CARIBBEAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND ORATURE:

MODES OF RESISTANCE IN JAMAICA KINCAID,

EDWIDGE DANTICAT, MARYSE CONDÉ AND AUDRE LORDE

by

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(Under the Direction of JAMES MCGREGOR)

ABSTRACT

Texts from Caribbean authors serve as a framework for questions of individual self representation that blends the aesthetics of both oral literature and written literature while situating identity within a collective context. In the discussion of Jamaica Kincaid's Autobiography of My Mother, Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory, Maryse Condé I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem, and Audre Lordes Zami: A New Spelling of My Name this dissertation studies the choice of component elements in autobiographical texts and shows how the use of autobiographical practices, oral literature and collective identity construct identities that resist sexist and racist ideologies and work to re-cast ethnic and feminine identities in positive terms. In showing how these texts generate a range of feminine and feminist constructions of identity in which questions of gender, ethnicity and sexuality are primary concerns, the study identifies common practices and themes despite the diversity of the texts. As a common framework to all these texts, life writing, especially fictional autobiography, is shown to be a practice of engagement and resistance through which identity can be textually constructed

in ways that politicize self-representation and challenge prevalent discourses that remain from the colonial and postcolonial histories of the Caribbean islands.

INDEX WORDS: Caribbean Literature; Autobiography; Ethnic; Orature; Feminism

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Introduction

Texts from Caribbean authors serve as a framework for questions of individual self representation that blends the aesthetics of both oral literature and written literature while situating identity within a collective context. In the discussion of Jamaica Kincaid's Autobiography of My Mother (1996), Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994), Maryse Condé's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (1992), and Audre Lorde's Zami: A New Spelling of My Name (1982) this dissertation will study the choice of component elements in the production of autobiographical texts and show how autobiographical practices are used to construct identities that resist sexist and racist ideologies and work to re-cast ethnic and feminine identities in positive terms. In exploring how these texts generate a range of feminine and feminist constructions of identity in which questions of gender, ethnicity and sexuality are primary concerns, I will identify common practices and themes despite the diversity of the texts. As a common framework to all these texts, life writing, and especially fictional autobiography, can be seen as a practice of engagement and resistance through which identity can be textually constructed in ways that politicize self -representation and challenge prevalent discourses that remain from the colonial and post-colonial histories of the Caribbean islands.

Given that the specific practices of self-representation are particular to each author and text, this study will identify and examine a number of themes and practices that are common to the corpus as a whole and show how each can be seen as an example of a space or mode of resistance in the construction of the life narrative. In each case, the co-presence of both oral and literary aesthetics of textual production and their relationship to the textual construction of identity will be taken into consideration. The study seeks to illustrate how the engagement of these aesthetics helps to construct an identity rooted in a collective context that reflects a political engagement with the complex social histories of the Caribbean community at large. This study questions the degree to which the particular staging of identity as female or feminine, in so far as representing female identity, is already an act of resistance, especially as tied into the particular post-colonial sphere of the Caribbean archipelago and each of its unique islands.

This introduction contextualizes the Caribbean as an important post-colonial location in which currents of ethnicity, language and culture converge to provide an environment in which a feminist sense of self expression is both necessary and possible. After staging the struggle for Caribbean identity within larger questions of ethnicity and gender within postcolonial contexts, I introduce several approaches to the discussion of autobiographical constructs that will establish the quality of resistance in these texts. Also, key concepts such as orature (the blending of oral and written literature), the elaboration of collective identity, and the exploration of subjectivities particular to Caribbean identity will be introduced, as they will frequently be used in the following chapters. Through the discussion of themes such as ancestral presence, the aesthetics of

orature, and the political significance of sexuality in the Caribbean, this dissertation seeks to showcase the presence of a characteristic of Caribbean literature wherein the personal and the political are as indivisible as the present, past and future. The dissertation proceeds, chapter by chapter, through close readings of the specific texts in developing the thematic links that bind the texts of this study. While each chapter will focus on one primary text, it will also borrow from other works by each author, especially essays and personal statements. In the specific context of the Caribbean, these elements are often present at the same time, meaning that the largely communal aspect of orature is also tied to another key concept of the oral text, the ancestral presence.

The frequent appearance of autobiographical form, technique and content in novels from the Caribbean raises questions about both narratological aspects of such texts and their place in Caribbean literary history. Life narratives make up a significant portion of the literary texts from the Caribbean context and deserve serious critical attention to their expressive and symbolic content and the figuration of the protagonists as representative cultural figures. Likewise, the narrative strategies are open to analysis of the use of cultural content, especially as regards the politics and poetics of self-representation or construction of identity. Ultimately, the analysis of each text within the corpus of the dissertation will serve to examine the elements of oral literature as well as mythic or religious archetypes, demonstrating the significant discursive space created by life writing as an important genre in which identity can be posited, challenged, and reconstituted across ancestral and communal lines.[1] Through the course of this dissertation, I will attempt to demonstrate how each text and author uses elements of

[1] I use this term to reference the use of discourse by Bahktin, in terms of *heteroglossia* and dialogic practices, as well as by Foucault, in terms of the political and social ramifications of discourse. See Bahktin, M. M. The Dialogic Imagination and Foucault, Michel. Archeology of Knowledge.

autobiographical genres to create an expression of an identity that illustrates the range and spectrum of feminine or feminist possibilities.

The Importance of Genre in Ethnic Literature

Often in studies of ethnic literature there is a conscious decision to ignore form and genre in preference of studies of content and source cultural materials. But as the October 2007 edition of PMLA, "Remapping Genre," reminds us, the forms and modes of expression in ethnic literature are essential choices in the production of literary materials. The choices made in the selection of literary modes and practices often reflect not just the author's position in relationship to given and accepted literary forms, but also culturally mitigated choices about the modes of expression which are most significant or most effective in delivering the cultural content most important to authors of diverse, and especially of marginalized backgrounds. Furthermore, as Wai Chee Dimock's introduction to the issue notes, the term genre can take on an active form, denoted by the gerund "regenering", which "highlight[s] the activity here as cumulative reuse, an alluvial process, sedimentary as well as migratory." Referencing Peter Stallybrass and Heather Dubrow, Dimock indicates another value of genre, that it can "do much to guide us in the opposite direction, for, not fixated on originality, [generic structures] give pride of place instead to the art of receiving, and affirm it as art: crafty, experimental, even risk-taking" (1380). Whether written from the borderlands in Chicano/a culture or from the profound zone of contact that is the Caribbean archipelago, literary texts are often

created through conscious experimentation with form and voice.[2] In the selection of lesser known literary forms, like letters, poetry or essays, marginal voices make a claim to these forms as the means of their expression. In literature from the Caribbean, the conscious choice to use autobiographical form is an act of destabilization of that form, especially through the production of fictional texts; the choice showcases the construction of identity within the multiple currents and traditions which come into contact in the archipelago by taking the rules and artistry of self-representation and shaping them with Caribbean cultural content, as well as rhythms and speech patterns of the islands.

One essay from this edition of PMLA, by Diana Taylor, calls attention not simply to the production of texts that emphasize, cross, transgress or appropriate genres, but also to the reader who productively reads such a text as performance, rather than object. On the surface, such a distinction calls attention to the relationship between the reader and the text, and emphasizes the responsibility of the reader to connect the dots, as it were, of any given text in order to produce meaning. But the act of reading a narrative as a genre of performance "allows for alternative mappings, providing a set of strategies and conventions that allow scholars to see practices that narrative, poetry or even drama as a scripted genre might occlude." Such a reading allows the text to operate in a kind of lived space between the producer and the receiver in which J. L. Austin's understanding of "performatives" is usurped, and the "utterances… that take place in highly codified conventions [in which] their power stems from the legitimacy invested in authorized social actors… rather than individual" (1417). The selection of genres creates an interplay between writer and reader that transcends the limits of power and asserts the

[2] This concept is quite similar to Mary Louise Pratt's "Contact Zone" described in "Arts of the Contact Zone" 1991, but Bhabha's Location of Culture (1994) advances the phrasing as well. Given the post-colonial nature of this discussion, each concept is quite valid.

legitimacy of a voice (especially from an under-represented social group), thereby the using the performative voice to transfer the seat of agency and power from its socio-political authority to the domain of the individual in her relationship to the community.

Caribbean Literature and the Question of Genre

The theoretical basis of this dissertation is provided by critical approaches that regard the practices of life narrative (a global term including biography, autobiography and certain kinds of fiction) as genres of self-representation which offer the strong possibility of politicization as a space for acts of resistance in literature. When these critical interventions are brought to the Caribbean, they must be informed by an awareness of the cultural particularities of Caribbean and Diaspora literature, such as the role of oral tradition, the relationship between personal identity and collective identity, and the impact of colonial and postcolonial history on the representation of the body.[3] This awareness can clarify how the composition of texts allows Caribbean literature to function as a site of resistance providing voice to the voiceless, saying the unsaid. Thus any discussion of Caribbean literature requires an in-depth interrogation of the genres at play, since any borrowed genre, despite having inherent rules and codes, will be deeply transformed by the incorporation of Caribbean cultural practices. Viewed through a

[3] While in this case, I define postcolonial history as the history since independence from colonial activity, I also use the term to describe a literary practice as well as a critical paradigm. I cite Georg Gugleberger's defintition in the Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism, which states that postcolonial writing is "the slow, painful, and highly complex means of writing one's way into European history, in other words, a process of dialogue and necessary correction," and that postcolonial critical studies is "a shift in emphasis, a strategy of reading, an attempt to point out what was missing in previous analyses and an attempt to rewrite and correct."

critical lens and my own literary analysis the social, political and artistic issues of literary production and self-representation can be identified and analyzed.

The significance of such resistance is central to cultural production in the Caribbean because of the confluences of cultures which meet at the crossroads of the triangle trade where European, African, indigenous Amerindian and even Asian populations carry conflicting and competing symbols and codes into what Homi Bhabha has called a "zone of contact" in which colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial power relations must be considered. The historical experience of slavery and the plantation economy includes a history of social and physical violence, of subjugation and cruelty and of suppression of the languages, ritual, and religions which accompany identity. Thus the "Caribbean poem and novel," according to Benitez-Rojo "are projects that communicate their own turbulence, their own clash, and ther own void, the swirling black hole of social violence produced by the *encomienda* and the plantation" (27). The appropriation and use of literary forms and genres taken from the European context, and in particular the forms which privilege the study or narrative of one particular life, is a significant upsetting of the power relations indicated by a hierarchic elevation of European codes and mores over African in the Caribbean context. But as Bhabha notes in The Location of Culture, the zone of contact produces a "third space" between any cultures in contact in which experimentation and creative imagination is possible, based on the assertion that "the meaning of symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). It is by blending and inscribing these cultural symbols, European or African, that the Caribbean writer is capable of arriving at "an extratextual point of social

nonviolence and psychic reconstruction of the Self," which according to Benitez-Rojo constitutes "a text that speaks of a critical coexistence of rhythms, a polyrhythmic ensemble whose central binary rhythm is decentered" in the production of a newly valorized critical space (28). The fluidity and intercultural nature of the Caribbean achieves an excellent goal in literature, where practices of literary representation borrow so freely from European and African traditions that neither can retain absolute authority.

This co-presence could be described as a form of hybridity or syncretism, but each of these concepts runs into significant critical complications in the sphere of post-colonial studies. The concept of the hybrid, while promoted by theorists like Bhabha and Spivak, has also been criticized for its tendency to rely upon and maintain heavy distinctions between notions of east and west (see Hendry and Wong (2006), Pieterse (2001)) and because it has been seen to gloss over important issues of power relations and dominant practices, especially in linguistic and religious contexts (Joseph, 1999 and Dirlik, 1999). Likewise, the term syncretism fell into disuse, especially in the field of anthropology, due to an excessive use of the term which began to imply a hierarchy in which "western" or "modern" technologies were not only better than traditional ones, but in which they would ultimately dominate traditional practices, causing their increased disuse and atrophy (Greenfield and Droogers, 2001). Thus I will use "symbiosis," the same term that Leslie Desmangles relies upon in discussing the co-presence of Catholicism and *vodun* practices in Haitian society.

For Desmangles, the term symbiosis recognizes the oppressive relationship between the Roman Catholic faith which for centuries rejected and outlawed *vodun*, and the means by which the *vodun* use of Roman Catholic iconography allows the practice to survive

and flourish.[4] In the context of this complex relationship, symbiosis describes "the juxtaposition of two religions which do not fuse with one another; symbiosis means coexistence without conflation, commensalisms without union" (Desmangles, 2001, 7). It also implies, beyond the mere co-presence, the creation of a 'tertium quid" a third object that, "parts of which are 'Creole' phenomena bearing no resemblance to African or Europe, but indigenous to Haiti, born out of the historical events in Haitian culture" (8). It is this model of co-presence which most suitably addresses the status of literary production in the Caribbean context, a little of the written, a little of the oral, and the creation of space of literary production which is unique to the context of any given island and the historical confluences specific to that region.

While not all of these theoretical approaches emerge from the Caribbean itself, each relates to the region and the literary practices common to the corpus as a whole. These approaches will be informed by criticism brought in from the Caribbean, for example by E. Kamau Brathwaite, Antonio Benitez-Rojo and Sandra Pouchet Paquet, as well as from critical comments from the authors themselves. In many ways, the significant commonalities between critical approaches from Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and elsewhere, whatever their original global context, speak to the universality of each approach; I do, however, acknowledge the need to tailor any critical approach to the specific historical, linguistic and political conditions that comprise the background or context of the literary works. Through the exploration of these literary and critical materials from the Caribbean, the value of life narratives as active, resistant, re-

[4] There is a history of debate as to the appropriate orthography of this term, but I have chosen to use this spelling here because it is the version preferred by Desmangles. In most other places, I will use the form *vaudau* because it is the form used by Danticat. However, where Dayan uses the "voodoo" form in her quotes, I have not changed the spelling.

imaginings of how personal identity is constructed in relation to collective strata which, when combined with the presence of oral and written aesthetics, illuminates the prevalence of collective identity in these Caribbean texts..

The Caribbean context impacts the use of literary genres of autobiography in a number of ways, including oral culture, collective identity and representation of the body, just to name a few. Colonial history, postcolonial history, and even literary history are significant to the texts of this study because they form part of a common discourse which is always in dialogue with texts of self-representation. This discourse includes remnants from the slave trade, from the plantation economy, from the schools and systems of governance, from colonialism to independence, and from the earliest literary and historical representations of the Caribbean. While this discourse may indeed be the dominant one, the articulations of self-representation from the authors and in the texts of this study show that each utterance made in dialogue with the discourse subtly changes and transforms it. In a way, the Caribbean practices of cultural blending are representative of this process, and thus the impact of Caribbean literary modes on dominant genres has a great potential for transforming generic practices; in the given genres of life narrative posited within this study, that transformation can validate wholly new practices of self representation that are cognizant of language, body and subjectivity.

The texts of this study as a corpus

The dissertation is organized around five texts illustrative of the spectrum of feminine experiences in the Caribbean, including French and English post-colonialities,

as well as both island and Diaspora identities. These literary representations of feminine identities in the Caribbean demonstrate that the Caribbean woman can not be reduced to one exemplar. She may be feminine or feminist, powerful or disenfranchised, educated or illiterate; and this is not to set up the feminine in a system of binaries, but to illustrate the complexity, diversity and multiplicity of the feminine in the Caribbean. The diversity of the Caribbean experience is further represented by the inclusion of texts from both the Anglophone and Francophone traditions recognizing language, education and administrative policy differences which distinguish English and French colonialisms and postcolonial experiences. Not only are experiences of island life important, but so too are the experiences of those who represent the Caribbean Diaspora. Thus the texts in this study include both, to showcase the plurality of identities in the Caribbean context, but also the multiplicity of Diaspora identities in which the markers of Caribbean identity may be identified and discussed.

Likewise, the women from these texts are not universally heterosexual or lesbian, but inhabit the spectrum of feminine identities illustrating their sexual diversity within the matrifocal, but patriarchal societies of the Caribbean. Following this thread, the corpus of the dissertation includes some texts which explicitly reject motherhood, while in others maternity is embraced, though not always as the maintainer of traditional culture. As a whole, the dissertation does not seek to concretize a singular feminine identity, but to identity formulations and representations that produce Caribbean feminine identities in the postcolonial worlds circulating in the Caribbean. Together they provide an insight into the creative possibilities of Caribbean exploration of literary form, of the insistence

on recognizing the oral culture of this region, of the flexibility and multiplicity of identity, and of the imaginative nature of the genres of life narrative.

Jamaica Kincaid's Autobiography of My Mother illustrates a conception of feminine identity through the depiction of a highly independent female narrator / protagonist, Xuela, as an orphan in what is traditionally a matrifocal society within a patriarchal culture. Given the loss of the mother figure, Xuela's development is conditioned, in unequal parts, by her nursemaid, by the schools, by her father's new wife, and by other women and men whom she encounters. While many women appear in the text, none is strong enough to efface the sense of loss which Xuela experiences from her mother's death. The text is a representation of the postcolonial context resultant from English colonialism, especially through the representation of males and their internalization of the heritage of colonial education and administration. Set not in her native Antigua, but in her mother's native Dominica, Kincaid's novel simultaneously shows the significance of the Caribbean island life while being produced from the position of the Caribbean Diaspora, signaling the role of migration and cultural contact in the Caribbean. Kincaid's protagonist Xuela recognizes the commercial and object value of her sexuality in Autobiography, primarily through the gaze of the men. Xuela's sexuality circulates through several positions, objectification, rejection and avid desire. Throughout the novel, however, Kincaid problematizes the expectations of a purely matrifocal society by starting with the death of Xuela's mother and illustrating her decisions not to bear children for men.

Where Kincaid actively denies the traditions of motherhood in Autobiography,

Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory has a much more complicated exploration of Caribbean female identity. Her novel, which circulates between the United States and Haiti, explores a dominantly female landscape wherein every female character seemingly represents a different relationship to her sexuality, broadly defining an all encompassing spectrum. Danticat writes from within the US, and the novel vacillates between Haitian and American space, showing the complex neo-colonial relationships at work in Haiti. While she valorizes Haitian island life and culture in some passages, she illustrates its many problems in others, especially in the internalization of restrictive colonial codes of femininity. From her authorial position, she describes the US in relationship to the Caribbean Diaspora as both a location of exile and also a much needed escape from the more oppressive traditions entrenched in the life of the Haitian countryside. Complicating the multiplicity of the feminine identities found in the text, there is a thematic treatment of female sexuality through mythic images that highlight the violence caused by the idealization of the feminine. Motherhood, in particular, is seen as an important cultural ideal in Haiti, counterpoised by expectations of purity and sexual innocence. As in the Kincaid novel, Danticat's representation of femininity and female relationships is often troubling, rarely providing satisfactory results in either the Diaspora or island space. The theme of circulating identity, through migration from island space to Diaspora and back again is a theme common to both Danticat's and Condé's novel.

Like Danticat, Condé is writing from a French postcolonial perspective, though Condé's native Guadeloupe is a department of France, like Martinique, and is thus not an independent nation, like Haiti. While the plot of I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem is set in early colonial Barbados and New England colonies of the US, Condé's perspective as a

French citizen raised in the Caribbean highlights the issues of race and gender in the colonial "crucible" portrayed in the novel.[5] Not only does the plot carry Tituba, the protagonist, from island to Diaspora, it also circulates her through urban and provincial regions within these general locations. Tituba's sexual self-discovery and her sense of agency in choosing or rejecting heterosexual lovers indicates a strong resistance of imposed norms of feminine sexual passivity. Her relationships with Yao, John Indian, Benjamin, Christopher and Iphigene all indicate the polyvalence of feminine identity both in relationship to a man, and independent of such bonds, be they daughterhood, marriage or motherhood. She rejects the role of being a polygamist concubine to Christopher, the rebel leader of the Maroons, and opts to make a space for herself on the outskirts of society, choosing a life of hermitage as an obeah woman, or root worker, providing curative herbs to the rural population. This novel, which takes a character from an American dramatization of colonial life, provides yet another complimentary perspective on colonial and gendered identities in the Caribbean. The continuation of Tituba's influence in the world after her death is pre-figured by her own frequent contact with ancestors in the spirit world, but her embodiment of a spiritual mother and revolutionary spirit shows the degree to which feminine agency can have influence in Caribbean culture beyond physical and living intervention.

The study concludes with Lorde's Zami, self-titled as a biomythogrpahy, which borrows from the genres of myth and *bildungsroman*. Lorde's appropriation and exoticization of her mother's Caribbean identity provides a stark contrast to the representations of motherhood in comparison to other texts of the corpus. Through an

[5] Arthur Miller's The Crucible (1953) is an important text with which Condé engages in an intertextual dialogue that offers quite different portrayals of Tituba.

exploration of literary and sexual identity, the text presents an array of female identities, including both lesbian and "straight." Lorde's work is a powerful assessment of female sexual power and ways of knowing which explores the decision to abort as well as the desire to have children. Both real women and mythological female figures serve as precursors for possible feminine identities, and the text engages with multiple possible identities, including how issues of gender performance and race complicate the lesbian community. Rather than asserting a universal feminine, the text offers many possible femininities, in which an acceptance of difference becomes the creative force for the construction of identity for one's self, rather than for any one particular group. Linked to her critical essays and other life writings, she specifically calls attention to the value of literacy and the need to communicate difference, as she valorizes a life of action and interaction over one of reflection and distance.

As a whole, these texts share many other common elements, especially in terms of their production in Caribbean versions of language, French, English and the many Creole tongues. The novels carefully represent oral forms of literature within their written form and challenge expectations of standardized language or literary form. Each of these texts borrows from a version of life narrative, but explodes the limits of the genre in the course of expressing the artistic content of the lives explored. In the process of this exploration of form, another common thread appears, uniting these texts: each author consciously chooses a protagonist that reinforces the separation between author and narrator, and expands this creative space of separation by locating the various quests for identity on non-native islands. These various cohesive elements unite the corpus of the dissertation as a spectrum or continuum of Caribbean feminine identities and their representations.

The organization of the texts follows a progression of more and more radical approaches to the genre of autobiographics as well as the focus on orature aesthetic and mythological qualities. While Kincaid's novel challenges the reader to accept an autobiographical writing "of" another person, it remains fairly focused in terms of the stability of the narrative voice, despite the surface links between the narrator and the narrator's mother. The next novel in the series, by Danticat, shows a broader lens of autobiographics as a process that represents the subjectivities of an entirely female family, expanding the link between narrator and mother to include grandmothers and grand daughters, while still including the subjectivity of the sister, and some might argue the *konbit* and the Sexual Phobia Therapy Group. However, the narrative retains a realist mode and relies upon one narrative perspective that happens to include a number of elements of orature. Condé introduces, in the third novel of this study, a much more fluid narratorial perspective, whose inherent intertextual qualities fairly break through the veneer of realism. This narrative is more radical in its playful and ironic approach, and sets up a historical figure as both narrator and avatar of orature; in the perspective of Condé's other fiction, this novel emerges as a radical, but playful, exploration of autobiographics which suggests the links between women of the 17th Century, no matter what their race, and women of the 20th and 21th Centuries who still struggle for spiritual and personal connections. Finally, Lorde's text can be seen as both the most straight-forward example of autobiographics, while also revealing the most radical tendencies of the genre. Lorde's full exploration of orature, including the invention of new avatars on which to model black lesbian identity, highlights her own personal subjectivity while incorporating it with the experience of her lovers and the other powerful women who

shared and shaped her life. As a result, the corpus of the study moves from an example of autobiographics which links daughter and mother to an example that emphasizes the need for a radical reconception of the idea of the individual and suggests a common linkage between women of diverse racial backgrounds and sexual orientations. The corpus moves from a poetics of individuality and sameness in Kincaid and Danticat, to a politics that celebrates difference and underscores universality in Condé and Lorde.

Chapter Two
Autobiography and Life Writing: Genres and Forms of Resistance

A discussion of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's interventions on the genres of life narrative, including autobiography and autobiographical fiction is useful to demonstrate the personal and political value of life narrative in contexts of oppression based on gender, ethnicity and other factors. Through their personal critical writings and their multiple anthologies which explore the political relevance of autobiographical practices for women and colonial subjects, Smith and Watson have significantly shaped the overall reception of life narratives as politically engaged literary practices. For the purposes of this study, their separation of the autobiographical subject into two; as a protagonist in a literary work distinctly different from the author is essential. Not only does it provide a space for identifying a certain level of agency in the practice of self-representation, it also situates autobiographical practice as a performance of the speaking subject, showing the fluid and dialogic aspect of life writing in identity formation.

Also, the works of theorists K. Anthony Appiah, Felicity A. Nussbaum, and Leigh Gilmore demonstrate the significance of life narratives through the production and negotiation of cultural scripts, the importance of subjectivity and subjective truth and the importance of the reader in the production of autobiographical texts which challenge the limits of the genre. Meanwhile, Chinosole, Françoise Lionnet, and bell hooks, argue that an Afrocentric or Diasporic context is important to reading these life narratives, as they collectively highlight the role of self-representation as a tool of resistance to practices of

discrimination and oppression that historically have excluded black and female voices. In concert, these interventions set the stage for the critical analysis of the use of autobiographical practices in the Caribbean and allow us to begin to identify the thematic topoi shared by these texts and analyze their usage as spaces for entry and engagement of discursive practices of identity, in short, as spaces in which to enact resistant practices.

Autobiography as ongoing performance, not finalizing practice

Based on the thesis that the zone of separation between the "narrating I" and the "narrated I" can be a site of resistance for Caribbean writers, the life narratives included in this study retain their value as "historically situated practices of self-representation" in which "lived experiences and personal story-telling" form and comprise autobiographical acts. Smith and Watson include memoirs, diaries and letters as some of the genres that make up their wide ranging study that also includes biography, autobiography and autobiographical fiction. Because they are all "located in specific times and places," they can be collectively read as life narratives that are also "in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory" (Smith and Watson 2001, 14). By opening this space within life narrative, Smith and Watson demonstrate the nature of autobiography as a narrative process, more than as a narrative. One result of this is an increased ability to locate the sources of agency in the narrated lives, sometimes found in the actions of the protagonist, sometimes found in the choices of the author.

The narrative space between the narrating-I and the narrated-I highlights the performative aspect of language; Smith & Watson call attention to Bakhtin's concept of

heteroglossia, the speaking-subject as discussed by Julia Kristeva, and the idea of identity as an always incomplete production within representation proposed by Stuart Hall. For Smith and Watson, these concepts illustrate the ways in which life narratives re-awaken language and enhance the signifying capacity of language. Smith and Watson prescribe five constitutive processes (memory, experience, identity, embodiment, agency) for reading life narratives which can also be applied all genres of life narrative, including fictional ones like the autobiographical novel. Most important amongst these constitutive processes are identity and agency, specifically in the articulation by Smith and Watson that these are processes that are active, not objects that are static. By looking at the processes of identification or differentiation by which autobiographical subjects constitute identify, Smith and Watson define identity as both discursive and intersectional, thus opening up the possibility that identity can be fluid and also defined contextually (Smith and Watson 2001, 32-37). Likewise, their conception of agency as an active process calls attention to the role that the narrating-I plays in relationship to the on-going construction and definition of the narrated-I.

Smith and Watson's critical framework, therefore, is one which recognizes the discursive engagement of the subject of life narrative as well as the ability of the genre to call attention to specific aspects of the context or relevant discourses. However, the questions to be raised by this approach probe precisely into the gap where fiction and fact necessarily intermingle in the production of life narratives. As such, this dissertation skates the thin ice separating fact and fiction in certain genres of life narrative. I thus feel the need to state that I am not seeking to provide more information about the real life details of any specific author. Instead, I seek to explore the process by which writing

becomes a site for resistance and the means by which life narratives showcase the production of meaning through the manipulation of the narrated-I and its contextualization in discourse by the narrating-I. Key to such an exploration is the positioning of the reader as capable of identifying spaces of conflicting subjectivities where outdated social codes are introduced and challenged through parody or direct challenges that raise questions about subject positions and the production of subjectivities within the ideological underpinnings of the texts in question, specifically the status of the Caribbean subject in a postcolonial world.

Cultural Scripts in Discourse and their reversal

Smith and Watson categorize some of these discourses as "cultural scripts" and show how these scripts represent archetypal, but real, identities or subject positions within the discourses that surround any articulation of identity. While these scripts are predetermined by discourse, they should not be seem as absolute or limiting parameters on the expression of identity. Rather, like any utterance in discourse, they are ripe for repetition, interpretation, transgression and reversal. Perhaps Appiah's commentary on the "social scriptorium" provides a more comprehensive working definition that shows the relationship between these scripts and discourse. Appiah identifies an ethics of individuality as a cultural paradigm in which the individual has a responsibility, an ethical task of self definition "to make a life for one's self," a life which is conditioned both by the limitations of available concepts and the autonomy or liberty to make choices within these available concepts. For Appiah, the responsibility of shaping one's self is

conditioned by the fact that the "material that we are responding to in shaping our selves is not within us but outside us, out there in the social world." But the relationship between individualism and identity is mediated between the personal dimension of identity and the relationship to collective identities. Appiah explains that "the collective dimensions of our individual identities… are the products of histories, and our engagement with them invokes capacities that are not under our control." These capacities are pre-existing discourses which are located in Appiah's scriptorium of possible "narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories" (Appiah 20-1).

According to Appiah, these collective identities, for example of group "L," are defined by common structures of "availability of terms in public discourse that are used to pick out the bearers of the identity… the internalization of those labels as part of the individual identities of at least some of those who bear the label… and the existence of patterns of behavior towards L's, such that L's are sometimes treated as L's" (Appiah 66-8). Appiah points out that inclusion in one collective identity does not prohibit inclusion in others; and like Smith and Watson's conception, Appiah's concept of identity is highly intersectional. Appiah cites Sartre's insistence that "we have to create ourselves as a work of art," suggesting the mutual role of agency (which he calls autonomy) and manipulating social perceptions to create a nuanced public identity as an individual. All of these interventions on identity and social scripts illustrate the discursive qualities of identity as a process. Thus the subject of life narrative is both subject to, and manipulator of discourse, and is able to shift between subject positions in discourse by exploiting the signifying gap between the narrating-I and the narrated-I. Within this gap, the speaking-

subject can be seen as dynamically moving through the continuum of discursive collective and individual identities.

Feminine Subjectivity and the Personal Truth of the Autobiographical Subject

Indeed the space from which the cultural scripts of identity are engaged and manipulated through life narrative is the most internal of all identities, the personal subjectivity of the individual. Through our understanding of autobiography as a process of self-representation, we can see how elements from the social scriptorium can be deployed as a strategic self-identification, but can also be deconstructed to allow space for the contradictions which intersectional identity creates. The representation of the speaking subject as a whole larger than the sum of her parts creates a subject that is impossible to contain within one particular cultural script, meaning that the subject is engaging and transgressing both the utterance of the social script and the discourse of the social scriptorium in asserting her voice. No longer contained by the limits of any one script, such a subject opens up a space of subjectivity which has an experiential truth value that may outstrip the truth value of objectivity in a static world.

These ideas recall Nussbaum's argument regarding "The Politics of Subjectivity" in her attempts to "rethink the autobiographical subject to interrupt our notions of a coherent, stable human self who originates and sustains the meaning of his experience" (160-1). Nussbaum's essay first explores the theoretical understanding of this split provided by the field of linguistics. Citing Beneveniste's "distinction between the 'I' who speaks and the 'I' who is spoken," Nussbaum notes that the existence of the split self

is fundamental to all language use. In fact, Nussbaum argues, the idea of a composite or unified self is one that can only emerge in relationship to the 'I' who is spoken, and does so because:

> we feel compelled as writers of ourselves and readers of autobiographies to construct a "self," but that interest in a closed, fixed, rational, and volitional self is fostered within a historically bounded ideology. One consequence of the subject's entering into the culture's language and symbol system is a subjectivity placed in contradiction among dominant ideologies while those ideologies simultaneously work to produce and hold in place a unified subject... If human subjects give heed instead to inconsistencies, the reformulated 'self,' an intersection of competing discourses, may seem less obviously continuous and explicable (162).

But to elaborate the condition of the self as multiple or even intersectional is a counterpoint to the stable and monolithic self of a "historically bounded ideology" and offers up the possibility that this newly constructed and imagined self will hold certain beliefs that are in conflict with the dominant ideology. Thus the conflict between the historically or ideologically produced self as a coherent, univocal whole and the individually articulated self as an intersectional, changing and conscious entity pivots on the validity of a specific kind of subjectivity.

Thus the consciousness of conflict between representations of an individual subjectivity in competition with general cultural subjectivities can be expressed through "language and symbol systems" which cause critical readers to raise flags in the reception of life narratives. So, in autobiographical texts that identify and explore numerous positions or "scripts" within the social sphere of the text, the reader is alerted to the inconsistencies of the speaking subject with respect to those positions. In refusing self-identification as a singular entity, the autobiographical subject asserts her agency over the

scripts and the discourse as a whole; similarly, in the construction of a text in which the subjectivity of a marginal subject engages the dominant discourses, the elevation of subjectivity as a way of knowing is an act of resistance. In so far as that subjectivity is established in counterpoint to a relatively dismissive or overtly oppressive discourse, the authority of that subject view can be seen as a demonstration of the agency of that subject as an individual, and where that individual self-identifies with another group, as a collective.

Gilmore's inquiry into women's autobiographical practices seems specifically focused on these flagged moments of conflict between individual and cultural subjectivities. She addresses this conflict through an exploration of narrative autonomy in the autobiographical process under the rubric "autobiographics," which she defines as a critical approach to life narratives that engages both the discourses of feminist criticism and autobiographical studies. Gilmore is not interested in autobiographies that offer stable subject positions, and she defines her critical practice "as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice." As such, she is specifically "concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation" (Gilmore 1998, 184). Autobiographics as a practice of reading explores the concept of identity through a relational network, and explores the concept of the "I" not as a site of singular or authoritarian declamation, but as "multiply coded in a range of discourse [where] it is the site of multiple solicitations, multiple markings of 'identity,' multiple figurations of agency" and a fundamentally resistant marker in self-representation. This practice of reading can also be transgressive across the lines of genre, and Gilmore claims the analysis of self-representation can "operat[e] within texts

that have not been seen as autobiographies and occur in the margins of hegemonic discourse within cultural texts… and that it is there that the terms of a different reading and retextualization of the subject of autobiography must be located" (184). Gilmore's approach is one that insists on the ability of the critic to locate discursive practices of self-representation within all manner of texts, including fictions, to find the places where practices of self-representation may oppose objective truth in preference of what Minnie Bruce Pratt called 'home truths,' for texts in which women "refuse the violence of gender identity compelled by dominant discourse of self-representation in order to put themselves into their texts through the agency of re-membering.[6] If autobiography provokes fantasies of the real, then autobiographics explores the constrained 'real' for the reworking of identity in the discourses of women's self-representation" (189). By leveraging the externally constructed self from the social scriptorium with the internally constructed truths of subjectivity, the complexity of the autobiographical is made explicit. Choices of female subjectivities add tension to the dynamic; however, the exchange between social scripts and subjectivities remains powerfully indicative of the destabilized, plural, subjective self even without gender markers. In the context of the postcolonial experiences of the texts that make up this study, it is important to look at several other markers of identity that inform our reading of the texts and their protagonists, such as race and ethnicity, as markers of a specific cultural experience in the Caribbean.

[6] The concept of re-membering in this context is seen as an act of agency in which fragmented memories are brought together into a more or less coherent whole. See Alexander, Elizabeth (1994) and King-kok Cheung's treatment of Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior and Joy Kogawa's Obasan (1993).

Autobiographics and The Disapora – producing a cultural gnosis

In the context of the African Diaspora in particular, according to Chinosole, the concept of identity is made more dynamic by the fact that autobiographical practices from the African Diaspora expound a "gnosis" of the group self which counters Eurocentric discourses of individualism with "an elaboration of the self as both individual and collective, singular and multiple, and multifaceted, inclusive of race, sex, gender, class and ethnicity" (Chinosole 2001, 156). Chinosole further organizes the co-presence of both the individual and collective self in Diasporic life narratives, by arguing that the "group self represents both collective (political group) and communal (cultural group) expression." Chinosole's arguments are not grounded in essentialism, but in a "cohesive political representation" that operates against "European-derived concepts of the self and the individual" produced by mercantile capitalism and which historically discounted slaves, referencing texts from authors as diverse as Harriet Jacobs, George Lamming and Audre Lorde (155). Grounded in this historical background, Chinosole recognizes that the articulation of the collective self in texts from the Diaspora is always filtered through an interlocutor, and describes as the "predicament" of these texts, "the intermediary position and role of narrators." These interlocutors of group identity frequently emerge from "privileged vantage point[s] in close association with the oppressor class often mak[ing] these narrators more responsive to and reflexive of dominant discourse more than to the gnosis of the people they represent" (158). To rephrase this insight with the terms of Smith and Watson, the interlocutor of collective identity, like the narrating-I,

holds a position of agency in forming the discourse of both the group and individual identities of the "narrated-I." Despite Chinosole's suggestion that the "position and role of narrators" needs to be critiqued, the "gnosis" of a two-tiered identity remains significant to postcolonial life narratives such as the ones in this dissertation

Expanding the term gnosis form Chinosole's concept of a gnosis of collective identity, and the idea of the Creole gnosis that will be shown in the analysis of Kincaid's Autobiography, causes us to consider the significance of Greek roots of the term. Using the same root word found in diagnosis, prognosis, agnostic and cognition, the Greek term suggests a form of knowledge that is equated with aptitude and experience.[7] Unlike objective or rational knowledge, gnosis implies an internal source of knowledge, such as personal experience, and thus relates to a kind of subjective truth, like Gilmore's "home truth", which comes from a different place or form of knowledge but is not mutually exclusive to the rational. To declare such knowledge, or such a way of knowing as "irrational" is to dismiss and devalue that knowledge, and the experience from where it emerges. But a reliance and acceptance of gnosis as a possible and valuable form of knowledge, and even mastery, especially of the self, reinforces the existence of a system of knowledge that co-exists with the sphere of the rational and can be identified with the preverbal or prelinguistic as a kind of feminine knowledge.[8] The concepts of gnosis and collective identity are essential to the consideration of Caribbean identity, and form the basis for understanding of how the poetics of subjectivity can become the politics of collectivity. One result of the presence of multiple autobiographical texts in Caribbean literature is the collective negotiation of a subjective version of a "home truth" or self-

[7] See Plato's usage in Politikos/Statesman (258e – 267a) where experiential knowledge (gnostikoi') is opposed to theoretical knowledge (episteme).
[8] In the sense of Julia Kristeva, as seen in her discussion of the *chora* and the speaking subject.

affirmed truth value which has equal value to the so called "objective truths" of the dominant discourse. This is particularly true in the inclusion of mythical referents, spiritual values and supernatural beliefs in a collective world view.

Métissage – Cultural Braiding in Caribbean Black Autobiographics

Using postcoloniality as a means to link the Caribbean and her native Mauritius as a source of textual production, Lionnet introduces the concept of *métissage* into the discourse of autobiographical practice and analysis. Édouard Glissant elevated this term for racial mixing to a cultural paradigm of braiding, or cross-cultural blending, as suggested by his use of the term "*créolization*," and Lionnet utilizes the concept as a metaphor of a blending of cultural practices of self-representation within Caribbean and African-American life narratives (Glissant 123-140). Defined as a form of opposition to western ideological forces that collectively marginalize men and women from the Caribbean, *métissage* is both concept and practice, "it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" (Lionnet 1989, 6). In a later study, Lionnet clarifies that while she maps *métissage* from the Caribbean Sea to the Indian Ocean, her intention is not meant to create a hegemonic theory, but rather to focus on "the processes that produce the personal and make it historically and politically unique;" instead, Lionnets states that "I am interested in the forms of *métissage* that exist in different geographical contexts," and remain dynamic models of relationality by which writers "in postcolonial contexts show us precisely how the subject is 'multiply organized' across cultural

boundaries, since this subject speaks several different languages (male and female, colonial and indigenous, global and local, among others)" (Lionnet 1995, 4-5). These multiple languages, effectively discourses, can remain embedded in a text not scrupulously critiqued, and Lionnet sees her goal as a literary critic using this concept, "to read the textual layers while occupying the interval where this otherness speaks, [and to do] justice to strata that might otherwise go unnoticed, remaining masked under superficial and epidermic structures of address" (Lionnet 1989, 23). It is this reliance on *métissage* as an aesthetic concept illustrative of the relationship between the historical context and individual circumstances that "allow[s] a writer to generate polysemic meanings from deceptively simple or seemingly linear narrative techniques" (29). The construction of métissage in the analysis of life narrative as concept and practice, as space for resistance is quite similar to bell hooks' conception of the use of theory in the production of life narrative.

Personal politics – agency and outcome in self-representation

In a short essay in which bell hooks (born Gloria Watkins) discusses the process of writing her own autobiography, hooks admits to having had the preconception that, by writing her own life narrative, she would finally be rid of "Gloria Jean". This "Gloria" somehow represented all the worst features of her conception of her child self. hooks desires nothing more than to "kill that self," and hopes that the expiation and catharsis of that self will, like scriptotherapy in the case of breast cancer and rape survivors, provide some closure to that undesirable aspect of her life. In the process of sorting factual from

fictitious memories, hooks realizes that the writing of life narratives contains a symbolic gesture indicative of the "longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a reunion and a release" (hooks 1998, 431) But the final outcome of narrating (producing) the "narrated I" (Gloria) and reading the final manuscript of her "narrated self" is, for hooks, a profound realization that what was not included in the "narrated I" was also important. hooks ends this article by concluding that "writing the autobiography enabled me to look at my past from a different perspective and to use this knowledge as a means of self-growth and change in a practical way. In the end I did not feel as though I had killed the Gloria of childhood. Instead I had rescued her" (432). While this essay does not discuss the means and strategies employed by hooks in the process of writing her autobiography and re-membering her "self", the constitutive processes of agency can be recognized within any act of memory because "memory involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present" (Smith & Watson 2001, 16).

In a collection of her essays, hooks makes broader commentary on one specific strategy that she sees as useful to writing and theorizing life narratives. In the essay "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", hooks concedes that "often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate… [thus,] Language is a place of struggle." By positioning the "narrated-I" in relationship to the existing cultural scripts, the "narrating-I" can demonstrate the existence of distinctions and the presence of difference. A new cultural script thus has the potential to emerge. However, she argues, as does Foucault, that oppressed people "struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew." She identifies herself with the practices, asserting: "Our words are not without meaning, they

are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle" (hooks 1990, 146). With this tenet in mind, hooks sets out to re-envision the conception of the subaltern in a radical fashion that participates in a counter-hegemonic discourse of identity. Recognizing the significance of marginal space to the disenfranchisement of minority and subaltern writers, hooks posits marginality not as a "site of depravation", but as a "site of radical possibility a space of resistance" (149). Without romanticizing this marginal space into a new dichotomy separating the oppressed as "pure" from the oppressors, hooks proposes a new dialogue to replace the discourse of the Other which "annihilates" and "erases" the subject located in the margins. hooks concludes,

> I make a definite distinction between the marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as the site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility… We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle… We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world (151-2).

Ultimately, hooks encourages the explicit recognition of the "marginal" aspects of one's identity in the process of writing life narratives. From a space of critical recognition, the position of marginality can be adopted and reversed, rather than simply internalized. The reversal of the cultural scripts of marginality represent the first stage in recognizing and enhancing the role of the historical subject in an engaged relationship to discourses which oppress, silence and diminish. Since the foray into dominant cultural scripts is present in many life narratives, the strategy of acknowledging and reversing cultural scripts would not be effective if it did not include a critical return to the origin of these cultural scripts. If the life narrative adopted the position of the dominant in a permanent way, the

speaking subject would likely suffer an irreparable disruption that would result in either a schizophrenic subject or a life narrative underscored by irony, satire or merely confusion. In any of these cases, that narrative would fail the basic premise attributed to all life narratives by Smith and Watson, the production of a meaningful interpretation of a life.

Transgressive Autobiographical practices and post-colonial identity

In a short essay entitled "Autobiographical Manifestos," Sidonie Smith discusses several "outlaw genres" of life narrative which are particularly important to the understanding of subaltern writing. As outlaw genres, "contestatory autobiographal practices" are significant strategies for controlling the means by which one's identity is defined. Citing the idea that women's entry into language, like that of Caliban in The Tempest, is actually a dangerous entry into the language of the oppressor, Smith asserts that a kind of strategic mimesis can be employed to great gain when "an unauthorized speaker positions herself into the locale of the universal subject, (this practice introduces) a menacing suspicion of inexact correlation between representations." This process, which Smith calls "autobiographical mimicry," is a useful strategy for imagining a way out of the "exclusionary configuration of subjectivity" based in discursively identifiable cultural scripts and ideology (Smith 1998, 434).

In the introduction to De/Colonizing the Subject, Smith and Watson assert that "the colonized subject is effectively stripped of agency", one who is always spoken for by the colonial. Smith and Watson locate the colonial subject between the patriarchal "law of the father" as defined by Lacan and the question of subaltern speech raised by

Spivak, showing the degree to which empires overwrite the agency of their subjects and by imposing laws and codes of speech and governance, refuse the right of authorship or self-expression (Smith and Watson 1992, xiv). The colonization of the subject erases not only agency, but also heterogeneity, or the capacity to embody difference, and this issue is especially important for the authors engaged in this study, since their identity as women, as black, as French or English or American, is effectively erased by the monolithic qualities of the implied patriarchy of colonial law. Even after the physical diminishment of colonial presence, the abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of women and the achievement of independent or representational governance, the vestiges of colonial systems remain in place, sometimes referred to as post-colonial or neo-colonial. One of the most powerful effects of colonization is achieved not through governance or language policy per se, but through the internalization of the colonizer's racist ideology within the colonized. As Ngugi in Decolonizing the Mind, Césaire in Discourse on Colonialism, and Albert Memmi in The Colonizer and the Colonized as well as others, have shown, the roots of decolonization are inherent in the colonial project, through the inevitable internalization of the racist "symptoms" of the colonizer by the colonized.

Decolonization is a complicated gambit which must reverse both the silencing and the homogenization of those involved in the formerly colonial relationship. Given the implicit heterogeneity of any population, issues of class and race can often obscure issues of gender and sexuality, sweeping them under the rug of larger, more visible issues of, as said before, governance and language use and the attendant issue of land and property and culture and cultural knowledge. In the linguistic division of the privileged "I" and

the counter-operative "other", the position of the colonized is "collapsed and fashioned into an essentialized "other" [who]…has no access to privatized but privileged individuality" (Smith and Watson 1992, xvii).

For writers who wish to respond to Spivak's question of the independence, autonomy and agency of the subaltern, there are distinct problems with the engagement of language. Firstly, colonial practices almost universally impose language upon their subjects. This can be seen in the existence of language policies that are meant to stamp out the use of Creole or patois in preference of an official governmental language, such as the King's (or Queen's) English or the French of Larousse or the Académie Française. Not only is the language of self-expression potentially weighted down with the ideology of colonialism, but even the avenues through which any given writing subject might assert their autonomy are similarly freighted and suspect. As Smith and Watson point out, this is true with autobiography as a genre as well: "That is why we have chosen to foreground the slash in the word de/colonization. The slash symbolizes the exchange between the processes of colonization and decolonization and the issues inherent in the process of neocolonization" (xix). Many authors use experimental forms to break out of the "neocolonizing metaphors" of autobiographical self as a stable and singular identity. Working within the realm of autobiographic writing, the writing subject can claim the discursive space of self-identification through a received genre, or can work, through transgressive strategies of writing and self-representation, to decolonize the genre from its tendency towards a stable self and towards a tendency of creating and asserting a dynamic, performative self that remains fluid in context and which has the capacity to embrace and advance an implicit heterogeneity and multiplicity.

In fact the assimilation of these codes, stripped of their previous relationships to power, is illustrative of the capacity of life narrative to resist imposed power and gender roles by manipulating and controlling them in an assertion of self-identity. By experimenting with alternate identities and subjectivities, the speaking-subject narrating the "narrated I" explores both the cultural scripts which have been ideologically dominant and repressed cultural scripts and destabilizes them by staging them in dialogic relationships that fill in the silences and erasures attributed to dominant ideologies. The analysis of identity as an intersectional process illustrates the ways in which identity can be complicated by commonalties and differences, discursive practices, and historically specific models. These possibilities become very significant to the process of agency, especially with respect to the representation of a life that contrasts existing cultural scripts from existing discourses or the social scriptorium. Since writing is fundamentally a discursive practice, the author exercises agency in order to inscribe individual experiences within the ideologically produced subjectivities that can be identified within the "language and symbol system" of literary and social discourses. By strategically deploying these various subjectivities, the "narrating I" inscribes the "narrated I" into a specific, historically conditioned subjectivity, one which may not be accessible to the "narrating I." Thus, by consciously recognizing and manipulating the ideologically produced subjectivities, the author can fluidly experiment with various subject positions in the goal of producing meaning.

Fields of Resistance in the Practice of Autobiographics

Several kinds of literary practices are engaged by these authors in order to make their life writings serve as forms of resistance and each of these practices deserves some preliminary discussion before moving into the main argumentation of this study. Given the particular history of colonialism in the Caribbean, some of these fields, such as geography and history may seem obvious issues for authors to address in the production of life narrative as an act of resistance. Others, like language choice, representation of the body, religion and belief systems, and cultural or collective identity require some additional introduction. Along with a position of the body, or even the Caribbean, as a place from which to speak, the very entry into literary signification is itself an act of resistance. The dominant discourse is still poised to disallow the Caribbean as a source of knowledge, so much so that even Caribbean writers with European schooling are still seen as surprising when their protagonists begin to speak, to read, to write. While I won't go into another discussion of gnosis here, I will point to that system of experiential and collective knowledge as a potential threat to the stability of the dominant discourse and its insistence on objective truths.

Orature

I borrow the term orature from N'gugi-wa Thiongo, as described in his lecture on "Oral Power and Europhone Glory" in Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams. Ngugi references his own native Gikuyu tongue, the Ananasesen of the Akan speaking

population of Ghana, and manifestations of the blending of oral literature, African language literature and Europhone language literature. Despite his own self-evident commitment to African-language literature, Ngugi's theoretical perspective suggests that any blending of the above stems from the same root source of all literary culture, orature. In one example, Ngugi references the group African Dawn, saying, "the fusion of art forms characteristic of orature is what gives to black artists an international character as artists and cultural workers defying… the geopolitical connection with centers of inspiration in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean without relinquishing their claims to their legitimate space" in other areas of the world (115). Where a eurocentric perspective may preference written literature over orature in some ways[9], Ngugi argues that orature cannot be replaced by the written, because the oral represented "a system, a different formal narrative, dramatic and poetic system." Citing Semebene Ousmane as a visual griot, Ngugi argues, "A good example is the rise of the cinematic narrative system and that of cyberspace. These are not developments which turn the other systems – oral and written – into relics of the past in the same way that a technical breakthrough or scientific knowledge may make earlier models and knowledge mere historical curiosities" (109). Rather, the oral, in which the elements of dramatic, narrative and poetic already exist, can be seen to emerge in other kinds of texts. Thus, Ngugi concludes, "Orature then is not seen as a branch of literature but as a total aesthetic system, with performance and integration of art forms as two of its defining qualities" (117). When successful, orature integrates a variety of literary strategies, forms and genres into one cohesive act that is at once resistance, action and theory.

[9] Ngugi's view of orature is a global view, and could be contested by a deconstructionist view of language. See the discussion of the terms "presence" and "trace" in "Jacques Derrida." John's Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism. 2nd Ed. 2005.

In his description of orature, Ngugi references Pitika Ntuli, a member of the theatre group African Dawn, who states

> Orature is more than the fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life. It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit. Within sculpture alone, it is stone wood, found objects, metal, shells. In poetry it is not only the images but also their presentation. Orature is the universe of expression and appreciation and a fusion of both within one individual, a group, a community. It is a weapon against the encroaching atomization of life (115).

Thus orature as a total aesthetic includes a blending of history, philosophy and religion, as much as of the written and the spoken word; I take this to include many other forms of cultural expression, including weaving and braiding, mixing and cooking, ritual and performance, and both sexual and platonic congress. The importance of ritual in each of these texts, combined with essential re-readings and re-writings of myth and mythical figures, challenges the limitations of standard definitions of textuality and offers a new way of viewing literature as a means of organizing, reclaiming, and understanding the world.

In his introduction to the concept of orature, Ngugi also mentions Brathwaite, specifically his concept of "submerged languages" which later became more commonly known as nation-language in History of the Voice. Ngugi particularly notes the "consequent black voice" found in early English language literature from African, Caribbean and Afro-American works that was a powerful mirror "that the entire continent and Diaspora could claim as their own…. [g]enuine voices of their own culture and history" (104). This particularly Caribbean-focused description of the effect of multiple languages in contact with one another produces what Brathwaite calls "the blue note" expressed in many literary and creative works from the region. The concept of nation-

language highlights the political immediacy of textual production, and signals the relationship of the individual utterance to the emergence of a larger collective voice with political immediacy. Nation-language calls attention to both the political and creative dilemmas faced in the production of literary texts in an area like the Caribbean, where the co-presence of languages is dictated by a poly-ethnic experience of migrations under the pressures of colonialism.

The use of nation-language not only reinforces the validity of oral aesthetics and the communal expression in an African context, but also the communal poly-ethnic political experience of migration and contact shared by all of the races, languages and ethnicities in contact within the Caribbean. The heavy impact of the cultural contact present in the Caribbean leads Ngugi to observe the importance of Brathwaite's "notion of the Nation Language, that submerged language of the enslaved which, through evolutionary and at times revolutionary subversion of the dominating, asserts itself, often changing the character of what was supposed to be the mainstream" (Ngugi, 1994). For Ngugi and Brathwaite, the connection of a strong African presence to the cultural production from the Diaspora involves a collusion of the written and oral aesthetic, but also a celebration, in the African presence of a distinct and powerful tradition of African oral tradition. For both writers, it becomes possible "to claim the twentieth and twenty-first Centuries properly and creatively… [so that a]cknowledgment of the past becomes the basis of strengthening the present and opening out to the future" (Ngugi, 1994). It is thus in the connection of the Caribbean literary tradition to the concept and aesthetic of orature that writers from the Caribbean can access literature as a means of expression which is more than a response to a received language or a Caliban-like cry. Rather, orature asserts itself

as a space of resistance, replete with the possibility of constructing identity not as a reflection of colonial presence, but as a positive and productive formulation of self within and beyond the traditions of either African or European constraints. By combining the two in a manner that asserts the power of ancestral ties and the autonomy of voice, Caribbean writers, and especially the ones discussed in this dissertation, elevate the politics of identity in the post-colonial theatre from reactionary to productive states.

In the larger scope of this study, the destabilizing function of orature and its ability to borrow and blend from multiple aesthetic systems has other significant applications in terms of the construction of literary texts. In the above paragraphs, I have focused on the use of oral forms in Caribbean literature, but the texts in this study offer other formal ways of differentiating themselves from hegemonic texts of the dominant discourse. Other literary and linguistic practices, in particular the use of songs and poetry in prose texts, change the nature of the literary work through the introduction of non-literary, or non-standard practices. In some cases, this may take the form of typographical experimentation, or in decisions about capitalization and spelling, making each of these choices an act of resistance in the larger resistant practice of asserting identity through autobiographics. Other choices, such as the inclusion of folklore, folk knowledge or myth, are just as important in affirming the validity of the test as resistant to hegemony by calling attention to spaces in the text where standard forms are refused. This is particularly important in the sense of gnosis, where the texts refuse to dismiss forms of knowledge that are typically seen as inferior or irrelevant to the dominant discourses.

Individual and Collective Identity in the Diaspora

Afrocentric and Caribbean conceptions of identity revolve not around the individual as a separate entity as much as the relationship between the individual and the collective or group. Thus the discussion of identity within this study, focused as it is on the Caribbean and underpinned by conceptions of self which are shared throughout the Diaspora, explores the conception and articulation of both individual and collective identity. A brief discussion of Yoruba *oriki* poetry makes clear the relationship of the individual to the collective as both the beginning and the end of individual identity. In "Salutations to the Gut," Soyinka specifically discusses *oriki*, a oral praise-song genre which calls attention to the presences of the ancestors within the performance of any oral text. Not only does *oriki* permeate almost all other genres of Yoruba cultural and textual production like hunters' chants, bridal songs and ballads, it also appears in written texts. *Oriki* poetry is always present in some form within Soyinka's own plays, including the fate of Elesin in his well known Death and the King's Horseman. Often, it serves to bind protagonists to their families, their communities, and even their fate. *Oriki* is always a sacred form of poetry, and its sacred quality is not diminished by being written. In practice, *oriki* poetry serves not only as a praise song, but as a kind of incantation, in which the presence of the ancestors is called up and made manifest in the sacred space of the poetic performance. Just as the poetics of orature call attention to the presence of the community within each utterance, the poetics of *oriki*, or any praise song, call attention to the presence of the ancestors, both human and divine. Soyinka's discussion of *oriki*

poetry illuminates the presence of African ancestors and deities as a collective background for the construction of individual identity (Soyinka 1962).

Oriki, as with other forms of orature, serves to bind the individual to the community, reflective of a dominant theme in African conceptions of the self as always irrevocably linked to the social world. But we can see that the event of death is not necessarily an event of crisis, but rather an event of transition, wherein the individual moves from the living sphere to inhabit the sphere of the dead, symbolically and literally joining the ancestors and becoming one of them, sharing in their ability to be present in the world even after death. Maryse Condé, in La Parole des Femmes, discusses the significant symbolic role that death plays in the Caribbean,

> In most African societies, death is not an ending, but a passage. In its unchanging way, the community accepts reincarnation, and accompanies the dying on their journey up to the threshold where they leave him, without too much grief, in a relative peace. Funerals are gestures of the living that facilitate the metamorphosis of the deceased into an ancestor, from then on invisible, who will not leave the survivors but will participate in their lives. In the Caribbean, such beliefs are still widespread.
>
> Dans la majorité des sociétés africaines, la mort n'est pas un terme, mais un passage. La collectivité, immuable en quelque sorte, étant donné l'admission de la reincarnation, accompagne celui qui voyage jusqu'à un seuil où elle la laisse, sans trop de souffrances, dans une paix relative. Les funérailles sont des gestes de vivants qui facilitent la metamorphose du disparu en Ancêtre qui, dès lors, invisible, ne quittera plus les humains et participera à leur vie. Aux Antilles, il reste de larges pans d'une telle croyance. (71)

The transition of the individual from community member into ancestral presence is not something to be feared, but to be admired and attended. The loss of the individual is, in

fact, a strengthening of the community, an ancestral presence that participates in the lives of the surviving members of the family and larger community, watching over them and even interceding on their behalf.

Desmangles offers a more detailed description of the Haitian concept of the self, wherein death is demonstrably a transition of parts of the soul into the world of the ancestors. Desmangles notes that the Haitian concept of the human includes the body, made of "clay and water" within which is

> a soul, consisting of many parts [including] the *se*… the immortal personal spirit, the divine spirit, the offshoot particle of *Mawu Lisa* (the Godhead), in humankind. *Se* is the lifeforce which animates the body. When a person dies, Mawu takes his se and transfers it to the body of a newborn infant fashioned by each clan's ancestor. Each process, which takes three years, is an endless movement to be compared to the ebb and flow of the ocean which never ceases. Hence in Dahomey the self is archetypal; it symbolizes a long unbroken chain of humanity which extends in retrogression to cosmogony. (2001, 10)

Here the relationship of the self and the community is not only preserved by transferring the individual spirit to the source of the divine creation, but is also brought back into the living form in the physical presence of the descendants. Thus, the "individual lives in a community where he manifests certain personality traits, yet also partakes of the conscious experience of life as a member of the clan… insofar as they all share in the same divine source, the same destiny and trace their heritage to the same mythological ancestors" (10). In this worldview, the individual is clearly bound to the community through both the past and the future.

Proper and Transgressive Names: Given or Taken

Another example of a discursive field of identity which offers some possibility of interrogation and dispute, as a form of resistance, is the site of the proper name. From the imposition of Western formulas of naming with the given, middle and family names, to the selection and meaning of names themselves, the proper name has been a common topic in African-American history, and that has certainly been incorporated into Caribbean discourse as well. In the 1960's and 1970's many members of the Black Arts movement in the United States, reflecting an awareness of the calls by militant activists to reject names that reflected the legacy of slavery in the United States, chose to write under different names or to adopt new names for their personal lives and/or careers. From Amiri Baraka to Malcom X, we can see the highly charged political and activist intentions behind such a choice. This has been reflected in the Caribbean as well, in particular in Aimé Césaire's version of Shakespeare's Tempest, in which Césaire's Caliban takes on the name "X" as an act of resistance against Prospero's attempt to imposed the name of Caliban with its complicated linkage to "Carib" and "cannibal." The politicization of the name is just one more example of a symbol of identity that can be taken from being a kind of imposed identity and transformed into a symbol of self-identification.

In his discussion of the significance of the name in ethnic American literature, William Boelhower cites Frank Lloyd Wright's use of "Irish, Chinese, Italian, Greek, and Spanish names [that are] exploded like balloons into myriad shining letters" as an example of what he sees as the plight of desemioticization of names as meaningful

signifiers in the cityscape of Chicago. Unlike the other names, Wright's search for his "ethnic self," Boelhower argues, results in the implosion of his name "in his moment of crisis approaches [the name] as an intimate sign of his virtual, now extrasemiotic self. Even more to the point, his intention is to reintroduce a cultural logic of relatives" (Boelhower, 26). By linking his name to the genealogical or ethnic parameters of his "ethnic self," Wright "redefine[s] the status quo semantics of political representation… in order to regain [his] lost sovereignty – in order to win [his] political rights, the condition of economic well-being, and a sense of cultural belonging" (Boelhower, 27). Thus proper names are not only signifiers of familiarity, but also the means by which selfhood becomes a contested category in ethnic American literature. The limits of a proper name, especially in the context of urban America are coterminous with the limits of a particular individual identity. The use of multiple names and pseudonyms in ethnic literature works to extend the self from the specificity of individual identity to a larger collective, even if fictive, identity.

In the texts surveyed by this study, there is a great deal of name changing and renaming, as is even highlighted in the title Zami: A New Spelling of My Name. The significance of this field is made more dramatic by the degree to which the authors themselves tend to use pseudonyms and other adopted names in representing both themselves and their protagonists. Like bell hooks, who discusses her relationship to the "Gloria" of her childhood, these authors seem to relate the given name with a received subject position, and often seem to choose names with symbolic or mythic significance in their efforts at self-representation. But the decision to engage the theme of names can occur in several different ways, as seen in Danticat's choice to focus on the names of

family members as a symbol of continuing collective identity, or Kincaid's use of names with subtle alterations to symbolize the mixed aesthetics of autobiographical authority as well as creative freedom. For Audre Lorde, the choice of names plays along another dimension of self-actualization and agency, but in each of these cases, the name becomes an important signifier that can be engaged in both the individual level and also the systemic level.

Geography and the body – embodying the margin

One final discursive field in the construction of identity as a counter-hegemonic practice can be found in the characterization of the protagonists and the choice of setting. Through the embodiment of the black female from the Caribbean, the authors of the texts in this study are asserting a marginal position for the protagonist and establishing the female body as an important element in textual resistance. This position is a reversal of multiple negations, since the black body, and the black female body in particular, has traditionally been ignored or overcoded through the stereotypes of the Mammy and the Jezebel (Patricia Hill-Collins, 69-96). Though these texts are in some ways autobiographical, they are also works of fiction, so there is the possibility of choosing to represent male figures just as readily as female figures; the choice to represent the female protagonist and her body is one which embraces a rejected body and reclaims it as a legitimate location of identity. Within these texts, the female body is represented in many contexts: as both the victim of rape and its product, the site of abuse as well as illness; but it also can be the source of female sexual pleasure and motherhood. By giving voice to

these bodies, the authors establish them as a legitimate source of counter-hegemonic discourse.

Similarly, the privileging of the Caribbean islands as a whole and even the particular islands of the Caribbean can be seen as a similar valorization of otherwise inconsequential geographic territories. Set in locales that are either not on a map at all, or which are known more for their poverty and destitution, the very identity of these islands as sources of knowledge or literature is subsumed by dominant discourses from Europe, and even other post-colonial locations. Still and all, these stories remind us that the characteristics assigned to specific islands, or to the Caribbean as a whole, or even all post-colonial locations, are finally of no greater exactitude than the depictions of the black body. Again, the fictional qualities of these texts mean that the author can select either their native island, or an adopted island, or an imagined island as the setting for their project. This is just as true for texts which propose the Caribbean as home as for texts which involve circulation and migration, or which are set entirely in the Caribbean Diaspora (the US). Furthermore, for writers who either live in the Diaspora or have spent significant time exploring the original territories of the Diaspora (Africa and/or the Caribbean), the choice of geographical representation is every bit as loaded as the choice of representing subjectivities or identities of black, female, or other marginal status.

Chapter Three

Jamaica Kincaid's Autobiography of My Mother:

Resisting Her Reader's Expectations by Relying on Them

The Autobiography of My Mother works as a component of Jamaica Kincaid's ongoing project of serial fictional autobiography that complicates the reception of her early works based on mother-daughter relationships in the Caribbean. It dramatically challenges the expectations of the title by disrupting the limitations typically associated with the genre of autobiography and does so through a narrator protagonist who constructs her identity through forays into life writing, orature and collective identity. Like the other works of this study, the text works to de/colonize the genre of autobiography, resulting in a fictional work of literature that is itself an act of resistance to colonial discourses about the status of black women authors from the Caribbean in general, and also upsets the popular American discourse on what Jamaica Kincaid's literary voice sound like and what is acceptable for her to discuss. Autobiography achieves this feat through the destabilization of grammatical form in Kincaid's literary voice as well as the depiction of the black female body, ultimately upsetting expectations of the accepted discourse of Caribbean women. This study includes a brief synopsis and discussion of Autobiography in the context of her other writings, a review of critical literature, and an analysis of the Kincaid's use of language and collective gnosis in the autobiographical practices used to construct identity.

The narrator and protagonist of Autobiography of My Mother is Xuela Claudette Richardson. Xuela is the daughter of Alfred Richardson, a government official of half Scottish and half African descent from the island of Dominica, and his wife, an orphaned woman of Carib descent, also named Xuela, who was raised by French nuns after being left at a monastery as an infant. Xuela's birth resulted in the death of her birth mother, and Alfred, incapable of caring for the infant, hands Xuela over to the care of Ma Eunice, his laundress. Raised alongside Eunice's patois-speaking family, Xuela calls attention to herself by speaking her first words in English, resulting in her being sent to to learn to read and write. After the father remarries, he has Xuela return to his household in Mahaut, but any illusion of family unity is belied by the mortal competition between Xuela and the stepmother, who jealously separates Xuela from her own children, and even tries to kill her with an obeah charm.[10] As Alfred realizes the irreconcilable conflict between his daughter and his wife, he sends Xuela to live with a business partner, Jacques LaBatte, and his wife Lise, in Roseau. After establishing a friendship with Lise and entering into sexual relations with Jacques, Xuela becomes pregnant, leaves and seeks an abortion. Xuela circumnavigates the island, symbolically laying claim to her ancestral inheritance on her Carib mother's side and learns to protect and provide for herself. She returns to her father's house only when she learns of her half-brother's illness, but rather than signifying a return to the family, the return results in Xuela helping her young half-sister obtain an abortion. Xuela makes her own way living with minimal contact with her father and his family. She takes on many lovers, including a married stevedore named Roland, yet remains fiercely independent, unwilling to love and

[10] Obeah is used in many English speaking islands in the Caribbean to designate a faith in herbal and spiritual connections and remedies. More can be found in Creole Religions of the Caribbean (2003).

unwilling to be loved or possessed by anyone. Eventually, she moves in with her half-sister's doctor, Phillip Bailey and his wife Moira, and gradually becomes Phillip's lover while enabling Moira's descent into a drug-dependent stupor that claims her life. Xuela and Phillip move from the coastal city to the interior mountains where they lead a fairly solitary life. At the end of the novel, Xuela tries to make peace with the early loss of her mother and realizes that her story is both engendered by her mother's and encompasses both of their lives.

Autobiography, along with the other texts of Kincaid's corpus, works to de/colonize the genre of autobiography by shifting the expectations of the colonial subject. Kincaid's colonial subject confronts the ideological constructs of identity in the Caribbean through the use of orature and a reliance on a sense of collective identity that resists naming, classification and categorization. Both in the text of Autobiography and in her larger corpus, Kincaid's work directly challenges expectation which emerge from the colonial context, as well as from the body of critical works that seeks to classify all of Kincaid's writing as one experience. Through the blending of oral tradition into her prose and her challenging representations of both English and patois language use, Kincaid manipulates language and the ideological structures behind it in order to destabilize opinions about the nature of her work and the status of her English language writing in the Caribbean context. Likewise, through her expansive examination of the role of history, nation and race, as well as gender in the formation of Caribbean identity, Kincaid plays with the idea of a collective identity that resists easy categorization.

Kincaid's Serial Autobiographics

Even prior to the release of this novel, Kincaid's work was described by Moira Ferguson and Diane Simmons as a serial autobiography, in which the novels and the creative essays were seen as mutually dependent component parts. Thus, Autobiography has also been read as part of this serial autobiography despite the dislocation of the narrator's perspective from that of a young Antiguan female to that of a female Dominican narrator who relates her life from childhood to her seventies. Following a significant hiatus from publishing novels, Autobiography (1996) concerns itself not with the figuration of Kincaid's life (as in Annie John (1985), Lucy (1990) and later My Brother (1997)) but with the creation of a mythologized mother figure representative of the complex racial and cultural symbiosis at work in the Caribbean. The process continues through to the novel Mr. Potter (2004) in which Kincaid's father's seems to be the central focus while the legacy of his departure and his impact on his children is laid bare. Though her titles may strategically shine the light on other members of her family, they serve as a discussion of the larger composite family relations and the ideological battles faced by the Caribbean population in former English colonies. However, throughout this time, Kincaid has continuously supplemented her novels and fiction with short stories and essays published in Ingenue, Ms., The Village Voice, and eventually The New Yorker where she became a staff writer.

Born and raised in Antigua, Kincaid moved to the US where she began to publish a number of short stories despite her parents' disapproval of her career choice.[11] In 1973, she adopted the pen name Jamaica Kincaid to appease her family's disapproval of having a writer in the family.[12] Kincaid attracted the attention of William Shawn by writing short stories that evoked the presence of the islands through their rhythmic prose and her characterization of Caribbean cultural traditions, and commentary on her life in New York City. Her first publication at The New Yorker was "Girl" in 1978, which became the centerpiece for her At the Bottom of the River (1983), and in which she seems to first attain the strident powerful voice which marks her longer prose pieces which engage the impact of colonialism, the experiences of black Caribbean women and the relationships between mothers and daughters. However, when she wrote the highly political essay "At the Bottom of the River", The New Yorker refused to publish it, and she was forced to find another venue for publication. The essay was published in a book form which was highly criticized by the Antiguan public. Her political writings, At the Bottom of the River and A Small Place (1988) are primarily collections of essays from her tenure at The New Yorker, and form their own corpus, along with the less political Talk Stories (2002) which contains small vignettes from her "Talk of the Town" column at The New Yorker. But the political nature of all of her writings is of primary importance to this study, and even her books of gardening, My Garden (2001), the collection of stories My Mother's Garden (2005) and A Walk in the Himalayas (2007) all politicize the convention of gardening and the colonial basis for plant nomenclature.

[11] The official name of the country is Antigua and Barbuda, as they have shared joint administration both under English rule (since 1871) and independence (1967). For the purposes of this study the name Antigua will refer to that nation. Kincaid's family and Kincaid's life experience are primarily centered in Antigua.
[12] Ferguson, Moira. Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body. 1994.

Jamaica Kincaid's creative writings indicate strong autobiographical content, a fact that has lead to numerous attempts to qualify the truthfulness of her texts in relationship to her lived experiences. For example, the text of Annie John has become the center of much critical examination, and at least one study has focused on the truth-value of the text to such a degree that a casebook of background materials has been compiled with the aim of legitimating the novel as primarily historical.[13] Despite the changing names, most of her protagonists are indeed black Caribbean women whose experiences often mirror those of the author herself. While individual incidents may or may not be directly transposed from Kincaid's life experiences, she does indicate in interviews that her own life followed trajectories similar to those of her early protagonists. For instance, in Lucy, the narrator is described as an "au pair" to a family of blond-haired, blue-eyed children who refuses all contact with her mother, and who finds her greatest pleasures from books. Certain details in this text provide a sense of the novel's own proximity to truth: Kincaid did indeed hold a position as an "au pair" and struggled with the vacillation between friendship and servitude to her employer (Garner, 2002).

Autobiography is exemplary of Kincaid's strategy of developing her female protagonists "in the shadow of" other figures in her life. As a symbol of the ironic wit and style of the novel, this text does not actually describe or significantly discuss the narrator's mother; she remains a shadowy figure only partially glimpsed in Xuela's dreams. Ultimately, Kincaid makes the choice to label her novel autobiography in order to capitalize upon the public's expectation that she will continue to incorporate materials from her own life into the text while simultaneously drawing attention away from herself

[13] Mistron, Deborah E. Understanding Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John.* 1999.

and her role in the production of the novel. Autobiography can thus be read as a "conundrum of the daughter writing the story of her childless mother, for had the mother not borne children, then there would have been no Elaine Potter Richardson, no Jamaica Kincaid, and no retaliatory narratives" (MacDonald-Smythe, 177). Kincaid embarks upon a similar strategy in her next book, My Brother, nominally about the AIDS death of her brother, another real event which occurred in her family life. Instead of a book with a male protagonist, the narrator / protagonist is the sister, whose memories of her brother serve to reveal the complex relationships in her family and how they have been affected by ideological concepts that deny homosexuality and AIDS space in public discourse especially within the Caribbean. Working through memories of her brother's life, the reader experiences a kind of double timeline; the key events of the brother's life serve as sites for reflection on the narrator's own life experiences. Thus the content of the book is overwhelmingly the narrator's life narrative, not the brother's.

This strategy is also at work in Autobiography. Although there is only a small emphasis upon the title figure, who dies in the process of birthing her daughter, every aspect of Xuela's life, and thus the narration of the novel, is affected by her absence. Her mother figures heavily into the text in two ways: the extreme bitterness which the daughter blames upon her mother and through the name, Xuela, which is the name of both the mother and the daughter. In Autobiography, the struggle between mother and daughter takes on a primary significance, and the narration ultimately shows the ways in which the protagonist, Xuela, is conditioned by the absence of her mother, another choice which establishes a qualitative difference between the protagonist of this text and her earlier works. By positing the alternative identities and misleading characters and titles,

Kincaid subverts the traditions of life narrative in order to disallow easy categorization of her life narratives into specific genres. Kincaid's writings are as much about the phenomenological and ideological conditions surrounding her narrated subjects as they are about the experience of those conditions by her subject. Her works engage a wide variety of discourses in order to elaborate upon the conditions of Caribbean subjectivity in order to establish them as a space of resistance through appropriation of voice and a re-working of subject positions, cultural scripts and narrative expectations.

Figuring In and Figuring Out the Mother Figure

Several early studies on Kincaid were released before the publication of Autobiography, My Brother and Mr. Potter, and thus focus on the correlation between the mother/daughter relationship and the colonizer/colonized relationship through readings of Annie John and Lucy, or the essays of At the Bottom of a River, perhaps best expressed in Giovanni Covi's essay from Out of the Kumbla. Of these early critiques, Diane Simmons' brief work on the use of language, ritual and magic provides some groundwork for this study of Autobiography. Ferguson's study also focuses on Kincaid's earlier texts, but her comments on the construction of Caribbean female subjectivities and her analysis of the ideological constructs of postcolonial literature are quite useful in the analysis of the construction of identity in Autobiography as an act of resistance. Lizabeth Parsivini-Gebert's study of Kincaid, published two years after Autobiography, explores the use of autobiographical form and material in Kincaid's textual construction, and shows how the figure of Xuela is pre-figured in both Annie John and Lucy. Antonia MacDonald-Smythe

situates Autobiography in the continuum of Kincaid's novels, showing that the link between the colonial and maternal relationships inhabits a subconscious level even in the absence of a real relationship.

In Annie John, the narrator and her mother share the same name, creating a kind of intrinsic bond between the two of them, especially during her youth and pre-adolescent period. The development of the narrator's consciousness can be figured in three parts, a close-knit mother daughter relationship, a troublesome adolescence wherein the daughter chooses her own friends and establishes her own engagement with history, and a kind of rebirth figured by the daughter's relationship to the grandmother (the past) and her intention to leave the island (the future). The link between the mother figure and the daughter is conditioned by the status of the island nation of Antigua and its emerging independence from England. The troubled relationship between a mother who attempts to control the fledging child serves as a metaphor for the colonial control and domination of the island. The figure of the controlling mother for whom the daughter feels both the emotional poles of love and hate becomes the dominant theme of Kincaid's essays and fiction until Autobiography. This dominating mother appears throughout A Small Place, is the repellent force driving the narrator of Lucy away from her home, and whose social rigidity magnifies the tragedy of My Brother. But in Autobiography, the mother figure is at once taken as a central character and as an absent character.

Ferguson's asserts that Annie John is structured on the basis of a girl's self development and rupture with the world of her mothers; she later continues this strain through the critique of Lucy as happening in a "new space" which allows for the more complete development of the individual, as well as the theme of independence. What

then can be said about the text Autobiography, since it represents a separate and new space, yet is set in an earlier time? Both in terms of the issue of colonialism, as well as the issue of female self-development, the text represents a kind of throwback that causes a reader of Kincaid's work to abandon certain expectation that might be carried over from prior texts to the reading of Autobiography. This is especially the case when we look at the way that Annie John is set up to show the role of the grandmother as an important agent in the development of young Annie. The positioning of Annie in relationship to the grandmother has been characterized as a marker of the rebirth of Annie after her rupture from her childhood world with her mother (Caton, 139).

As in Annie John, the mother and daughter share the same first name, but there is no period of bonding to establish a relationship of imitation or equality between the two. Despite the presence of several "other-mother" figures, Xuela doesn't ever experience the same kind of deep emotional bond which Annie did. Thus where Annie may be perceived as obsessed with her relationship to her mother, Xuela may be seen as somewhat obsessed with her mother's absence:

> I lay down to sleep and to dream of my mother- for I knew I would do that, I knew I would make myself do that, I needed to do that. She came down the ladder again and again, over and over, just her heels and the hem of her white dress visible; down, down, over and over. I watched her all night in my dream… To this day she will appear in my dreams from time to time but never again to sing or utter a sound of any kind – only as before, coming down a ladder, her heels visible and the white hem of her garment above them. 31-32

The obsession with this maternal trace is exacerbated by the highly conflicted relationships that Xuela has with both her wet nurse and with her father's wife. Both of these relationships were loveless at best, and downright malicious in the case of her

father's wife. In her descriptions of Eunice, the wet nurse, Xuela states: "I never grew to love this woman my father left me with, this woman who was not unkind to me but who could not be kind because she did not know how – and perhaps I could not love her because I, too, did not know how" (6). The more malicious characterization of her father's wife who deeply resented Xuela as a reminder that Alfred once loved another woman is turned in similar language. "She did not like me. She did not love me. I could see it in her face," Xuela explains, "My spirit rose to meet this challenge. No love: I could live in a place like this. I knew this atmosphere all too well. Love would have defeated me. Love would always defeat me" (29). It is then, the lack of the love, like the lack of a mother, which defines Xuela's nature, giving her cause to assert herself into the familiar space of absence, and without regard to convention. Xuela's agency, self-possession and determination to survive are evident either because of, or in spite of, the lack of a loving maternal relationship.

While the texts of Lucy and My Brother never explore the mother daughter trope from the other side, Autobiography contains a fair amount of discussion of the act of being a mother and the issues which related to that choice**.** Xuela's first pregnancy comes during her stay at the LaBatte household, and once she is diagnosed as being "with child" by Lise, Xuela states: "Her words, though, struck a terror in me. At first I did not believe her, and then I believed her completely and instantly felt that if there was a child in me I could expel it through the sheer force of my will" (81). Xuela's greatest fear, it seems, is that she will remain trapped by having a child, though it is unclear in the text whether her fear is of the new relationship with the LaBatte's or her own maternity. In the light of Covi's conflation of the colonial relationship with the maternal one, I read

Xuela's anxiety as a fear of being trapped in the same relationship described in works like Annie John and Lucy. Xuela fears for her future, commenting: "I believed I would die, and perhaps because I no longer had a future I began to want one very much. But what such a thing could be for me I did not know, for I was standing in a black hole, this other black hole was one I did not know; I chose the one I did not know" (82). Here Xuela equates her surrogate maternity with a kind of status quo, and exhibits agency in her choice to take a less traveled road by visiting Sange-Sange, the obeah (root-worker) woman who guides her through the excruciatingly painful process of terminating the pregnancy. Curiously, Xuela arises from her painful exile and emerges as "a new person then, I knew of things that you can only know if you have been through what I had just been through. I had carried my life in my own hands" (83). This symbolic rebirth is transformative in its way, and is figured as a kind of knowledge deeply seated in the body, as shall be discussed later in this study.

Since Covi equates the maternal relationship with the colonial, Xuela's refusal of the maternal is, by extension, a refusal of the colonial. Not only does she not want to be part of the adoptive and appropriative network of the LaBatte "family"; she does not want her daughter to be part of that network of relations, either. In later episodes in Autobiography, Xuela also helps her half-sister abort an unwanted child, using the knowledge gained from her own experience to help another person. "I had become such an expert at being ruler of my own life in this one limited regard that I could extend such power to any other woman who asked me for it," Xuela gloats, despite the fact that she was never thanked for her help (115). Here too, a transformation occurs between the two women; for Xuela notes that she "became my sister when… she found herself with child

and I helped her to rid herself of this condition" (114). But this transformation is effected by Xuela herself, and is not reciprocated; her sister never acknowledges her help or her sisterhood. Ultimately, Xuela's power is a nightmarish power, which causes her to be feared and even exiled from her community. Xuela herself dreads this power, and fantasizes about an unending proliferation of children:

> I had never had a mother, I had just recently refused to become one, and I knew then this refusal would be complete. I would never become a mother, but that would not be the same as not bearing children. I would bear them in abundance; they would emerge from my head, from my armpits, from between my legs; I would bear children, they would hang from me like fruit from a vine, but I would destroy them with the carelessness of a god. (97)

Separating the physical act of bearing children from the emotional work of mothering, Xuela's position is powerful, yet tenuous. In her nightmare fantasies of having children, she eats them, covers them with sores, freezes them in fetal position, throws them off high buildings and boxes and buries them. It is only in their death that Xuela chooses to decorate them with "polished wooden box[es]" and even then, only to be forgotten. In counterpoint to the autobiographical legacy of the Richardson-Potter lineage found in all Kincaid's previous books, Xuela's discovery of the occult power to prevent her own motherhood frees her from the emotional bonds of motherhood, and from the colonial aspect of that relationship which seeks to name, identify and categorize the colonized; in short to create in her own image. "It is in this way that I did not become a mother; it is in this way that I bore my children," Xuela concludes, indicating that she will perpetuate the absent relationship between herself and her mother by bearing children only in the same degree that her mother bore her (98). Perhaps they shall have the same name, but they shall have the power of self-knowledge and self-determination.

Gnosis, Obeah and Experiential Knowledge as Counter-hegemonics

Thinking back to Chinosole's study on autobiographics in the Diaspora, the concept of collective identity and individual identity is presented as a gnosis, in which the representative qualities of any autobiographic process can be seen to have symbolic value for the collective. In Kincaid's deliberate structuring of the subjectivities of not only her self and her personal identity, but a collective identity of family members and social structures, she creates an autobiographic picture that represents the Caribbean as a whole, precisely through the exploration of the individual streams of consciousness explored by any of her characters. In the case of Xuela in particular, this representative quality is prevalent despite the narrator's insistence that she "is not a people or a nation" (168). In particular, Xuela's refusal to have children or extend her family line seems as a denial of her value as a representative of a larger collective identity, but the staging of her identity through the text places this refusal in the context of her literary production.

In an early section of the novel, Xuela declares her lack of interest in school, and notes that the "education I was receiving had never offered the satisfaction I was told it would; it only filled me with questions that were not answered, it only filled me with pain." The net worth of Xuela's education is to teach her how to say her own name, a right which she sees as already trapping her in a larger system of discourse, of ideology and judgement, "[f]or the name of any one person is at once her history recapitulated and abbreviated, and on declaring it, that person holds herself high or low, and the person hearing it hold the declarer high or low" (78-9). Xuela's choice to declare her name and

her history is conditioned by her realization that her story is her mother's story, and by her refusal of the love of other people in preference of the love she has and chooses for herself, for she figures herself as her own mother; thus despite her entry into the discourse of names and history, Xuela sees her childlessness as a protection from the judgment of others. Xuela positions herself as a God that is self-creating, that produces and destroys, and for whom "history was not only the past: it was the past and it was also the present" (138-9). Free of the constraints of nation or people, living in a past that is also the present, where she is neither victor or vanquished, Xuela embodies a gnosis of her lived experience. Rejecting the constraints of history as an imposed discourse, Xuela champions self-knowledge and self-sufficiency through the means of obeah.

Rhonda Cobham discusses a kind of "Creole Gnosis" which, like the Creole language, is devalued by the colonial system. Cobham shows that Kincaid, "treats the persistence of African derived systems of belief and knowledge as an integral part of Caribbean consciousness" and that "their repression or symbolic appropriation" is important in the colonial context, but that "their usefulness [lies] in the present, not their sanctity in the past or other cultural contexts" (Cobham 880). Cobham worries that an ongoing postcolonial debate on the relationship between self and Other dominates and represses the issues of spiritual engagement that are part of Creole Gnosis, and shows that the construction of self, in the Caribbean, is closely linked to an acceptance of the possibility of the irrational and unexplainable. Cobham's one specific example, of the female figure in the river who seems to lure one of the schoolchildren to his death ties Kincaid's text to the Mammywata, or Water mother whom Awolalu Omosade links to Osun, an important Igbo deity from Nigeria who also plays a major role in African based

religions in the New World (Omosade, 46-8). It is the refusal of this story, by the teachers and parents first, then by Xuela's classmates which illustrates the importance of the issue of this gnosis. Ultimately it is only Xuela who still believes her eyes, and maintains her faith in the reality of this experience despite the demands of colonial education to internalize the need for objective, logical, and European evidence.

Like Cobham's Mammywata, the question of obeah's utility and reality is a key element to the text of Autobiography because of its significance as a counter-hegemonic form of knowledge. Obeah is a spiritual belief system rooted in African spirituality which, like *vaudou* and *santeria*, serves both religious and symbolic purposes. According to Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, obeah should not be conceived of as a religion as much as "a system of beliefs rooted in Creole notions of spirituality, which acknowledges the existence and power of the supernatural world and incorporates into its practices witchcraft, sorcery, magic, spells and healing" (131). For the most part, obeah is used to describe African-derived practices at work in the English speaking Caribbean and is closely tied to root working and herbal healing. Despite Alejo Carpentier's assertion that magical realism, or *lo real maravilloso*, is the primary mode of literary practice in the New World, the characterization of Caribbean, or of other fiction, as magical realism can be seen as a dismissive trope (Carpentier 1957, 8). For instance, Toni Morrison has repeatedly rejected claims by critics that her writing falls under this rubric because she believes that her literature is an expression of reality, and that the attachment of the adjective magical is dismissive and is essentially a negation of the literary work from the perspective of the dominant discourse (Gilroy 1993, 181).[14] It

[14] Despite her statements to the contrary, a significant amount of critical attention still considers Morrison's writing through the lens of magical realism, especially Beloved.

isn't so much that the magical realism doesn't exist, but that Caribbean realism includes a kind of gnosis that is essential to Caribbean life and to the collective identity; yet this gnosis is, in fact, a counter-hegemonic source of knowledge and strength. Kincaid represents obeah as an important force in all of her works, from Annie John to Autobiography as well as in other texts. This is nothing short of an assertion of the counter-hegemonic properties of that gnosis as a symbol of a cultural identity which survives despite the negation of dominant discourse.

Incantation as self-representation: Kincaid's orature

The intermittent appearance of Creole and patios in Kincaid's multi-voiced writing provides grounds for an analysis of Caribbean and Creole language usage and an exploration of the political significance of these languages in Caribbean fiction. Most of the criticism in this vein situates Autobiography within the context of Kincaid's other novels and essays in order to more fully develop patterns of language use which might not be evident from the experience of reading just one novel. Gisele Lisa Anatol, for instance, follows Kincaid's problematization of the "mother tongue" in Autobiography, but also references Annie John and A Small Place in order to follow the complex treatment of the Creole language in Kincaid's work as a symbol of resistance to the colonial patriarchy which valorizes only English amongst the several languages in circulation throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. Terri Smith Ruckel argues that Kincaid's Autobiography "redoes/undoes such binaries as self/Other, belonging/unbelonging and home/exile" and that by "decenter[ing] postcolonial subjects"

and “deconstruct[ing] the idea of homeland” Kincaid produces a fluid identity which is “not an essence, but a positioning within discourse” that eludes polarity in an almost endless series of transformations and appropriations (Ruckel 8, 22, 4). Veronica Marie Gregg points out Kincaid’s use of “reverse discourse, inversion, and parody” in appropriating the “master’s language” to create “a speaking subject who returns the [objectifying] gaze” (Gregg 925-6). Due to the “death and voicelessness” of the mother, Xuela’s voice is amplified, and thus challenges the phallocentric and imperialist bases of language and knowledge, so that “the described, the labeled, the fixed, the spoken for, now speaks” (933). In each of these cases the choice of voice and the positioning of the speaker as an outsider to the dominant discourses of language, whether through choice of language, upsetting polarities or reversing the location of the voice, establishes Kincaid’s literary endeavors as resistant practices which seek to establish possibilities of expression.

Kincaid’s Voice

While Kincaid’s work only occasionally references proverbs or elements of African storytelling, her narration is rich with an embedded spoken quality. Throughout her novels, Kincaid’s voice has a strident power, and each of her protagonists narrates with a pronounced cadence and rhythm. Kincaid uses, both in her fiction and essays, a pronounced reliance on lists and repetition that recalls a drum beat or dance steps that is often described as “incantatory, magical, or religious.” For Simmons, the “incantatory lists” are part of Kincaid’s literary conjuring, and like a spell, have a transformational

power, in which "one reality constantly slides into another under cover of the ordinary rhythms of life" (Simmons 45). In Kincaid's early works it is the mother's voice which is recorded and transmitted in the lists of domestic tasks and means of controlling both domestic and personal space: "the mother in Kincaid's works uses her repetitious chants to control others, the daughter uses them to control herself, appearing to steady herself by chanting out the properties of a beloved world even as she prepares to leave it" (50). Simmons concludes that Kincaid's insistent drumbeat voice is one which destabilizes perspective, since the voice can switch from adult to child (as in Annie John) or use the same word, "you," or "native," to complicate the subjectivities inherent in language, even as her language "signals impending change" and loss (Simmons 54– 6).

This repetitious quality of Kincaid's writing is also present in Autobiography of My Mother. The novel is narrated in one voice with no dialogue, and yet it has a profoundly oral quality, with a dynamic sense of repetition, an emphatic element of tragic loss and a transformative self-possessed power. [15] Even without transmitted dialogue, the text has a strong spoken quality indicative of a narrative consciousness, as in this example preceding her first sexual encounter with Phillip: "He did not look like anyone I could love, and he did not look like anyone I should love, and so I determined then that I could not love him and I determined that I should not love him" (Kincaid 152). The development of her approach to her lover is phased through the choice of the conditional in the verbs could and would, but while the first enunciation is one of expectation, the second utterance of the phrases is charged with the conviction of agency. But like the photographic image of Xuela's mother which serves to separate the unnumbered chapters

[15] Throughout this study, I rely upon Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, narrative consciousness and utterance in Dialogic Imagination.

of the novel, with each repetition, more and more is revealed. In particular, the language of repetition works beyond dyads or binaries, and generates a new position between the old positions of the victor and the vanquished, or the conqueror and the conquered. While these phrases are repeated, Xuela constantly removes herself from these divisions and shows her ability to follow her own path.

(M)other tongues: representations of patois and English

One approach to the issue of language use, and to the multiplicity of languages and aesthetic codes in Autobiography, is offered in Anatol's analysis which focuses on the concept of "(M)Other tongues," a Caribbean concept of language acculturation advanced by Velma Pollard. Defined as "that one language the individual first acquires and learns to use in communicating with other people," (m)other tongue establishes a paradigm in which Creole and patois languages, like Brathwaite's nation language, have an expressly authentic role in self-identification and self expression (Pollard, 252). Even the referent behind Pollard's metaphor for language is deconstructed by Anatol, who points out that not only does Xuela not have a "mother's knee" at which to learn such a tongue, but that the biological determinism underpinning such a term devalues relationships between other women, including adoption and friendship, which Anatol sees as potentially more powerful since they involve a degree of agency or choice. By looking closely at language use in the house of Xuela's father, the LaBattes, and Phillip Bailey we can see how Kincaid upsets the power relations that gender the languages at play within the novel.

Xuela is suspicious of both English and patois as a marker of an implicit or essential bond. In the case of the "father's language," English, Xuela perceives early on how the English language is like a mask for her father, making his special deliveries of painful exploitation "appear benign, attractive, even kind" (Kincaid, 23). Like the flourishing letters on the pages written to the LaBattes, Alfred's use of language is beautiful, and therefore masks some of the intentions behind the writing. Of course Alfred also speaks patois, though only in private situations, and when he is not exercising official duties associated with his administrative position. In this characterization of English as a language of the Master, a colonial construct which Alfred has internalized, Kincaid demonstrates Xuela's awareness of the significance of choosing one language over another. The patois language, or "mother language" is also considered to be somewhat suspect in Xuela's opinion, as can be noted in her early understanding of the way her step-mother and Lise LaBatte communicate in that language. Once she moves into the household with her stepmother, Alfred's new wife, Xuela immediately senses the anxiety with which she is regarded, as a living reminder of the woman Alfred truly loved. Despite the degree to which English is used as the "official" language of the household, Xuela's stepmother frequently speaks to her in patois, in "an attempt to make an illegitimate of me, to associate me with the made-up language of people regarded as not real – the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low" (Kincaid, 30-1). Through this comment, it is apparent that Xuela is aware of the heirarchization of languages in both the colonial context and within the constructs of her own household. Rather than associating herself exclusively with the downtrodden, Xuela demonstrates

her competency to shift languages, allegiances and subject positions. Beyond the confines of Alfred's house, patois serves another purpose in the LaBatte household.

While both languages are used in the LaBatte household, the same power relations lead to the official preference of English and the de-legitimization of patois and patois speakers. English is spoken when Jacques LaBatte is present, and it is also the language of Alfred's letters to the LaBatte family in extravagant cursive. These letters remain unreadable to Xuela, despite her ability to read and write in English. Because of the artistry of his writing these letters between men are encoded in an English that excludes both Xuela and Lise. When Jacques is absent, Lise and Xuela choose to communicate in the language of the "illegitimate" as a shared language of two women who are oppressed by colonial society: Lise has not been a "productive" partner in her marriage, and is bound to stay in a relationship where her love is not reciprocated; Xuela is a domestic servant entrusted to the LaBatte's by her father, not by her choice. This relationship emerges in a way that promises to erase the servant-mistress power dynamic, as seen by the close physical contact of the two and the use of informal, first names, while Jacques LaBatte remains "Monsieur" despite the sexual intimacy which emerges in the confines of Jacques' counting room.

Despite Xuela's devaluation of English through the analysis of her father's conformity to its image and circumstance, and her anxieties about patois which emerge from her contact with her father's wife and Lise LaBatte, Xuela cannot refuse language completely. In her relationship to Phillip Bailey, Anatol argues, Xuela finds her own way in language. In the relationship with Phillip, a relationship which lasts longer than any other in her life, Xuela finds a balance of power symbolized in the use of language.

Xuela uses only patois, while Phillip uses only English. In this relationship neither partner codes their communication in the voice of the other, but rather each speaks their preferred language and requires the other to make any needed translation. The other aspects of this relationship show a remarkable overhaul of gender relations from any other marriage or partnership in the novel. This destabilization is emphasized by the location of their household, deep in the interior of Dominca where few, if any, inhabitants would speak English. Thus Xuela negotiates a space within this dynamic where she can speak her native patois without having to consider the mask which her father wears and which she connects with the imposed language of formal English.

Carib Identity: Islands, Bodies and Clothes as Markers of Collective Identity

The fact that Kincaid sets Xuela's narrative in Dominica raises questions about self representation that have to do with comparative representations and the discourses used to represent such things as the body and its clothing as much as race and the island. In Autobiography, each of these becomes of field of resistance, in which the hierarchies of power are prodded and questioned. Just as the question of language use is influenced by the concept of blended aesthetics implied by the term orature, the questions of identity in this novel are also questions of blended, or overlapping, aesthetic systems. The focus on clothes and dress of both Xuela and her father and the staging of the novel on the island of Dominica instead of Antigua illustrate a zone of blended aesthetics which play heavily into the conception of identity in the novel. Language is not the only code of signification by which identity can be established; these other systems of symbols and

signification, body, cloth, race and location articulate different cultural scripts of the social scriptorium. These symbols of identity are, however, both intersectional and performative, and do not necessarily relate to an essential or absolute identity, either collective or personal. Every identity, including gender, race and nationality must be processed through recognizable signifiers of that identity and perceived as a representation of one's self in a specific manifestation of one's "ethical task of self-definition" in Appiah's words, "to make a life for one's self." Thus, Kincaid's choice to explore questions of racial identity, and her choice to situate the novel on an island other than her native Antigua, are significant in terms of exploring the relation between the collective and the particular. While each body/dress/island/race bears the markers of its own unique history, the common and shared history questions the validity of allegiances as much as distinctions.

Bodies of Resistance, Clothes of Domination

Hoving recognizes the novel as a "forceful and deeply insightful gendered postcolonial critique, effectuated through an utterly radical presentation of the body" (Hoving 224). The revival of the female body in Kincaid's novel, including menstrual blood and sweat, Hoving argues, is Kincaid's way of rescuing the body from being diminished by the colonial project which defines the body of the black female as base and abject.[16] In the protagonist of Xuela, "the body [is] the only way to full subjectivity" tying the "disagreeable plural actuality" of the body irrevocably to the discourse of identity and "reveal[ing] so much about our position within postcoloniality" (Hoving 229,

[16] My use of the term reflects the usage of Julia Kristeva, in Powers of Horror and other texts.

237, 225). While not lingering on the role of the laundress in Caribbean literature, Matos shows how "competing yet mutually dependent elements of body and cloth contribute to another level of Kincaid's exploration of domination" (Matos 845). Xuela's identity, as well as her relationship to her father, is conditioned by his choice to leave the responsibility for her care in the hands of his laundress, Ma Eunice. Dropped of with no more care than the bundle of clothes, Xuela recognizes the exchange value of her life at this early phase that sets up an "evolving dichotomy between body and cloth, naked and clothed" in which clothing both hides the naturalness of the body, but also serves as a "means by which oppressors can disguise, inhibit and appropriate subjects' treacherous bodies" (Matos, 844-6).

Unlike her father, Xuela is less concerned with her clothes, and more concerned and aware of her body. Whatever clothes she is wearing, she tends to describe more the sensation of wearing them than the way that they look. From her initial conflation with dirty laundry, Xuela internalizes a need to be self-sufficient, and as a result becomes known as both a girl who cooks for herself, and as someone who washes and makes her own clothes. Much of this is born from the tension which underlies the relationship between Xuela and her father's wife, but Xuela's drive to be self-sufficient colors all parts of her life. Whether masturbating or having sex, Xuela chooses the time and place of these relations. Xuela declares herself beautiful because she finds herself so; she revels in the pleasure of fresh cashews which burn her tongue, she enjoys the anxiety of watching Roland talk to another woman. She chooses and embraces her experiences because she refuses to be half alive and half dead. Even while living at the LaBatte's, Xuela chooses the relationship by which she spends her days with Lise and her nights

with Jacques. But when Lise tries to make her wear her dresses, Xuela grows suspicious of Lise's desire to make Xuela like herself. Unable to be a mother, Lise infantilizes Xuela once she becomes pregnant, touching and caressing her not as a friend or a woman, but as a baby. Although the female intimacy is something which Xuela appreciates and longs for, she cannot tolerate being mothered by Lise, and reacts by terminating the pregnancy and the working relationship. While this departure is connected to being dressed in the clothes of another, Xuela wears the clothes of a dead man for some time, reveling in the liminality of sexlessness as she cannot be recognized as male or female, and during her fight with Roland's wife, she is dressed in the same red Irish linen as her opponent. Another dress made with Roland's stolen linen has a secret pocket which allows Roland to caress her discretely in public. While Xuela's choice in clothing is much more fluid than the uniform of her father, her clothes directly represent her openness to the world and her willingness to engage or distance herself from that world.

This theme is exemplified in Alfred's manner of dress, typically described as a police uniform, and in other ways the he comports himself, especially his handwriting and speech, but also in terms of his manner of social interaction: he refuses to converse with Xuela in public, he punishes her for challenging him in front of Lazarus, and he treats the acquisition of a son as if he had purchased a horse, for "At the time his son was born, her was no longer in love with life itself: he was not in love with anything. He only wanted more of everything" (Kincaid 107). Xuela sees her father's face, or "the mask that he wore as a face", and his skin, "the color of corruption: copper, gold, ore," as a kind of clothing, but these are like the skins of an onion, for there seems to be nothing left beneath these facades. There is, for her father, only his own perception of his self worth,

his pursuit of wealth, and his desire to cause suffering and participate in "a whole way of life which perpetuated pain" (Kincaid 39). Alfred's manner is one that is sexless and refined, having so completely internalized the pursuit of money that his own skin has turned the color of precious metal. This body is contrasted sharply by the bodies of Jacques Labatte and Phillip Bailey, whose pasty white bodies recall the fat, white tourists described in A Small Place., and with the body of Roland, who like Xuela is characterized as sexual and erotic, almost animal-like despite his untrustworthiness.

The role of cloth in the descriptions in the novel, and in Kincaid's other writings, is ample enough for Sharrad to argue that "part of the quest for identity running through her work is figured in terms of clothing" (Sharrad, 54). In fact, the descriptions of uniforms and borrowed clothes on the one hand, and clothes made with stolen fabrics and secret linings on the other hand, illustrate the diverse roles of cloth in the Caribbean context. The diverse origins of Irish linen, Guinea cloth, and Nankeen (from Nanking, China) are indicative of the diverse origins and locations which are components of the world economy that circulates through the Caribbean and its plantation economy. Choices of clothing are inherently choices of self-representation, even when those choices are conditioned by economic questions of buying power and the distribution of cloth. Given the tendency for women to more likely to be the dressmakers and laundresses in the Caribbean, the emphasis on clothing is also an emphasis on the female body, especially as seen by the arousing friction of the rough denim-like nankeen cloth on Xuela's naked body and the transparency of her flowered dress which allows her nipples to show through the fabric while she courts Roland. This focus on the external nature of representation is not unlike Kincaid's choice of Dominica, a smaller island

which has largely been administered or controlled by Antigua, as the focal point of Kincaid's attention. Xuela's sense of self is also conditioned by her location on the island of Dominica, by her choice of residence and by her manner of living.

Carib Island / Carib Race – Geography and Identity

Xuela self-identifies geographically with the island as a whole, yet contextualizes herself negatively in relationship to the more densely populated areas of Roseau and Mahaut, where her father and the LaBatte's have houses. After this relationship deteriorated, and Xuela leaves the LaBatte's Xuela establishes her own agency with respect to her living situation and her own identity. Xuela tells us, "I walked through my inheritance, and island of villages and rivers and mountains and people who began and ended with murder and theft and not very much love" (Kincaid 89). Even when Xuela does move in with Phillip, she convinces him to move to the interior of the island, where she remains close to her "inheritance." The text of Autobiography uses a geographically allegorical community and engages a new a biographical community of her maternal ancestry.

While this self-identification occurs on one hand, the staging of the novel on the island of Dominica plays another role in the development of the autobiographical form of the novel in relationship to Kincaid's other works. Along with the decision to inscribe this autobiography in the space of her mother's personal experience, instead of her own, Jamaica Kincaid also chose Dominica instead of Antigua as the geographical backdrop of the novel. Posited on another island, the entire network of social relations posited by

Kincaid is constructed to develop a "symbolic universe" appropriate for this narrative. Thus freed from the constraints of her own vexed relationship with Antigua and Antiguan intellectuals, Kincaid provides a history of Dominica which is a kind of alter-ego biography for her native Antigua and for herself. On the surface, her biological mother's origins from this island serve as a preliminary justification, but another interpretation emerges upon consideration of the mutual history of these two islands.

The islands were both encountered by Columbus during his second voyage in 1493, and were the subject of both French and British at different times during the colonial period in the Caribbean, until the French granted control over Dominica to the Amerindian population in perpetuity.[17] This promised autonomy was apparently forgotten in the period between 1666 and 1675, when there were multiple incursions by the French into British controlled Antigua as well as by the English into French controlled Dominica. During this period, the English agents responsible for governing Antigua and Dominica were two sons of Sir Thomas Warner, governor of St. Kitts. In Dominica, the fledgling English presence rallied behind Warner's younger son, from his Carib wife (his second) despite some uncertainty about his loyalty. The Antiguan governor, Sir Thomas Warner Jr. came to Dominica in 1674 to negotiate a treaty with his brother, ostensibly for a peace treaty. "Indian" Warner died on the ship and Sir Thomas Warner Jr. led a brutal attack against his Carib supporters at the town of Massacre, the site of Xuela's school, where she learned more on the roads than she did in the classrooms. In 1686, Dominica was again made into a self-governed Carib territory, despite significant French settlement; it was eventually designated a French colony by 1759 yet remained contested, with military conflict in 1774, ended in French surrender at

[17]The details of this historical survey are taken from Baker (1994), Dyde, (2000) and Honeychurch (1995).

the end of the Seven Year's War (1756-63), with only minor skirmishes in 1795 and 1805. After slavery was abolished in 1834, Dominica moved towards independence, but finds itself part of the British sponsored West Indies Federation (1958-62), with the seat of the federal government in Antigua, with Dominica taking self-governance in 1960 and Antigua in 1967. The competing history of these small islands, especially the elements of betrayal, colonial conflict and the struggle for independence makes Dominica a productive alternate site for the staging of the questions of identity which are fundamental to the novel.

Both in terms of the historical dominance of Antigua over Dominica, and in terms of the remarkable survival of the largest Carib descended population in the Caribbean on the Carib Reserve, Dominca represents a kind of triumph of survival for Xuela. Dominican society, as described by Kincaid, is marked by an internalization of the divide between black and white cultures, figured in the texts as people of African descent and those of European descent; this figuration designates biracial individuals, like Xuela and her father, as people of African descent. While her father is mixed Scottish and African heritage, Xuela herself is a scion of Dominca's Carib population through the vestiges of her mother. According to Patrick L. Baker's Ethnohistory of Dominica this Mulatto elite in which Alfred would belong were marked by a distinct skin color, "a social asset" as well as "a better education, an inheritance of some capital, and a different lifestyle" (Baker 124-125). Members of this social group considered themselves to be from Dominica and thus did not seek to return to Britain, but to increase their fortunes on the island. While Alfred represents the mulatto class in his manner of dress and occupation, all of which emphasize his allegiance to the British Crown and elevate him from the

larger black population of Domincan society, Xuela represents yet another class which rejects the black / white or the African / European division. Of course, Domincan society was more complex than any simplistic division along color and race lines were not the only ones, they "involved religion (Protestant versus Catholic) and language (French versus English) as well" (Baker 128). Xuela's ethnic ties to her mother's Carib population serve to compound these differences once again.

This element of Xuela's identity which makes her suspicious of black / white racial divisions is raised early in the text as she describes her education. Taught by a woman who was also "of the African people" and felt this reality as "a source of humiliation and self-loathing," Xuela recognizes her African heritage along with the other boys who are taught that "My mother was a Carib woman, and when they looked at me this is what they saw: The Carib people had been defeated and then exterminated, thrown away like the weeds in a garden; the African people had been defeated but had survived" (Kincaid, 16). Xuela's Carib identity pushes her out of the dynamic politics of race as black / white, and her resultant self-identification is succinctly with the island, not with either African or European "homeland." This Carib aspect of herself causes her to be isolated within her peer group at school, and is used as the basis for attributions of any of her unusual behavior as being evil or being possessed. Even today in Dominica, the Carib society retains a unique cultural position, fostered by the establishment of the Carib Reserve in 1975 which allows for collective ownership of a large section of land on the Northeast side of the island. This population is rare in the Caribbean, where the large majority of indigenous people were indeed decimated and erased from the island

demographics.[18] As such, both Xuela's mother and Dominica itself play symbolic roles of survivance in the Caribbean.[19] The staging of Xuela as both mother and daughter, and the use of Dominica as an alternate location to Antigua allows Kincaid to construct a protagonist whose sense of self is multiple and yet depends upon no-one.

Conclusion

There are some major commonalities between the processes through which Autobiography explores the fields of autobiographics elaborated in this study that should be explored in closing. It is clear that Jamaica Kincaid uses fictional names in most of her texts; this fact alone means nothing. But the fact that Jamaica Kincaid is itself a pseudonym gives pause for thought. In some way then, the explicit process which the separates the author (Jamaica Kincaid) from her subject (Lucy, or Xuela) is mirrored by the implicit process separating the author's socially determined identity (Elaine Potter Richardson) and the one she exposes to public reception (Jamaica Kincaid). Interestingly enough, bell hooks' commentary on her own autobiography seem implicated in this trend as well. Not only is bell hooks a pseudonym for Gloria Watkins, but the "childhood nickname" of Gloria Jean seems to be the explicit "narrated I" which Watkins / hooks exposes to the public. Thus, in all three of these cases, the author of the life narrative remains one more remove away from the doubled relationship of the "narrating I" to the "narrated I." It is my opinion that this is another facet or variety of the feature of transgressive life narratives. But in this instance, the transgression expands is

[18] Further details can be found in Layng's demongraphic study and history, The Carib Reserve, 1983.
[19] Here I refer to Vizenor's coinage of the term as a proactive collusion of both resistance and survival.

significance from the purely discursive into the domain of real life as it relates not only to the degree of separation between the "narrating I" to the "narrated I," but also to the degree of separation between the author, in her epistemological and phenomenological being in the world, and the fictional "protagonist" who performs the "act" of writing a life narrative.

The idea of multiple overlapping identities also emerges in Smith's analysis of the concept of the "I" that resists producing an "authoritarian relationship to her self, her past and the world [in an] attempt to transform the old autobiographical 'I' in that communal 'we' [that would] achieve a kind of anonymity and thereby escape the narcissism and egotism inherent in autobiography" (Smith, 1993, 87). According to Smith, the physical body becomes the locus to connect the commoditization of the body as a sexual object as well as its encoding in "nurturing femininity" and "dutiful daughterhood" as social scripts. Smith discusses childhood experience as that of the "sensate body", which serves as a monitor of experience without judging the distinction between self and world, and which stands in direct opposition to the "Totalizing I" which encodes identity into fixedness that doesn't permit fluctuation; a communal subjectivity that resists the "prisonhouse of singular identity" and opens experience across time, such that past events are not seen as linear, but as the basis for "the presentness of the present" and where the narrator is subject to memory not while also constructed through the "silences of the unremembered" (Smith, 98-99). Smith shows how female agency resists the repression of gender hierarchy and racial expectations and can create a supercharged, but problematized "I" which recognizes the body as the location of self, even if it is an "essentialized marker of identity," that creates a profusion of identities, "a self-

multiplication" (Smith 117, 120). Smith identifies these multiple voices and languages with Bahktin's heteroglossia and suggests that the profusion of voices, of "I"s in life narratives establish a kind of "Diasporan subject" that is a "way of being in the world, a condition of radical subjectivity" which moves from script to script like a ventriloquist, holding one voice just long enough to be identified, but not fixed (123-4). As an example of an outlaw autobiography, "wreaking havoc with the normative conventions of autobiography," Kincaid's Autobiography is a text in which neither the author nor the protagonist can be fixed; subjectivity is the dominant form of knowledge (125).

Chapter Four

Edwidge Danticat's Mythic Autobiographics:

Avatars of Femininity and Female Violence

Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory is a valuable text for exploring the way that a Caribbean author uses the nexus of life narrative and orature in the construction of identity. In this chapter, I will provide a very brief synopsis of the novel and relevant criticism, and then move forward into close readings based on theoretical discussions of the text as a life narrative, orature, and key *vaudou* religious concepts as they relate to the role of women in society. I will also discuss Danticat's other novels and writings in order to demonstrate, briefly, the role that each of these theoretical approaches could offer in analyzing these texts. In this section, I will also be referencing interviews by Danticat, as complementary pieces toward the understanding of her writing as a whole. I will end with conclusions drawn from my reading of this text, and comparisons to the texts of other Caribbean authors discussed in this dissertation.

The novel tells the story of a young girl, Sophie Caco, who is raised in Haiti in the house of her grandmother and aunt, until she is sent to live with her mother in Brooklyn, NY. Following this troubling dislocation, Sophie finds herself geographically exiled from her aunt Atie and grandmother Ifé, but also emotionally distant from her mother, Martine. Despite, or perhaps because of, the close proximity of their living arrangement, Sophie and Martine remain estranged during Sophie's youth, especially after Sophie has

her first menstruation. This "entry into womanhood" for Sophie triggers a repressive and controlling reaction in Martine, who begins to "test" Sophie with her finger to make sure that she is still a virgin, a practice instilled in her by her mother and family before her rape at the hands of the faceless Ton-ton Macoute, the secret police of Haiti's dictatorship. In order to end the traumatic cycle of violence caused by her mother, Sophie opts to break her own hymen with a kitchen mortar. While the immediate results of this act of resistance cause Sophie to seek refuge in the company of Joseph, an older African-American musician, it eventually leads to Sophie and Martine recognizing one another as equals. Sophie still suffers significant sexual trauma for which she seeks a ritualistic therapy, but she does have a child with Joseph. After making a return trip to Haiti, where she realizes the complexity of Martine's traumatic years before moving to New York, she returns and engages in an almost sisterly relationship with her mother. Martine, in the meantime, has become pregnant from her Haitian born lover, and the pregnancy re-awakens deep feelings of dread and trauma from her violent rape and loss of innocence. This dread becomes so unbearable that Martine kills herself, and Sophie again returns to Haiti, this time with the body of her mother, and faces the complicated realities of her mother's experiences and the internalization of sexist gender expectations by her family.

Public reception of Breath, Eyes, Memory, Edwidge Danticat's first novel has been largely successful, fueled no doubt by its inclusion in Oprah Winfrey's book selection and its quietly intimate voice which is highly approachable and readable. Though Danticat depicts stark events, rape, incest and suicide, the elegance of the prose maintains an artistic rendering which allows the reader the distance to process horrific

events without being overly emotional. Critical reception has largely followed the tendency of popular reception to accept Danticat's work as a powerful revelation of the brutality involved in Haitian village life and the strengths of the women who survive such experiences. Most of the critical articles which focus on Breath, Eyes, Memory examine the text's use of language and style, exile/migration, gender socialization, and/or the status of women in Haitian literary horizon

A significant amount of criticism has focused on Danticat's use of language and her ability to incorporate the folk aesthetic from Haitian culture into her literature, despite the fact that her work was originally written in English, not in French or Creole, the two official languages of Haiti. Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo brings a native Creole speaker's perspective to the analysis of Danticat's use of folk-lore and proverbs, focusing on a particular kind of Haitian code-switching, "*pwent*" or "*pale daki/andaki*" which is traditionally used to allude to difficult or painful issues without being directly confrontational (134-5). Rocio G. Davis and Valerie Loichot rely on multiple texts of Danticat's to describe some tendencies of her style, including strong use of intertextuality in her short story cycles, particularly in Krik? Krak! As a literary form, the short-story cycle destabilizes the relative solidity of the novel because it follows the development of a multitude of characters rather than one character and because it "mirrors the episodic and unchronological method of oral transmission" (Davis, 70). Loichot maps Danticat's expansion of Paule Marshall's concept of kitchen poets to show how cooking and braiding hair are potentially political statements, akin to writing, which collectively add value to both literary and other cultural expressions by women. Noting the ample presence of Haitian proverbs in the novel, Ifeona Fulani argues that Danticat, like other

Caribbean writers, relies on a "literary tricksterism" in which the author and narrator pose as Anancy, a spider/trickster figure from West Africa who "tests the limits of language." For Fulani, Danticat inhabits "an outsider/insider position [and thus] is as liminal a figure as Anancy, necessitating quick-wittedness and perspicacity, if not actual trickery in negotiating obstacles in her path" towards creating a literature that is read both in the American market and the Haitian one (Fulani, 69).

This outsider/insider perspective is relevant to a number of critiques which focus on the question of exile and the representations of Haiti within the novel. Florence Ramond Jurney reads exile in both Breath, Eyes Memory and Farming of the Bones as a condition of separation from the mother and the motherland; her analysis of Martine and Sophie's imposed departures and the desire for return as the necessary condition for Sophie's creation of a new relationship between herself, her family and her place of birth. Patrick Samway's "Homeward Journey" discusses the parallels between Sophie's and Danticat's stories, especially the construction of place names, as a key towards understanding how an American educated writer produces a text with a Creole heritage. Duvivier's analysis examines the significance of metaphors of métissage (or mixture) of cultures in the text to show how Danticat stages "poltical, gender and sexual ambivalences" to destabilize cultural polarities and illustrate the "multifaceted experiences of Haitian women" (Duvivier, 50, 55). Likewise, Carine M. Mardorossian, centers her analysis of Danticat on her ability to tell the stories of Haiti from the perspective of migrant literature, reconfiguring the "poetics of exile" that mark Caribbean writers from the early half of the century and arguing that "what matters is not what America is but Haiti's absence. What grounds Sophie's and her mother's identity crises

is the country and traditions that they left behind" (Mardorossian, 28). Taking it one step further, Newtona Johnson asserts that the "border crossing" displacement of Sophie is what permits the "distance to critically evaluate homeland patriarchal cultural norm and an opportunity to make liberating changes to their way of thinking" (Johnson, 151). For Johnson, territorial displacement allows for psychological transformation and emancipation from both oppressive patriarchal actions and ideologies.

Exposing patriarchal ideologies is, I think, at the heart of significant criticism which delves into the role that gender expectations play in the novel. Johnson identifies the way that Haitian patriarchal culture polices the bodies of women and enforces gender roles through education and story telling, but also notes that "not withstanding the subordinate position of women on the gender hierarchy, women as principal nurturers of children are their society's primary agents of cultural socialization, including gender socialization" such as the testing which is responsible for much of Sophie's trauma (Johnson, 155). Donette Francis also focuses on the source and aftermath of trauma, both rape and testing, in her article that analyzes Martine's sense of obligation to control her daughter's purity where she could not control her own, illustrating how Martine is "invested in disciplinary practices that curtail [her] daughter's sexuality" (Francis 82). Chancy notes that the testing is "[p]resented as a ritual enacted between mother and daughter through the generations" that reinforces imposed sexual values lingering from the colonial period that suppress female sexuality, and codify "women's bodies as vessels for male gratification in marriage" (Chancy, 121). Haitian folk culture, as exemplified by Ifé, internalizes this commoditization not on an individual level, but as a reflection of the family as a group, "If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family,

speak evil of me, even bring her back to me" (Danticat, 1994, 156). Johnston argues that this goes beyond the shame of the family, and that the "policing of women's bodies… to ensure that women are sexually pure before marriage… occurs solely for the benefit of men, as it is men who are honored when the women they marry are proved to be virgins on their wedding night" (Johnson, 154).

Rossi, Francis and Chancy all explore the novel's representation of women's bodies, voices and silences as metaphors for the history of suppressed women in Haitian society. Jennifer C. Rossi reads the text as a recovery from the conditions of both exile and trauma through a movement from internal to external spaces: through the articulation of her experiences to her grandmother and therapist, Sophie places these experiences in a narrative form, "giving testimony of trauma [that] fills in gaps in the historical record, and in this way, remembering becomes and act of resistance to the fragmented historical narrative" (Rossi, 205). Francis showcases how the representation of the female body, in five scenes of traumatic violence from the novel becomes an alternate text for this history. Francis points out that Sophie

> attempts to reclaim her own body as she unleashes pent up terror and fear – attacking the very canefields and cultural customs that disabled her mother and the entire Caco family by extension. Sophie does not simply act or react. Instead this scene in the canefields suggests a confrontation with cultural history and social practices as she uses her body as the vehicle to rewrite dominant narratives. Importantly here, however, the violence is enacted on the canefields rather than on her own physical body. In this way she frees herself from the debilitating subjection of the previous scenes. (Francis, 87)

This insight offered by Francis makes a powerful argument for a reading of Sophie's body, as well as the scarred and lumped bodies of the other Caco women, as texts which

exhibit the effects of the kinds of sexism imposed by colonial practice and kept alive in the post-colonial reality of Haiti's independent but impoverished state.[20] Chancy frames her analysis of Danticat's text within a broader focus on the collective disenfranchisement of Haitian women, what she calls the "*culture-lacune.*" A palpable "form of marginalization… an absence from historical and literary documents… [a culture] that embraces its own silence even as it contests it,… as a tool not only for subversion but also for self expression" (16-17). All three of these critics situate the reception of the novel into a larger literary question of the experience and representation of women in Haiti's history, and in all three, writing becomes a symbol of resistance to patriarchal violence and suppression.

Breath, Eyes, Memory as life narrative: Elevating female subjectivity

Assessing Danticat's work and the use of autobiographical practices in her work requires some effort to situate the novel in the discourse of life narrative. Though the text of the novel has significant fictional elements, the plot elements clearly have some relationship to the historical author, Edwidge Danticat. Like Sophie, Danticat was born in Haiti and came to the United States as a young girl, but any insistence on further parallels is moot since Danticat herself has disclaimed an exact correspondence between the protagonist's life and her own. In an interview with Bonnie Lyons, for instance, she discusses the evolution of the story from a essay written about a "little girl who comes to New York to be reunited with her mother and later returns to her village in Haiti as a

[20] As will be discussed later, Martine has had a double mastectomy, Atie has a lump on her leg, and Ifé has a hump on her back.

woman with her baby daughter;" but she states that in the course of reading more fiction in college, she began to realize the "possibilities of fiction, like being able to expand and broaden a story and invent parts of it" (Lyons 185). Though there remains a great deal of similarity between the author and her protagonist, the choices to develop the protagonist in a matriarchal family living in a rural setting conflicts with her own experience growing up in an urban environment with her uncle and three brothers.

Despite these issues, the novel can be analyzed through Gilmore's lens of autobiographics, especially since it blends the genres of memoir and autobiographical fiction, making it a life narrative that relies upon the first person singular voice. Most importantly, the text illustrates the processes of identity formation through the a mixture of narrative forms as we shall now see. Just as Lionnet opts to discuss the narratives of Maryse Condé and Michelle Cliff as self-referential texts in which the subjectively rendered consciousness is the most valuable and instructive text, Danticat's narrative can be discussed in the discourse of life narrative because the text is at once a fiction and autobiography. The choice to read Abeng or Breath, Eyes, Memory as autobiography, despite the obvious indicators to the contrary, is justified by the authorial ability to render "the cultural discontinuities that form the basis of [the] protagonist's inquiry and motivation" (Lionnet 1992, 323). Even in the fictional production of first person voice and subjectivity, the questions of subjectivity in the postcolonial context are engaged by the novel's protagonist.

This is arguably more relevant in the postcolonial context wherein both author and protagonist can be seen as situated within larger postcolonial discourses and can acknowledge that the colonial subject has been denied a voice and characterized as

inferior in the social coding of the Caribbean. Although the status of Sophie Caco's narrative cannot be read in terms of the factual expectations of an "authentic" autobiography, Smith and Watson argue that the fictional versions of life narrative can offer "subjective truth" which has a similar, but different ontological value from "objective truth" (Smith and Watson 10). Like Gilmore's "home truth," the subjective truth is created by the interplay of competing subjectvities elaborated from within the social scriptorium. In fact, this difference between subjective truth and objective fact is at the core of the question of postcolonial writing, as posed by Gilmore's approach. Factuality is certainly a concern of a number of critiques of the novel, most noticeably N'zengou-Tayo's work, where her research does not find evidence of the purported "virginity cult" which Danticat describes (N'zengou-Tayo 127-8). But issues of truth and fiction have little to do with the valorization of an extended study in female subjectivity, which is ultimately the core of the novel. This is seen in Johnson's explicit focus on not only the ability of the protagonist to overcome the ideological subjugation which she experiences growing up in Haiti, but also the process by which she achieves a "psychological transformation of the kind that is possible with territorial displacement" (Johnson, 163). Samway, likewise, suggests that Danticat's novel is a liberatory experience in which Danticat overcomes the misogyny of Haitian culture and further gives "a new sense of empowerment to the feminist literary liberatory movement there" (Samway 82). The novel can indeed be read as a description of the process of psychological development of Sophie as traced through her shifting subjectivities in response to sexual abuse and ideological suppression. However, the value of the novel in the larger issue of the women's movement is surely in raising the issues at all.

In this regard, Danticat is an important new voice in the ongoing literary history of Haiti, both male and female. Mardorossian's analysis critiques Danticat in relation to the Haitian "Indigenism" literary and arts movement that emerged around 1915 in response to American occupation in which mostly male artists "turned to folk culture and native traditions" to champion an African origin as a bedrock of Haitian culture, while "correct[ing] the Indigenous Movement's masculinist focus by making visible women's contributions to the heritage and traditions of the nation's culture" (Mardorossian 27-28). By valorizing female storytellers, in particular, Danticat constructs the Haitian background against which the novel's drama unfolds through the contributions of women who serve as the basis for maintaining culture and folklore. Grandma Ifé in particular is a vessel of that troubling culture, which can be seen as "both a site of oppression and freedom in the novel." While she is the oldest matriarch responsible for maintaining the tradition of testing in the family, it is also her "folk tales of the 'bleeding woman', 'the lark,' and the 'flying woman' that ultimately provide the narrator protagonist with models of resistance" that allow her to ultimately escape the testing (Mardorossian 26-27). The complicated, ironic and paradoxical figuration of the matriarch is most clearly signified in the final words of the novel, after the funeral when the Grandmother encodes the lessons of the novel in the Creole phrase "*Paròl gin pié zèl*. The words can give wings to your feet." Grandmother Ifé instructs Sophie to listen, tells her to how to answer, but simultaneously silences the younger woman, "press[ing] her fingers over my lips: "Now," she said, you will know how to answer" (Danticat 234, cited in Mardorossian 27).

The novel offers an opportunity to regard the protagonist through Smith and Watson "five constitutive processes" of autobiographical subjects: memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency. Throughout the text, Sophie's narration demonstrates the degree to which her sense of identity is fluid, controlled to a certain extent by her Haitian upbringing and the traditions of her family. But Sophie is able to develop new forms of identity, largely through the distance she gains as she migrates back and forth between Haiti and the US. As Mardorossian suggests in her article, this migrant identity gives Sophie greater access to both cultures and allows her to view "the traditional culture of the past as open to reinterpretation rather than as an inert and immutable condition awaiting to be unearthed" (Mardorossian 29). This positioning of Sophie as a migrant subject shows her dually articulated identity as two-tiered, both individual and collective. In fact, her collective identity is intersectional, providing her access to the social scriptoriums of both Haitian identity, and US Identity. Her US experience is expanded exponentially through contact with the sex therapy group and other cultural responses to problems of gender differentiation across the Diaspora.

Sophie's migrant experience and ability to access multiple cultural scripts also allows her greater agency (the last of the five processes) in manipulating the representation of her own subjectivities. Throughout the text, Sophie is able to establish her own collective identity through the inclusion of various different female family members. Sophie narrates past events in her own context; for example, "Dessalines's death brought to mind all those frightening memories" of Martine's rape, and mental illness before moving to the states. In this case, Sophie's memories and description of Martine's rape is part imagination and part collective memory: "He dragged her into the

cane fields, and pinned her down on the ground. He had a black bandana over his face so she never saw anything but his hair, which was the color of eggplants. He kept pounding her until she was too stunned to make a sound. When he was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threatening to shoot her if she looked up" (138-9). Having calmed Martine down from her nightmares for years, the memories of the mother constitute Sophie's narrative as well. Sophie also describes her memories to reconstruct past events of her own life that had been left out of the narrative present. An example is her hospital stay and her first sexual encounter with Joseph. These events can only be re-membered through the past, since Sophie was likely "doubling" or imagining herself somewhere else, during these events.[21] Like the memory of trauma, Sophie's experiences from her childhood and her trauma are constitutive of the narrating subject. Later in the novel, Sophie is able to situate herself within her mother's experience in a different way, following the advice of her therapist and confronting the nameless, faceless rapist in the canefields. In the confrontation of this original site of violence, as aptly described by Francis, Sophie generates a new connection between herself and her mother, a collective identity that now includes Grandmother Ifé, Aunt Atie, and a whole tradition of street vendors in the repetition of the Creole phrase "Ou Libéré?" meaning "Are you free?"

Recalling Smith and Watson's discussion of identity as first and foremost a pattern of difference or commonality, it is important to think of identity as a process, not an object. Thus identity is seen in discursive terms as a provisional intersection of such experiential categories as girl, or daughter, or woman; likewise identity borrows from discourses which constitute Sophie as Haitian, or part of the Haitian Diaspora, as linked to her mother and her matrilineal family. But identity is also constituted by the

[21] This concept is discussed at length later in this study.

recognition of difference, or of difference and commonality at the same time, such as when Sophie goes jogging in Haiti: "Along the way, people stared at me with puzzled expressions on their faces. *Is this what happens to our girls when they leave this place?* They become such frightened creatures that they run like the wind, from nothing at all" (157, her italics). In the larger sense that Sophie's identity is communally constructed, she is also fixed in a relationship to the political violence of Haiti, symbolized by the TonTon Macoute which traumatized her mother and shaped her life.

Through both of these connections, Sophie can be seen to engage in yet another of Smith and Watson's constitutive fields, that of embodiment. This works in two way: firstly, by situating the narration in the experiential body that is directly impacted, affected and formed by, in this case, Haitian political violence; and secondly, in the establishment of the body as a kind of text which can be read, like the narrative itself, for indicators of experience. The collective bodies of the Caco women all bear some kind of scarring or disformation: the hump on Ifé's back, the lump on Atie's leg, the prosthetic bra worn by Martine. For Martine and Sophie, the body is also a site where agency can be made visible. Martine, through her surgery, is able to combat and survive breast cancer; Sophie by taking the pestle to her own flesh chooses to change the circumstances which she sees as generating her trauma. Even Martine's suicide can be seen as an example of her agency, her will to change the status of her body, specifically her pregnancy that ends up being her death.

Orature as synthesis between oral and written literature in Breath, Eyes, Memory

Breath, Eyes, Memory makes use of several different versions of orature in the construction of the text, calling attention to the significance of oral culture and communication in the context of Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora. In this novel, there are many examples of proverbs, folklore, songs and other qualities of orature embedded throughout. Danticat's text is replete with sprinklings of the proverbs from the Haitian countryside, which serve as the "palm oil with which words are eaten," as Chinua Achebe states in his novel Things Fall Apart. In Danticat's text, these proverbs are integrated throughout the text as a whole, making it an example of orature in the way that Ngugi describes it, a blending of the two aesthetic systems. In Breath, Eyes, Memory, the interplay of these systems expands to include the use of proverbs, songs, silence, writing, tape recordings, phone calls, folk stories and prayers which multiply the number of aesthetic systems operating within the text and producing meaning. The presence of competing forms of orature within the novel will be discussed in a brief analysis of both written and taped messages throughout the novel, and the creation and maintenance of communities through oral culture. The conclusion to this section will address the role of "spirituals" within the text and in the ritual use of call and response in the healing ceremonies of the Sexual Phobia group in the fourth and final section of the novel.

In Ngugi's defining lecture on "orature," he makes a point to recognize both oral literature and written literature as separate but "complete aesthetic systems" with their own signifying codes and forms of meaning. The term "orature" is a useful generic catch-all that absorbs both of these systems in a symbiotic fashion wherein the signifying

codes and forms of meaning are co-present and yet not mutually exclusive. This symbiotic term means that the presence of an oral code, like the parable or folktale, embedded within the written narrative maintains its *a priori* significance in Haitian oral culture, but also takes on a new and specific role in producing meaning within the textual confines of the written novel. Throughout the novel, each proverb, folktale and aphorism works both within the oral system and independently produces a system of meaning within the written text.

The text of Breath, Eyes, Memory is replete with elements of the spoken word. It contains terms and phrases from English, French and Creole, and relies as much on the use of prose to describe the actions of the characters as it does on the use of gossip, recorded conversations and proverbs to advance the plot and thicken the significance of the story as a whole. The novel's use of oral culture connects with Ngugi's concept of orature because orality is an integral part of the composition of the world of the novel. The sense of oral culture which resonates through the use of proverbs and folk stories serves as a connecting tissue through the Haitian community represented in the novel and holds the community together as a body across communal differences laterally and across familial and genealogical lines vertically. One key element of the oral story or of the folk tale is the tendency to unfold towards an etiological conclusion, that is, towards an explanation of the thing which the story has described (Obiechina, 213). The traditional story concludes with an explanation or an attempt to provide an account of the origins of things, as we will see with the various stories about the "testing" cult. The novel as a genre has been noted as a particularly fertile grounds for the co-presence of the oral and

literary aesthetics, cited not only by Ngugi and Obeichina, but also African writers like Achebe, Soyinka and others.

The opening phrases of the novel, "A flattened and drying daffodil was dangling off the little card that I had made my aunt Atie for Mother's Day" signals the underlying condition of the novel, the young girl's separation from her mother and her reliance upon an extended family network of female relatives (3). This card, made up on a "squashed" flower and "plain beige cardboard" is a secret gift with which Sophie hopes to surprise her aunt, despite the fact that Atie has not yet learned to read. Despite her strongest wishes, Sophie's card is rebuffed by Atie, denying the relationship which Sophie seeks with the woman who has been the dominant female presence in her life. While Atie does not specifically reject Sophie, she rejects the maternal role that the card would signify and attempts to focus that energy on the relationship between Sophie and Martine, despite the fact that Martine is, for Sophie, not much more than the "picture on the night table" who nightmarishly pursues Sophie to "squeeze [her] into the small frame so I could be in the picture with her" (8). Not only does she reject the card as a written token of Sophie's affection, but she won't let Sophie read it aloud to her. It is not until later that Sophie asserts the voice of her love and recites the text of the card to Atie despite her protests. Despite, or perhaps because of, the conflicting emotions felt my both Atie and Sophie, this poem becomes a sign of their linkage and re-appears in Atie's notebook years later when she learns to write. The initial relationship between biological mother and daughter is made problematic by this misdirected affection and the incomplete connection of both the spoken and the written word.

In contrast to the rejection encountered by the written word, the world of the *konbit* potluck and the social network of Croix-des Rosets where Atie and Sophie reside is defined by a unifying social environment in which factory workers and field hands gather "to get together, eat, and celebrate life" (12). Within this small community, the role of the spoken word, including the "whispering mystical secrets of needle and thread" and the gossip which Madame Augustin has been circulating about the arrival of a large package for Atie defines a community of speakers and listeners (9). This community has its own codes of conduct which Sophie has internalized, learning "to listen without looking directly at the women's faces," knowing that this is disrespectful, and that she should "low[er] her eyes, pretending to be studying some random pebbles on the ground" (12-3). Within this community, codes of respect and behavior are implicit and form a complete aesthetic of their own, in which the roles of elders and children are established within the otherwise egalitarian social milieu. It is within this social milieu that Sophie finds out the truth about the recent package that has arrived, and the reason for Atie's particular reticence to engage in a maternal role with Sophie. Martine has sent for Sophie and "as fast as you can put two fingers together to snap" has sent a plane ticket (16). Despite her own reticence to part with Sophie, Atie reminds her that she has "heard with her own two ears what everyone has said" about the significance of the opportunity to relocate to New York (17). With her fate confirmed and affirmed by the community of the *konbit* and the neighboring families, Sophie is conducted from the Edenic world of her close female relations toward New York, where she will experience a far greater degree of isolation and exclusion.

While in New York, the oral culture of the Haitian Diaspora is represented in a far more distant way, primarily through the character of Marc, the attorney who helped negotiate Sophie's arrival in the United States. For Sophie, the world of Brooklyn is profoundly isolating, in part because of her language and schooling. Having been raised in the Haitian countryside, Sophie's day to day language would have been Creole, though she would have had some exposure to French. However, Martine insists that she attend the Marantha Bilingual Institution where she would learn French and English, both new languages. Her separation from her linguistic heritage leads to deeper exclusion in the American milieu. After school, when she crossed paths with public school students, she is mocked as a Haitian, fulfilling her fears of being idenitified with the anagrams for F.O.B. (Fresh of the Boat), H.B.O (Haitian Body Odor) and AIDS. Beyond this social discrimination of Sophie's peers, Martine imposes strict curfews and does not permit her daughter to participate in the culture and society of other teens in the City. It is only through Martine's interactions with Marc Chevalier, who often frequents Haitian restaurants, that the presence of the Haitian oral culture in the Diaspora is revealed. Marc's peers shout to one another about politics in a manner from across the dinner tables akin to a verbal boxing match, because:

> for some of us, arguing is a sport. In the marketplace in Haiti, whenever people are arguing, other would gather around them to watch and laugh at the colorful language. People rarely hit each other. They didn't need to. They could wound just as brutally by cursing your mother, calling you a sexual misfit, or accusing you of being form the hills. If you couldn't match them with even stronger accusations, then you would concede the argument by keeping your mouth shut (54-55).

Even in this context, the possibility of connecting with the larger community is denied by Martine who turns her attention to the menu rather than defending Marc from the joking attacks of the women in the restaurant.

Beyond this small pocket of oral culture within the Haitian Diaspora, the only other significant reservoirs of orality that exist for Sophie are found within the apartment itself, when Martine and Sophie discuss and then practice the testing and when Martine finally tells Sophie about the rape which resulted in her birth and Martine's exile to New York. Even the bare bones telling of the story, "like someone stating a fact" is an incomplete oral gesture, "sadder than the chunk of the sky and flower petals story that Tante Atie liked to tell" (61). This origin story, shared between Atie and Sophie, is preferable to the stark reality of Martine's rape story, and serves as a comforting reminder of Atie's bedtime stories, a gift in which Ifé is also quite skilled (110, 113-126). By contrast, the third part of the novel, set primarily in Haiti, focuses the reader's attention much more heavily on the use of proverbs and dialect in the daily exchanges of family member and the community. These include a number of proverbs that are mixed into the daily conversations of the Caco's with the rest of their community, including forms of honorific forms of address as well as the phrase "Ou libéré?" which refers, on a surface level, to the freight carried by each market woman (103, 96).[22] Along with the stories told by Atie and Ifé to pass the hours of the night, there are also numerous songs referenced in the novel, usually dealing with the perils faced by women or posed by women (118, 150). Between these two worlds, there is significant communication that takes place between the family members via the medium of cassette tapes, preferring the

[22] Danticat describes the use of this greeting as occuring only after women have entered the market and lain down their wares. It has a greater symbolic meaning at the end of the text, as discussed further on.

spoken word to the written word; Martine is informed of Sophie presence in Haiti through Ifé's tactful manipulation of the recording device. However, in the US the possibility of leaving messages on telephone answering machines rather than relying upon direct communication complicates the scene of Sophie's return to Joseph, the communication between Martine and Sophie, and finally, Marc's ability to contact Sophie and tell her about Martine's death. The combination of all these elements, in both Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora reveals the omnipresence of oral culture throughout the Haitian experience, though it may also serve to highlight a certain degree of ambiguity about both oral and written modes of communication which are seen in tension throughout the novel.

Another manifestation of oral culture within black communities in both the US and the Caribbean is the use of call and response forms in song, stories and ritual. Whether in the great oral epics like Sun-Jata or in representations of the "parole de nuit" when elders tell stories to the youth as in Rue Case Negres by Joseph Zobel, the call-and-response format involves an interrogation by the story teller and a response by the hearer of the tale.[23] In fact, this formula becomes the title for Danticat's short-story cycle Krik? Krak! where Danticat consciously links her stories to the intimate space of storytelling. Within the novel Breath, Eyes, Memory, there are multiple examples of call and response discourse, when Ifé is telling her story to the local children ("Krik?" "Krak!"), when the market women inquire about one another's safe completion of their work ("Ou libéré?"), and in the singing of the "Ring sways to mother" and "Good-bye brother. Good-bye sister" songs which mark Martine's funeral (230, 232). These songs recall the dinner at

[23] See Écrire la Parole de Nuit, edited by Ralph Ludwig, Paris: Gallimard, 1994. especially Juminer, 131-141.

Martine's when Joseph and Marc seem to implicitly connect in talking about the "Oh Mary, don't you weep" spiritual which Joseph knows, while Marc responds with "Erzulie, don't you weep" (215). But the most significant example of call and response, in terms of production of identity within the novel, is during one of the ceremonies of the Sexual Phobia Group.

This group, made up of four women symbolizing the far reaching significance of the Diaspora, share in various sexual traumas including excision, rape and testing. A therapist, whose experience includes being a Santeria priestess, organizes the therapeutic sessions in both individual and group sessions. In the individual sessions that we see with Sophie, there is a constant back and forth between therapist and patient in which Rena frequently asks Sophie to envision her mother's experiences of sexuality, including both rape and consensual sex. The combination of 20th century therapeutic methods with those that belong to *curenderismo* or other forms of folk healing has been validated by Ana Castillo, author of Massacre of the Dreamers, who demonstrates that folk healing in the Americas involves healing methods from all five continents and over five centuries of practices. In discussing the confluences of folk, herbal and medical remedies in *curenderismo*, Castillo sets as a measure of success the ability to remain "sane in an insane world" (154-8). This capacity to recognize the existence of trauma and to accept the desire for self-improvement is a basic necessity in order to overcome trauma, and is signified by the formation of the group within the novel and their use of various methods in order to overcome the traumas each member has experienced.

In this example, orature allows for the synthesis of the traditional practices of Santeria rituals with the practices of 20th Century therapy, specifically by bringing a

tradition of call and response to both the individual and the group practices. In the group practice which we are shown, Davina leads a series of prayers and affirmations which the rest of the group reiterates, forming a group voice which acknowledges pain and strength, beauty and difficulty, suffering and survival. This ceremony is specifically about Buki, the Ethiopian who experienced FGM (female genital mutilation) at the hands of her grandmother; she has written a letter in which she narrates her experience by communicating to her absent grandmother. In order to complete the ceremony, Sophie is called upon to finish reading the letter which becomes too painful for Buki to finish on her own. The last line from the letter sets up a paradigm that is as true for Buki, and for the therapy group as a whole, as it is for Sophie, "It would be easy for me to hate you, but I can't because you are part of me. You are me" (203). Here, not only is the therapy an explicit blending of the oral and the written, but it highlights both communal and ancestral bonds between women. Buki's identity is tied up in her relationship to her grandmother, as well as to the other women in the Therapy group; by extension, we can see that Sophie's identity is likewise tied to both her community and her ancestry.

Figures of Identity in Breath, Eyes, Memory: Caco family, Marassas and Erzulie

The question of collective identity in the context of Danticat's novel, and indeed in The Farming of the Bones as well, is mired in the complex and violent history of Haiti itself. Despite it's 200-year history of independence, the nation of Haiti has been plagued by a history of violence and oppression from both internal and external sources. Danticat's novel appropriately reflects that violent history in the metaphors which

characterize the collective identity of Sophie and her family as Haitian. Three key symbols of Haitian collective identity -- the Caco family name, the concept of the *marassas*, and the deity Erzulie -- become the subtext for the violent history on the nation, and by extension its inhabitants. While many critical articles on the novel focus on these three symbols as symbolic resistance against male patriarchy and colonialist ideology, each of them is also deeply and intrinsically born of violence. However, these symbols are mired in complex webs of violence and ideological hierarchies which need to be exposed before they can be appropriated as positive symbols of identity. By looking at the Caco heritage of internalized violence, which unites every family member to death (the graveyard on the hill called "Guinea"), by exploring the violent dissociation implicit in Danticat's use of the term *marassas*, which subtly diminishes the violence of testing and rape; and by exploring the impossible complexity of the violent deity of Erzulie, ultimately a goddess of objectification, the implicit violence of these metaphors can be exposed and deconstructed so that they can be explored critically to the degree that they function as symbols of identity for Haitian women.

The Caco Family

The first example of the significance of collective identity within the novel is the theme of the Caco family as a discrete unit or clan in which each individual is significantly linked to one or more ancestors or blood relatives. Caco blood, a symbol of family or clan identity, plays only a subsurface role in the first and second sections of the text, but takes on a profound significance in the third and forth sections of the text,

encompassing Sophie's trip to Haiti and her return to the US. The Caco family blood serves as an ambiguous identifier both within the novel, and within Haitian history. On the one hand, the Caco rebels were guerilla style fighters against the American occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934, named after tiny red ants with a stinging bite (N'Zengou-Tayo, 124). Their resistance to this 20th Century re-colonization of the first black republic and its claims to freedom is a proud history worthy of self-identification. On the other hand, however, Donette A. Francis notes that the Caco rebels were amongst the first to use rape as a means of politically motivated violence, despite the "reluctance of nationalist narrative to admit the these native insurgents also raped women of the very nation they were assembled to protect" (77). Thus, despite their cultural significance as anti-imperialist freedom fighters, the Caco name represents an internalized sexual violence on the national level.

The family name works as an ironic metaphor for Sophie's family; yes the family is proudly connected to resistance to the American occupation, but that resistance is compromised by the cruel history of Haitian men raping Haitian women. While the Caco rebels resist a violent colonial dominance, they impose an equally violent sexual dominance. Under the François "Papa Doc" Duvalier regime (1956 - 1971) the nation's secret police, known as the Ton-Ton Macoute, used rape and murder as political punishment and did so with relative impunity: "they roamed the streets in broad daylight, parading their Uzi machine guns" (138). Because Martine was a victim of this institutionalized rape by the Macoutes (and Sophie the product), their family name suggests the internalization of this violent means of expressing power through the sexual violation of innocent women. This is significant because the concept of testing can be

seen as a kind of sexual violation perpetuated by mother against daughter based on the internalization of extreme codes of sexual propriety that suppress women's sexuality outside of marriage. On the other hand, the Caco family history, as recited by Ifé, includes Charlemagne Le Grand Caco, whom N'Zengou-Tayo relates to the historical figure "Charlemagne Péralte who led the first Caco resistance against the American Occupation. The story told about the Caco's name does not expand on the legendary male historical figure but stresses the female lineage" (125). However ambiguous the cultural and historical context of the name might be, within the context of the novel, Ifé is in no way ambiguous about how she feels about her ancestry. The trip to the family graveyard is particularly illustrative of this, as Ifé chides Sophie "Walk straight," as she passes the hodge-podge markers of family graves, "you are in the presence of family" (149). Ifé's litany of names as she addresses the deceased allows us to see the connection that the Caco family retains to their ancestors, not only in the last name, but also in the first and middle names.

In the case of Brigitte Ifé Woods, whose first and middle names are borrowed from her great-great grandmother and great-grandmother respectively, the Haitian blood keeps her strong, but the Woods name, which does tie her to African-American culture, promises to protect her from falling victim to the same cycles of internalized sexual violence that have traumatized the other Caco women. Ultimately this name demonstrates the symbiotic nature of the Haitian Diaspora: Brigitte signifies Haiti's French colonial past, Ifé recalls the sacred Yoruba city in Nigeria, and Woods recalls the slave names given Africans in North America. Even at Martine's funeral, Brigitte's presence and participation is signified by Sophie's addition of a second handful of dirt

into the grave, “for my daughter who was not there, but was part of this circle of women from whose gravestones our names had been chosen” (232-3). There is another value to the name Brigitte in the Haitian context, as that name is occasionally used to reference a voodoo deity Maman Brigitte, the wife of Baron Samedi, who rules over graveyards and funeral rituals (Deren, 234). Though Danticat does not reference this herself, the connection between the name and the graveyard, and later Ifé’s funeral, implies this connection to Haitian folk culture.

The presence of all these names also indicates the degree to which identity, in the context of Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora, is constructed around concepts of ancestry as much as around the concepts of *konbit*, that community forged by orature and shared stories and songs. But the question of identity is also linked to another ancestral form, which finds its realization in spiritual terms. Not only is the term Guinea used to describe the burial ground above Croix-de-Roset, it also takes on a metaphysical significance as the place where the Caco women eventually come together. It serves as a “place where all the women in my family hoped to eventually meet one another, at the very end of each of our journeys” (174). It is thus a site where the names and origins of the Caco women are celebrated, but it also serves as a future gathering place for the family members to reconnect with the family line. Danitcat’s conceptual linkage between Guinea and the graveyard within the novel illustrates a Haitian conception of origins in African terms, though that heritage has been clearly coded into the Caribbean context, not unlike the concept of the twins, or *marassas*, which has African origins, but is an exclusively Haitian term.

Marassas

In Breath, Eyes, Memory the concept of the *marassas*, commonly recognized as twins, is used to identify twin-like relationships or the processes of doubling, that is splitting the self into two. In the text, these concepts are tangentially related to the understanding of *marassas* in Haitian voodoo and the related Yoruba cosmology in West Africa. A great deal of critical attention has already focused on Danticat's use of the twin figures and her novel's attempt to describe how women relate to one other and how they survive trauma. In the novel, the two explicit usages of the term *marassas* are complicated by Danticat's linking of the Haitian term to traumatic incidents of sexual contact. Based on a closer reading of the *marassas* in Haitian and West African culture, I propose to deconstruct the violence implicit in the term *marassas* as used in the novel, and to offer a counter reading of the text which would show that there are other groups within the novel that function as *marassas*, but are not explicitly identified as such.

Marassas are a Haitian version of the Yoruba cosmological view of twins, or *ibeji*, which symbolize the dual aspect of the cosmos in Nigeria (Desmangles 1992 110, Karade, 27). In Yoruba and Haitian contexts biological twins are highly revered, but the concept of the *marassas* is not dependent on biological twinning. Carrol F. Coates points out that in Desquiron's Les Chemins de Loco-Miroir, the two characters who share in the sacred *marassas* relationship are taken by their birth mothers to a ceremonial baptism which serves to "consecrate the special status of these 'sisters'" (189). In Yoruba, the *ibeji* are a very powerful force, but they are regarded with great trepidation; likewise, in Haiti, the *marassas* are associated with both good luck and great vulnerability (Mobolade

15, Coates 187). Specific to both Haitian and Yoruba culture, however, is a third element to the pairing of the twins, usually identified as the next child born after the arrival of the twins. This child is always considered to be special, and is revered as *esu lehin ibeji* (trickster behind twins) in Yoruba-land, or in Haiti as the highly respected *dossou/dossa* (male/female child born after the twins) (Mobolade 14, Coates 193). This is because in Yoruba cosmology, the twins represent the creative powers of the universe, Mawu-Lisa, the godhead, divided into male and female, which produce the rest of the world, starting with Eshu. Eshu is also known by the name Llegba in Haiti and is ritually worshipped in order to open the gates to discourse with other *lwa*, or Haitian deities (Desmangles 108-114). However, Maya Deren, in *Divine Horsemen*, points out that in Haiti, the *marassas* are often invoked before Eshu because of their greater creative power (Deren 92-8).

Chancy discusses the use of *marassas* in several Haitian novels, and cites Deren to support her argument that the *marassas* form an androgynous, holistic entity with three terms that fuses male and female power. Deren's text contains a footnote that notes Courlander's distinction, in Haiti Singing, between Marassa Guinée, of African origin and with male and female components, and a Marassa Creole of Haitian origin with exclusively female components (Courlander, 38, 55, in Deren, 291, n30). Relying on this concept, Chancy argues that in Breath, Eyes, Memory, and in Under the Bone by Anne-Christine d'Adesky, the holistic unity of the *marassas* represents a "purely female force," and that an all feminine representation of the *marassas* triangle suggests "that female labor, female (in)sight, will lead to revelation, to empowering sources of knowledge" (Chancy 162). In the case of the almost exclusively female context of Breath, Eyes, Memory, the figure of *marassas* can thus be read as a feminine union which produces

knowledge, power and wisdom. However powerful the *marassas* may be, their power is not implicitly or exclusively good; the invocation of the *marassas* also suggests maladies and crises like those encountered in Danticat's novel.

Whether referencing biological twins, or invoked as a symbolic relationship between individuals, the highly symbolic role of *marassas* in Haitian culture is illustrated in the novel Breath, Eyes, Memory. While the obvious incarnation of the *marassas* is figured in the relationship between Martine and Sophie, I would argue that the *marassas* theme is actually omnipresent in the novel as a means of connecting the female characters across generations and experiences. While only Martine and Sophie are explicitly linked in this relationship, the figure of the *marassas* can also be seen to encompass the relationships between Martine and Atie, between Atie and Louise and as uniting the three women in Sophie's sex therapy group. An argument could also be made that the uniquely Haitian concept could also be a metaphor for the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which share the island of St. Domingue.[24] *Marassas* are always linked through their shared history; however, they are always different. In their best incarnations, they form feminine triangles coinciding with a matrifocal context of Haitian, or even broader Diaspora life; but even then, the relationship suggests a shared, hard fate which is not easy to resist. Nonetheless, the concept of *marassas* in each of these cases offers the possibility of rewarding, productive female relationships that suggest an alternative to imposed standards of heterosexist relationships.

But this latent conception of the *marassas* as a Haitian paradigm of female unity is transformed into a violent and oppressive form by Martine when she first uses the phrase while justifying the process of testing and trying to distract Sophie from what she

[24] This is especially relevant to criticism of Danticat's Farming of the Bones (1999).

is doing. The testing, in which Martine inserts a finger into Sophie's vagina to verify that she is a virgin, becomes a kind of oppressive ritual which serves to "consecrate the special status of these 'sisters'" in terms of the *marassas* relationship (Coates, 189). While not a voodoo ceremony (there is no invocation to the *lwa*, there is no *hougan* or voodoo priestess), the act is ritualized in a patina of intimacy that obscures the obvious sexual violence of the act by connecting it to distracting stories about the unique form of love shared by *marassas*. When Martine initiates Sophie into the testing that both she and Atie experienced -- something "a mother is supposed to do… until her daughter is married" -- this becomes the basis of their new relationship, overcoding any other (Danticat, 60). Here Martine does not acknowledge the relationship of *marassas* as a productive feminine union, but instead tells Sophie that "[t]he *Marassas* were two inseparable lovers," without acknowledging the possibility of producing any new or different entity. Martine's conception of the *marassas* recalls the myth of Narcissus, insisting that the daughter be socialized in the image of her mother and denying Sophie any degree of autonomy or independence. Unlike the natural *marassas* relationship which Sophie perceives in the mirror, Martine's *marassas*,

> looked the same, talked the same, walked the same. When they laughed, they even laughed the same and when they cried, their tears were identical. When one went to the stream, the other rushed under the water to get a better look. When one looked in the mirror, the other walked behind the glass to mimic her. What vain lovers they were those Marassas. Admiring one another for being so much alike, for being copies. (84-5)

Implicit in the initiation is a threat that if Sophie chooses to love another, any other, she will lose the love of her mother, "The love between a mother and a daughter is deeper than the sea… You and I we could be like Marassas. You are giving up a lifetime with

me" (85). Though the two women now share the experience of this humiliation and violation, it fails to bring them closer. Instead, this limited understanding of *marassas* ultimately entraps Sophie by insisting upon static similarity between herself and her mother. Martine narcissistically drowns Sophie as she reflects, from under the water, Martine's experience, trapping Sophie in the glass of her own mirror-image.

Rossi correctly notes that Martine is aware that the testing is abusive, but justifies the incestuous violation of her daughter as an attempt to protect her daughter; that having been both tested and raped herself, Martine internalizes this gender socialization and repeats this method of policing her daughter's sexuality. Following in the family tradition of testing, she uncritically continues the cycle of abuse and violation. But by "[i]nflicting on Sophie the same pain she once endured, Martine attempts to reconcile her split existence by creating a double, believing that by sharing pain, their souls will be united. However, the testing has the opposite effect, distancing Sophie from her mother" (Rossi, 207). The violation becomes a repeated ritual as Martine continues to test her daughter weekly, until Sophie finds it so oppressive that she "eliminate[es] the object in question," by taking hold of the kitchen pestle (the phallic shaped grinder with which foodstuffs would traditionally be ground in a mortar), formerly a symbol of her dedication to her mother, to complete the violation started by Martine (Duvidier, 53). Sophie's self-violation, and the ensuing tearing, though performed by herself on herself, is perceived by Martine as a failure to adhere to the strictly imposed codes of virginity resulting in Martine's banishment of Sophie from her house.

But unlike Martine, who left a Haitian traditional culture without knowing where else to go, Sophie has had the experience of both Haitian and American life. Unlike

Martine, she has Joseph, who agrees to marry her and take her to his residence where she can convalesce through the significant vaginal tearing and subsequent infection caused by the incident with the pestle. Her choice to fail the test of virginity, a choice to destroy the *marassas* bond imposed by her mother, completes Martine's ritual transformation of Sophie into a woman just like herself: Tested, violated, exiled. However, Sophie's violation is not the total violent subjection to the will of another experienced by Martine. Sophie sees the act of self-mutilation as being "like breaking manacles, an act of freedom" (Danticat, 130). Ultimately, Rossi shows that while their traumas have been similar, the two women "are not identical (not Marassas) because their reactions to trauma differ. Martine endures secrecy and this leads to her death. Sophie exposes her secrets, disrupting the cycle of violence" (Rossi, 209). Sophie resists becoming a mirror image of her mother by showing agency in ending the testing, and in talking about her trauma and experiences to her grandmother, aunt and even her therapist. Ultimately, the act of self-mutilation is an act of agency not only in Sophie's own life, but across the lives of the entire Caco family: Sophie's choice, to end the testing through self-mutilation transfers the control of the practice to herself, allowing her to reverse the family's historical loss of control in testing, thus saving Brigitte from the practice.

We later find out (in the disjunctive unraveling of the events between the end of section two, when Sophie leave her mother's house, and the beginning of section three, when Sophie arrives in Haiti with an infant in her arms), that over the weeks of testing, Sophie "learned to double while being tested. [She] would close her eyes and imagine all the pleasant things that I had known" (Danticat, 155). Whereas Sophie relates this doubling tendency to her experiences of doing chores with Atie, when they would

imagine pleasant things while doing unpleasant tasks, the doubling during testing is a kind of dissociation of the mind and body and functions as a coping mechanism for Sophie, both through the testing, and later, during sexual contact with her husband (Francis, 83). Francis argues that Sophie's doubling is actually inherited from her mother, for whom doubling and dissociation are directly related to the post-traumatic stress disorder from her own rape by the Ton-Ton Macoute.[25] Francis argues that "Martine's dissociation is a faint attempt to deal with a trauma that has irrevocably altered her subjectivity and has literally rendered her speechless" and that Martine's nightmares and self-mutilation (she tears her sheets and bites her skin during the nightmares) are a part of this inability to tell this story herself, "demonstrat[ing] that she still suffers from the trauma of the rape" (Francis, 80). From this analysis, it appears that the doubling is not just a pleasant slipping away, it is a dissociative practice tied to violence, for example, "following the vaudou tradition, most of our presidents were actually one body split into two: part flesh and part shadow. That was the only way they could rape so many people and still go home to play with their children and make love to their wives" (Danticat 155-6). The dissociation between mind and body seems to occur with Martine as well, as Rossi argues through a statement made by Danticat in an interview, where the doubling or separation experienced by Martine "allows people to do very cruel things" (Shea 1996, 4, quoted in Rossi).

When the text next uses the term *marassas*, after Martine and Sophie return to New York, it coincides with an episode of doubling during a sexual encounter between Sophie and Joseph, Sophie once again dissociates herself from her body

[25] Francis relies on psychoanalyst Judith Herman for her description of this term and its symptoms which "include the will to forget or amnesia about the traumatic event, the attempt to dissociate that generally induces a sense of fragmentation, and, the "unspeakableness" of the trauma itself" (Francis, 80).

> I closed my eyes and thought of the Marassa, the doubling. I was lying there on that bed and my clothes were being peeled off my body, but really I was somewhere else. Finally, as an adult, I had a chance to console my mother again. I was lying in bed with my mother. I was holding her and fighting off that man, keeping those images out of her head. I was telling her that it was all right. That is was not a demon in her stomach, that it was a child, like I was once a child in her body. (Danticat, 200)

In this episode of dissociation, Sophie identifies anew with Martine in the condition of motherhood, both as a sibling to the infant, and as a mother herself. In this new bond of friendship, Sophie accepts that the past is gone and responds to her mother's desire for a strong relationship, "we were now even more than friends. We were twins, in spirit. Marassas" (200). Despite this new sense of unity, and the active effort made by Sophie and her therapist to have Sophie become more conscious of her true feelings about Martine, the possibility of a positive relationship is foreclosed by Martine's impending pregnancy. Nothing shows more completely the degree to which they are different: while Sophie is able to carry her child to term, Martine is not. She imagines the unborn infant speaking to her and associates the pregnancy with her rapist / attacker from her childhood. Ultimately the *marassas* bond is not strong enough to save Martine from herself. Martine ultimately repeats the rape in the canefield, with herself as agent violating herself and her unborn infant, using a kitchen knife to stab into her stomach seventeen times, terminating both the pregnancy and her own life. Martine's suicide can be read as another Caco self-mutilation in which she rejects pregnancy.

In following the development of the term *marassas* through the novel, one is struck by the relationship of violence to the term at every turn. Martine imposes both the relationship and the incestuous sexual violation upon Sophie at the same time. Sophie

responds by learning to double, splitting herself in the same way that the Macoutes who raped her mother were able to do. While doubling, Sophie makes an effort to engage her mother while she is pregnant with what would have been her half-brother, and shortly thereafter Martine "eliminates the object in question" just as Sophie did in order to end the testing (Duvidier 53). Thus the imposed relationship of the *marassas* over the mother and child union appears to be an unreasonable and impossible attempt to link women into a spiritual sisterhood. And while the doubling may seem to protect Sophie from the testing or from the trauma of sex with her husband, it is clearly one of the main issues that she is trying to address by going to a therapist to address her sexual phobias.

Despite this legacy, Johnson declares that these experiences make for a more "mature Sophie" who acknowledges the concept of *marassas* as indicative of an "inextricable connectivity [between women] as captives in the web of patriarchal power," essentially arguing that women are helpless against patriarchal power and that they have no recourse but to group themselves together (Johnson 157). Likewise, N'Zengou-Tayo claims that through the doubling, Sophie "is protesting silently against this assimilation, refusing to become her mother's double," despite the obvious psychological damage caused by this denial (N'Zengou-Tayo 130). Francis rejects these arguments by arguing that dissociation / doubling is not worth the too-high price of ideological and physical subjection. She argues that through the process of a holistic therapy influenced by Western, Caribbean and African concepts, Sophie experiences a "relational healing: she understands that the personal healing and development has collective implications. Through the difficult task of working through her personal "I" in therapy, Sophie makes claims for a plural first person "we." In transcending the limitations imposed on her own

body, Sophie insures that she is able to raise a daughter who has a healthy relationship to her own body and sexuality" (Francis 86). Though she has the help of the sex therapy group, the element of healing comes from Sophie herself, in her status as a migrant who weds Caribbean thought with Western perspectives to enact her own agency, knowing that it was "up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had her name burnt in the flames" (Danticat 203).

Though the examples of the *marassas* as twins and as doubling can be seen to be in an artificial and unhealthy competition with other relationships in this analysis, there are several examples of feminine relationships in the novel which seem to engage the fundamental theme of a productive, sustained, long-term relationship between women. These groups of twins include Atie and Louise, who "are like milk and coffee, lips and tongue. We are two fingers on the same hand. Two eyes on the same head" (Danticat 98)[26]. One can also recognize the *Marassas-trois* in the composition of the three women who represent different post-colonial subjectivities in the sex therapy group, since they are united by the experience of gender violence from their local cultures, that "have shaped their subjectivities" in a similar way (Francis 85). These women go through dramatic rituals to make this relationship sacred, dressing in robes, saying prayers in unison and burning the names of their oppressors as a group.[27] And perhaps most importantly of all, I believe the full, three-fold conception of the *marassas* is found in Sophie's conception of herself as the third element produced by the shared experiences and responsibilities of Martine and Atie.

[26] Miriam Chancy also points this out in her study of Danticat.
[27] While she doesn't go as far as to say that these women are *marassas*, Francis argues that the ritual dressing and burning is, as Danticat suggests, a Santeria exorcism that spiritually unites these women.

While not biologically born as twins, Atie and Martine can be read as a pair of *marassas* growing together after the death of their father and sharing in the experiences and dreams of girlhood. Martine tells Sophie, "You should have seen us when we were young. We always dreamt of becoming important women. We were going to be the first women doctors from my mother's village. We would not stop at being doctors either. We were going to be engineers too" (43). But this pairing was drastically cut short after Martine was raped, partially by her own suicidal anxiety, and partially because she is sent to work as a restavèk in another part of Haiti before being sent to New York.[28] To a certain extent, the mystique of the twin relationship remains, since the responsibility for providing for Sophie, the *Dousa*, is shared: Martine labors in the US, and the sends money which Atie uses to provide and care for Sophie.

Once Sophie arrives in New York, she finds that Martine has attempted to bestow some of her maternal affection to a surrogate child, a "well-dressed doll… caramel-colored with a fine pointy nose" that Martine has personified as a resident in the apartment, "'Come' she said, 'We will show you to your room'" (44). The doll is voiceless and complacent as Martine changes her clothes and entrusts the doll to Sophie, forcing her to share a bed that is so small that the artificial child "left little room for me" (46). This encounter with her surrogate self is somewhat traumatic for Sophie as it reinforces a sense of alienation regarding her role in the family as a whole. Sophie notices a photograph of "her and Tante Atie there. Tante Atie was holding a baby and my mother had her hand around Tante Atie's shoulder" (45). In this image of the feminine *marassas*, the twins and the child, Sophie recognizes not family unity, but disjunction,

[28] A restavèk lives with a family as a servant in exchange for room and board, and perhaps education, but many times in Haiti, this relationship is as abusive as child slavery. See Cadet's Restavec.(sic) or National Coalition for Haitian Rights, "Restavek No More: Eliminating Child Slavery in Haiti" 2002.

> I had never seen an infant picture of myself, but somehow I knew that it was me. Who else could it have been? I looked for traces in the child, a feature that was my mother's but still mine too. It was the first time in my life that I noticed that I looked like no one in my family. Not my mother. Not my Tante Atie. I did not look like them when I was a baby and I did not look like them now. (45)

The image of herself as an outsider prompts Sophie to reconsider her own lineage, considering the stories that Tante Atie told her to explain why she had a mother but not a father, that she was "born out of rose petals, water from the stream and a chunk of the sky" (47). That first night, Sophie encounters Martine's nightmares, though not the truth of her origin through rape. She awakens in the dingy apartment and sneaks into the bathroom, alone, "I looked at my red eyes in the mirror while splashing cold water over my face. New eyes seemed to be looking back at me. A new face all together… Accept your new life. I greeted the challenge, like one greets a new day. As my mother's daughter and Tante Atie's child" (49). After having played comforter to her own biological mother, Sophie establishes her own feminine *marassas* triangle and sees her identity differently through her new eyes rather than from the photographic image. Of her own will, and without specific instruction in the Haitian concept of the marassas, she baptizes herself as the *Dousa* of her mother and Atie, thereby consecrating their "special status as sisters" and her own productive emergence as a uniquely creative force within the *Marassas-Trois*. Thus through an unconscious re-enactment of the all feminine *marassas* triangle, Sophie finds the source of revelation, empowerment and knowledge which will help her to break the cycle of female subjection: herself.

ERZULIE

Like the figure of the *marassas* which takes on an ambiguous representation in the novel, Danticat's representation of Erzulie also requires some critical inquiry before being used as a universal metaphor or avatar of femininity. In the novel, as in religious characterizations, Erzulie is known as a representation of the Divine Mother through the Catholic icon of the Virgin Mary and fulfils multiple diverse, and even mutually exclusive, ideals of Haitain femininity. The name Erzili comes from the Fon in Benin, and much of her character can be seen as similar to Oshun, the Nigerian deity who represents the female nature of a cosmos of sexual duality (Desmangles 1992, 135). In the novel, Erzulie's power overwhelmingly emerges from her status as a divine mother capable of unconditional love. However, in both African and Haitian conceptions of the deity, the deity is far more complex, and is often enmeshed in webs of violent and arbitrary punishment. In the novel, Erzulie functions as a mythologized mother, a fantasy and phantasm that Sophie's imagination projects into the void left by the absence of her birth mother, and an impossible representation of femininity against which Martine tries to match up her life. Erzulie appears ubiquitously as a lifeless statue, and finally in the form of Martine's lifeless costumed body. These representations radically diminish the complexity of the deity within the novel, and while studies by Francis and Chancy elaborate on Erzulie as a symbol of female resistance and resilience, I seek to add to their excellent critical work by raising questions about the symbolic violence which silences and diminishes other aspects of this feminine deity in both Haitian culture and in the novel. By re-reading the depictions of Erzulie in the novel against the historically

profound erotic power of Erzulie in Haitian culture, I will show that Martine's transformation into Erzulie at the end of the text actually emphasizes the violence which stifles that feminine power in Martine more than the imagined power of the feminine.

Defined by Desmangles as the "Luxurious Virgin Mother," Erzulie (or Ezili in anthropological and religious texts, but Erzulie in the novel) "represents the cosmic womb in which divinity and humanity are conceived" and is a "symbol of fecundity who participates with the masculine forces of creation and maintenance of the universe" (Desmangles 1992, 143, 131). The Yoruba Oshun is "the divinity of fertility and feminine essence," and because of her qualities of unconditional love, sensuality and receptivity, she is consulted in cases of women's and children's health disorders; she can also "be very short tempered and irritable" (Karade 26). Desmangles argues that Erzulie, in the Haitian context is a major example of cultural symbiosis bringing together the African deity Oshun and the figure of the Virgin Mary from Catholicism[29]. This relationship demonstrates the complexity of the deity in all three contexts. She is multifaceted in the Yoruban world-view; she is represented by several different Catholic icons of the *Mater salvatoris*, the *Virgen de los Dolores*, and the *Maria dolorosa del monte Calvario* of Catholic hagiography; and in Haitian culture, she can be identified as Ezili Danto, Metres Ezili, and Ezili Freda (Desmangles 1992, 138-141). This listing of names is canonical, but far from comprehensive, as other studies by Metraux, Herskovitz and Deren include an almost unending plethora and profusion of names for different facets of the deity. According to Deren, this divine figure is

[29] I believe that Desmangles uses this term in the most positive sense of "mutual symbiosis" as opposed to "parastic symbiosis," emphasizing a non-dependent and non-destructive relationship. As with the other terms, hybrid, syncretic, synthesis, métissage, etc, this term is freighted with a certain biological significance, however the term seems to be less critically tarnished the terms "hybrid" and "syncretic."

> Recognized as the most powerful and arbitrary of gods in vodou, Ezili is also the most contradictory; a spirit of love who forbids love, a woman who is the most beloved yet feels herself the most betrayed. She can be generous and loving, or implacable and cruel. As mystery of love, assistance and beauty, she appears at might to her devotees in the form of a pale virgin. As spirit of vengeance, she is fiercely jealous and sometimes punishes wayward devotes with death, impotence, or frigidity if they dare drink or have sex on days devoted to her. (Dayan 1995, 59)

Erzulie is alternately defined and deified as virgin, prostitute, mother, vengeful woman, militant who desires everything in excess, seductress of men and women, patron of homosexuals and lesbians. It would seem that this deity is capable of being all things to all people, perhaps one of the reasons that so many have tried to appropriate this figure as an ideal of feminist power or female self-empowerment. While this role is a powerful and important one, Erzulie's power can be developed more fully by exploring the degree to which Erzulie is formed in the crucible of the Haitain plantation, absorbing projected images and ideals of women from both men and women, both whites and blacks, from throughout the island's history under French, Spanish, English, and even American control (Leyburn and Dupuy). If the multiplicity of representations and manifestations suggests anything, it is that Erzulie is an impossible fiction, an "impossible perfection which must remain unattainable" (Deren 144).

Dayan elaborates on Erzulie's diversity and mutability by pointing out that she is one of the few deities who "walks" in both the Rada (known as traditional and benign) and Petro (seen as more revolutionary and unrestrained) houses of Haitian vodou, going variously by the names Erzulie Freda, Erzulie Dantor and "*Ezili-le-wouj*" (Erzulie-the-rouge). These different names represent a spectrum of divine manifestations of femininity "as if the extremes of love and restraint, enacted for the community by the

generosity, tears, and surrender of Elizi Freda, lead to a more savage transformation: the flowers, perfume and basil of Ezili Freda turn into (or merge to form) the blood, flesh and dirt of *Ezili-le-wouj*" (Dayan 1995, 106). The image of Erzulie is a powerful metaphor for the symbiotic nature of Caribbean culture and can be seen as a "medium for apprehending the particulars of a society that was not African, not French, and certainly not a civilization as a dominant historiography has taught us to understand it" (Dayan 1995, 58). Erzulie is, by her very nature, a rejection of names and codes, symbolized by her free flowing passion which includes both male and female lovers. The most strident power of the deity is in her transformative qualities, her "mutability" from orisha to spirit horse, from Freda to Erzulie the Rouge, from "old hag" to "the young virgin" (106).

In an earlier study, Dayan states her concern that the richness of the deity results in "a language that fascinates, but distorts or annihilates the very specificities it attempts to describe" (Dayan 1994, 7). Chancy also warns against excessive elaboration of the female deity, stating, "Allusions to Erzulie only perpetuate the marginalization of Haitian women, in my opinion, since, as goddess, she occupies a spiritual realm and remains largely inaccessible" (Chancy 14). Dayan seeks instead to represent Erzulie as a representation of women's history in Haiti. Seeking an understanding of Erzulie that is both a history of women on the island, and also "an inquiry into the language of conquest," Dayan stages the conflicting identities of Erzulie Dantor, Erzulie Freda and "Erzulie-gé-rouge" as a simulacrum of the multiple forms of violence and desire on the mulatto in Haiti's plantation society (Dayan 1994, 7, 6). For Dayan, Erzulie is a "god specific to Haiti, whose strangest attributes delineate a history of women during slavery," and whose performance replays "this slippage between opposites: she both demands and

obeys, gains and loses, loves and hates" (11). The historical significance of Erzulie is also elaborated in the 1995 study, as Dayan characterizes Erzulie as "something like collective physical remembrance. The history of slavery is given substance through time by a spirit that originated in an experience of domination. That domination was most often experienced by women under another name, something called 'love'" (Dayan 1995, 56). This ideal of love as a justification for domination, possession and control is indeed a powerfully disorienting term, as seen earlier in the analysis of the testing, where claims to love and duty served to normalize sexual abuse. Dayan's conceptualization allows us as readers to better make sense of the use of the deity in Danticat's novel, and encourages us to explore the way the idolization of Erzulie can mask the subjugation of women by both male and female agents.

Erzulie statues from the Haitian bodega, Marc's home, Ifé's house in Haiti, and the special room dedicated to sex therapy group's rituals are all signifiers of the presence of this symbol of complex femininities. But since Erzulie is a symbiotic deity, "we know therefore that they are interchangeable in the stories. When Sophie's grandmother gives her a "statue" of Erzulie, we know that she gives her a statue of the Virgin Mary" (N'Zengou-Tayo 131). This detail multiplies the presence of Erzulie in the novel: for instance, we can interpret Sophie's prayer to Mary during the testing as an invocation of Erzulie. This correspondence also reveals itself when Marc and Joseph recognize that the African-American spiritual "Oh Mary don't you weep!" is linked to the "vaudou song[:] Erzulie don't you weep" (Danticat 215). Thus each time Martine curses "Jesus, Marie, Josesph" there is an implicit inclusion of the deity into the novel, despite the fact that Martine shows no other significant knowledge or practice of vaudau. In the form of a

statue or a curse / interjection, the figure of Erzulie / Virgin Mary does not serve as a productive metaphor for identity, but suffuses the background with reminders that prepare us for Erzulie's dramatic reappearance at the end of the novel. The song, however, does introduce a cross-cultural link, and also introduces the song that Martine has chosen for her funeral, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child." As a whole, the songs evoke the communal power of oral culture to unite, even across languages and cultures. In particular, Martine's song unites mother and daughter in recognizing the complicated relations that each has regarding maternity and their birth mothers. Only after this unifying moment does Martine acknowledge her own relationship to Erzulie, in the form of the Virgin, when she asks Sophie to pray to the Virgin for her after admitting that her nightmares are intensifying.

Erzulie haunts both Sophie and Martine as an ideal mother figure whose power, strength and love is infinitely complex, unlike their own birth mothers who fail to protect them from sexual trauma. Erzulie is introduced into the text in direct contrast to Martine, whom Sophie is only just getting to know. Unlike the frail, thin body of Martine, who has lost her breasts to cancer, Sophie considers her ideal mother:

> As a child, the mother I had imagined for myself was like Erzulie, the lavish Virgin Mother. She was the healer of all women and the desire of all men. She had gorgeous dresses in satin, silk and lace, necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets, anklets and lots and lots of French perfume. She never had to work for anything because the rainbow and the stars did her work for her. Even though she was far away, she was always with me. I could always count on her, like one counts on the sun coming out at dawn. (59)

The figure of Erzulie that young Sophie imagines is made all the more desirous by the sense of distance that ties the mythical figure to her real mother. This image of plenitude,

even in the absence of the mother figure, drives this description of the generous, even solicitous mother who provides for everything. Her power stems from erotic desire which is "the embodiment of human longing for an ideal in which human fantasy transcends the limitations of mundane reality and the exigencies of privation" (Desmangles 1992, 132). This erotic power is not purely sexual, but *eros*, the Greek word for love as noted by Audre Lorde, "born of chaos and personifying creative power and harmony." Lorde valorizes the erotic despite being labeled as "irrational… sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting" and claims the erotic as a "source of power and information… recognizing its power… and life appeal and fulfillment" (Lorde 1984, 101). The plenitude of Erzulie as mother is only a portion of the overwhelming excess of her rituals; and it is in her transformation into Erzulie Dantor, "the strongest female of the voodoo pantheon… above all else the single mother," that we perceive the fullness with which Erzulie exemplifies the erotic as a creative source of knowledge and power (Francis, 87). Dayan describes this transformation in a ritual typical of *vaudou* service, or spirit riding, "Nowhere is the demolition of an ideal type so pronounced as in the subversive erotics of [Erzulie]. The pale lady, alternately sweet and voracious enters the head of the black devotee, and together they re-create and reinterpret a history of mastery and servitude" (Dayan 1995, 60).

It is this final representation of Erzulie at Martine's funeral which most clearly shows the transformative power of the deity within the novel. Through the ritual of dressing the corpse before burial, Sophie creates a simulacrum of the divine Erzulie. Laid out in "the most crimson of all [her] clothes," Martine's appearance adds to the shock expressed by Ifé who does not look directly at the face or the body, but focuses

only on the red gloves and shoes. Martine's audacious costumery in "a two-piece suit that [Martine] was afraid to wear to the Pentecostal services", and "just a touch of rouge," recalls the Caco bird with which the family shares a name (Danticat 227). Martine's clothing represents not only her bloody demise, but also the image of that flying Caco bird, flushed with red, like a flame, as she makes the last stage of her 'journey' to Guinea, flying back to Africa with her ancestors. So in this scene, Martine is doubly manifest as an ancestor.

In her performance of Erzulie, "conjured" by Sophie, Martine becomes an unruly female, one who defies patriarchal law and religious law at the same time (Francis, 87). It is only in her death that Sophie can imagine Martine as the divine mother of whom she has always dreamt, in the image of a "Jezebel, hot-blooded Erzulie who feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped *them*, and killed *them*. She was the only woman with that power" (Danitact 227, original emphasis). Sophie transforms Martine from being the victim of rape to being the initiator, from fearing her sexuality to wielding it as a weapon. In this moment, Martine becomes an avatar of the divine feminine, but only in death. Only in the fact of her impermanence on this earth is she able to compare with the divine figure who, Chancy argues, she has been pursuing all her life through the use of skin lighteners and maintaining a sexual relationship without marriage (Chancy 123). In fact, Chancy asserts that Martine tries to emulate Erzulie by "attempting to transcend Haitian barriers of class, race and color by exiling herself to the United States." However, "as much as she seeks to transcend temporality by emulating Erzulie, [Martine] is bound to self-negating mores embedded in nineteenth-century ideals; for this reason Sophie is the painful memory of what she perceives to be her failure as a woman" (123). But

Martine's failure is her inability to unwed herself from those misogynistic ideals; beyond that, she holds a unique place in the spectrum of femininities found in the novel. She is a single mother who arrays herself with reds, yellows and greens and maintains a fairly long-term relationship with Marc. Sadly she devalues and disrespects herself for "failing" the testing, for "failing" to satisfy the codes with which she was imprinted by her mother, and this may lead to her own action in choosing to end her life.

Chapter Five

Maryse Conde, Tituba: The Rise and Fall of Subjectivity in Autobiographics of the Triangle Trade

Maryse Condé's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem confounds the line between history and autobiography through the re-imagining of a female figure, Tituba, from the Caribbean whose historical voice has been truncated and whose image had been preserved through the play The Crucible by Arthur Miller and its film adaptations. Taking this literary and historical figure as the site of an imagined first person narrative, Condé deconstructs Tituba's story in order to contrast Afrocentric Caribbean culture and Eurocentric Puritanical culture while emphasizing the interdependence between the two. Condé manipulates the narrative to allow for an expansive historical representation of slavery, the Salem witchcraft trials, and several examples of rebel slave communities and their role in fostering revolution and resistance against slavery in Barbados. In this process, Tituba's life swings from the tragic to the comic with representations of gruesome violence against slaves and bawdy sexuality. Producing an intertextual blend of court records, dramatic writing and Caribbean speech and literary patterns, Condé exploits forms of orature which resists easy classification into any particular genre. Likewise, through the practice of taking an underrepresented black female figure, elevating her voice to the first person, and expanding her story to include an imaginative and fictional representation of her influence in larger historical events and changes, the

novel illustrates a Caribbean conception of identity as both collective and free of the limitations of mortality. As a result, Condé resists the conception of a singular history of the Caribbean and offers a counter-history that focuses on the black African experience as opposed to a white European one.

Within the constructs of the text, which appears as a received narrative transmitted to Condé by Tituba herself, Tituba narrates her life from before her life begins and continues past her death. In the opening scene, set on a slave trading ship, an act of rape compounds the indignity of capture and chattelization, resulting in Abena's pregnant status upon her arrival in Barbados where she is partnered with another Nago slave, Yao, who names Tituba and become her adoptive father. While Tituba is still a child, she witnesses Darnell Davis, her white master, attempt to rape Abena; Abena stabs and kills Davis, and thus is hanged as a warning to all slaves not to raise arms against the whites. After Abena's death, Yao is sold to another slave owner and Tituba goes to live with Mama Yaya, another Nago who has special knowledge of both healing plants and the ability to communicate with spirits. After Mama Yaya's death, Tituba maintains contact with Abena, Yao and Mama Yaya through her spiritual knowledge, and lives for some time as a free woman along the River Ormond. Realizing that other slaves fear her for her powers, she decides to emerge from her hermitage and use her powers to heal the sick, which results in her meeting John Indian, her future husband. Tituba's choice to marry John is a choice to give up her freedom and live as a slave to Susanna Endicott, who torments her with Christianizing doctrines that barely conceal her racism. Tituba uses her knowledge of herbs and spirits to make Endicott become sick and bed-bound, eventually leading to her death.

Just before dying, Endicott sells John Indian to Reverend Parris, an unsuccessful merchant and unaccomplished minister, and Tituba accompanies them to Massachusetts, where Parris hopes to find employment as a minister. Eventually Parris is assigned to the troubled Salem parish, where poverty, plague and greed result in the historically famous Salem Witch Trials. Tituba is made a scapegoat and imprisoned, and chooses to confess rather than perish. After her jail time, in which she meets the Hester Prynne (from Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter), she is purchased by Benjamin Cohen d'Abruzzio, a Jew of Portuguese descent, in order to pay off the costs of her imprisonment. Here Tituba flourishes within the family and brings both physical and psychic joy to Benjamin and his family. After Benjamin's house is burned down in an act of Anti-Semitic persecution, he agrees to send Tituba back to Barbados where she starts a new life as a lover of the maroon, or rebel slave community, leader Christopher. Tituba eventually returns to the River Ormond where she serves her community as an obeah woman, or root worker, to her community, notably healing a young man, Iphigene from the brink of death. Iphigene, a revolution minded slave descended from the legendary Ti-Noel becomes her lover, but also forms an adoptive mother-son relationship until he and Tituba are condemned by Christopher and hanged. However, Tituba's narrative continues past her death as she describes, through Condé, her involvement with the lives of young as an invisible ancestral spirit.

The novel opens with an epigraph from Condé informing the reader that: "Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else."[30] According to this author's note, the text of

[30] For the purposes of this study, I will primarily use quotes from Richard Philcox's translation, though I will note some variations of meaning from the French. However, Lillian Manzor-Coats has provided an

the novel is Tituba's story, and the novel reflects this first person voice throughout the entirety. This narratological structure involves three levels of authorship, Condé, the narrating Tituba, and the narrated-Tituba. These perspectives are complicated by the translation itself and the presence of multiple editions.[31] Each of these voices, and the multiple editions, creates new textual space which are evidence of the multiple layers of agency in the construction of both the narrative and Tituba's identity. In the multiplicity of textual and narratological layers, the text both confounds and reinforces the understanding of narrative space that this study has taken from Smith & Watson's split of the narrative-I. By adding multiple dimensions and emphasizing this multiplicity, Condé appears to limit the role of her agency by highlighting that of Tituba's in expressing her story. Ironically, Condé's claim to have privileged access to Tituba's story elevates her status as author by implying an authentic and unique linkage between herself and Tituba, thus embedding Tituba's voice within her own. The interleafing of these voices raises the issue of the status of women's voices in the Caribbean in both the 17th Century and 20th Century. Not only is Condé's self-assertion as an artist and a woman from Guadeloupe a form of resistance in breaking silence, but Tituba's voice also breaks a silence imposed through the system of the plantation economy in Barbados.

Thus Tituba's slave-narrative, rendered through the words and vision of Condé, tilts its lance at the gendered and racialized nature of Caribbean discourse, claiming a space for Tituba, while at the same time emphasizing the constancy of racial and gender suppression from the 17th to the 20th Century. In her other texts, Condé explores and

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excellent study of differences in translation in her "Of Witches and Other Things: Maryse Condé's Challenges to Feminist Discourse" in World Literature Today.

[31] Manzor-Coats discusses these paratexts, including the cover art and marketing strategies for both the American and the French editions of the novel, ibid.

elevates the subjective view of Caribbean women both at home and abroad, occasionally using multiple first person voices in the same text. Condé's emphasis on subjectivity in the text of I, Tituba, especially through the use of the blending techniques of orature, explores the nature of both collective and individual identity in the Caribbean context.

Condé's Autobiographics

Condé has used many of her life experiences in her writing, as have other authors in this study. Condé confirms that while her fictional writing draw upon her experiences, particularly her childhood, she creatively incorporates these moments in fiction. In discussing Hérémakhonon (1976), for example, she admits that her own childhood was very similar to that of her protagonist, Veronica: "Certainly, though, if you sketch an anti-portrait, you must use some features that belong to your personality, and so I put some of my self into Veronica's character" (Clark 121). However, responding to the criticism which she faced that tried to conflate Condé with her protagonist, especially claims that compared her to Mayotte Capécia, author of Je suis Martiniquaise (1948), Condé cites her preface to the second edition, in which she asserts the differences between her and her protagonist. "I had decided to write a negative character," states Condé in an interview, "the opposite of myself: a person lacking in will power, energy, and dynamism; a character who does not know who she is" (121). Later, Condé argues that "Heremakhonon was not fictionalized autobiography at all. It was a novel of protest" (Pfaff 40). The construction of Veronica as a negative self-caricature and the experimental form of the novel seems to have complicated the text's reception, but Condé

did not shy away from writing protagonists who shared some aspects of her own experience. Condé notes however: "I believe that between my first heroines and myself, thirty years later – since I started to write in the 70's – there has been much change and much evolution. (Je crois que entre mes premières héroines et moi, trente ans plus tard-puisque j'ai commence d'écrire dans les années 70 – il y a beaucoup des changements et beaucoup d'évolution)" (Ouédraogo 163-4), indicating that despite the distance implied by this fiction, the protagonist of the novel is more of a reflection of her former self than the current version.

In Une saison à rihata (1981) her protagonist is again a Guadeloupian woman in Africa; and in the two volumes of Ségou (1984, 1985), Condé uses material from her own life, and from her own experiences in Africa to blend with her historical research on the Traore bloodline in Mali. Speaking of Une saison à rihata, Condé notes two similarities between herself and the protagonist Marie-Thérèse, that could be true of anyone, that she was "very bored in Africa," and that she experienced "alienation" (Pfaff 44-45). Likewise, the young Caribbean girl in La vie scélérate (1987) was also partially fashioned on some of Condé's childhood experiences. While these tales are not explicitly autobiographical, Condé's prose plays with subjectivity and voice by switching narrators and emphasizing the experiences and voice of women, thereby exposing these societies as largely sexist. The experimental character of her novels, especially as regards the depiction of female voices in male dominated societies, is a common theme in her work and has a great deal to do with her desire to break with conventions. As she says about the use of "slang and crude language" in the novel Heremakhonon, "this was a way for me to subvert French, assert myself, and break conventions" (Pfaff 35).

Condé's narrative experimentation goes far beyond the usage of illicit or disapproved of language, and engages many forms of resistance both in form and content. Not only does she frequently make critical assertions about the nature of the relationship between the Caribbean and Africa, or about the new dictatorships in Africa, but she also explores the relationship between writing as art form and as a form of social critique, often using the tropes of dreams and artists to explore her own situation as an artist by projecting herself into some of her other characters. In the short story "Nanna-ya" in Pays mêlé (1985), she writes about her time in Jamaica and her experiences there with respect to both Rasta communities and American escapism. Taking the first words of a song about Nanny of the Maroons, a key figure in the Jamaican Maroon movement, Condé writes about a researcher who loses a manuscript, only to realize that his obsession has been keeping him from his own family, his real life. "I mainly wanted to show how a dream can distance you from reality," notes Condé, who points out that "Only when he was free of the mythical past did he begin to live in the present" (Pfaff 57). Thus Condé challenges the false dependence upon myth for the construction and negotiation of identity, and shows the importance of both the present and the past in that identity, so long as one doesn't eclipse or obscure the other.

Another important work, Traversée de la mangrove (1995) also plays with the construction of the narrator protagonist as Condé voices the stories of over 20 different characters in a small Caribbean village. This exploration of subjectivity, exile and death can, like many of her works, be classified as a post-modern literary work. Traversée de la Mangrove and Moi, Tituba, Sorcière… *Noire de Salem* explore the extremes of the fictional and polyvalent "I", while Condé's Cœur à rire et à pleurer (1999) actually

returns the personal voice to the childhood experiences of Condé herself, narrating a collection of stories about her childhood and family More importantly for the purposes of this study, it shows Condé's ability to use multiple first person voices and subjectivities in her literary creations. As shown my extremely brief survey, Condé's fiction explores the unspoken episodes of history, imagining counter-histories to the dominant discourses of Eurocentrism. To a large extent, Condé's explorations focus on the role of women in African and Caribbean societies, elevating their voice and experience. Beyond Condé's fictional and dramatic works, Condé also takes on the role of literary critic, instructor and editor, producing numerous volumes of critical writing.

Condé's Orature: The counter-hegemonic Griot and Gnosis

Chinosole refers to Condé as a kind of modern day griot, particularly in relationship to her epic novel Ségu, in which she transformed research material originally planned for her Ph.D. into a fictive form while commissioned by a contract with Laffont (Pfaff 48). In this novel, Condé uses a narrative style which utilizes both a collective voice and individual pleas from the women who are oppressed by the polygamous West African culture that she describes; ultimately she draws from the voices of the disenfranchised (the women) while also imitating the voice of the official storytellers, the griot. A griot is an important figure in West African culture, whose role in society is one of historian and entertainer, maintaining the oral histories, family lineages and myths. While part of the griot's role is sacred, particularly in terms of the origin myths and legends surrounding political and historical figures, the griot also has a playful role and is

responsible for a kind of counter-discourse which entails joking and a parodic role. One of the most well known epic poems from the Mande culture, Son-Jata, is maintained primarily through the agency of the griot, though the text now exists in both written and filmed versions. In the case of Son-Jata, the ritualization of the oral history is maintained by a sacred society of *Jeli*, into which griots are inducted at an early age in the town of Kela and Kita, to which griots are expected to return each year (Hoffman 234-253). Even in this example, the griot is also acknowledged as an entertainer, and comedic digressions, lampooning and satire are part of the repertoire that balances out the sacrosanct nature of the epic as an origin story.

Condé has stated that she does not consider herself a griot; referring to the most limiting definition of griot as praise-singer, instead, she says "it seems to me I am doing just the opposite" (Clark 107). Condé has rejected the appellation of griot as it pertains to her work, perhaps because she feels herself to be freer from the constraints of the griot's *métier*, in so much as the griot is indebted to his or her patrons and must thus construct a truthful story which legitimizes the power held by those patrons. However, in her description of the role of the modern novelist, she compares the role of the novelist to the role of the griot (Chinosole 1995, 595). The tensions regarding the definitions and limitations of the griot, as represented in the modern novel, are carefully explored by Jean Ouédrago, in his comparative study of Condé and African novelist Ahmadou Kourouma; he defines the role of the griot in terms of the ability to be critical of dominant regimes and to question dictatorial and oppressive political regimes in the face of persecution:

> Kourouma and Condé use the griot's tales in their writing – the orality of the Mandé civilizations and the need for verisimilitude invites this – without necessarily appearing to be new griots. As historical novelists, they don't hesitate

> to condemn certain aspects of the griot's art and the griotism of certain bloodsuckers and other opportunists close to new regimes, notably the press agencies of the single party. In this, their novels rediscover their character as palimpsest, if not filters – the first texts being the songs of the griots.
>
> Kourouma et Condé usent des récits de griots dans leur écriture – l'oralité des civilisations mandingues et le besoin de vraisemblance les y invitant – sans pour autant paraitre de nouveaux griots. En romanciers de l'histoiren ils n'hésiteront pas à condemner certains aspects de l'art du griot et du griotisme de certaines sangsues et autres opporunistes proche des nouveaux régimes, notamment les organs de press du parti unique. En cela leur romans retrouvent leur caractère palimpestueux, sinon de filter – les premiers texts étants les chansons des griots. (82)

In Segu, Condé occupies a role of griot in terms of her contract sponsored research, and blends the various discourses - dominant and counter-hegemonic - in a polyvocal fashion; Chinosole's comments on the narration of Segu could be translated to include Tituba's narration: "She speaks not only in a public voice of what is historically prasieworthy, but also in a private voice of what is shameful" (Chinosole 1995, 594). Tituba's voice is both historical in the choice of narrator and setting while still private in terms of the personal content of her subjectivity.

In I, Tituba, Condé's retelling of Tituba's story mimics the role of the griot in many ways. Firstly, Condé is a kind of griot in terms of her historical research into the personage of Tituba, grounding her character in the original court documents, in the play The Crucible by Arthur Miller, and by a cursory nod to Ann Petry's children's book that deals with the subject. Secondly, Tituba herself is a kind of griot, telling riddles and jokes with other slaves in Barbados, inventing stories for the young girls who spend time in her kitchen in Salem, and even telling a story to Hester Prynne's child while in jail,

which follows the "Krik? Krak!" formula common to many Caribbean oral stories, as noted in the discussion of Danticat (99).[32] Ultimately, even Tituba's testimony serves the function of a story, one which is designed to terrorize the Salem community, and her false confession shows her ability to use a parodic voice in mimicking the dominant Puritanical discourse. In I, Tituba, Condé includes both the sacred and the profane, the dominant and the subversive in her writing, including songs, prayers, testimony, jokes, and one other category: lists of herbal remedies and curative rituals.

The elevation of these herbal and mystical practices acknowledges that they are sacred, part of a complete Caribbean gnosis, as described in earlier comments on obeah in Jamaica Kincaid's Autobiography, which has its roots in African and Caribbean culture, but which also finds expression as an alternative, if not counter-hegemonic discourse found in the margins of Salem's society. Condé's narrative illustrates the multi-genred and blended nature of orature by incorporating lists of remedies from both the Caribbean, exemplified by MaMa Yaya and from New England, through the personage of Judah White. From Mama Yaya, Tituba learns the basics of rootworking from an African perspective, but also the means by which to craft potions from herbs, strengthening their effects through incantations and ritual. Tituba describes Mama Yaya as "hardly of this world," since she had "cultivated to a fine art the ability to communicate with the invisible" (8-9). Mama Yaya's indoctrination of Tituba into the arts is achieved first through a kind of baptismal bath, through a gift of red stones, and through a careful education:

> Mama Yaya taught me about herbs. Those for inducing sleep. Those for healing wounds and ulcers. Those for

[32] In R. Philcox's translation, he actually uses the spelling "Crick? Crack!" but I rely upon the orthography previously introduced in this study.

> loosening the tongues of thieves. Those that calm epileptics and plunge them into blissful rest. Those that put words of hope on the lips of the angry, the desperate, and the suicidal.
>
> Mama Yaya taught me to listen to the wind rising and to measure its force as it swirled above the cabins it had the power to crush.
>
> Mama Yaya taught me the sea, the mountains, and the hills. She taught me that everything that lives, has a soul, and breathes. That everything must be respected. That man is not the master riding through his kingdom on horseback. (9)

Tituba's profit from these dreams is that, like Mama Yaya who can commune with her dead sons and husband, Tituba learns communicate with Yao and Abena. Understanding the essential fluids of blood and milk, Tituba is trained in the ability to change shape and to heal. These incantatory lists are conveyed primarily in Tituba's own voice, signaling her agency and self-identification with these talents and processes. However, the herbal remedies learned in Massachusetts are rendered in typographically distinct lists, indicating a greater degree of separation between Tituba and the herbal remedies native to New England.

In Salem, it is Judah White, a self-proclaimed friend of Mama Yaya, who instructs Tituba in both the medicinal applications of herbs, and also in cleaning a house of unpleasant spiritual energies left by previous inhabitants:

> Before moving into a house, or immediately after having moved in, place a branch of mistletoe and some marjoram leaves at the corner of each room. Sweep the dust from west to east and burn in carefully before throwing the ashes outside. Sprinkle the floor with fresh urine, using your left hand. (53)

Along with this specific instruction, Tituba passes on other more general lessons on healing and preparing gardens with healing herbs from Judah White, commenting, "In the

West Indies, our science is nobler and relies more on unseen forces than on things" (54). Tituba further distinguishes between herself and others who seek to use these herbal and unseen powers by describing the "villagers bending awkwardly over herbs and plants, their deceitful faces revealing the schemes in their hearts" (67). While Tituba recognizes the common knowledge of the power of plants, she also asserts that her knowledge is infinitely greater based on her ability to use "unseen forces" in order to increase the potency of her concoctions. Ultimately, following the advice of Judah White, Tituba sets up her own garden of essential herbs so that she need not venture into the cold forests under the cover of night. It is these herbs which Tituba uses to prepare a bath "in a liquid to which I had given all the properties of amniotic fluid" for Betsy, the child whose catalepsy attracted the harsh and unwanted attention of the puritanical Reverend Parris (63). More than the alchemical and medicinal knowledge held by Tituba, it is the ability to speak with spirits and the invisible which qualifies her knowledge as a gnosis that functions in direct opposition to the black and white perspective of Salem's puritanical community.

In particular, Condé's choice of boat names throughout the novel functions as a scathing critique of the mask of Christianity under which slavery was defended. The *Christ the King*, where Abena was raped, *The Blessing*, which brings Tituba and the Parris family to New England and the *Bless the Lord*, which brings Tituba back to Barbados serve to superimpose Christian themed names on the points of the Triangle Trade. Likewise, the forced conversion of both John Indian and Tituba at the hands of Susanna Endicott illustrate the superficiality of the Christian veneer on the ownership of slaves. Since slave owners were expected to care for both the bodies and the souls of

their slaves, they were expected to Christianize their wards, forcing Tituba to repeat her prayers, despite Tituba's comment that "these words meant nothing to me. They had nothing in common with what MamaYaya had taught me" (25-6). Ironically, in learning to repeat these lessons, Tituba learns of Satan, and upon first seeing Samuel Parris in the streets of Bridgetown, notes his "greenish, cold eyes, scheming and wily, creating evil because they saw it everywhere," and tells John Indian that she has seen Satan, whom she had never before believed in (34). The use of the term Satan, thus initiated within the text, takes on a new form in the new environment of Salem.

Upon her arrival in Salem, Tituba is clearly marked as an outsider due as much to the color of her skin as to her attachment to the minister. Despite her discomfort at the comments and stares of the village children, Tituba accepts their presence in her kitchen, as they provide some degree of social interaction and comfort to Betsy Parris. To a greater or lesser degree, Tituba sees the kitchen as a rare space of joy and pleasure in the miserable lives of the young girls who live in Salem. To amuse and entertain them, Tituba tells stories and sings songs which they all enjoy, particularly relishing the stories about people who are in league with the devil. Throughout these encounters, Tituba is aware of the dangerous ground on which she and the children tread, given the zealotry of Parris puritanical fanaticism. In Tituba's mind, however, the "devil" is not the same as "Satan," but a kind of mischievous spirit. But Abigail, the precocious young girl who lives with the Parris family, uses the kitchen gathering place to foment dark thoughts and to encourage the other girls to enter into games with Tarot cards and palm reading. Based on Betsy's repetition of Tituba's stories, Tituba develops a reputation as a witch, as pointed out by Manzor-Coats, in a way that corresponds more to the Anglo-American

mythography of witches than to Tituba's own understanding of the term, and more importantly, her understanding of her powers. Tituba is approached three times by women in the village who seek her help in causing pain or suffering to others, a role which she refuses because of her own experiences with Susanna Endicott; Tituba relates the misfortunes which landed John Indian and herself in Salem in the first place. Thus Tituba refuses these requests because she does not "want to become like them," by which she means the self-centered whites who denigrate her craft.

One final element of the narrative that indicates Condé's use of the narrative space to include more than just diegetic, plot-related information, is the use of Tituba's voice in pleas directed equally to the reader as much as to Barbados, her self-affirmed homeland. After setting up the bowl of water in whose reflection she can see her old residence at the side of the River Ormond in Barbados, Tituba seeks solace in this world of introspective escape. As the drama of the public inquiry increases, Tituba states: "Will I ever find my way back to you, my lost, beloved country" (79)? Throughout the chapters set in Salem, Tituba's voice becomes more strident, and more prophetic, too, showing her agency and the independence of her voice from the historical proceedings, for instance: "I hardened my heart. I would get my revenge very soon on that woman" (103)! At times, the conclusions to the chapters are also rueful and filled with sorrow, like: "Few people have the misfortune to be born twice" (122). In each of these cases, Condé situates Tituba's voice as both personal and directly transmitted, giving the air of a journal entry or final thought. Thus Tituba is elevated from the relative obscurity of both the historical and literary record and given a much more significant place than a mere character in a work of fiction. In each of these concluding paragraphs, Tituba's voice

rises to the forefront, following her descriptions of the plot events, and showing the validity of her own turbulent subjectivity as if in counterpoint to the erasure of that voice in the historical record.

Ultimately, Tituba practices her art as a form of resistance against both the Christianizing influence of Barbadian slave owners and the Puritanical furor of Reverend Parris and his followers in Salem. Her ability to heal injured slaves, to perform and assist in abortions, and to speak with invisible spirits run counter to the society of slave ownership. In her Afterword to the English translation of I, Tituba, Ann Armstrong Scarboro comments on "Condé's creation of a mock-epic hero and use of postmodern irony" disrupts the "status quo" that had limited the selection of setting in Caribbean literature. Condé's ironic depictions of the much popularized "Salem Witch Trials" and her description of both slave and maroon life in Barbados work, in the manner of the griot, to bring a sense of living significance to the historical events. As Chinosole notes, Condé's narrative art involves the careful blending of the historical and the personal: "Condé is a griot reflective of the insights of the larger imagined community, rich and poor, male and female, Muslim converts and the resolutely traditional" (595). In this way her function as a griot, whether through direct imitation or through the resistance of creativity, brings together the diverse views of the collective, while still valuing and emphasizing the individual.

Collective Identity in Historical Fiction, Tituba as exile and maroon

Whether as griot or producer of polyvocal texts, Condé's craft brings together both contradictory and contrary viewpoints: "In much the same way as the crazy patterns of a traditional African quilt might be woven, these background voices, effecting pivotal points of view within a collective, merge with the internal monologues, dialogues and stated points of view of individual characters" (Chinosole, 596). While the novel of I, Tituba is firmly grounded in a forcefully independent narrator protagonist, the text remains polyvocal, representing several other discursive positions through the characters of John Indian, Christopher and Iphigene, each of whom has a distinctly different perspective on the racism of Barabian plantation society. Thomas Spear, in his article "Individual Quests and Collective History" raises the question of collective identity in Condé's presentation of her protagonists, especially those who share biographical details with the author. Asserting that the dominant trope of her fiction is the quest for identity, Spear argues that the individual identity and the collective are inextricably linked: "An examination of her fictive protagonists can demonstrate how Condé renders through individual characters a search for identity which portrays that of a larger community" (721). Embedded in the "creoleness" of her prose, the focus on exile, and the transgressive, resistant comments made by her protagonists regarding official versions of history, is the link between her fictional texts and even those of a more critical or theoretical nature. Through her depiction of Tituba as a virtual non-entity in the eyes of Caribbean whites to her role as an outsider in relationship to both the plantation society

and the maroon community, Condé establishes an inherently collective individual in her protagonist.

The starting point of this individual identity is, as mentioned above, founded in Tituba's symbolic appearance as the product of a European's rape of an African. Tituba is made more symbolic by the replacement of the maternal function with a collective (though not entirely matrifocal) parentage that recalls the "othermother" typical of Caribbean literature and mentioned in the discussion of Danticat. The linkage to the Salem Witch Trials and the points of the Triangle Trade continues the development of Tituba not so much as an individual, but as an allegorical heroine; Condé herself notes: "The element of parody is very important if you wish to fully comprehend Tituba" (Scarboro 212). Citing the "deliberately overblown" depictions of "the presence of the invisible," the inclusion of Hester Prynne, and the shaping of the narrative to include many of the themes which Condé herself describes in La Parole des Femmes, she casts Tituba as a caricature: "Do not take Tituba too seriously, please" (212). Thus, Condé instructs us to read the novel as a mock-epic and to find the humor in the cobbling together of so many diverse elements in her heroine. This is especially true in the references to various strategies of survival and resistance to slave society, particularly in the contrast between participation in the slave society versus choices to live away from the plantation either in groups or as individuals.

Following the death of her mother and Mama Yaya, Tituba is feared by most other slaves, until they learn that she is willing to share her gifts to help those in need. Despite her abiding attraction to John Indian, her desire to stay near the River Ormond earns her a disrespectful condemnation as a maroon, a class of person for whom John

Indian has open contempt: “I’m not a bush nigger, a maroon! I’ll never come and live in that rabbit hutch of yours up in the woods” (17). One powerful depiction of Tituba confirms the deep racism of the plantation society which she joins in order to be with John Indian. While she serves Endicott’s group of friends, Tituba notes that she is being discussed as an object, even while in the same room:

> It was not so much the conversations that amazed and revolted me as their way of going about it. You would think I wasn’t there standing at the threshold of the room. They were talking about me and yet ignoring me. They were striking me off the map of human beings. I was a nonbeing. Invisible. More invisible than the unseen, who at least have powers that everyone fears. Tituba only existed insofar as these women let her exists. It was atrocious. Tituba became ugly, coarse and inferior because they willed her so. I went out into the garden and heard their comments, which proved they had inspected me from head to foot while pretending to ignore me. (24)

This depiction, along with the discussion of how these social views affect the way the slaves see themselves, draws a wedge between Tituba and John Indian. While John Indian splits his time between bawdy socializing with other slaves and patiently reciting the Christian prayers which are expected of him, Tituba becomes frustrated with being treated as a slave, since she had been living as a free black until she moved in with John. Not only does Tituba’s awareness of her invisibility recall W.E. Dubois’ concept of two-ness in African-American intellectual history, but her critique of John Indian anchors her to French Caribbean intellectual history, particularly Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks. While Tituba is seen as naïve in her interactions with the plantation society, John Indian is surprisingly, perhaps dangerously, adept at playing into the expectations of society, stating “The duty of a slave is to survive” (22). His survival skills include an exploitation of the racist system, playing up to stereotypes and nuzzling closer to the

plantation. This is contrasted to the maroon system in several ways, though Condé stops short of valorizing maroonage as a panacea for the problems of the plantation society, and also resists glorifying maroon communities as utopian enclaves which were responsible for the end of slavery.

In Mavis C. Campbell's discussion in The Maroons in Jamaica touches on other slave rebellion movements throughout the Caribbean, including the *quilombos* of Brazil, she notes that despite the heterogeneous nature of the African slave population, runaway slave populations tended to be organized on commonalities more than differences:

> Among the rich gleanings we have from a study of Maroon societies is the fact that despite ethnic plurality, the cultural commonalities would seem to have taken precedence over particularism. There appears to have existed a kind of "Africanness" that transcended regionalism, ethnic or linguistic affinities, on which the Maroons based their existence… The commonalities, for the most part, are reflected in sex roles, attitude to warfare, familial arrangements, attitude to hierarchy, but above all in religion which was pivotal to all resistance in the area. More than any other single factor, African religious beliefs gave the unifying force, the conspiratorial locus, the rallying point to mobilize, to motivate, to inspire, and to design strategies: it gave the ideology, the mystique and the pertinacious courage and leadership to Maroon societies to confront the mercantilist society with its awesome power. Maroon leaders were expected to be imbued with knowledge bearing on the supernatural forces. (Campbell 3-4)

These populations were indeed an option for some runaway slaves, but the preponderance of historical evidence shows that maroons traded loyalty for liberty, and that their status as free communities depended greatly on their willingness to turn over recent runaway slaves and to denounce plots of rebellion before they could be realized. In fact, Barbados itself did not have a strong tradition of maroonage, though historical evidence does indicate that runaway slaves were indeed a concern to Barbadian sugar croppers.

Ultimately, Condé's incorporation of the maroon story in her novel is more evidence of the allegorical, and therefore collective nature or her depiction of Tituba's experiences; Condé manipulates the geography of the Caribbean in several ways in order to produce her parodic, all-inclusive, collective quest narrative.

Like Kincaid's Autobiography, Condé's I, Tituba takes on the trope of a geographical dislocation. While Condé herself was born in the French department of Guadeloupe, her protagonist, Tituba, is born and raised in Barbados, an English colony. The history of any island in the Caribbean, as noted in the previous chapter, is rarely limited to one European colonizing force. Like Dominica, Barbados was a contested territory between the French, Spanish, Portugese and English imperial powers from about 1511 until the firm establishment of the first English colony in 1627 following the first British arrivals in about 1625 (Hoyas 12-14). Barbados quickly became a hub of both the sugar and slave trades for the expanding British Empire, serving as a slave market for smaller islands, and as a center for innovative sugar cultivation, harvesting and processing technologies (Menard 1-4). Because of this, Barbados itself had a higher population of indentured servants, British political prisoners and German immigrants than slaves for the first few decades of the "sugar revolution" (Hoyas 29-48). However, by the time of the sugar boom, 1640-1660, Portuguese and Dutch investment made slave ownership more economical for the few large British landowners who owned the majority of harvestable land in the island (Menard 31-32).

In the 1660s, the sugar boom came to an abrupt halt due to a disproportionately high infestation of rats and caterpillars and a huge fire in 1666 and renewed epidemics in 1670 (Hoyas 63-64). These conditions set the stage for a series of plotted slave uprisings,

most of which were aborted or otherwise compromised, in the years of 1675, 1683, 1686, and 1682 (Craton 335).[33] Despite the temporal proximity of these events with Tituba's fictional return to Barbados after the Salem trials of 1692, they led to a series of reforms in the plantation economy which would have made the existence of significant maroon camps virtually impossible. Firstly, the fires and need for expansion resulted in a wholesale deforestation of the island from 1640 to the end of the century (Menard 79; Dunn 67). Secondly, several concurrent changes in the plantation economy reduced the physical, if not moral, imposition of slavery in Barbados; these included a "slave-economy" system which allowed slaves to grow their own food on plantation land between harvests, and the large scale introduction of windmills which permitted the re-allocation of livestock resources from processing to the hardest work of clearing and planting. Despite conflicting results, such as wood shortages and reduced quantities of manure which may have reduced the total sugar production in the last decades of the 17th Century, Barbadian sugar production once again became both efficient and innovative after the significant economic downturns of the middle decades, which correspond to the decline of the Davis, Prescott and Parris enterprises in I, Tituba (Menard 78 -82).

The ahistorical location of a maroon camp in the slave culture of Barbados in I, Tituba serves as a nod towards the significant literary history of the maroons, notably by authors like Brathwaite and Walcott, and as such is an affirmation of the collective identity of the Caribbean and its reliance on the mythologized culture of the maroons. A.J. Arnold, in his study of the masculinist bent of the "creolité" movement, deconstructs the gendering of the maroon movement as primarily masculine, and set in the *morne*, or

[33] BBC.co.uk offers a timeline with aborted slave rebellions in the following years: 1622, 1649, 1675, 1686, 1692, 1708. At this time, I do not have an explanation for the discrepancy between their dates and Craton's.

hills (Arnold 1995, 29). While Arnold validates the expression and maintenance of maroon culture through the *conteur*, or storyteller, he retains a vision of the maroon as rebel and as male. The studies of Pascale De Souza and Pascal Bécel offer a nice counterpoint, describing the *petite marronage* of women in maroon camps and their role in maintaining a stable living space. Condé's own representation of the maroons is far from mythologization, instead, she offers a scathing critique of a sexist, deceitful and selfish maroon culture. This is contrasted by the depiction of Tituba herself, both before and after her experiences with the maroon camp led by Christopher. In her depictions as an outsider to the plantation society, Tituba's riverside runaway can be seen as a version of maroonage, not as a camp, but as an individual who serves the community as needed.

Tituba's maroon history does not follow the tradition of glamorizing the maroon camps as forefathers of resistance to slavery and to the plantation economy, but instead Christopher is shown to be incapable of revolutionary thoughts or actions. Christopher is not only sexist, his insistence on polygamy does not permit women to have any role or power in decision making. Christopher's women are both objects of pleasure and vessels for the perpetuation of his life through children, but are not valued for their individuality or their significant contributions to the life of the camp. Likewise, his relationship to Tituba repeats this tendency towards using and objectifying women; though he claims to respect Tituba for her mystical powers, his only real objective is to use those powers to establish himself as a "legendary" maroon leader so that he will be forever immortalized in a song. He can't even understand that Tituba's art, while powerful enough to heal the sick, and even to bring the injured back from the brink of death, can neither make him invisible nor invincible. Ultimately, Condé produces a "a frontal attack on the myth of

the maroon as cultural hero in the Lesser Antilles" by questioning what (and who) maroons would sacrifice in order to maintain their own freedom (Arnold 2000, 166).

Christopher is contrasted to Iphigene who in fact has a heritage linking him to the legendary Ti-Noel (160). Ti-Noel, like Nanny-Ya it appears, was a more progressive type of maroon.[34] Like many maroons, Christopher's independence relies on his ability to provide information to plantation owners so that they could thwart and prevent slave uprisings. Ti-Noel was quite the opposite, as he was a successful organizer of such uprisings. Likewise, it seems, Iphigene is also a more committed revolutionary. His arrival at Tituba's river dwelling happens after he was left for dead after being beaten for conspiracy. After his re-birth as both Tituba's son and lover, he continues to discuss the possibility of changing society, whereas Christopher seeks only to maintain the status quo of his independence and the subjugation of other slaves. In fact, it is thanks to Christopher that Tituba and Iphigene are captured and killed, as he trades their lives for his existence of compromise. However, Iphigene's continued dedication to a real cause of changing society continues even after his and Tituba's death. As Tituba narrates, he whispers into the ears of other revolution minded slaves even after his death, taking on the role of Abena, Mama Yaya and Yao for another generation of Caribbean slaves. If Christopher and Iphigene are to be contrasted to each other, another case must be made for the status of Tituba as a kind of maroon, offering another possible mode of resistance and opposition to the plantation society.

Pascale Bécel calls Tituba's strategy of engaged observation from the outside of these camps as a version of the *petite marronne*, a feminized, smaller kind of activist

[34] Ti-Noel is the name of the rebel-slave narrator who describes the violence of the King Henri Christophe's reign in Alejo Carpentier's The Kingdom of this World. That the child of a slave rebel would be sold to another island is not a significant stretch of the imagination.

activity. In her "attendant interstitial position, between the woods and the plantations, between the invisible world and the hardships of daily life," Tituba occupies a liminal space where she critiques both the plantation society and the maroon camp (Bécel 612). Thus Condé's representation of Tituba is a kind of valorization of her own critical comments, in La Parole des Femmes:

> The role of the woman at the center of struggles for liberation before and after the abolition of slavery has been largely occulted… She has in many cases been responsible for the collective poisonings of the masters and their families, participated in the burning of plantations, the terror of the 18th Century, and marooned in significant numbers.
>
> Le rôle de la femme au sein des lut1tes de libération antérieures et postérieures à l'abolition de l'esclavage a été largement occulté. Vivant souvent dans l'Habitation à titre de domestique (cuisinière, bonne d'enfants, lingère), elle a dans bien des cas été responsable des empoisonnements collectives des maîtres et de leur famille, participé aux incendies des plantations, terreur du XVIIIeme siìecle et a marroné en nombre important. (Condé, 1993, 4)

In critiquing large male maroon camps while establishing Tituba as a true heroine, known from her childhood for her powers, and recognized even after her long absence, Condé subverts the masculine glamorization of the maroon and offers her own counter history, admittedly fiction, which promises to fill in historical details that had otherwise been erased. In the representation of the maroon, especially in reading the character of Tituba as a female maroon, there is a linkage back to the concept of the griot, as Pascale De Souza notes, "women maroons find ways to bring together their community around tales" (149). In this reading, Tituba's use of stories is another part of her art as a rootwoman. Not only does her status as a resource for slaves who seek knowledge of herbs and remedies designate her as a griot, but her griot-like status as a teller of tales creates a

virtual maroonage in the domestic space of her kitchen in Salem, and even in the prison in which she shares space with Hester Prynne.

Chapter Six

Audre Lorde's Activist Autobiographics:

The Erotic, Poetic, Transformation of Zami

More than the other authors previously discussed in this study, Audre Lorde takes the concept of writing as a space of resistance for women and expands it from the personal level of individual narrative to a passionate plea for other women to engage in resistant, subversive and revolutionary practices of self-representation. She recognizes that creative writing is a discourse of privilege that has historically silenced women's voices and she seeks not only to create new role models for women in self-definition, but also to make clear the need for self-representation. Through her work in Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, her poetry, her speeches and essays, Lorde challenges normative practices of discourse in order to highlight issues of difference that might otherwise be silenced. In discussion with other critics who study Lorde's role in the creation of new discourses of black and lesbian identities, I will provide examples of the way that Lorde's writing explores new forms of grammar as well as new forms of knowledge, allowing her to write poetry and prose that explodes myths of identity and generates new forms of self-expression that accept identity as multiple and creative. Her poetics are intensely invested in her vision of erotic knowledge and express a new vision of collective identity as gnosis grounded in both the particular and the personal, and capable of signifying on a political and dynamic level.

Aware of the treacherous limitations of silence, Lorde uses her text Zami as a starting point and example of self-representation for an expression of self-identity that is both an instance of self-naming and self-definition, but also an attack upon and subversion of dominant patriarchal ideologies and discourses.[35] Her literary work undermines spelling, syntax and form in the creation of a new autobiographical practice capable of expressing her personal vision of identity. Secondly, Lorde's Zami relies upon mythological figures and concepts from the symbiotic religions in the Caribbean as reconceptualizations or revisions of traditional West African deities in the modern Caribbean Diaspora, essentially reincarnating those deities in a manner that mirrors Lorde's sense of self as containing multiple contradictory, though not mutually exclusive identities. Finally, in Zami, as well as her other writings, Audre's own female body functions as another kind of text, a landscape for her own personal sufferings, and also a site for the creative exchange: From the figuration of Audre's transformation from the myopic pre-linguistic phase of her childhood to her entry into the worlds of literacy, storytelling and sight, Lorde's literary project revolves around her embodiment of the experience which form her identity.[36]

All of the authors mentioned so far in this study have structured new voices of resistance, forging spaces in which self-representation is possible despite deep seated biases and ideological apparatuses in language which tend to exclude women from literary production. Thus each of these authors is already breaking the "Double-bind of the Woman Poet" as identified by Suzanne Juhasz, who states that:

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[35] Based on the idea of a separation between narrated-I and narrating-I, I will use the name Lorde to identify the author and Audre to identify the protagonist of Zami.

[36] The use of the term pre-linguistic here refers to Julia Kristeva's division of the semiotic and the symbolic, as discussed in Revolution and Poetic Language. I also refer to the period in her life before Audre begins to speak or write.

> To be a woman poet in our society is a double bind situation, one of conflict and strain. For the words "woman" and "poet" denote opposite and contradictory qualities and roles. Traditionally, the poet is a man, and poetry is the poems that men write. The long history of Western literature makes this point painfully clear. It is men who make art, who make books; women make babies. (1)

Granted, Juhasz's reiteration of Western mainstream perceptions is formulaic, but it resonates with historical accuracy: the privilege of creative writing has traditionally been a male privilege, whether in poetic forms or in various forms of prose. She goes on to recognize a further obstacle that exists for minority women poets, "because theirs is a triple bind, involving race and sex oppression," and to assert that feminist poets destroy the double-bind when "the political and the personal unite in this commitment to the self in poetry, in the need to validate the personal and the private as legitimate topics for public speech and in the need to integrate public and private worlds" (4-5). This awareness of the constraints and difficulties which bar entry into the world of literary representation also needs to be expanded to acknowledge a quadruple bind as Audre Lorde is also struggling to achieve acceptance as a lesbian in a heterosexist American and African-American community on the axis of sexuality.

In her 2003 study, Juhasz again focuses more specifically on the difficulties of lesbian women authors, which brings her to a chapter length of the characterization of desire in Audre Lorde's poetry and in Zami. Juhasz notes the degree to which these apparent impediments to writing serve to sharpen the edge of Audre's literary acumen:

> [S]he inhabited more than one site of culturally defined difference and marginalization, she was wise enough to understand that homogenization is a useless concept. She was, after all, black when the dominant culture prefers white; homosexual when the dominant culture prefers

> heterosexual. She was also heavy, almost blind, smart, rebellious and politically radical. Among lesbians being black was different; among blacks being lesbian was different; among working-class people being educated, a librarian and a poet was different; among educated people being working-class or black or lesbian (or fat, or blind, etc.) was different… Lorde's task in Zami is to make difference and marginalization the basis for a collective personal identity. (170)

Inverting the structures of difference which might place her outside any given collective identity, Lorde claims difference and outsider status to show that the politics of difference can be transformed into a poetics of collectivity. Lorde's poetic project is one of philosophical protest: she takes on social issues which others might leave to silence and engages these issues passionately, allowing the question of difference to be a reason for and cause of literary inspiration and development.

Lorde's Poetics and Politics: Gnosis as Praxis

Before developing the three points of my analysis, this study will proceed through a brief development of some Lorde's key ideas about the function of writing and poetry as an act of resistance. Her work creates a gnosis of itself, both in the collective sense offered by Chinosole and in the sense offered by a development of the Greek origins of the word. Because so much of the critical materials that are useful in developing the thematic discussion of Lorde's transgressive practices of writing and self-representation are, in fact, generated by her own discourse on the knowledge as action, this study cannot properly go forward without understanding Lorde's larger world view with respect to the kind of literary activism she practiced.

In her essay "The Tools of the Master Will Not Dismantle the Master's House," Lorde discusses the important question of language use in the Caribbean and postcolonial context. For Lorde, "The Master's House" is a metaphor for the context of oppression established through the colonial project as well as through the gendered world view of European white males that counts women as inferior. The "Master's Language" is essentially the toolkit that establishes this hierarchy by grouping oppositional forces in dyads like subject/object, where the subject is capable of choice, and the object is denied autonomy or agency. For women, and for black women in particular, the master's language conditions and controls them and refuses them any existence besides one of servitude and submission: "Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns" (Lorde 1984, 113). Rather than a rant against the oppression of language, the essay establishes the first plank of a new form of consciousness that can be found in looking at these dyads not as excluding the second term, but by taking the space between the terms as a source of creative energy. Rejecting the master's tools of difference as negation, i.e. female as not male, black as not white, Lorde insists upon rethinking the dyad inclusively in a way where difference is a positive, not a negative.

In the essay "Poetry is not a Luxury", Lorde advances poetry as a literary form that embraces experiential knowledge and intuition, and can be seen as the second plank of Lorde's new and productive poetics. For Lorde, poetry is both a language that embraces subjectivity and emotional knowledge as a valid form of knowledge as well as a way to think "of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, [in which]

we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, action comes" (Lorde 1984, 37). Poetic living is a vital form of living for Lorde, one which does not shrink from fear but embraces fearful experiences and starts a path to knowledge through naming fears and understanding what is feared. Poetic expression should not be, according to Lorde, the exclusive domain of either men, Europeans, or the educated, but should be accessible to all people as the form of language that encapsulates the most raw and basic forms of human experience. For Lorde, the poetic voice is indeed an elevated voice, but not to the same degree as in European culture, where poetry is seen as a discourse of refinement and education. Lorde's discussion of poetics recalls the description of Dionysian poetry, rather than Apollonian. It can be chaotic and frenzied, intuitive and irrational, reckless and orgiastic, while still tied into the myths and rituals of natural and cosmic drama, with an emphasis on cyclical continuity and unconscious linkage between nature and humanity.[37]

The reason for the need for poetry, and even for a renewed sense of difference as productive is two-fold, and can be found in the essays "The Transformation of Silence into Action" and "The Power of the Erotic." In "Transformation," Lorde links silence to powerlessness and asserts that the power of speech or writing is an active force of resistance in the face of fear or oppression. Linking back to her comments on the master's house, Lorde recognizes that the entry into language may be a difficult process and may require inventive approaches to language that allow the speaker to claim linguistic power for herself. Responding to her own experience with breast cancer, Lorde

[37] An excellent discussion of this trend can be found in A.J. Arnold's Negritude and Modernism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1981.

notes that the naming of unrealized or unspoken ailments and fears transforms them from a nameless oppression to a knowable condition about which one can have a comfortable and even healing relationship. Lorde states: "For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us" (Lorde 1984, 44). Despite the context of fear from which this concept seems to emerge, the experiential form of knowledge which Lorde describes in intimately related to her definition of erotic power and knowledge.

For Lorde, erotic knowledge is contrasted to scientific knowledge, it emerges from internal and intuitive experience and leads to a feeling of powerful self-awareness: "In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial" (Lorde 1984, 5). Lorde privileges a body-centered way of knowing in which expertise and experience are closely linked. This version of knowledge is a version of gnosis, but for Lorde it is produced through the body as a form of contact and interaction, as indicated by her essay on the erotic. Rather than the codified, gendered expertise of Western objective science, Lorde's "erotics", as discussed earlier, are an amply validated way of knowing which emerge as a gnosis of collective identity not only for the women who make up Audre's experiences as a collective, not a collection, of shared experiences with women. To say collection would imply ownership, which Audre not only doesn't seek, but would find oppressive if applied to her selves. The collective experience of feminine exchange defines not only her self-creation as a woman formed of exchange. Traditionally rejected as a tool for the master's house, erotic

experience is the final plank of Lorde's platform for resistance; it is the key to developing the new poetic voice that transforms silence into action, reduces the power of fear, and constructs a house built upon difference.

There is at least one more effect of this linked series of terms as a platform for writing as a form of resistance. Lorde's writing is a concrete form of action, at least in a discursive sense. Lorde's text serves to validate the black lesbian experience by providing an insider's view, and a kind of ethnographic perspective, on the lesbian culture of the Greenwich Village and Chelsea sections of New York City in the 1970's. In her other works as well, specifically in "Transformation" Lorde discusses the importance of eschewing silence and finding ways to act through language to confront the oppression. For Lorde, the discursive act is itself a survival tool that "forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so that it can be thought" (Lorde1984, 37). Not only did the process of placing her own history into narrative form make that history more bearable, but it also opened that experience to a wider audience that is able to draw strength from her struggles. There is a transformation at work within the writing, both within the author and in the reading, that "break[s] that silence and bridge[s] some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence" (Lorde 1980, 22-23).

De/Colonizing Autobiography: Unorthodox spelling, polysemy and the plural "I"

Lorde's Zami de/colonizes the genre of autobiography by naming itself biomythography, a neologism that demonstrates her rejection of available forms of self-representation and cements the status of her text as an "outlaw genre" of autobiographics that works to deconstruct spelling, syntax and genre.[38] Lorde herself defines the text as a work of fiction, though she acknowledges that many episodes of her life are factually represented: "It has the elements of biography and history of myth. In other words, it is fiction built from many sources. This is one way of expanding our vision" (Tate, 115). The inclusion of myth and autobiographical materials is, according to Birkle, an example of textual *métissage* as defined by Lionnet, but it is also an example of *orature* in the blending of oral and written genres. Birkle goes further to develop a reading of Zami as a version of what she calls generic multiculturalism because the invented genre combines "bio" – life, "myth" – legend, and "graphy" – writing just as it combines fact and fiction of Lorde's life to create the "human truth" that reveals itself in the text (Birkle 218-221). Close analysis of the narrative also reveals the presence of a number of writing styles, including poetry, prose and what seems like journal entries, such as "How I Became a Poet" which will be discussed later, that introduce non-diegetic elements into the text to complement and contextualize the otherwise episodic story. For example, the inclusion of sections of italicized script while discussing Gennie's death, allows the narrative to develop an accretive meaning for the impact Gennie has on Audre:

> *Things I never did with Genevieve: Let our bodies touch*
> *and tell the passions that we felt. Go to a Village gay bar,*

[38] See Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography : Outlaw Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects" in De/Colonizing the Subject. Edited by Smith and Watson. Pps.115-138

> *or any bar anywhere. Smoke reefer. Derail the freight that took circus animals to Florida. Take a course in international obscenities. Learn Swahili. See Martha Graham's dance troupe. Visit Pearl Primus. Ask her to take us away with her to Africa next time. Write THE BOOK. Make love. (97)*

This bit of text in italicized writing stands at the beginning of chapter 14 (though not all the chapters are numbered) and coincides with the appearance of the first poem in the text. The passage indicates the deep sense of loss which Audre felt upon losing Gennie, and underscores her disruptive and creative mentality by linking travel to Africa to writing and to making love. The very writing of things which were not done signals the importance of the many unsaid things in her relationship with Gennie.[39] Within the text, many of the embedded poems refer to Audre's affection for Gennie; even her characterization of writing poetry as a means of survival stems from her awareness of the magnitude of this loss in her own life. Lorde's text reflects Audre's emotional state, "My head and endless kaleidoscope of numb images, jumbled, repeated" through the italicized repetition of Gennie's name like a chant, "Gennie, Gennie, Gennie," over ten times in three pages (98). Writing the memory of her friend also serves as a way of establishing Gennie in the literary record, of making a monument to her life and documenting the tragedy of her suicide as a young abused black girl.

This historicization, or recording, is also the case in the lists of women in the early section of the text, and throughout the episodes of contact and exchanges with other women that form Zami. Audre's memory of them and subsequent recording of their lives and names is an illustration of Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez's assertion that Ethnic autobiographies rely on personal memory and history in the articulation of a collective

[39] Alexis DeVeaux, in her biography Warrior Poet, quotes at least four different unpublished poems in Lorde's personal journals written around this time. (28-32)

experience. The embedded memory of both language in general and autobiography in particular create a dialogic exchange which relies on both individual and collective memory. Hernandez notes "ethnic autobiographers create a hybridized, double-voiced form of autobiography in which collective ethnic memory and individual memory are linked in the dialogue that is itself... profoundly future oriented" (Hernandez 56-7). Lorde's detailed recollection of Audre's community as the crucible in which her identity is formed politicizes her memory of the black lesbian experience. This reified experience becomes a touchstone for others in similar situations as Lorde becomes a model of an experience where there once was no model.

Lorde uses a number of other devices to politically and artistically set Zami apart from other texts in the recording of her experiences. Amitai F. Avi-ram notes the political significance of Lorde's resistance to the constraints of normalizing patterns of standardized grammar through *apo koinou.* This Greek term meaning "in common" describes a word or phrase that is invoked in multiple contexts at one time, or that is part of two independent clauses or syntactic units, such as a "noun-phrase that serves as the object of one verb and the subject of the next" (193). While *apo koinou* is frequently found in the work of modernist poets like Mallarmé, Pound and Crane, Avi-ram suggests that it is a frequent poetic trope for Lorde, citing in particular "Hard Love Rock #11", "The Black Unicorn," and "Afterimages" as texts in which the trope is a poetic element that results in a proliferation of a multiplicity of meaning and signification. For Avi-ram, the trope "has the function of carrying into syntax her theory of the genesis of poetry in feeling prior to rational thought" that corresponds to Lorde's belief in the productive and creative energy of erotics and her insistence upon the power of the particular experience

as leading to both personal and collective meaning (202). In a poem entitled "Prologue", Lorde plays with the signification of "I" in a way that plays into two entirely different phrases: "Haunted by poems beginning with I/ seek out those whom I love who are deaf/ to whatever does not destroy/ Or curse the old ways that did not serve us…" (Lorde 1997, 96). The poem continues without punctuation, though the line breaks offer some sense of rhythm, for 27 lines which can variously be read as dozens of enjambed sentences: "Haunted by poems beginning with I," "I seek out those whom I love," "those whom I love are deaf to whatever," "whatever does not destroy or curse the old ways," "the old ways that did not serve us," etc. The asyntactical nature of the trope allows for associative, rather than logical, unfoldings of sense and signification that suspend the hierarchy of syntax over sense. Thus the *apo koinou* of Audre Lorde can also be seen as a distinct mode of resistance: it allows her to elevate the creative erotics of emotional experience over the rational constraints of rigidly syntactical modes of expression. An example from "Moving In" shows how this trope allows Lorde to blend spatial and temporal metaphors of renewal: "remove me from the was/ I still am/ to now/ becoming/ here this house/forever blessed" (Lorde 1997, 253). The poem describes moving into a new apartment, but emphasizes the transient nature of her own self in process; this becoming starts off with a self of the past and becomes a home of the future.

Another example of her ability to subvert syntax is offered by Rudnitsky, who notes that Lorde's poem "Sequelae" exploits and exemplifies a high degree of syntactic ambiguity that allows the poem to generate meaning on more than one level. Rudnitsky grounds his understanding of this ambiguity in terms that he locates in Lorde's essay, "The Master's Tools" and shows that her use of ambiguity has "an objective of

complicating the subject position, undermining monolithic categories of identities and demonstrating that difference can be a source of creativity" (476). Rudnitsky notes that the apparent incompletion of the opening stanza is not a problem that needs to be solved, but a stylistic choice which generates multiple interpretations:

> Rather than fill in the missing words and insert proper punctuation, we must instead consider why these things are absent in the first place. Why does the poem begin with a subordinate clause that turns out to be insubordinate? Why does a dependent clause function as an independent one? Lorde may have sought to demonstrate that those who have been discursively marked as subordinate and dependent are in fact capable of autonomy. In a more general sense, they syntactic ambiguity here and elsewhere in the poem produces multiple semantic possibilities and thereby plays out Lorde's theory of difference. (482)

In this reading, this is less an example of syntactic ambiguity than syntactic anarchy. The disruption of grammatical terms like subordinate/insubordinate, dependent/independent, even masculine/feminine illustrates the degree to which hierarchical evaluations of power relations become embedded in language, in this case the meta-language by which linguistic structures are categorized by academia. In particular, Lorde uses the term "fathers" as both a plural and a possessive, and destabilizes use of the verbal dyads of white/black, you/me and woman/not woman serve to amplify the meanings within the text and focus the reader's attention off the poem and onto the ideological underpinnings of language which make the poem possible. Whether this is explicit or unintended, Lorde adeptly targets the ideological structures of "the master's language" and uses unconventional syntax to both expand the potential meanings of the poems and also as a meta-linguistic commentary on the function of syntax itself.

For Avi-ram, however, the use of *apo koinou* in Lorde's work is more than a mere syntactical disruption or a move towards a preferenced degree of ambiguity. Avi-ram argues that the syntactical forms engendered by *apo koinou* allow Lorde to suspend finality, whether in terms of the structure of a sentence or in the establishment of identity. Even the first lines of the poem written for Gennie in Zami showcases both the keen awareness of how one word can change the significance of a phrase or sentence, and a refusal to accept finality:

> We did not weep for the thing that was once been a child
> did not weep for the thing that had been a child
> did not weep for the thing that had been
> nor for the deep dark silences
> that ate of the so-young flesh.
> But we wept at the sight of two young men standing alone,
> flat on the sky, alone,
> shoveling earth as a blanket
> to keep the young blood down.
> for we saw ourselves in the dark warm of the mother-
> blanket
> Saw ourselves in the deep of the earth's breast-swelling-
> no longer young-
> and knew ourselves for the first time
> Dead and alone.
> We did not weep for the thing- weep for the thing-
> we did not weep for the thing that was
> once a child.
>
> -May 22, 1949 (97)

Not only does the poem use the phrase "we did not weep for the thing" in six different contexts, Audre also fundamentally destabilizes the speaking voice of the poem, suggesting that the "we" of the poem is the couple formed by Gennie and herself, despite characterizing Gennie as the "thing that was once a child." The tension between the ambiguous subject (we/I/her) and the object (thing/dead/had been a child) show a recognition that "we" subject position is a false one. In the post-lapsarian world where

Audre leaves the edenic garden of childhood, the shared subjectivity of "we" is no longer unfied, leaving the speaker split between a buried self and one which watches the burial.

As a "technique for an alternative constitution of the subject in poetry as one that makes contact and has intense feelings in common with other," Avi-ram concludes, Lorde's use of ambiguity and her resistance to rules of both grammar and genre "enables her to suspend the ordinary pressure of sentence-closure, to reveal the suspect 'nature' of such closure and its ideological consequences and to reveal the hidden possibilities of meaning in words, especially in their ideological dimensions" (206-7). Even in this move against syntactical closure, Lorde's poetry signals the performative aspect of identity in the speaking subject. In her poem "At First I Thought You Were Talking About…" Lorde's poetic form resists approaching a final conclusion, and exhibits a high degree of hesitation, almost like a stutter: "Do you think I guess inasmuch as/ so so/ to be sure yes I see/ what'd you mean/ but listen yet and still on the other/ hand like as if you know./ oh/ at first/ I thought you were talking about/ a bird a flower"(Lorde 1997, 253). This refusal to let her poetry become finalized in an ultimate reading is representative of that performativity in her other works, including Zami. Lorde's writing intentionally leaves ellipses and gaps that generate new meanings and insist upon fluidity and multiplicity.

In Maureen C. Heacock's analysis of the complicated relationship between Lorde and the Black Arts movement, she notes that "the constant acts of code-switching and translation /interpretation that particularly mark women's and African American's relationships to language allow the speaker to lay claim to language as her own weapon" (183). Despite Lorde's distance from the contemporaneous Black Arts movement, which Heacock locates in a comparatively diminished use of typographical experimentation (in

comparison to Amiri Baraka or Lucille Clifton), Heacock confirms that Lorde's experimentation, in particular with thematic representations of the female body, establish her voice as just as frustrated, confrontational and politically engaged as other voices in the movement from which she was essentially excluded. Heacock notes that her exclusion adds to the liminality of her position, and becomes yet another source of power for her voice, and cites Lorde as a model for her ability to take a disadvantageous position and to position herself advantageously as a response. Lorde celebrates the black female body as a source of erotic knowledge thereby "provid[ing an] additional, alternative space to the system of valuation from which to struggle against entrenched forms of oppression" (180). Whether embraced by the Black Arts movement or rejected by it, "[t]hrough an awareness of her place within a multiplicity of communities, Lorde is able to articulate a position of power and resistance" (183).

Not only does Zami work to destabilize and deconstruct grammatical and syntactical rules, but it also complicates concepts of self-representation by positing an identity which is neither stable nor singular, but fluid, developing and multiple. Lorde's subject, Audre, is constantly in process, and the text of her invocation, Zami, is a performance piece wherein identity is produced through litany and ritual. Audre's communion with women, whether as a child or as an adult, emphasizes the exchange made possible by feminine intimacy. In the prologue to Zami, Lorde proposes a new mythos to replace the "age-old triangle of mother father and child, with the 'I' at its eternal core," as an inadequate model for identity. Her new model promises to "elongate and flatten out into the elegantly strong triad of grandmother mother and daughter, with the 'I' moving back and forth flowing in either or both directions at once." (7) This

conception questions the stability of subjectivity, no longer defined rigidly by the organization of families, but broadly along alliances. This subjectivity is no longer defined objectively by external relations and factors, but internally, according to the practical experience of a particular woman, even in the assertion of a collective identity. The fluidity that characterizes this model functions not only in time, as Audre proposes, but also across the disparate pieces of Audre's multiple selves, thus uniting "the journeywoman pieces of myself. Becoming. Afrekete" (5). The broader implications of this mythical image suggest a metaphorical reading of the sequences of Audre's relations with women from childhood to old age. The text implies a common subjectivity, allowing for self-identification with all women, and leads to a depiction of her psychic landscape in which "[i]mages of women flaming like torches adorn and define the borders of my journey, stand like dykes between me and the chaos. It is the images of women, kind and cruel, that lead me home" (3). Lorde's re-imagining of the "I" as a marker of collective identity along a matrilineal line is part of a larger re-imaging of her self as a collective product of the exchanges and reflections of femininity that she locates in her encounters with other women.

Just as the "I" is a site of resistance, Audre's personal name also becomes a site of resistance both in Zami and in Lorde's life, for like conventional prose, "conventional markers of identity are inadequate" as a device for Lorde's self-representational act (Rudnitzky, 743). In Zami, the usage of the name Audre is described in the text as a choice made in resistance to paternal rules and a rigid orthography. This challenge which starts early in Audre's life continues throughout Lorde's work as evidenced by the use of the pseudonym Rey Domini when publishing her short story *La Llurania* in 1955.

Her adoption of the name Gamba Adisa near the end of her life shows Lorde's awareness of the importance of self-naming as part of the horizon that contextualizes any self-representation. In Zami, Audre describes writing her name without the "y," despite her mother's insistence on "Audrey:" "No deviation was allowed from her interpretation of correct" (24). Here, Audre rejects her mother's insistence on a proper spelling of her proper name, and establishes her agency by representing herself, in writing, in her own hand, in her own spelling. Not only is this a destabilization of rules of orthography, it fundamentally questions the limitations and signifying capacity of proper names. Like her choices in capitalizing words like Black, Lesbian and Harlem and keeping white and america in lower case, Lorde's choice of what name to use to represent herself is a political engagement with language that shows her agency and autonomous usage of language as her own tool.

Throughout her early life, the question of self-identification and naming remains important, as indicated by the existence of a short story, *La Llurania*, published under the name "Rey Domini." In a brief article, Michele Valerie Ronnick suggests that the name, which appears to have classical Latin orthography, is a trilingual pun combining Latin and Spanish meanings to "tell us that the author of *La Lurania* is carrying out the business of a 'Lorde' (151). Tracking through Zami and through interviews, Ronnick asserts that the choice is an act of resistance to the racist treatment of her Latin instructor, Monsignor John J. Brady, who kept Audre after school forcing her to memorize vocabulary lists. Thus this act of self-naming benefits from Audre's negative experiences; Lorde transforms them from a legacy of belittlement into a posture of dominion.

During her relationship with Gloria Joseph, Lorde was compelled to rename herself, in part as a response to her battles with a new form of cancer, this time found in her liver. In 1992, shortly before her death on November 17, she selected the name Gamba Adisa, which means "Warrior: She who makes her meaning clear." This apt name corresponds to the way she saw herself, as a warrior and poet who believed that clarity of language was capable of successfully challenging oppression and changing the way people live. In her eulogy for Lorde, Jospeh acknowledges her multiplicity even in death, "[t]he voice of the poet, Audre Lorde, cannot be silenced. / The work of the poet, Gamba Adisa, will never be forgotten. For Audre Lorde has imprinted on the lives of all who know her work."[40] While Anna Wilson's fear of a iconic image of Lorde may be grounded, those who truly knew her, it would seem, would see that Gamba Adisa serves as a new myth and model for those who would look to her for guidance, example and clarity. Even after her death, Lorde's significance grows, resisting any final concretization.

But Wilson worries that even this identity as collective and fluid may become iconic and rigid in the establishment, within literary history, of a reified identity of Audre Lorde as the dominant signifier for "Black Lesbian" identity. She notes that part of the process of Zami as autobiographical text is the status of the text as a temporal marker of Lorde's identity in a certain time, and that the unfinalizability of Lorde's project is consistent with her own development as artist, writer and person.[41] In Persuasive

[40] This is reprinted in part in Birkle's study. Her footnote: "Gloria I. Joseph, "Audre Lorde: Of Marvelous Distinction," Publication of the Memorial Service held on January 18, 1993 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City" (Birkle, 180n).

[41] This term is from Bahktin in his discussion of the novelistic self in the polyphonic novel, which leads to an uncloseable loophole of the carnivalistic self described in "Epic and the Novel" in Dialogic Imagination p. 37. See also Morson and Emerson, Mikhail Bahktin: Creation of a Prosaics, Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1990. 223- 229.

Fictions, Wilson discusses the iconic nature of Audre Lorde as a contradiction of her project of continuously fragmented, eternally multiple and endlessly creative self-construction. Citing the rising usage of Zami in syllabi and anthologies of women's literature, Wilson notes that her text is symbolic of a "seismic shift" in the dissemination of both literature and power. Relying on Hortense Spiller's commentary in one such anthology, Wilson identifies the trend to accept Zami as Lorde's iconic text, "the representative" self in some officially sanctioned manner, a trend which relocates the text from the margins of its productions to a central position in discourse.[42] Wilson notes that "no marginal position of origin guarantees the survival of a text as an undermining force; no boundary is so far out that it cannot be colonized; no subject position is so marginal that it cannot be recovered" (97).

Lorde's choice to end the narration of Zami before addressing the biographical fact of Audre's pregnancy was, according to Wilson, a choice to exclude a heterosexual aspect of the novel and to maintain "a transcendent evocation of Black lesbian sexuality and community that makes no gesture toward such heterosexual or heterosocial possibility" (102). Contrasting the image of Lorde in A Litany for Survival, the film documenting her life, to the image of Audre at the end of Zami, Wilson argues that the film has a more dialogic nature as the narration of Lorde's texts respond to interviews with Lorde and others. For Wilson, the question of survival of the icon of Audre is paramount, for at the end of Zami, Audre is alive and powerful, having found herself in the connection and congress of multiple exchanges with women celebrating difference. In the film "Litany", however, the visual image of Lorde as she battles cancer over

[42] Spiller, Hortense. "Afterword: Cross Currents, Discontinuities: Black Women's Fiction" in Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Traditions. Ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1985. pps. 249-61

several years stands in counterpoint to her iconic status as an 'official' representation of Black Lesbian identity. Through this humanized, and therefore mortal, version of Lorde in the film, a contrast is made "between the immortality of the word and the mortality of the flesh" (119). But the more important vision is not that of the legacy of Audre as icon, but rather, in Wilson's words, ""the nonsurvival of her iconic presence… a refusal of the stasis that a legacy inevitably brings" (119).

The unfinalizability of Lorde's identity is mirrored in yet another aspect of her publishing career, the posthumous publication of a volume of poems published under the title The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance. Rather than setting the final word of all that is Audre Lorde, this collection introduces new complexities to her identity with the poem "Inheritance – His" which discusses her two-half sisters from her father's first wife, left in Grenada. The influence of Lorde's father, often reduced to a distant flash of lightning" in comparison to her mother's presence, becomes a re-emerging presence late in her life, where "only the deepest bonds remain/ the mirror and the gun." Despite Lorde's anger at her father's betrayal of these two daughters, she addresses his imprint on her physical and psychic makeup, "Now I am older than you were when you died/ overwork and silence exploding in your brain./ You are gradually receding from my face. Who were you outside the 23rd Psalm?[43]/ Knowing so little/ how did I become so much/ like you?" Lorde reveals a new awareness of the influence of her father, whose identity becomes conflated with her own. In the lines "Your hunger for rectitude/ blossoms into rage/ the hot tears of mourning/ never shed for you before/ your twisted measurements/ the agony

[43] "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want…and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." Pslam 23. The Bible. Book of Psalms. The last line of this poem was printed on Byron Lorde's business cards; he was a slumlord.

of denial/ the power of unshared secrets" Lorde absorbs her father's habits of rectitude and rage and recognizes in herself the tendencies of her father (Lorde 1997, 434-7).

The process of self representation, as shown above, is a potential site of resistance, and Lorde seems to have left no stone unturned in her efforts to create a mode and space of self-representation that is in harmony with her sense of language, knowledge and power. Lorde successfully finds formal creativity in her spelling, in her capitalization, in her typographic choices, in choosing the name by which she is perceived, and even the many facets of the "I' itself as it is perceived. One final arena in which Lorde asserts creative control is in the definition of the self. Refusing to take a singular position, or be identified by a single part of her fluid and multiple identity, she structures a new version of the self which accommodates all of her difference without forcing her into a fixed or entrenched position. Her vision of self is at once collective and individual, and resembles a kind of polyvalence whereby the bonds of her associative identity may allow her to engage in more than one collective identity at a given time. Shedding and adding bonds, her identity is as connective as it is combative; she refuses to be labeled as part of any particular collective unless it is she who chooses to self-identify with the group.

Positing the idea that representations of self are dependent upon how one sees one's self, Carmen Birkle's studies the representation of mirrors and mirror images in the poetry of Plath, Rich, and Lorde. Since Lorde's poetry makes only a few references to actual mirrors, Birkle advances her argument through the figuration of Lorde's representation of other women, in her poetry as well as in Zami, as metaphoric mirrors in which she can perceive herself:

> her doubles are her female lovers and finally her female poem-lovers. Lover and poem increasingly become one. Therefore, it is not possible, in the case of Audre Lorde, to clearly separate the representation of lesbianism and poetry writing and the idea of reflection that is inherent in both… Whereas neither Plath nor Rich were ever able to establish a satisfying mirror image in their poems, Lorde's mirrors were never sheeted or smoky but either individually distorting or individually affirming. Lorde saw herself most clearly in the communal *speculum*. (229-30)[44]

Developing the idea that self image is different from social image, Birkle illustrates how Lorde's self-investment in the women in her life, her mother, Gennie, Ginger, Muriel, Afrekete, creates a second self in which she recognizes the multiplicity of her identity. Since self definition cannot come about within a vacuum, Lorde finds herself in her connections with others. "The individual self consist of different selves or fragments which establish links to surrounding communities", states Birkle, arguing that because of Lorde's multiple encounters and experiences with women, the "plurality of mirrors…[does] not produce an illusion of oneness but of healthy fragmentation that allows the peaceful coexistence of different aspects" (234). Lorde's sense of herself as a reflection of all the women cited in Zami creates a sense of self grounded in the collective, not as a unified or homogenous group, but as a collective of difference. Birkle concludes that "Audre Lorde's reflection in society, her reflection in poetry, and her personae's reflection in actual mirrors express Lorde's concept of the communal (and not the individual) speculum as a means to achieve the acceptance of difference and the rejection of frozen and fixed identity patterns" (238). Thus Lorde's vision of her self as "Black, Lesbian, Feminist, warrior, poet, mother doing work" is validated not as a

[44] Italics hers, the subchapter is entitled "Idividual or Communal *Specula*: Representation in Audre Lorde's Poetry" and uses the metaphor of the speculum to replace the idea of sheet-covered or shattered mirrors in Plath and smoky mirrors in Rich. She adds that "For Lorde, the mirror became the meeting point of different ethnic cultures as well as the battleground for questions of gender and sexuality" (Birkle 229).

comprehensive list, but as a series of underlined or articulated identities amongst the many which Lorde claims for herself (Rowell, qtd in Berkle 238).

The anxiety between personal and public self is especially important for Lorde as an activist poet, and it is her self-entitlement to identifying herself in a way that the sum of her parts is greater than the whole. In a 1981 interview Lorde discusses the ways that her social identity is often forced upon her by others who want her to identify as just one aspect of her complex self, "whether it's Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc. – because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want you to dismiss everything else. But once you've done that, then you've lost because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself" (Hammond, qtd in E. Alexander 695). Rather than being identified by one particular essence, Lorde embraces her multiple essences and draws power from them all, even those that seem contradictory. Elizabeth Alexander to points out that for Lorde, "the self is comprised of multiple components within the self and evolved from multiple external sources," and is like a collage: her identities are often overlapping, but always retain their integrity and resist limitations, even those suggested by other elements of the collage (696). Taking a metaphor from The Cancer Journals, Alexander develops the idea of language crazure, adapted from the term discrazure in geology as a metaphor for the self in which "the lines and fissures are visible but the object – like Lorde herself- remains whole" (698).[45] This mixing of metaphors from geology and dream analysis involves a playful inversion of the geologist's strategy of identifying rocks through the history of their formation with a psychoanalyst's understanding that all the persons in a dream are reflections of the

[45] In Cancer Journals, Lorde notes that discrazure is "the cracking and wearing away of rocks" 14-15. Cited in Alexander, 697-8.

dreamer; identity is formed by bringing disassembled elements back together. Alexander argues that "[i]t is [Lorde's] credo, a way of living, that all people, but particularly those said to be marginalized, must refuse to be divisible and schizophrenic" if they are to retain their power as complex individuals rather than mere occupiers of socially and ideologically inscribed identities (713). For Lorde, the self is a dialogic concept, an unfinalizable construct that refuses the limitations of labels while still using them as a means to the construction of both individual and collective identity.

Making Mythography: Appropriating homes, gods and trickster identities

The myth making element of Zami comes from Lorde's search for a home, for a religious order that suited her own viewpoint, and for an identity that she could call her own. Raised in New York by two Caribbean immigrants, Audre's sense of home was always suspended by her parents' sense of sojourn; they always planned to one day return to the Caribbean. But home also becomes a metaphor for self-identification and thus has many meanings with the text. Starting with Linda's insistence that Harlem was never home, Audre describes home as a "far away off, a place I had never been" constructed out of Linda's recounted memories of Grenada and her birth-place on the island of Carriacou (13). Embedded deep in Audre's psyche, this idea of a home "deferred" becomes dominant in Zami, linked thematically to her quest for her own sexuality and personal identity. Not found on any map which Audre could locate during her childhood, Carriacou's mythic unreality transforms the small reef island into a "sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and

bind up between the pages of a schoolbook" (14). The fact that Carriacou cannot be easily identified, codified, and objectified means that it resists a stable and absolute definition. The significance of Carriacou, and the idea of home, grows through accretion both linguistically and sexually.

Audre's "homeland" of Carriacou is accompanied by the additional linguistic terms taken from the patois inflected language of Linda's birthplace. Not only is "friending" an important creolized term defining the relations between Grenadian women that developed when sea-faring husbands were lost at sea, it is also related to the term "Zami." In a passage from the first chapter, Zami is defined by the statement: "How Carriacou women love each other is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and beauty" (14) and once again in the final pages of the text, as a "Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers" (255). Thus the term Zami becomes a mythical antecedent for Audre's own identity, authorizing her sexuality and anchoring her to a woman-centered tradition and past. Regarding the proclamation of the new name, or new spelling of the name Claudine Raynaud claims that "[t]he mythic name is the true name." In the act of renaming herself Zami, Audre mythologizes her self and engages the myth politically: "the political implications of myth are to be understood as the reality that myth actualized" (222). Becoming Zami, Audre realizes the mythic potential of her mother's lesson about Carriacou and embraces the Afro-Caribbean identity as a source of power and role model for identity.

Similarly, the discussion of Carriacou establishes the significance of Audre's Afro-Caribbean heritage to the myth building at work in her text. In the introductory pages of Zami, Audre asks, rhetorically "To whom do I owe the power behind my voice,

what strength I have become, yeasting up like sudden blood from under the bruised skin's blister?" and, "To who do I owe the symbols of my survival" (3), answering, only two pages later, "To the journeywoman pieces of myself. Becoming. Afrekete" (5). The whole text is bracketed in this incantation, ending by recalling "in words the women who helped give me substance: Ma-Liz, DeLois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda, and Genevieve; MawuLisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become" (255).

Summoning Afrekete, also know as Aflakete, or Elegba, the trickster figure of the Fon (Dahomey), "a powerful and many-faced agent of transformation, who mediates among the gods, between the gods and mankind, among humans, and even among the many forces that bring humans into being" reinforces the focus on mythic figures not as stable archetypes, but as changing, chameleon ones which permit reinvention, negotiation and growth (Pelton 72). Not only does Aflakete's name, which means "I have tricked you," indicate the carnivalesque attitude in which the sacred and profane walk hand in hand, but it also recalls Legba's, and by extension, Audre's relationship to language. Seen as a "divine linguist" in Fon creation mythology, Aflakete is both an originator of language and its master. In Fon spirituality, the initiate must address him or herself to Aflakete before approaching other deities (72-73). But Aflakete / Elegba, like Eshu and Ananse, are primarily seen as male figures, indeed, Melville Herskovits describes Elegba as the youngest, and therefore the brightest, of the seven sons of the sea god. In this incarnation, however, Afrekete, like Audre herself, is the youngest of three daughters, whose knowledge of languages bolsters her power. Other researchers show that Elegba,

like Eshu and Ananse, share elements of both male and female sexuality, and their status as tricksters with fluid, changing identities is manifest in the tendency to cross borders, to flaunt eroticism and sexual prowess and to defy the rules of convention. According to Kara Provost, "this fluidity is clearly an important concept for Lorde, whose gendered identity and sexual orientation cannot be easily accommodated by dualistic, normative roles. Drawing on the boundary-breaking expressions of gender and eroticism within the trickster models allows Lorde to recuperate both of these as sources of power, vitality, and creativity" (Provost 50). The re-writing of the sexually ambiguous trickster deity as pronouncedly female is another appropriation of myth which illustrates Lorde's agency in the creation of the mythic and literary landscape against which she defines herself. The appropriation of African myth in the works of Lorde is a trope which frequently finds expression in her poetry as well.

Along with the African patriarchal myths which Lorde subverts, she also reverses or feminizes European myths of the patriarch and male dominance. The poem "The Winds of Orisha," ostensibly an African myth based poem since the orisha "are the goddesses and gods – divine personifications- of the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria,"[46] actually bridges Greek and Yoruba mythology with a stanza about Tiresias:

> Tiresias took 500 years they say to progress into woman
> Growing smaller and darker and more powerful
> Until nut-like, she went to sleep in a bottle
> Tiresias took 500 years to grow into woman
> So do not despair of your sons. (Lorde 1997, 90)

This reference to a transgendered Greek hero is only one of the "impatient legends" which Lorde unlocks in her poetry, which also uses Christian iconography and parables

[46] From Lorde's "A Glossary of African Names Used in the Poems" originally published at the end of The Black Unicorn (1978). Taken from Lorde, Audre. The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde. (New York: Norton, 1997). P. 331

to show that her use of African myth is equal to if not more powerfully symbolic than Western myth. Throughout her most pre-eminent collection of poetry, "The Black Unicorn," she takes the myth of the white, one-horned (male) unicorn from Western folklore, and recasts it as black and implicitly female. Not only is the unicorn appropriated in gender and color, but also the source of the unicorn's difference and his power, the phallic horn, is not the source of Lorde's black unicorn's power; her power is a black, female, and sexual and located in what Lorde calls her "moonpit." Citing the presence of an eroticized black female Colossa in another poem, "Scar," Carr notes that Lorde conflates and combines Western and African signifying systems by her choice of names. Looming larger than life in the poem's final stanza, Lorde "constructs a 'big black woman' as a cultural sign that can only be read as talking back to that emblem of the Western patriarch – the Collosus of Rhodes." The description of Colossa appropriates "figural strategies deployed in the Song of Solomon" and upsets these by using them in a homoerotic context that "transgresses literary and cultural norms of sexuality… [and] constructs a Black lesbian eroticism that asserts self-determined agency" (146). These obvious appropriations of European myth are not without precedent, for there is also a strong Western trickster tradition represented in the figures of Mercury / Hermes.[47] The European trickster can also be recognized in any figure of transformation, for instance Dionysis, who transforms water into wine, and of course the Christ figure who performs a similar feat.

[47] For more on the Western trickster, see Hynes, William J., and Doty, William G. (1993). "Historical overview of theoretical issues: The problem of the trickster." In Mythical trickster figures: Contours, contexts, and criticisms. Edited by Hynes and Doty. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. (1997) Pps 13-32

But in true multivocal trickster fashion, while Lorde challenges she can simultaneously connect, inspire, and energize. Lorde says of her own writing that she writes and speaks "[in] an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence" (Lorde 1982, 22-23). Invoking trickster strategies aids Audre Lorde - and, ideally, her readers - in surviving and struggling against the devaluation and fear of "difference." While she never denies the difficulty involved in this struggle, her work helps transform difference(s) from solely points of pain into sources of power as well. "We must never close our eyes to terror, to the chaos which is Black which is creative which is female which is dark which is rejected which is messy which is...sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting...," Lorde writes in Sister Outsider (101). Repressed or rejected, these disturbing, "Other" aspects within ourselves can become weapons turned inward or turned outward against others; channeled and expressed, as Lorde has through drawing on trickster traditions in her writing, these forces can become sources of creativity, vitality, and strength.

Body as Text: Black Female Discursive Space, Embodiment, and Body language

In Zami as well as in Cancer Journals, Lorde's writing encodes her physical body as a new discursive space, resisting the dismissal of the Black Female body as a valid frame of reference for bodily experience. In this process, the character of language becomes increasingly linked to the body, as the experiences of speaking and writing are conditioned by bodily experience. In counterpoint, since Lorde's language emerges from

her body, her voice can be read as an organ and the performance of her body can be seen as a text. From the description of her abortion in Zami to the personal history of the experience of breast cancer in Cancer Journals, Lorde documents her own physical experiences so that the record of her body as a battle ground or site of engagement could be recorded and have cultural and political value. In the establishment of a discursive space and method that accommodates her experience, Lorde's metaphorical use of the body becomes a site of both joy and pain, and the records of those experiences organize a kind of body language where the borders of text and experience become radically blurred.

In order to understand the relationship of the body as text and Lorde's project of the embodiment of language it is useful to consider the historical rendering of the black female body in the dominant discourse, where it is frequently sexualized (as Jezebel) or maternalized (as Mammy) and given an object status.[48] Within this historical discourse, the bodies of black women are not only reduced, they are seen as a negation, and this is even more true with a body like Lorde's: "its blackness, its lack of a breast, its cultural absence – clearly fails to signify within masculine sexual economies except as a negation, and this is why she must posit a community more disposed to her particular form of difference" (Major 46). In contrast to this discursive politics as negation, Lorde's writing is a writing of self and subjectivity which is literally the embodiment of a political consciousness affected by racial and sexual discourse. With the female body thus established as a site of resistance because of its negation in discourse, the validity of Lorde's discourse of the body is confirmed as the basis of that resistant practice.

Because this body is the central site of these discourses, its representation is an

[48] See Patricia Hill Collins chapter "Mamies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images" in Black Feminist Theory, pps 96-90. Also see Alexander, Elizabeth 699-703 for a review of this material in Lorde.

important means of reversing its negation. The body is essential in the emergence of a poetics of erotics that links the body's experience of pleasure to the body's erotic knowledge of pain, thereby creating a valid *gnosis* or form of knowledge. In discussing Lorde's characterization of her experience with breast cancer, Margaret Kissam Morris notes that "[i]n Lorde's work, the body speaks its own history; she chooses corporeal language to articulate what she could not previously put into words" (Morris 174). This corporeal language is a reflection of both physical and emotional experience, all of which occurs through the presence of the body. Considering from the *gnosis* of the body's experience and the physical markers of Lorde's cancer experience, it is easy to see how the body and the text share the same power of representation and recording, for Lorde's physical scars and imbalanced body serve as a flesh and blood record of her history and experience. Lorde's textualization of the body works in two ways: not only do the scars of the body emerge as a record of her physical history, but her entry into language is also figured as a corporeal experience, particularly in Zami.

Audre's undiagnosed myopia was in fact a legal blindness which physically prevented her from being able to read, and she did not begin to speak until relatively late in her life, so Lorde's entrance into the world of literature was blocked by her body. Thus when she describes the first time she ever has a story read to her, in which a bear eats its entire family, starting with the parents, she enters not just the world of literature, but also makes her first entry into the world of speech when she states "I want to read" (Lorde 1982, 23). Furthermore, Audre's entry into storytelling can be seen as another form of resistance, since her exclusion from her sisters' nocturnal ritual of storytelling results in her decision to "make up a story of my own" (48). Figuring her sister's

nocturnal discourse as the first of many places which forbade her access and agency, Lorde's description of her first forays into speech, reading and writing poetry are profoundly linked to her body's physical experience of her sisters and her mother.

In one of the few unnumbered chapters that dot the book, entitled "How I Became a Poet," Audre comments "My mother had a special and secret relationship to with words, taken for granted as language because it was always there" (31). This language, full of "picaresque constructions and surreal scenes," as well as terms like "l'oregion," "bamsy," and "zandalee" for intimate parts of the body transforms both physical and human geography into something "masked and cryptic, but attenuated in well-coded phrases" (32). This complicated overlay of language on the world defined by her relationship to her mother and her mother's body is the source of Audre's own poetic sense of the world. Describing the intimacy of having her braids done by her mother, Audre highlights their sensual intimacy and similarity,

> I remember the warm mother smell caught between her legs and the intimacy of our physical touching nestled inside the anxiety/pain like a nutmeg nestled inside its covering of mace.
>
> The radio, the scratching comb, the smell of petroleum jelly, the grip of her knees and my stinging scalp all fall into - *the rhythms of a litany, the rituals of Black women combing their daughters' hair*. (33).

From these experiences of language and human rhythms, Audre acknowledges the debt she owes to her mother and claims, "I am a reflection of my mother's secret poetry as well as a reflection of her hidden angers" (32). In this section, the global concepts of "poetry" and "erotics" are combined in Audre's physical link to her mother, described in a particularly detailed scene in which Audre enters her mother's bed and presses herself between her mother breasts and a hot water bottle, rendered in a sensual language of

smells, sounds, and physical touch. However, Audre's own journey from seeing the world through the lens of her mother's poetry towards the development of her own literary voice emerges only at a great personal cost of emotional experiences like Gennie's death and Audre's abortion.

Gennie's suicide had a profound impact on Audre for several reasons, Firstly, Gennie was one of Audre's few true friends, someone with whom she shared many new experiences and deep emotions. Audre's relationship with Gennie, while never explicitly sexual, was clearly a model for her future relations with women. Gennie's impact on Audre's psyche resurfaces again and again throughout the novel. It was with Gennie, after all, that Audre first began experimenting with different wardrobes and clothes, as "Bandits, Gypsies, Foreigners of all degree, Witches, Whores and Mexican Princesses - there were appropriate costumes for every role, and appropriate places in he city to go to play them all out" (88). These parodic experimentations of dressing in costumes and masquerading around New York City allowed Audre to forget her own anxieties and experiment with multiple performed subjectivities. That these forays into performative identity were made possible by the manipulation of the body reinforces the relationship between the body and text, particularly in terms of identity.

The deepest part of that relationship surfaces only near the end of Gennie's life, as she moves in with her estranged father as an act of rebellion against her mother and Caribbean grandmother. Despite the fact that Gennie has discussed the option of suicide, Audre never really believes that she will kill herself. After Gennie's first failed suicide attempt, Audre signals her concern, but never intervenes to stop what she perceives as mere suicidal fantasy. Within the constructs of the text, Audre's first poem appears after

she recounts Gennie's death and burial. This poem, cited earlier in this chapter, locates the sense of loss in the fragmenting of her subjectivity; but it is the burial of the body, the casket, and the object which hammers home the loss: “shoveling earth as a blanket/ to keep the young blood down.” A second poem, entitled “Memorial II” illustrates the ways in which Gennie remains alive and vital to Lorde, “What are you seeing/ In my mirror this morning/ Peering out like a hungry bird/ From behind my eyes” (Lorde 1997, 3). Not only does she keep Gennie alive in her image of herself and in her written poems, but she also acknowledges the mark which Gennie traces on her own existence. In Lorde’s unpublished papers there are two pages torn from a journal about her relationship with Gennie, which “formed a thick and indelible line across the emotional background of my adolescence”(Lorde, unpublished, 1950, qtd in DeVeaux 32).[49] Lorde affirms a concept which becomes central to her literary project, that writing is a means of surviving loss.

Audre’s poetry often seems to be associated with mortality and pain, both physical and psychic, as is the case in the period following her abortion. Audre describes her decision to have an abortion as "an action [that] was a kind of shift from safety towards self-preservation... a choice of pains... what living was all about" (111). However, as she first notes the significance of the "choice that [she] had made," she is haunted by nightmarish dreams which disrupt her sleep and lead her to continually write "poems of death, destruction, and deep despair." In the following months, Audre recalls typing furiously into the night, "Writing was the only thing that made me feel like I was alive" (118). Throughout Audre Lorde’s own life, texts like the Cancer Journals attest to the importance of what Smith and Watson call scriptotherapy or, to use Major’s term autopathology, to establish her own psychological well-being. Whether in prose, poetry

[49] Taken from the unpublished “Audre Lorde Papers”, 22 September 1950. Cited in Warrior Poet, p.31

or journal entries, the acknowledgement of pain serves, for Lorde, as a form of expiation; it also corresponds to her basic belief that one can transform silence from fear into action.

In the waging of her war against breast cancer, Lorde positions herself as combating two specific barriers to her entry into language about medicine, figured as Cancer, Inc. and a societal muting of the experience of breast cancer. The community of medical discourse, figured as overwhelmingly white in the bodies of her male physicians, as well as the white walls and sheets of the hospital, are seen as an indelible erasure of Lorde's blackness. The racist economy of the medical community which reacts to her questions and personal knowledge about cancer as anathema is given physical form when she is offered a white prosthetic breast. This prosthetic, emerging as it does from the all white discourse of medicine is not only hard and uncomfortable; it is the wrong color and could never be a substitute for what she has experienced through radical mastectomy. But in negating the powerful imposed silence of Cancer, Inc., Lorde is faced with another obstacle in trying to find a model from which to learn how to get through this experience. Morris positions herself as a responder to Lorde's question on page 28 of Cancer Journal, "Where are the models for what I'm supposed to be in this situation?" by stating "Naturally there are no models because of the silence that lies like a pall over the subject of breast cancer. Lorde herself become a role model by recounting with courage and probing honesty her particular experience" (Morris 175). If she was not able to find a model for understanding and surviving the experience of cancer, she does find a model for her re-emergence into the world after her convalescence in the form of the Dahomean Amazon warrior, who would ritually remove a breast to improve their archery skills.

Not only does the Amazon warrior woman body reflect Lorde's sense of self-

definition as a warrior poet, it provides another space in which Lorde can realize the politicization of her body as myth. By representing her choice as a form of empowerment, Lorde is shows how her radical mastectomy is another choice for survival, like her abortion. The warrior-poet not only survives, but is able to more accurately aim her word-arrows; she literally lives to fight another day. Not only does the Amazon provide a model by which Lorde can see her surgery not as loss, but as exchange for the power to fight, but her single breasted body allows her access to another political collective:

> More than a heterogeneous, disseminated, and spontaneous attempt at resistance, Lorde's autobiographical project seeks not only to understand power, but also to manifest a utopian ideal: a 'well-informed' army of single-breasted women – Lorde calls them Amazons –ready to break with medical and social codes of normalization. In short, her text supports the idea of embodied and political activism so necessary in the land of disembodied postmodern subjectivity. (Major, 52)

Lorde engages in both the political discourse and the mythological through the representation of her body, not just in writing, but also in the refusal to erase her experience by wearing a prosthetic and pretending to ignore the history which has left its mark upon her body as a scar. Her entry into these discourses recalls the beliefs put forth in "Poetry is Not a Luxury," where she argues for the importance of writing down even one's deepest fears because that action can release their power. In her Amazon identity, Lorde is "the magic woman in 'A Woman Speaks' [who] does not wait for authorization to speak. She embodies authorization not despite but because of being a woman" (Morris 180). The question of embodiment is crucial where the human body and the literary text meet as a representation of self. The political ramifications of such self-representation

touch on the discourse of gender, race, sexuality, but for Lorde, this embodiment also means the engagement and representations of subject positions in order to empower women who have been silenced or ignored to break that silence and emerge on the stage of signification with agency and autonomy. For Lorde, this is not merely a theoretical exercise, as her work to promote awareness of the options available to women with breast cancer, and her fashion designs with triangular shapes for survivors of breast cancer shows. She becomes the model she did not have available to her in her time of need and uses her public profile to address these issues in countless interviews and statements.

CONCLUSION

Through Lorde's literary explorations into language, she uncovers words and concepts that have been buried or disavowed by patriarchal cultures with histories of oppression and silence. Using now familiar concepts of fluid identity over rigidity, a valorization of the subjective over the objective, Lorde clearly constructs a female identity that is woman-centered, resists patriarchal ideology and showcases female creativity not as an extension of or appropriation of male modes of expression, but as an enigmatic expression of resistance and originality. Additionally, the narrative self constructed in Zami is a cohesive entity that, while incorporating many disparate elements, results in a stable and yet fluid identity. The act of writing can be seen as an act of healing, since these texts offer a way of "comprehend[ing]. A way of grasping what was happening around and within me," for women who share these experiences (hooks, 6). As such, Lorde not only appropriates mythological figures from African and

the Caribbean as avatars of feminine identity, but also refigures her own personal experiences and the relationships she has with other women as mythological avatars. Just as the personal becomes the political in some feminist theory, the mythological and the personal become both shared and collective in Lorde's Zami. Audre is reborn in the construction of this literary text, and functions as an avatar of difference as a powerful creative and unifying force.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

As Selwyn R. Cudjoe points out in Resistance and Caribbean Literature, the tradition of resistance in the Caribbean finds expression in every possible field, from the public to the private: "In analyzing Caribbean literature, an understanding of history in general and of the role of resistance in particular becomes indispensable" (73). Just as C.L.R. James notes the expression of resistance to imposed cultural norms in political life through his analysis of the practice of cricket in the Caribbean, Cudjoe shows how literary practices from early slave narrative defy and resist the imposed systems of slavery, of colonialism, and of the kinds of dispossession which are a residue of these systems in Caribbean society.[50] In his dissertation, he discusses the need to deal with capitalism in order to advance the causes of Caribbean resistance and independence, Cudjoe notes that his proposed socialistic project should nor be "a carbon copy of the European experience, but a socialism that is consonant with our needs, a socialism that is our creation; created out of a peculiar history and environment" (Cudjue 1976, 91). Even in this political manifesto, the need for self-definition, and the refusal of monolithic received ideas is conditioned by an inherent acceptance of the multiplicity and uniqueness of the Caribbean experience. This tradition of self-definition and differentiation remains essential to the texts encompassed in this study, and the fields of resistance, self, voice and identity are inexorably united in the specific texts analyzed.

[50] Cudjoe references C.L.R. James Beyond a Boundary, 1963.

In the course of this study, I have identified three major confluences which united these texts: their reliance on autobiographics as a component of their literary practice, their incorporation of orature and affirmation of the oral tradition of Caribbean literature, and their use and deconstruction of collective identity as a basis for individual identity. Beyond these three concepts, the study has explored the textual use of Caribbean and African concepts, form *vaudou* and obeah to the significance of twins and tricksters in the production of Caribbean literature. In addition, the geographical representation of the Caribbean through the depiction of specific islands or locations has been explored as a means of opening a space for displacing identity across the geographic and historical gaps and linkages of the Caribbean. The concept of gnosis has emerged as a source of counterhegemonic knowledge, valued for its opposition to Western forms of knowledge advanced through colonialism.[51] Finally, themes of feminine identity, including relationships between women and motherhood, have been investigated for their representation, especially as relates to autonomy and agency. These themes unify in some ways the texts of this study, and indicate numerous avenues for further study, not only of other texts by these authors, but both male and female authors from diverse parts of the Caribbean as they repeat the reliance of autobiographics, orature and collective identity.

Given that life narratives are always engaged in struggles with identity politics, I have tried to identify the specific issues germane to these texts and establish the grounds for a reading of life narratives as highly political, and indeed revolutionary texts. As

[51] As a caveat to my conclusion, I note that my depiction of Western knowledge, history and culture may seem to be reductive or monolithic. It is not my intention to promote a monolithic view of either Western or Caribbean culture; but the nature of this study, and its focus on the Caribbean, does not permit me to develop the multiplicity of Western identities at length, or the remarkable use of experimental form in Western autobiographics by both male and female authors.

Cudjoe notes in the conclusion to his study, “The story of Caribbean literature, as one tries to impose some order on it, is the struggle of man for freedom and dignity, with resistance to any form of oppression that would deny him his right to be a person” (Cudjoe 1980, 275). This history of resistance in the self-definition of the Caribbean author, in claiming his *or her* independence from oppression, is exemplified by the novelistic use of the autobiographic form. In his survey of Caribbean poetry, Kamau Brathwaite notes that “For these inheritors of the revolution, nation-language (his term for orature) is no longer anything to argue about or experiment with; it is their classical norm and comes out of the same experience as the music of contemporary popular song: using the same riddims, the same voice-spreads, syllable clusters, blue notes, ostinado, syncopation, and pauses… which after a time becomes part of the sound-structure and meaning of the poem” (Brathwaite 46). In fulfilling the oral characteristic in the texts of this study, the individual voice and its tempo and repetition invites a conflation of individual and collective identity, conditioned by the experience of individuality that marks the texts of this study. It centers on the exploration of identity on the body of the Caribbean female as the site of the metaphysical, spiritual and emotional experiences which define identity. Denise de Caires Narain notes that “Everywoman is an island, so that to take refuge in a collective identity is to escape the responsibilities and possiblities of self-definition" (345). While the collective identity remains as a background from which the individual emerges, it is the articulation of the self, the expression of agency and autonomy which connects these texts and offers the possibility of significant further studies.

Autobiographics and Authentic Feminine Subjectivity

The texts of this study are deeply focused on the role of history and culture in self-definition. This study of texts by women who exploit the expectation of the autobiographical genre, namely authenticity, to engage discourses of identity in productive and non-traditional ways that celebrate difference as a site of resistance. Jamaica Kincaid's engagement of cultural politics through her narratives is a clear example of this continuing tradition, and the novel studied here, Autobiography of My Mother is deeply engaged in the politics of self-definition. Kincaid plays with the form of autobiography in order to establish a position of female subjectivity defined in relationship to race, gender and politics. Likewise Edwidge Danticat uses the voice of an abused Haitian girl in a way that tangentially engages the history of US-Haiti relations. In the process of self-definition, her protagonist in Breath, Eyes, Memory plumbs the interior relations of the matrifocal culture of Haiti's interior while also exploring the expressions of the Haitian Diaspora in the context of New York City. In Maryse Condé's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem, the historical questions of identity and the cultural stereotyping of Caribbean women are addressed as Tituba tells her story including her role in the Salem Witch Trials. Condé takes Tituba's voice as her own, elevating her female subjectivity in a way the erases the historical reduction of Tituba to a nearly voiceless caricature in Arthur Miller's play. Finally, Audre Lorde's telling of her own story emerges as something close to auto-ethnography, embracing the issues and questions of difference in a project of dynamic self-definition. Her text Zami: A New Spelling of My Name celebrates rather than hides the conditions of her sexual, gender

and racial difference as a part of a greater project of opening a space, along with women like Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, for lesbians of color. While each of these texts offers its own radical rendition of the limits of autobiography, the Caribbean, as a confluence of historical and cultural influences retains a dominant influence over this generic expectation. The Caribbean asserts itself as a space where intertwining cultural currents provoke a need for self-discovery and self-definition.

Oral Expression and Myth

Like the interweaving of the personal and political in Caribbean autobiographics, the texts of this study explore, in various ways the cultural phenomenon of orature, blending the sounds and rhythms of oral culture and expression into the written forms. In manners both subtle and direct, these texts embrace the oral culture of the 'parole de nuit' or the "Krik? Krak!" culture of storytelling. In the texts of this study, the use of oral expression has been both part of the form of writing, and part of the symbolic content of the novels as a whole. In the study on Kincaid's Autobiography, I have demonstrated how the strident cadence of voice, located in the maternal heritage of Kincaid's narrators, influences the form of the text. Likewise, the expression of cultural ideals, like the Mammywata figure and the references to obeah invokes cultural myths which allow Xuela to imagine herself as a destructive mother goddess. The discussion and transmission of cultural myths is essential to my study of Danticat's Breath as well, for it is in these myths that the seeds of Sophie's, and all the Caco women's pain, is born. In the deconstruction of these myths, Danticat is able to salvage the positive elements of

oral culture, while moving away from the destructive and abusive aspects of the Marassas and Erzulie that teach women to perform violence upon their fellow women. In the study of Condé's I, Tituba, it Tituba's status as a historical figure that is transformed by Condé's playful oral culture, and despite the horrible things which happen to Tituba, she retains a powerful role, whispering into both Condé's ear and into the ears of Barabdian youth. And in Audre Lorde, it is the concept of the litany which elevates poetry from an artistic form to an activist calling. While referencing the myth of the trickster Afrikete, Lorde creates a manifesto for the need to communicate and explore difference. Each of these texts uses orature in both form and content to deconstruct symbols of cultural myth and to re-create them as positive and productive role models.

Culture, Geography, Names and History as Fields of Resistance

Along with the focus on specific cultural practices and beliefs in the Caribbean, this study has focused on the concept of collective identity as a possible basis for the establishment of individual identity. Whether through a focus on geographical linkages and leaps from specific islands and their particulars, or through the engagement of African or Caribbean worldviews and concepts, the collective identity of the Caribbean is characterized as a formative basis for identity, from which the individual needs to differentiate herself. While there is an unquestionable difference between any of the islands in the Caribbean, there is also a largely shared history of cultural interweavings from the indigenous, European, African and Asian populations which meet in the Caribbean space - even if many from the region may be unwilling to acknowledge a

larger geographical identity. The choice by the authors of this study to incorporate varying degrees of geographic dislocation in their writing projects succeeds in broadening the geographic connections between Caribbean islands without reducing the Caribbean to one monolithic structure or location. As I have shown in the study, this kind of geographical displacement allows the author to construct and project an identity which occupies a more concretely fictional space, thus allowing for greater freedom of invention and innovation. Not only is this done through the names of the islands, but also through the reconstruction and reconstitution of given or proper names, as well.

The results of such fictionalization can perhaps best be seen in the field of history; and each of these texts, through the advancement of a particular subjectivity, offers a version of history. As such, each claims a degree of authenticity and veracity which opposes the forces which label history as "History" and record only the subjective experience of the victors and conquerors as the objective truth. As Glissant notes in Caribbean Discourse:

> "The French Caribbean is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal disclocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment, as it were, as happened with people who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance, European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory. (Glissant 61-2)

In the face of this nonhistory, in which the voices of women in particular are subsumed and silenced, texts such as the ones in this study emerge to challenge the rigidity of place names, given names, and all that is concretized in what is called history. Like the

feminist term of "herstory", which emphasizes the stories of women which have been erased in standardized histories of the academy, the texts of this study produce multiple and sometimes divergent histories which embrace both subjectivity and subjective truth.[52] In challenging the non-history of the Caribbean, the authors of this study access memory and creativity to weave a historically based subjective reality: "One of the duties of orality is therefore to be absolutely historical. But the nonhistory suffered by the [Caribbean people] has prevented them from having access to a collective memory… In the efforts to access a form of collective memory, they produce a… literature [meant to] ' deconstruct the complex mechanisms of frustration and the infinite varieties of oppression'" which mark the official history of the colonial Caribbean (Glissant, 227, translated in Praeger 98). Fulfilling the words of Eloge de la Créolité, the authors of this study demonstrate that: "Only poetic knowledge, fictional knowledge, literary knowledge, in short, artistic knowledge can discover us, understand us and bring us, evanescent, back to the resuscitation of consciousness" (Bernabé 99). In each chapter of this study, the elevation of female subjectivity serves as a direct act of resistance to the concept of a History of the Caribbean, generating a gnosis of the Caribbean in which female voices subtly replace the dominant ideology.

Collective Identity and the Counter-Hegemonic Properties of Gnosis

The concept of gnosis, as explored in the study, is in fact a confluence of the individual and the collective, of the oral and the written, and embodies all the issues of

[52] The term "herstory" emerges from the 1970's feminist movement, possibly coined by Morgan in Sisterhood is Powerful (1970) and cited by Miller and Swift in Words & Women (1976).

experience and agency which are at play in the processes of autobiographics. As Cobham suggests, gnosis is as much about the validity of subjective knowledge and personal truth as it is a valorization of a Caribbean worldview: one in which logical explanations are not always required, as in the culture of obeah, as one example of a culturally specific worldview. The introductory discussion of a "creole gnosis" posited this kind of knowledge as a counter-hegemonic force which asserts it own authority outside the strictures of logical and received knowledge, coded primarily in the function of the colonial school.

In Kincaid's Autobiography, for example, the school children were obliged to change the story of watching their playmate swim to the "Mammy-wata" spirit, accepting instead a story about a natural drowning. It is Xuela's insistence on the veracity of her experience which marks her outsider status in relationship to the other children who also accept the schools indoctrination of racial hierarchies and limited social roles that Xuela refuses.

In Danticat's Breath, however, the gnosis which functions outside the norms of Western, in this case American, society has a different function. Rather than asserting a powerful knowledge, Danticat's woman-centered gnosis of testing, marassas and the Erzulie figure can be seen as the source of knowledge of the abuse and suffering experienced by the Caco women. But while Western knowledge has no immediate answer to Danticat's troubles, it is the liminal figure of the therapist schooled in Santería who guides Sophie through a kind of therapy which presumably allows her to raise an unmolested daughter.

The concept of gnosis is again at play in Condé's I, Tituba, through the means of Tituba's obeah knowledge. Here again the concept of gnosis is expanded, since it also includes arcane forms of Eurocentric knowledge, exemplified by Judah White. While Tituba's obeah is capable of connecting her to the realm of the ancestors, and she is even able to use her power to communicate with the wife (and eventually children) of Benjamin, her power is the very thing which, along with her outsider status, causes her to be placed at the center of the Salem Witch Trials. Here, Tituba's gnosis is contrasted starkly against the Christian teachings of Parris's puritanical society; however, through the ironic use of Christian ship names, the figuring of Christians as cruel and vindictive slave owners, and the crafting of a scene in which Tituba is gang-raped by the Puritanical ministers, Condé makes clear that this gnosis is a more sustainable form of knowledge than the puritanical faith.

In the case of Audre Lorde, it is her essays and poetry which combine the idea of erotic knowledge and poetry to show a form of expression which contrasts the codes of fear and silence through which Cancer, Inc., for example, refuse women the right to know their bodies and objectively assess their own experiences. The conclusion of Lorde's Zami relates directly to this concept of gnosis as experience in describing the shaping of herself through the experience of embracing difference by loving women of many different backgrounds.

The concept of gnosis operates fundamentally on the valorization of personal experience. Gnosis elevates personal subjectivity and rejects a hierarchization of knowledge. In the Caribbean, it seems, this knowledge may include the supernatural, but certainly includes subjective truths that allow for multiple interpretations of lived

experiences. In each of the novels of this study, that ability to embrace this gnosis, and to adapt it subjectively, is an important measure of the agency and autonomy of the protagonists. In terms of the role of gnosis in autobiographics in general, the concept seems central to the validation of the individual experience, while simultaneously suggesting a shared link to a collective experience.

Collective Femininity: Sexuality, Maternity and the Feminist Question

Caribbean women are never completely separated from a sexual identity, but the space of sexual identity can become a space for resistance and autonomy, rather than being subsumed into the positionality of objecthood and reduced status. Narain notes that the female Caribbean author "insists on sexuality as both the site of both limitation and possibility for her protagonists and in the process, refuses the alternative seductions of an escape into "the folk" and collectively articulated identities" (334). Each of the authors in this study examines the concept of a collective identity and finds the need to redefine, if not utterly reject, the received concepts or notions of Caribbean identity. Whether these symbols of collective identity point towards male or female modes of identification, their sources are re-examined and imagined more fully in order to show inconsistencies, and even outrages which make their acceptance problematic to the project of Caribbean self-identification. As in Walcott's "What the Twilight Said" the notion of a "folk" in the Caribbean is frequently a notion of a "fake folk," the "steelbandsman, carnival masker, calypsonian, and limbo dancer…" in other words, "popular artists… [who] preserve the colonial demeanour and threaten nothing," which does more to obscure authentic

Caribbean identity than it does to focus attention on the particularity of Caribbean identity (Walcott 7). For the women in this study, the unquestioned notions of “sisterly solidarity” as well as the stereotypes of the "exuberant Tantie or elevated spiritual Mother" that form the basis of collective identity for Caribbean women are countered either through narrative exploration, or through the fictive imagining of alternative communities and cultural concepts (Narian 347).

The first text of this study, Kincaid’s Autobiography, explores the concept of the Caribbean female in her capacity as a sexual being with maternal power and reverses this stereotype in its depiction of Xuela. Xuela’s power is deeply related to her sexual encounters, a fact that is compounded through her assertion of power by using abortion to refuse becoming a mother, and to help others achieve that control as well. While Xuela’s power is found in her ability to refuse motherhood within a colonial and controlling context, Danticat’s protagonist finds some degree of autonomy through the assertion of her sexuality when she leaves her mother’s house, and through her decision to protect her daughter from the kinds of abuse which she and the other women of her family experienced. In the same text, Martine’s decision to abort her second child ultimately leads to her death, but can be read as an assertion of power and self-determination. Ultimately, Martine and Sophie both take on new identities through their sexuality. While their lives are conditioned by the matrifocal society of rural Haiti, their refusal to conform to the expectations of that society shows that individual identity is related to the collective, but involves an assertion of individuality and self-differentiation. Condé’s I, Tituba explores the concept of a collective identity in two ways, both through the recovery of Tituba from the annals of history and through the exploration of the concept

of the maroon. While Tituba's sexual identity defines much of her character, resulting in her making many choices that limit her potential and cause her great problems, her decision to abort her child is situated as an act of resistance, refusing to allow another child to be born into the world which she knows to be full of suffering. While she denies motherhood in a biological sense, Tituba does take on a kind of motherhood in a spiritual sense. Not only does she see Iphigene as her lover, she also sees him as her son; this maternal tendency continues after her death, when she communicates with children and future rebels to nurture them from beyond the grave. Where Condé explodes the myth of the maroon and offers a very different view of the matrifocal world of the Caribbean as the nature of collective Caribbean identity, Audre Lorde elevates the Caribbean concept of the matrifocal society to a virtually utopic paradigm. In Zami, the collective power of women as role models and lovers takes on a mystical element and allows Lorde to construct an individual identity which constantly redefines itself through exposure to the collective. With difference posited as the source of identity, Lorde's poems, essays and novel develop a lesbian gnosis, tied as much to individual experience as to myth and fantasy.

While issues of relationships between women are raised as significant to female identity in these novels, the intrinsic value of these relationships is deconstructed, by Kincaid, Danticat, and Lorde, at least to show that the collective does not always make the best choices for the individual; in each case, Condé included, the condition of the Caribbean woman is reviewed in relation to the question of the Caribbean male and the question of gender relations. Patricia Mohammed notes: "Feminism within Caribbean society has therefore been involved in an unrelenting dialogue about what constitutes

Caribbean manhood and masculinity and womanhood and femininity, as it has also been affected by the increasing consciousness of and struggles for gender equality which inform the global discourse" (Mohammed 1996, 8). While the exploration of female identity is always a feminist project, not all who explore this identity will define themselves as feminist.

Within this study, Lorde most clearly identifies herself as feminist, in particular by noting the way her race and lesbianism mark her as different from other feminists. Condé has been analyzed as a feminist writer as well, and yet she refuses the appellation; in her interviews with Vévé Clark, she describes herself as a kind of gadfly observer. In her comments, Condé refers to I, Tituba as a parody of the feminist novel, especially the scene with Hester Prynne (129-31). The novels of Danticat and Kincaid must also be considered with respect to feminism, but the fictional nature of their projects does not lend these two novels to be easily codified as activist works. However, their exploration of feminine identity and their refusal of traditional feminine roles can be seen to correspond to a more locally rooted version of feminism, a paradoxical engagement of certain kinds and realms of power which asserts female self-determination.[53] The concept of a Caribbean identity, as stated above, should not be considered a monolithic experience, but recognized as a multi-dimensional one which embraces the circumstances and confluences of gender, race, sexuality and history. The texts of this study often rely on the concepts of the collective, but always move past the collective to assert new forms of identity that permit self-determination and self-definition.

[53] See the collection of essays in Mohammed's Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought, especially Momsen's "The Double Paradox"

Looking Forward

In a 2004 study by Maryse Condé that looks at loosely autobiographical texts written by three francophone Caribbean women, she asserts that "It is difficult to pigeonhole these various narratives. There is no declaration of a common objective. There is no desire to create a literary movement or school" (161). These texts, in which sexuality, race and gender take a prominent role, seem to unite in the deconstruction of myths of the feminine, especially in myths of the maternal: "Lest we get the wrong idea, this bitter destruction of myths - the myth of the spiritual mother, the myth of the biological mother – aims for total liberation" (162-3). The same comments might be said about these texts which traverse the Caribbean and its new Diaspora. But where Condé's analysis must ask what gains the "pyrrhic battle" of liberation produces in this generation of authors, I contend that these authors resist without overtly opposing, thus creating new spaces, and new identities in which to inhabit without being subsumed by prejudice or oppression. These authors deconstruct the means by which identity has been produced, and re-deploy less oppressive cultural scripts to acknowledge the condition of femininity in the Caribbean without falling to either the side of submission or of rejection.

I would contend that the use of the "feminine" forms of narrative, of journals, letters and autobiographical texts will continue to be used in the emerging generation of writers, such as those found in Danticat's collection The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Dyaspora in the United States and Afrikete: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Writing, named after Audre Lorde's transformational, mythic trickster figure. However, like the works of Julia Alvarez, and even Danticat's Farming of the Bones, they will

continue to call attention to enormous and egregious acts of historical violence against women, showcasing the relevance of Caribbean women to every aspect of Caribbean history. That these authors should use fiction as their means of resistance in clearing a space for their stories is not, in my opinion, evidence of a weakness, but rather, proof of the dimension of their engagement with historical discourses and the subterranean ideological constructs which perpetuate the violence of erasure against women in Caribbean culture.

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