as well as a broadcaster and political activist. In 1931, when Marson was Treasurer of the Jamaica Branch of the Poetry League, one of its objects was the development of knowledge of contemporary poetry in Britain and the colonies.<sup>92</sup> With contemporary poetry on the League's agenda, Marson articulated with increasing confidence, some of the contradictions in the real world she experienced. She experimented with the set forms of poetry popular in her day, using for example, the sonnet and ballad stanza for themes of love, nature and country. At the same time, she worked with the Creole voice.

Ford-Smith argues that Marson was 'influenced by ideas about women's liberation as they were expressed by the Pan Africanist Movement and the Universal Negro Improvement Association'(UNIA).<sup>93</sup> The overwhelming post-slavery circumstance of large sections of the black population championed by UNIA is an aspect of Jamaican reality reflected in Marson's writing. Further, Ford-Smith states that within the organisation there was a distinctive 'feminist tradition' and that Marson 'as a feminist

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<sup>91</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, p.44.

<sup>92</sup> Cundall, p.494.

<sup>93</sup> Ford-Smith, 1998, p.24.

and Black Nationalist artist' needs to be contextualised within this.<sup>94</sup> For these reasons, throughout her career, social issues of gender, race and class hierarchies at odds with a liberal world of books and learning ensured that Marson's writing reflected these struggles.

While Marson's prolific writing enhanced her status as a writer, like earlier writers such as Mackay, Marson's trajectory would include years of exile in a metropolitan centre, London. Within Marson's poetry, there is evidence that her London experience impacted not only upon publication possibilities, but also upon her preoccupations as a writer. Race became crystallised as a theme and poems such as 'Quashie Comes to London', reflects the dissonance of this experience.<sup>95</sup> Marson's assertion of the creative mind needed to account for race and its meanings in a world context. For example, in 'Black Burden', the lines, 'I am black/ And I have got to travel/ Even further than white folks'<sup>96</sup> issue a first-person declaration relating blackness to a universal consideration of whiteness and an assessment of some of its meanings. In this text, the wisdom of the folk appears to be superseded by the authoritative 'I' narrator's voice. Yet the philosophising is based on wisdom of the folk and experience of past and present reality. This is more readily evident by transposing the 'I' to the second person 'you' which allows a suggestion of the maternal voice, out of which the African-Caribbean woman poet begins to emerge as philosopher and theorist. Where shadism had figured in Jamaican society, racism in the metropolitan centre which Marson visited was inescapable and offered compelling material for writing, and the opportunity to reflect upon 'everyday' theorising.

That despite difficulties of employment and racism, Marson successfully negotiated a path as a writer in the decade before World War II, owes much to her tenacity and singleness of vision. I suggest that her success owed much to the network with which she was involved, that of the League of Coloured Peoples founded by

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>95</sup> Marson,

<sup>96</sup> Una Marson, *Towards The Stars*, Kent, 1945.

fellow Jamaican, Dr Harold Moody<sup>97</sup> and which she developed to meet her own vision. Jarrett-Macauley's charge of 'Machiavellian' administrative intent on Marson's part in her role within Moody's 'League' does not diminish Marson's achievement.<sup>98</sup> The League, established in 1931 and based at Moody's home in Peckham, south east London, offered a particularly warm welcome to Jamaicans abroad.<sup>99</sup> Jarrett-Macauley suggests that the unemployed Marson having become unpaid secretary to the League operated a system which allowed her to 'cream off the best invitations for herself, including lunch with John Masefield, the Poet Laureate'.<sup>100</sup> It seems more likely that sociopolitical engagements suited most League members whereas literary events matched Una Marson's interests perfectly for, while poets may be of particular interest to other poets, we may conjecture that poetry and poets were a minority (West Indian) interest, then as now. In addition, Marson, not in paid employment, was much more available to pursue her interests as the opportunities presented themselves. Doubtless, however, to have written so prolifically, Marson, committed to her writing and occupying a prominent position within the 'League', developed a range of strategies for realising her vision. Thus it was that eighteen months after arriving in Britain, Marson's play *At What Price* enjoyed a West End debut, signalling more success for the twenty-nine year old. By her presence and her success, Marson had modified the London literary scene. Production of the play, according to Jarrett-Macauley developed from a 'League performance' 'involving every available member' on 23 November 1933, to a 'three night run' at the Scala Theatre two months later.<sup>101</sup> Marson's London years are indicative of a new type of movement of African-Caribbean women. Whereas that of earlier periods had been mainly not voluntary, the trend began by Marson was both voluntary and purposeful.

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Joan Anim-Addo, 1995, p.70.

<sup>98</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, p.52-3.

<sup>99</sup> Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics*, London, 1986, p.63. Carter suggests that the League was modelled upon the National Association for the League of Coloured People, USA.

<sup>100</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, p.52.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

Marson's double role as island and international writer began to point to a 'liminal' conception of the Caribbean.<sup>102</sup> The 'fair island', was not the 'other' space but one with pressing realities not necessarily recognised as such, hence Marson's ironic observation in the poem 'In Jamaica':

O! it's a glorious life in Jamaica  
For the man who has nearly enough,  
But it's a dreary life for the beggars,  
And the large slums are all pretty rough.  
It's a gay life too for the children  
Not poor and whose skin is light,  
But the darker set are striving  
And facing a very stiff fight.<sup>103</sup>

The poetic struggle to find appropriate forms between 'classical' conventions such as the sonnet and the iambic pentameter, on the one hand, and the demands of a regional orality, on the other, has been little appreciated.<sup>104</sup> Her shifting style represents the African-Caribbean writer's dilemma, that of mimesis as dis-ease and links directly with issues of masking which I develop in Part Two of the thesis. Honor Ford-Smith assesses Marson's work as 'not always successful' though 'the first of its kind'.<sup>105</sup> There can be no doubt about Marson as a literary foremother in terms not only of Jamaican women's writing, an island perspective, but also within a Caribbean matrix inclusive of the diaspora. Marson's oeuvre opened up a route for Caribbean women's writing central to which is the oral as literary voice. Her writing interests led her to the BBC where she was appointed, in June 1941, a presenter on 'Calling the West Indies' and other programmes aimed at Caribbean listeners.<sup>106</sup> She would also, as later writers of the fifties and sixties, develop a sense of audience from this broadcasting platform. For the pioneer writer, Marson, the claiming of a public voice would be aligned as much to the

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<sup>102</sup> See Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, Charlottesville, 1989.

<sup>103</sup> Marson, 1931.

<sup>104</sup> See, Alison Donnell, *Cultural and Gender Politics in a Neglected Archive of Jamaican Women's Poetry: Una Marson and Her Creole Contemporaries*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1994, p.3. Marson's 'silenced and devalued' poetry is central to this study.

<sup>105</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, 1988, p.36.

<sup>106</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, p.149.

BBC and dramatic writing as to poetry. Marson's model would later serve another literary foremother and fellow countrywoman, first novelist, Sylvia Wynter.

Louise Bennett, born in Jamaica in 1919, also travelled to London. When, in 1945, Bennett took up a British Council scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), she already had three collections published locally in Kingston.<sup>107</sup> Bennett's preoccupation with Jamaican creole or 'dialect' is evident in the titles of the publications: *(Jamaica) Dialect Verses* (1942),<sup>108</sup> *Jamaican Humour in Dialect* (1943)<sup>109</sup> and *Anancy Stories and Poems in Dialect* (1944).<sup>110</sup> With Marson's creole poems as well as those of Bennett, a trend is indicated which concerns a breaking of silence alert to the vernacular voice. That Bennett's publications played a role in her reception in London is indicated in Mervyn Morris's statement that within months of arrival, Bennett had her own programme on the BBC.<sup>111</sup> Bennett appears not to have been seduced by London. Rather, as Morris suggests, she 'rejected opportunities' to stay and returned to Jamaica at the end of her course, though she accepted later periodic engagements with the BBC.<sup>112</sup>

Bennett's writing, at first enigmatically received in Jamaica because of its claiming of the oral voice as a literary voice represents a range of local women's voices and demonstrates a marked concern with the 'folk' or community. Bennett also reflects a clarity about the social position of women summed up in the poem 'Jamaica Oman' which represents the woman as 'long liberated', 'strong' and 'tallawah'. These qualities are juxtaposed in the writing against perceptions enshrined within the culture which persists in the oral myth that 'Oman luck dey a dungle'. The 'dungle' or rubbish heap signifies the multiple oppressed position of black women in the local society. Bennett counters this with ironic observations which belie the dungle assessment. In the

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<sup>107</sup> See Mervyn Morris, 'Louise Bennett', in *Dance*, ed., pp.35-45.

<sup>108</sup> Louise Bennett, *(Jamaica) Dialect Verses*, Kingston, 1942.

<sup>109</sup> Louise Bennett, *Jamaican Humour in Dialect*, Kingston, 1943.

<sup>110</sup> Louise Bennett, *Anancy Stories and Poems in Dialect*, Kingston, 1944

<sup>111</sup> Mervyn Morris, in *Dance*, ed., p.36.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

penultimate stanza of 'Jamaica Oman', Bennett gives a direct affirmative response to the oral allegation:

But as long as fowl a scratch dungle heap  
Oman luck must come!<sup>113</sup>

Furthermore, in the final stanza of the poem, Bennett articulates the double gaze of the liberated, strong, 'tallawah' woman beginning to receive hard-won praise from her man. The narrator wonders 'if him know', that is, if he appreciates the larger social picture, the changes imperceptibly taking place in the black woman's position.<sup>114</sup> In the poem, knowledge becomes the prerogative of the woman while partial perception is ascribed to her mate who believes himself to be the one who, given the prevailing patriarchal order, is privy to knowledge. Glissant's 'survival' mode, indicated through 'oral expression' may be read through the texts of African-Caribbean writing women emerging in the twentieth century and occurs simultaneously with writing indicative of 'a passion for memory'. Bennett, for example, assumes a folklorist role in some of her writing and retells Anancy stories drawn from the culture. Yet it is exceptional that Bennett's books have all been published in Jamaica. For Bennett, creativity meets a rare publication context within the region so that content and context coalesce locally. More usually, access to a published voice is linked to metropolitan location. Indeed, I suggest that this factor is vital to the emergence of published writers particularly those producing full length narratives such as novels.<sup>115</sup>

What did Marson's and Bennett's writing offer that was different from that of Prince and Seacole? Each, in turn, provided testimony about prevailing difficulties. In addition, writers after Prince moved beyond the giving of testimony, while in the poetic writing there is an articulation of both personal and collective concerns. For Marson, part of her personal struggle as a writer would have been those imposed by a male dominated writing world. How to claim the public voice in such circumstances? Marson

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<sup>113</sup> Mervyn Morris, ed., *Selected Poems: Louise Bennett*, Kingston, 1982.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> See George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, London, 1960, pp.41-2 on the frustrations of Caribbean writers in the Caribbean.

accomplished this through poetry but also through assuming a role as editor and working on cultural journals. Later twentieth-century African-Caribbean women writers such as Philip and Collins would attest that some half a century afterwards there remains a difficulty with African-Caribbean women writers in even perceiving the possibility of themselves as writers.<sup>116</sup> Literature was, after all, painstakingly impressed upon African-Caribbean learners, as the norm imbued with values derived from the deliberate, complex, crafted and the work of a single author, a process far removed from African-Caribbean women's lives. In contrast, the African's native oral product was, at best, simple, uncrafted, and the product of the communal mind, a creative space which Louise Bennett appropriated to the literary task. At worst, the creole culture of the region was perceived as yielding forms of dubious moral value; forms to be denigrated; forms to be supplanted by a good (British) education if the native proved herself sufficiently deserving. Further, women were largely invisible, other than as wives, and becoming a writer was 'the last thing' to be expected.<sup>117</sup>

Patterns related to cultural ways of knowing begin to emerge in contextualising the period of one hundred and five years which represents the 'years between' 1857-1962. Several key stages in the making of Caribbean nationhood during that time, also parallel the establishing of published or authorial African-Caribbean voices. Slave emancipation, colonial rule rooted deep in the minds and ways of life of the people, and the independence movement of the region are noted here as important markers of the period. Each succeeding generation also worked to alter the conditions impacting upon the survival about which earlier anglophone African-Caribbean women wrote. In addition, the emergence of thinkers and creative writers, including women, came about with the 'circular nomadism' allowing women access to metropolitan centres, greater publishing possibilities and a lifestyle allowing the assertion of the creative

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<sup>116</sup> See, M. Nourbese Philip, 'The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy', 1993, p.76.

<sup>117</sup> Sherlock and Nettleford, p.22.

mind. For example, born in the same decade as Marson, Claudia Jones (1915-1965), succeeded in travelling abroad and gaining credibility as a West Indian writing woman.<sup>118</sup>

Jones has remained largely ignored but for rare publications such as Buzz Johnson's *I Think of My Mother': Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (1985), upon which I have drawn extensively.<sup>119</sup> While Johnson's interest focuses on Jones, the political activist, mine prefers the different perspective of Jones as a writing woman.<sup>120</sup> There is little to suggest a literary preoccupation on Jones's part, but her place in this literary history is important. In contrast to Marson, Jones, born during the First World War, emigrated with her parents to the USA. In Trinidad as in other islands, strikes featured in the battle for better pay and conditions giving way to a period of unrest which, during 1911-1920, involved the migration of over one hundred and twenty three people to the USA. Jones's family migrated in 1924. Like many Caribbean families, Jones's parents sought jobs and were prepared to face the gross racial prejudice prevalent in the USA. Jones's family settled in Harlem, the sprawling urban centre which became home for many black people in New York. In that largely ghetto area, black people like Jones's family were locked together in poverty. Jones states:

From an early age like most Negro Americans and with the additional penalty of being foreign born and a Negro in the United States, I experienced the indignity of second class citizenship in the United States.

My parents emigrated from the West Indies in 1924 in the hope of finding greater economic opportunity and freedom to rear their children. But what we found instead in the U.S. was not only economic poverty for the working class but also that special brand of American racism - Jim Crow.<sup>121</sup>

Jones's early life illustrates a continuation into the twentieth century of Schwarz-Bart's 'moving cabin', on an international scale. Her formal education suffered under the 'Great Depression', and she was obliged to abandon school and take a menial job. She

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<sup>118</sup> See Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'The Love Axe/1: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic, 1962-1974)', *Bim*, 16, 1, 1977, 53. Brathwaite, commenting on a similar pattern, notes that 'nearly all our major novelists continue to live abroad' which, he indicates, began in the 1950s, that is, approximating to the beginnings of greater publication by anglophone African-Caribbean writers.

<sup>119</sup> Buzz Johnson, *I Think of My Mother': Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones*, London, 1985.

<sup>120</sup> I have discussed in public lectures the topic of Jones as a writing woman.

<sup>121</sup> Cited in Johnson, 1985, p.8.

testifies that she was twelve years old when her mother, a garment worker died from exhaustion at her machine. Her father had responsibility for raising his four children while the young Jones tried at poorly paid jobs. What those difficult years brought to her attention was the plight not just of her own family, but of poor people generally, so that by eighteen years old, she was a self-declared Communist involved with a network of young activists. It was the practice of Marxist-Leninist analysis which strengthened Jones's critical thinking enabling her to understand and act upon the world in order to bring about the vital change she believed to be necessary. Jones, therefore, claims a place as critical foremother on the grounds of theoretical engagement since notably she grappled with Marxist-Leninist ideas in order better to comprehend the poverty and despair about her. She states:

It was out of my Jim Crow experiences as a young Negro woman, experiences likewise born of working class poverty that led me to join the Young Communist League and to choose the philosophy of my life, the science of Marxism-Leninism - that philosophy that not only rejects racist ideas, but is the antithesis of them.<sup>122</sup>

Thus Jones came to join the American Communist Party, a dangerously subversive organisation according to McCarthyites for whom the involvement of black people, who had ceased to be slaves in the USA only some seventy years earlier, was problematic. In spite of this, Jones persisted in her active involvement in communism. I have written, above, of the 'collective' dimension to African-Caribbean women writer's project. In Jones's case, the collective-activist aspect dominates, to the exclusion of literary writing. Yet, writing and its relationship to action was important to this black woman whose traumatic life had led to this path.

By 1940, Jones was elected chairperson of the Young Communist League and contributed regularly to its weekly publication, writing about issues of war, economy, politics and equality for women. The USA authorities were alert to Jones's writing and her unwavering support for Communism, and the American government arrested her in 1948 on a charge of 'un-American activities'. Later found guilty of writing an

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.7.

inflammatory article, Jones elected to come to Britain and was duly deported to London in 1956 where she briefly developed her career as a journalist. Jones's crime, according to the authorities, consisted of her radical politics; she was a writing African-Caribbean woman and a public figure. Yet her principal endeavour remained the interpreting of history.<sup>123</sup> At a time when African-Caribbean women did not claim a public voice; were not author-ity figures in metropolitan centres like London, Jones sought to influence the views of her readers. She wrote concerning the *West Indian Gazette* which she launched:

A major effort designed to stimulate political and social thinking has been the launching, six years ago, of the progressive news-monthly, the *West Indian Gazette*. This newspaper has served as a catalyst, quickening the awareness, socially and politically, of West Indians, Afro-Asians and their friends. Its editorial stand is for a united independent West Indies, full economic social and political equality and respect for human dignity for West Indians and Afro-asians in Britain, for peace and friendship between all Commonwealth and world peoples.<sup>124</sup>

Like Marson, through literary writing, Jones had learnt to counter women's silence in adopting a public voice. Each in her way contributed to the establishing of a tradition of African-Caribbean women's claiming of author-ity.

### **Windrush Meanings and the Articulation of Mind**

In 1948, the year of Jones's arrest in the USA on a deportation warrant, large scale changes affected the UK, altering its perception of black British subjects and the visibility of black people within the motherland. The Moyne Report of 1939, publication of which had been delayed until after the Second World War, confirmed the depressed state of social and economic conditions in Britain's Caribbean colonies. According to Ford-Smith, Marson gave evidence to this.<sup>124</sup> Caribbean family patterns and the role of women were particularly important to the commission. US 'open door' policy which allowed families such as Jones's into the USA, subsequently closed to large numbers of

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<sup>123</sup> Buzz Johnson, 'Claudia Jones: Freedom Fighter', *Dragon's Teeth*, 16, (1983), 9.

<sup>124</sup> Claudia Jones, 'The Caribbean Community in Britain', first published *Freedomways*, 4, 3 (1964) 341-57; reprinted in the *Black Liberator*, 1 (December 1978), 29-37. References are to the reprint edition. See also Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race*, London, 1985, pp.136-140

Caribbean families, and this resulted in large-scale immigration to Britain. This redirection of anglophone Caribbeans to the UK was satirised by Jamaican poet, Louise Bennett, whose style owes much to Marson. The social commentary in 'Colonization in Reverse',<sup>125</sup> focused on Jamaican social life, encompasses the experiences of those whose lives were affected when:

Man an woman, ole an young  
Just pack dem bag and baggage  
An tun hisory upside dung!<sup>126</sup>

Political analysis such as Jones's pointed to immigration as a reflection of prospects 'not yet qualitatively improved for the vast majority of West Indian workers and people, inhibited by the tenaciousness of continued Anglo-American imperialist dominance'.<sup>127</sup> Yet significantly for this study, post-Windrush immigration had three major effects: the proximity to the metropolitan centre with greater access to writing networks, education and development of a 'literate imagination' and access to publication, a crucial stage within literary production.

It was no coincidence that the *SS Empire Windrush's* historic trip in 1948 bringing to Tilbury four hundred and ninety-two West Indians, mostly from Jamaica and Trinidad, took place immediately after the end of the Second World War. In this period, at the beginning of the Cold War and McCarthyism, West Indians having contributed to the war effort, like the British population, had their expectations of a better future heightened by post-war promises. Britain was perceived, particularly by returning West-Indian war personnel, to have an obligation to those who, like them, had served in the war. The voice of Britain to its colonies, via its broadcasting service to which Marson had contributed, sought to reflect, at least some of the time, the voice of its subject peoples particularly in the post war years. By this means, several key Caribbean figures gained access to first-stage publication, as the broadcast voice may usefully be perceived.

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<sup>125</sup> Ford-Smith, 1998, p.27.

<sup>126</sup> Mervyn Morris, ed., pp.106-7.

<sup>127</sup> Jones, 1978, 29.

Among Caribbean writers whose voices reached a wider audience through radio were the young George Lamming (1927-), and Sam Selvon (1923-1998). Ian H. Munro's biographical writing on Lamming observes that in 1950 Lamming and Selvon 'sailed on the same ship' for England.<sup>128</sup> Lamming's poems and short prose pieces had been regularly broadcast by the BBC from 1947, Munro notes, and until 1962, Lamming produced programmes for the BBC.<sup>129</sup> Selvon also regularly contributed to the BBC, a role which served, not the mainstream programmes, but an overseas slot broadcasting to the colonies. A network of male West Indian writers including Jan Carew (born 1925), Wilson Harris (born 1921), Edgar Mittleholzer (1909-1965) and Roy Heath (born 1926) - predominantly Guyanese and Eastern Caribbean - began to be published. During the fifties and sixties, through the fiction by these writers, African-heritage Caribbean subjects became not only more visible but were also represented as writing subjects.

Despite the overwhelmingly male presence, given the patriarchal colonial system in place within the region, women like Marson and Jones became published writers during the same period.<sup>130</sup> The post-war era had also given rise to reforms allowing greater access to post-elementary education in the region. In February 1947, the University College of the West Indies was founded in Jamaica. As Philip Sherlock and Rex Nettleford demonstrate in *The University of the West Indies* (1990), Britain in the mid-twentieth century, was among the last colonial powers to begin to found a university in the region, more than three centuries after their first colonies were settled. In comparison, Spain founded three universities within its first fifty years locally and northern America founded Harvard in 1636.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, the scholarship system, reflecting Britain's own post-war social reforms, allowed able African-heritage children increased access through free or assisted places into secondary education. George

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<sup>128</sup> Ian H. Munro, 'George Lamming' in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., p.264.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Johnson, 1983, carries a photo of Carew and Jones together.

<sup>131</sup> Philip Sherlock and Rex Nettleford, *The University of the West Indies: A Caribbean Response to the Challenge of Change*, London and Basingstoke, 1990, p.5.

Lamming, for example, benefited from this, and beginning his writing career in the Caribbean, travelled to London in 1950. Publishers began to have access to new authors and to appreciate the possibilities of new markets. A black migrant labour force was becoming visible in the metropolitan centre making it more difficult to ignore the new writers but, of more significance to publishers and signalling the possibility of expansion was the rumblings of the Independence Movement with its 'rabble-rousing nationalists' across the empire.<sup>132</sup> The visible writers among the new migrants to London would become the first writers of publications aimed at local home markets. A significant meaning was that of Independence for while this movement articulated a rebellion against colonialism, it also generated new confidence in the African-heritage population as book readers.

The Windrush decade, 1948-1958, also saw a large-scale profiling of the male presence in Britain whether as student, writer or migrant labour. That African-Caribbean women were present in smaller numbers is significant to women's limited access to publication.<sup>133</sup> This, however, followed the period of conservative cultural politics which had sought to push women back into the home.<sup>134</sup> I have indicated that from Prince and Seacole to Marson and Jones, the acquisition of a public authorial voice for the African-Caribbean woman appears linked to location or association with the metropolitan centre. While the vitality of the twenties and thirties had brought to London personalities such as Marson, during the period of the fifties, the migrant African-Caribbean women, among whom were a small proportion of students and aspiring writers, largely remained invisible.

Victor Chang's biographical essay portrays the young Sylvia Wynter as a high achiever who gained an island scholarship which would take her to King's College, London, to study in the post-war years, 1947 - 1953.<sup>135</sup> By 1953, Wynter had completed

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<sup>132</sup> Sylvia Wynter, 1962, p.192.

<sup>133</sup> By 1961 an estimated 125,000 West Indian men had entered Britain compared to 95,000 women. See Jones, 29.

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, Joan French, 'Colonial Policy Towards Women After the 1938 Uprising: The Case of Jamaica', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 34, 3 and 4, (1988), 38-61.

<sup>135</sup> Victor Chang, 'Sylvia Wynter', in Dance, ed., 1986, pp.498-507.

her second degree, a Master's in Spanish Literature. The literate African-Caribbean female mind had been stimulated and Wynter's interest in literature assured her a place amongst the literary and academic Caribbean set who were, like her, former students from the West Indies, temporarily resident in London in the post-war period.<sup>136</sup> Yet, publication by black women resident in Britain was considerably overdue in comparison with their African-American sisters, particularly, considering the sojourn of African-heritage people both in the West Indies and in Britain. Historian Ziggi Alexander argues, for example, that 'from the period of Roman occupation to the middle of the twentieth century, whether by force, choice or accident of birth, these islands [UK] have been home to thousands of Africans and their descendants'.<sup>137</sup> My own research corroborates Alexander's and similarly challenges the 'popular myth' of a short term, post-war black presence. Rather, it is the visibility of an African-Caribbean women's presence in the UK that has been short term, and so, correspondingly, has been the anglophone African-Caribbean woman's published voice. As a result, one meaning of post-Windrush publication, I shall argue, is that African-Caribbean women's writing fell into a vacuum rather than a 'tradition' of black women's writing. Within the radical 'break' this represents, and the new-found author(ity) practice, clues may be found to the nature of the societal shift allowing the emergence of the first anglophone African-Caribbean women writers, and specifically, first novelist, Sylvia Wynter. Alexander, whose research brought to light for contemporary readers the autobiographical writing of Mary Seacole, argues that the stories of black women in the UK have 'rarely been seen as relevant' and have, as a consequence been, 'persistently excluded'.<sup>138</sup> I want to counterargue that not only are these narratives 'relevant', but that their suppression is directly linked to bewildering amnesiac patterns within British historiography.

In her collected writing, *Leaves*, Guyanese Beryl Gilroy, novelist, ethnopsychologist and contemporary of Sylvia Wynter, offers invaluable insight into the

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<sup>136</sup> Among this wave of writers there were Sam Selvon, Andrew Salkey and George Lamming, men embarked upon a writing career.

<sup>137</sup> Alexander, p.22.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

pattern of post-war West Indian student movement to Britain.<sup>139</sup> Gilroy stresses the privileged position of those who travelled as students. Strict pre-departure colonial vetting structured the selection process and those who secured coveted scholarships were few, 'mostly the children of the great and the influential'.<sup>140</sup> The sense of being colonial students, reinforced by being also successes of the elaborate selective process, continued throughout their stay in 'war cultured' Britain.<sup>141</sup> The Crown agents, whom Gilroy describes as the students' 'overseers', played a key role in regulating student behaviour, for the students, allowed access to a wide range of ideas, would themselves, in turn, become key players in the Independence Movement. Gilroy describes, for example, how as background to that period, 'important and upcoming leaders' gave talks on self government and Independence to Caribbean students in Britain at that time.<sup>142</sup> Protest marches against colonialism informed student conversation. Gilroy attests to being one of two thousand students among whom were few women who came to Britain for the purpose of study in 1951. Her account of living, learning and working in fifties London highlights the rarity of African-Caribbean women students.<sup>143</sup> On her education course of one hundred and fifty men and women in the early fifties, for example, she noted the presence of two Caribbean women.

When Claudia Jones was deported to Britain in 1955, student Britain was not, for her, a primary concern. Jones found a black presence concentrated in key areas such as Notting Hill where she would later work.<sup>144</sup> She bore witness to the Notting Hill race riots in 1958, which would force British authorities to begin to engage with endemic racism. Against this background, Jones edited the *Caribbean News*, a publication aimed at the growing Caribbean population,<sup>145</sup> the first issue of which, in 1956, carried an interview with her.<sup>146</sup> The Windrush student era witnessed clever, young Black

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<sup>139</sup> See, for example, Gilroy, 1998, pp.193-8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p193.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., pp.146.

<sup>144</sup> But see Bryan, et al., p.136-7.

<sup>145</sup> From 1952-56 *Caribbean News* was published by the Caribbean Labour Congress.

<sup>146</sup> *Caribbean News*, June, 1956, cited in Johnson, 1985, p.81.

hopefuls in London, among them, Pearl Connor, Jan Carew, Len Bushell, Donald Hinds and many others. In 1958, Jones founded another organ, the *West Indian Gazette* referred to above, and this would engage her until her death six years later. Whether the student Wynter met Jones is not documented. Certainly, Wynter's future husband, Carew, took part in protest demonstrations in support of Jones and at that time, a figure like Jones was important to fellow West Indians including the small student circle also involved in published writing. During this period there was not only increasing freedom of physical constraints for African-Caribbean women, but also women like Jones were taking a fuller part in public life and this involved heightened visibility as writers. In addition, publishers, beginning to be interested in new audiences in the Caribbean, started also to engage male Caribbean readers.<sup>147</sup> A Caribbean, though predominantly male, network was emerging.

Wynter's writing flourished in London. She collaborated with Carew, to complete several projects for radio and television in the UK. Her play, *Under The Sun* was accepted for production by The Royal Court Theatre.<sup>148</sup> It was later dramatised for radio and adapted for publication, in 1962, as *Hebron*, the first novel by a West Indian woman of African-heritage.<sup>149</sup> That same year, Wynter returned to newly independent Jamaica with her husband, Carew. Wynter's 'travel' in the sense of Marson's 'got to travel even further' included literal journeys to Britain and Europe between 1946-1958.<sup>150</sup> In that period, her commitment to the development of skills and knowledge in theatre, literature and dance was extensive.

*Hebron*, set in 1940s rural Jamaica, a novel in the 'folk' tradition, portrays a rural African-Caribbean community marked by slavery and in the grip of separatist religious fervour, their chosen route to post-slavery survival. As Hebronites, the 'New Believers' entrust their physical and spiritual salvation to a 'new beginning' based upon

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<sup>147</sup> See Gilroy, p.245, for her 'Anancy men' analogy.

<sup>148</sup> See, Chang, in Dance, ed., p.499.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., for reference to Wynter's plans to found a 'professional theatre company'.

<sup>150</sup> Marson, 1945, p.40.

a 'vow' taken by the founder of the church, Prophet Moses.<sup>151</sup> Out of this setting an unexpected leader, Gatha Randall Barton, arises following the 'crucifixion' of her husband, Moses. Of the many concerns of the text, I wish to single out the 'collective', a direct consequence of slavery and its impact upon the African-heritage population. If the collective dynamic is currently little understood, it was not appreciated by Wynter's reviewers. *The Times Literary Supplement* review, for example, takes as its reference point the writing of V.S. Naipaul, an unfortunate choice because it led the reviewer to 'black-white hatreds in the West Indies'<sup>152</sup> and 'the dark forces of Jamaican nationalism'.<sup>153</sup> This type of 'playing in the dark' appears to have no reliable reference point for Wynter's collective concern, neither relative to African-Caribbean writing or women's writing. Wynter's 'large cast of characters', therefore, is explained, only in terms of her 'apprentice author' status. Yet, an historical awareness of the Caribbean suggests that the 'apprentice' author's large cast connects with an intention to articulate a collective story. The narrative is not solely that of the 'madman' Prophet Moses, dead at the opening of the text and upon whom the reviewer devotes two paragraphs. An understanding of this lends credence to Wynter's difficulty with managing the points of view within the novel. Further, if the text is an 'ambitious study of the lunatic religious fringe' as the review dismissively states, then the meeting of this 'lunatic' with the representative of the Anglican church and the deal they strike cannot be ignored for the issues they raise. While the two negotiate to further their religious leadership, the body of a sexually abused local girl is central to their bargaining with the effect that the 'Reverend Brooke knew nothing of the daughter born to him in Hebron'.<sup>154</sup>

Wynter's character, Prophet Moses, is interesting, I suggest, not for the flamboyant figure, that of Alexander Bedward, upon whom he is loosely based,<sup>155</sup> but in her writing of memory which the characterisation transcribes. While it may be argued

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<sup>151</sup> Wynter, 1984, p.4.

<sup>152</sup> See *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 September, 1962, 765.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Wynter, p.202.

<sup>155</sup> Bedward's obituary see, for example, *Handbook of Jamaica*, Kingston and London, 1931, p.565.

that a historical figure such as Bedward points to written sources, the oral nature of the society draws attention to such figures as folk figures learnt about firstly through oral culture. As such, in Wynter's writing, the folk figure, Prophet Moses, may be seen as a re-writing of Ananse the trickster figure of the Anansesem and African-Caribbean traditions so that while Bennett retells Ananse's tales, Wynter rewrites Ananse as religious leader at a crucial historical moment. Ananse, a god in the West African tradition, needs apply intricate cunning and skill in the post-slavery context, to attempt leadership. Further work could be done on the characteristics of Prophet Moses, including study of Gather Randall, his wife. Gatha, like the folklore Ananse's wife, is subjected to secrecy and the problems of her husband's non-disclosures. Not a consenting party to his plans, she, comes, in turn, to betray Rose, the Reverend Brooke's daughter whom she is coerced into rearing following her mother's death in childbirth. When Prophet Moses, himself, dies, and Gatha Randall's ambition for leadership surfaces, it is a singular projection of her ambition for her son. She assumes leadership, therefore, for purposes of the maternal project despite having been yet another silent black woman in the community. Since the burden of post-slavery community life demanded the energies of its members either to avoid being trapped by it or to do battle with it in order to bring about change, an activist's role becomes inescapable to her as to her husband. It is such a real life activist's project that is represented in the microcosmic black church community of Hebron whose realities are insistent, demanding and exacerbated by poverty. In the 1930s, for example, the grassroots Jamaican leader, Marcus Garvey, referred to, above, in relation to Una Marson, had emerged with a vision for meeting head on and solving the endemic difficulties of post-slavery life central to which was destitution and abject poverty.

A twofold concern is articulated in Caribbean texts foregrounding the burden of community. Firstly, there is identification with an immediate and inescapable post-slavery reality and its impact upon a world which the African-heritage writer, regardless of class, needs to negotiate. Secondly, there is the dilemma of the African-Caribbean

artist, of weighing the necessity of being an activist, given the urgent need for change, against an individual creative imperative. In identifying this context of militant literature, I am reiterating the debate opened by Hodge in 'Changing the World Versus Writing Stories'.<sup>156</sup> *Hebron* is the first of several women's novels through which this tension may be discerned. In this sense it is a historical text engaging with the aftermath of slavery as does later novels such as Collins's *Colour*, and Denise Harris's *Web of Secret* (1996).<sup>157</sup> Wynter's text also begins to define a tradition of militant concern in the literature of African-Caribbean women.

Released from 'anonymity' and the appearance of being like 'a spectre at a feast', by her husband's death, Gatha Randall's former silence evaporates.<sup>158</sup> As a result, within a congregation founded by her husband, Gatha becomes recognised as and is accused of being a 'word exchanger'.<sup>159</sup> Her accuser and rival, Brother Hugh, similarly contending for leadership, provokes Gatha's response to shout secrets from the most sacred place of all and 'inside the Lord's tabernacle' if necessary.<sup>160</sup> Gatha's erstwhile anonymity is for her, a facet of motherhood, itself a role of distinction within the community. The lifestyle with which she is familiar and to which Africans adapted within the region, allowed limited opportunity outside the maternal domain for the conferment of status upon women. Motherhood, however, confers status despite the most dire poverty and within a culture irrevocably shaped by endemic slavery, the status of 'mother' allowed a legitimisation of needs and desires which could be channelled into the offspring. That is to say, encouraged to be selfless, women's desire on behalf of their children became validated by other women as well as by the larger society.

Wynter's Gatha has experienced the profound silence of the African-Caribbean female prior to becoming a speaking subject. Yet, within the opening chapter of *Hebron*, she is being urged to shout to an audience of 'New Believers' guaranteed to be responsive

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<sup>156</sup> Hodge argues (p.202), 'the power of the creative word to change the world is not to be underestimated'.

<sup>157</sup> Denise Harris, *Web of Secret*, Leeds, 1996.

<sup>158</sup> Wynter, 1984, p13.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.12.

to her message. Gatha's first demand of the congregation is 'hear my testament' to which, in the call and response tradition of African orature, she commands the grave response, 'We are hearing, Miss Gatha'.<sup>161</sup> The notion which energises Gatha's argument and the listening women of the church of the New Believers is one which is complex and problematic in the way in which it isolates and denudes the young woman Rose, Gatha's erstwhile stepdaughter. The same argument, however, rests on an appeal to curse the young woman in order to save 'our black children'.<sup>162</sup> The plot of Wynter's text, then, turns on perceptions of the dynamics of maternity and its central concern with the good of the black child even at the expense of sacrificing the woman or mother. Yet, in speaking out, Gatha acts ironically to first condemn Rose to silence, a woman who from the 'rising' of her stomach exposed to the congregation, is clearly pregnant. Rose, too, had characteristically 'grown up in the midst of long silences',<sup>163</sup> a familiar aspect of women's condition. In this condition, women learn obedience, as did Rose's mother, or find themselves checking their anger, believing they 'could not afford to be angry, for the children's sake'.<sup>164</sup>

The power of the maternal project is exemplified, also, in Sister Ann's outburst against Obadiah, the maddened church Elder deposed by Gatha. Madness, theorised in the text as 'a private nirvana a man could reach when he was pushed beyond the limits of human endurance'<sup>165</sup> is a familiar condition to the Hebronites and one respected by the community.<sup>166</sup> Yet, when Sister Ann's perceptions of Obadiah's madness is suffused with 'the savage uncleanliness of birth, the unwashed sheets, the blood, the slime'<sup>167</sup> she violently denounces Obadiah's 'private nastiness' and in the process gains the support of many in the community. Signs of oppressiveness inherent in mothering is located within the physical biological conditions of maternity, the metaphorical 'blood' and

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p.23.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. p.55.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp.63-64.

'slime', as well as in the prevailing social conditions which determine the 'unwashed sheets' referred to in the text. The 'speaking woman' of Hebron speaks also out of this contradiction for the context of the maternal project carries a particular significance for the group.

It is such a context which Carole Boyce Davies distinguishes in her discussion of issues of race and history in relation to questions of 'maternal thinking'.<sup>168</sup> Boyce Davies argues,

For, when explored in relation to motherhood in African societies and when examined in materialist/ feminist contexts which read-in the exploitative nature of motherhood in male-dominated societies, the rewriting of 'mammy' offers its own theoretical excursions.<sup>169</sup>

The highlighting of cultural difference is important to my discussion, which seeks to signal a differentiated historical experience. Lack of awareness of this specificity leads to the critical distortion indicated in Wynter's review. For this reason, Boyce Davies warns of 'the need for feminists to racialize and historicize their definitions of motherhood'.<sup>170</sup> Patricia Hill-Collins<sup>171</sup> similarly warns of the decontextualisation of western thought' on theoretical issues of mothering and my reading insists on a recognition of race and history as important features marked within the text.<sup>172</sup> Significantly, the social context represented by Wynter is one which portrays aspects of the lived reality for the group. Thus when Gatha refers to 'our black children', she is privileging a coded understanding of race and history which acknowledges that survival itself is at issue. It is to this maternal, racial concern that the congregation responds. This collective response is simultaneously to an understanding of race and history that is grounded in a hostile lived reality. The parameters of leadership grasped by Gatha are determined by the group's history as well as by her comprehension of African-Caribbean motherhood and its survival imperative. Yet, the burden of the specific

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<sup>168</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, London and New York, 1994, p.137.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>172</sup> Hill-Collins proposes that 'black women have a self-defined standpoint' concerning their 'oppression'. See Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds., *The Black Feminist Reader*, London, 2000, pp.184-207.

condition represents her individual pain in that Gatha's son, Issac, is 'crippled'. Isaac's physical lameness metaphorically figures the condition of the legacy of slavery.

Readings of Wynter's novel remains sparse though Wynter's critical output in the 1970s was remarkable. Brief reviews of *Hebron* appeared in *Time*, *Freedomways*, *Bim* and *The Times Literary Supplement*.<sup>174</sup> Chang considers that Wynter's 'messages tend to overwhelm the story'.<sup>175</sup> Whether or not this pinpointed the activist project within the writing, Wynter's text confronted literary gatekeepers with perhaps notions of literariness which served to under-value her fiction. It was not until 1984, during a period of increased literary production of Caribbean women's writing that *Hebron* began to attract critical attention. Herma Diaz's review, two decades later, while mindful of qualities in the text symptomatic of a first work, such as the use of 'characters as mouthpieces for her views' nonetheless remarks upon the 'great profundity' of the text.<sup>176</sup> The sparse criticism, symptomatic of the reception of women's writing, is particularly difficult for this tradition of writing which relies largely on readings by critics outside of the culture. Arguably, the West Indian 'academy' suffered its own cultural imposition difficulties. Poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite writes of demands for 'Westindianization' which was manifested in a student sit-in at the Creative Arts Centre in Mona as recently as 1970.<sup>177</sup> Wynter was profiled in this, not the least because of her activist stance aligned with the students specifically in relation to their demand for Caribbean arts practice on campus. In the light of the recency of this event, the reception of *Hills of Hebron* is problematic. An underlying question concerns how, with such resistance from within the region, the novels might be critically received at all.

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<sup>173</sup> For a rare reading, see Janice Lee Liddell, 'The Narrow Enclosure of Martyrdom: A Study of Gatha Randall Barton in Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron*', in Boyce Davis and Fido, eds., pp.321-30.

<sup>174</sup> 'Review of the Hills of Hebron', *Time*, 80 (11 August 1962), 69.; Keith E., Baird, 'Review of the Hills of Hebron', *Freedomways*, 3 (1963), 111-12; Karl Sealy, 'Review of the Hills of Hebron', *Bim* 9 (January-June 1963), 292; 'Review of the Hills of Hebron', *Times Literary Supplement*, (28 September 1962), 75.

<sup>175</sup> Chang, in Dance, ed., p.503.

<sup>176</sup> Herma Diaz, 'Review of the Hills of Hebron', *Sunday Gleaner Magazine* (12 August 1984), 5.

<sup>177</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, 1977, p.60.

Wynter's novel is set in colonial Jamaica. Yet, the inescapable and specific colonial reality underlying the literature is that of slavery, a reality easily marginalised by theory which can and does disregard the fact that the islands and territories within the Caribbean region were not simply colonies. They were slave colonies. How might this literature of slave colonies be read? The legacy of a literature contextualised by a heritage representative of the 'birthing of property' might usefully characterise African-Caribbean women's literature. That is to say, a powerful meaning of the legacy of slavery for the African-Caribbean woman is that of giving birth or refusing to give birth to offspring measured by values not matching her own maternal perspectives. I hope to have illustrated that this maternal dynamic, powerfully indicated in the nineteenth-century testimonies of slaves, re-surface in literary texts such as Wynter's. In addition, the African-Caribbean survival ethic, thematically insistent within the text, begs the question of discourses which proffer tools effectively allowing the reading of such a literature.

Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970)<sup>178</sup> overtly signals in its title a bridging of the powerful oral culture and the competing written one representative of further Windrush meanings. While the title, taken from one of the region's ritual storytelling openings, signifies its orality, Hodge's bildungsroman, the first to maintain a singular focus on the African-Caribbean female to the exclusion of any significant male characters is arguably feminist in its stance. The text foregrounds, however, crucial African-Caribbean issues principally those of colonial ideology, language, the construction of multiple of subject positions, patriarchy and the intersections of race, class and gender. Hodge's text which, in comparison, has received critical attention, marks a particular commitment to African-Caribbean female subjectivity. In addition, the novel also takes up the maternal project and foregrounds a familiar 'other-mothering' directly related to slavery and the colonial context.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, Hodge's text offers a construction

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<sup>178</sup> Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* Harmondsworth: Heinemann, 1970 (hereafter, *Crick*).

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, Maureen T. Reddy, 'Maternal Reading: Lazarre and Walker' in *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectives*, Knoxville, 1991. I also write of this in the poem 'Aunt Hetty - Other Mother' in *Haunted By History*, p.35.

of 'Self' which profiles the beginning of a literate tradition among African-Caribbean women.

The narrative concerns a young girl, Tee, whose growth into womanhood necessarily requires that she engages with issues of Caribbean reality such as language, material poverty, miseducation, displacement and so on. Two opposing forces struggle to shape Tee's future: that personified by the anglicised and soulless Aunt Beatrice and that of the uneducated though 'rooted' folk figure, Tantie. Even as the women battle to establish themselves as Tee's surrogate mothers, the girl progresses through her education which prepares her for a future different from both Tantie's and Aunt Beatrice's. Yet, finally, the choice is not Tee's for colonial circumstances dictate that she emigrates to join her father in the UK, a process which mimics the coalescing of factors of education, proximity and production crucial to the publication life chances of potential African-Caribbean writing women. Tee embodies, I would argue, some of the crucial tensions for educated African-Caribbean young women of the period.

How might the writing which negotiates such tensions and derives from such history be read? Evelyn O'Callaghan prioritising different concerns opts for a feminist perspective on postcolonial theory.<sup>180</sup> O'Callaghan proposes a 'combination of strategies "lifted" from post-colonial *and* feminist theories' to 'underline the heterogeneity of West Indian texts'.<sup>181</sup> This critical strategy, while useful to O'Callaghan's purposes is of limited value to my own, since my concern here is not with the heterogeneity which concerns O'Callaghan. Aware of an historical reluctance to engage with issues of race, and specifically African-heritage issues, this thesis nonetheless negotiates what Wynter termed the 'unchanging and unchangeable'.<sup>182</sup> Uncertain of 'where questions like this might end', I must persist with theoretical questions concerning race and its repercussions in relation to the historical context of the region.<sup>183</sup> Further, fundamental

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<sup>180</sup> O'Callaghan, p. 51.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>182</sup> Wynter, p.192.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

questions of power remain unanswered by the prevailing theories concerning who speaks critically and who does not. It is this question which the collection of critical essays, *Framing*, begins to address. In the Introduction I write:

Interpreters of texts created from the complex social, historical and linguistic web which comprises the Caribbean context may be as steeped in 'hierarchies of privilege' as other critics. Readings of Caribbean women's literature reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, such groundings. In the process, influential theories based on cultures and traditions intimately experienced and understood by critics are extended to accommodate the lesser known literatures.<sup>184</sup>

At risk of stating a complex phenomenon perhaps more simplistically than it merits, I suggest that it is not unusually the case that a literature produces its critics. The argument is that the literature read by concerned readers symbiotically related to the culture and its literary product, the text, gives birth to its critics. This is patently not the case for African-Caribbean women's literature.<sup>185</sup> In the absence of widespread articulation of theories by critics in such a relationship to African-Caribbean women's writing, I argue for particular attention to the theorising which the texts themselves offer while remaining alert to the absence of critical voices such as I have indicated, itself symptomatic of that which has produced the literature. In other words, the large-scale absence of indigenous critics is itself problematic and has not been fully or even adequately addressed. Rather, the response has been a traditional one to 'speak for' those rendered voiceless. (It is as if on finding that the subaltern could not speak, ventriloquist practice determined the signs of her sub-vocalising!)

My position derives from a concern with the ways in which in the absence of the taken-for-granted indigenous critics, the criticism produced in relation to African-Caribbean literature, for example, is rendered as not problematic. A parallel would be a situation in which critics of English literature are overwhelmingly unfamiliar with the cultural context and rarely themselves English; or, American literature rarely commented upon by an American scholar. I would like to recall the 'Sister Goose'

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.ix.

<sup>185</sup> Jeanette B. Allis argued similarly in 1970 concerning the region's literature. See Allis, p.3.

parallel of the previous chapter which may also, I suggest, apply to the field of literary criticism. That there are few indigenous scholars and critics in this field is itself worrying and reflects the continued power dynamics in the production of literary and critical texts. The phenomenon is articulated by African-American critics such as Barbara Christian, and Valerie Lee. Lee's focus upon the theorising which literary texts themselves offer is particularly important to this thesis and I examine this feature in some detail in Chapter Six. I hope to have addressed in Part One questions of the changes from voicelessness to voicedness allowing publication of the first African-Caribbean woman's post-slavery novel. Part Two focuses on reading the first-wave texts.

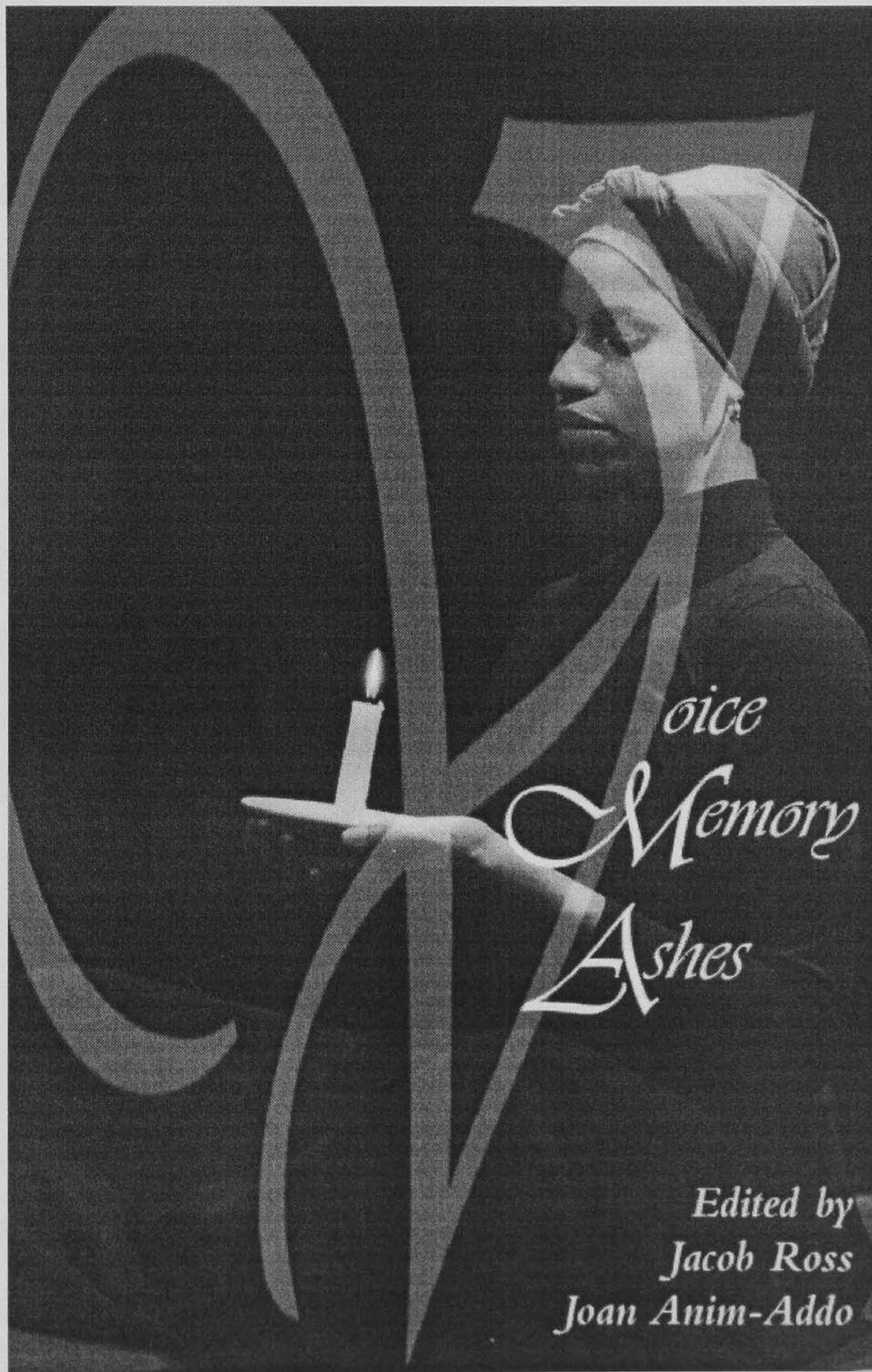
# **Part Two**

## **Theory**

## Chapter Four

# Writing Women: First-Wave Novels and Creolisation of the Master Discourse

Language as the house of being (Heidegger) Straight english, Queen's english, received pronunciation - I prefer to call it King's English - a more honest description of its pedigree. None of these is really the house of my being - I am always a stranger. *Dialect or what I prefer to call the demotic English should have been my house, my home.*<sup>1</sup>



Jacob Ross, *Voice Memory Ashes: Lest We Forget*, photograph for book cover design, 1994, London.

<sup>1</sup> M. Nourbese Philip, *A Genealogy of Resistance*, Ontario, 1997, p.50.

In Part One I hope to have established an historical context of the emergent literature's marginal position in relation to English Literature. I move now to some tentative theoretical formulations towards the reading of African-Caribbean women's writing.<sup>2</sup> While this literature has been little theorised, the spate of conferences since 1988, inspired by the writing (see Introduction), suggests a strong desire for recognition. Notably, Caribbean women's literature appears not to have provoked the response given to the predominantly male body of writing for 'an aggressively regional criticism'.<sup>3</sup> Rather, the critical lead for women's writing seems to have been taken by Caribbean-heritage critics and scholars in metropolitan USA in a determined bid to place the women's writing within a gendered critical tradition.

Within the larger context of women's writing, critics have identified difficulties posed by (white) female authorship. For example, USA feminist, Susan Stanford Friedman, in her essay 'When a Long Poem is a "big" poem' (1997), argues the case of women poets who 'dismantle the boundaries so as to position themselves as women *writing inside a tradition in which women have been outsiders*'.<sup>4</sup> As I have shown in Part One of my study, African-Caribbean women have been 'outsiders' - outside, to invoke Friedman, both of the publication and critical traditions. If such outsider status has been noticed by other writing groups, then it has rarely been debated.<sup>5</sup> There is a contrast to be highlighted here between Gilroy's notion of the 'barricade' with its resonance of confrontation and physical struggle and Friedman's more quotidian 'boundaries' which divide or limit but need not signify hostility on the part of those already 'inside'.<sup>6</sup> The passage from outsider to insider is critical to this thesis. A question at issue is what part might the role of language play in defining the 'outsider' position of African-Caribbean women's literature?

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<sup>2</sup> Allis, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, 'When a Long Poem is a "big" poem', in warhol and price herndl, eds., p. 724.

<sup>5</sup> But see Alexander, 22-33.

<sup>6</sup> Gilroy, 1998, p.215.

The linguistic relationship articulated by Philip, above, that of being a 'stranger' to her (official) language, is pivotal to this chapter. In order to examine this issue of vital concern to African-Caribbean women writers, I draw upon some of the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin proposes in *Dialogic Imagination* (1992) that the novel be recognised as a form stylistically dependent upon 'the system of its "languages"'.<sup>7</sup> He insists upon a definition of the novel which foregrounds its diversity of languages or speech types, and Bakhtin asserts that this is because the novel requires the 'social heteroglossia' of everyday living language in order to achieve varying levels of authenticity.<sup>8</sup> The plurality of languages at play, key in Bakhtin's theory, features distinctively within African-Caribbean literature. Furthermore, the 'dialogic orientation' of language crucial to the Bakhtinian perspective; the way in which one stratum of an hierarchic language dialogues with another within or indeed across language systems,<sup>9</sup> is particularly relevant to this study and represents a particular dilemma for individual authors.<sup>10</sup>

My interest in Bakhtin's theoretical emphases and its contribution to the development of this thesis are threefold. Firstly, Bakhtin's concern with 'dialogizing', in the European novel, informs my understanding of Caribbean literature, particularly since, as Holquist states:

The conception has as its enabling *a priori* an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere.<sup>11</sup>

Such 'opposition and struggle' speaks directly to the texts with which this study is concerned. Secondly, I develop and propose a perspective on the 'contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity' of the language of the women-authored texts.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, Bakhtin's

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<sup>7</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (first translated into English in 1975), Texas, 1981, p.262.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.263.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.275.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Merle Hodge in interview with Joan Anim-Addo, *Mango Season*, 11 (1998), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin, p. xviii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.272.

notion of the 'dialogic orientation of discourse' as 'a property of any discourse' becomes an important point of departure as I attempt to conceptualise the critical polyphony of carnivalised discourse in Chapter Five.

If the rich and diverse heteroglossic language context of the Caribbean is examined as the result of a linguistic 'experiment',<sup>13</sup> a fresh perspective may be gained concerning the 'embattled tendencies' within the texts.<sup>14</sup> The 'experiment' might be said to have taken place 'long ago and far away'. It involved People A transporting People B to an unknown location, Place X. In the process, each element of People B's culture: language, religion and history, for example, was shackled. In Place X a creolised culture emerges in which People B is not allowed speech in the mothertongue. Since even severing of tongues cannot prevent People B's thought processes in the mothertongue, a language system develops which betrays established patterns of thought and speech. The specific heteroglossia is referred to by M. Nourbese Philip as the 'Caribbean demotic'.<sup>15</sup> The term *demotic* may usefully apply to the linguistic outcome of the 'experiment', a continuum 'from standard to Caribbean English'.<sup>16</sup> Philip's use of the conditional perfect tense '*should have been* my house, my home' in relation to vernacular forms of Caribbean language flags the complex relationship between writer and language<sup>17</sup> and simultaneously signals an ontological dis-ease with standard English 'as the house of being'.<sup>18</sup> Further, throughout Philip's writing, there exists a strong sense of the 'opposition and struggle at the heart of existence', the 'ceaseless battle' central to Bakhtin's concern with language.

Philip engages, too, with the question of entry into the master discourse in terms of relationship to the father tongue. In 'Discourse on the Logic of Language', for

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<sup>13</sup> I first used this analogy at a keynote address at a conference titled 'Including the Caribbean' in Wandsworth, London, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin, ed., p.272.

<sup>15</sup> Philip, 1993, p.84.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Philip, 1997, p.50.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Concerning Caribbean writers and educational alienation from the mothertongue, see also Merle Hodge, 'Caribbean Writers and Caribbean Language: A Study of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*', in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., pp.47-8.

example, the master discourse, identified as SE for the African-Caribbean woman, is figuratively construed as both 'father tongue' and foreign language.<sup>19</sup> If, as Philip's poetics suggest, to engage with the master discourse is to negotiate foreign territory, this accounts, in part, for the large-scale absence of theoretical writing. Philip's own discursive writing highlights the hostility of SE to African-Caribbean experience. So, entry into the master discourse is also to engage with hostility.

Literary foremother, Merle Hodge, refers in contradistinction to Philip's 'demotic', to a 'Creole language'.<sup>20</sup> The range of terms: 'bad English, broken English, patois, dialect or idelect', for example, used variously to describe the language heterogeneity of the anglophone Caribbean<sup>21</sup> indicates the complexities of the Caribbean language situation. Linguists, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), propose that the 'Anglophone Caribbean' may be treated as a 'single cultural region in respect of language', providing there is a simultaneous awareness of the unique linguistic and cultural make-up of individual territories and islands.<sup>22</sup> In addition, there is generalised agreement among Caribbean-focused linguists since De Camp (1971), that a language continuum from basilect Creole to Standard English serves to characterise the region's language.<sup>23</sup>

That Caribbean language and specifically its Creole component constitutes an important part of the African-Caribbean woman writer's reality cannot be ignored. Linguist and poet Velma Pollard, for example, highlights the creolized nature of the Caribbean context. She writes of Jamaican writers writing 'themselves, their cultures, their identity into their work' and achieving a Creole effect 'by exploiting the dual linguistic heritage'.<sup>24</sup> So, it is the 'linguistic integration' itself an indication of creolisation, 'at once authentic, and available if to different degrees to both insider and outsider

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<sup>19</sup> Philip, 1993, p.30.

<sup>20</sup> Hodge, 'Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty', in Cudjoe, ed., p.204.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.275.

<sup>22</sup> Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity*, Cambridge, 1985, p.87.

<sup>23</sup> D. De Camp, 'Toward a Generative Analysis of a Post-Creole Speech Community', in D. Hymes, ed., *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, Cambridge, 1971, p.350.

<sup>24</sup> Velma Pollard, 'To Us All Flowers Are Roses', in *Centre of Remembrance*, ed., Joan Anim-Addo, London, 2000, p.176.

readership', which concerns Pollard.<sup>25</sup> In addition, writers such as Olive Senior and Merle Hodge have registered concern with the role of Creole in publication and the privileging of one language stratum, SE, as literary language, to the virtual exclusion, at times, of Creole.<sup>26</sup> Senior, author of three collections of short stories and winner of the 1987 Commonwealth Writer's Prize, whose narratives illustrate the centrality of the Creole voice in her writing, plainly states 'mainstream publishers don't like Creole'.<sup>27</sup> Such dislike serves to suppress writing rich in Creole. If Senior's concern is to be taken seriously, this factor contributes also to the repression of already published voices and on-going publication silence of potential writers. Hodge similarly refers to the 'active suppression' of Creole in home and school and the ontological insecurity to which this gives rise and to which Philip alludes.<sup>28</sup> Historical precedents verify Hodge's claim. For example, in *Acts of Identity* (1985), Le Page and Tabouret-Keller cite the 'prohibition' in Grenada, in 1884, of the speaking of patois, the mothertongue Creole, in primary schools.<sup>29</sup> It is against this long-term repression that Creole as medium for published prose may be seen. Furthermore, by generalising from the specific prohibition to widespread colonial practice, it becomes evident how hierarchies within Caribbean language have been legitimised through a process of coercion, rewards and punishment within the education system. Since Creole prohibition was not specific to Grenada, the 'dialogic orientation' within the language is resonant of issues of status and power which Philip takes up in 'Managing the Unmanageable',<sup>30</sup> and which Nichols illustrates in 'The Battle with Language'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The subject of Creole arises in many interviews and discussions with Caribbean women writers. See, for example, Joan Anim-Addo's interview with Olive Senior in *Mango Season*, 7 (December 1996), 4-8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hodge, in Cudjoe, ed., p.204.

<sup>29</sup> Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, p.52. The Grenadian situation compares with that of Surinam, where, before Emancipation, schooling had been in Creole. From 1877, with Dutch the designated language of instruction, children were 'severely punished' for speaking Creole. See Jan Voorhoeve and Ursy Litchveld, *Creole Drum*, trans. Vernie A. February, New Haven and London, 1975, pp.8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Philip, 'Managing the Unmanageable', in Cudjoe, ed., pp.295-300.

<sup>31</sup> Grace Nichols, 'The Battle with Language', in Cudjoe, ed., pp.283-9.

Hodge draws attention to a qualitatively different precedent operating against the use of experimentation with Creole in literary publication. Asked in interview about possible linguistic tensions within *For the Life of Laetitia* (1996), Hodge invokes an awareness of the 'traditional option' of standard English for narration and correspondingly, Creole for characterisation.<sup>32</sup> Hodge articulates her position as 'stuck' in such a 'traditional' mode. She points contrastingly to her earlier stance on Creole, one of radicalism privileging writing as transformative action and the positive role of Creole in such a project.<sup>33</sup> To illustrate, her rhetoric turns on the lack of 'contradiction between art and activism' and 'the power of the creative word to change the world'.<sup>34</sup> While the powerful 'word' was the Creole word, Hodge suggests that Creole is most vulnerable to editing policy and practice and is likely to be diminished in the exchange between a foreign publisher's concern with lucidity and an author's concern for Creole as a complex language.<sup>35</sup> Pollard emphasises that 'English is STILL the more widely used language' for publication 'not only for historical reasons but because it makes the writing accessible. Her linguist/writer view - and like Hodge she is both - appears to invoke the 'wider reading public' argument of which Hodge is wary.<sup>36</sup>

For the writer, decisions concerning the use of Creole and its impact upon the representation of social reality and publication are important. Significantly, while Bakhtin indicates the part played by ideology in, for example, the role of interested groups such as linguists and their perception of language function, it appears that ideology impacts decisively even prior to publication. Susan S. Lanser, in *The Narrative Act* (1981), indicates the 'relationship of the writer' to the circumstances of production of the text as 'essentially ideological'.<sup>37</sup> Lanser highlights ways in which critics have sought to avoid issues of ideology which, she argues, may be located in 'point of view'. Lanser's

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<sup>32</sup> Hodge, in interview with Joan Anim-Addo, *Mango Season*, 11 (December 1998), 7. Hodge, *For the Life of Laetitia*, London, 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Hodge, 1998, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Hodge, in Cudjoe, ed., p.202.

<sup>35</sup> Hodge, 1998, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Pollard, in Anim-Addo, ed., p.180.

<sup>37</sup> Susan S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, New Jersey, 1981, p.64.

perspective draws upon strong argument. John Goode, for example, refers to point of view as 'precisely' situating the 'relationship of the text to ideology itself'<sup>38</sup> and Lanser suggests that in attempting to separate the text from the 'circumstances of its creation' there is a perpetuation of ambiguity in which narration and point of view are implicated.<sup>39</sup>

That narration, and specifically, narrative voice, work powerfully upon the reader is of particular concern in the Caribbean context since, as I have shown, issues of power and ideology abound and persist. Taking Lanser's point that the concept of narrative voice is complex,<sup>40</sup> I emphasise that 'voice' as used here, though imprecise, incorporates the notion of 'some speaking or perceiving consciousness'.<sup>41</sup> Lanser stresses that it is frequently a plurality of voices which come to the fore in any one narrative. If this view of textual voice(s) as interlocutory between writer and audience is correct, what meanings might this hold for African-Caribbean texts? While debate concerning the novel has focused upon Barthesian concerns with the 'readerly' or 'writerly' text, the first-wave novels of interest here incline towards negotiated fictional realities which derive also from oral culture.<sup>42</sup> It is no coincidence that first novels, *Hebron* and *Crick*, draw differently from a tradition of the oral or spoken word. Wynter's text developed as a novel from a dramatised script and performance which portrays an oral-religious community, while the title of Hodge's *Crick Crack* uses a ritual storytelling opening. The phrase 'crick crack monkey' signifies itself to a Caribbean audience as a story or *imagined* narrative not to be confused with a true account.<sup>43</sup>

First-wave African-Caribbean women writers straddle both the worlds of live storytelling and books; of childhood steeped in oral culture and adjustment to a

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<sup>38</sup> John Goode, cited in Lanser, p.16. John Goode, 'Women and the Literary Text', in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Harmondsworth, 1976, p.218.

<sup>39</sup> Lanser, p.52.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, London, 1970.

<sup>43</sup> For this insight, I draw upon my own Caribbean childhood experience and that of my involvement in storytelling.

technologised, literate world. As a result, not only is the oral language of storytelling characterised by heteroglossia present in first-wave texts, but oral styles of narration are also transferred to the written texts.<sup>44</sup> I have attempted to trace examples of the latter in a paper focussing upon the short story in which I highlight 'jokes' and folk tales as well as storytelling conventions which feature as narrative modes in the short stories of Merle Collins.<sup>45</sup> To some extent, this is part of the larger debate identifying orality as an aesthetic component within African diaspora writing.<sup>46</sup> Textual voice(s) incorporate a consciousness of the oral which, perhaps more difficult to isolate in the novel, is readily identified in the short story. Nonetheless, the 'openness' of the novel and its elasticity allow the encoding of Creole textual voices which, given the status of Creole, also draw attention to hierarchy and social stratification. Susanne Mühliessen's reminder of the close association between women's lives and oral culture is pertinent, particularly in consideration of literacy opportunities for African-Caribbean women prior to the 1950s.<sup>47</sup> In addition, it may be argued that first-wave novelists within the emerging women's tradition build upon the use of Creole by earlier male writers such as Selvon and Lamming. This increases the likelihood of polyphony as a feature of narrative voice in the texts. Lanser's warning that 'publication confers an additional authority a real as well as symbolic evidence that some preselection process has occurred' cannot be ignored.<sup>48</sup> The extent to which the narrative voice is polyphonous is linked to this additional authority as perceived by gatekeepers in publishing and amongst authors themselves.

Few African-Caribbean women writers have addressed the issue of language and its representation of women's experience as Philip has. Taking Lanser's use of the term 'extrafictional voice' as that which carries 'all the diegetic authority of its (publicly

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Merle Collins, 'Orality and Writing: A Revisitation', in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.43.

<sup>45</sup> See my 'Woman-Centred Narratives at the Intersections of the Oral and Literary', *Journal of The Short Story*, 26 (Spring 1996), 49-62.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Wilentz, *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992, p.xv.

<sup>47</sup> Susanne Mühliessen, 'Encoding the Voice', in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, p.170.

<sup>48</sup> Lanser, pp.121-2.

authorised) creator', Philip's 'extrafictional voice' is particularly resonant and polyvocal.<sup>49</sup> The poem 'dreamskins' for example culminates in the woman's ceaseless 'whispers' fixated upon 'the voice, the voice, the voice', reclaimed from a hostile and wounding silence symptomatic of the African-Caribbean woman's largely unrecorded history, characterised by denial of voice.<sup>50</sup> Philip is no stranger to the unmasked authorial voice as her collections of essays attest.<sup>51</sup> In 'The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became A Spy' (1993), she indicates a particular concern with figurative language which accurately represents the experience of the African-Caribbean woman.<sup>52</sup> Philip makes a direct connection between mothertongue and woman's tongue and takes pains to point out the hostility of standard English to African cultural experience. More specifically, she refers to the negative portrayal of African experience arising from associated images within everyday as well as literary language. As a result, she indicts the language that 'kinks hair and flattens noses'.<sup>53</sup> She stresses, in the light of this, the need for African-heritage writers to find alternative means of figuring images in the languages to which they have access. A key question posed by Philip's writing is that of perspective. She questions, for example, whose perspective is privileged in the established usage of standard English? For this reason, she proposes the notion of 'i-mage',<sup>54</sup> one of which, central to her poetry, is that of the black female's body. It is that body configured either as child's or woman's which is redefined in much of the poetry. That body, too, characterised by its peculiar (dis)embodiment, a result of former claims as sexual or chattel labour as in Dunbar's figuration and Prince's testimony, and its related silence(s), texture the challenge of writing.

It is to the speaking 'i' that Philip turns in a determined attempt to substitute figurative language which positively serves African experience. She fragments the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.122.

<sup>50</sup> Philip, 1993, p.8.

<sup>51</sup> See M.Nourbese Philip, *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture*, Ontario, 1992, as well as Philip, 1997.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Philip, 1993, pp.80-1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp.78-80.

accepted literary concept, 'image', so as to accentuate the 'i' as in Rastafarian usage, hence her alternative use of the term, 'i-mage'.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Philip uses 'i-mage' to figure the African-heritage image-maker as one who creates in the image of the first person 'i', the African-Caribbean woman. For Philip, therefore, i-mage stresses the African self in reclaiming power as one who creates and produces figurative language in the face of an inbuilt hostility within the dominant language. Primarily, the i-mage serves not to negate but to reinforce historical realities. A connectedness with silence, sexuality, gender and race are central to Philip's poetics and she returns to the genesis and functioning of African-Caribbean women's silence. For Philip, the African-Caribbean woman's body demarcates the locus of the struggle for speech and self-determination. Consequently, in much of her oeuvre, the body itself figures racial and gender difference. It is such signification which I refer to as *woman reality* and which in first-wave texts may be fruitfully read as difference.<sup>56</sup>

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert illustrates how the writing of such *woman reality*, habitually received in critical silence, might achieve critical recognition and even acclaim.<sup>57</sup> Though I draw upon Paravisini-Gebert more extensively in Chapter Five, it is useful to examine here, her suggestion that the privileging of SE in publication is well rewarded. She refers, for example, to Jamaica Kincaid as one whose success is related to this.<sup>58</sup> While Kincaid is a rare anglophone African-Caribbean woman novelist to receive widespread critical acclaim, how related is this to the accessible language of her texts, distinguished by a marked absence of Creole? Hodge, for example, notes that the strategy, 'not to engage with the [Creole] language situation at all',<sup>59</sup> is an 'option exercised by Jamaica Kincaid'.<sup>60</sup> The range of strategies to which Hodge refers, like the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> I borrow the term from Wilfred Cartey, cited in Helen Pyne-Timothy, p.79. The creolised term omits the use of the possessive thus deriving its contextual distinction.

<sup>57</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, 'Woman Against the Grain: The Pitfalls of Theorising Caribbean Women's Writing', in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., pp.160-8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>59</sup> Merle Hodge, 'Caribbean Writers and Caribbean Language', in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.48.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

languages of the region, may be viewed along a continuum from polyphonous engagement indicative of Creole narrative voice to that of the exclusive use of standard English. For purposes of the larger undertaking of the reading of first-wave texts, I propose to link such a continuum of narrative voice with the notion of masking. The concept of masking used here develops an idea by Betty Wilson, critic of francophone Caribbean literature, in the essay subtitled 'The Writer as Maker, Wearer, and Breaker of Masks'.<sup>61</sup> Wilson's analysis draws upon the idea of *masking* and its relation to black people which francophone Frantz Fanon (1925-61), treats in *Black Skin White Masks* (1986).<sup>62</sup> Fanon's main theme is the 'disalienation of the black man'.<sup>63</sup> He proposes that meanings of negation related to Atlantic slavery and colonisation of African-Caribbean men, specifically Martinicans, together with colonial imposition, have led to the black man's assumption of a white mask in order to survive. Re-reading this seminal text, the 'mask' remains powerfully valid in considering language and the breaking of silence. The link is explicitly made in Fanon's opening chapter:

I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject, which should provide us with one of the elements of the colored man's comprehension of the dimension of *the other*. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other.<sup>64</sup>

While Fanon's text is problematic at the lexical level in that it positions the woman reader as 'outsider', the fundamental issue addressed remains vital.<sup>65</sup> At a semantic level, Fanon presents an analysis of the meeting of black and white worlds in which the black subject must comprehend *the other*. He offers a schema for engaging with the textual meeting of novelistic language and material circumstance. I borrow his elucidation, involving masking, which allows an understanding of the literary gaze

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth (Betty) Wilson, 'Michelle Cliff and Her French Caribbean Antecedents: The Writer as Maker, Wearer and Breaker of Masks', in Helen Pyne-Timothy, ed., pp.91-101.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.91, Wilson usefully clarifies Fanon's notion of assimilation as 'the wearing of the mask of another's language, manners, costume, culture'.

<sup>63</sup> Fanon, p.38. References, from the introductory epigraph, to 'millions of men', and throughout the text itself, attest to the author's primary concern with 'understanding among men', 'our colored brothers', 'the black man' and so on.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. See also, for example, p.9.

and its impact upon the African-Caribbean woman writer. While Fanon refers to the gaze in which he, as an African-Caribbean male, meets the white man's eyes, I am interested in transferring this gaze so that it is the African-Caribbean woman who returns the gaze.<sup>66</sup> For the black woman, this is a male gaze carrying with it all the meanings of a master discourse. Of that discourse in relation to silence, Fanon affirms:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, *to support the weight of a civilisation*.<sup>67</sup>

If Fanon is right, then this burden is great, indeed, for African-Caribbean women novelists, given the historicised position. For black women, to speak is to have wrested a voice from a traumatic gendered and racialised past and its difficult aftermath. Yet claiming a published voice leads to a conundrum, for while silence is also existence 'absolutely for the other', including on a domestic level, publication according to Fanon, is equally burdensome. Mary Louise Pratt, in *Speech Act Theory* (1977), points to the way in which the authorial voice is formed in relation to the literary community.<sup>68</sup> For African-Caribbean women, this is overwhelmingly a white male community located in metropolitan centres.<sup>69</sup> How, in the circumstances, does she negotiate linguistically? From Fanon's analysis, the notions of masking and 'cultural imposition' are particularly useful, then, to this discussion. Betty Wilson in an earlier critical borrowing of Fanon's concept of the mask makes explicit some properties of the mask. She notes:

Masking has two main aspects: dissimulation and transfiguration. Its mode is imitation; its aim is essentially transformatory. Both the maker and the wearer are at risk.<sup>70</sup>

I am suggesting that in order to meet the white literary gaze, a greater or lesser degree of masking comes into play in first-wave texts. This is why Pollard, for example, notes

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<sup>66</sup> See my 'Black Women Gazing or Looks that Might Kill', a keynote address presented at the "'Black Gaze' Conference', London, November 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Fanon, p.17-18.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Speech Act Theory*, Bloomington and London, 1977.

<sup>69</sup> With rare exceptions this continues to hold true though a few novels, e.g. Brodber's have been published by small black presses in metropolitan areas.

<sup>70</sup> Wilson, in Helen Pyne-Timothy, ed., p.91.

that 'most artists have written predominantly in English' though they offer also a 'creole flavour'.<sup>71</sup> This is evident at the level of textual voice, as an examination of African-Caribbean novels reveal. My concern is to differentiate the extent to which novels conceal or foreground Caribbean language including the mothertongue Creole, since this phenomenon appears to be linked to critical silence.<sup>72</sup> While this thesis is not concerned with a prescriptive rationale for the production of literary texts, I am interested to explore the language circumstance allowing an understanding of 'the literary act' and its meanings. Therein lies the linguistic tension indicated within the fiction of anglophone African-Caribbean women.

Fanon's thinking allows location of that source of linguistic tension, and, appropriating the Jungian term 'collective unconscious', he demonstrates, firstly, its Eurocentric implications and secondly, its transferability to Caribbean consciousness. As a result, the black subject becomes imbued with negative beliefs about the black self through cultural material intended primarily for a white market. By this process, states Fanon, 'the Antillean has taken over all the archetypes belonging to the European'.<sup>73</sup> Thus attitudes to Caribbean language are inculcated, thereby giving rise to belief in the inferiority of the self and of language as an aspect of self. The language prohibitions of the nineteenth century, above, were by the twentieth century so internalised as to produce negative attitudes to Caribbean language.<sup>74</sup> In literary production of the novel, itself prestigious as measured by the dominant discourse, it is useful to assess which choices are more compelling for African-Caribbean women novelists - is concealment of Creole or the highlighting of it more rewarding?

'Cultural imposition' may be applied to the process by which British culture was made to replace the 'shackled' African culture of the enslaved. A result of the institutionalisation of this is evident in, for example, Hodge's *Crick Crack*. Hodge's

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<sup>71</sup> Pollard, in Anim-Addo, ed., 2000, p.180.

<sup>72</sup> An interesting parallel is Sam Selvon and critical response to his creolised novels of an earlier period during the fifties but detailed examination of this is largely outside the scope of my study.

<sup>73</sup> Fanon, p.191.

<sup>74</sup> Hodge, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.46.

protagonist, Tee, responds to the institutionalised 'cultural imposition' within her formal education by creating for herself a persona more accurately resembling the ideal of the dominant culture. Books - critical cultural vehicles - reinforce, for Tee, the values of the dominant colonial culture. As a result, in 'Third Standard', at approximately fourteen years old, she creates the (alter)native Helen.<sup>75</sup> Tee explains:

Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighbing and built snowmen, ate potatoes, not rice, went about in socks and shoes from morning until night and *called things by their proper names never saying 'washicong' for plimsoll or 'crapaud' when they meant a frog*. Books transported you always into Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad.<sup>76</sup>

Helen signifies the power of naming things by reference to their 'proper' names which Tee understands to be those given by the dominant culture. Since Tee is Caribbean, her acculturation also carries insecurity. The familiar term 'washicong' is incorrect; so is the French Creole lexical item 'crapaud'. Nor does Tee's 'masking' remain at the level of words. Cultural signs such as dress, for example, are similarly 'corrected' until the ritual of cultural correction is interrupted at home and the girl's compulsive donning of socks and shoes to visit the village shop usually frequented by barefooted inhabitants is stopped. Hodge's portrayal simultaneously highlights the process by which the potential writer becomes acculturised. I am suggesting that Tee encapsulates this, for the young protagonist is also the scholarship-winner and high-achiever whose profile matches that of potential and actual women writers.<sup>77</sup> The meaning of Tee's appetite for fiction might also be questioned. Since such learnt behaviour begins in childhood, Tee's apprenticeship is, I suggest, significant. The potential writer, educated like Tee, is disposed towards or has been apprenticed similarly to assume the dominant culture and to support 'the weight of' this by 'dissimulation' or concealment of the culture considered inferior and its indigenous or creolised habit of naming. The pervasiveness

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<sup>75</sup> Hodge, 1970, p.61.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Wynter, for example, was a scholarship winner and so was Hodge.

of this may be measured through Senior's critique, 'there was nothing about us at all' in the education system.<sup>78</sup>

Collins's eponymous Angel experiences 'dreams and visions' which parallel Tee's 'doubling'.<sup>79</sup> Angel's school library, 'filled with Enid Blyton adventures' and supplemented by 'Mills and Boons paperbacks', represents the cultural material which becomes culturally crucial to Angel and her peers and which, the text implies, are available locally.<sup>80</sup> This may be contrasted with Caribbean books which are not widely available.<sup>81</sup> Stimulated by such reading, Angel dreams of blonde, blue-eyed ladies and dark-haired young men. For her, cultural imposition impinges upon her secret desire to be an angel in the Christmas play. In Collins's text, the church and its related sites, such as Angel's secondary school, function as the engine of *cultural imposition*. Thus, Angel becomes acculturised to the notion that angels are white. Since Angel herself is black, she feels constrained to name her desire only to herself. Collins writes:

They might laugh at me, she thought, but ah wouldha really like to be an angel. I mean, *she corrected herself in her thoughts*, I would really have liked to be an angel (*italics mine*).<sup>82</sup>

Wilson argues that masking is not 'simply a device intended to hide'.<sup>83</sup> It involves a direct attempt to 'make contact' with particular forces. Her argument is guided by an understanding of the way in which the mask functions in dance or theatre, for the wearer of a mask is involved in a ritual of engagement with powerful forces. By this analysis, Angel's desire to make contact with forces capable of making a black child white enough to be acceptable as an angel, leads to an altered mode of speech to the valued SE register. As a result, '*she corrected herself in her thoughts*'. The inferior Creole, Angel's mothertongue and the language of her thoughts have to be masked or 'corrected',

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<sup>78</sup> Pollard, in Anim-Addo, ed., p.175.

<sup>79</sup> Collins, p.113.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.113.

<sup>81</sup> See Olive Senior's interview with Joan Anim-Addo in *Mango Season*, 7 (1996), 7.

<sup>82</sup> Collins, 1987, p.113.

<sup>83</sup> Wilson, p.92.

since the channels for appropriating power is the prestigious SE which Angel needs adjust even at the level of her thinking. Child protagonists like Angel and Tee, allow the reader access to a process which shapes the patterns of thought inhibiting Creole, and restricting or banishing polyphony. Hodge writes:

Moreover Caribbean writers are themselves the product of an education process which may have alienated them from their first language so that they are not so proficient in it as in the standard language. Or, education may have produced at worst contempt, at best a certain discomfort with the Creole.<sup>84</sup>

### **Linguistic tensions and women's texts: oral tones on the page**

In an earlier essay referred to above, I examined selected short fiction by Collins to account for the oral qualities of her writing. I would like to develop this further by exploring ways in which African-Caribbean women's texts are culturally mediated and the impact of this in terms of linguistic tensions evident in specific novels. For writers such as Collins, Brodber and Edgell, explored in this chapter, Caribbean culture is informed by a rich and diverse oral tradition. That tradition is part of a much wider oral culture which itself draws upon a distinctive creole mix of African and European cultures. I use 'creole' to refer to the melting pot of cultures within the region though Creole, in the main, refers to the contact language which evolved within the Caribbean and which employs African syntax overlaid with European vocabulary.

The language background of individual islands and territories assume a crucial significance in the reading of Caribbean texts. Knowledge that Trinidad, for example, has had at least two lingua francas in the last two centuries<sup>85</sup> contextualises Tee's use of the French lexical item 'crapaud' within a predominantly standard English sentence. But what does the reader make of the use of 'washicong', which according to Allsopp's *Dictionary of Caribbean Usage* (1996), is to be found in Grenadian and Trinidadian usage and has etymological roots possibly in Mandarin Chinese?<sup>86</sup> Indian, Portuguese,

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<sup>84</sup> Hodge, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.47.

<sup>85</sup> Warner-Lewis, p.159.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, Oxford, 1996, p.591.

Spanish and Dutch as well as the indigenous languages and cultures variously contribute to the make-up of the Caribbean as a result of the region's colonial history dating from Portuguese expansion in approximately the fifteenth century. Narrative texts carry, in the form of the language chosen by the author, the region's sociohistorical context, one replete with issues of dominance and resistance which the language reflects. Notably a problem of language in the Caribbean context is not one of straightforward bilingualism but of Caribbean language perceived as a continuum of, at times, conflicting language forms.<sup>87</sup> The language(s) of Grenada, like Trinidad, includes French and English Creole, SE and local varieties of English. In the everyday language of characters created in such settings is the reality of linguistic tension.

A dilemma, over and above the insecurities of aspiring authors, arises which relates directly to questions resolving the use or absence of Creole for aesthetic expression. Linguists such as Whorf (1956), and Burton (1991), point to the impact of the linguistic construction of an individual's world.<sup>88</sup> Simply stated, they stress the way in which the language we use also shapes us, though not over-deterministically. What, then, are some of the effects of constructing literary representations of realities from a complex language situation such as that of the Caribbean? Firstly, a plurality of ways of expressing 'reality' may be expected, approximating to Bakhtin's 'social heteroglossia'. The texts selected in this chapter reflect such plurality in their use of the Creole to SE continuum available to anglophone Caribbean speakers.

Three sample opening paragraphs examined here through practical stylistics serve my study. While linguistic analysis privileges the effects produced within a literary text, I am specifically interested here in the effects produced by Creole literary texts and which impact upon their reception.<sup>89</sup> Further, I wish to argue that the continuing trend towards the use of Creole releases a far reaching network of competing meanings

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Hodge, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.47.

<sup>88</sup> Deidre Burton, 'Through Glass Darkly: Through Dark Glasses', in Roland Carter, ed., *Language and Literature*, London, 1991, p.200.

<sup>89</sup> See Carter, p.5, for his argument concerning the role of linguistics in understanding the 'effects produced by literary texts'.

still too little understood. The approach used here may be described as partially deictic, drawing upon John Lyons's definition of deixis as 'orientational features of language relative to the time and place of the utterance'.<sup>90</sup> Mary Mason (1991) adds to this the understanding that 'such features include person, demonstrative and locative expressions, and tense'.<sup>91</sup> Specifically, however, 'the' and 'a' referred to as deictic determiners, are less helpful in discussion of Creole lexis and syntax as they evoke different meanings or are differently represented in Creole.<sup>92</sup> So, there are limitations to the wholesale application of such a reading though it is useful for addressing the larger question of pedagogic practice and access to the constructed realities which Caribbean texts offer when so many readers are from outside of the culture. Clearly, within this literature featuring Caribbean Creole, close linguistic exploration is rewarding in relation to time and place, already mentioned, as well as (power) relationships. I refer also to textual functions such as dialogue and mood which enrich understanding of the plurality of social realities pertaining to the culture.

### **I. Bad talk: Merle Collins's *Angel***

The yard in front of Paren Comessee's house was full of restless silence. Quick whispers, staring faces, the sound of an occasional 'Sh-h-h-h!' Some people stood on straining tiptoe to see better. Eyes wide open, staring. Eyes narrowed peeping. Mouths half-open. A small figure would occasionally make a quick dart away from an enveloping skirt, only to be pulled back impatiently by a pouncing hand. Maisie heard a sudden fretful sound from the baby on her shoulder. She rocked the child gently. 'Sh-h-h-h! Sh-h-h-h! Hush, baby, hush!'

Heads turned towards them, sharply, released from the elastic force that kept them straining to stare ahead. Feet shuffled. People brushed away the sandflies. You could hear the slap! against face, feet, the quick brush against skirts. Toes scratched impatiently against shins; air was whistled in through teeth. People stamped their feet to send the flies away. They were so tiny and quick that they were gone by the time you felt the sting. They made the children fretful. 'Sh-h-h-h! Hush, baby, hush!'<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge, 1968, p.275.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Mason, 'Deixis: a Point of Entry to Little Dorrit', in Carter, ed., p.31.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>93</sup> Collins, 1987, p.1.

The opening paragraphs of Collins's first novel present the reader with a masked authorial voice. SE is key to the mode by which the reality of the sample text is conveyed so that, for example, few but Creole speakers would appreciate the direct translation from Creole which is represented in the latter half of sentence twelve, 'air was whistled in through teeth'. Where Creole speakers might use the lexical item 'steups',<sup>94</sup> a more 'universal', that is, non-Caribbean, reader is constructed by the text through the idealised author/literary community collaboration suggested above. The implied reader encoded in the text is offered the less authentic, arguably less meaningful, but accessible translation which in the opening paragraphs at least, demonstrates the writer's narrative facility with the prestigious SE. Ideologically, the text, through construction of a narrative persona whose voice is SE, acts to reassure the implied reader of the authority of the writer.

The 'orientational features' of the sample text and indeed the opening page of the novel excludes dialogue, though the ambiguous 'Sh-h-h-h! Hush, baby, hush!' is repeated. The proper noun 'Paren Comesee', as well as the common nouns, 'yard', 'sandflies' and 'cutlasses' (third paragraph) serve to orientate the western reader to an indeterminate but exotic setting for the narrative world into which she is being drawn. From the second page of the novel, however, the characters begin to be represented through dialogue and Caribbean language becomes an inescapable reality. Whatever the authorial choices constraining and initially restricting the use of language to mainly SE and the textual voice, they are overruled in the subsequent two hundred and ninety pages of text.

An extensive range of Caribbean language is found in novels by African-Caribbean women writers. *Angel*, for example, illustrates Collins's linguistic breadth. By drawing extensively on local language use with its regional variation, Collins actively defines an audience inclusive of Caribbean readership. Grenadian Collins has published

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<sup>94</sup> One of a variety of spellings given in Allsopp, p.530.

in addition to *Angel*, a second novel, *The Colour of Forgetting* and two volumes of poetry.<sup>95</sup> Within *Angel*, language may be explored as both sub-text and theme. While Collins's language range is readily evident in the text, it also mirrors the Caribbean 'demotic'. For example, Collins fuses varieties which may be identified as French-based Creole, English-based Creole, Creole French/English mixture, Grenadian English and SE. The following examples are drawn from the narrative:

French-based Creole

'Sa ki fe'w?' (p.22)  
 'Mwen wive!' (p.82)  
 'Pwangad waya pike mwen!' (p.82)  
 'vini ou kai vini, ou kai we!' (p.96)  
 'po djab, krapo' (p.217)  
 'pwangad waya pike mwen' (p.241)  
 'tout moun ca playwai' (p.258)

English-based Creole

'He mout' fas too much!' (p.80)  
 'Me ah don know' (p.81)  
 'Me ent like Delicia. Me ent have nobody to play wid self'. (p.96)  
 'it go save a lot of people' (p.70)  
 'it watching me bad eye!' (p.126)  
 'we go be late, you know' (p.175)

Creole French/English mixture

'Qui chile sa?' (p.5)  
 'Pale Patwa! she said. Se kon sa tout nom an famni-a ye. it in the blood I tell you." (p.55)  
 "Ka dammit fut, move out o' me eyesight' (p.90)  
 'Woy! Makome'! We do it!' (p.231)

Grenadian English

'take the pancup off the nail' (p.2)  
 'Regal sucked his teeth'. (p.12)  
 'He cuffed her' (p.69)  
 'How much for the skin-up?' (p.217)

It should be emphasised that Collins's polyphonous range of voices serves to shape the narrative as well as to represent speech acts. Headlines, predominantly in Creole, structure the novel. Warner-Lewis shows a number of ways in which post-emancipation contact in the region with more recently arrived Africans has kept alive the West African linguistic system, as exemplified through the Yoruba language, itself a

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<sup>95</sup> See Merle Collins, *Because the Dawn Breaks!: Poems dedicated to the Grenadian People*, London, 1985; and *Rotten Pomerack*, London, 1992.

contributor to Caribbean Creoles.<sup>96</sup> She points to the linguistic similarity of the West African group of languages which came to be known as the 'Niger-Congo' group, a similarity which lies, notably, within their syntactic relationship and phonemic characteristics, despite the 'mutual intelligibility' of the languages.<sup>97</sup>

A Creole feature which occurs repeatedly in both French and English Creole throughout *Angel* is that of morpheme or word reduplication considered typical of Niger-Congo African languages, for example, it 'good, good' (English Creole) or 'grand, grand' (French Creole) are conventions used to convey intensity of action, state, time or manner.<sup>98</sup> Other Creole rules, by Warner-Lewis's account, are illustrated in such usage as 'it red' as verb conveying a 'European adjectival concept',<sup>99</sup> 'is come a come' as verb fronting,<sup>100</sup> and 'di children dem' as overt signalling of plurality.<sup>101</sup>

Warner-Lewis cites idiomatic expressions such as the Yoruba, 'ki lo se e?' which translates as 'what do you?', an example of typical language use in *Angel*.<sup>102</sup> She refers, too, to 'soro buruku' which, translated, is 'bad talk', a theme treated by Collins:

'Woy! That was fire, yes, Miss'.  
'Yeh, boy, big talk down de line! '  
'Hear how de boy talking bad, non! [...]  
'So youself you talkin better den? someone asked.  
'*He not talkin bad. He's speaking a different language, that's all. It's no better or no worse than English*' (my italics).  
'Is not dat Cambridge want through!' '... How about if we go ahead with the precis lesson? We have a double period today. We have the speech on tape and it has been transcribed. How about if I pass around copies and we do a precis of the American President's address to the Congress last week?.... Then we could use it as a springboard for our discussion'.<sup>103</sup>

'Bad talk', English and Creole variants, are distinctly used as, for example, in the first four lines of the extract. At the level of lexicon, too, there is evidence of a rich and

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<sup>96</sup> Warner-Lewis, p.159.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Spaniards, early colonials, appear to have left few linguistic traces while French Creole, a vestige of the second colonial language impact, has largely disappeared from both islands. This is unlike St. Lucia where French Creole remains a dominant language.

<sup>99</sup> Warner-Lewis, p.162.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>103</sup> Collins,1987, p.236.

varied heritage reflecting diverse European and African linguistic influences, e.g. non, oui, krapo, fool-fool, carenage, chenets, makome, ting, kwibo, bukan, and so on. Where does such usage position the reader? Since the author opts for the main narration in third person SE, the reader is lulled into a seeming familiarity. My argument is that the main narration functions as a type of concealment which allows a familiar safety zone for the implied reader. Collins, however, embeds within the text a whole range of Creole-speaking voices in direct speech and through letters in non-standard variants, effectively subverting the main discourse. In the process of creolising the discourse, she invents the Grenadian female self through the protagonist Angel, her mother, Doodsie and her grandmother, Ma Ettie.

The extract also depicts a Caribbean classroom productive of the language tensions at play. Significantly, prestige and status in English teaching is indicated in the setting down of the canonical *Macbeth*, which, in this context, assumes colonial meanings. That the teacher gives in to discussion of immediate and revolutionary concern to her students is extraordinary in comparison to teaching situations depicted by authors as varied as Hodge, Senior and Kincaid. The pupils' ready accusation of 'talking bad' indicates, too, the internalisation of issues raised by writers as varied as Hodge, Nichols and Glissant. Here, too, is Fanon's 'collective unconscious' revealed as, indeed, it is in Senior's much cited poem, 'Colonial Girls High School'.<sup>104</sup> Such attitudes have characteristically been reinforced by agents of the education system very unlike the teacher, Angel, whose explanation counters the accusation of 'bad talk' and who proffers instead a linguistic explanation of the pupils' verbal behaviour. Further, while the teacher's reference applies directly to Creole, Angel's explanation, that of a 'different language', may also be 'doubly' read as character's and authorial justification for the extensive textual use of Creole. Angel, a product of the colonised context, is by Caribbean representation in literary texts, a radically progressive teacher.

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<sup>104</sup> Olive Senior, 'Colonial Girls High School', *Talking of Trees*, Kingston, 1985.

Angel, herself, is no stranger to accusations of 'bad talk'. When, at seven years old, her family moves home, Angel is just beginning 'big school'. The narrative reveals: 'She didn't like it at first. The children kept shouting "country-bookie" and telling her to speak properly'.<sup>105</sup> Angel's linguistic taunting is resolved only after she accounts for the difference in her speech with a lie about her foreign birth. Linguistic assault similarly takes place at home, too, where Angel is also vulnerable to charges of 'bad talk'. For example, in dialogue with her father:

'Mu dey fly? said Allan. 'That is any way for people going to school to talk? When for you to correct us, yusef saying 'Mu dey fly?''<sup>106</sup>

The SE translation of 'Mu dey, fly!' is 'go away, fly!' Angel's father's indignation is precisely because his daughter, is expected, as the beneficiary of a prestigious education, not to use such obvious creolisms. Similarly, the status of language comes into play when Angel, desperate for the examination results which would ensure her a scholarship to university, talks to God, 'in proper English'.<sup>107</sup> The process of mothertongue rejection, a product of coercion by home and school, with its early childhood beginnings, lends itself to the 'masking' central to this debate.

Is SE a metaphor for cultural imposition? Grenada, the setting for Angel, by virtue of its history of colonial domination by Britain since the mid-eighteenth century, significantly replicates certain cultural norms imposed upon the island's subject people. Notable among these is the way in which the education system, typical of the Anglophone Caribbean, insists upon reinforcing the use of SE as a measure of literary or linguistic competence. This means an acceptance of a norm, SE competence, the attainment of which in the specific creolized linguistic circumstances of mothertongue versus official language, is highly unrealistic for most of the school population.<sup>108</sup> It also means a systematic severing from African linguistic roots which persist through

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<sup>105</sup> Collins, 1987, p.91.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.123.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Voorhoeve and Litchveld, p.9.

Creole usage. African-Caribbean writers, the product of an educational system which aims for such linguistic masking, confirm in their writing the success of the system. Indeed, first-wave writers are the achievers within a formal education system which profoundly discredits Creole languages and culture. This may be described as a second major cultural imposition in that it succeeded the banning of African languages during slavery.

Collins, interviewed for BBC Radio Four in 1992, was asked to comment on 'Caribbean poets (who) insisted on corrupting the Queen's English with their primitive tongue'.<sup>109</sup> In response, she confirmed that the language of her texts derived from 'the struggling with formal training, with (its) emphasis on Keats, Wordsworth, Hardy and Milton' and with 'speech rhythms and stories around'.<sup>110</sup> Writers from a similar background, writing ostensibly in English, find the tensions from their education, which institutionalised cultural imposition, replicated in their 'struggles' with writing. Collins states:

When I was at school, all of that (the language and lore of the community) was not literature. What came from the community was not literature so that I had to look for an explanation of that existence in order to incorporate the tone and rhythms of the community.<sup>111</sup>

## II. Touching the Spirit: Erna Brodber's *Myal*

Mass Cyrus said that it was not worms and that no black boil had broken in her either. He spoke very quietly. If those people had only learnt to deal with quietude and silence, they would have seen the notes on his score if not the dulce melodia - sweetly please -, the pp for soft, the diminuendo poco a poco - turn it down please-, and the curlicues for rest that Mass Cyrus face had become.

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

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<sup>109</sup> BBC Radio Four, November, 1992.

<sup>110</sup> Collins, p.123.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

'Another kind of people would have said: 'Mass Cyrus we need help'. Just that and shut up. In two two's the woman would be better. Curing the body is nothing. Touching the peace of those she must touch and those who must touch her is the hard part. And you cant do that unless you can touch their spirits. My people woulda humble them spirit and let me reach them: but this kind of people, ... spirit too sekkle pekkle. Best let them keep their distance after all'.

- Leave her here. An acre of land on a high hill. Bring the transfer paper with you when you come for her on Thursday, in six days time.

The six days he wanted all to hear well. He wanted the woods and the trees, dry and green, growing and dying and the smallest stone bruise crawling in its many coloured fur to hear. They all knew no matter what their age or state that to get that grey mass out of that rigid, staring, silent female would take seven days and that she should be there until the end of the cure.<sup>112</sup>

Erna Brodber's second fictional text, *Myal*, was published in 1988. 'Myal', a word of mainly Jamaican usage, refers to the Afrocentric belief system akin to voodoo in which the spirit of the dead is central to the curing of evil.<sup>113</sup> Like *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), Brodber's first novel, *Myal* was published by the London-based small black press, New Beacon Books, which lists few novels.<sup>114</sup>

Time, as the 'posterior' narration in the extract indicates, is managed chronologically throughout the text.<sup>115</sup> Mass Cyrus, a key player in Brodber's story world, opens the novel and, indeed, dominates the opening page. 'Mass', a Creole derivative of 'mister', implies the respected status of this male character.<sup>116</sup> The term, enforced during slavery to acknowledge master-slave social distance is used three times in the opening page. The first occasion allows insight through the indirect discourse of the opening paragraph into the thoughts and pronouncements of the male subject of the opening section of text. Each of the three sentences of the paragraph builds towards a sense of the presence of Mass Cyrus culminating in the second mention of his name in the final sentence of the first paragraph. The narrator's internal analysis which constitutes the narration of the entire paragraph suggests that Mass Cyrus's face is a 'score' open to reading. The metaphor, a construct of 'western' classical music, is one

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<sup>112</sup> Erna Brodber, *Myal*, London, 1988, p.1.

<sup>113</sup> See Allsop, for example.

<sup>114</sup> New Beacon Books lists mainly non-fiction.

<sup>115</sup> Lanser, 1981, p.199.

<sup>116</sup> See Allsop, p.375.

which surprises within the context. Technical musical references such as 'dulce melodia' and 'diminuendo' juxtaposed against 'worms' and 'black boils', incongruous in this passage, disorientate the reader temporally as well as locationally. Similarly, reference to 'wee small babe', so distinctly not Caribbean, functions so as to defamiliarise the reader.

Few time-related references appear within the first four paragraphs other than the plot-signifying phrase, 'Thursday, in six days time', suggesting that the day is expected to bear a particular meaning in relation to the narrative action. That the phrase is part of a statement which is narrated rather than presented in direct speech makes for ambiguity compounded by Mass Cyrus's wish to have the statement witnessed by 'all'. At the same time, reference to 'seven' days in the final sentence of the opening page resonates with the Judeo-Christian creation myth in which the world is created within such a period of time. It is within this sentence that the realisation of the dramatic situation is made clear. The final sentence of the extract is, in contrast, unambiguous about the plot of the novel and the part which time plays in the tension within that. The reader learns of a re-creation story in which a 'rigid, staring, silent female' is to be cured and presumably given voice by he who is empowered to 'touch' 'spirits'.

Locational clues related to place are sparse in the opening page of *Myal*. By line sixteen, reference to 'my people' within direct Creole discourse confirms that the narrating voice is a Creole speaker and implies an extensive kinship which, given the title of the text, is African-Caribbean. Reference, in the final paragraph, to 'woods and trees' signifies the countryside which appears, this early in the narrative, to be the only witnesses Mass Cyrus is in a position to call upon. 'An acre of land on a high hill' is also mentioned but any link between the two remains unstated. Subsequent clues to location are provided through creolisms such as 'my people wouldha humble them spirit', 'sekkle pekkle' and 'stone bruise' which appear in the last two paragraphs. The possessive plural, 'Them spirit', though represented in standard orthography, evokes the Creole 'dem'.

In effect, a Creole social context is revealed within the opening page of *Myal*. Central to this location is the healer, a quietly spoken, Mass Cyrus, whose face communicates a language like music. The source of Mass Cyrus's direct speech is, as a result, actually the healer's 'score', part of the way of representing the awesome power upon which he draws. The opening extract raises many questions including that concerning the subject of the text. On the one hand, there is the powerful healer figure, named several times in the text; on the other, there is the unnamed, silent, stricken figure waiting to be cured and who is aligned, indeterminately, with 'in-between colours' and 'trained minded' people. The two may be explored in terms of dualities such as male subject and female object; male power and female powerlessness; male voicing and female voicelessness which are binaries not-taken-for-granted in female-authored texts. Yet, to focus upon the individual figures exclusively is to ignore two groups whose presence in the text is signalled in paragraphs two and three. 'Those people', first mentioned in sentence three of the first paragraph are referred to directly in each sentence of paragraph two. An accumulative picture is built up so that assuming the narrator to be reliable, the reader learns that 'they' are 'new', 'in-between colours', 'trained minded', insensitive, knowing, and discordant. The group, in short, is antagonistic in contrast to 'my people' who are appreciative of appropriate timing for speaking and also for remaining quiet. The people comprise two 'bodies' interested in the healing, the outcome of the dramatic action.

Brodber makes clear in the main body of the text, that the silence of the female is attributed not merely to lack of speech but to zombification or 'spirit thievery'. This central metaphor explains an absence of desire or perhaps more accurately a robbery of the will upon which desire rests. The phenomenon, concerned with much more than silence, allows the issue of silence itself to be addressed as it is in lines three and eleven as well as in the final paragraph. In line three, for example, the narrator's viewpoint suggests a complex reading of Mass Cyrus's face which has not been appreciated by 'those people' whose problem lies at the centre of the opening action. It is suggested,

too, that a lack of understanding of silence is causal to the difficulty in communication between 'those people' and Mass Cyrus himself.

The cumulative detailing of anthropological and other difficulties presented in the opening page function as backdrop to the problem of the zombified female. But who is the Subject? If, the silent female is Subject, and in her zombified state is without desire, where is the novel's 'narrative energy' to be located?<sup>117</sup> Narratologist Evelyn Birge Vitz (1989) argues that 'causality like desire is a concept bound up with problems of cultural anthropology and intellectual history among others'.<sup>118</sup> A survey of the texts of interest to this thesis indicates a complex relationship between protagonist or Subject and the main body of the text. A feature of the relationship is that each novel to some extent refuses the single subject or easily defined protagonist. Rather, a number of possible Subjects are presented as the narrative unfolds. This question will be treated at greater length in the chapter following but the main idea is that first-wave novelists' concern with collective experience is such that the individual Subject emerges alongside a range of would-be Subjects among whom is the 'community' itself, which is the 'my people' of Brodber's extract. An identifying trait of the literature is the collectivising impetus which it reveals. While this may be discerned in genres beside the novel, it is also to be recognised as a particularly important feature of the fictional mode.

As a result, part of the creolising of the discourse which takes place in *Myal* is articulated through the giving of voice to 'my people'. In the extract, for example, Mass Cyrus's voice is reported from the opening line. Furthermore, the character is presented as multilingual. He communicates with a voice ranging through several linguistic registers exemplified in extremes from 'wee small babe' to 'spirit too sekkle pekkle', as indicated above. The former phrase is representative of a register resonant of Scottish dialect and uncharacteristic of the setting of the novel; the latter, on the other hand, is the more characteristic Creole expected of the location. Perhaps even more powerfully,

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<sup>117</sup> Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Mediaeval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire*, New York and London, 1989, p.176.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

Mass Cyrus communicates also through the meta-language central to which is his facial features itself orchestrated as if it were a score. That this is another language is worthy of note and links in a mystical fashion with the extraordinary Mass Cyrus in whom the power to 'touch spirits' resides. Herein lies another difficulty for the reading of the text. *Myal*, for example, refuses a simple 'feminist' label since the female subject is not only silent but zombified and the power to heal lies in the hands of a male subject. 'My people', on the other hand, is not only characterised as sensitive to sound, but flexible and adaptable, able to 'humble' themselves when necessary. Theirs is a direct voice: 'Mass Cyrus we need help' with direct access to healing. By dint of such characteristics, the group contends for a Subject position within the opening page of the text. Following this line of argument, altogether five possible Subjects are presented only one of whom, Mass Cyrus, is named. Two possible Subjects are the collective 'my people' and 'those people' linked in turn to the anonymous narrator and the unnamed silent female.

Karen McCarthy Brown (1997) writing about Haitian women's 'power to heal' through 'vodou', states:

Feminist research, or research in general for that matter, has yet to reveal all the ramifications of Western medicine's *intense physicalisation of disease* or of its view of healing as something done by an heroic actor who 'possesses' power to an essentially passive, physical body.<sup>119</sup>

The opening page of *Myal* might readily serve as an illustration of McCarthy Brown's point though clearly hers is a critique of 'western' thought. What then does the reader make of Brodber's text? Is this a wholly mimetic representation? The text indicates no primary concern with feminist paradigms but rather appears to break several rules. The 'intense physicalisation of disease' represented by the silent woman's body renders the text, as feminist, problematic. Not only is the possible subject anonymous, she is also silent and 'essentially passive' in her zombified state. The 'heroic actor' meanwhile

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<sup>119</sup> Karen McCarthy Brown, 'The Power to Heal', in Consuelo Lopez Springfield, ed., *Daughters of Caliban*, Bloomington, 1997, p.123.

is a detached figure able to command the attention of people and inanimate objects alike with his powerful knowledge, yet he shows little positive interest in the female whose healing has been negotiated. Indeed the price of the woman's cure is as metaphoric as her 'disease'. The cost of removal of the latter, 'that grey mass', is no less than 'an acre of land on a high hill'. The 'root metaphor' however, which McCarthy Brown describes as 'healing power as material property' in the privileged male, appears to be the same in Brodber's text as in many other 'western' texts.

Literary resistance concerns feminist writing.<sup>120</sup> Is the situation represented by Brodber in the opening page of *Myal* one which allows the reader access to such resistance? While the quoted section cannot be considered representative of the whole novel, reading further into the text confirms that in Mass Cyrus's character and the narrative context presented, patriarchy is not primarily being challenged. If not patriarchy, then is perhaps colonialism the target? The 'new', 'in-between colours', 'trained-minded people' referred to in the extract are confirmed, later in the text, as not colonials, but the indigenised offspring of colonial fathers and local mothers, a group representative of a key strata of the hierarchised society.<sup>121</sup> While anti-colonialism is represented in the opening of the text through the choice of the woman figure, there is another interpretation specific to the region. It is that *Myal* is a post-slavery text, the history of which is treated in Part One of this thesis. In the silent figure, Brodber is writing this difference.

In the opening page of the text, the non-speaking woman appears unlikely to be a Subject. In support of this, there is no indication that her character has been given any agency. Rather, she seems to be the object of the collective referred to above as 'those people'. Constructed as one without desire, her cure is the desire of the collective subject. In turn, it is the desire of this group which proves critical to the beginning of

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<sup>120</sup> See for example, bell hooks, 'Black Women Shaping Feminist Theory' in James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, p.140. hooks defines resistance in relation to black women's oppression.

<sup>121</sup> Jenny Sharpe, 'Figures of Colonial Resistance', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35, 1 (1989), p.1+5. If, as Sharpe argues, the literary act is essentially ambiguous and renders resistance 'an ambiguous in-between position', then there is a level at which the ambivalence of a character such as the zombified female figures anti-colonial resistance.

the plot line of the text. So the causal links in the plot may be traced back to the collective subject. Since the group wants the woman cured, they approach Mass Cyrus, hence his announcement to 'all' of his seven-day plan. Thus, the reader glimpses the ways in which plot, causality, time and structure may be interlinked. The opening of the text appears to present two active subjects, or perhaps more accurately, a single protagonist and a collective antagonist. Between the two, there is a causal relationship in which the silent figure, later named Ella O'Grady Langley, plays a crucial role.<sup>122</sup> That role, profiling the silenced woman figure, questions the subjects of the text, the narrative shifts as the subjects shift and the writing of difference in this post-slavery text. If Ella, representative of creolisation, can only be silent or 'zombified' in the midst of such polyphony, then *Myal* exposes the difficulty of writing the difference which is more than that of gender.<sup>123</sup>

### III. Speaking Subject(s), Creole Voice and High Mind: Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*

On a warm November day Beka Lamb won an essay contest at St. Cecilia's Academy, situated not far from the front gate of His Majesty's Prison on Milpa Lane. It seemed to her family that over night Beka changed from what her mother called a 'flat rate Belize Creole' into a person with 'high mind'.

Befo' time,' her Gran remarked towards nightfall, 'Beka would never have won that contest'.

It was not a subject openly debated amongst the politicians at Battlefield Park - a small, sandy meeting ground near the centre of town. At home, however, Beka had been cautioned over and over that the prizes would go to bakras, panias or expatriates.

'But things can change fi true,' her Gran said, slapping at a mosquito.

The front verandah was in its evening gloom, and the honeyed scent of flowering stepanotis, thickly woven into the warping latticework, reminded Beka of the wreaths at her greatgranny's funeral. The vine half-screened the verandah from excessive sunlight during the daytime, and at night, provided a private place from which to observe passersby. Beka fingered the seed pod that dropped like a green mango from the glossy leafed vine. Her Gran continued,

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<sup>122</sup> See O'Callaghan, pp.71-9, in which she offers a comprehensive analysis of *Myal*.

<sup>123</sup> Sylvia Wynter writes of the 'dimension of Sameness and Difference' which the term 'womanist' encompasses. See, 'Afterword: "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman' '", in Davies and Fido, eds., p.363.

'And long befo' time, you wouldn't be at no convent school'.

On the far side of the street below, Miss Eila limped her way to the waterside, a slop bucket heavy in her right hand. As she drew abreast the Lamb yard, she called,

'Any out tonight, Miss Ivy?' Beka was grateful for a slight breeze that carried the bucket's stench away from the house.

'One or two, Eila,' Beka's Gran called across, brushing at her ankles with a cloth she used as a fly whisk. Steadying the swing, she got up and leaned on folded arms over the railing.<sup>124</sup>

Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* raises expectations of a central focus upon a single Subject. The eponymous Beka is introduced in the opening line of the narrative, within family and community. Indeed, Beka's success is being celebrated as the novel opens and her achievement, the winning of an essay competition, signifies also social mobility from a 'flat rate Belize Creole' to a person with 'high mind'. Thus, a crucial ontological shift is indicated through Beka's literary achievement. As a result, Beka having earned authority, ceases to be powerless. The transformative act, a scribal one, propels Beka from Creole status to 'high' mindedness 'overnight'. The nature of such radical change captures not only the imagination of Beka's parents but also that of her Gran, Miss Ivy. Two generations apart, Gran articulates a compulsion to compare Beka's day with 'befo time', when similar reinvention and reinscription for a black female would not have been possible. The opening page offers, therefore, through Gran's perspective, an understanding of the enormity of change which Beka's success represents. It also raises epistemological issues concerning racial difference. Discrimination and exclusion are signalled in line five which makes explicit Beka's domestic preparation for failure. A cultural cushioning is constructed for her through the repeated caution, at home, that those likely to be selected would be from the more influential and dominant social groups, principally white or very light-skinned members of the society.<sup>125</sup> That is to say, the privileged offspring of 'expatriates', temporarily resident in the Caribbean region during the period of 'His Majesty', presumably George VI, together with the lighter-skinned middle classes had, as a group, effectively silenced Creoles such as Beka.

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<sup>124</sup> Zee Edgell, *Beka Lamb*, Oxford, 1982, p.1.

<sup>125</sup> Allsopp, p.61 confirms that 'bakra' is a racial category.

The term 'creole', used once in the opening page, functions as a locational device. It is used specifically in relation to the geographical space, Belize, once the setting is established in the opening line as 'St. Cecilia's Academy' near 'His Majesty's Prison on Milpa Lane'. In effect, the specific sites mentioned in the subsequent sentence are located within Belize, as the reader comes to terms with the associative meanings of Creole as 'flat rate' and not 'high mind'. The notion of 'flat rate' begins to be clearer when it is appreciated that access to 'high mind' is denied to Creoles but accessible to those more privileged. That times have changed is reiterated within the first page of the text but Edgell brings the past to bear on the action of the novel through Miss Ivy's consciousness which differentiates between the two periods of 'befo' time' and 'long befo' time. The former, more recent, is one during which the likelihood of Beka's winning such a contest was 'never'. By implication, Beka, a black girl, might have gained access to the high status school but not to prestigious prizes. During the earlier period, denoted by 'long befo' time', Beka would have had no access to such a school. It is this change which Gran reflects upon in consideration of her granddaughter in the relative safety of the 'Lamb yard' referred to in sentence thirteen.

The 'yard', a specific regional 'geo-social concept' has been explored variously by authors such as C.L.R James in *Minty Alley* (1936); Roger Mais in *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1966); Earl Lovelace in *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979),<sup>126</sup> and Beryl Gilroy in *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996). Brodber's sociological study of yards in Kingston, published in 1975, confirms the historical continuity from the seventeenth century onwards represented by notions of the 'yard' for Africans or 'creoles' (as Edgell uses the term).<sup>127</sup> The 'affective connotation' of the term, Brodber suggests, differs for black and white Caribbean persons.<sup>128</sup> For black people, the term has signified two important differences, firstly, 'respite from enforced labour' and secondly, exclusive

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<sup>126</sup> C.L.R James, *Minty Alley*, London, 1936; Roger Mais, *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, London, 1966; Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Harlow, 1979.

<sup>127</sup> Erna Brodber, *A Study of Yards in the City of Kingston*, Mona, 1975.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

exposure 'to each other's company'.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, Brodber argues that the yard plays a 'crucial' role in the culture of the community and that it is linked to community life not least because 'the actors in this community are mostly women without steady partners'.<sup>130</sup>

Although Brodber's study focuses exclusively upon socio-economically low-income yards in Kingston, Jamaica, the investigation allows insight into meanings of the 'yard' and its significance in the text *Beka Lamb*. Particularly, the reader begins to appreciate a sense of the women's world demarcated by the 'yard' and the roles of characters such as Miss Ivy and her friend, Miss Eila, within such a space. Both characters, with their childhood rooted in 'befo' time', are therefore non-recipients of a privileged education. Nonetheless, they address a range of concerns drawn from their own domestic lives as well as from larger Belizean society. Within the yard, the women enjoy a certain freedom of discourse which focuses upon national concerns. Thus, the first exchange between the two friends refers to public matters, political prisoners associated with the Independence Movement. Edgell is interested to show how these connect with Beka's life and specifically with the changes which Beka comes to experience and from which she benefits. For this reason, Miss Ivy is revealed in the second page of the text as a founder member of the 'People's Independence Party' currently agitating for change. Edgell effectively establishes a situation in which the external, national state of change is reflected in changes within the family and linked by the actions of at least one member of the Lamb household. The voice of this agent of change, Miss Ivy, informs the opening page of the novel. It is Miss Ivy's consciousness which allows access to the history impacting upon the colonial, pre-independent Belize which is the setting of the text.

In contrast to her grandmother's, Beka Lamb's voice is noticeably absent from the opening page and when it subsequently appears, hers is initially a questioning and deferential voice, for Beka is a 'good' fourteen year old girl within a society hierarchised

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.56.

in terms of race, class and gender.<sup>131</sup> Beka's apparent voicelessness is placed in a historical context in the opening of the novel as the girl defers to her grandmother for the information which serves to ground her. It is interesting to note that first-wave anglophone women focus significantly upon child protagonists. This is presumably because of the 'limitations' of the Caribbean book market,<sup>132</sup> an issue which I address in my final chapter, which looks at how and the ways in which African-Caribbean women negotiate this publishing space.

An irony set up in the first line of the text, in Beka's winning of the essay contest, belies the protagonist's apparent voicelessness within the opening page. Beka's critical breakthrough as essayist confers a more influential voicing through the written word, yet, in the domestic space, Beka remains deferential to the adults within her social sphere. Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980), illuminates the term 'voice' and points to the part played in the narrative by the 'narrating instance' and the subjects involved in this process:

not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it, and, if need be, all those people who participate, even though passively, in this *narrating activity*.<sup>133</sup>

The 'narrating activity' of *Beka Lamb* is such that the voices of three generations, as in Collins's *Angel*, contribute. Miss Ivy, Beka's grandmother, her friend, Miss Eila, as well as Beka's parents and Beka herself. Genette's theorising is useful to an understanding of the context of *Beka Lamb*. He suggests that the complexities involved relate to 'its protagonists' and 'its spatio-temporal determinations'.<sup>134</sup> Beka's story, by juxtaposition of her grandmother's voice and those of others, is also the nation's story and the Creole people's or her people's story. That Beka appears to be voiceless is less important in terms of Genette's 'time of narrating'. The main narrative which concerns Beka and her

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<sup>131</sup> See Roger D. Abrahams, 'Negotiating Respect', in *Women and Folklore*, Texas, pp.68-70. While Abrahams focuses on African-American women, we can apply some of his ideas to African-Caribbean girl's socialising.

<sup>132</sup> See *Mango Season*, 7 (1996), 5.

<sup>133</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, 1980, pp. 213 and 214.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215.

friend Toycie, Miss Eila's niece, is told in a series of flashbacks. In terms of 'temporal position' therefore, the narrative may be described as having a 'subsequent' narration. However, the interval between Toycie's story and the narrating of it, like the interval between Miss Ivy's story and its narrating serves to reinforce the collective tendency of much first-wave fiction. So, while to some extent a story-within-a-story effect may be discerned throughout the text, the various narrative levels serve to reinforce the collective African-Caribbean story. I mean by this to refer to the way in which Toycie's story sits within Beka's story which in turn relates to her grandmother's story and that of the pre-independent colony so that a range of Creole voices echo throughout the many levels of narration.

### **Narration and Points of View**

'Narrative intersubjectivity' is one of the preoccupations of Susan Lanser whose theorising bears some relevance to the Creole text.<sup>135</sup> She argues:

From the levels of narrative consciousness that can be incorporated into the text, especially when there are multiple voices at any level, the creator of a novel can weave an extremely complex structure of *narrative intersubjectivity*.<sup>136</sup>

Lanser teases out such intersubjectivity through the interrogation of point of view which she locates within the 'psychological and ideological planes' of narrative stance.<sup>137</sup> The phraseological plane, Lanser suggests, allows ready perception of the range of characters' voices within a single text. Lanser cites Lubomir Dolezel's definition equating the total number of instances of the narrator's discourse with character's discourse as representative of a single text. By this description, *Beka Lamb*, for example, may be equated with the discourse of the single 'third person' or heterodiegetic (not told by a participant) narrator as well as that of the various characters representing three generations of Belizean creole characters.

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<sup>135</sup> Lanser, p.147.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.184.

In relation to masking, the omniscient narration throughout *Beka Lamb* effectively uses SE to achieve a 'mimetic authority'. An authorial narrator is achieved by this means, one whose narration alone offers little evidence of the text's ideology.<sup>138</sup> The novel is simultaneously rich in dialogue, and values and attitudes are made explicit in the character's direct discourse. Beka Lamb's mother Lilla's opening statement is: 'If I catch you conversing with that half crazy coolie woman once more, Beka Lamb, I'll report you to your father'.<sup>139</sup> Lilla's racialised condemnation of her daughter's relationship signals a punitive intention. Not only is Mrs Lamb's inter-racial view suspect, but her ideological position is further reinforced in the text through the psycho-narration which follows immediately upon Lilla's direct voice. The narrator at this point allows access into Beka's consciousness which invites comparison with her mother's observation likened to 'a john crow eyeing dead crab'.<sup>140</sup> The 'john crow' or vulture analogy sits uncomfortably as an introduction to a mother-daughter relationship. The narrator's stance is further confirmed in the description of Lilla lying on her stomach 'peering through the blinds', and 'worrying about her rose plants'.<sup>141</sup> The point of view being established is that Lilla, though more sophisticated in manners and status, is less insightful than her mother-in-law, Miss Ivy, and less committed to the larger nationalist cause (which motivates creoles like Miss Ivy). Comparing the attitudes of the two women on the subject of the rose bushes, the narrator invokes Granny Ivy's words of censure:

Miss Ivy and Lilla exchanged words because Granny Ivy felt that Lilla had no business 'going on so bad over rose bush when people out district watching corn and yams shrivel under the sun'.<sup>142</sup>

The privileging of Miss Ivy's speech within three paragraphs of narration establishes an affinity between her and the narrator. There is a comparison to be made with Hodge's

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., pp.184-5.

<sup>139</sup> Edgell, 1982, p.5.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

Aunt Beatrice whose behaviour, like Lilla's, mimics the colonial ideal. In contrast, Granny Ivy's concern with basic foodstuff, the 'corn and yams' of necessity is juxtaposed against Lilla's interest in colonial favourites such as roses. An affinity based on such polarisation is gradually developed throughout the text so that the opening chapter reveals Lilla as a mimetic product of colonialism, mindless of the indigenous.<sup>143</sup> Rather, her energies focus on the cultivation of roses 'like those she saw in the magazines which arrived in the colony three months late from England'.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, such representation is established before Lilla is depicted interacting with her daughter, and presented with her daughter, it is Beka who ministers to her mother as indeed Granny Ivy does earlier in the text.

In contrast, Beka's father, Bill, is portrayed as a powerful figure within the domestic space. He is the patriarchal authority to whom misdeeds are reported. His authority lies, also, in his informative relationship with members of the household. Thus, Bill is first presented in interaction with his daughter. It is suggested, too, that he operates powerfully within the world of employment where his subordinates dare only refer to his nickname 'Wild Bill' 'behind his back'.<sup>145</sup> Information of this nature is presented through narration signalling approval of Bill, in contradistinction to the disapproval of Lilla. Similarly, Granny Ivy's authority is invoked to authenticate the worth of Lilla, and the older woman's indirect speech is embedded in the narration so as to confirm the nature of her son, Bill. Granny Ivy's mediation justifies Bill's, thus 'unless Daddy Bill got wild, the workers at the bond shed would let the boxes pile high'.<sup>146</sup> So, whereas Bill has earned his reputation by being responsible, there is a suggestion that Lilla's behaviour, if not irresponsible, is at least self-centred.

Edgell in *Beka Lamb* has undertaken a task which utilises complex masking to reveal and conceal levels of point of view requiring careful presentation. The text's

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<sup>143</sup> Fanon, 1986, p.14. I am interpreting Fanon's 'psychoexistential complex' as one which manifests itself in mimesis. In addition, he relates the way out of the 'problem' to 'mastery' of the colonial language. See also p.18.

<sup>144</sup> Edgell, p.9.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

ideology is arguably nationalist, womanist, and Afrocentric as presented through multiple masks. Writing at the beginning of the eighties, Edgell might, with due cause, have considered her audience and, I suggest, constructed for the text an ideal 'narratee' requiring careful access to the narrative.<sup>147</sup> The likelihood of publication within the 'school market' may partly account for Edgell's choice of child protagonist. In addition, Beka's girlhood affords her an innocence not only for the textual narratee but the wider publishing market. I suggest that innocence is preferred as a mask through which Toycie's more quotidian and less 'respectable' tale of a 'fallen' girl might be told.

Within Caribbean culture, Granny Ivy, the wise older woman similarly represents an acceptable point of view which aligns with Lilla's and the narrator's to offer a powerful combination for what appears, initially, to be a story of Creole or African-Caribbean childhood. Gender points of view are similarly masked first by the device of placing Beka within the context of a purportedly 'normal' family, that is, one which includes within the household both mother and father. The historical reality of African-Caribbean families belie this,<sup>148</sup> with the nuclear family no less representative of cultural imposition than the earlier regional model of concubinage. As a result, Beka's mother's point of view may be considered less important to Beka's narrative which itself masks and reveals Toycie's story, one that is recognisably 'Creole' and confirmed within the framework of Granny Ivy's parallel personal narrative. In many respects, it is the points of view of the journey woman who combats domestication which surface within first-wave texts such as *Beka Lamb*. The relation of this aspect to the theorising text is further developed in Chapter Six.

A crucial space to be negotiated by African-Caribbean women characters is the 'yard', a feminised, womb-type space of female expression and power.<sup>149</sup> Out of this emerges the journey woman who travels through a growth in stature marked by wisdom

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<sup>147</sup> See Lanser, pp.179-84 for a discussion of the function of a narratee.

<sup>148</sup> See, for example, Senior, 1991, pp.82-7.

<sup>149</sup> I allude to Wilson Harris's notion of the 'womb of space'. See, Harris, *The Womb of Space: the Cross-cultural Imagination*, Connecticut, 1983.

and maturity. Alternatively, the yard produces a more contemporary figure who physically flees while still a young woman as a direct result of the influence of a colonial education.<sup>150</sup> It is the latter group, journey women in educational flight, who appear to dominate the literature. Hodge's Tee becomes such a figure and Collins's Angel travels within the region, while Brodber's Ella ventures to the USA. Elizabeth Wilson, writes:

The journey is an archetypal symbol, but whereas it is most often a journey-as-initiation - to self knowledge and or/integration into a community - in Francophone female Caribbean writing, the journey, except in rare instances ... takes the form of journey-as-alienation. Self knowledge often leads to destruction of self.<sup>151</sup>

Edgell's *Beka Lamb* reveals narrative levels with the journey at its core. While Beka's story is underscored by the novel's title, it is Toycie's narrative which preoccupies the protagonist and it is her grandmother's story which serves as an illuminating parallel to Toycie's tragic life. Within the various narrative levels, several Creole women's journeys are inscribed. That journey begins in the yard or rather, the parameters of the journey are related to the yard and the limited possibilities it recognises as the lot of Creole girls. Accepting the narrator's authority, the reader learns that Beka and Toycie were atypical Creole girls as follows:

Also Toycie and Beka were different on the street where economic necessity forced many Creole girls to to leave schools after elementary education to help at home, work in shops and stores as salesladies or take jobs as domestic servants in the houses of those who could afford such help.<sup>152</sup>

The 'difference' which separates the two from other Creole girls is the level of 'economic necessity' impacting upon their lives. As the region's literary history illustrates and the yard reflects, 'economic necessity' weighs heavily upon the colonised. Such necessity fuels physical flight from both the yard and community. Yet the narrative of flight is not foremost in Edgell's project .

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<sup>150</sup> Gilroy's Melda, for example, is supported by her mentor and teacher to this end.

<sup>151</sup> E. Wilson, "Le Voyage et l'espace clos" - Island and journey as metaphor", in Davies and Fido, eds., p.45.

<sup>152</sup> Edgell, p.34.

Rather than 'journey-as-alienation', Edgell reveals Beka's 'journey-as-initiation' to self knowledge and 'integration into a community'. How is this achieved? The child/woman protagonist is particularly appropriate for the initiate and Beka at fourteen is three years younger than her friend, Toycie. A curious and questioning adolescent at home, Beka regularly initiates dialogues with adult members of the family. With her grandmother, Beka poses a question familiar to them both, one which the narrator states that the girl has been rehearsing with her Gran for several years: 'What wouldha happen to me befo' time?'<sup>153</sup> While the familiar question appears to cue Beka's grandmother's storytelling, a different type of question leads to Beka's first dialogue with her father: 'Importing coffee from Guatemala now, Dad?' This differentiated request for information is at once more objective and less personal,<sup>154</sup> while yet another type of question is whispered to her mother: 'How are your eyes, Ma?'<sup>155</sup> Beka's interrogative disposition indicates her approximation to the 'good' Creole girl from an exemplary family relative to the colonial ideal model. It can be argued that this comprises masking at the level of plot since sociological evidence such as the 'Women in the Caribbean Project'<sup>156</sup> confirms that the Creole family is more likely to be female-headed households approximating to single parent families (as they would be labelled outside of the region).

The unmasked narrative which represents Toycie's story relates a more everyday Creole woman's tale. At this level, the novel presents a love plot which ends in pregnancy and death. One complication of the plot is that the girl, Toycie Qualo, is still attending school; another complication is that her lover of similar age is from a different racial group and considered of higher social class and status. Toycie's appears to be a quest for love but her friend, Beka, filters Miss Ivy's perception of the relationship ominously thus: 'Granny Ivy said that Toycie was trying to raise her colour, and would wind up with a baby instead of a diploma, if she wasn't careful'.<sup>157</sup> To 'wind up with a baby'

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>156</sup> Senior, 1991, pp.82-4.

rather than a diploma defines a primary struggle which also colludes with the imperatives of 'economic necessity' so familiar to Creole girls. A diploma on the other hand offers opportunities for escaping the drudgery and material poverty which constitute everyday reality. It is only after Toycie's 'sickness' becomes evident that Beka fully appreciates 'that the Qualos were very poor, and there was no romance in it'.<sup>157</sup> Toycie, an intelligent and accomplished young woman, is thought 'a queen' by her aunt with whom she lives and Miss Eila cannot begin to conceive of the possibility of the girl's pregnancy. Toycie's narrative concerns black female desire and fulfilment, inter-racial relationships and the female body's struggle with nature in the material circumstances of poverty. Toycie's story is, therefore, on one level every Creole woman's story. That it is not Beka's story allows the narrative to function also as a morality tale. Indeed Edgell may be said to embed a critique of romance through Toycie's narrative within the text. Despite a semblance of equality about the young lovers who are the same age and both embarked upon a prestigious education, Toycie's hope for marriage is shattered and Edgell compounds the plot with Toycie's expulsion from school, failed suicide, mental degeneration and subsequent death.

The prospect of 'winding up with a baby' seems in comparison a pedestrian option in the face of the cataclysmic sequence of events which Toycie endures and to which she finally succumbs. Why does Toycie earn death? In one sense, death is presented as an outcome which follows the fatal logic of heightened female sexuality and desire, and in this sense, Toycie is very much a stereotypical female character of nineteenth-century Western romantic fiction. Therein lies a tension between twentieth-century colonial ideals and African-Caribbean reality, a product of colonial slavery.<sup>158</sup> Even the mental disintegration which Toycie experiences does not atone for her precocious sexual activity for Toycie is portrayed as an active partner in the heady physical relationship with Emilio. Further, she deceives those around her in pursuit of

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<sup>157</sup> Edgell, p.47.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>159</sup> O'Callaghan, p.42.

clandestine meetings with him. O'Callaghan notes that for characters like Toyctie, 'social mobility for women is accessible via several channels, all of which involve conflict in terms of social/sexual roles'.<sup>160</sup> While Toyctie's story is central, the narrator implies that this is unlikely to be Beka's story partly because of the painstaking grounding or Creole consciousness which Beka comes to realise through her grandmother. Specifically, realisation comes through closure of the text and Miss Ivy's admission that 'Toyctie's first trouble caught me too and I turned to rocking the cradle'.<sup>161</sup> That Edgell withholds this information until the close of the novel is significant to the framing of the narrative. Further, this serves to strengthen the author's critique of romance, for the women of the text appear not to experience fulfilment through romantic liaison. Beka learns of this through at least three sources indicating the direct experiences of women within her own close circle of friends and family, Toyctie's tragedy, a chance meeting with her maternal grandfather and her Granny Ivy. So the text poses the key question of cultural norms and their relationship to women's sexuality but also provides answers which destabilise the dominant, idealised colonial ideology itself portrayed in the characterising of the Lambs. Alternatively, it may be argued that 'voice impinges upon voice' or, more accurately, voice frames voice in that the impersonal narrator articulates Toyctie's story which is touched in turn, or re-personalised by the brief first-person account of Granny Ivy as the 'I' narrator 'left rocking the cradle'.<sup>162</sup> Lanser proposes the notion of 'public and private narrative levels as a category particularly relevant to the study of women's texts'.<sup>163</sup> I am indicating that this is demonstrated in the 'public and private' levels which the mimetic SE narration seeks to mask.

*Beka Lamb's* atypical journey, moreover, one in which the protagonist does not flee the region, may be contrasted with Ella's journey in *Myal* which portrays 'journey as alienation' in which the female subject leaves the region in order to develop her

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<sup>160</sup> Edgell, p.170.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Lanser, 1997, p.684.

<sup>163</sup> Edgell, p.82.

potential. As a consequence, Ella is re-invented, in this instance, directly in the image of the coloniser. What are the options for the Creole woman who stays at home? *Beka Lamb* suggests that varying kinds of domesticity comprise Creole 'woman reality'. The most prestigious is the upwardly mobile married domesticity over which Mrs Lamb presides. Domesticity as social expectation shapes the lives of each female character within the text so that throughout the novel a domestic presence is highly evident. For example, though Beka will be late for school and despite everyone's concern, the girl's duty in the mornings is first to 'set the table'.<sup>164</sup> An idealised breakfast scene presents Granny Ivy frying eggs, Beka making tea and slicing the bread and dad emerging from the bathroom ready for work. Yet, I suggest that there is a muted irony at play in this scene since, at the outset of the novel, the narration through evocations of Granny Ivy's memory of an earlier period, points to a critical difference in Beka's socialising. Metaphorically, the 'shift' highlighted from 'the washing bowl under the house bottom' suggests less constrained times ahead for Beka's generation.<sup>165</sup> Edgell makes clear that material conditions are changing and that women like Miss Ivy who 'washed and ironed the family's clothes so Beka could study' were active players in the process of change for young women.<sup>166</sup> For this reason, they understand the significance of the 'diploma' in ameliorating if not escaping domesticity.

### Encoding the Creole Self

The 'Creole self' is a notion adapted from Edgell's *Beka Lamb* which in referring to 'we Creoles' invokes the creolisation process.<sup>167</sup> Édouard Glissant's definition of creolisation as 'first the unknown awareness of the creolized' is appropriate here.<sup>168</sup> He expands upon this further in comparison with the Jewish diaspora as follows:

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<sup>164</sup> Edgell, p.2.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>167</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Dash, Charlottesville, 1989, p.3.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.15.

I feel that what makes this difference between a people that survives elsewhere, that maintains its original nature, and a population that is transformed elsewhere into another people (without, however, succumbing to the reductive pressures of the Other) and that thus enters the constantly shifting and variable process of creolisation (of relationship, of relativity) is that the latter has not brought with it, not collectively continued, the methods of existence and survival, both material and spiritual, which it practised before being uprooted.<sup>169</sup>

This 'constantly shifting and variable process' related to transformation lies at the core of Caribbean culture and its artefacts, including the literature which is produced. I have referred, above, to the collectivising tendency among African-Caribbean women writers of which 'we Creoles' is symptomatic. It appears that the phenomenon is not uncommon to women's writing generally. Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *Writing Beyond The Ending* (1985) explores such a strategy in the later novels of Virginia Woolf:

The choral or group protagonist is, as we have seen, another major strategy of female modernism, a means of empowering narrative *if one chooses* to depend neither upon the romance and personal Bildungs plots nor upon some of the assumptions (beginning with gender polarisation and the dichotomy of male and female, public and private spheres, and moving to hero and heroine and the 'hard visible horizon' of the isolated individual) underlying those plots.<sup>170</sup>

The question of bourgeois choice, and its focus on the personal and individual is considerably less of an issue for first-wave African-Caribbean women writers. These are, after all, descendants of a group systematically coerced into non-individualistic patterns of being through Atlantic slavery, a matter, in some instances, of a mere three or four generations away. For many writers within the group, therefore, the published voice, like the group's historiography, is encoded 'in collective rather than individual terms'.<sup>171</sup>

I would like to conclude the chapter by positing a relationship between collectivising and masking, mentioned earlier, by reflecting on the textualisation of the female body, and the significance of a generational focus in first-wave writing. Diane Simmons, writing about Kincaid, compares elements of Kincaid's style to that of the

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<sup>169</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond The Ending*, Bloomington, 1985, p.162.

<sup>170</sup> Wilentz, p.116.

<sup>171</sup> Diane Simmons, 'Jamaica Kincaid: Conjure Woman', in *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 11, 3 (1996/1997), 235.

nineteenth-century African diaspora writer Charles Chesnutt who similarly, she suggests, disguises the narrative of primary concern to him as author in order to 'sound' the (white) audience.<sup>172</sup> The sounding or testing of such audience is critical since, as Lanser highlights, a publisher's ideology affects each stage of publishing, including selection. It could be argued that 'sounding' informs the blurb found on the backs of novels such as *Beka Lamb*. Such publicity material aimed at 'sounding' bears little resemblance to the texts they purport to describe. Since editors of Caribbean novels are usually based in metropolitan capitals, culturally and geographically removed from the circumstances of the texts, it is a naïve writer who remains unaware of publishers' preference for certain themes and languages. For this reason, the practice of masking is at once pragmatic and a signifier of cultural continuity referred to in critical debate as 'double consciousness' or 'double-voiced discourse'.<sup>173</sup>

First-wave fiction textualises the young black woman's body as problematic. Brodber's Ella is subject to mysterious swellings and ultimately zombification; Edgell's Toycie is subject to death as a result of a gendered body's vulnerability. In Collins's *Angel*, the woman who sees and acts outside of the domestic sphere pays a penalty. Angel loses an eye. It may be argued, then, that on the one hand the figuration of the body is particularly complex given both the collective historiography and the material context of poverty which textures the narratives. On the other hand, the body in question is being claimed for the first time, in a literary sense and against a background of colonial practice, 'knowledge' and education about the black female body signified in collective memory and varied gendered warnings such as the prospect of 'winding up with a baby' or proscriptions against the 'slut she is becoming'.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, Toycie's expulsion from school and consequent barring from access to knowledge constitutes a

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<sup>172</sup> The concept of 'double speak' or 'double consciousness' is one commented upon by W.E.B. Dubois just after the turn of the twentieth century. Notions of 'double consciousness' have been developed by various theorists, including Henry Louis Gates and Paul Gilroy. See Gilroy, p.160.

<sup>173</sup> Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*, New York, 1988.

<sup>174</sup> See Jane Bryce, 'A World of Caribbean Romance', in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, p.110. Bryce, writing on the romance genre within the region, notes 'the rocks of contradiction' which such writing is required to negotiate.

reality she faces in pregnancy which stands in contradistinction to her same-age lover's experience. Given a gendered Caribbean reality, there is no romance in the sense that DuPlessis, above, understands it, for romantic inclination needs first to confront harsh reality as Toychie's narrative illustrates. Nor does Edgell's encoding of this notion stand alone.<sup>175</sup>

African diaspora writers appear to locate the substance for configuring and communicating a more stable black womanhood within a 'generational' focus.<sup>176</sup> Gay Wilentz's study explores this in relation to African and African-American writers and I am suggesting that this holds true also for African-Caribbean women writers. Critics like Brinda Mehta identify the shaman woman figure,<sup>177</sup> while Diane Simmons calls attention to the 'conjure woman'. The figurations of ancestral presence, grannies and other culture-bearers, represent memory linked to orality and centrifugal to the collective consciousness. They provide a contrasting perspective with innocent children figures and serve to signal a history of survival in their creole words of wisdom and authority. Their reflection of an oral culture is important. Chancy writes:

In communities of the African diaspora, and most especially in the Caribbean, orality equals survival..... Memory both personal and collective, provides the basis for cultural cohesion in societies where chaos, as defined by those outside the societies, appears to be the only constant.<sup>178</sup>

Characters like Granny Ivy bridge past and present, as indeed do first-wave novelists. The link which Granny figures represent between their own cultural tale-telling and the author's attempt to replicate that orality represent another layer interwoven in the fabric of those first-wave texts. When the oral achieves 'status' in the literary text, the effect is also a creolising of the text.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Houston Baker, *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature*, Chicago, 1984.

<sup>176</sup> Brinda Mehta, 'The Shaman Woman', in *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 11, 3 (1996/1997), 193-213.

<sup>177</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 1970, p.74.

<sup>178</sup> See, Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body*, London and Basingstoke, 1993, p.3.

## Chapter Five

# Carnivalising Theory: Countering Hegemony

Now the connection between carnival and the Caribbean is very very precise, and although there are carnivals in Europe and there were (and are) Europeans in the Caribbean, the form and structure of the Caribbean carnival - and its origin- is not in Europe but in West Africa.<sup>1</sup>

I am saying too that the experience of Black women lends itself to the notion of fluidity, multiple identities, repetition which must be multiply articulated.<sup>2</sup>



Newton Brown, *Cocoyea: Plantations*, photograph, 1986, London.

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<sup>1</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, 'Notes on Caribbean Cosmology', *River City*, 16, 2 (Summer 1996), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, London and New York, 1994, p.48.

Carnival has, since the late-eighteenth century, represented for African-heritage peoples in the Caribbean a legitimised public space; a site of dialogue.<sup>3</sup> In this space, Africans have developed a tradition characterised by both imitation and transformation of European practice, assertion of difference and articulation of social criticism. I have sought, through the focus on masking, to show that African-Caribbean women writers, in negotiating the written text, enter also a syncretic creolised space, like carnival.<sup>4</sup> I am proposing that the creolised text which results is a complex product demanding of critical reading sensitised to the social, historical and cultural mix out of which it was forged. Furthermore, the need for a carnivalised discourse, I suggest, is reinforced by the process of literary production as articulated by several writers.<sup>5</sup> Within this process, elements of 'imitation and transformation' characteristic of carnival appear to be at play and to signal a role for similarly generic critical strategies. In addition, the need for theoretical formulations applicable to such textual reading has become increasingly urgent since, as I have explained, Caribbean women writers and critics remain unconvinced about the applicability of current critical practice. In this chapter I aim to address issues raised by Caribbean women's responses to critical interpretation of first-wave texts and to suggest ways of using existent analytical tools in a process of carnivalising which resonates with the cultural specificity of the texts.

### **Limitations of hegemonic theories and the need for a multi-faceted approach**

Women of the region, as (re)sisters, point to the limitations of powerful hegemonic theories as evident in the critical reception of Caribbean women's writing. Manifestations of 'theory problems' cluster around issues of ideological positioning, validity, privileging and the larger question of theoretical containment.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Warner-Lewis, 1991, p.180.

<sup>4</sup> While the notion of African-Caribbean writing as creolisation applies not only to women's texts but also to men's, the constraints of this study does not allow me to develop a comparison.

<sup>5</sup> Many writers, like Collins, refer to the literary models they were encouraged to emulate in the process of their education and formative years. Collins and Senior, for example, show in their writing how they have transformed this.

The ideological positioning of individual writers, at odds with publishers' perceptions, for example, highlight a difficulty for the production and critical reception of texts. To illustrate, Beryl Gilroy insists:

*We were the first feminists because we had been forced to think, serve and do for ourselves out of bald necessity. We were the first active, unremitting feminists and the British knew it.*<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, Gilroy's fiction remains unpublished by feminist presses. In part, this points to the 'unsayable' at the interface between African-Caribbean women's literary preoccupations and feminism.<sup>7</sup> My own writing refers, for example, to 'poems with black, prejudice, racism' which 'write their own rejection slips/however much you change the ordering'.<sup>8</sup> While such an articulation of crucial constraints upon acceptable content for publication cannot be applied exclusively to feminist publishing houses, the question of whose experience is considered normative or 'universal' is important. Gilroy's novels, for example, exhibit an unwillingness to focus exclusively or even predominantly upon the female subject.<sup>9</sup> Further, her 'folk'-orientated writing, so consciously grounded in lived reality that she describes her oeuvre as *faction*, is difficult to reconcile with a narrowly perceived feminism.<sup>10</sup> The protagonist of Gilroy's *Boy Sandwich* (1989), is a young, male, black Londoner, Tyrone. Melda Hayley, central to *Praise* (1996), is female but carries her extended family doggedly with her throughout the narrative, while Gilroy's protagonist in *Gather the Faces* (1996), is young, black, religious and marries her man.

Kadiatu Kanneh's analysis of 'defining icons of black identity' in relation to the marketing of African-American Alice Walker sheds light upon the problem of Gilroy's

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<sup>6</sup> Gilroy, 1998, p.208.

<sup>7</sup> See McDowell, p. 243. McDowell writes of critical writing by black women as 'outside the bounds of the acceptably sayable'. See also, Philip writing about 'white feminism', in *Frontiers*, Ontario, 1992, pp.62-3.

<sup>8</sup> Anim-Addo, 1998, p.111.

<sup>9</sup> See Philip, 'Managing the Unmanageable', in Cudjoe, ed., p.300. Philip argues that the act of writing itself betrays African-Caribbean women's 'long tradition of unmanageability'. It may be argued that 'unmanageability' in writing is also punishable by critical silence.

<sup>10</sup> Carmen Callil, one of the first directors of Virago publishing house, suggests that 'politically correct feminist narrowness' made for difficulties within feminist publishing as well as outside of it. See Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook, eds., *Writing: A Woman's Business*, Manchester, 1998, p.186.

characters for feminist ideology.<sup>11</sup> The 'defining icons' of Gilroy's texts: elderly women, young men, and domesticated women, for example, do not approximate to the 'radical imaginary' which Kanneh identifies as marketable qualities of black women's writing as feminist presses have come to know it.<sup>12</sup> While elderly women are significant to African diaspora culture, as reflected in ancestral figures like Hodge's Ma Chess and Schwarz-Bart's Ma Cia, they are of little interest to contemporary western commercial culture.<sup>13</sup>

Drawing further on Gilroy's writing, there is to be found an emphasis upon the centrality of her concern with the 'existential': a term she uses to refer to the conditions of existence of the lives of black people. Existentialism, for her, denotes an emphasising of the existence of the individual while referring generally to the human condition.<sup>14</sup> 'Anguish' and the 'absurd', key concepts of existentialism, are, then, important to the meaning of Gilroy's narratives. Her philosophical position frees her characters from any sustained perception of being 'victim' since they are depicted as having access to choice. This is itself a distinctive stance in the light of the region's history.<sup>15</sup> Since freedom of choice is accepted as a given for Gilroy's characters, anguish follows as a result of making specific choices and is itself directly related to the individual's chosen action, its consequences and the responsibility taken for these. For example, Mama King, Gilroy's protagonist in *Frangipani House* (1986), chooses to escape from the home for the elderly and in realising her fundamental free choice, she experiences moments of anguish. An example of such a 'key moment' for her is when she is found hiding in the latrine of the home for the elderly where she is 'in care'. Mama King's situation at that moment is simultaneously portrayed as both comic and 'absurd'. Her escape disguise consists of two dresses, one worn over the other. While removing her top layer, a child

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<sup>11</sup> Kadiatu Kanneh, 'Marketing Black Women's Texts: The Case of Alice Walker', in Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook, eds., p.145.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Notably, Morrison is not published by a feminist press. Her *Song of Solomon*, for example, illuminates the figuring of the ancestral presence as an important dynamic of this writing.

<sup>14</sup> Gilroy discusses existential thought in essays such as 'Frangipani House', in Gilroy, 1998, pp.31-6.

<sup>15</sup> I have written more extensively on the subject elsewhere from which I draw some of the discussion above. See my 'Anguish and the Absurd', in Adele Newson and Linda Strong Leek, eds., pp.131-43

walks in with her frock raised ready to relieve herself. The effect, in a cultural context carrying meanings of 'respect' due to elders, especially within child/elder relations, as Gilroy treats it, is comically ironic. Similarly, Gilroy's texts confound notions of postcolonial writing. Is *Frangipani House*, which is set in the Caribbean, postcolonial, and does this descriptor apply equally to *Boy Sandwich* and *In Praise*, both of which feature London and the Caribbean?<sup>16</sup>

Gilroy left the Caribbean in the 1950s. Her claim to know nothing of postcolonial Guyana problematises the validity of postcolonial discourse relative to her writing.<sup>17</sup> While 'disagreement concerning the very validity of postcolonial theory' is well documented, my priority lies in foregrounding the tension generated particularly among Caribbean women writers and critics by critical approaches informed by individual theories.<sup>18</sup> If postcolonialism appears to be centre stage in this, one might look to its 'recent upsurge' for an explanation.<sup>19</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of The Subject* (1994), expresses these reservations:

My positions are that postcoloniality represents a misnaming of current realities, it is too premature a formulation, it erroneously contains decolonising discourses, it re-males and recenters resistant discourses by women and attempts to submerge a host of uprising textualities, it has to be historicised and placed in the context of a variety of historical resistances to colonialism, it reveals the malaise of some Western intellectuals caught behind the posts and unable to move to new and/or more promising re-/articulations.<sup>20</sup>

A case for prematurity is supported by Joan French's research into colonial policy and West Indian women. French stresses ways in which, in Jamaica, colonial policy was established in order to 'blunt the militancy of women' in the workplace following the 1938 workers' uprisings.<sup>21</sup> French's hypothesis is that the colonial action recommended

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<sup>16</sup> The problems of defining postcolonialism are considered part of the contested terrain of its multiple discourses. See, Padmini Mongia, ed., *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, London, 1996, pp. 1-3. From the 1950s, a new wave of Caribbean literature emerged, predominantly by African-Caribbean males.

<sup>17</sup> Comments by Beryl Gilroy in her opening remarks on her paper, 'On Creativity, Autarchy and Memory', given at the 'Centre of Remembrance' conference at Goldsmiths College, London, in June 1998. See also, Gilroy, 'I know nothing of post-independence Guyana' (1998, p.18).

<sup>18</sup> Mongia, ed., p.2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>20</sup> Boyce Davies, 1994, p.81.

<sup>21</sup> Joan French, 'Colonial Policy Towards Women After the 1938 Uprising: The Case of Jamaica', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 34 (1988), 38.

by the Moyne Commission, in 1945, while essentially reformatory, was designed to control women as a direct consequence of their part in the radical labour movement. She notes that the reforms transplanted a Eurocentric model of the 'housewife', rigidly fixed within a nuclear family, upon Jamaican family patterns. French argues that by this means a notion of 'proper' families was reinforced which ran counter to established plantation practice. Edgell's *Beka Lamb*, referred to in the previous chapter, represents such a 'proper' family. 'The lack of this "proper" family', states French, 'was blamed for the entire suffering of the masses - for poverty, for infant mortality, for venereal disease and 'for the lot of their unfortunate children'.<sup>22</sup> French points particularly to the Moyne Commission's disregard of historical explanation for the prevalence of the distinctive African-Caribbean family patterns, in favour of a pseudo-scientific explanation invoking the 'immature minds' of the West Indian, 'ruled by their adult bodies'.<sup>23</sup>

To extend French's thesis, the practice of colonial intervention in the 1940s, based on the Women's Institute model which she describes as 'the most conservative branch of British feminism', served to reinforce restrictive colonial values for West Indian women at a moment when Second World War realities were forcing a release from restrictive mores upon British women.<sup>24</sup> Further, prominent radical Jamaican women such as Una Marson were, as French indicates, co-opted onto this project. Marson, for example, was interviewing Women's Institute members for programmes broadcast to the West Indies but written by agents of the reform.<sup>25</sup> Rather than being gradually eased into roles of independence as their menfolk, Jamaican women were being persuaded on the one hand and coerced on the other, into 'good housewife' roles. Thus, the mass of women were being urged to transform their roles into essentially supportive ones of males. Effectively, for women, a reassertion of colonial bonds took

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

place at the moment when African-Caribbean males were campaigning for Independence and the breaking of colonial bonds. So, in any consideration of a postcolonial moment, it needs to be appreciated that for Jamaican women, for example, there was a latter-day reinscribing of the colonial order which challenges notions of a clear-cut postcolonial period even within the Caribbean region.

A question posed by Kanneh and which shares my concern, is 'what do Black women's texts define themselves within and against?'<sup>26</sup> Gilroy's later experience as colonial subject, London teacher, headteacher, mother and ethno-psychologist, necessarily impact upon her writing. Further, she refuses to confine herself to pre-determined categories. Gilroy's position may be compared to that of Senior who comments:

When I started to write I wasn't conscious about feminism and those issues. I think basically my writing reflects my society and how it functions. Obviously, one of my concerns is gender. *I tend to avoid labels.*<sup>27</sup>

The tendency 'to avoid labels' is double-edged in that it may also inhibit a writer from approaching a particular press. At the same time, there appears to be a mismatch between the publishing criteria of mainstream publishing houses and Caribbean women's concern with reflecting society. Indeed, Senior identifies this as a crucial issue of the late 1990s.<sup>28</sup>

Merle Hodge argues similarly concerning the misnaming and prematurity of the concept of postcoloniality. Indeed, Hodge challenges the term as a 'marker' of an historical period.<sup>29</sup> She proposes, rather, that Caribbean children 'are facing a new era of colonialism, which is the onslaught of American culture' and identifies neo-colonialism as the current problem.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, she envisages the role of Caribbean literature as itself significant to current and future battles against neo-colonialism

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<sup>26</sup> Anim-Addo, 1998, p.146.

<sup>27</sup> Dominique Dubois and Jeanne Devoize, 'Interview d'Olive Senior', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 26, (Spring 1996), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Olive Senior interview with Joan Anim-Addo, *Mango Season*, 7 (December 1996), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Mongia (p.2), proposes the 'historical marker' as an important meaning of the term, 'postcolonial'.

<sup>30</sup> Merle Hodge interview with Joan Anim-Addo, *Mango Season* 11 (December 1998), 4.

especially in the light of widespread regional unavailability of anglophone Caribbean-authored fiction. In interview, Hodge points to a crucial aspect of colonialism which prevails:

The last place to look for a book of Caribbean fiction is the Caribbean. The only reason why *Crick Crack Monkey* used to be in stores in Trinidad - it isn't right now - was because of the CXC curriculum so it was very available for a while.<sup>31</sup>

Hodge's 'last place' point underscores her insistence upon the continuing need for keeping colonialism on the agenda, particularly its militating role against local literary production. By her analysis, colonisation 'is taking place now'.<sup>32</sup> To expand, she draws attention to the way in which the Caribbean is 'inundated with other kinds of literature, cheap foreign literature'.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, she argues, the role of Caribbean literature already functions so as to 'move forward' a colonised Caribbean consciousness. Highlighting the function of the literature, she states:

But fortunately before the present onslaught of American culture, we had a little breathing space, and we were able to sufficiently set down the foundations of self-knowledge and self-esteem so that even though our children are swamped by American culture, I think that there is - perhaps not sufficiently - some element of self-identification, which allows the onslaught of American television not to entirely bowl them over in somebody else's identity.<sup>34</sup>

While such setting down applicable to African-Caribbean women's fiction, is located by Hodge as at the 'foundations' stage, Caribbean literature on the curriculum, though available in some schools since the 1970s Independence era, remains, in part, the tokenistic product of contradictory colonial conditions.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the process of literary production continues to be tied, if not to the 'mother country' then to metropolitan areas.

Hodge's position is validated in relation to that of Ghana's first colonial Head of state, Kwame Nkrumah, writing in the 1950s, and that of Sylvia Wynter writing two

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, demands for 'WestIndianization', in Brathwaite, 'The Love Axe/1: Developing A Caribbean Aesthetic, 1962-1974', *Bim*, 16 (1977), 54.

decades later. Nkrumah proposes:

The aim of all colonial governments in Africa and elsewhere has been the struggle for raw materials; and not only this, but the colonies have become the dumping ground, and colonial peoples the false recipients of manufactured goods of the industrialists and capitalists of Britain, France, Belgium and other colonial powers who turn to the dependent territories which feed their industrial plants. This is colonialism in a nutshell.<sup>36</sup>

That Nkrumah's 1950s 'dumping ground' analogy remains applicable to Hodge's representation of literary realities at the end of the twentieth century allows some insight into the extreme cause for concern as understood by contemporary Caribbean women. Nkrumah's corollary of colonial peoples as 'false recipients' might similarly refer to the literary context. In comparison, Wynter's influential paper, 'Novel and History, Plot and Plantation', reasserts the historical basis of Caribbean plantation culture, 'not in order to form societies' but to 'produce' for a specific market.<sup>37</sup> It is appropriate to foreground some of her analysis:

In old societies with traditional values based on the old relation, resistance could be put up to the dominance of the new dehumanizing system. In new societies like ours, *created for the market*, there seemed at first to be no possibility of such a tradition (my italics).<sup>38</sup>

The common thread of the 'market' remains influential since, as Hodge intimates, those related forces of production and consumption powerfully established by the old colonial order continue to affect literary conditions.

Yet, the multiple emphases examined above, point also to theoretical containment as a key site of struggle. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's 'Women Against the Grain: The Pitfalls of Theorising Caribbean Women's Writing' elaborates upon this concern.<sup>39</sup> Paravisini-Gebert condemns the USA practice of privileging particular textual practice approved by 'totalizing theories'.<sup>40</sup> She cites the 'multicultural, postcolonial book market' as a crucial source of this problem and suggests that it functions so as to

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<sup>36</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Towards Colonial Freedom*, London, 1962, p.xv.

<sup>37</sup> Sylvia Wynter, 'Novel and History, Plot and Plantation', *Savacou*, 5 (1971), 95-102.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, 'Women Against the Grain: The Pitfalls of Theorizing Caribbean Women's Writing', in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., pp.162-8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162. In comparison, the UK book market is just beginning to recognise a similar 'multicultural' niche.

attract customers searching for 'easily consumed' books of this category.<sup>41</sup> She warns that such texts become easily 'co-opted' and misappropriated even as they affirm reader understanding of the Caribbean 'without having to penetrate its multifarious realities'.<sup>42</sup> I referred in the previous chapter to Paravisini-Gebert's assessment of the role of Jamaica Kincaid's oeuvre in relation to its use of literary language. In addition, she suggests that such choice, markedly absent of Creole, renders Kincaid's texts 'perilously accessible to essentializing theories of Caribbean womanhood'.<sup>43</sup> If Paravisini-Gebert's argument holds, then perhaps Collins's *Angel* exemplifies the converse difficulty. Gay Wilentz expands upon the problem:

Much of the literature of the Caribbean has been considered difficult because of the lack of linear narrative, the fragmented quality of narrative voice and *the apparent obscurity of the language*.<sup>44</sup>

By Collins's admission, however, her intention was precisely that of presenting narrative informed by her familiar oral culture, effectively the source of 'difficulty'. In 'attempting to privilege the voices of oral narrative', Collins also self-consciously represents aesthetic difference not always recognised as such in critical reading.<sup>45</sup> If, within dominant discourses, lack of awareness of African-Caribbean aesthetics serves to discredit Caribbean women's texts, the problem is also a larger one of significance to that which, in Glissant's terms, is a poetics of creolisation. Yet for women, it may be argued that whereas (re)production had on the plantation been subject to physical containment, literary production becomes subject to theoretical containment and the trials of 'being theorised from without'.<sup>46</sup> Paravisini-Gebert writes:

Black women - given their gender and race - have become the subject of almost feverish study, Caribbean women, by virtue of their race, gender and postcolonial condition,

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<sup>41</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.162.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Paravisini-Gebert writes extensively about Kincaid. See also her *Jamaica Kincaid: A Critical Companion*, Connecticut, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Gay Wilentz, 'Affirming Critical Difference: Reading Black Women's Texts', *The Kenyon Review*, 13, 3 (Summer 1991), 149.

<sup>45</sup> Merle Collins, 'Orality and Writing: A Revisitation', in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.42.

<sup>46</sup> Paravisini-Gebert, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.162.

have become the other's other, a valuable commodity. We - our writers particularly - can be scrutinised in all our pathologies and charming - when not exotic - aberrations.<sup>47</sup>

Her apparently relentless critique of postcolonialism is not as singleminded as it might at first appear, for Paravisini-Gebert is similarly scathing of postmodernism and feminism. This is because her real interest lies less with the limitations of hegemonic theories than with that which she refers to as the 'specificities of our insularities'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, she insists upon a central recognition of that which informs Caribbean aesthetics, including women's experience of this, and is, in consequence 'deeply connected' to the region's 'languages, cultures, religions, and traditions'.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, another limitation implicit within the tensions explored above is the distance - whether ideological, contextual or cultural - between the literary product of African-Caribbean women and the critical discourses used to analyse them. Distance, I suggest, may be measured by the cultural preoccupations of the individual theory relative to the texts they seek to interpret with the result that the theories themselves may be perceived as 'text-specific'.<sup>50</sup> This interpretation is attributed by Miriam DeCosta Willis to Nancy Morejón who writes, 'no es posible aceptar mecánicamente para nuestra literatura, categorías que se forjaron en relacion con literaturas metropolitanas' [it is not possible to apply mechanistically to our literature, categories forged relative to metropolitan literatures].<sup>51</sup> The clause 'no es posible' stresses not physical impossibility but implied constraints of an 'ideological, contextual or cultural' nature referred to above. The relative preoccupations of text and theory may differ markedly. One result may be critical silence or distortion of varying degree.<sup>52</sup> This is particularly problematic when those from the community generating the text are at best marginally represented

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Miriam DeCosta Willis, 'Orishas Circling Her House: Race as (Con)Text in Morejón's Poetic Discourse', in Carole Boyce Davies, ed., *Moving Beyond Boundaries* (Volume 2), *Black Women's Diasporas*, London, 1995, p.98.

<sup>51</sup> Cited by DeCosta Willis. See *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> The role of collective memory, for example, has been under-explored in the reading of Caribbean women's literature. See, Joan Anim-Addo, ed., *The 'Centre of Remembrance': Reading Caribbean Women's Literature*, London, 2000.

within the critical community.<sup>53</sup> Contemporary anglophone African-Caribbean women's literature risks this difficulty.

Since Caribbean women have, in the main, not produced much theoretical work, engagement with preoccupations arising from the cultures of the region is problematical.<sup>54</sup> Yet, drawing also upon Morejón's thought, it appears that 'mechanistic' application of individual critical theories to African-Caribbean women's texts, carries similar difficulties. In the light of this and the limitations examined above, I propose a multi-faceted approach informed by creolised cultural practice within the region.

### **'Carnivalised' Critical strategy**

Out of the confluence of African-Caribbean energies and African and European forms, Caribbean carnival has developed.<sup>55</sup> Maureen Warner-Lewis argues that the African elements in Trinidad carnival are located in the old masking traditions still evident in "old mas" bands.<sup>56</sup> An 'Old Mas' band such as Cocoyea, illustrated, above, 'playing' or depicting 'Plantations' in 1986, is of particular interest to my thesis since 'Plantations' carry distinct levels of meaning. One who 'reads' the visual text has immediate access to the spectacle so important to carnival. Yet 'Plantations' refer spectators and participants alike back to the region's history and simultaneously to the particular carnivalised interpretation offered by the band.<sup>57</sup> That history explored in Part One of my thesis, viewed from this 'Old Mas' portrayal, is an interpretation which invites further critical commentary dependent upon the analytical 'tools' available to the 'reader'. In reclaiming

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<sup>53</sup> Boyce Davies, for example, interrogates postcolonialism in terms of the absence of women, and specifically black women. See, Boyce Davies, 1994, p.88.

<sup>54</sup> See, McDowell, p.235. Her argument in relation to African-Americans parallels my own.

<sup>55</sup> Similarities may be drawn here with Stuart Hall's conception of Caribbean cultural identity in terms of 'presences' borrowed from Aimée Césaire and Leopold Senghor: 'Africaine', 'Européenne', and 'Américaine' in the 'new world' sense. See Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Mongia, ed., p.116.

<sup>56</sup> Warner-Lewis, p.181.

<sup>57</sup> I refer to the (Eastern) Caribbean practice as distinct from carnival in London. The history of the latter in the 1970s and 80s has been one of hostility as may be seen in the brutal policing of the event and negative representation within the media. See, for example, front pages of *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Daily Mail*, 1 September, 1987. Reportage also points to a blindness to cultural difference and cultural meaning which has helped to modify carnival towards spectacle rather than the 'old mas' meanings to which I refer.

and refiguring some of the oratorical space of carnival for literary reading, I seek to enhance access to textual meaning beyond that which may be immediately available. This remains crucial since 'oratorical traditions' such as the 'boast' of the midnight robber and the various forms of kaiso, for example, can become readily subordinated to the immediate spectacle within carnival.<sup>58</sup> In effect, a similar difficulty awaits the unsuspecting reader.

Glissant's idea of 'Relation' lies at the heart of my notion of the carnivalised since it insists upon recognition of the creolised nature of the culture but also because, in many ways this thesis has attempted to define 'Relation' in terms of African-Caribbean women's writing.<sup>59</sup> For example, when Glissant writes of 'a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green', it is also the history contextualised in Part One.<sup>60</sup> He stresses that as a result of that history, 'they live relation'.<sup>61</sup> Carnival is evidence of this lived 'Relation' as is the novel. Glissant writes, 'Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge'.<sup>62</sup> Out of this 'shared knowledge', I articulate another Relation between a particularised carnivalising and textual practice meaningful to the culture from which the texts derive. As in Caribbean carnival ritual, so with the novel in which African-focused preoccupations, such as creole language use, oral culture, testimony and sociopolitical concerns, encounter European cultural form. Collins exemplifies the process in relation to Angel:

there had to be a divergence from certain accepted forms if the story was to reflect all that I wanted it to reflect. Had to diverge, that is, from what I had learned of the nineteenth-century British novel but at the same time employ techniques used there as well as in the African novel, the Caribbean novel and in the voices of oral storytelling.<sup>63</sup>

While such a process need not apply to all writers or even to all novels by the same author, Collins demonstrates the type of 'admixture' which takes place.<sup>64</sup> My

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<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the transporting of carnival to metropolitan centres such as London has largely omitted these aspects.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Glissant, 1997, pp.6-9.

<sup>60</sup> Glissant, p.6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Collins, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.42.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

central question, as I seek to align the disparate spaces of carnival and theory, is how such creolised cultural practice might inform the reading of similarly creolised first-wave novels, artefacts of this culture. Carnival, as suggested by Brathwaite, above, is concrete and populist, while theory is abstract and the domain of a privileged and powerful minority. Carnival takes place on the street, a traditionally male space while theory, similarly largely claimed by men, is restricted to space demarcated by the 'ivory tower'.<sup>65</sup> Women have increasingly used carnival as a space of articulation about, for example, sexuality. Similarly, women have begun to claim a public voice as pan musicians and more recently, as calypsonians.<sup>66</sup> A result is that the vehicle of critical commentary, kaiso, better known as calypso, is gradually being appropriated by women. While, as Derek Walcott states, '[calypso] lyrics are judged by a whole country',<sup>67</sup> critics from the region are increasingly interested to foreground the creolised dynamics within the literature and its relation to carnival. Jennifer Rahim, for example, offers an important reading of Hodge's *Crick* as a calypso narrative.<sup>68</sup> She suggests that the text lies 'within the traditions of of the folktale and the calypso' and utilises the 'distinctively calypso-related devices - such as wit, ridicule, abuse, grand-charge, picong, Sans humanité' in its structuring.<sup>69</sup>

My articulation of carnivalised, creolised discourse relies on a notion suggested by Wilson Harris who describes:

[the] energies in carnival that may illumine a counterpoint between the ruler and the ruled, the exploiter and the exploited, between order and abandonment, between overt mask and hidden motivation.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See James J. Sosnoski, 'A Mindless Man-Driven Theory Machine', in warhol and price herndl, eds., pp.33-50 for a discussion on the role of the academy. Sosnoski, referring to the 'academy' and the 'institution of criticism', shows how in literary study, the history of male theoreticians, has shaped the professional practice of academics.

<sup>66</sup> Calypso Rose was, for example, crowned Calypso Monarch in 1978 in Trinidad. See, Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean*, Ithaca and London, 1997, p.198.

<sup>67</sup> Derek Walcott interview with Luigi Sampietro, 'An Object Beyond One's Own Life', *Caribana*, 2 (1991), 32.

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Rahim, 'Laughter in *Crick Crack Monkey*: An Exploration in Comic Discourse', in Pyne-Timothy, ed., pp.208-19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211.

<sup>70</sup> Wilson Harris, 'Carnival Theatre: A Personal View', in *Masquerading*, London, 1986, p.38. See also Rahim's discussion concerning the Caribbean culture of laughter as resistance, p.209.

In the interpretive process, such 'energies' are vital for critical play. Harris goes on to refer to 'carnival dialogue as an imaginative necessity and strategy that engages word, mask, dance and space within the cross-cultural mind of our age'.<sup>71</sup> While this Gadamerian-like notion of play at the heart of carnival strikes a hermeneutic chord, I am interested also in the capacity within carnival to 'illumine',<sup>72</sup> and thus, my aim is to develop Harris's idea in order to explore carnivalised theory as critical strategy. Word, mask and space become important signifiers in this theoretical approach, and likewise vital is a consideration of the plurivocal space typified by carnival. I suggest that the juxtaposition of critical voices is central to this, for the creolised and gendered literary product, as already examined, challenges the limitations of hegemonic discourses. Moreover, such a text demands a carnivalised critical approach alert to its cultural complexities. Hence my use of 'bits and pieces' of theory together, including the poetics of 'Relation', feminist narratology and cultural criticism, to achieve a carnivalised effect.<sup>73</sup>

In my approach to theoretical space, I am in Lévi-Strauss's terms, a 'bricoleur'<sup>74</sup> engaged in a process which utilises disparate material 'at hand', that is, 'tools and material' which are drawn together, for the purposes of the selected project.<sup>75</sup> The diverse nature of such material itself demands 'dialogue', involving reflection and interrogation. Glissant's similar use of the term 'djobbeur' approaches a more literary dimension for he refers to the storyteller as a 'handyman, the djobbeur of the collective soul'.<sup>76</sup> Further, carnival, viewed from a perspective closer to its beginnings in the region, may be shown to have developed from the creative artistic impulse of the 'djobbeur' who first utilised the available 'bits and pieces' to lay the foundations of

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<sup>71</sup> Harris., p.40.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Gadamer, 1977, p.56.

<sup>73</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind (La Pensée Sauvage)* [1966], trans. George Weidenfield, London, (1978 edition), pp.16-18. I draw upon Lévi-Strauss's idea of the role of the 'bricoleur'.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp.16-17. See also Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, New Brunswick, 1994, p.19. Irwin-Zarecka's use of this technique as the 'intellectual bricoleur', someone ready to try out various tools and strategies borrowed from many academic quarters in order to piece together a complex puzzle' is similar to my own.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>76</sup> Glissant, p.69.

carnival rituals as the African-heritage population experiences it.<sup>77</sup> As a result, carnivalised dialogue in its reflective process carries the polyphony and critical juxtapositioning evocative of Caribbean carnival space and ‘energies’.

For the critical project in hand, the body of fiction selected for this thesis needs to be further contextualised within the writing of the region. If as Daryl Cumber Dance states, West Indian literature which ‘reflects the themes and concerns, the language and culture, the perspective and ambiance of the Caribbean and its people’ developed in the twentieth century,<sup>78</sup> this holds true for much of the Caribbean with perhaps the exception of Cuba.<sup>79</sup> Yet, there too fiction by African-heritage women began to be published mainly after the 1960s. Within the Dutch Caribbean, the plethora of languages - Papiamentu, Sranan, Sarnami, Javanese, Djuka, Saramacca, Dutch and English - highlight a linguistic complexity with implications for publication and critical reading.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to the Anglophone context, writing in Creole languages appears, however, to have been published in Surinam since the colonial period, with, for example, writing in Sranan dating back to 1718.<sup>81</sup> In comparison, creole women’s poetry in Sranan was being published in the 1960s.<sup>82</sup> While the more popular genre, as for anglophones, appears to be poetry, fiction by African-heritage women has also been published in the final decades of the twentieth century. Among anglophone women writers, Rhys, with her debut novel *Postures* (1928), ranks among the first women novelists.<sup>83</sup> According to Chancy, within Haiti, the first woman’s novel is Virgile Valcin’s *Cruelle Destinée*

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<sup>77</sup> Paget, p.263. Paget argues that Caribbean philosophical thought is itself characteristically creolised albeit asymmetrically relative to European thought.

<sup>78</sup> Dance, *ed.*, p.2.

<sup>79</sup> See Catherine Davies, ‘Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba: An Eight-Point Survey’, in Anim-Addo, *ed.*, 1996, pp.138-58. Davies indicates the substantial body of literary work from Cuba, including novels published by women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are, for example, novels by Countess Merlin (1789-1852) and Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda (1814-1873) whose ‘seminal text’ *Sab* was published in 1841. See also, Catherine Davies, *A Place in the Sun*, London, 1997, and Nara Araujo, ‘Women and Literature: Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism in Cuba from Colonial Times to the Revolution’, in Helen Pyne-Timothy, *ed.*, p.22-31.

<sup>80</sup> Petronella Breinburg, ‘Surinam Women Writers and Issues of Translation’, in Anim-Addo, *ed.*, 1996, p.186.

<sup>81</sup> Voorhoeve and Ursy Litchveld, p.vii.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.217.

<sup>83</sup> Jean Rhys, *Postures*, London, 1928 (as *Quartet: a Novel*, New York, 1929).

(1929).<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Chancy cites a study of Haitian writers by Pierette Frickey in 1987 which reveals a gender imbalance in the publication of fifteen African-heritage women in comparison with over four hundred male writers.<sup>85</sup> For Francophones, Mayotte Capécia's *Je suis Martiniquaise* (1948), is the first novel to be published by an African-heritage writer.<sup>86</sup>

Caribbean women's literature represents a substantial body of writing, even glimpsed through its linguistic divisions. Within this corpus, several literary traditions linked to former colonial ties signal 'Relation'. A complicating factor, given that history, is that within any one such tradition, smaller and more recent traditions may be isolated and viewed within one language group or across language groups. Gender, race and ethnicity, for example, provide additional classification so that within anglophone Caribbean or West Indian writing, a body of African-Caribbean writing may be identified.<sup>87</sup> African-Caribbean women's literature might also be located in relation to male writers of the fifties. Yet, Derek Walcott reminds us of the nature of the culture out of which the literature arises:

I mean, Caribbean culture - since it was permitted to be articulate - is just about two hundred years old. And that is babyhood compared to any other culture.<sup>88</sup>

Two factors to which Walcott refers, the nature of the culture, 'shackled' or 'gagged' as I have discussed it in the previous chapter, and its recency - together with its artefacts - have also contributed to critical silence. This constitutes an important dilemma when literary production and reception are regulated by publishing practice located in the colonial motherland. Further, the specificity of the region is implicated

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<sup>84</sup> Cited in Chancy, p.6.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>86</sup> Mayotte Capécia, *Je Suis Martiniquaise*, Paris, 1948. See also, Beverley Ormerod, 'The Representation of Women in French Caribbean Fiction', in Sam Haigh, ed., *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique*, Oxford, 1999, pp.105-6.

<sup>87</sup> This may be viewed against a background which, from the 1930s, included new voices such as that of Claude McKay. In a climate of increased access to education relative to the immediate post-Emancipation years, figures like McKay served to stimulate interest in literary production. In the post-war period from the 1950s, a new wave of Caribbean literature emerged, predominantly by African-Caribbean males.

<sup>88</sup> Luigi Sampietro, 'Derek Walcott on Omeros: An Interview', *Caribana*, 3 (1992-93), 37.

in Walcott's reference to 'since it was permitted to be articulate'. Therein lies a problem in that silence, and correspondingly the 'gift of speech', discussed in Chapter Two become integral to the region's literary production. How this impacts upon the reception of the literature and specifically upon African-Caribbean women's literature is only beginning to be appreciated.

A consequence of the precarious conditions of literary production is that black writers within the British context, for example, have until recently made a minimal incursion into feminist literary consciousness and this holds particularly true with respect to the novel. In the final decade of the twentieth century, apart from Collins, four other feminist authors - Jean Buffong, Joan Cambridge, Vernella Fuller and Elean Thomas - treat identifiably African-Caribbean themes and issues. For at least half of the novels by these authors set in the Caribbean, 'returning home' is a dominant theme.<sup>89</sup> What are some of the meanings of this? Stuart Hall writes:

Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers of the crisis of British society...This is not a crisis of race. But race punctuates and periodises the crisis. Race is the lens through which people come to perceive that a crisis is developing. It is the framework through which the crisis is experienced. It is the means by which the crisis is to be resolved - "send them away".<sup>90</sup>

From the number of 'returning home' novels, this theme appears to be the burning preoccupation of African-Caribbean women to the exclusion of much else. Where, for example, is the writing about the stay in Britain prior to the return or of Britain as home? Does this camouflage a particular silence?<sup>91</sup> I am questioning in effect whether spatial setting is manipulated to shift questions of power and to effect a different kind of latter day silencing given the stranglehold of metropolitan publishing.

The writing project is also one of reclamation of power as Philip's theorising outside of her poetic writing indicates. Like W.E.B. Dubois before her and unlike many

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<sup>89</sup> See Mary Condé, 'Houses and Homes: Elizabeth Jolley's *Mr Scobie's Riddle* and Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House*', in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, pp.128-33. While Condé points to a focus on home within the narratives, the emphasis is not that of return to the Caribbean.

<sup>90</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Racism and REaction, Five Views of Multicultural Britain', London, 1978, pp.31-2.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, my 'publishers insist there is no market for the writing of racism', (Anim-Addo, 1998, p.110).

other African-Caribbean women writers (Gilroy is an exception) Philip writes 'the relationship between modern consciousness and racial subordination'.<sup>92</sup> Foregrounding aesthetics which insist upon an awareness of an unequal relationship in the literary world, she argues:

Publishing, reviewing and criticism are by no means unbiased activities; individuals who work in these areas reflect and represent certain political and social attitudes, which in turn affect which work will not only get published - this is often the easiest part of 'publication' - but also reviewed and criticised.<sup>93</sup>

Philip's critical writing allows a transparency concerning the struggles of African-heritage writers. In 'Journal Entries Against Reaction', Philip cites an example of this illustrated by extracts from correspondence to a Women's Press editor:

What remains unacknowledged is that a very culturally specific sense of female identity is being manipulated - and one that is very acutely ahistorical in its failure to acknowledge *race and class as anything more than economic and social categories*.<sup>94</sup>

Issues of privilege are first among the concerns suggested by Philip. This gendered discourse, she argues, is also racialized. In contrast, it is the denial of race, class and history which Philip subverts in her dialogue with 'white feminists' when she contends 'the white feminist has, in certain situations, also been the beneficiary, at the expense of Black women ... of the spoils of patriarchy'.<sup>95</sup> White feminist practice within publishing, then, in its denial of race, class and history presents a challenge to African-Caribbean women writers similar to that highlighted by African-Americans particularly in the 1980s. The challenge for African-Caribbean writers is exacerbated by specific literary production issues limiting access to publication.

Carnivalised discourse juxtaposes critical perspectives which together seek to release a range of meanings from the creolised text. Despite the limitations referred to, above, I suggest that feminism(s) is useful to this critical strategy. McDowell notes in

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<sup>92</sup> See Paul Gilroy's discussion concerning W.E.B. DuBois, 'Whose Millennium is this?', in *Small Acts*, London, 1993, p.160.

<sup>93</sup> Philip, 1992, p.162.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

relation to the African-American context, the 'often unequalled sites of knowledge production' and she questions 'how and if the work of black feminists is read in a way that restructures'.<sup>96</sup> My proposed 'restructuring', through a polyphonous carnivalised approach, addresses such concerns. It complements, too, *that history*, its culture and artefacts with a genesis simultaneously in Africa, Britain, and the Caribbean region, by offering critical theory which is malleable, dialogic and alert to difference. At the same time, I am aware that I seek to break through critical silence. The situation of academic inequality warrants this since the forces of containment remain. For this reason, it is important that I embed cultural forms of critique such as the Sister Goose story, retold in Chapter Two, and African-Caribbean women's poetics.

Valerie Lee's essay 'Testifying Theory: Womanist Intellectual Thought' (1995), has been influential to my thinking.<sup>97</sup> Lee asks two crucial questions: firstly, what happens to black women's literature when it is 'subjected exclusively to critical approaches' albeit 'useful and illuminating', which do not foreground or give primacy to 'black women's experiences and intellectual traditions?'<sup>98</sup> The second question refers to (black) students denied access to black women's theorising. Lee's enquiries are also relevant to African-Caribbean women's literature, and I, too, am concerned with when, where and how all students, whatever their colour and culture, gain access to black women's theorising.

As I have begun to show, my particular womanist/feminist praxis, that is, my practical and theoretical involvement in Caribbean women's literature, demands that I begin with feminism in the light of its particular manifestation of 'theory problems' relative to African-Caribbean women's literature. Yet, from the argument developed here, African-Caribbean realities demand a specificity still largely unrecognised. Wynter points to the plantation, where African-Caribbean culture begins, as the source of

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<sup>96</sup> Lee, 201.

<sup>97</sup> But the demand for greater visibility for black women theorists is one which is growing. See also, Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis, 'In Search of a Discourse and Critique/s that Centre the Art of Black Women Artists', in Jacqueline Bobo, ed., *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, Massachusetts and Oxford, 2001, p.146-72.

<sup>98</sup> Lee, 201.

difference. In addition, Brathwaite proposes a number of hypotheses on Caribbean cosmology pertinent to this discussion. Brathwaite's notion of a 'Caribbean Cosmology' is based upon etymological understanding of the Greek 'cosmos', meaning the order, the world of, the related universe. Firstly, he states that 'Caribbean cosmology as we ? (sic) understand it today' derives from the crisis and catastrophe of the slave plantation.<sup>99</sup> This understanding, confirming of Wynter's analysis is crucial to the study of the Caribbean, for the 'crisis' is reflected in its literature, particularly that of African-heritage peoples.<sup>100</sup>

Brathwaite notes that the oral tradition, 'a deprived tradition,' is significant to an understanding of the nature and formation of African-Caribbean culture.<sup>101</sup> Extending this idea, I suggest that out of the 'deprived' tradition arises key features of African-Caribbean women's literature.<sup>102</sup> Collins's oeuvre, for example, attests to this. Thirdly, Brathwaite stresses that Caribbean literature is 'let through' from time to time during key periods of western literary history, a situation relative to the nature of Caribbean political economies based on structures themselves established as part of the earlier colonial exercise.<sup>103</sup> A widespread effect of this is an established historical dependence 'upon the metropole'.<sup>104</sup> There is implicit in the notion of 'letting through' the formal and informal prohibitions similar to those discussed by Joanna Russ particularly in relation to women's writing.<sup>105</sup> This leads to another, later moment in the latter half of the twentieth century, when feminist preoccupations resulted in a 'letting through' of anglophone African-Caribbean women writers among them Joan

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<sup>99</sup> Kamau Brathwaite 'Notes on Caribbean Cosmology', *River City*, 16, 2 (Summer 1996), 9.

<sup>100</sup> Space does not permit me to develop an emphasis upon race and class within the writing, but see, for example, 'Introduction', Carmen C. Esteves, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds., p.xxii-iii.

<sup>101</sup> Brathwaite, p.8.

<sup>102</sup> Collins may usefully be read against or alongside, for example, Jacob Ross's *A Way to Catch the Dust*, London, 1999.

<sup>103</sup> Brathwaite, p. 6. See also Nicci Gerrard, *Into The Mainstream*, London, 1989, p.9. Gerrard notes that in Britain, presses such as Women's Press and Virago as part of a specific feminist project, 'provided space for writers from different backgrounds and cultures.' She corroborates the 'letting through' of some African-Caribbean women's texts which, by the publishers' definition, are 'feminist texts'. Since the mid 1980s, the publication explosion by women generally, itself related to a commitment by women's presses, has meant also a wave of published fiction by African-Caribbean women across the diaspora.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>105</sup> Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, London, 1984, p.6.

Riley, Collins and Philip. Prior to the feminist period and black women being 'let through', the publication record of anglophone African-Caribbean women novelists remained negligible.<sup>106</sup> In terms of publication and its reception, this remains overwhelmingly true. Fourthly, Brathwaite writes of an Ananse component to African-Caribbean culture which merits the attention of those interested to 'read' cultural forms representative of that world. The 'Ananse component' refers to a self-creating dynamic which draws from the survival of the Anansesem tradition of the trickster spider/human figure of the region, Ananse. The power of the spider figure, Brathwaite argues, lies essentially in an ability to first create the road upon which it must move through the web.<sup>107</sup> Ananse's very survival depends on this. That is to say, the culture has an established tradition, adapted to Caribbean conditions, of finding the resources within itself to articulate its meanings despite the unprecedented barrage of 'strictures, constraints and trauma represented by Atlantic slavery and its aftermath.'<sup>108</sup>

Whether an individual writer is 'conscious about feminism' or, indeed is determined 'to avoid labels' as Olive Senior describes her relationship to feminism(s), publication in the eighties and nineties has brought Caribbean women writers into feminist debate.<sup>109</sup> In the wider Caribbean setting, Morejón, in interview, refers to feminism(s) in terms of the 'academic' and the 'radical':

I do not consider myself a feminist. My writing which is very irrational does not have the ingredients that certain academic feminism requires. I obey the freedom of writing too much to be classified in that way. Nevertheless, I always applaud and receive with affection any social movement that joins women and men together.<sup>110</sup>

Translation issues apart, implicit in Morejón's critique is a perception of feminism as prescriptive and running counter to 'freedom of writing'. Comparison may be drawn with Senior's concern, above, which has a clear corollary, that of reflecting an inclusive

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<sup>106</sup> I have elsewhere commented on this as a gap 'telling of the lack of publication opportunities'. See Anim-Addo, 1996, p.211.

<sup>107</sup> Brathwaite, p.8.

<sup>108</sup> Brathwaite refers specifically to the period in the 1950s when several Caribbean male writers among them, Lamming, Selvon and V. S. Naipaul were 'let through' the publication barrier.

<sup>109</sup> 'An Interview of Olive Senior by Dominique Dubois and Jeanne Devoise', *Journal of the Short Story*, (Spring 1996),13.

<sup>110</sup> See Morejón interview with Aida Bahr in *Mango Season*, 8 (May 1997), 4.

society.<sup>111</sup> Morejón, too, is explicit in her refusal of a theoretical stance which separates the preoccupations of male and female writers:

Radical feminism that does not accept the social and historical condition of women related to urgency of individual freedoms, the achievement of national projects and the total dignity of human beings, seems to me unacceptable.<sup>112</sup>

While, in Morejón's statement, Cuba's socialist imperative is prioritised, I wish, also, to draw attention to her concern with feminism's lack of engagement with the 'social and historical condition of [specific] women'. Morejón is emphatic about this. In her words, 'feminism that emerges from specificity, assuming specificity as a dynamic part, not of the centres but of the peripheries, seems to me a necessity'.<sup>113</sup> Such a radical critique by an African-Caribbean woman writer is unusual only in that it is so firmly positioned.<sup>114</sup> Yet, Morejón's concerns are frequently articulated by African-Caribbean and Latin American writers.<sup>115</sup> At the core of this is an awareness that the social and historical specificity of the group risks erasure by indiscriminate use of ideological tools to interrogate the literature.

The foregrounding of specificity is central to the role of African-Caribbean women's poetics deployed in this discourse. I take also to this means of access to African-Caribbean women's theorising, James Sosnoski's suggestion that 'theorising is not necessarily making theories'.<sup>116</sup> Sosnoski argues that theory making, so often a patriarchal preoccupation, may also be an 'effective instrument of falsification'.<sup>117</sup> I consider that the 'anti' position of many of the Caribbean women cited corroborates Sosnoski's stance. He argues that, in contrast to the 'falsification' process encouraged by 'scientific' theory, itself loaded with meanings of academic career strife, it is 'in the understanding of a problem through differing intuitions of it that theorising occurs'.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Dubois and Devoize interview with Senior, *Journal of the Short Story*, (Spring 1996),13.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> It can be argued that the clarity of Morejón's position lies in her 'distance' ideologically and physically from the metropolitan centres.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Amy Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers*, Minneapolis, 1993, pp.49-50.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

If this holds true, African-Caribbean women's poetry offers a particularly potent source of theorising. Within carnivalised discourse such poetics seek to decentre the individual theoretical discourses similarly at play by reinforcing the particularised consciousness rendered by the primary texts as well as provision of a distinctive critique. For example, Philip's 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' (see my 'Preface', pp.6-7), offers, in critical play, commentary upon the textual extracts already examined as well as upon the larger endeavour comprising this thesis.

As a medium, African-Caribbean women's poetics draws attention to perspectives which may well differ from those premised by the totalizing discourses. A point at issue is that of patriarchy. While feminism is consistent in its discussion of patriarchy in relation to men, Caribbean women's plantation experience from testimonies of slave women onwards, suggests a more complex viewpoint. Questions concerning the colour and gender of patriarchy, for example, remain to be addressed for Caribbean writers as for 'women of colour'.<sup>119</sup> Issues of power carry plantation meanings of enactment of power by white planters, men and women, who sought to contain 'unmanageable' African-Caribbean women. Such 'Relation' bears relevance to the literary production process, including that of reception and the unequal production of critical knowledge. In addition, published fiction by African-Caribbean women attest to a simultaneity of 'levels of domination'<sup>120</sup> which renders as distortive, the prioritising of one strand of social reality such as gender, within the texts, as more problematic than, for example, race or class. While for 'feminist critique' in its examination of 'ideological assumptions,' patriarchy has been an important theme,<sup>121</sup> Caribbean feminism, like that of African-Americans needs take account not only of a simultaneity of oppression but of

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<sup>119</sup> See Cordelia Chavez Candelaria, 'The "Wild Zone" Thesis as Gloss in Chicana Literary Study', in warhol and herndl, eds., p.251. Candelaria's 'wild zone' analysis asserts the importance of defining experience and reality from within a specific culture 'and not solely in relation to the dominant political hegemonies, public or private'.

<sup>120</sup> See, for example, Hill Collins, 1991, pp.227-8. Hill Collins's concern with the African-American context parallels my own African-Caribbean interest.

<sup>121</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', in Mary Jacobus, ed., *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, Surry Hills, 1979, p.25.

transformative action.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, writers such as Rhoda Reddock<sup>123</sup> and Paravisini-Gebert<sup>124</sup> argue the case for recognition of Caribbean style feminism based upon the reality of a distinctive women's liberatory praxis within the region. Specifically, the direction is given to observe Caribbean women's action rather than rhetoric since the latter risks limited dissemination.<sup>125</sup>

Errol Miller, at the University of the West Indies, proposes that the distinctive feature of Caribbean women's liberation is precisely that it has 'not been the direct outcome of women's assertive actions, but more the unintentional and indirect result of male conflict'.<sup>126</sup> Despite the negative emphasis, Miller asserts:

support for this conclusion is to be found in the observation that the Caribbean region presents the interesting paradox of the coexistence of *the greatest degree of women's liberation anywhere in the world* - including North America and Europe with the absence of any organised militant feminist movement championing the cause of women.<sup>127</sup>

Miller's paradoxical analysis warrants consideration. In not attempting to differentiate between liberatory (feminist) rhetoric and praxis, he also fails to point out that 'the greatest degree of liberation' manifests itself in survival strategies, not rhetoric. Nonetheless, Miller identifies features within the lifestyle of many grassroots African-Caribbean women; qualities of independence, self-reliance and sisterhood which are ideals of feminism(s). That such a lifestyle has become part of the ontological reality of African-Caribbean womanhood in the twentieth century, is not surprising given the plantation history of dependence on the self rather than on a male partner. By this analysis, Gilroy's statement, 'we were the first feminists' cannot easily be dismissed. For similar reasons there was resistance by black women writers such as Alice Walker who,

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<sup>122</sup> Paget points to 'practical transformation' as practice closely linked to African-Caribbean philosophical thought. See Paget, p.269.

<sup>123</sup> See Rhoda Reddock, 'Feminism, Nationalism, and the Early Women's Movement in the English-Speaking Caribbean', in Cudjoe, ed., 1990, pp.61-81.

<sup>124</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, 'The Home-Grown Roots of Caribbean Women's Movements', in Consuelo Lopez Springfield, ed., *Daughters of Caliban*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997.

<sup>125</sup> McDowell makes the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice politics'. See McDowell, p.37.

<sup>126</sup> Errol Miller, 'The Rise of Matriarchy in the Caribbean', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 34, 3 and 4 (1988), 18.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

in 1984, set aside engagement with theoretical feminism in preference for womanism.<sup>128</sup> In that period, the monolithic nature of white western feminism presented positions unacceptable to many 'women of colour'.<sup>129</sup> For Walker, the more practical version, indicative of action familiar to black women thinkers, found more appeal.

Resistance is significant to the poetics upon which I draw. I refer to resistance to plantation values which, as Wynter illustrates, still pertain. Creole language use, a skill which as a written form, is learnt in the process of writers claiming an individual voice, is itself a sign of resistance to 'the foreign anguish', English. Michael Gilkes (1981) identifies Herbert de Lisser's *Jane's Career* (1914) as the first 'noteworthy' West Indian (anglophone) novel, a suggestion which serves to underscore Walcott's reminder of the 'babyhood' of the culture.<sup>130</sup> Gilkes highlights characteristics of Caribbean literature as:

its use of myth, folk rhythms, and proverbial speech forms; its increasing emphasis on a direct involvement of author and audience in an enactment of the journey into the unknown.<sup>131</sup>

African-Caribbean feminist novels - even in publisher-defined terms - correspond, to some extent, Gilkes's notions. As I hope to have shown in the previous chapter, Collins's *Angel*, for example, is identifiably Caribbean in such respects. Gilkes writes of a distinction between 'émigré' writers such as McKay and some more 'authentic' Caribbean writer. This is problematic in the light of the fluidity of movement of Caribbean writers from the region to metropolitan areas in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.<sup>132</sup> The issue is significant for African-Caribbean women's texts not simply because of the correlation between 'émigré' activity and publication. It also

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<sup>128</sup> Nara Araujo, for example, stresses the oppositional nature of Walker's stance against feminism at that time. See Araujo in Pyne-Timothy, ed., p.24.

<sup>129</sup> See, for example, Barbara Smith's critique of feminism ('Towards a Black Feminist Critique', in Mary Eagleton, ed., *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Oxford, P77).

<sup>130</sup> Michael Gilkes, *The West Indian Novel*, Boston, 1981, p11.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>132</sup> Indeed, if as Brathwaite highlights, most of the novelists live abroad, then Gilkes's argument opens a different debate.

begs recognition of Boyce Davies's argument that black women cross multiple boundaries. Indeed, such crossing of geographical boundaries into the metropolitan centres has given rise to women's literary production which could not have been sustained in the region. Specifically, feminist publication for anglophones carries the mark of 'nomadic' writerly activity.<sup>133</sup> By this I mean that if access to publication abroad was problematic, as anglophone writers suggest, so too was this specialised access demanding of manuscripts appropriate to the publisher's ideology as well as to 'increased multinationalism'.<sup>134</sup>

Critical writing published towards the end of the 1990s and written by Caribbean women demonstrates the principal concern with language. For example, the collection of critical essays, *Winds of Change*, highlights issues of identity as a central focus. In 'Part One' of the book, subtitled 'Language, Orality and Voice', six of the contributors are African-Caribbean authors of whom five are anglophones. Of these, four writers: Collins, Hodge, Pollard, and Opal Palmer Adisa, focus on language. In comparison, Part Four of the book, 'Expressions, Literary Theory and Exile', offers papers by four authors and critics who, while representative of a wider Caribbean, include a single anglophone Caribbean author, Patricia Powell, whose paper, 'The Dynamics of Power and Desire in *The Pagoda*' is concerned with her novel, *The Pagoda*. Without refusal of 'high' or macro theory, there appears to be a reluctance by writers from within the region to apply dominant western theories to the literature. Conversely, analysis made through rigid application of such theories leaves a writer bemused and concerned about the kinds of distortion which arise through lack of understanding of the culture in which the literary product is rooted.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> This 'circular' nomadism also feeds directly into the literary product. See, for example, my interview with Merle Collins, *Mango Season*, 5, (April 1996), 5. Collins states, 'And because I keep going and coming, moving in and out of the country (Grenada), the voices are always so very current'.

<sup>134</sup> See Gerrard, p.11.

<sup>135</sup> I refer here to comments made in plenary sessions at the June 1998 conference, '(Sub)Versions/ InVersions/ DubVersions' at Goldsmiths College, London.

Resistance within African-Caribbean women's poetry may also parallel that found in the fiction thus rendering certain meanings more visible. In this process, collective memory and the rewriting of history, preoccupations of post-slavery fiction, cannot easily be ignored. Yet, the critical juxtapositioning which I suggest as crucial to carnivalised discourse adds much to its possible rhetorical dimensions. As my reading of the texts illustrate, I draw particularly upon feminist narratology, itself a hybrid approach, for exploration of voice and an understanding of the role which gender plays in my reading. If the voice of a text carries the authority of its author and 'the community in which it is published', as Susan Lanser argues, and if between the two authorities there are unresolved issues of dominance and 'cultural imposition' or 'cultural invasion', some interesting narrative complexities arise.<sup>136</sup>

Lanser in *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992) distinguishes between 'discursive' and 'narrative' authority, of significance to women authors.<sup>137</sup> She writes of 'authority' as, 'the intellectual credibility, ideological validity and aesthetic value claimed by or conferred upon a work, author, narrator, character or textual practice'.<sup>138</sup> Overall, Gilroy's writing career is indicative of 'a quest for discursive authority' and illustrates a claiming of authority in the absence of its conferment upon her work.<sup>139</sup> That authorial claiming is predicated upon Gilroy's perception of herself as a professional woman. By her account, one of her earliest manuscripts submitted to publishers was that of *In Praise of Love and Children*.<sup>140</sup> The narrating protagonist, Melda Hayley, an African-heritage West Indian migrant to London, becomes, despite emotional childhood trauma, a professional woman whose narrative is the focus of the novel. An independent, professional, African-Caribbean woman character, Melda is neither the 'fertility goddess' or 'sexual prize' which, it is suggested, may be found in

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<sup>136</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Harmondsworth, 1972, p.121. Freire writes of the invaders as 'the authors of, and actors in, the process; those they invade are the objects'.

<sup>137</sup> Susan Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, New Jersey, 1992, p.6.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>140</sup> See, Anim-Addo, in Newson and Strong-Leek, eds., p.1+2.

writing about African-Caribbean women.<sup>141</sup> How difficult is it for an African-Caribbean woman of the period portraying this new womanhood to gain entry into 'Western' discourse? In the context of post-Windrush Britain deaf to the voices of African-Caribbean women, the claiming of authority has been difficult particularly with a text like *In Praise*. In the first chapter, Melda encounters Trudi, a white woman who appears to be suggesting an intimacy which Trudi is not prepared to tolerate. Their first meeting follows:

Suddenly, the downstairs door opened and up the stairs came a tall, blonde woman with eyes as blue and hard as fossils of aquamarine. *Our eyes made four* and her thin, funny-coloured, string-bow lips shifted this way into a smile, which drew my eyes away from her limp yellow hair.<sup>142</sup>

Feminist narratology articulated by robyn warhol suggests that to determine the 'focal character', the critical questions to ask of a section of narration include: 'Who is speaking and Who is seeing?'<sup>143</sup> The first-person narration of *In Praise* is Melda's, whose self-conscious statement is clear. She states: 'our eyes made four'. But what does Melda see? While she mentions 'eyes', 'lips', 'hair', 'legs', hers is not an immediate preoccupation with ideals of 'western' beauty. Despite Trudi's expectation of intimacy, Melda insists upon maintaining her distance. For example, in three exchanges, Melda refers to Trudi, firstly, as 'Mistress Lady' and secondly, as 'Mistress'. Further, Melda remarks upon a physical response to what she sees. 'Sweat began to shine on my skin', she states. Why? Warhol argues that in verbal narration, 'the gaze and the look, though related', are 'distinct from each other'.<sup>144</sup> The gaze occurs 'outside the world of the story', while the look 'can be located inside'. Trudi's 'look' leads to comprehension:

Sweat began to shine on my skin. What did Arnie want with a person like that? A mistress who pay poor people twelve dollars a month to scrub and cook, throw old clothes at them, keep mothers away from their baby-children! I began to boil with passion. The nearest I had ever been to those people was the distance of the pulpit in church.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Gilkes, p.155.

<sup>142</sup> Gilroy, 1996, p.18.

<sup>143</sup> robyn warhol, 'The Look, the Body and the Heroine of Persuasion', in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, Kathy Mezei, ed., Chapel Hill, 1996, p.24.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>145</sup> Gilroy, 1996, p.19.

Her meanings, which may be located within the world of the story, are also directly linked to memory. 'Outside the world' of the text is the hitherto untold Plantation woman's narrative and the world of 'Relation' which draws in the reader. Gilroy's autobiography, *Black Teacher* (1976), documents entry into the master discourse as also engaging with on-going hostility. Evidence of this is in her writing of the racialised and hostile London environment of the 1950s in *Black Teacher*. A similar knowledge is given to Melda, the 'I' narrator, who affirms, for example, that 'to be civilised was to speak English and, more importantly, to be English'.<sup>146</sup> Despite this, Melda articulates a compulsion 'to put my deepest concerns down on paper', a process which describes Gilroy's own writing activity.<sup>147</sup> By such a process and through the master discourse, Gilroy establishes authority, firstly through the autobiographical text, *Black Teacher*, and secondly through critical analysis as collected in *Leaves*.

Gilroy acknowledges as significant to her personal passage the period when, as a young colonial woman, she travelled to London in search of the motherland's 'superior education'.<sup>148</sup> *In Praise* fictionalises this process. Despite the quality of her hard-won education, inequality persists in Gilroy's London. She writes:

The fifties saw the first meetings between publishers and Black women in an unequal yet semi-equal footing. The publishers, editors and other occupants of the inner publishing sanctum had been raised on the stereotype, preserved them and could not see beyond them.<sup>149</sup>

Contrary to her initial plans, Gilroy, having arrived in London at the beginning of the 1950s, remained resident there. She occupies, therefore, a particularised space spanning a colonial Caribbean upbringing and a London adulthood from the immediate post-Windrush era. Gilroy's accounts of the period of her journey to London confirm that, as a student like Melda, she was determined to learn and to work.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.78.

<sup>148</sup> Gilroy, 1998, p.211.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

In the circumstances of plantation history, collective memory becomes a crucial, albeit fragmentary, archive. Further, in the light of a scribal tradition recently available, African-Caribbean women have had little access to the process of writing the self into the history. Yet, the question of 'how the past is made to matter' is crucial to the literature.<sup>150</sup> Firstly, the texts perform a partially didactic function. They aim to teach in ways similar to the Sister Goose tale. The first-wave texts of interest to this thesis do not merely aim to entertain.<sup>151</sup> For this reason, many of the texts engage with the collective history if only to share an understanding of the current situation. In these texts are the beginnings of a replacement of the oral tradition and specifically oral storytelling which partially served a didactic function. This too may be seen as part of the resistance process since institutionalised education has variously urged or forced the forgetting of oral culture and indigenous ways of knowing.<sup>152</sup> An intimation of how the past matters is important, therefore, to a reading of these texts each of which offers a subsequent rewriting of the collective history. This is not to suggest a uniformity of intention. Indeed, the tension between the impetus to forget and that of remembrance is such that the collective memory is more immediate a task for some writers rather than others. Walcott's much cited 'we make too much of that old groan, history', though convincingly unmasked by Bobb in *Beating A Restless Drum* (1998), marks a classic divide in African-Caribbean thought.<sup>153</sup> In the light of this, any suggestion of homogeneity would be at best naïve. For individual writers, questions of social class and urban or rural preoccupations may, for example, be decisive factors in shaping the social reality they present. While for some writers the meanings of 'that old groan' may not be insistent, the concerns of many make finally for the writing of post-slavery which actively engages with excavation of a traumatic history.

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<sup>150</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, p.7.

<sup>151</sup> See Joan Riley's dedication: 'and for the sake of putting at least a small part of the record straight'. *Waiting in the Twilight*, London, 1992.

<sup>152</sup> Merle Hodge interview with Joan Anim-Addo, *Mango Season*, 11 (1998), 4. It is useful to compare Hodge's views with her portrayal of, for example, Tee's classroom experience. See Hodge, 1970, pp.23-30.

<sup>153</sup> This 'divide' has been much illustrated with reference to the contrasting poetic preoccupations of Walcott and Brathwaite. But see June D. Bobb, *Beating A Restless Drum: The Poetics of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott*, New Jersey, 1998. See, for example, pp.34-6.

Bobb, addressing the issue of history in the poetry of Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite, writes:

For Brathwaite and Walcott, their islands are symbolic and real, liberating and imprisoning. At the center [sic] of these oppositions is the poetic imagination that forges out of these contradictions a place where the self is inviolate and the community sacrosanct. To reach this place, Brathwaite and Walcott journey back to a history and a past they refuse to relinquish.<sup>154</sup>

Bobb's Caribbeanist stance refuses a 'high', or western theoretical frame of reference for critical purposes. Similarly, Chancy, one of few African-Caribbean critics writing about the novel by African-Caribbean women, is explicit in her refusal 'to participate in the Western critical practice of co-optation, by contesting theories of postcolonialism and postmodernism and displacing them through the theories the texts themselves unleash'.<sup>155</sup> One of the claims I make to the value of the carnivalised process lies in its capacity for dialogue with the theorising text. I develop this idea in the final chapter. Chancy's view, that 'the study of narrative implies an awareness of the cultural modes of production, that it delineates the ways in which we both understand ourselves within culture and transmit our knowledge of codes of (self)representation' is similar to my own.<sup>156</sup> The theoretical underpinning of this thesis is a syncretic mix evocative of the 'dub' process within the culture,<sup>157</sup> and specifically, the region's carnivalised rituals. Carnivalised discourse, linked to this dynamic, seeks the juxtapositioning of disparate critical voices and meanings demanded by the texts, a plurivocality first demanded by writers and critics in their rejection of theoretical containment. Further, by carnivalising theory, I aim to invoke the pluralistic vision endemic to African-Caribbean culture and to establish a place for theory more aligned with the region's cultural practice. It encourages dialogue, including black women's theorising. This critical practice simultaneously counters the habit of 'speaking for' which I examined in Chapter One,

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>155</sup> Chancy, p.9.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>157</sup> This may be contrasted with Evelyn O'Callaghan's approach to West Indian women's writing as a 'dub' version. See, O'Callaghan, p.11.

and promotes a strong awareness of specificity of context. Indeed, the flexibility and strength of carnivalised discourse as I envisage it, allows the crucial issues already signalled, to be addressed so that the profiling of African-Caribbean thought and particularly that of women becomes a crucial component of the critical undertaking. So does close attention to the fictional texts themselves, potential and primary sources of theorising.

### **At the Crossroads: the figure of the 'Midnight Robber'**

The significance of the crossroads to the genesis of carnival and to women's increasing visibility in carnival practice lies in the meeting of forms and content beyond the house and yard, away from the domestic space, and in a public arena habituated to male authority. Yet, the 'marked feminization' of old mas is a feature of the final decades of the twentieth century.<sup>158</sup> While there is some tension concerning women's voices and carnival practice, the meta-narrative of gender is well established. For example, women are not only crucial carnival participants who initiate their offspring into carnival culture, but traditions about which Warner-Lewis has written, such as 'Dame Lorraine', 'Gros Budan' and 'Baby Doll Masquerade' bring gender issues directly into play at carnival. Further, the evolution of carnival practice is reflected in the changing role of women's participation as referred to above. Carnivalised theory in taking account of such change also marks a departure from the binary thinking such as that of, for example, Roger D. Abrahams, for whom women's place at the crossroads is demarcated by their roles as 'guardians of respectability' specifically within the home.<sup>159</sup>

Philip, in her focus upon 'Jamette' as gendered carnival experience, identifies three attributes which relate to carnival and the crossroads. These, the polyvocal, historico-spiritual and kino-poetic (from her use of the term kinopoesis), point to the

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<sup>158</sup> Burton, p.219.

<sup>159</sup> But see Roger D. Abrahams, *The Man-of- Words in the West Indies*, Baltimore, 1983, p.152. Abrahams argues that significance lies also in oratorical differences typified by Standard English as a marker of respectability in the home contrasted with creole usage on the street.

African dynamics within the culture but also to the nature of creolisation. While arguably female figures associated with carnival, such as 'Jamette', are characterised by silence, my approach subverts this by bringing into play oratorical figures which challenge such silence. From Trinidad carnival, the figure of the Midnight Robber serves as a useful trope of rhetoric and spectacle. For example, the words of the masquerader Narrie Approu underscore meanings ascribed to the exhibit as follows:

I am the mighty Horang, the Midnight Robber, the voice of terror of terrors who roams the bowels of the Earth and emerge here to strike fear into the heart of wrongdoers.<sup>160</sup>

While the Midnight Robber is played as a figure inclined towards hyperbole and bombast, Trinidadian writer Ramabai Espinet stresses that this figure is a powerful creative source of her poetic writing. 'The robber is made up of bits and pieces of all kinds of things', she comments. 'it's a wonderful invention to use ... it talks about origins and grand origins'.<sup>161</sup> The Midnight Robber's role is specific to a manner of philosophising, and like the Old Mas Bands may be said to serve a historicist function. In addition, the habit of appropriating and recycling 'bits and pieces', a distinctive feature of Caribbean carnivalising, represents a powerful means of relating to 'origins and grand origins' as sought in carnivalised discourse. If European accounts have shaped the dominant perspective in the Caribbean through colonial institutions, I seek in some measure to redress this through the polyvocal approach I suggest. O.R. Dathorne refers to the writer as 'engaged in threading a synthesis into literature' of the region.<sup>162</sup> I share with Dathorne an interest in the notion of synthesis specifically in relation to African-Caribbean literature. It is the 'texture and variety' of the synthesis of African-Caribbean women's literature which I wish to address through the Midnight Robber figuration. Dathorne's reminder of the function of carnival for Africans in the New World is important as opportunity for reviving 'beliefs and customs' as well as playing

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<sup>160</sup> 'African Worlds' Exhibition, Horniman Museum, South East London, 1999, displayed such a figure.

<sup>161</sup> Ramabai Espinet interview with Joan Anim-Addo, *Mango Season*, 10 (1998), 4.

'mass'.<sup>163</sup> Alert to carnival as an 'occasion for social commentary and artistic expression', I assume the djobbeur's mantle in order to put into theoretical play issues deriving from African-Caribbean women's lives and culture, since the absence of such a dimension in critical literary practice relating to African-Caribbean women's literature has finally to be addressed.

The *Midnight Robber's* 'voice of terror of terrors' in the critical sense highlights a consciousness of role in the theoretical space and a concern with having that role valued. It utilises specified time and place within which to don the mask of theory and all that attends such a masquerade: ideology, heightened discourse claims, and the assumption of authority. At the same time, it anticipates reception (terror) of the carnivalised critical voice which parallels, for example, certain terrified responses to the actual imposition of Caribbean carnival practice on the streets of Notting Hill, London.<sup>164</sup> It also signals awareness of the 'terrified consciousness' as used by Kenneth Ramchand.<sup>165</sup> which is part of the coloniser's response to the decolonising process, an issue addressed by Fanon as follows:

Decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon... Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonised. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling, in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonised. But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another 'species' of men and women: the colonisers.<sup>166</sup>

While Fanon's decolonisation stance is popularly read as unrelated to its Caribbean context, his concerns remain relevant as more Caribbean voices, including those of women, articulate a similar position. Henry Paget, writing of Fanon's place in African-Caribbean philosophy, notes that he is 'seldom' examined in relation to 'the Caribbean

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<sup>162</sup> O.R. Dathorne, *Dark Ancestor: The Literature of the Black Man in the Caribbean*, Baton Rouge, 1981.

<sup>163</sup> Dathorne, p.37.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, Kwesi Owosu and Jacob Ross, *Behind The Masquerade*, London, 1988, pp.81-2.

<sup>165</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, London, 1970, p.244.

<sup>166</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth, 1967, p.29.

tradition of thought'.<sup>167</sup> Despite this, Fanon's theorising, 'one of the most powerful syntheses' continues to impact upon the 'modern Caribbean imagination'.<sup>168</sup> If Fanon's decolonisation arguments represent counter-hegemonic desire, so too does women's insistence not only upon a published voice but also upon involvement in critical discourse.<sup>169</sup> The carnivalising process seeks a Caribbean style synthesis which allows an indigenising of that discourse.

In part, Caribbean women's voice(s) have already appropriated counter-hegemonic critical space in the spirit of Caribbean carnival. A tradition of calypso and related genres such as lavway, calinda, belairs and bongos attest to this.<sup>170</sup> I offer within the framework of this tradition, in Brathwaite's terminology, a 'nam' or naming of collectivised voices. Such critical practice familiar within Caribbean carnival, while different from western practice, is habituated to the use of 'bits and pieces' for constructing powerful means of theorising.<sup>171</sup> In the search for 'bits and pieces', women's poetry serves not only as a critical treasure trove, but to develop a tradition of poeticism influential to Caribbean thought.<sup>172</sup> This is not to suggest an 'either/or' situation, that is, either carnivalised theory or high theory. Rather, I am proposing a theoretical space predisposed to a plurality of critical voices and positions inclusive of African-Caribbean women's voices. A feature of this space is its fluidity in terms of the juxtapositioning of critical discourses and carnival figures.<sup>173</sup> I stress, however, that the notion of carnivalised space and its derivative, carnivalised theory, is particularly appropriate since it accommodates both indigenous and western thought.

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<sup>167</sup> Paget, p.68.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.78.

<sup>169</sup> M. J. Fenwick, 'Caribbean Women Poets Confront the Canon', *River City* (1996), 36. Fenwick argues that 'literature itself' has been used as part of the institutionalising of cultural hegemony.

<sup>170</sup> Donald R. Hill, *Calypso Calaloo*, Florida, 1993, pp.3-4.

<sup>171</sup> Space has not permitted me to explore comparative European carnival traditions. But see, for example, Hania Janiurek, 'The British Tradition of Carnival', *Carnival*, (1987) 12-3.

<sup>172</sup> Paget, p.5.

<sup>173</sup> See, Joan Anim-Addo, 'Translation, Communication and Joy: Reading my Sister - Nancy Morejón', in Leonel Ruiz Miyares, Daniel Escobedo Beceiro, Juan Ferrer Pérez and Gloria Corpas Pastor, eds., *ACTAS II: VII Simposio Internacional de Comunicación Social*, Santiago, 2001, pp.443-50. In this paper I use the Grenadian 'shatnees' figure in a carnivalised approach to Morejón's poetry.

Caribbean women's writing which negotiates between oppositional diasporic space(s) is imbued with 'social and political protest'.<sup>174</sup> From within the context of the University of the West Indies, Evelyn O'Callaghan describes the status of women's writing:

In terms of critical material, women's writing receives minimal attention in classic works like Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970) and Michael Gilkes's *West Indian Novel* (1981); Jean Rhys warrants a chapter in Bruce King's *West Indian Literature* (1979) and of the eighteen pieces in Edward Baugh's *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (1978) only one deals with a female writer: The poet Louise Bennett.<sup>175</sup>

Critical silence inside the region is similarly representative of the conditions of literary production and has similarly served to suppress writing. Brathwaite's account of 'students demanding "Westindianization" of the cultural events at the Centre and greater student participation in and control of its administration' in 1970 illustrates the task of decolonisation and why it continues to be a reality within the region.<sup>176</sup> While students interpreted the university's position as contemptuous of black students, Wynter assessed the University's action as a determination to protect 'its privileged status quo',<sup>177</sup> and expressed her own 'feeling of alienation'.<sup>178</sup> She wrote, too, of the promise implicit within the Caribbean's 'multiplicity of heritage'<sup>179</sup> and the work required to 'discover ourselves, to excavate from memory if necessary'.<sup>180</sup> It is against this background of racialised realities within and without the region that Cudjoe wrote of the 'founding event of Caribbean women's writing' when, in 1988, and outside of

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<sup>174</sup> I refer to Julia Kristeva's writing about the 'carnavalesque'. See Julia Kristeva, in Toril Moi, ed., *The Julia Kristeva Reader*, London, 1986. Much writing about the 'carnavalesque' derives from Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Massachusetts, 1968. While Bakhtin is concerned with the carnivalised text, my interest lies in a carnivalised reading of the text. Bakhtin's notion of polyphony bears directly on my understanding of the polyvocal though my preoccupation is with its genesis in creolised literary practice which I propose should be extended to critical practice. Further contrasts may be drawn with Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, London, 1986, p.117. Castle is concerned for example with the masquerade as a 'trope of destabilization'.

<sup>175</sup> O'Callaghan, 1993, p.3.

<sup>176</sup> Brathwaite, 1977, p.60.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p.65.

the region, anglophone African-Caribbean women writers were invited to speak for themselves.<sup>181</sup>

The impact of race and gender is, perhaps, clearer in critical discourse. The relation between who speaks theoretically and who does not, illustrates a significant power imbalance whereby African-Caribbean women largely do not enter the discourse as theoreticians. This is particularly true in the UK where African-Caribbean women are not visible in literary discourse.<sup>182</sup> While there is a plantation logic to this, the interpretation process is patently problematic without the voices of those within the culture. Of course, even 'allowing' articulation of the culture has been problematic, as Walcott highlights, though poetry in this context carries a particular tradition of theorising. Yet, in poetic writing, which so often retains oral features, many tensions between African-Caribbean and other world views become readily evident. An extract from Collins's 'Crick Crack' plays to such tension:

tales of hunting will always  
glorify the hunter  
until the lioness  
is her own  
hiss-  
-torian<sup>183</sup>

In the poem, Collins questions the way in which information framed by a particularised cultural perspective is presented as universal truth. Whose truth? Whose reality? 'Do we know what is truth and what is truly fiction?' she asks.<sup>184</sup> 'Crick Crack' harks back to African-Caribbean oral culture and simultaneously to African culture in its titular use of the ritual refrain 'Crick, Crack' which reverberates across the region to signal the opening of a story.<sup>185</sup> In effect, Collins has transformed the original African proverb through a gendered reappropriation. Further, she structures the text by the repeated

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<sup>181</sup> Cudjoe, 1990, p.5.

<sup>182</sup> Lack of access may be measured by absence of African-Caribbean women from English departments particularly in institutions of Higher Education and also by lack of published critical writing in the field.

<sup>183</sup> Merle Collins, 'Crick Crack', in *Rotten Pomerack*, London, 1992, p.63.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> An equivalent francophone ritual storytelling beginning is 'Mesieur Crick! Mesieur Crack!'

use of 'Crick, Crack' drawing upon a culture rich in its production of fiction, until recently, oral fiction, which by its nature, could not be contained in the way that present-day written forms can. African-Caribbean oral culture, adapted through rupture and violence, uses, as the poem demonstrates, 'double speak' or inferential means to make its crucial point.<sup>186</sup> The critical point Collins makes at the close of the poem is the need for caution on the part of people of the oral community to beware of the inherent dangers in cultural information packaged as universal truths. In effect, the poem urges a resistance to the interpretation of African history presented by authorities outside of the culture.

For cultural and historical reasons already explored, western critical thinking seeking to explore African-Caribbean women's writing, rather than account for missing African-heritage theorising voices, engages in exercises of co-optation and appropriation. In the wake of concern with postmodernist writing, for example, attention has focussed on specific African-Caribbean women's texts as postmodernist. Philip, asked in interview whether she considers herself a postmodern writer replies:

I have never considered myself a postmodern writer, though I know that *She Tries Her Tongue* in particular has been interpreted as a postmodernist text, which is fine with me.<sup>187</sup>

Implicit in this statement is the consideration similar to that of Morejón, above, that critics arrive at conclusions about texts regardless of the specificity of the writers and their situation. Philip argues that the postmodern descriptor or 'label' is of limited applicability. 'You lose a great deal if you only see it as postmodern', she adds, 'unless we understand the Caribbean as a postmodern space long before the term was coined'.<sup>188</sup>

Philip's response is interesting primarily in confirming the genealogy of the text and its 'Caribbean context'.<sup>189</sup> Yet, it is arguably the nature of the Caribbean context

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<sup>186</sup> Glissant, 1997, p.68. Glissant writes, for example of texts 'working to say without saying', that is, reflecting a 'double consciousness'.

<sup>187</sup> Paul Naylor, 'A River City Interview with M. Nourbese Philip', *River City*, 16, 2 (1996), 33.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

which is unknown or problematic to theorists. Philip offers clarification concerning the complexity of this context which she describes as 'a Caribbean sensibility with competing discourses, discourses colliding, colluding with each other, separating and so on'.<sup>190</sup> She agrees, in relation to her work, at least, that postmodern theory with its tendency towards competing voices and realities is in some measure appropriate to *Tongue*. Her particular quarrel with postmodernism, however, is located in its 'claim that history is dead'. She asserts, 'for us history is very much alive and well and kicking'.<sup>191</sup> The truth about history and Caribbean women's writing may be verified by close reading of the writers foregrounded in this thesis or indeed in a random reading of first-wave African-Caribbean women novelists. Yet the historical consciousness of the writing remains to be explored.<sup>192</sup> It is partly for this reason that like Morejón, Philip is concerned with the specifics or the 'particular' Caribbean 'matrix':

It can be read in a postmodernist fashion, but it is really coming completely out of that particular matrix with, as I said before, competing discourses, collage, bringing bits and pieces, and this history of interruptions that I spoke about earlier. Caribbean literature has been a site of interruptions of many discourses ever since its conception.<sup>193</sup>

It may be argued that the 'competing discourses' to which Philip refers are also the products of the 'particular' process of cultural hegemony in the Caribbean. Are these master discourses marginalising or appropriating African-Caribbean women's writing? According to Philip, theory needs to account for the complexity of 'that particular matrix'. If, as she argues, bits-and-piece-ness is integral to the fabric of the literature, then theoretical discourse allowing a prismatic view of this, as in the carnivalised theory which I propose, is indeed valuable. My own approach and its concern with disrupting critical metanarratives might itself appear to be post-modernist. Arguably, a postmodern moment renders more acceptable such critical dialogue. Yet, my thinking draws primarily upon a creolised tradition which may be compared, for example, in Elaine

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> This concern informs London's Fourth International Conference on Caribbean Women's Literature: 'Swinging Her Breasts at History', held at Goldsmiths College, London University, 6 and 7 April, 2001.

<sup>193</sup> Philip, p.34.

Savory's writing, to poets Nourbese Philip and Pamela Mordecai, both of whom foreground the notion of 'prismatic perception'.<sup>194</sup> Mordecai's 'prismatic perception' is defined as 'the disposition to perceive and construe experience in sometimes unresolved pluralities very different from logical/linear methods of knowing'.<sup>195</sup> Further, Savory cites writers such as Claire Harris who theorises about 'continuous incarnations' and Brathwaite who draws upon the notion of 'tidealectics' so as to similarly invoke a plurality of perspectives.

Mordecai makes two points which serve to develop further my argument, firstly, that 'it is this palpable sense of diverse others that the prismatic perception tolerates', and secondly, that 'this habit of cognition proceeds from the reality of cultural syncretism which characterises Caribbean societies'.<sup>196</sup> The former statement demonstrates an awareness not only of self but also of others, in this case, 'diverse others'. It is such an awareness which informs the 'double consciousness' which threads my argument. One way of reading this awareness is to note the watcher's gaze focused upon the 'diverse other' observing the watcher. In some respects, this parallels the Midnight Robber's stance since the Robber sets out not merely to 'rob' but to 'speechify' or engage in discourse. Similarly, the 'cultural syncretism' to which Mordecai refers is itself a vibrant part of Caribbean reality which ensures that one learns to live with contradictions. The concept of the carnivalised accommodates such contradictions, clashes and conflicts, not as an end in itself, but to allow the development of a Caribbean aesthetic even while acknowledging its syncretic 'origins and grand origins' each with competing claims, born of interests other than that of the African-Caribbean literary product. In addition, the project opens up dialogue between text and theories as well as between one theory and another about the questions they address and those for which they give little account.

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<sup>194</sup> Elaine Savory 'En/Gendering Spaces', in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, pp.12-27.

<sup>195</sup> Pamela Mordecai, 'A Crystal of Ambiguities: Metaphors for Creativity and the Art of Writing', in Derek Walcott, *Another Life, World Literature In English*, 27, 1 (1987), 93-105.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

Creolised critical discourse, as I propose it, takes 'the baby', that is both Creole culture and literary practice, to the carnival of the region's history. By this process, issues of power impacting upon cultural production and reception are addressed in the offsetting of meanings possible in the multiple discourses at play. While theoretical texts, whether postmodern, feminist or postcolonial, have resisted engagement with Caribbean women's literature, my proposal seeks a dialogue which is inclusive and speaks to the complexities of Caribbean women's experience. Brathwaite's 'letting through' is pertinent specifically in relation to the legacy of the slave plantation. That is, gross inequities, including unequal weighting of the word written and spoken characterise both past and contemporary theoretical literary contexts. That the twentieth century has seen African-Caribbean women largely not represented as theorists constitutes a silence rarely the subject of academic or critical debate. This needs to be addressed. Especially since there has been and is a situation in which Caribbean-focused critics confront a powerful tradition of 'being spoken for,' with voiceless being regarded as the norm.<sup>197</sup> On the one hand, Walcott urges a caution in the rush for theory in that present day Caribbean culture, following the decimation of the native peoples in the wake of European adventurism within the region, is relatively young.<sup>198</sup> A certain Ananse awareness, or cultural memory cautions resistance on the part of authors and critics alike within the Caribbean. On the other hand, to cite Brathwaite again, 'the power of the spider figure lies essentially in an ability to first create the road upon which it must move through the web'.<sup>199</sup> Caribbean culture points to 'synthesis' as the fabric of that road. Meanwhile, African-Caribbean women have yet to be 'let through' the British academy in any numbers in order to begin spinning webs of theory. It is in the culture's collectivised tradition that I propose the carnivalising of theory and specifically the Midnight Robber's paradigm. Dathorne refers to writers' 'involvement in a primary synthesis and an awareness of how close they are to an absorption within a secondary

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<sup>197</sup> See Collins, in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996.

<sup>198</sup> Luigi Sampietro, 'Derek Walcott on Omeros: An Interview', *Caribana*, 3 (1992-93), 37.

<sup>199</sup> Brathwaite, 1996, p.8.

synthesis'.<sup>200</sup> I interpret the 'primary' synthesis as the initial creolising of Caribbean culture attendant upon Atlantic slavery. Carnivalising as it is proposed in this thesis begins to negotiate the 'secondary synthesis' on Caribbean terms and from the perspective of its creolised culture. The following and final chapter explores the theorising to be found threading a selection of narratives by African-Caribbean women.

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<sup>200</sup> Dathorne, p.243.

## Chapter Six

# Theorising Texts: Reading the Carnivalised

From dih pout  
of mih mouth  
from dih  
treacherous  
calm of mih  
smile  
you can tell  
i is a long memored woman<sup>1</sup>

Women wining round their space - their inside space, the space of their becoming, where anything happening- the crossroads! That is their space - their inner space where woman meeting woman meeting man meeting woman.<sup>2</sup>



Joan Anim-Addo, 'Tim Tim Bois Sec' Banner from Grenadian Ole Mas Band, photograph, 1992, Grenada.

<sup>1</sup> Grace Nichols, *I IS A LONG MEMORIED WOMAN*, London, 1990, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Philip, 1997, p. 224.

The 'cross roads' as women's space suggested by Philip in the quotation above, is useful in developing further the creolised intersections between womanism/feminism and selected theoretical positions for the reading of African-Caribbean women's writing. The concept, already resonant within African cultures, is invoked here to signify a 'discursive crossroads'.<sup>3</sup> Philip's figurative 'wining round', a signifier of the dance and calypso rhythms of Caribbean carnival, is also suggestive of the pleasure of the body text which the practice of creolisation advocated in this study seeks to release. In addition, the movement connects with women's creative 'womb of space', alluded to in Chapter Four, and which I appropriate from Wilson Harris's theorising.<sup>4</sup> Harris's concerns, though not woman-centred, are important in that they share a crucial impetus, which is:

to bring into play certain disregarded yet exciting pathways into the reality of tradition that bear upon the cross-cultural capacities for genuine change in communities beset by complex dangers and whose antecedents are diverse.<sup>5</sup>

Having, in this womb of discursive space, drawn attention to the major issues of traditions of silence and their relation to the literary product, it remains in this, the final chapter, to focus upon a selection of the texts themselves and to ask how might African-Caribbean women's texts offer their own theoretical strategies. How might we read the texts by the texts themselves?

The marked absence of African-Caribbean women as producers of theory within the academy renders a particular significance to theorising texts which I wish to foreground.<sup>6</sup> As Boyce Davies asserts concerning issues of black women's writing, 'theory as it is reified in the academy, still turns on Western phallogentric (master) or feminist

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<sup>3</sup> See Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, New York and Oxford, 1988, p.65. Gates refers also to the orisha Esu, from Yoruba and African diasporic cultures, who dwells at the crossroads. Like Esu, he argues, the black critic also dwells at the crossroads.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, 1983 (p.50), for example, refers to 'motifs of the womb of space' in relation to Rhys's *Sargasso*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xv.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, 1994, p. 19. Bhabha explores the binarism which locates theory 'as the elite language of the culturally privileged'.

“gynocentric” (mistress-master) philosophy’.<sup>7</sup> Her argument leads to a point particularly useful to my discussion. She explains:

The understanding of ‘theory’ as frames (or modes) of intelligibility’ through which we see and interpret the world or as ‘discursive ways of making sense of structures of values and belief which circulate in any given culture’ and not as a reified discourse for the privileged few offers a way of breaking through the binary of ‘theory or no theory’.<sup>8</sup>

While the ‘theory or no theory’ question is, for my purposes, not a primary focus, the opening up of theory, in terms of ‘frames’ and ‘cultures’, allows an important flexibility. I am suggesting that theory is located in a range of cultural spaces, not just in the academy, but also in language structures such as proverbs and riddles, as well as poetry. It is the self-conscious formalising of theorising, subject to rules of difficult and ‘abstract’ language, ‘patrilinity’ and so on to which Boyce-Davies refers as sanctioned by the academy.<sup>9</sup> By this ‘formalising’ definition, less powerful groups such as African-Caribbean women, with little access to the academy may be believed to be not theorising. Sharing a similar concern with the lack of black women’s theorising, Valerie Lee suggests alternative practices which redress this imbalance through an evocation of voice. Lee, concerned with choosing texts for pedagogic purposes, expands upon principles of selection which include orality and testimonial discourse, the exemplification of popular culture, or texts which theorise in specific ways. Since orality and testimony signal voice, and because of the distinctive cultural quality voice brings to the text, I would like in addressing the question of theorising texts, to examine issues of authorial voice claimed by African-Caribbean women writers.

In *Fictions of Authority*, Susan Lanser distinguishes between three ‘narrative modes’ which she refers to as *authorial* voice, *personal* voice and *communal* voice.<sup>10</sup> Lanser argues that these ‘represent three kinds of authority that women have needed to

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<sup>7</sup> Boyce Davies, 1994, p.39.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>10</sup> Lanser, 1992, p.15.

constitute' as authors.<sup>11</sup> Simply stated, *authorial* voice intimates an authorship function which is public by nature, so that narrators, for example, 'set themselves forth as authorities'.<sup>12</sup> *Personal* voice, on the other hand, signal narrators who 'are self consciously telling their own histories',<sup>13</sup> while *communal* voice refers to 'a collective voice, or a collective of voices that share narrative authority'.<sup>14</sup> Lanser sets these up as technical categories to explore narrators within a range of texts. Notwithstanding the caution she signals in her work, as a 'preliminary and speculative project', the strategies Lanser offers are useful to my purpose, particularly since her enquiry includes a focus on the collectivised voices of interest to this thesis.<sup>15</sup> It seems to me that Lanser's categories offer the possibility of exploring meanings of voice in post-slavery texts, including how gender is constructed, and simultaneously indicating the sources of theorising within the texts.

Narratological tools alone offer important though limited access to meanings within the texts and therefore, I would like to suggest that we keep in view the notion of the carnivalised as outlined in the previous chapter. Deploying both kinds of approach permits the complexity of the cross-cultural negotiation being undertaken. Carnival conjures up cultural images which are qualitatively different for European and Caribbean audiences, so that, for example, the women's 'wining round', cited above, bears a creole significance which relates to the *double entendre* style of discourse typical of calypso and its meanings for women's claiming of physical empowerment expressed in dance.<sup>16</sup> Several languages converge since carnival represents a cultural juncture comparable to the creolising process which typifies Caribbean existence, features of which include mimesis, hybridity, transformation and appropriation. This meeting of cultures is similarly reflected, on a micro scale, in the appropriating of the novel as a cultural form

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed Lanser welcomes a similar study of texts like these. Ibid., p.24.

<sup>16</sup> Philip, 1997, p.224.

by African-Caribbean women. In the circumstances, there is danger that the shared language of a cultural product, such as carnival or the novel, masks meanings more readily accessible to one cultural context than another. Inherent in the notion of the 'carnivalised', for example, there is both a mimetic and a transformative element which includes cultural framing. The 'carnivalised', in this sense, offers its own reading of the original source of the cultural product, its interpretation and re-writing. To illustrate, it is useful to enquire by what process readers might gain meaning from the inscription on the banner given of the mas band. How is 'Tim Tim Bois Sec' to be read (see figure 7 above, the first of a series of 'frames' viewed by spectators of this band).

Wilson Harris writes of carnival as 'an imaginative strategy in fiction', one which 'invokes mask, dance, birth, death, life'.<sup>17</sup> In addition to concerns with mask and with life informed by a survival ethic derived from plantation experience (see Chapter Four), Harris's 'dream-logic' of carnival is of interest to the notion of theorising texts I wish to explicate.<sup>18</sup> He writes:

Such a dream-logic assists us, I think, to visualise the masks and the dances of carnival as extensions of an absent body into which a present humanity descends.<sup>19</sup>

This is useful in helping to visualise the 'absent body' of African-Caribbean women's thought in the emerging body of texts where 'every day' theorising is to be found in the foregrounding of 'womantalk'; in narratives rewriting history; in oraliterary narratives which utilise stylistically the counter dynamics of the vernacular; and in those testifying through the re-working of memory, usually linked to an ancestral presence. By the very nature of the novel and its internal accommodation to a variety of genres, some overlapping invariably presents itself in the writing. In part, this is also the nature of the carnival. The notion of the 'carnivalised' highlighted here refers simultaneously to the body of first-wave texts and to the signifying trope which brings together issues raised by the reading of the novels. Among these are questions of language

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<sup>17</sup> Harris, in *Masquerading*, p.38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.5.

use; literary preoccupations reflected in content such as the re-writing of history; literary devices impacting on form such as the way in which memory is reworked; and the presentation of literary difference in narratives telling of the *struggle against* slavery and colonialism. The notion of cultural colonialism is important also. As Lovelace emphasises, 'I think that our experience has had as its central theme not slavery and colonialism as is often thought, but the *struggle against* enslavement and colonialism.'<sup>20</sup>

Nichols's poetic text, above, prefaces and entitles the 1983 Commonwealth Poetry award-winning collection. This verse prologue turns on a visual metaphor which begs the question: whose gaze is being privileged, that of the 'long memored' woman's or the implied reader's, the 'you' of the text? It grapples with issues of visibility and voice, audience and reading, resistance and testimony and in so doing allows rich beginnings for an exploration of some 'long memored' underpinnings of African-Caribbean women's writing and questions of theorising texts. Few Caribbean novels, with notable exceptions such as Lovelace's *Dragon Can't Dance* (1979)<sup>21</sup> and Harris's *Carnival* (1990) have explored through literature meanings of the carnivalised.<sup>22</sup> Yet, across the Caribbean, masking traditions variously named gumbé, jonkonu, kambula and old mas, attest to carnivalised rituals as crucial dynamics within the region.<sup>23</sup> While Trinidad and Grenada boast annual carnival celebrations spanning several days, carnival traditions are widespread across the archipelago.<sup>24</sup> Indeed since 1965, Caribbean carnival, so vital to sections of the Caribbean community, has, despite great resistance from the host community, been introduced to the streets of post-war Britain by Caribbean immigrants.<sup>25</sup>

Philip, one of the few African-Caribbean women to have published on the theme of carnival, signifies the space created for women by the carnivalised as the

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<sup>20</sup> Earl Lovelace, in *Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, eds., Samba Gadjigo, Ralph Faulkingham, Thomas Cassirer and Reinhard Sander, Massachusetts, 1993, p.52.

<sup>21</sup> Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, London, 1979.

<sup>22</sup> Lovelace's novel is considered a classic carnival text. See Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean*, Ithaca and London, 1997, pp.213-20, for an exploration of Lovelace's 'ambivalences'.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Warner-Lewis, 1991, p.180.

<sup>25</sup> Over a million revellers attended Carnival 2000. See *The Times*, (29 August 2000), 7.

'cross roads' central to which is woman's inner space. I borrow the notion of the 'cross roads', one redolent with meaning in Caribbean oral culture as a meeting point of the spiritual and the mundane; past and future; known and unknown. Not surprisingly, the significant role of collective memory within creolised culture is reflected in the literature. Imagined, or lived experience, or a mixture of the two, framed by cultural memory, contributes to the material of a literature still struggling to find forms appropriate to the contrasting worlds straddled by the authors. A result is that oral and written narratives coexist and increasingly appropriate the novel form as a vehicle for narrative.<sup>26</sup> If African-Caribbean culture is approximately five hundred years old, in its 'babyhood', as Walcott suggests, and for much of that time African-heritage women were mainly and compulsorily illiterate, it is useful to appreciate how new the writing of the novel form is for the group. Among the preoccupations which surface, confoundingly for the purveyors of high theory, issues of modernity, for example, are not foregrounded.<sup>27</sup> Rather, of more immediate concern is how to tell stories so as to reconcile notions of literary language, familiar oral modes of narrative and the prevailing conditions of existence.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time if desire is important to women's lives, it is nonetheless little addressed in first-wave texts. Edgell's third novel, *The Festival of San Joaquin* (1997), rests upon female desire which blossoms in the promise of marriage and its violent thwarting in the confines of domesticity. The novel opens as follows:

I am out of goal now. In a certain sad and terrible way I sometimes feel that it is the second time I have been released. There is no one to meet me. I did not expect anyone. I do not know if I have anyone left. I had three children before I went into prison on March 20, another Monday in 1989, nearly fifteen months ago. It seems like an eternity.

The railings and the grillework of the courthouse steps are blindingly white in the sunlight. They make my eyes flood with water, and I remove dark glasses from my bag and put them on. I feel a bit safer now; the light seems more remote. The red flowers on the flamboyant trees in the park across the street are muted. The trembling in my body lessens and I can move again. My fingers are icy cold.

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<sup>26</sup> See Wilentz, for example, and her use of oral literature in, Gay Wilentz, *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992, p.xvii.

<sup>27</sup> See also Glissant, 1997, p.65.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Malcolm Bradbury on modernism, in *The Modern World*, London, 1988, p.5.

The lawyer, Mr Reuben Oliver, his teeth bright against the blue black of his skin, is smiling at me, expecting a change of plan, perhaps, or a smile of thank you. I wait as he mops the sweat from his forehead, and I watch as he transfers his black robes from one plump arm to the other.

'We did very well Luz Marina, under the circumstances. Three years probation seems long but the time will soon pass. How are you feeling? Belize City can be a miserable place in June.' He puts his free hand under my elbow to guide me down the steps.

Incapable of speech, I smile and feel myself veering to the left, away from his touch.<sup>29</sup>

*Festival* is the fictional autobiography of Luz Marina Figueroa, a woman released from a prison sentence for the murder of her violent 'common law' husband, Salvador. Luz's monologic account, a *personal voice*, by Lanser's distinction, opens the text. The female narrator is constructed initially in the narrative through ambiguity, as someone 'the second time' 'released', and with 'no one to meet' her. She is also substantiated in relation to the male companion 'smiling' at her and from whom she physically recoils. A professional lawyer, he speaks fluently while Luz is 'incapable of speech'. Why Luz is thus incapacitated is revealed throughout the narrative which indicates that hers is not a self-silencing but rather, a silencing induced by the material conditions of her society. The implications for the society lie in the lack of personal voice which has contributed to Luz's tragedy. Edgell's narrating protagonist is a 'common law' wife. If portrayal of the wife figure is shrouded in ambiguity as Edgell's Lilla Lamb exemplifies in the previous chapter, then the 'common law' wife is even more problematic. Edgell faces several challenges, from prevailing Christian mores, notions of respectability and her own negotiations as a writer in need of publication. I suggest, therefore, that Luz's silence though appropriate, serves also as a masking device through which Edgell constructs an 'authoritative' text, given the murder trajectory she explores in the novel.

Edgell's masking allows Luz to reveal, without sensationalism, the fact of being out of goal followed by a 'sad and terrible' feeling related to the second level of release which she senses but does not articulate. Luz's supposition, which she hardly dares admit to herself, runs counter to her socialisation. Her 'theorising' reveals at the level

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<sup>29</sup> Edgell, 1997, p.1.

of intuitive thought and by inference only, that the killing of her husband had been her first 'release'. How is such thinking, judging, reasoning, mapping of a thought world presented in the novel, given that an awareness of her second release also points to Luz's silenced state? Luz, by an awful and final liberatory act is also rendered 'incapable of speech'. How Luz's ideas evolve, and the causality she attributes to events may be examined through the 'sad and terrible' conditions explored in the text. By these means and through the killing of someone she loves, Luz finds release from psychic numbing and physical abuse. To understand her relationship is to appreciate the part played by fundamental beliefs and its complex intermeshing with social conditioning and material poverty in the region. Luz's socialisation, shaped by the church and the 'Christian order of sisters' who are responsible for her education prior to leaving school at fourteen, is such that despite her partner's increasing physical and mental cruelty to her and the children, the religious significance of her union remains sacred for, as she reveals:

I believed the words of God in the bible. I believed that even though I was only a common-law wife, I should obey my common-law husband, as I would obey God. I believed that the man is the head to which the woman's body is united, just as Jesus Christ is the head of the church.<sup>30</sup>

The abstract relationship between the Christian God and the husband in marriage is constructed in theological thought for Luz, that her action is no common murder, but signifies, rather, at the level of the breaking of the ultimate taboo inscribed in the word of God, 'thou shalt not kill'. The protagonist has broken not merely the constitutional laws of the state but the foundations of her belief system and her relationship with her chosen deity. Obedience, by Luz's account a central guiding principle of wifely behaviour is also a process by which one's husband becomes 'as' God and is consequently due an unqualified *deference*. The pattern of Luz's *deference* lies in not articulating her needs, 'especially if it meant having an argument';<sup>31</sup> restricting her physical space to the house, according to his preference, and diverting her energies

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<sup>30</sup> Edgell, p.16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.11.

to the preparation of 'tempting' foods so that he would stay indoors. Despite devotion to such practice, the young woman fails to have the required effect upon the one she desires.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, Luz's body, 'united' to that of the man to whom she defers, is subject to restrictions and brutal assault at his hands. Salvador's behaviour, correspondingly, includes the padlocking of doors and barring of windows to prevent Luz leaving the house. Characteristically, he drags her by the hair naked from her parental home and periodically beats her.

Edgell's text, set in a 'mestizo' or mixed race community of Belize reveals a process through which, in contemporary Caribbean society, a woman's body may be so abused within a cohabitive or marital relationship that despite love for her partner, in actively 'choosing to live' she may, like Luz, find no other choice but to kill him, a process which transforms her and paradoxically, gives her the power of speech.<sup>33</sup> Luz's deference is compounded by her historicised position as Caribbean woman and the meanings of her body as well as her individual neediness at the point at which she became 'desperate for him to stay'.<sup>34</sup> The structure of Luz's thought-world may be identified, perhaps most acutely, in 'woman talk', loosely defined here as talk between women who share different types of bonds, for example, those of friendship or kinship. Edgell's portrayal of Luz and her mother, Mamá Sofía, illustrates 'everyday' patterns of thought drawn from Christian philosophy as well as social adaptation to ideas in the light of new experience. Indeed, the constant adaptation to modes of thought recently brought into the family or community is readily evident. For example, Mamá Sofía, contemplating the family's misfortunes, speculates about 'harmful winds' blowing upon her family and considers consulting a 'H'men' to find the necessary 'curses and enchantments'.<sup>35</sup> Luz, particularly vulnerable, reminds her mother of the more powerful and recent community concern with Christianity and being 'saved', thereby obviating

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

visits to the H'men.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, her mother's talk of 'fate' and its manifestation as lack of sons, elicits the reassurance, albeit learnt from the prison doctor, that such 'lack' is 'not the woman's fault'.<sup>37</sup> Mamá Sofia's belief that 'we (women) are always to blame', and that 'it must be our fate, a part of the good and the bad of our lives as daughters and mothers' is embedded thought in individual and community.<sup>38</sup> It is this pattern which is interrupted as a consequence of Luz's imprisonment.

Central to the retrospectively told narrative is that which Luz refers to as her 'lost wedding day'. The wedding, signified in her bridal gown, meticulously fashioned by the bride-to-be and her mother, remains tangled in the narrator's memories of her 'common law husband'. Certainly, Luz's dream of marriage never materialises. Rather, perversely, it is Salvador, her prospective bridegroom who causes the disappearance of the dress which had kept her ever hopeful of marriage. Luz, who had aired the garment periodically at her bedroom window, returns from an outing to find that the dress has disappeared and, that 'it blew away'.<sup>39</sup> Distraught about the dress and Salvador's implausible lie that it blew 'like a handkerchief through the window, across our small garden, and the neighbour's, to finally drown in the falls of the Rio Caracol', Luz grieves 'silently' smiling through her tears.<sup>40</sup> While for her, 'marriage' or cohabitation serves to reinforce female silence, her internalised thought, foregrounded through the first person narration, speaks her silence.

Luz takes refuge in dreams when Salvador, by this single act, demonstrates his power to destroy both the dress that is the symbol of a future union and with it the possibility of marriage. Despite this, Luz's single recurring dream functions to keep her hopeful of fulfilment. Further, her failure is that of her hypothetical thinking; the what-might-happen-if. Since in her dream she replicates the dress as costumes for the festival of San Joaquin, Luz retains the dream of marriage which in turn stimulates a renewed

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.78.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.14.

resolve to 'try even harder to please'.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, silence indicates her social predicament, for speech leading to quarrels and beatings is dangerous, possibly life-threatening. Despite local belief that 'if a man beats a woman, he loves her' Luz is reluctant to provoke Salvador.<sup>42</sup> Her experience of his violent drunkenness counsels otherwise. Indeed, in such a drunken attack, as Salvador attempted to strangle her, Luz had 'felt nothing but sweet relief, release', following her fatal act of self defence.<sup>43</sup>

Edgell's text gives voice to women silenced by circumstances of material poverty, compounded by severe societal constraints upon women's lives. Gilroy's *Praise* is similarly fictional autobiography which foregrounds women in difficult material and emotional circumstances. Despite the shared common standpoint, radically different subjects emerge as characters. *Praise* opens as follows:

'These peaceful days of swaying trees and branches...' Mrs Jocasta Penn, my teacher and mentor, had written those words which had come to her on the waves of a dream. She bade her students commit them to memory to challenge themselves with, and I had grown to rely on their music when either uncertainty or dread gripped me, as they did on the day of my arrival in London.

I stood on Paddington Station amongst its swarming life unbelieving, yet conscious of a boundless joy. My breath came softly, slowly, to form the words, 'At last! I'm here! I've come! We're together, London and I!' But where was Arnie, my brother, who had left us six years earlier to fill a menial niche here? He had promised to meet. Now where was he? On Nation Time perhaps - that indefinite time, when we renounced the clock and came and went as we liked! The sun was our clock at home but there was no sun in this English August. I craned my neck to see through any break in the frenetic panorama, my doubts whipped up like wind-blown water.

Had Arnie come and gone unrecognised? Had he left me lone and lost in London town? Then I saw him coming towards me, measuring ground with even, loping strides, a jaunty cap on his head. The same sharp, pointed chin, the same beetle-brown eyes too large for that size of face, the hands pushed into the pockets like a spade into the earth. The smooth, grey coat gave him a parcel-wrapped look; I was sure it did not belong to him. He smiled swiftly. Now dark, now glowing like fish scales at night.

'Hello, Sis! Sorry I'm late. Shift work. By the time I get up, wash and shave, the hour past and gone.' I could not contain myself, so flooded with delight I was! He looked more handsome than ever. I hugged him, kissed him, taking in the ripe-fruit smell of his sweat and breath, and then, remembering Ma and the others, I sobbed a little. But Arnie, inured from childhood to the sighs and sobs of women, let the sounds fall and die in the dust.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp.8-9.

<sup>44</sup> Gilroy, 1996a, pp.8-9.

A contrast between Gilroy's first person narrator and Edgell's lies in the quality of presence of the former, itself a difference between the voiced and voiceless. The *personal* voice of narrator, Melda Hayley reflects upon and cherishes, at the opening of the novel, the words of her mentor, Mrs Jocasta Penn, as she has done from childhood, in the face of 'uncertainty or dread'. Like Edgell's Luz, Melda has experienced familial trauma, though hers are the realities of an 'outside' child growing up within a matrimonial family.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Luz, self-aware Melda is not wrenched from family life by trauma but chooses to travel away from the familial. A student and achiever, Melda is also knowledgeable about the world she has left and the one into which she has organised herself. Yet, to sustain herself emotionally as an immigrant to London, she draws fully upon memories of home.

From the outset, Melda is a woman of choice, who significantly, has the independent financial means to travel to London. At Paddington Station, anticipating the arrival of her step-brother, Arni, Melda, a person in touch with her emotions, experiences incredulity, insecurity, 'boundless joy' and anxiety as a result of her journey, but also because she loves her family. Melda is a figure of reason who argues: if he is late, it may be that he is on 'nation time' for waiting triggers 'doubts' allayed by reunion with her step-brother. Melda's love for Arni is rooted in a co-dependence attendant upon the communal living typified by the culture. At best, the extended family gives rise to the variety of nurturing relationships Melda has enjoyed though 'remembering Ma and the others' brings sobs as brother and sister embrace. However, Melda's is the differentiated experience of the 'outside' child who carries unhappy memories of her stepmother.<sup>46</sup> Memory, a particular feature of Gilroy's oeuvre, is also indicated through the siblings' physical contact in which Arni releases 'the ripe-fruit smell of his sweat and breath' along with family memories of 'Ma and the others'.<sup>47</sup> The body as recipient or 'store house' of memory is indicated, for Melda carries anguished memories.<sup>48</sup> Her

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<sup>45</sup> In comparison, see Hodge's, *For the Life of Laetitia*, London, 1996. The protagonist, Laetitia, must, like Hyacinth come to terms with life within her father's new family.

<sup>46</sup> Gilroy, 1996a, p.8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Gilroy, 1998, p.131.

painful memories also signify her status as a survivor who, in African-Caribbean tradition, resolves to 'prove' herself 'by my work, as generations of black women had done'.<sup>49</sup> The rewriting of history in which Gilroy engages is that of the achieving African-Caribbean woman, absent from the narratives of post-war Britain. Melda, a meritocratic product, is driven by the work ethic applauded by her society and she has both the means and the will to independence.

As Gilroy notes, the impact of acute change upon memory is part of the adjustment implicit in use of the term 'immigrant' or 'immigration'.<sup>50</sup> Yet, Melda's memories are those of one accommodated to punishing realities. The harshest of these relate to Ma 'whose mind was always spiralling about or boring down as if trying to find and put the tangled ends of herself together'.<sup>51</sup> The sympathetic introduction to Ma partially ameliorates her behaviour towards the child, Melda. Yet, Melda recalls, for example, always having to work 'like the donkey that turns the millstone from dayclean to dusk'. She remembers brutal beatings, physical and mental cruelty and, in short, a hostile and at times sadistic mother substitute.<sup>52</sup> Equally, Melda appears to understand the context of those realities: chronic, untreated emotional instability in a stepmother 'between sanity and lunacy' and family life rooted in a culture demarcated by crushing poverty.<sup>53</sup> Paradoxically, survival is also possible for her through the love and support she finds. This is despite Ma and principally through her father, Arnie, the extended family and the wider community signalled by the 'yards'. The 'yards' as collective space holds particular significance for the women who gather and engage in 'womantalk' while reinforcing their bonds and providing mutual practical and emotional support.<sup>54</sup> The yard, then, functions as a metaphor for the collective will which Aunt Bet personifies through the healing and help she offers. Her 'ancestral presence' links memory with 'everyday' reality.

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<sup>49</sup> Gilroy, 1996a, p.12

<sup>50</sup> Gilroy, 1998, pp.104-5 discusses 'change by immigration' in relation to the characters Melda, Arni and Trudi.

<sup>51</sup> Gilroy, 1996a, p.12.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>54</sup> See, Gilroy, 1998, p.112. See also, Erna Brodber, *A Study of Yards in the City of Kingston*, Mona, 1975.

In large measure, *Praise* theorises the complexities of African-Caribbean life and a world view arising from that. For the majority African-heritage population, a particular tenacity, like Melda's, is required for survival. Gilroy's rewriting of history interrogates the nature of this survival. *Praise* also suggests answers to the nature/culture debate. For example, Melda overcomes childhood trauma with support but finally through her inner resources of intelligence, the will to achieve and an inclination towards hard work. At the same time, *In Praise* figures the material conditions of African-Caribbean life as a powerful force which cannot be ignored, hence the preoccupation with realism and history central to Gilroy's writing. Her characters and to some extent, Edgell's, are more readily appreciated by contextualising the material poverty of their setting and its meanings such as co-dependence and communalism, strong sisterhood, and a strong culture of work. Gilroy's critical writing refers to 'the culture of material poverty', the background against which Melda Hayley's family may be viewed.<sup>55</sup> This condition, critical to the lives of so many black families, is also directly linked to Imperial slavery and colonialism which Melda's narrative problematises. Further, Gilroy makes clear that this link, attributed to 'the avaricious other' is generally appreciated as such among colonial subjects.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Henry Hayley, Melda's father is obliged to find poorly paid employment further and further afield, characteristic of the 'leaving and returning' of internal migration or 'circular nomadism'. This requires him to emigrate rather than daily face his destitute family. Nor is it only the social effects of this condition which concern Gilroy. The psychological consequences of immigration are of equal importance. She writes of change by immigration as requiring 'dramatic and external orientation'.<sup>57</sup> Such 'orientation', evident also in Joan Riley's writing examined below, assumes a specific complexion in Melda's case as she adjusts not only to an immigrant's life but also to sharing her brother with his white partner, Trudi.

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<sup>55</sup> Gilroy, 1998, p103.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.104.

Gilroy's 'faction' underscores her authorial concerns. Issues of poverty, memory and change are at the core of her texts alongside the impact of immigration, a crucial factor of twentieth century sociopolitical Caribbean reality. Suffused with psychological understanding, Gilroy's novels lend themselves to a variety of readings. Her interest in existentialism and consequently her insistence upon the individual as capable of choice in the most dire circumstance is at the core of her theorising. Gilroy refers to 'body text' which, she suggests, survives in the memory. She distinguishes, too, the body as mortuary where dead memories and past hurts remain unresolved, a phenomenon illustrated not only by reference to Ma Hayley but also to characters like Adella in Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987).

Melda's single-minded application to work in London, and her disapproval of Arnie's relationship masks an ambiguity concerning female desire touched upon above. The 'I'-narrator states:

Suddenly, I realised that my life had taught me to love women, but left me ignorant of men. I had never seen Pa and Ma sharing and tolerating each other's weaknesses, and discussing things with love and tender talk.<sup>58</sup>

The love of women to which Melda refers is the sisterhood characterised by the sharing of the women of the yards. This conceptualisation does not begin to entertain the possibility of sexual desire other than in a heterosexual relationship. For this reason, Melda contrasts the sisterly love she has known, with her ignorance of men and confesses: 'I knew nothing about making a relationship with a man which could grow in strength, flourish and endure'.<sup>59</sup> Why is Melda in this predicament? In part, this relates to the Victorian sense of propriety, instilled by the teaching of the churches and their missionary staff further examined below. *In Praise* offers an additional rationale based upon Melda's father's lack of demonstrative affection even to his children. This generational slant upon the development of heterosexual relationships is as follows:

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<sup>58</sup> Gilroy, 1996a, p.54.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.55.

Pa resisted the desire to hug me, for in his world to hug a lady in public was disrespectful, and not for men of his age. Men of his age still kept to what their slave forbears had learned, that affection had to be concealed with darkness.<sup>60</sup>

The dominant plantation codes of behaviour carried penalties which made heterosexual relationships particularly difficult for those young women who sought the approval of their community and were concerned to be 'respectful'. Respectability, a prerequisite of progress and success, informed the socialisation of girls and women in particular ways.<sup>61</sup> This socialisation, ingrained into the fabric of the education process, also informed the experience of first-wave writers. In effect, anglicised Caribbean mores characteristic of Victorian missionary values and replicated as elements of gentility impact upon textual content largely absent of sexuality and desire. The absence of sexual desire is a marked feature of anglophone African-Caribbean first-wave fiction.<sup>62</sup> Connection with an 'educational' market helps explain this especially since, as Gilroy suggests, 'affection had to be concealed with darkness'.<sup>63</sup> Covert affection, sexuality and desire are issues little researched in relation to African-Caribbean literature. Sisterhood, on the other hand, a distinctive feature of African diaspora culture and indicated in Melda's 'love' of women, is a key reference point in diaspora literature.<sup>64</sup> Evidence of the impact of sisterhood upon the emotional life of women, and consequently upon family and community life is readily found in the texts.<sup>65</sup> In contrast, heterosexual relationships particularly those based on notions of affection and physical desire are rarely explored.<sup>66</sup> Scarcely does sex figure in the first-wave novel and when it does, it signifies women's plight so that, for example, Hyacinth, the protagonist of Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) is left emotionally crippled in a rare exploration of incestuous desire.<sup>67</sup> The particular irony located in the absence of desire relates to the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>61</sup> See also French, pp.40-1.

<sup>62</sup> This is less the case for poetry. See, for example, Lorna Goodison, *I am Becoming my Mother*, London, 1986.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion by Gilroy of intimacy, see Gilroy, 1998, pp.113-4.

<sup>64</sup> For a comparison with African-American culture, see, for example, Hill Collins in James and Sharpley-Whiting, eds., pp.195-6.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, *Rain Darling*, London, 1990, pp.1-44.

<sup>66</sup> But see Jane Bryce, 'A World of Caribbean Romance', in Anim-Addo, ed., 1996, pp.108-27.

<sup>67</sup> Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging*, London, 1985 (hereafter *Unbelonging*).

licentious and sexually voracious African-heritage woman of Long's eighteenth-century figuration examined in Chapter One. Absent from anglophone black women's first-wave fiction, such characters may be glimpsed in products of the male imagination.<sup>68</sup>

Migratory subjects are central to the fiction of writers like Gilroy and Riley whose perspectives are informed by lengthy experience of residence in Britain. Migrants themselves, both writers present the narratives of subjects who have experienced African-Caribbean and metropolitan existence. Caribbean diaspora experience, that of the dispersion of Caribbean peoples particularly during the mass immigration, post-war period and the settlement of Caribbean heritage people in metropolitan centres, characterises the texts. As a concept, diaspora extends the margins of the home space and alters the boundaries of that space for Caribbean nationals and their families. A result of this is texts by African-Caribbean women writers which span the Caribbean region and diaspora space, including, for example, Canada, USA and Britain.<sup>69</sup>

In many respects, the significance of and the relationship between diaspora experience and the literary product remains to be explored.<sup>70</sup> Riley's writing which focuses upon post-war immigration to Britain, concerns itself especially with the experience of women. Her novels, marked by 'contextual explicitness' and 'the burden of history' is grounded in realism central to which is the gender-specific experience of African-Caribbean women.<sup>71</sup> Further, Riley's fiction offers the highly contested perspective of the African-Caribbean woman as victim.<sup>72</sup> Yet, in moving forward the larger narrative of African-Caribbean heritage women from the post-Emancipation era to those of the post-Windrush years, Riley's texts hold true to the logic of Atlantic slavery which victimised African-heritage women in specific ways already examined.

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<sup>68</sup> I refer to the 'barrack yard' genre of which James's *Minty Alley* is an important example.

<sup>69</sup> Melda, for example, moves from Guyana to London.

<sup>70</sup> But see Carole Boyce Davies, 1984, p102. Boyce Davies suggests that 'unbelonging' is a product of migration.

<sup>71</sup> See also Loretta Ngcobo, *Let it Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain*, London, 1987, pp.8-10. Ngcobo's reception of Riley's *Unbelonging* was subsequently criticised. See Patricia Duncker, *Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, Oxford, 1992, p.221.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Gabrielle Griffin, 'Writing the Body: Reading Joan Riley, Grace Nichols and Ntozake Shange', in G. Wisker ed., *Black Women's Writing*, Basingstoke, 1993, p.25.

Riley's writing of the black woman's body carries, as a result, a certain specificity of interest to this thesis. Hers is a writing of the post-slavery text foregrounding the everywoman of the plantation rather than the exceptional such as Gilroy's Melda. There is a marked continuity in Riley's writing, of the maternal project, discussed in Chapter Two, and explored in *Twilight* through portrayal of Adella's life as containment. The novel, dedicated to 'one woman and a whole generation of women' whose migration is motivated by a determination '*to build a better future for their children*' (my italics), also explores generational shifts offering a substantive reading of the black woman's body. Further, Adella, who has 'tramped the streets' 'looking for any job that would feed her children',<sup>73</sup> finally needs come to terms with 'the prison of her room'.<sup>74</sup> Riley's post-slavery writing, beginning with *The Unbelonging*, offers a distinctive representation of the post-slavery African-Caribbean woman's body.

For *The Unbelonging*, Riley's first novel, the use of a *personal* creole mothertongue voice for narration was unlikely, since hers was the task, in the mid-1980s, of breaking new ground with a radical press and its white readership.<sup>75</sup> Riley's story of Hyacinth, a Jamaican adolescent, who joins her estranged and abusive father to live with his new family in London is narrated in an *authorial* voice, the authority of which rests in standard English. The action of the novel begins in Hyacinth's third winter in London, a time of relentless misery for the girl who, culture-shocked and isolated at home and school, has all but given up functioning even within her family:

The three of them were in their secret place again and the sound of their laughter rose through the sweet-scented bushes from where they lay. Hyacinth felt the lazy warmth of the early afternoon air wrap her in well-being as she lay back in the cool grass, listening idly to the conversation. It was safe in this little green cave, the recesses of the brushes laden with long-stemmed hibiscus and yellow trumpet-flowers and humming with insect activity.

They were talking about the Independence parade just past, and Hyacinth soon lost interest, her mind centred on the warm glow of contentment somewhere in the centre of her chest. She was slipping back, back to the fever of anticipation, the mounting impatience as the minutes on the face of the monument clock slipped slowly by.

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<sup>73</sup> Riley, 1987, p.149.

<sup>74</sup> Riley, p.148.

<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, Collins's *Angel*, published two years later utilised Creole significantly. However, her setting Grenada, allows a stronger argument for the use of the mothertongue.

Hyacinth was hopping from foot to foot, caught in the excitement, part of that jostling good-natured crowd, craning forward, impatient to see the first float appear. They had been lucky to get a place right at the front, and she pressed closer to Aunt Joyce's reassuring bulk as the crowd surged against her. She was glad of the cane-cutter's hat on her head, and of the little breeze that was so cool where it blew on the wet patches of sweat on her back and under her arms. Aunt Joyce had a big sombrero slung lazily across her bulk, eyes squinting against the glare of the sun, the usual smile on her face as she turned every few minutes to exchange words with her neighbour.

Suddenly there was silence in the crowd. Far away in the distance came the sound of a flute, followed by the boom of a big goatskin drum. Hyacinth's heart skipped a beat, then raced with excitement. She shuffled, as the crowd surged around her, craning forward, pushing out eagerly, wanting to catch her first glimpse of the colourful band float. Her aunt's big hand grabbed her dress, shook her.<sup>76</sup>

The omniscient account of Hyacinth's journey, to the 'motherland' is mediated in the opening of the novel through the girl's habitual dreaming of home. Contrary to her expectations, the new diasporic context approximating to 'home' is so resoundingly hostile that only an emotional escape route accessible through dreaming makes possible her desire for return to the Caribbean. This desire, figured in the 'laughter', 'sweet-scented bushes' and 'hibiscus and yellow trumpet-flowers' of the first paragraph of the novel, recreates the 'home' left behind, where the girl last felt 'the warm glow of contentment' absent from her life in London. For Hyacinth, regardless of the symbolic interpretation attributed to her dream, migration of the subject and consequent separation from 'home' are traumatic experiences which succeed only in placing her continually at risk of both racial and sexual abuse.

Riley's engagement with feminism and empirical realism is characterised by an authorial SE narration which contains each of her narratives, as well it might given her concerns, particularly with racism.<sup>77</sup> Against this containment, Hyacinth is the powerless, black female, whose status is complicated by issues of class and age. Without voice in her father's house, Hyacinth's dreaming signifies the (*dis*)embodiment sometimes necessary to black women's survival. Nor does dreaming of home offer a safety zone, for even dreams constitute a source of betrayal in that no sooner does she experience a semblance of security than she awakens to the nightmare of 'big hand'(s). In London,

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<sup>76</sup> Joan Riley, 1985, p.9.

<sup>77</sup> See Gerrard, p.69.

Hyacinth's world is typified by a 'fear', which resounds throughout the text. There is, for example, mention of 'shame and fear warring';<sup>78</sup> fear which 'crawled in her belly';<sup>79</sup> 'suffocating fear';<sup>80</sup> and 'cold fear'.<sup>81</sup> Such is the world which demands retreat into dreams. Even the new family home is represented as, 'a peeling, black painted house full of fear and hate'.<sup>82</sup> Beyond that, in Riley's bleak realism, there is the concrete jungle of school and the wider world with its playground battle cries of 'kill the wog'.<sup>83</sup>

Riley's concern with the minutiae of social life is such that the novel serves in part as sociopolitical documenting. The effect, typically of her writing, is a critique of the social conditions of African-Caribbean women's lives in post-war London and a theorising of the circumstances of survival. A difference in Riley's narration is not only that of omniscience. Riley's narration in *SE* also suggests the implied reader of the text and provides a distance which allows a particular focus upon the context. But how knowing is Riley's author-ity? While, as I have indicated, many African-Caribbean women writers demonstrate a concern with realism, the narration of *Unbelonging* is punctuated by questions throughout, with interrogatory effect and consequent indirect theorising of the difficult post-slavery legacy. It is the worst excesses of this which fear-filled Hyacinth endures as she is dogged by racism outside her home and sexual abuse within it while her sense of unbelonging extends from London to Jamaica.

The process of Hyacinth's (*dis*)embodiment may be viewed through a focalizing consciousness indicated in the narrator's serial questioning: 'How could it be her fault?'<sup>84</sup> 'How would she explain her lateness? What excuse could she give?'<sup>85</sup> 'Why can't they die?'<sup>86</sup> 'Why can't they all die?' 'Why hadn't she thought of that?'<sup>87</sup> 'How could she be

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<sup>78</sup> Riley, 1985, p.11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.27.

bleeding like this? What could have caused it?’<sup>88</sup> Hyacinth appears in this light to have so internalised silence that the dream suffices since the outer world cannot be trusted. For this reason as well as culture specific interests, dreaming is signified in the text. Riley draws attention to an additional danger in the post-slavery context, that of familial collusion in the oppression of women. So, in effect, Riley breaks another silence in exploring the unsavoury reality of incest.<sup>89</sup> Arguably, the tendency towards the treatment of social issues within the literature, relates to the long silence which has marked the absence of literary representation.<sup>90</sup> For this reason, a range of pressing issues remain to be treated.

In the extreme conditions of Hyacinth’s displacement, memory becomes essential to survival but even memory is disrupted by questions: ‘There was no pain, but who would expect it when she was so happy?’<sup>91</sup> ‘How could she forget this day?’<sup>92</sup> In addition, fundamental to Hyacinth’s difficulty is the abuse she endures at home, an issue of oppression which has been neglected in discussion of the text.<sup>93</sup> What are some of the meanings of being a girl from a culture shaped by the endemic violence of slavery yet preoccupied with the ‘fallen’ woman and her opposite, the ‘good’ woman? Post-slavery anglicised mores insisted upon Christian missionary values of obedience, punishment, respect and duty. Within this ethos and stressing chastity and silence, an idealising of the desirability for ‘good’ girls, by Christian values, took place. At the same time, excesses of plantation control replicated by and at times distorted within black families were not addressed. Reliant upon and reproducing the docility thought particularly desirable in girls, in order that they grow into dutiful women, the exercise of patriarchal power is carried, in Hyacinth’s case, to its most decadent extremes. Such adultism, deferred unquestioningly to the male ‘head’ of household with his right signified in ‘the beating’

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.44.

<sup>89</sup> For a response much commented upon, see Maud Sutler in Ngcobo, London, 1987.

<sup>90</sup> Another argument is that, characteristically for a first novel, *The Unbelonging* is issue-laden.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>93</sup> See, Hodge, ‘In the Shadow of the Whip’, Orde Coombs ed., *Is Massa Day Dead?*, New York, 1974, pp111-8.

of children, regardless of whether or not the household was officially 'female-headed'. Hodge's *Crick* and *For the Life of Laetitia*<sup>94</sup> for example, both treat this theme as does Collins's *Angel*. Hyacinth, a 'good' girl measured by the ideals of this code, must defer first to older siblings, to adults and ultimately to the male 'head'. In Jamaica, though brought up by single parent and 'othermother' Aunt Joyce, Hyacinth's socialisation has prepared her for the punitive relationship she subsequently encounters with male adults. As a result, she is predisposed to tolerate in silence such extremes of adult behaviour signified in physical and sexual domination by her father.

In *Unbelonging*, Riley grapples with psychological issues and complex behavioural difficulties in her exploration of the sadistic sexual behaviour of Lawrence Williams for whom sexual arousal, is 'the lump of his anger' prior to the beating of his daughter. Read alongside Mary Prince's narrative, there is a distinct continuity which this text represents, for here is the logic of the whip and the corresponding licence to whip whoever will not be coerced, including those with whom there is a close relationship. Comparison may be made also between Edgell's Luz, who only comes to appreciate her anger after she has killed her husband. Contrastingly, Hyacinth's father's anger is expressed through his aggressively invasive sexual encounters and Hyacinth's powerlessness corresponds to his increased power to regulate her life. Indeed, the girl's first menstrual cycle connotes increased sexual power to her father, leading to his determined efforts to dominate her body ultimately through the sexual act. The void which such physical and emotional assault creates in the young girl leaves her easy prey to negation and sexism within the home. At the same time, she is rendered more vulnerable to racism in the wider world so that the necessary battle with multiple oppression is exacerbated by her own insecurities.

Despite warnings such as, 'they don't like neaga here', race is not, by Riley's account, the single oppressive issue in the diasporic context.<sup>95</sup> Rather, race features both in racism and shadism familiar to Caribbean culture with its legacy of the racial

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<sup>94</sup> For an important reading of these texts exploring the Indo-Caribbean consciousness with which they engage, see Sheila Rampersad, 'Merle Hodge's Revolutionary Dougla Poetics: A reading of *Crick Crack Monkey* and *For the Life of Laetitia*' in Anim-Addo, 2000, ed., pp.157-74.

<sup>95</sup> Riley, 1985, p.64.

hierarchy explored in Chapter One. References are made to 'the yellow skinned woman'<sup>96</sup> and to 'red neaga', for example.<sup>97</sup> This serves as a reminder that, while Caribbean identity may be discussed in terms of distinguishable racial heritage, for example, that of African, Indian or European grouping each of which played crucial historical roles in the making of the present day Caribbean, the 'red neaga' and 'yellow skinned' are also perceived as black, with meanings of oppression in the diaspora. Multiple identities, therefore, belie the fixity that might be assumed by superficial observation. Understanding of this nature confuses Hyacinth in her relationship with 'mixed race' Margaret White precisely because Hyacinth translates Margaret's identity in terms of the 'yard' familiar to Gilroy's readers: 'Margaret White was definitely red, from the tinge of her skin to her matted, uncombed hair'.<sup>98</sup> Yet Margaret, raised by white adults, like Hyacinth's white peers, exhorts her to 'go back to the jungle where you come from', one of many responses along a continuum of racist abuse.<sup>99</sup> Riley's exploration of race, limited in *Unbelonging* to education and 'caring' institutions, is concerned with the larger world of employment in texts such as *Waiting in the Twilight*, (1987), and serves to critique racism and its impact upon black women and family life.

Above all, it is the nature and variety of the power relationships encountered by Riley's women characters which speak to the post-slavery context. That class is implicated in the oppressive constraints upon black women's lives is accentuated through settings of both the work place and the family home. The family space as ideally women's space, reinforced by and central to religious values informing Caribbean culture, is shown in Riley's texts to be frequently unsafe and dangerous. Since, for example, both Hyacinth's father and stepmother are implicated in the process of her negation, Riley is in effect, questioning mothering and stepmothering roles. She engages with precisely the 'othermothering' within Caribbean families which still features in contemporary

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.19.

Caribbean culture so that Hyacinth's untold story, that of her biological mother, remains unknown.

Riley's writing, bereft of positive mother figures in relationships with their daughters, explores, rather, wives subjected to emotional and physical abuse. In an hierarchical chain, Hyacinth's stepmother, Maureen Williams's status as wife, justifies her 'telling' of Hyacinth's bed wetting, which precedes and is causal to the beatings which the girl receives. 'Wait till your father comes home', a sentiment familiar enough cross-culturally, is pregnant with the promise of physical beating and sexual abuse in Hyacinth's case. While Riley's Maureen is portrayed as 'almost smacking her lips', with pleasure at the prospect of Hyacinth's beating, the same social hierarchy allows her husband, at the top of the pinnacle of power, to also beat his wife.<sup>100</sup> Riley maintains the secret of Maureen's apparent hostility to Hyacinth as a climax to the narrative so as to reveal, instead, Maureen's gain in domestic labour from Hyacinth's presence within the household in terms of cleaning, ironing and cooking. Riley's post-slavery world, illustrates by this means the continued prioritising of the black woman's body as domestic and sexual labour. Physical abuse of the body continues despite the generational shift. Maureen's complicity in Hyacinth's beatings which saves her own skin, alters only after her warning to the girl to 'watch your father'.<sup>101</sup> As a result of the stepmother's accurate reading of her husband's sexual motivation, the confrontation and subsequent violence leads her to escape the marriage.

Riley's exploration in *Twilight*, of the wife figure, Adella, who is emotionally dependent on her partner regardless of his abusive behaviour suggests more about the complexities of marriage derived from cohabitive plantation practices.<sup>102</sup> Marriage produced two categories of children: those *inside* wedlock and those *outside* of it. Superimposed upon a system of concubinage rooted in slavery, marriage remains in

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>102</sup> See Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*, London: 1859, pp 86 and 87. Writing of his visit to Jamaica, Trollope comments, 'these people marry now, you know', and, 'matrimony is in vogue'.

the region, the locus of many tensions regarding 'inside' and 'outside' relationships and offspring resulting from these. The presence of Hyacinth, an 'outside' child carries, therefore, tensions familiar to the culture. Similarly, in *Twilight*, Adella Johnson's relationship with her partner, Stanton, is compromised by the fact of being herself mother to 'outside' children before having met him. Her woman's body betrays sexual activity with consequences of childbirth and dependence on 'goodfanuting' males.<sup>103</sup> This troubling subject elicits from Adella's friend, Lisa, the response: 'Listen girl, if a wait fa ihm, a would breed every year, and me an de pickney dem would starve'.<sup>104</sup> The woman's body vulnerable to biological programming and demands of maternity is also one which assumes (*dis*)embodiment in Riley's oeuvre. Gabrielle Griffin, writes of Riley's writing of the body 'as battlefield rather than sacred soul' and of the state of being where 'subject to the body equals being a victim'.<sup>105</sup> Riley's post-slavery texts are perhaps best understood contextualised in 'Relation', in order to appreciate their apparent 'unremitting negativity', for the specific attention paid to the body is also a means of theorising that 'Relation'.<sup>106</sup> Whether exploring a body lived in 'Relation' like Adella's, deformed through physical and emotional abuse, or like Hyacinth's, dysfunctional through sexual abuse and emotional negation, Riley is not only writing about African-Caribbean women and black family life, she is articulating a position in which *that history* has left black women. The *struggle against* or resistance to the post-slavery legacy is being written.

It is suggested by Gilkes in *The West Indian Novel* (1981), that certain specific areas of reading will prove particularly illuminating as follows:

We must look more carefully at the riddling, oral nature of Caribbean literature: its use of myth, folk-rhythms and 'proverbial' speech forms, its increasing emphasis on a direct involvement of author and audience in an enactment... this is the magical reality which lies behind the fixed perception of history as loss, or as a dualism of Victor and Victim, Master and Slave, Ruler and Ruled.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Riley, 1987, p.24.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Griffin, in 'Wisker, ed., p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>107</sup> Gilkes, *The West Indian Novel*, Boston, 1981, p.156.

The 'oral, riddling nature' of Merle Collins's *Colour*, allows insight into a specific negotiating of textual 'crossroads' by a first-wave novelist. Collins's second novel develops particular stylistic features which draw heavily on local traditions of storytelling employing the use of riddles, as well as the more literary traditions associated with the creation of a fictional written text. The novel opens as follows:

'Blood in the north, blood to come in the south, and the blue crying red in between.' The woman, dressed in red, stood in the middle of the cemetery, faced north and moaned after delivering her message, turned west and groaned, turned south and shouted, 'The blue crying red in between!' Turned east and cried, 'Lord, have is mercy.'

The child standing at the top of the hill ignored her. He picked up a pebble, rubbed it thoughtfully on the khaki pants of his school uniform, threw it far away over the bushes, down towards the sea.

Carib walked out of the cemetery and past the primary school on her right, down on to the grass and left again below the cemetery to the wall overlooking the steep drop and the sea below. 'Blood in the north,' she shouted, 'and the blue crying red in between.' The goat chewing the grass in the pasture lifted its head and bleated. Kept chewing. Bleated again. Went back to nuzzling the grass.

Carib walked down towards the cemetery, talking conversationally. 'Look at them. Running and jumping. Jumping and screaming. You hear the voices coming up from the bush? Forgotten and consoled. Forgotten and drowned. And the blue crying red in between.'<sup>108</sup>

Beginning with a riddle indicative of a violent history, 'blood in the north', and the prophecy, 'blood *to come* in the south' (my emphasis), the woman, Carib, is introduced. Carib embodies the riddle she speaks not only by virtue of being 'dressed in red' but through the physical actions with which she circumnavigates the spatial cross at the centre of the cemetery, tangibly holding the past through the bodies interred there.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, the compass points through which Carib moves are marked by bodily manifestations of distress: moaning, groaning, shouting and crying. In contrast, the child who ignores her, separated in his school-uniformed world above, 'at the top of the hill', is without knowledge of the links the woman perceives between herself, the past and the future; he cannot begin to conceive of the woman herself as the cross-roads.

Carib, as the character's name echoes, also embodies a temporal crossroads between the pre-fifteenth century era of the indigenous peoples of the region, among

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<sup>108</sup> Collins, 1995, p.3.

<sup>109</sup> There are links, too, with ancestral worship.

them the Carib peoples, and the relatively new groups replacing them: the Europeans and Africans focused upon within the text.<sup>110</sup> Carib's utterings, simultaneously discomfiting and ambiguous, raise questions as to the veracity of her perceptions for not only does she appear to see what others do not, 'the blood crying red', but she also hears 'voices coming up from the bush'. The woman's position at the opening of the text is, for these reasons, also spatially significant since she overlooks the sea from the point which marks the indigenous peoples' choice, in the face of aggressive European invaders, to leap into the sea rather than submit to the newcomers' regime. The poignancy of 'Forgotten and consoled. Forgotten and drowned', the final line of the first page of the text is therefore built up cumulatively from Carib's 'message' which opens the novel. In effect, the reader becomes increasingly confirmed in the idea that the woman's words function as an oracle which cannot be summarily dismissed. Collins in interview describes Carib as 'like the soul of the novel, the soul of the country and, in lots of ways she is a part of Thunder so that he has to come to understand all of that'.<sup>111</sup> She sums up the novel as 'to do with re-creation, with silences, with the fact that people are walking around with a lot of other people whom they don't know, inside of them and there are apparent contradictions. It is about coming to understand a lot of that in order to be able to make sense of existence'.<sup>112</sup>

What are Collins's meanings and by what process are they understood? The *authorial* voice which the text assumes at the outset functions, by my reading, as a mask. It shows a face with which the implied audience might more readily become accustomed. Alternatively, this might be understood as a double-voiced authority for no sooner does the reader settle into an SE narration than another, a Creole-inflected voice continues the narrative and announces ironically, 'Mixture in the blood of the story. Not simple. Where we starting is after the beginning. Man come so they didn't call him man. Call him slave'.<sup>113</sup> Within the two authorial voices by which meanings

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<sup>110</sup> Carib peoples were decimated in the encounter. See for example, Olive Senior, 'Meditation On Yellow', *Gardening in the Tropics*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1995, which gives voice to the Amerindian peoples. See also, Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominican Story: A History of the Island*, London and Oxford, 1995, pp.20-9.

<sup>111</sup> Collins Interview with Anim-Addo, *Mango Season*, (5,1996), 5.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Collins, 1995, p.17.

are understood, there is also a sense of the overall struggle for authority, since, considering press and audience, authority cannot rest with the Creole voice alone. The oral rootedness of texts such as Collins's, their reliance upon cultural memory, and creolised discourse, compound the need for an 'insider' perspective informing interpretation such as is taken for granted in the reading of many literatures. It is such a stance that this chapter offers in its foregrounding of the voices of African-Caribbean women and their literary products as critical sources of theorising.

What is the function, in Collins's text, of the riddling so characteristic of the oral culture of the region?<sup>114</sup> At least two roles, the pedagogic and the curatorial crucial to transmissive traditions within the culture have been teased out in earlier discussion. In a historical period open to multiple histories, we find the beginnings of the writing of Caribbean women's herstories signified in Carib's story, at times as a third person account and at other times as a *personal* narration in *Colour*. It is possible that a postmodern moment allows Collins this flexibility especially as the protagonist, Carib, carries her ambiguous authority wrested from gender, madness, ethnicity and creolisation.<sup>115</sup> In the text, Carib's voice strives 'to kick-start their memory' collectively and advises two generations of African-heritage women to 'walk back over all the story' in order to cure their young offspring, Thunder, of his peculiar distress.<sup>116</sup> It is through the process of 'walking back', that is, telling and re-telling, or, transmitting the history of the group by oral means, that people demonstrably find the emotional resources required to withstand the traumatic realities of their lives and to survive.<sup>117</sup> Yet the riddling is 'an act of survival' according to Glissant, 'as if these texts were striving for disguise beneath the symbol, working to say without saying'.<sup>118</sup> Collins's polyvocal text absorbs such processes, simultaneously speaking to a private and public audience.

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<sup>114</sup> See also Glissant, 1997, p68.

<sup>115</sup> Limited space allows me only to suggest this, but see Lanser on Toni Morrison's narrative authority and postmodernity (Lanser, 1992, pp.122-3).

<sup>116</sup> Collins, 1995, p.5.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>118</sup> Glissant, 1997, p.68.

Key to the pedagogic function of oral culture is the part played by active listening. It is for this reason that the creole narrating voice reminds: ‘if you *listening careful*, careful, you will hear that kind of story howling in the wind in villages all over Paz’ (my italics).<sup>119</sup> As the narrator emphasises, the history that is the Malheureuse’s story and which is foregrounded in the novel, is both specific and endemic to the island (and region). Central to this is the history of racial and sexual violence examined in previous chapters, so that ancient great grand-motherly memory ‘walking back’ recalls: ‘That is woman! Even when she come out under Malheureuse she making sure she keep in she mind the man those Malheureuse kill’.<sup>120</sup> It is such a story, like Imoinda’s, discussed in Chapter One, that Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* does not tell, for the euphemistic coming ‘out under’ is one of rape, childbirth, miscegenation, racial stigmatisation and finally, denied birthright. In the Caribbean context as in the diaspora, the history amounts to ‘family business’ like that of Dido examined in Chapter One.<sup>121</sup>

June D. Bobb proposes that ‘the act of re(member)ing addresses the African’s violent separation from the original body’ and the ‘need for reconnection’ to this so as create ‘an identity out of the ruins of the past’.<sup>122</sup> Her argument strengthens my own, that ‘insider’ perspectives missing from the meaning-making process are vital to critical framing of the literary word’.<sup>123</sup> Bobb’s analysis also appears consistent with the gendered body as written in texts already explored. Collins’s *Colour*, for example, highlights the ‘mixture in the blood of the story’, signified in the story of the progeny of planter Malheureuse and ‘the slave women generation that Boss-man Malheureuse breed’.<sup>124</sup> On a temporal level, the narrative moves from days of ‘the Spanish Catholics’, to that of ‘Scots adventurers’, to the post-emancipation years circa 1844 and beyond that to 1930 and the turn of a generation of black Malheureuse, direct descendants of the planters,

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Collins, 1995, p.60.

<sup>122</sup> June D. Bobb, *Beating A Restless Drum: The Poetics of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott*, New Jersey, 1998.

<sup>123</sup> Bobb, 1998, p.38.

<sup>124</sup> Collins, 1995, p.18.

to act out 'the mixture in the blood of the story'.<sup>125</sup> On a spatial level, only the renaming from the Carib original, Camerhogne, to Pax, and from the Scottish Arthur's Seat to the creolised 'Attatseat', has altered the village in which the new generation of Malheureuse act out their family troubles. Why is this story of strife considered so important that the ancestral voice invokes, in its wisdom, the need for remembrance? Implicit in the exhortation to listen is that of learning. In interview, Collins assesses the importance of history in the novel as follows :

I am interested in themes of history and literature. When I talk about memory, for example, in *The Colour of Forgetting* a lot of Thunder's story is explored, so that on one level, there is discussion of a type of reincarnation of experience. Thunder has to understand that where he is today as an individual is due to so many other things that happened before being able to make sense of his existence at all. That gives a flavour of how it is constructed in the novel, as fiction. Quite apart from that, for me in every day life, it is extremely important. I guess that is why it feeds into the novel. The discussions within Caribbean writing, that focus on writers such as Una Marson and Edouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott and Earl Lovelace, you know, all of the writers on the whole question of history and literature, all of those, I find tremendously important in the Caribbean experience. Not 'only' in the Caribbean experience, but I say the Caribbean experience because a lot of what I deal with in the novel, say in *The Colour of Forgetting*, is linked very much with the kind of politics, too, of the Caribbean situation. The idea that blue - the blue of the islands, the sea, the sky, all of that tremendous amount of light that makes the blue look even more unbelievable - that could be a very kind of of touristic vision. 'The colour of forgetting! Ooh, rush off to the Caribbean!' I mean, even for those of us who live outside, sometimes every so often we think of needing to go home, needing to go back to the blue but still knowing that the blue, as Carib says in the novel, 'once you know the colour of the mud on the hill, blue can never be the colour of forgetting!' You know that blue is only drawing you back to a lot of remembering. That certainly does not stop ... in the touristic presence. So, in that sense, the whole *Colour of Forgetting* idea is very intimately bound up with the politics and the history.<sup>126</sup>

The significance of the 'act of re(member)ing' is to be found within the community constructed in Collins's text and specifically within the empowerment which such cultural memory affords. Illustrative of this is the great-grandmotherly advice to 'Look up and laugh in people face. We blood not weak. If we generation couldn't see the funny side of life, not one person live to tell the story'.<sup>127</sup> The direct theorising of 'we generation' serves to concretise the specific identity born out of the horrors of the past

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp.17-19.

<sup>126</sup> Collins interview, in *Mango Season*, 1996, 5.

<sup>127</sup> Collins, 1995, p.35.

as well as its strengths, particularly that of not being defeated by adverse circumstances. Further, in the privileging of the vernacular voice of the Caribbean, which is selected for the narration of the text, a particular ideological stance is indicated attesting to the significance of collective memory. Collins in interview refers to the 'voices of my early socialisation' which remain a dominant influence upon her writing.<sup>128</sup> For Collins, this particular 'long memoried' stance is crucial. To be 'long memoried' is, in the first instance, to be active in recording or publishing signs from 'before and now' of significance to the self or community.<sup>129</sup> For writers like Collins, language is a crucial sign of community.<sup>130</sup>

To be 'long memoried' is also to be prepared to testify as Nichols's and Collins's narrators do. Collins's narrative, structured by highlighting the Caribbean demotic, achieves the effect of theorising rooted in everyday language of proverbs, riddles and pithy popular Creole sayings:

Hush! If is stranger is one thing. But don't put your mouth. Is family business. But is a good thing Mamag land wasn't family land. She could do as she want with it. She could get together all those who knew that it was useless to try and clap with one hand.<sup>131</sup>

The futility of attempting to 'clap with one hand', the material of 'everyday' theorising of the community, constitutes an important focus of the novel, functioning as signifiers of remembrance as well as contemporary thought. What becomes apparent in this theorising is a particularised significance through the play of words which in some measure defines the silence discussed in earlier chapters as suppression rather than absence of words. This accords with Bobb's suggestion that 'the experience of Caribbean people has been built on suppression and silence, but a silence under which the 'word' was carefully preserved'.<sup>132</sup> It is such silence, broken by black women, at the

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<sup>128</sup> Collins interview, in *Mango Season*, (1996), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> This is not to suggest that the complex Caribbean language situation and that of individual writers resident in any number of locations is solved by a binary choice between either SE or Creole.

<sup>131</sup> Collins, 1995, p.60.

<sup>132</sup> Bobb, p.40.

level of publication of African-Caribbean women's literary texts, which now remains to be broken through an insistence upon the valuing of practice described as 'Black women's intellectual tradition' by African-American, Patricia Hill-Collins.<sup>133</sup> The nature of such a tradition extends from the 'everyday' Caribbean-rooted theorising, often the preserve of matriarchs and other wise, ancestral women, extant in the literary texts, to the theoretical texts written from a knowledge-base valued by prestigious western institutions of learning. The significance of the 'everyday' heightened within the literary text remains yet to be valued in critical practice.

Chancy, in *Framing Silence* (1997), contributes to the debate on the role played by memory in Caribbean women's literature in relation to Haitian women writers. She highlights the way in which memory functions as a 'crucial element of the politics of representation in the Haitian woman's novel'.<sup>134</sup> Chancy's analysis points to memory as a 'signifier of identity'.<sup>135</sup> In this respect the Haitian situation resembles that of the anglophones in the resistance which it encourages. Indeed, the scope of memory in first-wave fiction is only beginning to emerge in anglophone African-Caribbean novels. *Colour*, for example, indicates a narrative stance that is politically resistant in ways which borrow from local oral culture. For example, at a point in the tale when the villain of the piece is established as Son-Son, an estranged family member, an allegorical tale begins to circulate telling of Mrs Son-Son, his wife, being almost tricked by a *lajabesse* and its child, *Ajakbe*. Though Son-Son and his wife have benefited materially through recourse to legal practice against his family, thus alienating much of the community, that community by practical means and through empowering group representation, resists the wrong perpetrated.

If Collins writes of the home space in terms of past historical realities and people 'walking around with a lot of other people whom they don't know, inside of them', Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa* employs a long-remembered perspective offering a

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<sup>133</sup> Cited in Lee. See Hill Collins, 1990, p.15.

<sup>134</sup> Chancy, p.74.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

complimentary reading of the community.<sup>136</sup> Brodber's text opens with a section entitled 'Voices':

Papa's grandfather and Mother's mother were the upper reaches of our world. So we were brown, intellectual, better and apart, two generations of lightening blue-blacks and gracing elementary schools with brightness. The cream of the earth, isolated, quadroon, mulatto, Anglican. But we had two wiry black hands up to the elbows in khaki suds, cleanly singing:

-Brother Jack, we must get the sugar out if we are to supply the cakes-  
-Too true, Miss Tucker, too true -forever organising... people, corn, cane, cow, tired but happily sure of a Baptist seat in Heaven.  
-Cock-fighting on a Sunday! Lord take the case.-

It is hard work that gets a Baptist Amen through lips pursed for the Te Deum.

-Mother says I must stop writing to you-  
-All right, but you must write to let me know why she says so-  
-She says all this writing is not good for me for I must take my Training College exams-  
-But she must know that writing is good practice for your exams. Tell her I say so-  
-She says no good can come out of you-  
-Show her the pillow cases I brought you-  
-She says you haven't made your intentions clear-  
-Show her the ring-  
-She says you are ten years older than I and you have nothing to show for it-  
-Let her see your waist-

Yes now. The chile life spoil. Lord take the case! Those sneaking khaki lips forcing poor little Baptist contractions. Not only one time, but twice, five times, six times. Oh God. Poor chile. But she must have out her lot.

-I got a scholarship Granny-  
-That's what my father said, "your blessing shall flow like a river. Not unto your children but to your children's children"-  
-The best one Granny-  
-Praise to the Redeemer. Paul may sow and Apollos may water but the increase come from God. Learn that Nellie and quiet yourself-

Quiet yourself Nellie. You had nothing to do with it or anything else. Your Granny Tucker proposes and God disposes. He is the God of creation and who is you?<sup>137</sup>

Chapter one of 'Voices', given in its entirety above, may be examined by reference to the five sections indicated through line breaks in the layout of the text. The opening section within which the reader might reasonably expect to find indications of place, is, contrarily, sparing of locational clues. Effectively, while the geographic setting remains uncertain in the opening extract, a few textual clues though confirming location, relate

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<sup>136</sup> See O'Callaghan, 'Erna Brodber', in Dance, ed., p.72, for elucidation about Brodber's impetus for writing this novel in the wake of 'Black Power'.

<sup>137</sup> Brodber, 1980, p.7.

also, in the first paragraph, to information about people: 'brown', 'blue-blacks', and 'quadroon, mulatto' resonant of Long's racial classifications discussed in Chapter One. Furthermore, a plurality of voices is signified at the outset through the collective consciousness of the narrator echoed in the plural pronouns 'we' and 'our' which appear in three of the first four sentences. Brodber seems to display in this text an aesthetic impulse discussed in the previous chapter namely that of privileging the collective over the personal and individual and the cross generational over any single generation. Does this multiplicity function so as to collectivise or differentiate?

The multiple focalization of the text, more clearly delineated through direct speech which follows the opening paragraph, heightens, as in Collins's case, the lack of distance between narrator and characters comprising the textual community. 'Brother Jack' and 'Miss Tucker', the two named characters appear, in the context of Brodber's text, to bear kinship names or generational markers understood in relation to the community. Also included are 'Papa's grandfather and Mother's mother', generations nurtured upon different Christian denominations, 'Baptist' and 'Anglican' as well as its social groupings, among whom are the 'intellectual', the 'cream of the earth'. A range of voices dominates the page from the fifth sentence onwards and while the multiple narration gives primary place to the religio-conversational exchange of the elders, it is to the more intimate dialogue within Section Three that the narrative moves, pausing only for the brief, wry commentary on the impact of Christian mores locally figured in the notion of a 'Baptist Amen through lips pursed for the Te Deum'.

If the older generation within the community is privileged in the first section of the text, it is a younger generation which begins to be revealed, albeit anonymously, in Section Three. Even so the character 'Mother' is instrumental to the epistolary dialogue between the younger characters, male and female, so that each line refers to the matriarch either directly or, more usually, indirectly through third person pronouns, 'she' and 'her' cited in the young couple's exchange. Specific community attitudes are being denoted here namely that of adult deference and correspondingly, young adult

accountability, particularly that of young women. The 'I'-narrator, Nellie, whose name is given only in the final section of the brief chapter defers to her mother in the exchanges with her lover despite the negative maternal comments she feels constrained to relay to him. Being male and older, he, on the other hand, is allowed scope for objecting to the (adult's) assessment as presented through the narrator. He is also allowed to be forceful in turn. Unlike Nellie, the male not only counters the assertions reported to him, but also advocates his own views with some conviction, 'tell her I say so'. For Nellie, however, family members comprise the 'upper reaches' of her world, one which is also circumscribed by shades of blackness and its meanings in terms of a dominant form of Christianity that is by nature also Victorian and missionary. The memory privileged in Brodber's text is one which makes reference to a more recent time when girls take 'College exams', negotiated through a Christian denominational education. For this reason, though maternity is prefigured in the opening of the text, Nellie's character carries her own authority through formal education with classical aspirations indicated by a familiarity with Latin.

Is Nellie constrained by her world or simply suspended within it? At the heart of the community which Brodber presents is woman and her experience hence the titular 'Jane and Louisa' of oral cultural resonance rooted in the children's ring game once popular in anglophone Caribbean countries. In the 'girls' game, 'Jane and Louisa' are rewarded for appropriately romantic endeavours such as 'picking roses' and 'waltzing', thereby gaining access to the 'beautiful garden'. The game begins with selection, and is followed by the girl's circumscription of the circle or group who woo her into compliance. Brodber's text maintains its polyphonic stance alongside a particular sense of an inclusive community, a part of which is woman and her distinctive role. While at the root of the community is that which Collins articulates in historical terms, in Brodber's novel, it is the binding nature of the aftermath of slavery which is being probed in 'the warmth and security of those eggs in the dark of her (the hen's) bottom'.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.9.

Such 'security' shaped by the material conditions of poverty 'under zinc, sweet potato slips, and thatch' and ameliorated by religion, ascribes places to girls and young women. At puberty, a process of confusion begins in which 'it' plays a key part, as the narrator begins to appreciate at eleven years old.<sup>139</sup> The game which 'Jane and Louisa' play may be viewed as an idealised game. How does the African-heritage Caribbean girl in circumstances owing much to the historical legacy of slavery come to understand her part in this game?

It is within the 'kumbla' that Brodber's girl/woman finds space to reconcile her characteristic womanhood. The kumbla, 'like a beach ball' but also 'an egg shell' which 'does not crack' is the protective space which Nellie eventually finds in her quest to come to terms with her black woman's body.<sup>140</sup> Specifically, it is the womb which proves problematic as the 'fall' of women in the community illustrates:

She had seen her cousins rise then fall. Laetitia, Teena, B. Black sperms disintegrating black wombs, making hollow women and name-less, pointless children. Hadn't she seen her mother's fall and spawning poverty?<sup>141</sup>

Brodber's concern resonant of Philip's 'dis place' examined earlier, similarly negotiates the black woman's body. Yet, the 'fall' presents a more contemporary difficulty in that the woman's body of Philip's text had been ascribed the reproductive function albeit for the master's gain. In Brodber's text, Christian values and mores construct the same activity, childbirth outside marriage, as the Judeo-Christian mythical 'fall'. Children, the source of wealth to 'others' on the plantation, are in the twentieth century, the means of further descent into 'spawning poverty' representative of the material circumstances of local black life. These circumstances serve to distort the black woman's sensuality, so that, in or out of wedlock, reproduction and its relation to poverty determine perceptions of the African-Caribbean woman's body. Brodber's articulation of black female sensuality continues the theme of the body claimed by earlier male writers such as James and Lovelace. The disconnection and distortion perceived by the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.123.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.142.

narrator arise from her woman's lot figured by the 'womb' and equated with 'dungle' or rubbish heap experience.<sup>142</sup>

Disconnection between body, womb and heart begins with separation after experience of 'it', which the girl/woman realises as puberty signalling the body's preparation for sexual activity. At the same time, even suspicion of such womanly behaviour specifically attracts the attention of the 'whisper circle'.<sup>143</sup> Separation and confusion are features of 'it', 'a hidey-hidey thing'. Since 'it' made you a whisper', the girl/ woman is separated from playmates particularly boys and from familiar activities such as climbing.<sup>144</sup> Further, separation takes place against a background of confusion caused by the partial truths of adults and the partial myths of children. Similarly, 'it' separates adult women; 'it' cuts them off from everybody'.<sup>145</sup> In the Christian circumstances of her community, the girl imagines that she has become unclean and in need of ritual cleansing. Out of such circumstances, when the young woman comes to understand the function of the womb, and to perceive the action and perceptions of adult women in the light of this function, there is dismissal:

So the black womb is a maw. Disinfect its fruits with fine sterilised white lint if you can. You suck a wasp's sting from a child's hand, clear its nose of the bluish green blockage and spit. The black womb sucks *grief and anger and shame* but it does not spit. It absorbs them into its body. Take an antidote. Silence it. Best pretend it doesn't exist (my emphasis).<sup>146</sup>

While the 'grief and anger and shame' constitutes contemporary African-Caribbean reality in Brodber's text, it also figures a continuity for the African-heritage woman. At the same time, Brodber's ironic use of the image of 'the black womb' as 'maw' appropriates the stereotype of an earlier period representing black woman's sexuality as voracious. The difference in Brodber's framing, as in Riley's, owes much to the social conditions of a post-slavery, colonial Caribbean where poverty and Christianity have both been imposed.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.143.

The role which time plays is significant, for Brodber suggests a place for silence in attempting to deal with feelings of grief, anger and shame attendant upon slavery with which the black woman's body must contend in reproductivity. Is Brodber's notion an articulation of a new form of silence? If African-Caribbean history may be thought of in terms of the key periods: Atlantic slavery, post-Emancipation colonialism, independence and neo-colonialism, then the black woman's silence during post-Emancipation colonialism as Brodber sees it is different again from earlier silences by virtue of the Christianity-induced 'shame' popularised within this era and which plays a judgmental role in relation to black women's sexuality, deeming women to have fallen or to have had their lives 'spoilt'. This silence is reflected back in first-wave novels as absence of concern with woman's sexuality. Within such silence is the complicity of the woman's body over which she has little control; the judgement of missionary values in material conditions of dire poverty and the reconstituted social mores imposed by the status quo. That is to say, the change from slavery to post-slavery times is also significantly marked by social mores regulating and containing the woman's body. The post-slavery colonial era with its rigid imposition of Christian codes of conduct, imposes an expectation of propriety which includes the right number of children within a Christian marital context. Few fictional texts have treated this theme.<sup>147</sup> Since part of the legacy of Atlantic slavery is the institutionalisation of childbirth outside of marriage or single parent families, it follows that women, currently indicated as overwhelmingly head of West Indian households, would also be at the mercy of the churches allowing access to education. The situation is further compounded by the promise of church membership as access to an enhanced future for their children.<sup>148</sup>

Brodber's narrator, concerned with the separation of body, womb and heart which the black girl/woman experiences, turns to the kumbla, a specific space of

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<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Olive Senior, *Arrival of The Snake Woman*, Essex, 1989, p.38. The story allows insight into the way in which the missionary churches served to regulate women's lives through the roles they assumed, particularly as gatekeepers to education services.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

separation, in which the process of fusion and meaning-making takes place effectively 'putting the heart and womb together'.<sup>149</sup> Though unmistakably a woman's space, it is to the wisdom of folklore that Brodber turns in order to explain the significance of the kumbla. It is also in the voice of the trickster figure Anancy (Ananse) that the words, 'go eena kumbla' echoes and re-echoes in the text. Understanding of the kumbla draws on community wisdom in which there is a special place for the trickster, Anancy, who is also a father whose children do not escape his trickery. In the tale, 'Anancy and Dryhead' cited by Brodber, the family man, Anancy, finding himself in yet another difficult situation bargains with his children's lives but saves them through the device of ritually dispatching each in turn to 'go eena kumbla'.<sup>150</sup> By this means, Anancy gains materially from the encounter as he does in other tales so that Brodber writes: 'Anancy crafts such finely woven white silk kumblas designed to protect for generations'.<sup>151</sup> The story, figured in the oral tale retold in the text, functions on one level as a praise song for Anancy as creator of the kumbla not only to protect his family but also 'the folk'. But can we trust Anancy? Joyce Walker-Johnson, writing of the text as personal autobiography and group history, argues that the 'Caribbean woman's behaviour' aims 'to avoid conflict and to promote survival'.<sup>152</sup> Though a controversial figure, Anancy, is also a folk icon of particular significance to African cultures. While current debate focuses on the moral value of Anancy as cultural icon, charting his demise from god in West African tales to 'criminalised' figure in Caribbean stories, and despite questions of sexism in the latter's behaviour, African-Caribbean women writers such as Brodber and Collins hold to the cultural wisdom of the Anansesem tales.<sup>153</sup> It is not to the gender of the creator of the kumbla, then, that the narrator of Brodber's text looks but to its effect.

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<sup>149</sup> Brodber, p144.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.130.

<sup>152</sup> Joyce, Walker-Johnson, 'Autobiography, History and the Novel: Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*', in *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3, 1 (January 1989), p.46.

<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Gilroy, 1998, pp.178-85. Gilroy poses the rhetorical question: who criminalised Anancy? Thus she signifies the altered figure of Ananse transformed for survival in the Caribbean.

Brodber's *Jane and Louisa*, like many of the texts examined in this thesis reflects the internal migration patterns which became the economic lifeline of the community in a setting constructed by poverty and consequent powerlessness attracted to Christianity. Such migration is reflected most poignantly in the prayers of Granny Tucker, the narrator's maternal grandmother who 'always prays':

Kneading her bread, she prays for health and strength to continue making bread to supply the shops, to bring in money to pay Brother Jack, to run the sugar mill to make the sugar to feed the district. Granny Tucker prays for those who cannot afford to buy bread, for those who sing rag songs and stray from the good book, waste their money on cock fights and cannot buy their bread.<sup>154</sup>

The gentle satire through a listing of the subjects of Granny Tucker's prayers over several pages of text gives a strong indication of the old woman's dependence on prayer in the face of her own powerlessness. The list culminates in a climax in the old woman's ritual Sunday morning prayers 'especially for her children dispersed to the ends of the world ... three, eight, forty miles and even overseas doing what she does not know but God knows best'.<sup>155</sup> Of Granny Tucker's six children, Rita, the second eldest is in Colon, Panama, and Obediah, for whom she prays particularly hard, writes to her from the city threatening to 'put out sea'.<sup>156</sup> Yet, the old woman is one of an array of ancestral figures peopling the texts and who function as signifiers of an ancestral presence crucial to the guidance of the community.

From Nellie's district, remote and reached by a single bus, it is only Mass Stanley who 'has travelled'.<sup>157</sup> Having 'worked in foreign',<sup>158</sup> and fought in 'the war' Mass Stanley provides a fund of stories 'about Cuba' and other subjects.<sup>159</sup> He is differentiated from others in the village by his demeanour, dress and style making him appropriate for special posts of responsibility within the community such as that of gate person at the local annual fair, despite not being a member of 'our church'. Having travelled, 'nobody

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<sup>154</sup> Brodber, 1980, p.86.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 103.

dares fool with him ... stranger or district people'.<sup>160</sup> Such enhanced respect was similarly due to Granny Tucker's deceased spouse, Corpie, who had also known war service. The significance of travel lay in the manner in which it sets individuals and their families apart, adding an extra dimension to their existence in the eyes of local people. Mass Stanley's distinctive dress: 'cut away coat', 'panama straw hat' and 'two-toned shoes' both with 'pin-pricked holes' which he wears to the fair is indicative of his superior material circumstances.<sup>161</sup> Noticeably in Nellie's community, there is an expectation that those 'dispersed' will return as Mass Stanley does.

If as Walker-Johnson argues, the parallel with Nellie's story is that of the society, then much of Brodber's theorising lies in an interrogation of that which is intimate to the society 'in the dark of her bottom'. Brodber questions, for example, the meanings of cultural values of the kumbla, educational ambition which separates the community, family divisions over land, gender socialisation and so on. Similar to Collins, there is too the distinctive riddling quality to be found in *Jane and Louisa*, firstly in 'everyday theorising' such as 'Mama only said, "Hog pickney ask him mek him mout so long. Hog say "you a grow you wi see"'.<sup>162</sup> Secondly, the sections variously entitled 'the spying glass', 'the one sided drum', 'the pill' and so on function as fables about the society. On another level, too, Brodber presents direct discourse: 'You never could get Granny Tucker to admit that her grandfather had been a slave. No Sir. He was a brown man who could read and write'. Peculiar to the text, the personal narrator addresses the reader 'you' directly.

In attempting to illustrate ways in which the selected texts theorise I hope to have indicated also the 'every day' theorising important to an oral culture and among whom women, frequently heads of households, are crucial transmitters of culture. In addition, I have attempted to strengthen my proposal for an alternative pedagogical

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.100. Poet, Lorna Goodison, similarly figures such a male particularly attractive in closed communities: 'cream serge pants, seam like razor/ and the beret and the two tone shoes', in 'For My Mother (May I Inherit Half Her Strength)', London, 1986, p.46.

<sup>162</sup> Brodber, p.91.

tool allowing access to textual meaning which significantly profiles African-Caribbean women's voices. My exploration hearkens back to Valerie Lee's key question concerning 'black women's experiences and intellectual traditions'?<sup>163</sup> In addressing this issue with respect to African-Caribbean women's writing, I hope to have demonstrated the applicability of the 'theorising text' to African-Caribbean women's novels and to have expanded upon the value of this means of reading fiction as part of a creolised discourse.

Having advocated a carnivalised discourse as a means of critical analysis which *simultaneously* engages with high theory and African-Caribbean women's voices, inclusive of the text's theorising, my aim has been to prepare ways in which the study of narratives by African-Caribbean women might benefit. In one sense, the approach plays out similar strategies involved in the creation of the literary texts themselves since, the selected first-wave authors examined here, highly educated products of competing cultures, are caught between high and everyday theory; between silence and the insistent wisdom of womenfolk from the oral culture critical of their formative years. In suggesting a means of unlocking cultural codes within the texts which may be used alongside more formal theoretical voices including those of African-Caribbean women critics, I hope to have argued convincingly the case for the value of a carnivalised discourse. At the same time, I have been careful to foreground the theorising of African-Caribbean women most accessible in the absence of interpretative means informed by and grounded within the culture. The orientation of the texts towards memory is a feature of such theorising. So is the insistence upon the use of Creole by authors educated against its use as literary language. Ultimately, it may be useful to emphasise that there are levels at which the texts theorise perhaps more obviously to someone reading from within the culture than without. But this exploration, it is anticipated, fills a gap in its engagement with questions of language use; of literary preoccupations reflected in textual content; of literary devices impacting on form; and, in short, of the presentation of literary difference in these post-slavery texts by first-wave African-Caribbean women.

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<sup>163</sup> Lee, 1995, 203.

## Conclusion: Yemoja Smiling

Mother of origins, guardian  
of passages;  
generator of new life in flood  
waters, orgasm  
birth waters, baptism<sup>1</sup>

When I set out to explore what I term the breaking of silence, I could not have envisaged the breadth of research it would entail. The process, a type of journey out of the kumbla,<sup>2</sup> has led to attempts at the tracking of 'Relation' in 'origins' and a negotiation of theoretical currents converging in creolisation. At the same time, this journey is representative of that which Sylvia Wynter refers to as 'a second self-assertion' which undertakes an 'altering of our systems of meanings, and their privileged texts'.<sup>3</sup> The carnivalising of theory crucial to this study, even while it acknowledges my limitations of power to influence theoretical practice, nonetheless works towards an 'alterability' similar to that which Wynter envisages as a timely next step. My contribution to the breaking of African-Caribbean women's critical silence, running, as it does, at crosscurrents to issues of race and gender, promises some interesting further debate which may usefully enhance the critical tools I have proposed.

What are some of the meanings of the passage out for Tucuma's sister? Since several African-American (re)sisters have 'trace(d) this trail of bones', there is much that can be anticipated.<sup>4</sup> I have broken silence; I now welcome the dialogue but if, as Senior indicates, Yemoja, orisha and goddess of the sea 'in her protective role' is also 'guardian ... of passages', I can only speculate that she would be smiling on this daughter.<sup>5</sup> Yet, there is at issue meanings greater than that of the personal. The twentieth century

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<sup>1</sup> Senior, 'Yemoja: Mother of Waters' in *Gardening in the Tropics*, p.131.

<sup>2</sup> See Brodber, 1980, p.123, but also Mordecai, in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, eds., p.viii.

<sup>3</sup> Wynter, in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, eds., p.365.

<sup>4</sup> See 'Another African Tomb: Ilfracombe', in Anim-Addo, 1998, p.3+. This metaphor for slavery and its aftermath refers here to the power dynamics of critical silencing.

<sup>5</sup> Warner-Lewis, 1991, p.80, suggests that the orishas also appear in 'a loving, protective role' and that the relationship between deity and follower is expressed in parental terms.

has seen the re-awakening of African-heritage people and a global claiming of women's authorial voices. For African-Caribbean peoples, that century represents one of liberation since, only in the final decades of the millennium, have African-Caribbean women, no longer enslaved (chattel), been allowed to claim authority as novelists.

In *Framing*, I referred to the 'periodic conferences held variously in the Caribbean, the USA and finally in London' which proved to be 'critical sites' for the reception of the new literature.<sup>6</sup> While the writers may be attributed to two categories, the regional and the diasporic, it is evident that location outside of the region, however temporary, enhances both publication and the prospect of wider critical reception.<sup>7</sup> The theorising proposed by this study treats such dispersal and its locational result as both an ontological feature of Caribbean life and an outcome of 'Relation'. My insistence upon a foregrounding of African-Caribbean women's poetics seeks, as part of Wynter's 'second counter-exertion', to draw importantly upon these voices wherever they are located.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is imperative in the twenty-first century, that specific critical account be taken of the corpus of literature since its growth and the concerns arising from its related silence(s) indicate the need for critical theoretical articulation, from a position within the culture, alert to the many concerns raised.<sup>9</sup>

In part, an examination of issues of ideological positioning, privileging and theoretical containment has led me to propose the (alter)native perspective, carnivalised discourse. Crucial to my theoretical formulations are notions of creolisation and 'Relation' as indicated principally by Glissant; Caribbean cosmology as proposed by Brathwaite; and 'plot and plantation' indicated by Wynter.<sup>10</sup> In addition, I highlight also the role of feminist praxis which reconciles an African-Caribbean ontology with western modes of articulation. It is upon such meanings that this thesis rests.

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<sup>6</sup> Anim-Addo, 1996, p.x.

<sup>7</sup> See Harris, 1983, pp.120-1. Indeed, Harris argues that 'philistine' conditions within the West Indies induce some writers to 'turn to' metropolitan areas.

<sup>8</sup> Wynter, in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, eds., p.366.

<sup>9</sup> See, McDowell, in warhol and herndl, eds., p.235, for her 'objection' to the eclipsing of criticism by black feminists.

<sup>10</sup> Wynter, op.cit.

## Beginnings: Questions, questions

Since this study is representative of critical beginnings relative to anglophone African-Caribbean women's literature, a whole range of questions arises. Perhaps foremost, and concerning the theoretical approach favoured, is whether this amounts to more than 'playful pluralism'?<sup>11</sup> Certainly the playfulness encouraged by Gadamer has been a comfort in this task. Yet, specific concerns have led to the various axes of enquiry: womanist-feminism(s), poetics, inclusive of African-Caribbean women's voices, hermeneutics, narratology, creolisation and Foucauldian theory. The engagement with feminism(s), an underlying assumption given the gendered body of texts, raises questions about the extent to which it may be possible to 'specify' as I have indicated or even to resist an easy co-option in the face of power dynamics implicit in 'academic feminism's coming of age'.<sup>12</sup> For this reason I have attempted to maintain the tension between the two and the contradictions they evoke.<sup>13</sup> Yet, because of an openness to dialogue, feminism(s) has much to offer. My critical borrowing, even from feminists, however, indicate the invisibility of African-Caribbean women's writing within the field, with few exceptions. The way in which feminist narratology might be developed with respect to African-Caribbean women's writing is an area for future research.

The polyphony within carnivalised discourse also acknowledges 'the often unequally positioned sites of knowledge production and their influence'.<sup>14</sup> That is to say, the power relations are such that my theoretical formulations - an African-Caribbean woman's - can, at best, mark difference rather than seek to prescribe. 'Carnivalised discourse' allows the negotiation that is possible in such circumstances. If carnival is, at heart, also an experience 'of power', then, in trickster tradition, there may be more at stake.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Annette Kolodny, in Warhol and Herndl, eds., p.184.

<sup>12</sup> McDowell, in Warhol and Herndl, eds., p.236.

<sup>13</sup> Wynter, in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, pp.365-6

<sup>14</sup> McDowell, in Warhol and Herndl, eds., p.235.

<sup>15</sup> Burton, p.239. He argues that carnival and culture are means of empowerment in Caribbean culture. I refer also to the Anansesem tradition and the trickster, Ananse.

## Breaking new ground and pointers to further investigation

In the process of this study, I have opened up many areas of possible research: visual representation, Enlightenment and slavery, eighteenth century women, constructions of femininity, an interrogating of Eurocentricity, and the relation of race to this discourse amongst many other things.<sup>16</sup> Toni Morrison, writing about the USA context, has noted that 'in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse'.<sup>17</sup> To what extent might this statement be also true of the Caribbean? A positive outcome of this thesis is, I hope, that it offers rich beginnings and ample scope for further research seeking to develop Caribbean dynamics within critical enquiry and to render African-Caribbean women's writing a greater visibility.

Necessarily, given the absence of research in the field, this exploratory thesis has been broad-based. The over-riding difficulty and disappointment has been that so little of this work has been previously attempted. Nonetheless, beginning with writing published mainly in the 1980s, the nature of the body of texts dictated my exploration of earlier periods and links with representations of African-Caribbean women. The more I delved, the more clearly delineated the scope of the study appeared so that the research has sought to engage with a range of areas. A result was that it became all the more inescapable that several studies could be carved out of this large project. Future work might be organised around womanist/feminist textual readings with a focus on narratology. African-Caribbean women's poetics deserve exploration as does the conditions of literary production for African-Caribbean authors. Comparative studies with African-Caribbean men is yet another suggestion while the theorising text remains a promising area of study. Readings of individual post-slavery novels by African-Caribbean women remain overdue. Indeed, the textual reading of individual writers,

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<sup>16</sup> It is expected that the conference, 'Swinging Her Breasts at History', held at Goldsmiths College, London, on 8 and 9 April 2001, will be an important vehicle for such issues of critical debate. The conference title derives from Grace Nichols, 'Thoughts drifting through the fat black woman's head while having a full bubble bath', in *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, London, 1984.

<sup>17</sup> Morrison, 1992, p.9.

for example, Beryl Gilroy, is, already for me, work in progress, an outcome of this larger undertaking.

If the dynamics of African-Caribbean first-wave fictional texts also point to the power implications of criticism itself, the contribution I hope to have made by this study lies within its individual as well as collective critical silence-breaking. For these reasons I argue for the application of a range of counter-hegemonic critical tools for effective reading of the novels. In addition, this is also part of the manifestation of the will for change which has run throughout the narrative of African-Caribbean women's writing. Finally, though this thesis focuses on first-wave texts, I look forward to successive waves of African-Caribbean women's literature, to all their differences and all their similarities. *Difference*, a particularly challenging notion in the Caribbean context given *that history*, remains to be critically investigated.

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In this far off island place  
witnessing what we could not speak  
know your children have kept faith

(from 'Saraka')