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Modernity and the Novel in the Expanded Caribbean

Wilson Harris, Patrick Chamoiseau and Carlos Fuentes

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies

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Declarations

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at the University of Warwick or any other educational institution. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at the University of Warwick or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged. This thesis may be photocopied.

Abstract

My thesis examines how the form of the novel is transformed in the postcolonial/neo-imperial context of the 20th century Expanded Caribbean. I focus on works written in Spanish, English and French and thus privilege a regional approach over a linguistic one. While the fragmentation of the region has been furthered historically through the educational system, neo-imperialism, economics and global politics, the region is united by the common experience of colonialism, of plantation slavery and/or the *encomienda* system, and of anti-imperial resistance. By focusing on the form of the novel that has originated in Europe, I set out to examine the impact of geo-politics and economics on aesthetics.

Furthermore, Carlos Fuentes, Wilson Harris and Patrick Chamoiseau can arguably be seen as representative for the academic fields of Latin Americanism, Postcolonial Studies and Francophone Literature respectively, given their canonical status within them. One of the aims of this thesis is to examine how the novels from the Expanded Caribbean speak back to certain developments within the 'central' academies over the last few decades and what the canonization of certain writers to the exclusion of others, and the promotion of certain ways of reading texts, tell us about the latter. For this reason, most of the novels examined in this thesis have been published during the last quarter of the century that, on the political, economic and social level, has witnessed dramatic global changes that have had a devastating impact on the achievements of the 'boom' period of the sixties.

- Introduction -

Reading Regionally

El Caribe ha sido mar de encuentros y su literatura una corriente del espíritu que fluye del Mississippi al Orinoco, y en la cual nadan peces de todos colores y todas las lenguas, desde William Faulkner en Nueva Orleans hasta Gabriel García Márquez en Cartagena de Indias, pasando por Alejo Carpentier en la Habana, Jean Rhys en Dominica, Luís Rafael Sánchez en San Juan de Puerto Rico, Arturo Uslar Pietri en Caracas, Jacques Roumain en Puerto Príncipe, y los ya mencionados Naipaul y Walcott, Césaire, Glissant y Depestre.

Carlos Fuentes, *Geografía* (220)

[the school teacher] taught Masters the geography of Europe, particularly of Great Britain; nothing at all of the Americas but his silence here was sometimes deafening.

Wilson Harris, *Carnival* (72)

The proposition to read literature of the Americas regionally is not new and has been promoted by engaged local literary journals and intellectual groups throughout the twentieth century.¹ Its distant roots lie in the Cuban José Martí's plea in 1891 that "the European university must give way to the American university" to replace those Eurocentric spectacles through which the region is viewed with ones that would be anchored in a regional outlook ("Our America" 297). Yet despite political, social and cultural efforts at integration, the region continues to be fragmented into different zones - politically, socially, economically and linguistically- a fact that still has a tangible impact on the formation of regional bodies of knowledge. As Raphaël Confiant – one of Patrick Chamoiseau's fellow Créolistes in Martinique – remarks: "Nous Antillais, nous sommes complètement isolés par rapport à la littérature des pays qui nous entourent. Nous sommes complètement tournés vers l'Europe [...] Nous n'avons même pas de contacts directs

¹To list a few examples, we might mention the Guyanese literary journal *Kyk-over-al* founded in 1945 and West Indian in scope (Wilson Harris was amongst its early collaborators), as well as *Savacou* (a journal that came out of the relatively short-lived Caribbean Artist Movement 1966-1972). More broadly, efforts to think regionally have been promoted by the New World Group (involving thinkers such as Norman Girvan, Lloyd Best, Clive Thomas) associated with the University of the West Indies (an institution founded in 1948); by regional festivals of art, such as the first CARIFESTA in 1972 in Guyana (the earliest precursor of which was the regional festival in Puerto Rico in 1952); by the recent creation in Quintana Roo (a State on the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico) of a yearly prize honouring the region's contribution to Caribbean thought (Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History* 20).

avec nos amis les écrivains de la Caraïbe” (qtd by D’Hulst, “Interliterary Relations” 123-124).² Furthermore, on an international level or, more precisely, in the academies of the central economies of global capitalism, this fragmentation is often cemented not only by the institutional affiliation of Caribbean cultural studies to language departments rather than area studies, but also through the relative separation of the fields Latin Americanism (that includes but also marginalises the Hispanic Caribbean) and Postcolonial Studies. One might say that the most ‘unorthodox’ aspect of this thesis is the inclusion of the Mexican boom novelist Carlos Fuentes (b.1928), who, while addressing Mexico’s inextricable ties to the Caribbean, is perhaps not what one might call a ‘Caribbean writer’.³ As I shall sketch below, this decision is based on historical, political, geographical and literary reasons, as well as the fact that the three writers can be seen as representative for the academic fields of Latin Americanism, Postcolonial Studies and Francophone Caribbean Literature/ Francophone Postcolonial Studies respectively, given their canonical status within them. In a sense, then, one of the aims of this thesis is to examine how the novels from the Expanded Caribbean speak back to certain developments in the ‘central’ academies over the last few decades, and what the canonization of certain writers to the exclusion of others, and the promotion of certain ways of reading texts, tell us about the latter. For this reason, most of the novels examined in this thesis are ones that have been published during the last quarter of the century that, on the political, economic and social level, has witnessed dramatic global changes that have had a devastating impact on the achievements of the ‘boom’ period of the sixties.

²More generally, this intellectual isolationism affects the cultural exchanges between most peripheral areas of the globe: as Spivak writes, “[a]n important infra-structural problem of the restricted permeability of global culture is the lack of communication within and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world” (*Death of a Discipline* 16).

³The Yucatán area, in particular, has strong historical links to the Caribbean. As Torres-Saillant writes, “[s]uffice it to mention the thousands upon thousands of enslaved Maya Indians who were sold to work on Cuban and other Caribbean plantations alongside their African counterparts” (*An Intellectual History* 20).

Modernity and the Expanded Caribbean as a Region

[The enslaved] from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life.

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (392)

The Caribbean [...] matters enormously to an understanding of the modern world, the global outcome of colonial transactions.

Silvio Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (18)

Why study the literature of the Expanded Caribbean? Because it matters - to an understanding of modernity and the contemporary 'global moment' characterised by US hegemony, to the development of a new literary comparativism and to postcolonial studies as a field. I take the term 'modernity' to refer to the time period starting with the beginning of the imperialist conquest of America in 1492.⁴ After its 'discovery', the Expanded Caribbean quickly became the centre of the modern world as the involuntary battlefield of emerging imperial powers and as the sustaining force behind the economic and industrial development of the European countries through the exploitation of cheap labour under the plantation system, and the extraction of raw materials. Modernity, in the words of Enrique Dussel, 'appears when Europe affirms itself as the "center" of a *World History* that it inaugurates: the "periphery" that surrounds this centre is consequently part of its self-definition' ("Eurocentrism and Modernity" 65). From the start, modernity is thus inextricably interlinked with capitalism and imperial expansion. The othering of the non-European subject – exploited by the centre - has played a pivotal role in the formation of the 'modern' European subject: "Modernity was born when [...] Europe could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself" (ibid 66). The positive values of freedom and autonomy that for many are constitutive of the concept of the modern subject are thus only one side of the coin,

⁴ In this context, one might want to refer briefly to Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*, since it purports to reflect on the issue of modernity and aesthetics. The study suffers from its employment of the terms 'modernity', 'modernization' and 'modernism', terms that it leaves ill- (or non-) defined. It is, for instance, unclear whether by 'modernity', Gikandi means a historical phenomenon or the cultural forms produced by it and he never distinguishes between capitalist modernity and Eurocentric representations of it; 'modernism' – which is usually employed to designate a twentieth century literary movement – here becomes indistinguishable from 'modern cultures/societies/life', which in peripheral societies are, as he rightly points out, inescapably defined "by the colonizing structures" (3). Yet, despite the sliding of categories, there is an interesting aspect to his argument, as he is trying to make a case for a Caribbean counter-discourse that developed out of its particular historical situation: for instance, in contrast to European Modernists for whom "history is a nightmare", for Caribbean modernists it is "*colonial* history [that] is a nightmare" (my emphasis 6).

occluding the repressed side of imperial and colonial violence that sustained it.⁵ The Expanded Caribbean also played a pivotal role in the US rise to global hegemony: in 1846 the US went to war with Mexico in accordance with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, winning a third of Mexico's territory; the 1850s were marked by US 'interventions' in Nicaragua and Panama; in 1898, the US declared war on Spain, as a result of which the US occupied Cuba (whose 'independence' would be marred by the Platt amendment of 1903 and the economic hegemony of US capital within Cuba) and Puerto Rico (that would eventually become a 'Free Associated State', a status comparable to that of the Overseas Departments of France). Throughout the twentieth century, the US continued to 'intervene' militarily, politically and economically – both overtly and covertly – in the Expanded Caribbean, which was propelled to the centre of global affairs by the Cuban Revolution and – more recently – the humanitarian crimes committed by the US government in Guantánamo Bay. Furthermore, while the ideological clash during the Cold War is centred around Cuba, the Mexican border – if we 'expand' the notion of the Expanded Caribbean a bit further – is one of the most visible economic pressure points between the Third and the First World; as Carlos Fuentes has noted, "this is not only a border between Mexico and the United States or between a developing and a developed nation. It is also a border between the United States and *all* of Latin America, which begins south of the river that you call the Rio Grande and we call Río Bravo. What happens on the line between Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, is bound to affect the relationship between the United States and the Western Hemisphere" (*A New Time* 160). It is as a result of its colonial history, as well as of current global politics and the further entrenchment of underdevelopment through the enforcement of SAPs and various neo-liberal projects and agreements launched by the US (for instance the Caribbean Basin Initiative and NAFTA), that the region continues to be characterised by economic asymmetries and insular isolation with regards to its neighbours, despite the establishment of CARICOM and other regional trade agreements, which, as one critic points out, "are products and agents of globalization and restructuring", complementing a "US strategy for deepening the integration of the Caribbean into

⁵ This is reflected in European literature with the gradual racialisation of notions of self and other. For instance, during the height of British imperialism in the nineteenth century, we encounter characters like Rhoda Swartz in *Vanity Fair*, who can only inadequately perform the role of the educated English lady and thus acts as the foil for the construction of the protagonist Amelia's 'white' English identity.

the economy of North America” (Watson 66).⁶ The region continues to be plagued by poverty, social instability and unemployment and to provide for US capital a pool of cheap, under-paid workers lacking in basic rights, especially with creation and expansion of industrial free-trade zones in Haiti, Jamaica and the Dominican republic.

Given the economic and historical realities underpinning and sustaining this fragmentation, it seems at the very least undesirable to reproduce it on an academic level.⁷ Silvio Torres-Saillant – one of the most prominent scholars of pan-Caribbean literature – thus urges scholars to go beyond the felt need to *prove* the existence of a pan-Caribbean field of academic enquiry, which in the case of European literature, is simply *assumed* (“Towards a Centripetal Vision” 57). Yet, in relation to my thesis, one must here observe that the inclusion of Carlos Fuentes’s work somewhat jars with the particular version of a ‘Caribbean-centric’ perspective promoted by the important pan-Caribbean work currently undertaken. While the Caribbean regions of Mexico are readily included, at least on a theoretical level, a writer such as Fuentes who did not grow up in this particular zone of Mexico and has usually focussed in his writing on regions further up North does not normally figure in them. While undoubtedly one could have written a different study replacing Fuentes with a writer from the Hispanic Caribbean ‘proper’ – that indeed displays more similarities with the other islands than mainland Mexico – one might also pause to question the reasons behind this resistance. On the one hand, Torres-Saillant has pointed to the tendency of Latin Americanism to subsume the Caribbean into its remit due to the fact that Latin Americanists traditionally enjoy more prestige than Caribbeanists. This serves to occlude the specificity of the region and thus constitutes a danger one must be wary of (*Caribbean Poetics* 20). On the other hand, Peter Hulme has observed that the Caribbean has traditionally been represented as being caught between ‘two Americas’: a spiritual ‘Nuestra America’ is pitted against the capitalist US; the North versus the South (a division that makes little sense if one includes

⁶ “There is little reason to believe CARICOM is in a position to secure the economic viability of any individual Caribbean country at this time in history. CARICOM economies have not registered any meaningful industrial integration, without which meaningful economic integration is impossible. CARICOM does not own the means of production, it does not produce exchange value, nor does it accumulate surplus value or make a direct contribution to the members’ share of global value-added” (Watson 81).

⁷ Recent academic efforts to bridge the disciplinary gaps include Silvio Torres-Saillant’s *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (2006) and *Caribbean Poetics* (1997); J. Michael Dash’s *The Other America* (1998); the *General History of the Caribbean* sponsored by Unesco (1997- 2003); and the monumental three-volume compilation *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* edited by A. James Arnold (1994-2001).

Mexico in one's considerations and that leaves us with the problem of deciding "what happens to the bits in the middle" ("Expanding the America" 4)). Countering the tradition of dividing the American continent into two, Hulme thus proposes to view the continent as composed of different regions, one of which would be the Expanded Caribbean. Its conceptual precursors are regional categories such as 'Plantation America', as well as Glissant's notion of the Caribbean as the 'estuary of the Americas' (*Discours Antillais* [hereafter *DA*; *Caribbean Discourse* hereafter referred to as *CD*] 427), an image that closely resembles Fuentes's geo-literary category that served as the first epigraph. Hulme describes the Expanded Caribbean as follows:

The Expanded Caribbean is undoubtedly a special place, most of all perhaps because of those three great rivers. But it is also where Columbus thought that paradise was situated and it is home to El Dorado and the Fountain of Eternal Youth; so much American mythology belongs in this region. And it is where history has been made. Whereas until relatively recently we seemed to live in a world whose politics had been shaped by the Second World War, we increasingly seem to live in a world shaped by a US imperialism which began at the turn of the twentieth century with the occupation of Guantánamo Bay and the building of the Panama Canal, two of the key places within the Expanded Caribbean. [...] the real challenge posed by the idea of the Expanded Caribbean [to a literary historiography] is that the region also includes some parts of the larger nation states that have a deep investment in the model of a national literature, such as the USA and Colombia ("Expanding the Caribbean" 13; 15).

Like Glissant's and Fuentes's above-mentioned categories, the notion of the Expanded Caribbean includes the Southern parts of the US, which, in terms of a literary history, translates, for instance, into the inclusion of William Faulkner's oeuvre that asserted a great influence over the writers from the Caribbean and Latin America, including the Guyanese Wilson Harris (b.1921), the Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau (b.1953) and the Mexican Carlos Fuentes.⁸ The notion of the Expanded Caribbean does perhaps not unequivocally answer the question of whether or not a

⁸ Indeed since the 1960s Fuentes has been one of the most eloquent proponents of Faulkner's centrality to the region.

writer such as Fuentes should be included in a regional literary history, but given the commonalities that Fuentes's work displays with Chamoiseau's and Harris's, as well as his attribution of a central place to the Expanded Caribbean in his understanding of modern Mexico and, more broadly, capitalist modernity, one might here argue for a turning of the tables, as it were, and 'read Fuentes' from a Caribbean-centric perspective.⁹

Before turning to the issue of genre I would here briefly like to turn to Édouard Glissant's concept of the 'Other America' ("l'autre Amérique") as hinted at – rather than fully explored – in his seminal work *Discours antillais*. In geographical terms, the 'Other America' roughly corresponds to the combination of the overlapping categories of South America and the Expanded Caribbean. As Hulme observes, the term itself is in danger of perpetuating the myth of the two Americas, but it also, I think, gestures towards an ideological definition that – while still relating to geography – is not determined by it; in the same way as not every writer from the Third World is necessarily a Third World writer in the sense of speaking on behalf of 'the wretched of the Earth', so not every writer from the 'Other America' is necessarily an 'Other American' writer. A vision of the 'Other America' – a notion that hinges on the Glissantian concept of opacity that is formulated in response to the homogenizing pressures exerted by the cultural imperialism of the central economies – must be informed by a focus on the oppressed indigenous masses (*DA* 390). This ideological dimension becomes even clearer when Glissant talks about the emergence of the 'new man' of the 'Other America' – a notion that in the context of the Caribbean inevitably carries echoes of Che Guevara's famous speech on "el hombre nuevo" born by communism. The idea of the 'new man' is developed in relation to his discussion of the 'Other American' novel:

Il s'agit (à travers les avatars des luttes particulières qui ont lieu un peu partout au long de la chaîne des Amériques) de l'apparition d'un homme nouveau que je définirais, s'agissant de son 'illustration' littéraire, comme un homme qui est à même de vivre le relatif après avoir souffert l'absolu. J'appelle relatif le Divers, la nécessité opaque de consentir à la différence de l'autre ; et j'appelle absolu la recherche dramatique d'imposition d'une vérité

⁹ Artemio in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* is notably Afro-Mexican and from the 'Mexican Caribbean', and *Terra Nostra*'s Pilgrim's first experience of America take again place in the coastal regions (see chapter 2 and 5).

à l'Autre. Il me semble que l'homme de l'Autre Amérique 'concourt' à cet homme nouveau, vivant le relatif ; et que les luttes des peuples qui essaient de survivre dans le continent américain portent témoignage pour cette naissance (439).

The 'new man' of the 'Other America' (who as "illustration littéraire" gestures towards a new aesthetic) is born from the struggle of the oppressed and opposed to the homogenizing forces of neo-imperialism - although one must here stress that neither in Glissant's vision, nor in that of the three writers, does this invocation of diversity and otherness translate into a postmodernist fragmentation, a point to which I shall return throughout the thesis. In other words, the notion of the 'Other America' plays on the relation of aesthetics to geography and position within the world system, as well as to ideology and the role of liberation struggles, issues that should be central to efforts to rethink literary comparativism as a discipline and that will provide one of the guiding enquiries of this study.

The History of the Novel and the Expanded Caribbean

Chamoiseau, Harris and Fuentes are all important in terms of a literary history of the novel – internationally as well as regionally - having come out of the literary boom period of their respective countries and having quickly achieved canonical status in the field of contemporary literature. One may here note that while the 'boom' in Anglophone Caribbean and 'Latin American' writing occurred during the 50s and 60s contemporaneous to the struggles of independence and important changes within the world system, there was no comparable self-assertion and international recognition of Martinican literature, despite the publication of some important individual novels such as Joseph Zobel's *La rue cases-nègres* (1950), and early novels by Édouard Glissant, such as *La Lézarde* (1958) and *Le quatrième siècle* (1964). Overall, the sixties were characterised by a literary output that reflected in its themes and images the growing disillusion with departmentalisation; after the earlier literary and political outburst of the négritude movement, "the dominant themes in the literature become illegitimacy, impotence, alienation, and madness" (Shelton 428). This promoted a vision of the Francophone Caribbean that would be

challenged by Simone Schwarz-Bart's "poetics of presence and plenitude" in the seventies (Shelton 432). Yet, international recognition was delayed until the late eighties and early nineties, when François Mitterand's ascent to power heralded a new emphasis on, and recognition of, regional differences (paradoxically correlative to the further entrenchment of dependency), and the Créolistes announced their arrival on the literary scene with their literary manifesto *Éloge de la créolité* (1989).

A fundamental question that must precede a comparative study centred on the genre of 'the novel' is whether this particular focus can be justified, given the literary and cultural history of the region. In response to Franco Moretti's global theorizing about the novel and the travel of forms, Efraín Kristal points out that it is in fact poetry that has been the more influential genre in Latin America (Kristal 62); indeed, many of the issues that my thesis will touch upon – the relation between art and society, between the individual and politics, the 'subaltern' and the intellectual, and the construction of subjectivity – have been played out very forcefully in the poetic tradition. Furthermore, Peter Hulme has made a strong case for the necessity to be less reverential in our approach to genres in order to allow for a more interdisciplinary approach ("Expanding the Caribbean" 14).¹⁰ It is certainly true that the boundaries between different genres - such as the novel, the essay, the political treatise, poetry, oral narratives and music, anthropology, *testimonio*, autobiography and history - are less pronounced than in the European context where the separation of the 'public' realm of politics and the 'private' realm of aesthetics was intensified with the industrial revolution. One only needs to mention José Martí's very lyrical essay 'Nuestra América', or the twentieth-century tradition of very explicitly political poetry, starting with Rubén Darío's anti-imperialist poem "A Roosevelt". It would indeed be misleading to study the novel in isolation from larger cultural, historical and political processes. Nevertheless, the upsurge of Caribbean and Latin American novelistic writing during the mid-century, the transformations it has undergone since (reflecting changes in the world system) and the remarkable achievements of the novel from the Expanded Caribbean in transforming an originally European art form and the ideologies on which it was based – all these

¹⁰Glissant similarly writes that "la littérature pour nous ne se répartira pas en genres mais impliquera toutes les approches des sciences humaines" (DA 228). In the context of his theorisations relating to genre examined in more detail below, this suggests that an exclusive and narrow focus on the novel that does not take into account the fact that in the context of the Americas it is a *displaced* form that clashes with reality would be the equivalent in literary criticism to what he calls 'provincialism' in creative writing.

arguably ensure that it is a genre that manages to engage pressing political, social, economic and cultural questions that concern all of humanity at the beginning of the new century. It is precisely because the novel form in the Expanded Caribbean is so inextricably linked to larger processes and other genres of representation that it becomes so relevant for understanding the history of the present, the history of the ‘global moment’ (to borrow Denning’s phrasing).

We must here briefly turn to the history of the novel to understand its centrality to an understanding of capitalist modernity: the modern novel emerged in Europe during the transition from feudal times to the capitalist era, and its great “energizing themes”, in the words of Roberto Schwarz, are “social climbing, the corrupting power of money, the clash between aristocratic and bourgeois ways of life, the antagonism between love and marriages of convenience, between vocation and the need to earn a living” (43). The hero/heroine is generally distinguished through his/her difference from society, thus embodying the notion of an autonomous, self-originating subject, an ideological product of bourgeois individualism. In the wake of the destruction of “pre-capitalist collectives”, novels were ‘machines designed to construct “centered subjects”’ (Jameson, “On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution” 183). Furthermore, as has been emphasised in postcolonial criticism, the novel as a bourgeois form of expression was implicated in the enterprise of imperialism. As Said notes:

the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other. Of all the major literary forms, the novel is the most recent, its emergence the most datable, its occurrence the most Western, its normative pattern of social authority the most structured; imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible [...] to read one without in some way dealing with the other (“Consolidated Vision” 692-693).

Édouard Glissant has further pointed to the link between, and mutual reinforcement of, the development of History – understood as a teleological narrative of ‘progress’ that is Eurocentric and imperialist by nature – and the emergence of realism (*DA* 240), both of which ultimately served to make the colonial subject ‘our’ civilizational ‘Other’. Hence, for better or worse, the novel as a form has much to tell

us about the emergence of capitalist modernity, and it is when the novel is displaced to the peripheries of capitalist modernity that its European form and content clash with local reality and acquire counter-discursive potential.

It is here also necessary to point out that while my thesis argues strongly in favour of a regional comparativism and the importance of the impact of geo-political context and position within the world system upon aesthetics, I do not advocate an isolationist focus on the literatures of one particular region at the expense of approaching the history of the novel from a global perspective. These two poles must dialectically inform one another, an approach necessitated by an understanding of capitalist modernity as a global system that continues to structure the world into ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ (*one* and *unequal*, as the slogan goes), perpetuating structural economic inequalities that have in recent decades been worsening with the onslaught of neoliberalism. This does not necessarily produce a deterministic understanding between geography and aesthetics; zones of ‘underdevelopment’ are found within the central economies and, as aforementioned, not all writers from the Third-world are necessarily Third-world writers.¹¹ There is, in other words, an ideological and political dimension that is implicit in a category such as ‘Third World literature’, hinted at by Glissant in his term ‘Other America’. This becomes explicit in Michael Denning’s recent attempt to define a *global* counter-canon to that of modernism and postmodernism, which he suggestively calls “The Novelists’ International” – a canon that is characterised by political engagement on behalf of the oppressed masses, an undertaking that by necessity entails attempts at transforming the ideological baggage of the novel form. Arguing that the early twentieth century proletarian novel lies at the roots of magical realism, of the testimonial novels, and more broadly the contemporary postcolonial novel, Denning sees the emergence of the counter-canon as allied to the international socialist and communist movements that erupted in 1917 in Europe (one could here add the Mexican Revolution that broke out in 1910).¹² As examples of the early twentieth century proletarian novel from the Americas, we might cite César Vallejo’s *El tungsteno* (1931), José Félix Fuenmayor’s *Cosme* (1928) C.L.R. James’s *Minty Alley* (1936), Jacques Roumain’s *La montagne ensorcelée* (1931), to name but a handful of the more famous. The proletarian novel sought to transform the legacy of the form of

¹¹ See Gugelberger, “Decolonizing the Canon”.

¹² One might note that the socialist writers’ congresses, most notably the one in 1937 in Civil War-torn Spain, had a similar effect on Latin American poetry.

the novel in ways that continue to inform this particular strand of literature; it was characterised by: “the attempt to represent working-class life [...]; the attempt to represent a collective subject in a form built around the interior life of the individual; the attempt to create a public, agitational work in a form that, unlike drama, depended on private, often domestic consumption; and the attempt to create a vision of revolutionary social change in a form almost inherently committed to the solidity of society and history” (“The Novelists’ International” 710). Strike narratives, descriptions of the tenements, of the working conditions of the mines became the new stock themes around which the novels would be organised, and a strong desire to testify to the conditions of oppressions often lies at the very heart of this aesthetic. This emergent counter-canon became the natural ally to the mid-twentieth century decolonization movements and its aesthetics became increasingly diversified (as Denning writes, “magical realism”, for instance, produced a shift in this international movement quite early on, unleashing desire, where previously we would find an aesthetic of hunger and lack).¹³ The novelists of this movement were, and are, clearly influenced by modernism, and, in the case of its most recent practitioners, by postmodernism, yet “they rarely fit into the canonical genealogies of Western modernism and postmodernism” (Denning 704). It is certainly striking that the ‘engaged’ novel’s attempt to construct a collective subject is contemporaneous to the ‘decentring’ of the modern subject - the dissolution of the bourgeois individual - through psychoanalysis, modernism and especially late twentieth-century postmodernism. As we shall see throughout the thesis, what defines the works of Fuentes, Chamoiseau and – to a certain extent – those of Harris, is an attempt to take the ‘decentring’ of the individual subject further and to reconstruct the subject as a collective character. As Fredric Jameson argues, ‘only the emergence of a post-individualistic social world, only the reinvention of the collective and the associative, can concretely achieve the “decentering” of the individual subject [...]; only a new and original form of collective social life can overcome the isolation and monadic autonomy of the older bourgeois subjects in such a way that individual consciousness can be lived – and not merely theorised – as an “effect of structure” (Lacan)’ (*The Political Unconscious* 111-112).

¹³However, classifying these novels and their descendents in terms of style has been a politically fraught exercise, given the Cold War debates between modernism and social realism. If we define magical realism as one of its strands, it becomes obvious that the history of the proletarian novel is ‘by no means congruent with that of the official “socialist realisms” of the communist regimes’ (Denning, 704).

It is in relation to the question of how the novel from the Expanded Caribbean relates to the aesthetic of postmodernism that I want to return to the question of geography. In a seminal essay entitled “Le roman des Amériques” (in *DA*), which discusses the relation between aesthetics and geography, as well as issues of displacement, Glissant notes his ambivalent response to intellectual developments in the ‘Western academy’ during the post-WWII decades.¹⁴ While the questioning of the status of the text, the author and the subject appears important to him, he also finds it “ridiculous”, since these issues do not apply to, and sit uneasily with, the literatures of the ‘Other America’, literatures that are engaged – or *should* be engaged – in an undertaking of a different nature, which nevertheless coalesces in certain features with the ‘Western’ project:

nous *devons* développer une poétique du ‘sujet’, pour cela même qu’on nous a trop longtemps ‘objectivés’, où plutôt ‘objectés’. [...] Le texte *doit* être ici (dans notre vécu) mis en question, et c’est peut-être par là qu’effectivement nous rejoignons ces propositions qui se sont fait jour ailleurs. L’auteur *doit* être démythifié, oui, parce qu’il *doit* être intégré à une décision commune. Le Nous devient le lieu du système génératif, et le vrai sujet (my emphasis, *DA* 442).

The formulation of a communal perspective and of a new subject that resists his/her objectification replace the bourgeois individual subject; the de-centring of the latter is thus not the same as that which occurs in postmodernism. This distancing from the ‘Western’ project occurs as part of his discussion of the distinction of what he calls the “matured modernity” of the European tradition (“‘maturée” signifie ici “donnée à travers des espaces historiques étendu” (441)), and “lived modernity” as experienced in the periphery as a result of the experience of the “irruption into modernity”, i.e. the imposition of modernity through conquest and colonisation. As a result of the latter, the ‘Other America’ does not possess a literary tradition that has slowly matured:

nous naissons à brutalité, je crois que c’est un avantage et non pas une carence. La patine culture m’exaspère quand elle n’est pas fondée dans une

¹⁴ Glissant here uses the word ‘occident(al)’ which he specifies as follows: “L’occident n’est pas à l’ouest. Ce n’est pas un lieu, c’est un projet” (*DA* 14).

lente coulée du temps. La ‘patine’ culturelle quand elle ne résulte pas ainsi d’une tradition ou d’un agir, devient provincialisme vide [...] Le provincialisme est confortable à celui qui n’a pas fait sa capitale en lui, et il me semble qu’il nous faut redresser nos métropoles en nous-mêmes. L’irruption de la modernité, l’irruption hors tradition, hors la ‘continuité’ littéraire, me paraît être une marque spécifique de l’écrivain américain quand il veut signifier la réalité de son entour (438).

In other words, the American novel will necessarily be a “compromise between foreign form and local materials” (Moretti, “Conjectures” 154); unless the literature “takes in, at the level of content, the unsuitability of the European form without which we cannot be complete”, it will not achieve “sufficient density”, it will turn into an empty provincialism (Schwarz 68). The historical reason for this is furnished elsewhere in *Discours*: while the bourgeois classes in Europe assumed a positive role in the dialectical overcoming of feudalism, in Martinique the political elite never owned the means of production nor exercised any control over them; “ici, la représentation politique a précédé l’appropriation des moyens de production, ce qui la vide de son sens” (163). While Glissant is speaking specifically about Martinique, it is of course true of the ‘Other America’ as a whole that there was no positive bourgeois Revolution to overthrow the structures of feudalism; hence, the ideologies it produced, especially those centred on the individual as well as the notion of ‘progress’ (defined according to Eurocentric standards) and the domination and subjection of ‘wild nature’, are out of place.

Glissant therefore provides a list of characteristics of the literature of the Americas: it formulates, or *should* formulate, a communal aesthetic centred on collectivity; land and nature play a much more prominent role than in European literature (437), where the subjection of nature and (other) lands formed part of the imperial enterprise; it is characterised by a sense of being haunted by the past, which was buried under colonial History - hence the novelists’ task is to “débrouiller une chronologie qui s’est embuée, quand elle n’a pas été oblitérée pour toutes sortes de raisons, en particulier coloniales” (435); arising from the juxtaposition of a displaced *written* form and a traditional oral culture that has its own forms, it constructs itself “à la limite de l’écrire et du parler” (439) ; lastly, given that according to Glissant myth precedes history and founds national identities (237; 261-2; 330), the American

novel, confronted *belatedly* with the outcomes of such a process in European history, i.e. nineteenth century realism and Eurocentric History, has to combine myth and demystification “cette innocence première à cette ruse acquise” (330). The thesis will examine how these preoccupations are played out in the works of the three writers.

Postcolonial Studies and America

If, as I propose, the novel from the Expanded Caribbean has vital contributions to make to decolonizing our understanding of modernity, one must also consider it in relation to the field of postcolonial studies that has emerged during the 80s and 90s and that has also provided the parameters for the emergence of a ‘new comparativism’ under its banner. As is by now commonly recognized, one of the most significant omissions of early postcolonial readers, such as *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989) and *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995), is their exclusion of Latin America and the Francophone Caribbean produced by their mainly Anglocentric focus (hence somewhat paradoxically *including* parts of the Caribbean), an omission reproduced in works throughout the decade and into the new millennium.¹⁵ Yet one must also note that metropolitan French literary critics in turn have been “deeply suspicious of ‘radical, Anglo-Saxon’ theories such as postcolonialism, queer theory and cultural studies, with their ‘historical’ and often overtly committed readings of literary works”, and that Francophone Caribbean literature and thought remains a marginalised field in French Literature departments (Forsdick and Murphy 8). Latin Americanists have also often been resistant to the field, a stance taken to its extreme by Klor de Alva’s polemical rejection of the terms of colonialism, decolonization and postcolonialism in the American context (“Colonialism and Postcolonialism as (Latin) American Mirages” 1992)). However, as Peter Hulme observed in an article entitled “Including America” (1995), “it would seem a strange definition of colonialism that would not include in its purview the European settlements in America that began in 1492”, which does obviously not inevitably need to lead to a homogenization of the experiences of colonialism in different parts of the world

¹⁵ On this issue, see Fernando Coronil’s “Latin American postcolonial studies and global decolonization”, 226-7.

(118). It is here not simply - or at least not only - a question of accumulatively 'adding on' thinkers from the continent of America to an existing canon, but rather of a shift in perspective: taking 1492 as a starting point for thinking about imperial expansion and about postcolonial processes "of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (Hulme 120) emphasises the link between imperialism and capitalist modernity and thus by implication places anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, Marxist and socialist thought back on the map of postcolonial studies, functioning as a corrective to a field that has been constitutively anti-Marxist and resistant to including anti-colonial, "antagonistic" thought within its purview (Parry 2002, Lazarus and Varma 2007). As Fernando Coronil puts it, "from a Latin American perspective, it has become indispensable to globalize the periphery: to recognize the world-wide formation of what appear to be self-generated modern metropolitan centers and backward peripheries".¹⁶ Hence, "the absence of a corpus of Latin American postcolonial studies is a problem not *of* studies on Latin America, but *between* postcolonial and Latin American studies" (238; 221). In other words, postcolonial studies – if it wants to achieve global relevance - needs to take on board the important contributions made by Latin American and Caribbean thinkers and anti-colonial/anti-capitalist resistances. Most importantly perhaps, it needs to include the thinking produced by the dependency theorists; Enrique Dussel's rethinking of modernity; the intellectual work of early anti-colonial thinkers such as Bartolomé de las Casas; the radical humanism and anti-racism of anti-capitalist revolutionaries such as Che Guevara (Young 2001); the anti-colonial writing of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire; the legacies of the Mexican and the Cuban revolutions, which both had continental and global repercussions.¹⁷

¹⁶As Peter Hulme writes, '1492 has no rivals as a starting point and has the distinct advantage, for those of us interested in the common ground between postcolonial studies and Marxism, of working within the framework established by Marx for what he sarcastically designed the "rosy dawn" of capitalism' ("Including America" 120).

¹⁷Walter Mignolo formulates a distinction between postmodernism and postcolonialism as two different types of critiques of modernity, the former enunciated from the limits of a hegemonic narrative of history and emerging from the central economies (including what he terms "settler colonies" of type 'a', such as the US), the latter from the history and experiences of the formerly colonized areas of the world (type 'b' and 'c' that involved "deep settlement", where the colonial regime was kept in place with particular brutality (5)). According to Mignolo, the postcolonial discourse should thus be defined "como utopía o como equivalente a la razón anticolonial (contramoderna), antes y después de la independencia política" (3), a definition that would thus be able to include the long history of Latin American liberationist thinking.

From a regionalist perspective focussed on the Caribbean one might further observe, following Torres-Saillant, that the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1980s resulted in the “unseating” of the work of Caribbean intellectuals – such as Kamau Brathwaite, Nicolás Guillén, Jacques Stephen Alexis, Boeli van Leeuwen, Eric Williams, Marie Viau Chauvet, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, Jacques Roumain, Pedro Mir and Lydia Cabrera - from the forefront of critical debates; “[t]hus marginalized,” he continues, “[Caribbeanists] began to assert the relevance of their studies by highlighting their link to the larger, grander, and more “theoretical” postcolonial field” (*An Intellectual History* 43). In a perverse reversal, “[p]ostcolonialists resignify paradigms that the Caribbean had long developed, repackaging them anew and exporting them back to the dependent scholarly economy of the Caribbean. Thus an endemic formulation such as creolization turns into the more costly imported commodity known as hybridity” (44). Torres-Saillant’s assessment of the status of Caribbean intellectual writing is striking, as a cursory study of postcolonial theory from the 80s and 90s would suggest that Caribbean writing has been central to the development of the field, rather than being marginalised, especially when its status is compared to that of other peripheral areas of the globe. Nevertheless, his assessment is certainly correct and could thus function as a salutary corrective to the field, although one might here need to add certain details to explain the disjunction between the *seeming centrality* of Caribbean thinking to postcolonial studies, and the *actual marginalisation* of many writers and thinkers that the boom period produced; details that also relate to Harris’s ascent from relative global invisibility in the sixties and seventies to his canonisation at the very centre of postcolonial theory through works such as Ashcroft’s *The Empire Writes Back* and Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*. In short, a few writers became central to the field to the exclusion of other writers. Unlike many of his fellow Caribbean boom novelists, Wilson Harris was part of what one might term a ‘second boom’ of Caribbean thinking, this time within the Anglo-American academy and propelled by the rise of the field of postcolonial studies in the eighties and nineties. The rise of postcolonial studies, a field heavily influenced by poststructuralism, resulted in a de-linking of Caribbean themes from the historical, political and material context from which they arose, a process to which Harris’s often highly abstract work was better suited than that of his more realist fellow writers, as I will show.

Yet the trends that dominated postcolonial studies were certainly not exclusive to this particular field. Carlos Fuentes – perhaps partly due to his prescience regarding intellectual changes displayed above all in his theoretical writing – has continued to be a canonical author, both ‘globally’ and within the field of Latinamericanism, which, since its inception during the 60s and 70s, has similarly prospered under the aegis of deconstructionism/poststructuralism. Yet, many of Fuentes’s most important novels continue to resist the readings that they have been subjected to and display an investment in meta-narratives, a materialist approach to culture, and a social(ist) engagement on behalf of the oppressed that sits uncomfortably with many of these trends. Chamoiseau’s fictional work, in turn, does also lend itself to poststructuralist-postcolonial readings, as he throws into question issues of authorship, of (historical) representation and the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’, written and spoken culture. Nevertheless, such approaches serve to ‘streamline’ his works with academic concerns that do not exactly match his own. Therefore, one of the aims of this thesis is to reflect on how a regional perspective developed from the reading of works from the Expanded Caribbean might impact upon Postcolonial Studies as a theoretical field as well as in its approach to literary comparativism.

The *desyoización* of the Novel from the Expanded Caribbean

In an interview, Carlos Fuentes observed that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century “the modern [European] novel has been a confessional adventure” with the central focus on the ego that is thrown into crisis in twentieth century European literature. “I think we are faced with the breakdown of the first person singular and the great question of how to save the individual, the person, where to put him now. That is where I think Hispanic literature has an extraordinary role to play” (interview with John King, 143). Although one might widen Fuentes’s claim to include literatures from the non-Hispanic parts of America, as well as other peripheral areas of the globe, it is, in one sense, precisely the challenge that these literatures pose not only to the ‘modern subject’ conceived as the bourgeois individual, but also to the central modernist and postmodernist fragmentation of the latter, as well as to its ideological implications, that will be evaluated to throughout the thesis.

My reflection on the novel in the Expanded Caribbean will also engage with Paget Henry's tracing of a genealogy of two schools of philosophic thought in the Caribbean, that of Poeticism (anti-historicist, anti-realist, and characterised by a belief in the necessity of transforming the self before transforming society) and that of Historicism (arguing that the transformation of institutions will precede the transformation of the self, and thus realist in nature). His study *Caliban's Reason* makes a seminal contribution to the investigation of Afro-Caribbean thought, but one might add that the Poeticist/Historicist distinction is predominantly based on an evaluation of the *Anglophone* tradition. In relation to the mainstream of Anglophone realist writing during the sixties, Harris's writing certainly stood out, so much so as to come to be seen as *sui generis*. Yet, if, as I propose in my thesis, one were to insert a Harrisian poeticism - which as Henry shows has important lessons for the historicist tradition such as its contributions to the transformation of the Caribbean subject and the inclusion of Afro-Caribbean spiritualism - into the larger context of the Expanded Caribbean, its shortcomings begin to appear more clearly. Harris's brand of archetypalism seeks to 'ground' itself in 'universal consciousness', a fact that may have helped to propel him into iconic status in the field of Anglophone postcolonial theory. Nevertheless, Chamoiseau's and Fuentes's materially grounded critiques arguably offer a more serious challenge to the *status quo* of global capitalism.

In the first chapter, "**Violence, Imperialism and Culture**," I examine the recurrent theme of violence - both physical and symbolic - and its relation to neo-imperialism/neo-colonialism in Harris's *Carnival* (1985), Chamoiseau's novels *Texaco* (1990) and *Chemin d'école* (1994) and Fuentes's *La frontera de cristal* (1995), employing Jameson's observations regarding the relation between the 'private' and the 'public' in Third World societies. While in Harris's fictional universe, violence manifests itself through and as a result of the 'conquistadorial legacies' - a broad concept allowing for little internal differentiation - Chamoiseau and Fuentes focus on the impact of French and US neo-imperialism on the *habitus* of the individual under very specific historical circumstances.

The second chapter, "**Towards interior vision: Nation, Culture and Hybridity**," focuses on the three authors' most overtly national texts, *Guyana Quartet* (1960-3), *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) and *Texaco* (1992), which will

be discussed in relation to developments in the field of postcolonial studies in which Harris has been such an important figure. Harris's and Fuentes's novels emerged at a time when the national liberation movements and social revolutions around the globe were having an enormous impact on the world system, while Martinique was continuing down a very different path – that of departmentalisation. I therefore turn to the later novel *Texaco* in which the national question is central again and is linked to lower class resistance struggles, which resonates with Fuentes's critique of the nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* that has become dis-connected from popular struggles.

In chapters three and four, I examine the way in which the writers attempt to reconstruct character as a collective subject. Chapter three, entitled **“Testimonial Voices: Genre, Representation, and the Individual,”** does so in the context of the debates surrounding the neo-realist genre of *testimonio*. I have therefore here included an examination of a testimonial novel by the Salvadoran writer Manlio Argueta, which will serve to bring out the connections between the *testimonio* (sometimes seen as fundamentally opposed to literature) and magical realism. I analyse Manlio Argueta's construction of character in *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* (1986), arguing that he constructs character as the polar opposite of the ‘bourgeois individual’ as a metonymic representative of the community at large. In contrast to the late twentieth century suspicion of the possibility of representing the ‘Other’, the representational strategies of Argueta's novel posit that the engaged intellectual and the subaltern are not ‘incommensurable’. The chapter then moves on to examine the double displacement that characterises Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnifique* (1988), a failed detective novel that might also be read in the testimonial tradition. As I argue, these two displacements of genre function as a politicised commentary on the relation between the ‘masses’ and the ‘individual’.

Chapter four entitled **“The Archetypal Imagination: History, Community and Character in *Jonestown* (1996) and *Terra Nostra* (1975)”** focuses on Harris's and Fuentes's art of archetypalism, a comparison that destabilises the Historicist/Poeticist divide. Both writers attempt to construct a post-individualistic character through their recourse to ‘archetypes’, but the term notably takes on very different meanings in their respective works. I argue that by the 1990s, the limits of a Harrisian aesthetic begin to appear very clearly, not only because of his own evolution as a writer, but – perhaps more importantly – in relation to the dramatic

changes that the world system has undergone since the sixties. Fuentes's novel, on the other hand, was published at a time when those problems had begun to appear. Yet, contrary to Harris, Fuentes offers a secular, reconstructed 'modern subject', firmly grounded in material reality and literary tradition and, unlike *Jonestown*, is able to provide a challenge to anticommunist and anticomunitarian rhetoric.

Chapter five, "**Towards a Global Vision: Peripheral Modernism, Ex-centricity and Genre**", responds to the first chapter, by returning to the issue of how a peripheral position within the world system may impact on – though not determine – aesthetics. It focuses on three novels, the publications of which span nearly three decades: *Terra Nostra* (1975), *Carnival* (1985) and *Biblique des derniers gestes* (2002). The novels will be examined within the context of the political and economic changes in the world system during the last few decades and I will seek to evaluate their contributions to contemporary thinking about the current 'global moment'. The issues examined in the last chapter provide important lessons for a new literary comparativism, recently conducted under the banner of 'world literature'. I will conclude by drawing together the contributions a regional comparativism can make to this new field as well as to that of postcolonial studies.

- Chapter 1 -

Violence, Imperialism and Culture

Carnival (1985); *Texaco* (1990) and *Chemin d'École* (1994);

La frontera de cristal (1995)

Violence, both symbolic and physical, is a recurrent theme in the literature from the Caribbean basin and, more broadly, in literatures from the periphery of capitalist modernity.¹⁸ Physical violence is usually portrayed as occurring between different classes, between the agents of (neo-)imperialism and the peripheral subjects, and/or as effected by the state. Often, such violence is represented as being exerted through the imposition of alienating, oppressing working conditions, an issue examined both by Chamoiseau and Fuentes. Symbolic violence on the other hand depends (in Bourdieu's formulation) on the state's - or perhaps more broadly on the existing power structures' - simultaneous incarnation "in objectivity, in the form of organizational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought" ("Re-Thinking the State" 3-4). In Chamoiseau's work, symbolic violence is exerted by the French state and is shown to be inherently imperialist and racist and has the effect of alienating the subject profoundly from a local reality. In Fuentes's recent novel *La frontera de cristal*, on the other hand, the domination that is misrecognised is exercised via US capital; it is shown to lure Mexicans living on the border (predominantly those belonging to the middle classes) into assimilating a stereotyped US *habitus*. As we shall see, while Harris is similarly interested in how oppression is incarnated objectively in "organizational structures", as well as "in subjectivity", unlike the other two writers, he does not attribute the exercise of power and the continuity of oppression to the state, or a particular class (at least not exclusively or even predominantly so), but rather offers a conception of power as much more all-pervasive due to the perpetuation of what he calls the "conquistadorial legacies".

¹⁸ I take Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence" to refer to 'the capacity to impose the means for comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised, taken-for-granted forms. Symbolic systems exercise symbolic power "only through the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it"' (Swart 89). I evoke Bourdieu's concepts here because he has consistently argued against conceiving of society and the individual – the realm of the public and the realm of the private – as distinct and separable; it is for this very reason that his concepts are usefully employed in a 'Third World' context.

This, one might argue, risks leaving him without a leg to stand on (at least for the purposes of a materialist critique of the present) and results in his equation of the “material” with “evil”.¹⁹

As these different conceptions of violence imply, my discussion takes as its starting point the fact that - for all the differences between the works of Harris, Fuentes and Chamoiseau - all three writers are fundamentally opposed to a vision that sees the individual and society, or the private and the public, as distinct and separable. As Jameson has argued in his polemical essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, “in the West, conventionally, political commitment is recontained and psychologized or subjectivized by way of the private-public split” (71); yet, that proposition must be inverted in the Third World, where “psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms” (72), where politics and the effects of global capitalism are not easily repressed.²⁰ It is here appropriate to introduce the concept of a “cultural revolution”, which, Jameson argues, turns on the phenomenon of subalternity, a concept that he defines as “the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience which necessarily and structurally develop in situations of domination – most dramatically in the experience of colonized peoples” (76). Importantly, he adds that when “a psychic structure is objectively determined by economic and political relationships, it cannot be dealt with by means of purely objective transformations of the economic and political situation itself, since the habits remain and exercise a baleful and crippling effect” (76). Those habits can be successfully addressed and exposed in the realm of culture, the mediating level between the ‘private’ and the ‘political’. As Imre Szeman explains, ‘the cultural is what lies “between” the psychological and the political, unifying “theory and practice” in such a way that it is only there that the “baleful and crippling” habits that are the residue of colonialism can be addressed and potentially overcome’ (810). Culture and the struggle over (self-)representation are therefore central to postcolonial literatures and the field of Postcolonial Studies, since throughout

¹⁹ As Glyne Griffith writes in *Deconstruction, Imperialism and the West Indian Novel*- perhaps the most lucid and concise critique of a Harrisian aesthetic to date - Harris’s approach has “the effect of conflating falsehood and evil with the material, and in a sense introducing evil as the necessary force initiating the schism between the immaterial and the material” (62).

²⁰ Two detailed articles that defend and illuminate Jameson’s thesis, as well as the reactions it evoked within the field of postcolonial studies (in which “Jameson” seemed suddenly to “have become a dirty word” (Lazarus 44)), are Neil Lazarus’s “Fredric Jameson on ‘Third-World Literature’: A Qualified Defence” (2004), and Imre Szeman’s “Who’s Afraid of National Allegory?: Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization” (2001).

modern history the exclusion of the oppressed masses from the space of representation has been inextricably linked to their economic, social and political exploitation. In “peripheral” cultures, it is those oppressive power relationships that constitute the reified cultural forms that have to be dealt with in the struggle for self-representation.²¹

Despite the initial violent rejections that Jameson’s essay provoked in the field of Postcolonial Studies, his underlying thesis regarding the different organisation between the political and the private, as well as the political and the cultural, has long been confirmed (implicitly and explicitly) by theorists working on, and writers from, the Caribbean and Latin America.²² Paget Henry observes in his seminal study *Caliban’s Reason* that the tradition of Afro-Caribbean philosophy has developed as a “peripheral cultural system” (9) in a situation in which the hegemonic culture brought by imperial conquest constantly needed to confirm, to ‘produce’, its own legitimacy discursively and accumulated authority at a much faster rate than competing systems. Hence Afro-Caribbean philosophy is “indelibly marked by the forces of an imperial history” (1), constituting a “highly politicized formation” that points to “its embeddedness in the social and political problems of Caribbean societies” (7). As a result of the uneven development of the competing systems, the Caribbean writer is, as Harris observes, “faced with the broken parts” of this heritage (*Tradition* 31), with what he calls the “phenomenal legacy” of colonialism that s/he will have to face in the struggle over representation. In the Latin American context, Angel Rama in his well-known work *The Lettered City* has similarly pointed to the inextricable link that existed throughout colonial and postcolonial history between what he has termed “the lettered city” – the small minority of *letrados* – and power and cultural hegemony. Given the historical link between writing and power, the involvement of writers in politics remains the norm (while access to education has widened considerably throughout the twentieth century).

As is well-known, the most provocative statement of Jameson’s essay has proven to be the by now (in)famous passage claiming that “all third world texts are necessarily [...] *national allegories*” (69). Yet, as many materialist critics have

²¹As Jameson writes, “cultural structures and attitudes” that originated as ‘vital responses to infrastructural realities (economic and geographic, for example), as attempts to resolve more fundamental contradictions [...] survive, in reified forms, as “cultural patterns” that must then be confronted by later generations’ (“Third World Literature” 78).

²²See for instance Selwyn R. Cudjoe’s *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (1980), especially his theoretical chapter four entitled “Resistance and Literature”.

pointed out, the nation “is unforgoable as a site of liberation struggle” given the contemporary global situation (Lazarus, “Fredric Jameson” 57). Furthermore, one might add that for Jameson the nation names a “frankly utopic space”, identifying ‘the possibility of other modes of social life that are organized in strikingly different ways than the American-led “culture ideology of consumption”’ (Szeman 821), involving ““what Henri Lefebvre liked to call ‘the great collective project’, and tak[ing] the form of the attempt to construct a nation”” (Jameson, qtd by Szeman 821). The creation of a future collectivity, a community, is a concern that is central to all of the writers referred to in this thesis, although the type of community evoked by Harris differs greatly from that sought by Fuentes and Chamoiseau, an issue that I will deal with in chapter 2. However, as we shall see in the current chapter, the reasons for these differences lie in how these writers address the residues of colonialism in the objective and subjective structures that inform people’s lives.

“Block Functions” and the Legacy of Colonialism in *Carnival* (1985)

Le passé, notre passé subi, qui n’est pas encore histoire pour nous, est pourtant là (ici) qui nous lancine. La tâche de l’écrivain est d’explorer ce lancinement, de le “révéler” de manière continue dans le présent et l’actuel.

Édouard Glissant, *Discours Antillais* (226)

From the start of his career as a writer, Harris has pointed to the damaging perpetuation of the colonial and imperial legacy not only in objective, organizational structures and material reality, but also in aesthetic practices such as realism, as well as in the subjective mental structures of the individual. His emphasis as a writer falls on reforming the subjective structures, on an “aesthetic reworking of the elements of broken traditions, with a vision toward transforming the consciousness and identity of the Caribbean people” (Henry 16). Or, to put it differently, it falls on reading the political, representational and cognitive gap between colonizer and colonized not simply as “the semiotic marker of the cross-cultural violations of History” but as also “constitutive of a gateway into a genuinely ‘re-visionary’ potential in the fields of

cognition, culture and politics” (Slemon 72).²³ However, before I turn to re-examine and question the ways in which Harris proposes to overcome colonialism’s legacy in the following chapters, I here want to focus on how the latter is represented. For it is on this level that many of the conceptual problems originate, due to the undifferentiating nature of Harris’s critique that – especially in his post-1970s writing - tends to allow for little differentiation between, for instance, nineteenth-century realism (that was “embedded within the apparatus of colonialism” (Slemon 72)) and the various twentieth-century forms of realism, between different anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles, authoritarian regimes and the role of native *comprador* elites in the further entrenchment of inequalities, between the actions of the colonizer and colonised, between differently motivated groups.

According to Harris, one particularly damaging ‘fixed’ image that structures people’s perception, action and thought is the hierarchical dichotomy of oppressor versus victim, which is a direct result of the conquest and its hierarchical Christian perception of the ‘Other’ as heathen. According to Harris, this dichotomy even shapes and conditions the vision and action of critics of the colonial/imperial legacy; for instance, historians critical of imperialism often see the West Indies as “utterly deprived, or gutted by exploitation”, thus limiting its complexity by confining it to the status of being a victim of colonialism, oblivious to the “subtle and far-reaching renaissance” that grew out of the contact between peoples (*Unfinished Genesis* 158, 159). He therefore urges us to reconsider the indigenous heritage as well its interactions with, and transculturating influence on, the hegemonic tradition. Yet, he also evokes this dichotomy to reflect on the potential and actual pitfalls of resistance

²³ While initially a positive innovation set against the background of the realist mainstream of Anglophone Caribbean writing during the middle decades of the century, over the course of his career, it is precisely this de-emphasising of the differences between colonizer and colonized, between those living at the centre and those living at the periphery of global capitalism, that becomes increasingly problematic. Consider, for instance, Slemon’s summary of Harris’s argument against realism in an essay from 1989: “Whatever its location [...] the cognitive contract of realism, in Harris’s argument, works to promulgate a nihilistic system of representation which at roots amounts to a repudiation of the idea of the ‘cross-cultural imagination’. And as a consequence, ‘...the divide between extreme or wasteful affluence and extreme or endemic poverty grows wider and deeper year by year’” (Slemon 78). While the role that nineteenth century realism has played in the imperialist enterprise is by now well recognized in (and beyond) the field of postcolonial study – and Harris was notably one of the first theorists to point towards this fact in his seminal study *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (1967)- we are here witnessing a reversal of cause and effect (even if we take realism to refer more broadly to a way of representing the world, rather than just an aesthetic category). Surely, it is not realism as such that is to fault for the global entrenchment of capitalism; even more to the point, by the late 80s, an emphasis on a cross-cultural practices is beginning to be co-opted by neo-liberalist rhetoric on globalisation. During the eighties, it was in fact from the neo-realist perspective of *testimonio* and the testimonial novel – and from a re-constructed subject-position - that this entrenchment was being vehemently denounced, and very effectively at that. Please refer to chapters 3 and 4.

movements, arguing that it often circumscribes and thus limits the scope of resistance to colonial structures, as “cultures are enmeshed in codes to invert or overturn each other rather than become involved in complex mutuality and the difficult creation of community” (ibid 98). Fanon famously observed that “decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon”, since the colonial regime is fundamentally based on, and supported by, violence (*The Wretched of the Earth* 27); Fanon also foresaw the potential pitfalls of decolonisation, which have become a central concern for Harris, as he responds to the specific situation of Guyana.²⁴ Yet, in contrast to Fanon’s nuanced analysis, Harris’s logic possesses a circularity that does not offer a way forward on a material or political plane: “it is very easy for a society to overturn an oppressor, but it is equally easy for those who overturned the oppressor to become the oppressor in turn” (*Unfinished Genesis* 85). Decolonisation perpetuates colonialism’s violence without remedying social/racial division: “if they are locked within block functions, either they submit (within a hierarchical model) or they rebel, violently, they burn property, they do terrible things, they protest against the society without a grain of understanding that they carry within themselves the very seeds of disaster against which they protest. Unless they can understand that, complex, inner revision, complex, outer dialogue, is lost” (ibid 84). Given that Harris’s posits that ‘they’ – we – must first wrestle ourselves free from these ‘block functions’ (also referred to as ‘frames’, ‘frozen masks’ or ‘fixed archetypes’) before we can alter society, we must here turn to his notion of the block function, a manifestation of what he calls the “monolithic character of conquistadorial legacies of civilisation” (*Womb of Space* xv).

In *Carnival*, Everyman Masters – the fiction-guide who has transcended the colonizer/colonized dichotomy as his name suggests and who returns from the dead to aid Jonathan Weyl in his exploration of the past – puts it as follows: “Humanity is uniquely infected by legends of judgement that conflate all professions, all sciences, all vocations, into the theatre of the Word or the Wound” (9). “Politicians, journalists, economists, interviewers, interviewed” (8) alike are conditioned by the cultural capital inherited from colonial society: “Something claws at them and unwittingly they utter the Sermon on the Mount to the unemployed or their eyes twist

²⁴ As Stuart Murray observes, “part of what Harris is as a writer was conditioned by the profound disturbances within Guyanese politics during the 1950s”, which bore witness to “the breakdown of democracy, the suspension of the constitution and the increasing division of society along racial lines” concomitant with the growing racialisation and racism of politics (17).

into another mask and they become noble, they cry like Old Testament prophets for the return of the death sentence.” The image of preaching to the unemployed, promising a heavenly reward to the oppressed, indicates a (perhaps unwitting) consolidation of the status quo. According to Harris, Christianity (“the Word”), or more broadly the cultural capital of the conquering nations, is profoundly implicated in inflicting the “Wound” of conquest committed under the banner of Christ (see *Unfinished Genesis* 188-189). The image of the “Wound” thus acquires a duality in the Harrisian vision, as it is both inflicted and endured by Christ. It imprisons the imagination, but for Harris it can also translate into rebirth through the transcendence of the ego-consciousness of the individual, an issue that I shall explore in chapter four.

Carnival does not actually represent the political and racial struggles leading up to independence in the fifties and sixties; instead, it is the events and scenes of chapter three and four that function as a foreshadowing of Guyana’s future, since the future would, in Harris’s analysis, remain locked within the same socio-economic, mental and behavioural structures: “Perhaps it was the gestation of a nuclear age to be sculpted in the atom that Carnival felt in 1926” (57). Both chapters are situated within the “colonial Inferno” of the 1920s, narrating the childhood of Masters at the same time as offering glimpses of a more remote past and of the future. This characteristic of the Harrisian narrative style forms part of Harris’s desire to break the determinism of linear time, but it can also symbolise the present’s imprisonment within oppressive, unconscious structures of the past. This is elaborated in the figure of the “false” shaman, whom Masters encounters on the beach and who may be read as a device to illuminate the characters’ manner of responding to, and dealing with, the painful legacies of the colonial past. As Harris explains elsewhere, the ‘true’ shaman aims to “re-open imprints that have hardened into a block device, block divisions, block poverty, block wealth, within the body of a civilization” through a voyage into the unconscious to tap the cross-cultural potential (*Unfinished Genesis* 216). The ‘true’ shaman embodies creativity and re-genesis; accordingly, in *Carnival*, Weyl has a vision of the original El Doradan shaman sculpting El Dorado from an axed cherry tree (Maes-Jelinek, *The Labyrinth of Universality* 303). The encounter between completely alien cultures as experienced as a result of the conquest (the violence of which is here rendered through images of “slicing”) may thus engender new cultural structures and modes of being. The false shaman, on the

other hand, is non-creative, reinforcing polarizations and stasis “to promote an automatic procession riveted in reflexes of fascination with violence” (19). Whereas the true shaman or “creator” (19) engenders freedom, the false shaman, or “manipulator of defeated cultures” (19) engenders un-freedom and plants “the seed of Ambition to rule, to master a universe that had despoiled one”(22), or in other words, an ambition to overturn existing power relations in order to occupy the dominant position. He engenders ‘block functions’ that pre-exist the individual. We may here note that while Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus* “embodies the attitudes that we inherit, but [...] *does not* constitute a stimulus which conditions how we must behave” (my emphasis, Robbins 29), Harris’s “block functions” are always in danger of acquiring this deterministic quality.

Carnival is Harris’s metaphor that enables him to render visible fixed ‘masks’ and serves to highlight that merely swapping ‘masks’, or inverting the existing social positions, does nothing to transform society. The concept of mask in Harris’s fiction does not point us to an essential self to be recovered from behind the mask, since for him there is no ‘absolute’ identity. A ‘partial mask’ cannot express human complexity; Everyman Masters, for instance, who escapes being restricted by any one particular mask, dons various “inward masks” (39). Fixed masks typify restricting modes of behaviour, thinking and acting, which are conditioned by oppressive external, objective structures that they in turn uphold. As this suggests, Harris’s fiction is radically anti-essentialist and in its blanket rejection of an identifiably reconstructed identitarian position resembles a postmodernist aesthetics.

Two fictional representations of this condition of the ‘fixed mask’ are Flatfoot Johnny as well as, more unexpectedly, ‘Doubting Thomas’ (a reworking of the biblical character who questioned Jesus upon his resurrection). In the absence of any passages explicitly devoted to Guyana during the sixties, it is through these two characters that Harris allegorises the failure of independence to produce lasting change. Yet, before examining them more closely, I shall look at the ‘objective’, external structures of their colonial surroundings. Chapter four focuses on the “Market”, the canal, and the plantation tenements, the roots of which lie in the post-conquest history of Guyana, which was marked by slavery and the plantation system. The “obsolescent” (54) colonial privileges are now held by the new native elite represented by Masters, the plantation-king (not yet Everyman). The canal, for instance, “had been designed and built [...] by an eighteenth-century antecedent of

Everyman Masters. It supplied the Municipal Waterworks and the Sugar State Reservoir of New Forest. The latter was constructed to hold a special reserve supply for overseers and other top staff in the dry season of the year when the water was rationed” (52). The canal is protected by crocodiles that metaphorically represent “territorial imperatives” (55) and metamorphose into cannons “drawn by denizens of the Inferno” (53). The oppressive colonial structures are thus kept in place by force, as well as by violence of a different kind, namely the suppression of the past, which makes the current structures of society/economy appear inevitable. As Masters observes in his role as fiction-guide:

All images are partial but may masquerade for an age as absolute or sovereign. [...] As *absolute* or *sovereign image*, the Market beguiles us into overlooking the terrors associated with it over centuries. We tend to see in it the ground of honest trade, honest money [...] As partial image, however, the Market suddenly assaults us. It is brightest when it is darkest fellowship of greed. It is a net in which peoples and species have been decimated (44).

As Marx observed nearly one and a half centuries ago, “money does not reveal what has been transformed into it” (*Capital* 229). The discrepancy between seeing the ‘Market’ as an absolute model and understanding it as a historicized, partial image points us to “the forgetting of history which history itself produces” in order to eliminate alternatives (Bourdieu, *Logic* 56). The ‘Market’ as absolute model appeals to our notion of ‘common sense’ through a de-historicized invocation of ‘honesty’. However, this is rendered absurd when Thomas accidentally runs into the “marble woman”, who is carrying eggs to the market. As a result of the impact, she drops the eggs and thus loses the equivalent of a month’s rent (30). Even though Thomas is responsible for the incident, he “could not shake off the feeling that he had exposed, rather than inflicted, an injury” (31), since the incident reveals social inequalities that pre-exist their encounter.²⁵ ‘Doubting Thomas’ is thus initially the positive counterpart to the young Masters (before his transformation into Everyman), who abuses his privileges as plantation-king to sleep with the women living in the plantation tenements (50). ‘Doubting’ is an important theme in *Carnival*, since doubt

²⁵ One may here note that the issue of personal responsibility is a troubling one; while Thomas here does assume responsibility to a certain extent, personal failures in Harris’s fiction tend to be subsumed into the explanatory scheme of the ‘block function’.

may uncover what “Faith” in the dominant model prevents us from seeing by congealing “into a fortress that blocks our vision of the starving and emaciated in every corner of the globe” (55).

Yet, Thomas’s capacity to doubt is not the norm in the Harisian fictional universe, in which social injustice has produced violent reactions of a less questioning spirit. The poverty-stricken tenements turn into “green/rotting nurseries of future wars, future abortive revolutions, future czars”, a formulation that collapses the difference between ideologically opposed regimes (51). Johnny Flatfoot embodies this negative mask: The potential revolutionary has turned into “embalmed Lenin” or “carnival czar”, reigning over the plantation tenements. Revolution has ironically become taboo under “embalmed Lenin’s” regime (61). In Johnny, Harris ‘embodies’ the negative and determining influence that the past can have upon the present, as the following description illustrates:

The czar Johnny was proceeding with an enormous bag aloft on his shoulders. He was a man of prodigious strength, grotesquely muscular, grotesquely powerful. His prime defect was an awkwardness of pace, so awkward it made him seem old and crippled as he shuffled along. And then of course one saw his muscles and his back that seemed peculiarly incongruous then, incongruous youth cemented upon incongruous age (43).

The image of the human body simultaneously inscribed by young and old age is a recurrent literary motif of Latin American/Caribbean fiction, expressing, as it does, the inequalities and unevenness produced by capitalist imperialism, subjectively experienced as ruptures in time.²⁶ Czar Johnny is young and “of prodigious strength”, but his body is also inscribed and “lamed” by an old age that he has not personally experienced. His bodily deformity thus expresses a negative conditioning of, or impeding by, a past that exceeds the individual and robs “youth” of its positive connotations, reducing it to a mere “cosmetic” function (44). The difference between Masters and Johnny Flatfoot, thus ‘embodied’, is not absolute but only one of degree,

²⁶ In *Texaco*, for instance, the body of the old African mother is transformed after her death into “un corps frais de négritte étonnamment ridé” (153), thus indicating the old woman’s life-long emotional imprisonment within a past that has become inaccessible. Her corpse thus lacks the life-expectancy of youth, while her wrinkles do not indicate the wisdom of old-age and life experience. One might also refer to Úrsula in *Cien años de soledad*; after her death, her corpse resembles a foetus, incorporating her nostalgic imprisonment in an edenic past that prevents her from perceiving historic continuity.

as Harris is seeking to go beyond an antagonistic view of colonial struggles and thus somewhat problematically minimizing the positional and material differences between ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’. This is metaphorically represented in their symbolic encounter with the “false shaman”: “[Johnny’s] awkward foot was the gift of the false shaman. It fired his ambition to balance the globe on his head” (43). Masters on the other hand had managed to outrun the false shaman. As a result, Johnny – the oppressed – turns into an oppressor. However, despite the fact that he is the most obvious representation of the condition of the ‘block function’, even Johnny is not completely identical to it, as is revealed during his dispute with Mrs Bartleby in the Market. Mrs Bartleby belongs to the new elite, whose children are educated abroad and who can afford to own a crocodile-purse²⁷ that equals half a month’s rent for the inhabitants of the plantation tenements (and yet, Harris suggests that she is “chained” (49)). Their fight threatens to escalate into violence, as both adhere to “the mutual devouring principle within a chained civilization” (48). However, the tension is dissolved thanks to the interjections of the “spectral voices”, which issue from Johnny’s own mouth:

“You cunning bitch” he cried with venom[...] “*Don’t be hasty, don’t abuse the Lady Bartleby, HE SAYS.*” [...] “Lady Bartleby I asking you polite to stir you ass and to move out of me way. [...]” He began to roar like thunder. Then he stopped. He was listening to someone invisible whose lightening caution he repeated: “*Be careful, Johnny, be careful what you say, HE SAYS.*” (46-7)

There emerges another ‘mask’ (“the contours of oblivion” (49)) that has been repressed by the dominant one and functions as its conscience. It highlights the kinship between Masters, Thomas and Johnny (47), and suggests that Johnny would need to explore the layers of ‘consciousness’ repressed by his mask.

Thomas’s initial response to the injustices encountered seemed to carry the hope of going beyond existing structures. Yet, his ultimate failure to do so (he kills Flatfoot Johnny, perpetuating the cycle of violence) acquires the status of

²⁷ In Harris’s imagery as employed in this chapter, the crocodile sustains the “festering disease of territorial imperatives”(55).

representing the failure of an entire society, of “a colonial age lacking in genuine revolutionary hope and deceived by all sorts of fallacies and ideologies” (86):

The blood was true. The transfigurative wound or revolution came within an ace of realization but in his immaturity, her immaturity, my immaturity- in the way we were locked into self-perpetuating order and primitive habit- the revolution eluded us again. [...] *The czar is dead, long live the czar in the cave of abortive revolution* (63).

This passage seems to suggest that Harris does not categorically reject a violent uprising of the oppressed. Yet when Harris writes that the failure is due to lack of “a complex relationship to the tyrant-psyche one overcomes, a complex apprehension of the tyrant’s blood as native to oneself” (67), it seems to suggest that for change to occur, the antagonistic relation between oppressor and oppressed must be de-emphasised – perhaps abandoned - in order to allow for a vision of them as mutually constitutive, a view that, given the reality of (class) oppressions that can hardly be described as non-antagonistic, is certainly problematic, but one that has dominated the field of postcolonialism throughout the 90s. In *Carnival*, Thomas’s failure comes to function as an allegory for the future ‘abortions’ of anti-colonial resistance movements. This representation of complex historical processes through a single individual character and, perhaps even more problematically, through this somewhat reductive formula of ‘colonized turns into colonizer’ that edits out any positive attempts that have been made to produce lasting changes in social structures (such as the substantial achievements of the anti-colonial movements) is a point that I will return to throughout my thesis.

For the moment, however, I would like to point out that Harris’s sweeping emphasis on the ‘conquistadorial legacies’ produces a curious blindness to specific ethical issues at stake. One might here cite the example of Jonathan Weyl’s father, a lawyer, who in the 1930s defends the case of an Amerindian who has killed his mother suffering from terminal cancer. The Amerindian claims to have been asked by the god Kanaima to sacrifice his suffering mother to the sun. The case attracts much attention, and the situation is exacerbated by the fact that there have been some violent clashes with Amerindian tribes. There is much here that could stimulate heated debates: apart from the sensitive issue of the relations between the

Amerindians living in the interior and the coast-line government, the most pressing issue in this particular case is that of euthanasia, though framed differently by the Amerindian who comes from a non-secular society. The 1930s, one might add, were the decade that witnessed the commencement of the movement for legalization of euthanasia in England in 1935, as well as three years later in the United States.²⁸ However, following the typical Harrisian argument, Martin Weyl's defence goes down a very different route, not once addressing the issue of the mother's illness. Instead, he seeks to defend her son by waging an attack on the "moribund principles" and the "charisma of the law" that "we bury in our own institutions", ignoring the "pagan" within us that links us to the Amerindian accused (108; 109). "Divine right of kings may have vanished in Europe and elsewhere", he argues, "but divine right to territory, to frames of space, frames of water, frames of earth, was entrenched in the laws of sovereign states, East and West, North and South, everywhere" (109). While his critique of the survival of feudal aspects into the capitalist present – landownership by the few, though no longer by the king or the church – is perceptive and offers an entry point into discussions surrounding indigenous rights and landownership, it is not entirely clear what precisely this has in common with this particular case, apart from the fact that the Amerindian claims that his mother's death was "divinely" ordained (something that Martin Weyl sees as "pagan"). The argument thus claims that the Amerindian's actions are not so different from capitalist society's repressed rationale behind the present. Yet it seems curiously unable to address squarely issues of the personal responsibility of the Amerindian or of the (il)legitimacy of an individual to choose death; in fact, the question whether or not the Amerindian mother wished to die is never addressed. Arguably, it is the undifferentiating and sweeping nature of Harris's critique that sees the "colonial legacies" as all-pervasive that sets up the absolute necessity for the spiritual quest narrative that all of his novels perform.

²⁸ "euthanasia." Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2007.

The “imperialism of the universal”, Language and Racism in *Texaco* (1990) and *Chemin d’école* (1994)²⁹

In contrast to Guyana, Martinique has never become an independent nation-state, but was transformed into an Overseas Department of France in 1946 and has since become increasingly dependent on the metropolitan country. The issues of ‘universality’ and ‘language’ – both of which feature prominently in postcolonial literature and theory – take on a special inflection in this context: over two hundred years ago, the French Revolution “founded a new nation, not by reference to common blood, ancestors or Christendom, but as ‘the nation of free men’” (Amin 81), thus conceiving of the ‘nation’ as an expression of the universal, rather than the particular and forming the Republican mindset (equating *la Nation* with France), which still needs to be dismantled if Martinique is to achieve independence in the future (Miles, “When is a nation ‘a nation’?” 647). Language was crucial in the expansion of the ‘universal nation’ since “a French-language education was seen as the key to France’s ‘civilizing mission’ in the colonies” (Forsdick and Murphy 4).³⁰ In the context of the Overseas Departments, both issues are inextricably linked to racism and colonial subjugation and thus become, as Chamoiseau demonstrates, the instruments of creating ‘subalterns’. For Chamoiseau, a third key issue is that of the transformation of the former black slaves into ‘free’ wage labourers, which, in reality, has perpetuated their subservience to the *béké* and the mulatto class that is reflected in the often dehumanizing, alienating working conditions typical of (untrammelled) capitalism (of which imperialism is the ‘highest stage’ as Lenin would have it).³¹ I here want to examine Chamoiseau’s exploration of these issues in both *Texaco* and *Chemin d’école*, since it is in the former that he offers a

²⁹ Bourdieu, “Abuse of Power by the Advocates of Reason” (*Acts of Resistance* 19).

³⁰ The issue of language is less prominent in the Hispanic Caribbean: “In the Spanish Caribbean, the Spanish language has become (since the Spanish-American war of 1898) a marker to define cultural identity, a wellspring of emotional identification as both the official language and common language of the streets. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in neo-Baroque texts. This is in contrast to the non-Hispanic Caribbean, descended from the northern European tradition, in which there is invariably a difference between the official and the common languages: French and Creole in Haiti, English and Anglo-Creole or French-Creole in the Commonwealth Caribbean, Dutch and Papamentio or Anglo-Creole in the Dutch colonies. Heteroglossia and polyglossia are part of the non-Hispanic Antillean tradition” (Zavala 177).

³¹ “Racism often functions as a displaced or surrogate class system, growing more extreme as the domestic class alignments it reflects are threatened to erode”, Brantlinger writes (“Victorians and Africans” 181), an observation not unfamiliar in the Caribbean context (see for instance Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944)).

Békés are “white Creoles of Martinique, members of the old planter class and their descendants”, as Réjouis explains in the glossary of the English version of *Texaco*.

comprehensive historical view of them, while in the latter – a childhood novel and thus forming part of an important genre in (post)colonial literature - he focuses in on language and education in the formation of the ‘departmental’ subject of the French state.

Through the testimony of Marie-Sophie, *Texaco* offers a narrative that spans over one and a half centuries tracing the lives of her father Esternome and herself, and emphasises the fact that not much has changed in Martinique, politically or structurally.³² In *Texaco*, many of the current problems that haunt the island are shown to have their roots in the pre-Abolition past. The Abolition period thus takes on crucial importance, since it left the social/racial stratification of the island unchanged. With emancipation, the “nèg-de-terre” in *Texaco* had hoped for the re-distribution of the land of the plantations (144), recognizing that without it their freedom would be fragile and literally for sale. However, under the guise of the freedom of the individual, it was historically the rights of the former slave owners that were protected by Republican laws, as it was declared that “*on a le droit de posséder ce que l’on possède*” (146). As Marie-Sophie phrases it in her notebooks: “...même si le commandeur n’avait plus de fouette, il était debout exactement pareil, le citoyen béké malgré sa citoyenneté passait aux mêmes heures et sur le même cheval, longvillait le travail avec les mêmes yeux” (149). The domination of the lower classes – in this case the ex-slaves – thus continued in a mutated form: “Liberté s’était faite un travail à contrat, avec livret, avec passeport” (156). Those who refuse to - or simply cannot - get a work contract are vulnerable to being arrested for vagabonding, as the law is being used as a mechanism to control the ‘mob’.³³

Furthermore, for Chamoiseau, the period leading up to Abolition is also central for identifying two modes of identity available to Martinicans, one focussed on France and French culture and thus marked by “exteriority” (*In Praise* 8), and another, grounded on lower class culture. As the final decree of Abolition was continuously being delayed, the slaves’ growing resentment eventually exploded in the revolt of the 27 April 1848 that forced the government to declare their freedom

³² As the political scientist William Miles phrased it in 1985: Martinique is still “colonized politically, exploited economically, dominated culturally and occupied militarily” (73).

³³ Land and labour thus take on seminal importance in the narrative, as it is around their relation to the land and the type of work that they do that their mode of identity is defined. As remarked by Glissant, Maximin and others, land turns into a “character” of their history on an island where, one should add, “the béké class continues to hold 80 percent of the land” (McCusker, “This Creole Culture” 119).

before the arrival of the official decree from France. As Burton observes, “whether the end of slavery should be commemorated on 27 April or 22 May [the date of the ‘official’ liberation] remains a controversial issue in Martinican political-intellectual life” (“Between the Particular” 192). Assimilationists obviously prefer the latter, whereas Chamoiseau stresses the psychic importance of the former, which for him is representative of an ‘interior’ mode of identity.³⁴ Thus, in *Texaco*, Esternome – representative of the lower classes – believes that liberty must be taken, rather than received, and that it can only be achieved by the oppressed and enslaved masses. The bourgeois mulatto class, on the other hand, believes that liberty “*viendra des grandes traditions de la France*”(110), invoking Victor Schoelcher and the French Revolution.³⁵ As Chamoiseau illustrates, the alignment with France creates a fundamental alienation from the history and cultural reality of the island due to the participation in French ‘History’ (with a capital); as Marie-Sophie, the novel’s protagonist phrases it: “l’Histoire accélérée par les milâtes allait soulever tout le monde des ancrages de cette terre. Que tous, devenus gibiers fous, nous volerions vers l’envie pleine de devenir français” (109-110). As a result, French ‘white’ culture is internalized into the sense of self, which manifests itself in the adoption of French language, manners and cultural values as part of a desire to ‘whiten’ one’s soul. The mimetic model of identity is marked, in Frantz Fanon’s terms, by “negrophobia” coupled with a fetishistic “lactification” (*Black Skin* 47; 192). Again, *Texaco* emphasises continuity and lack of change; before Abolition, this phenomenon manifests itself when Osélia – Esternome’s partner - desires to find a lover whiter than herself and leaves Esternome as soon as the opportunity arises. Furthermore, Osélia’s overt preoccupation with her future partner’s racial origin has a more subtle counterpart in the assimilation of a French *bodily hexis* - which Bourdieu defines as “political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking” (*The Logic of Practice* 69-70). This turns the body into the main site of symbolic domination. As Esternome observes, “y’avait l’affaire de la couleur mais y’avait

³⁴Celebrations of the abolition of slavery in 1848 “have tended to propagate a one-sided, specifically French version of them. The 1998 celebrations of the 150th anniversary of abolition, for instance, presented the end of slavery as the product of metropolitan philanthropy, conveniently forgetting both the slaves’ own agency and the fact that this was abolition for the second time” (Forsdick and Murphy 2).

³⁵Historically, the identification of Martinique’s bourgeois mulatto class with metropolitan France ironically originated in the French Revolution, when the mulatto petite bourgeoisie, who by 1790 owned about a quarter of the slave population, was trying to obtain the rights to full French citizenship.

aussi l'affaire de la manière et des beaux-airs. Avec la manière et les beaux airs on te voyait mulâtre, si bien que les mulâtres étaient parfois tout noirs" (95).

The fetishisation of France and French culture re-emerges in the novel most strongly through the portrayal of two bourgeois intellectuals during WWII and the period leading up to departmentalisation. One must here stress that while the identification with France affects the whole of the social body, it is most strongly manifested by *Texaco's* bourgeois classes. Contrary to the lower class characters, Gros-Joseph and Alcibiade have not been able to construct an independent sense of identity; their identity and psychic sanity are marked by exteriority to such an extent that they become grotesque stereotypes of French models and descend into madness once the exterior source of their identity is undermined.³⁶ As Chamoiseau shows through his portrayal of these two characters, one of the most damaging effects of "the mimetic impulse" (CD 18) is psychological, as the alienation from a local sense of identity perpetrates an "insidious violence" (18) on the individual psyche. As Bourdieu stresses, "the doxic attitude"³⁷ does not mean happiness; it means bodily submission, which may indicate a lot of internalised tension, a lot of bodily suffering" ("Doxa and Common Life" 121). This "internalised tension" becomes visible in both of Chamoiseau's characters after their descent into madness. During the 1930s, Gros-Joseph inhabits a property appropriately called "Little France" and speaks French like Michel de Montaigne. Before his descent into madness, he judges literature according to French universalist values, unlike Marie-Sophie for whom "chaque livre [...] libérait un parfum, une voix, une époque, une douleur, une présence" (280). A French 'universal' identity has been completely internalised and determines his way of speaking, feeling and thinking. However, after Germany's invasion of France, which destroys his idealist belief in, and forestalls his voyage to, "Mother France", he descends into a state of madness in which he displays the characteristics of the anal phase of Freudian theory: "Il pissait, chiait, mangeait ses propres livres [...]. On l'entendait manger comme un cochon en éructant Rimbaud ou Lautréamont [...] Ah Jonathan Swift goût de merde, Ah Zola goût de merde, Ah Daudet goût de merde" (285-286). The image of Gros-Joseph eating the 'great works' of literature literalizes the inculcation of French ideals. Yet through his madness he symbolically separates himself from Mother France, "shitting" and

³⁶ The notions of interiority and exteriority are explored in *Éloge de la Créolité*.

³⁷ The doxic attitude: the "bodily and unconscious submission to conditions that are in fact quite arbitrary and contingent" (*Understanding Bourdieu*, p.xi).

“pissing” on his books, which may be compared to the infant’s first manifestation of creativity. If the anal phase is that in which “social conditioning really begins to come into play”, then it is interesting to note that Gros-Joseph here undoes French conditioning, reversing his earlier evaluations of canonical works, but that he is unable to progress to a more re-constructive stage.³⁸ Gros-Joseph remains entrapped within madness, unable to progress beyond this infantile gesture of rejection or to construct an independent identity. “Psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms”, Jameson writes (“Third-World Literature” 72); Gros-Joseph’s predicament can obviously not be understood without reference to the political, and allegorises a larger sense of crisis, since the island had become too dependent on a country that at the time was being invaded, as a result of which there was a shortage of food and medical supplies.

The fate of the character Alcibiade follows a similar trajectory: as another middle class intellectual, he aligns himself with Fort-de-France (which as a former army settlement pre-conceived on paper before it was built, incorporates an externally imposed order), rather than with the outlying quarters, which he describes as “des plots de barbarie” (322) (for Chamoiseau the latter incorporate the possibility of a Martinican identity, since they have grown ‘organically’). In the years leading up to Césaire’s election as mayor of Fort-de-France, Alcibiade embodies an obsession with the French language, which privileges style and eloquence over content.³⁹ This potentially dangerous fascination with empty rhetoric emerges most clearly in the pro-colonialist speech Alcibiade delivers and in Marie-Sophie’s reactions to it. Alcibiade has assimilated imperialist rhetoric and imagery, pouring forth a string of clichéd images without any critical analysis or factual basis. Yet, allured by Alcibiade’s enthusiasm for France’s pseudo-universalist culture, Marie-Sophie positively responds to “son français, son accent pointu, ses phrases fleuries”, “sans même tenter de comprendre ou bien de réfléchir” (315), thus uncritically accepting its racist contents. However, after the election of Césaire – “*un négre se disant de l’Afrique [...] et communiste en plus*” (322)- the violence on which his identification with colonialism was based disturbingly surfaces when madness leads him to rape Marie-Sophie; the last glimpse we are offered of Alcibiade shows him

³⁸ Ruth Berry, *Freud*, p.50.

³⁹ Edouard Glissant analyses this phenomenon in *Discours Antillais* in his section on “Le délire verbal” (which is excluded from Dash’s translation). See especially 638 – 646, where he analyses the tendency in Martinican rhetoric to employ accumulative techniques, “universal” formulas empty of any specific meaning and obvious facts (the most extreme form of empty formulations).

“vêtu en rouge et noir, avançant raide et chantant une mazouk dans un vase de malpropre” (335). Like Gros-Joseph, he descends into insanity once his ideals are undermined by the new mayor’s overtly anti-colonial and pro-African stance. He, too, allegorizes the end of an era.⁴⁰

Significantly, before Marie-Sophie turns into the founder of Texaco in 1950 (the shantytown that will become the ground for a local identity founded on the lower class’s relation to the land and their technical know-how), she spends several years working as a servant for different middle class families – amongst them the families of Gros-Joseph and Alcibiade - all of whom identify with France and a French mode of life. While labour can ground identity, as we shall see in chapter two, it is here represented as dehumanizing and destructive of sociality.⁴¹ While not all of the families treat her badly, this period of her life is mostly characterised by isolation, exploitation (sexual and economic), and a detachment from the communities amongst which she used to live during the time when her father was alive. Yet, long before turning into the founder of Texaco, she voices her opposition to the middle class alienation and the underlying racism on which it is based, quitting her job after one of her employers demands that she should wear white gloves for serving food “comme si étant plus noire [Marie-Sophie était] plus malpropre qu’elle” (272).

If in *Texaco*, alienation and the identification with France are explored in most detail before 1946, *Chemin-d’école* focuses on post-departmentalisation Martinique and explores the central role of schooling in the assimilation of the Creole subject into the French *habitus* by narrating the experiences of an unnamed child protagonist, the little “négrillon”, during the mid-twentieth century. The perspective of the child is blended with the adult narratorial voice, which allows the reader to experience the young boy’s fears and sufferings, at the same time as

⁴⁰ One might here add that while Chamoiseau is certainly critical of Césaire and his politics – a criticism expressed quite clearly when Esternome declares him to be ‘mulatto’ after having heard him speak many years prior to his election - he is more willing to concede the positive, albeit limited, changes that he brought for the lower classes than his fellow Créoliste Confiant. As Marie-Sophie writes, the lower classes voted Césaire into office; during the early 50s, when the shantytowns keep being attacked by the C.R.S. (an anti-riot squad) and the Police, the Communists, in turn, “furent les premiers à nos côtés, et jamais plus s’en allèrent” (393). They rehoused the inhabitants of Texaco elsewhere and helped them to settle everywhere; “[ils] avaient créé des voies, cimenté des passages, amené de l’eau, les avaient soutenus” (402).

⁴¹ As Neil Lazarus has pointed out, “[t]hroughout postcolonial literature, one encounters extended descriptions of work as identity-defining activity. Sometimes, work is phrased as being constitutive of self-making. At other times, though, it is viewed in the contexts of exploitation and servitude, as dehumanizing, more or less relentless, utterly destructive of sociality and even self-preservation” (“The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism” 781).

inserting them into a broader social context. The ‘childhood novel’ – a version of the *Bildungsroman* – is a prominent genre in colonial and postcolonial literature, especially in the Anglophone Caribbean,⁴² often allegorising the political transition of the colonies as the coming of consciousness of the child. One of the reasons why childhood is such an important trope in the literature of the (ex-)colonies and has an important role to play in the struggle over representation is that the “idea of the child as ontologically different from the adult” (which, incidentally, “only emerged in Western society after the invention of the printing press”), has long been linked to primitivism in European culture (one might here mention Montaigne’s essay “On cannibals”, for instance). This link resulted in the late nineteenth century in the concept of ‘development’ by which the child and the non-European occupied the lower ranks and were constituted as ‘lacking’ (Ashcroft, *On Postcolonial Futures* 38-39). This also explains the central importance of a Eurocentric education in the colonial enterprise.⁴³ As Chamoiseau shows in the novel, cultural assimilation in the post-1946 decades begins in nursery school, where Man Salinière, the nursery teacher, imparts to her pupils the cultural capital of France, i.e. the images, songs, stories and thought categories that make up the French popular imaginary. Naturally, the French imaginary bears little resemblance to Martinican reality: “Man Salinière [...] lui fit voir d’étranges images de neige et chanter des choses douces de Bretagne ou de Provence” (39). Increasingly alienated from a local imaginary, the little ‘négrillon’ thus soon begins to refer to the fée Carabosse rather than the Manman Dlo⁴⁴ and to the four seasons that characterise the European climate; he is drawing images of apples during the mango season (despite the fact that “elles arrivent par bateau, dans des boîtes fermées, et à moitié pourries (80)), of the Eiffel tower and of houses with smoking chimneys built in little forests of fir trees (44). This assimilation into French culture is continued when the protagonist enters school; but whereas in nursery school, it was conducted in a playful manner, cultural

⁴² One might here mention *In the Castle of my Skin* (George Lamming, 1953), *A Year in San Fernando* (Michael Anthony, 1965), *Crick, Crack Monkey* (Merle Hodge, 1970), *Annie John*, (Jamaica Kincaid, 1985), *Beka Lamb* (Zee Edgell, 1982). See also the chapter entitled “The Novels of Childhood” in Ramchand’s *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970).

⁴³ As Ashcroft writes, “[j]ust as ‘childhood’ began in European culture with the task of learning how to read, so education and literacy became crucial in the imperial expansion of Europe, establishing ideological supremacy, inculcating the values of the colonizer, and separating the ‘adult’ colonizing races from the ‘childish’ colonized. Literacy and education reinforce the existence of the very gap they are designed to close [...] they do this because education is always on the terms of an adult consciousness to which the colonial subject can never aspire” (*On Postcolonial Futures* 39).

⁴⁴ see *Manman Dlo contre la Fée Carabosse*, by Chamoiseau, 1982.

assimilation becomes more imperative and repressive of Creole culture in the ambit of the school. This repression is highlighted in the following passage, in which one of his classmates is caught telling a Creole story by the headmaster:

Il racontait à pleine gorge une affaire de vieille voisine qui se changeait ne bête-volante. Le Paroleur, corps tordu, la figure en grimace et les bras battant l'air, continua son conte de plus belle alors que Monsieur le Directeur était déjà sur lui. [...] Monsieur le Directeur crocheta l'oreille de l'Animal et le traîna sur trente-douze mètres : *Qu'est-ce que j'entends, on parle créole?! Qu'est-ce que je vois, des gestes-macaques?! Où donc vous croyez-vous ici? Parlez correctement et comportez-vous de manière civilisée...* Cela se sut des petits nouveaux. L'apparition de Monsieur le Directeur suscita autour de sa personne des pétrifications de cimetières (64-65).

In this passage, there is a strong emphasis on Creole bodily expression and mannerisms, which the headmaster seeks and manages to repress. Read in relation to Bourdieu's concept of the *bodily hexis*, the above-quoted passage takes on a larger, politicised significance that exceeds the every-day scenario of the school-boy being chided by the headmaster for behaving improperly. As Chamoiseau has stressed in many of his novels, the figure of the storyteller is of singular significance for Creole culture, for which he functions as a repository. However, in the environment of the school, Creole culture is completely devalued, as the teachers directly associate it with "l'obscurité bestiale où on perdait à jamais l'idée de l'Homme", with the "chaînes de l'ignorance et de la bêtise"(70). French culture, on the other hand, achieves in their eyes the status of the 'universal' which it claims for itself, and is thus inextricably linked to the ideals of progress and the advance of knowledge (although it was of course French culture that has literally "enchained" a large part of the Martinican population in the past, and attributed to them the "obscurité bestiale" in order to justify their enslavement). The extent to which knowledge is equated with a knowledge of French culture is rendered explicit in the physical make-up of the classroom, which is decorated by "quelques images d'hiver" and "de grandes cartes mystérieuse d'un pays hexagonal"(56). Similarly, the schoolbooks exclusively refer to French culture, which becomes the norm and threatens to replace the Martinican imaginary. However, Chamoiseau does not represent the grasp of French culture as

absolute, juxtaposing the reality portrayed in the schoolbooks with the reality outside of the classroom. Gros-Lombric's description of his home, for instance, is completely distinct from, and clashes with, the French "univers de fermes idylliques, de moulins, de bergers" (165). Within the novel, Gros-Lombric stands out from the start, since he only knows his Creole name, ignoring his French name that makes him a citizen of the French state. He functions as the representative of lower class Creole culture, as his identity remains securely anchored in Creole reality despite the punishments and discouragements he receives because of his use of Creole and his references to Creole culture. Gros-Lombric introduces the child protagonist to the marble games outside of school, which are governed by rules that are very different to the ones that govern their days at school. Gros-Lombric also introduces Creole knowledge into the ambit of the school, thus subverting the authority of French knowledge; for instance, he offers the teacher a cane, which, however, turns out to be ineffective for the purposes of punishment. However, the school is attributed a supreme authority by all of the parents (including, perhaps surprisingly, Gros-Lombric's father, who punishes his son for not conforming to the rules of the school, even though they effectively negate his own way of life). This reflects the social prestige (predicated on material privileges) of French culture within Martinican society.

The prestige attached to French culture is also attached to French language; Creole, on the other hand, shares the associations of Creole culture. In school, Creole is thus turned into the language "du frustré et du violent", and increasingly it is used to express "des injures, des mots sales, des haines, des violences", whereas elevated feelings can only be expressed in French (92). Throughout the novel, Chamoiseau stresses and enumerates the differences between Creole and French (such as differences in vocabulary, in pronunciation and sentence structure), which has the effect of raising this issue to the awareness of the non-Creole speaking French reader. The Creole-speaking children first have to translate their thoughts into French and then be careful not to 'infect' the French words with the Creole pronunciation (88), which, as Chamoiseau's narrative shows impedes their learning progress, since they develop a fear of the school. The relevant authorities misdiagnose this general underachievement, which Chamoiseau reveals in the rather comic episode of the distribution of the "universal milk" that is meant to fight a supposed malnutrition. However, despite the efforts of the schoolteacher to eradicate Creole, it remains the

most natural form of expression, to which even the representatives of the school resort at times. French, on the other hand, tends to lose its capacity to convey meaning through words and becomes reduced to “un outil ésotérique pour créer des effets” (67).

The novel also examines the racism that underlies the devaluation of Creole culture and language. Racial differentiation in the mind of the individual is shown to come into existence through his/her gradual initiation into the racism that structures society. In nursery school, the ‘négrillon’ notably only perceived a racially non-differentiated mass of schoolchildren, to whom he refers as “d’autres négillons” (the term “négrillons” is here being used as a generic term for children). It is the socially initiated narrator who feels obliged to add in brackets: “en fait, ils étaient multicolores, chabins, koulis, cacos, mulâtres, chi-chines, békés-goyave...mais il ne s’en apercevait pas” (38). However, in school, the little boy progressively becomes aware of racial difference as a result of the teacher’s differential treatment of his students. Their totally assimilated teacher- a black Martinican- associates blackness with inferior intellectual skills (111). This association of blackness, Creole and ‘barbarism’ is so strongly engrained into the teacher’s perception that he unconsciously feels the need to adapt reality to his preconception of it, which is revealed in his decision to ignore his pupil Gros-Lombric during the maths lessons, for the simple reason that the latter excels in this discipline. He prefers his lighter-skinned pupils who possess European features, speak French rather than Creole, and are better dressed than the rest (a detail that clearly indicates the injustice of the distribution of material wealth (112)). A black skin colour is thus associated with Creole culture and the Creole language, which are seen as the negative counterpart to French “Universal” values (“mœurs d’énergumène, mœurs nègres ou mœurs créoles- c’étaient les mêmes” (169)); whiteness, on the other hand, is associated with universal Culture, Progress, History and “l’humanisation du grouillement de la terre” (170).

At the end of the novel, the reader is offered a glimpse of hope as the little négillon transforms the reading and writing skills that he has acquired in school into “une tracée de survie” (202), which, as one may speculate, may have resembled Chamoiseau’s own experience of schooling. Most of the characters in *Chemin d’école* are never completely assimilated into the French block function (apart from perhaps the teacher himself). Similarly, *Texaco* offers an interior mode of identity

based on lower class culture that is based on a long history of lower class resistance which I shall explore in chapter 2.

Mexican Labour, Stereotypes and Cultural Imperialism in *La frontera de Cristal* (1995)

Y el Presidente de los Estados Unidos es más Presidente de mi país,
que el Presidente de mi país
Roque Dalton, "O.E.A"

In a polemical script for a US American TV debate in 1962, Fuentes had proclaimed his belief in the necessity of Revolution in Latin America, plagued by the survival of feudal structures (the *latifundia*) and underdevelopment (with the typical characteristics of mono-productive dependence and dependence on foreign capital) that cannot be overcome by free-enterprise capitalism ("The Argument of Latin America" 223).⁴⁵ By the 1990s, following the radical changes experienced by the world system since the beginning of the 1970s when it entered into a profound crisis, Fuentes's rhetoric is clearly more restrained, as he seeks to propose solutions to transform the neo-liberal North American Free Trade Agreement (1 January 1994), the implementation of which he had seen as inevitable given its subservience to US interests ("So Far from God" 161).⁴⁶ However, as attested by his novel *La frontera de cristal*, he remains profoundly critical of 'free-labour capitalism' dominated by

⁴⁵ "Investments? Yes, you have invested ten billion dollars in Latin America. It is a curious thing: we have always received your investments, and we are still poor," writes Carlos Fuentes in 1962 ("The Argument of Latin America: Words for the North Americans" 223).

⁴⁶ In general, Fuentes considers globalization as inevitable (Méndez-Ramírez 582), also evidenced by his anecdote of betting with one of his friends that NAFTA would indeed come into effect. Hindsight, of course, makes him *appear* to have been correct, but I would here agree with Samir Amin, who strongly contests the TINA syndrome ('there is no alternative') (*Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* 43): "The alternatives are still either (worldwide) socialism or barbarism" (22) (on this issue, see also Bourdieu's "The Myth of 'Globalization' and the European Welfare State"). Amin describes NAFTA as following a neo-imperialist logic by harnessing a region of the South to the central metropolises (76); it is "inadequate for the purposes of reducing the development gap" (105). Nevertheless, one may concede that Fuentes's propositions for changing NAFTA seek to undermine the agreement's neo-imperialist character: he points out the fact that 40 million Mexicans continue to live in poverty, a fact un-remedied by the neoliberal model espoused by the Salinas administration, for which "fighting inflation had become a fetish" at the expense of local production. He also critiques the absence in Mexico of a real separation of legislative, judicial and executive power; further, he argues that economic development must go hand in hand with democracy and social justice; restrictions and taxes must be put on speculative capital; a social component must be added to the free-trade dynamics of NAFTA; "human development" should be a priority, "without sacrificing fiscal discipline, currency stability, and access to financial markets" (165-172).

US neo-imperialism as well as of the mal-functioning of Mexican ‘democracy’. He examines globally relevant issues such as the exploitation of cheap Third-World labour (whether in the assembly lines of the *maquiladoras* on the Mexican side of the border, or of legal and illegal immigrants on the US side). While in chapter five, I will focus in more detail on how Fuentes’s work addresses the structural inequalities of globalization in his earlier novel *Terra Nostra*, I here want to focus more specifically on how Mexico’s semi-peripheral position within the world system impacts on the individual’s *habitus* in relation to the Jamesonian thesis regarding the relation between the political and the private.

La frontera de cristal is a novel composed of nine chapters, each consisting of a short story (except for the ninth chapter, which is composed of several brief short stories). The overarching link is provided by Leonardo Barroso (the 1990s version of the arch-capitalist Artemio Cruz), to whom virtually all of the remaining characters are linked in some way or another: he is the owner of the *maquila* – an assembly line for TVs – in which Marina and her colleagues make a miserable living in the central chapter of the novel “Malintzin de las maquilas”; he is the entrepreneur who flies out a Mexican workforce for the weekend to clean New York’s skyscrapers at a cheaper rate than any US labour force would in the chapter that carries the same title as the novel; he sponsored Juan Zamora’s postgraduate studies in the US (since the latter’s father – Leonardo Barroso’s lawyer – had never made enough money due to his integrity and honesty); at the end of the novel, he is murdered at the US-Mexican border, apparently in relation to drug trafficking (“sólo hay latinoamericanos culpables [...] los culpables son los que ofrecen, no los que piden” (305), he is told moments before his death by his US ‘business partners’, re-emphasising the subordination of the ‘peripheral’ *comprador* class to the capital of the ‘centre’).

One must here also mention Leonardo’s forgotten brother Emiliano, whose fate is narrated in the chapter preceding “Malintzin de las maquilas”, a chapter appropriately entitled “La raya del olvido”. Emiliano, an old and defenceless man in a wheelchair is abandoned at the border without any means of identification and initially, without any recollection of who is. What at first reads as an internal reflection on identity in the border area soon takes on a different inflection, as he slowly recollects pieces from his life, revealing that he was a young left idealist, a communist, an “agitator” (122), whose beliefs in workers’ rights clash with his

younger brother's belief in the rights of the stronger individuals to accumulate wealth.⁴⁷ Concerning his brother, he comments as follows: "su nombre verdadero es Contratos. Su nombre es Contrabando. Su nombre es Bolsa de Valores. Carreteras. Maquilas. Burdeles. Bares. Periódicos. Televisión. Narcodólares. Y un desigual combate con un hermano pobre" (126). The issue of the neglect of workers' and human rights – the exploitation of the "hermano pobre" – is central to many of the chapters,⁴⁸ most significantly perhaps to "Malintzin de las maquilas", in which Fuentes's represents women who are struggling to preserve their dignity, humanity and some sense of solidarity in the face of degrading and alienating working conditions. The *maquilas* have profoundly changed the gender balance of the border areas as most employees are women (according to Leonardo Barroso, he is thus 'liberating' them from farming, prostitution and *machismo*) and have uprooted the workers' from their original background. The workers are forbidden to form unions, have no insurance, nor any other basic rights, and the fast rate at which workers' change jobs (to avoid being consumed by the de-humanizing and often unhealthy work) means that political consciousness remains low to the benefit of their employers.⁴⁹ This dehumanization is tragically symbolized by the death of the child of Dinorah, a single mother struggling to cope on her own; her small son accidentally strangulates himself at home "amarrado como un animal a la pata de una mesa" while she is away (166).

It is in this context – of the domination of capital (ultimately of US capital, as Leonardo as part of the *comprador* class depends on his US partners) – that Fuentes examines the issues of the cultural imperialism, racism and stereotyping, issues that inextricably link the 'private' and the 'political' in the realm of 'culture'. I would first like to turn here to one of the failed romances in the novel, narrated in the story that carries the name of the entire collection, "La frontera de cristal". The conventional romance plotline typically enacts the reconciliation of class and ethnic differences as two 'individuals' fall in love. In Fuentes's story, it is precisely the easy overcoming of those differences that is questioned and symbolised in the 'crystal

⁴⁷ For Alfonso González, this particular story is a metaphor for those who live a dual heritage, either within the United States or at the Mexican side of the border ("La intensificación" 18).

⁴⁸ See also "La frontera de cristal", "Las amigas" and one section of the last chapter involving Juan Zamora, who returns to the US to offer medical help to Mexican immigrants who under the proposition 187 are deprived of education and health benefits in California.

⁴⁹ "Casualization of employment", Bourdieu writes, "is part of a *mode of domination* of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into acceptance of exploitation" (*Acts of Resistance* 85).

frontier'. As Stephen Boldy points out, "[a] 'crystal frontier may reveal everything, or, alternatively, by dint of being invisible, hide everything, starting with itself' (232). In this particular story, the frontier takes the form of a window pane (belonging to a building entirely made out of glass) and functions as the material divide between the wealthy US businesswoman Audrey sitting at her desk, thinking up slogans for the global brand Pepsi, and Lisandro, a Mexican, who, forced by economic necessity, has been contracted as part of a cheap Mexican work force to fly out to New York during the week-end to clean windows. The encounter between the two replays the common motif of love-at-first-sight, which Fuentes inscribes into the very specific historical and economic context of the exploitative exportation of cheap labour from Mexico to its richer neighbour. During their encounter, Lisandro and Audrey both imagine the other, and yet, it is Audrey who is singularly oblivious to any differences that may exist between them. For Audrey, the crystal frontier, which here comes to symbolize the social, cultural and economic differences between the two, is non-existent, or at least completely transparent, as she freely projects her distinctly US American expectations onto Lisandro, assimilating him into her daydream of US American happiness, not even once making a mental reference to the obvious difference in, for instance, social standing. She turns him into an "espejismo" (a word that she herself employs and yet fails to note the consequence of) that incorporates her ideals: "Cortesía. Lo que había en este hombre, en su actitud, en su distancia, en su manera de inclinar la cabeza, en la extraña mezcla de tristeza y alegría de su mirada, era cortesía, una ausencia increíble de vulgaridad" (220). Fuentes's narrative acquires a satirical edge when she reads his appearance as bespeaking a man who would never give away the end of films (222). The difference between her reaction and that of Lisandro could hardly be more pronounced: "Los dos pensaron lo mismo. Puedo ponerle el nombre que más me guste. Y él: algunos tienen que imaginar a la amada como una desconocida; él iba a tener que imaginar a la desconocida como una amada" (224). Despite the fact that the narrative voice insists on the similarity of their reactions, Audrey noticeably wants to assimilate difference, whereas Lisandro realises that he has to accept difference. The supposed transparency of the crystal frontier in Audrey's eyes may therefore be read as a reference to an assumed universal human nature, which here possesses distinctly US American features. Lisandro thus shows great lucidity when, asked by Audrey to write his name on the pane, he escapes the projection by inscribing himself in the

collective category of the Mexican to assert what Glissant terms his “right to opacity” - the right of the ‘Other’ to resist being read by his/her others and being transformed into mere objects of anthropological inquiry or the exotizing/assimilating gaze; as Méndez-Ramírez phrases it, “apunt[a] al enorme desafío o imposibilidad de la negociación cultural” (594).⁵⁰ To this statement, one should add the clause “under these particular circumstances” to do justice to the narrative, as Fuentes is very careful to be historically and culturally specific; circumstances that include certain US American attitudes towards foreigners, the global hegemony of US culture, as well as the de-humanizing aspects of Lisandro’s weekend job that is a product of the new era of US-Mexican relations under NAFTA, which many Mexicans had hoped would symbolize the “longed for move of their own country from the ‘third’ into the ‘first world’” (Maihold 226). His identification with the collective category is particularly significant because Lisandro initially had felt himself to be different from the other - darker-skinned - workers. He belongs to the newly impoverished classes, as his family lost their money in the inflation and devaluation of the mid 80s and mid 90s, respectively. Initially, he had felt that a ‘Mexican identity’ had become an illusion, erased by his ‘exportation’ as labour force: “ya no había país, ya no había México, el país era una ficción” (204).⁵¹ Yet confronted with the unconscious and unvoiced cultural imperialism of Audrey, he recuperates a sense of solidarity with his fellow workers and rejects the ‘individualism’ that Audrey and the romance incorporate.

Following the same pattern, Juan Zamora (the protagonist of the story “La pena” and medical student in the US) had initially sought acceptance in US society by falsely presenting himself as a rich *hacendado* – an identity apparently more palatable to his host family who insist on calling him ‘Spanish’ rather than ‘Mexican’ for fear of insulting him - and a supporter of Reagan’s anti-communism. He eventually returns home defeated after the rejection by his US American gay lover (that has partly to do with his revelations about his real past) and his disenchantment with his host family (who are involved in the arms trade to Central

⁵⁰ The “right to opacity” is evoked by Glissant, in relation to the position of marginal/peripheral cultures that are threatened by another hegemonic tradition: “Nous réclamons le droit à l’opacité. Par quoi notre tension pour tout dru exister rejoint le drame planétaire de la Relation : l’élan des peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd’hui à l’universel de la transparence, imposé par l’Occident, une multiplicité sourde du Divers” (*Le Discours Antillais* 14).

⁵¹ NAFTA, as Amin writes, has broken Mexico into two “by separating its Texan north from its Guatemalan south, as the Chiapas revolt has just confirmed” (38-39), and thus throwing a uniform national identity into question (Maihold 226).

America). Eventually, he too recovers a sense of solidarity with his fellow Mexicans: after the infamous Californian proposition 187 in 1994 that responded to anti-immigrant sentiments, he returns to the US as a doctor at his own expense to help illegal immigrants who fear going to the hospitals.⁵²

However, many other characters – mostly those belonging to the upper middle classes – react very differently to the encounter with US cultural and economic hegemony. Attracted by US wealth, they assimilate the self into the US *habitus*, assuming US American identity that becomes a debased stereotype. This alienating cultural assimilation is most explicitly formulated in the case of Margarita Barroso (a relative of Leonardo's), who, when still in school, had demonstrated her acceptance of American culture by transforming herself into one of its most stereotypical representations, namely a majorette, thus breaking with her family and their traditions. When the latter see her “mostrando las nalgas [...] y manejando un bastón como si fuera un falo simbólico, supieron que la habían perdido” (271). Cultural assimilation and the acceptance of a different set of values thus manifest itself most obviously in the *bodily hexis* of the individual. Of course, the adoption of another culture by an individual is not negative in itself, and yet, it is here problematised by the explicit anti-Hispanic racism that underpins her assimilation, as her new cultural identity excludes and negates her Mexican heritage: “No te dejes llamar Margarita, hazte llamar Margie y pasa por blanca, ni quién se entere: no hables español, no dejes que te tratan de mexicana, pocha o chicana” (271). It is further inscribed within the context of the exploitative economic relations between Mexico and the United States, as Margie lives on the US American side of the border to live an assimilated lifestyle, but is an overseer in an assembly firm (thus socially above the workers, but not of Leonardo Barroso's social standing), which is situated on the Mexican side where labour is cheap after NAFTA.

Like her, many other characters in the novel are lured by the guises of financial prosperity and assimilate the US American lifestyle, transforming themselves into stereotypes of US American culture (stereotypes that acquire quasi-

⁵² Méndez-Ramírez makes a similar point: “Todos ellos [referring to Juan Zamora, Josefina's husband, and Marina's friend Candelaria] son ejemplos de individuos que han adquirido conciencia política y social a través de su enfrentamiento ontológico con la otredad” (595). Even though this might amount to nothing more than nit-picking, I would nevertheless like to insist that this reaction is *not* produced on the ontological plane and an abstract encounter with Otherness, but rather by a historically determined, social racism and exploitation that all of these characters have to confront.

fetishistic qualities within this context).⁵³ Surrounded by high fences to protect their wealth, the Barroso family lives in a Tudor-Norman house described as Disneyland by his neighbours, “sin ningún contacto con Campazas, con el país, ignorando cuanto ocurre del otro lado de sus altos muros, consumiendo pura cosa importada, mirando pura televisión por cable” (31-32). Leonardo regularly travels across the border to enjoy the luxury of US hotels with his amorous conquests.⁵⁴ In this context, the border indeed begins to *appear* “porosa”, “ilusoria”, “de cristal” (34). Yet, Fuentes’s emphasis on the reality of cultural imperialism (underpinned by economic domination) complicates and implicitly criticises hybrid models of identity. Leonardo Barroso’s wife and her acquaintances believe themselves to be culturally superior to the women living in Mexico City because of their access to US culture, but ‘culture’ here translates merely into consumerism: “si la frontera estaba a un paso aquí nomás, a media hora se estaba en un Neiman-Marcus, un Saks, un Cartier, ¿de qué les presumían las capitalinas que nomás por ser del Norte ellas eran de a tiro nacas?” (23).⁵⁵ While (Anglophone) postcolonial theory during the nineties tended to focus on the ‘hybrid’ as an epistemologically privileged subject-position for the formulation of a revisionist politics (a position that is inhabited by the postcolonial intellectual in the ‘diaspora’), Fuentes’s investigation is much more concrete and class-specific, dealing on the one hand with the ‘americanisation’ of the *comprador* bourgeoisie and, on the other, with the “economically enforced dispersal” and the “experiences spoken by scattered, impoverished, and despised populations stranded in temporary and exploited employment as contract workers, casual laborers, or domestic servants” (experiences that as Benita Parry argues, should be the focus of Postcolonial Studies (“Directions” 72)). In a similar manner, Chamoiseau questions

⁵³ In “So Far From God”, Fuentes similarly observes how “the excessively quick opening of the traditionally overprotected Mexican market led to a veritable shopping spree by Mexican businesses and middle-class individuals, who sometimes imported prestige items like mineral water and tennis shoes that could be had for less in Mexico at comparable quality” (“So Far From God” 166).

⁵⁴ Méndez-Ramírez has pointed out another significant layer in the representation of the Barroso family. In the first chapter of the novel, Michelina – a young woman from the capital – married Leonardo Barroso’s son, and the general perception of the situation by the other characters is that she has sold herself. “El relato se centra en la tensión entre centro y periferia, entendido esto según la dicotomía que propone Carlos Monsiváis de la capital como centro de la cultura y de conocimiento y la provincia como un *locus* amorfo de ignorancia y mezquindad [...] Leonardo Barroso y su familia fronteriza representan a los nuevos ricos con acceso al primer mundo, pero carecen del acerbo cultural de la capital” (586).

⁵⁵ As Maihold writes, “[s]eine [i.e. Fuentes’] Position bleibt beschränkt auf die Kritik der Hybridität, die ihm als lächerliche Maskerade erscheint und damit auch nicht identitätsstiftend wirksam werden kann” [his position is limited to a critique of hybridity, which he sees as a ridiculous masquerade and therefore as unable to found identities] (236).

the Glissantian notion of the *mise-en-relation*, which in the real world of global inequalities often turns into a *mise-sous-relation* (*Écrire en pays dominé* 250).⁵⁶

In the story “Las Amigas” and in the ninth chapter of the novel, Fuentes examines anti-Hispanic racism even more explicitly. He examines racist stereotypes on two levels: he inscribes them within the social and the historical level (mentioning for instance the US-Mexican war in which Mexico lost Texas, California and Arizona to the US (1848)), as well as examining the psychological dimension of its more local employments. The story “Las amigas” deals with racist stereotyping on the latter level, as the outrageously racist Miss Amy slowly comes to terms with her own past and thus has to rethink her behaviour towards the ‘Other’, including the racially and culturally other. Miss Amy initially pre-judges and rejects the ‘Other’ (not only the person of a different origin) out of fear of exposing herself emotionally. Her initial racist stereotyping of her Mexican servant Josefina as lazy, smelly, and a thief – which even Miss Amy herself knows to be wrong as she constantly has to set her servant little traps to be able to accuse her of those vices - is thus partly conditioned by readily available stereotypes that are the result of a history of racial and social oppression, but also by Miss Amy’s own personal history: at the crux of the story, she learns from her nephew that the latter’s father – the love of her life – never asked her to marry him for the simple reason that she had never shown him any affection and that he believed her incapable of love. It is at this point that she alters her attitude towards Josefina, opening herself up to other people. However, it would be wrong to read this story merely on the private plane of the self/Other dynamic. One might here add that Josefina had only agreed to work for Miss Amy after her husband had been charged wrongly with murder in a manner that testifies to the police force’s institutional racism: “Los asesinos eran cuatro, uno de ellos se llamaba Pérez, tomaron a cuatro Pérez, los acusaron, ellos casi no hablaban ingles, no se pudieron explicar, no entendieron las acusaciones” (176). Josefina had accepted the job in order to be able to pay Amy’s nephew, a lawyer, for tutoring her husband in the legal profession so that he would be able to defend himself even though he is barely able to speak English. This context to the relation between the two women, which eventually transforms into friendship, emphasises the fact that the psychological dimension that the story deals with can never be detached from the

⁵⁶“‘Relation’ is in the first place a relation of equality with and respect for the Other as *different* from oneself. It applies to individuals but more especially to other cultures and other societies. It is non-hierarchical and nonreductive”, Britton explains (*Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory* 11).

historical, social and economic context. While the story ends in the embrace of the two women, the fact that Josefina's husband has just lost his appeal puts a damper on this 1990s version of the romance of social and ethnic reconciliation.

Similarly, in the last chapter composed of several short stories, Fuentes portrays Dan Polonsky, a third-generation immigrant of Polish descent, as seeking to solidify his fragile US American identity through his extreme racism and xenophobia, as well as harbouring a secret fascination with violence. However, Polonsky's personal racism is also inscribed into the broader conflict by the chapter as a whole; in another story included in the chapter, for instance, Fuentes narrates the shooting of a group of migrant workers by a neo-fascist gang, which recalls real incidents such as the shooting of Dario Miranda, an illegal immigrant worker, on 12 July 1992 in Arizona. Miranda was shot by an US border patrol agent, who was subsequently acquitted despite the accusation of murder, assault and obstruction of justice. Fuentes recalls this incident in "So Far From God", as it sheds "a terrible light on the wave of antimigrant hysteria and xenophobia that grows day by day along the tense border between Mexico and the United States" (174). The basis of this growing xenophobia, he writes, is the stereotyping and scapegoating of Mexican migrant workers as responsible for the state deficit, unemployment and the introduction of drugs into California (which is factually untrue), and ignoring "the heart of the matter", namely "that Mexican workers travel across the border in response to the demand of the US market. California produces one-third of the nation's agricultural wealth, and 90 percent of that wealth is harvested by Mexican hands" (175). While racist anti-Hispanic stereotypes have a very significant impact on the lives of the individuals portrayed in the novel, the anti-US American stereotypes that the Mexican chef Dionisio Rangel displays in "El despojo" have little, or no, real impact on his surroundings.

The reason that I have insisted on Fuentes's emphasis on the (historical, political and class) specificity of racist stereotyping is that it noticeably clashes with much academic writing produced during the eighties and nineties, especially under the banner of postcolonialism. The primacy ultimately attributed to the horizon of politics and economics (as suggested by the over-arching narrative provided through the character of Barroso), clearly distinguishes the novel's portrayal of stereotyping from that of Homi Bhabha, whose essay "The Other Question" constituted a seminal work in the field of Postcolonial Studies. Rejecting a conception of colonial

discourse as *antagonistic* (in favour of one that is *agonistic*) and thus shifting away from struggle-based models of resistance, Bhabha argues that “[s]tereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices” (in contrast to Fuentes’s view of the “scapegoating” of Mexican workers as disguising the real conditions of economic exploitation), but rather is an “ambivalent *text* of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity” (my emphasis, 81-82).⁵⁷ Supported by the universalizing idiom of psychoanalysis, Bhabha’s essay expounds a general theory of the constitution of the stereotype under colonialism, in which he links stereotyping to Freudian fetishism. Significantly, the essay does not suggest that historically specific stereotypes may be invested with fetishistic qualities at specific moments in history (such as “Disneyland” that metonymically stands in for US culture in *Frontera*, or racist stereotypes of the ‘lazy Mexicans’ that ‘justify’ their ill-treatment), but proposes instead that stereotyping *as such* is fetishistic;⁵⁸ he locates its origins in the ‘universal’ Freudian scenario of an originary male castration anxiety that is disavowed and displaced, as well as in the Lacanian mirror phase and its two forms of identification, narcissism and aggressivity. This throws up several important problems, the most important being that racial difference is by implication privileged over a myriad of other differences between the self and the ‘Other’ – a

⁵⁷Benita Parry rightly critiqued the postcolonial field for promoting “a theoretical project which construes colonialism as a cultural process and is committed to reconstructing its histories and aftermaths from a theoreticist and selective reading of textual and symbolic significations” (“Directions” 74).

⁵⁸Formulating a Bakhtinian critique, Michael Holquist refutes Bhabha that stereotyping is in and of itself fetishistic. Stereotyping is “a global activity, in all the senses of the word global. [...] Stereotyping is a universal strategy for seizing the other. It is a way that subjects colonize each other as different kind of subjects, different not merely in features such as those of class or the body: such distinctions are merely incidental compared to the difference between the way each subject conceives them as bearing on other subjects and the way s/he conceives them as relating to his or her *own* status as a subject” (208). However, his critique—while valuable as a rebuttal of the Freudian/Lacanian model for an analysis of the racist stereotype – fails to provide an adequate account of the *racist, classist* or *sexist* stereotype, a structural weakness due to a methodology focussed on a largely ahistorical and apolitical analysis of the role of language in the process of subject formation. Stereotypes have an important social and political dimension that can only be understood within a concrete historical context, since stereotypes often codify oppressive power structures, which become part of people’s thought processes. This is clearly at work in stereotypes such as the patriarchal virgin/whore dichotomy or, to evoke an imperialist/colonialist context, stereotypes concerning the “laziness” of black/Hispanic peoples. While Holquist stresses the issue of responsibility (205), seeking to formulate an ethically responsible linguistic theory, I nevertheless strongly insist on the necessity to distinguish “stereotyping” from “the normal mode of operation” (209), since the term “stereotyping” – understood merely as a function of discourse and language acquisition – loses its usefulness for identifying mental mechanisms of oppression.

privileging that is itself fetishistic.⁵⁹ In other words, the Freudian analogy may encourage an understanding of racial difference as the originary cause, rather than promoting a more historically differentiated reading of the racist stereotype as fetish. Furthermore, Bhabha's focus on the ambivalent 'text' of colonial discourse (displacing the importance of economics and politics) is highly problematic (see Parry "Directions"), and here results in a privileging of 'private' psychoanalytic models of explanations (derived from examining the psychic development of the individual) instead of addressing particular historical conditions.

As Anne McClintock points out, the term 'fetish' originated in the eighteenth century as a result of the European encounter with radically different cultures (186). Accordingly, it must be read firstly as originating *on* a socio-historical level and secondly as originating *in* specific socio-historical contradictions, despite its being felt by the individual on a psychic level. This, then, does not mean that psychoanalytic theory has no explanatory purchase, but rather that one must, with McClintock, reject the Freudian narrative of an originary trauma during infancy: "since fetishes involve the displacement of a host of social contradictions onto impassioned objects, they defy reduction to a single originary trauma or the psychopathology of the individual" (202).⁶⁰ Similarly, Fuentes's narrative insists on the historical, political and economic origins of stereotypes and fetishes and on the possibility of their different employments depending on the political and social context (some stereotypes thus *are* "false images" used to justify discriminatory practices).

All three writers - for all their differences - represent the public and the private as inextricably interlinked. Yet, as we have seen, Harris's fictional universe is not drawn with the same attention to historical specificities as that of the other two writers. While Chamoiseau and Fuentes both evoke in detail the realities of the exploitation of labour, of the economic realities that underpin cultural imperialism

⁵⁹ See Anne McClintock. As she argues in *Imperial Leather*, the Freudian scenario itself, which, though supposedly universal, excludes women as well as differences between human beings other than the sexual one between man and woman, must be thrown into question. For it cannot account for the "great variety of the deployments of fetishistic ambiguity", except by assimilating the latter into the logic of castration anxiety, which entails "a great loss of theoretical subtlety and historical complexity" (184).

⁶⁰ For similar reasons, one might criticise Homi Bhabha's emphasis on the "in-between spaces", which is evoked by Méndez-Ramírez in his article on *La frontera* (588), for not paying sufficient attention to the economic and political forces at work in those negotiations, nor on how class status to an extent conditions those negotiations of identity.

and racism, Harris focuses much more broadly on the “conquistatorial legacies”, from which there seems to exist no escape on the material plane as we are caught in his circular logic. This conditions his vision of how to overcome the “crippling habits” of the past, as we shall see. In my next chapter, I will therefore turn to the writers’ most ‘national’ novels to address the way in which they imagine the creation of a future collectivity or, on other words, the way in which they attempt to write the novel of the communal “Nous” as evoked by Glissant.

- Chapter 2 -

‘Towards interior vision’: Nation, Culture and Hybridity

Guyana Quartet (1960-3), *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), *Texaco* (1992)

I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

Derek Walcott, “The Schooner Flight”

[t]he aversion to national and regional constructs and the consequent desire to privilege all thought that apparently promotes hybrid identities and interstitial spaces continue to marginalize questions of historical and geographical particularity in postcolonial thought.

J. Michael Dash, “Postcolonial Thought” (232)

In much critical and postcolonial theory of the 1980s and early 1990s, the nation was defined as a textual, narrative phenomenon that – rather than deriving from a pre-existing essence – produces the illusion of a national essence or content. In the last decade, such a view has increasingly come under fire by materialist critics. Neil Larsen, for instance, warns against simply replacing the “fallacy of essentialism” – associated with cultural nationalism – with the “fallacy of textuality” according to which the nation effectively loses its relation to historical experience and is treated as “severed from all historical determinacy” (Larsen, *Determinations* 85). Neither position, Larsen argues, manages to overcome “the standpoint corresponding to the individual atom of modern bourgeois society” (87), or, in other words, to allow for a conception of the ‘nation’ – or, more broadly, culture – as an outcome of particular historical (class) struggles. Concurrent and in a sense complementary to the conceptualisation of the nation as narrative has been the emphasis on ‘hybrid’ forms of identity that have tended to displace national and regional modes of identity sometimes seen as retrograde. The emphasis on hybridity in much postcolonial theory has served to marginalise non-hybrid forms of identity despite the fact that even a cursory reading of writers from the Expanded Caribbean will suggest that promoting a situated agency does not necessarily mean resorting to ahistoricized, essentialist forms of identity.⁶¹ While theories of hybridity, creolisation

⁶¹ As Neil Lazarus has pointed out, the focus of much postcolonial theory on issues of hybridity obscures the topics that occupy a predominant number of writers from the “Third World”, issues such as class violence and state oppression (“The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism”, 771).

and cultural mixing have played an important role in Caribbean and Latin America throughout the 20th century for obvious historical reasons, ‘hybridity’ – if removed from the specific historical context – risks becoming an empty term that lacks inherent social or political content. ‘Hybrid’ forms of identity can play an important and positive role in national culture if linked to emancipatory class struggles as Chamoiseau’s fiction demonstrates, but they can be – and have been – activated in hegemonic nationalist discourse to obscure the marginalisation of particular ethnic groups, as has happened in post-revolutionary hegemonic Mexican ideology, tellingly represented in Fuentes’s protagonist Artemio Cruz. This brings to mind Benita Parry’s plea for the need to contextualise, as she considers whether or not “revisiting the repositories of memory and cultural survivals in the cause of postcolonial refashioning ha[s] a fixed retrograde valency”: “Such censure”, she argues, “is surely dependent on who is doing the remembering and why” (Parry, “Resistance Theory” 86). Like hybrid identities, non-hybrid ‘nativist’ identities can be linked to a variety of struggles and causes, but it is ‘hybrid’ forms that have internationally come to be seen as the only ‘authentically’ Latin American ones (Miller, *The Rise and Fall* 26).

Wilson Harris has been an early and influential proponent of cross-cultural imaginative spaces in postcolonial theory,⁶² as well as an important theorist of a Caribbean – and perhaps even more broadly, an American – philosophy of history. However, as certain strands of Postcolonial Studies have come under criticism, we also need to re-examine Harris’s fiction, which has been criticised for some time by a number of Caribbeanists for its tendency to de-historicise. Indeed, it seems questionable whether his fiction is able to achieve fully two aspects that he theorises at length in his essays: overcoming the perception of the West Indies as ‘history-less’ and going beyond the atomistic perspective and conception of the individual. My argument is that, in the *Guyana Quartet*, Harris’s tendency to de-historicise and to map his philosophy of the Caribbean psyche onto material reality severely limits his exploration of the nation and the role of particular ethnic groups within it.

⁶²These include, for instance, the widely read and quoted work by Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back*, especially 147-52 (1989); Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), especially “The Commitment to Theory” (19-39) first published in 1989; *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995) includes Harris’s reflections on limbo (378-382) in its section on history; Childs and Williams’s *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory*, published towards the end of the nineties at a time when materialist critics had begun to formulate a critique of certain trends within the field of postcolonial studies, offers a more critical perspective on Harris’s fiction and thought (46-49).

Unlike the *Guyana Quartet*, written before Guyanese independence, Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* was written in an independent Mexico at a time when the "Revolutionary" government's failure to redress social inequality had become apparent to certain left-wing writers. While Fuentes, too, is now predominantly seen as an author interested in the multiple, the indeterminate, the hybrid – and to a certain extent perhaps justifiably so in relation to some of his work from the 70s and 80s – in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* the discourse of *mestizaje* is historically and politically situated, exposed as functioning in the service of the emergent oligarchy and to disguise the national reality of violent class and land struggles, institutionalised racism and the penetration of foreign capital. As Anderson has shown in his study on nationalism, the Creole elites in the Americas were the first to develop a sense of a national 'imagined community' in response to the perceived need to curb lower class revolt, and novels and newspapers provided a privileged space for creating this sense of national and cultural cohesion (22-36).⁶³ Fuentes's post-independence, post-revolutionary novel *Artemio Cruz* functions in the opposite way, seeking to reveal the social disunity, economic fragmentation and severe inequalities of the nation in crisis. National identity incorporated metaphorically in the figure of the hybridized *mestizo* is here indeed represented as a political *narrative* that employs the rhetoric of inclusion concurrently to the practice of exclusion, but this is not, as I want to argue, shown to be necessarily or inevitably so. Instead, a regionally anchored, national Mexican identity emerges on the margins of the text and is related to the struggles of the oppressed classes.

Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, published three decades after Fuentes's and Harris's seminal texts, also explores the positioning of a hybridized form of identity in relation to nationality and 'regionality'. In Chamoiseau's fiction we are offered an understanding of 'national' – or rather, Martinican – culture as an outcome of lower class struggles for land and survival.⁶⁴ As we shall see, a creolized (or hybridized)

⁶³ Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* is another seminal text about the role of the novel in nineteenth century nation-building in Latin America. More broadly, it needs to be added that issues of social, national and regional (dis)integration have of course preoccupied thinkers such as José Martí and Simon Bolívar with increased urgency since the nineteenth century.

⁶⁴ Of course, to talk about "national" identity in the case of Martinique is problematic, since Martinicans are by passport French nationals and, furthermore, those who voted in the 2003 plebiscite (less than 45%) rejected the possibility of the recognition of Martinique as a nation (independence was not even on the table). This might be partly due to the efforts of the local right to play upon fears that this might endanger Martinique's position within the French Republic, a fear that already in the early 80s caused the electoral defeat of Mitterand on the islands (socialism was equated with independence). The paradoxes of Martinican identity are well encapsulated in the surprising fact that shortly after the defeat of the plebiscite, Marie-Jeanne's independent party (the *Mouvement*

Martinican culture is here represented as historically determined and linked to specific emancipatory struggles. In contrast to Mexican *mestizaje*, it functions as a counter-hegemonic discourse against French Republican ideology and in contradistinction to an alienated middle class ideology orientated towards metropolitan culture. For the Créolistes, working class culture – forged in the struggle of survival against the forces of imperialism and capitalism – provides the basis for a future national liberation perceived not as an exclusionary project but as paving the way for regional alliances (*Éloge* 56/116). While clearly promoting a situated mode of identity – both regionally and ‘nationally’ – Chamoiseau’s approach is clearly non-essentialist, inclusive and materialist in nature. While Harris’s fiction tends to resist re-grounding identity in favour of an abstract spiritual metaphysics – which arguably might be seen to work against some of his own theorisations – Chamoiseau integrates the spiritual dimension into the historical, thus achieving a dialectical art that might be seen to bridge the gap that the critic Paget Henry perceived between the Poeticist and Historicist schools of Caribbean writing, and follow in the footsteps of other distinguished writers such as Alejo Carpentier (*El reino de este mundo* 1950) or also Earl Lovelace (*The Dragon Can’t Dance* 1979).⁶⁵ *Texaco*, I argue, thus offers an important intellectual contribution to the field of Postcolonial Studies, which risks being occluded if read exclusively through the lens of hybridity, creolization and indeterminacy. On the other hand, when Harris’s *The Guyana Quartet* is extracted from the political climate of the 1960s in Guyana and the literary context of the realist mainstream of Anglophone writing (something

Indépendantiste Martiniquais) enjoyed a landslide, and an “absolute majority of declared independentists thus governed the regional council” (Miles, “When is a nation a ‘nation’?” 648).

The “very notion of ‘Martinicanhood’ is problematic”, Miles writes, as “it is especially difficult to trace its origins as a functional and integrative island-wide identity” ; [...] “to be *Martiniquais(e)* is a relatively recent notion of group identity, one that remains problematically linked to race” (ibid 635; 637). The link between race and Martinicanhood is one that needs to be understood within the broader historical context: the relatively isolated *béké* class continues to hold most of the land, and despite the fact that during abolition they were the ones to defend the island’s autonomy so as to ensure the perpetuation of slavery as an institution, the *béké* class has since then “long come to accept that their continued prosperity lay with unequivocal linkage to France” (645). William Miles argues that “[m]ore than the popularisation of a local, bottom-up reinterpretation of history and culture, a veritable Martinican nationalism would require dismantling of the French republican mindset (647)”. Chamoiseau – a proponent of Martinican independence – wants to achieve both: the “illusion” of a French identity is precisely what causes the population’s alienation from autochthonous, popular Martinican culture, and in his novel the most ardent proponents of a French Republican mindset are the upper classes, even though its repercussions are felt throughout the social body.

⁶⁵ This gap is perhaps more applicable to the literary history of Anglophone Caribbean writing. One only needs to cite Alejo Carpentier here, who clearly integrated the concerns of both schools in *El reino de este mundo*.

that much postcolonial theory is guilty of), it loses much of its radical nature because of its tendency towards abstraction.⁶⁶

National Fragmentation and the Quest for Spiritual Community in *The Guyana Quartet* (1960-3)⁶⁷

What in my view is remarkable about the West Indian in depth is a sense of subtle links, the series of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities.

[the writer] sets out again and again across a certain territory of primordial but broken recollection in search of a community or species of fiction whose existence he begins to discern

Wilson Harris 1967, (*Tradition* 28; 48)

Harris's first four novels that now make up *The Guyana Quartet* (written after his move to Britain in 1959) in many ways respond to the particular situation of Guyana in the 50s that by the end of the decade "had become a Cold War battleground and the scene of an Anglo-American diplomatic confrontation. The colony had also been transformed into a divisive society, with its politics marred by deep ethnic and racial divisions" (Rabe 48). In British Guiana's first national elections in 1953, the PPP – a then racially inclusive party – won an overwhelming majority, but after just five months in office, imperialist Britain sent in troops and suspended the constitution, apparently spurred by the fear of communism and the radicalism of the PPP. Backed by the U.S., the (British) Conservatives sought to destroy the PPP and resorted to stimulating the racialisation of politics, pitting the country's two main ethnic groups – the Indo-Guyanese and the Afro-Guyanese – against one another,⁶⁸ which, by the

⁶⁶ *The Empire Writes Back* emphasises the central place of Caribbean theorists in debates concerning cross-culturalism and syncretism, but, as may be observed from the vantage point of hindsight, does not go far enough in distinguishing between the position occupied by the Haitian Jacques Stephen Alexis – who emphasises the importance of national concerns that for him are necessarily cross-cultural in the Haitian context and defines "marvellous realism" as a local branch of social realism – and a writer like Harris, whose emphasis increasingly falls on the cross-cultural in *opposition* to the national and who has rejected realism throughout his career.

⁶⁷ *The Guyana Quartet* includes *Palace of the Peacock* (originally published in 1960), *Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962) and *The Secret Ladder* (1963).

⁶⁸ That these issues were rife in the fifties is also attested to by the political writing of another important Guyanese artist, Martin Carter (see the writings selected under the heading "Anti-colonialism and 'Race' in British Guiana" in *Martin Carter: The University of Hunger*). As Gemma Robinson writes in her introduction to Carter's poetry, "Carter was quick to argue for non-cooperation in the face of the Emergency; he protested against US involvement in the colony; he greatly feared the divisive "race" politics that were increasingly defining a Guyanese population descended from both

end of the decade, resulted in the division of the party system along racial lines. In the early sixties, the CIA again funded demonstrations and strikes that led to the outbreak of the 'racial warfare' of 1962-4. The U.S. also actively backed Forbes Burnham (a politician who by the beginning of the 60s did not shy away from "making capital out of racial passions"), despite the fact that "the U.S. intelligence community considered Burnham an opportunist, a thief, and a racist and predicted that Guyana would undergo conflict if Burnham gained power" (Rabe 54; 9). It is thus unsurprising that in much of Harris's fictional and theoretical writing of the sixties, there is a yearning for the wholeness of 'primordial' community that contrasts with the racial and political tensions that debilitated British Guiana/Guyana. Situating his work in the particular context of British Guiana on the eve of independence brings out the radical side of Harris's argument, lost in de-contextualised appropriations. However, even Harris's early work displays certain tendencies that, as I want to argue, fundamentally undermine his own project.

The uneasy relation in Harris's fiction between the material and the spiritual has prompted various debates surrounding the success or failure of a Harrisian dialectics and his emphasis on cross-cultural connections has prompted discussion regarding his treatment of historical, geographical and social specificities.⁶⁹ As Kenneth Ramchand has noted, there is a clear trend in his development as a writer as the earlier Guyana novels are much more strongly rooted in local realities that are seen to provide "a necessary stone and footing" (*Palace* 24), whereas his later novels such as *Jonestown* "the immediate social and political themes merely float" (Ramchand, "Pursuing the *Palace of the Peacock*" 128).⁷⁰ Yet, while *The Guyana Quartet* is perhaps indeed one of his most 'national' texts in the sense that it is most firmly grounded in cultural and geographical particularities, it nevertheless already displays some of the conceptual tendencies that will become even more pronounced in novels such as *Jonestown*. Reading *The Guyana Quartet* in conjunction with his lecture series of 1967, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas"

the African continent and the Indian sub-continent; and he predicted the politics of personality that would eventually govern the Guyanese political arena" (Carter 28).

⁶⁹ Commenting on the relation between the material and the spiritual in Harris's works, a number of critics and writers have formulated a critique of the metaphysical drive towards abstraction at the expense of material, social and historical reality (Poynting, Shaw, Griffith). Critics more sympathetic to a Harrisian vision have, on the other hand, sought to argue that it is successfully dialectical and re-grounds the spiritual in the material (Durrant, Maes-Jelinek).

⁷⁰ Indeed, the editorial arrangement of one of the most widely available collections of his essays – *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* – frustrates an understanding of the evolution of this tendency in Harris's fiction and thought as the essays are arranged in a supposedly thematic, rather than chronological order, fostering the de-historisation of Harrisian paradigms.

will serve to highlight the radical challenges posed by Harris's work, whilst also pinpointing some of the underlying conceptual problems, ranging from his metaphorical use of particular ethnic groups, the coupling of his de-historizing tendencies to colonial narratives, the inability to locate or imagine alternatives on a historical plane and the 'archetypal' conception of the individual that will be explored in more detail in the fourth chapter.

In the lecture series, Harris argues that a "philosophy of history" might be found in the "arts of the imagination", that is, not in so-called "high art", but rather in the myths, folklore, rituals and spiritual beliefs of the Caribbean. The latter would provide a corrective to representations of the Caribbean as "utterly deprived, or gutted by exploitation" (*Unfinished Genesis* 159). An often quoted section from this lecture series discusses the significance of the limbo dance as a site of ritual memorialisation of the physical sufferings endured during the Middle Passage, a passage worth quoting at some length:

Limbo was born, it is said, on the slave ships of the Middle Passage. There was so little space that the slaves contorted themselves into human spiders. Limbo, therefore, as Edward Brathwaite [...] has pointed out is related to Anancy or spider fables. [...] Not only has the journey from the Old World to the new varied with each century and each method of transport but needs to be re-activated in the imagination as a limbo perspective when one dwells on the Middle Passage: *a limbo gateway* between Africa and the Caribbean. In fact here, I feel, we begin to put our finger on something which is close to *the inner universality* of Caribbean man. [...] limbo [...] is *not the total recall of an African past* since that African past in terms of tribal sovereignty or sovereignties was modified or traumatically eclipsed with the Middle Passage [...] Limbo was rather a *renaissance of a new corpus of sensibility* that could translate and accommodate African or other legacies within a new architecture of cultures. [...] a profound art of compensation which seeks to replay a dismemberment of tribes [...] and to invoke at the same time a *curious psychic re-assembly of the parts of the dead god or gods* (my emphasis 157-159).

Limbo, for Harris, is a cultural form that remembers (or re-members) the traumas of the past through the body. Already in the 60s, then, Harris emphasised the way in which the body is inscribed by history and can potentially become a site of memorialisation, something that is for him brought out by Caribbean popular art forms. Popular culture is shaped by history, the outcome of the slaves' and subsequent immigrants' suffering and struggles for survival. At the heart of "New World" limbo – and, more broadly, culture as a whole – lies the displacement of peoples. The cultural perspective offered by the dance necessitates the interrogation of the narration of the past and the nation, disabling an essentialist understanding of culture or the nation, as tribal "sovereignties" were "modified or traumatically eclipsed". While being a typically Caribbean art form, limbo cannot be understood in geographical isolation, always activating an initial moment of displacement. In Harris's theorisation of the dance, limbo is turned into a dialectical art, implying a constant questioning of its own foundations coupled to the necessary re-grounding, a "curious re-assembly of the parts of the dead god or gods". An art that is fundamentally "displaced", then, is by necessity relational (i.e. anti-essentialist and aware of its situatedness in the global order), but anchored in local culture. As he argues, it is through this foundational displacement that West Indian art becomes "universally" relevant, redefining the "universal" as an awareness of one's relational position within the global. In other words, in the lecture series, Harris formulated a strong argument for re-considerations of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Caribbean that have universal – rather than just folkloristic – importance without falling into narrow-minded, exclusivist cultural nationalism.

For Harris, limbo and other creolised cultural manifestations such as Haitian Vodou are resistant cultural practices and repositories of memory based on an underlying syncretic belief system. Before turning to his fiction, however, it is also necessary to contrast his conception of African-derived practices with his descriptions of the role Amerindian peoples are to play in the construction of a regional 'West Indian psyche'. Here, Harris's reading of the colonial myth of Mahanarva is instructive as it informs elements of his philosophy of history and of his conceptualisation of the West Indian psyche. The Mahanarva myth had grown out of tales that related the tribal leader's arrival at the coast in 1810. According to the tales, the new British government in Demerara was tricked by a mere "needy savage" into providing large supplies in return for capturing run-away slaves, since

the latter pretended to be “the king of a mighty tribe” (Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed* 54). In Harris’s twentieth century re-telling of this story that – as he claims – is only a footnote in imperialist versions of history (implying misleadingly that he is offering a counter-history), Mahanarva is described as a shamanistic trickster whose deception is uncovered by a secret scout who realizes that his “ancient command had shrunken to rags” (172). Harris transforms Mahanarva into a larger-than-life archetype that metonymically represents a culture/civilization at the point of extinction. The death of Amerindian civilization is envisaged to precipitate a rebirth of a West Indian consciousness:

When Mahanarva claimed that his fighting forces were intact [...] he was compensating in himself losses his people had endured over centuries. He became the womb of the tribe in certain respects that are analogous to traces of mythology – ancient Greek, Persian, Mithraic as well as Christian – in which stones and rocks become charged with architectural latencies, inner rooms, etc., and therefore give birth to numinous tenants. [...] The shaman therefore stands in a perspective wherein ‘death’ becomes ‘life’ and the diseased warrior-king is translated into half-priest, half-feminine guide into the underworld. And that underworld of the lost Caribs constitutes for us a very significant dimension of elements (animate and inanimate realms of the psyche, realms of subsistence of memory) (172-3).

Harris employs this story to construct an architecture of West Indian consciousness,⁷¹ with Maharnava as the metaphoric “womb” that will gestate the new “West Indian”. Yet, the most significant problem underlying Harris’s use of this myth stems from the fact that far from offering a counter-history, his story is actually based on “bad history”, “on a colonial fiction about the events themselves” (Burnett 57). Mahanarva does not appear to have threatened the Court of Policy, nor to have been discovered a liar. Most importantly for the present argument, however, the myth of Mahanarva as the last survivor of his civilization is unfounded, since the Court of Policy continued their negotiations with him in the following years (as could be established through archival research), suggesting the continued strategic importance of a colonial alliance with the Amerindian tribes (Burnett 57). In its assertion of the

⁷¹ A mythic or spiritual correspondence to José Luis González’s architectural representation of Puerto Rican history in *El País de cuatro pisos*, one might say.

complete decline of indigenous culture, Harris's version is therefore derived from the quite familiar colonialist representations of Amerindian cultures as extinct.⁷² If the story of the last warrior-shaman and the collapse of the empire is a colonial myth that served to legitimate colonial authority and allay fears regarding rebellions, then Harris's imaginative un-digging of the past leads him down the wrong path, the contours of which are laid out by colonialist ideology. It misrepresents the point of crisis, effectively flattening out historical complexity and thus obscuring other aspects that one may have wanted to explore regarding the complex historical relations and alliances between the indigenous peoples, the African slaves, and the British colonialists. While one may assume that Harris intends history here to be read on a metaphorical level, the framing of his theory carries the burden of colonialist mis-representations of history. His reading of the Mahanarva myth and by extension of the dawn of 'West Indian-ness' replicates metaphorically the extinction of the Amerindians whom it seeks to sublimate as the 'host consciousness' of the West Indian psyche.

This may also shed a different light on the passage from Harris's seminal essay *Tradition, the Writer and Society* that has served Bhabha in his formulation of the 'Third Space'.⁷³ In this passage, Harris emphasises the necessity to descend into the "void, wherein, as it were, one may begin to come into confrontation with a spectre of invocation whose freedom to participate in an alien territory and wilderness has become a necessity for one's reason and salvation" (quoted by Bhabha 38). Bhabha's theorisation of the 'in-between' spaces – the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation" (Bhabha 38) – leans on the Harrisian emphasis on cross-cultural spaces and his understanding of the 'void'. While both Harris and Bhabha have highlighted the transculturating impact on, and presence of the 'Other' in, colonial discourse as well as the necessity to break out of the categories constructed by colonialism, Harris's problematic treatment of the Mahanarva myth also points more generally towards potential pitfalls in this line of thinking: an exclusive focus

⁷² One might cite here writers such as von Humboldt, with the difference being that for Harris, Amerindian civilization will "host" West Indian consciousness, rather than being replaced by Euro-imperialism.

Burnett very accurately pinpoints the central problem: while he concedes that "[t]he story of Mahanarva is indeed a story about the need for "spatial re-assembly" and the need to "salvage the muse of authority," [as Harris argues] it is not merely a story *about* those needs. The story itself was an attempt to address those needs. As a myth, it was first and foremost an intervention" (59-60).

⁷³ The "third space" is a disruptive, metaphorical, or "unrepresentable", space "which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 37).

on the ‘hybridized’ forms and locating transculturated spaces in colonial discourse might blind us to exploring the historical intricacies of the class/cultural alliances between different social groups; most importantly, it points to the distortion that may ensue if a Bhabha-ian emphasis on the “*textuality* of colonial history” comes to dominate critical discourse (my emphasis, 38).

Harris’s lecture series, then, is marked by the co-existence of radical challenges to theory and literature and a troubling survival of colonial myths. As aforementioned, *The Guyana Quartet* is characterised by an uneasy yoking of the material and the spiritual/metaphysical, a conjunction that causes the fiction to fall short of the yardstick set by his theoretical formulations regarding the necessity to reconstruct West Indian history from the perspective of popular culture, and to deconstruct notions of the ‘sovereign subject’. *The Guyana Quartet* engages in an investigation of what was to become the independent Guyanese nation-state, raising questions regarding the relation between the developed coastline and the under-developed interior, between the government and its subjects, the subaltern and governmental projects for development, and the relation of the nation to its past – African, Amerindian, European and East Indian. Its scope embraces settings in different geographical zones – the savannahs, the interior, the coastline – and plotlines involving the various different ethnic groups, with the East Indian community being set apart in *The Far Journey of Oudin*. The *Quartet* can thus be said to be ‘national’ in orientation, though not in any exclusivist manner – like limbo, it is aware of its foundations, evokes a regional context, and situates itself in the global order.⁷⁴

The crews in both *Palace of the Peacock* and *The Secret Ladder* may be read as allegories of the multi-racial nation, and their journey into the interior as an exploration of the nation’s past as well the government’s relations to the subaltern groups. Both crews are torn by strife and rebellion, and disagree over the way in

⁷⁴ Robert Carr has offered an excellent analysis of the *Quartet*’s national dimension. In response to Carr’s article, Robert Bennett asserts that the *Quartet* should rather be read as a “post-national” work of art. This seems premature given the fact that Guyana was still a colony of Britain at the time. Harris’s consistent endeavours to deconstruct colonial thought categories coupled to his efforts to root his thought in indigenous and African-derived cultural traditions to counter a Euro-centric worldview seems to justify a denomination as “national”. Bennett’s evaluation seems to be relying on a somewhat organicist notion of the nation that clearly would not be applicable to Harris. The nation-state remains a political reality that it is hard to circumvent, a “necessary stone and footing”, despite its arbitrary boundaries, the diasporic location of many of its (former) subjects, and the social fragmentation characteristic of capitalist development.

which Guyana's past should be approached and what place the 'subaltern' – the Afro-Guyanese population derived from the maroons, the Amerindian 'labour force', and also women – occupy in the national project. As Robert Carr claims, "Harris's agenda in the *Quartet* is a survey of the diverse groups constituting the nation written with an eye to rethinking the world and problems of knowledge and nationhood from the perspective of Guyana's constituencies and terrain" ("The New Man in the Jungle" 136).⁷⁵ *Palace of the Peacock* provides a commentary on the underprivileged position of the Amerindians who are treated as mere labour power by Donne, who embodies the imperialist legacies that shape society on the eve of independence, and the crew's journey is thus also described as involving a process of re-conceptualising the relation between Donne and the folk.⁷⁶ *The Secret Ladder*, on the other hand, explores and highlights the position of the descendents of the maroons within British Guiana; their fears that Fenwick's mission to gauge the water levels might be a prelude to the inundation of their lands for the benefit of the sugar plantations on the coastline owned by East Indians may clearly be read as a commentary on the situation of particular ethnic groups in British Guiana during the early 60s. The social and ethnic divisions of the nation are also clearly illustrated and problematized by the organisation and structure of the *Quartet* as a whole: *The Whole Armour* focuses on impoverished subaltern groups, *The Far Journey of Oudin* on the East Indian community (who, as Poynting has observed, are *not* included in either of the two multi-racial crews of the opening or closing novella (109)). Lastly, the *Quartet* also denounces the fragility of women's position within the nation, incorporating an indictment of the misogynous aspects of the imperialist legacy.⁷⁷

The *Quartet* offers several glimpses of the transcendence of what Harris calls 'biases', 'frames', or 'block functions' (analysed in chapter one), the most sustained of which is offered in *Palace of the Peacock*. Several critics have provided detailed analyses of the journey towards the alteration of consciousness performed in *Palace*

⁷⁵ "The whole crew was one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were" (39).

⁷⁶ Donne: "I have treated the folk badly [...] I am beginning to lose all my imagination save that sometimes I feel I'm involved in the most frightful material slavery. I hate myself sometimes, hate myself for being the most violent taskmaster – I drive myself with no hope of redemption whatsoever and I lash the folk. If they do murder me I've earned it I suppose, and I don't see sometimes how I can escape it unless a different person steps into my shoes and accepts my confounded shadow. [...] there's a ghost of a chance [...] that I can find a different relationship with the folk" (50).

⁷⁷ In *The Whole Armour*, for instance, one of the most sustained plotlines is that of a mother attempting to secure a better life for her son and forced into prostitution in the process; in *The Secret Ladder*, it is the mistreatment of Catalena by her husband that convinces the surveyor – a representative of governmental authority – of the necessity to intervene and to exercise his authority.

of the *Peacock*, which cannot be rehearsed in full here. Harris represents the alteration of consciousness and the dissolution of the bourgeois 'sovereign individual' in a variety of ways: the recurring image of the threshold indicates the impending alteration of consciousness; the device of the double enables the subsequent deconstruction of binaries (Donne/narrator incorporate the duality between material reality and visionary dream); the disappearance of the narrative 'I' as he comes to inhabit the psyche of the conquistador Donne signals the simultaneous inhabiting of the perspective of the conqueror-materialist and the idealist; the eventual merging of Donne – the conquistador – with the psyche of the folk – the conquered – clearly signals a vision of 'community'. The last two chapters of *Palace of the Peacock* offer a glimpse of an inclusive vision incorporated in the "undivided soul and anima" (116) that would counter the perception of the Caribbean as lacking a history of its own through a spiritual regeneration:

One had the intuitive feeling that the savannahs – though empty – were crowded. A metaphysical outline dwelt everywhere filling in blocks where spaces stood and without this one would never have perceived the curious statement of completion and perfection. (111)

The passage here evokes again the concept of the void in which one needs to delve to confront the spectral presences. Its position and function within the *Quartet*, date of publication and its national focus provide the "undivided soul" with a local inflection that is later lost in some of Harris's writings on the cross-cultural womb of the imagination.⁷⁸

The last novella of the *Quartet*, *The Secret Ladder*, while most similar in structure to the first (Fenwick clearly also undergoes a process of transformation), refuses to end on a vision, projecting the alteration of consciousness into the future beyond the scope of the novel as Fenwick dreams that an "inquisition of dead gods and heroes had ended" and finally awakes on the dawn of the seventh day, the day of creation (464). *The Secret Ladder* also adds another historically more specific layer

⁷⁸ In the essay "Profiles of Myth and the New World" published in 1996, for instance, Harris posits the existence of "Voice prior to all voices", suggesting that "the ventriloquism of Spirit" informed the "fluid identity" of pre-Columbian traditions that manifested themselves in their ability to intuit the existence of other cultures (Tudor England and Zimbabwe) in their sculptures and art (*Unfinished Genesis* 201-211). The radical edge of Harris's writing has here given way to a completely de-historized version of cross-culturalism, descending into the realm of nonsense, to put it bluntly. Surprisingly, however, it has been well received by some critics (see Bundy's introduction (ibid 11)).

to the journey performed in *Palace*, as Fenwick – like Harris in his early years – is a government surveyor sent into the country's interior to gauge the water levels for the possible instalment of new irrigation systems.⁷⁹ One might read it as an attempt to re-ground the earlier novel in a dialectical fashion, something indicated most explicitly in the following quote:

Fenwick had named his dinghy *Palace of the Peacock* after the city of God, the city of gold set somewhere in the heart of Brazil and Guyana. He liked to think of all the rivers of Guyana as the curious rungs in a ladder on which one sets one's musing foot again and again, to climb into both the past and the future of the continent of mystery (367).

In the concluding novella, then, the drive towards abstraction seeks to rejoin the exploration of a 'national' identity. The ladder leading to an alteration of consciousness is mapped onto the geographical disposition of Guyana, and thus linked to the explorer's quest to map, and thus produce, a territory.⁸⁰ Yet, while Fenwick's naming of the boat is a clear attempt to materialise the alchemical, spiritual dimension (the colours of the peacock indicate the third stage in alchemical symbolism, the stage of fulfilment (*Unfinished Genesis* 169)), the reference to the "city of God" and "city of gold" and "Palace of the Peacock" also might bring to mind the role colonial myths played in the boundary disputes that would determine the territory of British Guiana. *El Dorado* first entered the colonialist imaginary through Raleigh and achieved geo-political importance through Schomburgk's attempts to reveal its identity as the village of Pirara in the nineteenth century.⁸¹

⁷⁹ As Shaw writes, the "myth that has built up around Harris is that of a writer who ventured into the South American Heartland, experienced a special vision of some sort and returned to tell the world. An aura of the shaman has tended to cling to him, with the majority of critics seemingly inclined to regard him as a writer 'sui generis', visionary in his utterance and quite unlike anything that has hitherto appeared on the literary scene. [...] Harris himself has taken up the banner of aesthetic revolution" (141).

⁸⁰ The image of the ladder or scale is related to "a drama of living consciousness within which one responds not only to the overpowering and salient features of existence [...] but to the essence of life, to the instinctive grains of life which continue striving and working in the imagination for fulfilment" (*Genesis* 144). In *Palace of the Peacock*, at the moment at which Donne is approaching the "undivided soul and anima in the universe" (116), he also has to climb "hazardous ladders against the universal walls" of the waterfall to leave behind "conquistadorial biases" that he so obviously incarnates.

⁸¹ "As a result of the work of Humboldt and Schomburgk, Pirara possessed mythic stature in British Imperial geography and imagination. These explorers' work attached to the village a symbolism that placed it at the heart of British Guiana at least, and possibly of British Imperialism as well: Pirara was

While it is certainly positive to value and incorporate myths of different social and cultural provenance to formulate an inclusive ‘national’ imaginary, the simple naming of the boat – the vehicle that is to drive and contain Fenwick’s inquest – alludes to the contradictions that underlie Harris’s fiction through its allusions to the vanished empire. For Harris, the myth of *El Dorado* at once evokes the material greed driving the exploitation of the Americas, as well as – if revisited today – the possibility of rescuing an originary idealism (*Unfinished Genesis* 144), but again one might question here the feasibility of formulating alternative histories and imaginaries out of the fictions that once drove imperial acquisitions.

Furthermore, the *Quartet*’s historical resonances and national concerns risk turning into mere metaphors for a metaphysical quest. While it is no longer the nation that is naturalised through the descriptions of the land and the populace, it is the metaphysical quest narrative (leading to a West Indian psyche, to a supposedly pre-existing primordial community made of nebulous links) that is naturalised through a similar process. This manifests itself most clearly in the representation of different ethnic groups and their relation to the nation: they tend to incorporate certain spiritual or anti-spiritual tendencies, a somewhat reductive view of reality that limits our ability to imagine alternative possibilities on a historical plane, as well as potentially cementing ‘racial’ stereotypes. As Jeremy Poynting has observed, “there are times when the Indian peasant characters lose the rich concrete particularity of the individual and become emblematic figures, exemplary of particular spiritual tendencies” (106/7); the East Indians in *The Far Journey of Oudin* tend to represent a shallow materialism, incorporated most noticeably in Ram who contrasts with the “raceless” Oudin. Poynting further objects to the metaphoric use of the divide between inland and the coastline, in which the former is associated with the unexplored and rich past (of the maroons for instance) and the latter with the capitalist spirit: “there are other ways in which the East Indian enterprise of rice can be viewed; for though it carried its own class contradictions, the rice industry was the first genuinely autonomous, non-metropolitan economic enterprise in Guyana, a very significant liberation of a people’s productive capacities (112).” Similarly, one needs to object to the representation of the Amerindians: in *Palace of the Peacock*, Mariella, who kills Donne in chapter one, becomes synonymous to the land itself as the narrative progresses (in a rather unreflective employment of the colonialist

El Dorado; El Dorado was Raleigh’s destination; Raleigh was the founder of the British Empire” (Burnett 48).

representational conflation of woman and land in the narratives of conquest (*Palace* 42)), and is later replaced by a nameless Amerindian woman for whom “no show of malice, enmity, and overt desire to overcome oppression and evil mattered any longer” (a formulation that smacks of representational quietism (*Palace* 61)). Eventually, she is transformed into the “nameless unflinching folk” (110). Harris is thus denying an identitarian position to the Amerindian groups, since, as in his lecture series, the ‘native’ element is transformed into the ‘host’ for the new consciousness, taking advantage of the relative ‘absence’ of the Amerindians that renders them ‘less assertive’ as a cultural group in the Harrisian scheme and thus closer to the desired ‘primordial’ condition (Poynting 109). Another central paradox thus becomes apparent: while seemingly seeking to formulate a locally rooted, national and regional identity and imaginary rooted in popular culture, there is a contrasting tendency that seeks to dissolve identitarian stances that are seen as retrograde and reactionary.

Intervening in the ongoing debate on the success or failure of Harrisian dialectics, Durrant argues that the “shift from the material to the immaterial is precisely not a movement towards abstraction; it is instead a materialization of that which has only just begun to matter, to make an impact on the consciousness/conscience of the living: not the tribe itself but its absence” (66). Such an argument is unconvincing since the complete absence of the ‘folk’ has not just begun to matter – in fact it mattered greatly in, and was invented by, colonial discourse, as we have seen. It only compounds the problem of a supposed West Indian ‘historylessness’ if the critic reads the fiction’s drive towards the abstract as a re-grounding in the material, since it reifies Harris’s naturalization of his philosophy. Harris’s use of colonial narratives that he challenges on a spiritual level – rather than both the material and the spiritual – has prompted severe criticism from Caribbeanists: Griffith, for instance, argues that Harris offers an “unashamedly romanticised vision of the folk” that “forever entraps the “folk” in the textuality of their own innocence and primitiveness” (61). Perhaps one could say that they are not so much entrapped in their own “textuality” – since Harris’s proclaimed aesthetic creed is at odds with a merely self-referential postmodernist aesthetic – but rather in a state of metaphysical archotyping (the ‘archetypal’ or ‘metaphysical fallacy’, as one might term it).

While Harris's use of African-derived practices and belief systems is less contentious than his use of Amerindian ones, its de-historizing tendencies somewhat undermine his radical transformative intentions. African-derived belief systems, such as Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean, Vodou in Haiti, Santería in the Hispanophone Caribbean emphasise the connection between the world of the living and the dead ancestors. While there are obviously regional and local differences between the different forms of African-derived practices,⁸² in Harris's fiction this is translated into a more generalised perspective on reality from the position of the shamanistic medium. Much of his fiction thus figures dead protagonists who come back to 'life' to seek their redemption that is to be found in the dissolution of their unified autonomous self (constructed through an opposition to nature and the 'Other' and 'framed' by the imperialist legacies) and a merging with the "universal unconscious" or "the stirring spirit of an ancient compassion" (206). As all four novellas narrate a quest for metaphysical transcendence, Harris employs these cultural beliefs and practices to indicate the characters' progression towards the alteration of consciousness. For instance, at the start of *The Far Journey of Oudin* – the *Indo-Guyanese* novella – we see the world from the perspective of the recently deceased Oudin: "The shape of a cow loomed on the opposite bank, so enormous it blotted out the lights and invisible windows of the far scattered settlements" (123). The description evokes the Obeah belief in the apparitions of spirits in the shape of animals in the sky, normally feared as harbingers of evil (Fernández Olmos 141). While for the greedy character Rajah later in the novel, a similar spirit apparition bodes disaster and he is struck dead by lightning shortly afterwards, for Oudin – who has managed to break out of the 'frame' of slavery – it seems to announce a "new freedom" (123).⁸³ In the episode involving Rajah, a causal connection is made explicit by the character himself – indicating perhaps the oppositional relation of 'rational', materialist man to the spiritual – whereas in the earlier occurrence, the

⁸² Central to the practice of Obeah is the relationship between humans and spirits (yet, these spirits are not the tutelary spirit of Santería and Vodou). Ghosts that can be called as helpers in the process of revealing mysteries (Fernández Olmos 131-142). Obeah in Guyana has syncretised with Hindu mysticism, a fact reflected in the syncretic employment of myths of different provenance in Harris's fiction.

⁸³ In *Ti Jean L'Horizon* (1979) by Simone Schwarz-Bart, the cow-shaped Obeah spirit is also used as a narrative device but retains its negative connotations, as a giant cow swallows the world symbolizing the "night" of slavery and imperialism, the effects of which are shown to disable the characters from rooting themselves in the local. The movement of Schwarz-Bart's novel is thus in a sense the reverse of Harris's since it seeks a reconnection with the material and cultural reality of the island. The imperial 'frames' that Harris seeks to overcome are here not equated with the material/social reality of the island, but rather with a dangerous alienation from it.

spiritual dimension is represented as suffusing the landscape and is narrated in free indirect style. However, it is curious that Oudin, when looking across the land, is described as “possess[ing] it all now as one would a matchbox world” (124), a phrasing that suggests the *absorption* of the world into the psyche now at a spiritual distance, rather than a relation of reciprocity, something that I would like to comment on in more detail in chapter four in relation to Harris’s use of archetypes.

In *Palace of the Peacock*, too, the (dead) members of the crew have to re-enact an earlier journey during which all of them had been drowned. During their journey, Vigilance’s individual spiritual progression towards redemption is indicated through his visions of, and metaphoric transformation into, a spider, which only the Arawak woman shares (an image related of course to the African-derived Caribbean Anancy tales, as well as to limbo). The two are outside of the “childish repetitive boat and prison of life”, at an “enormous spiritual distance” to the “crust and shell he had once thought he inhabited” (83). In the aforementioned episode involving Rajah, the spider image – here employed in a cross-cultural metaphoric simile with an “Indian fetish with many sprouting hands – re-emerges in a different context as part of the description of his new tractor: “It was an amazing bladed contrivance, looking like a spider and a butterfly rolled into one, or like an Indian fetish with many sprouting hands, and Rajah felt that here he had a greater labour-saving device than any other” (188). The metaphoric references to the sacred suggest that the new technology possesses positive potential, but Rajah is unable to pick up on it. When he decides to trade his daughter as a wife for Ram in return for more machinery to secure more profit, it is clear that he has forfeited his spiritual potential and he dies soon after. In all of these instances, the spiritual dimension is only very loosely connected to the social and historical context. It seems to suggest a regional, mythic or spiritual worldview that is only accessible to an ‘altered consciousness’. Harris’s use of these different cultural forms, practices and belief systems – seemingly in support of asserting a situated agency, a Caribbean or more broadly, American identity – again become part of a quest to dissolve identitarian ‘biases’ (a tendency countered or mitigated in *Guyana Quartet* by the work’s situated-ness in Guyana).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ A brief comparison with Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* (1950) is here instructive. Like practitioners of Obeah and Vodou throughout the Caribbean, Mackandal employs poison to sabotage the plantations system. He is feared by the slave-owners and revered by his peers. During the episode narrating his death – when he is burned at the stake – Carpentier masterfully brings into contact two clashing sets of ideologies. While the slaves believe that Mackandal has transformed himself into an animal and escaped the “justice” meted out by the slaveholders – and, Michael Bell has observed, he

The Harrisian vision tends to disconnect emancipatory cultural, spiritual practices – that are social, as well – from the historical and cultural context to map them onto a different quest that is ‘cross-cultural’ and oriented towards the spiritual. The two Amerindian characters – Vigilance and the Arawak woman – are thus seen as limbo-spiders but this does not feed back into an assertion of the historical struggle for indigenous rights within the novel, but merely seems to indicate their closer position to the desired primordial community; Oudin’s death that liberated him from ‘victimhood’ distantly recalls the suicides of those who sought to oppose their enslavement, but it is de-radicalised and de-socialised as the freedom is achieved through an “acceptance of his immateriality” – a quietist rather than a revolutionary gesture (Poynting 124).

The Death of the National Project?: Nation, class and race in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962)

“I do believe very deeply in historical specificity.”

Carlos Fuentes 1962 (qtd by V.M. Durán 42)

Around approximately the same time as Harris, Fuentes was writing what was to become his most acclaimed work of fiction and one of the first boom novels: *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, a novel that in many ways responds to the political forces unleashed in the Hispanic Caribbean during the middle of the twentieth century. Read in this context, the work’s regional dimension is its most striking aspect: parts of it were written in Cuba just after the Revolution, as the author emphasises by adding the date and place after the main body of the text; “La Habana, mayo de 1960. México, diciembre de 1961” (187).⁸⁵ The ‘Cuban perspective’ clearly shapes

has indeed escaped annihilation as his death has transformed him into a myth that survives the physical death of the individual – the slave-owners believe that they are witnessing a demonstration of the slaves’ supposed lack of human feelings thus confirming the racist beliefs with which they justify the system of oppression (*Literature, Modernism and Myth* 186). In Carpentier’s fictional treatment of African-derived creolized belief systems, the latter feeds directly back into the black population’s struggle against enslavement, nourishing their hope and courage.

⁸⁵ Fuentes has consistently linked the Cuban Revolution to its Mexican “precursor”: “Mexico has been the only country in Latin America, except Cuba (which has made another type of revolution), that has had a revolution capable of destroying the feudal structure, which is the great historical backwash in all Latin American countries. Mexico really destroyed the land-tenure system of feudalism; it destroyed the caste army; it expropriated land holdings; it expropriated oil and all these things – but

the vision offered by the work as a whole, adding a utopian dimension that links moments of lost opportunities in the past, such as the original idealism of the Mexican revolutionaries or that of the next generation during the Spanish Civil War, to the contemporary promise of social justice incorporated by the Cuban Revolution.⁸⁶ To put it simply, the ‘Cuban perspective’ highlights two pressing interrelated issues that feature prominently in the novel: class struggle and racial/class oppression. While denouncing the continued exclusion of the indigenous *campesino* sectors of society, *Artemio Cruz* is also the first major contemporary Mexican novel to feature “[un] gran personaje mulato” (Giacoman 12), a fact that firmly integrates the Caribbean regions of Mexico and Afro-Mexicans into the novel’s examination of the national project.⁸⁷

The novel presents the reader with a Mexican version of the rags-to-riches story, in which the protagonist is *not* represented as making his way to the top through honest work as in the all-too-familiar Anglo-American version shaped by a Protestant work ethic, but, more cynically – and perhaps more honestly – through deals with the winning political party in the wake of the Mexican Revolution and the ensuing political power struggles, opportunist business deals with foreign (US) investors that deprive the indigenous lower classes of their lands by abusing the new agrarian legislation, deals with the old oligarchy that betray the ideals of reform, abuses of the ‘democratic’ system through political corruption and media misrepresentation. Structurally, the novel is narrated in three voices, *yo*, *tú* and *él*: in the third person narrative, the novel shifts into historical realist mode, narrating his social ascent as part of the newly emerging oligarchy; in the first person, it shifts to the present and a ‘modernist’ mode that represents the fragmentation of the individual (here a result of his moral choices, rather than an ontological condition as in the ‘central’ high modernist texts); in the second person – the voice of conscience

for the purpose of creating a middle-class and bourgeoisie within a capitalist structure” (Fuentes, quoted in *Homenaje*, ed. by Giacoman 215).

⁸⁶ Van Delden has very convincingly illustrated the workings of this utopian dimension and its reliance on the plot of romance (*Carlos Fuentes* 52-60). Similarly, in a survey of the boom novel, John King writes in relation to *Artemio Cruz*: “The seemingly deterministic structure [...] cannot mask a great optimism in human potential, as the narrative reveals at certain moments when describing episodes in the Mexican Revolution and in the Spanish Civil War. While these two projects were thwarted, the novel seems to argue, what greater chances do we have in the sixties, once we have unmasked and revealed the old order of men like Artemio Cruz.” (“The Boom of the Latin American Novel” 72).

⁸⁷ Interestingly, this simultaneously links Fuentes to writers from the US American South, notably Faulkner who exerted a great influence over the Boom writers and whom Fuentes sees as “even more Latin American than most Latin Americans.” “[T]he South is in a way Latin American”, he believes (see Interview with John King, 138-140).

or reflection – the novel shifts into the future tense while narrating past events in an attempt to break historical determinism. The novel opens on Artemio's deathbed in 1959 with the protagonist's internal narration of his physical disintegration and loss of control of his bodily functions that mirrors his ethical and spiritual disintegration alluded to in little un-contextualised fragments throughout the passage:

Cierro otra vez los ojos y pido, pido que mi rostro y mi cuerpo me sean devueltos. [...] Catalina me roza la mano con la suya. Qué inútil caricia. No la veo bien, pero trato de fijar mi mirada en la suya. La retengo. Tomo su mano helada.

-*Esa mañana lo esperaba con alegría. Cruzamos el río a caballo.*

-¿Qué dices? No hables. No te canses. No te entiendo. (my emphasis, 4-5)⁸⁸

As the reader will eventually find out through flashbacks throughout the course of the novel, these references stand for missed opportunities in the past to build a more humanitarian future (in this case, the reference alludes to his son and therewith the idealist, socialist option that Artemio himself had rejected); while the opening is thus not dissimilar to Samuel Beckett's *Malone meurt* (1951), that similarity is soon dispelled – even within the opening paragraphs themselves – as the political and ethical dimension is super-imposed onto the ontological-existential one. As the opening section progresses and moves into the second person perspective, it openly addresses Artemio's ethical and moral bankruptcy, referring to the “funcionarios a los que has comprado” (6) and mentioning his hold over the newspapers. If re-arranged chronologically, the narrative of his life as it unfolds throughout the novel

⁸⁸ The deathbed scenario may be read as a meta-textual gesture to the “first Latin American novel” - Fernández de Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816). Written just prior to Mexican Independence, Fernández de Lizardi's work is a picaresque novel in which a reformed protagonist (Periquillo) evokes his life of dissimulation from his deathbed, a situation replicated in modernist form in *Artemio Cruz*. In a recent re-examination of Fernández de Lizardi's canonical text, Marzena Grzegorzczuk concentrates on the implied reader through whom the novel seeks to produce an ideal “model citizen”, envisioned as sedentary and reflective. Grzegorzczuk argues that the latter was envisioned in order to replace the criticized undisciplined subject embodied by Periquillo, an anti-modern hero who generates a need for what he lacks: interiority, privacy and “implacement” in civil society (*Private Topographies* 23-46). Yet, if Periquillo did not “fit” into society, Artemio “fits” disturbingly well. Like Periquillo's momentary attempts to settle into a particular social space, his “implacement” relies on dissimulation and opportunism and, like Periquillo, he is characterised by the lack of a coherent social and political identity and ethical integrity. If, as Grzegorzczuk argues, *El Periquillo Sarniento* seeks to evoke the need for new types of post-colonial subjectivity for a new national era, *Artemio Cruz*, through an equally negatively coded protagonist, evokes the need for the reconstruction of an ethical civil subject and an inclusive nation based on the reconstruction of those voices and histories actively pushed to the limits of the text by Artemio.

presents us with the moments when Artemio had made choices that would eventually forestall the possibility of a more democratic and egalitarian future (and result in his moral and physical disintegration), answering the memorable question that Vargas Llosa was to pose nine years later in relation to Peru in *Conversación en la Catedral*: “when did [México] fuck itself up?” Most interesting for the current context is that Artemio – an obvious allegory for the ‘nation’ in its official version⁸⁹ – might also be read as an allegory for the discourse of *mestizaje*: Artemio Cruz is metaphorically linked to both the Aztec and the Spanish past, to both Quetzalcoatl and Cortés, as the ultimate *mestizo* figure, as has been documented by the critics: “Artemio Cruz is developed in terms both of Hernán Cortés, to indicate the continuing influence that the *conquistador* wields in Mexican society, and an Aztec emperor – a modern version of Moctezuma or even the Aztec God Huitzilopochtli, as Cruz relentlessly demands blood sacrifice in order to renew himself” (Gyuorko 66). Like that of Cortés, Artemio’s ‘journey’ begins in Veracruz; both Cortés and Artemio commit (and, in the case of the latter, is born of) rape; Cortés defeats Montezuma, Artemio defeats don Gamliel (representative of the old landed wealth) (Boldy 80). While Artemio’s son Lorenzo is associated with the God Quetzalcoatl’s positive traits, Artemio incorporates the negative ones, such as vice, lust and shame (Fiddian 114). Furthermore, as the offspring of a *mulata* woman who had been raped by a white landowner, Artemio also incorporates the archetypal (*mestizo*) Mexican –as *hijo de la chingada* – so memorably invoked by Octavio Paz in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950). What this section will examine, then, is how, as an allegory for the ideology of *mestizaje* and the discourses surrounding *lo mexicano*, Artemio reveals the politico-discursive uses as well as exclusions of such an ideology.

Read in relation to Harris’s *Quartet*, one may note that *Artemio Cruz* is also concerned with national fragmentation (reflected on a formal and thematic level).⁹⁰ However, as we shall see, it problematizes the emphasis on cross-culturality and

⁸⁹ “Artemio Cruz. Así se llamaba, entonces, el nuevo mundo surgido de la guerra civil” (27).

⁹⁰ Fuentes links the fragmentation of the narrative and its protagonist to the economic and social fragmentation of post-Revolutionary Mexico (“Discurso inaugural” 18). The critic Clark D’Lugo argues that the fragmented novel form has come to dominate contemporary Mexican literature precisely because it is able to reflect so accurately the failure of the integrationist national project. Mexico, he reminds us, continues to be “a fragmented society, as so graphically demonstrated by the 1994 New Year’s rebellion in Chiapas by the Ejército Zapatista de la Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army), named for the one revolutionary leader truly committed to land reform, Emiliano Zapata, and the June, 1995, massacre of workers near Aguas Blancas in the state of Guerrero, another area known for its poverty and violence” (2).

hybridity that have become part of the dominant ideology of *mestizaje*, an ideology that has come to obscure the continuation of racial and class oppression. Yet, before turning to how Artemio problematizes the ideology of *mestizaje*, we need to turn to the issue of *mis*-representation (both on a political and an epistemological level), which is so prominent within the novel. That the grounding of national(ist) ideology in an indigenous culture and an emphasis on its essential hybridity does not necessarily translate into egalitarian economic structures is amply demonstrated by Mexican history: the 1950s, for instance, were marked by the fall of real wages until the middle of the decade; legal and institutional changes and a dramatic increase in foreign investment altered social relations in production; in the countryside “agribusiness and increasing proletarianization shifted the balance of power from reform (ejidal) sector to the private sector” (Carr, *Marxism and Communism* 187); and increasingly, the political elite came to believe that the land reforms had “gone too far” (Hart 14). For the Mexican Left, the fifties were a difficult period marked by bitter divisions between the PCM and the POCM, police repression and the ‘purging’ of leftist workers from private and state industry and unions had been weakened by the crushing of their autonomy. However, from 1957, worker mobilization (with the support of the Communist parties) challenged the status quo of labour state relations (Carr 188). The years 1958-9, in particular, constituted an important moment in the history of Mexican labour unionism: militants like Demetrio Vallejo (mentioned by name in the novel) led the railworkers’ strike that managed to secure the union’s independence from the government, but the strike was brutally suppressed by the government and demonised as a Soviet plot (Carr 203-7).

In the Fuentes novel, Artemio Cruz’s life choices reflect this conservative backlash. In particular, his flashbacks and the tape-recorded conversations Padilla plays back to him on his deathbed offer a blueprint for ‘effective’ strike-breaking: he orders his allies in the US to stir up their press against the railroad workers – “los ferrocarrileros comunistas” – and to put pressure on the Mexican government (since, after all, it is in their interest to maintain “un clima favorable para la inversión”(69)); as events unfold, he ‘advises’ the Mexican Undersecretary (threatening to withdraw his and his associates’ capital from Mexico) to declare the strike as non-existent, send in the troops and throw the leaders into jail (83); the order is given that any acts of police repression are not to be mentioned in the newspapers owned by Cruz and any independent workers’ newspapers are to be shut down (50).

As an easily recognisable allegory for the post-revolutionary nation and nationalist inclusive rhetoric, Artemio's life may thus indeed be read as a map of the social and national body, but as one that becomes increasingly exclusive and deliberately *mis*-representative, powerfully exposing the conditions for its existence: political and economic power and control of the means of representation.⁹¹ As we have seen above, one of the most important sources of power is the representational space offered by the newspapers. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out in his study on nationalism, the newspaper, like the novel, was closely linked to the emergence of the nation since it is able to create a cohesive image (22-36). However, for Fuentes in the 60s, the difference between novelistic representation and journalistic discourse is that the latter was dominated by right-wing and mercantile interests.⁹² In *Artemio Cruz*, those who control the image of the nation as offered by the newspaper are shown to wield an immense political power. Referring to the members of the new ruling classes attending his New Year's party, Artemio Cruz asserts that he can "destruirlos o halagarlos con una mención en el periódico" (154).⁹³ The representation of the nation is shown to be edited to suit the interests of the ruling class: left resistance movements, strikes, are represented as "infiltración ajena a las esencias de la Revolución Mexicana" (32) (that is represented as very different to the Cuban Revolution's attack on private property), and part of "la conjura roja" and anti-democratic (32; also 121). Capitalist interests are hidden under the cloak of anti-Communist rhetoric, employed to deprive left movements of their history.⁹⁴

Of course, the issue of who is controlling the means of representing the 'nation' is also closely linked to the question of political representation. The current

⁹¹ In 1978, Fuentes stated: "Nuestro instrumento son las palabras, y las palabras, como el aire, pertenecen a todos o no pertenecen a nadie. No hay poder político sin apoyo verbal. La democracia puede ser medida por la latitud del poder verbal de los ciudadanos frente al poder verbal de los gobernantes" ("Discurso inaugural" 13).

⁹² "In other more socially and culturally developed countries it is possible that the writer may devote himself strictly to his creative work. In our countries, however, this is very difficult. The creative writer feels an obligation, a responsibility to wield a double sword: the literary and the political. He feels he has to give voice to the voiceless. Our countries generally do not have labour unions; the voiceless do not have political parties. The situation of the newspapers in Latin America, as you know, is deplorable. They are rightist newspapers controlled by foreign influences, by mercantile influences. They do not give a voice to the people, so the creative writer in Latin America feels the urge and responsibility to speak not only for himself as a creative writer, but for millions who do not have a voice in his country"; 10 August 1962 (quoted by V.M. Durán 42-43).

⁹³ The close relation of news and state power in Mexico has also been observed by Ángel Rama in *La ciudad letrada*.

⁹⁴ The railroad workers managed to successfully gain independence from state control under the leadership of Demetrio Vallejo in 1959. In response, the Mexican government resorted to force: Vallejo was imprisoned, the local union's offices were occupied, and nine thousand workers were dismissed.

ruling class is memorably captured and satirized in the description of the New Year's party at Artemio's Coyoacán residence, during which they refer to their alliances with international capital, their holidays in Acapulco, and their opposition to giving "esta bola de indios" the vote (156), a comment that points to the actual marginalisation of indigenous groups that contrasts with nationalist rhetoric. In a similar vein, at another point in the novel, Artemio orders the repression of a demonstration by the Indians against the exploitation of *ejido* lands (155-6). Money and a leisurely lifestyle for the few are thus clearly dependent on the exclusion of the masses from access to the space of representation.

Furthermore, the characters are also shown to *mis*-represent deliberately their own past – even to themselves – to make it more palatable. The most obvious and most commented on instance is the 'romance' during the Revolution between Artemio and Regina, which the latter makes up in order to cover up the rape on which their relation is actually based. While her beautiful lie enables the survival of a fairytale romance (until Regina is eventually hanged by the opposing Revolutionary faction), it also, as Currie Thompson points out, forestalls the possibility of forgiveness as the past is merely repressed (202). Given that the genre of the romance is the traditional genre for depicting and constructing a sense of a national identity through a reconciliation of ethnic and class divisions in a narrative evolving around love interest (see Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions*), this misrepresentation may be read as a fictionalised version of Walter Benjamin's well-known statement that each document of civilisation is always also a document of barbarity. Yet, while *Artemio Cruz* thus deconstructs the traditional plot of the romance, van Delden has observed that the novel still relies on it as seen in the episode narrating the romance of Artemio's son Lorenzo (who, unlike Artemio, fights and dies for his beliefs) and Dolores during the Spanish Civil War (*Carlos Fuentes* 59). In other words, the novel does not discard the possibility of national/class/ethnic reconciliation, nor the possibility of representing it through the traditional means of the romance.

In line with the postmodernist consensus dominating literary debates, Julio Ortega argues that the novel formulates an essential distrust of representation: "Si la forma del lenguaje da cuenta del sentido histórico, la historia, al enunciarse, miente. Esta inhabilidad para decir toda la verdad implica la indistinción (histórica) entre lo cierto y lo falso, entre la certidumbre y la estafa" (201). However, this distrust is

arguably more his own than the novel's, as *Artemio Cruz* carefully distinguishes between the *possibility* of adequate representation (both on an epistemological and a political level) and the reality of ideologically motivated *mis*-representation. The narrative of Artemio's life in fact marks the failure of an inclusive national project, as a result of which the image of the nation is distorted to suit the interests of the ruling class.⁹⁵

In order to examine more specifically *Artemio Cruz*'s critique of the *mestizo* as a symbol of the post-colonial state, we need to briefly situate the ideology of *mestizaje* in its broader intellectual and historical context. In Latin American culture, there is a long history of theories and ideologies that evoke the process of cultural and racial mixing as a potential method for national integration and cultural identification. The ideology of *mestizaje* has had a particularly strong impact on Latin American writers and politicians in the twentieth century. In Mexico, it blossomed during the Revolution, as it became synonymous with the representation of the nation. Vasconcelos – the most famous Mexican proponent of *mestizaje* – sought to counter theories of US Darwinists who declared racial mixing as degenerative, a pseudo-science responding to the need to justify imperial domination. *La raza cósmica* (1925) was designed to be regionally specific, as well as situating itself in the global context and in opposition to US imperialism. It offered a utopian vision of the future in which the Latin American 'cosmic race' would solve current racial tensions. Vasconcelos's theory uncomfortably yoked material and biological processes to a metaphysical quest for wholeness, while not breaking out of the category of 'race' as such: "[the continent's] predestination obeys the design of constituting the cradle of a fifth race into which all nations will fuse with each other [...] unity will be consummated there by the triumph of fecund love and the improvement of all human races" (18). Yet, despite its inclusive thrust, it perpetuates negative racist stereotypes, as Vasconcelos posits that the black and the Indian elements will slowly cede according to the dictates of a "selection of taste": "The Indian, by grafting onto the related race, would take a jump of millions of years [...], and in a few decades of aesthetic eugenics, the Black may disappear, together with

⁹⁵ "With him," Stephen Boldy writes, "the Revolution has become mired in big business deals with foreign capital, institutional cynicism" (75). One might here also mention that as a critique of the Revolution, the novel treads the same ground as Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo*, serialized over four decades earlier (1915).

the types that a free instinct of beauty may go on signalling as fundamentally recessive and undeserving” (32).⁹⁶

In Mexico, *mestizaje* became the official, hegemonic ideology after the Revolution: it was propagated during the 1920s and 30s through state-sponsored culture and consolidated in the 40s and 50s. This process went hand in hand with an emphasis on indigenous culture – mainstream *indigenismo* and its more radical form *Indianism* (the former stressing the necessity to integrate ‘the Indian’ without violating his/her culture, the latter emphasising the superiority of the Indian in a reverse form of racism and positing the necessity for autonomous development rather than integration).⁹⁷ It needs to be stressed that during the Revolution there was no such thing as a self-conscious ‘Indian’ movement (with the exception of the Yaqui Indian rebellion in the northwest), and ‘Indian’ grievances were expressed in terms of class rather than race (even though the indigenous population *was* doubly oppressed in terms of class and race, but the latter category was externally imposed). “Post-revolutionary indigenismo”, Alan Knight writes, ‘represented yet another non-Indian formulation of the “Indian problem”’ (77). Intellectuals such as Vasconcelos sponsored the *indigenismo* movement in the 1920s, and a department of Indian affairs was established in Chiapas in 1936. This valorisation of the indigenous elements of culture and the celebration of the *mestizo* character of the contemporary nation was concurrent with the elimination of “race” from the national census after Independence,⁹⁸ and the exclusion of black Mexicans and other ethnic minorities from official history.

In the 1940s and 50s, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán sought to incite interest in Afro-Mexican cultural heritage and he published the first edition of *La población negra de México* in 1946. However, despite the book’s immediate success, it failed

⁹⁶ In contrast, the concept of *mestizaje* and the related *mulatez* have been invoked by other Latin American intellectuals such as Nicolás Guillén to advocate a revalorisation of the African elements of culture and to provide a more inclusive alternative to Afro-centric Négritude movements that flourished in the Caribbean and the States.

⁹⁷ “The mestizo thus became the ideological symbol of the new regime. *Indigenismo* fitted well within this vision, since the very aim of the *indigenistas* was [...] to integrate the Indians, in other words, to “mestizo-ise” them. Or, rather, as the more thoughtful *indigenistas* put it, the aim was to mestizo-ise the Indians and, at the same time, to Indianize the mestizos, to create a national synthesis on the basis of reciprocal contributions” (Knight 86). Concurrent with the obliteration of Afro-Mexicans and the nationalist emphasis on the Indian, there was also a growth in Sinophobia culminating in mass expulsions in 1931. Chinese immigration had been encouraged by the regime of Porfirio Díaz, and Sinophobia thus went hand in hand with revolutionary *indigenismo* (see Knight).

⁹⁸ In 1976, a historian writes: “No census seeking racial information was permitted until 1921, and there have been none since, although between 1930 and 1940, matrimonial license forms did stipulate that the applicant indicate his or her race” (Rout 280). In 1991, the government lent its support to *Nuestra Tercera Raíz*, a project aimed at uncovering Afro-Mexican cultural heritage (Appiah 1298).

to stimulate further interest in the study of the historical role of Blacks in Mexico. In his prologue to the second edition to his book in 1972, Aguirre Beltrán writes that “México sigue negándose a reconocer la importancia de la contribución Africana” (11), a statement confirmed also by the historian Rout four years later, writing that the “recognition of the nation’s African background is somehow totally ignored” (282)). Ethnic minorities are assimilated into the dominant ideology that emphasises the mixing of the European conquistadores and the indigenous population, and that invokes the indigenous past as its mythical foundation.⁹⁹ It is here necessary to sketch briefly the still neglected history of African descendents in Mexico, since they have played a significant role in post-Conquest history. In today’s Mexico estimates regarding the number of Afro-Mexicans classified as such vary between 0.5 and 5% of the overall population, although the number of Mexicans with African ancestry is presumably much larger (Appiah 1298). Already in the first sixty years after the fall of Tenochtitlán, between 30,000 and 40,000 black (mostly male) slaves were transported to Mexico, predominantly directly from Africa (1293). The original slave labour force in Mexico was mainly Amerindian, but by the late fifteen hundreds, their numbers had been decimated to such an extent by disease and ill-treatment that the Spanish increasingly argued in favour of the importation of the supposedly more ‘resistant’ African slaves. The Mexican black slave trade reached its peak between 1580 and 1640, “when imports from Africa averaged better than 1000 slaves a year and two out of every three slaves bound for Spanish America were destined for Mexico” (1294). The port of arrival was Veracruz, where still today there are predominantly black settlements, and where Fuentes’s protagonist was born. Of course, as in all other regions in which the economy was based on slavery, enslavement was never passively borne. As early as in 1537, there was a (unsuccessful) slave revolt in Mexico City (Klein 207). Furthermore, like elsewhere in the Americas – most notably also Brazil, Panama, Columbia and Venezuela – *cimarrón palenques* existed, predominantly near the coast; one of the most important

⁹⁹ With the institutionalisation of the Revolution in the 1950s, the nation’s patrimony was arranged in museums. In *Hybrid Cultures*, Néstor García Canclini analyses the way in which patrimony is used, monumentalised and ritualised in the *Museo nacional de Antropología* to stage national identity (127). The contemporary building and location was inaugurated in 1964, and it is generally considered to be representative of “Mexicanness”: offering rooms dedicated to each of the main ethnic groups of pre-conquest Mexico, the central one being dedicated to the *Mexicas*, who inhabited the space that is now Mexico City. This “architectural” centralism is not only representational (the transportation of artefacts from the local sites to the capital was met with local protest). The *Museo nacional* thus represents national identity as having its source in indigenous culture. Problematically, other ethnic groups – Spanish, Blacks, Asians and Jewish – are not attributed a space, thus naturalising nationalist mythology based on revolutionary *indigenismo*.

and successful *palenques* was established in the early seventeenth century by Nyanga Yanga in the Veracruz area, “where the rebel leader [...] managed to occupy a large portion of the Gulf Coast estates and force the viceroy to negotiate” (Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror* 198; also Appiah 1296). In the early to mid 18th century, there were revolts in the area inland of Veracruz, as well near Atapulco and Huatulco at the Pacific coast. It is a little known fact that Afro-Mexicans also played an important role in Mexico’s struggle for independence; there were revolutionary leaders such as Vincente Guerrero, who was of African descent and became Mexico’s second president, and it is further believed “that a troop of Afro-Mexicans, under Hidalgo, the Batallón de los Morenos, began the revolution” (Appiah 1297).

In contrast with the state-sponsored research into the conditions of the Amerindian ethnic groups, the Afro-Mexican heritage did not become the focus of governmental research until the 1980s and 90s.¹⁰⁰ However, despite this national emphasis on the Amerindian groups, it is important to remember that the Revolution did not fundamentally change their position within modern Mexico. Official ideology, while employing an “instrumental Indianess”, remains at odds with socio-political reality (Knight 100). Artemio’s unscrupulous manipulations of the agrarian land reforms to his own benefit here stand metonymically for a larger and complex process during which concessions were made to defuse lower class unrest.¹⁰¹ As aforementioned, by the 1940s and 50s, the political elite increasingly came to believe that agrarian land reforms had gone too far despite the fact a large section of the *campesinos* were still landless, an issue exacerbated by explosive population growth rates (in fact, by 1970, there were more landless *campesinos* than at the beginning of the Revolution (Hart 14)). And although efforts were made to expose the actual conditions of the indigenous population in Mexico (think of López y Fuentes’s *El indio* (1935), for instance), the inclusive nationalist rhetoric of *mestizaje* increasingly

¹⁰⁰ Aguirre Beltrán mentions the bureaucratic difficulties that worked to impede the work of an original group of investigators set to conduct research into the various ethnic groups of Mexico: due to bureaucratic inertia, and the fact that its original head – Manuel Gamio, “entonces jefe del Departamento Demográfico de la Secretaría de Gobernación” – became the director of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, this initial project failed, and Gamio put Aguirre Beltrán in charge of the investigation of Blacks in Mexico (9-10). In 1991, the government lent its support to *Nuestra Tercera Raíz*, a project aimed at uncovering Afro-Mexican cultural heritage (Appiah 1298). In the 80s and 90s, the Dirección de Culturas Populares established programs that promoted research into the various Afro-Mexican communities (Paulette Ramsay, “Cross-cultural Poetics: Debating the Place of Afro-Mexican Poetry in the Context of Caribbean Literary and Cultural Aesthetics”, unpublished article).

¹⁰¹ See Hart. The reforms by Cárdenas in the 1930s, for instance, are often seen as proof of his commitment to social democracy but can also be read “part of a far-reaching effort to save Mexican capitalism and the ruling elite from incipient lower class unrest rooted in the economic hardship of the Great Depression” (14).

worked to divert attention from the continuing problem of racism, and to disguise actual conditions of oppression and marginalization of the *campesinos* and the workers in favour of the consolidation of the newly emergent bourgeoisie. As Miller writes, “a rhetoric of inclusion [...] operate[s] concurrently with a practice of exclusion” (*Rise and Fall* 4).

If Artemio functions as an allegory for this rhetoric of inclusion, the moment at which the latter begins to mask exclusion occurs during the Revolution: Artemio and Tobías – a Yaqui Indian – are captured by the opposing *villista* faction and spend the night imprisoned, together with Gonzalo Bernal, all three awaiting their execution. During the night, Artemio and Gonzalo overhear Tobías talking in his fevered sleep about his people’s dispossession by the government to the benefit of some ‘gringos’ and their transportation to Yucatán, where they were sold as slaves and forced to work on the hemp plantations (111-2). Gonzalo Bernal (the son of the landowner Gamaliel) deplores the fact that the war has degenerated into factions (114), betraying the Revolution’s idealist and reformist strands that he embodies. Artemio betrays both of them by choosing to co-operate with the enemy and by later usurping Gonzalo’s place by marrying his sister Catalina. Artemio’s betrayal (of the cause of indigenous rights, of revolutionary idealism and of the popular cause of Villa (Stoopen 698)) is of course deeply symbolic. The betrayal of Tobías, in particular, alludes to the fact that little has changed despite the Revolution. While overall racism decreased after the Porfiriato, the introduction of a Yaqui character here points to a continuity of practice (despite the changes in rhetoric through which the revolutionary elite sought to differentiate themselves from the earlier regime of Porfirio Díaz): as the historian Knight writes, “[i]n 1926 the revolutionaries quelled the last Yaqui revolt with an efficiency Don Porfirio would have envied (and it was a revolutionary, Manuel Diéguez, veteran of the famous Cananea strike, who in 1915 coined the inevitable plagiarism: “the only good Yaqui is a dead Yaqui”), but such unfortunate parallels made it all the more necessary to put rhetorical distance between the “revolutionary” present and the “reactionary” past” (Knight 83). Furthermore, it is also of significance that it is during this night that Artemio recalls the moment when he first rejected the possibility of solidarity with the marginalized and the importance of his past, the day of his departure from Veracruz, the place that links him not only to Cortés, but also to his black ancestry: “Sólo entonces recordé

que siempre había mirado hacia delante, desde la noche en que atravesó la montaña y escapó del viejo casco veracruzano. Desde entonces no había vuelto a mirar hacia atrás” (111).

Artemio's relation to Mexican cultural discourses of *mestizaje*, *lo mexicano* and Aztec myths and beliefs must be understood in the light of this betrayal. As has often been pointed out, different conceptions of time are evoked in *Artemio Cruz*. Notably, the temporal construction of the novel recalls a prehispanic understanding of time as organised in cycles of 52 years: the New Year's party in 1955, for instance, is narrated just before Artemio's departure from the hacienda in Veracruz 52 years earlier (Meyer-Minneman 90), which initiated his engagement with the world and the fall from innocence as he kills his uncle. The party marks the zenith of his power/nadir of his corruption, as well as hinting at the start of a new cycle embodied in the young Jaime Ceballos, a representative of the new generation of capitalists. This projected take-over follows the pattern laid out by the narrative: Artemio replaces the old land-owner Gamaliel Bernal; the Menchacas were supplanted by Juaristas. However, as several critics have argued, this does not mean that Fuentes offers a reading of history as 'eternal return' nor that he sees the present through a pre-Hispanic lens in a straightforward manner. On the contrary, it articulates the "need to break the pattern of cyclic abuse and powermongering" (Clark D'Lugo 115), having turned into an "alienated travesty of cyclical Aztec time".¹⁰² What is the purpose, then, of evoking Aztec myths and conceptions of time in the present, and do they say anything about the present at all? While Fuentes's continuous references throughout his fictional and theoretical work to the importance of pre-Hispanic myths and understanding of time for the present obviously indicate the value he attaches to using them in a constructive way, the novel importantly also shows that the Aztec vision of time can be employed in favour of the ruling elite as a naturalisation of the perpetuation of oppressive social structures. As has long been noted in studies about nationalism, national identity often seeks to root itself in pre-modern traditions, either real or invented.¹⁰³ In the Mexican context, Bartra has

¹⁰² See also Meyer-Minneman and van Delden's *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico and Modernity*.

¹⁰³ As Bartra writes: 'Con la creación del mito mexicano moderno ocurre un proceso similar al que se desarrolla con la formación del indio como prototipo del mexicano tradicional. Es necesario inventar un personaje que encarne el drama de la modernidad, de la misma forma que – como afirmó Manuel Gamio – en ausencia de un conocimiento preciso sobre la realidad indígena es necesario "forjarse – ya sea temporalmente – un alma indígena"' (130-1).

convincingly argued that national myths surrounding *lo mexicano* – “las redes imaginarias del poder político” – are employed to legitimate the networks of power to dominate and rule the masses more successfully (*La jaula* 225). One might here argue that *Artemio Cruz* is already thinking through some of these issues in the 1960s, issues that will be further developed in *Terra Nostra*, as I argue in chapter five.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the employment of myth is not merely de-constructive: Quetzalcoatl is linked to both Artemio (associated with Quetzalcoatl’s negative traits) and his real son (as opposed to the ‘usurper’, Jaime Ceballos), who incorporates a utopian potential that Artemio has forfeited in his ascension to power.¹⁰⁵ In other words, Aztec myths occupy a somewhat ambivalent position in relation to ideology in the novel, which highlights the potential dangers inherent in the culturalist discourses on Mexican identity.

In *La jaula de la melancolía*, Bartra has observed that in the Mexican context, “hay una transposición peculiar de algunos aspectos seleccionados de las luchas y de los sentimientos de las clases populares”, “aunque esto no quiere decir que la cultura nacional sea un reflejo objetivo de la situación de las clases populares”; rather, these characteristics are chosen according to the projects of political legitimation (236). As the title of his book suggests, he has formulated a strong critique of writers such as Octavio Paz, who offer descriptions that mystify rather than expose the historical and social conditions from which they arise, or in the words of Bartra, produce national subjects that have literary and mythological origins. In Paz’s influential description, the “Mexican” is attributed a collective psyche (a deterministic notion belonging to the realm of metaphysics rather than proven reality and paving the way for quietism and resignation):¹⁰⁶ he (Paz’s description is clearly gendered) is characterised by melancholia, solitude based on an intrinsic feeling of inferiority, by an inability to open himself to the world or to communicate, and caught within the dichotomy articulated by the duality between Cortés and La Malinche – *el chingón* and *la chingada*. But who is Paz’s archetypal Mexican? In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz

¹⁰⁴ Julio Ortega argues the novel “no se limita al juicio de Cruz, lo que le haría redundante; pero tampoco se resigna a la mitificación, lo que la haría un documento tópico” (198-9), but he does not explore how myth may be implicated in the networks of power.

¹⁰⁵ As Boldy has noted, the disjunction between Cortés-Quetzalcoatl coincides to some extent with the choice between opportunism and idealism (85). In other words, the indigenous mythic figure is valued as positive, the Spanish historical-mythical figure as negative, which coincides with official ideology at the time.

¹⁰⁶ “The Mexican, whether young or old, *criollo* or *mestizo*, general or laborer or lawyer, seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself: his face is a mask and so is his smile” (*Labyrinth* 29).

obscures rather than illuminates issues of class, ethnic and geographical specificity. While it may be true that these are derived from socio-historical reality (Meyer-Minnemann 92), their sublimation into the ‘archetypal Mexican’ flattens out historical reality, as well as being unable to envisage alternatives based on communal political action.

In *Artemio Cruz*, however, this ‘archetypal Mexican’ is given a class and an ideology. As aforementioned, the second person may be read as the voice of conscience or reflection as the novel shifts into the future tense while narrating past events in an attempt to break historical determinism. Around nearly half way through the novel, the *tú* voice asserts that Artemio is born of ‘la chingada’ and turns into the ‘chingón’ to avoid being victimised (84).¹⁰⁷ However, the analysis offered by the *tú* voice changes as the novel progresses, and it eventually offers him these alternative options missed in the past projected into the future:

tú elegirás permanecer allí con Bernal y Tobías [...]

tú no visitarás al viejo Gamaliel en Puebla [...]

tú te quedarás con Lunero en la hacienda [...]

tú te quedarás fuera, con los que quedaron fuera (146)

The future tense here conveys the opening of alternative paths to take for Mexico in the second half of the century, paths that are necessarily rooted in aborted projects in the past and open alternatives to the chingada/chingón dialectic. In this alternative vision for the future, Artemio – as an emblem for the nation – will reconnect with the betrayed cause of the Indians (Tobías), the political idealism of the intellectual (Bernal). He will denounce its alliance with social structures based on private landownership (Gamaliel). He will not denounce its Afro-Mexican heritage (Lunero).

I now wish to turn to the representation of Artemio’s Afro-Mexican heritage, an issue that is as we have seen repressed in the discourse of *mestizaje*. As Robin Fiddian has observed, in the final sections of the novel, Fuentes develops a

¹⁰⁷ Judith Payne’s analysis of the sexual politics of the novel similarly suggests that this “simplistic oppositional worldview” is not that of all Mexicans, but derived from Artemio’s early experiences in life. It “truncates his emotional development and isolates him from his fellow human beings, particularly women” (66). Through the character Laura, Fuentes traces other ways for humans beings to interact, she argues.

Caribbean perspective that links the ‘Mexican Caribbean’ to the islands (Fiddian 115), and an important part of that link to the Caribbean is the importation of cheap black workers in the nineteenth century (173), as well as the earlier history of the slave trade. Lunero’s father – thus Artemio’s grandfather – had moved with his master’s family to Veracruz from Cuba when the war broke out (169), bringing with him Cuban lower class culture in the form of songs. The Caribbean basin is where pre-Hispanic, African and European cultures meet:

la media veracruzana tendrá otra historia, atada por hilos dorados a las Antillas, al Océano y, más allá, al Mediterráneo que en verdad sólo será vencido por los contrafuertes de la Sierra Madre Oriental: donde los volcanes se anudan y las insignias silenciosas del maguey se levantan, morirá un mundo que en ondas repetidas envía sus crestas sensuales desde la partitura del Bósforo y los senos del Egeo, su chapoteo de uvas y delfines desde Siracusa y Túnez, su hondo vagido de reconocimiento desde Andalucía y las puertas de Gibraltar, su zalema de negro espelucado y cortesano desde Haití y Jamaica, sus comparsas de danzas y tambores y ceibas y corsarios y conquistadores desde Cuba (165)

Artemio’s background seeks to integrate the marginalised ‘Mexican Caribbean’ – and its importance in terms of world history – into the national project, even if to reveal the failure of that very integration.

In a recent article, the critic Hernández Cuevas has examined the Afro-Mexican heritage of the protagonist of *Artemio Cruz* – which is usually mentioned only briefly, sometimes omitted, in critical material – and has read the novel in the context of the ideology of *mestizaje* as formulated by Vasconcelos. While his overall evaluation of the novel as a racist text that simply reiterates the exclusionary gestures of Vasconcelo’s ideology of *mestizaje* is not doing justice to Fuentes’s novel nor his politics – after all, the novel represents the nation as in a state of crisis, fragmented, and exclusionary both in terms of class and race – Hernández Cuevas nevertheless makes some very valuable observations regarding the issue of race in the novel as well as, more broadly, Mexican culture. As he observes, in official ideology, the “history of *cimarronaje* was erased and African Mexican national heroes were whitened” and “African Mexican national achievements [thus] became *criollo*

based” (10).¹⁰⁸ Given the importance of Afro-Mexicans in Mexican history, it seems insufficient to applaud Fuentes simply for including a protagonist who is of African descent. Fuentes does indeed not portray Afro-Mexican resistance, and any awareness of Afro-Mexican culture in the twentieth century is pushed beyond the boundaries of the novel. The image of Afro-Mexicans offered in the novel does follow the racist model of representing Blacks as assimilated and quietist: “Lunero, Cruz’s Uncle, is a well-tamed and *criollo*-loyal young Mulatto who quietly accepts his fate [...]. The novel [...] omits mentioning, under a just light, Mexicans of African lineage who do not desire to be whitened and are not servile, tame, submissive, or backward. This renders the African Mexican ahistorical” (Hernández Cueveas 14-15). Indeed, in Fuentes’s portrayal, Lunero and the young Artemio are portrayed as living according to the rhythms of nature, evoking the image of a primitive Edenic past. To this critique, one might also add that, as Bartra has observed, the invocation of primitive Eden is typical of modern nationalist discourse that adapts the canons linked to capitalist development: the myth of primordial man “fecunda la cultura nacional y al mismo tiempo sirve de contraste para estimular la conciencia de la modernidad y el progreso nacionales” (77). In Mexican/Latin American discourse it is normally the Indian who is portrayed in this light. This invocation of an Edenic primitive past continues to function as a seemingly positive point of reference – a fact that sits uncomfortably with the demystifying project of the novel, although one must here also concede that the signs of Lunero and Artemio’s oppression (such as the Master’s house) are never out of sight.

Nevertheless, in relation to the status of Afro-Mexicans within that discourse, one also has to recognise that Fuentes’s novel poses the repression of the Afro-Mexican heritage *as a problem*, one that forms part of the larger, flawed project of Mexican nation building. Despite the inclusionary rhetoric of *mestizaje*, racism is shown to be a constituent feature of post-revolutionary class struggles. In contrast to Hernández Cuevas, I would argue that the exclusion of the Afro-Mexican heritage is

¹⁰⁸ Indeed, we may note that despite Fuentes’s assertions that America’s heritage is Indo-Afro-European, his study of Latin American history and culture, *The Buried Mirror* (1992), dedicates only four pages to the impact of slavery on the Caribbean basin, and offers little detail on the slave trade to Mexico (197 – 201; also occasional references to “Blacks” throughout the book). Given the length of the volume and the amount of space dedicated to the discussion of Spanish culture and of indigenous American culture, this indeed replicates to a certain extent the marginalisation of Blacks in Mexican culture. His bibliography displays the same bias: while offering long reading lists on Spanish and indigenous culture and history, he mentions only two general works on the black presence in Latin America, as well as Esteban Montejo’s *Biografía de un cimarrón*: Aguirre Beltrán’s name is notably absent.

exposed rather than enacted through the narrative repression of Artemio Cruz's racial heritage. Commenting on the fact that the narrative initially refuses to provide any clear information as to the protagonist's race only referring to it through small details about his physical appearance (his thick lips, his curly hair, his darker skin colour), Hernández Cuevas argues that "this renders his heritage confusing. The analytical Afro-centric reader must amass the fragments to realize Cruz is an African Mexican" (12). Surely, Hernández Cuevas is here overstating his case: the novel makes it abundantly clear towards the end of the narrative that Cruz has a 'mulata' mother, and it has long been noted by critics who might not describe themselves as Afro-centric that Cruz has black ancestry. The initial 'confusion' with regards to his racial heritage may indeed be related to an ideological *blanqueamiento*, but it is precisely this ideological operation that emerges at the end of the novel as part of the repressed violence, the betrayed potentials, that haunt Artemio and fragment his sense of self. One must here remember that just moments before Artemio's death (represented on the page by a final paragraph that is even more fragmented than the novel's beginning), the narrative turns to the moment of his birth in the 'shack', an episode that, in turn, follows the narrative of Artemio's murder of his uncle thirteen years later. I also disagree with Hernández Cuevas when he suggests the possibility that Artemio's racial status may paint a negative image of Blacks as inherently corrupt. Artemio is also associated with Cortés as well as Quetzalcoatl, which would suggest that race is not the determinant factor. Artemio's corruptness is presented as related to his lack of an ethical core that is characteristic of his entire class, a class that is predominantly white, or 'whiter' than the average Mexican, but thrives on the discourse of *mestizaje* incorporated metaphorically by Artemio. The fact that Artemio is Afro-Mexican, I would argue, is therefore more convincingly to be read as a recognition and critique of the fact that this exclusion and repression of the Afro-Mexican heritage has occurred.

In *Artemio Cruz*, Fuentes paints a society that is highly stratified, a society in which race is intimately linked to social status. Not only are the upper classes predominantly white, or 'whiter' than the rest of society – a fact often illustrated by the difference between Artemio and other members of his class – but there also exists a subliminal desire to 'whiten' oneself, a recurrent topic of analysis in much Caribbean fiction and poetry (Guillén's poem "Mulata" from his 1930s collection

Motivos de son may serve as an example).¹⁰⁹ As in the Caribbean, the effect of colonization and slavery produced the overlay of the class system with racial categories, so that a lighter skin colour came to be associated with a higher social status, with all the devastating psychological consequences analysed in the previous chapter. Artemio Cruz tends to surround himself with women who are lighter than himself like the blond escort he hires for his beach holiday in Acapulco in 1947. During this episode, the socio-racial stratification becomes very explicit: his skin colour and his curly hair is referred to in contrast to his escort's, and the only other non-white character described is "el negro que alquilaba la sillas" (94) at the other end of the social ladder. As Anita González observes, "in actual practice, Mexican constructs of mestizaje preference white skin color over darker-skinned "Indian" [or Afro-Mexican] heritage. Mexican citizens gain economic and social rewards as they move up the ladder of mestizaje and adopt Euro-American culture and values" (2). Being a *mestizo* is of course not only 'biological', but mainly cultural and social.¹¹⁰ Artemio Cruz's ascent in society from the 'shack' to the Coyoacán residence is indeed due to social factors and the accumulation of power and money, rather than simply the fact that he is lighter than Lunero. While references to his racial physical features haunt the text, his social ascent has clearly succeeded in 'whitening' his representation of himself. In *Artemio Cruz*'s analysis, the repression of Afro-Mexican heritage goes hand in hand with the failure and betrayal of the Mexican Revolution, and the ongoing process of editing out unwanted historical realities. Highlighting issues of racial and cultural oppression, ethnic marginalisation and class violence, *Artemio Cruz* evaluates the relation of (hegemonic) national culture to power and its legitimation; it de-mystifies the Revolutionary legacy and points to the failure of the ideology of *mestizaje* to translate into a more egalitarian society. *Artemio Cruz* thus offers not merely the recognition that nations are 'imagined', nor simply the European modernist recognition that the modern subject is fragmented by time. Rather it posits that an alternative national identity expressive of Mexican reality could have been, and can be, formulated through a reconstruction of what Artemio seeks to push beyond the space of representation.

¹⁰⁹ As Alan Knight notes: "The ancient practice of "whitening" also continues, reinforced by film, television and advertising stereotypes". Furthermore, he points to the ethnic exogamy of Mexican presidents: "no president, I am reliably told, has ever married a woman darker than himself" (100).

¹¹⁰ Alan Knight has commented on how, historically, attempts to make distinctions between "Indians" and "Mestizos" were completely determined by the criteria applied.

The Politics of Martinican Identity: History, Class and Popular Culture in *Texaco*

Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge. **Walter Benjamin**, *Illuminations* (251)

While in the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America, issues such as hybridity, *mestizaje*, and creolisation were nothing new, the manifesto of the Créolistes – that was to a large extent based on these issues – burst onto the French literary scene in the late 80s, representing itself as breaking with Martinican literary past, but out of time with its Caribbean and continental neighbours. On a superficial level, the discourses of Francophone *créolité*, postcolonial or postmodernist hybridity, and Latin American *mestizaje* seem to have many common characteristics, most notably a challenge of imperialist ontologies based on dichotomies of self and other and notions of (racial) purity.¹¹¹ Positioning itself as a discourse that resolves the identitarian impasse created by the *Négritude* movement's symbolic return to Africa, the Créolistes have offered a manifesto grounded in the celebration of cultural and racial mixing: "Creoleness is an annihilation of false universality, of monolingualism, and of purity. It is in harmony with *Diversity*" (*Éloge* 28/90). The anti-essentialist stance results in a theory that is supposedly in "keeping with postcolonial orthodoxy, [...] propos[ing] that 'colonizer' and 'colonized' cannot be viewed as separate entities, but that they are rather mutually complicating and contaminating discursive positions" (McCusker, "This Creole Culture" 116).¹¹²

¹¹¹ In "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove", Richard and Sally Price justifiably accuse the créolistes of being quite "insular" in their presentation of their ideas on creolization and hybridity in *Éloge*: "Setting their ideas within an insular intellectual history of Martinique, the créolistes have been able to underscore their difference from other generations. But in a more international Caribbean context, the major programmatic claims of the créolistes were already, when first stated, widely acknowledged" (7).

¹¹² Maeve McCusker has further pointed out that the development of *créolité* does not quite fit into the concerns of mainstream postcolonial theory, hybridity, multiplicity and indeterminacy. Indeed, as critics such as Neil Lazarus have pointed out, it is not only Caribbean writers that do not fit into these supposedly quintessential postcolonial concerns.

It might also be noted that the discourse of *créolité* as formulated in *Éloge* is less concerned with claiming *creolization* as a continental feature (as did the ideologues of *mestizaje*); instead, the authors see this particular feature as linking them to other "peripheral" regions of the globe. To the geopolitical solidarity expressed in the concept of *Antillanité*, the authors seek to add their understanding of their "human situation", which for them relates to the process of *creolisation* or *mestizaje* (*Éloge* 32/94). Their attempts to set themselves apart from the rest of the Caribbean through the feature of creolisation - apparently, Martinicans are anthropologically closer to Mauritians than to Cubans (*Éloge* 26-33/87-94) - testify to a curious blind spot in their supposedly regional thinking (see Price 11).

The tract - its content, form and presentation - is fraught by many tensions and contradictions. Possessing a clear identitarian thrust, it was directed at a French metropolitan audience in standard

However, there are also plenty of distinctions to be made, which expose the pitfalls of an anti-historicist celebration of global *mestizaje*. The main difference between French Caribbean *créolité* and Mexican *mestizaje* lies of course in their relation to emancipatory practices: while the ideology of *mestizaje* is the hegemonic discourse in post-Revolutionary Mexico, *créolité* is conceived as an anti-hegemonic discourse rooted in local lower class culture and formulated against a supposedly ‘raceless’ and ‘genderless’ French Republican ideology that hides racial, economic and (neo-) colonial oppression and state violence (Forsdick and Murphy, “Introduction” 9). It emerged at a time when independence had come to be seen increasingly unlikely – and even undesirable – by the majority; ‘Martinican identity’ is riddled by the same paradoxes that surround the *Éloge de la Créolité* by Chamoiseau, Confiant and Bernabé (an address in French, originally delivered in France, claiming ‘creoleness’ and the ‘creole’ language as their heritage). Yet, one needs to distinguish between the tract itself, and the individual works by the Créolistes: while *Éloge* offers a celebratory view of the historical process of creolization, the fictional world of the Créolistes is often much less celebratory of a blanket ‘hybridity’, a notion that can potentially obscure the actual conditions on the island, different forms of (often forced) creolization. As McCusker writes:

while the tract claims to embrace the entire population of the Antilles in all its ethnic diversity, whites and mulattos are almost entirely absent from the fictional world of Chamoiseau and Confiant, suggesting not only an essentialism which valorises ‘métissage’ over purity, but one which only rates a highly selective form of racial mixing (“This Creole Culture” 117).

It is not entirely clear whether this supposed new ‘essentialism’ is a positive or negative feature for McCusker, who herself offers several caveats regarding an uncritical celebration of hybridity. Arguably, Chamoiseau’s omission stems not from a new ‘essentialism’, but rather from a vision that responds to the material situation in a country in which – as McCusker herself points out – 80 percent of the land is

metropolitan French, pointing us to one of the fundamental problems underlying the production of Martiniquan literature that is necessarily mediated via the Metropolis.

still owned by the *béké* class and in which Fanon's analysis of a libidinal whitening continues to have explanatory purchase (119).¹¹³

As we shall see, in *Texaco*, a conception of identity as 'rhizomatic' arises necessarily from the emancipatory struggle of the Martinican lower classes against an alienated middle class ideology that is orientated towards metropolitan culture. In other words, it provides a positive egalitarian conceptualisation of identity linked to libertarian struggles that, however, is not matched by reality. Furthermore, in contrast to Harris's detached versions of symbols of popular culture through the image of the spider, popular (Afro-)Caribbean culture and its myths are in Chamoiseau's writing firmly linked to material struggles in a dialectical relation and to a broader historical vision that emphasises lower class struggles throughout the centuries. In other words, to Harris's recognition of the importance of popular Caribbean culture and his revalorisation of its myths, *Texaco* adds its strident historicism, a relentless focus on class relations, as well as its emphasis on the material grounding of Creole identity. While Harris's novels represent mental and physical liberation as something that is yet to be achieved, in *Texaco*, Antillean historical consciousness and identity are already existent in the material practices of the popular classes. As Confiant has phrased it, "l'échec de Césaire est moins à mettre sur le compte d'une impuissance ou d'une lâcheté individuelles que sur l'incapacité des élites de couleur des Antilles à repérer les lieux de résistances de leur peuple et à s'appuyer dessus pour affronter le pouvoir métropolitain" (Confiant 147), a formulation that aptly defines the project of the novel to locate these sites of resistance in order to lean on them in the formulation of a local, Martinican identity.

Traditionally, and especially for the writers of *négritude*, it is the maroon that is valorised as a model for an oppositional, locally rooted identity. As Édouard Glissant contends, the maroon could function as a catalyst for Antillean society since he forms part of the suppressed Antillean history. The history of marooning, he explains, has historically been subject to a damaging degree of censorship imposed by the colonial authorities: marooning, he writes, was "stripped of its original

¹¹³ Price and Price – quoting Michael J. Dash – make a similar point, arguing that Chamoiseau *et al* turn Glissant's emphasis on the *process* of creolization into a dogmatic emphasis on créolité as an identitarian position. While their scathing analysis of the film *L'Exil de Béhanzin* (1995) – the screenplay of which was written by Chamoiseau – seems justified judging by their critique of the movie ("creoleness" is apparently represented by a mixed-race actress, who is sexualised, I believe that the claim that they risk undoing the epistemological break with essentialist thinking is certainly not applicable to *Texaco* (10).

meaning (cultural opposition)”(CD 87) and was re-interpreted as social deviation (DA 180). For Glissant, the maroon is “le seul vrai héros populaire des Antilles [...] il y a là un exemple incontestable d’opposition systématique, de refus total” (DA 180). However, for Chamoiseau, the historical figure maroon does not provide an adequate model for post-Abolition society and the pre-abolition that must be uncovered is thus not (only) that of maroon history (a position that he would later revise in *Biblique des derniers gestes*). Accordingly, in *Texaco*, the maroons “semblaient avoir déserté ce monde-là” (68/49) and only ever appear in the narrative when they confront or rob the land slaves or the white slave owners (illustrating how in a small island such as Martinique, the maroons cannot “totally abstract themselves from the world of the plantations” (Burton 473)). After abolition, the maroons’ voluntary exclusion from the island’s history emerges more clearly, as they are stuck in an anachronistic past: “Ils étaient, le temps passant, demeurés en esprit dans le pays d’avant” (163).¹¹⁴

Chamoiseau therefore revalorizes the mute resistance of the land slaves— the internal marooning — as a model and grounding for a local form of identity and, as J. Michael Dash observes, breaks with “the negritude movement’s image of the romantic maroon and all those images of the sovereign self in Caribbean writing” (*Other America* 148):

Les nègres marrons rompaient l’affrontement, mais les nèg-de-terre restaient en ligne, se maintenaient tant bien que mal en surface de la boue, un peu comme les chapeaux-d’eau du marigot aveugle, tenir, tenir, et sabler ton fond de coeur d’une liberté profonde, sans grands gestes (109).

One may note that this image stresses the necessary anchoring to the ground, which, translated into knowledge of the land and technical know-how, plays an important part in the development of an independent identity. Meanwhile, the resistance “without big gestures” is embodied in the mythic *mentôs* who are the source of psychic motivation for an internal opposition. Chamoiseau’s conception of the formation of Martinican identity is, as we shall see, dialectical, incorporating the

¹¹⁴ Price and Price are certainly right to point out that the Créolistes (and one might add earlier writers such as Simone Schwarz-Bart) understate the “tremendous diversity of African cultures” and thus “obscure the ways in which these maroon communities were, in fact, the most thoroughly (and earliest fully) “creolized” of all New World communities” (“Shadowboxing” 9).

spiritual/cultural resistance of the *mentôs* as well as grounding itself in material circumstances.

One of the novel's central episodes in relation to the formulation of a Martinican identity is that of Noutéka (as Derek Walcott points out, Noutéka translates as "we used to" ("A Letter to Chamoiseau" 218)), an episode that also foregrounds its necessarily 'rhizomatic' grounding. Since abolition did not much affect the social ordering of the island as ownership of the lands remained in the hands of the white ruling elite, Esternome and Ninon set out into the hills in order to found a separate community and to be the agents of their own history. Although their flight into the hills re-enacts the earlier movement of the maroons, there is for them a significant difference: "C'était pas marronner [...] C'était pas refuser, c'était *faire*" (162). Initially, their quest seems to be fuelled by a desire to return to a 'Root identity' as defined by Glissant: an identity rooted in one's own territory and a single origin (they set out in search of a land in which they will be like "deux innocents au paradis"(159)).¹¹⁵ Notably, however, Ninon and Esternome find that the hills were not that empty (161); they are inscribed with the various traces of Martinican history, emblemized in "les Traces" (tracks, paths or marks) that mark the landscape. Their ascent onto the hills may be read as a symbolic travel through this history: they discover the ruins of ancient Big Hutches; a blackwoman – mistress to a *béké* – and her mulatto children; maroons cut off from the world; mulattoes with slaves of their own, emulating the class of white slave owners. Finally, they are welcomed by a community that, as the outcome of that history, is far from uniform (165). While the utopia of a self-enclosed Noutéka ultimately fails – as is inevitable on a small island without much of a 'hinterland' – it articulates the notion of the multiple roots of Caribbean identity that Chamoiseau envisages as a positive conceptual model for articulating a 'national' Martinican identity, evoking Glissant's concept of the rhizome as a model for identity (a concept that does not deny the idea of rootedness but challenges notions of a singular, or "totalitarian root" or origin (*Poetics of Relation* 11)). As the Noutéka episode demonstrates, it is one that grows out of the liberationist struggles of the lower classes. All the later 'sites of resistance' – Morne

¹¹⁵ One may read this as a critical reference to the myths about the island -and Latin America more generally- as a paradise of primeval nature. These myths persisted in European culture from the 'Discovery' onwards and were eventually assimilated into Latin American culture as a means of expressing the cultural specificity of the region. Alejo Carpentier, for instance, refers to "the jungle of Martinique, with its incredible intertwining of plants and its obscene promiscuity of certain fruit" and to "the magic of the tropical vegetation, the unbridled creativity of our natural forms with all their metamorphoses and symbioses" ("On the Marvelous Real in America" 85).

Abélard and Texaco – are characterised by the same foundational rejection of a singular root and an openness to difference and diversity, at the same time as clearly providing a model for locally grounded modes of identity. Marie-Sophie – who is initially alienated from local culture, as a result of her employment by the members of the mulatto class – eventually returns to the ‘roots’ of Antillean culture as encapsulated in Morne Abélard. Like Noutéka, Morne Abélard is characterised by diversity that has taken material shape in the different lanes that contrast with the imposed urban grids of Fort-de-France: “Il y avait [...] la passe des mystères oubliés où des vieux-nègres ressemblaient aux guerriers caraïbes. La passe des nègres-marrons qui sculptaient la fougère en parlant d’autres langues [...] La passe des syriens [...] la passe du chinois égaré” (357-358).¹¹⁶ Marie-Sophie’s later founding gesture again captures the sense of diversity and openness to the modern world: “Sur la pente, je perçus le même vent doux, chargé du monde et de la Caraïbe, et je vis de haut l’éveil de l’En-ville [...] Je vis s’éclairer les arbres de la Savane où mon Esternome avait pris pied il y a tant d’années.[...] *je me nommai d’un nom secret* (379-80).” The repetition of the pronoun ‘I’ and Marie-Sophie’s act of naming herself (her secret name being Texaco as we later discover) expresses Texaco’s self-determination and self-assertion. However, while her gesture contains obvious echoes of the myth of creation, this is not a creation *ex nihilo*, but an act of creation that is founded on an awareness of the historical diversity of the island and, on a narratorial level, a self-conscious re-writing of previous myths. It thus lacks the exclusivity and pseudo-universalism, which, for Glissant, are characteristic of (Western) foundational myths;¹¹⁷ instead it is aware of and open to the diversity of the world whilst expressing a local Caribbean reality. While in City “on se perd dans le moderne du monde” (218), in Texaco “on ramène de très vieilles racines, non profondes et rigides, mais diffuses, profuses, épandues sur le temps avec cette légèreté que confère la parole (218), in a clear allusion to Glissant’s rhizomatic model of identity.

As aforementioned, the cultural and spiritual traditions of lower class culture play a fundamental role in the resistance struggle and thus also in the founding of

¹¹⁶ As this quote demonstrates, this diversity also manifests itself materially in the different lanes, in clear contrast to the imposed urban grids of Fort-de-France.

¹¹⁷ Glissant argues that foundational myth is the “myth of the exclusion of the other, and which only comprehends the inclusion of the other through its domination”(my translation) (“Le chaos-monde, l’oral et l’écrit” in *Écrire la “parole de nuit”* 119).

Noutéka and Texaco. In *Texaco*, creolised African-derived myths and beliefs propel slave/lower class resistance and provide an alternative culture to that imposed by France. Like *Obeah*, *Vodun* and *Santería*, *Quimbois* was outlawed during most of Martinique's history, because of its relation to resistance movements and the use of poison as a means to sabotage the plantations (Fernández Olmos 132)). *Quimboiseurs* function as mediators between the spirit world of the dead and the living (the cult of the ancestors being central to African-derived religions) and are able to cast or undo spells. Like the *Obeahman/woman* of the Anglophone islands, they are also skilled herbalists, who acquire during their apprenticeship a "considerable skill and knowledge of the pharmaceutical qualities of the leaves, bark, seeds, and flowers of certain plants and herbs for the treatment of common ailments, the methods of preparation of particular medicines" (Fernández Olmos 137). In *Texaco*, there is an abundance of references to, and stories derived from, this Creolized African-derived belief system, ranging from the *mentôs* to the sister of Idomenée, a *morphoisé* (a person who can metamorphose into animals – in her case a cockerel – and attack her unsuspecting victims) (Fernández Olmos 151).¹¹⁸ Significantly, while the role of the *mentôs* changes over time in *Texaco*, the advice given by these spiritual 'mentors' continues to shape the nature of the struggle in which the protagonists are implicated. *Mentôs* – devalued as sorcerers and necromancers in official History as Marie-Sophie notes – incorporate the spirit of resistance; they are "*la Force*" (70), spiritually free in spite of physical enslavement. Unlike that of the maroon, the resistance of the *mentô* is not one of direct opposition but one of discreet subversion; he is "*le charbon d'un combat sans héros dont le chaud ne peut se calculer jourd'hui, qu'au toucher des services conçus par les békés en vue de défolmanter*" (71). Esternome's father is the first of a long line; he is one of the "men of strength", poisoning the master's animals and fostering the memories that he retains of Africa. He possesses herbal knowledge that manifests itself when he manages to cure himself from a normally deadly snakebite. He is believed to be mumbling formulas to tame *loas*, or spirits. His master eventually identifies him as a

¹¹⁸ This is an aspect that the novel shares with earlier Francophone Caribbean texts, such as Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ti Jean L'Horizon*, which equally portrays a universe in which the mystery of the death of a *morphoisé* is easily deciphered by initiates but not understood by the authorities. Slavery and neo-colonialism are metaphorically represented by a large cow that swallows everything it finds – again an image that clearly derives from *Quimbois/Obeah* traditions that include "belief in the sudden apparition of a variety of animal figures in the night sky. Among these the most feared is the lowing cow or the rolling calf, a most dreadful harbinger of evil" (Fernandez Olmos 141). However, contrary to Schwarz-Bart's novel, as well as to Harris's oeuvre, this spiritual or mythic dimension is re-grounded within a historical narrative.

practitioner of “witchcraft” and throws him into the dungeon where he dies. In the later generations, the *mentôs* become even more invisible and their resistance to the system mainly takes shape through spiritual advice and the transmission of a will to resist domination. After being emancipated by his master for defending the latter’s life against a maroon (at that point effectively collaborating with the system), Esternome meets a *mentô*, who “insuffla dans son coeur le coeur même de partir”, “prendre de toute urgence ce que les békés n’avaient pas encore pris: les mornes, le sec du sud, les brumeuses hauteurs” (73-4). While Esternome does not follow these instructions until he has found the appropriate mooring in the technical knowledge of carpentry, the *mentô* thus prepares him spiritually for the post-Emancipation struggle for land. During the period immediately prior to Abolition, it is also a *mentô* who works as a catalyst for slave resistance that culminates in the invasion of Saint-Pierre, forcing the governor to proclaim emancipation, as he reminds the slaves of the fact that liberty cannot be given but must be taken. 1848 is a key episode in the novel that defines different modes of identity for Martinique, and the *mentô* thus plays a key role in the formulation of a history and identity based on the self-liberation of the slaves.

During the lifetime of Marie-Sophie, *mentôs* are gradually disappearing, which is explicitly linked to the change of the system of domination that after departmentalisation has become more insidious, asphyxiating Martinican culture (a development already allegorised in *Solibo Magnifique*). However, despite the fact that the *mentôs* have increasingly come to be confined to folklore rather than everyday life, Chamoiseau nevertheless stresses the continued importance of the African-derived spiritual inheritance as Marie-Sophie’s conquest of the grounds of the Texaco oil company is again motivated and propelled by a *mentô*, whose lessons she internalises like her father. During the episodes of Marie-Sophie’s encounters with the *mentô* in the Doum, the emphasis is again on the latter’s skills at healing – both physical and spiritual – and his knowledge of, and respectful dependence on – his natural environment.

Like the ‘folk’ in Harris’s novel, the Afro-Caribbean spiritual inheritance and the spirit of resistance is one that is not part of official History, where it figures only indirectly (*Texaco* 71/52). However, Chamoiseau is not content to evoke their absence as a spectral presence in a bid to transform the reader’s psyche. Instead, he seeks to recreate imaginatively the impact of that legacy on present-day lower class

identity. Spirituality is thus re-grounded in a historical narrative and the ancestral presence is inscribed upon the land grounding present-day modes of Martinican identity.

As aforementioned, in *Texaco*, the cultural and spiritual aspects are inextricably linked to material ones. Land and labour take on seminal importance in the narrative, as it is around the characters' relation to the land and the type of work they do that their mode of identity is defined.¹¹⁹ I have already commented on *Texaco*'s representations of the dehumanizing and destructive aspects of certain types of work, as well as on City's alienation from the land and local production. Resistance to domination in the novel is manifold, but the form of resistance valorised as the most effective is thus not surprisingly one that is grounded in material resistance through an adaptation to the land and enacted by the lower classes.

The resistance of Esternome and later Marie-Sophie is based on traditional, local knowledge of handicraft synthesised from the various different cultural influences, on an adaptation to the characteristics of the Antillean land, and the conquest of the country. It should be noted here that 'conquest' for Marie-Sophie and her fellow inhabitants of *Texaco* does not translate into private or even communal ownership of the land. Land, according to Marie-Sophie, should be inhabited, not owned. It is again Noutéka that is central to a first flourishing of an Antillean knowledge of craft, house-building, gardening and of how to inhabit the Antillean landscape, since Noutéka is based on bringing together the knowledge of all its inhabitants, most notably carpentry, gardening and the transmission of medicinal knowledge. Before abolition, Esternome had been apprenticed into the craft of carpentry by Théodorus Koko-doux (a name referring to his sexual prowess). The latter had perfected the trade by adding "son savoir de Normand aux enseignements offerts par les cases africaines et carbets caraïbes" (77), and adapted it to the island. It is thus on the construction site that "creolization" takes on concrete shape: even when the békés, france-whites or "mulattoes" seek to imitate French models of houses, "l'esprit des ouvriers nèg défaisait l'habitat et le réinventait", creating a local "aesthetic" that is located in material practices (104). This job is what ultimately provides Esternome with the skills necessary for survival in the post-abolition period.

¹¹⁹ As remarked by Édouard Glissant, land turns into a "character" of history, since it is on the possession of land by the few that oppression was and remains grounded.

It also grounds a local identity, as opposed to the French identity that the mulatto class seeks to emulate.

It is thus in the building and in the art of carpentry – not just in the folktales – that an Antillean identity begins to take shape, and it is Esternome's know-how that plays a central role in the construction of Noutéka. As Marie-Sophie will later write in her notebooks: "Métier c'est belle mémoire" (59). The inhabitants of Texaco will employ the skills learned in Noutéka and add their own to adapt themselves to the new environment. Significantly, the novel as a whole is divided into historical periods that are defined by the building materials employed by the popular classes, thus placing material reality at the centre of the reconstruction of Martinican history. The gradual construction of Texaco – the symbolic and actual site for a contemporary Martinican identity – replays the different phases of the history of the land slaves and their spiritual inheritors and adds another phase, the Age of Concrete.

Texaco also draws vitally from the understanding developed in Noutéka that one has to 'read the landscape'. In stark contrast to the Fort-de-France's urban grids but like Noutéka, Texaco adapts itself to the natural landscape: "Nos cases se posaient en épousant la terre", enabled to do so due to the light house frames tested in the Noutéka of the Hills (407). "Quartier créole est une permission de la géographie" (171), growing "comme fleur de l'endroit" (172). As Bhabha has noted, the metaphor of the landscape has often been employed in Western nationalist rhetoric "to naturalize the rhetoric of natural affiliation and its forms of collective expression" (143). In *Texaco*, the imagery of nature and landscape does not correspond to a naïve 'naturalization' of any pre-given concepts of an essence, nor does it seek to naturalise its author's pre-conceived philosophy. Rather, Chamoiseau seeks to reverse the relationship between the landscape and his characters: while the characters are not represented as simplistically determined by their environment, they *choose* to adapt their practices to the contingencies of the land. The landscape imagery thus seeks to express their respectful (material rather than metaphorical) relation to the land that does not seek to impose grids on it and to alter its characteristics (unlike the original army settlement of Fort-de-France, Fort-Royal). As Renée K. Gosson has shown, *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows* "reveals a very definite correlation between French modernization of Martinique and the erosion of indigenous countryside and culture" ("For what the land tells" 220), an observation that could just as easily be applied to *Texaco*. The Creole Quarter Texaco resists the

bétonisation of Martinique according to French urban planning and multinational constructions.¹²⁰ Unlike the inhabitants of City, Texaco's inhabitants have not cut their ties to the land, bringing with them the countryside in the form of both medicinal plants and food crops. Texaco's resistance, like that of the *mentôs*, does not consist of noble gestures; instead, it is 'moored' in the practical skills and communal memory of its inhabitants. In the creole gardens, both Chamoiseau and Confiant therefore see a (potential) means to resist French domination, as Martinique depends on France for the majority of its food supplies.¹²¹ This form of resistance – based on alimentary independence – is one that has its roots in the gardens cultivated by the slaves, not in maroon resistance (cf. Confiant 147-8).

Communal identity is here not constituted through narrative – or at least not predominantly so – but rather through material practices that are formulated in response to the pressures of the state and multinational capital. The sense of communal belonging is one of the central features of Texaco; it is represented as at least partially grounded in the material set-up of the quarter that is the product of its communal construction: "Avant même la communauté des gens, il y a celles des cases portées l'une par l'autre à la terre descendante, chacune tirant son équilibre de l'autre"(355). In his study of Césaire, Raphael Confiant offers a similar appraisal of the 'lakou', a potential model for the organisation of a whole society, but not recognised as such by Césaire. A 'lakou' according to Confiant is a Martinican "urban habitat spontaneously elaborated by deracinated rural incomers who have come to settle in the periphery of Fort-de-France in the sixties" and normally built around a couple of bread trees (150).¹²² Like Chamoiseau, he emphasises its

¹²⁰ As Renée K. Gosson notes, "Patrick Chamoiseau is deeply committed to issues of ecology, having served as vice president of MODEMAS (*Mouvement des démocrates et écologistes pour une Martinique souveraine*) in the 1990s. MODEMAS is a militant movement for Martinican sovereignty and has as its president Garcin Malsa, who is an outspoken ecologist and mayor of the town of Sainte-Anne (Pied)" (220).

¹²¹ However, Chamoiseau is also clearly aware of the fact that any such independence is threatened by the dominance of French chains. In *Chronicle*, Pipi's garden is destroyed by the competition of the French supermarkets that can sell at lower cost. Of course, this is a problem that not only affects Martinique, but also for instance independent Jamaica, where the internal market is suffocated by regulations imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as documented in the recent film *Life and Debt*.

¹²² type d'habitat urbain élaboré spontanément par les ruraux déracinés qui sont venus s'installer à la périphérie de Fort-de-France dans le courant des années soixante. Quatre, cinq, dix cases sont disposées autour d'une petite cour de terre battue, au mitan de laquelle se dresse souvent un ou deux de ces arbres miracles qu'est l'arbre à pain; leurs habitants développent des relations de voisinage, d'entraide et de convivialité extrêmement puissantes, assez proches en cela des 'concessions' africaines de Dakar à Soweto. Cela explique que, même en ville, personne n'est jamais mort de faim en Martinique, même dans les périodes de pire disette comme à l'époque de l'amiral Robert (1940-1944). La politique municipale césairienne a négligé cette auto-organisation populaire de l'espace

communal character, which is destroyed when bulldozed and replaced by HLMs (council estates) that are then no longer accessible to the original inhabitants.¹²³ Memory (of local myths, crafts and technical know-how) and material reality are thus inextricably interlinked, as well as being connected to lower class struggles for liberation.

Perhaps one of the strongest (international) attacks on the Créolistes has been waged by Sally and Richard Price. They argue that “there is a tendency for the literary works of the Créolistes [and here the authors add in a footnote that they exclude *Chronique des sept misères* which “also treats in considerable depth the processes of change involved in *départementalisation*”] to be complicitous with the celebration of a museumified Martinique, a diorama’d Martinique, a picturesque and “pastified” Martinique that promotes a “feel-good” nostalgia for people who are otherwise busy adjusting to the complexities of a rapidly modernising lifestyle” (15). Following Glissant, they point out that in the context of Martinique’s rapid, imposed modernization, “cultural symbols of Martiniquan identity – music and dance, the Creole language, local cuisine, carnival – take on remarkable power [...] by fostering in people the illusion that they are representing themselves, that they are choosing the terms of their “difference,” while at the same time obscuring the rapidity and completeness of the assimilationist project”(14). While Price and Price mainly refer to Confiant’s novels in their critique (as well as to the film *L’exil du roi Béhanzin* (1994), scripted by Chamoiseau), I would agree that there is indeed a certain nostalgic romanticisation of the past in *Texaco* – notably of the mythic *mentôs* and their spiritual resistance, of the communal Noutéka, and problematically of the plantation (on which both Esternome and his mother live quite happily despite the brutal death of his father). These aspects might indeed to a certain extent resonate with Price and Price’s warning about the way in which a museumified ‘tradition’ can be employed in identitarian discourse; it can also be incorporated into French

pendant trente ans jusqu’à ce qu’un urbaniste du PPM avance les concepts de ‘mangrove urbaine’, de ‘diglossie urbaine’, concepts tout à fait créoles, en rupture avec les méthodes urbanistiques européennes appliquées de façon brutale en maints quartier de la capitale. Ainsi à *Texaco*, magnifié depuis le roman du même nom de Patrick Chamoiseau, on a conservé la mémoire des lieux et l’ancienne solidarité du ‘lakou’, tout en modernisant l’habitat, tandis qu’à Morne Pichevin, on a tout rasé au bulldozer et construit des HLM à la place (inaccessibles bien sûr aux résidents originels). (150).

¹²³ Confiant identifies two modes of resistance that Aimé Césaire was incapable of incorporating into his political practice “le soussou et le lakou” (148). The former, he explains, is a form of popular credit that evolved outside of and independent to the French bank system.

mainstream culture as an exoticised and commodified representation of the ‘otherness’ of Martinicans.¹²⁴

However, Price and Price are guilty of over-simplifying the Créolistes’ supposed inability to choose between a “fast-disappearing “traditional” Martinique “and the “modern media” (here curiously choosing to focus on the *modes* of communication – radio, television and newspaper – rather than ideological and cultural content) (16). The relation between tradition/memory and the present is much more complex in *Texaco*: it is constantly debated through the relation between City and Texaco – which, as the name indicates, cannot escape the realities of corporate capitalism that it is forced to battle against.¹²⁵ From the start, Noutéka is an impossibility and the *mentôs* of course no longer exist in the present. Simultaneously to the presentation of ‘traditional’ Martinique, a more materialist understanding of the relation between past and present emerges. Within the realm of the novel, a Martiniquan identity is based on lower class culture – which, as we have seen in chapter one, is not completely immune to the lure of a ‘French’ identity, but is nevertheless more responsive to local – ecological and geographical – realities.

Perhaps even more powerful than the charge of nostalgia is the charge of sexism that “emerges directly – and uncritically – from the routine sexism of Martiniquan daily life” (16), Price and Price argue. While Maryse Condé has pointed

¹²⁴ Arnold has –somewhat smugly– denounced the works of the Créolistes as mere commodities produced for the world market (“With mock sorrow, I declared to the assembled colleagues my sad duty to inform them that the literary works by Chamoiseau and Confiant that had won so many prizes in the preceding decade were, quite precisely, commodities produced for the world market” (19-20)). He continues: “What sells is what the circuit of production and consumption in the metropole dictates is marketable. Products that don’t fit the profile don’t get reviews – assuming they are published at all – and then simply fall through the cracks. [...] An excellent example is Dany Bébel-Gisler’s book, *Léonora: L’histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe* (1985) [trans. by Andrea Leskes as *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994)]” (21). Arnold here forgets to mention the fact that if Bébel-Gisler’s text is still available in North America, this surely has to do with the main-streaming and commodification of *testimonio* that has occurred in North American universities during the nineties. In other words, while Arnold’s criticism of the exclusions that occur in the marketing of certain books at the expense of others are well taken, one might nevertheless ask whether the incorporation of a work into the mainstream market necessarily reduces the novel’s radical content? This debate has waged in North America in relation to *testimonio* and will be addressed in chapter three. Suffice to say here that Arnold’s description of the Créolistes’ literary achievements as merely pandering to the tastes of a French audience seems unnecessarily dismissive, but is perhaps in keeping with his declared preference for “open-ended and mutable” (hybrid and indeterminate, in a postmodernist vocabulary) rather than identitarian forms of writing (23).

¹²⁵ As Chris Bongie writes, in a lot of recent criticism, nostalgia (associated with an essentialist, static version of the past) is set against memory (a “positive and active experience of history” (216)). He argues the point that “good” memory and the “bad” nostalgia of the essentialists cannot be disengaged so easily but are “hopelessly – but also productively – entangled” (217), a point certainly applicable to *Texaco*, where the nostalgic vision of the *mentôs* coalesces with, and feeds into, the “active experience of history”. Furthermore, as Bongie further observes, Price’s “argument does not actually do justice to the metafictional dynamics of the *créolistes*’ best work” (221).

out that women's role in the liberation struggles has often been obscured, and that "it was often she who was responsible for the mass poisonings of masters and their families" (quoted by Price 20), in *Texaco*, it is notably *not* Esternome's mother who is the source of herbal knowledge and the *mentôs* are notably all male (which should, however, not obscure the ways in which Chamoiseau adds to our understanding of the interrelation between class, race, and identity).¹²⁶ Furthermore, *Texaco's* representation of Martinique in the twentieth century cannot, I believe, be seen as emerging 'uncritically' from the 'routine sexism'. In fact, Marie-Sophie is portrayed as having to struggle precisely with the sexism of Martinican life (she is even raped by her employer), and she undergoes several painful abortions in her struggle *not* to be confined merely to the sphere of biological reproduction. The sympathetic portrayal of Marie-Sophie, of her suffering, and her ability to take on an important and public role in the life of her community surely speaks against the "routine sexism" that may to a certain extent shape the Créolistes' public performances.

Myth, History and Resistance

Je ne vais pas te refaire l'Histoire, mais le vieux nègre de la Doum révèle, dessous l'Histoire, des histoires dont n'aucun livre ne parle, et qui pour nous comprendre sont les plus essentielles. **Marie-Sophie** character in *Texaco* (49)

The comparison between the three writers' most overtly national texts has brought out issues that are relevant for any discussion regarding the nation and social and racial equality. *Artemio Cruz* emphasises how seemingly inclusive national symbols such as the *mestizo* and pseudo-popular interpretations of the nation such as the *chingón* can be adopted by hegemonic discourse to cement the exclusion of certain social/ethnic groups. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the novel, it must certainly be the imperative to historicise. Furthermore, it emphasises the fact that a

¹²⁶ Price and Price's scathing critique of the film scripted by Chamoiseau (*L'Exil de Béhanzin*), of Chamoiseau's sexually charged attacks on a female, non-Martinican critic, of Chamoiseau's and Confiant's sexualised discussion of Simone Schwarz-Bart and the omission of the name of Dani Bébel-Gisler in their endeavour to sketch a literary history for the Francophone Caribbean, and of the Créolistes' tendency to represent the *conteur* as male does make it hard to defend the Créolistes on these grounds. The examples offered by the critics are indeed quite overt examples of sexism (although the quotes from Chamoiseau's attack on the female French critic – while obviously quite offensive – also perhaps seem to contain a certain *humorous excess* of the employment of sexual attributes that makes it almost too easy to charge him with sexism?), but I do not think that this judgment can necessarily be applied to all their works, certainly not their better works to which *Texaco* certainly belongs, as Chris Bongie argues.

truly 'national' culture will be connected to struggles for liberation of the lower classes.

In Harris's fiction, on the other hand, material reality tends to be conflated with the negative legacies of colonialism,¹²⁷ and national community must thus be located in a more abstract "essence of life" (*Tradition* 34). Durrant reads Harris's fiction as a work of mourning that seeks to redeem history through a materialisation of "the tribe's absence" (66). Yet, how can 'history' be redeemed if the text steers away from historical narrative as well as historical events, one might ask? Can a psychoanalytic concept formulated to address *individual* loss be applied to a whole culture? Are the 'folk' really all gone? Reading *Palace of the Peacock* in relation to Benjamin's "Theses on History", Durrant argues that for Harris, "the Angel's witnessing itself constitutes a mode of redemption" (68). It might be useful here to recall Benjamin's insistence on remembering the history of barbarity that underwrites the history of civilization. In his study of Renaissance drama, Francis Barker makes some illuminating points that are transferable to the present context:

History, in the critical sense, must be constituted as *difference from domination*: at the descriptive level, as the underside of what 'is' and what we have been told, whether the official lies or, more fundamentally, the naturalised facticity of 'things as they are'; and at the political level, as the dialectical ground of the possibility of the practice of the overcoming of the fact of the present (231).

The Angel's witnessing of the horrors is thus not enough; Harris's mode of redemption in *Palace of the Peacock* fails, as it cannot proceed beyond the signs of the absence of the folk. Durrant proceeds in his argument as follows: "to recover the tribe's history would be to endow it with a presence that it never actually had in history" (68), which is clearly not accurate as we have seen.

In contrast, Chamoiseau's *Texaco* much more readily lends itself to a Benjaminian reading: the past is explicitly activated in the present as part of the struggle for survival of the "prolétariat sans usines, sans ateliers et sans travail, et sans patrons" (402). The novel possesses a dual structure, one mythic (or more precisely, biblical, structured around the announcement of the coming of Christ, the

¹²⁷ Overlooking, as I have argued in chapter one, the material impact of US foreign policy and funding.

urban planner), the other historical. The mythic structure of the chapter is presumably an allusion to Benjamin's concept of the redemption of history (each moment is a messianic strait gate through which the redeemer might enter, in this case the urban planner referred to as Christ). Marie-Sophie literally "seize[s] hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of the danger" (*Illuminations* 247): the past is recalled in the face of the threat of the quarter's elimination, which is turned into "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (*Illuminations* 254). Chamoiseau's text thus provides a tangible example of how to bridge the perceived gap between Poeticist and Historicist strands within Anglophone Caribbean literature. In the next chapter, I will examine Chamoiseau's novel *Solibo Magnifique* in relation to the 'neo-realist' genre of the testimonial novel. I will not only continue to examine the overlaps between Poeticism and Historicism, but also throw into question the often invoked epistemological gap between *testimonio* and 'high art' that translates into the 'gap' between 'us' and 'our' subaltern 'Other'.

- Chapter 3 -

Testimonial Voices: Genre, Representation and the Individual

Cuzcatlán (1986) and *Solibo Magnifique* (1988)

Testimonio emerged in Cuba in the 1960s “in close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade” (Beverley, “The Margin at the Centre” 25) and in 1970, it was awarded official recognition as a genre when the prestigious Cuban publishing company *Casa de las Américas* established a corresponding literary prize category.¹²⁸ Its roots reach of course much further back and span a broad range of influences, ranging from the *crónicas* of the conquest and the realist novel, anthropological studies of the 1950s to a literature of personal witness and involvement that grew in parallel to armed struggle movements (such as Guevara’s *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (Beverley 25-26)). During the 1970s and 80s, a majority of Latin American *testimonios* was produced in Central America in response to the contemporary liberationist struggles in that area. As part of his definition of *testimonio*, John Beverley – one of the founders of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group - argues that “the situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself” (26).¹²⁹ In other words, *testimonio* is a genre that was born in and shaped by the struggle against imperialist domination and its social consequences. Furthermore, like the anti-capitalist proletarian novels, *testimonio* features characters that are representative of the community rather than distinguished from it, while at the same time insisting on

¹²⁸ When talking about *testimonio*, one must also mention Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonial text *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), which quickly acquired world-wide fame and alerted readers around the globe to the plight of the Guatemalan indigenous population and thus saved many Guatemalan lives (Menchú won the Nobel prize in 1992 for her activism). Her testimony also became central to an ideological warfare in the US - the so-called “battle of books” - which was caused by a right-wing backlash to Stanford university’s efforts to make their introductory courses less Eurocentric and include texts by such “inferior and derivative thinker[s]” as Fanon (according to the *Wall Street Journal* 1989) or that of Menchú, which the right-wing Republican D’Souza in his book *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991) deemed as unworthy of attention (see Mary Louise Pratt, “I, Rigoberta Menchú and the Culture Wars”, 34-36).

¹²⁹ The Latin American Studies group was founded in 1993, taking its inspiration from the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, but situating its own emergence explicitly within the Latin American history of thinking on ‘subalternity’ (see their “Founding Statement” in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*). It also emphasised the necessity for thinking about “subalternity” from the standpoint of postmodernity (a term emphasising in this context the “post-national”).

a “powerful affirmation of the speaking subject itself” (Beverley and Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics* 175), thus deconstructing the bourgeois subject, but not discarding the sovereign subject altogether. Since *testimonio* has been such an influential genre in the Expanded Caribbean in the latter half of the century, and since it has focussed the debates surrounding representation, location, subalternity and postmodernism in the last three decades, my examination of the issues of representation, realism and genre must necessarily situate itself within this context.

As is well known, during the last third of the twentieth century, ‘representation’ has been perceived as in a state of crisis (at least in the academic ‘centres’): “speaking for others has come under increasing criticism, and in some communities is being rejected” - specifically in universities of the First World (Alcoff 6). It is assumed that ‘we’ cannot speak for the ‘Other’ without misrepresenting him/her, or even worse, committing an act of ‘epistemic violence’. In this climate of a perceived and often invoked collapse of meta-narratives, the difference between the subaltern and ‘us’ (usually referring to the academic located in the United States) is fetishized as an unbridgeable gap that disables ‘us’ to see the potential similarities that might link our lives at the developed centre benefiting from inequalities in the global distribution of wealth to those living in the under-developed periphery. In Latin American studies, the debates surrounding the (im)possibility of representation have crystallized around the reception of the genre of *testimonio*. Initially, it was perceived as “the salvational dream of a declining left in hegemonic countries” - a medium through which “the subaltern” could speak for herself (Gugelberger, “Introduction” 7). Overall, the wave of first critical responses to *testimonio* that emerged in the late 80s and the early 90s had hailed *testimonio* as an authentic, anti-representational, anti-literary discourse, something that was problematized in the early to mid nineties by critics such as Sklodowska and Moreiras. The second wave of *testimonio* criticism (represented by the latter) has focused increasingly on examining the obstacles that may impede the entry of a genuine testimonial subaltern voice into academic discourse. Moreiras, in particular, pushes this line of argument to its postmodernist/poststructuralist extreme, arguing that the ‘subaltern’ can never adequately be read and represented in academic discourse; there is a “radical break between *testimonio*’s subject and the enunciating subject of *testimonio* criticism that does not bear comparison with the merely

positional distance between the literary author and its paraphrastic or exegetic critic”, he warns (“The Aura of Testimonio” 197).

One might argue with Neil Larsen that both waves of critical responses are ultimately framed by a postmodernist distrust of representationality and referentiality in literary discourse, which the former seek to circumvent by trying to exempt *testimonio* from these modes of discourse, thus seeing it as essentially distinct from other modes such as the realist novel. Reminding ‘us’ of the conditions that have produced it, Larsen links this particular worldview of anti-universals to “the overall retreat of North American radicalism after the “heroic” period of Vietnam, corresponding to what Samir Amin has termed the general “reflux” of imperialism beginning in the mid-1970s and leading up through the present to a long series of defeats for anti-imperialist forces on the periphery itself” (*Reading North* 16). Further, he argues that it is still shaped by modernism, the cultural moment at which a rampant Euro-imperialism and its cultural apparatus had come under crisis: narrative authority gets ‘bracketed’ in a worldview recognized as such, and the ‘Other’ – previously misrepresented as barbaric and/or a noble savage – is slowly emerging as a projection of the imperialist imaginary. In postmodernism, this ‘bracketing’ becomes a universalised fragmentation that is effective on the level of the individual (no longer the centred subject of realism) and of societies and cultures (that no longer have claim to universality). Larsen therefore advocates a return to realism and to representationality, a belief shared by the two authors examined in this chapter (which does not however imply the complete rejection of modernism that Larsen demands (*ibid* 19)).

Chamoiseau and Manlio Argueta – a Salvadorean testimonial novelist - both invoke truth as their guiding principle; Chamoiseau, for instance, argues that an effort “to be true or in truth” (interview with Réjouis 375) must shape the approach of the writer and Argueta claims that his vision “no es una verdad inventada, sino una verdad que es la realidad de mi país”.¹³⁰ Both writers focus on the plight of the subaltern classes and their struggle for survival, adopting – as traditional intellectuals - the responsibility of speaking for other people. The present chapter examines their work in the context of the debates surrounding *testimonio* and representation, and the discussion is framed by the assumption that there is no absolute epistemological or

¹³⁰ “mis planteamientos nacen de una situación muy especial, de una realidad que conozco, que he vivido, que he padecido y que es mi verdad, pero no es una verdad inventada, sino una verdad que es la realidad de mi país” (interview by Rafael Varela).

ontological break between *testimonio* and “the literary” as such or between ‘us’ and the subaltern subject. The argument is rooted in the works of the two authors, who both engage centrally with issues surrounding the possibility of representation and significantly disassociate themselves from the postmodernist questioning of referentiality and historical truth. This is expressed in the novels on a thematic as well as on a formal level. The latter is important because, as has been noted by many critics (Jameson 1981; Schwarz 1992; Said 1993; Parry 2002), forms emerge from particular social conditions and produce and reflect modes of subjectivity arising from these. The novel was a European bourgeois form in its inception, producing centred subjects and coherent narratives; the late twentieth century ‘first world’ variety on the other hand generally produces fragmented subjects and narratives, something that Jameson has convincingly linked to the effects of late capitalism. However, the novel form is susceptible to change and does not necessarily need to carry any particular ideological content. As Jameson explains, we should understand the form of the novel as a “production process” rather than a fully finished product; as such it can be displaced from its original ideological context and transformed (Jameson, “Literary and Cultural Import Substitution” 177). Different social and political contexts, then, give rise to different modes of selfhood incorporated in the characters, and to different organising themes and narratives.¹³¹

In *Cuzcatlán*, Argueta’s construction of character and the organising themes are similar to those of the *testimonialistas*, and thus very distinct from European bourgeois novel of the 19th century or 20th century ‘central’ postmodernist fiction. Through the narrative voices he employs, he problematizes the issue of representation, conscientization and the transformation of consciousness, as we shall see.¹³² In *Solibo Magnifique*, Chamoiseau reflects more explicitly on genre and form,

¹³¹ I fully agree with Larsen’s warnings about the dangers of a romantic “Third-Worldism” that implicitly divests the “Northern” critic of social responsibility on a global scale (*North* 16). The transformations to the novel discussed in this chapter are not so much only typical only of “Third World” narratives, but of those arising out of the socialist movements (and that have lost their momentum in the First World in the last third of the century). However, given the reality of the uneven development of global capitalism, we might not want to discard completely the notion of a link between geography and aesthetics, since new forms of the latter have, throughout the twentieth century, arisen in ‘under-developed’ areas of the globe, or when a strong anti-colonialist/anti-capitalist movement has impacted on the ‘central’ traditions. This will be further discussed in chapter five.

¹³² Astvaldur Astvaldsson argues that *Cuzcatlán* “is not best understood as a testimonial novel as has been suggested. Rather, it is more profitably read in fictional terms as a voyage of self-discovery undertaken jointly by the protagonist, Lucía Martínez, and the author. At the end of their common journey, they share a new outlook on Salvadorean history and how to create a better future for their country” (603). Astvaldsson provides a compelling analysis of the journey that contributes vitally to current research on Argueta, but the distinction between Argueta’s texts - that are “essentially fiction”

as he employs to great effect a deliberate displacement of the genre of the detective novel, which forces the reader to reflect on the social conditions and ideological assumptions that have enabled its emergence in nineteenth century Europe and North America. Furthermore, despite a strong deconstructive component, *Solibo Magnifique* is clearly affiliated with testimonial literature in its contestation of imperialism and return to representationality.

Representing the Subaltern: the narrative strategies of *Cuzcatlán* (1986)¹³³

Todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932
 Ser salvadoreño es ser medio muerto
 eso que se mueve
 es la mitad de la vida que nos dejaron
Roque Dalton, “Todos” 1974¹³⁴

The political and social urgency that shapes *testimonio* also prompted the artistic work of the Salvadoran writer Manlio Argueta, as his novels were written against the background of the civil war in El Salvador. Like the paradigmatic

(604)- and the testimonial novel seems a bit forced. *Cuzcatlán* is certainly no *testimonio* but it displays all the contextual and technical characteristics of a testimonial novel; there is no reason why an ‘essentially fictional’ narrative cannot perform the role of a testimonial novel, especially when it deals with a contemporary situation of human suffering that is very real. There is no reason why the novel cannot be testimonial *and*, at the same time, a fictional “journey of discovery” – although perhaps not so much of the ‘self’ as of the nation, given the Martínez family’s allegoric function.

¹³³ What is immediately striking when one compares the English and the Spanish versions of the text is the difference of the front covers: while on the softback edition published in Costa Rica in 1987, there is a photo in which several military helicopters threateningly loom above a green and blue landscape seen from the sea, the jacket of the hard-back edition published in London in the same year is illustrated by a downsized image of the painting “children with banana leaf” by the Brazilian painter Lasar Segall, which is placed on a tastefully lime-green background. Thus, for the English-speaking reader potentially unfamiliar with Latin American culture, politics and history, the book’s presentation is effectively de-politicised and aestheticised to cater for a Anglo/North American taste shaped by the boom novel. In 1990, Monique Sarfati-Arnaud published a detailed, and highly interesting, comparative analysis of the original Costa Rican book-cover from 1986, and that of the Salvadoran edition that came out in 1988 and which “parece corresponder plenamente a la visión oficial de la Historia de El Salvador en la cual se omiten los aspectos conflictivos y se ocultan todos los aspectos que pudieran revelar la intervención extranjera actual” (130).

¹³⁴ Roque Dalton is perhaps the most famous of the Latin American ‘guerrilla poets’. Tragically, Dalton was murdered in 1975 not by right wing death squads, but by an opposing faction within the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* of which he formed part. He was accused of treason and executed (Beverley and Zimmerman 127).

As Craft has pointed out, Argueta alludes to the poem “Todos” in *Cuzcatlán*, when he refers to the Salvadoran peasants as “medio muertos” (*Cuzcatlán* 98; Craft 124). While Dalton and Argueta both clearly shared their concern for the oppressed, Argueta’s focus on the plight of women and peasants may be read as a corrective to Dalton’s *machista* aesthetic.

testimonio of Rigoberta Menchú, his novels have an obvious political function, namely the denunciation of injustice, the internal ‘conscientization’ of the Salvadoran lower classes and the evocation of solidarity outside of El Salvador.¹³⁵ *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* was written in exile and it incorporates testimonial voices and oral history into the text. In the novel, Manlio Argueta – a writer of the *Generación comprometida* – denounces the long-standing oppression of the peasantry and the working classes of El Salvador, the dispossession of the indigenous population as the land was “redistributed” throughout the centuries, their exposure to the forces of transnational capital, the government’s failure to combat unemployment and poverty, and US military and financial interventionism.¹³⁶ Despite the fact that it is a generational novel, its structure is unlike that of the most famous of all generational Latin American novels, *Cien años de soledad*. Notably, the subaltern characters of *Cuzcatlán* have an attitude towards history that is very distinct from that of the Buendía clan. The circularity that characterizes the *Cien años de soledad* encapsulates a nostalgic obsession with a past on the part of the ruling class, and a refusal to inscribe oneself into linear history. In contrast, in *Cuzcatlán*, the characters attempt to restore history, which becomes a project that exceeds the literary dimension of the text. The aesthetic dimension is thus never allowed to obscure the overtly referential aspects of the narrative, which becomes especially clear in passages that narrate the oppression effected by the state. Furthermore, unlike traditional European generational novels, *Cuzcatlán* does not conform to a linear narrative, but shifts backwards and forwards in time. All the chapters are dated and thus located in time (although they often contain flashbacks into the past and, on one occasion, a glimpse of the character’s future). The novel is punctuated by 6 chapters that take place on 9th January 1981, thus notably opening and ending in the present of the Salvadorean civil war; the other chapters roughly follow an ascending chronological order. In other words, while the narrative reconstructs a historical narrative from a subaltern perspective, this is clearly

¹³⁵ Argueta sees internal conscientisation of the population as the primary function of his books, which, given the high illiteracy rates and the wide-spread poverty in El Salvador, is not easily achieved through the novel form. During the last decade of the twentieth century, a Salvadoran radio station made *Un día de vida* available to a greater audience through short daily transmissions of the individual chapters of the novel (Craft 109).

¹³⁶ The *Generación comprometida* (which first called itself *Grupo de Octubre* commemorating the Guatemalan Revolution) was founded in 1956. It eventually included members such as Roque Dalton, Manlio Argueta and José Roberto Cea. The group was interested in the social function of literature, taking Neruda as their guide (Craft 67); it “had grown impatient with the possibilities for peaceful economic and political reform in the late 1950s, and [...] had been very much stimulated by the Cuban Revolution” (Beverley and Zimmerman 124).

activated in the present in the context of the civil war of the 1980s. It describes a collective process of conscientization, which culminates in, and is seen from the perspective of, the present in the 70s/early 80s.¹³⁷ *Cuzcatlán* is more overtly fictionalized than Argueta's earlier novel *Un día de vida*, as it is characterized by a modernist polyphony of narrative voices and shifts of perspectives (from interior monologues to external descriptions), which, as we shall see, takes on significance in relation to the question of the representation of the subaltern.¹³⁸ It thus eschews the narrative authority of the nineteenth century European realist novel (which postcolonial critics have linked to the consolidation of the imperial enterprise), but nevertheless returns to a realist historical narrative through a coalescence of different voices. Furthermore, while firmly rooted in Salvadorean history, its avoidance of great detail with regards to the different factions of the resistance movements transforms it into a story of the subaltern's emancipation that acquires universal – or global - resonances.

The family's name, Martínez, is one of the most common last names, thus signposting the family as representative of a larger collective, transforming the narrative into an "allegory of the nation", as Linda Craft notes (*Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* 123). But the name is also shared by one of most violent military dictators of the country's history, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who came to power in a coup d'état in 1931. He consolidated his power through the brutal repression of the Communist uprising that had grown out of the enormous social inequalities created through land dispossession throughout the centuries and exacerbated by the economic depression of 1929. As is not widely known in Europe outside of Latin American departments, "[b]ack in 1932, long before the world had heard of Fidel Castro, El Salvador was the site of the first communist uprising in the hemisphere, a rebellion that cost the lives of 30,000 [equivalent to 2% of the country's population]" (Armstrong, *El Salvador* vi). The

¹³⁷ As the historian Byrne writes: "prior to the early 1970s, memories of the events of 1932, harsh repression at the hands of landowners and the National Guard and legislation banning union organizing in the countryside helped keep the lid of peasant discontent" (*El Salvador's Civil War* 27).

¹³⁸ In an interview, Argueta claims a testimonial dimension for his novels. In particular, *Un día de vida* (1980) was based on a tape-recorded interview, narrating the experience of a *campesina* he had met. Argueta claims that "si se retrovierte uno a través del método poético, de la nostalgia y de la memoria, uno puede con facilidad convertirse en esa mujer campesina. En mujer primero, porque ella es mujer y segundo, en una mujer humilde, campesina como era ella" (interview by Varela, see above). The seeming assumption here of the possibility a total erasure of difference between himself and the *campesina* is problematized in his later novel *Cuzcatlán*.

legacy of this slaughter was devastating for the country's Communist resistance groups; as Armstrong documents, "[t]he Communist Party was almost wiped out. Using the electoral rolls from the January municipal elections, the army systematically killed virtually all of its members and sympathizers. Farabundo Martí died before a firing squad on February 1, 1932. His name was erased from history; his graveside covered with weeds" (Armstrong 30).¹³⁹ In the wake of the massacre, the government's actions were actively suppressed from official accounts. Miguel Mármol – who was one of the few surviving Communist leaders – gives a detailed account of 1932 in his *testimonio* (produced in collaboration with Roque Dalton) and denounces the government's revisionism: "Why do our historians and journalists continue going along with giving young people a schematic, false and criminal view of 'the massacre that the communists caused in 1932' and not dare to state the naked truth down to the last detail?" (Dalton, *Miguel Mármol* 317).¹⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, the events of 1932 are a fundamental episode in Salvadoran history that have had a profound impact on the social and political life of El Salvador in the twentieth century, including the civil war of the 1980s (see Dunkerley, Pearce, Armstrong). For the right, the rising was an example of the dangers of communism; for the left, 'la matanza' stands for the failed dream of revolution and social justice. As Dunkerley writes, the rising "is indelibly etched into the nation's collective memory both as a momentous occurrence in itself and as the matrix through which all succeeding developments have been understood" (*The Long War* 19). The pivotal importance of 1932 is also acknowledged in *Cuzcatlán*; already in the first chapter, the politically active Lucía (whose codename is Ticha after her grandmother) describes it as moment that determined the authorities' oppressive attitude towards the peasantry and thus shaped the civil war of the eighties. While the earliest date given in the chapter headings is 1936 – thus referring us to the period in which opposition had been crushed and resistance was at a low – Emiliano describes in the corresponding chapter the events of January 1932. Emiliano, who belongs to the second of six generations, delivers his testimony without any mediation in the form of an interior monologue: "Recuerdo el año 32" (43) are the first words of his eye-witness account of the killings, and he remembers how anything connected to the demand for higher wages or human rights was labelled Communist (44).

¹³⁹ Farabundo Martí co-founded the Salvadoran Communist Party, PCS.

¹⁴⁰ Roque Dalton interviewed Miguel Mármol in 1966 in Prague, where the latter lived in exile. The *testimonio* was published 1971.

Yet, while Emiliano may carry the same last name as the dictator – who is not mentioned by name in the novel – the reader is not aware of that fact at this particular moment in the narrative.¹⁴¹ Emiliano, his father Macario, his daughter Beatriz (or Ticha for short) and her husband Eusebio, are exclusively referred to by their first names, a fact through which their disenfranchisement is made explicit. The name only becomes re-appropriated by the next generation, which, however, is crucially divided. Pedro Martínez and his brother Manuel had been abducted as teenagers and had been re-educated by their foreign, US advisers to become National Guards, while the youngest brother Jacinto was not recruited, first for being too young and later for being literate. The impending confrontation of Lucía, the daughter of Jacinto, with “Corporal Martínez” (her uncle) is referred to in the first chapter and drives the whole novel, but their blood relation is not made explicit until the chapters that refer to events in 1980 when Pedro Martínez is sent on repressive missions in the area where his family has moved to. While Pedro assumes his last name when he becomes a Corporal in the army, his youngest brother Jacinto re-appropriates his name mentally as he becomes conscious of the extent and nature of their political oppression. Only when confronted with the atrocities of his brother “Martínez” and asked by his neighbours about his last name does he begin to realize the significance of the loss of their last name – and thus their civil status - as he recollects their exclusion from elections and the rigging of votes by the hacienda owner. The confrontation between the Corporal Martínez – who, as Lucía argues at the end of the novel, has also been a victim of the land-owning elite - and his relatives is of course highly symbolic, and the novel’s utopian ending makes a gesture towards social reconciliation. The Martínez family is thus used as a symbol for a national lower class culture that needs to work towards unification (cf. Craft 123).

As aforementioned, the non-chronological structure allows for a framing of the narrative that privileges the politicised voice of Lucía. Throughout the plot of the novel if rearranged chronologically, there is a gradual development of a communal and politicized voice; this development reflects the dominant theme of the novel, the conscientization of the Salvadoran *campesinos*, which comes to a head in the late 70s/early 80s. The structure suggests that, as in *testimonio*, the present generation’s

¹⁴¹ As Linda Croft has noted, the novel does attribute almost no textual presence to the oppressors who remain abstract figures: “The textual distance parallels what Argueta sees as a “technification of dictatorship”, a concept key to the awareness of what has caused the proliferation of atrocities” (126).

concern with the past is activated in the present to contribute to contemporary struggles that are clearly inscribed within a global context.

When the narrative turns to events that occurred in the decade following “la matanza” (the massacre of 1932), the reader is not allowed an easy identification with the characters. In Chapter two, which describes the family’s situation in the 30s, the family’s suffering caused by the deadly working conditions in the dye factory, such as Emiliano’s grief about his wife’s death, are described from an internal perspective. Yet, these internal renderings of the characters’ suffering are at times intruded upon by a voice that reminds the reader of his/her exteriority, since it is clearly external to the characters’ consciousness: Eusebio is described as “[f]laco y alto como son los campesinos de Chalatenango. Nada más en los ojos hay tristeza. Así son los campesinos todos de Cuzcatlán” (italics in original 31). The members of the earlier generations, Beatriz, her partner Eusebio and her father Emiliano are illiterate without any formal education, and their awareness of their situation is circumscribed by lack of access to any information that would enable them to place their lives within a larger historical framework. They are affected by, and discuss, the working conditions of the mills, rumours about the decline of the indigo factories, and the need for Eusebio to find work in the coffee plantations as there are no opportunities to earn a living in Chalatenango (one of the poorest areas of El Salvador since it is unsuitable for large-scale coffee-production (Pearce, *The Promised Land* 45)). These experiences are inserted into a broader historical dimension by the narrator who assumes the voice of a historical analyst:

A las condiciones esclavas de trabajo se sumaba la desocupación, signo de penurias y miserias. Miles de campesinos se estaban quedando sin la menor oportunidad de conseguir trabajo. La tinta de añil había dejado de ser el sueño de colores del viejo mundo. Una inmensa población flotante era perseguida como vagos por la guarida rural y obligados a trabajar forzosamente en los cafetales, en las nuevas fincas situadas en las faldas de los volcanes de la cordillera central de Cuzcatlán. Los campesinos como Emiliano, se aferraban a su oficio de miserias y alguna parcelita para no darles justificación a los guardianes del orden, y evitar ser trasladados forzosamente a los volcanes. Ahí donde se carecía de oportunidad de tener un techo propio, o de tierra donde sembrar aunque no fuera propia (39-40).

The narrator here employs the third person plural to refer to a certain sector of society, thus indicating his exteriority, which grants him an overview and also perhaps a position of objectivity. He situates Emiliano's struggle to survive under worsening circumstances and his son-in-law's migrancy within the larger socio-historical context of El Salvador. From his position as a narrator, he is also able to situate the local situation within that of the world system, commenting on the direct impact of the rise of synthetic dye in Europe on the situation of the indigenous population of El Salvador, as the decline of indigo on the world market results in the closing down of the exploitative indigo factories in El Salvador. Of course, the illiterate Emiliano has no access to data that would enable him to produce this broad overview.

In other instances, the shift between the broader historical perspective and one deriving from the characters own experiences is almost imperceptible, as the narrative voice adds pieces of information that do not appear to form part of the character's interior monologue (in the 50s):

Emiliano estaba pensando en las piedras de moler. En la subsistencia. A la vez que contemplaba el mar. Mira gaviotas, pelícanos, troncos de árboles arrastrados a saber dónde. [...] Observa, también, los barcos a la distancia, *cargando los últimos fardos históricos del añil, procesado en bloques compactos, en pasteles turquesas*. Color de mar (my emphasis 41).

From Emiliano's reflections on his personal lot, the narrative shifts to the historicising perspective. The occurrence of these narrative shifts between exterior and interior positions destabilizes the reader's identification with the characters. The (obviously literate) reader is thus reminded of his/her non-identity with the illiterate Cuzcatec peasant, and his comparative closeness to the historicising external narrator.¹⁴²

Emiliano and his family partly manage to resist exploitation through their trade with the grinding stones. However, it is not certain to what degree Emiliano is aware of the entirety of their situation, as the relation between an exterior, objective position as constructed by the narrative voice and the characters' consciousness is

¹⁴² This argument assumes that the novel is being read. If the novel was read aloud on the radio as a means of conscientisation – as was *Un día en la vida* – the effect would obviously be slightly different.

often more complicated than suggested by the quotes above. To explain Emiliano's resistance to the factories, the narrator relates an exchange between him and his daughter (which is characterized by a sense of uncertainty, as the reader does not know which parts of the dialogue are spoken aloud):

-No seremos *esclavos de la muerte* – lo dice sin dirigirse a la hija, como quien echa a volar una bandada de mariposas. Alguna vez habían sido *sabios y poetas* los hombres como Emiliano. Después fueron *esclavos y siervos*. Un siglo atrás, se habían convertido en asalariados, pero las condiciones de vida eran similares a las de la esclavitud. “Alguna gotita de *sabiduría* nos queda”, piensa Emiliano. “Eso se transmite por la sangre”, sigue pensando. Los abuelos se lo heredan a los nietos, y éstos a sus hijos, en una cadena luminosa como el Camino de Santiago en el cielo. “*No seremos esclavos de nadie, ¿me oíste?*” Aunque todo lo ha dicho para sí, le parece que ha estado hablando con su hija. *Los dos golpeaban la piedra*, sacándole astillas.

-Te oigo papá – dice Beatriz. O lo piensa (my emphasis 39).

As in the passages quoted previously, the voice clearly shifts between different narrative positions. The poetic image of the butterflies does not seem to be attributable to Emiliano, but rather forms part of the aesthetization of experience through the narrative voice. The next sentences also seem to originate from a source exterior to Emiliano's consciousness, as the voice distances itself from the Emiliano and his social class. The narrative thus leaves unresolved the question of how far Emiliano in the 1930s is consciously aware of the historical dimension of their oppression or even of their past of his ancestors prior to the land dispossession that started with the hacienda system under colonialism and was expanded with the rise of the coffee plantations in the 19th and 20th century. However, the seeming opposition between the narrator and Emiliano is partly destabilized, as the latter repeats some of the words employed by the narrative voice: his mention of the “gotita de sabiduría”, for instance, connects to the earlier statement that seemed to derive from a source external to his consciousness. Significantly, this (spoken or tacit, explicit or intuitive?) dialogue is conducted at the same time as their work on the grinding stones. Within the imaginative space of the novel, the grindstone

becomes a symbol for a non-verbal, non-articulated form of resistance, as it is through their skills at traditional handicraft that the family manages to set themselves apart. From the very first page of the novel, the grindstone plays a central role in the life of the *campesinos*, as it used to make tortilla:

[el metate] [e]s una piedra preciosa para mí, formada por lava de los volcanes; de ella han vivido mis papás, mis abuelos, mis bisabuelos. Ellos hacían piedras de moler. Para moler maíz. Los campesinos molemos el maíz con la fuerza de nuestros brazos. [...] Con eso nos alimentamos. La tortilla es nuestra pan. Es la vida (9-10).

The grindstone is made of indigenous materials and central to their mode of life, linked as it is to corn (which is of central importance to the Maya) and the staple food tortilla and, within the space of the novel, functions as a symbol of the “family’s strength and survival” (Craft 126). The grindstone is a means of political resistance on the part of the characters (one that is not, however, immune from the market); metaphorically, it also comes to represent Glissant’s “right to opacity”. This opacity is as we have seen also integral to the narrative, as the voice shifts from internal to external perspectives, thus disabling an easy identification of the reader with the characters. Like Rigoberta Menchú in her *testimonio*, who insists on not telling all the secrets of her community, the narrative strategies of this text thus disable a complete knowledge of the ‘Other’.¹⁴³ However, this insistence on ‘unreadability’ does not necessarily need to be read as a complete ontological or epistemological break between the reader of the text and the (fictional) testimonial subjects, which is precisely what Moreiras argues.¹⁴⁴ As we have seen, the narrative voice in *Cuzcatlán* constantly inserts the characters’ fate into the larger context of global capitalism, thus linking their economic situation to the reader’s. The family’s business of making grindstones –a symbol of the peasants’ material and spiritual resistance to domination – is complemented by their tradition of journeying to the seashore to baptize their children in what is referred to as “agua universal” (122).

¹⁴³ The last sentence of her narrative is: “Sigo ocultando lo que yo considero que nadie sabe, ni siquiera un antropólogo, ni un intelectual, por más que tenga muchos libros, no saben distinguir todos nuestros secretos” (271).

¹⁴⁴ It is not only in field of Latin American Studies that academics have defended this position. The debates surrounding the Indian Subaltern Studies movement are characterised by similar positions. O’Hanlon, for instance, argues that “the only constant feature of the subaltern’s ‘nature’ which we can identify with any certainty, which is its alienness from our own” (“Recovering the Subject” 96).

The sea for them brings imperialist domination, but it also represents hope: “sus brazos de agua salada lo estrechaban con otro mundo, otros hermanos” (124-5); the gesture of baptism thus functions as “un acercamiento intuitivo a otras naciones” (42), evoking the possibility as a positive globalisation ‘from below’ based on solidarity.

“The right to opacity” is invoked by Glissant as a means to resist being inserted into global history without having been able to formulate first their internal history buried under the imperialist narrative; it manifests itself in the “élan des peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd’hui a l’universel de la transparence, imposé par l’Occident, une multiplicité sourde du Divers” (*DA* 14). As he adds in the footnote, the Occident is not a place, it is a project; in other words, the supposed objectivity of the invoked “transparency” is a product of, and is clearly shaped by, the imperialist project (which, as postcolonial critics have argued, may be linked to certain cultural manifestations, such as realist narrative authority, the centred subject, the construction of self/Other dichotomy).¹⁴⁵ Opacity “is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can co-exist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (*Poetics* 190). In other words, while resisting (neo)imperialist universalism that seeks to assimilate its others into its own conceptions of humanity or to abject it as a barbaric/primitive/exotic ‘Other’, Glissant does not seek to counter this through a theory of incommensurability but instead refers to the “fabrics” in which we all coexist, and it is on those links that the analysis should focus. Accordingly, in *Discours antillais*, he does offer a ‘readable’, re-constructed version of Antillean history, which has divested itself of the periodizing proffered by French history, and of the ‘monumentalism’ characteristic of much ‘Western’ history writing, focused on ‘great men’. Similarly, while the reader is never allowed to be certain as to the extent of Emiliano’s political awareness and is never offered a completely transparent view of him, Argueta’s character Lucía offers a politicised and historically aware analysis of their situation and also, significantly, grants the reader insights into how she constructs herself as a subject.

¹⁴⁵ In “The fetish of “the West” in postcolonial theory”, Neil Lazarus argues that, as it is used in postcolonial theory, “the West” “has no coherent or credible referent. It is an ideological category masquerading as a geographic one” (*Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* 44).

As John Beverley observes, “the narrator in testimonio [...] speaks for, or in the name of, a community or group” (“The Margin” 26). Menchú, as a political activist seeking to represent her community, makes this very explicit:

lo importante es, yo creo, que quiero hacer un enfoque que no soy la única, pues ha vivido mucha gente y es la vida de todos. La vida de todos los guatemaltecos pobres y trataré de dar un poco mi historia. Mi situación personal engloba toda la realidad de un pueblo (Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* 21).

Similarly, in *Cuzcatlán*, Lucía employs a communal voice (conjugating the verbs in the first person plural), especially when she is referring to her people’s customs, traditions, history and long-standing resistance against oppression.¹⁴⁶ This evocation of a communal identity does not translate into an erasure of personal differences such as feared in much (bourgeois) European literature where community threatens to become the mob of the city; it does not, in other words, transform the individual into the faceless “man of the crowd” invoked by Edgar Allan Poe, for instance. “Anonymity here means not the loss of a personal identity, of the proper name”, as Jameson phrases it, “but the multiplication of those things; not the faceless sociological average or sample or least common denominator, but the association of one individual with a host of other names and other concrete individuals” (“On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution” 185). As such, he argues, it is both social and literary, constituting a new way to conceive of collectivity. *Cuzcatlán* shares with Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio* the narrator’s assumption of a communal voice and the emphasis on a process of conscientization. Both texts open with the act of naming, as the characters assert their identity; in both cases, this is immediately followed by an inscription of the individual self within the community.

Examining the difficulties of the intellectual to represent peasant consciousness within discourse, Partha Chatterjee – one of the members of the Indian Subaltern Studies Group, a forerunner of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group - argues that the historian of subaltern history, or the testimonial novelist in this

¹⁴⁶ One might here also refer to Rama’s comparison of US individualism to Latin American ‘collectivism’: “If myths condense collective desires about the world then in the case of the United States they gain wide play from positive perceptions of the capacity of the individual, while in the Latin American case they rest on an acute sense of individual helplessness in the face of monolithic state power” (55).

instance, needs to be aware that peasant consciousness cannot be constructed in accordance to the “paradigm of bourgeois rationality”, as it is almost its polar opposite (“The Nation and its Peasants” 14). He writes:

what the principle of community as the characteristic unifying feature of peasant consciousness does is directly place it at the opposite pole to a bourgeois consciousness. The latter operates from the premise of the individual and a notion of his interests (or, in a more fashionable vocabulary, his preferences). Solidarities in bourgeois politics are built up through an aggregative process by which individuals come together into alliances on the basis of common interests (or shared preferences). The process is quite the opposite in the consciousness of a rebellious peasantry. There solidarities do not grow because individuals feel they can come together with others on the basis of their common individual interests: on the contrary, individuals are enjoined to act within a collectivity, because, it is believed, bonds of solidarity that tie them together already exist. Collective action does not flow from a contract among individuals; rather, individual identities themselves are derived from membership in a community (Chatterjee 13-14).

As Menchú's *testimonio* and *Cuzcatlán* show, the construction of peasant consciousness according to the paradigm of bourgeois humanist individualism is by no means inevitable in discourse and, more specifically, the novel. In contrast to the hero of the traditional European novel who is often distinguished through his *difference* from the rest of society, the protagonist is, in accordance with Chatterjee's definition, an active part of his community for which s/he functions as a metonymic representative; furthermore, s/he does not only represent memory and community, but rather is an agent of it. Lucía sees herself as a prolongation of the past (and hence chooses her grandmother's name as her codename) and is speaking for 'her people'. Similarly, Jacinto – who is, as Lucía notes, becoming more politically conscious during his later life - reflects on the overlaps of their lives: “Beatriz es igual a su nieta Lucía, a su nieta Antonia; también es igual a todo el mundo. Desde que nace es una mujer que deberá vivir en otras mujeres para transformarse[...]. Son las mismas. Sus historias se confunden. Sus vidas se confunden” (267-8). In direct contrast to this communally constructed subaltern consciousness, Corporal Martínez has been re-

educated by the military to conceive of the betrayal of his family and his re-alignment with the oppressor as a means for forming and preserving his individuality, his rise out of poverty: “cada quien es libre de disponer de lo suyo, toda vez que sea en defensa de los intereses del individuo. Y él es el individuo que debe alzarse por encima de los demás y en contra de los demás” (247). ‘Individuality’ is here employed as an ideological justification for his murders and abductions. This is the kind of ‘individuality’ historically afforded by the owner of the *encomienda* (in the case of Central America) and the slave owner (in the Caribbean), which is formulated in contradistinction to the slaves later transformed into ‘free’ workers; it is supported by force, land dispossession and the prolongation of the legacies of colonialism. As Harris writes, “the *individual* possesses certain distinguishing marks, education, status, background, morality, etc, while a slave [...] was like an animal put up for sale” (*Tradition* 33).

Significantly, in the novel, the assumption of the communal voice coincides with the characters’ conscientisation. The historical perspective, which in the previous quotes was often added by an external voice, is now internalised: “Ser campesina. Ser campesina en Cuzcatlán significa que mis padres, mis abuelos y bisabuelos, fueron campesinos. Sus tatarabuelos fueron Señores de estas tierras, las cultivaron y repartieron el producto por igual entre todos. Después, los Señores se convirtieron en esclavos y se fueron difuminando sus características de quienes habían sido formados para la poesía y el combate. Mucho tienen de poetas los campesinos cuzcatlecos. Nos viene de generación en generación” (my emphasis, 141). The contrast between this passage and the one quoted earlier reflects on the narrative level the process of conscientisation represented in the plot, as Lucía appropriates those aspects that were exterior to her great-grandfather’s consciousness (at least on a representational level), such as poetry and a historical overview. It thus reflects the subaltern’s move out of subalternity and into discourse; like Rigoberta Menchú through the publication of her story, the fictional Lucía ceases to be subaltern within the imaginative space of the novel.

In the debates surrounding the possibility of representing the subaltern, it has been argued that the representation of the subaltern and the writing of his/her oppressed history risks falling back into a humanist essentialism, constructed on the basis of concept of the “self-defining, self-originating individual” (O’Hanlon 74), something that is somewhat reluctantly advocated by Spivak as the subaltern studies

group's use of strategic essentialism. However, as Priyamvada Gopal has pointed out, the stark choice that many critics, including Spivak, offer between a peasant consciousness that is either constructed as authentic (and thus essentialist) or entirely constituted (hence directing the scholar towards an analysis of the discourses of power) is misleading, as it precludes the possibility that "the subaltern may have a mediated (rather than incoherent) relationship to both consciousness (of her condition) and agency (to resist)" ("Reading Subaltern History" 149). In the novel, the characters incorporate this possibility. In Lucía's case, her resistance derives partly from her ancestor's resistance, represented by the grindstones, but also from the fact that Lucía is the most politically aware of her family, has received some form of education and is strongly involved in the trade unions, in the revolutionary struggles and has links to the guerrilla (the *muchachos*). As she explains, she first learned about being "organized" in the cooperatives of Chalatenango (one of the areas where the "revolutionary movement was most strongly implanted among the peasantry" (Byrne 31)). There were two cooperative movements in the 60s and 70s, one state-led ("with strong financial support from USAID and the Inter-American Foundation"), the other originating in the church, and putting "much more emphasis on the social aspects of the cooperatives and on their role in helping to solve some of the immediate problems of the poor peasantry" (Pearce 93). Although their direct impact on solving poverty was limited as Pearce notes, for Lucía, it signified a springboard for getting involved in trade unions and other mass organizations of resistance, and ultimately the guerrilla war.

Yet, even though Lucía is the most politically aware, the rest of the family also develop a revolutionary awareness of their situation and a sense of themselves as a group as the events involving Corporal Martínez come to a head and Jacinto is forced into what Lucía refers to as 'consciousness', i.e. a mental stock-taking of their situation. In the novel, it is the fact that Pedro, Emiliano's son, has turned into one of their oppressors that propels the growing awareness. It is when the characters start reclaiming their rights that the narrative voice increasingly shifts to a communal one. In other words, in the novel, many factors contribute to the *campesinos'* conscientization; partly, their resistance is rooted in their own culture, partly derives from circumstance and the desperateness of their situation, and partly from the influence of the revolutionary groups, as well as the influence of liberation

theologists who are no longer teaching submission to the status quo.¹⁴⁷ The historian Byrne gives a similar account noting that the two main catalysts were “activist Catholic clergy and lay people and the recently formed political-military (guerrilla) organizations” (27). Perhaps, it is due to the nature of a work of fiction that Argueta is able to attribute importance also to the role of the peasants’ own culture and traditions in the rising of consciousness (their baptism in the sea; their evocation of Maya creation myths that explain the existence of oppressors; the identity formation around material practices such as the production of grindstones).

The process of conscientization transforms the subaltern into an active agent, annulling his/her subalternity. Lucía understands that her political involvement and her ‘conscientization’ alienate her to an extent from those who surround her. As she phrases it in the first chapter: “Yo no me incluyo entre los inocentes. Trato de resistir y por eso uso seudónimo. Si no me hubiera salido del caserío no habría participado en esta guerra. Nada más como víctima” (14). In contrast to those in her hamlet, she has been taken in by her aunt, became a member of trade unions, cooperatives, and was taught and continues to be taught about their history and the reasons for their poverty. This complicates the relation between Lucía and those who she includes in her communal ‘we’, as she no longer forms part of the subaltern group. When she speaks to her grandmother after her great-grandfather has been killed in an incident that involved Pedro Martínez, she questions her own ability to communicate with her grandmother, who may not understand her:

Sin embargo, adivino que me está ocultando algo. O mejor dicho se lo miro en sus ojos, en la manera de mirar. Es un defecto de los pobres: ocultamos nuestras emociones detrás de los ojos; por eso preferimos no ver directamente cuando no queremos que se nos descubra. Pero ya lo he visto, mientras ella levanta la cabeza queriendo defenderse del viento norte que tira a un lado su pelo blanco. Me dice entonces que últimamente no se siente bien del corazón. “Tóquemelo, m’hija”, dice. Como las estrellas de mar, pienso luego que he sentido sus palpitaciones en el pecho. Pero no le digo nada porque quizás no me entendería.

¹⁴⁷ It is important to note that “by 1975 an estimated 30 percent of the rural, economically active population had less than two months of work a year, and another 19 percent had between two and six months” (Byrne 32). The revolutionary groups were formed in 1970 and while successfully seeking to create a mass base among the peasantry were led by middle class activists (Byrne 33-35).

- Como si tuviera un montón de mariposas enjauladas.
- Y quisieran volar – me interrumpe la abuela (260-261).

Despite the fact that there is a big difference between Lucía and her grandmother Beatriz, they clearly overcome the ‘gap’, as her grandmother responds to the poetic image used by Lucía and responds to what Lucía thought she might not understand. Significantly, they also carry the same name. As suggested by this passage, Lucía’s conscientization does not create an unbridgeable gap between herself and her family/the subaltern *campesinos*. In other words, despite his acute awareness of the pitfalls of representation, Argueta never discards its possibility. Lucía - an organic intellectual - can speak for her community, and Argueta – as a writer and traditional intellectual – equally has the responsibility of speaking for his the oppressed groups of his country, as implied in the very act of writing this book, which for Argueta had personal and political consequences.¹⁴⁸

This is where the discussion needs to turn to the wider debate surrounding *testimonio*, which has centred precisely around this question of representation. Critics like Beverley and Yúdice have stressed the subversive value of *testimonio* and its challenge to academic discourse, and more specifically, deconstruction, which “only recuperates the other as absence” in hegemonic discourse (Yúdice, “Testimonio and Postmodernism” 50). Beverley, in a more recent article, adds that we must allow for the possibility of transculturation from below (“The Real Thing”, 272). Their critique of (post)modernism, poststructuralism and deconstruction is well taken; however, as mentioned above, their championing of *testimonio* is partly based on representing it as an extra-literary, extra- or anti-representational discourse. For Yúdice, “the speaker does not speak for or represent a community but rather performs an act of identity formation” (43); in “The Margin at the Centre”, Beverley

¹⁴⁸ The Salvadoran writer Manlio Argueta, who is a member and co-founder of various engaged literary movements, has been imprisoned several times for his political activities; he lived in exile during the civil war that lasted from 1980 to the early 90s, and his books were forbidden in his own country. In 1980, the year of the publication of his most famous novel entitled *Un día de vida*, the Salvadoran authorities halted the printing of the former and ordered the confiscation of all existing copies.

<http://www.curbstone.org/authdetail.cfm?AuthID=76>. Accessed 17th September 2007.

In 1983, Jonathan Alter wrote in his review for *Newsweek*: “Perhaps the best testimony to the power of Argueta’s polemic has been its official reception. Shortly after the book appeared El Salvador’s rulers rounded up all copies, ordered publishers to stop printing it, and forced the author to flee to Costa Rica, where he remains in exile” (quoted by Narváez, “Manlio Argueta y la (re)escritura de la historia salvadoreña”, 114).

– while making some very valid points about the construction of subjectivity – argued that *testimonio* constituted a “radical break with the novel and literary fictionality” (38). For them, Lucía can clearly speak and we can hear Lucía, although Yúdice would not admit the difference between Lucía and her grandmother.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, given that this is a *fictional* text written by a *traditional* intellectual (transforming it into “high literature”), *Cuzcatlán* for these critics does not fall into the same category as *testimonio*. Yet, while of course it is useful and necessary to draw out the differences and similarities between, for instance, Rigoberta Menchú’s and Argueta’s positioning in relation to the indigenous peasant community, it is important to recognize that both text forms are oppositional discourses that derive from social and political practices. Sklodowska’s examination of how a testimonial *text* constitutes itself as “truth-saying” is thus the logical response to such celebrations of “authenticity” that set up a false dichotomy between representation/literature as such and subaltern testimony (“Spanish American Testimonial Novel”).

Critics such as Moreiras and González Echevarría, however, have pushed such deconstructionist/poststructuralist reading of *testimonio* – or, in Moreiras’s case, of ‘our’ reading and criticism of it – to the limits. In his reading of the *Biografía de un cimarrón*, González Echevarría (writing before Yúdice and Beverley) collapses the positional difference between Barnet and the testimonial subject, Montejo, thus effectively de-historicizing and de-contextualising the production of the text; he argues that “both turn out to have been the same all along, when the difference between them is discovered to be the conventional distinction necessary for the constitution of the text” (González Echevarría 121).¹⁵⁰ A few years later and in response to Beverley and Larsen, Moreiras formulated his theory of the “auratic practice of the postauratic” that supposedly beleaguers Latin Americanism (“The

¹⁴⁹ Several critics have since pointed out the pitfalls of this argument. Colás argues that *testimonio* is an “oppositional discourse that seeks to reoccupy and redefine – not escape and flee- the terrain of representation” (“What’s wrong with Representation?” 171). Larsen points out that the Yúdice’s obliteration of the gap that enables representation effectively transforms *testimonio* into a semi-religious “act of transubstantiation” that would truly exclude “us” communicating with her who *is* the community (*North* 14).

¹⁵⁰ In one of the most famous *testimonios* (or testimonial novels, as the author describes it), Miguel Barnet – an anthropologist - narrates the life-story of Esteban Montejo, an ex-slave, maroon and fighter in the Cuban wars of independence, based on a series of interviews he had conducted with the latter (*Biografía de un cimarrón*, 1966). Certainly, it is the kind of reading of *testimonio* conducted by González Echevarría, which overemphasises literary specularity at the expense of the “subaltern” agency, that necessitated Yúdice’s and Beverley’s impassioned defence of it as a new, and different genre.

Aura of Testimonio”). To simplify a somewhat convoluted argument, he writes that the ‘Other’ cannot be represented in academic discourse, despite the fact that critics claim to have overcome the ‘abjection’ of the ‘Other’ and letting ‘Other’ voices enter the discursive space of academia (a claim referred to as “post-auratic”); yet, the nature of academic discourse is such that it is founded on the exclusion of the ‘Other’ who is never able to enter the sites that sustain the current power structures (academic discourse is thus inescapably “auratic” in nature). I would argue that Moreiras not only fetishizes the difference between ‘us’ and the subaltern but also severely underestimates subaltern agency, which is here not simply problematized (indeed a necessary exercise), but rather completely written out of academic discourse. Furthermore, the argument relies on a sleight of hand that does not hold up under scrutiny, as it rests on a reading of the pivotal moment of Neruda’s *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, a *fictional* (but nevertheless engaged) text. Like Neruda’s speaker, ‘we’ supposedly only ever “prosopoeically” invoke the dead/the absent/the Other (who is abjected in academic discourse as an inhabitant of an unlivable zone (201)). However, even if we were to accept that *Las Alturas* can function as an archetype for how traditional intellectuals approach the issue of representing the ‘Other’, it should be noted that Neruda’s speaker does not only – or even primarily – invoke the dead, but rather appeals to the class of oppressed indigenous workers;¹⁵¹ that *Canto General* contains many more poems that denounce the imperialist domination at the root of the workers’ oppression; that Neruda himself was politically engaged on behalf of the working classes which in the years after the publication of *Alturas* forced him to go into hiding and later into exile.

This last detail, while not acknowledged as relevant by Moreiras, re-introduces the question of political responsibility into the debate. Moreiras, Gugelheimer and other critics are certainly right to problematize the canonization of *testimonio*, especially in the wake of the infamous Stanford canon debates and the vicious and politically charged attacks on Rigoberta Menchú’s credibility.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ He refers to the workers of the past with Hispanic names, and in the last canto, clearly voices a socialist battle cry of solidarity. Macchu Picchu becomes the symbolic site of resistance, which is activated in the present.

¹⁵² In *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), Stoll – who graduated from Stanford – “exposed” Menchú as a liar; the accuracy and methodology of Stoll’s own research has since been put into doubt (see *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*). Yet, even leaving aside this quarrel over historical accuracy, I fully agree with Mary Louise Pratt’s remarks that what is hardest to accept when reading Stoll’s (in)famous exposition of supposed discrepancies and inaccuracies in Menchú’s testimonio is what she calls the “ethical scale” of his argument: “it remains incongruous to equate these [discrepancies] ethically with the monstrosities of the army, the enormity of indigenous

However, questioning the very possibility of non-academic voices from the margins entering 'our' academic discourse effectively disenfranchises the third world organic intellectual, pushing him/her back into a position of subalternity. The de-politicization that did accompany the canonization of *testimonio* need not be understood as an ontological/epistemological failure, but rather as a political one; furthermore, as the Stanford canon debates and the conservative backlash unleashed by their integration demonstrate, while *testimonios* may have been de-politicised in class-room conditions the choice of assigning these texts remains a highly politicised one, since it demands the un-thinking of Euro-centrism that has been central to the field of Postcolonial Studies. I agree with Neil Larsen when he challenges the academic invocation of non-commensurability: "in declaring ourselves "unfit" to be her [Menchú's] cocommunicants, are we not relieving ourselves of consciously political burdens of organising to resist a common (hers *and* ours) enemy?" (*Reading North* 16). This is, then, the fault line between poststructuralism/postmodernism and the ethics of writing advocated by the writers examined in this chapter, who as part of the "Novelists' International" invoked by Denning incorporate a return to representationality and realist representation (that does not, however, reject all aspects of modernism).

suffering and loss, the immensity of the inequalities and injustices of Guatemalan society, the courage and stamina of those who survived, the legitimacy of the demands for peace and justice [...]" (45). Like Pratt, many other left-wing intellectuals rightly point out that whether or not Menchú did attend a boarding school makes little difference to the fact that the atrocities narrated are very real and cannot be refuted. Furthermore, Stoll's and subsequent attacks on Menchú often miss the fact that her testimony is not constructed in the same way as a traditional bourgeois autobiography, and that it does not construct subjectivity in the same way. Menchú testifies to the oppression of an entire class of people, not just of herself. It goes almost without saying that her testimony is- and must be - politically engaged.

A testimonial detective story: Genre and Displacement in *Solibo Magnifique* (1988)¹⁵³

[O]ur literary material only achieves sufficient density when it takes in, at the level of content, the unsuitability of the European form, without which we cannot be complete.

Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas* (68)

[L]es massacres se perpétuent partout dans le monde. Nous sommes un écho caricatural.

Édouard Glissant, *Discours Antillais* (90)

Solibo Magnifique is obviously not a testimonial novel as such.¹⁵⁴ However, since there is arguably no absolute epistemological or ontological break between *testimonio* and the testimonial novel on the one hand, and *testimonio* and the engaged novel on the other, I would here like to examine *Solibo Magnifique*'s engagement with the question of representation, which occurs to a large extent on the level of plot.¹⁵⁵ Chamoiseau - a strong critic of the departmental status of Martinique and the 'Frenchification' that has been its by-product - enters many of his texts as a fictional persona - *Oiseau de Cham* - and it is through the dramatisation of his relation to the characters of his narrative that Chamoiseau draws attention to the process of transforming life into fiction and, in particular, to the problem of transforming an oral - and thus by definition subaltern - culture into writing, entering the discourse of the hegemonic print culture. This is central to his early novel *Solibo Magnifique*, in which the *conteur* of creole culture is notably not the narrator of the story, unlike in

¹⁵³ Thanks to Maria Cristina Fumagalli for comments on an early version of this section, presented at the Annual Caribbean Conference in 2006.

¹⁵⁴ The first Francophone testimonial narrative was published in 1985, *Léonora: L'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe*, by Dani Bébel-Gisler. Like Chamoiseau, the Guadeloupan woman Léonora emphasises the cultural alienation effected through the school system, the violence of the anti-riot C.R.S. (Compagnies républicaines de sécurité), and the transition to a subsidized consumer economy. However, a much more prominent role is attributed to Créole: entire passages are written in Créole and translated.

¹⁵⁵ The novel investigates the death of the traditional storyteller Solibo Manifique, who functions as a representative of a threatened Martinican Creole culture, anchored in the island's and, more broadly, the region's culture and geography, and who, as we are told, has been 'strangled by the word'. The novel is told in three sections: the first is a brief mock police report that details the scene of the supposed crime, the exact positioning of the body, etc. The second section is told by the 'word scratcher', a writer and ethnographer who has become fascinated with Solibo Magnifique, and who is a fictional representation of Chamoiseau himself. In the section, he is describing the police investigation, as well as the working class characters' efforts to reconstruct a memory of Solibo and to understand his death. The last section, which is again quite short, is a reconstructed version of Solibo's last words.

other Francophone Caribbean novels (one might here cite *Ti Jean L'Horizon* by Simone Schwarz-Bart, published in 1979). The author's critique of Martinique's political status is expressed through a series of displacements of genre: most notably, *Solibo Magnifique* evokes and parodies the genre of the detective novel, but it also recalls that of *testimonio*. Significantly, the carnivalesque parody produced by these discrepancies belongs to a strategy of resistance explicitly identified in the novel as one of the lessons learned from the traditional story-teller. In their excessiveness, the displacements of genre formulate a critique of the unequal economic and power relations from which they derive. This engagement with genres inherited from the metropolitan country, as well as with those that have originated within the region itself, opens up larger questions of representation.

Solibo Magnifique is a failed detective story, in which the conventions of the genre continuously jar with local reality. As has been noted, the birth of the detective novel in the nineteenth century was closely linked to capitalism, to the Enlightenment ideology of order, rationalism and empiricism and the new sciences, such as forensic medicine. The genre became, in the words of the critic Mandel, the "epitome of bourgeois rationality" (*Delightful Murder* 26), and he emphasises that many of the traditional detective novels are affirmative of the social and legal status quo. Law and order is restored after the detective has discovered the truth of the crime.¹⁵⁶ It is significant, then, that in *Solibo* the police cannot get to the truth. Solibo's death possesses a metaphoric significance that cannot be understood within the framework of the detective novel. The detective and his police force meticulously record the position of Solibo's body and the contents of his pockets (as if to look for the vital piece of circumstantial evidence that would unravel the whole mystery, as is customary in the detective novel), they slice up all of his internal organs to find poisonous substances and invent theories to reconstruct his supposed murder, but all of these attempts only lead to the conclusion that from a medical point of view, Solibo's death is "enigmatic". The institutionalised French discourse of this inquest and the form-driven logic of the detective novel are thus represented as completely

¹⁵⁶ This affirmative dimension is taken to its extreme in the police procedural genre popular in the US, in which justice and truth is incorporated by the police investigator or the forces of the state (one might think of the inspector Columbo series of the 70s, for instance). However, in the context of neo-colonial Martinique, the adaptation of the genre to the local context reveals the bankruptcy of the ideologies on which it was traditionally based.

inadequate for dealing with the realities of Creole culture.¹⁵⁷ The comic discrepancy between Solibo's death that needs to be read on a metaphoric and cultural level and the policemen's literalist response thus highlights the disparity between local culture and the French culture of officialdom. In other words, the policemen comically adopt the wrong genre, acting in accordance to the conventions of the detective novel, even though the fact that Solibo's body is infested by ants and miraculously changes in weight clearly recalls *Cien años de soledad* perhaps suggesting that magical realism might have provided a more adequate interpretative lens.

However, while the enquiries of the detectives lead to an impasse the Creole working class characters clearly understand the significance of the event. Solibo belongs to a culture that has become obsolete, as his death suggests. As the writer and critic Ernest Pépin remarks, to the reader familiar with contemporary Fort-de-France, "the locations over which Solibo's stream of discourse flows seem to belong to another era. [...] Similarly, the torches used by the *serbi* players and the urns of *tafia* that slaked their thirst have long since migrated into the mists of collective memory" (Pépin 13). In the communal process of reconstructing his last words, the witnesses of his last performance realize that "cet homme était la vibration d'un monde finissant" (227), as the world of orality and the culture of pre-departmentalised Martinique is being given over to a culture that needs to be written in order to exist and that is threatened by the hegemony of French culture. With Solibo, who in fact seems to be a ghost of the past, "an entire world of knowledge and its mode of transmission disappear" (Sourieau 131). Solibo himself had always rejected to participate in events organised by the authorities of "l'action culturelle" that artificially preserve the oral culture of the Martinican conteur, who, as Chamoiseau pointed out elsewhere has disappeared with modern urbanization and the demise of the plantations (*Éloge* 43/104).¹⁵⁸ Despite his dislike of the written, Solibo is aware of the necessity and inevitability of change and, even though he always disapproved of Oiseau de Cham's project, he seems to validate it implicitly:

¹⁵⁷ As Mandel writes: "[in the detective novel] [f]ormal logic rules supreme. Crime and its unmasking are like supply and demand in the market place: abstract absolute laws almost completely alienated from real human beings and the clashes of real human passions" (26).

¹⁵⁸ Why Solibo gives his final speech during carnival is explained by Confiant's description of the cultural significance of the event: "De nos jours, le carnaval constitue un formidable déferlement de gestes, de langages, d'aspirations créoles dans une Martinique complètement francisée par quatre chaînes de télévisions qui passent, à longueur de journée, des feuilletons franco-euro-étasuniens. Pendant quatre jours par an, donc, du samedi gras au mercredi des Cendres, toute la Martinique parle créole, chante créole, s'époumone en créole, oublie ou abolit l'hypocrite morale chrétienne. L'école française est fermée, les églises sont désertées et la radio et la télévision guère regardées. Pendant quatre jours, il y a vacance du pouvoir français" (*Aimé Césaire* 138).

“Z’oiseau, tu dis: La tradition, la tradition...., tu mets pleurer par terre sur le pied-bois qui perd ses feuilles, comme si la feuille était racine! ... Laisse la tradition, pitite, et surveille la racine” (63). As we shall see, more important than Solibo’s words – the dead leaves of the tree of tradition - is in fact the middle section, significantly entitled *La Parole*, suggesting that the burden of representing culture is no longer carried by the story-teller, although, importantly, the novel continuously stresses the prime importance of the storyteller’s legacy for the present generation’s self-understanding.

Furthermore, despite – or perhaps rather through - the comic nature of the violent clashes between the police and the witnesses that often border on slapstick, the novel clearly emphasises the discrepancy in power between the state – specifically the police - and its subjects. It is here instructive to turn to a report by Amnesty International revealingly entitled “France, the search for justice: The effective impunity of law enforcement officers in cases of shootings, deaths in custody or torture and ill-treatment”:

As long ago as 1997 the UN Human Rights Committee, in its concluding observations on France’s third periodic report regarding its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), stated that it was “seriously concerned” at the number and grave nature of the allegations it had received of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials of detainees and other persons “who come into conflictual contact with them”, and at the fact that “in most cases there is little, if any, investigation of complaints of such ill-treatment by the internal administration of the police and the gendarmerie nationale, resulting in virtual impunity”.¹⁵⁹

The article also emphasizes the underlying racism/neo-colonialist attitude that seems to manifest itself through these acts: “[a]lmost the entirety of cases which have come to Amnesty International’s attention have involved persons of non-European ethnic origin and are often of North African or sub-Saharan extraction, or from France’s overseas departments or territories (DOM-TOMs)”. In other words, the novel has a serious subject matter and it reinstates meaning at the same time as it seems to mock it. Throughout the novel, which offers a serious political critique of the current state

¹⁵⁹ Amnesty, “France, the search for justice”.

of affairs in Martinique, Chamoiseau stresses the continuity between colonial times and the present of departmentalisation, since the social structures have remained unaltered. For the lower classes, the police and its repressive mechanisms produce terror and recall the “chasseurs des bois d’aux jours d’esclavage, les chiens à marronnage, la malice des alentours d’habitation, les commandeurs des champs, les gendarmes à cheval, les marins de Vichy du temps de l’Amiral” (83). As in colonial times, the ones in power, in this case the high officials of the police corps, are often French, or, as in the case of Évariste Pilon, have spent a considerable amount of time in the metropolitan country.

Bouafesse precedes Pilon at the scene of the crime, and also structurally in the novel. Chapter two focuses on Bouafesse’s brutal and thuggish investigation methods; Bouafesse is a colonial anti-maroon figure, who without any qualms takes the side of the stronger party. He is described as one of the native collaborators of the regime, who would have been the *béké*’s right hand during times of slavery according to the narrator and participated in the Algerian war (notably on the opposite side to his non-fictional compatriot Frantz Fanon). In chapter three, Pilon – who incorporates the more insidious violence of post-departmentalisation – is in charge, but despite his different methods he is unable to suppress the violence that characterised Bouafesse’s investigation. Colonial violence disrupts the seeming order of the neo-colonial investigation. Through Pilon, Chamoiseau highlights the psychological paradoxes on which this middle class, post-departmentalisation alignment with France is based, as the university educated inspector is torn between local and the hegemonic metropolitan culture (ultimately lending his support to the latter, as the former is transformed into a nostalgic impossibility). Hence, he advocates the use of Creole, but does not want his kids to speak it, celebrates the internal self-liberation of the slaves at the same time as commemorating Schoelcher, is proud of Fanon (whose theories he considers impracticable at home), and ultimately supports departmentalisation despite his nostalgia for independence. Bouafesse is a less complex character: he is less alienated from local culture but does not shy away from suppressing it. In *Solibo Magnifique*, hope therefore arises from Pilon’s changing attitude at the end of the novel, as he is beginning to reassess the death of Solibo; the ending thus bears similarities to *Cuztcalán*, where Lucía seeks to transform Pedro.

Throughout most of the novel, there is a notable disjunction between the official language, culture and legal system incorporated by the state and its officials and the local reality, culture and language of the working class characters. On the most obvious level, this is a difference in language, as the language of officialdom is, or is supposed to be, a metropolitan French, whereas most of the characters speak either a creolized French, or Creole. In contrast to the language of officialdom, the language spoken by the characters interviewed and tortured by the police— whether Creole or a (creolized) French - employs a frame of references that clearly arises from local history and is thus shaped by the oppressive social structures of Martinican society. The difference between these two discourses is thus not only one of language (Creole versus French) but also one of class and cultural frame of reference, as the elite speak a French as spoken in France. For instance, many of the interrogated do not understand the officer's questions regarding their profession, which Bouafesse translates for them as “Quel genre du travail tu fais pour le béké?” (98). Linguistically speaking, this particular phrase is comprehensible for the non-Creole speaker (in contrast to, for instance, the Creole spoken by the character Congo), but it is clearly based on a different set of references and inscribed in a social context where the *béké* class monopolises power and land. As we are told in a footnote in *Solibo*, this expression – which unveils the (racial) injustice and inequality of the structures of society - has remained part of the cultural repertoire of expressions, because it is still reflective of social reality (98). This disjunction (between the ‘official’ language alienated from social local reality and the one actually spoken by most characters) impedes the subaltern's entry into official discourse, as the cultural codes and references of the latter are very different from those of Creole culture. Official discourse –such as the law - is produced in France, and it functions to de-legitimise the Creole characters' ways of living. See for instance the list of witnesses extracted from the police records:

-Le surnommé Bête-longue (des recherches concernant l'état civil de cet individu sont en cours), se disant marin-pêcheur, très certainement sans profession, demeurant à Texaco, près de la fontaine.

[...]

-Patrick *Chamoiseau*, surnommé Chamzibié, Ti-Cham ou Oiseau de Cham, se disant “marqueur de paroles”, en réalité sans profession, demeurant 90 rue François-Arago (30).

The report seeks to classify them, to fix them spatially to an address and socially to a profession. However, almost all of the characters are declared to be without profession, an act that de-legitimises the work they do carry out, such as fishing, and producing manioc graters. Most of the characters have no numerically precise address, resisting thus the control mechanism typical of a panoptic society (the use of house numbers was notably introduced in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the rise of a panoptic, disciplinarian society seeking to control the threat of the ‘mob’). The difference between the different ‘languages’ employed is continually emphasised in the novel, as Bouafesse, the narrator and the characters are continually engaged in the act of translating from one discourse to another – from Creole to French and vice versa, and from metropolitan French to a Martinican French, from a middle class discourse to one spoken by the working classes. Significantly, those translations are generally not ‘word-for-word’, which emphasises the difficulty of translating a whole culture.¹⁶⁰

As we have seen, the genre of the detective novel was one that was in its inception linked to the Enlightenment order, and more broadly, to the developments characteristic of capitalist modernity. As such, it also was a response to the increasing urbanisation of Europe during the 19th century, to the anonymity of the cities, and the masses of people contained within them. While the modern city is traditionally represented “as the acme of rational planning”, the crowd came to be portrayed as “an undifferentiated mass that threatened to disorient and engulf the subject” (Dawson 21). In Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, for instance, the crowd of the city is perceived as frightening for “the lack of distinctions within it”; the crowd is no longer composed of individual people, but threatens to become a faceless (working class) mob, which the spectator fails to grasp or comprehend visually (Makdisi 37). The conservative Wordsworth renounces the city - aesthetically and politically - for not being able to frame “an independent and detached - and

¹⁶⁰ Some of these differences in translations become obvious from reading the text, others are difficult to detect for a non-Creole speaking reader. Furthermore, in some of the footnotes, Chamoiseau ‘translates’ customs for the non-Creole speaking reader, or adds a Creole definition for the reader able to read Creole. Other expressions are left un-translated.

paramount - subjectivity in opposition to the spectacle of the crowd” (Makdisi 37). For Baudelaire, on the other hand, the crowd becomes an intoxication (which Benjamin interprets as the intoxication of the commodity); the “man of the crowd’s” “passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd” (“The Painter of Modern Life” 9). This fear or fascination with the crowds produced by urbanisation is at the heart of the birth of the detective story: “the original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual in the big-city crowd” (Benjamin *Charles Baudelaire* 43). The flâneur is one of the prototypes of the detective, but as a gentleman of leisure who sought to resist the process of specialisation and the division of labour, he was one of a dying breed (the man of the crowd was already a post-flâneur, Benjamin argues in *Illuminations* 168); he was to be replaced by the detective à la Sherlock Holmes, who ‘reads’ and classifies people. Not surprisingly, the rise of the detective novel coincided with the rise of a panoptic society as analysed by Foucault; interestingly, its birth was also coincident with the discovery of photography, which Benjamin saw as the “most decisive of all conquests of a person’s incognito” (*Charles Baudelaire* 48).¹⁶¹

If I invoke 19th century European literature here, it is because Chamoiseau’s novel deals similarly with the effects of urbanization on aesthetics. In his novel, we find a reconfiguration of the relation of the individual to the crowd. As Hobsbawm argues in *The Age of Extremes*, the death of the peasantry was the most significant feature of the twentieth century, a development felt strongest in the peripheries of global capitalism.¹⁶² One might say that Chamoiseau approaches the crowd from the opposite side than Wordsworth or the aristocratic flâneur; his perspective is derived from, and formulates, an aesthetic of resistance from the standpoint of the lower classes in the colonies.¹⁶³ In the plantation society, the most individualised person was the master, whose house would dominate the plantation on a visual level. The most important traditional Martinican – and Caribbean – figure of resistance is that

¹⁶¹ Mandel eloquently and forcefully makes the link of the detective novel and the rise of a capitalist, panoptic society as follows: “If the question is asked why [the history of bourgeois society] should be reflected in the history of a specific literary genre, the answer is: because the history of bourgeois society is also that of property and of the negation of property, in other words, crime; because the history of bourgeois society is also the growing, explosive contradiction between individual needs or passions and mechanically imposed patterns of social conformism; because bourgeois society in and of itself breeds crime, originates in crime, and leads to crime” (135).

¹⁶² Ashley Dawson has analysed *Texaco* as dealing with this process in Martinique through the generational tale narrated by Marie-Sophie.

¹⁶³ Chamoiseau “grew up as the son of working-class parents” and he is a social worker (Murdoch 197). I am not invoking his working class origin or his social engagement to authenticate his literary vision, but simply as an indication of where he situates himself ideologically.

of the maroon, who, as Murdoch has outlined at length, Chamoiseau, Confiant and also Glissant rhetorically link to the figure of the *conteur* (Murdoch, *Creole Identity*). Both thus become figures of resistance – one from the inside, the other from the (relative) outside of the system. Importantly, the storyteller is “le délégué d’un imaginaire collectif”, giving voice to the group (Chamoiseau, *Lettres Créoles* 62).

However, before Solibo turns into a storyteller, he has to experience his “solibo”, his fall into what Chamoiseau in *Texaco* refers to as “drifting”; this spiritual, emotional fall is caused by the violence of the French system to which his father had fallen prey and results in Solibo’s loss of his sense of self. This experience is not one that is unique to Solibo, but common to an entire community: “Chaque nègre, et les négresses plus souvent qu’à leur tour, ont eu leur solibo” (77). At first, he is drifting outside of the city, then within. While the episode of Solibo’s drifting is not explored in great detail in *Solibo*, the theme is expanded in *Texaco*: “Qui marronne en mornes, maronne dans l’En-ville. Qui marronne dans l’En-ville marronne dans la Drive. C’est les Driveurs qui marchent, qui marchent, qui marchent... Pense aux Driveurs qui eux descendent dans l’En-Ville sans perdre *La Parole*: elle habite leur gueule folle comme un vent permanent” (374). In other words, the “drifter” is a contemporary version of the maroon. It is interesting to read Chamoiseau’s concept of “drifting” alongside de Certeau’s concept of “walking”. Writing from the metropolitan country, de Certeau had postulated that the act of “walking” in the city escapes the disciplinary mechanisms of a panoptic society. “Walkers” “elude legibility” (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 93); the panoptic dream (or rather nightmare) of total control over the subjects of the urban space can never be fully realized. Through his/her “style of use”, the individual creates his/her subjectivity. Similarly, in *Texaco*, “walking” or “drifting”, becomes a way in which the “drifter” seeks to free himself. Drifting is turned into an act of resistance, a refusal to fit into the system. As Marie Sophie later adds, “[l]e driveur, c’était notre désir de liberté dans l’être, notre manière de vivre les mondes en nous, notre nègre marron d’En-Ville” (459). However, Chamoiseau is less affirmative about the freedom offered through, and the resistance posed by, “drifting”. In *Solibo* as in *Texaco*, the drifting is seen as a sign of despair. The “walker” is inscribed into a (neo-) colonial context, and transformed into the drifter – clearly a victim of the symbolic and physical violence exerted by the French state. His resistance cannot offer any positive way forward, neither for himself nor for his community.

Resistance is located in the storyteller, or rather in the sense of community and memory that he incorporates. Yet, since he is an anachronistic figure, he cannot provide a solution either, except indirectly. In *Texaco*, Chamoiseau therefore locates resistance in the organically grown shantytown of Fort de France, which, while necessarily a product of global capitalism, is not controlled by urban planners. In de Certeau's use of the term, the "city" is shaped "from above", by corporations, the government, and other institutions. Chamoiseau, on the other hand, turns to the phenomenon of the shantytowns – a pressing and growing problem in the "Third World". In all of his works, Chamoiseau proposes a completely different image of the crowd than any of the authors mentioned above; the crowd is not threatening, but rather threatened by, the authorities. Furthermore, in the working class districts of Fort-de-France as described in the novel, the crowd on the market is not anonymous, unlike in the shopping malls of a post-industrial consumer society (in fact, there is no 'crowd', if the concept is defined through its anonymity). As Oiseau de Cham, the word-scratcher, writes: "tout le marché me connaissait" (43). Unlike Wordsworth, the word-scratcher abandons voluntarily an "independent and detached [...] subjectivity in opposition to the crowd". He abandons the panoramic view of the supposedly readable city (really only an "optical artefact" (de Certeau 92)), and enters what de Certeau calls the "*migrational*, or metaphorical city" that insinuates itself into the supposedly legible and categorizable reality that is the city. The word-scratcher might be seen as a detective of sorts – who like the police detectives seeks to solve the mystery that is Solibo – but contrary to the prototypical detective, he abandons principles of objectivity and distance. The police detectives, on the other hand, are agents of an oppressive system that, as we have seen, will never get to the truth.

The displacement of the detective novel thus exposes the conditions of its birth, formulating a politicised deconstruction its ideological basis. It is not surprising that the same phenomenon has occurred more widely in Latin American countries concurrently to the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies, as the detective novel has become problematized and politicised in the genre of the *novela negra*. In the Belascoarán series by the Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II –who is writing post 68, the year of the massacre of the students in Tlatelolco - the criminals are the state, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the police. As Braham notes, Héctor Belascoarán Shayne seeks to defend "the Mexican Revolution

against the putrefaction of its institutions” and adds that in general the *neopoliciaco* is “more overtly leftist than the American hard-boiled novel” (*Crimes against the State, Crimes against Persons* xiii). In these narratives, then, the reader is encouraged to sympathise with the ‘deviants’, which takes us back to novels written prior to the rise of the detective novel. One might think of the Spanish *pícaro* in the 16th century, for instance, or of Balzac’s criminals (1830s) who were often victims of social injustice and who possessed a true insight into society. It also more broadly recalls the popular tales about the “good bandits” such as Robin Hood or Til Eulenspiegel, a tradition that, as Mandel states, “dat[es] back at least to social movements contesting feudal regimes, and receiv[ed] powerful impetus with the onset of the decay of feudalism and the rise of capitalism in the sixteenth century” (1). Caribbean tales – derived from the slaves’ counter-culture – similarly figure positive deviants. In the Francophone islands, this is most notably Ti Jean, who tricks his master in a variety of ways in order to secure his own survival (see for instance Chamoiseau’s collection of tales in *Au temps de l’antan*). He is representative of a subaltern struggle focused on day-to-day survival.¹⁶⁴ The legacy of the popular figure of Ti Jean is taken on in *Solibo*, and its energy is transposed to an entire community that is being criminalized and that collectively seeks to resurrect their memory of Solibo.

As aforementioned, the novel also displays certain traits of the genre of *testimonio*, a genre that has grown out of the political and social struggles of the region.¹⁶⁵ However, again, the displacement of the genre to Martinique may be seen as a political comment on the current situation. *Testimonios* typically narrate

¹⁶⁴ However, Chamoiseau also notes that over time, the original message of resistance was sometimes subverted in the tales: Ti Jean dies, in order to restore “divine justice” favouring the slave holder (*Lettres Créoles* 64). Hence the importance he attaches to making the process of alienation explicit and conscious.

¹⁶⁵ In “Reading Testimonio: The Sound of Rigoberta’s Voice”, Lagos and Meehan reject the similarity between the créolité movement and *testimonio*. While I do not seek to apply the aesthetics and politics of créolité as expressed in *L’éloge* to the context of *testimonio* (which is what the authors object to), it is nevertheless noteworthy that the authors emphasise the dimension that stresses the “hybrid” – or perhaps rather creolized – nature of Martinican identity (derived from the particular history of the Caribbean islands), which they oppose to Menchú’s “Manichean cultural logic [that] makes it a near anti-thesis of créolité”, that, in turn, is derived from a different colonial and imperial history (302). Yet, the argument is based on (over-)emphasising the importance of the “mosaic” to the Creolistes’ thinking, and thus fails to take into consideration that Chamoiseau and Confiant are both pro-independence writers and activists who denounce the violent excesses of the power of the state vis-à-vis the lower classes and independence fighters as well as the continuing structural racism of the island, in which the béké class continues to own 80 per cent of the lands (“This Creole Culture”, McCusker 119).

massacres at the hands of an elite – Solibo on the other hand is not killed by physical violence, but chokes to death internally from the “word”. The cause of his death is invisible, insidious, and cannot be grasped through the discourses of the “Law”. *Solibo* is not a *testimonio* in the conventional sense and yet Chamoiseau invokes the genre in his fiction, thus commenting on the specific situation of Martinique, which – despite, or perhaps rather because of, a high annual increase in the GDP since 1946 (achieved mainly in the tertiary sector) – has been subject to a “considerable decline of the apparatus of production”, increased unemployment rates, and the worsening of the “structural handicap” (Daniel, “The Construction of Dependency” 63).

The word *testimonio* possesses legal connotations, which Chamoiseau makes explicit in *Solibo* as the characters are transformed into witnesses (“témoins”) and suspects in a police inquest. Furthermore, the title, the subject matter and the structure of the novel, and the fictional persona of the word-scratcher who runs around the market with a tape recorder, are all clearly evocative of this genre, which the novel parodies to a certain extent, but with which it importantly also shares the concern for representing a culture that is being oppressed, the concern for “speaking truth to power” (Said 65). The clash of discourses presented to us in the novel may also reflect critically on the testimonial framework, as it highlights the difficulties involved in the subaltern’s entry into discourse in neo-colonial societies. John Beverley argues that in the case of *testimonio*, “it is the intentionality of the *narrator* that is paramount”, rather than the intentionality of the *recorder* who wants to represent oral history from a standpoint of objectivity (“The Margin at the Center” 26). If the police-witness constellation is seen as replicating the site of testimonial production composed of the testimonial subject and the engaged (literate) intellectual who transmits the discourse into writing, it is noticeable that here it is for the most part the detective’s intentionality that seeks to impose itself. The act of testifying within the framework of the police inquest actually works as an impediment to the access to any useful information, as the questions asked by the police are frequently pointed in the wrong direction. This is further highlighted by the structure of the novel, as the main part of the novel, significantly entitled “La Parole”, is preceded by “L’écrit du malheur” that consists of a mock police report of the supposed “scene of crime” and a description of Solibo’s dead body and its exact positioning. As Sourieau notes, the preface “postulates, from the very beginning, the irreconcilable discrepancy between the incident reported by the law and the real meaning of the

event. [...] The French state inherits Solibo's estate – his corpse, source of his language – and reduces it to definitive silence" (131). The ordering of the novel again recalls *testimonio*, which is usually preceded by an introductory preface written by the 'engaged intellectual'; it thus highlights the need to study the relation between the two. The institutionalised French discourse of this inquest that is framed by its own particular conventions, as well as the conventions of the detective story, is represented as completely inadequate for dealing with the realities of Creole culture (cf. to Glissant's assertion that the genre of 'realism' is inadequate for dealing with local realities (*Discours Antillais* 437)). The mock-testimonial framework might also be read as an implicit commentary on the conditions for the production of his own text, which contrary to Confiant's early novels is written in a French that is accessible to the metropolitan reader. In contrast to Argueta's works, Chamoiseau's novels have never been banned, but are instead all published by French publishing houses (mostly Gallimard). Yet while Chamoiseau, Glissant and other Caribbean writers are celebrated in France, it is still worth remembering that there is still no member of the Académie Française who is from the Départments.¹⁶⁶

Reading the novel in the context of *testimonio* immediately raises the question of who should be considered as the subject of the (fictional) testimonial narrative. The title would suggest that it is Solibo, who in the novel functions as a representative of a threatened Martinican Creole culture, anchored in the island's and, more broadly, the region's culture and geography. Such a reading, however, would produce an impasse in the present, since Solibo is dead when the story is told, and his words have become (almost) irrecoverable. The last section of the novel is composed of a reconstructed version of his last words, which, however, is highly mediated, as it is reconstructed orally in a communal effort, then re-enacted by one of the characters, recorded by the ethnographer, and finally translated onto the page. Furthermore, the difficulty of representing Solibo on page is further emphasised by Solibo's own warnings that the oral cannot be written; these are interspersed throughout the text in form of (paradoxically written) quotations: "Écrire, c'est comme sortir le lambi de la mer pour dire: voici le lambi! La parole répond: où est la mer?" (53). The narrator's awareness that writing the oral is essentially a "treason" (since the written cannot capture the non-verbal aspects of the story-teller's performance) lies at the heart of his definition of himself as a "marqueur de paroles",

¹⁶⁶ In fact, there was one member from Guadeloupe, a white Creole called François-Nicolas-Vincent Campenon (1772-1843). There were two members from Haiti in the 18th and 19th century.

a “dérisoire cueilleur de choses fuyantes, insaisissables, comme le coulis des cathédrales du vent” (225). As Ashley Dawson remarks, “despite the radical intent of the *testimonio* as a vehicle for representing marginal populations such as indigenous groups, the genre’s dependence on a literate interlocutor dramatizes its necessarily hierarchical relation with orality” (20). Oral culture loses some of its integral aspects in the process of being fixed into writing, but this is not allowed to detract from the importance of doing so. While the difficulty and near-impossibility of recovering Solibo’s words is emphasised throughout the novel, it is also significant that its importance is continually stressed by all of the characters including the narrator-ethnographer. Of course, Chamoiseau’s own project, which includes two collections of popular tales, further underscores the importance of representing oral culture in written form.

The evocation of *testimonio* and anthropology forces the critic to re-open the age-old literary debates about the nature of representation and referentiality in a politicised context and to reconsider the function of literature as a cultural practice. Oiseau de Cham is clearly meant to evoke Chamoiseau himself, not only through the name, but also through footnoted references to other previously published works by the real author. Further adding to this sense of ‘the real’ are the numerous other footnotes (more typical of a scientific work, or *testimonio*) that explain the cultural context for the metropolitan reader, or translate phrases back into the Creole for the Martinican reader. In other words, while he presents the reader with a narrative in a mock-realist/mock-mystery/magical realist mode that refutes an immediate and unproblematic transparency of the ‘real’ insofar as it is enmeshed in the neo-imperialist strategies of domination, he uses the strategies employed in *testimonio* to constitute the text as “truth-saying”, emphasising thus the political and social importance of his fictional narrative in the construction – or perhaps rather recognition – of a Martinican reality.

Solibo recalls *testimonio*’s preoccupation with the construction of a sense of community and the construction of subaltern memory, and it is similarly driven by a desire to testify, despite the police inquest. As Oiseau de Cham – the narrator-ethnographer – writes:

J’aurais voulu pour lui d’une parole à sa mesure: inscrite dans une vie simple et plus haute que toute vie. Mais, autour de son cadavre, la police déploya la mort obscure: l’injustice, l’humiliation, la méprise. Elle amena les absurdités

du pouvoir et de la force: terreur et folie. Frappé d'un blanc à l'âme, il ne me reste plus qu'à en témoigner, dressé là parmi vous, maniant ma parole comme dans un *Vénéré*, cette perdue nuit de tambour et de prière que les nègres de Guadeloupe blanchissaient en souvenir d'un mort.¹⁶⁷

While his attempts to do justice to the memory of Solibo's words are violated by the methods employed by the police, the narrator nevertheless expresses a desire to testify, which becomes an act of respectful remembrance in which all the characters participate and which he seeks to root in the traditional Caribbean ritual of the "veillée" that has fallen into disuse. Solibo's death provokes a revival, which on a metaphorical level roots the testimonies of the characters into Martinique's cultural past. This act of remembrance is continued throughout the police inquest, since despite the policemen's restrictive questions and their attempts to evoke a different set of answers from the characters, stories about Solibo's life are being evoked. The character Pipi explains this spontaneous act of testifying as a process necessary for their own survival: "c'était ramener la mémoire en oxygène, pour vivre, pour survivre" (184). In other words, as in *testimonio*, the emphasis still falls on the present struggle for survival of a culture, which in this case is undergoing profound changes at the same time as being threatened by destruction from the dominant culture. As in *Eloge de la Créolité*, the storyteller is thus represented as the ancestor of contemporary identity. Significantly, it is the middle section – rather than the section containing Solibo's words - that is entitled 'la Parole', a title that combines different meanings. Most obviously, it refers to the oral, but it also carries connotations of the sacred as it may refer to the word of the Bible; importantly, in Martinique it also refers to the 'tale' called 'parole' in Creole.

This middle section is narrated by the *marqueur de paroles*, who recalls the engaged intellectual of *testimonio*, as well as the supposedly 'objective' foreign ethnographer, and more remotely and through contrast rather than similarity the (European) chroniclers and travel writers of the past centuries.¹⁶⁸ The middle section

¹⁶⁷Note the proliferation of words denoting 'whiteness' and 'blackness' (un blanc/blanchir/nègres); as I have shown in chapter 1, Chamoiseau is very critical of constructions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' and their inherent violence. In this context, the 'blank' or 'void' that 'hits his soul' could also refer to institutionalised constructions of 'whiteness' (blanc=white) that exclude Creole culture defined as 'black'.

¹⁶⁸In an interview, Chamoiseau expresses his annoyance at (Canadian) ethnographers who come to study them, something that he sought to parody in his first novel *Chronique des sept misères* in 1986 (Perret 219-20). He therefore describes his project as seeking to reclaim their voice.

contains the testimonies of several characters including the *marqueur*. Significantly, the latter employs a communal ‘nous’ to include himself amongst his characters, which is clearly reminiscent of the solidarity that *testimonio* seeks to evoke. However, the novel warns against an uncritical employment of the pronoun ‘we’, which can be evoked in very different contexts; the first time it is employed is notably by the police inspector Évariste Pilon in his report, and it refers to himself, Bouafesse and the docteur Siromiel. It clearly excludes the other characters, who are external to the production of official discourse, and is meant to produce a voice of authority. The *marqueur* is aware of the problematic relation implied in the ‘nous’, as he reflects on the difference between his own social position (which enables his ‘ethnographic’ studies and his writing) and that of the other characters who lack his education and social status. In a flashback, the *marqueur* recalls how, equipped with his tape recorder, he slowly made an entry into Creole lower class culture, as his presence gradually became tolerated. However, this is not equated to an understanding of that culture (in fact, he stresses the incomprehensibility), and is further accompanied by a loss of objectivity as he becomes increasingly enmeshed in that culture. In other words, he emphasises that in order to understand another culture, one needs to inhabit it emotionally, rather than contemplating it from a vantage point of “scientific” inquiry.¹⁶⁹ During the middle section of the book, the pronoun ‘nous’ is employed by Oiseau de Cham in response to Solibo’s death and the subsequent police violence, which unites him and the other characters in mourning and fear, as all of the characters including the *marqueur* are equally affected by both, irrespective of their class: “Ti-Cal, Congo, [...] Didon, Zaboca, Coeurillon et moi-même mélangeons nos tremblades et nos sueurs” (121). Despite the caveats that Chamoiseau attaches to his use of the pronoun ‘nous’, the texts reflect his desire to express communal history and identity. As Chamoiseau states in one of his interviews: “l’idée est de garder le caractère collectif de tous les textes” (Perret, *La Créolité* 234). He thus opposes himself to the notion of individual artistic genius, a position that is notably very different from the postmodernist invocation of the “death of the author”, as the author is reconstituted on the level of community.

¹⁶⁹ In Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador*, the anthropologist who visits the tribe of the Machiguengas that faces extinction becomes so involved in the culture that he turns into the storyteller - the *hablador*- of the Machiguengas.

Writing the Real, Combating Tradition: Wordscratcher or Warrior of the Imaginary?

On commence à s'apercevoir qu'autant que les épisodes d'une lutte des classes ou d'une poussée de nations, la mutation profonde des mentalités commande en la matière une possibilité de changer l'ordre du monde.
Édouard Glissant, *Discours Antillais* (276)

If one were to broaden the application of Henry's categories of Historicism and Poeticism to the Expanded Caribbean, Argueta and also the genre of *testimonio* would presumably fall into the former category, although the "magical realist" elements that are often to be found in Argueta's work (see for instance *Un día de vida*) would complicate the matter, especially when taking into account Argueta's efforts to "disassociate his work from the hype of magical realism" (Astvaldsson 604). If the Poeticist/Historicist division holds up if one compares a C.L.R James to a Wilson Harris, it seems less adequate for describing a writer such as Chamoiseau, whose work squarely refuses to be restrained to one of the above categories. Indeed, one might further say that an awareness of the necessity of the transformation of the self is not exclusive to the Poeticists, nor is it fundamentally at odds with a realist approach.

As Astvaldsson has observed, Lucía in chapter one of *Cuzcatlán* emphasises the importance of dreaming and reflecting ("Distracción favorita: reflexionar. O soñar, como se dice" (9)) in contrast to her uncle, the Corporal Pedro, who lives only for and in the present ("Se considera persona para quién sólo existe el presente" (247)). For Lucía, "true political awareness does not only mean cognizant insight into the current situation, but also a vital link to the past, a link partly provided through a dream-like process of intuition"; "while not rejecting the importance of rational thought, [this] emphasises the crucial role that the imagination and intuitive insight must be allowed to play in any human society" (Astvaldsson 606). Astvaldsson suggests that we could read the chapters not narrated by Lucía as part of an imaginative journey into the past and towards an understanding of her uncle Pedro (conducted during her literal journey to her confrontation with the latter). In this argument, Lucía draws her awareness of the need for a peaceful settlement and the

breaking of habits of vengeance (which may be read as a critique of the brutal guerrilla tactics) from her internal imaginative journey. While I would resist collapsing the polyphony of voices and the complex play on narrative positions within the novel back into the individual imagination of Lucía, we might stress that even within those chapters narrated by her, there is this emphasis on the imagination, reflection and on the importance of their past, when they were “Señores de estas tierras” (141) and poets, which leads her to pose the crucial question in the last chapter of who their real enemies are. The highly symbolic final encounter between uncle and niece and Lucía’s forgiveness are narrated in the future, providing, as Astvaldsson writes, “the ideological framework for a peace settlement and for securing a peaceful future after a peace agreement has been signed” (611), which at the time of publication lay still far in the future.

Chamoiseau’s oeuvre as a whole shows a clear concern with the recuperation of subaltern memory and the writing Martinican history/histories, and it undoubtedly posits the need for the transformation of society and for a non-alienated sense of identity that is associated with the urban working classes. However, throughout his oeuvre, he simultaneously stresses the need for the writer to re-think his/her categories of perception in an effort to reshape the communal imaginary. In *Solibo*, Chamoiseau most powerfully captured the way in which one’s thought categories shape one’s perception of reality through the discrepancy between the different characters’ perceptions of Solibo: Bouafesse’s racist and classist description of Solibo as a “nègre de rien comme on en rencontre derrière les marchés, pas même assez grand pour jouer au basket” (102) notably clashes with the other characters’ perception of him as someone worthy of the title Magnificent. Furthermore, he introduces a caveat that is even more explicitly voiced in his later works:

Solibo Magnifique me disait : Oh, Oiseau, tu veux l’Indépendance, mais tu en portes l’idée comme en porte des menottes. D’abord : sois libre face à l’idée. Ensuite : dresse le compte de ce qui dans ta tête et dans ton ventre t’enchaîne. C’est d’abord là, ton combat... (133)

Such a warning from a pro-independence writer – albeit through the mouth of a fictional character – might come as a surprise, but it must be read within the wider context of Caribbean thought surrounding the relationship between H/history,

politics, realism and the imagination. In *Discours Antillais*, which breaks the boundaries between traditional academic categories such as literary criticism, philosophy, social commentary and history, Glissant argued that myth always precedes historical consciousness and realism (237). Realism – as a cultural response growing out of the social conditions of imperialist Europe – was linked to the emergent new discipline of history (240). Realism in its nineteenth-century European form, as well as *History* based on principles of “objectivity” and a particular way of framing historical narrative may impede the expression of a cultural and historic reality specific to the Americas. He therefore emphasises the importance of the writer and, more broadly, the imagination in the task of recuperating history: “The problem faced by collective consciousness makes a creative approach necessary, in that the rigid demands made by the historical approach can constitute, if they are not restrained, a paralyzing handicap. Methodologies, passively assimilated, far from reinforcing a global consciousness or permitting the historical process to be established beyond the ruptures experienced, will simply contribute to worsening the problem” (*CD* 61; *DA* 223). This concern with the inadequacy of “passively assimilated” forms of reading reality is of course not unique to Glissant, but rather a predominant concern for many American writers. In a similar vein, Wilson Harris speaks about the effect of traditional history writing as reinforcing the apparent “void of history which haunts the black man [and which] may never be compensated until an act of imagination opens gateways between civilizations” (*Unfinished Genesis* 166). Most memorably, he also refers to the “dead, seeing eye” of realism which he opposes to “the living, closed eye” which he describes as a “threshold into tradition, lost traditions” (*ibid* 86). “Conventional realism”, he writes in another essay, “cannot breach the limits of individual existence” (*ibid* 231).¹⁷⁰ In the context of Martinique, this is further complicated by Martinique’s dependent status (although a lot of the points made by Chamoiseau seem far more widely applicable). As Chamoiseau argues:

[D]ans un pays comme la Martinique, il faut *déchirer* le réel. C’est comme une toile d’un tableau qui est devant nous, et qu’il faut déchirer pour voir

¹⁷⁰ However, one might want to define the terms a little more clearly perhaps. The socialist novels of the early twentieth century, or a novel like Argueta’s *Cuzcatlán* are not too far off what one might refer to as “conventional realism” and yet they do break out of the limits of the “individual” if defined as in Harris’s *Tradition*.

ce qu'il y a derrière. Mais si on déchire tout le tableau, les gens ont l'impression qu'on fait de la fiction et qu'on invente des histoires. Par contre, si on déchire un petit bout du réel pour laisser entr'apercevoir ce qu'il y a derrière, un petit bout du ciel, et que ça se mélange avec le reste du tableau, et qu'on ne sait plus le réel ou l'irréel, je crois qu'à ce moment-là on fait un œuvre de déshallucination. [...] on met en doute le réel pour le situer dans une perspective qui permet de reconsidérer le réel autrement. La finalité, c'est de faire en sorte que nous puissions nous regarder autrement nous-mêmes. (interview by McCusker, "De la problématique du territoire" 729)

The writer receives certain modes of reading and writing reality not only through fictional genre and styles, but also through mass TV culture and the way in which the land is inscribed by the imperialist legacy through street-names and museums commemorating French politicians such as Schoelcher. Chamoiseau's employment of the term de-hallucination here suggest that, for him, there clearly is an "outside" to the power-knowledge system imposed by France. As his project as a whole demonstrates, Chamoiseau believes that a regeneration, de-hallucination, takes place both on the level of the imagination, as well as on the level of recuperating local history. In that aspect, his oeuvre again rejoins Glissant's. In *Discours Antillais*, the latter memorably highlighted the need for writing the island's history from an internal perspective by reproducing on the first pages of his book a French chronology of Martinican history, entitled "le leurre chronologique", the chronological illusion. Starting with Columbus's "discovery" of Martinique (thus obliterating the Arawak and Carib past, relegating it to the status of the pre-historical) and ending with the doctrine of economic assimilation introduced in 1975, this Eurocentric chronology is based on laws and changes imposed by the Metropolitan centre or its representatives, excluding and silencing the island's internal history. In this version, no reference is made to Antillean slave revolts, the process of creolization or the gradual formation of a mulatto elite for instance. While Glissant's version of a Eurocentric chronology is perhaps caricatural in its bareness to emphasise the point, the absence of the history of the Afro-Martinican population, for instance, has characterised imperialist versions of history and still to an extent characterises contemporary thought. Murdoch rightly criticises A. James Arnold for

chastising the Creolistes' "discursive overinvestment in the figure of the maroon" on the basis of the supposed absence of marooning and slave uprisings in the Francophone Caribbean, an 'absence' that Murdoch proves to be an imperialist invention (Murdoch 207). Glissant therefore rightly concludes: "tout reste à découvrir de l'histoire antillaise de la Martinique" (39). It is noteworthy that this formulation relocates Martinican history in its Antillean context, implying a trans-linguistic unity that has been actively suppressed by the former colonial powers to forestall solidarity movements amongst the populations of the different islands. Antillean memory, as Glissant's notes, has thus never been allowed to sediment, hindered by the ideologically motivated fragmentation of the islands and the internal suppression of non-white, or non-French, histories. Hence, the task of recuperating subaltern history is immensely difficult, as the historian is often faced with silence. While not discarding the notion of history but rather advocating its necessity (see his chronology of Martinican history on p.271/2), Glissant, as we have seen above, also vindicates the role of the writer of fiction in the "creative exploration" of the past, as well as stressing the importance of valorising oral histories, myths and tales that are needed for the formation of "mythic" foundation of historical narrative.

Chamoiseau's oeuvre is characterised by similar tensions between a creative exploration of the past and an incorporation and creation of foundational myths and oral tales, a desire to construct a historical narrative and to introduce a clearly referential, or even testimonial, aspect into his novels, and lastly to re-shape (rather than merely to deconstruct) the writer's and the reader's imaginary and his/her perception of the 'real'.¹⁷¹ In Chamoiseau's oeuvre, these different strands are inextricable, although different works privilege different aspects of it, and it is perhaps *Texaco* that most successfully combines them (*Texaco* incorporates testimonial traits on a thematic level, as well as 'actual' testimonial material and like in *Solibo*, the issue of representation is again explicitly thematised). As Chamoiseau stresses repeatedly, a resistant consciousness can no longer be created through a simple writing down of subaltern history but must think through the mechanisms

¹⁷¹ Perhaps, the combination of these two aspects is most clearly visible in his recent novella *Seven Dreams of Elmira: A Tale of Martinique*, which juxtaposes a series of photographs by Jean-Luc de Laguarigue, which depict rum factories as well as workers, with a Martinican tale based on a story narrated to him by one of the workers. We can here see that Chamoiseau is here working on two levels, recording and documenting lived reality through the photos, as well as opening up an imaginative space that provides a different lens through which to view that reality. Furthermore, Perret lists a number of documentaries "à teneur ethnographique" in the production of which Chamoiseau has been a key figure (220).

through which it is dominated.¹⁷² In *Texaco*, the *mentô* – a maroon figure of resistance - remarks:

Il n'y a plus de Grande-case, alors d'où marronner? Il n'y a plus d'Usine, alors dans quelle aveuglage donner? [...] Dans l'En-Ville on ne parle plus. Conteurs morts ou tombés babilleurs. Mais *La Parole* n'est pas parler. Tu as à battre ici. A marroner quand même. La gazoline t'offre son berceau.... Ecrire *La Parole*? Non. Mais renouer le fil de la vie, oui (377).

In his words, 'La Parole' (recalling the middle section of *Solibo*) is not necessarily oral or written, but it constitutes a practice that ruptures the alienation from local reality, 're-tying the knot with life'. It is linked to the resistance of the urban subaltern in the shantytowns that clearly bear the traces of global capitalist modernity. As explored in chapter 2, *Texaco* forms part of the project of recuperating Martinican history or histories, in particular the histories of the urban subaltern, which is expressed in form of a historical chronology that precedes the narrative. However, *Texaco* is also clearly a fiction, which teems with local legends and oral tales of popular subaltern culture, and Marie-Sophie's narrative may be read as an attempt to create a foundational myth. The historical chronology thus strongly contrasts with the table of contents that clearly bears the traces of a mythic structuring (it re-inscribes biblical stories, providing the chapter headings with Martinican ones, providing the headings for the sub-chapters). Written history as a separable discipline remains an important category, since it is through history that History is most effectively challenged; myth, on the other hand, provides the ideological basis for the construction of an interior vision of Martinican history.

Examining Chamoiseau's oeuvre as a whole, one notes that the *Marqueur de paroles* becomes increasingly involved in the process of fictional creation. His role in the collaborative effort to record subaltern history takes on increasing importance in novels such as *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* and *Biblrique des derniers gestes* where the persona turns into the *Guerrier de l'imaginaire* who attempts to

¹⁷² "Q : Vous m'avez dit que Marie-Sophie, c'est votre mère.

R : C'est aussi Madame Sico du quartier Texaco, qui est aussi la fondatrice de Texaco et qui m'a servi de modèle aussi, donc une bonne partie de l'histoire de Marie-Sophie vient de Mme Sico. Toute la partie où je raconte la plantation de Marie-Sophie, les premières toiles, la lutte avec le gardien, tout ça c'est l'histoire réelle de Mme Sico. Et tout le reste, c'est l'histoire réelle de ma mère" (interviewed by McCusker, "De la problématique du territoire" 730).

reshape and liberate the dominated imaginary. *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, in particular, can be read as a 'foundational tale' in which the persona of the writer tells us that 'serious' anthropology faces an impasse when it seeks to interpret the Amerindian stone and the bones on which the narrative is based: "tous – anthropologues vraiment sérieux, religieux de la science – refusaient l'aventure dans cette fange poétique. Ils me l'abandonnaient volontiers" (142). The story itself is thus unashamedly dreamed up by the writer with the assistance of the stories told to him by his fellow Martinicans. Similarly, in *Biblrique des derniers gestes*, the narrator is a journalist, who contrary to what might be expected, does not faithfully record every single word of the protagonist (who has fought in independence movements around the globe), but fulfils a more central role in the construction of the narrative: "Je n'étais plus un Marqueur de paroles dans une assise maintenant balisée entre l'écrit et l'oral, mais un Guerrier dans un champ de bataille dont le point de vue d'ensemble était inexistant, et la fin improbable" (762). While it is of course impossible to come to definite conclusions regarding an œuvre that is still in formation, one can say that the emphasis in Chamoiseau's work has shifted in recent years more towards the Poeticist side, which, I want to suggest in the last chapter, needs to be read in the context of the reflux of imperialism and the 'exhaustion' of the independence struggles. While between 1956 and 68, "departmentalization was stoutly resisted in the Caribbean by a variety of popular political organizations in Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane" (Millette 221-2), the formerly independentist Union Populaire pour la Libération de Guadeloupe declared in 1992 in the regional elections that political independence was not on the order of the day (Maingot 329).¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Such a disenchantment with the possibility of independence similarly occurred in Puerto Rico, and in the broader context of the Caribbean, it might be linked to the increase of the perceived un-viability of socialism.

- Chapter 4 -

The Archetypal Imagination: History, Community and Character

Jonestown (1996) and *Terra Nostra* (1975)

The concept of ‘marvelous realism’ constitutes for me an alchemical pilgrimage, a ceaseless adventure within the self and without the self in nature and beings that are undervalued or that have been eclipsed or imprisoned by models of conquest.

Wilson Harris¹⁷⁴

sólo la palabra vertida puede descolorar eso que pasa por ‘realidad’ para mostrarnos lo real: lo que la ‘realidad’ consagrada oculta: la totalidad escondida o mutilada por la lógica convencional (por no decir: de conveniencia)

Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (85)

In the twentieth century, nineteenth-century bourgeois realism and the bourgeois mode of subjectivity came to be critiqued, de/re-constructed from the perspectives of a variety of at times overlapping literary movements, such as *modernismo*, *indigenismo*, the ‘proletarian novel’, modernism, postmodernism, the neo-baroque and magical realism, as well as ‘neo-realist’ modes such as *testimonio*. In their theoretical writing of the sixties, Harris and Fuentes had both stated their particular interest in the ‘occluded’ side of ‘reality’, that is, myth. In relation to the construction of character, Harris had criticised realist “consolidation” that had been implicated in the consolidation of class and imperialist interests, and called for the “fulfilment” of character (*Tradition* 28), while Fuentes, declaring his intellectual distance from the 19th century novelistic tradition, had explained that he sought to offer characters “en proceso de *hacerse*” (*Territorios* 243). It is on these two aspects – the construction of character and the relation between history and myth – that this chapter will focus. The latter still plays a central role in the texts that will be considered, although it is here of significance that, while Fuentes’s novel is the “last boom novel” (Martin, “Spanish American narrative”), *Jonestown* clearly emerges from a post-boom context.

¹⁷⁴ Qtd. by Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 144.

In *Terra Nostra* and *Jonestown* (the former overall a neo-baroque text, the latter belonging to a particular strand of marvellous realism), both authors seek to approach reality from an “archetypal” perspective based on the recurrence of patterns over time. Offering a mythic perspective on reality, archetypes denote “a primordial image, character, or pattern of circumstances that recurs throughout literature and thought consistently enough to be considered a universal concept or situation”.¹⁷⁵ In *Terra Nostra*, Fuentes examines and rewrites three such literary archetypes: Don Juan, Don Quixote and Celestina. Yet, these literary archetypes are not presented timeless or universal, as we shall see: Fuentes links their original creation to the moment when the system of global capitalism emerged with the conquest of the ‘New World’, and their consolidation to that of capitalism.¹⁷⁶ In Harris’s fiction, on the other hand, we are approaching a loosely Jungian conception of the archetype. An archetype, as defined by Jung, is not accessible through fiction since it is unconscious: “archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form, and then only to a very limited degree. A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience” (Storr 40). Harris’s “universal consciousness” and its archetypes are similarly ultimately beyond grasp, but his characters do bear historically specific traits, as they are filled out with the “material of conscious experience”. While Harris de-emphasises the importance of reconstructing a historical record and a historically specific subject in favour of accessing a mythical plane, Fuentes’s dialectical novel arguably ultimately advocates a return to historicity. In other words, while Harris’s vision relies on the abstract, shamanistic concept of ‘universal consciousness’, Fuentes offers a ‘dialectical archetypalism’ that ultimately tends towards secularism.

As this chapter will show, the two novels thus differ fundamentally with regards to the alternative that they offer to a bourgeois mode of subjectivity, as well

¹⁷⁵“archetype.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2007.

¹⁷⁶ My analysis thus fundamentally disagrees with Gloria Durán’s Jungian approach to *Terra Nostra*, which relies on Jung’s theory of the “anima”, apparently a bipolar figure that can appear either as witch or maiden and forms part of the collective unconscious. Durán reads the fact that Fuentes stated that he was unacquainted with Jung’s theories as “an example in itself of the totally unconscious nature of the archetypal figures which may appear to any of us in dreams, or be faithfully reproduced by the writer who is unfamiliar with their Jungian classifications” (*The Archetypes of Carlos Fuentes* 34). As one might expect, such an approach ends up de-historicising, de-contextualising and simplifying the material at stake.

as with regards to their intellectual proximity to postmodernist strands of thought. In the sixties, Harris's archetypal approach (that contrasted with the realist mainstream of the Anglophone literary tradition) had been fulfilling the crucial role of highlighting a submerged African spiritual tradition that survives in cultural phenomena such as *vodun*, as Paget Henry has argued. However, by the 1990s, the limits of Harris's particular brand of 'archetypalism' begin to appear very clearly, not only because of his own evolution as a writer (which is somewhat out of sync with that of other important American magical realist writers who emerged during the mid-twentieth century), but – perhaps more importantly – in relation to the dramatically altered historical context. The latter is highlighted by the media representations of the Jonestown suicides in 1978, which, as we shall see, have grown out of anti-communist/anti-socialist rhetoric, to which *Jonestown* cannot offer a serious challenge, as a comparison with historical/sociological research on the dramatic event from the eighties and nineties will highlight. While Harris's text is obviously not a piece of historical/sociological research, I shall argue that it is due to its deliberate refusal to offer reconstructed versions of history or character that his novel is ultimately unable to offer a challenge to nineteenth century realism, nor to specific, oppressive stereotypes. If we look at *Terra Nostra* from the vantage point of hindsight and in relation to *Jonestown*, we recognise its material groundedness and its continued investment in a 'meta-narrative'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ One might here object that in *Valiente mundo nuevo*, published some fifteen years after *Terra Nostra*, Fuentes explicitly states that meta-narratives have, in the postmodern world, given way to "multirelatos" that deny the exclusive validity of "occidental modernity" (25). However, while there is in Fuentes's work this emphasis on plurality to displace Eurocentric understandings of the world, *Terra Nostra* nevertheless clearly inserts those plural realities in a larger paradigm that encompasses global modernity.

“Trapped in the venom of history”?: Archetypes, Stereotypes and the ‘Atrocity Tale’

[...] mis ojos
se nublan y los días y años
sus horrores vacíos acumulan
Octavio Paz, *La piedra de sol* (1957)¹⁷⁸

A cursory glance at Harris’s novel might give the impression of a fictional testimonial novel: the narrative is prefaced by an address of the witness to the editor referred to as W.H., and the first line of the first chapter presents the witness as the sole survivor of the tragedy. However, as Sharrad points out, there is another signification for the act of “witnessing” that is important in a ‘New World’ context, which refers to “the religious sense of giving testimony of grace and vision” (94). The emphasis in *Jonestown* falls on this signification, which de-emphasises the importance of constructing a historical record in favour of accessing a mythical plane of “grace and vision”. The critic Wendy Faris describes magical realism as “resembl[ing] the performance of a shaman who constructs a persona and a discourse that imaginatively negotiate different realms, joining the everyday world of concrete reality and the world of the spirits” (*Ordinary Enchantments* 75), which is a particularly apt description in relation to Harris’s work (though perhaps less so of Jacques Stephen Alexis’s, for instance).

When seeking to elucidate the process of gaining access to “consciousness” in his theoretical writing of the 60s, Harris referred to the dancer of Haitian voodoo (*Tradition* 50-51), whose ego rapidly loses control over the body movements in the trance evoked by the dance. He becomes “insensible to all conventional props of habit”, and is turned into “a dramatic agent of subconsciousness” (51). The ego is voided as he becomes the medium for an “intense drama of images in space” and privileges an imagistic approach to reality (51). In this reading, space becomes the character of the dance, displacing the centrality of the dancer, and destroying the binary oppositions between body and soul, external and internal reality. For Harris, the writer of fiction seeks to achieve a similar invocation of a subconscious

¹⁷⁸ In this quote from Paz’s most famous poem, we encounter the surrealist emphasis on the internal vision of dreams and the imagination as the narrator’s eyes are ‘clouding over’, blocked from a rational, objective vision. History and the progression of time are here inevitably associated with chaos and war, evoking here most concretely the Spanish Civil War (1936-9), from which Octavio Paz drew very different lessons than a poet like Pablo Neruda, whom these experiences turned into a committed Communist and a writer of overtly engaged poetry.

dimension, but unlike the dancer, he does so in a self-conscious manner. Both ‘performances’ centrally rely on images (hence, the image of sculpting employed to describe the dance also recurs in his fiction). Like the *vodun* dancer, the archetypal writer seeks to access “consciousness” “beyond conventional memory”, a “spatial” rather than temporal vision (*Tradition* 52). As Paget Henry’s important study of Afro-Caribbean philosophy demonstrates, such a view is shaped by the heritage of the philosophical vision upon which African religions rested, as the latter posited a “supersensitive spiritual world that has both immanent and transcendent relations to the material, social and individual worlds” (*Caliban’s Reason* 24).¹⁷⁹

Yet, unlike the novels of the *Guyana Quartet* that were, as I have argued, more overtly ‘national’, and locally grounded, *Jonestown*’s primary subject matter is *not* the creation of a new ‘West Indian’ or the unearthing of oppressed traditions – such as the influence of African religions and philosophy on present culture- but seeking to understand the tragic event of the Jonestown suicides in a broader cultural context, a task for which the novel turns out to be badly equipped, as we shall see (*Jonestown* was notably published at a time when the heyday of Latin American/Caribbean magical realism in its initial manifestations had passed). However, before turning to Harris’s rendering of the event, it is important to set the historical context, as well as to examine some of the existing narrative constructions of the events leading up to the suicides, since, as I will argue, Harris’s novel is in many ways unable to break out of the patterns laid out by the US mass media and anti-communist rhetoric.

As indicated in the title, Harris’s novel is based on the infamous mass suicides that occurred on the 18th November 1978 in an independent commune in Guyana, called Jonestown after the Peoples Temple’s official leader.¹⁸⁰ The event immediately elicited a flood of films, books and exposés that pretended to reveal ‘what really happened’, accounts generally constructed as “atrocities tales” (Hall xvi).¹⁸¹ Rather than seeking to understand the ambiguous trajectory of a group that

¹⁷⁹ Harris sees similar characteristics in pre-Columbian cultures, arguing that their “traditions of fluid identity [...] [seem] to breach tribal fixtures and adamant racial codes, and to possess enormous potential bearing on arts of fiction” (*Unfinished Genesis* 201).

¹⁸⁰ Two of the better studies on Jonestown include: Hall’s *Gone from the promised land: Jonestown in American cultural history* (1987); McCormick Maaga’s, *Hearing the voices of Jonestown* (1998).

¹⁸¹ In his travel narrative, Shiva Naipaul offers the reader a satirical and perceptive account of Guyana’s infestation by foreign journalists and writers after the suicides. In one episode, he describes the conversation a US writer strikes up with him: “You see that guy over there?” He pointed at a

believed in religious socialism – in removing “people’s expectations from heaven into a here and now” (Jack Beam, qtd in Hall 24) - the US mass media represented Jones as a “megalomaniac and a madman who compromised his followers through blackmail and brainwashing to obtain their commitment not to a political and religious viewpoint but to his own personal rulership”; a man “who plotted the deaths of his followers for reasons so perverse as to lie beyond rational discourse” (ibid xv). The Peoples Temple’s progression towards the event of 1978 was represented as inevitable; blame was laid on Jones, whose ‘evil nature’ is demonstrated by identifying disturbing behaviour in his childhood, and his followers are presented as brainwashed and, if female, as sexually exploited and hence not in charge of their actions on a rational level. As critics have pointed out, such narrative constructions have clear affiliations to the anti-Communist rhetoric of the Cold War era:

brainwashing first came to be used as part of the anti-Communist rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s where the assumption was that communist beliefs were “fundamentally alien to human nature and social reality” and that “the acceptance of Communist beliefs is consequently regarded as ipso facto evidence of insanity or a warped, evil personality, or both”. Thus, brainwashing ideology is at its core anticomunitarian, antisocialist, and antitotalitarian. For this reason the shift in application of brainwashing from anti-Communist to anti-new religions was not a difficult one [...] (McCormick Maaga 34)

Indeed, in the case of Peoples Temple, this shift would have been facilitated by the ‘cult’s’ religious-socialist practice of sharing/redistributing its members’ wealth within the group and their obvious affiliations to various socialist/Communist groups (although, as Hall remarks, from a Marxist standpoint, ‘Jones could best be described as “crude communist”’(26)).

bearded fellow American sprawled on a deck chair. “He’s writing a book. You see that guy behind him? He’s writing a book. You see that fat guy? He’s writing a book. I’m writing a book. You’re writing a book. In fact, there is hardly a single person around this pool who isn’t writing a book. But mine’s going to be different.” “How so?” Again he touched my arm. “Sex.” “Sex?” “Sure....sex. Race. Suicide. Corruption. A hot Third World country. That’s a classic mix. Pure Graham Greene. Can’t be missed if it’s handled right” (*Journey to Nowhere* 90).

While there seems to be at least some measure of truth in some of the accusations made against Jones, this mass produced narrative construction of the event erases the memory and significance of the Peoples Temple's ministry to the disenfranchised in society and of the political and social context out of which it had grown (McCormick Maaga 37).¹⁸² One and a half decades before Harris, the West Indian born writer Shiva Naipaul (brother of V.S. Naipaul) sought to understand the events at Jonestown by seeing them in a broader cultural and political context in his travel narrative *Journey to Nowhere* (1980).¹⁸³ In the second section of the book, he shows to what degree the movement was typically US American: it responded to the racist class stratifications of society and the poverty of Blacks, and had grown out of the failure of the student revolutions and Black power movements of the sixties that gave way to the more inward turned movements of the seventies that were characterised by an aversion to larger issues such as race or class. While the overall tone of his narrative is quite cynical, he nevertheless offers a balanced view of Jonestown – neither a paradise, nor “the hell on earth its enemies made it out to be” (Naipaul 156)- and raises some challenging questions, most provocatively perhaps regarding the personal responsibility of the movement's enemies, as well as that of the survivors who are generally portrayed as ‘the hapless victims of “coercive persuasion” and “mind control,” heroes and heroines who ought to be applauded for their courage rather than pardoned for their sins’ (Naipaul 157).

The question of individual responsibility has also been taken up in McCormick Maaga's study. As phrased in the foreword by Catherine Wessinger, “[t]he focus on laying all the blame on Jim Jones makes [the individual members] disappear. We do not confront them as individuals, who were committed to an ideal, and possessed the ability to agree with and carry out the murder/suicide plan, and who also had the power to disagree and refuse to carry out those actions” (x). McCormick Maaga counters and deconstructs the brainwashing theory by examining the three different groups of which Peoples Temple was made up, and their respective reasons for joining the movement. When still in Indiana, Jones had split

¹⁸² Half of the members were dependent because of young or old age (McCormick Maaga 9). At the time of their death in 1978, 17% of the members were under 11 and 16 % over the age of 66. 14% of the members were single mothers with children.

¹⁸³ The first section of his book is focused on Guyana, and – though justifiably critical of Burnham's dictatorship – is tainted by a somewhat unsympathetic representation of a country as steeped in degeneracy, moral decay and corruption apparently part and parcel of becoming part of the Third World (a state of mind “that spreads like an infection (26)), a representation reminiscent of earlier imperialist portrayals of the “Third World”.

from the mainstream church in a dispute over interracial worship and had set up his own church in 1954. Already in its early days, the sect offered free meals for the poor and homeless (2800 meals per month by 1960) and nursing home facilities under the direction of Reverend Archie Ijames, the first black man in the leadership. Marceline, Jones's wife, still played an integral part at this moment in the movement, but her influence soon diminished as the sect moved to California and turned into a cult, and Jones was considered as the sole, charismatic leader gifted with the power of divine healing.¹⁸⁴ In California, the cult attracted many white educated new members from the new religious movement group during the 60s and the early 70s. The leadership comprised "almost exclusively educated, white women from the new religious movement group" (78), inspired by a desire to transform society. However, most of the members who moved to Jonestown in 1977 belonged to a third type of member recruited during the mid 70s: they were predominantly black and from urban California, attracted by Peoples Temples efforts to "bridge the gap between the other-worldly preaching of many black spiritualist church traditions and the concrete political activism of the black power political movements" (81).¹⁸⁵ Most of these were women, many single mothers, who would have found it hard to leave the movement for financial and social reasons, unlike its more affluent middle class members.

As most scholars and writers have noted, despite the proclaimed anti-racist ideology, Jones's preaching against racism and his adoption of children from various ethnic backgrounds into his own family, Peoples Temple were unable to overcome the divisions between ethnic groups, making it "almost impossible for black persons to make their way into positions of influence in the Temple, and in that sense Peoples Temple was both racist and institutionally inflexible" (McCormick Maaga 65). In fact, most of the members of the leadership cycle were white educated middle class women. In this context, there is another important observation to be made: as the movement became bigger, Jim Jones gradually lost the importance and centrality that he occupied in the beginning and the authority of decision-making shifted

¹⁸⁴I here employ McCormack Maaga's definition of the terms 'sect' and 'cult', the former referring to a group that has split from an existing religious group, the latter to referring to a group born of an innovation in belief or practice.

¹⁸⁵ Incidentally, the group had unofficial links to the Black Panthers. In his travel narrative, Naipaul reports a conversation/interview with Huey Percy Newton (cofounder of the Black Panther Party) who said that, while there was no political alliance, "you could say that we gave them moral support". Newton added: "I wasn't aware of his faith healing. As far as I knew he was an herb doctor. He told me in Cuba that he didn't believe in any religion, that he only used that as a tactic to organize the religious community" (285).

increasingly to this female leadership circle (for instance, the faked miraculous healings of Jones became replaced by a more bureaucratised system of standard health care administered by the leadership (90)). As McCormick Maaga argues, it seems that a leadership change was underway in the last months in Jonestown. Yet, in much of the research that does focus on the white educated middle class women, they are reduced to their sexuality (McCormack Maaga criticises a fellow historian for repeatedly linking “female power in Peoples Temple with sex in a way that narrowly defines and limits the kind of power that the women in the leadership of Peoples Temple exercised” (15)). The fact that many of them did indeed have sexual relations with Jones is thus allowed to obscure research into their roles within the movement. Finally, further adding to the argument that Jones can by no means be described as the sole responsible party for the events of 1978 is the fact that the final escalation was partly provoked by the increasing external pressures of the society of the “Concerned Relatives”.

Contrary to McCormick Maaga, Hall and Naipaul’s approaches to the suicides, Harris’s novel does not seek to offer an explanatory reconstruction, focussing instead on a re-visionary re-visiting of the past and relying on a series of omissions and changes.¹⁸⁶ The clearly fictional Francisco is represented as the sole survivor of an apocalyptic event to allow for the typically Harrisian emphasis on the rebirth that may follow catastrophe. He is represented as the true author of the book and is in turn guided by various ghosts and apparitions within the narrative. Both

¹⁸⁶ Surprisingly, none of the available essays on *Jonestown* is critical of Harris’s fictional version of the event, and most of them do not seriously consider the relation between the critical historical material available and Harris’s version, which is epitomized by the fact that Hena Maes-Jelinek – perhaps the most prominent authority on Harris – cites *50 Great Conspiracies of All Time* as a source, in which Vankin and Whalen apparently argue that Jonestown was a CIA experiment that ran amok (*The Labyrinth of Universality* 420). There is also a general tendency in (the weaker) criticism on Harris to obfuscate and mystify the act of reading his novels. Louis Simon’s description of the act of reading in his article on *Jonestown* is exemplary: “Serious engagement with a work such as this necessitates a particularly contemplative state of mind. Such engagement requires a willingness to surrender oneself to an active, uncertain, and associational exploration of an overwhelming profusion of concepts, perspective, and poetic images, often juxtaposed and layered in surprising and fascinating ways. The reader enters in a kind of spontaneous play [...] Clearly produced from within a surrender to intuition (as Harris has stated repeatedly) this kind of writing calls for its reader to similarly surrender to the play of intuitive clues, to participate in and contribute to its performance.(208)[...] one must adopt a particularly open, fluid state of mind. There must be an active surrender to an uncontrollable, ultimately unprocess-able number of images, impressions and juxtapositions” (212). This interpretation seeks to represent the act of reading Harris’s novels as a subliminal, almost sub-conscious exercise that relies on intuitive association, and attributes a particular ‘openness’ to the Harris scholar. Even if Harris encourages such an interpretation, the meaning of his images – which may shift over the course of the narrative - is usually given by the text, and reading his work thus requires attention and concentration, rather than some mystical openness on the part of the critic.

Harris and Francisco act as shamanic media; aesthetics, in other words, act as a guide to the real in true Poeticist fashion. The decision-making inner circle consists here of the ‘trinity’ that is Jones, Deacon and Francisco, all *men* who are of European, Indian and African descent respectively, a combination that transforms their alliance into a metaphor for the postcolonial nation.¹⁸⁷ However, this fictional trinity does not further an understanding of why racist structures continued to shape this particular organization, which had set out to transcend racism. Instead of aiming for historical accuracy, Harris seeks to offer an exploration of “overlapping layers and environments and theatres of and theatres of legend and history that one may associate with Jonestown” (1), an exploration that will address the legacies of colonialism and imperialism and in which all characters are fictional and archetypal. History is represented as a monotonously horrible nightmare from which one can only awake by transcending chronological narrative through a transformation into an archetype or the submersion into the collective unconscious. As we shall see, what can thus not be addressed within this narrative framework are issues such as personal responsibility (as the individual is absorbed into the archetype), or social particularities that shape a given situation. Nor is the narrative able to give voice to the ‘subaltern’, in this case women, who are effectively neutralised as agents of history through their sexualised representation.

As archetypes, the characters form part of Harris’s fictional use of the “memory theatre”, on which also hinges the relation between myth and history as presented in the novel; the “memory theatre”, which is also evoked in Fuentes’s novel, thus provides an interesting entry point. The tradition of the “art of memory” (mnemotechnics), to which the memory theatre belongs, has been investigated by the Renaissance scholar Frances Yates.¹⁸⁸ The classical, pre-print art of memory sought “to memorise through a technique of impressing ‘places’ and ‘images’ on memory” (Yates xi). In this purely rational method, an “artificial memory” is established from a series of places arranged in a particular order; each place is associated with a particular image that can thus be evoked in the order of the loci starting at any point

¹⁸⁷ Postcolonial Guyana, notably, has been marked by tensions between those of Indian and those of African descent and the fact that the Amerindians are excluded from this pact may also be read as a comment on contemporary affairs. At the time of the Jonestown suicides, Guyana had a black president, Forbes Burnham, and an East Indian leader of the major opposition party, Cheddi Jagan.

¹⁸⁸ Harris applauds Yates’s efforts to “salvage traditions [that existed] prior to the rise of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European, realist novel that are disregarded when it comes to the language of the Imagination within fiction” (*Genesis* 201).

in the series. The images, representing either a single word or entire arguments, need to be striking in order to be remembered,¹⁸⁹ a technique obviously employed in *Jonestown* (some of the most striking and frequently recurring images are Mr Mageye's "ancient new camera", the (Virgin) ship, and bodies inscribed simultaneously by young and old age),¹⁹⁰ with the difference that these images never freeze in Harris's fiction, as they constantly metamorphose and frequently acquire opposing meanings. Furthermore, *Jonestown* is structured around a series of "loci" - such as Limbo Land, Graveland, Mount Roraima - through which Francisco must pass.

Importantly, the 'art of memory' also acquired a spiritual, metaphysical component, as it eventually became linked to Aristotle's theories, in which the imagination - or the "image-making part of the soul" - is described as the part of the mind that enables thought. It was further overlaid with Plato's views that the art of memory needs to be in service of the recollection of pre-earthly Ideas (Yates 32; 36).¹⁹¹ Yet, most important for understanding the spiritual dimension is Yates's description of the Renaissance memory theatre constructed by Camillo, in which Neo-Platonic, Hermetic and Cabbalistic influences converged to transform the rational art of mnemotechnics into a memory system that claims to be based "on archetypes of reality on which depend secondary images covering the whole realm of nature and of man" (37), representing "the order of eternal truth" (138). Externalising the rules of the art of memory in an actual construction, Camillo stored images in certain places, for which purpose he adapted the classical Vitruvian theatre (composed of seven grades, divided into seven series). The order in which images are arranged corresponds to the different stages of the universe expanding from the super-celestial sephiroths (the pillars), through the seven planets (on the first grade), down to the seventh grade in the theatre, assigned to law, religion, sciences and other

¹⁸⁹ As the anonymous author of *Ad Herennium* (ca 86-82 BC) explained: "When we see in every day life things that are pretty, ordinary and banal, we generally fail to remember them because our mind is not stirred by anything novel or marvellous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time (qtd by Yates 9-10).

¹⁹⁰ In *Terra Nostra*, we encounter similarly striking images, such as an empress whose virginity is gnawed away by mice, or certain bodily characteristics shared by several characters in the novel, such as tattooed lips and the tattoo of a cross.

¹⁹¹ Aristotle's theories were essential for the scholastic and medieval art of memory, in which memory acquired the didactic function of a "moral habit" utilized to remember heaven and hell, and the virtues or vices that may lead to either 'location'. Frances Yates therefore convincingly proposes to read Dante's *Divine Comedy* as belonging to this tradition, suggesting that one could read Dante's Hell as a system of loci on which images of vices are imprinted to ensure the reader's memory of hell.

human achievements. Camillo's theatre reverses the arrangement of a 'normal' theatre, since there is only one spectator, standing on the stage, and gazing at the auditorium, consisting of seven times seven memory places. Camillo made extraordinary claims for the theatre, which he described as a "built or constructed mind and soul" (132); according to him, it connected the mind of the spectator to the universe and the divine, enabling him/her to "remember" the entire cosmos and to move upwards and downwards through creation.

Harris evokes the memory theatre as an analogy for his own approach to historical events, which privileges images over events and reorders reality in a way that ignores historical chronology. We are initially entering this memory theatre through the psyche of Francisco and reference to specific events that are transformed into archetypes (a transformation through which Harris is seeking to alter the reader's thought structures). For instance, the looting of the possessions of Jonestown's dead by locals (also mentioned by Shiva Naipaul) is represented by a single figure, the Grave-digger, who later metamorphoses into the capitalist Carnival Lord Death; Jim Jones is transformed into a mythic Jonah Jones; the Guyanese-Indian Deacon is a potential, but failed, revolutionary leader (a typical Harrisian figure); three Maries appear, who are all linked to the Virgin archetype and belong to the same 'series' as the Virgin Ship which later metamorphoses into the Ship of Bread, all of which are suggestive of redemption through non-violence.¹⁹² The movement is opposite to the descending order of Camillo's theatre, but in both cases, what is striven for is the transcendence of the individual, who seeks to merge with the universe in order to come closer to the "unfathomable body of the Creator" (*Jonestown* 234).

According to Harris, the ego normally conceives of the 'I' as an autonomous entity, repressing its own otherness (that is, its connectedness to its surroundings, the peoples of the past, present and future). In the memory theatre, the 'images' or archetypes of reality can potentially be re-ordered or altered to effect change; in other words, the emphasis is on the individual consciousness as a force for change through its link to 'consciousness', as opposed to an emphasis on history as a motor for change. Although it can never be fully grasped, 'consciousness', for Harris, can be accessed in form of a vision or revelation that follows a 'voiding' of the ego as

¹⁹² Clearly, as this brief schemata shows, Harris's theatre is constructed as a response to violence and oppression that arise out of the colonial and imperialist structures of society, and hence it possesses a political character that the Renaissance version seems to lack.

effected by catastrophe. Thus, Francisco writes after his time travels through the memory theatre:

I sense the collective or universal unconscious extending into voices that echo within the roots of nature as from the ancestral dead, from rivers, from rocks, from birds and other species, from the rhythm of landscapes, skyscapes, etc. Intuitive clues which erupt from the unconscious are rooted in labour and in ecstasy – as much in labour as in revelation – and they bring insights for the re-education of society by strangers in the self (*Jonestown* 201).

It is through “labour” – of the artist for instance – and “revelation” that the “sovereignty” of the “I” (supported in imperialist fiction through the imaginary and real domination of lands and of its ‘uncivilised Others’) is deconstructed. Francisco’s travels through the memory theatre eventually culminate in his “imaginative” leap into the void/unconscious, which he had resisted on two previous occasions (75, 206), and which is here provoked by his confrontation with the Amerindian Indians of the interior – his ‘Others’ – who drive him over the edge of the cliff to atone for Deacon’s colonialist crimes (since he is at this moment re-enacting Deacon’s role; he is and he is not Deacon, whose ghost inhabits him and whose body he inhabits). Before this leap can take place, Francisco needs to re-conceptualise the relation between himself and the most archetypal presence within the novel, the Predator, with the help of the “hunterman Christ” (a figure combining the violence of the hunt with the resurrectionary potential symbolized by Christ) in order to go beyond his initial impulse to kill the former and progress beyond violence. The final lines of the novel thus strive to overcome the dichotomies of Predator/victim, colonizer/colonized. Within Harrisian philosophy, salvation, change and redemption are not achieved on the historical or the social plane.

Yet, as this suggests, it also means that a variety of issues will by necessity be left unexplored: Francisco declares his feelings of guilt at the start of the narrative, but given his transformation into a vessel of a variety of issues, his actual *personal* responsibility (as one of the architects of the suicides) is not addressed, as the question of guilt is forced into the – by the nineties somewhat formulaic - Harrisian deconstruction of binaries and the absorption of contradictions within the archetype; women are written out of the leadership circle and appear only in stereotyped roles (a

point I will come back to); the fact that Francisco would in real life presumably not have formed part of the inner leadership circle and the specific reasons for the perpetuation of racist structures are equally beyond the scope of the narrative as this would require a closer look at the specific socio-historical circumstances. Considering the fact that by the nineties (after the failure of the sixties movements and the 'end of communism') the historical context has considerably altered, it is surprising how little difference there is between the basic constellations Donne/narrator (offered in *Palace*) and that of Huntsman/Francisco.¹⁹³

Concerning the archetype's relation to the natural environment, we might recall Harris's emphasis on shifting the focus away from the individual to the landscape:

where Lukács speaks of a middle-of-the-road hero within his besieged marxist premises I must speak of a 'middle-of-the-road' hole within my iconic landscape – middle-of-the-landscape sculpture or waterfall or river or escarpment of jungle down which a phenomenal erosion happened, quite suddenly, precipitately of conquered peoples (*Explorations* 16).

This shift of emphasis onto landscape, which is echoed by Glissant's insistence on understanding land as a character in the American novel, is indeed very relevant, especially given the current process of 'greening' that is underway in the field of postcolonial studies.¹⁹⁴ However, *Jonestown* is not doing justice to this injunction, as nature is turned into Hopkinsian 'inscape' and the relation between humans and nature occurs on purely human terms, that is, on a spiritual plane, which might recall early twentieth century primitivist conceptions of the relation between the environment and man. Potentially interesting issues, such as Peoples Temple's attempt at co-operative farming and their efforts to become self-sufficient, are thus again outside of the scope of his novel.

¹⁹³ Griffith has pointed out that Harris's fiction from the sixties is already unable to address the complexities of power, an issue that is compounded in *Jonestown*: 'For all the apparently admirable re-integrationist vision of Harris's work, his eliding of differences tends to de-emphasise the complexities of power which are grounded in difference. Perhaps this partially explains the categorisation of Harris's work as "magical realist". His re-integration of physical and metaphysical experiences examines the interrelatedness of apparently discrete entities and modes of existence without accounting for the redistribution of power within the context of its integrationist vision' (55).

¹⁹⁴ See for instance Graham Huggan's article "Greening" *Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives* (2004). In the Caribbean context, an important recent publication is *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2005; ed. by DeLoughrey, Gosson and Handley).

Many of these problems stem from Harris's desire to transcend history, which I have already mentioned in chapter one. However, not only does that dismissal of history here become much more explicit, but it is further compounded by the fact that, as we have seen, narrative constructions of the history of Jonestown are monolithically conceived and borrow from anti-communist rhetoric, thus effectively blinding us to some of the more complex issues at stake. In other words, the problem is here not history *per se* (both as a discipline and as 'past events'), but rather particular ideological constructions of the event. Given the ideological and epistemological dominance of those constructions, they would be most effectively challenged through a coherent counter-narrative (that would not necessarily have to be realist).

In Francisco's "dreambook", history is a closed system with a "Mind" of its own that has repressed certain aspects which can only be accessed through entering history's "unconscious", yet unlike in Hegel's conception, history lacks the dialectical forward movement.¹⁹⁵ In the "ancient/futuristic Camera" or the "Memory Theatre", the past is imagined as a nightmarish compilation of historical and mythical wreckages, failed utopian dreams and ruins; as Francisco first looks into the camera, he sees nothing but chaos: "I saw the floating planks from the forests of King Midas, I saw floating cargoes of South American rubber bound for the Golden Man in the kingdom of El Dorado, I saw the mastheads upon broken slave-ships" (51). This vision denies the possibility of constructing a coherent historical narrative of any of these events as horror piles upon horror, and one "holocaust" evokes another. To these is added the ruin of the failed utopia of Jonestown, described as "rubble and wasteland on the Utopian Bridge from the coastlands of Guyana into the interior of the South Americas" (84); as such, it is turned into "an imaginary station to be revisited through other imaginary stations and ghost trains in time" (84). The memory theatre thus establishes parallels between different "holocausts" in human history; the interrogation of Jonestown thus leads Francisco back into the year 1939, explicitly evoking the war in Europe and establishing a comparison with Hitler's extermination of the European Jewish population, a link that is reinforced by his

¹⁹⁵ "Eclipses appear within the Sky of the past (Eclipses of Memory) which one revisits and sees *through* historic blinds or curtains: such Eclipses have immediacy in the Dark of the Mind, the Mind of Memory, the Mind of history. Memorial stars appear over the cradles of humanity and arch in the neighbourhood of Eclipse. Such curvatures were apparently non-existent in the past to the Eye of history" (*Jonestown* 226).

continual references to Jonestown as “holocaustic”. To explain Deacon’s and his own original fascination with Jones, Francisco refers to their “addiction to holocaustic sacrifice [...] that ran deep in antagonistic cultures around the globe” (50), a formulation that links the tragedy to Mayan ritual human sacrifices (158).¹⁹⁶ Specific historic events are transformed into archetypal “holocausts” of which one serves to illuminate and interrogate the other. *Jonestown* offers a vision of history that is singularly bleak and does not go far enough in differentiating between different historical periods or events, which occludes, rather than elucidates, the reasons and causes for their occurrence. In particular, one might argue that firstly, the Jewish holocaust can hardly be compared to the self-imposed deaths of the Peoples Temple, and secondly, that the Mayan sacrifices fall into a very different global world order than any of the other events that are evoked.¹⁹⁷ Contrary to Harris, I would insist on the fact that Mayan sacrifices can tell us little or nothing about the Jonestown suicides, which are partly the product of the particular circumstances that shaped the ‘age of three worlds’ (to borrow Denning’s phrasing) as well as the particular socio-historical circumstances of US society, partly that of the choices particular individuals outside and inside the group have made. Harris’s interrogation also seeks to widen its scope by including the failed decolonization movements of the mid-century, transforming Deacon into the typical Harrisian failed revolutionary (who embodied the potential and the desire for change, but failed due to his hubristic belief in his own immunity to the “wounds” of the past, and his ignoring of the advice of the indigenous population). The evocation of the anti-colonial liberation movements of the sixties could have potentially been employed to make a commentary on the history of the present, an opportunity missed however due to Harris’s refusal to distinguish between differently motivated groups. Here all are sat at the game table of history, which leaves us with little to hold onto: “Not only Presidents and Prime Ministers but Bankers and Peasants played at the table. They belonged to all parties across generations of colonial and post-colonial histories” (156). Such a vision of history occludes any positive attempts that have been made to

¹⁹⁶ The phrase here evokes the Greek root of the word, *holokauston*, “a translation of the Hebrew word ‘olah, meaning a burnt sacrifice offered whole to God” (“Holocaust”, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2006).

¹⁹⁷ As Enrique Dussel reminds us, the current global situation of modernity is unique in the history of humanity: “This is the only world-system that has existed in planetary history, and this is the modern system, Europe in its center, capitalist in its economy” (“Beyond Eurocentrism” 9). Octavio Paz’s interpretation of the Tlatlelolco massacre as a resurgence of Aztec practices is open to similar charges, and indeed, politically highly dubious as it reads the oppressive governmental methods through a cultural/national identity lens.

overthrow capitalism and/or imperialism, and ends up saying very little about the specific historical conjuncture of the seventies.¹⁹⁸

In *Jonestown*, the reconstruction of the imagination occurs as a result of Francisco's travels through the Memory theatre, during which he revisits a past, which is altered in the process. To take an example, the original "pact" between Jonah Jones, his right-hand man Deacon, and his left-hand man Francisco Bone (in *Jonestown*, the architects of the mass suicide) is transformed into and replaced by various other pacts, one being the pact between Deacon (played by Francisco), Francisco Bone (who is 'inhabited' by the ghost of Deacon), and the Prisoner (an archetype of a "framed God", as opposed to the "unfathomable creator" of consciousness 173). In the words of Francisco, this "*new* pact planted in the past, the *new* shape to time *within the past* (in this revisitation from the future) signified a mathematic of decapitation in the re-shouldering of past and future in my body, upon my body, through Deacon's absent body, and through the Prisoner's potential sacrifice of his body (174)". According to Francisco then, in order to alter the present, the past needs to be transformed imaginatively, rather than to be approached with the analytical spirit of historical reconstruction. As the spectator and constructor of the Memory Theatre, Francisco – who is no longer autonomous in his individuality being inextricably linked to Deacon, his skeleton twin and various other characters – is central to this transformation, as the dissembled past becomes

¹⁹⁸ Take Walter Rodney, for instance, who in Guyana sought to establish a race-less worker's party and was murdered by the government in 1980. Harris's vision downplays the importance of activists and politicians such as Walter Rodney and the Working Peoples' Alliance (WPA), and – if Deacon alludes to Cheddi Jagan – this would also seem to beg the question of the role of the United States in his ousting (possibly alluded to through the figure of Jones who is somewhat overloaded with different significations).

An argument related to that regarding his treatment of history could of course be made in relation to Harris's reading of trauma as moments in which a "voiding" of the colonized individual occurs. As Henry notes, in a Harrisian vision this voiding would allow for the re-cathecting and decolonization of the self (see chapter on Harris, 90-114). Francisco – here the sole survivor – has suffered a considerable trauma and experiences a "voiding" of the self: "I was driven in my flight from Jonestown to reflect on myself as an 'extinct creature'. I dreamt I had been robbed of my native roots and heritage. I suffered from a void of memory. I belonged to peoples of the Void...." (7). Francisco thus aligns himself with other victims of colonization in the Americas in a move to broaden the scope of his experience (even though their experience might have been significantly different to his own!). Significantly, this is done through an interior voyage, rather than through establishing connections with these other victims who are absorbed into his archetypal narrative. This experience is a prerequisite for reconstruction since it develops Francisco's sensitivity to "breathlines" (7) (note the regular appearance of threads and keys that precede the crossing over into another loci of the memory theatre, such as Limbo Land, Graveland, Mount Roraima). These provide seemingly insignificant clues or keys that reveal the interrelatedness of apparent opposites, promising access to "a therapeutic community" (23), a concept that seems to lack cash value and empties out the concept of a social community.

reassembled in his body (recalling the dancer of *vodun* as well as perhaps the Christian Eucharist).

The reconstruction of the imagination is anti-linear and non-chronological: “There is a real continuity running out of the past into the future”, Francisco concedes, but “such continuity cannot be lodged absolutely in the frames and the dogmas of the past” (173). In chapter one, I examined how the simultaneous inscription of the body by young and old age expresses the imprisonment of the present by past (mental and institutional) structures. However, the same image is here part of the re-writing and re-imagining of those structures established in the past. As Francisco revisits his own childhood and attends one of Mr Mageye’s lessons for the second time, he rubs his face with a piece of chalk, acquiring “a slightly greyish unshaven look” (29); “a nine-year-old child with an ageing head on his shoulders within a Nemesis Bag invisible to all” (29). Francisco travels into the past with a knowledge of the future (also indicated by his hurting finger, to be cut off on the day of the Jonestown suicides by a bullet) and a desire to alter reality (symbolised in the Nemesis bag), rejecting the “frame” of a linear historical narrative, in particular of progressivist historical narratives: “To sail back into the past is to come upon ‘pasts’ that are ‘futures’ to previous ‘pasts’ which are ‘futures’ in themselves to prior ‘pasts’ *ad infinitum*. [...] What lies behind us is linked incalculably to what lies ahead of us in that the future is a sliding scale backwards into the unfathomably past within the Virgin womb of time...” (5). In the “Virgin Womb of time”, the future and the past are intimately related and changes to the future are only possible if the past is altered. What looks like a post-modernist celebration of the multiplicities of times (the product of ‘combined and uneven development’) seeks to inscribe itself into a different tradition of thought that is mythic/metaphysical in nature (although whether it ever fully manages to maintain that difference is questionable, a point to which I shall return).

Francisco’s travels into the past are characterised by a high degree of literary self-awareness and playfulness, which again may seem akin to a post-modernist aesthetic.¹⁹⁹ As exemplified by the image of the “futuristic/ancient” camera that often

¹⁹⁹ One of the most striking and most frequently recurring images of the novel – that of the “futuristic, ancient camera” – expresses this continuously questioning self-awareness that seeks to transform the present/past/future by constructing a new reformed memory theatre of mythic archetypes through a transformative replay of the past: “Mr Mageye held his Camera in his hand which he – as magus-Jester of history – had brought from the future as much as from the technologies in the past: a Camera stored with paradoxical archetypes, new-born yet old as the mysterious anatomy of time. His

hovers over the scene, the bearded children, the giant phallus, on which Jones will climb into space, jest and parody form part of a strategy of resistance, as they do in *Solibo Magnifique*. This is articulated by, and incorporated in, the figure of the magus-Jester of History, one of the three magi in the novel and Francisco's "apparitional" mentor. Mageye (whose name indicates his significance as well as stressing the visual element of the imagistic imagination) emphasises the importance of "see[ing] the funny side of the sacred"(88); only a "Colonial Fool in a post-colonial, post-imperial age" (89) can absolve Deacon, the failed liberator, from the burden of "fate", scripted and imposed by a society that is "addicted to violence" (88).

However, ultimately, the narrative's announced transformative dimension – destined to alter our thought structures – is severely limited by its inability to transcend the mass media narrative constructions of Jones. As announced in Bone's prefatory letter, the leader of the Peoples Temple is transformed into a "fictional and archetypal" character called Jonah Jones, in accordance with the quest to transcend a realist witness account in order to address the larger context of the "conquistadorial legacies" and to access the archetypal mode of consciousness. Jonah Jones – who himself on a conscious level always remains a "framed archetype" or more simply a *stereotype* conforming to existing narrative constructions – is therefore linked to various intersecting 'memory series' of related images. Most obviously, his first name links him to the series that relates to the sea. The biblical character Jonah is a recalcitrant prophet, representing a narrow Jewish nationalism that seeks to exclude gentiles from salvation. The well-known incident of the whale, "recalling Leviathan, the monster of the deep used elsewhere in the Old Testament as the embodiment of evil, symbolizes the nation's exile and return".²⁰⁰ Jonah Jones's fanaticism is similarly narrow in the scope of its proposed salvation, "locking" the "saved" into their exclusive heaven (115). He is one of the many Harrisian characters who fail to break out of the behavioural patterns prescribed by colonial and imperialist legacies. The failure of Jonestown is assessed through the portrayal of Jones, who in Francisco's memory theatre displays an obsession with 'pure blood' and retains the

apparitional figure stood on the deck of the Virgin Ship with the futuristic, ancient Camera in his hand (50-51). The past and its "framed" archetypes are exploded by the self-conscious and irreverent, often grotesque, rehearsal of the past with a knowledge of the future.

²⁰⁰ "Jonah, Book of." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica 2006 Ultimate Reference Suite DVD 24 Oct. 2006 .

imperialist conviction of the innate superiority of 'white' American civilization, despite proclaiming to fight against racism and racial inequality. In other words, the failure is interpreted as stemming from the non-acceptance of the hybrid and mixed legacies of the Americas and, in particular, the negation of the 'heathen's' (non-white) culture. As Francisco remarks, "his championship of [him], the erstwhile savage," is not based on an equal exchange, but "is a 'liberal' exercise in which 'liberalism', or 'conservatism' [and] becomes a medium to upbraid his civilization for the impurities it houses" (120). Rather than seeing the perpetuation of racist structures as stemming from the particular socio-historical circumstances that marked the group's growth and composition, the argument is here shifted exclusively to the ideological/cultural realm and stays on a very general level that, I feel, is inadequate for addressing Jones's *personal* cultural 'biases'.

As in much colonialist and imperialist literature, this conflict between cultures and the resultant oppression is rendered in sexual terms and we are thus entering the realm of stereotyped representations as women figure as mere sexual objects. As aforementioned, the historical Jones had sexual relationships with various female followers, which are here transformed into his sexual relation with Marie Antoinette who represents the racial and cultural 'Other'. Jones's sexual intercourse is described as transforming and "violat[ing] women into a collective map of place to be conquered, to be saved, to be purified" (120). The traditional colonial romance is here depleted of its amorous dimension and rendered as a struggle for power:

Intercourse with her was justified as a way for a puritan to absolve her of tainted antecedents [...]. Thus it was that an irredeemable continent was rendered sterile, it was voided of its pre-Columbian background, its legacies, its cultures, in a process of proselytisation or conversion to charismatic Christianity (128).

The "charismatic Christianity" of the Peoples Temple is thus seen as cultural imposition, operating according to the schema of colonial occupation. One might perhaps justify the comparison with a colonial venture by referring to the fact that Peoples Temple erected their settlement in Guyana's forests employing indigenous labour to construct their houses (although, again, the scope of colonialism's domination of the indigenous populations around can hardly said to be matched).

While Marie Antoinette claims to exercise power over Jones, she is ultimately turned into one of the victims of Jonestown and an exploration of the potential active role she might have played - beyond her sexual relation – is outside the scope of the novel.

Jones is further associated with Melville's classic American novel *Moby Dick*, which further endorses the reading of him as a colonialist: "Jones intrigued us with fictions of whales, *Moby Dick*, whales that swallowed civilizations and threatened the Virgin ship"(47). By implication, Jones, then, is here associated with the monomaniacal captain Ahab, whom C.L.R. James read as a corporate manager of the mechanized world of the factory that is the ship (*Mariners* 1985). Yet, in accordance with Harris's refusal to construct a new binary opposition between two opponents or to construct fixed equivalencies, Jones is also associated with the whale itself: "Jones – in the Mask of the Whale into which he descended at times – raged at the prejudices, the biases, the hypocrisy, that were visible everywhere" (49-50). Francisco's and Deacon's original pact with Jones is based on this anger, incorporated in the whale, which without a re-visionary sensibility can "become an involuntary ape of imperial hubris", recalling Flatfoot Johnny's failed revolution in *Carnival* (50). In Mr Mageye's and Francisco's revisionary "womb of the Camera" (198) the whale is combined with other images, symbols or deities derived from Indian and African cultures (the Spider Anansi, Kali) and transformed into the artistic representation of a "Spider Whale" that is a womb-like space of global dimensions, painted in the past by "Australian Aboriginal Old Gods" (198) but containing in its stomach houses "inhabited by futuristic immigrants from Newcastle or Leeds or Liverpool or London" (198). This transformation charts the movement from character to archetype.

In line with Harris's thought on archetypalism and 'universal consciousness', the reader can glimpse a vision of redemption through Jones on an archetypal level. On an individual level of ego consciousness Jones remains "numb to everything except an ever-lasting divide between the damned and the saved" (135), but by being inscribed in the series of memory images that relates to sea voyages, Jones is also linked to the redemptive possibilities inscribed in the Virgin Ship built to transform the past. Furthermore, through his transformation into an archetype of imperial conquest rendered in sexual terms, the narrative seeks to abolish the oppositional relation to nature which Harris associates with an imperialist Enlightenment tradition

that sent “into exile all voices in nature and space that differed from a human-centred cosmos preoccupied with its own vested interests in power and wealth at any price” (133). In a comically exaggerated image of what one might term a mytho-geo-logical intercourse a log that nearly kills Jones while he is swimming in the river is transformed into a giant phallus that vertically penetrates the “womb of space”, ejaculating white birds from the wounds that open in its shaft, visually evoking the possibility of a new genesis that Jones himself is never able to perceive:

[...] the Phallus had broken on its penetration of floating wings in the belly of oceanic, riverain Cloud far above me but close to Jonah’s apparitional climb into self-deception of eternity’s closure of time. A red rim or slice appeared beneath the lofty erection and mounted head, mounted by Cloud, in Jonah’s log. Waterfall log, rainfall log, that I saw *through* Jonah’s body? [...] Within the slice of log or Phallus, feathered birds, white and dark as rain, seemed to pour out like a river. It was an incalculable spatial phenomenon or omen of genesis (133).

Jones’s desire for sexual/imperial domination is externalised, as he climbs up the log/phallus/tree.²⁰¹ The wounds of the phallus/log represent the traumas of imperialism, envisioned as potential generators of new creative possibilities. As Harris explains elsewhere, “Archetypal dreams employ symbols of brokenness to depict the breaking of habit” (*Unfinished Genesis* 42). The wounds can become “inimitably complex and sensitive sculptures of science and art” (137) if they interrogate and revise the structures on which the colonial self and society are built. It is through this archetypal de-individualisation of Jones that Harris seeks to revise the “othering” of Jonestown and its members, to understand its failure, and to create different possibilities.

Yet, despite this announced emphasis on transformation, one should stress here that Harris’s fiction is unable to un-think *concretely* the representation of Jones as propagated by the mass media. Within the space of his fiction, the emergence of subaltern voices remains an unrealized possibility forfeited in the quest for the archetype. In his version, Jones met his “right-hand man” Deacon and his “left-hand man” Francisco in 1942 in San Francisco, and Jones is essentially portrayed as the

²⁰¹ In the context of Jones’s literalized phallocentrism, the choice of the image of a “log” is certainly not incidental.

‘colonialist’ megalomaniac in the making, as he speaks of Moby Dick and other “classics of anger”, and is a regular client in brothels, which here bespeaks the possessive mindset of a future conquistador (47). In other words, we are still presented with the basic set-up of reading evil retrospectively into past events. Equally, within the thought parameters of the novel, there is no space for imagining the women’s contribution in non-sexual terms, since they are transformed into Virgins (evoking the possibility of non-violence), or Kali (through whom the Virgin is linked to the unnatural mother, a cruel Goddess). Admittedly, to accuse Harris of failing to go beyond the sexualisation of women is to go against his announced transcendence of gender through the archetype:

All this runs deeper than gender. Archetypes run deeper than gender. Their manifestation is partial at the best of times. We need to read them in their broken fabric, we need to read them differently. [...] When one reads reality differently from slavish alignment to literal frame or code. [...] by way of weighing another text (a hidden text) in a given text, then the privileged male discloses privilege as a form of perversity, a trauma, that cracks open to hint at the saviour-archetype dressed in partialities and biases that civilization should never absolutize or it is forever trapped in the venom of history (204).

This pre-emptive and repetitive rebuttal of the question of gender in his construction of archetypes does not fundamentally alter the problem at stake, but – I would argue – only signposts Harris’s desire to wish away a conceptual problem that severely undermines the transformative potential of his archetypalism. His archetypes actually reinforce the ‘frames’ they are seeking to question, effectively turning into *stereotypes*; in its treatment of a specific historical event, Harris’s analysis refuses to give specific answers and withdraws into a more generalised critique of a society addicted to violence, in line with his rejection of the ‘sovereign self’. Even if we read these as a criticism of contemporary society, as a criticism of the way in which women and men have been restricted to these ‘frames’, it seems hard to imagine a space in the novel for the emergence of those voices that have never been accorded a space. According to the critic Szeman, the aim of a “cultural revolution” is, and has to be, “to produce an authentic and sovereign subjectivity and collectivity by

undoing the sets of habits called subalternity” (810), which is precisely what Harris’s vision rejects.

Given that Harris’s aesthetic grows out of his rejection of bourgeois realism, it seems here necessary to return to the question of genre. As Griffith has already pointed out in relation to *The Guyana Quartet*, Harris’s blanket refusal of realism cannot offer a challenge to the naturalising ideology of bourgeois realism and does not “subvert the hegemony of realism” (57), since it rejects its categories *tout court* without deconstructing them:

The force of the nineteenth century novel of manners and realism is precisely in its constitution of bourgeois concerns and interests as natural, pragmatic and commonsensical. The nineteenth century novel of manners and realism assisted in rendering bourgeois ideology and class interest as the natural condition of the world. [...] Class, gender and race contribute significantly to the production and organisation of knowledge. [...] Thus, when Harris attempts to emphasise universal humanity by de-emphasizing the strategic positioning of realism’s classifications, he misses an opportunity to deconstruct the ideological foundation on which these classifications are built (57; 58).

Harris’s novels are generally classed as marvellous (or magical) realist, but one should here add that there are significant differences between Harris’s shamanistic marvellous realism and other strands within that genre. In his definition of marvellous realism, Jacques Stephen Alexis, for instance, does not see the genre in opposition to realism, but as a strand of social realism, a genre that is “conscious of the imperatives of history [...] preaches an art that is human in its content, but resolutely national in its form” (197).

The relation of Harris’s aesthetic to that of postmodernism is somewhat more complex. D’Haen summarises the characteristics of postmodernist fiction as follows: “self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the dissolution of character and narrative instance, the erasure of boundaries, and the destabilization of the reader” (192-3). If we want to broaden our analysis to include other postmodernist debates emerging from other disciplines

(social science, politics, philosophy) – since, after all, a strictly literary understanding of postmodernism is “a Western (or perhaps American) luxury, because few developing societies seem able to fund literary criticism as such” (de la Campa, *Latin Americanism* 15) – we might cite as its characteristics “the exaltation of diversity, aesthetic and cultural individualism, multiplicity of languages, forms of expression and life-projects, and axiological relativism” (Hopenhayn 97), which go hand in hand with the rejection of foundational reason and notions such as progress, vanguard, and directionality. Yet, a celebration of the plural and diversity does of course not automatically translate into emancipatory projects and can in fact be linked to a variety of ideologies. In fact, as Martin Hopenhayn points out “postmodernist rhetoric has been profitably capitalized on by neoliberalism in order to update its longed-for project of cultural hegemony” (98) and, as Larsen writes, its “blanket hostility toward the universalisms of Enlightenment thought may in fact serve to preempt Marxism’s carefully directed critique of that *particular universal* which is present day capitalist ideology and power.” It thus becomes “objectively, albeit perhaps obliquely, a variation of anticommunism” (Larsen “Postmodernism and Imperialism” 118). Larsen includes in his critique even ‘left postmodernism’, i.e. the strand of postmodernism that seeks to displace the false universals of the centre by the specific localisms of the peripheral ‘Other’, assuming a strategic and politically motivated, essentialism, since ‘left postmodernism’, too, rejects universals as fictional.²⁰²

While Harris’s fiction does not reject the notion of the universal as such – indeed, it does offer a mythic universal²⁰³ – it nevertheless displays certain similarities in its displacement of the locus of agency from the realm of history to the realm of myth (rather than, like in postmodernism, to discourse), and its rejection of ‘essentialist’ categories of class, race and party. His fiction displays the radical scepticism regarding history that characterises postmodernist fiction and theory,²⁰⁴

²⁰² Such a ‘left postmodernist’ position can be arrived at from different perspectives and he thus dismisses efforts to distinguish ‘peripheral’ aesthetics/philosophy/politics merely by virtue of geographical position (Larsen 124). I will return to the complex issue of relating geography or, rather, position within the world system to aesthetics in my last chapter.

²⁰³ This is also the ground on which Harris himself has rejected the label of postmodernism: “The way I diverge from the post-modernists- I must insist on this- is that the post-modernists have discarded depth, they have discarded the unconscious, thus all they are involved in is a *game*, a kind of game, whereas what I am saying is not just a game. I am convinced that there is a tradition in depth *which returns, which nourishes us even though it appears to have vanished* [...]” (*Unfinished Genesis* 86)

²⁰⁴ This may be illustrated by a critical examination of Linda Hutcheon’s defence of postmodernism’s “historicity”; while – as she argued – postmodernism is not necessarily ahistorical or apolitical, her argument nevertheless reveals some fundamental differences: “the postmodern” she writes, “effects

and as I have demonstrated above, because of its blanket rejection of the possibility of reconstructing sovereign subjectivity from a subaltern perspective (combined with the fact that its response to an event that has grown out of a historical conjuncture specific to the post-sixties decades and the Cold War dynamic), it also, in its idiosyncratic way, becomes a form of anti-communism.

“Una vida no basta”: Revolution, Community and the Modern Subject in *Terra Nostra*

Camarade Depestre
C'est un problème assurément très grave
des rapports de la poésie et de la Révolution
le fond conditionne la forme
Aimé Césaire, “Le verbe marronner”

La historia sólo se repite porque desconocemos la otra posibilidad
de cada hecho histórico: lo que ese hecho pudo haber sido y no fue.
Valerio Camillo, fictional character in *Terra Nostra* (677)

In this context, it seems appropriate to turn to *Terra Nostra*, a novel that has been described as the last of the boom novels – if the post-boom is defined by the “absence of grand narratives” (Martin, “Spanish American narrative” 107) - and whose relation to postmodernism, modernism and the neo-baroque has been addressed and debated by a number of critics. *Terra Nostra* and *Jonestown* – despite their fundamental differences – display a number of similarities: both feature archetypal characters, both examine the relation between myth and history, and between revolution/communism and religion; both are strongly self-referential as well as meta-textual; both evoke Yates’s description of the memory theatre in order to envisage an imaginative re-ordering and the lost opportunities of the past. One might here add that since the field of Latin American studies entered the Anglo-American academy in the sixties and seventies with the popularity of the boom novels it coincided with the “advent of new critical paradigms in humanistic

two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. [...] there can be no single, essentialised, transcendent concept of “genuine historicity” (*Poetics* 89). As van Delden has argued, this analysis is infused by poststructuralism’s “radical scepticism” in its approach to history “that must ultimately lead to a denial of our ability to know the past” (*Carlos Fuentes* 114). Furthermore, the recognition that there are different versions of history to be told that differ from the imperialist universalising narrative has long characterised peripheral narratives.

scholarship”, and thus became “quite invested in structuralist, semiotic, and deconstructive modes of reading, or in a literary understanding of postmodernism that is by and large removed from extra-literary social constructs, and more so from postcolonial entanglements” (de la Campa, *Latin Americanism* 3). Though it entered the US academy slightly earlier than the field of postcolonial studies, it is by now similarly marked by the dominance of poststructuralist/postmodernist strands of thought that are critical of earlier paradigms (ibid 14). This particular context has certainly affected the way in which *Terra Nostra* has been read.²⁰⁵

Before examining the way in which the novel reconstructs history - a global ‘meta-narrative’ - I need to briefly comment on Fuentes’s emphasis on the necessity to re-vision, to “re-invent”, history (*La nueva novela* 95), a concern that has occupied him throughout his career. In *Terra Nostra*, an entire chapter is devoted to the memory theatre, focussing on ‘Valerio’ Camillo and his invention. The description is closely modelled on those of Yates with the important innovation that what ‘Valerio’ Camillo’s theatre seeks to offer is a ‘complete’ version of history that includes events that could have, but never have, happened (“El teatro de la memoria” 666-680). At the apocalyptic end in 1999, Polo Febo, who has apparently just read the same novel as the reader, and Celestina, who appears in various reincarnations throughout the novel and has the capacity of transmitting memory through a kiss, are the last survivors of humanity. Celestina’s kiss transports Polo into the memory theatre and the novel’s narrative becomes his own. Polo - who, like Cervantes, possesses only one arm (one of the many indicators that we are to read the novel as a twentieth-century version of *Don Quixote*) - realizes that history had been offered a second chance, but ended up merely repeating itself with merely some details changed. Rephrasing Marx’s famous opening sentences to *The Eighteenth Century Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, he muses: “tragedia entonces y farsa ahora, farsa primero y tragedia después, ya no sabes, ya no te importa, todo ha terminado, todo fue mentira,

²⁰⁵ Critics have argued that *Terra Nostra* privileges a mythic expression over history in such a way “that time and space lose their differentiating power” (González Echevarría 92); that it is written “against history” (Volpi, introduction to the English version of *Terra Nostra* xiii); or, on the other hand, that it does not “condemn” History, but posits that “true history [...] is not linear and chronological but simultaneous and multiple” (Ibsen, *Author* 50). Ingrid Simson reads *Terra Nostra* as a novel of circles and spirals and as suppressing causality and chronology (*Realidad y ficción en Terra Nostra, de Carlos Fuentes*). In an illuminating article, Zunilda Gertel argues that “la función semiótica de la historia como integradora de la ficción permite al *facto* histórico desprenderse del eje de su continuidad diacrónica y, en su nueva condición de signo móvil, proyectarse como discontinuidad hasta integrarse (metonomizarse) en el contexto espacial del presente” (63), in line with Fuentes’s emphasis on how the past shapes the present. In contrast to Gertel, however, I here intend to focus on how the transformed “signs” are re-inscribed into a diachronic history.

se repitieron los mismos crímenes, los mismos errores, las mismas locuras, las mismas omisiones que en otra cualquiera de las fechas verídicas de esa cronología linear, implacable, agotable: 1492, 1521, 1598..." (1917-8).²⁰⁶ However, as the novel ends on Celestina and Polo's sexual act that unifies them into a hermaphrodite and offers a new mythic foundation to history, it suggests a new start that would be based on those opportunities that were rejected, notably the pluralist heritage of Spain represented by the character Mihail-ben-Sama/Miguel/Micah (his names reflect his triple identity Arab/Christian/Jewish).²⁰⁷ As Ibsen has observed, the role of the spectator in the memory theatre is offered to the reader, who "is invited to reconstruct and make sense of the barrage of images presented in the novel through the activation of his or her own capacity to recollect these images and to correlate them with the transtextual reserves brought to the act of reading" (*Author* 120-1).²⁰⁸ The text thus seeks to alter the reader's thought structures to induce a different vision of the past that would be based on the values of diversity, community and tolerance and upon a foundational myth of a hermaphrodite creator, rather than a patriarchal unique God-the-Father.²⁰⁹ However, this emphasis on the imagination of the reader and the implied attempt to alter his/her conception of reality *does not* involve a blanket rejection of history and realism as it does in the Harrisian vision, but rather implicates a more nuanced, transformative relation to them. Fuentes's injunction to "reinvent history" stands in dialectical relation to his materialist reconstruction of it, in the same manner as (religious apocalyptic) myth is worked into, and altered by, revolutionary struggles in *Terra Nostra*.

With regards to the relation between myth and history in the novel, Fuentes's own theoretical statements have sometimes contributed to confusing matters. In an interview in 1980, he states:

²⁰⁶ 1492 is the year of Columbus's 'discovery' of the New World, of the conquest of Granada, of the publication of Nebrija's *Gramática* and the edict of expulsion of the Jews (*Cervantes* 36). 1521 is the year of the *comuneros* rebellion and the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán. In 1598 Felipe died.

²⁰⁷ "La expulsión combinada de judíos y moros, en efecto, significó que España se privó de los talentos y servicios que más tarde necesitaría, desesperadamente, a fin de mantener su estatura imperial" (*Cervantes* 38).

²⁰⁸ Or as Swietlicki writes: "The Theatre of Memory may be seen as the key to unlock the world from the confines of circular history, the patterns which encompasses all characters and events in *Terra Nostra*" ("*Terra Nostra*: Carlos Fuentes' Kabbalistic World" 161). In contrast to Swietlicki, however, I would argue that an 'unlocked' narrative is already to be found within the fictional world of *Terra Nostra* itself. In an early article on the novel, Soto-Duggan also emphasises precisely the importance of the imagination in reconstructing the future, the present and the past ("Memoria e Imaginación").

²⁰⁹ In "Los treinta y tres escalones", Felipe is offered by the ghost of Mihail a list of different choices (896-898), which is remarkably similar to Glissant's list of distinctions between the concepts of Root identity and Relational Identity (*Poetics of Relation* 143-4).

The mythical time, which as I say is a present, does not admit the past as such. It considers what we call the past – in the Western linear system – as a present which is accreting, which is constantly enriching the moment, the instant. The past is never condemned to the past in the mythical system (qtd by Parkinson Zamora, “Beyond Apocalypse” 149).

The critic Parkinson Zamora hence concludes that Fuentes rejects “linear, sequential time in favour of a cyclical and synchronic vision of time” (162), a vision that evokes Vico’s theories. In his theoretical writing, Fuentes himself refers to Gianbattista Vico (1688-1744) as a critic of a Eurocentric, pseudo-universalist, exclusivist historical narrative conceived as ‘inexorable march’ towards the future; defined against this imperialist version of ‘universal’ history, Vico’s theories stand out thanks to their emphasis on difference, and his refusal to view history – on a theoretical level – as a narrative of ‘progress’ (a concept defined here from a Eurocentric perspective). Vico, according to Fuentes, believes that history “no es un progreso ininterrumpido, sino un movimiento en espiral, en el que los progresos alternan con factores recurrentes, muchos de ellos negativamente regresivos” (*Valiente mundo* 35). However, conceiving of history in theoretical terms not as a narrative of evolutionary progress, but one of spirals/cycles, does not necessarily imply a blanket rejection of a historical materialist narrative, but rather a rejection of *particular* narratives, such as the Euro-imperialist narrative of evolutionary cultural history (in which European civilization would figure as the highest stage). As one might expect from the writer of historical studies such as *The Buried Mirror* (a *diachronic* account of the history of Latin America), *Terra Nostra* does not completely dismiss “linear, sequential time” – *pace* Parkinson Zamora. It is true that Fuentes has consistently emphasised the interrelation of past, present and future: “Recordamos aquí, hoy. Pero también imaginamos aquí, hoy. Y no podemos separar lo que somos capaces de imaginar de lo que somos capaces de recordar”, he writes in *Valiente mundo nuevo* (18). The “mythical system”, then, enables an imaginative re-thinking of the foundations of historical narrative, a transformation of how we read the past to alter our understanding of the present and open opportunities for the future. The most interesting aspect of the novel, then, is how this understanding (that our construction of the past is active in the present and thus needs to be transformed) dialectically

informs the novel's historical materialist narrative of the emergence of capitalism, and, more specifically, its reworking of character.

As the 'last of the boom novels', *Terra Nostra* does offer a "grand narrative" based on a historical materialist narrative of the emergence of capitalism and the correlative "rise of reflexivity and [...] the expansion of a secular viewpoint" (Resina 291). This twin focus emerges most clearly in the way in which the novel's structure and its construction of characters are interlinked: the novel is organized around two rebellions in which all of the main characters are directly or indirectly implicated, and the narrative significantly starts on the 14th July 1999, the 210th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. This points us to the heart of Fuentes's attempt to reform constructions of character of major works of Spanish fiction of the Golden Age and thus also the emergent conception of the autonomous "modern subject".²¹⁰ Most literary and historical figures and events that occur in the novel can be historically located between the dates of 1492 and 1598 roughly spanning the Spanish Golden Age, with the third cardinal date being 1521, the date of the *comuneros* rebellion that was, according to the historian Maravall and Fuentes, the first modern revolution. In other words, the text returns to the moment at which capitalism emerged as a world system, the moment of the 'first', Spanish modernity during which modern forms of subjectivity were being formed, cultural manifestations of which are the protagonists of *La Celestina* ((1499) often considered the first European novel, it was written by Fernando de Rojas, a Jewish convert), *Don Quixote* (Part I 1605 by Cervantes, also a Jewish convert), and the play *El burlador de Sevilla* (by Tirso de Molina, 1630), the three works that, according to Ludovico, contain the destiny of their history.²¹¹ Literature, Fuentes writes, does not only express reality, but also constitutes "una nueva cosa en el mundo" (*Cervantes* 93).²¹² The rise of the novel has often been

²¹⁰In relation to the nineteenth century realist novel, Jameson argued that its role was the 'secular "decoding" of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens'; "[...] populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism" (138). In the introduction to his study on *Terra Nostra*, Michael Abeyta quotes this passage – which indeed can shed an important light on the novel – but he completely misses the analytical openings offered by it. While Jameson is talking about an epochal shift and the way in which it affected subjectivities (and one might see the 'national romances' of the nineteenth century as fulfilling a similar role in Latin America), Abeyta believes this to be the same as *Terra Nostra*'s addressing of the question of how to "re-codify" (or perhaps a more adequate term would simply be to 'represent') Latin American syncretism without transforming it into a mass product of the global market, an altogether quite different issue which is characteristic of the present 'global moment'.

²¹¹Located at the crossroads of medieval and renaissance Spain, *La Celestina* mocks courtly convention, transforms facts into "reflection, interpretation, exaltation, mockery" (*Cervantes* 46).

²¹² see also "Palabras iniciales", a short version of *Cervantes* published in *Plural* in 1972.

attributed to England of the eighteenth century, a time when the realist novel “had come to seem extraterritorial” in Spain with the reinforcement of class barriers and the blocking of social aspirations on which the novel form thrives (Resina 297-301). However, as Resina points out, this may be read as an attempt to erase the novel’s Spanish predecessors such as the genre of the picaresque novel characterised by an “aggressive realism”, or the self-reflexive *Don Quixote*, the last “scion of the Erasmian spirit in Spanish literature” in the Spain of the Counter-reformation (291; 298).²¹³ Interestingly, *Terra Nostra* does not feature a picaresque character (nor its aggressive realism, which Fuentes reads as “una brutal negación de lo anterior” (*Cervantes* 81)), which may perhaps be linked to the fact that the picaresque novel is quite an orthodox genre (often inspired by the Counter-revolution), in which the individual “lacks the power to alter the cosmic order in which society is inserted” (Resina 300). Or, as Fuentes puts it, the picaresque hero’s exclusive focus on the present is impoverishing: “para ser un presente pleno, requiere un sentido del pasado y una imaginación del futuro” (*Cervantes* 31).

Fuentes revises these literary characters that have become literary archetypes over time in order to alter their legacies. Yet, whereas Don Juan is never allowed to become more than a negative, repetitive stereotype, Celestina is transformed into a “communal character”, a new model of selfhood, positively seeking to alter the existing social order. Celestina as well as Ludovico – the two central lower class characters - are involved in both of the revolts, which are firmly set within a Marxist narrative of the historical emergence of global capitalism driven by class struggle, into which the mythic strands of the novel also feed.²¹⁴ The three youths - marked by

²¹³Fuentes shares Resina’s reading of *Don Quixote*, and emphasises the (self-)critical dimension of the novel that constitutes a “critique of reading” (see *Cervantes*). The critical spirit is, for Fuentes, the most important feature of modernity: “la modernidad no puede creer en normas invariables sin sacrificar el espíritu crítico que su legitimación” (*Cervantes* 101). Erasmian thought corresponded to the rise of individualism and criticism. As Polo Febo phrases it: “al Medievo, le arrebató Erasmo la certeza de las verdades inmutables y de los dogmas impuestos; a la modernidad, le reduce a proporción irónica el absoluto de la razón y el imperio del yo” (912). Unfortunately, he continues, it was replaced by a fierce individualism and the illusion of an emancipated singularity.

²¹⁴As Fuentes states in an interview: “Mi información – más que mi formación política – la debo al contacto con el marxismo, pero no en cuanto dogma absoluto o reductor – sino en cuanto método de interpretación de determinados fenómenos de la vida histórica y llamado de libertad e integración de posibilidades humanas. El marxismo no es, ni pudo ser la vida. Es una interpretación, rica y parcial, de la existencia, que se niega al negar su relativismo dialéctico y pretender a una totalidad dogmática” (qtd. by Claude Fell 147). This quote is particularly interesting in relation to *Terra Nostra*, a novel that clearly illustrates this statement: it is informed by the Marxist understanding of the emergence of capitalism, but this does not mean that Fuentes only talks about class struggle, integrating, as he does, mythic/mystic strands and the energies of heretical religious movements into the representation. His dialectical understanding is demonstrated in the way in which the value attached to the millenarian vision changes over the course of history/the novel, as well as the changes in Celestina’s character.

a cross on their shoulder blades and possessing twelve toes, characteristics that signpost them as millenarian messiah figures - are also centrally linked to rebellion. While the characters whose appearance is linked to the revolts recur and develop over time, the aristocratic characters tend towards being compressed representations of various royals from different generations and countries, thus representing the sterile stasis embodied in *Terra Nostra* by the Escorial.

Terra Nostra is divided into three parts, the first of which (“El viejo mundo”) deals “with the shifting power relations as sixteenth-century Spain experienced the transition from feudal society toward an emerging capitalism” (Anderson 59). The history of late 15th and 16th century Spanish society and the position of the labourer/vassal within it is complex and uneven, but Fuentes’s depiction is evidently less concerned with accurate details than overall historical trends.²¹⁵ One of the prime conditions for capitalism - the transformation of money and commodities into capital - is, according to Marx, the confrontation of “two very different types of commodity owners”: the “free” workers, who do not “form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc.”, and the owners of “conditions for the realization of their labour”; “capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale” (*Capital* 874). In *Terra Nostra*, the workers’ deprivation and the history of their expropriation plays a large role in the episodes relating to the construction of the Escorial and leads up to the rebellion of the *comuneros* portrayed in the third section and central to the novel as a whole (of course, the rebellion took place some forty years before the construction of the palace, and yet, by re-arranging history in this way, Fuentes has made these events into symbols of a larger process of historical

whose continual rebirths might otherwise point to a static realm of the mythic that dispenses with the historic.

²¹⁵Becky Boling has convincingly argued that *Terra Nostra* offers a Marxist version of history and a concomitant critique of positivism. In chapter one of his study, Abeyta offers a good analysis of this section couched in the language of Bataille and Derrida (especially interesting is his analysis of the novel’s representation of the “divorce between *words* and *things*” that “has a parallel trajectory with the rise of capitalist exchange” (41)). I am, however, slightly sceptical of Abeyta’s reliance on Bataille (who is really only mentioned on the last two pages of *Cervantes* and whose concept of the potlatch is employed merely as a metaphor by Fuentes for describing Joyce’s writing) for reasons that will become more apparent when I talk about the “New World” section (see chapter 5). In any case, my emphasis is here not so much on the fact that *Terra Nostra* represents the emergence of capitalism (which has already been analysed by Becky Boling), but rather on Fuentes’s understanding of how this has impacted on subjectivity.

change fired by class struggle against oppression). The former inhabitants of the lands on which the Escorial is being built have been dispossessed and displaced for the construction of the palace and have been transformed into day labourers: “el señor los ha dejado sin más sustento que un jornal. Y es más fácil quitarle dinero a un sueldo que arrebatarle fanegas a una cosecha” (164). Money, as an alienated form of payment, is more easily manipulated than the measurable harvest production of farming; several episodes in the novel lament this move from a system based on barter to one of abstracted monetary relations.²¹⁶ The workers of the Escorial are joined by labourers from other regions of Spain, who have fled the dreadful conditions of serfdom for the ‘freedom’ of wage labour (which, as Jerónimo observes, effectively deprives them of whatever protection they were offered under the previous system). The near absence of an identifiable middle class in 16th century Spain is reflected by the fact that they work for El Señor rather than a middle class capitalist. Historically, the weakness of the middle classes was due to diverse factors: a social structure still based on land (owned almost exclusively by the Church and the nobility), a “social prejudice against trade” on the part of the nobility, and a resultant aspiration to “invest their money in a landed title” on the part of the merchants (Lynch, 148); the ousting of Castilian manufacturers in the colonial markets from the 1550s onwards by foreign merchants due to the price rise in Spain that had resulted from the influx of precious American metals.²¹⁷ The incipient class of merchants is nevertheless represented through the character of Don Gonzalo de Ulloa (the *comendador* of Molina’s *El burlador*, the play that introduced Don Juan into the literary canon). He is here rewritten as a capitalist merchant with international trading connections with a bought rather than inherited title.²¹⁸ Don Gonzalo is the only apparent benefactor of the change that is lamented by most of the other characters. Guzmán, a member of the impoverished lower nobility and a voice

²¹⁶ See the chapter “Las cenizas de la zarza”, which describes the second Celestina’s and her father’s failed attempt to live an isolated existence away from the “cruel world” of oppression; see also Boling’s article (128).

²¹⁷ As Fuentes writes in *Cervantes*, Spain’s rejection of the forces of modernity had severe consequences on the economic level: “España, mera intermediaria del tesoro Americano, desprovista de capitalistas modernos, obligada a adquirir productos manufacturados en el exterior y a alto costo, y a vender materias primas a bajo precio, entró en un proceso de decadencia económica” (62).

²¹⁸ It is not difficult to imagine Don Gonzalo to have been based on the 16th century merchant Simón Ruiz. Ruiz was “corresponding ceaselessly with the greatest merchants of Lisbon, Antwerp, Lyons, and Genoa, and he was well known in the entourage of Philippe II. Beginning from about 1550 as an importer of Breton linens, he gradually extended his operations and acquired sufficient capital to speculate – with enormous success – on the exchange; by 1576 he was lending money to Phillip II and was participating in numerous *asientos* for the payment of the army in Flanders” (Lynch, 147).

for their wide-spread misgivings about commerce, describes himself as “incapaz de comprender o detener un movimiento invisible en que la sólida tierra, base de todo poder, se convertiría en inasible dinero” (206) and he warns El Señor that the economic power of the cities will soon replace his political power. Celestina, a member of the lower classes, sees it as a change from one system of oppression to another equally bad. While in 16th century Spain, merchants like Don Gonzalo were a clear minority (Lynch 147), the *comendador* not only functions as a commentary on 16th century Spain, but also as a critique of future developments. Rejecting the feudal, fantastical world in which Felipe’s mother seeks to prolong her line indefinitely through the resurrection of corpses, Don Gonzalo - essentially the anti-Don Quixote - announces the reign of the Enlightenment ideologies of Reason and progress: “Razón llamo mi deidad, sentidos despiertos, rechazo del misterio, exilio de cuanto no quepa en el seguro arcón del sentido común, donde lógica y ducados acumulo, conllevadas en felices y provechosas nupcias” (430). Reason and progress are ultimately subordinated to money, as this quote suggests. The circulation and accumulation of capital is a-moral, used indiscriminately to fund wars, industry or palaces (398); money itself becomes the ultimate value for the merchant, the proto-capitalist.

As aforementioned, this narrative of the dispossession of the working class/peasantry is structured around two rebellions. The first is represented in part I in the chapter “Aquí y ahora” (the massacre that occurs in its wake is described at length in the third part). The title clearly refers to the millenarian movements (which subscribed to the belief that collective salvation was imminent, terrestrial, total and miraculous (Cohn 13)) as well as, within the realm of the novel, to the slogan shouted by the flagellant masses during the apocalypse evoked at the beginning and end. In the chapter, it is the future Señor, Felipe (whose real identity is only known to Celestina), who convinces Simón, Pedro, Celestina and Ludovico that utopia is to be found not across the seas but “here and now”, that Jerusalem is to be found in the current world. He attracts other millenarian groups inspired by Joachimite prophecies (which predicted that the Third Age – the age of the Spirit – was imminent) and leads them to his father’s castle, which they loot (the poor crusaders described by Cohn similarly looted towns on their way (66)). Shortly after, they are all massacred by Felipe’s soldiers (with the exception of Felipe’s original travel companions). While

this rebellion – which is here portrayed as spontaneous and without any specific political programme – is thus suffocated before it can take off, it nevertheless is important to recall the positive role ascribed to the millenarian movements by Fuentes in *Cervantes*, where he sees them as forces of a heterodox pluralism that undermine the medieval orthodoxy (21-24). In the novel, this emphasis on the epistemological dimension is combined with an emphasis on the social conditions out of which these movements arose (poverty, the growth of the cities, social insecurity, a shift to uncontrolled capitalism that left workers exposed to the forces of the market, the destruction of medieval social hierarchies (Cohn 53-59)).

Furthermore, these movements are shown to feed into the social revolution portrayed in part III of the novel. The second uprising is a more organized and meditated attempt to alter the current power structures. Structurally, this rebellion is the climax of the third section (it is even preceded by a count-down of seven days/chapters), and perhaps even the book as a whole, as all the chapters in the ‘Old World’ contribute to the lead-up to this episode, which functions as Felipe’s final rejection of the ‘second chance’ that Ludovico seeks to offer him. This symbolically becomes the moment at which Spain rejected its pluralist heritage in favour of a narrow-minded nationalism based on the ‘purity’ of blood, as well as the rejection of the possible elimination of the oppressive social hierarchies. After the rebellion (resulting in the killing of the workers and the members of the junta, and a mass exodus of characters to the ‘New World’), Felipe slowly dies, rotting up inside, and we are presented with a few glimpses into a violent (Spanish and Mexican) future, more shocking for its resemblance to reality despite its grotesqueness and marked by the unchecked legacy of Felipe’s regime and the failure of the revolution.

Fuentes’s choice of the *comuneros* revolution in 1520-1 as a central structuring episode for part III – as well as the novel as a whole - rests on the importance of this particular historical uprising that the historian Maravall describes as a first modern revolution. Its defeat constituted a severe setback to the democratization of Spain (and thus also America, as Fuentes argues (*Cervantes* 60)). As the historian Lynch writes, the revolt (led by Toledo) was the product of the longstanding conflict between the cities and the nobility; it spread to most of the cities of Old Castile, and included four cities in Avila. A revolutionary junta and an army were formed to support the cause, which was to alter the relations to the king, “maintaining that the kingdom stood above the king and that the junta represented

the kingdom” (Lynch 57). In “La rebelión”, Fuentes introduces actual historical material from letters in italics, in which the junta seeks to realize a new order in which the king is “*sólo un elemento*” (757). Their demands were clearly revolutionary: “*los que tuviesen sospecha de perder sus haciendas, ni curen de seguir esta empresa, ni menos de venir a la junta*” (762); social change must necessarily be accompanied by land redistribution. In the non-italicised sections of the chapter, Fuentes emphasises the contributions of the millenarian groups to the rebellion against Felipe, naming amongst other groups the Waldensians, the Cathari and the adepts of the Free Spirit, which Cohn’s *The Pursuit of the Millennium* examines. The chapter’s emphasis on both the spiritual and the social revolutionary forces as feeding into the moment that represents Spain’s chance of a social revolution is reflected on the level of the novel as a whole by the dialectical relationship between a Kabbalist portrayal of the transmigration of souls and a materialist formation of the ‘communal’ character of Celestina that I will examine more closely in a moment.²¹⁹

However, before moving on to the discussion of character I here want to stress the historical nuances that characterise Fuentes’s representation of the role of millenarian/apocalyptic thinking in social revolution. Van Delden argues that, while Fuentes is critical of apocalypticism in his political writing, in his fictional writing it occupies a positive role since it is defined against oppressive orthodoxy.²²⁰ However, while van Delden is correct to point out that in the novel the revolutionary millenarian movements are shown to have “fulfilled a key role in the slow undermining of the monolithic edifice of medieval ideology” (*Carlos Fuentes* 131), in the apocalyptic future evoked in the opening and closing chapters of the novel their role is significantly more negative.²²¹ In the first chapter, Saint-Sulpice

²¹⁹ As Catherine Swietlicki has demonstrated in some detail, the mythic strand associates the millenarian movements with heretical aspects of Kabbalist thought - evoked most powerfully through the novel’s use of number symbolism and its insistence on the mystic number three (one might here think of the three youths marked by crosses that link them to flagellant movements whose members wore uniforms with crosses (Cohn 133)), as well as through the transmigration of souls (Celestina notably appears in many reincarnations) (Swietlicki, “Carlos Fuentes’ Kabbalistic World” 162-3).

²²⁰ This would go against the thesis of Cohn’s influential book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, in which millenarian movements are seen as precursors of the fascism’s holocaust and the crimes committed in the name of Communism (286).

²²¹ I would there agree with Michael Abeyta that van Delden over-emphasises the positive aspect of millenarianism in *Terra Nostra* (Fuentes, *Terra Nostra* 87). However, in his critique of van Delden’s evaluation of ‘utopianism’ in *Terra Nostra*, Abeyta conflates millenarianism with the utopian images projected onto America as well as with the revolution (Abeyta agrees with Goytisola that the novel waivers between “two opposed ideas – the necessity and the failure of the revolution – without fixing definitely on either”; how these ‘ideas’ are opposed is anyone’s guess). While there *are* links between

Cathedral in Paris in the year 1999 is the site of resurrection of the mass flagellant movements (based on Cohn's descriptions 127-133). To Polo, these evoke the 'last solution' of Fascist Germany and ordered evil; the flagellants' pronounced amorality ("oh crimen cuántas libertades se cometen en tu nombre" 64) – historically related to the adepts of the Free Spirit's belief in freedom from morality (Cohn 148) – thus take on worrying dimensions, further emphasised in the last chapter, in which apocalyptic thought becomes linked to an untrammelled capitalism, and in which the masses are killed by the rich in order to solve the problem of overpopulation.²²² Some of these tendencies – such as its amorality and the manipulation of the masses by the powerful – already emerge in the depiction of millenarianism in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.

The failures of the millenarian movements partly account for changes in Celestina's character, who obviously evokes the transmigration of souls but also allegorises a historical materialist narrative based on a subaltern perspective. The scenes of revolt have a structural importance that emphasises their crucial impact on the construction of character, and it is here that Fuentes's novel differentiates itself most clearly from Harris's. Swietlicki has suggested that the youths are psychological doubles of El Señor ("Doubling, Reincarnation and Cosmic Order in *Terra Nostra*" 94), and González Echverría states that "Don Quixote, Don Juan, Celestina, and the shipwrecked youth project various facets of the split matrix-figure Philip" (92).²²³ However, this absorption of the other characters into the "matrix-figure Philip" not only attributes too much importance to El Señor, but also misses important differences between the different forms of selfhood that these characters represent.

these different strands of thought and social movements, they are overall very different in application, impact and ideological background, and Fuentes's analysis is nuanced in its treatment of them, as we shall see in the present and the following chapter.

²²² "La plaga moderna fue programada: se salvaron, en nuevas ciudades esterilizadas bajo campana de plástico, algunos millonarios, muchos burócratas, un puñado de técnicos y científicos y las escasas mujeres necesarias para satisfacer a los elegidos" (909).

²²³ Swietlicki writes: "Psychologists tell us that partisanship in socio-political attitudes can result from personality fragmentation as a means of dealing with one's own inner tension and insecurity" (94). This certainly explains why she has no difficulty seeing characters in extremely different social positions (and even El Señor's dog) as mere doubles of one another, as if the realm of politics and history were only an extension of the psyche. For a critique of the re-privatisation of the political through the language of psychoanalysis, see Jameson's influential work, *The Political Unconscious*. Through a similar de-contextualisation, García Nuñez arrives at a reading of Don Juan and Celestina as two opposing principles identified as God and the Devil, respectively, which unify in the end in the de-hierarchised androgyne (see the chapter "Las figuras de Celestina y Don Juan en *Terra Nostra*"). His identification of Don Juan with God seems to me a little stretched, given that Don Juan only pretends to be God in order to have sex with a nun, in a scene that is surely parodic in mode.

Felipe - who is an almost continuous presence in the novel - represents the persistence of the structures of the old feudal order and, as such, his own construction of his self, as well as the novelist's construction of him as a character, does not emphasize his own individuality and difference from other aristocrats (although there certainly is a difference between him and the servants and workers), but rather stresses how the individual's role within society is determined by the legacy of the past.²²⁴ Felipe is very aware of the importance of external displays of power that confirm his position within the dynastic line, thinking of himself as a member of the ruling class rather than as a self-contained individual: "mi presencia está transida por el poder que represento y el poder me traspasa porque, siendo anterior a mí, en cierto modo no me pertenece y al pasar por mis manos y mi mirada, de mí se aleja y deja de pertenecerme; no basto yo, no basta el poder, hace falta el decorado, el lugar, el espacio que nos contenga y nos dé una semblanza de unidad a mí y a mi poder" (431). This explicitly stated awareness of his construction of subjectivity itself arguably derives from a modern understanding of selfhood, as the narrative perhaps somewhat uncomfortably seeks to represent a pre-modern consciousness from a modern perspective. The mode of subjectivity inhabited by the pre-individualistic subject is perhaps more elegantly expressed through the construction of the character, as Felipe is an amalgamation of various different kings: "Felipe [...], although primarily modelled after the pious and autocratic Felipe II, who ruled Spain from 1556 to 1598, also represents, among others, Fernando el Católico, whose reign witnessed the voyage of Columbus, the expulsion of the Jews, and the fall of Granada, and Carlos V (1517-1556), under whom took place the conquest of Mexico and the Comunero revolt" (Ibsen, "El teatro" 111-112). All of the aristocratic characters are treated in this way: "la dama loca" combines characteristics of Juana la loca, Mariana of Austria, Carlota (who attempted to rule Mexico between 1864-67); Isabel amalgamates features of Elizabeth de Valois - Felipe II's third wife - the English queens Elizabeth and Mary Tudor and Isabela de Osorio (ibid 112). The best analogy for this is offered in the novel itself, when Isabel seeks to construct a new companion for herself out of different pieces from the corpses of dead kings, an enterprise that is "monumentalist" (to borrow Nietzsche's

²²⁴ Within Fuentes's representation of the "Golden Age", Felipe is already an anachronistic character, since the homogeneity of the Middle Ages has been undermined by the pluralism of the millenarian groups and the *comuneros*. As Luz Rodríguez Carranza writes, "en él luchan las posibilidades de libertad con las opciones de poder" (60).

term), elitist, and unable to incorporate change. All of the royal characters display an obsession with the past, often bordering on necrophilia, and a resistance to change; most of them either bear the traces of the incestuous degeneracy of the aristocratic line, or physically degenerate, which functions as an easily deciphered critique of the effects of the perpetuation of their power. The mad Lady, for instance, despite the amputation of her limbs, accidents and even her own death does not 'die', and her spectre haunts even the 'New World' in the imagined future, while Isabel's grotesque companion-corpse comes to life as a bizarre version of Franco. The recurrence of the royal characters in the glimpses that we are offered from 20th century Spain and the contemporary world seeks to render explicit the continued legacy of social hierarchies that have never been fully overthrown by any of the revolutionary attempts.

In contrast to this conjectural feudal form of subjectivity, the modern bourgeois form of subjectivity is one that emphasizes the autonomy of the individual. The greater class mobility and the influence of Erasmian thought were the conditions that enabled this development of a 'new subject': towards the end of the 15th century and throughout the 16th century, a "new ethics of the autonomous subject emerged in works like Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina*" (Resina 301), a text written in 1499 in which "the exemplary voices of medieval morality are defeated by money, passion and sex interest" (Fuentes, *Buried Mirror* 84). As Watt notes in his study *Myths of Modern Individualism*, Don Juan and Don Quixote are individualists with "exorbitant egos; [...] [they] decide to try to do something no one else has done; and they pursue their choice at any cost [...] [and] seek personal fame or glory"; they "operate without any regard whatsoever to 'race, people, party, family or cooperation'" (122).²²⁵ But while Don Quixote is unable to recognize the anachronism of his feudal worldview until the very end of his adventures, Don Juan in contrast completely rejects the "honour-based ideologies of chivalry and courtly love" (Watt 101). His acts violate the feudal codes, as well as the moral codes of the bourgeois family. All three works that are most prominent in the novel are cultural

²²⁵ Don Quixote and Don Juan have acquired an afterlife that has even further enhanced their status as "individuals": they were taken up by many of the European Romantics, whose poetry centres on writing the individual's subjectivity (either of the poet him/herself or of the hero-figure). This emergence of the writing of individual subjectivity coincided with the emergence of class-consciousness and the formation of the bourgeoisie and its ideology in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

expressions of the emerging modern subject, based on ideals of individualism and autonomy, and display the tensions produced by the transition from feudalism to a mercantilist order.

The three characters - Don Quixote, Don Juan and Celestina - evoke a conception and construction of self and character that are the polar opposite of Felipe's. Yet, having noted that difference, it is necessary to examine how Fuentes alters the legacy of these characters: "A mí no me interesa dar el personaje hecho y derecho de la novela del siglo XIX" (*Territorios* 243), he declared in an interview, rejecting the 19th century European realist tradition that further developed the individualist bourgeois mode of subjectivity. It is through a rewritten Celestina that he offers a new form of communal subjectivity based on transmitted subaltern memory; and it is through the three youths - who metamorphose and/or encounter Don Quixote, Don Juan, the Pilgrim and the idiotic prince - that he offers a critique of the emergent bourgeois subject, and the ideologies on which it is based. The positive version of Celestina, we may note, bears little resemblance to the original text by Rojas, in which she is an aged bawd with a coarse sense of humour, serving as the go-between for Calisto and Malibea. In Fuentes's re-writing, she is composed of three women: the first plays a role in the revolt and ensuing massacre, the second in the revolution, and the third appears during the apocalyptic beginning/ending (this 'transmigration of souls' links her to Kabbalah). The first Celestina is traumatized and literally scarred by feudal oppression: she is raped by the first Señor on her wedding day in accordance with the feudal seigneurial right to his female vassals' virginity; unable to cope with the experience, she leaves her husband, burns her hands in an open fire to drown out the pain, and is raped by another two old men in the forest whence she had escaped. Her voluntary sexual adventure with the younger Felipe and Ludovico in her quest for a personal utopia of limitless and free sexual expression - free of responsibility, memory and the past - seems momentarily to offer respite from her troubled state and links her to the movement of the Free Spirit, who saw guiltless eroticism as a sign of spiritual emancipation (Cohn 151). However, the younger Felipe's betrayal not only ends this utopian dream, but also emphasizes Celestina's complicity in the events, since she had given preference to the realization of her timeless utopia rather than warning the others about Felipe's true identity. Somewhat disturbingly, the first Celestina remains unrepentant, perhaps to defend the value of her failed utopian dream that stripped people of their past and social

status; but nevertheless, she thus also promotes an anti-social, amoral blindness to the rest of the world.²²⁶ Significantly, none of the later two *Celestinas* promote this sexual utopia free of the past; their sexual encounters always result in a re-historicisation through the transmission of historical memory via a kiss from her tattooed lips that link her to the mystical tradition.

Yet, it is also out of this failure that this communal character is born. After having escaped from the castle with Ludovico - taking with them the first of the three children bearing the mark of the cross that transforms them into potential messiah figures - and after having borne the second one herself, she again resorts to burning her hands in the open flame, evoking this time a vision of the devil. As in many rewritings of Satan - most notably during the Romantic period during which he became a heroic figure of rebellion against the established order - the devil is here not associated with evil but, as the archetypal rebel and individualist, reveals to her the falsity of “este atroz orden masculino” (636) based on the suppression of the myth of the original androgynous creator, and the necessity for transmitting her memories to another woman of the next generation. The second *Celestina*, whose lips are permanently tattooed, or burned, from the transmission of the first *Celestina*’s memory, thus becomes the repository of subaltern memory and her character emphasizes the need to historicize. In turn, she transmits memory (not only her own personal memory) to other characters (the third *Celestina*, the Pilgrim, Polo Febo). As has been noted, “while the male characters re-appear and are reincarnations of one another, only *Celestina* represents a process of continuity” (Ibsen, “El teatro” 118). Yet the difference between the two *Celestinas* has not been sufficiently emphasized; it is the second *Celestina* who - unlike the traumatized and pleasure-seeking first *Celestina* - is socially and historically aware; she is critical of what she interprets as “[el] derrumbe de un mundo cruel y [...] la lenta construcción, en su lugar, de otro mundo, igualmente cruel” (196). While the second young *Celestina*

²²⁶The link between sexuality and the Free Spirit’s belief in spiritual emancipation and the ability to merge with, and even become, God is parodied in the chapter “La hermana Catarina” (which offers a satirical re-writing of the fourteenth century tract *Schwester Katrei*). In the original, after a series of ecstatic experiences, she exclaims: ‘Rejoice with me I have become God!’ (Cohn 175). In Fuentes’s rewriting, *Schwester Katrei* is found in a compromising situation with one of the three youths: “La Hermana Catarina, desnuda era montada por el joven acompañante del ciego; gritaba que cabalgaba sobre la Santísima Trinidad como sobre montura divina, enlazaba sus piernas abiertas sobre la cintura del muchacho, estoy iluminada, madre, soy Dios, arañaba la espalda del muchacho, y Dios nada puede saber, desear, o hacer, sin mí, y la espalda desnuda del joven se llenaba de cruces sangrantes, sin mí nada existe” (689). In its own, idiosyncratic way, the passage makes a similar point to Cohn’s observation that the adepts of the Free Spirit – unlike other millenarian groups – were not really social revolutionaries, but intent on their own spiritual salvation (148).

carries the first Celestina's legacy henceforth - dressed as a man to avoid the sexual exploitation of women by the feudal lords - the first Celestina slowly transforms into Rojas' bawd. Other characters begin to recognize her as "Celestina", and when the aged Celestina reappears many years later at the Escorial, she has no recollection of her earlier life and has become the shrewd go-between, swayed by her own self-interest and happily assisting Felipe in getting rid of his potential opponents. Celestina, the bawd, thus turns into a symbol for the exhaustion of the utopianism of her own youth (which from the start, however, had been conditioned by her traumatic experiences of rape) as well as into a symbol of the exhaustion of these individualist modes of being that are replaced by the post-individualist communal character constructed through memory. Ibsen refers to the young Celestina's recurrence as constituting a "mythical, cyclical, female history" (118), a reading proffered by the novel itself, as the devil rejects linear time in favour of a supposedly female realm of mythic and simultaneous time. Yet despite these gestures toward the mythic, the novel's structure, its emphasis on the transmission of memory, and the difference between the Celestinas, seem nevertheless to promote a dialectical understanding of history that makes up a continuous narrative into which both the mythic and material strands feed. Furthermore, the cross-dressing of the second 'hermaphroditic' Celestina somewhat destabilizes critical readings of her as archetypal, mythic 'Woman' (as argued by Durán in *The Archetypes of Carlos Fuentes*) by problematizing the notion of gender, which is constructed and socially produced rather than simply innate. In *Terra Nostra*, mythic archetypes are historicised and grow out of particular moments; while they feed into the struggles, they are not timelessly universal, or timelessly mythic, but transformed by them.

If the construction of Celestina places an emphasis on communal memory, rather than on her as a person, the three youths formulate a warning against, and a critique of, historical amnesia and a rampant individualism, at the same time as incarnating the hope for revolutionary social change. All three are centrally linked to the revolts and the threat that the oppressed multitude poses to the elite (this is expressed most clearly through the curse of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, who prophesies that the cross will be the sign of rebellious slaves). The three youths are all born, conceived or abducted at the time of the first revolt; their meeting after twenty years is supposed to take place on 14th July on the *Cabo de los desastres* and

they are all in the palace during the days prior to the *comuneros* revolution. At least two were conceived by the first Felipe, and the third is conceived either by him, the second Felipe, Ludovico or the two rapists in the forest; at least two, possibly three, children are the offspring of the rape of Isabel, Celestina, and a she-wolf. In other words, the threat of revolution is literally produced by patriarcho-feudal oppression. The second, materialist Celestina links their appearance to the change from a feudal to a mercantilist society and to the plight of the oppressed, the dispossessed and the displaced (177). Ludovico's interpretation of the existence of three youths slightly differs from hers; his often privileges the realm of ideas rather than material conditions, following the teaching of the Ancient in the Synagogue, who taught him that ideas need to return in order to realize their as yet unfulfilled potential. Ludovico sees in his sons a mode of selfhood that presents a positive challenge to that of El Señor; one that is open to the world and clearly non-self-sufficient and that does not see the self as an end in itself: "Una vida no basta. Se necesitan múltiples existencias para integrar una personalidad. Toda identidad se nutre de otras. Nos llamamos solidaridad en el presente. Nos llamamos esperanza en el futuro. Y detrás de nosotros, en el ilusorio pasado, vive, latente, cuanto no tuvo oportunidad de ser porque esperaba que tú nacieras para dársela" (734). Clearly, this differs from those modes of subjectivity offered by the epitomes of 'individualism' evoked in the novel, and, in terms of literary history, presents us with an interesting reversal of a Balzacian focus on the individual to represent all of society metonymically. Yet, selfhood is here constructed in the same manner as the ideas of the Ancient, with an emphasis on the realm of ideas rather than material reality; the youths seem to incorporate humanity's desire for freedom from oppression, renewing itself after each defeat. In the first chapter, *Terra Nostra* points to a danger potentially inherent in Ludovico's thinking, as its homogenizing tendency (embodied by the ordered flagellant movement) is contrasted to Celestina's less unified but organic resistance. While Fuentes's novel clearly incorporates many different strands of thought - idealist, spiritualist, millenarian, materialist, postmodernist, modernist - I would argue that the structure tends to emphasize the youths' emergence out of material conditions, while simultaneously positing a transcendent human need for freedom.

However, contrary to all these portents, the three youths are obviously no revolutionaries and fail to incarnate that communal mode of being in a positive way.

In fact, one is 'adopted' by the mad Lady as the reincarnation of the first Felipe and the second turns into a pleasure-hunting, apolitical and antisocial Don Juan. Only the third offers his dream of America to Felipe, which, as Ludovico and Celestina hope, may represent a new utopian beginning pregnant with possibilities (promptly rejected by Felipe). It is significant that the narrative links the youths' failure to their lack of memory. All three are first introduced into the narrative as shipwrecked youths without an identity or memory of their past. In European literature, the narrative of the shipwreck that precedes the encounter with other lands has been a stock element since the times of classical Greece. In Fuentes's version, however, they land in their own land of origin, seemingly offering the possibility of a new start. However, as soon as they awake, the two to arrive first are immediately picked up by the mad Lady and Isabel, who impose an identity and certain patterns of behaviour upon them. It is their lack of memory that makes them vulnerable to the two women's endeavours to shape them into their own respective fantasies (and this reshaping takes on very literal dimensions, when the first youth has his face and body "re-shaped" by Barbarica in order to transform him into the dead Señor). Trying to second-guess what the mad Lady might expect from him, he turns himself into a grotesque parody of the royal heir, memorably crowning himself with a dead dove. Through the first youth, then, the novel offers yet another critique of the aristocratic feudal mode of selfhood and its anachronicity.

The second youth is imprisoned by Isabel in her chamber as her lover; to her, he is no more than "un cuerpo cuerpo, sin palabras que lo prolonguen" (348). When he eventually stands up to her, this seeming emancipation is diminished by the fact that he is really only acting out her unvoiced desire to show to the world an image of the vices of men to liberate women from Eve's guilt. Don Juan, then, rather than being a character who epitomizes the autonomy of the individual, is turned into a mere prolongation of Isabel's will. One could argue that this throws into doubt the very concept of a self-sufficient autonomous individuality, since, as the episodes of the shipwrecked youths demonstrate, every human being is born into what Bourdieu calls a "social field". Furthermore, the character Don Juan is deprived of his original 'individuality', since many 'copies' appear in the narrative, something that corresponds to a postmodernist, rather than early modern, approach to character. A twenty-first century reader immediately recognizes the pattern of behaviour that corresponds to this literary character, something that Fuentes brings to the reader's

attention in the chapter entitled “El duelo”, which features an initially unnamed character who seduces and betrays women. His name is only revealed at the end of the chapter, at which point the reader is already well aware that s/he has been presented with yet another reincarnation of Don Juan. Chronologically (although not in the order of appearance), he precedes Don Juan/the youth, and he predicts that the latter will continue his life in the future. However, deprived of memory, the continuation of the same personality lacks the positive potential of Celestina. One could argue that the proliferation of character, which challenges the notion of a stable self, approximates a postmodernist aesthetic that falls short of the reconstitution of an identity.

Furthermore, Fuentes’s Don Juan not only questions the possibility of an autonomous individualism, but also formulates a more specific critique of the model offered by Don Juan, one that lacks historical memory and social responsibility. Like the original character, Don Juan defies all bourgeois or courtly moral codes, which Don Juan/the second youth makes clear in his exchange with Inés’s father, the merchant; he pursues pleasure alone (which reflects back on Celestina’s privileging of pleasure over justice). Don Juan is reduced to a stereotypical mode of behaviour, one that is self-centred and exploitative. The negative and antisocial implications of this mode of selfhood come most clearly to the fore when Don Juan travels to the ‘New World’, where, we are told, he fathers many children, which of course recalls the historical fact of the rape of many indigenous women by the Spanish colonialists. As Fuentes phrases it towards the end of the book, out of the positive questioning of the feudal order grew

un individualismo feroz, divorciado de la sociedad pero dependiente del gesto externo, la actitud admirable, la apariencia suficiente para justificar, ante uno mismo y ante los demás, la ilusión de la singularidad emancipada. Una rebelión espiritual que termina por alimentar lo mismo que decía combatir: el honor, la jerarquía, el desplante del hidalgo, el solipsismo del místico y la esperanza de un déspota ilustrado (912).

The positive challenge to feudalism and the oppressive hierarchies that it fostered has been usurped; indeed, the usurpation of the revolts against the feudal order and of the promise of freedom (by Felipe, by Guzmán, the impoverished nobleman, and his

huntsmen, by the merchant González de Ulloa, and others) is a recurrent theme of the book. Pedro, for instance, complains about how the multitude had been deceived and enslaved in the name of liberty (442). Through Don Juan and the idiotic heir, the threat of revolt represented by the three youths has been neutralized.

Like Don Juan, Don Quixote predicts that one of the youths will live his future, but this prediction is never fulfilled. While the youth who encounters Don Quixote is sympathetic to him and partakes in his 'folly', Don Quixote (a harmless version of Felipe and his anachronism) does not seem to offer a model for the three youths when they return from their dreams shortly before the *comuneros* revolution. Don Quixote reveals that he was himself Don Juan in his youth, and only turned into Don Quixote as a consequence of his selfish actions that resulted in the death of his lover and her father. Instead of the eternal damnation that awaits the original Don Juan after his deadly encounter with the stone statue of his victim's father, Fuentes's Don Juan is condemned to being Don Quixote. In other words, the exhaustion of the character of Don Juan results in his transformation into a character, who sees the surviving spectres of the feudal order invisible to others. Spectres of feudalism are of course omnipresent in the novel as a whole, and even reappear in different shapes in the chapter that narrates the Mexican future, suggesting the survival of oppressive structures into the present. However, perhaps it is approaching the question in too narrow a way if one only looks for a literal reappearance of Don Quixote. As has been noted many times, the supposed author of the book represented within the novel itself (or at least one of them) is the chronicler who is of course Cervantes and who has written two books - that of the "knight of the sorrowful countenance" and that of Felipe. In other words, Cervantes's formulation of an emergent mode of selfhood and his concern with the historical transition from a feudal to a mercantilist order is transposed onto the book as a whole, of which the appearances of Don Quixote function as reminders. However, whereas in *Don Quixote*, an aesthetic of the quotidian replaces the miraculous (that exists only in Don Quixote's head), thus prefiguring the rise of realism in the nineteenth-century, *Terra Nostra* challenges realism's certainties by opposing an aesthetic of magic realism that serves as an expression and critique of the unevenness produced by capitalism. As such, one might argue that it is qualitatively different from a postmodernist aesthetic despite bearing some of its traits. His rejection of realism does not translate into a Harrisian *anti-realism*, but rather a Cervantean *ante-realism*, into a resurrection of an

alternative tradition “dentro de la modernidad que valora la duda, la ambigüedad el pluralismo de los valores” (van Delden, “Extremo Occidente” 84).

In a recent article, Williams argues that Fuentes should be seen as a Modernist writer (despite the fact that some of his texts display certain postmodernist characteristics), since for Fuentes “history goes far beyond Postmodern interests in reducing historiography to just another text” (“Fuentes the Modern; Fuentes the Postmodern” 212). As I have shown above, Fuentes’s novel – while advocating pluralism – does not move toward a complete rejection of totalization. While some of the features of Fuentes’s novels resemble a postmodernist aesthetic, I would here agree with Abeyta’s insistence that these may well derive from a different tradition of the critique of modernity. One might here, with Fuentes, emphasise the Cervantean/Erasmian tradition of the critique of absolute, static reason, or like Abeyta, the baroque, “an art of resistance to capitalist modernity” (Abeyta 14). Indeed, Iris Zavala links the baroque to the colonial resistance to Eurocentric universals: “[s]ince the dawn of modernity, Caribbean [and Mexican] Baroque culture has fought against the imperial ideology’s negation of the possibility that the colonized world had its own cultures and could create its own destiny” (177). The Baroque is thus arguably the most typically Latin American/Caribbean of forms (Lezama Lima 31). Baroque art derives from “la desesperación o del horror del vacío” (Song 253), it musters “bypasses, proliferation, spatial redundancy, anything that flouted the alleged unicity of the thing known and the knowing of it, anything exalting quantity infinitely resumed and totality infinitely ongoing” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 78). Yet, plurality of viewpoints does not, as we have seen, necessarily culminate in the rejection of the possibility of ‘true’ universals (hence, Glissant speaks of the “unity-diversity of the world” (79)). Through its reconstruction of a meta-narrative of capitalist modernity, Fuentes’s novel is thus able to offer a challenge to a neo-liberalism that could more easily co-opt a postmodernism that lacks this dimension. By the nineties, the time when Harris writes *Jonestown* and Mexico feels the full impact of neo-liberalism through NAFTA, Fuentes’s has therefore opted to return to an even more overtly anti-capitalist meta-narrative in his novel *La frontera de cristal*.

- Chapter 5 -

Towards a global vision:

Peripheral modernism, Ex-centricity and Genre

Terra Nostra (1975), *Carnival* (1985) and *Biblrique des dernières gestes* (2002)

The true capacity of marginal and disadvantaged cultures resides in their genius to tilt the field of civilization so that one may visualize boundaries of persuasion in new and unsuspected lights to release a different apprehension of reality, the language of reality, a different *reading* of texts of reality. **Wilson Harris**, *Unfinished Genesis* (182)

[A]ccumulation of wealth at one pole is [...] at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole. **Karl Marx**, *Capital* (Vol. I 799)

This final chapter seeks to draw together some of the issues relating to genre and modernity and to focus them around a reflection on the global nature of the vision offered by *Terra Nostra* (1975), *Carnival* (1985) and *Biblrique des derniers gestes* (2002). The analysis will situate itself within the context of the world system, which had entered into crisis by the early seventies, the time when many of the revolutionary and liberation movements in the Americas gave way to a wave of (military) dictatorships most of which had been directly or indirectly financed by the US government/CIA (for instance in Guyana, Chile, Argentina, Haiti, the Dominican Republic). After WWII, the capitalist world system had undergone a period of economic growth that “had shaped a world system very different from that of the past”, characterised by the increased globalisation and integration of the economy (Amin ix). The post-WWII prosperity had been propelled by the national-democratic movement of the welfare state, by the Third World national liberation movements and revolutions and by the Soviet project of ‘capitalism without capitalists’ that sought to de-link itself from the world system (Amin 17). By the last third of the century, however, the world system had entered into depression; the last twenty-five years of the century – which saw a return to so-called “democracy” in countries like Argentina and Chile - were marked by the instalment of neo-liberal policies (enforced by the World Bank and the IMF on indebted countries), setting in train “a

savage restructuring of class relations worldwide” (Lazarus and Varma 309).²²⁷ The dates of publication of the three novels thus roughly span this period of devastating changes and transformations, which partly determined the choice of texts for this chapter.²²⁸

In other words, of the three novels, only one was written during the current “global moment” that succeeded the “age of three worlds” with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.²²⁹ However, as many left-wing theorists and writers remind us, globalization, as well as anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist movements, have a much longer history, key dates of which are 1492, 1791 (the Haitian Revolution), 1945 and 1989. From a global perspective, liberationist thinking originated not with the Enlightenment but in the first, Hispanic modernity brought about by the “discovery” and exploitation of Amerindia, of which key figures are anti-colonialists like Antón de Montesinos, Bartolomé de Las Casas and Bernardo de Sahagún (Dussel “Beyond

²²⁷ Stephanie Black’s documentary *Life and Debt* (2001) – a film loosely based on Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* – provides an excellent and eye-opening commentary on the devastating economic and social effects of IMF loan agreements on Jamaica (the first of which was signed in 1977). John Pilger’s recent documentary *The War on Democracy* (2007) exposes the role of the United States in the crushing of democracies throughout the Americas, and notably employs the term ‘imperialism’ in reference to US foreign policies (a term that seemed to have been ‘superseded’ in postmodernist thought).

²²⁸ Other texts that could have been considered would have obviously included *Texaco*: it is through the relation between Texaco and City that Chamoiseau deals with the issue of globalization and its effect on local culture; Texaco is obviously the name of a trans-national oil company, the territory of which is here appropriated by a local community. *Texaco* deals with perhaps the most pressing contemporary global problem, namely the “death of the peasantry” and the resulting increase in the number of the world’s poor forced by economic necessity into squatter camps surrounding the cities of the underdeveloped world (Dawson 17). As Dawson points out, *Texaco* thus makes an argument for not viewing the global cities of the twentieth century as something novel, but for understanding their existence as part of the process that had created the colonial-era cities, which are shown in *Texaco* to possess many of the same traits, “including cultural and ethnic heterogeneity, transnational flows of labor and capital, and uneven spatial and social development” (18). Another compelling text to consider would have been *La frontera de crystal* (1994), one of Fuentes’s best recent novels. Published the year after NAFTA came into effect, it provides a powerful critique of the structural, imperialist domination of the US, of the effects of NAFTA’s neo-liberal policies on the Mexican working class near the borders, and of the collaboration of the Mexican bourgeoisie that is ultimately subordinated to US capital. It is certainly much more overtly political than *Terra Nostra*, and contrasts with some of the theoretical works that Fuentes has published: *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (originally published in 1969) focuses on language, and *Valiente mundo nuevo* (1990) and *Geografía de la novela* 1993 “have helped shape a new critical consensus in which Fuentes figures as the great novelist of hybridity and heterogeneity, of multiplicity and open-endedness” (van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes* 40).

²²⁹ Michael Denning offers an illuminating account of the “end of the age of three worlds” in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, in which he seeks to “understand the emergence of a global culture in a time when few would have imagined that that phrase could be used in the singular” (11). In fact, one might here want to emphasize that Latin Americans and Caribbeans have been much more poignantly aware of “globalization” from early on; “the globalization of identity and culture, the advent of so-called post-modernity, which most Western thinkers only began to glimpse in the 1960s, became evident earlier to Latin American observers like Henríquez Ureña, Mexico’s José Vasconcelos [...] Borges, Carpentier, Zea and Paz, as they gazed from the periphery in that extraordinarily fertile period in Latin American thought and literature between the 1920s and the 1960s” (Martin 640).

Eurocentrism”). Furthermore, if one seeks to trace the emergence of global, anti-capitalist thinking in the twentieth century, one needs to refer back to the Communist movement that created for the first time “a full-blown *culture* of anti-imperialism” (Brennan 191).²³⁰ As Timothy Brennan emphasises, anti-imperialist theory did not just appear after WWII; rather, “the links between the theoretical, not necessarily organizational, Marxisms of interwar Europe, and the anticolonial intellectuals who anticipated postcolonial studies as we now understand it, were also close and sustained, in part because of the anticolonial heart of the Soviet idea” (197-8). The anticolonial intellectuals Brennan refers to played a crucial role in the development of a global analysis of the relation between colonialism and economics. These debates (which originated in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa) provided the foundations for dependency and world system theory.²³¹ However, with the ‘destruction’ of Communist hopes by the example set by ‘actually existing’ communism, and the later onset of the crisis of world system, Marxism fell into disrepute, was seen as in need of being transcended and declared ‘dead’ by the end of the eighties.

More recently, efforts have been made by leftist thinkers to unearth this repressed and disavowed history.²³² In an important and path-breaking article, “The Novelists’ International”, Michael Denning traces the emergence over the course of the twentieth century of the canon of the “world novel”, or the global novel as I call it.²³³ The works belonging to this canon are articulating struggles against the dehumanizing effects of capitalism and colonialism and have their origins in the proletarian, regional and ethnic (*indigenista*) novels of the beginning of the century that, in turn, had links to the Left-wing international organisations such as the Third

²³⁰ Surrealism had obvious links to the Communist Third International. Plenty of leftist intellectuals and artists went on voyages to the Soviet Union.

²³¹ In 1938, C.L.R. James had argued in *The Black Jacobins* that the Haitian revolutionaries were the most modern people of the time, asserting the importance of the Haitian revolution in 1791 in the history of modernity and thus displacing Eurocentric accounts that would preference the French Revolution. Other texts worth mentioning include amongst others Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955) and William Demas’s *The Economics of Development in Small Countries with Special Reference to the Caribbean* (1965). A strand of Latin American thought – *arielismo* – has long linked capitalism to US imperialism, albeit often in simplistic opposition to Latin American spiritualism (this strand originated in José Enrique Rodó’s text *Ariel* (1900); an important forerunner is Rubén Darío’s “El triunfo de Calibán” (1898)). Later during the twentieth century, important dependency theorists include the Argentines André Gunder Frank and Fernando Cardoso.

²³² *Refusal of the Shadow* 1996; Brennan 2002; Lazarus and Varma 2007.

²³³ This term that seems preferable to me because it refers to content unlike the term “world” which often translates into non-Anglophone/Third World in common usage.

International.²³⁴ During the post-War decades, the novels of so-called magical realism, which address the conditions that are the product of ‘combined and uneven’ development, show a clear affiliation to the intellectual, social and cultural environment from which emerged dependency theory.²³⁵ The global novel thus provided an important space for the emergence of liberationist thinking conceived on a global scale, and this chapter seeks to situate the three texts within this tradition and to evaluate their contribution.

Emerging from the Latin American tradition which, as Gerald Martin argues, has been “since the 1920s, [...] the first regional narrative system with a truly global perspective” (2006: 636), *Terra Nostra* is a ‘global’ novel in that it offers an account of the emergence of modernity as a world system and as dependent on the discovery and exploitation of Amerindia, anticipating Enrique Dussel’s important rethinking of the history of philosophy and liberationist thinking. By focussing on *Terra Nostra*’s ‘New World’ section and the way in which it is built into a narrative focussed ostensibly on the impact of modernity in Spain, the analysis will focus on the interrelated issues of European representational modes (such as primitivism), and the material exploitation that is repressed in those representations. Harris’s *Carnival*, published a decade later, may be read as a distant relative of the fields of thought surrounding dependency and world systems theory, albeit with a spiritual, utopian inflection, through its re-writing of the *Divine Comedy*’s division between inferno/purgatory/heaven. As such - and despite some of the problems underlying this increasingly abstracted vision that clearly seeks to transcend Marxist theory and global paradigms based on economics- it marks an important change in Harrisian poeticism that responds to changes within the world system. Finally, *Biblique des derniers gestes*, the most recently published novel examined in this chapter, reflects on the failures of the liberation movements and the emergence of a new kind of imperialism, epitomized in the novel by the relation of France to Martinique.²³⁶ As I

²³⁴ Of course, for students of Latin American *poetry*, the link of poets such as Guillén, Neruda, Vallejo and others to communism is immediately obvious with their intellectual involvement in the Spanish Civil War and, in their own involvement in Communist struggles in their countries.

²³⁵ *Cien años de soledad*, for instance, might conceivably be read as a literary analogue to dependency theory, Denning argues (*Culture* 71).

²³⁶ Chamoiseau is not the only, nor the first, critic to have explicitly pointed out the similarities between French assimilationism and US (cultural, material and political) neo-imperialism. Seeking to evaluate the contemporary relevance of texts written by French Caribbean thinkers during the first half of the century, Richardson, for instance, writes: “the French policy of assimilation has much in common with the contemporary globalization that, emerging from US-based multinationalism, is the dominant ideology forming our world. This promotes a cosmopolitanism of culture resulting in an all-pervasive and totalizing ideology that homogenizes all particularity (even the indigenous culture of

argue, the novel tries to think beyond the contemporary impasse by offering an intellectual revalorisation of Marxist and anti-colonialist history (from the Communism of the twenties and thirties, to the importance of revolutionary intellectuals such as Fanon and Guevara in the sixties) that is often disavowed in contemporary postcolonial theory, a field that found its institutional home when Marxist theories and global paradigms appeared to have lost their usefulness.

***Terra Nostra*, the World Paradigm and the 'Primitive'**

[L]a globalización es el nombre de un sistema de poder.

Carlos Fuentes, *En esto creo* (100)

In the Caribbean and Latin America, the most important political development of the prosperous post-revolutionary decades was of course the Cuban Revolution that inspired Third World Intellectuals around the globe (in particular, the writers of the boom novel), and mobilized support throughout the region. Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* is thus typical in its openly Marxist/pro-Communist politics, its exploration of the penetration of US capital at the expense of social justice for the lower classes, of the continued legacy of colonialism/imperialism, the focus on the dialectic between the universal and the particular, on class struggles, and on the necessity of political democracy as a basis for social progress. However, the regional political context had clearly changed by the 70s with the increasing restraints on intellectual liberty in Cuba that escalated in the 'Padilla affair' in 1971 (an incident that divided the boom writers into opposing intellectual camps), the proliferation of military dictatorships in the Americas, of repression, torture, 'disappearances' of political opponents, and wide-spread political corruption. In Mexico (similarly marked by political corruption), democracy had suffered a severe blow with the massacre of demonstrating students at Tlatelolco in 1968, and the massacre of June 10, 1971.²³⁷ While by the time of his novel *La frontera de cristal*

the United States itself). In the radical version of this ideology, 'multiculturalism' and 'post-modernity' are the watchwords, and not infrequently it even claims to respect cultural diversity. This new imperialism is not easy to resist" (29).

²³⁷ The article published on the non-governmental National Security Archive (based at the George Washington University) offers the following account of the June massacre: "The protest of June 10 was to be the first major student demonstration since Tlatelolco, and many hoped it would revive the student movement, hard hit by the repression of 1968. The march began at the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), in the Casco de Santo Tomás. It would quickly become a bloodbath. At five in the

published in 1995, Fuentes had re-assumed an openly politicised and anti-capitalist approach to the topic of the relations between Mexico and the States in the wake of NAFTA, *Terra Nostra* is undoubtedly much more baroque in its encyclopaedic dimension, and less explicit about Mexican affairs. Nevertheless, the way in which the arche-theme of the twentieth-century Latin American novel – the relation between the global and the local – is inflected in *Terra Nostra*'s 'New World' section reflects on the representational and ideological relations between Mexico and Europe. Most importantly, it reflects on how these are part of a material relation of dependency and exploitation. *Terra Nostra* clearly registers the twin importance and centrality of Spain and Amerindia in the emergence of "modernity" as a system divided between the centre and the periphery.²³⁸

In the previous chapter, I examined Fuentes re-writing of the modern subject by his re-working of Spanish literary classics. It is in the 'New World' section and through the third pilgrim that the novel introduces another constituent component of the emergence of capitalist modernity and the modern subject, namely the 'discovery' of America and the concurrent construction of a global capitalist system fuelled by the exploitation of America's resources, as well as the ideological

afternoon, as some 10,000 demonstrators wound their way down the Avenida San Cosme, dozens of young men swarmed out of buses and pick-up trucks and descended upon the crowd. Dressed in civilian clothing, they were armed with wooden poles, chains and truncheons. They attacked the students as scores of police stood idly by and watched. When the fighting stopped hours later, some 25 students lay dead and dozens wounded. These were the Halcones, the "Falcons," thugs-for-hire enlisted, trained and armed by the Federal District government to carry out the dirty work of suppressing the student movement in Mexico City. In the aftermath of the "Corpus Christi massacre" (named for the Catholic celebration that takes place on that Thursday every June), numerous historical and eyewitness accounts have testified to the brutality and violence of that day, but never has the Mexican government acknowledged its part in the attack" (Doyle "The Corpus Christi Massacre Mexico's Attack on Its Student Movement, June 10, 1971").

Despite this tragic incident, Fuentes continued his support for the president Luis Echevarría (who, as he believed at the time, "was the victim of a conspiracy hatched by right-wing elements in the state apparatus who wanted to undermine his policy of democratization" (van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes* 126). He was (justifiably) severely critiqued for this decision by some fellow intellectuals. Yet, his support for the president must also be seen in the context of Fuentes's thinking on the Cold War: Fuentes interpreted the détente between the superpowers as a sign that they would tolerate one another's imperial ambitions, and Mexico's main threat was thus not to be found internally, but externally, as the United States consolidated its hold over Latin America. He therefore argued that "the state constitutes the principal barrier against U.S. imperialism" (qtd by van Delden 125)). I intend to focus here not on his politics, but on his novelistic production, which, while withdrawing from direct comment on Mexican political affairs, still contribute to the thinking on global relations of exploitation and representation.

²³⁸As Wallerstein writes, "bullion was desired as a preciousness, for consumption in Europe and even more for trade with Asia, but it was also a necessity for the expansion of the European economy" (45). Similarly, Dussel points out that it was "not a coincidence that twenty-five years after the discovery of the silver mines in Potosí in Peru and the mines in Zacateca in Mexico (1546) – from which a total of 18,000 tons of silver arrived in Spain between the years 1503 and 1660 – [...], Spain was able to pay for, among the many campaigns of the empire, the great armada that defeated the Turks in 1571 in Lepanto" (10-11).

construction of the modern subject's 'Other'; as Dussel notes, Amerindia "contained the first "barbarian" that modernity needed in its definition" ("Beyond Eurocentrism" 18). The year of the *comuneros* rebellion – the first "modern" revolution according to Fuentes and Maravall – was also that of the conquest of Tenochtitlán, retold in pilgrim's narrative. This provides one of the links between the 'New' and the 'Old World', and represents both events as part of the same process. Furthermore, as a central component to the argument emerges a denunciation of the unjust violence on which the world system is based. As Dussel emphasizes, the theoretical and philosophical reflections produced during the first modernity, which expressed "the originary experience during the period of the constitution of the first world-system" (14), centred on the illegitimacy of the European enterprise and the subjugation of the indigenous population, issues that are suppressed by "so-called modern philosophy (which is only the philosophy of the second modernity)" (14). However, before turning to the theme of repression and material exploitation of Amerindia – which as I argue is one of the main themes of the 'New World' section – it is necessary to comment on the European subject's construction of its barbaric, savage, primitive 'Other'.

Given the centrality of Bataille's thinking to its argument (in particular on the 'primitive' practice of the potlatch, a concept that Fuentes briefly evokes in relation to the question of writing in *Cervantes*), Michael Abeyta's recent book-length study on *Terra Nostra* (2006) is a good place to start. Setting out the context for its poststructuralist analysis, the study begins by evoking the historical context, referring to the post WWII decades that were marked by an increased awareness of economic globalization and a nostalgic interest in 'primitive' or pre-modern societies that came out of Europe and impacted on peripheral writers such as Paz and Fuentes.²³⁹ It is significant for the ensuing analysis to fill in the missing links in Abeyta's brief historical sketch. The links between primitivism and anti-colonialist nationalism date back to the inter-War period (20s and 30s), a period also strongly marked by communism. Written after WWII and the onset of the 'crisis' of Communism and Marxism, Bataille's *The Accursed Share* "fits itself within the familiar genre of attempts to work one's way out of Marxism by revising its fundamental economic

²³⁹ Abeyta states that both writers were interested in, but also critical of, these anthropological discussions. Their supposed critical attitude is attributed little space in Abeyta's study that – somewhat surprisingly – ignores the important writing that has been done by Monsiváis and Bartra on the subject of the construction of a primitivist, 'savage' Mexico and its political consequences (Abeyta 2006: viii).

concepts – by destroying their capacity to attract, which might be said to be one of postwar theory’s explicit intentions” (Brennan 198). Seeking to integrate both the primitive and the Communist strand, it privileges the interwar emphasis on the primitive, while seeking to supervene the Communist legacy, “supplanting productivity with excess, production with consumption, and the sovereignty of states with the sovereignty of subjects” (*ibid* 199).²⁴⁰ It is precisely the history of Marxism and Communism that Abeyta leaves out of his sketch, which – given the shift in Fuentes’s aesthetics from *Artemio Cruz* (written by a young ardent supporter of Communism at a time when two thirds of the globe were nominally Communist) to *Terra Nostra* (published over a decade later when Cuban Communism no longer enjoyed the unremitting support of all Latin American intellectuals) – is significant and somewhat limits the discussion. Did Fuentes in his *fiction* – like Bataille in his theoretical writing – seek to ‘transcend’ his earlier Marxist affiliations? Does he, like Bataille, offer a straightforwardly primitivist view of the Aztec world? What has

²⁴⁰ During the 30s – a period during which the French leftist movement was stricken by a sense of impotence and fatigue – Bataille argued for the necessity of sacrificial practices to undo reification, his broad definition for exploitation from which human beings needed to be liberated; he theorized “a form of useless exchange called unproductive expenditure, a sacrificial practice meant to combat the productive, useful, and accumulative forces that characterize free markets” (Goldhammer 17). *The Accursed Share* (1967) synthesises his pre-war work still “tout[ing] the revolutionary sacrificial ideas” of the 30s, but “situates those ideas within a landscape of American hegemony, Soviet aggression and leftist defeat” (*ibid* 19). He proposes to supplant the concept of what he calls “restricted economy” by a consideration of “general economy”; the latter perspective would not focus on production, but rather on consumption and the issue of surplus energy or excess wealth, which in pre-capitalist (‘primitive’) societies would be solved through the expenditure of these energies in form of sacrifices and potlaches. Capitalism, he argues, is the least successful system for dealing with excess, which it then has to spend wastefully in wars (that is, if it can no longer be spent on growth). The concept of “general economy” (which he compares to living organisms in that both always have greater energy resources at their disposal than needed) shifts the focus away from questions of ownership of the modes of production. Yet, the assumption that all “organisms” – including apparently the capitalist system – naturally produce an excess in wealth/energies is clearly wrong. In fact, as Laclau argues, the accumulation of capital of the central countries depends on the “maintenance of pre-capitalist relations of production in the peripheral areas [which] is an inherent condition of the process of accumulation in the central countries” (*Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* 37); “[w]hat seems to be the key to a sustained process of accumulation is the expansion, in any sector of the system, of productive units in which either low technology or super-exploitation of labour makes it possible to counteract the depressive effect on the rate of profit of the increasing organic composition of capital in the dynamic or advanced industries. Now the enterprises of the peripheral areas are in an ideal position to play this role (38).”

Furthermore, his (primitivist) writing on the Aztecs is also highly debatable and outdated. He sets Aztec society up as dominated by the sacrificial logic: “They were just as concerned about *sacrificing* as we are about *working*” (46). “The value of warfare in Mexican society cannot mislead us: It was not a *military* society. Religion remained the obvious key to its workings. If the Aztecs must be situated, they belong amongst the warrior societies, in which pure, uncalculated violence and the ostentatious forms of combat held sway. The reasoned organization of war and conquest was unknown to them” (54). His view of Mexico as marked by an inherent, “uncalculated”, irrational violence governed by religious sacrificial practices has obvious roots in the primitivist European imaginings of Mexico, especially as developed during the 20s and 30s. The view that Aztec society was not imperialist, but dominated by a sacrificial religious logic has been disproved by historians such as Hassig.

happened to the Communist/Marxist legacy of reading imperialism as the ‘highest stage of capitalism’, or the thinking on dependency and under-development? In my reading, Fuentes’s novel throws the primitivist strand into question, revealing it as one of the representational modes employed to cover over, and suppress, the history of exploitation and its importance to understanding the current world system. As I argue, it also poses some challenging questions regarding twentieth century magical realism, a style that has certain primitivist leanings. Yet, this is not to say that all of the representations of Amerindia are merely and straightforwardly fictive (if it were so, they would be much easier to resist); as Abeyta insists, Fuentes is certainly critical of Aztec cruelties, such as their human sacrifices and their imperialist subjection of other tribes.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, the shift from a more historicist narrative to a mythic one when the Pilgrim begins his narrative of his adventures in Amerindia coupled to the theme of repression clearly signals that there is more at stake here – ideologically speaking – than a simple critique of Aztec practices.

It is important to recall here firstly that the ‘New World’ section is narrated within a framework that clearly emphasizes the *European* interpretation of the encounter: it is narrated by the Pilgrim with regular interjections to the Señor to remind us of the setting and the by no means dis-interested reception of his tale by the merchant.²⁴² Secondly, the section’s meta-textual nature is emphasised from the outset: the Pilgrim’s sea travel to the hoped-for land of utopia incorporates pre-realist and post-realist modes of writing, as the Pilgrim and Pedro witness an epic and seemingly allegorical battle between the leviathan and a swordfish reminiscent of the

²⁴¹ “Fuentes deconstructs the utopian vision of the golden age by demonstrating that there is always an underlying cruelty in human existence”, writes Abeyta (106). My sense is that Fuentes’s deconstruction of the utopian vision is slightly more complex – and more materialist – than that, revealing the way in which this narrative, ideological construction is linked to a history of exploitation (and not only that of the Aztecs vis-à-vis their subordinate tribes). When Abeyta further states that “[w]hile Pilgrim is mainly associated with the Plumed Serpent, he escapes the destiny of Smoking Mirror” (64), he clearly misses the point that Fuentes is making about the issue of historical repression in relation to modernity.

²⁴² See also Anderson’s assertion that the section “explores the Americas as exotic otherness as well as a blank site for the construction of conflicting European utopias” (Anderson 59). One of the best and most informative articles on the ‘New World’ section is that by Santiago Juan-Navarro, in which the latter is justifiably very critical of the version of the Quetzalcóatl myth that Fuentes offers throughout his oeuvre – especially in works such as *The Buried Mirror*. This version presents a reading of the conquest through the myth of the ‘returning god’, a myth that is based on a biased selection of available material from the post-conquest period, as Juan-Navarro meticulously documents. However, to claim that he offers no scepticism is not doing justice to this particular novel and is produced by Juan-Navarro’s exclusive focus on the ‘New World’ section (107). In Fuentes’s best novels – which are grounded by an attention to material conditions of exploitation and an understanding of the global dimension of social injustices – Fuentes transcends, I believe, the dangers of abstraction and a de-historicised nostalgic mythification that are at times allowed to come to the fore in his other writing.

marvels recorded in travellers' tales, followed by a Borgesian episode of almost dying in the maelstrom, which disorients and confuses them, and which is followed by a symbolic rebirth: "volvía a nacer, volvía a morir y sólo una razón me acompañaba en el vértigo total: - Esto ya lo viviste..." (456).²⁴³ The narrative consciously *re-visits* the emergence of a new subject from the depths of the Atlantic. Yet, despite this conscious re-visitation - both on the level of a character who half-remembers what is going to happen and on the level of narrative that incorporates early modern texts - the pilgrim is unable to change what is about to occur and the narrative similarly tends towards reproduction. The 'New World' section is particularly striking in its shift to a much more mythic, marvellous and less historicised narrative mode (in a novel that Faris describes as a text of "documentary realism" that displaces the magical realism of the boom novels (36)). The pilgrim describes a world dominated by ritualistic sacrifice, potlatches, magical encounters (such as that with an earth goddess wearing a crown of living butterflies), and relates his own integration into the mythic mode as a god. His narrative thus contrasts with the other two sections that describe Europe, establishing an initial opposition between 'primitive' American and European society, an opposition that is of course destabilized by the many parallels that link both worlds. It might be useful here to emphasize from the outset that an essentially mythic-religious understanding of indigenous Aztec culture as driven exclusively by the need to nourish the gods with human blood can, and has been, criticized from a historical perspective. The historian Hassig, for instance, insists that while "the supernatural was interwoven with Aztec warfare, [...] this was just as true of other civilizations"; Aztec imperialism was "shaped by political realities and practical necessities" (*Aztec Warfare* 9;10).²⁴⁴ However, situated within a novel that so explicitly signposts itself as being *about* representation, the 'New World' section is clearly *about* European representations of the 'Other' - from the first encounters to twentieth century primitivism and Latin American magical realism - rather than being straightforwardly primitivist and magical realist.

²⁴³ Abeyta traces to further textual layers, as the narrative here also rewrites a poem by Sor Juana de la Cruz (Primero Sueño) and Góngora's opening verses of *The Solitudes* (Abeyta 91; 96-101).

²⁴⁴ Abeyta somewhat uncritically reiterates Bataille's conception of Aztec civilization as essentially driven by sacrifice: "According to Georges Bataille, sacrifice preserves and unites the commonality; in order for the community to survive the impending doom, it must placate death by offering the victim over to violence. In Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*, as in Nahua cosmology, this consumption of life in sacrifice celebrates the abundance of life and represents a "perpetual devotion" to renewal. One thing is sacrificed to save everything else" (62).

While integrating Nahua *and* European myths and texts, thus constituting – to a certain extent – a hybridized narrative, the fact that we witness everything through the eyes of a European traveler should make us pause before accepting his account as a ‘transparent’ representation. It contains several different representational paradigms that have been applied to Amerindia: the figure of the noble savage and America as Eden; ‘marvelous America’; ‘savage’ Mexico evoking a world of sacrifice, ritual and myths (as opposed to ‘Western’ society governed by ‘reasoned’ political maneuvers). When the Pilgrim steps onto the beach, the ‘New World’ initially figures as paradise; the members of the first tribe, whom he observes in the manner of other European travel writers, chroniclers and anthropologists throughout the centuries, may be described as ‘primitive’ noble savages, living communally and according to a natural rhythm. While most of Abeyta’s analysis does not sufficiently take into account that we are being offered a representation of the Aztec world through a clearly signposted European filter, he makes some excellent observations when offering a close analysis of Pilgrim’s interactions with this tribe: during his initial (and potentially life-threatening) encounter with the tribe, the Pilgrim offers the chieftain a pair of scissors. As Abeyta writes, while his observation of the man’s reactions simply suggest that the latter does not know how to handle the instrument, his interpretative rendering of the situation suggests that the man inhabits an animistic belief system and sees the scissors as alive. This disjunction between action and interpretation thus constitutes Fuentes’s critique of the European objectifying anthropological gaze, and in particular, of Marcel Mauss’s descriptions of the fetishistic nature of the gift in primitive societies on which Bataille’s analyses were based (Abeyta 76-77).²⁴⁵ I will return to the “noble savage” stage of the narrative when addressing the issue of repression after having examined in more detail the issue of primitivism that surfaces here.

The ‘edenic New World’ soon gives way to two different, and yet historically interrelated, representational modes, namely European twentieth-century primitivism and Latin American magical realism, both of which are here evoked in a critical way. While the pilgrim has plenty of marvellous, magical real encounters in the ‘New World’, the most significant is perhaps his encounter with the Lady of the Butterflies who is part of the Aztec imperialist society that oppresses the coastal tribe and whom

²⁴⁵ Abeyta also points out that it is in fact the Pilgrim who labels the actions of the villagers “ritual”, “barter”, “exchange”, while they themselves describe the exchanges somewhat differently, or not at all (Abeyta 118).

he encounters after the possibility of a community of 'noble savages' has been destroyed by the slaughter of the villagers. After the death of the inhabitants of the first village in which the pilgrim had lived, the pilgrim's journey is propelled forward by a magical spider's thread that leads him to the woman around whose head are fluttering numerous butterflies, forming a living crown. The lady of the butterflies is both attractive and repellent, described as an apparition "de deslumbrante belleza y deslumbrante horror" (502). The pilgrim's erotic encounter with her is evocative of the exoticised, sexually charged, Humboldtian atmosphere that reigns in the jungles surrounding Macondo in *Cien Años*: "no sabía mirar su cuerpo pues mi mirada estaba capturada por los labios de la mujer: las sierpes de color que se fijaban y se hundían y ondulaban en la carne de la boca que ella me ofrecía [...] Traté de imaginar los pezones de esos negros senos, y la negra selva de vello sobre el monte de Venus, mi guía, mi preciosa gemela, mi estrella negra" (502-3). If, as Wendy Faris writes, magical realism constitutes "a remystification of narrative in the West" (3), we might read the pilgrim's desire to re-unite with his female, exoticised 'Other', the marvellous and magical lady of the butterflies, as a search for marvellous re-enchantment, which is only achieved briefly once during their first meeting (the snakes on her mouth link her to Celestina, with the difference that they are here not simply tattooed onto her lips but actually appear to be magically alive on this marvellous incarnation of the Spanish go-between). Couched in slightly different terms, the encounter might express a nostalgic desire "for a direct allegiance" to the earth that has been destroyed with the deaths of the villagers, "an attempt at reterritorialisation" (Abeyta 121).

The other twentieth century representational mode evoked is that of interwar European primitivism, which created the myth of 'savage Mexico'. In Fuentes's case, the most influential European primitivist is D. H. Lawrence, and, in particular, his novel *The Plumed Serpent*, which displays, as Jad Smith remarks, a racist, "ethnocentric primitivism".²⁴⁶ In the novel – undoubtedly Lawrence's weakest work of fiction – the Irish protagonist Kate gets involved in the attempts of two upper class Mexicans to revive the Aztec gods and their ritual sacrifices (which culminates in the actual, and bloody, sacrifice of three men). From the start, Kate perceives Mexico and its inhabitants as inherently threatening, repelling and dangerous but at the same time is attracted to them as she desires "to transcend a constraining Western

²⁴⁶ <http://www.eiu.edu/~agora/Dec03/JSmithall.htm>, accessed 29 August 2007. Also published in *D.H. Lawrence Review* 30:3, 2002.

individualism” (Smith) through the supposed pre-individualist mode of being in the world of the “prehistoric races” (*Serpent* 102). In Fuentes’s earlier novel *La región más transparente* (1958), the protagonist Ixca Cienfuegos is notably a reworking of *The Plumed Serpent*’s Ramón and engages the notion of an Aztec mythic past that would be opposed to ‘Western’ individualism.²⁴⁷ In *Terra Nostra*, the Lawrentian Mexican ‘savage primitive’ has clearly shaped the ‘New World’ section and most obviously surfaces in the chapter entitled “Día del espejo humeante” (which begins with an address to El Señor, reminding us once again of the frame in which this narrative is recounted). As the pilgrim progresses from the ‘Edenic’ lushness of the coast inwards, his description of the transformed environment takes on increasingly savage-primitivist overtones, as he describes the atmosphere of ‘luxurious desolation’ that emanates from a landscape he perceives as inherently threatening and religious: “Un paisaje de rocas me rodeaba: piedra amarilla y roja, a la vez simétrica y caprichosa en sus desnudas formas de *cuchillo y sierra, altar y mesa*” (my emphasis, 519). His description of the landscape here anticipates what he is about to witness – namely the Aztec ritual sacrifices on top of a temple, described in gory detail with an emphasis on blood, bodily mutilation and pain (reminiscent of the sacrificial executions during the ceremony in *The Plumed Serpent*, in which Ramón and Cipriano become the Living Huitzilpotchli and the Living Quetzalcoatl (chapter XXIII)). It is as though the cruelty of these customs emanated from the very land itself as in Lawrence’s descriptions of Mexico (in Kate’s perception of Mexico, “there was the dark undertone, the black, serpent-like fatality all the time” (41)). On his way to the temple, following the spider’s thread that will lead him to his marvellous lover, the pilgrim descends into a valley of dust, smoke and haze:

²⁴⁷ As van Delden writes, through the character Ixca Cienfuegos, *El región más transparente* proposes a vision in which the self loses all its vestiges of autonomy; “the individual merges entirely with the communal past, specifically with Mexico’s Aztec heritage. This past is viewed as the origin and ground of an unalterable, culturally determined identity to which the self is inextricably attached” (*Carlos Fuentes* 11-12). By his novel *Cambio de piel* of 1968, the Lawrentian presence is clearly much more detached and satirical: “el friso de Xochicalco es una sola serpiente, un círculo de serpientes, sin principio ni fin, una serpiente con plumas [...]. Te alejaste, caminaste alrededor de la pirámide, volviste a acercarte al friso, lo tocaste, te recargaste con los brazos abiertos sobre los bajorrelieves de Quetzalcóatl [...] Contra el friso, a espaldas de la plaza, donde no te podían ver. Conozco tu tentación. Lo sentiste como un círculo de violencia que lo aprisiona todo. [...] un mundo al servicio de fuerzas que no necesitan ser nombradas. Ok. Has leído bien tu D.H. Lawrence: allí estabas y allí querías permanecer, aunque en apariencia te alejaras [...] Aquí, unida al friso, donde los demás no podían verte ni adivinarte, volvió a tentarte ese caudal de palabras aprendidas (*Cambio de piel* 39-40).

Con una mano me dejaba guiar por la araña. Con la otra, aparté ese polvo y ese humo hermanados que me impedían ver y respirar. Adelanté la mano, *Señor*, como hacen los ciegos, aun cuando destrón les conduce. Y mi mano desapareció en esa espesa niebla. Y mis dedos tocaron a otros cuerpos, una veloz fila de cuerpos humanos que caminaban ocultos por el polvo y el humo de este amanecer silencioso al pie del volcán. Silencios. Pies. Retiré mi mano *adolorida por el temor* y con ella me toqué el pecho, el rostro, el sexo, *pues quería asegurarme de mi propia existencia*; y sólo al saberme presente y vivo, comencé a distanciar mis sensaciones de la realidad; y la realidad se insinuaba, *Señor*, con tal astucia, que me hacía creer que mis sensaciones la realidad eran. Mas si yo me decía que había llegado a un mundo de polvo, la realidad era que el polvo era humo; y si creía estar rodeado de silencio, *malicia era esta de la realidad rumorosa* en el llano al pie del volcán. (my emphasis, 520-1)

The change of mood from when he described the coastline to these descriptions of the valley could not be more pronounced. Entering the latter at first implicates giving up the clear vision commonly associated with rationality; note here also the disorienting effect the physical environment has on his perception of himself as an individual, the renewed address to the *Señor* that clearly signposts his foreignness to the situation as well as his attempt to distance himself rhetorically from it, and the perceived de-personified ‘evil’ that emanates from the smoke in contrast to the paradise-like quality of the beaches. As he progresses, his narrative establishes a clear distinction between himself and the dancing bodies, who lack the detached individuality that he possesses and seeks to retain: “Pies que bailaban en silencio. Pies cuyo compás no les era propio, sino marcado por un ritmo ajeno a ellos y que a ellos se imponía” (521). While his narrative – spiced with yet more interjections to the *Señor* – continues to employ the singular and thus to indicate his distance from the dancers, the latter clearly incorporate the Lawrentian pre-individualised mode of feeling.²⁴⁸ Once he ascends the pyramid (which has 33 steps, the same number as are between the crypt and the plain in Felipe’s palace, emphasising the fact that the two worlds are not as distinct as they might seem) and regains clear vision, he is at the

²⁴⁸ One might compare the scene to that of Kate in *The Plumed Serpent*, when she witnesses a ceremony of dancing and drumming manifesting the “timeless, primeval passion of the prehistoric races” (102); she prefers to stay at the “fringe” (107) trying to resist the de-individualization of the ceremony, conducted by men described as dark, collective and non-individual (115).

centre of a ceremony of bloody and inhumanly cruel ritual sacrifices in honour of him, as he is integrated into the mythic understanding of the world as the Smoking Mirror. The earlier promise of re-enchantment has become impossible as the Lady of the Butterflies is transformed into a cruel, terrible priestess: she is no longer crowned by a circle of fluttering butterflies, her long black hair is smeared with blood, and at the foot of her throne lie snakes and centipedes. Barely escaping being sacrificed himself (thanks to the fact that his experiences do not quite fit into the numerological order that had been predicted by the Aztec priestess), the pilgrim makes his way to the volcano, declaring that he prefers to find his own death rather than being integrated into their mythic rituals. As he looks back upon the pyramid from a distance, the last few sentences again evoke the Lawrentian ‘savage Mexico’: “El templo era una bestia parda, agazapada a la hora del ocaso. Sus fauces de piedra labrada devoraban la sangre y el polvo del llano” (539). We might here concede that on a historical level it is obviously true that the Aztecs did practice human sacrifice; the critic Abeyta is undoubtedly right in pointing out that Fuentes was critical of both European and Aztec excesses (and especially, as the novel suggests, of Aztec imperialism and their subjugation other tribes), but I would nevertheless insist that this chapter is not about ‘real’ Mexico as much as it is about the primitivist construction of ‘savage Mexico’.²⁴⁹ In *The Plumed Serpent*, we perceive Mexico through the eyes of the Irish Kate who feels attracted and repelled by the alien landscape onto which she clearly projects the desires produced by the failures of Western civilization and subjectivity; in Fuentes’s chapter, we are presented with an equally mediated account that is no less primitivist in mode, albeit self-consciously and critically so.

Despite the fact that the link of primitivism to magical realism may not be immediately obvious, the transformation of the lady of the butterflies makes it explicit in the narrative. According to Camayd-Freixas, magical realism is characterised by the intrusion of the magical into the realist mode as stemming from the manifestation of the ‘primitive’, non-scientific mind in contemporary society (“Narrative Primitivism”).²⁵⁰ To contextualize this historically, magical realism had

²⁴⁹ In relation to *The Plumed Serpent*, Peter Fjågesund has argued that the novel is primarily about European concerns rather than Mexico itself (137).

²⁵⁰ As Michael Bell explains, according to the beliefs of many early twentieth century writers and anthropologists, a primitive or “mythic sensibility refers to a way of feeling and thought, not to specific ideas and mental *objects*”; the fundamental characteristic of such a sensibility is the absence

partly grown out of European intellectual movements of the interwar period during which the European perception of the colonies underwent a sea change due to the spread of Communist anti-imperialism and a growing awareness of unrest in the colonies. It has thus intellectual affiliations to primitivism, as well as to surrealism, which thrived during that period when “intellectuals were working for the first time within a structure of interactive, crosscultural contacts that combined an aesthetics of “primitive art,” on the hand, with political uneasiness towards a colonial system, on the other” (Brennan 188-9; Faris *Ordinary Enchantments*; Richardson). Surrealism – out of which Carpentier’s “marvellous real” would develop²⁵¹ – was thus both anti-colonialist/communist, as well as marked by the encounter with, and interest in, non-European cultures, which, as leading surrealists like André Breton believed, put an emphasis on the unconscious repressed in capitalist society.²⁵²

In the Mexican context, the European conception of the ‘primitive’ took on a slightly different inflection that emphasized cruelty, barbarism, a fascination with death and, like surrealism, an opposition to capitalist, ‘Western’ individualism. In an important article published in 1984, Carlos Monsiváis critiqued the ideological construct of *mexicanidad*, which, as he argues, has been informed by the writings of the 19th and early 20th century of visitors to Mexico and consolidated and internalized by the Mexican upper classes. Of particular importance was the primitivism of the accounts of European travellers such as Lawrence, Lowry and Greene during the 20s, 30s and 40s. As Monsiváis explains, in these three decades occurred the ‘discovery’, or invention, of a “‘*México*’ de esencias primitivas, capaz de hazañas artísticas y de la estetización de la crueldad’ (211).²⁵³ It is noticable that it is when he travelled to

of “a firm and rational distinction between the inner world of feeling and the external order of existence”, an animistic response to the environment in other words (*Primitivism* 7; 8).

²⁵¹ “Surrealism ushered in a poetics based on unpredictability, magic, primitivism and surprise that in fiction became loosely called magical realism.” (Jason Wilson, “Alejo Carpentier’s Re-invention of América Latina as Real and Marvellous” 66).

²⁵² With the support of the Communist party, the French Surrealists organized a counter-exhibition entitled ‘The Truth about the Colonies’ to the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris organised to celebrate the French Empire (Richardson 4). Important Caribbean Surrealists included René Ménil, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire, who declared their allegiance to Communism. Surrealism had a strong influence on emergent writers from across the region, from the Cuban Alejo Carpentier to the Mexican Octavio Paz (whose work in turn strongly impacted on the movement). The former’s ‘ontological’ marvellous real is based on the belief that an authentic surrealism is to be found only outside of Europe, and thus fundamentally at odds with René Ménil’s conception of the marvellous, which does not seek to reify difference. Ménil’s understanding leans on surrealism’s universalist basis that – while cultural differences are important and to be respected – there are, as André Breton phrases it, “profound affinities [...] between surrealism and so-called ‘primitive’ thought, both of which seek the abolition of the conscious and the everyday” (qtd in Richardson 23).

²⁵³ In the 30s, the surrealist Antonin Artaud (who invented the primitivist “Theatre of Cruelty”) wrote that, in Europe, “se cree que la Revolución Mexicana es una revolución del alma indígena, una

Mexico that Lawrence's conception of the 'primitive' mode of being in the world took on all the negative, racist and ethnocentric aspects, which contrasted strongly with his earlier representations of a 'primitive', or mythic, mode of being in the world that he located in rural England.²⁵⁴ Lawrence's depiction of Mexico is not singular, but grew out of a more general, Spenglerian worldview that also informed Caribbean writers such as Carpentier and his 'ontological' marvellous real. The merging of different accounts and myths possesses a seductive power, similar to that of the euphemistic concept of 'the encounter of two worlds' to refer to the brutal reality of the conquest. As Wendy Faris stresses, "although themes in magical realism contain many elements taken from indigenous cultures, magical realism also embodies a specifically narrative primitivism, irrespective of theme" (59). Faris's observation functions as a reminder that despite the integration of Nahua symbolism (analysed in detail by Abeyta) and indigenous texts in the 'New World' section, one must not overlook the overall primitivist mode that the *pilgrim's* – though not necessarily Fuentes's – narrative adopts. On the level of the nation, *Terra Nostra* throws into question what one might term the Mexican 'marvellous real'; on a regional level, it throws into question Carpentier's ontological understanding of the 'marvellous real', which it inserts into a global framework of 'combined and uneven' development through the theme of repression.

The theme of repression and historical amnesia is expressed through the Quetzalcóatl/Tezcatlipoca configuration, which also functions as an analysis of the emergence and construction of the modern subject that defines itself through its 'barbaric Others' that are not pre-existing, but constructed by the imperialist imaginary. The character of the pilgrim in fact emerges as a euphemism for the historically repressed brutal conquistador; the European modern subject, in other words, is founded both on the political oppression of its 'Others', as well as on repressing the memory of it.

As has been well documented by Ibsen, the pilgrim's experiences on the "new continent" retrace those of Cortés, "arriving on the coast, and discovering

revolución para conquistar el *alma indígena* tal como existía antes de Cortés. [...] El sustrato indígena de México. El espíritu del Noble Salvaje que regresará a estas tierras enloquecidas. La conjura de fuerzas primigenias. El ámbito donde sólo tiene sentido lo prístinamente irracional" (Monsiváis 226).

²⁵⁴ On the difference between those two different types of primitivism, see Michael Bell's *Primitivism*. As Bell argues, Lawrence's earlier novels are able to evoke an inward recreation of ancient modes of feeling. This contrasts with the "conscious reference to primitive motifs" in novels such as *The Plumed Serpent* where they are put to moral or symbolic use (32). The difference between these modes (internal versus external) also traces the movement to overt primitivism, usually directed at the "other" of the civilized self.

Tenochtitlán via Cempoala, Cholula, and the volcanoes that surround the valley of Mexico” (“El teatro” 113).²⁵⁵ When the Pilgrim steps onto the beach, the narrative harks back to Columbus’s letters and the early chronicles, reporting the astonishment at the “marvels” of the ‘New World’ and representing it as paradise.²⁵⁶ The edenic/marvellous representations offered by Columbus were of course by no means disinterested; Columbus was notably “neither a merchant nor a pilgrim: he was on a state sponsored mission from a nation caught up in the enterprise of the *Reconquista*” (Greenblatt 53), and needed to secure funds. Representations of these lands as Edenic rhetorically empty them of their traditions preparing the way for Euroimperialism, as he was seeking to take possession of the “newly found” lands despite the existence of prior inhabitants, something that was by no means unchallenged by his fellow Europeans. Fuentes sets out to critique the repression of these economic and ideological underpinnings: the pilgrim repeatedly describes the riches of the ‘New World’, but rejects the temptation these represent - although even during the remembered episodes, this rejection is mainly due to the fact that he recognizes that they would only be of value if he could take them back to Europe, something that at that moment in the narrative seems an impossibility.²⁵⁷

Fuentes’s text links this repression also to the myths and legends that surround the indigenous reactions towards the invaders. In the pilgrim’s account of his (remembered) experiences in the ‘New World’, he is repeatedly accepted by the indigenous population as either a returning god or a returning ruler. He is made head of the tribe, whose members all kill themselves, supposedly in his honour as he is later told; at the great pyramid, sacrificial murders are performed in his honour, as he is believed to be the returning god Smoking Mirror; entering Tenochtitlán, he is recognized by his double as the returning god and ruler Queztalcóatl, and offered the throne that is rightfully his, an episode taken almost word for word from the *Códice* (*Broken Spears* 64-5; Ibsen, “El teatro” 114). Significantly, we should add, the Nahua text was written more than thirty years *after* the conquest; its authors were

²⁵⁵ The text includes many conscious rewritings of early modern accounts produced by the conquistadors, most notably by Bernal Díaz and Hernán Cortés, as well as of indigenous accounts taken from the *Códice Florentino* and Nahua myths, especially those surrounding Quetzalcóatl, the “Plumed Serpent” and his double Tezcatlipoca, the “Smoking Mirror” (Ibsen, “El teatro” 114). In particular, the pilgrim’s entry into Tenochtitlán as described in *Terra Nostra* is close to Díaz’s 16th century account, and the portents that accompany his arrival are adapted from the *Códice*.

²⁵⁶ Wonder and marvel, Greenblatt notes, were the “central figure in the initial European response to the New World” (14).

²⁵⁷ “Bañéme en perlas [...] había aquí con qué cumplir la más fervorosa y exacta de las venganzas contra los enemigos que dañaron nuestra vida, o con qué colmar la belleza de la mujer más inalcanzable y fría” (459-460). See also 475; 514; 566.

presumably driven by the “need to excuse the strategic and military failure of Motecuhzoma and others” (Klor de Alva xx, foreword to *The Broken Spears* ed. by León-Portilla). In any case, any initial response towards the Spaniards as Gods would have soon been discredited by the realities of the war.²⁵⁸ Whatever their original provenance, myths surrounding the status of the Spanish in the ‘New World’ were exploited, embellished and propagated by the Spanish *cronistas*. Starting with Columbus, the accounts of the conquistadors attribute to the indigenous population the belief that the newcomers “came from the heavens” (qtd in Greenblatt 174), or to the myth of a returning, wrongfully banished ruler, as Cortés reports in his letter to the crown, written during the siege and reconquest of Tenochtitlán in 1520. According to Cortés, “Mutezuma” had welcomed the “returning” representative of the great ruler in Spain, and had asked his people to do the same (Cortés 99).²⁵⁹ Representing Carlos as the rightful legal emperor of the Mexican empire, his account seeks to legitimize Spanish rule and to counter the dubious legality of his enterprise. The effect of these legends (in the form in which they are employed by the European invaders) is a ‘naturalization’ of European rule. The supposed confusion of the invaders with gods has certainly had a profound impact on the imperialist imagination in the centuries to come, which is attested by the proliferation of narratives that feature European travellers turned into gods or rulers, thus justifying the enslavement/subordination of indigenous peoples. In *Terra Nostra*, the pilgrim – during the five days he remembers – is only indirectly responsible for all the deaths that have occurred since his arrival. According to him, his arrival disturbed “el orden consagrado de las cosas y los tiempos” (515), resulting in the deaths of innocents. As he proceeds to describe his travel up to the volcanoes, the pilgrim again directly addresses Felipe and he muses about how his intrusion unwittingly destroys the balance of the sacred order. While geographically, the journey retraces Cortés’s journey to the high pass between the volcanic peaks Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl that preceded his attack on Tenochtitlán, in his account the journey re-enacts Quetzalcoátl’s descent into the underworld to retrieve the bones of mankind and thus offers a much more favourable account of his deeds in the ‘New World’.

²⁵⁸ Fuentes himself has in his theoretical writing employed this explanation of the mythic indigenous response, but significantly, this is handled more subtly in the fictional text, whether consciously or unconsciously so.

²⁵⁹ Cortés’s account of Montezuma’s speech is certainly not a reliable historical account of their meeting, combining Christian overtones and allusions to the myth of a coming Messiah with local indigenous myths about the return of a banished ruler from the East, which Cortés may have heard on the way to Tenochtitlán and consequently embellished to his own advantage (Elliott 105-7).

However, this representation of the virtuous, humanist European subject as positively contrasting with the ritual sacrifices of the indigenous population - who slaughter one another, or even kill themselves - is based on a repression of historical truth, which emerges through the theme of the double who is represented as an indigenous god (Tezcatlipoca/Smoking Mirror or possibly also Xolotl), and into whom the Pilgrim is transformed during the 20 days that he forgets. Again, according to the pilgrim's representation as related to the court in Spain, this role has been imposed upon him by the cultural logic of the 'New World'. One might argue that it seems somewhat problematic that Fuentes chooses to convey the suppression of the historical reality through Aztec myths, as it could be seen to reflect the responsibility for the brutalities back onto the indigenous population, as if it was their culture that was inherently violent, a representation popularised in twentieth century primitivism.²⁶⁰ Yet, it is here the pilgrim who is relating this version of himself to the Spanish crown, and the double - supposedly the Aztec God "Smoking Mirror" or Xolotl - is very recognizably a version of a conquistador of the mould of Cortés, slashing throats, setting fire to temples, ordering the beheading of unarmed dancers, firing cannons against people armed with lances, and carrying away their gold (577-8). The compilation of Nahua texts in *The Broken Spears* is dominated by accounts of the conquistadors' cruelties, and massacres of the indigenous population, to which this list of cruelties obviously refers. Not surprisingly, however, the pilgrim's narrative does not include lengthy rewritings of these sections of the *Códice*, as they are pushed to the unremembered margins. The novel suggests that this suppression is partly due to the lack of historical self-reflection, as Ludovico had interrupted the youths' circular relationship, where one would tell the others his dream, and vice versa. In other words, he had interrupted the self-reflective process, which results in this historical distortion. In one of the other youths' dreams, the Pilgrim had quite openly assumed the role of a blond white god to his own advantage in order to pillage the 'New World', he had set people against people; "creó una cadena de exacciones, peor que cualquier servidumbre antes conocida en estas tierras: se justificó diciendo que todo lo hizo para sobrevivir; un hombre solo contra un imperio" (700). In this version of the dream, it becomes obvious that he is not a "pilgrim", but rather Cortés, who with an army composed only of several hundreds

²⁶⁰ As one critic argues, these two prominent intellectuals are "two of the principal architects of this construct of Mexico as a crucible of inevitable, cyclical violence and sacrifice, simultaneously the victimizer and victimized of its sanguinary past" (Braham 82).

wreaked havoc on the Aztec empire. In the chapter “Cenizas” (830-45), the two faces of the ‘first’ modernity emerge most clearly as the figure of the pilgrim is split into Gúzman and the monk Julián, the latter trying to save manuscripts and artefacts from the ancient cultures, while the former transforms the indigenous population into slaves and mistreats children, which, as Abeyta reminds us, recalls of course Las Casas’s condemnations of the conquistadors’ actions (Abeyta 84).

Furthermore, the perhaps most important counter-argument to reading *Terra Nostra* as a perpetuation of the myth of ‘savage Mexico’ is Fuentes’s own critique of this mode of representing Mexico (that by the time of *Terra Nostra* has become fairly explicit), expressed most forcefully in the chapters “La restauración” and “La última ciudad”. In the latter, at the apocalyptic end of *Terra Nostra*, the world’s overpopulation is “solved” by the world’s rich and powerful through mass extermination of the lower classes. In this nightmarish version of a nevertheless recognizably 20th century capitalist world, explanatory meta-narratives seem to have lost their usefulness for interpreting a fragmented reality in which commodified news items become obsolete from one day to the next (908). However, Fuentes – and this is where his aesthetic clearly diverges from a postmodernist one – still adheres to a global continuous narrative that has not ‘transcended’ the notion of antagonistic class struggles: The world, he writes, “no sabía desprenderse de sus hábitos adquiridos: mayor opulencia para unos cuantos, hambre mayor para la gran mayoría” (908-9). It is to the benefit of the opulent minority that the myth of “savage Mexico” is evoked: “potenciaron a la muerte ofreciéndole soluciones acordes con lo que antes se llamó, sin la menor ironía, “el genio nacional”: México recurrió al sacrificio humano, consagrado religiosamente, justificado políticamente” (909). Clearly alluding to the portrayal of the Mexican as enamoured of death and the rhetoric of the discourse of *mexicanidad*, the narrative exposes the myth of “savage Mexico” as politically dubious and at the service of the ruling classes, thus anticipating Monsiváis’s and Bartra’s critiques. It also indirectly articulates a critique of Octavio Paz’s interpretation of the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 as a resurgence of Aztec sacrificial practices (“Olympics and Tlatelolco”).²⁶¹ In the chapter “La restauración”, mass-

²⁶¹ My conclusions on Fuentes’s attitude towards such ritualistic, mythic reading of Mexican history – at least as encoded in his novel – differ here substantially from Michael Abeyta’s, who writes: ‘when Octavio Paz in *Posdata* places the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco in the context of Mexican history, he notes that “to live history as a ritual is our way of accepting it; while for the Spaniards the conquest was a heroic deed, for the Indians it was a ritual, the human representation of a cosmic catastrophe.” For Paz, the massacre revealed that the history of a people is the visible manifestation of another

extermination is similarly linked to an evocation of the Mexican national character and the concept of the fiesta – said to recover forgotten collective bonds –, which constitutes another oblique reference to Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1962).²⁶²

To conclude, most interesting for the present chapter are the links the novel makes between primitivism and 'savage Mexico', the insistence on colonialist injustices and the implied critique of the repression of the liberationist thinking of the 'first', Hispanic modernity, as well as the global framework in which these issues are evoked.

“One throne makes another footstool visible” (*Carnival* 59): The World System and the “tilted” Vision

Harris's *Carnival* (1985) was published around a decade after *Terra Nostra*. It may be seen as marking a new stage in Harris's oeuvre, as it seeks to address the forces unleashed by capitalist globalization. In some of his works published during the seventies, Harris is beginning to examine the importance of a country's position within the global system. In *Genesis of the Clowns* (1977) for instance – a novel set in Guyana and mostly overlooked by the critics – the main focus is local and centred around a voyage into the interior in 1948, but it is inscribed into a global framework by the fact it is narrated in 1974 by the by now exiled land surveyor Frank Wellington, a white Guyanese. For his voyages into the interior in 1942 and 1948,

history, an underlying history that needs to be deciphered. *Terra Nostra* demands of the reader a similar decipherment' (19). It seems to me that after the publication of Bartra's seminal book on the subject of the construction of ritualistic savage Mexico and his exploration of how this is at the service of the ruling classes, such an argument has become difficult to defend and would urgently need to address Bartra's critique. Furthermore, my sense is that the Fuentes of *Terra Nostra* actually anticipates some of these critiques imaginatively; his fiction often intuits what his theoretical writing does not – is not yet able to? – say explicitly.

²⁶² In reference to the novel *El aire mas transparente*, D'Lugo writes that a “basic reference to the Plaza de Tlatelolco within the text (390) will immediately signal for subsequent readers a cycle of violence evocative of Aztec sacrifice a mere ten years after the publication of the novel: the student massacre of 1968. And the cycle continues” (102). While D'Lugo offers an excellent reading of the history of the Mexican novel in the twentieth century, her remarks here clearly demonstrate the danger inherent in Fuentes's earlier (and, by extension, Paz's) vision: the cycle of oppression that the massacre stems from *does not* originate in Aztec sacrifices. It is important to remember that fact before conceding explanatory power to such mythic arguments, and thus implicitly shifting the blame to the indigenous population. Shifting the blame to Aztec sacrifices and pre-conquest oppression does little to help us account for the racial and class stratifications that continue to fragment modern Mexico, a country in which a large proportion of the population lives in poverty. The danger of such representations is clearly illustrated by Mel Gibson's *Apocalypse* (2006), which – while situating itself clearly on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum – nevertheless continues to evoke the same myth of indigenous cruelty for highly dubious ideological reasons.

Wellington employed a foreman who carries the allegorically charged name of Hope. Wellington's ventures "into the interior in search of hydroelectric power" (114), his references to the strikes on the sugar estates of 1948, his reflections on his efforts to communicate with his Amerindian employee - who according to him possesses a radically different, un-scientific worldview - and his somewhat disparaging remarks on the capitalist ambitions and successes of his East Indian employee (see chapter 2), clearly make this into a novel that seeks to explore the future challenges that face British Guiana in the post-WWII decades. Importantly, however, what prompts the narration in 1974 is the suicide of Hope of which Wellington learns by a letter that he receives at the very start of the novel. The narrator has long since emigrated to Great Britain (in 1954) and is as such representative not only of Harris's own experience, but those of numerous Caribbean emigrants to Britain in the 1950s and 60s.²⁶³ The same day he receives this letter, Wellington also receives another letter from a solicitor - "one Mr Burness of Hope Street, Dunfermline, Fife" (81) - informing him about an inheritance. The coincidence in nomenclature is used by Harris to point out the legacies of British Empire: "Guyanese Hope and Fife's Hope Street were the natural but wholly fortuitous subsistence of names upon names built into imperial/colonial legacies around the globe" (81). Furthermore, it foreshadows another coincidence of names, as Hope commits suicide after killing a black Trinidadian also called Frank Wellington who had slept with Hope's woman, who is of East Indian and Chinese descent. All is not well in the "rigged co-operative family" that is Guyana (147), whose fate is somehow mysteriously linked to the exiled Guyanese. These two letters, then, and the dating of the voyages and Hope's suicide in 1974 are a deliberate attempt by Harris to emphasise the colonial roots of the state of affairs of Guyana and to inscribe it into an international (economic) framework. As the anonymous author of the first letter - whose initials are also F.W. - writes, Hope was a black man and his suicide in Albuyostown therefore "could have no bearing on the state of the state" (144). Clearly, pre-independence hopes have been dashed in 1970s Guyana, ruled by the authoritarian Burnham and the PNC and, more broadly, in the Americas, with "rumours of rigged elections [and] democracies *manqué*" (92).

²⁶³As Bundy writes in his introduction to Harris's *The Unfinished Genesis*, "although accounting for less than one per cent of the population per annum, emigration has exerted since the late 1940s a potent psychological force in the economic life of the country. Guyanese who have become citizens of the USA, Canada and Britain now out-number by perhaps a third the official Guyana census. Their money supports relatives at home, allows materials and services to enter the country" (22).

In *Carnival*, published eight years after *Genesis*, Harris builds on the theme of international connections and explicitly thematizes the global dimension of dependency through a secularised re-writing of Dante's *Divine Comedy* that after over 700 years has clearly lost its explanatory purchase for a contemporary world. As Maes-Jelinek writes:

There is a level on which the characters progress, like Dante, from Inferno through Purgatory to Paradise, but each phase or state is indissociable from its opposite. Thus, in New Forest, the plantation or colonial Inferno, the "Inferno of history" (21), Aunt Alice's tears "water the rose garden of paradise" (44), while the state of paradise achieved by Jonathan and Amaryllis in the last chapter of the novel is dearly paid for by Masters' descent into the underworld. On a deeper level, there is no regular progress from the depths to the heights but a penetration through the gateway into the underworld *and* the overworld. As Harris himself has suggested, Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso are not absolute and separate categories. These are altered in the narrative "to overlap and penetrate one another in subtle degrees" (*The Labyrinth of Universality* 320).

This is indeed true, but one must also stress that in Harris's fiction, there is an economic and historical dimension that refines and contextualises what in this description reads like an exercise in the deconstruction of binaries, or, more specifically, of Dante's fixed religious absolutes. While, of course, Harris's fiction always sets out to destabilise such explanatory schemes, it nevertheless seems significant that such a framework exists. In conversations with Weyl in the sixties and seventies, Masters reflects about the origins of those "parallel existences" that he will enable Weyl to explore in more depth after his own death. As we are told, Masters argued that 'parallel existences or incarnations of Uncertainty owe the character of jealousy that possesses them to a collision of worlds implicit in the "primordial colonial egg" that Carnival dramatizes as the birth of a diversity of fictions and masks' (32). Furthermore, in their conversations Masters also "addressed the philosophic myth of a colonial age that draped its mantle everywhere around the globe on superpowers, as on empires past and present, to set in train parallel existences, executions, resurrections of a plantation king or emperor or president or

god” (24). As these two observations suggest, Masters sees 1492 as a key date in writing the history of the present of capitalist globalization, driven by an imperialism that increasingly spans the globe. The onset of colonialism and the brutal conquest of the Americas clearly changed the face of the world, explaining why Dante’s schemata and its infernal funnel to the centre of the earth have become not only scientifically, but also morally and epistemologically, obsolete.

These are not the only dates Masters, or Weyl, offer and indeed some of them are revealing when read in the context of twentieth century thinking on capitalism and dependency. Maes-Jelinek thus skips an important element of the narrative when she dismisses the precise evocation of chronological time and events, seeing them “only as frames through which Jonathan freely travels back and forth in his imagination, so that links and parallels emerge between events and characters which at first seem to have little in common” (320). These ‘frames’ constitute Harris’s rendering of material global reality (which he certainly does seek to transcend and alter through the imaginary). Weyl divides Masters’ existence into four periods: the first last from 1917 to 1957 (a period he subdivides into 17-39; 39-57), the second from 1957 to the seventies, the third until 1982, and the fourth refers to his afterlife as Virgilian guide to Masters (112); those divisions are reinforced by several symbolic events, including Masters’ two deaths (and one death experience) and three fires, in a baroque multiplication of events and characters. This dating of Masters’s life corresponds roughly to the periods into which Weyl divides the century when travelling back in time to the 1920s:

Perhaps it was the sculpture of coming events that Carnival felt in 1926, the economic depression of the thirties, the war that would follow that depression. [...] Perhaps it was a nameless foreboding that Carnival felt about independence for the colonies of the Inferno, an independence that would lay bare a variety of stigmata that would bleed in the 1950s and 1960s, but succumb to a brute hardening of the flame of blood, to tribal institutions that made all the more ironclad every ritual grievance of the 1970s and 1980s (57-8).

The periods offered here are again 20s-30s and then WWI; the 50s and 60s that were marked by the independence movements; and the 70s and 80s, marked by

authoritarian regimes in the Americas and the beginning of the imposition of neo-liberalist policies. While one may justifiably defend a substantially more positive view of the achievements of the independence movements, what is here interesting is the periodizing and the implication of a global perspective, given that the colonies are here designated as the “Inferno”, which might lead one to suspect that “Paradise” could be at the “centre” (which, of course, is ultimately not the case, as the search for paradise in Harris’s fiction is not geographic, but lies in the search for spiritual, cross-cultural “wholeness”). The reason why the 1920s are seen as central to future developments – although not specified here – may become more apparent when historically contextualised: in the 1870s, British Guiana’s cane planters had prospered, but with the expansion of the economy of the Caribbean into the foreign markets between 1880s and 1930s in an increasingly integrated world market fuelled by the renewed industrialisation of the second Industrial Revolution (Cassá 7-9), British Guiana’s sugar production faced increasing international competition.²⁶⁴ As a result, the sugar industry entered into decline;²⁶⁵ the limited boom during WWI was followed by the depression of the 1920s and 30s. In the epigraph to my introduction, I have referred to the school teacher’s deafening silence on the Americas engendered by the framework of the colonial education system. Significantly, while not addressing the economic depression in class, Mr Quabbas also contemplated – but never finished – writing a book “about the complexities of New Forest sugar”; yet, “Mr Quabbas had long vanished from the scene by the late 1940s when the World Bank invested a loan in propping up the archaic economy of New Forest” (72).

The novel thus sets up the early decades of the century as pivotal in the shaping of British Guiana/ Guyana’s twentieth century history, and issues such as the significance, causes and consequences of economic depression have not been addressed because of the colonial framework of public education. When Masters the First leaves the country in 1957, he has, after the labour strikes in the 40s, lived through the election of the PPP, the consequent British invasion, and the division of the PPP that prepared the way for Burnham’s assertion of power. Much more explicitly than that of Wellington in *Genesis of the Clowns*, Masters’ migration to

²⁶⁴ German beet sugar, in particular, became a strong competitor, which was strengthened by the “protectionist policy adopted for the beet-sugar industry in Europe, Beets being a crop which profited more than sugar-cane from the application of innovative technologies” (Cassá 9-10).

²⁶⁵ By 1900 the number of plantations had fallen from 136 in 1870 to 50; the number would fall to 19 by 1950, nearly all of which were by then controlled by Booker Brothers McConnell and Company Limited that asserted a similar power as the United Fruit Company elsewhere in the Americas (Rabe 20).

England introduces a global perspective that links the colony to the centre. There are two clearly identified doorways into the inferno when Weyl and Masters travel through Masters' past: New Forest's Crocodile Bridge, where Masters' subordinates and Flatfoot Johnny live, the "colonial inferno", and the factory in North London that "made Frigidaires and washing machines" (123), in which Masters starts working as a "common labourer" on his arrival in London in 1957. Dante's scheme is here translated into secular, material conditions of oppression, and, on a global scale, there is a link made between colonial oppression and the exploitation of the labour force in the central economy. Interestingly, despite the narrative insistence on Masters having both inhabited the position of "plantation king" and that of the Everyman, the "common labourer", Masters' stint in the factory is relatively short, since in November 1958, he suffers a heart attack – his second death experience – and has to stop working. Masters has by that time received the money from his sales of his plantations and is thus economically secure, which subtly undermines this narrative of a reversal of fortunes and the de-construction of opposites; "Everyman Masters", one might say, is perhaps never truly "Everyman", despite the insistence of the narrative voice. As aforementioned, the dating is also punctuated by a series of symbolic events (that do not always match exactly with his periods), such as the first death of Masters, the Plantation-King (in 1957), and his second death, ending his earthly life through a stabbing that mirrors the first (1982), and the burning of a schooner in 1926 – symbolic of the initial colonial clash of cultures – and of two buildings: the first in 1957 at the time and place of his first "death" by the hand of the fisherman and his wife; the second in the late 60s/early 70s when a nightclub in London burns down in which a series of "mudheads" – that is, Guyanese – used to dance, evoking for Masters the question of whether they were puppets or free actors, which, given the timing, might perhaps be an implicit and derogatory reference to political events in Guyana after independence. All these instances are marked by Harris's typical conception of the potential of rebirth emerging from catastrophe; Masters' first death turns into "seed" as he miraculously survives the attack and the fire, and amidst the ruins of the burned down club, the "stage or stairway" is left "virtually uncharred" (155-6).

Of course, it is true that this implicit global perspective that is based on material, historical reality is not followed through in the same way as in the works of other writers such as Lovelace, García Márquez, Fuentes or Chamoiseau to name but

a few – indeed, the dates and periods often appear as mere ornaments or ‘frames’, as Maes-Jelinek suggests; instead, such a perspective is replaced by a utopian vision of “wholeness”.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, to ignore this dimension of his fiction seems to deprive this concept of “wholeness” of the historical context from which it derives, and which in some way responds to the important intellectual work on dependency that has emerged from the Americas. Before turning to his concept of “carnival wholeness”, then, it might be useful to recall some of Harris’s own theoretical reflections on the writing of fiction, which also increasingly insert the local into a global system. In his lecture series “History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guyanas” from 1970, for instance, he argues that the “true capacity of marginal and disadvantaged cultures resides in their genius to tilt the field of civilization [...] to release [...] a different *reading* of texts of reality” (*Unfinished Genesis* 182); in other words, the peripheral location of certain cultures produces a worldview different to that one might hold when positioned at the economic centre.²⁶⁷ One might also see a connection here to his refusal to be seen as a postmodernist in his talk from 1989, “Literacy and the Imagination”, in which he argues that while “post-modernists have discarded depth, they have discarded the unconscious”, he is “convinced that there is a tradition in depth *which returns, which nourishes us even though it appears to have*

²⁶⁶ Harris’s global vision of interdependencies also has a somewhat strange, and certainly problematic, moral counterpart in *Carnival*: a cultural relativism that is inscribed into a system of moral interdependencies. Jonathan Weyl and Amaryllis – who occupy the heavenly end of the balance – are free to love each other, “a freedom that did not exist in other countries, in [apartheid] South Africa for example” (123), which given their different ethnic backgrounds is a relevant point. However, Jonathan continues: “I suddenly saw with a shock that our two selves ran in parallel with unfree selves (unfree lives) in many spheres of hell, not only political hells but moral hells, the moral hell to which Quabbas is subjected who is attracted to his unsuspecting niece Alice (123). Earlier on in the novel, Quabbas’s attraction to his niece is described as the “reversible likeness of Thomas for a woman of forty” (81), the difference being – Harris writes – that in the popular imagination, one would be transformed into a romance, the other would outrage propriety. Whereas in Dante, characters’ are the agents of their own downfall, Harris here seeks to locate the reason for their being in inferno or in heaven in the external, cultural circumstance. However, we might here want to add a few details that somewhat modify Harris’s obvious attempt to challenge our moral codes. If Thomas had seduced the “marble woman”, then the younger – and male! – participant would have taken the active role in the relationship. Amaryllis and Jonathan, on the other hand, who are mentioned in the first example, are two willing participants of the same age. This is very different to the scenario involving Quabbas, who is an unmarried teacher attracted to his young niece, who innocently and unsuspectingly inspires love in men. Quabbas dies of a heart attack while spying on “unsuspecting Alice” practicing the high jump and offering him a vision of “paradise”. The difference is here of course that no active part is taken by the under-age Alice (the typical female “blank canvas” who does not seem to do much desiring herself).

²⁶⁷ Harris’s sense of how a peripheral location may affect the writer’s vision is shared by a number of contemporary critics. One might here refer for instance to Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* (2004): “There is, then, a certain reading of literary works of which only writers at the periphery are capable; certain homologies and similarities that they alone, as a result of their outlying position, are able to discern. What is more, the interpretation by writers in literarily removed lands of works produced by authors elsewhere on the periphery is apt to be more realistic (that is. more historically grounded) than the dehistoricized reading of critics at the centre” (250).

vanished" (*Unfinished Genesis* 86). It is interesting to compare his reflection on art with Jameson's Marxist perspective, as the latter argues that art is able "to resist the power of reification in consumer society and reinvent that category of totality which [is] systematically undermined by existential fragmentation on all levels of life and social organisation today" (*The Ideologies of Theory* 146). Like Jameson, Harris is interested in recuperating the notion of totality – or "wholeness" as he calls it – but his is clearly not a social, political or economic concept, but a spiritual one, which seeks to offer a "poeticist" remedy, or utopia of "wholeness", to economic capitalist globalisation. As he writes in his own introduction to *Carnival*:

All the imaginaries are partial, though attuned to a wholeness one can never seize or structure absolutely. Wholeness becomes a thread or a continuity running from the *inferno* to the *paradiso*. I said earlier that 'wholeness' cannot be seized or structured. Wholeness is a rich and *insoluble* paradox. Wholeness has to do with an origination of the Imagination whose solidity is interwoven with a paradoxical tapestry of spectrality, of the light year (viii).

In the context of Harris's theoretical and fictional oeuvre as a whole, one may – justifiably I think – be critical of its tendency to abstraction that sometimes clearly over-stretches itself in its desire to find what one may term a "spiritual globalization", which it seeks to conjure into existence.²⁶⁸ However, within Harris's own trajectory as a writer and given his belief in the primacy of the imagination and the "universal unconscious", this nevertheless constitutes an interesting response to the changes that have occurred between the sixties and the eighties, and contributes to imaginative thinking about the current 'global moment'.

While Harris's concept of the "initial unity of mankind" transcends time, it nevertheless seems significant that the moment when we are offered the most sustained discussion of "unity", "wholeness" and the related metaphor of "carnival" occurs after descriptions of the burnt schooner and the market, evoking, as Maes-Jelinek writes, the collision between Amerindians and European conquerors (304),

²⁶⁸ He is obviously referring to a work of fiction, and perhaps one should not necessarily take it too literally – although Harris himself does seem to posit this global spiritual community as more than just his own invention in his theoretical essays. In any case, this imaginative over-stretch that loses touch with reality becomes especially evident when he writes about the pre-twentieth century past: "Long before mock-constellations or satellites, invented by science, encircled the earth, cultures had invoked their own satellites and images in the stars through which they bridged distances and separations and spoke silently to each other. [...] The telepathy of the soul" (*Carnival* 130).

or, to couch it in slightly different language, the creation of the modern world system and the consolidation of global inequalities through capitalism. It is thus when Weyl and Masters revisit the burning schooner that the former writes: “We were partial figures on the deck of the night. Such partial figuration of soul was a signal of terrifying wholeness. Terrifying in an age that had settled for fragmentation, for polarization, as the basis of security” (42). Wholeness – though ultimately unachievable – is thus a utopian, imaginative counterpart to real capitalist global expansion. As visitors from the future, Weyl and Masters’ presence on the symbolic burnt schooner (that represents the negative material reality of globalization) makes them intuit wholeness as a “third dimension” – again anticipating Bhabha’s formulations – “in which every mask suffers the kinship of exchange, the kinship of glory, the kinship of humiliation” (45). The “unfathomable Carnival whole” (27) thus implies that while there is no absolute truth, no absolute mask; behind each mask, “there will be another partial truth or mask, and so *ad infinitum*” (Maes-Jelinek 299). It is in this context that Dante’s inferno, purgatorio, and paradise are further modified and clearly transcend – and perhaps even seek to annul – the global mapping based on dependency theory that I have referred to above, a tendency that goes hand in hand with the spatialisation of time – and thus a transcendence and rejection of its chronology – as Weyl and Masters freely move through different episodes in history to discover a “carnival”, or baroque, doubling and mirroring of characters and events. Amaryllis and Weyl’s marriage in paradise – that signals a successful marriage of cultures as they are of different ethnic backgrounds – thus depends on Masters’ descent into the inferno of the past; their union is the positive counterpart to Masters’ abuse of his privileges in his treatment of the women on the plantations, as well as of his encounter with the two Jane Fishers. A Harrisian response to capitalism and globalization (of which we *are* offered a timeline) is thus not based on learning from past anti-colonialist, liberationist or dependency thought, but on an attempt to overcome them.

As aforementioned, Harris’s concept of “wholeness”, while interesting within his own development as a writer, remains quite vague and lacks concrete historical foundation. In fact, the Harrisian “tilted vision” of the eighties resembled larger intellectual tendencies of the period, displaying, for instance, many of the features that characterised the field of postcolonialism that was being consolidated during the 80s and 90s, namely its constitutive anti-Marxism, its favouring of identity politics

over notions of class struggle, and a turn to cultural issues. As Lazarus and Varma explain:

[postcolonialism] has been governed at a very deep level by the supposition that the decline of 'Third World' insurgency in the late 1960s and early 1970s was part of a wider – epochal – shift, heralding, as has often been claimed (and not only within postcolonial studies itself, of course), the demise of the 'modern' forms of political struggle and identification – liberalism, socialism, secularism, nationalism, internationalism, etc. – and of the grand sociological categories associated with them: revolution, unevenness, the nation state, modernity, even imperialism (n.p.)

While, as argued above, Harris has in the eighties not completely discarded the notion of dependency and unevenness, nor the validity of the concept of imperialism (see chapter one), his work certainly is marked by the same belief that “‘modern’ forms of political struggle and identification” have been discredited, as well as by a “constitutive anti-marxism”, at least in the belief that class-based, antagonistic models of struggle are outmoded. Indeed, the insurgency movements of the 60s distinctly lack positive connotations in his work, a response that may partly be shaped by his home country’s particular road to independence. Yet, I would like to emphasize again that Harris – despite being an icon of ‘po-mo’-postcolonial studies for by now obvious reasons – is not perhaps the most typical writer of the Caribbean, nor of “the periphery” (see chapters 2 and 3).

For instance, if we concentrate for a moment on the concept of ‘carnival’, it is certainly instructive to turn to Lovelace’s slightly earlier novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1979), in which Lovelace offers a grounded vision that offers a much more complex approach to carnival as a Caribbean cultural phenomenon. In his novel, carnival – as well as calypso and the Steelbands - in the 1950s is represented as a threatening gesture of rebellion on the part of the oppressed against the status quo, and as affirming a sense of community amongst the inhabitants of Calvary Hill. However, from the start, these cultural events risk not being more than a yearly outlet of self-assertion without ever challenging social or political structures: Cleothilda, lighter skinned than the other inhabitants of the yard and owning a parlour shop, may proclaim during Carnival that “All o’ we is one”, but nevertheless reasserts her

difference and superiority as soon as Carnival is over; Fisheye's efforts to make the steelbands join up to fight "the people who keeping down black people" (51), as suggested by his partner Yvonne, are never realized; a decade or so later, Fisheye (the steelband warrior), Aldrick (the Carnival dragon) and seven others kidnap two policemen in an act of rebellion and frustration which ultimately fails for being merely an effort to assert their selfhood but not to begin to act for themselves, as Aldrick realizes in prison. These failed attempts are contextualised by the novel's tracing of the gradual commercialisation of Carnival (with the penetration of the bands by sponsorship money) and Calypso (signalled by the Calypsonian Philo's eventual 'selling out', singing what the masses want to hear rather than his own protest songs). In other words, Lovelace's novel demonstrates that Harris's de-historicised recognition that carnival masks can potentially freeze into absolutes can also be arrived at through a 'historicist' approach. Carnival, in Harris's fiction, risks losing its meaning and importance as an *actual* Caribbean event, and becomes a mere symbol of a Harrisian vision of wholeness that can never be arrived at, but is constantly in process of formation. Problematically, Harris's de-contextualised, dehistoricised rendering of carnival begins to resemble the version of multiculturalism propagated by neoliberalist ideologies.

Underdevelopment and the Counter-Narrative of Liberation in *Biblique des dernières gestes*

In this context, Chamoiseau's emphasis on the importance of twentieth century anti-colonialist and communist struggles is instructive. *Biblique des derniers gestes* - one of his most recently published novels – marks a significant shift in his fiction, both formally as well as in terms of its broadened, internationalist perspective. The novel's time of narration is in 1993, when Césaire turns 80 and Balthazar Bodule-Jules, the novel's protagonist and an ex-revolutionary fighter who symbolises Martinique's hope for cultural, economic and political independence, announces that he is about to die, since colonisation has been so successful as to become all-pervasive and invisible by the end of the twentieth century (17).²⁶⁹ His

²⁶⁹ However, the dating overall should perhaps not be taken too seriously: despite the clear reference to Césaire's birthday at the outset, the footnotes throughout the book refer to interviews that Balthazar has given up until the late 90s, suggesting that he cannot have died in 1993. While Chamoiseau does

announcement passes without notice, buried by other news items, such as that of a local opera singer who regrets not having pursued an international career in Europe.²⁷⁰ As further distractions from the impending death of the hope of independence, the novel lists a natural disaster - a tropical flood wave - which is promptly responded to by financial and practical aid from the metropolitan country and displays of the politicians' and general public's humanitarian disposition.²⁷¹ Problematically, the latter activities distract from any in depth-considerations of the causes of this disaster, which, as the narrator wryly remarks, is a result of the deforestation occasioned by 'progress' – a term that, as he adds in a footnote, translates into hotels, *béké* quarries that disembowel the slopes and provide employment (19). The question of Martinique's economic, political and social dependency should be at the forefront of debate and is inextricably linked to environmentalism, as the novel suggests through the figure of Balthazar who increasingly turns to ecological issues in his later days. Apart from the narrator those who come to share in Balthazar's final days belong to the "pays enterré", a lost past of traditional quimboiseurs, *mentôs* and story-tellers; a past incidentally characterised by a distinct lack of motorised vehicles – a fact that clearly contrasts with the current status quo, as the ratio between population and cars is 2:1.²⁷² Hence, the novel enters a self-consciously nostalgic mode when it narrates the strange assembly. In contrast to Chamoiseau's previous novels, the narrator is transformed into a 'warrior of the imagination' rather than a mere witness-scribe, since Balthazar never actually communicates with him, and he is forced to read his bodily gestures as death approaches.

seek to establish a quite defined time frame, Balthazar's symbolic or allegorical nature does seem to allow for this break in realist conventions.

²⁷⁰ Chamoiseau's implicit critique of the central place that 'cultural' concerns have begun to take in public attention after the perceived defeat of anti-colonialist and liberationist ideologies resonates with the criticisms that Terry Eagleton directs against the field of postcolonial studies that focuses on "hybridity, ethnicity and plurality" rather than the more urgent concerns of "freedom, justice, and emancipation" (qtd by Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History* 39).

²⁷¹ Compare this to Confiant's observations in an interview with Renée K. Gosson: "when there is a cyclone – and there are usually a lot of them in September – on an independent island, the next day, everyone spontaneously goes out to lift trees that are blocking roads, to repair electric wires, to clean up, etc. But not in Martinique. We wait for the French army to take care of everything." (148)

²⁷² "Je fus surpris de découvrir autant de personnes réunies sans que les abords du quartier soient encombrés de voitures-quatre-quatre BMW Clio Golf Audi, et autres merveilles pour asphalte ordinaire. [...] Je croyais côtoyer des spectres des temps anciens, fantômes d'époques invalidées, détenteurs des sagesse désappries depuis déjà longtemps" (50 ; 51). The question of cars in relation to the issue of dependency is not merely incidental: as Justin Daniel explains, the deficiency of public transport leads to the increase in the numbers of cars, which necessitates the building of yet more roads, the financing of which is guaranteed by a local tax on gas; furthermore, the tax on the import of vehicles is employed to finance local assemblies. "All of these elements form an integrated system which generates dependence and maintains it" (68).

So far, the plot and overall concerns sound not unlike those of *Solibo Magnifique*, with the focus shifted increasingly to environmental concerns and the increased importance of the narrator. However, Solibo, while being regionalist in his references, perspective and knowledge, has never left the island and lacks Balthazar's internationalism. After his unique upbringing on the island that integrates traditionalist, mythic, radical leftist, communist, anti-colonialist, formalist-poetic, aestheticist and poeticist strands of thought through the figures of Man L'Oubliée, Deborah-Nicol and Sara-Anaïs-Alicia, Balthazar turns into a revolutionary anti-colonialist independence fighter, involved in a number of – often national - liberation movements, in Indochina, Algeria, Angola and Ghana to name but a few. Balthazar is thus turned into an allegory for a history of liberation and resistance, a history that critically explores its own failures and shortcomings. Like many of Chamoiseau's previous novels, it centrally addresses the problem of Martinique's increasing economic dependency (partially covered over by the country's artificially stimulated growth in GDP), but Martinique of the 80s and 90s is here turned into a paradigmatic case that speaks to the global entrenchment of underdevelopment. As a whole, *Biblique* may therefore be read as one of the latest instalments of the 'global novel', formulating a counter-narrative of liberation and seeking to focus on the plight of the 'wretched of the earth', as well as addressing the shifts that have occurred in the world system in the last decades of the twentieth-century, which, in the current context, is perhaps the novel's most interesting dimension.

Balthazar Balthazar may be read as an allegory for the 'counter-history of liberation': Chamoiseau seeks to offer a representation of the history of national, anti-colonial resistances and internationalist alliances to imperialist capitalism in the twentieth century, while remaining firmly anchored in Martinican reality. Furthermore, in line with Dussel's re-conceptualization of the history of philosophy, dependency and world systems theory as well as earlier efforts to challenge the imperialist narrative of the supposed European origin of modernity and its civilizing mission, this is framed in a narrative of modernity from a global perspective, one that posits the crime of the slave trade and the conquest and exploitation of the Americas as foundational to the history of globalization, as well as, importantly to the counter-discourse of liberation. Hence, Bodules-Jules narrates his own birth(s) as foundational moments for establishing the history of the present: the first is an

account of his birth during the creation of the universe, notably a secular event lacking a filial/genealogical myth of origin and described in (pseudo-)scientific rather than religious terminology; his second occurs in one of the ships employed for the slave trade (“Le crime fondateur des peuples d’Amériques” (59)). The emphasis is here, as well as throughout the book, not on his individual suffering or destiny, nor on the question whether he as an individual has actually been born on a slave ship (hence the variations in the name of the ship and, of course, the chronological impossibility), but on giving a voice to the destinies of those who have been oppressed, tortured and killed.²⁷³ Importantly, there is thus an emphasis on the *unrecorded* ‘New World’ resistances to exploitation as precursors for liberationist thinking and the twentieth-century liberation movements adding thus to Dussel’s argument that focuses on *recorded* resistance: Balthazar talks about the resistances and rebellions he instigated in the plantations, his marooning, his solidarity with the Amerindians, and the importance of the “Parole”, a resistance in form of dissimulation and communicated through the tales narrated on the plantations (70).

Throughout the novel, we encounter several figures that embody a collective counter-memory of suffering, like the living mummy who accompanies the beautiful “métisse” Balthazar encounters in Bolivia. As the woman tells him, “la momie était son père, mais que c’était aussi son grand-père, et ses arrière-grands-pères qui tous avaient subi plus de fer que prévu au fond des mines d’argent” (215), where they were forced to work by the Spanish colonialists, a humanitarian crime that has been left unpunished (217). Hence, the mummy functions as a ghostly repository for eight million dead who cannot die for having been forgotten:

sa voix provenait du silence écrasé d’une charge de millions d’hommes [...] son abdomen était devenu l’unique sanctuaire qui abritait ces millions d’armes perdues, jamais vengées, jamais saluées, et jamais honorées, errantes maudites sur la conscience des hidalgos maudits qui mangèrent durant des siècles dans des assiettes d’argent (216).

²⁷³ see 69, for instance, for the story of a mutiny on board of a slave ship.

Crucially, the importance of this counter-memory of the exploitation effected throughout the history of capitalist expansion and its aftermath is also driven home explicitly by one of Balthazar's principal mentors, Man L'Oubliée, a female mentô, whose name and gender of course themselves stand for oppression – in this case, patriarchal/racial oppression of women/blacks in the narration of Martinique's mythic past.²⁷⁴ On numerous occasions, she is called out to cure what she identifies as effects of “La Malédiction”, a curse that can be bodily and mental and that is provoked by the crimes perpetrated during slavery and the officially endorsed forgetting. In one instance, an Indian boy falls mortally ill after rolling down a slope. As Man L'Oubliée reveals, this slope was used by the slave-owner for a particular brutal form of torture that involved forcing the slave into a small barrel spiked with nails and pushing the barrel down the slope. Not knowing where to demand justice, the slaves' souls still inhabit the place (476). Other places of the Martinican landscape are revealed to be similarly inhabited by the souls of those who have been brutally abused and killed, such as a hole in the ground, an “oubliette” (where slaves would be imprisoned and left to die (484)), as well as another site where a tribe of Caribs had been exterminated (510). Man L'Oubliée thus stresses the importance of acts of homage and remembrance. Having learned from her, Balthazar is aware of the existence of these places of memory around the globe later on during his life. The fact that these forgotten atrocities often have a physical effect on the bodies of the descendants symbolises Harris's recognition that there often survives a ‘gestural’ cultural memory of the body as well as Balthazar's recognition that past injustices

²⁷⁴ I have above referred in relation to Harris's novel to a certain moral relativism that displays a sexist bias. One might here also refer to *Biblique's* protagonist Balthazar, who has an impressive array of female lovers involved in various different revolutions – an allegorical re-writing of the trope of the national romance. Balthazar at the end of his life – and the novel as a whole – is very self-conscious about gender issues (Balthazar, for instance, realizes at the end of his life that he should have taken the time and effort to get to know one woman properly – a realization in line with his regret of having travelled too much). However, during a description of the various sexual practices from different cultures that he learned to appreciate during his voyages, he also lists “ce plaisir solitaire qu'offrent les femmes sans clitoris” (726). While this is admittedly only a very small passage, I find it nevertheless troubling, especially given Chamoiseau's highly self-conscious attitude towards gender and gender equality throughout the novel. One must therefore here agree with Balthazar's general assessment that he seems to have been too detached from specific local struggles, as he merely categorises these different practices in an accumulative fashion. Chancé has criticised Chamoiseau's narrative strategy of accumulation (877-8); while I would not see that as a negative feature *per se*, I think that it is in the descriptions of his voyages that this sometimes reveals itself to be a weakness – a necessary one given the novel's encyclopaedic ambitions – since a differentiation between different revolutionary leaders, cultural practices, religions, and beliefs is neglected.

affect the present in a material way: “toute injustice a des racines! et des racines qui remontent loin! Toute misère a une mémoire, toute violence a un terreau” (526). Given that these atrocities often remain insufficiently documented, Balthazar stresses the importance of imaginatively uncovering the past in the same way in which the “warrior of the imagination” feels entitled to interpret the bodily gestures and movements of the protagonist to decipher his past, thus displacing the primacy not only of the written, but also of the spoken word.

Balthazar’s early childhood and youth are dominated by the mythic battle between the forces of good and evil (his parents/Man L’Oubliée and Yvonne respectively), which hints at the potential futures for Martinique (independence versus economic dependency) and perhaps resembles more closely the moral universe of tales than that of a novel in realist mode. It is of course Yvonne who incorporates – though in a somewhat vague and abstract fashion – the threat posed by the French *assistanat* (symbolically represented through her destructive and life-threatening love for Balthazar) and, more broadly, colonialism and imperialist exploitation; Man L’Oubliée, on the other hand, is a benevolent force, living autonomously and in a somewhat mystic – or perhaps rather mythic in Michael Bell’s definition – relation to nature, possessing an encyclopaedic knowledge of the natural environment’s medicinal and nutritious qualities.

However, while Man L’Oubliée’s mythic relation to her environment continues to have an important influence on Balthazar throughout his life, Balthazar clearly enters a more historical stage once he is tutored by Déborah-Nicol sometime during the 1930s. Déborah-Nicol, a woman dressed as a man in order to be able to fulfil her political vocation in a male-dominated society, is a political activist who organises labour strikes, negotiates new work contracts, protests against the slavery-like conditions on the plantations, seeks to raise peoples’ consciousness of the nature of their exploitation, founds the local communist cell, and is untiring in her rage against colonialism (a rage that is firstly regionalist, then internationalist, in scope (383)). For her time, she is a particularly prescient character, refusing to adhere to the rules imposed by the French Communist Party, and criticising the latter’s lack of interest in the question of colonialism. As Burton remarks in his chapter on socialism and communism in Martinique between 1900 and 1940, “[l]’universalisme socialiste

prend la relève de l'universalisme jacobin : le socialisme martiniquais est, dès ses origines, frappé d'exteriorité, décentré par sa forte polarisation sur la classe ouvrière française et ses organisations. Loin de contester la logique assimilationniste, les socialistes martiniquais en sont les plus farouches partisans" (Burton, *La famille coloniale* 116). As the political historian Miles adds, "administrative assimilation was pursued not only from a classical French Revolutionary framework but also from an internationalist one: namely, the solidarity of workers and the Communist revolutionary struggle. It was, after all, as a member of the French Communist Party that Aimé Césaire labored for departmentalisation and the rights of the working classes" ("Fifty Years" 48). Césaire, who had initially held high hopes for the assimilation into the French state and had hoped that it would not mean cultural assimilation, broke with the Communist party in the mid fifties "on the grounds that 'Marxism and communism [ought to be] at the service of black peoples, and not black peoples at the service of Marxism and communism" (ibid 49). In contrast, the fictional character Déborah-Nicol already employs "un vocabulaire négro-politique" (380) a long time before Césaire's rejection of the Communist party; her internationalism is not Euro-centric, but focuses on the question of colonial exploitation that, as she argues, has now also directed itself inward towards Europe with the rise of Nazi Germany (611). Furthermore, as an avid reader of Marx, Engels and Lenin, it is not surprising that she should link colonialism and imperialism explicitly to "the domination of capital" (536). "L'occident", she argues, "c'est surtout une intention pointue comme une flèche, aiguisée comme un sabre, une intention productiviste, une soif de rentabiliser le monde, la terre, le vent, les feuilles, les animaux, les ancêtres, une force d'exploitation qui n'a pas de limites et qui ne peut supporter ceux qui rêvent avec les bisons, qui honorent le soleil" (385). Furthermore, like Man L'Oubliée and the mummy, she stresses the importance of a counter-memory of oppression, and assembles testimonies of massacres perpetrated by the police and plantation owners, who could "supprimer des jours dans les calendriers, effacer le détail d'une journée, jeter le doute dans les mémoires et installer des vérités divines" (540)). She leaves them with a notary to create the Martinican annals of oppression.

Yet, Balthazar's upbringing would not be complete with the influence of

Anaïs-Alicia, the daughter of Sarah, as Balthazar grows up in a field of two opposing, but complementary and inextricable tendencies (430; 555). Sarah - and later her daughter, who are in fact “le même être” (402) - lives in a world of Borgesian mirrors, in which another world of angels and zombies becomes visible to her, a world of the imagination that impacts on real life. The only photo of Sarah in existence shows her reflection in the mirror, unable to represent her directly, as if part of Martinican reality was unable to be captured by the naturalistic means of a camera, thus perhaps suggesting the anachronism of (European) realism (551). Sarah-Anaïs-Alicia, as Balthazar calls her, possesses an immense, encyclopaedic knowledge - again, one might see this as a clear reference to the encyclopaedic ambitions of the baroque ‘total novel’ (of which both *Biblique* and *Terra Nostra* are examples) - but she is inept at living in the real world. However, her access to the world of the imagination and the beyond through the mirrors renders her also more capable of inhabiting forgotten languages and cultures and thus rescuing them from oblivion (388), as well as of imagining the unrecorded resistances and heroisms of past battles. While Déborah-Nicol talks about the horror of the slave ships, for instance, she imagines them as a moment of rebirth (400). If Déborah-Nicol incorporates a Marxist-materialist approach, Sarah-Anaïs-Alicia might be said to incorporate a more abstractly idealist, baroque and poeticist response to reality, which, while less moralistic and thus for instance able to recognise St. Perse’s Caribbeanness to which Déborah-Nicol is blinded by her anti-colonialist ‘rage’, can at times also become dangerously amoral, as exemplified in her appraisal of the beauty of perfection in weapons or her compassion with Stalin’s solitude. Yet, Balthazar’s intellectual development testifies to the necessity of that other strand of thought in the novel’s universe. From Anaïs-Alicia, he learns to dream and to use his imagination in order to further and to consolidate his understanding (429). Thus he is able to criticise a ‘Western’ – or rather, a Eurocentric – narrative more thoroughly than Déborah-Nicol, being able to point out to her that her library “était purement occidentale” and that she was employing and battling with purely ‘Western’ concepts and ideas, while also being able to posit the idea that there exists “une face de lumière” in the ‘West’. Both Sarah and Anaïs-Alicia have thus valuable lessons to teach to Balthazar and Déborah-Nicol. Sarah, the latter believes, is “notre point de départ, notre paradis perdu [...]”

notre vieil impossible” (580). In order to find her missing body, which has disappeared from her tomb, the two try to locate a refuge in the world that would provide a refuge from its cruelties and injustices. After a fruitless searching of the maps of the world and encyclopaedias to find “une présence humaine pour le moins digne des éternités d’une personne comme Sarah” (581), Balthazar finally suggests that they would have to invent this ideal world before trying to locate it, an inversion typical of the poeticist strand of Caribbean writing (581). The novel thus overall advocates a rejection of the boundaries between naturalism/realism/historicism and poeticism/idealism on the other hand, which would work as an impediment to the creation of a counter-memory. As Balthazar advises his audience at the end of his life, “moquez-vous des historiens coloniaux, pissez sur leurs documents [...] Inventez-vous cette mémoire fondatrice, que l’on jardine en soi-même et qui dicte son principe d’ouverture aux puissances de ce monde!” (279)

During his revolutionary activism in struggles around the globe, Balthazar, it is suggested by the novel, combines the lessons by his different mentors to respond to the reality of imperialist oppression. Upon his return to Martinique, Balthazar as an experienced anti-colonialist fighter has no difficulty in identifying the processes by which Martinique is transformed into a dependent periphery - a “colony” of France as he calls it – showing, like many left and Marxists thinkers before him, a clear awareness of the links between colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. Balthazar therefore resolutely rejects the benefits of the French welfare state, as well as imported goods:

Il ne se rendait dans aucun supermarché. N’achetait aucune boisson ni manger importé. Vivait à l’ancienne comme dans une case des années vingt. Deux-trois assistantes sociales vinrent lui proposer quatorze allocations, et une banque alimentaire lui fait expédier quelques sachets de riz et une tablette de chocolat. [...] Le quartier découvrit ainsi ce Martiniquais qui refusait l’assistanat pour organiser sur son brin de terrain une autosuffisance disparue des souvenirs (767-8).

It bears recalling here that one of the basic tenets of dependency and world systems theory is that the development of underdevelopment is an intrinsic feature of the capitalist world system that cannot be overcome by the system itself; capitalism necessitates the underdevelopment of the peripheries in order to secure the increase of profit.²⁷⁵ As Justin Daniel has observed, in the case of Martinique the “Welfare State has paradoxically served as an impediment to economic development in the French Antilles” (63). While Martinique has, over the last five decades of the twentieth century, experienced an annual increase in the Gross Domestic Product that was particularly high and even during the 70s, 80s and the beginning of the 90s higher than that of France and the developed countries (Daniel 62), this only masks its increasing peripheralisation, as growth “is paradoxically derived from a considerable decline of the apparatus of production, which has experienced a downfall of traditional economic activities, such as sugar, rum and even bananas” (Daniel 63). As Daniel explains, “the development of some activities located primarily in the tertiary sector can be explained by the high levels of public investment or monetary transfers, while the primary sector is oriented towards exports and the second remains somewhat weak (63).”²⁷⁶ In other words, while Martinicans are comparatively well off by Caribbean standards, the island is transformed into a periphery of the world system by the economic suffocation of its primary and secondary sectors through public investment.

²⁷⁵ See for instance Laclau’s concise theoretical explanation why this must be so: “The process of capital accumulation – which is the fundamental motor force of the ensemble of the capitalist system – depends on the rate of profit. Now the rate of profit is in its turn determined by the rate of surplus-value and the organic composition of capital. A rise in the organic composition of capital is a condition for capitalist expansion, since technological progress is what permits the reconstitution of the reserve army of labour and the maintenance of a labour of a low level of wages. But unless a rise in the organic composition of capital is linked to a more than proportional increase in the rate of surplus value, it will necessarily produce a decline in the rate of profit. This tendency is partially compensated by capital movements from industries with a high organic composition to those with a low organic composition: from this there emerges an average rate of profit which is always higher in value terms than the corresponding rate of profit in the technologically more advanced industries. Nevertheless, since a growing augmentation in the organic composition of capital is inherent in capitalist expansion, in the long term there can only be a permanent tendency for the rate of profit to decline. [...] what seems to be the key to a sustained process of accumulation is the expansion, in any sector of the system, of productive units in which either low technology or super-exploitation of labour makes it possible to counteract the depressive effect on the rate of profit of the increasing organic composition of capital in the dynamic or advanced industries. Now the enterprises of the peripheral areas are in an ideal position to play this role (38).”

²⁷⁶ One might add here that it is of course no coincidence that these developments are also reproduced on a world scale: by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the world system entered into crisis “with a progressive decline in the level of productive investment, and the growth of a mass of excess financial capital which has not ceased to increase ever since” (Amin 98).

On his return to Martinique (roughly in the 70s), what Balthazar experiences could be seen as the last death throes of a local economy: the strikes of the early 70s, during which colonialism finally shows its ugly face through the violent repression by hands of the CRS (777). As time passes, these upheavals give way to an outwardly calmer situation that in fact only bespeaks the successful entrenchment of dependency: “Les derniers usines avaient fermé. La plupart des champs mirent à vivoter sous des torrents de subventions” (771). As Burton writes, by the mid-seventies, “the French West Indian departments were, so to speak, all superstructure and no base, by virtue of the funds which, for scarcely disinterested reasons, France continued to pour into them, totally impoverished when measured by standards of what they actually produced” (“The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe” 4).²⁷⁷ As a by-product of this development, unemployment rates rose by a worrying degree, despite – in the case of Martinique - a tripling of the number on (French) government payroll in the sixties and seventies (currently, unemployment rates are over 30 % (Daniel 63)). As Samir Amin explains when commenting on the global rise of unemployment since the seventies: “The rise of unemployment over the past twenty-five years has been produced not by the market, but by the strategies of capital. [...] Unemployment is desired by the capitalist state as a necessary means to destroy the achievements of the workers’ movements (15; 16).” And indeed, for Balthazar, unemployment is yet another form of oppression, similar in kind to that effected by colonial and imperial exploitation (see 808).

As in his other novels with a more exclusively local focus, Chamoiseau here also explores the psychological impoverishment wreaked by the structural inequality. The later parts of the novel are dominated by his efforts to address the current drug problems that affect Martinique, a problem driven home by the protagonist’s own niece’s addiction to crack and cocaine. As he sees it, “[l]e problème c’est que [ces] enfants sont vides, assistés dans un pays assisté, perfusionnés dans un pays sous perfusion, dépourvus de rêves dans un pays qui ne rêve plus! (789)” Certainly, in a

²⁷⁷ It might here be useful to quote briefly just some of the statistics that testify to this development. In 1963, there were still 42 sugar cane processing and rum distilleries in existence, which employed in total 14000 workers; by 1980, only 2 factories and 18 distilleries are left (production has dropped by four fifths), which employ 3000 workers; in 1961, Martinican exports covered 77% of French imports, a percentage that has dropped to 15% by 1980 (Miles, “Mitterand in the Caribbean” 64).

novel that places such a strong emphasis on the necessity to imagine - to dream – a better future, this particular impoverishment must inevitably have devastating consequences (symbolised in the novel by the death of Balthazar). One might recall here that one of the first times “dreaming” is mentioned in a positive, revolutionary context is when we read about Déborah-Nicol’s early career as a school teacher, when she would sing the International with her students and would quote Lenin: “Il faut rêver! Et travailler consciemment à la réalisation de ses rêves! (376).” Later on, Balthazar discovers the importance of dreaming to a better understanding of the past and, in particular, to the deconstruction of a Eurocentric construction of knowledge. Finally, dreaming also plays a central role in Deborah-Nicol and his construction of the utopian “Lieux”, in their imagining of a more just alternative way of life. In other words, it seems that the problem at the end of the twentieth century is precisely the seeming exhaustion of socialism, the apparent ‘end of history’ heralded by the end of the Cold War.

For Chamoiseau – and for Balthazar – Martinique’s situation is inextricably inscribed in the larger developments of the world system. Significantly, Balthazar’s field of vision has always been global in perspective, starting during his lessons with Déborah-Nicol. Further shaped by his experiences around the globe, he continues to integrate the island in a larger global perspective after his return to the island. To those representative of the legal system who seek to criminalize his actions he replies: “Je vous connais car je vous ai vus au Congo, en Algérie, à Grenade [...] Je connais cette engeance qui transforme les gestes de liberté en délits de basse-courts” (772-3). His awareness of the entrenchment of colonialism in Martinique therefore goes hand in hand with his increasing awareness of the failures of the independence struggles elsewhere, which have turned into “des enfers de violences, de massacres et de tueries” (820). The failure of Martinique to liberate itself from its entrenched dependency thus for him in some sense becomes symptomatic of larger crisis in the world system that is based on the defeat of the independence struggles and the entrenchment of global and social inequality. The following passage is worth quoting in full since it offers Balthazar’s pessimistic assessment of the current state of affairs:

Nul coin de terre ne connaissait de paix. Toujours le champs de forces. Toujours des peuples seuls contre des ennemis herculéens. Il voyait grandir la puissance mafieuse des medias. Il voyait la connaissance scientifique se transformer en arme. Il voyait les technologies neuves se concentrer en des mains prédatrices. Il devinait un peu partout des organisations sans visage et sans âme, sans drapeau et sans dieu, qui fructifiaient dans le brouillard des hautes finances. De nouveau conquérants déployaient leurs griffes cybernétiques dans les espaces du monde....Ils proliféraient puis se concentraient comme des poulpes. Ils traversaient les peuples comme des hordes barbares et les asservissaient sans même qu'on les perçoive ou qu'on sache où tirer. Ils traversaient les esprits, habitaient les envies, et dominaient non plus des nations ou des races, mais des centaines de milliers de personnes consommant leur produit... (808-809)

The passage shows a clear intellectual affiliation to dependency and world systems theory. We might compare it to Samir Amin's *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* (originally published in individual essays in French during the 1990s), where Amin offers an analysis of the symptoms described by Balthazar from a political economist's point of view. As suggested by Balthazar, Amin sees war, oppression, unemployment and poverty as integral and constitutive parts of the capitalist world system; problems that cannot be overcome by a liberalisation of the market that facilitate the strategies of capital. Furthermore, in *Capitalism*, Amin has identified five monopolies, on which the current global power of the economic centres is based: a technological monopoly; the financial control of financial worldwide markets; the monopolistic access to the planet's natural resources; media and communication monopolies; the monopolies over weapons of mass destruction (4-5). In the above passage, Chamoiseau similarly mentions the monopolies in technology (that are transformed into weapons – presumably both literally and metaphorically) and the media (this perhaps presupposes a broader perspective, since in Martinique, the political decentralisation that has occurred since the 80s, and the concurrent localisation of the media, might give the surface impression of the opposite trend). As suggested in the passage, the financial resources appear totally disconnected from

local/national control in the hands of international co-operations; the central paradox of the current state of affairs is that while the “[c]entres of gravity of the economic forces commanding accumulation have shifted outside of the frontiers of individual states [...] there is no political, social, ideological and cultural framework at world level that can give coherence to the overall management of the system” and Amin therefore urges the future “construction of a global political system which is not in the service of a global market” (xi; 6). Lastly, while not mentioned in the above passage, the monopoly over natural resources is of course a central concern of the novel, and is focussed in the issue surrounding the access to water. Water, Balthazar explains to the disaffected, drug-addicted youths when back in Martinique, is bought by the rich and will become inaccessible to the masses, and he therefore proclaims the necessity to write the “Droits universel de l’eau” (235), the enforcement of which would necessitate precisely the existence of a global political system as described by Amin. Balthazar becomes a committed ecologist on his return, seeking to defend the forests, beaches and ecosystems, particularly threatened by the effects of mass tourism that globally took off in the 70s and 80s (772). Eco-activism, for Chamoiseau and Balthazar, is thus inextricably linked to the fight for social justice and equality, not only because the strategies of capital do not act in accordance with long-term considerations, but also because ecological issues most crucially affect the most impoverished sectors around the globe.²⁷⁸

The critic Watts – who offers some illuminating comments on gender and ecology in the novel - has read the novel as staging a tension between the dynamics of nomadism and nationalism, as Chamoiseau has supposedly become more interested in the “nomadic” and renounced his earlier more localist or nativist stance (Watts 897). *Biblique* is certainly more internationalist in perspective than his earlier works, but I would argue that Balthazar Balthazar is no nomad; he is an internationalist, anti-

²⁷⁸Chamoiseau is himself a member of ASSAUPMAR and MODEMAS. Furthermore, in 2000, he became one of the signatories of the “Manifeste pour un projet global” that proposes heavy investment in the area to transform it into a green zone that would produce high quality organic foods for the upper end of the international market (see Eric Prieto, “The Uses of Landscape” 244). For a more detailed exploration of the issue of ecology, see Watts. With regards to the mystic relation to water that predominates in the novel, Watts has some very valid reservations: “Of course, this occasionally spiritually-charged environmentalism runs the risk of simplifying complex geo-political problems” (905).

colonial resistance fighter who often chooses to act on a national level, and always in defence of the “wretched of the earth”. In Watts’s reading, the novel “pits the alternatives of postcolonial errancy and neo-Jacobin investment in nation against each other [...] through the trajectory of the life of the protagonist” (899); a later pronouncement reveals the implicit set of values he attaches to these: “It is in this turn to ecology and, in particular, Bibidji’s pronouncements on the importance of water that the tension between fixity and displacement, between nationalism and nomadism, becomes clear” (900). The novel indeed spans the two poles of national/local politics and international solidarity (poles that are in a complementary and dialectical relationship), but Watt attaches to them values that clearly stem from a poststructuralist vocabulary that seems misplaced in this context: fixedness/nationalism is opposed to displacement, nomadism and fluidity. One may repeat here one of the most memorable passages from *Biblique*, in which Balthazar at the end of his life laments not the fact that he has been too ‘fixed’ in his position, but rather that he has not identified closely enough with specific local stances: “Je n’ai pas été assez palestinien en Israel. Pas assez juif en Allemagne. Pas assez zapatiste au Mexique. Pas assez nègre en Afrique du Sud. Pas assez musulman en Europe. Pas assez haïtien à Saint-Domingue. [...] Pas assez dominicain en Guadeloupe. [...] Pas assez chômeur dans cette merde libérale. Pas assez femme un peu partout” (808). This quote also clearly demonstrates that he sees a continuity between imperialist, racist, class and gender oppression on the one hand, the illegal migrations from the poorer to the richer countries and the crushing of the work force through widespread unemployment in the neoliberal stage of capitalism on the other. Balthazar’s national/local involvements do not run in contrast to his “nomadic” life, but are rather inserted into a globally conceived framework of imperialist capitalist modernity to which his international solidarities seek to oppose themselves. In this context, then, Watts’s employment of Hardt and Negri’s concepts of *Empire* and *Counter-Empire* seems ill-advised. One must object to the concept of “Empire” itself, since the latter presupposes the obsolescence of terms such as imperialism for our understanding of capitalism. Their rejection of ‘imperialism’ is clearly premature, as tragically confirmed by the post 9/11 resurgence of imperialism, US hegemony and the so-called

‘war on terror’.²⁷⁹ To apply the concept of *Empire* to *Biblique* is a category mistake: Balthazar, as an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist resistance fighter who displays radical solidarity towards those oppressed by colonialism and who is in many ways a homage to a long list of intellectual revolutionaries such as Guevara, Fanon, Bishop and many others, is certainly very clear about what he is fighting against, namely colonial/imperial oppression. Even during the 80s and 90s, he does not doubt the applicability of the term, while he struggles with the fact that colonialism has become more ‘invisible’. “Empire” is clearly a term borrowed from an intellectual discourse to which *Biblique* does not belong.

Through his employment of terms such as nomadism and Empire, Watts seeks to read the novel in relation to the larger tendencies within the field of postcolonialism, and sees the work as reflecting the concern with the “nomadic” and the scepticism of national and identitarian projects in the field of francophone postcolonial studies (as evidence for which he cites the assessment offered by two volumes of *Yale French Studies* in 1993 appropriately entitled *Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadism*). However, since the publication of his article in 2003, two other volumes were published in an effort to assess the directions of the field that have changed since the beginning of the 1990s: *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2003) and *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies* (2005). Especially the former reflects the recent changes that Neil Lazarus has observed more broadly in the field of Postcolonial Studies: Dash, for instance, renounces the aversion to “national and regional constructs and the consequent desire to privilege all thought that apparently promotes hybrid identities and interstitial spaces” that characterises postcolonial studies; Stafford, in an article on Fanon, evokes the contemporary rise of Fascism and the return of Imperialism – a phenomenon with which postcolonial theory must engage - and evokes Lazarus’s notion of the necessity of a “counter-narrative of

²⁷⁹As Lazarus and Varma write: “In these contexts, and in the absence of a serious commitment to international solidarity along class lines and a coherent analysis of what exactly is being opposed, Hardt and Negri’s optimistic declarations seem wildly and implausibly overstated. Their thesis runs counter to the work of theorists of uneven development in the ‘Third World’, who point to the rapidly escalating *inequalities* in the ‘globalised’ world order. There is in *Empire*, as Parry has pointed out, a ‘spectacular failure to address the substantive and experiential situations of the settled populations of the nation-states of Asia, Africa and Latin America’” (Lazarus and Varma, 24).

liberation” (176). One might argue that the field of Francophone postcolonial studies has undergone a change, perhaps partly in response to the continued insistence of many postcolonial writers – such as Chamoiseau – on the importance of issues such as anti-colonial struggle, national/local identity and political and economic emancipation. The employment of ‘fashionable’ terms such as nomadism and Empire is thus already anachronistic when applied to *Biblique*.

On the level of plot, *Biblique* seems to offer no resolution to, or way out of, the current situation, but instead ends on a quite pessimistic, almost defeatist note, despite the apparent victory of childless and seemingly sterile Balthazar against Yvonne. Both Chancé and Watts have criticised the end of the novel for its easy resolution into an epic battle between good (Man L’Oubliée) and evil (Yvonne) of a complex, more ‘baroque’ worldview. While not disagreeing with their critical assessment of the ending, the mythic resolution of a more complex historical situation is also part of the point: Balthazar’s trajectory had originated in myth (his youth is spent in the seemingly enchanted forests of Martinique with Man L’Oubliée and dominated by an epic battle against the forces of evil), and progressed into the realm of history and politics. However, his old age is marked by defeat, increasing isolation and retreat from politics, as Yvonne takes hold of his life (806). The reader will not fail to notice that the final epic battle marks a retreat from those political, social and economic issues that had occupied Balthazar’s mind back into the realm of myth, which brings back to mind the negatively escapist dimension of Sarah-Anaïs-Alicia’s life in the mirrors. Do we need to read this as the defeat of anti-colonialism and socialism in the current ‘global moment’ marked by neo-liberalism? While the ending does not offer any solution – certainly none as concrete as that offered by *Texaco* – *Biblique* nevertheless contributes in important ways to our rethinking of the contemporary moment. As I have already discussed in chapter 3, the novel re-asserts the importance of the author, in particular the importance of the imaginative writer in re-thinking the past. More concretely, this means – in the case of *Biblique* – a re-assertion of the importance of anti-colonial liberation movements and the thinkers and revolutionaries it produced; hence, the centrality of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara – and more indirectly, the Césaire of *Discours sur le colonialisme* – as cardinal reference points for the hero and the mentioning of Ho Chi

Minh, Nkrumah, Lumumba and many others.²⁸⁰ It means, as outlined above, a re-thinking of the history of capitalist modernity and its critiques. The author is word-scratcher no longer, which does not imply that he has given up his function of witnessing to the oppression of peoples around the globe, but a re-valorisation of the role an engaged post-colonial critic from the “periphery” can play in transforming our understanding of globalization, both in its negative aspects of economic imperialism and capitalist underdevelopment, as well as in its positive potentials that a global universalism based on solidarity movements might possess. The narrator becomes here the author of a “prophetic vision of the past” (73) that Glissant had already referred to, a witnessing to a collective memory “qui nous habitait tous dans toutes les Amériques” (74).

Mapping Regional Culture: the Geographies of Postmodernism, Marvellous Realism and the Baroque

The contributions of the ‘global novel’ to a planetary conceptualisation of modernity are thus significant: in the seventies, Fuentes’s novel urges us to re-evaluate the ‘first’ modernity and to rediscover its repressed liberationist thinking and, in terms of a literary geography, forces us to re-consider the links between primitivism, conceptions of Mexico and magical realism, between European and Latin American literary traditions. In the eighties, Harris’s novel implicitly posits that utopian, poeticist thinking must from now on be global in scope if it wants to respond to today’s world; despite seeking to transcend dependency-related modes of thinking imaginatively, his theoretical comments on the geographies of postmodernism clearly – and somewhat paradoxically – re-inscribe his own poeticist response within a global context marked by inequalities. In other words, even if a Harrisian poeticism seeks to transcend the material conditions of dependency, this utopian response is one that self-consciously emerges from this very context. As I argued in chapter 4, Harris’s imaginative response to global capitalism risks

²⁸⁰ In *Discours*, Césaire displays a similarly internationalist perspective: “Et aujourd’hui il se trouve que se ne sont pas seulement les masses européennes qui incriminent, mais que l’acte d’accusation est proféré sur le plan mondial par des dizaines et des dizaines de millions d’hommes qui, du fond de l’esclavage, s’érigent en juges. On peut tuer en Indochine, torturer à Madagascar, emprisonner en Afrique Noire, sévir aux Antilles. Les colonisés savent désormais qu’ils ont sur les colonialistes une avantage. Ils savent que leurs ‘maîtres’ provisoires mentent.” (8)

becoming another version of anti-communism, and one might say that the dangers potentially inherent in his thinking are incorporated in Chamoiseau's Sarah-Anaïs-Alicia. Chamoiseau's novel is particularly challenging, given its closeness to the current moment: it urges us to take into account the *unrecorded* resistances in our re-writing of the history of globalization; to integrate poeticist and realist strands of thought into global thinking; and finally, to recognize the centrality of the history of anti-colonial and communist struggles throughout the twentieth century for an adequate understanding of the current 'global moment'.

Harris's observations on the geography of a 'tilted vision', and his reservations about the term 'postmodernism', combined with Chamoiseau's insistence on the importance of anti-colonialist and communist resistance struggles and Fuentes's insights regarding the relation between primitivism and magical realism, are particularly consequential if one wants to think about a regional, literary geography. The three novels I have examined could be considered to form part of two regional, interrelated genres: that of magical/marvellous realism and/or the baroque. *Terra Nostra* has been examined mainly in relation to the latter category – in particular in relation to the regional phenomenon of the 'total novel';²⁸¹ Harris's fiction, while baroque in its doubling devices, has generally been associated with a 'shamanistic' marvellous realism (see chapter 4); *Biblique*, finally, is certainly baroque in a number of ways (especially formally), but ideologically shows more affiliations with Alexis's definition of marvellous realism as a regional branch of social realism.²⁸²

²⁸¹ See Sang-Kee Song, "La sombra precolombina en el ethos barroco en las obras de Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz y Rufino Tamayo" (2001); M Anderson, "A Reappraisal of the 'Total' Novel: Totality and Communicative Systems in Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*" (2003); Abeyta (2006). Rejecting the label of postmodernism in the Latin American context, Michael Abeyta argues that "[m]any postmodernist readings reduce the specificity of Borgesian, baroque, and syncretic Latin American modes of thinking and expression within a fundamentally Anglo-European, modernist-postmodernist, or 'late capitalist' theoretical frame. Several of the characteristics [...] associate[d] with postmodernism, in fact, pertain to the neobaroque as conceived by Latin American writers since at least the 1940s: in particular, the novel's openness, indeterminacy, intertextuality, temporal and spatial distortions, and so on" (12). In line with Carpentier's/Glissant's assessment of the baroque's relation to imperialism, he argues that the neo-baroque must be read "as an art of resistance to capitalist modernity" (14).

²⁸² Chancé concedes that while *Biblique* is formally baroque, citing "le mélange des styles, la satire et la parodie d'interviews, de discours publics et médiatisés [...] la manifestation du merveilleux et la matière vivante d'une oeuvre en train de se fabriquer" (886), it is not conceptually so, since its ideological, moral and epistemological universe is not particularly ambivalent. Indeed, the novel shares certain baroque characteristics, but clearly lacks others: while it does not display an "interpretative multiplicity" (Zavala 174), it does project itself towards the future (Carpentier, "L'éternel retour" 30) and it does possess a style that "deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) its own possibilities, and that borders on self-caricature" (Borges, qtd by Lambert 4) – one might here think of Sarah who is pregnant with 156 babies – despite the novel's serious political undercurrent.

If one seeks to place them into an international framework, one could easily imagine them being labelled either 'modernist' or 'postmodernist', although I would here resist employing the latter term for reasons outlined in the previous chapter. One might add to these that while postmodernism emerges in advanced capitalist societies as a product of the reification of social codes and relations, modernism might be said to emerge in conditions of unevenly developed societies that produce the felt dislocations between traditional and modernized elements of society, dislocations often expressed as different "temporalities".²⁸³ It seems more historically accurate and theoretically useful to describe these novels as 'modernist', although one might here want to introduce the differentiation between 'peripheral' – or 'Third World' – and 'central' modernisms that I have referred to throughout the thesis.

In a polemical article first published in 1990, Larsen critiques Jameson's theory regarding 'Third World' texts and Said's related argument (that presents the marginal as "epistemologically privileged") as continuing the myth of "spontaneism", thus disqualifying conscious political decisions, as well as implying "a tacit abandonment of conscious and scientific revolutionary strategy and organisation" (120-9). He therefore sees such a theory as unable to break out of a 'left postmodernism' and not fundamentally at odds with Spivak's – typically 'pomo-postcolonial' – advocacy of a strategic essentialism. Yet, I would nevertheless argue for retaining a geo-political notion of difference. Recalling the history of twentieth century anti-colonial and communist struggles against

Chancé therefore situates Chamoiseau in relation to Alexis, who employs "un réalisme qui se fait souvent merveilleux, dans un contexte politique assez clair: la dénonciation du néocolonialisme aux Antilles françaises" (871). Indeed, *Biblique* more readily fits into the definition of magical realism, especially if we take Aléxis's definition of its objectives.

²⁸³ Theo D'Haen seeks to define the relation between the two categories, and traces their historical emergence: while both terms have international origins, in the period during which they acquired their current meaning, "postmodernism" was used to refer to North American literature and "magical realism" to that of South America (192); as he points out, it is only since the 1980s that both terms have begun to be geographically more widely applied. D'Haen's argument hinges on a definition of postmodernism as an umbrella international literary movement, of which magical realism would be the most "cutting edge" strand (201), due to its inherent ex-centricity "in the sense of speaking from the margin" (194). His adoption of a hierarchal model to comment on the relation between postmodernism and magical realism (umbrella versus local strand) produces a misrepresentation of their relation, when he argues that the latter "appropriat[e] the technique of the "centr"-al line and then us[e] these, not [...] to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this "reality" depends upon" (195). While postmodernism has undoubtedly had wide international repercussions and is certainly adapted, adopted and questioned by many peripheral writers in the way he describes, this is only partly true, since many of the so-called post-modernist features might also be related to the long tradition of the baroque or of the marvellous real and are thus not simply appropriated, but can rather be related to certain historical conditions that have thrown Eurocentric universalism into question long before the contemporary postmodernist moment.

capitalism/imperialism and its relation to the texts produced by the 'Novelists International' would enable us to retain Jameson's notion of the difference of the 'Third World' text to adapt a theory of aesthetics to the structural inequalities engendered by capitalism, while avoiding the trap signposted by Larsen. As I mentioned in the introduction, the merit of Denning's proposal to consider novels such as these as part of the 'Novelists International' is that it makes explicit the ideological/political dimension that is implicit in a category such as 'Third World literature', which as Gugelberger has pointed out, is not – or not only – a geographical term, but also a political one, since not all writers from 'Third World' are necessarily producing texts defined by an effort to 'de-colonize the mind' to paraphrase Ngugi, and to take on the plight of the 'wretched of the earth' as Fanon urges us ("Decolonizing the canon"). Geography and position within the world system matter, and clearly shape culture. Nevertheless, this relation is not absolute; as we have seen, anticolonialist and anti-capitalist movements have had a strong impact on strands of European literature, and one can conceivably compose a global canon that bridges the centre-periphery divide. Furthermore, one might argue that a writer like Harris – despite his refusal to be labelled a postmodernist – diverges little from a postmodernist frame of thought and has therefore been central to the field of Postcolonial Studies in the nineties. Not all routes to postmodernism lead through French poststructuralism (Larsen, "Postmodernism and Imperialism" 124), nor do they all lead through the central economies.

- Conclusion -

Regional literary studies and (Global) Comparativism

The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated. [...] if imperialist culture has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of *culture*.

Amilcar Cabral, speech delivered in 1970 (“National Liberation and Culture” 41; 43)

[A] small percentage of elites in the Third World is being enriched while millions are being pauperized. Indeed, we in the Third World get more than our fair share of the cultural detritus that globalism spawns. The detritus from the first globalism was ethnocide, slavery and racism; while that of the second flings at us, hourly, homogenized fragments of so-called “information,” bombarding both our conscious and unconscious minds with surfeit trivia.

Jan Carew (2006, “Heirs of All Time” 18).

As we have seen throughout the thesis, for Chamoiseau, Harris and Fuentes, the act of writing involves a struggle over representation; a struggle against traditional forms, against mis-representation, against the cultural legacies of imperialism and against neo-imperialist oppression that manifests itself also in the cultural realm. Like Glissant and many other writers and thinkers from the Expanded Caribbean, all three emphasise the importance of transforming the collective and the individual imagination to enable the alteration of the current face of the world. As argued in the last chapter, all three hold on in some form to the notion of a ‘totality’, which, as Fuentes suggests, seeks to counteract the current overload of information that results, paradoxically, in fragmentation. While thanks to the proliferation of information we might *think* ourselves informed – ‘information’ that comes without any effort of our own – we have never felt as incomplete, lonely and starved for information (*Geografía* 12). It is in this context that Fuentes evokes the role of the imagination and literature:

Hay información, hay datos, hay tópicos, hay imágenes asociados a la violencia o al placer, al terrorismo o a la vacación, e incluso al terrorismo de las vacaciones o a las vacaciones del terrorismo. En cambio, hay poca

imaginación. Los datos y las imágenes se suceden, abundantes, repetitivos, sin estructura ni permanencia. Sin embargo, ¿qué es la imaginación sino la transformación de la experiencia en conocimiento? [...] ¿Puede la literatura oponerse, quizás a sabiendas de su fracaso, al proceso de des-historización y des-socialización del mundo en el que vivimos? (ibid 14; 16)

As I have argued in chapter one, culture is what lies between the private and the political and it is in the realm of culture that the 'habits of subalternity' can be combated most successfully. One might thus answer Fuentes's question by referring to the global vision that the three authors' novels seek to provide. Harris's *Carnival* asks us to recognise the global reality of uneven development, which inevitably connects peoples' lives at the centre and at the periphery. Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* challenges Eurocentric versions of modernity and forces us to recognize the pre-history of globalization; his later novel *La frontera de cristal* strongly and insistently evokes the necessity for the revival of a socialist counter-narrative to the overarching frame provided by Leonardo Barroso, the arch-capitalist. Chamoiseau's *Biblique des derniers gestes*, finally, offers a counter-narrative of liberation that revalorises the achievements of early twentieth century Communism and the mid-twentieth century liberation movements.

However, as I have argued throughout the thesis, Harris's withdrawal into the realm of archetypes and 'universal consciousness' – the realm of 'culture' privileged over the realm of politics and history - *at the expense of* confronting and reconstructing history and subjectivity effectively weakens his critique, especially in the political and economic context of the last quarter of the twentieth century. While both Fuentes and Chamoiseau reject a *particular* version of historical narrative (i.e. Eurocentric and imperialist History) and a *particular* version of realist representation, Harris is more sweeping in his judgements which in practice dangerously erodes the positional difference between his own writing and that of a postmodernism that is easily co-opted by neo-liberalism and 'multi-culturalist' rhetoric. Fuentes's and Chamoiseau's works are often characterised by a strident emphasis on the need to historicise and a close focus on specific instances of oppression and exploitation that are represented as 'antagonistic' rather than merely 'agonistic'; they are thus at odds with mainstream Euro-American academic thought during the nineties. Both reject *mis*-representation, not (realist and/or political)

representation as such; both reject exclusivist nationalism, but do not attribute an essential value to 'hybridity'; both advocate the necessity of conceiving of a genuinely 'national' culture as the outcome of particular class struggles.

As we have seen, Harris's rise to prominence in the field of Postcolonial Studies was to a large extent due to his tendency towards abstraction, his blanket rejection of realism/history and his emphasis on the deconstruction of 'binaristic', antagonistic thinking. However, as the postmodernist/poststructuralist character of this field has come increasingly under fire, we also need to re-think the role of Postcolonial Studies as the 'new comparativism'. While, on the one hand, the development of the field was, as we have seen, in line with broader intellectual developments prompted by drastic changes in the world system, it also reflects a problem between Area Studies and Postcolonial Studies. In the latter field, selected writers (predominantly from the Anglophone Caribbean and matching academic preoccupations) achieved prominence to the exclusion of others, with the damaging result of excluding and marginalising the work of many important thinkers (often those who favour a realist approach; those who focus on 'antagonistic' class struggles and the labour strikes; those who work on dependency and uneven development). Furthermore, as already mentioned in the introduction, the inclusion of 'Latin America' into considerations of what 'postcolonial' means would help us to broaden our perspective on the current moment still marked by the failures of decolonization and the pronounced end of Communism/Marxism.

What place, then, does or should Area Studies occupy in relation to Postcolonial Studies? One might here briefly turn to Samir Amin's concept of "polycentric regionalization" (51). Amin contends that a positive global political order still lies far ahead in the future and cannot be achieved before some of the real divisions in, and inequalities of, the world system have been addressed: "the real problems with which nations and regions are confronted are not identical and cannot be in view of their unequal development. [Polycentric regionalization] sets for itself the primary objective of reducing this inequality in which the polarization produced by the world expansion of capital manifests itself. It recognizes a place for globalization, on condition that it conceives itself in a manner appropriate to serving the primary objective" (51). Comparativism – whether in the guise of Postcolonial Studies or the newly emerging field of World Literature – would do well to heed Amin's assertion that is impossible to "bypass the stage of popular national

construction, of regionalization, of delinking and the building of a polycentric world” (79). While of course this observation was made in relation to politics and economics, it seems equally applicable to the study of literature, where the ‘bypassing’ of a regional outlook has led to a skewed and de-contextualised representation of ‘Caribbean literature’. One must also be careful in employing the method of “distant reading” that would rely on other people’s “close readings” as Moretti proposes (“Conjectures on World Literature”), given the way in which academic fields – including Area Studies – can be shaped by trends emerging from the metropolis (such as was the case in the field of Latin Americanism).

However, this does not mean giving up the notion of a global comparativism (of ‘a positive globalization’), which is currently debated under the banner of World Literature, which is beginning to replace Postcolonial Studies as the ‘new comparativism’. While Postcolonial Studies seems a more useful label to me, since, despite all its shortcomings, the field has been marked from the start by the desire to un-think colonialism and its legacies, World Literature is much more vague – defining itself as ‘transnational’, ‘international’, ‘crosscultural’, ‘planetary’ – and has its origins in Goethe’s notion of *Weltliteratur*, which for Goethe refers mainly to European ‘high’ literature and a few texts from elsewhere (from China for instance). Yet, as important new collections have appeared in recent years, such as *Debating World Literature* (2004, ed. by Christopher Prendergast) and *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2006, ed. by Haun Saussy), it seems that the best option might be to “join the throng on the inside arguing about what crops to plant and where to put the gates”, as Hulme argued over a decade ago in relation to the field of Postcolonial Studies (“Including America” 117).

As Rey Chow has pointed out, peripheral literary studies have long been deeply comparatist in nature, whereas ‘traditional comparativism’ translated – and often still translates – into a field occupied by “those who specialize in certain European literatures” (Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, qtd by Chow 292); in other words, it is a form of Area Studies disguised as a more general discipline and reliant on (often binary) comparisons between European literatures. In peripheral/Third World/postcolonial cultures, the study of literature – even if it is of national literature – is more thoroughly comparatist by its very nature: “a culture such as postcolonial India, postcolonial Africa, Spanish America, modern Greece, or modern Japan, already contains, in its many forms of self-writing, imprints of a fraught and

prevalent relation of comparison/judgement in which Europe haunts it as the reference of supremacy” (295). Indeed, as we have seen throughout the thesis, issues of displacement, of the transformation of European forms and ideologies, and a sense of the positional difference of the Third World writer inform much of the writing and thinking from the Expanded Caribbean, and the relation between the global and the local has long been a stock theme. Theorists such as Roberto Schwarz and Édouard Glissant have produced seminal works that reflect on forms and displacement, as have novelists such as Chamoiseau.

Obviously, there is no space here to refer to the field of ‘World Literature’ in any detail, and I shall therefore constrain myself to two authors who have made important contributions – Franco Moretti and David Damrosch. Franco Moretti’s articles and recent edited collections constitute one of the most interesting developments. In “Conjectures on World Literature” (originally published in 2000), he seeks to apply the model of world systems theory to literature, arguing that global literatures are unevenly developed and that forms therefore travel from the centre to the periphery. One objection that has been made against his central thesis – that forms in the periphery are a compromise of foreign material and local reality – is that there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ form, that “literary form is always a compromise between opposite forces” (Moretti, “More Conjectures” 79). Yet, such an objection clearly demonstrates the dangers of not taking into account historical specificities and the reality of the global inequalities: certainly, there is no pure form as such, but this is indeed a very different issue to examining the transformation of an imported/imposed form and the ideologies on which it was based in a peripheral country (see chapter 3). As Moretti writes: “the picaresque, captivity narratives, even the Bildungsroman could not exert the same pressure over French or British novelists that the historical novel or the *mystères* exerted over European and Latin American writers: and we should find a way to express this difference” (“More Conjectures” 79).

In relation to Moretti’s own argument, one might perhaps add that his thesis – as developed in “Conjectures on World Literature” – might perhaps run the risk of abstracting the laws of the travel of form a little too much. Forms travel, and mainly from the centre to the periphery, but what about those proletarian and engaged novelists from the beginning of the century, writing from all over the globe? Here, it seems that ideology and politics are as transformative of the novel form as a

peripheral position within the world system. This is of course implicitly addressed by Franco Moretti's two-volume edited collection *The Novel* (2006), which contains, amongst other excellent articles, Denning's "The Novelists' International" that I have mentioned throughout the thesis. The collection is impressive, combining as it does the knowledge of regional specialists to produce a larger, global overview of the developments of this particular form and its relation to history and politics. Yet, I think there are also certain *potential* pitfalls one must be wary of when moving from the regional to the global. The novel form should occupy, as I have argued in my introduction, a central place in our thinking about modernity. However, once one moves away from Area Studies and to a global study of the novel form, I think it becomes easy to lose sight of the substantial contributions that peripheral writers have made – or could make – to contemporary thinking about the global moment in forms other than the novel. Certainly, forms tend to travel from the centre to the periphery, having much more economic backing and 'cultural capital'. Fruitful studies can be, and have been, conducted on this topic. However, whether or not we let thinking from the periphery conducted in other forms – such as the essay, the poem, social and political writing – impact back on the fields that have formed in the central academies is also a matter of *choice*. In other words, I think studies of the novel form are extremely useful, especially since it is also often through the novel form that innovative thinking about aesthetics, politics and the global moment has been conducted, but what 'global' approaches must be wary of is not to disconnect them from these other cultural and historical developments.

While Moretti's articles and collection are extremely thought provoking, David Damrosch's contributions seem somewhat less useful. In an article entitled "Comparative Literature?" (2003), he argues for the necessity to embrace translation (328) – and indeed, his arguments and those advanced by Rey Chow against the fetishisation of multilingualism are compelling – and for a "specialised generalism" (a combination of Moretti's notions of distance and close reading). However, there is, in the article, no reference to global politics or the global inequalities between the periphery and the centre. Given that comparative literature has been involved in an undertaking of refashioning itself as 'World Literature', this omission is – in my eyes – a fundamental flaw, as it displaces politics as the horizon of interpretation and is formulated from a critical position located at the centre rather than the periphery, where one cannot easily separate culture from politics as I have argued. This

becomes even more evident when read alongside his article “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age” (2006), in which he observes that statistically the traditional authors like Wordsworth, Shakespeare and the like have lost nothing of their status in the academy (judged by the number of articles published on them). Instead, “what has happened is that the rich have gotten richer, while most others just scrape by or see outright declines in their fortunes” (45). He makes some useful observations about exclusions and inclusions but he does not examine *why* we read more Rushdi than Ghalib (40). Furthermore, it is even more surprising - reading this article alongside his earlier book-length study *What is World Literature* (2003) - is that he argues in the latter that World Literature is *not* about canons and canon-making, but about *modes* of reading. I disagree on this point. It might be about modes as demonstrated in the field of Postcolonial Studies, where traditional texts have been examined under a new light with revealing results. But it is also, and perhaps more importantly, about canons, since canon-formation has never been ideologically neutral. Why is César Vallejo’s *El tungsteno* on no reading lists despite his fame as a poet? Why does the European modernist canon consist of Joyce, Lawrence, Proust and Woolf, rather than the novels of the counter-canon outlined by Denning?

In my own thesis, I have examined three canonical authors and probed some of the reasons for their canonicity as well as the ways in which they have been read, and I have examined how they speak back to developments in the academy. One of the issues that has been thrown up by my thesis is precisely that of exclusion. Postcolonial Studies has to “include America” in its remit – an inclusion that has important repercussions for the field - but work must also be done to undo the process of marginalisation of Caribbean writers that has occurred. Dany Bébel-Gisler, Jacques Roumain, C.L.R. James, Earl Lovelace, Ralph de Boissière, José Luís González, Juan Bosch, Roger Mais, Joseph Zobel, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Daniel Maximin, Mayra Montero – these are just some of the names that, while often – though not always - enjoying prestige in area studies, have not really been allowed to impact on the field. Like national liberation, regional and global liberation is also “necessarily an act of *culture*.”

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