CRITICAL APPROACHES TO ETHNIC AMERICAN LITERATURE

01

FROM SHADOW TO PRESENCE

REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNICITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

JELENA ŠESNIĆ



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Critical Approaches to Ethnic American Literature

No 1

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Representations of Ethnicity in Contemporary American Literature

Jelena Šesnić

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Introduction: US ethnic identities from cultural nationalism to trans-nationalism

> I want to draw a map […] of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World—without the mandate for conquest. I intend to outline an attractive, fruitful, and provocative critical project, unencumbered by dreams of subversion or rallying gestures at fortress walls.
>
> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (1992: 3)

> [I]n the shrinking world of the present day […] it ought to be less difficult to understand to what degree the concept of good and evil is a positional one that coincides with categories of Otherness. Evil thus […] continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence. So from the earliest times, the stranger from another tribe, the "barbarian" who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows "outlandish" customs, but also the woman, whose biological difference stimulates fantasies of castration and devoration, or in our own time, the avenger of accumulated resentments from some oppressed class or race, or else that alien being, Jew or Communist, behind whose apparently human features a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk: these are some of the archetypal figures of the Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar.
>
> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (1981: 101)

As the provisional boundaries set down in the title to this section indicate, my argument will focus on a temporal stretch marked in fictional, textual, and some popular culture representations by cultural nationalism on one end, and by the most recently identifiable trend in American studies, labelled trans-national, on the other end. In between these two models, which have been prevalent in representing ethnicity and related concepts in contemporary, post-1965 United States fiction,

there have also been other significant developments, which I am addressing here as the rise and flourishing of ethnic women's writing, somewhat coextensive but not quite identical with feminist politics and its agenda, and the chronologically later paradigms of border writing and various models of identity formation, transcending if not quite obliterating the nation-state model, such as in this case, diaspora.

Self-conscious interest in ethnicity as a methodological approach to the study of American literature makes its entrance only in the 1970s; MELUS, the Society for the Study of the Multi-ethnic Literature of the United States, was founded in 1973 with the specific goal of integrating so-called "ethnic" works into the literary-historical discourse delimiting American literature. It has been a long way from the first tentative soundings of "difference" to the 18th annual MELUS conference 'Transfronterismo: Crossing Ethnic Borders in US Literatures,' which took place in San Antonio, Texas, itself the site of the current American socio-cultural borderlands, in 2004. I propose to situate my discourse in between these two auspicious moments. Also, the imposed end point of my study is perhaps best exemplified by the most recent American Studies Association conference, which features the theme of transnationalism as its focal point, regardless of what such a perspective in fact bodes for the name and the initial scope of the discipline in question.[1]

In addition, it would be hard to miss the concentrated attention that the most prominent scholarly journals in the field have paid over the past thirty years to the cluster of questions pertaining to ethnicity, identity, and their embodiments in literary and other texts. It is enough to mention the thematic issue of *PMLA* (January 1998) dedicated to ethnicity, or the Spring 2003 issue of *American Literary History*, which dealt with the questions raised by what some authors in the volume call "the aesthetics of ethnicity" (Bercovitch 2), while still others try to theorize, evoking Raymond Williams's terms "emergent literatures" (Patell) and "structure of feeling" (Ferraro 2003: 80). The efforts to situate diachronically the cultural phenomenon of ethnicity as it decisively shaped the contours of American nationality as early as the mid-nineteenth century are central to Susan Mizruchi's project (2003) and have recently been formulated by Priscilla Wald in *Constituting Americans* (1995). I mention this historicization of ethnicity not only to

acknowledge what another scholar of ethnic literature, Thomas Ferraro, terms "ethnic signification's long durée" (82), but to make us sensitive to the discursive dynamics within the fields of literary and American studies, which have long embraced and naturalized these concepts arising from other disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, political studies, history, etc.) and have turned them into an apparatus not only for conceptualizing the American present and future (which was admittedly the primary orientation of ethnic studies at their inception), but also for intervening critically into the American past. In this sense, this project will partly chart the trajectory of representational mechanisms as they traverse the ground from constructed to presumed objects; however, it will also try to situate, especially in the first chapter but also throughout the text, the historical process by which in the 1960s and early 1970s this epistemological shift was enabled.

The more recent conceptualization of phenomena central to my project—namely, ethnic, ethnicity, identity, and nationality—highlights their constructedness. In this sense, the construction of ethnicity implied by the title should reflect the ways different ethnics experience and live their state of ethnicity. In the process, another equally crucial insight emerges: regardless of their constructedness, these structures/formations envelope the individual so fully and in such comprehensive ways (through the native language, communal or national culture, mythology, folk tales, dietary practices, religious observances, etc.) that they become our "second nature" (Poole 272). To use a well-rehearsed metaphor deployed by another political scientist, Benedict Anderson, those entities might be "imagined communities," but that does not imply that the hold they have over their members, and not only in the grim sense of some false consciousness, does not require the member's constant full-scale investments into the imagining of those communities.

My effort here will be to show how the terms and conditions of becoming American have changed in the post-1965 American "social scape" (Appadurai), while admitting that the siren call for belonging and acculturation has not lost its appeal (can it be otherwise, one wonders), but recognizing that it takes place under different auspices than was the case for the previous droves of immigrants. This would imply that the co-optational fantasy of the immigration paradigm, as a

master narrative of US nation-formation, shifts and swerves, but still operates strongly within the American imaginary.

Perhaps the most obvious sign of these shifts has been the resurgence of ethnicity in the latter part of the 20th century, prompted by the continuing socio-political pressure mounted by the African American community, aided by an increase in the number of visibly new ethnicities (produced by immigration), but also operating on the well-established ethnicities (Amerindians, Mexican Americans). These continue to chart supplemental positions for the articulation of ethnic and national identities. This is far from saying that this particular articulation cancels the hegemonic, assimilating ambitions of the designation American identity. Indeed, it is one of the paradoxes of American cultural, political, and intellectual history that dissenting moves and voices are, admittedly somewhat later, cast as precisely the forms of cultural behaviour that are patently "American." To simplify somewhat, it is when the embattled Chinese "sojourners" in California courageously challenge discriminatory ordinances in the courts that they "become" American, even if only in cultural and political mythology, naturalization being for the most part difficult to obtain for years to come. Or it is when the marginalized Filipino immigrant-turned-author and celebrated founder of the Asian American literary canon Carlos Bulosan claims America during his economic migration that he enacts the paradigmatic move of the immigrant: shedding the old self and fashioning a new one in the New World.

It is my contention that these four broadly conceived models of the cultural description of ethnic identities in the context of the US nation-state (cultural nationalism, ethnic feminism, borderlands/ contact zones, diasporic writing) decisively mark the contemporary socio-political scene, especially as it came into being by the landmark decisions of the mid-1960s affecting primarily the status of African Americans but also other "racial formations" (Omi and Winant) and so-called new ethnicities (new due to increased post-1965 immigration from the Western hemisphere or newly perceived on the national radar thanks to more energetic and stringent political organizing, as in the case of resident Amerindians and Chicanos) in the United States. Not only do these descriptions construct a set of recognizable and distinct

strategies of conceptualizing ethnic, racial, minority, and subaltern identities which proceed mostly from their own midst, but they also interact and mix with and invigorate one another. Furthermore, as much as they have instigated significant redefinitions of the crucial concepts of my study—namely, ethnicity, nation, race, identity—they have in turn been the fruit—and a symptom—of larger social, political, and cultural upheavals that have been overtaking the US since the 1960s. In that sense, I view literary and cultural representations as not quite all-powerful agents of transformation even as I try to give credit and recognition to their reformist impulses. In my readings of the context in which these ethnic texts operate, it will often become clear that they are as much constrained by their immediate context as they are successfully working to expand its limitations. This comes forth especially in the way I attempt to read, first, the historically determined emergence of the discourse of cultural nationalism, as it was conditioned not only by the Civil Rights movements in the United States, but also when considered in conjunction with other national liberation and anti-colonial movements worldwide, and secondly, how it on one hand energized and on the other handicapped the subsequent emergence of women-of-colour writing.

Also, within each of these matrices of representing, conceptualizing, and showcasing the plurality of ethnic concerns in contemporary US literature and culture, there are fault lines that create and sustain constant interrogations and disruptions as to the viability of a seemingly monolithic and single-minded project—that of conjuring an ethnic presence or identity as an indisputable cultural value or quantity, or, more importantly in the context of contemporary politics, a lever for achieving political goals. These fault lines, which in my study are read repeatedly as race, ethnicity, and gender are crucially understood and approached here not simply as quantifiable political and social categories but more importantly as ciphers of unquantifiable and less tangible processes involving psychic and immaterial investments and (mis)recognitions.

What I hope this study will keep alive from beginning to end is a palpitating sense of the productive, if sometimes awkward, interaction between the socio-historical and the psychic as far as these are configured in textual, visual, and other cultural forms I will be dealing with here. In order to make my stakes clear from the start, I put a great

premium on the certifiable referential status of an occurrence within the historical time-frame set down in this study (e.g., the landmark United States Supreme Court decision on desegregation Brown vs Board of Education in 1954, progressive civil rights legislation in 1964, the reform of US immigration laws in 1965, etc.), even while I am far more concerned with the echoes, repercussions, implications, and fantasies these occurrences have occasioned in the US cultural imaginary.

Nor am I totally swayed by the incipiently reformist, progressive, and transformative impulse that is perhaps inevitably traceable in these representations and works by virtue of their ethnic, racial, or minority status (on the contrary, liberal political theory is concerned with a minority's quenching of dissent within its own ranks so as to enhance its appearance of unity)—as testified, for instance, by cultural nationalists represented here by their African-, Asian-, and Native American and Chicano variants. Their collective and anti-imperialist politics clashed almost inevitably with their unsavoury and heavily patriarchal mores. I use the term inevitably since the conjunction of masculinity and nationality, in its modern Western form, is one of the premises which the cultural nationalists embrace but expand to include also ethnic men. Neither does the plume of progressivism and potentially revolutionary change accrue to these works simply because of their then marginal, non-canonical, and suspect national status, nor should they be called upon to perform in line with, for instance, the indigenous movement in Chiapas in Mexico or, in the not-so-distant past, the tradition of union organizing which constituted the backbone of Chicano revival in the United States. If and when these texts are performative, in the sense of being transformative of a set of referents they figure through linguistic or generic codes, they do so as discursive and cultural forms, thus of a distinctly separate order and epistemological status from the aforementioned historically verifiable occurrences. Still, even as I would very much like to retain a clear-cut line between these two orders, it is nevertheless apparent that they intersect with and imbricate each other.

This apparent incongruity is also observable in the choice of critical and theoretical tools driving the reading of the texts. Given that one of my central concerns is the way an identity overdetermined by difference is emerging as a cultural fact in contemporary US ethnic

fiction and other cultural forms, it is not surprising that among several available discourses one finds psychoanalysis perhaps most pertinent to the set of concerns expressed by the texts. In other words, we need to recognize to what extent the long-term ideological structures that underlie ethnic, racial, national, and gender identities bear marks of phantasmatic structuring. It is thus necessary to move away from a more static concept of identity politics and enter the fray of various identifications, negotiations, and repositionings assumed in the process of identity building. Julia Kristeva (1991) traces the phenomenology of strangeness or alienness in the Western cultural milieu from its construction in the Greek polis to its articulations in the Bible and its various embodiments in different periods of Western history, ending up, surprisingly or not, in the midst of our own selves. It was Freudian psychoanalysis as the first full-scale episteme that brought the external condition to bear on the constitution of the inner self. Thus the other, the stranger, was shown as residing within the self. Jean Laplanche's work also contributes revealing moments of the fundamental role of the Other in the ego-formation. This points out the inescapability and urgency of the issues raised by the discourses of ethnicity/race and identity formation, not only in the American cultural complex but also much more widely. If we fail to deal with them, this gross oversight affects not only the excluded or the marginalized, but that which is suppressed and subjected within ourselves, as it were.

As pointed out by Fredric Jameson, even within the present disposition of manifold, indeed almost innumerable, critical discourses, "psychoanalysis" stands out as "the most influential and elaborate interpretive system of recent times," amounting to a very strong "hermeneutic" whose "terms and secondary mechanisms drawn from it are to be found strewn at great distance from their original source, pressed into the service of quite unrelated systems" (2002: 46-7). Although many scholars working with ethnic texts still assess the dual potential of psychoanalytic discourse, long detached from the narrow procedure itself, to offer guidance into their corpuses, there are still others who at the least are willing to engage its premises of the complex interaction between the psychic and the social in the process of identity building, even as they are eager to displace it with less ethnocentric paradigms of interior development (Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldúa).

As maintained by Judith Butler, "psychoanalysis has a crucial role to play in any theory of the subject" (2000: 140), especially given her view that the foreclosures immanent to the emergence of any subject—here notably a marked one, a non-normative one—are not "prior to the social" (140) but rather coextensive with it. If we go on and consider what Butler terms "subject formation through a traumatic inauguration" (in her model represented notably as the fear of castration and the ban of incest), it becomes clear that the inaugurating trauma here precedes any "social and historical reality" as such, but is also "linked to both the scene of castration and the incest taboo" (141), especially insofar as these two require as precondition "a […] specific theory of sociality" (141). The focus of her enquiry is primarily sexual difference, but we can extend her remarks to bear on the inaugurating difference marked by racialization and one's ethnic or racial status, as another area in which psychoanalytic process is tied closely together to social dynamics.

Let me dwell for a moment longer on this clinging to poststructuralist use of psychoanalysis—here predominantly employed as a viable hermeneutical tool and descriptive model—as it marks not only my readings but also increasingly a line of discourse used in ethnic, American, and postcolonial studies. To go back to Judith Butler's pronouncements, psychoanalysis may give us a clue of the stakes involved in the process of subjectification as it is bound to and contingent on the subjection to and ultimately acceptance of the norm (castration, renunciation of the mother, the stigma of race) which brings it about (149). Butler makes clear that it is through fantasy and identification that this gradual accession to the status of the subject—with all the attendant prerogatives and limitations—actually takes place. Yet, even as we—across cultures and societies—succumb to certain generalized norms of sociality, which "work on the subject to produce its desires and restrict its operations" (Butler 151), this nevertheless gives rise to a number of specific and individualized reactions that can be grasped with the help of a "combined" analysis, according to Butler, when we want "to understand the phantasmatic dimension of social norms" (151).

In order to illustrate the way in which a fantasy proceeding from the subconscious—one that nevertheless borders on the pre-existing and normative, assimilated model of social relations—operates to produce and situate subjects on a large scale, let me refer to several

theoretical and fictional renderings of these interactions. The first instance is the relevance of the Freudian model of melancholia to the process of racialization in American society, as it is laid out by Anne Cheng. "Racialization in America may be said to operate through institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (Cheng 2000: 10), and thus can be compared to the process of incorporation observed by Freud in melancholia, to distinguish it from the process of mourning ('Mourning and Melancholia'). Not only is the order of race in America invested in the melancholic cannibalization of the other, but the other is also implicated in the process of responding to this foreclosure: "racial melancholia […] has always existed for race subjects both as a *sign* of rejection and as a psychic *strategy* in response to that rejection" (Cheng 20).

Furthermore, if, as is the premise of William Boelhower's study *Through a Glass Darkly*, what is ethnic and how one is ethnic is for the most part "ineffable" (1987: 31), i.e., impossible to utter, then surely psychoanalytic enquiry could tell us of that region where it dwells even though it resists being spoken about or spoken for. This persistent presence bordering on absence, silence, and ineffability becomes almost a central conceit in the second chapter of Boelhower's book, where he traces American "ethnogenesis," the becoming of the American nation and its subjects. His paradigm does not explicitly bow to psychoanalysis, but he charts a telling process of identity formation in which, among other salient elements, that which is gone, banished, or buried is in fact constitutive of the American national character; "that" being the Indian.

When he comes to the Pilgrims after an overview of how the production of colonial meanings always relies heavily on ethnicizing, on producing the other in terms of religion, colour, physique, or culture, he claims: "the Pilgrims introduced the world of historical events into the ahistorical world of nature, and these events were ethnically saturated" (59). Proceeding with their American "semiosis" (used by Boelhower to punctuate his theory), the Europeans erected "colonial foundations […] built on a local ethnic corpse" (63). A corpse requires a burial, but this one entailed more than just removing the murdered body; namely,

"the Americans succeeded in burying the very clues that would permit them to solve the riddle of themselves" (63). Boelhower, interestingly, continues with the metaphor of ritualized foreclosure of the past, not just personal but also collective, in this image of the burial, as when he goes on to rehearse the corporeal and corpse-like nature of ethnicity in its relationship with "American identity" (64). Indeed, as shown by the historical vicissitudes of the concept itself and its long interchangeability with the concept of "race," ethnicity is based and inscribed on the body, while its supplemental role has been interred for the greater part of US historical record. These dynamics between "presence and absence […] in the definition of American identity" and a glimpse of the originating operation of othering, which had been covered up, displaced, and forgotten, actually resemble the psychoanalytical readings of personal and collective identity formations (notably as laid out in Freud's texts such as 'The Ego and the Id,' *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and *Totem and Taboo*, among others). If, as claimed by Boelhower, "[k]nowledge of American foundations […] is built on a tomb" (77), it then calls for the operation of retrieving, remembering, and commemorating that which has been buried. In the process the dynamics of the Freudian uncanny plays itself out as a paradigm of that which is not new and unfamiliar but disturbingly close, so close to home in fact that is has to be repressed, suppressed, and kept secret, even from one's self (Freud, 'The Uncanny'). However, the moment it resurfaces and comes to light, it takes on unexpected forms and meanings which cannot be controlled from any one centre.

Similar resonances echo through Ishmael Reed's playful postmodernist rendering of the course of Western, and within it American, history in his flamboyant fantasy *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), which effectively encodes the ghostly presence of the phantasm of racial difference as a factor in the formation and the shaping of Western civilization. Reed's elaborate conceit finds its starting point in Carl Jung's remark as to "Indian and Negroid" features in the behaviour of the American people. Jung expressly states in his 1930 article ('Your Negroid and Indian Behaviour') that the American nation "is not wholly white" and draws on what he calls "contagious" closeness with "that most striking and suggestive figure—the Negro," which inflects and

shapes "the American temperament" (Jung 195). To put it bluntly, while on the subconscious level the signs of "infection" (Jung 196) by the black presence are everywhere on display (motility, music, language), on the conscious level what is at work is a strenuous, continuing process of (melancholic) foreclosure, abjection, and disavowal of undesirable, "primitive" traits (to use some of Jung's terms). The other tremendous (though acknowledged just as reluctantly) presence in the national formation is the Indian: "Without conscious imitation America instinctively molds herself to the spectral outline of the Red Man's temperament" (Jung 201). In chapter 1 it will become more obvious how this phantasmatic game of identifications and counter-identifications supported by complex affective reactions ranging from fascination and envy to repulsion and loathing on both sides—"white" and "non-white"—in fact comes to contribute and influence the cultural nationalist phase of identity politics. Also, this game of ghostly, spectral identifications, sustained or marred by melancholia, denial, foreclosure, abjection, and denigration, comes to the fore in subsequent procedures of representing the formation of ethnic identities through the regimes of race, gender, and national history.

This amounts, according to Reed, to the acknowledgment of "Jes Grew" (an African malady) in an America otherwise loath to accept and give credit to its non-European, particularly black/African, heritage. Although Reed polemically banishes Freudian psychoanalysis as just another avatar of the deadening effect of Western civilization, throughout this book I will try to recuperate psychoanalysis, alongside other critical discourses, and show it to be capable of performing what the title promises to deliver—to do the work in the shadow of the underlying structures of the Western, US-American socio-political system, as these interfere or interact with the psyche of the other. This image, construction, and fantasy of the other, however, refuses to remain stable; in fact, in the period I am focusing on in this study, the relative fixity of the projected image of the shadowy other begins to outgrow its assigned place as the others striving to come out of the shadow manage to recreate themselves not merely as images, masks, and fantastic projections, but as presences.

If Morrison (1992) begins her well-known examination of the buried implications of black figures in the recesses of overinterpreted

and thus seemingly highly legible texts of classic American literature precisely by referring to the charged metaphor of the black shadow, it is pertinent to continue to examine how shadows change shape and substance and become embodied and materialized in a new set of texts. The concept of the "shadow" harks back to Ralph Ellison's examination (1964) into the complex ways in which the popular US culture—here generated by a powerful vehicle of Hollywood film industry as shown in Ellison's essay 'The Shadow and the Act' (1949)—turns black existence in America into either an illusion or an inverted image in the white mind (Ellison 276-7).

The idea of the gradual presencing, or what Morrison refers to as *becoming* (4), requires that we examine what new kinds of subjects are involved, and demands that we heed the language in which they articulate their own emergence, fully cognizant of the fact that these new identities and their representations have set down new terms of discussion within the canon of US literature as well as in American, ethnic, and postcolonial studies. It is the aim of this study to try and provide an understanding of the ways in which these new identities express their status faced with the US nation-state and its apparatuses, and to examine how this self-consciousness generates a thorough questioning of the extant system, which is primarily literary-cultural and only secondarily socio-political. To draw again from Morrison's helpful reading, it falls to the (presumably emancipated) reader of American literature to see through the entangled mass of textual/representational strategies used to pin down the other, the "Africanist presence" (Morrison 6): this requires that one pay attention to strategies, in turn, of the "economy of stereotype," "metonymic displacement," "metaphysical condensation," "fetishization," "dehistoricizing allegory" and "patterns of explosive, disjointed, repetitive language" (67-9). These strategies are implicitly engaged with and disputed by the ethnic writers that form the bulk of this study, insofar as their discourse is occupied by that phantasmagoric and yet ever-present concept of race.

In other words, part of the on-going interest which these literatures evince is definitely, in my view, attributable to the ways in which these texts mount a thoroughgoing and ethically challenging critique of US society, democracy, and polity, even if, as I have suggested, they lack

the wherewithal to transform these. One of the most important lessons imparted first of all by the black Civil Rights movement, followed by other similar ethnic-nationalist initiatives (e.g., the Chicano movement, Red Power, and Asian American panethnic activism), is summed up by Michael Dawson: "A central theme in black political thought has been […] to insist that the question of *racial* injustice is a central problematic in *American* political thought and practice, not a minor problem that can be dismissed in parentheses and footnotes" (2001: 14). Ethnic literatures from this period carry on this critique and implement it consistently and forcefully, using all the available rhetorical and aesthetic means, which constitutes a fair share of their ideological agenda, as I try to point out in chapters 1 and 2, especially.

To that end, varied ethnic strands are set in mutual dialogue or against each other, as the case may be (different implications of African American and Native American nationalism), and they are considered as parallel and coextensive historical-cultural formations. This is a position which I find increasingly sustained and promoted by non-US Americanists, and even adopted by a growing number of the critics in the United States. The sociologists Omi and Winant have offered a workable encompassing model of "racialization" as it has played itself out in the United States and affected various groups of strangers and newcomers, whether they were brought in unwillingly or came of their own accord. Also, the concept that Omi and Winant have derived from their model—that of "racial formation"—gives us a vocabulary with which to address the question of indigenous populations and their specific place in United States' political, legal, and cultural domains, here especially pertinent to Amerindians.

To give a slightly different spin to this sociological concept, let me turn to Ann Pellegrini's study of the intersection of racial and sexual identities and the tension between their being performed and negotiated versus being fixed and assigned. Pellegrini sees racialization as a socio-psychic phenomenon broad enough to encompass and include different groups which are similarly positioned towards what Butler refers to as the unstated but assimilated norm (of whiteness, masculinity, WASP-ness, for instance). She further warns: "Racial difference, like sexual difference, provides one of the instituting conditions of subjectivity. It helps to set limits between self and other, precariously identifying

where the 'I' ends and unknowable other begins" (Pellegrini 1997: 7). What tentatively unifies the groups I examine here (African-, Native-, Asian-, Mexican-, and Caribbean-Americans) is their subjection to a continuing historical process of racialization, which produces them, to borrow again a term from Pellegrini, "as the outside of 'whiteness'" (7). She goes on to clarify how "[f]or any subject, the Law—of gender, of race, of sexuality—represents an impossible ideal" (7), making great demands on whoever lacks the standardized prerogatives. My primary interest will be on the way these coextensive commands call a subject into being.

The first chapter takes up the cultural-nationalist paradigm (the 1960s-1970s), not only with respect to its historically paramount role, but more so from the point of view of specific phantasmatic investments and affective structures which, in fact, contribute to the vibrancy, poignancy but also, ultimately, exclusiveness of this discourse in its stark essentialism and rampant masculinity. Thus cultural nationalism in the Civil Rights period and its aftermath is shown as a specific form of affective discourse, which has managed to redeploy this powerful affective capital into strategies of establishing what, following Benedict Anderson, might be called "imagined communities." Cultural nationalism, with its deft mixture of the political, the personal, and the cultural, stands as the first important contemporary discourse on ethnic and racial identity within the national sphere. The principal site of annunciation of these new trends is the discursive construct of ethnic masculinity, which through various procedures outlined in psychoanalysis and cultural studies engages in complex relations with, on one hand, normative white, "Anglo-Saxon" masculinity, and on the other, various forms of culturally constructed femininities (white and ethnic alike). Remasculinization, the working-through of demanding affects; the abjection of the woman's body (especially the mother's), counteracting symbolic castration; and racialization, affecting ethnic masculinity—these are all procedures employed in various texts, which in chapter 1 include non-fictional, polemical, and propaganda literature (manifestoes of "cultural nationalism"), while in the second part of the chapter the attention is devoted to semi-fictional accounts of masculine emergence in Shawn Wong's *Homebase* (1979) and Oscar Zeta Acosta's

The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973).

The othering that is apparently inherent in the identification subsuming ethnicity proceeds principally through the process of abjection (Kristeva, Douglas) and melancholic foreclosure, as laid out by Freud, and revisited by Cheng and Butler. The first chapter also seeks to address the ways in which their texts to some extent revoke and rework the dynamics of abjection and melancholia, also entailed in a related concept of double-consciousness (Du Bois), when challenged by emergent ethnic men.

Here already another salient marker of identity in contemporary US fiction by ethnic writers has asserted itself—that of gender, which is addressed especially in the second chapter, which chronologically and conceptually follows up on the lessons learned from the first generation of immediate post-Civil Rights intellectuals. Cultural nationalism has opened up a space for the phantasmatic and material recuperation of ethnic identity, but has failed in large part to address the issue of gender as it comes to bear on race. Given the impetus provided in the late 1960s by the fledgling feminist movement, there arises at about this time and especially throughout the 1970s a generation of ethnic women writers, here represented by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maxine Hong Kingston. This section deals with their intervention into salient genres such as historical fiction, the *Bildungsroman*, and life-writing, as they bring it to engage the non-representative ethnic and gendered subject-in-the-making. Their line of attack can be contextualized by the postmodernist sensibility of the redefinition of historical representation (Hutcheon), the critique of the phallogocentric drift of language (Cixous), and the affirmation of the tradition of ethnic (specifically African American) women's cultural production (A. Walker). Concomitantly, the novels discussed here, *Sula* (1973) and *The Woman Warrior* (1976), each highlighting an extraordinary woman, address and question standard models of gender identity formation, and, hand-in-hand with some then current feminist redefinitions of the psychoanalytic oedipal plot (Chodorow, Benjamin), show how genre (representation) is crucially implicated with gender, and take deliberate steps towards conceptualizing a new nexus among the ethnic, the national, and women.

Whereas the trajectory of identity politics as charted out in chapters 1 and 2 relies on the vocabulary of presence, wrested from the shades of invisibility and denial, and the assertion of some salient identity traits (the fact of blackness, the mark of gender), the subsequent chapters register and proceed from what has been termed as a transition from the "color line to the borderlands," a transformation which has also affected the body of knowledge subsumed under American studies.

In chapters 3 and 4, I want to address some issues more commonly raised in postcolonial theory than in American ethnic studies, and therefore, I would like to consider the growing recognition of their imbrications and interdependence. What I propose to call the borderlands/contact zones paradigm is exemplified in the texts by two not-quite-ethnic-nor-national groups, namely, Native Americans and Mexican Americans (Chicanos). While the axes of masculine (cultural-nationalist) identifications and ethnicized gender continue to be operative even here, the focus shifts to a different array of phantasmatic investments and productions. The third chapter continues the time-line, pushing it forward into the 1980s, with another crucial intervention into the national imaginary proceeding from alternative, minority, subaltern spaces, subsumed under the heading of borderlands or contact zones (Pratt). This perspective has been articulated within the purview of border studies initiated by Chicano scholars and infused by postcolonial studies, the poststructuralist revision of anthropology and ethnography, and interventions from cultural studies. Colonial discourse analysis (Arteaga, Krupat, Bhabha), which conjoins psychoanalysis, ethnography, and (post)colonial situation, helps us to try and disentangle the stakes for a sense of personhood which emerges and is consolidated against a tangled web of identifications (as the primary process underlying identity formation) and desires (as derivative processes in this respect) that are activated in the process of the articulation of subaltern identity in the contact zone/borderlands. In addition, the experience of (post)colony almost inevitably requires that we also engage the questions entailed in the uneven process of transculturation (Ortiz, as referenced in Pratt 1997; Mignolo), which is neither a postmodernist haven of hybridity nor a postcolonial nightmare. The texts by Sherman Alexie (*Reservation Blues*, 1996), Denise Chávez (*Face of an Angel*, 1994), and Rolando Hinojosa (*Klail City*, 1987) read against the backdrop of

the borderlands paradigm voice a post-colonial and almost by definition liberating perspective. This, however, is quickly followed by another equally persistent view, that of the contact zones bearing much stronger and intransigent marks of the colonial condition. So chapter 3 goes on to show the potential and the limits of the two perhaps most valued contributions of ethnic studies to American studies, that of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje*, and contends that, particularly as approached from the vantage point of the emergent subject (e.g., a government ward on the reservation or a woman engulfed by masculine-styled cultural space) these categories acquire quite a different meaning.

There is also a continuing engagement with various psychoanalytic models: chapter 1 discusses the concepts of abjection and melancholic identifications; chapter 2 focuses on the feminist intervention into psychoanalytic master narratives of the Oedipus complex which might be displaced by laying emphasis on the mother-dominated, pre-oedipal phase; in chapter 3, psychoanalysis hopefully proves itself to be an ally to another pre-eminent concern of US ethnic fiction, namely, its relation to (national) history, addressing the concept of memory as dream-work, and the process of retrieving buried (ethnic) history.

On the other hand, we have to acknowledge the movement extending across national borders as it was charted by what has recently been termed "anti-imperialist nationalism" (Claire Fox); as observable, for instance, in one of the prime documents of cultural nationalism I mention in chapter 1, 'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,' it is now one of the hailed new orientations in the discipline. The East-West axis, as suggested by Arteaga and recent contributions in *American Literary History* (2006), has been replaced by northern-southern directionality, while the Plan's appeal to the brothers (and one should add, the sisters) of the bronze continent reverberates today as inter-, trans-national and hemispheric American studies.

A similar shift is also traceable in chapter 4, which outlines the diasporic model of ethnic emergence in the United States with the Caribbean and the southern US figuring as spatial nodes of analysis. Whereas chapter 3 features a dialogue in American studies enacted nowadays between literary study and anthropology, in chapter 4 the sustaining link is that between the concept of diaspora, again taken from anthropology and the social sciences, and trauma studies, another

offshoot of psychoanalytic theory. James Clifford, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Azade Seyhan approach the cultural and historical concept of diaspora from their respective vantage points of anthropology, cultural studies, and literary criticism. It is my contention here that some strands of US ethnic literature, notably Cuban American and Haitian American (interestingly, both deriving from the Caribbean), display a dynamic in their accounts of their minority status in the US nation that can be accounted for through structures such as collective memory, informed and transmitted intergenerationally, and here, transgeographically; postmemory (Hirsch), engaging the force of a traumatic event to generate a feeling of cross-generational solidarity; traumatic memory, which in the Freudian model is likened to the mechanism of hysterical memory, thus indicating its compelling impact but also its troubling aspect; and the possibility of treating historical trauma as analogous to individual, structural, base trauma (Freud, Laplanche, LaCapra, Caruth). Even if this poignant model of the reconstitution of a communal and, consequently, personal identity is largely based on memory-building strategies, they are by and large underwritten by the strong affective structures of pathos, nostalgia, and melancholic (unresolved) longing, and are figured in the texts of two exemplary authors in this section (Roberto Fernández and Edwidge Danticat) as shuttling back and forth between, on the one hand, enabling structures of narrative reconstruction and working-through and, on the other, the shattering primal scene of trauma, which must constantly be revisited. A corpus marked by diasporic, thus at least dual, allegiance, shares a strong affective undercurrent with the model of cultural nationalism that is laid out in chapter 1. Furthermore, it pays obeisance to the interventions launched by the ethnic feminist model of gender formation discussed in chapter 2 and avails itself of the opening up of the nation-state paradigm promoted by the borderlands/contact zones model in chapter 3, but goes even further in deconstructing the premises underlying the constitution of ethnic identities. Thus it constitutes the bottom line and the final post for the present-day articulations of difference within the US national imaginary. The novels addressed here are Fernández's *Raining Backwards* (1988) and *Holy Radishes!* (1995) and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994).

These four interpretative frames, namely, cultural nationalism, ethnic feminism, borderlands/contact zones, and diaspora, are to a large extent chronological, and feed into each other—arguably, cultural nationalists provide their feminist compeers with some vocabulary and symbolism for articulating the questions pertaining to ethnicity and race; the interventions of ethnic feminists in their turn energize the gender fault line engaged with in the texts pertaining to the context of the borderlands paradigm and also diasporic writers in my presentation. Still, the model is not laid out as a neat succession of four dominant models, but also engages generic and thematic issues, where each set of representational strategies in ethnic literatures favours or discounts previous traditions. Needless to say, this presupposes another temporal phenomenon, rather than simple chronology, and that is a growing self-consciousness of a broadly imagined ethnic corpus within US literature (this process is suggested by Morrison on the level of production and reception of literary texts, cf. 1992: xii). Broadly speaking, we could place each one of these four models within their respective heydays, with full awareness that their ideological reach and image repertoire is not depleted by time but continues to exert some symbolic, representational, and cultural influence—so, for instance, the cultural nationalist frame flourishes in the 1960s and extends into the mid-1970s; already in the early 1970s the model is shaken up and fissured by the strong feminist onslaught; this challenge is in turn taken up and refined by the 1980s discourse of the borderlands, which is sensitive to the issues of gender, place, embodiment, and power, refracted through long-standing structures of the (post)colonial condition. They continue to exert their pull on the discipline, the reception, and the production of minority texts even today. Diasporic concerns, at least as expressed by the two writers represented here, also echo at least as far back as the late 1980s, punctuated by periodic political crises pertaining to their respective home countries, but on the whole also extend into our time.

Potentially, these four models may include other similarly positioned texts, but that contention must stand or fall on the strength of the reading of each particular text. Needless to say, the texts represented in my study do not rigidly endorse the proposed schema, even as they conveniently illustrate it. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, for instance, may fit several

models at once. For example, Palumbo-Liu's reading engages it as an already diasporic text; Sau-ling Wong, Ferraro, and Cheng read it as a predominantly US ethnic textual production; and Sidonie Smith brings psychoanalytic theory together with feminist/gender studies to bear on the text. Caribbean American texts (classified as such in view of their overwhelming thematic concerns), as they have been marketed and received in the United States and abroad, seem to endorse the possibility of devising a model to account for their rhetorical effects and narrative logic within a diasporic perspective lately imported into American and ethnic studies from the social sciences and political theory. Then again, Morrison's *Sula* is alert to both the stringent requirements of racial identity construction and replete with evidence of Morrison's unease and dissatisfaction with the way this master narrative encapsulates her heroine and the black community as such.

Shawn Wong and Oscar Zeta Acosta, authors central to my discussion in chapter 1 and representative of the trend of cultural nationalism, are juxtaposed in a single chapter so as to demonstrate how their textual strategies relate to the non-fictional and politicized but nonetheless mythological discourse of the early, neo-militant ethnic emergence. The next step is to articulate a point of divergence—the melancholic foreclosure of threatening feminine identifications promoted by abjection, the ghetto mentality and "racist love" (Chin et al.) bestowed on immigrant and resident Chinese/Asian Americans by the predominantly white culture (as shown by Shawn Wong). In Acosta, on the other hand, we find a case of overcompensation for the abjection of the corporeality of a raced (brown) body through the fiction of the ultimate masculine power entailed in Chicanismo, the concept of Aztlán, the Brown Buffalo image, etc. This site of banned identifications will, in turn, be revisited by Chávez, as shown in chapter 3, in her revision of the south-western romance. This points to, acknowledged or not, implicit and explicit, dialogue and contestations among and between these texts and models, and once again enables us to construct a very rough scenario for some salient models representing multifaceted ethnic and minority identities in US fiction pertinent to our age.

I: Impassioned discourse and "passionate politics": cultural nationalism and the ethnic revival

I've got a Song to Sing for You.
It is The Song of the Cockroach People.
It is A Song of My Pain and My Pride,
A Song of My Loves and My Woes…
Oscar Zeta Acosta

How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man…
How many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free…
Bob Dylan, 'Blowin' in the Wind' (1963)

In this section I shall examine one of the possible models for ethnic textual production which emerged in the particularly loaded historical context of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and was termed the cultural nationalist model. Omi and Winant offer a working definition of this paradigm of minority self-representation operating at the intersection between race and nation ("the nation-based paradigm" [37]): "Cultural nationalism has focused less on the political and economic elements of the nation-based approach than it has on *cultural* elements which give rise to collective identity, community, and a sense of 'peoplehood'" (40). In a somewhat different context, John Hutchinson argues that cultural nationalism needs to be considered as "a movement quite independent of political nationalism," especially since its specific goal seems to be "the moral regeneration of the national community rather than the achievement of an autonomous state" (1987: 9). As further suggested by Hutchinson, these strivings need to be seen as "a recurring force even in advanced industrial societies, regularly crystallizing at times of crisis generated by the modernization process with the goal of providing 'authentic' national models of progress" (9). Such projects and goals are carried out usually by specific social groups, "humanist intellectuals and a secular intelligentsia," whose

role appears central as they "construct[...] new matrices of collective identity at times of social crisis" (9).

Working with an array of non-fictional, conventionally designated political, or overtly ideological texts (manifestoes, speeches, propaganda literature), in the first part of my discussion I will try to show how an exchange between the eminently non-aesthetic and the dominantly aesthetic takes place, seeing this as a hallmark of ethnic writing. Simultaneously, we can notice how the appropriation of cultural nationalist signifiers on the part of ethnic writers enables ethnic literatures to do their cultural work, which among other things consists of closing the gap between the literary and the political, while in doing so they self-righteously and performatively highlight their ethical positioning. This model in itself is meant primarily as a paradigm, or in Hutchinson's words quoted above, a *matrix*, with a specific arrangement of symbols and signs which then can be taken up and rearranged by the later participants in the cultural work of a given society. Still, it is crucially important for my project to register links among ethnic resurgence, cultural impulse, and literary field due to the extent that this fruitful interaction will have had an impact on some later models of ethnic representations. The cultural nationalist model, furthermore, thrives and flourishes in what David Leiwei Li calls the "nation-state framework," while later on it will be redeployed and redefined in the "diasporic-transnational framework" (again Leiwei Li's term), the theme of my later chapters.[1]

Acosta, in his appeal to the majority culture, from his perspective as an alienated minority intellectual, joins two contradictory, yet connected, aspects of ethnic experience, collective "pain" and group "pride," and consequently the affective responses derived therefrom, namely "loves" and "woes." In the process of singing, this pain and pride merge as a personal investment (they are his, as Acosta maintains) and a collective experience ("The Song of the Cockroach People," an appellation referring to the politically active Chicano collectivity in the initial phases of ethnic organizing).

So intellectuals, cultural elites, and purveyors of representations and images within the ethnic communities in the United States begin to react to the overwhelming sense of crisis (cf. Gleason 1992; Glazer

and Moynihan 1975). Stephen Henderson, one of the central figures in the Black Arts movement, writing on black revolutionary writers from the perspective of an engaged African American intellectual, sees the emergence of "the Black Consciousness Movement" as "the transfiguration of blackness" (1969: 67). The transfiguration which the Movement would bring about is, implicitly for Henderson, tantamount to the spiritual renewal of America, at the time "choked with the bodies of the dead" in the wake of the shattering political assassinations of the '60s; "choked with all the filth and trivia of our lives." Even more dramatically, America is in the throes of "national death," in part dispatched through the physical and spiritual violence committed against the black people, especially against black men: "the white values [...] deliberately cannibalize the meaning of the black man's life" (Henderson 70, 72, 75). This peculiar "black experience," bred from subjection, discrimination, and suffering, culminated, according to Henderson, in "the affirmation of black selfhood" and the birth of "the new black consciousness" as cast in the forms of "the black aesthetic" (72, 79). Larry Neal continues in a very similar vein in his 1968 manifesto, 'The Black Aesthetic,' where he makes clear that one of the strains running deep in the Black Arts movement, vibrant at the time, was a link between ethics and aesthetics (928).

A similar sense of urgency can be detected in one of the representative novels of minority cultural emergence in the US, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), where in one of the passages her protagonist, a young Laguna Pueblo Indian, articulates his sense of bitterness against the Western civilization, the failed project, as

> evident […] in the sterility of their [white people's] art, which continued to feed off the vitality of other cultures, and in the dissolution of their consciousness into dead objects: the plastic and neon, the concrete and steel. Hollow and lifeless as a witchery clay figure. (204)

Interestingly, both Silko and Henderson make use of the metaphors of feeding ("choked," "cannibalize," "feed off") in their attempt to register the emergency entailed in aesthetically forestalling this act of relentless devouring. As they articulate their indignation, these authors imply a strong ethical position. Not only was it proclaimed as central

to that cultural moment of crisis, and thus signalled its increasing politicization, but it came to function as a dividing line between the degraded and spent Western art forms and (their polar opposite in this black-white scheme) black art, by extension—other ethnic/minority art. This urgent and oversimplified classification gives a shorthand for cultural nationalist programmes that would come to the fore in this phase of ethnic revivalism and would be firmly grounded in the concept of unambiguous, streamlined ethnic identity formation.[2] In view of later, more nuanced and subtler approaches to the processes of ethnic identification, such as voiced by Appiah (1985), Gilroy, and Cornell West, among others, this earlier model cannot be simply disregarded or bypassed due to its crudeness, but begs to be considered in view of a specific, lived model of ethnicity—what David Leiwei Li calls the *anthropological model*. I will again draw from Li's instructive and highly appropriate division to further highlight the challenge with which the cultural nationalist model of ethnic emergence, and the attendant art forms, are faced—that is, to set up a semantic-cultural, and by necessity political, matrix within which it will become possible to represent in novel ways some modes of social-psychological existence in the US that were previously underrepresented or absent. It is only after this anthropological impulse has been sated that the next stages can engage what Leiwei Li identifies as an *aesthetic*, performative and symbolic model of ethnicity. This is not to suggest that both poles are absolutely set apart, but to point out that different aspects get foregrounded at various stages of the development of ethnic literature and art.[3]

Another aspect of the politics of cultural nationalist representational models are its "structures of feeling," to borrow Raymond Williams's term, evident in their flaunting of masculine self-fashioning and aggressive, phallic styles of presentation, as deployed in most of the political, semi-autobiographic, and fictional texts that I read in this section. This trait makes this model, in spite of its vaunted novelty, heavily implicated in the norm of masculine supremacy concomitant with the objectification of (ethnic) womanhood. Even ethnic masculinity's relationship with white femininity is subject to and dependent upon the economy of normative masculine desire and its effective circumscription of the white woman's body. As African-, Asian-, Native American, and Latino

male authors in the late 1960s and early 1970s operate with liberating and emancipating nationalist discourses and strategies (at least from the political point of view), they are often oblivious or insensitive to the ways those parameters effectively marginalize or exclude the site of gender. What needs to be explored here is the nexus of gender, ethnicity/race, and national identity formation.

Still, even when some gendered (male) subjects are cast as more representative in the economy of national subject formation, when juxtaposed with the race/ethnicity regime their claims are often undermined. Further, the fateful conjunction of gender and national formation often works so as to elevate race/ethnicity at the expense of gender in proffering an exemplary national subject, seeing as women are cast as aberrations in the national project (Rosaldo 336-37). Julia Kristeva, in an overview of the intertwined nature of the ideas of citizenship and foreignness, for the most part glosses over the gender divide in the historical construction of citizenship in Western democracies, but nevertheless makes clear how even its occlusion is invested in the production of a representative man:

> one can be more or less a man to the extent that one is more or less a citizen, […] he who is not a citizen is not fully a man. Between the man and the citizen there is a scar: the foreigner. [...] Not enjoying the rights of citizenship, does he possess his rights of man? If, consciously, one grants foreigners all the rights of man, what is actually left of such rights when one takes away from them the rights of the citizen? (1991: 97-98)

Here we see how legal and political language couches the relation of identity in the space between citizenship (national subjecthood) and manhood, silently sidestepping women-as-potential-citizens. The foreign (ethnic, racialized) masculinity is wedged between the granting of rights by the authorizing agency of nation-state machinery and moving in a circle: the citizenship is withheld precisely because the masculinity test has been failed, but insofar as the citizenship is in itself a supreme marker of man, this failure doubly constrains the foreigner (also symbolically inscribed here as ethnic or racial subject) who is thus neither a citizen nor a proper man. Also, masculinity in conjunction with race/ethnicity may point to alternative modes of identity formation such that may challenge the received masculine requirements, but

oftentimes they will be compromised by their investment in the same dominant norms which have proscribed them in the first place. In such cultural nationalist arrangements ethnic womanhood is more often than not strategically circumscribed, women's bodies becoming markers of either ethnic identity affirmation (through reproduction and motherhood) or its defamation (if they overstep the lines implicit in the masculine norm and its vision of the group or national identity, operative along the gender axis). However, even as I register this overweening investment in affirming or restoring ethnic masculinity, let me once again point to the political and legal practice in Western societies which demonstrably links the questions of political rights to the questions of masculine status.

Historically, it was African Americans, involuntarily classified as a denigrated group on the basis of some salient factors ("race," phenotype), that have appropriated this ascribed status, turned it into political capital, and provided a model of revivalism which struck a chord with other national minorities in the United States, such as the above-mentioned Mexican Americans, as well as the American Indians and the Asian Americans as a non-national minority. This phase of fierce identity assertion culminated in cultural nationalism, which tends to focus not only on securing political gains but on articulating, through written matter but also symbolic action, viable forms of cultural politics for these groups. So, if for some groups (notably Asian Americans) the liberalization of immigration laws means a point of entrance, physical and symbolical, into the American socio-political system, for other groups this entrance is marked by similarly portentous developments, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This politically explosive, socially seemingly divisive and culturally pluralistic phase, which many commentators contrast with the "quiescent '80s," serves as a point of contact and mutual exchange among groups who perceive their status to be, for different reasons, second-hand, whether seen in terms of political representation or their cultural standing.

Identity is produced by othering, while national identity formation also incipiently works with gendering strategies. It is well worth pointing out different affective investments operative in the cultural nationalist phase of the ethnic revival. These affective structures—generating,

and in their own turn being upheld by, ethnic/racialized masculinity—will their way into the national project but do so through what Anne Cheng describes as a script of racial identification. Cheng sees both dominant and minority groups as implicated in the workings of "racial melancholia," so that its participants may, first, be subjected to and, later, themselves effect the melancholic foreclosure of non-normative (foreign, ethnic, feminine) subjects (2000: xi). Based on Judith Butler's theorization of the subjectification and its investment in power, psychic and social, Cheng maintains that it is not only possible, but necessary "[to] see racial identity as a melancholic formation" (24) which, according to Butler, entails that the subject-in-the-making has already gone through and enacted certain foreclosures in the choice of a viable object; in other words, the subject has denied himself/herself by default the option of identifying with or desiring some objects. It is furthermore this repository of "repudiated identifications," as Butler calls them, that virtually demarcates the zone of whiteness. Racial identification masked as melancholia assails the "dominant white culture," which circumscribes and guards its domain of identifications by melancholically rejecting and abjecting "the racial other": "white American identity and its authority," explains Cheng, "is secured through the melancholic introjection of racial others that it can neither fully relinquish nor accommodate and whose ghostly presence nonetheless guarantees its centrality" (xi). The objectified racial other, for his or her part, also comes under the sway of this order, identifying with it to a greater or lesser extent (Cheng doesn't apparently deal with cases in which the "melancholic object" [xi] will not identify with the imposed script): "[the object] suffers from racial melancholia whereby his or her racial identity is imaginatively reinforced through the introjection of a lost, never-possible perfection," which is "an inarticulable loss that comes to inform the individual's sense of his or her own subjectivity" (xi). In the texts I will be working on, these foreclosures are for the most part exemplified by homosocial bonding over the female (especially maternal) body and, secondly, by ethnic protagonists' ambivalent affective investment in white masculinity set up as a social/national norm. The trajectory of masculine identity from the ethnic/racialized to representative/national, seeing how these positions are still inscribed in the US cultural imaginary, can thus be

traced through gendering, abjection, (self)denigration, melancholia, and other affective investments in order to provide a terrain (crossing and recrossing a specific female body—maternal, ethnic, white) through which such masculinity will represent itself.

My starting point here, taken from various psychoanalytically inflected models of identity formation and racialization, is that ethnic manhood has always already been marked; furthermore, that marking may be compared to the moment which is, in another context, termed interpellation, whereby a potential subject is called forth, called upon, interpellated to take up a specific subject position (in Louis Althusser's famous example, a man is being hailed by the police) and therefore urged to identify himself with it, albeit temporarily. We could say that, up to a point, the ethnic subject is also being interpellated in that capacity by the dominant, majority society. However, I will propose to work in the space located between the more fixed term "interpellation" and the more floating processes entailed in the term "identification," especially as given in the model developed by Diana Fuss. Cheng, for her part, prefers the concepts of "introjection" and "internalization" to account for similar psycho-social complexes. Identification, as seen by Homi Bhabha and David Eng, for instance, references not an accomplished state, but rather processes, placements, taking of positions, realignments, a structure never totally finished and closed (Bhabha 51), and thus appropriately signals the status of any one subject which is always in the becoming, beset by myriad, manifold identifications.

Julia Kristeva, especially in her study *Powers of Horror*, approaches the concept of abjection in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the dynamics of melancholic foreclosure, which, rather than merely expelling and getting rid of the intractable, unmanageable object—as we manage to do in the process of mourning—simultaneously banishes and yet retains the object as marginally available for identification: "It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. […] [I]t beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It […] disturbs identity, system, order" (1982: 4). She also manages to expand the range of abjection from the purview of individual identity formation into an exemplary route into the symbolic, the entrance into language and subject-position of every individual (cf. esp. 12-5, 61-4).

I would like to propose a frame of inquiry which engages somewhat strange bedfellows, in line with what was outlined beforehand, a tendency in contemporary theory to posit points of interference between zones traditionally considered apart, as Eng makes clear—one being the zone of the subject, identification, the psychic and "becoming", the other of the agent, identity, the political, and "being" (2001: 25). There is likewise a degree of productive tension between the stringently *emotional* appeal espoused in various political and more strictly literary writings in the period from 1965 to 1975 and the etiology of *social* actions which it presumably invoked or advocated. This justifies the investigation of the ways different affects, emotions and identifications inflect representations of ethnic masculinities, such as can be detected behind Malcolm X's political use of "black rage," as recently examined by Cornel West (135-51).

In her recent study *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler suggests the possibility of understanding typical emotional and existential states that are inherent to humans, namely, "vulnerability and loss" (and by extension, other affects as well, such as the feeling of pain and grief), as capable of providing a "political reason for reimagining the possibility of community" (2004: 20). Butler interestingly proposes to incorporate these potentially shattering side-effects of socially purveyed violence, aggression, denigration, or discrimination as potential instruments in strengthening political, and therefore social, intersubjective ties with others in an attempt to constitute a viable community. Thus, the immanent vulnerability of a human being, proceeding "from our being socially constituted beings, attached to others" (Butler 20), translated in passionate, pained emotions, can be redeployed to act as a binding force and a powerful social agent, as witnessed in ethnic movements. For Butler, some forms of pain, loss, and grief cannot be simply dismissed as privately indulged emotions and so safely "depoliticiz[ed]"; rather, they beg to be considered as conducive to the establishment of "the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" (22). So once again we find a powerful explication of the way "mourning, fear, anxiety, [and] rage" can in fact become vehicles of sociality and provide a ground for a collectivity to emerge

or, alternatively, redefine moral, ethical, and political terms under which an ongoing community operates (Butler 28).

George Devereux uses the psychological concept of hypercathexis in his description of the coming about of ethnic identification. He claims that in this case, the aspects of group behaviour that can undeniably be classified as "ethnic" prevail over all other possible identity markers, be they of gender, class, profession, etc. According to Devereux, in this case ethnic identity serves as an ideal module or "a sorting device" (391, 392), which somewhat imperiously cancels out all other venues of identification. A particular hypercathexis of various ethnic traits, designated as the phase of cultural nationalism, and its concentration in a relatively short and recognizable time-span (from the 1960s to the early 1970s) obviously has to move beyond the discussion of its potential functionality or dysfunctionality, and engage the conditions of its emergence within a group and in a wider social context. This ethnic hypercathexis was occasioned by specific material configurations and was registered in a set of discursive practices, which in their own turn bear evidence of emotional investments—Cheng appropriately labels them "affective history" (xi)—inseparable from the discursive form and content and tied to its historical setting.

This fierce, disturbing, aggressive, and poignant engagement with the American present, more often than not referencing and evoking a hidden and suppressed American past, served as an initial and necessary step towards the explosion of ethnic discourses with an emotionally much wider and more diverse range. Also, it may be more than just a coincidence that almost all of these raucous, irreverent, and radical voices are male, while female voices will emerge much more articulately in the later phases of ethnic literary revival, with their own programmes and concerns.[4] In a very important insight offered by Ron Eyerman, one of the basic gains of the various ethnic movements, beginning of course with the African American movement, was the transformation of collective, group "cultural trauma" into, potentially, a "national trauma." By this he means not only that the respective intellectuals and artists have managed to turn some elements of group memory into "America's collective memory," but also that at the same time they have made these absent, dislocated, lost, or abjected elements representable,

and thus visible (Eyerman 18). To draw some more on Eyerman, these texts show a range of interventions whereby an emergent, subaltern, minority "collective memory" challenges the dominant, normative, codified "national memory."

Let me reiterate that an affective archive or the structures of feeling, perhaps not surprisingly employed in this agenda of claiming a self-righteous moral stand and defaming dominant yet essentially unethical social norms, can be recognized as tools of political and collective action. In literary and cultural studies of late, the growing importance of affective reality and emotional responses has been acknowledged.[5] As evidenced by Cheng's model it is necessary in this respect to distinguish between two directions of the trajectories of subjection. They both work along the axis of power; however, in one case it flows from the dominant to the marginalized group, whereas in the other case, it circulates in the marginalized group itself, due to its imprint in the personality (internalization), and is being distributed along the in-group axis. As explored by Sander Gilman in the case of the Jewish self-hatred, this acceptance of the dominant group's "projection of the Otherness" by the Other herself results in "[t]he fragmentation of identity" (1986: 3). This fragmented identity, corroded by self-hatred as "encoded" by the dominant cultural criteria, is bracing itself against this threat by turning the stereotypes heaped on the group as a whole towards a segment within the group, as pointed out by Gilman:

> The positive element [stereotype] is taken by the outsiders as their new definition. This is the quality ascribed to them as the potential members of the group in power. The antithesis to this, the quality ascribed to them as the Other, is then transferred to the new Other found within the group that those in power have designated as Other. For every "noble savage" seen through colonial power a parallel "ignoble savage" exists. (3)

In other words, scapegoating ensues within the subordinate group prompted by the scripts of power from the outside, and fuelled, furthermore, by the intense need to get rid of the sense of shame, humiliation and mortification (all related emotions, cf. Scheff 1990: 80 n) targeting the self. This projection of abnegated elements will usually be discharged in this early phase of radical ethnic politics on

women, members of ethnic communities. In other words, in the novels and political statements central to my argument here, two paradigms of abjection/abnegation will be played out—one performed on the ethnic masculinities, and the other enacted by those "grieved" masculinities (Cheng) on the others in their midst. It is important here to specify, as Bhabha is wont to do, that these "fantasmatic identifications" (Bhabha 61) are "ghostly" (Cheng) precisely because they take place in the sphere of image and fantasy, even prior to being distributed and deployed in the social sphere. It is in this place of fantasy that a colonized or a racialized subject will desire to be white and enact his own denigration from that phantasmatic position; likewise, a white man's desire will follow the path of equally contradictory fantasies (Bhabha 60-1), combining different mixtures of "fear and desire" towards racialized objects (Cheng 12).

In this context the accusatory, aggressive, and masculine-styled language of the texts; cultural nationalists' invocation of manly prerogatives at their most oppressive and most assertive; their self-conscious stylization of heroic, larger-than-life, and therefore super-man persona; their obsessive insistence on accepted (dominant) masculine traits; their equally persistent expulsion and denigration of all weak, effeminate, and ultimately feminine-styled facets—all these strategies point to the formations which owe a lot to the convoluted investments of the disadvantaged social groupings in the circulating discourses of subjectivation, subjection, and disciplining. Relying on some important insights provided by the paradigms of cultural and social studies (Goodwin et al.; Scheff) we can see how responses by the denigrated male subjects, articulated through textual representations in the volatile and visceral first phase of the ethnic revival, prompted by the Civil Rights struggle and other forms of civil disobedience, resulted in a very specific set of cultural norms and expectations that significantly affected the terms of cultural discourse at large and specifically targeted the (self)image of the ethnic male subject.

Partly because their strong affective and emotional language could not be properly validated and gauged, most of the personas and characters in these texts do not affect the transference, let alone approximate the completion of the identity formation process, and so remain bitterly

disaffected, emotionally quite distraught, with a fragmented sense of self. However, they open up some important questions, long pent up and suppressed, and thus pave the way for later writers who might chart different processes of cultural confrontation and dialogue. They also provide the modules for all subsequent identity articulations, especially on the collective level. According to Shamir and Travis, "it is important to recognize that [the debates on emotion and contemporary US masculinity] are representative of a larger debate about the politics of affect and the political efficacy of emotions" (5).

The forms these representations of collective identity have taken in this period can be validated by Benedict Anderson's insights to the effect that "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1991: 6). The core of the cultural nationalist movements of the late 1960s in the US has produced some distinctive styles of imagining potential nations. These would-be nations (or self-consciously identifiable groups) create their stories, narrate their almost forgotten histories or recreate the lost ones, and choose what to remember and what to forget (cf. Anderson 187-206) in an effort to inscribe their place on the US map. This strategy of idealizing, overvaluing, and even sanctifying a set of symbols to be elevated to national status could be understood in terms of a national consciousness development such as other, western European but also New World, nations were undergoing in as early as the 18th century (Great Britain) and mostly throughout the 19th century. Additionally, as pointed out by Eyerman, "the articulation of a collective identity is a central task and even a defining characteristic of social movements" (20). The content and the deployment of this invented tradition are to be set against adversary historical forces of long duration. Thus the impulse for renaming one's community or reconstructing its history through manifestoes, radical cultural politics, literature, art, and political activism testifies to the exigencies of positive image construction and self-identification. This is not meant to elide or disregard the inconsistencies or historical fallacies of the cultural nationalists' agenda, but simply to make us alert to a wider scene in which these images circulate and signify.

In these literary-political manifestoes (African American, Asian American, Chicano, Native American), the authors engage in "passionate

politics" (Goodwin et al. 2001) as a means of forging strong emotional/ affective ties expressly relying on "group solidarity" and "loyalty to collective 'identity'" (Goodwin et al. 5), even as that group identity is still in the making. They lay the ground, with their impassioned diatribes and appeals, not only for the cognitive attachment among the potential group members, but more importantly attempt to frame the floating feelings of anger at their social subjection and marginalization, paranoia about government practices, outrage at the overall social and moral bankruptcy, but also at the injurious treatment of minorities, into a platform for political and cultural activism.

In 1984 the Irish rock band *U2* launched one of their mainstay songs, entitled significantly 'Pride (In the Name of Love),' dedicated to the memory of the assassinated leader of the black Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr. In the dynamics of the title and the song itself ("They took your life/ They could not take your pride"), the gist of the affective logic underlying not only the black movement but other contiguous minority movements, finds its apposite expression (*U2*, 1984). If the primary goal of the movement is to counter deeply ingrained and collectively experienced shame (due to the processes of shaming that African Americans were continuously exposed to), it is to be done by forging bonds and initiating such actions as will activate a sense of pride, dignity and self-worth. The primary motivation, however, is affective in the sense of a culturally privileged emotion, that of love, mythologized in the Western civilization as a prime motivating force and transformative agent, also acknowledged in the song: "In the name of love/ What more in the name of love." However, the inflection of such love points more toward "feeling men," brotherly love, and homosocial bonding, rather than to the sentimental heterosexual bond. Moving on to a more theoretical level, cultural activists then not only locate the sources deserving of "indignation or outrage" (Goodwin et al. 8), but, more importantly, they mobilize people to act on the strength of those powerful affects, and translate them into forms of social and political activism.

The cultural nationalists will not restrain from using emotion-enhancing strategies that are typical of nationalist discourse, such as

the "demonization" of the opponent, or the glorification of one's own side (Goodwin et al. 17). The fascination/repulsion—or the previously mentioned envy and fear—enacted by these discourses lies precisely in the manipulation of powerful and explosive emotional forces, of which the parties involved may only partly be aware. As a countervailing force to the mechanisms of subjection and denigration afflicting minority masculinities, these movements check the process of self-loathing and self-abjection and eventually "reshape broader emotional cultures as well as emotional repertoires" (Goodwin et al. 22). Most of these texts are documents of the transformative power of affects usually perceived as enthralling, such as shame, humiliation, or anger, which, when turned outward and aimed at a collective enterprise, effect a sort of transcendence. It is interesting to try and limn the impact of the nationalist "emotion work," with respect to the gendered expectations, group definitions (either imposed or self-generated), bodies and places, where the material and emotional intersect (for these interpretive loci, cf. Goodwin et al. 24). The occasionally irreverent, shocking, and controversial deployment of affects on a collective level, their discharge mostly resulting from past denial and repression, has enabled the minorities in question to conjure up a positive group self-image and to circulate more empowering discourses of themselves in US society. In other words, this is the story of the passage from shame to pride.[6]

In order to give an example of male (inter)ethnic homosocial bonding as one instance of possible identifications, running alongside but also departing from the dominant script of masculine roles, I will briefly present the undercurrents of the African American cultural and political programme and the way it explicitly and implicitly informs Asian American forays into cultural politics; then I will address the rhetoric of "cultural nationalism" espoused by the Chicano movement.[7] As a fourth instance, which complicates the picture, I will present a view of the Native American cultural nationalist programme, which borrows from earlier African American models, shows wariness of them, and combines the facets of European-based theories of nation with the traditional Indian tribal base. Lastly, I will focus on some of the conventionally designated literary texts that are engaged with and partly informed by the political struggle in the period of cultural self-determination.

1. Emotionalism and (cultural) nationalism

We might begin this historical record by asking explicitly what the place of emotion, or feeling, is in the "Black Aesthetic" (I borrow this term from Henderson 1969). Henderson does not address the query head on, but the central place he devotes in his meditation on the "revolutionary" art to what he calls "soul," then blues and jazz, clearly indicates the dense emotional underside of the forms of black culture in the United States.[8] Not surprisingly, Henderson singles out Malcolm X as a paragon of black manhood who knew "suffering and anguish" in the urban ghettoes and so was able to speak to that experience more forcefully than Martin Luther King, Jr, who galvanized Southern rural blacks, whose plight was somewhat different than that of their Northern counterparts (111, 110). In a significant turn of phrase, Henderson credits Malcolm X as presenting to the community "the gift [of] Black Manhood" (113). Given that Malcolm X was eulogized by Ishmael Reed (1999) as "our shining prince," it is necessary to devote attention to the blending of his obviously forceful, masculine rhetoric with the strong undercurrent of affective investments, and to observe how the conceptualization of the new black masculinity takes place at this intersection.

In his 'The Ballot or the Bullet' speech (1964), Malcolm X is initially showcasing himself in the position of a victim, accompanied by righteous indignation at the injustice of his group's position when compared with other (immigrant) groups in US society. It is at this juncture that he performs the first instance of othering, drawing a comparison between the unwilling immigrants—Africans and their descendants— and the willing newcomers, with the implication that the handicap of their "newness" to the land is often balanced by the immigrants' whiteness, which enables them to supersede the blacks (1966: 25-26). He also skillfully plays upon the white man's fear of the future, and the contemporary political morass America finds herself in, at home and abroad (36-37; 40). He is building a coalition with other coloured people, for instance in Asia.[9] It is instructive that he addresses the need for the black people to "change our own minds about each other" (40). This is where the image of family, tied to a universal, religious image of brotherhood/sisterhood comes into picture: "We have

to see each other as brothers and sisters" (40). His appeal here attempts to raise the pitch of community bonding, after which he continues in a similar vein, employing and manipulating the images likely to evoke powerful emotional responses: "We have to come together with warmth so we can develop unity and harmony [...]" (40). Throughout the speech, images recalling positive affects alternate with those conjuring potentially negative emotions of righteous indignation, anger, and resentment. Even while they are potentially adverse to the sense of stable identity, they are also expedient means in the political struggle and the cultural nationalist agenda. If he paints for the audience the image of the head bowed down in shame (44), he counteracts it with a call for action, based on the sense of the morality of their political platform.

Malcolm X's nationalist politics as refracted through the questions of gendering are more pronounced in his other 1964 speech, 'With Mrs Fannie Lou Hamer,' the then candidate for Congress, who had been brutalized in Mississippi, interestingly, by black men, who, according to Malcolm X "were just puppets. […] They were just carrying out someone else's orders" (1966: 108). Voicing his outrage at the indignity that this black woman suffered as a result of racist machinations, which exploit black men as their executors, the speaker casts Mrs Hamer as a representative "black woman," only to turn her almost immediately into a personalized image of potentially anybody's "mother," "sister," and "daughter" (107), sidestepping her public role as one of the foremost civil rights activists in favour of the female position based on her status within the kinship structure as a basis for family allegiance and other broader allegiances (communal, national). Then he belabours on the fact of the brutalized black womanhood in a manner which shows the deep, ambiguous entanglement of the new black (nationalist) manhood with the truly endangered black womanhood: "I ask myself how in the world can we ever expect to be respected as *men* when we will allow something like that to be done to our women, and we do nothing about it?" The answer is almost predictable: "No, we don't deserve to be recognized and respected as men as long as our women can be brutalized in the manner that this woman described" (107). Such protectiveness and, we might add, possessiveness, is again based on the model provided by kinship structures, most notably the family,

which carries certain pitfalls. The family generates and at the same time replicates the emergence and regimentation of subjects, both in their social and psychic/affective dimensions. If it can be, on one hand, a ground for the creation of a shared ethnic identity, its regulatory power, according to Fanon, can also be seen as a glue which holds together the larger, more intransigent social structures, such as the state or the economic order, which can be seen as reflecting and in their own turn being buttressed by the family arrangements (141-3).[10]

2. Asian American men

The by-now historical appearance of *Aiiieeeee!* (1974), the first anthology of Asian American writing in the US—especially the preface and the introduction to the volume worded by the editors Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn H. Wong—is portentous for several reasons. First, not only does it elucidate an emergent corpus of writings by a minority group (since Asian American writers had been published before but without the accompanying self-consciousness of a cultural tradition to draw upon), but it also announces the birth-pangs of the still provisional but strategically empowering Asian American identity. Secondly, it does so by espousing—in the vein of contiguous cultural nationalist movements, a male over a female identity as exemplary of the new trend and so opens up a venue for later valuable inscriptions and interpolations by feminists and cultural critics. Thirdly, this new "Asian-American sensibility" (Chin et al. 1974: ix) announces its maturation by exploiting similar cultural nationalist tropes as used previously by several generations of black American authors and intellectuals, ranging from Ralph Ellison to Malcolm X.[11] Ellison's articulation of a literary-political programme in *Shadow and Act* (1953) prefigures a set of demands that Chin and other Asian American writers make for Asian American literature in the 1970s. To sum up, it is Ellison's insistence on the conjunction of culture creation, the invention of a new language and the emergence of a distinctive masculinity (xvii, xviii) that echoes in the 1974 anthology of Asian American writing.[12]

Several formulations from the introductory part of the anthology bring us to the set of concerns that we find congenial with and expressive of cultural nationalist revivalism. For the writers included in the anthology, for obvious strategic reasons, the decisive marker of "belonging" will not be simply the status of citizenship—very often denied to Asian American immigrants and only provisionally extended to their descendants born in the States (cf. Wu and Song xv-xxviii), but something more symbolically charged, if less palpable: the writer's capacity to enunciate the birth of a new man. So the editors, by necessity, have to engage in selection and the operation of othering, to make clear what "Asian American" stands for: neither Asian nor white American (1974: viii), however hazy it may sound at this stage. Their grievances are by now well-documented in both socio-historical and literary-critical accounts in Asian American ethnic studies as effeminization (emasculation, gendering) and orientalizing, translating as continuous abjection (as opposed to downright exclusion of the black people; cf. Ling 1997). Orientalizing stereotypes, continuously churned out by American popular culture especially in its visual register, effectively depersonalize Asian American subject (either as the submissive Charlie Chan or the inhumanly deprived Fu Manchu) or undercut his agency altogether (Chin et al. 1974: xiii).

Not far behind this baneful work performed by a stereotype (Chin et al. 1974: xxvii), is an effective erasure of ethnic identity as a cultural fact sustained by language, manners, durable and extended kinship bonds, localities containing historical memory or bearing traces of ethnic agency. As noted with acrimony by the writers of the manifesto, these modes of cultural identity were effectively foreclosed to Asian American men, as the processes of abjection translated as cultural amnesia overshadowed any counter-response. Finding a voice that will break through sedimented falsehoods imposed by long-term discourses of Christianity, colonialism and scientific racialism (cf. Chin et al. 1991: xxvi-xxxv) informs the ferocity and stringency of their appeal presented as an inarticulate, manly and angry cry.

According to Shimakawa (1-22), place and language are the two cultural markers through which the dominant system performs abjection of Asian Americans. It is, therefore, instructive to see how the

editors grapple with the issue of language and expression. The title of the anthology can stand alternately for a cry of impotent rage, anguish or as an inarticulate shout, but here it is being redeployed to signify "our whole voice" (Chin et al. 1974: viii). Moreover, they elevate the specific ethnic idiom, "neither English nor the idealized conception that whites have of a 'Chinaman's tongue'" (xxxi) into an empowering "vernacular," comparable to black and Chicano "unconventional English" and "recognized as being their own legitimate mother tongue" (xliii-xliv). The transition from, in turn, silent, inarticulate or abjectly imitative subject seems to be under way. Elaine Kim, whose book virtually constitutes a pan-ethnic textual coalition termed "Asian American literature," sees the group project in terms of their editorial and literary works, as asserting "individual Asian American identity" (173), meaning not simply or conveniently collectivist and ghettoized, neither exotically Asian nor blandly American. A reading of an earlier version of the manifesto side by side with the later, expanded preface added in 1991, may give us a sense of the historicity of their variant of cultural nationalism and also of its manifold extensions into our present.

The shift traced in the two texts is mainly two-pronged, from the first strategic (melancholic) repudiation of "Asianness," which meant, in short, emasculation and orientalizing, to its affirmation in a stringently heroic form; then, a transition from a working-class ethnic masculinity to a culturally more encompassing model. Also, Kim documents how, through their editorial efforts, these writers actively engaged in retrieving and instituting what nowadays stands for Asian American literary tradition (175). Terms denounced by the authors of these two manifestoes, primarily "sojourner," "racist love," and the "model minority," alongside "honorary whiteness," enable us to make connections between the salient questions of inclusion and exclusion which underlie their claim for recognition within the accepted models of assimilation operative for other, non-racialized ethnic groups, as laid out by Chu (2000: 1-23).[13] Through a denigrating name, sojourner, legal and political discourse easily casts the bearer of the label as stranger, a migrant, reading his (at this stage almost exclusively masculine) necessary mobility (in search for job, security, manageable living conditions, etc), as a minus-sign which invalidates his potential citizenship claims.

"Racist love" is cast by the manifesto writers as, in fact, a castrating hand of the white norm, which extends the promise of acceptance on the condition of renouncing one's manhood, under threat from or succumbing to, in Eng's phrase, "racial castration." Not only has this class of subjects been foreclosed from American culture and its imaginary, but it has melancholically, as it were, interiorized its abjection, as maintained by the authors: "Seven generations of suppression under legislative racism and euphemized white racist love have left today's Asian Americans in a state of self-contempt, self-rejection, and disintegration" (1974: viii). A few paragraphs down, they state, "[f]or seven generations we have been aware of that [America's] refusal, and internalized it, with disastrous effects" (ix). Further elaborations on the state of the emerging Asian America, in a cultural sense, bring an image of a cultural formation which strategically repudiates fetishization extended by this typology. Instead of a convenient fantasy, they offer "our history," which derives from and transcends "mere personal experience and shared memory" (1991: xli).

The "model minority" thesis further contains the threat Asian American difference poses to the American body politic—and in this phrase the engine of its containment is socio-economical. Paradoxically, while "sojourners" are seen as inassimilable, in the model minority thesis their foreignness, once it cannot be expelled, has to be subsumed as an epitome of desirable assimilation. This type of an almost perfect blending, or mimicry, in Bhabha's terms, is now recast as a result of the emasculating discipline exerted by the workings of racist love. This regime has disciplined (potentially inassimilable and thus menacing) Asian Americans and has enabled them to gain access to the standardized procedures of assimilation. The model minority idea works this magic through, principally, family dynamics, intermarriage (between white men and Asian American women, as noted alarmingly by the cultural nationalists) and through "gentrification" of the working-class Asian Americans.

The toll honorary whiteness exacts from Asian Americans is translated as internalized refusal, comparable to self-abjection constitutive of melancholic identification (Chin et al. 1974: xxviii). This emotional spiral, as we have already seen in this section, is almost a necessary prelude to the articulation of a new sensibility, which is the cultural nationalists' predominant concern. However, in order to pass

on to a stage where they will be capable of countenancing the insidious work of the cultural stereotype, they need to perform an exorcism of melancholically subsumed objects (in the first instance, their damaged sense of manhood). This is done in a series of gestures affirming ethnic identity politics (claiming historical presence, agency and material contributions to American culture made by Asian American men, primarily) and historicizing the roots of orientalizing images. The political works hand in hand with the psychic strategies of splitting, projection and working-through.

Even as they focus on a wounded subject, Asian American cultural nationalists simultaneously herald new possibilities as they evoke the concept of generations, of Asian American historical presence and tradition. Again, the emerging community is gathered around the naturalized images of (biological) provenance and origin. Significantly, the place of ethnic women is not far away from their role in other ethnic communities at this stage; as the editors note alarmingly the high rate of intermarriage with whites for Japanese and Chinese American women (1974: viii), it becomes clear that the women are called upon to preserve some kind of imaginary "racial purity" and also to reinforce, passively, by endogamy, the elusive boundaries of the ethnic community. If the refusal and rejection bred resignation, shame, and self-contempt, as well as anger and resentment, these affective responses had to be recognized, thought through and recoded in order to become culturally exploitable material for this new literature and culture setting itself up on the American stage.

3. Chicano fraternalism

A similar affective drift, with an underlying political strain, can also be seen in the Chicano manifesto 'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán' (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán), drafted at the First Chicano National Conference in Denver in 1969 (Anaya and Lomelí 1989: 5). As such, it stands out as one of the crucial documents of the Chicano Movement, the civil rights and nationalist grassroots upheaval launched in the late 1960s. The principal goal of the drafters—although Alfred Arteaga, for one, claims it was written by cultural-nationalist poet Alurista (1997:

12)—was to present the manifesto as a "concrete political program" (Anaya and Lomelí 5); my reading, however, will focus on the text's rhetorical strategies and symbolic invocations of Aztlán as a mythic space for the dramatic affirmation of a new "Chicano identity." As is the case with the Asian American manifesto, the language reflects the need to mobilize the community (the apostrophized "*we*, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán" [Anaya and Lomelí 1]) against the perceived oppression and the suppression of cultural, language, economic, and civil rights. Throughout the manifesto it is obvious that the legitimacy for the claims put forward on behalf of this group derives from their historical and continuous occupancy of the land in today's southwestern United States, which they construct in more familiar terms than the abstract national territory; this land is rightfully theirs, it is "our house, our land" (1). Land here both eschews and embraces the connotations of motherland because it also refers to the land the workers work on in "the sweat of our brows" (1). So the identity evoked here is decidedly local, in terms of allegiance to the soil where their families have lived and worked for generations. This restricted solidarity is, however, quickly compounded with a broader affiliation forged with "our brothers in the bronze continent" as opposed to "the foreign Europeans," "gabacho[s]," "gringos" (1). If the first level of local identification served to evoke the history of the violent and unlawful US appropriation of Mexican land in the wake of the Mexican-American War in 1848, this second dramatic announcement displaces the conflict to an international, both transatlantic and hemispheric level because it evokes the whole history behind the colonization, settlement, enslavement and genocide of the populations "on the bronze continents" (1). The third move is strikingly similar to the Asian American and African American projects: solidarity and the rising national consciousness are harboured in masculine bonding, in "brotherhood," thus instituting explicitly a masculine-based model of group membership (1).

So when the particular modes of action are laid out in the Program—one of them, "[n]ationalism," is seen as "transcend[ing] all religious, political, class, and economic factions or boundaries" (2)—one is hard pressed not to notice the elision of gender as a dividing line.[14] Their

sense of entitlement goes, at least in the Plan, well beyond the stirrings of Asian American writers and extends to encompass not only "social, economic, cultural" but also "political independence" (2). The rest of the Plan, with its sections that call for coordinated action, "unity," "economy," "education," "institutions," "self-defense," "cultural values," and "political liberation," indeed sounds like a blueprint for a declaration of independence (or the annunciation of secession).[15] At any rate, they testify to the articulated awareness of the Chicanos' special status within the political system of the United States, which was seen as promoted by nationalism and culminating in "the goal of self-determination" (5). This special status, which is acknowledged even by liberal political theory as pointed out by Kymlicka—namely, their national minority position, is reinforced by another political tradition on which the Plan draws. While it is possible to tie the portent and the tone of the Plan to the Declaration of Independence and thus to a political content easily appreciated by and adaptable to the US nation-state context, Arteaga also points out that, "[t]he notion of the 'plan' follows the tradition of Mexican revolution, during which revolutionary movements were launched with a plan named after the place where it was declared" (12).

Still behind this rhetoric of national liberation and the rallying of the forces, the dominant metaphor is that of the brothers, ultimately forming one great "Familia de la Raza" (4), banding together to protect their land and language and to demand their civil rights. If we recall the decisive linkage between the status of citizenship and the political empowerment that it entails, then this insistence is neither surprising nor superfluous. This rhetoric of political activism mobilizes by its chain of metaphors the multiple layers of Chicano society (workers, youngsters, teachers, artists, etc.), but also targets the most basic, naturalized forms of solidarity building, such as home, family, brotherhood, land.

At the same time, the Plan offers to transcend these local affiliations, if a national and transnational consciousness is to be achieved. Thus the Plan simultaneously announces the dawning of a new, broader set of identifications, as it sets down the political, cultural, and social means for achieving a working level of solidarity. It offers to do so primarily through a mythic symbol derived from the pre-Columbian,

Aztec culture and mythology, with Aztlán as a mythic homeland. It is an interesting, intriguing, and elusive thing to try and locate this Aztlán, although geographically, "[i]t is believed to have been north of the gulf of California," as summed up by Michael Pina (1989: 14). The point, of course, is not to locate it on the map but to draw its imaginary boundaries. Again, the spatial politics of the Plan is striking. On the one hand, there is the idea of banishing "capricious frontiers on the bronze continents" (1); the plural here would imply both Americas, at least. Then, in a move contrary to the previous expansion and broadening, the space shrinks from the size of the continents to "a union of free pueblos" (1), and then even more to "our barrios, campos, pueblos, lands" (2), and even "ranchitos" (3). Thus, one could draw the conclusion that the "nationalism" and national consciousness that the Plan seeks to elicit is in the first instance operative on the level of the local communities, then on the broader international level (US-Mexico, US-Latin America), only lastly to wind up in Aztlán as the place of utopian possibility. The whole program is informed, as I have tried to show, with contrary movements, which need not be mutually exclusive. This movement of expanding and shrinking energizes the formulaic language behind the Plan and enriches its seemingly linear progressive rhetoric with subsidiary impetuses. It also makes clear that the Chicanos' allegiance is neither wholly to the United States nor unconditionally to Mexico, but to "Aztlán," which can shore up their awakened sense of a distinct identity. In terms of cultural nationalist agendas, it is very instructive to follow Klor de Alva's discussion as to how Aztlán, a loaded mythological concept pertaining to the Aztec ruling elites, has been construed as a rallying sign for nationalist Chicano communities since the 1960s, while its problematic historical record (spurious "indigenism" [Klor de Alva 1989: 152]) has been recruited to sustain a communal political platform (Klor de Alva 148-53). According to Michael Pina, it is clear that "historical contradictions" inherent in the reconstruction of the background of the myth are only secondary to those aspects of the myth of Aztlán which "function[...] to provide identity, location, and meaning for a people" (1989: 39, 37). Further grafting on the mythological appeal of Aztlán will be added in a powerful gesture by Gloria Anzaldúa and Chicana feminists and writers, of which more later.

In order to supplement this image of the principal goals of the early phases of the Chicano Movement, let me offer some more examples of the issues at stake, which once again bring to the fore the concept of affective mobilization for the accomplishment of social/political goals. In a 1966 editorial significantly titled 'Long History of Abuse,' one of the concluding paragraphs, aiming at the highest pitch of emotion (in this case through rightful indignation and motivating anger), states: "How long must a man suffer and let his family suffer the indignities of human bondage before he arises and fights back? For the Mexican farm worker it has been more than fifty-five years" (Rosales 2000: 294). Here we find some of the concerns already outlined by the Spiritual Plan: man as a representative of a community; long-term suffering (calling to mind Malcolm X's emphasis on "social degradation") inflicted not only on his individual sense of manhood, but reinforced through his implicit incapacity to provide for his family, a sanctified concept in the Chicano community; the strong evocation of the causes of suffering, "indignities" (one presumes equally social as psychological) proceeding from the worst, and stigmatized, form of social exploitation, "human bondage."[16] The final section of this rhetorical question again brings us back to the injured manhood, which has but one option to recuperate itself—active resistance and struggle.

Gutiérrez-Jones argues, moreover, that "machismo" was successfully promoted "as a concept around which to ground cultural affiliation" (1995: 124). Also, as the appeal makes clear, this resistance mentality was fostered in a specific stratum of the Chicano community, agricultural workers, whose struggle thus acquires the additional sense of urgency—it is an issue of survival for them and their families. They were not the only segment of the Mexican American population that spearheaded the more militant and radical forms of resistance; another, of course, were students. For instance, in the Delano Proclamation, which was written by Luis Váldez, one of the most prominent Chicano cultural nationalists and activists, and published in the Los Angeles State College newspaper in 1968, we can see "a perfect example of how the confluence between the Chicano Movement and the farm worker cause inspired the young militants" (Rosales 295). This Proclamation, however, is interesting for yet another reason: its style clearly reflects

the underlying influence of the non-violent rhetoric of the black Civil Rights movement, thus indicating once again the rich subtext for the reformist and radical styles of expression at this time. The beginning of the Proclamation sets down the by-now requisite commitments (by no means detracting from the need and urgency of their being met): "God-given rights as human beings" (it is hard not to notice here the echo of the Declaration of Independence); the evocation of suffering; the principle of non-violence; the stressing of the need for unity, even across ethnic/racial lines (Rosales 295). Finally, "dignity" is held up as a valuable and non-estimable asset of the suffering and shamed masculinity, as its last refuge: "we do not want charity at the price of our dignity. We want to be equal with all the working men in the nation; we want a just wage, better working conditions, a decent future for our children." This sequence also implies a shared national feeling, and not separatism or isolationism; and also points to class consciousness as a basis for the Movement and its image of masculinity which is dignified, protective, and supportive of its dependents. In block letters, the Proclamation also reads King's famous words: "WE SHALL OVERCOME" (Rosales 295).

Finally, in Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's address to students, the concept of *machismo* is weaved together with the call for political, social, and cultural revolution, and the struggle for Chicano self-determination. This strategic usage will call forth vocal and constructive criticism from the gender divide in the Movement, but here it is critical to see that the conjoining of *machismo* with "guts," "courage," "action," and revolutionary violence, as such conducive to national liberation, situates it as a dam against the tide of destruction threatening Chicano culture and way of life, the coding of the inferiority complex (344) through education, the historical amnesia, and the "ethnic suicide" (341) that the young Chicanos have presumably been subject to. So this cultural nationalist programme, as in the other cases listed here, works with the sense of imminent danger posed to a culture, which is seen to be on the brink of destruction and extinction.[17] Again, the whirl of feelings, articulated and sustained by the speech's chanting and repetitive rhythms, focuses on suffering resultant from shaming, but moves on to the inserted pride, the realization that the self/manhood, and co-extensively the "Chicano nation," can and must find sustenance

in the capacity to retrieve and circulate positive forms of resistance and endurance, which have been part of their historical and cultural archive. Again, the injured or "grieved" subject (Cheng) is represented as a man, and his masculinity is laid out as a principal site of denigration, degradation, abjection, and subjection; also through his suffering, and it is interesting to observe this inflection of the *machismo* ethos, he is ultimately called forth to vindicate his *raza* or people: "We've been bleeding. And we've been getting angry" (344). Although this passage seems awkward, we have witnessed this emotional "spiral" (Scheff 1990) in the texts produced by comparable civil rights and cultural nationalist movements.

4. Native nationalism(s)

Vine Deloria, the former Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians and lawyer-historian, reflects the trend of "nationalist revival" with his 1969 study *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, a revisionist account of the treatment of the American Indian at the hands of American institutions. In a vein similar to the previous denunciations of the practices of US nation-building and state-consolidation, ranging from genocide to cultural denigration, Deloria's nationalist history employs the language of enlightened outrage and reformist zeal, and combines it with contemporary radical rhetoric. If the widespread practice in the past of white-Indian relations was to mandate "conform[ity] to white institutions" and if necessary, the forceful eradication of Indian social, cultural, linguistic, and religious ways (Deloria 8), then the language of uncompromising radicalism seems to provide the first line of defense construed as offense. Still, what one has to bear in mind at this stage is that cultural nationalists feel the urge, take the responsibility, or assume the mandate to act as spokespersons for the whole communities, which occasionally creates an unwelcome sense of generalization, such as is observable in the skipping of gender issues or other in-group differences. For all intents and purposes, in order to fortify their discursive and strategic position, the cultural nationalists of this phase act in the manner of Old Testament prophets, and so is their audience strangely dual: not only do they

address their communities but, one feels it even stronger, admonish the outsiders, revise their received (very often indeed incomplete) version of history and through their harsh, embittered words lead the audience to the perception of their group's vision and point of view. This discursive bashing dealt to the oppressive institutions and systems in all the cases stated here is an attempt to forge one's voice, to reclaim the sense of the dignity of the self and one's community culture as a whole, and to escape the cycle of denigration, degradation, emasculation, cultural pressure, and deprivation. Thus Deloria's words are very apposite, in a sense articulated by the affective politics of the cultural nationalist rhetoric: "Civil Rights is a function of man's desire for self-respect, not of his desire for equality. The dilemma is not one of tolerance or intolerance but one of respect or contempt" (179).

Deloria's mix of prosecution brief, plea, and history lesson is simultaneously more and less than history and fact, a treatise and a diatribe, directed at and against white Americans, both educating and thrashing the readers. Indeed, in his title he indiscriminately apostrophizes the whites, for whose "sins" Custer paid in the battle of Wounded Knee. He identifies some junctures that Indian American history shares with the black American struggle (7-9) but goes on to point emphatically, that "American Indians do not share [western European] heritage," as one of the building blocks of the United States (11). Interestingly enough, it is through the logocentric reach of legal language (numerous treaties, bills, provisions) that the Amerindians were created as subjects of history—though not as full-fledged citizens—and have recently begun more energetically to recuperate their national status on the basis of legal precedents (Fuchs 80-6). What, in this respect, aligns Native Americans with Chicanos is the concept of national self-determination based on land, on a territory occupied by an ethnic/tribal group.[18]

Deloria also constructs a tenuous platform of intergroup solidarity by referring to trajectories of discrimination in the historical experiences of Indians and blacks in the US. Its makeshift nature, however, is not to be located in the civil rights phase but in the later phase of black nationalist activity, marked by increased militancy, leftist revolutionary language, identification with anti-colonial struggles worldwide, and, within it, the stringent articulations of self-determination: "Black

power, as a communications phenomenon, was a godsend to other groups. It clarified the intellectual concepts which had kept Indians and Mexicans [Chicanos] confused and allowed the concept of self-determination suddenly to become valid" (Deloria 180). His position on black nationalism remains ambivalent throughout, although somewhat sympathetic, but some of his implications bear further scrutiny.

In order to articulate the shadow-presence of nationalist thinking in Deloria, I will turn to the ideas as identified by one of the scholars of the emergence of the black nationalist movement, Wilson Moses. He sees "unity (or collectivism), separatism (or self-containment), and a mystical racial chauvinism" as the movement's "consistent elements" (Moses 1978: 20). Moses argues further that the ideas of "organic racial unity" and "organic collectivisim" were staple food for the theory of nationalism as advanced by various European, mostly German, thinkers; besides, more often than not these could be fortified by the commonality of experience shared by the members of the black community (21-22; Appiah 1985: 26-27). Separatism did not so much imply "the perpetual physical separation of races" as "a simple institutional separatism," a goal to establish separate institutions alongside those of the whites (Moses 23). This insight is confirmed by Kymlicka in the broader context of shifts and rifts in contemporary US society: "National minorities in the United States are not irredentist" (67). Finally, a form of chauvinism that Moses refers to in black nationalism "occurred in both religious and secular forms." Its religious bent is evident in the mystical/spiritual evocations of African cultural forms and retentions, in the use of biblical tropes and the interpretations of history as a product of the workings of "the divine providence [...] to elevate the African peoples" (Moses 24-25). Its secular strain originated "from European racial theory" and its claims that each race had some innate characteristics and natural endowments, so that the Negro race contributed its special gifts to humanity in general and American society as a whole (Moses 25; Appiah 25, 29). It is thus possible to trace in these texts marked by the Civil Rights era and the immediate post-Civil Rights period more than the echo of political rhetoric and cultural roots of nationalism as it was consolidated in the modern world. The images of Aztlán and its obvious mythic rather than historical significance; Deloria's attention to the singularity of Amerindian mythology, spiritualism, way of life,

and belief-systems; African American soulfulness—all of these point to this tendency of "mystical racial chauvinism," which of course can and does work as a viable cultural strategy.

What this review of cultural investments in the revival of older (American Indian, Chicano, African American) identities and the emergence of new forms of collective identity (Asian American) aims to show is the viability of the language of nationalism, common culture, shared ideologies, myths of origin, which saw its cusp in confluence with some auspicious worldwide nationalistic and ethnic-revivalist tendencies. Again let me quote the pithy Deloria: "Tribalism is the strongest force at work in the world today. And Indian people are the most tribal of all groups in America" (263). With its somewhat reductive and exclusionist chartering of the community's identity, this phase nevertheless provided energizing formulas and models for subsequent generations of minority members and ethnics. The overall impact of these superimpositions on US society has been on the whole rather disruptive (or transformative) and also too serious for complacent dismissal, as evidenced by the retention of some terms and strategies derived from this period (e.g. the so-called civil rights legislation; multifarious affirmative action programmes; Asian American as a term; various Native American institutions aiming at the inclusive representation of tribal interests; panminority networks; real social gains from Chicano labour activism, and so on). Let me also point out that for this phase of cultural movements the salient norm is to outline the boundaries of the group as opposed to the majority society, and seemingly this would imply a degree of divisiveness, fragmentation, and separation, so unpopular in the narratives of US identity. This conflict seems to be inevitable given that one of the principal goals of these cultural representations has been to redefine the concept of national identity. In other words, cultural nationalists put their stakes on the *pluribus*, rather than the *unum*.

5. Claiming a home in America: *Homebase* (1979)

Shawn Hsu Wong's novel *Homebase*, exemplary of the emergence of Asian American post-civil rights literary discourse, was put out by a small independent press in 1979. Wong himself, alongside Chin, Chan,

and Inada, helped launch a literary equivalent to the more evidently political concerns involved in the affirmation of Asian American panethnic identity, especially so in a successful effort to bring out anthologies of Asian American writing, both in 1974 and in 1991. *Homebase* is, I would suggest, a text which enacts scenarios of subject formation characteristic of the embattled ethnic identity (cf. Cheng, Bhabha, Eng), and simultaneously strives to transcend its discursive and historical limits. It does so through a poignantly mournful, melancholic, and subdued voice, which at times barely covers the subject's pain, and at others all but seethes with suppressed resentment. The narrator's investments are placed in the structures of melancholia, an unresolved and prolonged process of mourning, so that the work it performs is directed both at the privileged norm of white masculinity and the abjected ethnic masculinity, but is also acted out on both white and ethnic femininities. Towards the close of the novel, the narrator-protagonist arguably affects the working-through such that, as Freud points out in his seminal work 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1915), melancholia spends its destructive energy and gets transposed into the psychically more manageable process of mourning.

In one of his visions/dreams the novel's protagonist/narrator is on the road with his fifteen-year-old patronizing blonde bride, who represents America. But, says the narrator, "in fact I have nothing of my own in America. But I stay with her to get what I can out of her" (*Homebase* [*H*], 78). This strategic repudiation on the part of the protagonist, however, amounts to the preemptive protective move against his imminent refusal by the "blonde bride." At the same time, it is hard to miss the ironic echo of the sojourner's complaint; namely, that Orientals were in America only to drain her and get out. The process of writing serves Wong's narrator not only to engage the potentially disturbing and destabilizing affective discourse, but to do so in a way which will proffer to the subject viable avenues of self-affirmation and put him on a solid ground for his engagement with America. The fact that the country is personified as female is in itself nothing new; what is interesting here is the marking of the implied position of privilege that white womanhood—even if allegorized as is the case here—exercises in a racialized and gendered economy constitutive of US history.

The first-person narrator of Chinese American family memoirs, Rainsford Chan, is "named after my great-grandfather's town, the town he first settled in when he came to California from China" (*H*, 1-2). It is one in a sequence of homebases that mark the individual and collective aspects of the layered Chinese American experience, which was constantly haunted by the threat of non-belonging, or temporary location. Other *loci* of emergence are the Sierras, through which his ancestors drilled to make the way for the railroad; the San Francisco Chinatown; Guam as the outpost of the burgeoning empire for freedom and "[t]he Home on the Range" in the Pacific (*H*, 3); and, last but not least, Angel Island, a detention centre for Chinese immigrants after the enactment of the exclusion laws in 1882. Bill Brown notes this obsession with the external world filled with objects: "Wong depicts a character who manages the tragic chaos of his life by desperately naming places and by learning how desires can be channeled through and lodged in material objects" (1998: 940). As evident from the listing of these salient junctions, it is not merely his personal "chaos" which needs to be appeased—what is at stake for the protagonist is, in Brown's words, to "complete[…] his archeological mission by rematerializing his ancestry within the landscape" (1998: 941). In order to effect this recuperation Rainsford engages in the twofold project, whereby the story of his family dovetails with the story of the immigrant and settler Chinese in California. This reclaiming takes place emphatically through the male line: thus we learn that his father is fourth generation Chinese; he often has visions of his male ancestors where he blends with them; his voice fades into the voices of his male predecessors.

Dictated by the exigencies of the labour market and the dynamics of the Gold Rush, the Chinese immigration was preponderantly male, thus the prevalence of fathering and the male-centred generation. Male progeny was given pre-eminence not only in the light of the patriarchal set-up of the Chinese peasant society, from where most of the immigrants hailed (cf. Chan 103), but also by virtue of the immigration constrictions that made restricted provision for "sons" to enter the country on behalf of their sojourner fathers. This created a loophole which both stressed the salience of the family ties on the masculine side and opened up a space for manipulating and invalidating the blood ties

in favour of fictitious "paper sons": "I have memorized someone else's family history, taken someone else's name and suppressed everything that I have chronicled for myself," says Rainsford as he transforms into one of those would-be-immigrants (*H*, 105). Thus the principal site of identity formation and the main anchor of history, the family through generations, is both a privileged repository of memory necessary for identity building and a site of jeopardized history. Such fake, paper reproduction also effectively pre-empts the female body as one of the sites, however constricted, of instituting genealogy, and once again puts the onus of reproducing the family onto the male. Genealogy and family history are thus poor consolation to Rainsford for the loss of his parents before the age of fifteen; he can claim them only through the knowledge that in order to have a history to claim at all, for immigrants it pre-empted the primacy of kinship genealogy. Potentially, however, this crisis of genealogy which creeps through the half-opened doors may have brought about the realignment of community ties; if your own sons cannot make it, there will be others to take their place: "All this new information about my new family has been memorized. All my sons after me will have my assumed name" (*H*, 104). It also announced a state of crisis, which prompts Rainsford to cling all the more ferociously to the materiality of bloodlines and to the irrefutable presence of marks his ancestors left in places and localities. That his lineage is primarily traced through the masculine line testifies, however, to an interesting oversight. Historically, the claim to citizenship for non-whites could be staked only through the female (maternal) body at least until WW II.[19] If the mother's body is excised/excluded, for instance, through death, but looms as a site of providing citizenship status, then this exclusion rather bespeaks the dynamics of abjection—as a simultaneous rejection of and attachment to an elusive object, both feared and adored; and thus conforms to the script of abjecting the female, especially the maternal, if a subject is to gain its symbolic status. Conversely, Rainsford's investment into his masculine progenitors is more akin to the melancholic script, if we understand it as a deeply felt, insatiable loss counteracted by the incorporation of the lost object into the ego, where it becomes alternately repudiated and reverenced, and which the subject is unable to let go of (cf. Cheng 7-14)

At this stage we can see the quandary of Rainsford's identity formation, clinched in between the demand for the immigrant family generational dynamic and the patronizingly obliterating voice of the young bride—America. The family—great-grandfathers, grandfathers, fathers, and mothers (most of them inaccessible in China or through death)—stands for Chinese America, immigration and settlement history, an emergent mixed tradition and memory, whereas America offers youth, consensual ties, and the off-hand dismissal of history. However, as I have shown above, even Chinese America had to fabricate history in order to survive and become situated in the United States. If these are the intertwined conditions of becoming Chinese American, is there a way to avoid both the traps of the paper history, and its underlying obliteration (of individual family) for the sake of preservation (of the entire Chinese community), the record of abjection and violence, and the facile dismissiveness of the American version of the hardships of that history? Wong suggests what I would call the cultural nationalist model, as outlined earlier in the chapter; namely, the primary necessity and obligation to recover the other side of the Chinamen's history, first of all through recoding the derogatory name itself, Chinaman, to assume the affirmative potential: "When you call someone a Chinaman it didn't mean Chinese. It was a mutant name dragged up out of America's need to name names." He goes on to say: "[The Chinese] wanted something out of America, a way of life of their own [...]. In the dream about me, I know my name" (*H*, 81). So "Chinaman," a person who engages America and makes demands on her, is also able to subvert the exclusionary implications of the naming until the day when he actually gets to name himself.[20]

Another space of the Chinamen's history in America, which carries tremendous emotional strain and needs to be recodified, is Chinatown, as another pregnant locality, an ambiguously encoded homebase. Since ghettoization, the enclosure of immigrants, was a hallmark of their precarious status (not only but most dramatically and lastingly for Asian immigrants, especially the Chinese), it is no coincidence that the narrator pointedly focuses on his own and his ancestors' constant and almost unhampered mobility. (His father is a highly mobile professional; his ancestors roamed the West Coast; he himself is an almost compulsory

mountaineer.) Mobility, then, becomes a charged cultural marker. Not only does it reciprocate the call of the western expanses and the myth of untrammelled opportunities awaiting (desirable) newcomers, but it also reinscribes the sojourners' forced removal, expulsions, and constrained movement in search for work along the West Coast. In the appealing model developed by Sau-ling Wong on the corpus of Asian American fiction, this mobility is coded sometimes as necessity and at other times as extravagance, but always within the particular chronotope, as it were. It is also not surprising that the narrator evades the Chinatown mystique by displacing it as a paradigmatic location for the historical experience of the Chinese American community.[21] (So, his first task is to reclaim the heroic, adventurous, and masculine side of the Chinese American character; the second is to exorcise the demons of history; and the third, to repudiate America's "racist love" [Chin et al.] and her blandishments as a form of emasculation). The fact that the American bride is only 15 may point to traces of cultural chauvinism, as one of the strategies identified by Moses in the repertoire of cultural nationalism; this overbearing spoilt girl is so young and rootless in comparison with Rainsford's long-standing Chinese tradition, and clearly lacks the long historical memory of Chinese America.

Rainsford's head-on confrontation with history takes place on "the saddest kind of land there is," on Angel Island (*H*, 101). The important interethnic dynamic of cultural nationalist projects is reaffirmed in the fact that he gets a cue from a Native-American/Chinese man during the 1969 effort to reclaim Alcatraz, as another site of buried grief which has to be released if melancholia is to give way to mourning and ultimately to healing.[22] The man, envisioned as Rainsford's grandfather, directs Rainsford to the piece of land adjacent to Alcatraz which he can finally claim as his homebase, Angel Island—on which following the enactment of the Exclusion Acts thousands of aspiring Chinese immigrants were detained, some of them indefinitely while their immigrant status was being scrupulously screened. The underlying sadness underscores the emotional mould through which melancholic history operates on the ethnic masculinity—melancholic insofar as it references a historically unacknowledged (unrecorded) loss, something that in fact happened but can only be scripted as a phantasmatic event. This is what Brown

terms "oneiric drama," with special reference to the use of dreams in the text. Dreams for Rainsford don't point to the future, they "foretell the past," which is otherwise inaccessible; even more importantly, they "adumbrat[e] what […] might yet come to count as history" (Brown 1998: 951). So far, as Rainsford makes clear when approaching Angel Island, his dominant mode of engaging history was resorting to violence or the evocation of violence, done or suffered by him; oftentimes this violence was transposed through manly activities (sports, adventures, feats of labour, protests), his own or those of his ancestors, but as he comes to this ultimate homebase he finds these models inadequate. Instead he has to reconnect with the emotional landscape of the locale so suffused with pain that it feels like a haunted house giving away ghost-like, dream-like voices (*H*, 103).

Indeed, he relives the whole experience of the detention, the agony of waiting and the psychological terror entailed in the precariousness of the immigrants' position. He casts himself in a position where, according to Brown, his "longing for history" will be "experienced with something like the ache of physical desire," which enables him "to make fantasy physical, to transform the material of the unconscious into materiality, to make the dreamwork count as the cultural work of precipitating countermemory" (1998: 951). If he can survive this history and carry it within him, like other marked sites, then he can challenge America, not on her terms, a whining and exacting 15-year-old bride, but on his terms: "And today, after 125 years of our life here, I do not want just a home that time allowed me to have. America must give me legends with spirit" (*H*, 111); this injunction on America is clearly in breach of the official immigrant credo, giving up your old ways, making the best of where you find yourself and contributing wholeheartedly to your adopted country. There is sense in his stringent requests for the accountability that America bears for her history, which she needs to be reminded of because she tends to forget: "We are old enough to haunt this land like an Indian who laid down to rest and his body became the outline of the horizon" (*H*, 111). Significantly, this reminding, like the previous engagement with a painful past runs parallel with strategies undertaken by another subnational group which mourns its own losses and bereavements. However, if haunting is supposed to mean the

persistence of the suppressed histories, then the only way to appease the ghosts is to honour that past, to face it and name it, just like this cultural project would have it. The Chinese American project, alongside with other similarly inflected agendas, has undertaken to rename the sites of lost history and to ritually, through song, prayer, and writing (*H*, 114), reclaim their past and in doing so obtain empowerment, healing, and recognition in the present. The site of empowerment, as I have tried to show here, is referenced, implicitly or explicitly, as the ethnic and racialized masculine body hurt by the excised history but trying to refashion itself around the potent relics of the surviving and usable past of its male ancestors.

6. Oscar Zeta Acosta: a misfit nationalist

A similar movement infuses the corpus of Oscar Zeta Acosta, a legendary Chicano lawyer and bohemian, political activist and social maverick. Writing in the early 1970s Acosta, also known as the Brown Buffalo (a telling metaphor of masculine strength and aggressiveness), undertakes writing as a form of self-mythologizing. What prevents his works, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and the 1973 blend of fiction and autobiography *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, from sliding into an overbearing testament of self-praise—although they occasionally verge on it—is the saving grace of his self-irony and his penchant for grotesque and burlesque, addressed both to the historical and the personal plane. As is the case with Wong's discourse, Acosta's is also rendered in the first person, posing as a first-hand account of the interaction between the psychic and the social in the formation of the Chicano masculinity in the post-WW II rural Southwest, later on in the urban crucibles of flower-power San Francisco in the 1960s to wind up in the hellish maze of the City of Angels at the turn of the decade. However, as with Wong, Acosta is committed to the project of rendering—and thus also creating—a masculinity which will both admit its crucial investment in the structures of grieving, but will continuously attempt to redeploy them as manly activism, be it in a legal, political, cultural, and personal sense or in terms of gendering. Even though rampant individualism is Acosta's hallmark, even more

pervasively so in his stylistically flamboyant autobiography than in his later work, I would argue that the personal mythology which he finds sustainable is itself socially encoded—casting him either as a beatnik or a bohemian—and played out as a counter-discourse against the normative cultural myths of the time. Finally, it is a clever strategy to authorize himself as one of the viable role-models for the emerging Chicano (as opposed to merely Mexican American) masculinity and cultural nationalist consciousness.

In his first work[23] Acosta dramatizes his coming into consciousness as the Brown Buffalo, echoing in this act of self-naming the two traditions often overlooked or denigrated in the previous array of official categories to cover the Southwestern non-Anglo population, such as "Spanish surnamed" or "Spanish speaking"; the underground strains were the Indio tradition and the history of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious mixing which had taken place in Spanish Mexico.[24] As is the case in most ethnic autobiographies, he partly plays the role of a representative of his community; the breach in the traditional plot, however, occurs quite early in the first book, when it becomes clear, principally through a failed romantic plot botched by the racism of his sweetheart's parents, that the integration into the dominant society will not be a straightforward business for the young Oscar. The next step which he takes, implicitly also on the track to gaining social acceptance, is enlisting in the army, apparently another cauldron and the vehicle of social mobility for so many ethnic youths before and after Oscar, but even this proves a failed strategy. The stigma associated with his ethnic identity proves rather early in the novel to be an insurmountable obstacle to the workings of the machinery of Americanization. Instructively, Oscar engages the third powerful motor of social engineering in US society, education, which seems to offer a glimpse of opportunity for the beleaguered hero.[25]

The second breach in this ethnic life-writing is associated with the systematic efforts, in the later phases of Oscar's young manhood, to destabilize not only the overall national (American) narrative which he could enter at this point through education and work, but also to undermine the ethnic line of the plot. His ultimate interest here rests with the sense of self as an isolated entity, rather than, as will be the case in *The Revolt*, an entity arising from the tension between the individual and

the community. This kind of ontological reductionism is highlighted in the autobiography through the corrosive and self-destructive, but also transformative, agencies of alcohol and various kinds of psychedelic drugs, which Oscar taps into at this stage. Hence his identity crisis is primarily embedded not in the cultural nationalism phase, but in the cultural script of existentialism and experimentation characteristic of the 1960s liberal and youth counterculture; in the book this beatnik/hippie plot, with frequent black-outs, fantastic interludes, and jumbled images, bears testimony to a generalized cultural mood among the youth.[26] His alleged Aztec heritage is simply a symbolic token amid other equally provisional and assumed identities, which can melt at any time as during one of the sessions with a randomly assembled circle of friends: "Miller was into Zen, and Scott into tigers, so I got my clarinet from the car and called up the dead ghost of my Aztec ancestors. We watered the little green plants they cultivated and our heads began to mellow" (*The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* [*ABB*], 158). The subplot, which is carefully interwoven and traditionally reinforces the *Bildungsroman* framework, is Oscar's ambition to become a writer; thus this critical period in his life is doubly coded: his wanderings and his anxieties are possibly, when we consider the backdrop of his literary aspirations, a necessary schooling period, a phase in which he comes to experience life and meets with people who will catalyze his creativity.

In the meantime, the national Cold War paradigm resurfaces regularly in the text, initially through World War II, in which Oscar's father served; the Korean War, which disrupted the lives of some of Oscar's childhood friends; the politics of containment through Oscar's military deployment in Panama; the Cuban missile crisis (*ABB*, 152); and ultimately the Vietnam War (172). However, as the narrator makes clear, this period of consolidating American hegemony on the international scene leaves no room for ethnic politics: "it was 1960 and no one had heard of Chicanos in those days. I would have to wait until after the revolution before any hotshot would pay me for writing about things that mattered" (*ABB*, 155). Let us just take a pause here and note the confluence between the dynamics of the literary market and the politics of ethnic identity, especially in the light of the current heyday of ethnic literature. Also, Oscar's artistic formation is interrupted by law as

another, more powerful paradigm of masculine entrance into the public sphere. Gradually, as evidenced in Acosta's miscellaneous collected writings, Oscar will come to realize that the legal profession may become a single crucial lever for the decisive articulation of Chicano nationalist consciousness and self-affirmation. Still, even as he takes up law school (*ABB*, 155), the writer/beatnik's plot does not entirely wane; it continues to disturb and stimulate the plot of the emergence of a new, ethnic subject, who is confident in his status and gets an education not in order the better to assimilate, but in a true Calibanesque sense, to curse, berate, and outsmart the wielders of legal power through the imitation of their own discourse.

Before he can do that, however, the protagonist has to undergo a process of self-discovery. Symbolically, the first scene in the autobiography is a mirror-scene, which is always partly misrecognition. His reflection is not really him; it can be any number of film stars and cool guys (*ABB*, 12). Besides, his psychotherapy tends to make him a neurotic, obsessive talker who appropriates various personas in his imaginary dialogues with his "shrink." After he quits his unsatisfying law practice, he sets out on an eastward journey and, through a kind of road-movie collage of faces, events, and encounters, provides a hectic portrait of the disintegration of Vietnam-era America.[27] Intermezzos in his mythic travel are served in the form of flashbacks which provide an altogether different kind of American story; his memories of growing up Mexican American in a blue-collar and thoroughly segregated southwestern town serve not only to stabilize his current sense of the total loss of identity by presenting him as a person with a past, with family roots and stories to tell, but also to punctuate, perhaps ironically, the kind of desultory travelling that he has undertaken, or to critically address his propensity to flee the conflicts in his life. His past is a repository of suppressed grief, scars, and resentment—and more than a fair share of hilarious moments—which he tackles in episodes, but its chronological ordering suggests that the Brown Buffalo, as a persona behind the writing of his memoirs, has managed to come to grips with his painful legacy.

The way he effects this synthesis of his submerged past and the disassembled present occurs in his parallel handling of the forward

movement induced by his changing places, which is interlaced with the backward thrust so as to make a connection which will come to bear on his present situation. If we continue to consider the mythical import of his identity-recovering voyage, then it cannot escape our notice how the movement east fails to be regenerative; in fact, it amounts to a string of bizarre episodes interspersed by uninhibited effects of drug and alcohol binges, which actually don't lead anywhere. A true transformation can happen only when he confronts his past and thus interrupts his seemingly progressive movement for a circular one: "I decided to go to El Paso, the place of my birth, to see if I could find the object of my quest. I still wanted to find out just who in the hell I really was" (*ABB*, 184). In a true immigrant-like fashion, but again reversing the dominant direction (he is going south), he arrives to town with only the barest personal possessions, echoing numberless accounts of almost destitute new arrivals in the United States. He lists his belongings: "one brown suitcase [...], one black [...] camera, my b-flat Conn clarinet and $ 150" (*ABB*, 184). However, even in his birth-place, his wish to find out who he really was is embroiled in a dangerous fantasy of enacting a return to the mother's womb (in his memory of the first sight of female genitals) and thus finally annihilating himself through sweet non-existence (*ABB*, 185). The other fantasy he evokes has to do with an equally devastating, if unresolved, Oedipal desire for his mother (185). Both memories cast as powerful fantasies highlight the futility of his quest, at least in the States. He has to go one step beyond the entanglements of his personal psychological crisis and has to engage his family's history by going back to Mexico, where the generations of his family originated. His quest takes on a new and ultimately more productive aspect.

Besides the ironic reversal of the immigrant trail, from the North to the South, we should also bear in mind, as shown by Rachel Adams (2004), the beatnik elements of the plot, where Mexico figures as a place of ritual purification and a constraint-free territory, the exotic nether world to be indulged in freely. Not surprisingly, then, Oscar submits to this impulse all too readily, at least initially. In Mexico he begins to discover a whole new world and is enchanted by the intense beauty of the brown faces (*ABB*, 185) and dazzled by the glorious music of Spanish, which he no longer speaks (due in part to interdiction at school) and it makes him feel his loss keenly: "that language of my youth;

[…] a language of soft vowels and resilient consonants, always with the fast rolling r's to threaten or cajole" (*ABB*, 186).[28] His subsequent encounters with the Juarez underclass are tinged both with a painful and somewhat sentimentalizing nostalgia and with an undercurrent of power imbalance: after all, these people see him as "gringo," thousands of whom cross the border each day in search of the supposed "answer to [their] pain" offered by the bodies of Mexican women, even if he idealizes them (*ABB*, 189). Still, even when it seems that the Brown Buffalo all too easily transfers the burden of his (masculine and ethnic) identity mess onto a real (authentic, Mexican) woman, as a proper antihero, who revels in undermining his high-minded motifs, he ends up in jail and then stands trial before a Mexican woman magistrate, who denounces his claims for ethnic and professional alliance by curtly dismissing his American macho behaviour and showing him the extent of his difference and detachment from the Mexicans. He is, after all, just another American, crossing over and trying to recuperate himself by virtually feeding off the bodies of the Mexicans: "I am guilty of all those nasty things, vile language, gringo arrogance and *americano* impatience with lazy *mexicanos*" (*ABB*, 193). This is not the final twist in his identity search, however, and the last word, which ultimately launches another phase of Oscar's engagement with Mexican American identity, is given to an American immigration official who almost turns Oscar from the border because he has no papers and "[y]ou don't *look* like an American, you know?" (*ABB*, 195). Repudiated by both master narratives of identity, neither Mexican nor fully American, Oscar finds out that this search, instead of ending in his birth-place or in Mexico, has only just begun, as he tries to document in the sequel, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*.

The Revolt of the Cockroach People *(1973)*

> [D]ance […] with lead in my belly and tears in my heart…
>
> Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Revolt* (208)

This mixed-genre text, a fictional-factional follow-up to *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, listed ambiguously on the cover of the 1989 Vintage paperback edition under "Chicano Literature/

Autobiography," and, as pointed out earlier, elsewhere classified as a "novel," carries an initial endorsement by the pioneer of the counterculture scene, the journalist Hunter Thompson, and sports a dedication to Joan Baez, among others.[29] The first book dealt with Oscar's personal crisis and only tangentially and more forcefully towards the end tried to connect it with the broader socio-political scene. It is instructive, in order to diagnose the supposed transformation the protagonist has undergone in the meantime, to look into one of the standing motifs in the novel, that of the cockroach, the famous *la cucaracha* of the folk song. Initially, this "old revolutionary song is just about the only Spanish I know. It puts me to sleep," and is playfully evoked by Acosta with a counterculture twist, "porque le falta,/ marijuana pa' fumar" (because she [the vermin is female in Spanish] needs/ marijuana to smoke) (*The Revolt of the Cockroach People* [*RCP*], 23).[30] Another clue leads to "an old movie classic, *La Cucaracha*", featuring "General Zeta […] a combination of Zapata and Villa with Maria Felix as the femme fatale" (*RCP*, 37). As usual with Acosta's representational strategy, the high-minded aspect is always downplayed and subverted by its popular and unorthodox counterpart. The reference changes, however, when the term is used in connection with the "Cockroaches" in the East Los Angeles *barrio* or in the syntagm, "poor Cockroaches in far-off villages in Vietnam" (*RCP*, 13). With his use of the term encompassing Mexican history, extending to Mexican American trials and pointing to the international context of the Vietnam War, the narrator programmatically weaves a series of parallels and similarities which underlie the politics of his text and ethnic politics in the 1970s, with the heyday of the Chicano Movement. The manifold significations couched in the motif give Acosta free rein to indulge in his protagonist's, "Zeta's," aggrandizement fostered by his participation in and contribution to the Movement, but also enable him to eschew the standard revolutionary clichés. His constant struggle, as the authorial consciousness, to avoid clinching the meaning of zoological imagery in the novel, populated by (brown) buffalos and cockroaches, renders vivacity to the text, which could easily slip into dry political propaganda. Also, a degree of self-irony and his inveterate iconoclastic individualism lace Acosta's flare for self-promotion and help to harness

his dramatic outbursts. This fruitful exchange is documented by Michael Hames-García, who proposes to read this transgeneric text within the context of the personal/political narrative called "testimonio" and that of the "grotesque satire" (2000: 464).

So the overt personalizing impulse behind the former is tempered by the ironic tug of the latter. This by no means, according to Hames-García, detracts from the serious implications of Acosta's "critique of certain assumptions about authenticity and identity that plagued the Movement" (464). Similarly, one of the important strands in Acosta's account may be identified relying on Ron Eyerman's very helpful model of collective memory and cultural trauma in the context of African American cultural production as "the formation and reworking of collective memory and collective identity" (2001: 10), here applicable to the situation of Chicanos (Mexican Americans). These reconstructive processes, summed up in the action of remembering, and constitutive of building a community or even a nation, have been repeatedly evoked and their significance rehearsed in the non-fictional and political texts mentioned in the first part of my discussion. Eyerman sees them rooted in salient historical events; for African Americans it was slavery, for Chicanos it was primarily the 1848 Treaty. I am not trying to equate the two historical occurrences; it becomes impossible to do so in absolute terms, but to regard them in relation to the immediate group which they have historically affected.

Acosta's texts, in line with manifestoes, present other possible sites of collective trauma, such as the Spanish colonial venture and its impact on Aztlán. He comes back to this inaugural historical event repeatedly in his account of the Chicano Movement, most notably so in the episode of the trial of the so-called "Tooner Flats Seven" (*RCP*, 209), where he strategically enacts a definition of Chicanos as a (national) collectivity that literally becomes interpellated in the official and highly public arena of the American legal system and thus granted public recognition. Another important aspect of Acosta's account can be traced in his mapping of distinctive events in the group's more immediate past and their subsequent refashioning as carriers of collective, in Eyerman's words mythic, memory. The importance of the cultural, psychological, and historiographic work for the Chicano group undertaken by Acosta

can be better appreciated if we bear in mind the urgency and chaos attending the events, which thanks to Acosta and other non-fictional and fictional accounts will have been retroactively recognized and construed as "primal scenes" (for an application of the term in this context, cf. Eyerman 1) for forging the contemporary Chicano consciousness. That is why Eyerman's assertion of the centrality of the processes of "interpretation and representation of the past" as they bear on "the constitution of collective memory" (4) can be justifiably applied to Acosta's narrative agenda. Events which have by now been consensually designated as constitutive of the group's collective consciousness, and are covered in Acosta's novel-memoirs in an admirably short period after their occurrence, given the fact that the book was published in 1973, are the Chicano school blow-outs in 1968 and the massive anti-war demonstrations in LA, "the Chicano Moratorium of August 29, 1970" (*RCP*, 198). Besides these commonly recognized and enshrined events, Acosta also brings in other actions, more significant in terms of his personal history, but also in a sense representative of the process of constituting the collective memory clustered around significant, traumatic events.[31] Into this category fall his numerous contacts and meetings with people later on to be identified and put down in history as political and intellectual leaders of the Chicano movement, notably its progenitor, Cesar Chávez, and his symbolical offspring, Corky Gonzales and Reis Lopez Tijerina (*RCP*, 40).

The appeal of Acosta's agenda, as well as its greatest risk, may be said to reside in his commitment to turn events into historical data by forswearing the sanction of temporal distance. Namely, as evident in Eyerman's model of cultural trauma, a passage of time, temporal deferral is needed to give a sense of an event as a potential rallying ground for the emergence of group identity (12), and even psychological accounts of trauma put a high premium on the necessary period of "latency" before an experience can be termed traumatic (Eyerman 3). The fact is that for some of the experiences Acosta did not wait for the sanction of history, writing as he was from the position of a zealous participant or an interested by-stander, but was nonetheless vindicated by later historical assessment and emerging historiography on the period. Taking the risk of choosing what and how to represent, however, is attendant upon the

role which intellectuals in the widest sense of the term play in this model of cultural emergence, as pointed out by Eyerman, and Acosta was not afraid of acting on that premise. Summing up what was going on before his time and what had significantly affected the fate of his ethnic group, and incorporating new elements into a group consciousness still in the making has made this text one of the grounding scripts for collective identity construction and the way it implicates or clashes with the creation of personal identity.

Looking back on his life in politics and the Movement, the textual Acosta is likewise able to construct episodes which accrue great symbolic import. One of the earliest but very important scenes, because it traces his transformation from a lone rider into a community political activist, is a carefully laid out and symbolically overcharged moment of conversion, so to speak. And my term here may not be so much off the mark given the fact that the change occurs in a chapel. The importance of the episode is manifold; his conversation with the ailing Chávez signifies the transferal of power onto a new generation of people; it also implies new strategies of struggle and the affirmation of nationalist and militant policies which were in abeyance in the first phase of the movement; and last, but not least, it enhances dramatically one of the principal contrasts entailed in the protagonist's worldview—the clashing demands of his private self and his public, ethnic, group identity. This dichotomy is seemingly cast as taking place between the "American way" and its ethnic variants, as enlightened and nationalist positions, respectively. However, as shown not only by Acosta, but also by Wong, this distinction no longer holds true as ethnic identity construction claims its validity for and a place in the national sphere.

We have seen this tension informing the tone and the message of Wong's text through his constant recasting of a group's past as history, in which, uncannily, personal remembrance comes to exemplify historical memory. An individual's mind becomes a synecdoche for the collective processes of remembering. In Acosta's work this juxtaposition takes place between his earlier and his later text: *The Autobiography* has effectively shown the limits of indulging personal pain and a dead-end street of wallowing in personal psychic trauma if detached from its historical and social (i.e. collective) context. His focus in his second

book, therefore, moves towards more serious examination of the sutures between the (personal) past and (collective) history. However, being situated at the sutures, the meaning can never be stabilized, and the emphasis shifts from one position to the other, from Acosta's disavowals of Chicanos' group effort to his earnest commitment to the "cause," from his role as the militant lawyer and activist to his iconoclastic shadow-self of the writer and counterculture guru. The book swerves between the poles of "identitarian" and "individualist" positions, as Acosta ruminates on his chances upon his arrival at Los Angeles and his attempts to launch a professional writing career: "Politically I believe in absolutely nothing. I wouldn't lift a finger to fight anyone. In a way I agree with Manuel: the best way to accomplish what you want is simply to *work* for it, on an individual level" (*RCP*, 28). Here is the gist of the American way, the gospel of individual effort and achievement, a belief that the system is only incidental and malleable to an individual's will to power and drive for success. However, in the next breath, Acosta acknowledges another impulse, to think of himself as "a member of a group," and as such he is ready to register an undertow of violence, aggression, and hostility as social phenomena resulting from the Chicanos' unsatisfactory status (*RCP*, 28).

The group's status is premised, not accidentally, on the "brown" body, its excessive, lumpish, greasy corporeality, also evocative of its execution of back-breaking chores and its apparently endless availability for cheap manual labour. That brown body, the buffalo, a metaphor for the Chicano entity, is at the same time the backbone of the regional economy, but is also an anonymous mass of flesh and bone, expendable and mutually replaceable, not least by a steady immigration flow from the United States'southern neighbour. Omi and Winant have demonstrated how physical schema contributes to the process of racial formation as it has played itself out in the US. Frantz Fanon approaches the racial body as a sort of phobogenic object, an object capable in the economy of the racialist society to incite, sustain, and *contain* phobia as a psychic reaction combining irrational fear and repugnance (1967: 154; emphasis mine). In this context, the insertion of cockroaches as one of the trademarks of Chicanos illustrates not only how the phobia operates, but also how it can be counteracted; the cockroach as a paradigmatic

phobogenic object turns into a self-consciously crafted symbol of perseverance, resistance, and resourcefulness. The buffalo may be grand and noble, but it is also fated for extinction; the cockroach, on the other hand, thrives on, and is virtually inextinguishable in, his lowly role.

Besides conveniently filling out this slot of the abject, the racialized male body operates on other levels too, as I have outlined in the introductory part of the chapter. To draw on Fanon again, "I am the slave of my own appearance," as it becomes clear in the moment of interpellation of the Negro by a white boy: "'Look at the nigger! [...] Mama, a Negro!'" (116, 113). 'The Fact of Blackness,' as Fanon titles this chapter, also works among other things with one sense of the Du Boisian "double consciousness," "to experience [one's] being through others" (Fanon 109). Fanon goes on to elaborate on this crippling experience: "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness" (110). The final result of this "overdetermin[ation] from without" (Fanon 116) is quite literally the death of the coloured body: "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day" (113). Let us see how this white cannibalism devours the brown body.

Even as the Brown Buffalo glories in his bodily escapades, from eating to sexuality, he is also careful to note how (racialized) masculine bodies themselves become scrolls for marking anger, hate, pride or *machismo* in the carefully arranged postures, physiques, tattoos, dress-codes etc. of the numerous Los Angeles gangs (cf. Smethurst, Paredes). Still this is very much what Fanon has in mind when he denounces the power of the white culture to determine the body image of the Other, and of the Other's entangled investment with keeping up with that image. This contradictory position is gorily presented in the episode of the second post-mortem done on the body of a young Chicano detainee, Robert Fernandez, who dies in the Los Angeles county prison under murky circumstances, prompting his family, represented by Acosta himself, to reopen the case. The detailed record of the renewed dissection of Robert's bulky body ("Robert was a bull of a man. He had big arms and legs and a thick neck now gone purple" [*RCP*, 99]) comes

to represent the carefully recorded and systematically executed, as post-mortem is wont to be, violence done on the masculine brown body by the system's scalpel. Paradoxically, this "distortion," desecration, done for the second time on the "sprawled out" body is initiated by Acosta, the lawyer: "Me, I ordered those white men to cut up the brown body of that Chicano boy, just another expendable Cockroach" (*RCP*, 104). That is, as a part of the system which cannibalizes brown bodies, Acosta cannot help acting differently. This destruction and then necrophiliac defilement of the racialized masculine body clinches the meaning of colour and corporeality in the making of race, and an individual's status attendant upon that marker. Potentially, in Rainsford's Chinese America as well as in Los Angeles during the 1970s for the Chicanos, the racialized masculine body has always already been "clad in mourning," enveloped in the potential for violently induced decomposition. It has been, in other words, a melancholic body in the national imaginary, a site of numerous identifications and always vulnerable to their more or less violent playing out.

The site of gender in Acosta's novels

If elsewhere Acosta the author, by way of his uncontainable carnivalesque/satirical impulse, eschews a typical nationalist self-righteous pose, one place where he doesn't—and perhaps cannot—move away from the ideological framework of the cultural nationalist programme is the site of gender. A nationalist agenda upholds mythic, reified images of womanhood as a suitable fold for the people (*la raza*) to gather in; in the Chicano nationalist consciousness that role has been played by the Virgin of Guadalupe (the patron-saint of Mexico, also greatly venerated in the Hispanic US Southwest). On a ranch acquired by Chávez's Farmworkers Union, a chapel is adorned not with the images of divine male personas, but rather "[a]n oil painting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the patron saint of the *campesino*, hangs above the flowers. A bronze madonna with a bronze child in her arms is their principal deity. There is no Christ in the homey green temple" (*RCP*, 44). Symbolically, then, the (semi)divine figure of the mother and virgin conjoins the two presumably most valued traits of womanhood, which fixes its status in the very act of glorifying and venerating it.

The thematic kernels of both *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt* to a great extent play up to this sanctified (and sanitized) image of womanhood. Mexican American women are primarily mothers, sisters, or classmates; as such, they are mostly off-limits as sexual objects, which, on the other hand, makes them game for Buffalo's sexualized Freudian fantasies. The realm of fantasy in both texts acts as the site of an imaginary register which continuously disrupts the normative register, and so reinforces contradictory pulls at work in Acosta's writing agenda. However, this is not to say, as correctly observed by Hames-García, that Acosta can be considered immune to the tendency to reinscribe the same set of gender positions as has been the case with other writers considered here. So even his "critical representation of sexist nationalism" (Hames-García 475) inflected by satirical and phantasmatic impulses serves more to diagnose a malaise than to treat it. Women as family members and relatives are protectively covered by the sacred taboo, while other ethnic girls are culturally undesirable, and this is where fantasy works hand in hand with melancholic foreclosure. Due to their workings, the young Oscar is not disposed to perceive ethnic girls/women as "primary" sexual objects; their bodies have been foreclosed from the circuit of desire, which institutes a white woman's body as its final, laudable goal. The "brown" woman is potentially "La Malinche," the traitor of her race, whose surrender, presumably body and soul, to the early Spanish conquerors presages all subsequent treasons committed against her people. It is therefore not surprising that this image of shamed, denigrated womanhood resurfaces in the early nationalist movement (*RCP*, 159-60; Gutiérrez-Jones 1995: 130)—except in Mexico, outside of US national space, where, on the other hand, "brownness" can function as an exotic booster to (any) masculinity.

The hidden workings of phantasmatic identifications besetting the ethnic masculine subject can by no means become unravelled even at the moment of their uncovering. Namely, the Brown Buffalo is aware that he has adopted the excision of the racialized female body from the cultural repository of desirable femininity, but this does not prevent him from pursuing the norm. On one level, however, it can be said for both texts that the female complex fares equally badly—regardless of its respective starting position in the cultural repository: what lurks

behind the seeming sexual looseness and liberation of the 1960s is, again, a commodification of the female body (both white and ethnic), while mother/sister retains its special, albeit fixed, position. Due to its immovability, it is a convenient adjudicator of meanings attached to femininity, but is itself a victim of that process, which it neither directs nor controls. Acosta's problematic sexual politics also comes to the fore in his iconoclastic, irreverent, and hilarious, but nevertheless chauvinist linkage of his potent protagonist's political awakening for the nationalist cause with his discovery of the brown woman (or, in this case, more scandalously, a girl) as a desirable object (*RCP*, 86-7).

The images of ethnic masculinity making its bid for entrance into the purview of national cultural representations which parade through these texts bear the marks of a specific cultural and aesthetic agenda, which, however, cannot be divorced from its political and social implications. In the cultural nationalist, revivalist model of ethnic formation, the stakes of representing ethnicity as a culturally relevant structure, especially in its masculine form, tower over other related issues of ethnic and identity representation. This engagement taking place in the texts discussed here is meant to be understood as a type of cultural reaction, as providing a range of signifying practices which can be deployed, re-codified, or deconstructed by subsequent similarly committed cultural projects, which is what has happened when the structures activated by these authors' imaginings of ethnicity and subaltern, aberrant identities in the national imaginary begin to be recognized and contested by another model, centering on female ethnic identity. The next chapter shows what happens to identity politics as its operations get distributed both along the axis of gender and that of ethnicity and race, complicating further the stakes entailed in identifications available to emerging subjects.

In this chapter the focus was on the outlines of the tentatively called cultural nationalist model of ethnic emergence, as a first self-consciously elaborated project on the part of members of ethnic minorities in the US. As such, it was proleptic; committed to specific cultural and political goals; given to political engagements and interventions into the public space. Also, the representational strategies employed by these writers radiated an uncomfortably high degree of misogyny, to such an extent,

in fact, that it signalled, in my view, an overwhelming concern with a specific "bogeyman in the closet," where the feminine signifies a whole set of ethnic masculine concerns. This, coupled with the representations soaked in violence being suffered or inflicted by the characters/personae in the given texts, could also be seen as a backdrop against which an ethnic (here especially racialized) masculine subject can be envisioned and interpellated. Thus his positioning takes place between what Ann Cheng has aptly called "grief" and "grievance."

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II: Summoning a new subject: "ethnic feminists"

> The students […] were new women, scientists who changed the rituals.
>
> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

> To think about (and wrestle with) the full implications of my situation leads me to consider what happens when other writers work in a highly and historically racialized society. For them, as for me, imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*.
>
> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (4)

1. Gender, genre, race

My remarks in the preceding chapter dealt with the Civil Rights and immediate post-Civil Rights generations of predominantly male writers and tried to address the ways they employed the politics of cultural nationalism to remasculinize the concept of American ethnic/racialized manhood. I have attempted to show how this remasculinization entailed a refined process of recoding grief, emasculation, racialization, gendering, and oppression in order to signal and usher in a redefinition of American nationality. More often than not, however, this redefining also entailed the framing of ethnic femininity, as made clear, for instance, in Madhu Dubey's reading of the reaches of the black cultural nationalist discourse: "Black Aesthetic discourse, consolidated around the sign of race, discouraged any literary exploration of gender and other differences that might complicate a unitary conception of the black experience" (1994: 1). By necessity of focus, my presentation has made it seem as if women were nothing more than convenient objects of men's creative potency, but that is far from true. Energized from France in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there arose a sustained effort at producing a discourse which would seriously challenge the societal assumptions, too often taken at their face value, about the feminine,

and its cultural potential. This worked in tandem with the indigenous, American, strain of more stridently political feminism, which sought to intervene in the public sphere of labour relations and gender equity, but also turned upside down the traditional assumptions of the strict division between the public and the private, notably through sexual politics, including motherhood.

However, there has been a continuous perception that the premises of the second feminist wave were shaped by the concerns of the white middle-class Euro-American women, who have, consequently, mostly profitted from it. (Cf. Dawson; Friedman; Hull et al.; Wall) Still, a glance at the discursive scene gives a more varied and complex picture, and if we were to judge by the textual quantity, we would be hard pressed to overlook at the time crucial and indeed historical contributions of ethnic women. The slew of texts which they contributed to the literary and, somewhat later, critical canon of American letters intervenes forcefully and consequentially into the new racial/ethnic paradigm promoted by the Civil Rights generation of activist and writers, their main task being to tackle and tease out the gendered aspects of the allegories of ethnic and national formations. (Cf. Christian; McDowell 1980)

Slightly modifying Dawson, my aim in this chapter is to show "how the intersection of race and gender shapes the social location" (142) of ethnic women occupying textual space in the novels of two of the most vocal and insistent voices of the period: Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston. Cultural nationalism, as pointed out by Omi and Winant, is decidedly a nation-based paradigm of racial formation and is thus oblivious or insensitive to gender (or class, for that matter). As already stated, the norm which regulates US subjectivities is implicitly masculine and "white," so that any interrogation into the ways that ethnic feminists subvert these presumed links has to attend to questions both of racial/ethnic and gendered identifications as they suture, to borrow Palumbo-Liu's terms, the somatic, the psychic, and the political.

These complex intersections are negotiated through overdetermined generic moulds. Patricia Chu in *Assimilating Asians* (2000) pertinently addresses this double articulation through a frame of analysis engaging the generic models of the *Bildungsroman*, alongside the historical novel and other salient genres, all instrumental in the crystallization and

circulation of the traits constitutive of the national subject especially in their obviously gendered narrative strategies. Chu validates her starting contention that these genres, even while effecting the interpellation of characters and readers as national subjects, do it by assigning them to different plots and symbolic protocols depending on the gender marker.

Pin-chia Feng reads works by two ethnic women writers—Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston, also represented in my enquiry—in the tradition of "the strong genre" of the "narrative of development" (1997: 2), namely, the *Bildungsroman*, and shows how the genre flexes to accommodate female and racialized subjects in the process of recounting their *Bildung* (6-9). In another important study on the way the black female writers of the 1970s incorporated and redefined the ideology and discourses proffered by black cultural nationalism, Dubey contributes a crucial insight, that "black women novelists of the 1970s interrogated the racial discourse of nationalism" (1), creating in their texts spaces where the received generic expectations are continuously undermined or expanded by the exigencies of gender and race/ethnicity. Another "strong genre," in the sense that it has already been overdetermined by cultural assumptions that we term phallogocentric, and thus has already inscribed the position of the gendered subject, while being also implicitly ethnocentric, is autobiography (life-writing). That this genre also encodes blueprints for representations of larger structures even when being articulated in a "private," first-person mode, is attested by Azade Seyhan, who considers autobiography and "fictional confessional" as the "unauthorized biography of the nation" (2001: 150). This would imply that for ethnic women writers the engagement with these genres in particular is far from an idle literary exercise, and that the new meanings they couch in these well-known forms amount to challenging the presumptive norms of representing gender, race, and the nation.

Given the already voiced uneasiness with prefacing the ethnic women's discursive foray with what has become a paradigmatic battle-cry of feminism, now paradoxically almost fixed in its unorthodoxy but, in my view, still an indispensable instrument not only of historical critique but also of epistemological turnaround, I will risk doing just that. Hélène Cixous's 1976 transgeneric meditation 'The Laugh of the Medusa' by its blend of poetry and philosophy disregards the rationalist

foundations of writing, and purports to announce a new mode of "feminine" writing (879). Cixous attacks with bold strokes—the extent of her metaphors as broad as the field she tries to survey critically—"that enormous machine [Western writing] that has been operating and turning out its 'truth' for centuries" (879). She furthermore locates one of the crucial strategies in the struggle over representation, namely, "woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history" (880). Cixous recognizes the nexus between the moment of speaking and the prerogative to create history; in Western knowledge systems, this occasion is of a paramount import indeed: "To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic concern, in every political process" (880). Secondly, Cixous acknowledges the investment of writing in the maintenance of the symbolic and political orders, themselves tightly joined. So a woman, when "seizing" the moment, stealing it from its symbolical arrangements, works implicitly against but also within the established systems. She is in a position, however, to "forge for herself" what may amount to a new discourse, not only for rendering her present determination not to miss the opportunity to speak, but also for speaking on behalf of all those missed opportunities in the past: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 885). This is an important utterance, insofar as it calls for the rereading of myths, narratives constitutive of any one culture, in such a way as to revise the fetishized and demonized, ultimately spoken-for, image of femininity. If we can see the Medusa in different terms than given by mythology, then we can begin to grapple with the systemic misrepresentation of women in Western cultures.

So the line of critique which takes on discourses of patriarchy and gendering goes, if not always hand in hand, then a step behind or ahead of critical attention paid to the fault line of race/ethnicity. This is excellently demonstrated by Alice Walker in her series of groundbreaking essays later collected under the title *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, mostly written between 1967 and 1983. As shown by Walker's interventions, it is impossible at this stage to imagine a pristine place of enunciation, such a spot which would be uncontaminated with

(phal)logocentric assumptions. Also, as much as the Western paradigms reflect the problematic historical processes of their formation, they are also a necessary point of departure; in other words, for good or ill these paradigms provide a symbolic mode within and against which the writer finds herself working.

The sense in which I propose to use the expression from the title, "ethnic feminists," is to highlight the challenge which the emergence of ethnic women writers ("women writers of colour," as they are sometimes designated) presents to the entrenched representational systems which bluntly favour the masculine norm, whether in its dominant form (that of white masculinity) or in its somewhat denigrated ethnic variant. If and to the extent that their respective poetics may also be said to be influenced by the specific agendas flourishing within the realm of the feminist movement and the concomitant feminist theory (this is particularly the case with Walker and Kingston), this adds to the strength of my argument, but, I repeat, this is not the primary intended meaning of the appellation in the chapter title. It is not enough simply to state that the fledgling and later on very viable feminist movement during the 1970s enabled writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, or Maxine Hong Kingston to produce feminist revisions of received plots, for it is also the case that they engaged no less powerfully if critically the cultural nationalist discourse of their immediate predecessors and ethnic male contemporaries.

In this gap lies the double bind of this writing project. Cultural nationalism inscribes racialized masculinity as presence, affirmation and plenitude. In the process, however, this valorization may set itself up as a fetish. The ethnic feminist project reacts to this potential fetishizing of ethnicity huddled around masculinity by pointing to its performative function, its masking of lack, which is one of the fetish's functions. They thus destabilize the presence and plenitude of racial identities through generic and representational strategies, subtended by gender categories. Their project is feminist insofar as it foregrounds the constructedness of racialized masculinity as a privileged signifier, as such, however, dependent on the construal of difference, ethnic femininity. On the other hand, female identification is all the time overridden by ethnic/racial identifications making the protagonists in

this trajectory of identity at best reluctant participants in a racialized collectivity. The normative identification favouring whiteness, itself heavily dependent on othering as shown in the previous chapter (cf. also Pellegrini 92), further qualifies their membership in the nation.

2. Psychoanalytic plots

Even as we have diagnosed certain predilections towards positioning gender differently in the dominant cultural scripts as laid out in genres such as historical fiction, the *Bildungsroman*, and life-writing, it is still necessary to account for this inherent peculiarity. We have seen in the previous chapter how contemporary cultural and ethnic studies' practitioners have identified several predominantly psychoanalytic scripts which account for representations of racial and gender difference implicated with the model of ethnic emergence as articulated in cultural-nationalist discourse. Implicitly, these models tried to account for the work invested in the fantasy of the exemplary national subject. On one hand, thus, the set of investments around masculinity as some kind of transcendental signified is being retained by these writers, while on the other level they insist on recuperating and incorporating in their representations the racialized (male) body, which hovered in widespread images as a shadow, stereotype, fetish or as a caricature, if we recall Ellison's and Morrison's readings of American films and classic literature. Can revised psychoanalysis offer in this case some exemplary tales?

I would like to keep in focus the previously articulated model of abjection,[1] which I will revisit in this section, but also want at this point to introduce another configuration of gender difference, offered as a challenge to the grounding force of the Oedipus complex in the individual identity formation, here presented by psychoanalysis inflected with feminist readings. This may help us to account for the representation of gendered identities in excess of the national imaginary, even while psychoanalysis is perceived to be less efficient in addressing the question of race and ethnicity.

The models I have been using so far, principally the Freudian model and Kristeva's inflections of it, have been found lacking and prejudicial

when addressing jointly the questions of gender and race. Indeed, it has been noted that African American scholars and critics by and large bypass psychoanalysis as a viable vehicle of analysis and try to supplement it with other models (Wall; Spillers; Abel et al.); Alice Walker does it through interestingly conceptualized spirituality, which I will address later on. This red alarm at the mention of psychoanalysis is perhaps expected in view of the recognized and increasingly theorized ethnocentric bias of this practice (the ethnography of the white, male Western psyche as the implied object of discourse). Still, recent critical anthologies situated at the intersection of race, psychoanalysis and feminism, show a way out of this impasse (Abel et al. 1997; Lane 1998). Projects like these also provide a starting point for my enquiry into the workings of powerful narratives of identity proffered by psychoanalysis (as it configures femininity) and postcolonial theories (as they configure nation and minority formations). My contention will be that on the level of textual politics in the novels by ethnic women writers discussed here (notably Morrison and Kingston), narratives grounding the formation of gendered *and* racialized subjects become crucially intertwined with questions of history and national representativeness, and the issues of genre.

Psychoanalysis has shown since the powerful re-readings of Frantz Fanon in the 1950s its potential to engage the questions of raced/ethnic subject, even as it highlighted Fanon's unwillingness to address the problem of gender; even more recently, there have arisen approaches which bring psychoanalysis and critical race theory to bear on the cultural text (Spillers, Abel, Wiegman, Hartman, Cheng and Fuss, to name but a few). However, in view of Barbara Christian's staunch advocacy of non-psychoanalytical accounts of identity formation (in Abel et al. 1997), we can also identify in these novels alternative scripts of psychic formation which complicate the Freudian scenario.

Dominant tendencies in contemporary theory on various forms of identities, principally derived from psychoanalytic approaches, endorse a view of the feminine that posits its presence but closer to the margins and borders, concomitant with the earlier, and thus surpassed, phases of an individual's development. Countering these assumptions, Jessica Benjamin maintains that, as long as the grounding psychoanalytic drama is recast in terms of "the equation of paternity with individuation and

civilization" (140) and (psychic and social) subjectivity seen to be dependent on the repudiation of maternal traits, so long the arrangement of gender relations in Western societies will continue to posit the feminine, interestingly, as the primary but otherwise superseded script of identity formation. Diana Fuss further confirms this strategic forgetting (for boys) of their primary female (maternal) identification, leaving it behind and getting back to it through the prism of the phallic order (for girls) by stating how the originary nature of these identifications also means that they are pre-theoretical, thus resistant to symbolization (58).

Even while Benjamin acknowledges the powerful and constraining models of symbolizing the feminine, as laid out by Kristeva for instance, she goes on to outline a model which recognizes, reactivates, and also recuperates the feminine in the postoedipal phase, through what she calls the "intersubjective" perspective on gender (20). Relying on the importance of preoedipal identifications and interaction between mother and child, Benjamin follows a trajectory of the emergence of the gendered subject which is, for a boy, not attained by simply "repudiating the femininity," but rather by engaging with it through a strategic renunciation, which still enables femininity to function as a possible source of later, more mature identifications (Benjamin 169). Similarly, she attempts to bypass a possible dead-end of the Oedipal phase for girls, which leaves their feminine identification culturally denigrated and side-lined, rather than fully recognized as a viable identity option, as the intersubjective model would have it (Benjamin 168).

As suggested by Diana Fuss, there is no positing a unitary or universal pathway for the mesh of identifications constitutive of any one subject. Therefore, even a canonical reading "that posits identification with the phallus as the inevitable precondition of female subjectivity" lends itself to several possible interpretations, thus not unequivocally endorsing the Oedipal line (Fuss 30). Earlier, Chodorow, in her important study of the socio-psychological stakes for patriarchy in the "reproduction of mothering," in fact has moved away from the Oedipal phase and gone back to sketch the preoedipal lines of identity development. This preoedipal phase is centred on the mother-child relationship, and Chodorow specifically shows how it affects children of both sexes. While for boys the next stage involves the passing through

the Oedipus complex in order to secure masculine identification with the father, for the girl child the onset of the Oedipal phase entails more complex negotiations. What is at stake for her is to achieve a sufficient degree of separation from the mother, but at the same time not to shut down the possibility of female identification. So for girls, the preoedipal phase lasts longer, the attachment with the mother is not so easily dissolved as is usually the case with their male counterparts, and the Oedipal phase, when it sets in is more likely to be grafted on this set of previous identifications centred on the mother. Even when they reach a satisfactory level of individuation, in order to be able to function as stable psychic entities, and emerge from their Oedipal phase as gendered subjects, what awaits them is, according to Chodorow, "further identification with the mother" (165).

These revisionist readings of Freud have shown in particular that this initial inscription of the feminine under the auspices of female-figured nurture in the care-provider/child dyad does not become entirely blotted out and refuted once the later set of identifications come into play, both for girls and boys. If it remains as a residual form, or even if its presence is not easily relinquished in favour of the culturally demanded phallus identifications, it may still continue to powerfully inflect and direct the range of identifications constitutive of our individuation process.

Even in Kristeva's model of the abjection of the maternal as a precondition of the subject's emergence in the symbolic order, once the realm of the *chora* (maternal space) has been repressed, it does not proceed that it has been either simply subsumed under the symbolic or that it has safely retreated to its dark den (1982: 14). The abject feminine, as she goes on to show convincingly, continues to skirt the boundaries of the subject, just as abjection is correlative with the demarcation of the zone of the sacred, which continuously necessitates it to affirm its own presence (Kristeva 1982: 17). This would imply that this residual and marginal, but viable, element continues to claim its due, as set down by primary identifications, instantiating in its own turn desires and further identifications which, as suggested by Fuss, will not be easily suppressed or policed (Fuss 49). So even as the abject has become exiled in the new phase of the subject constitution (for women in particular, but more subversively so for men), it nevertheless continues its forays in the

border zone (Fuss 49); it continues to remind the subject of the primary object cathexis (Kristeva 1982), and rehearses the originary fantasy of its encounter with the mysterious other (Laplanche).

It is not my aim here to fetishize the feminine as the single originating moment of any one subject formation but to remind us of the investments placed in the process of our identity formation(s), such as cannot at any one stage safely repudiate the effects either of predominantly feminine or principally masculine identifications. My other intention is to disprove the ring of inevitability and naturalness surrounding the respective positions accorded to gender formations in cultural, and by implication, textual representations. If we heed the exemplary stories of psychoanalysis as they plot the way we become subjects, then we also have to revise the seemingly inevitable plotlines of national and group formations as these have been promulgated in various genres, heavily invested in the Oedipal version of identity formation, whereby the masculine becomes a more valued option. The ethnic feminists from the title rather go back to preoedipal narratives of becoming a gendered subject, even if they simultaneously acknowledge a double potential of the mother figure, to act as a source of female identity and to suppress the process of individuation.

These interventions are more than apposite for the context of the 1970s articulation of the new female subject. However, as shown by Cixous, we still have to contend with the discursive systems which have at best ignored and at worst abjected the feminine; I have in mind specifically the discourses of nation and nationalism and their attendant mythologies. Even though we need to consider McClintock's warning against conflating the two orders of examination (personal and political), it is worth looking at Kristeva's model of abjection again to understand how it constructs, through its principally psychic dynamic, specific social spaces, thus eminently showing the interlocking of the two domains.[2] Pellegrini in her study draws on Freudian accounts of group formation and underlying identifications and bases her extensive discussion of Fanon on his capacity to engage the interconnections between "the social" and "the psychical," seeing how the effects of "race" (and gender) work intersubjectively all the time (103).

I began this examination by inserting the self-conscious female voice laying out the contradictions entailed in the feminine emergence,

who in order to become a subject, needs to, according to the dominant scripts, repudiate, abject, and mourn precisely her investment with her femininity. In the paragraphs to follow, I will try to deepen this contradictory position by contributing the vantage point of another non-normative subject, the ethnic woman. It is illustrative to repeat Morrison's remark, that the evasion to acknowledge the Africanist presence in the formation of the canon of American literature speaks more of the anxieties within that cultural formation than it really explains, to paraphrase Melville's words in 'Benito Cereno,' the uncanny power of the shadow of black presence. Much the same conclusion permeates Jean Walton's article in which she traces the ways some grounding psychoanalytical scripts of feminine formation have elicited and then (subconsciously?) repressed, circumvented, and abjected the black body, specifically the black female body, in order to fortify its claims against the narratives of (white) male psychic development:

> the white female imaginary is occupied not only by the fantasized retaliatory white mother but also by a racially differentiated Other. This Other is *not male*, *not white*, and apparently *crucial* in negotiating how attempts at achievement will be received in a world where achievement is traditionally a white man's prerogative. (Walton 1997: 242; emphasis mine)

This reluctant, circumspect designation, identification through negation, suspended between being and non-being yet "crucial," bespeaks the vexed status of the black (by extension ethnic) female subject. It is she, no matter how elusive and fantastic, that ethnic women writers consciously recover and conjure from the group subconscious, even if they don't work primarily or recognizably with psychoanalytic paradigms. This revision of the image of the black female body, figuring openly in some of the exemplary case studies on the femininity complex, as shown by Walton, only to become lost or buried in the disciplinary archive afterwards, is attempted no less vocally in non-fictional texts, although most of the texts to be considered in this section have at least one thing in common with that of Cixous, the mistrust of generic boundaries. In the next stage of my examination, the focus will be shifted to the fictional domain, in order to see how the newly recuperated bodies erupt and divert the mandatory path of personal,

political, and generic scripts. This array of textual representations belies the erasure of the racial other which gapes at the heart of the "founding narratives of feminism" (Walton 223).

3. Mothers and daughters

Alice Walker's widely anthologized essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1974) stands as a manifesto to the emerging black women's writing. As suggested by Eva Lennox Birch, the twin impulses behind Walker's writing are "reclaiming [her] own cultural heritage and identifying the literary tradition to which [she] belonged" (1994: 195), and both of these concerns nicely commingle in this piece (cf. also Šesnić 2004). It is also highly symbolic that this essay joins together a "sickly, frail black girl" (Walker 235) by the name of Phillis Wheatley, the mother of black letters in the Atlantic diaspora, and Virginia Woolf, the mother of the second feminist florescence. This insertion of Phillis as a literary foremother signifies the tremendous symbolic potential of black female creativity as it gets realigned and remobilized to act in new—post-Civil Rights and feminist revival—circumstances. Historical footnotes provided by Woolf, on the other hand, point to a specific set of socio-historical arrangements which have obtained in Western societies regarding the institutional marginalization of feminine agency. The symbolic admission of the importance of a "room of her own," to slightly modify the famous dictum, for Phillis Wheatley, among others, situates the genealogy of African American literature in the context which from the start refutes an unadulterated, pure source of origin, whether in Africa (from where Phillis, under an unknown name, has been seized) or in America (where she is being "civilized"), and ushers a moment which Gilroy aptly describes in his concept of the "black Atlantic," a moment of cultural hybridity. Here the irony cuts both ways, as the concept of ownership is transferred, in the case of Phillis, not to the room itself, but to her own body, which is being owned by another, and the hybridity is nothing but a catch-phrase for the violent uprooting of culture and its chance survival in the new environment. I want to foreground from the start this, in my view, extremely fruitful

cross-insemination of feminist and ethnic studies paradigms, because that intersection has provided the ethnic female canon of writing with an enabling voice.

However, there is also another sense in which Walker's essay blurs the boundaries between practices and discourses mostly considered apart in theory, and that is her consideration of "the creativity of the black woman" (234). She impresses on us the images of these innumerable, anonymous women as artists, poets, and writers, creating their artworks not in an institutionalized mould but in the off-beat modes of spirituality, folk music, quilting, gardening, cooking (echoing Lévi-Strauss's *bricoleurs*; significantly, Walker terms them "artists").[3] What concerns Walker here is not only, I think, the vexing division between the written and the oral, the arty and the folkloristic, which inevitably gets transcribed as "high" and "low," but more so a historical genealogy which runs through generations of these women "driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release" (233). So the search in the title of the essay refers to the "mothers' gardens," just as Walker's other search involved looking for and locating (she herself cannot be quite sure) Zora Neale Hurston's grave in Florida's backwater. That Hurston, the unwearied jumper of cultural barriers in her work, should pose as another one among the foremothers in Walker's African American women's canon is therefore not surprising. The convocation of "our 'crazy,' 'sainted' mothers and grandmothers" (234) with Phillis—later on with Frances Harper, Nella Larsen and others—provides another signal that Walker's agenda here is to promote a historical overview of the various aspects of black female artistry, informed by the insights of feminist thought.[4]

Yet, at the same time, her attempt at canon-making is not simply trying to enlist even the feminist point of view; she obviously wants to energize her move by the metaphor of a search for a mother's garden:

> so many of the stories that I write […] are my mother's stories […] through the years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded. (240)[5]

In other words, when undertaking the search, the present-day black woman writer engages in an archaeology of the fleeting, lowly, domestic, provisory, make-shift, distorted, stifled, "abused and mutilated," "trapped," "crazed" (232, 235), all that is cleansed from the official record of cultural knowledge, and in the process begins to reclaim it.

What Walker marks here are outlines of a historical moment in which this felt urgency to reveal the findings in the mothers' gardens gets registered in a number of records, accounts, and testimonies. This cultural moment also brings a privileging of the written (or standardized in music) over orality and other sub-cultural forms of expression; however, Walker is bent on showing how detrimental it would be to the whole project to erase and forget its deep implication in and imbrications with the so-far culturally unsanctioned forms of black female creativity (cf. Dubey; Byerman; M. Henderson). What is meant here is not only oral or folk culture, but also the blues, the modes of production which evoke non-pragmatic activity, such as quilting or tending a garden.

This gendering of literary tradition, and I borrow the phrase from McClintock in a somewhat different context, accompanied with the inscription of race, its matrifocal bent and the implied matrilineal genealogy, is a powerful and imaginatively shrewd move on the part of Walker. This tendency will be appropriated and deployed by a great number of ethnic women writers as cogently demonstrated by Caroline Rody, who works on the corpus of African American and Afro-Caribbean women's texts. Still, even as the texts invite readings that seem to install an alternative historical genealogy of the national space-time, they also raise several intersected concerns. The foremost concern is situated at the point of contact between the national formation and the ethnic (minority) formation, and directly addresses the capacity of the former to incorporate the latter, but also the tenacity of the latter to impose itself on the potentially exclusionary or co-optational narrative of the former. In negotiating their space, these texts enact an agenda very similar to the concerns delineated in the preceding chapter, but their point of entry into the folds of the national entails further risks. Just to remind us of the implied invisibility of the black woman in the repertoire of national subjects, Dawson refers to the "Celia case" in 1855, which legally clinches the erasure of her black and enslaved presence and relegates her

to the veritable limbo of what Spillers refers to in the essay I will come to later as a vestibular being (135-6). Similarly, legal procedures that were instrumental to the abjection of Asian sojourners and immigrants throughout the nineteenth century hardly leave an opening for an Asian American female presence (Chu 11).

In most nationalist projects, suggests Anne McClintock, women, as citizens-by-proxy, occupy a tenuous position: "Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit" (354). Tracey Sedinger confirms this ambiguous relationship in her contention, "[w]omen and the nation remain incommensurate entities" (2002: 61); also, "women's exclusion from democracy is not accidental but structural" (54). She usefully distinguishes between "symbolic identification," which underwrites different sets of positions that can be symbolized (e.g., nation), and "imaginary identification," such as femininity: "Because sexual difference has not positive content, it does not provide grounds for the types of identifications [seen] as necessary to the construction of collective identity" (Sedinger 61), meaning that women as a group solidified exclusively around the question of their "sexual difference" still cannot function within a "democratic politics [which] takes the nation-trope as its implicit […] ground" (Sedinger 61).

This tentative gendering of the national formation has presumably secured the functional liminality of the female body; however, further shifts and realignments are entailed when the embodiment of the ethnic female subject begins to tax the system.

In trying to address this historical conundrum, Hortense J. Spillers peruses what she calls "an American grammar book," a layered social text filled with blanks in which the agency of the ethnic woman is to be inferred, situated, and described. Paradoxically, as suggested by Spillers, the history of the Atlantic slave trade and the economy of slavery initially works so as to obviate all gender specificity and to reduce their hapless participants to "the ungendered flesh," which only subsequently gets codified into "a gendered being" (Spillers 1987: 67; cf. also Wiegman 1995: 68-69). This body, subsequently, is not by any means constructed so as to conform to the culturally dominant scripts of femininity, even though its vulnerable corporeality marks the boundaries of its social

marginalization. As elaborated further by Spillers, neither the order of kinship, nor the salient fact of motherhood could unequivocally be applied to that female body so as to fix its social status: "I would call this enforced state of breach another instance of vestibular cultural formation where 'kinship' loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*" (74). Spillers's incisive investigation into how these arrangements may have informed "the African-American female's historic claim to the territory of womanhood and 'femininity'" (77) comes as a cogent answer to the controversial observations put in circulation by Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, commissioned by the US Department of Labor in 1965.

Contrary to Moynihan's claims that due to the impact of slavery on the black families' dynamics, which has put undue stress on the mother's line thus in effect incapacitating the black male and hindering his progress in the patrilineal society, Spillers has in fact demonstrated that the "power" ascribed to the black womanhood or motherhood was a misnaming, sanctioned by the dehumanizing and de-gendering codes of slavery: "the dominant culture […] assigns a matriarchist value where it does not belong." She adds: "Such naming is false because the [enslaved] female could not […] claim her child, and false, once again, because 'motherhood' is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance" (80; cf. Lennox Birch 1994: 178). However, having shown by what displacements this "powerful and shadowy" agency has become instituted in the African American community and American official discourse, Spillers suggests the potential of this inversion to extricate its principal targets, African American women, from the imposed gender typologies, "out of the traditional symbolics of female gender" and into "a place for this different social subject" (80).

In another essay, Spillers also addresses this historical lacuna, when she states with respect to the contradictory positioning of black femininity: "For the African female […] the various inflections of patriarchilized female gender—'mother,' 'daughter,' 'sister,' 'wife'—are not available in the historic instance" (1989: 129). We have to be careful here not to hypostasize this abjection and displacement from the

fold of history into a countervailing empowering move *par excellence* for this class of subjects. Still, this may help to situate for us a specific enunciative position, both outside and inside history, both outside and inside the implied gender norms that "interpellates" this class of subjects, but does it so to speak erroneously under- or overestimating their reach, thus both instituting their claims and making them invalid.

Unravelled before us we have a viable program of resituating the abjected ethnic feminine in the national imaginary, which has come full circle, from Walker's evocation of this posited maternal, matrilineal complex—which Spiller invites us to historicize, deconstruct, and reconstruct—to an enabling twist in the historical narrative. That is to say, through the paradox of being subjected in the slavery formation and afterwards to a symbolic overkill, the label of "African American woman" has accrued a set of significations which have enabled it to elude the regime applied to most of the other female subject positions, so as to open up a space wherein the problem of female agency, the natural predispositions of femininity as entailed in motherhood and kinship ties, and even the unequivocal equation between the female body and the gendered body, may effectively be challenged, though the novels before us warn us how this "privilege" was paid for dearly. Thus there is an indication that this cultural position, as pathological, dispossessed, circumscribed, and pre-empted as it is most often constructed, may signify a field of difference such as bypasses or at least challenges the primacy of the original differences implicated in the nation formation. Once again, Spillers invites us to savour this paradox: "Actually claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name'), which her culture imposes in blindness, 'Sapphire' might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment" (1987: 80). If, even through a blatant misrecognition, the feminine can be mandated to take over a considerable part of symbolic prerogatives, usually inflected as masculine, even though such usurpation then has to be termed monstrous, crazy, disturbed, hysterical, and perverse, this points to possible ways to conceptualize the points of attack on the seemingly monolithic national imaginary, as couched in salient generic models.

This is also confirmed by Rody, who addresses among other things precisely these intersections in her attempts "to emphasize both the ethnic and the feminist character" of the ethnic women writers'

"historiographic project" (2001: 3). Furthermore, she has identified as the locus of this historical interest and a fountain-head of such historical representations the site of the female, more specifically, maternal body. This revisionist move in fact can be compared to the revised psychoanalytic plots addressed earlier. Another scandal seems to be in the offing as Rody traces in a number of projects clear indications of the enunciative authority of the feminine (daughter's) narrative voice as it charts the female (mother's) line of plot, meant to work as a staging of national history, or, if not that encompassing, then at least of a community's past. I have called it a representational "scandal" insofar as, just as was the case with the peculiarity ascribed to the matrifocal African American family, or on a more general level, to the quirkiness and abnormality attached to the trajectories of female identifications as laid out in the exemplary psychoanalytical plots (as teased out by Fuss, Pellegrini, Walton, Abel), the subject position or the enunciative site occupied by the feminine complex here seeks to disengage itself from its position in suspension, in abeyance, as a misnomer. This ingenious intervention, if we follow Rody's arguments, proceeds from the engagement with the normative, sanctioned, seemingly neutral but nationally representative, symbolically charged narrative forms and genres—for instance, the epic and the historical novel—and then works to "reinvent ethnic, political, and literary bloodlines" (5).

Spillers's and Wiegman's astute and strict historicizing moves help us to situate the junctures at which gender (as a category which marks both men and women, albeit in different ways) and ethnicity operate to summon one class of subjects and to exclude others from the process of national formation. As Rody's principal focus is literary and literary-historical, her insights help to account for the perceived ideological impact of the generic models, which can be reappropriated to promote ethnic and feminist agendas, thus proffering somewhat different plots of national or ethnic formations. Priscilla Wald has shown how "cultural anxiety" occasioned by numerous fissures in the body of the nation during the better part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, prompted various narratives and genres which in their turn tried to transpose it into versions of the becoming of the national subject, occasionally with a vengeance (mostly in the cases of black, female, and

black female subjects). This group of writers also attempts a series of constituting moves, all the time working within, and stretching the limits of, the discourses of history as a patrilineal enterprise. Indeed, most of the critical projects addressed here urge us to continuously revisit our assumptions about historiographic writing (genre), the constitution of literary history, and the tenets governing individual genealogies (gender and body). Under the seeming "horizontality", to paraphrase Rody again, it is actually the "mother-of-history" that lurks (9, 3).

Given these constrictions, is it possible to suggest that these writers' projects imagine the nation differently than those of the cultural nationalists, or even that in the process they conjure a different nation, a structure which will manifest greater potential to engage these "lacking" identities? As posited by Mae Gwendolyn Henderson in one of the path-breaking essays of black feminist and feminist criticism in general, 'Speaking in Tongues,' this specific corpus enacts "rereading and rewriting [of] the conventional and canonical stories," and also entails "revising the conventional generic forms that convey these stories" (1989: 30).

It is my specific concern, then, in this chapter to work in the space between, on one hand, resolute diagnosis of the incompatibility of the inscription of gendered and racialized identities into the nationalist and national projects, and, on the other, observation of how individual writing projects question and invert this received and well-proven caveat, engaging all the while both the overdetermined discourses of myth and history and the underused, emergent potential of their various feminist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial critiques. The texts in question are situated at the intersection between history and femininity as history's other, the unrepresentable. They gloss the historical master narratives through the insertion of the plotlines of female desire. That insertion, however, is shown to be far from securing a successful recuperation of ethnic femininity—rather, it goes to show in this surge of ethnic writing, with pivotal contributions by black women writers but also specifically by Hong Kingston, that the conjuring of forgotten, repressed, and suppressed histories exacts a heavy price—witness the amount of violence and various unsatisfying affective schemes which are featured in these novels. If phase one in these projects is centred on

female genealogies of ethnic (African American or Chinese American) history, then phase two, which most of the texts approach but never quite achieve, is the site of reconciliation with, reaching out to, and incorporating one's own plotline into a larger communal/national plot. The risks entailed in the process have been appropriately signalled by Rody as the figure of the devouring mother-of-history, so that the female agency has to undergo a split into its motherly and daughterly components, in which case it is the latter that will hopefully carry on a process of recuperation. If the motherly line signifies destruction, threat, and the radical strangeness of female history, the daughter's plotline stands for creative and transformative processes.[6] We can trace this dichotomy by scanning the actantial structures of the novels to be considered here. In Morrison's *Sula*, the possible pairs are Eva/Hannah, Sula/Nel; in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* the mother is capable of being both sustaining and overbearing. So this overburdened signifier of the mother-of-history gets redefined and ironically re-examined even as it is used fruitfully to sustain the sites of enunciation of the ethnic female, and as the source of narrative authority.

I will also concurrently address the problem of genre, such as history writing and life-writing (here exemplified by Kingston's fictional autobiography/family memoirs). Both *Sula* and *The Woman Warrior* court history; Morrison states initially that her narrative scope is a community and then zooms in on members of that community; *The Woman Warrior* masks history as *Bildungsroman* and family memoirs. So we find ourselves at the site where textual engendering through the optics of gender mirrors uncannily literary/generic and national genealogies.[7]

4. The emergent subjects (of nation): Morrison's *Sula* (1973)

> They were simply women whose character and personality excited no interest.
>
> Fannie Barrier Williams (1900)

Barbara Christian identifies different patterns in black male and female development narratives and tentatively proposes that black women's novels are more circular in motion, hinge on an intense

relationship between a character and her community (even if she leaves, she will inevitably return), and, thirdly, demonstrate the writers' "desire to articulate their mother's stories as a metaphor for human existence" (1980: 242).[8] Dubey sees Morrison's *Sula* as an exemplary text for teasing out fragmented aspects of black female identity. Dubey, however, is careful to point out that this fragmentation takes place against the previous construction of "blackness" as presence, achieved by the black aesthetics, which then creates a foil for later inscriptions of identity (30). Additionally, in view of my present concern with both gendered and raced identities, this move is also an ironic comment on the presumed incompatibility between blackness as presence and the black female subject. She goes on to say that "the embodiment of a radically new black femininity" intimated by *Sula* founders if considered "within an exclusively nationalist or feminist ideological frame; instead it provides [an] example of the novel's selective and critical appropriation of both ideologies" (Dubey 57).[9]

Almost from the outset the plot outline of Morrison's novel begs to be considered within the suggested generic matrix.[10] To remind ourselves, the narrative spans the years 1919 to 1965 and focuses almost exclusively on tracing the lives of several characters, most prominently two black girls, Sula and Nel, strictly as they are framed by the spatial coordinates of the struggling black small-town Ohio neighbourhood of the Bottom. When on rare occasions the narrative push strays outside these textually imposed boundaries (European battlefields in WW I and a traumatic New Orleans trip), it is strictly subordinate to the motivational structure of foregrounding the elusive but inescapable pull of the black neighbourhood. Robert Grant draws on this aspect of Morrison's work, when he cites "her powerful evocation of discrete black neighborhoods with the attendant 'spirit of place,' […] her sensitivity to the real details—material and historical—forming the mental-emotional dialectic of the black experience." In her novel, "[t]he community of the Bottom […] 'breathes' for us with […] *re*visionary vitality" (1988: 91). Susan Willis claims that "Morrison's writing […] represents a process for coming to grips with historical transition," whereby "the neighborhood" comes to stand out "as a concept crucial to her understanding of history" (1982: 34, 37). Morrison, in other words, seems committed to configure in this

text what the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai terms "the production of locality" as a sustainable grounding for communal identity (1996a: 42). This production, as made clear for instance by Cornel West, is not simply spatial or material, but also operates through affective ties, which he sees as being under threat of erosion in the contemporary US (2001: 9-10, 24). It is Morrison's agenda here to capture manifold aspects of this strenuous cultural and emotive work, as relayed through her female protagonists, Sula and Nel. Feng, among others, maintains that "the loss of a black community frames the narrative of *Sula* and becomes its racial/political subtext" (91). Since I propose to read the novel primarily in terms of historical fiction, let me reiterate that two historical moments contextualize the narrative: the first is World War I and the post-war upheaval it brought to US race relations, and the second relates to the aftermath of the first phase of the Civil Rights movement, where we can already see some adverse forces affecting the group that is supposed to be its greatest beneficiary (urbanization, zoning, economic restructuring, mobility; cf. L. Jones 95-121; Dawson 37).

The untitled preface, also serving partly as a conclusive comment on narration, may be seen as a take-off on the conventional situating of narration as mandated by historical fiction. The temporal dynamics is installed in the almost elegiac, but also strangely sardonic, tone of the impersonal narrator, who in the same act represents the instalment and the demolition of a black community.[11] The sardonic tone is occasioned by the structures evoking but also in their frightening effectiveness mocking traditional historical rationales usually inserted in narration to give it a solid referential founding in historical reality. These ironic intertextual signals pointing to the tradition of historicizing a period, a community or even a larger unit, underwrite the barely perceptible at the beginning but subsequently growing sense of elegiac and melancholic workings of African American history which has apparently ended even before it has begun. As the narrative voice makes clear in its opening remarks, the neighbourhood whose history is about to be recounted is no more—it has succumbed to the impersonal, and thus historical, forces of suburbanization, development, and spatial segregation as these have obtained in the post-Civil Rights United States, adversely affecting precisely this spatial-temporal and affective structure called

the black neighbourhood. (Cf. Willis 34; Wall 1451; Novak 186-7) Thus the prefatory address, functioning in the doubly-encoded sense of offering guidance to the reader and orienting her in the presupposed temporal chain in which making sense of the reader's present crucially hinges on the past about to be recounted, both serves this purpose and cancels itself in the inexorable sequence of demolition attending the future of the neighbourhood.

This situation of double-encoding is also reinforced by observations provided by Henderson in her application of the categories of Bakhtinian criticism to the discourse of the black women writer, who "not only speaks familiarly in the discourse of the other(s), but as Other she is in contestorial dialogue with the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or 'ambiguously (non)hegemonic' discourse." As such, claims Henderson, "[t]hese writers enter simultaneously into familial, or *testimonial* and public, or *competitive* discourses—discourses that both affirm and challenge the values and expectations of the reader" (1989: 20). The first sentence instantly alerts us to this logic of destruction which, on one hand, obviates, and on the other, obviously inspires the rationale for historicizing: "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighbourhood" (*Sula* [*S*], 3). What follows, presents the same structure of the jarring discontinuity between the past (as the referent of narration) and the present: "The beeches are gone now"; "funds have been allotted to level the stripped and faded buildings"; "[a] steel ball will knock to dust Irene's Palace of Cosmetology"; "[m]en in khaki work clothes will pry loose the slats of Reba's Grill"; to culminate in the ominous prediction, "[t]here will be nothing left of the Bottom" (*S*, 3). At first glance, there is perhaps a self-understood link between the levelling ball of time and the counterimpulse to memorialize and commemorate inherent in historical fiction.

However, there has to be recognized a lacuna in which the above identified feeling of sardonic bitterness infuses the narrative discourse—it is lodged in the destructive agency of the impersonal deictic "they" ("they are going to raze") and the passive voice implicated in the tearing down of the tissue of the community. That is, we have to acknowledge a distance, a sense of conflicting role imbuing these "they"—so irrevocably

bent on levelling every trace of the physical and cultural existence of a black community and "they" (the readers?) who actually might be invested in reconstructing that abolished existence from the textual traces. In a classic historical novel, there is usually no sense of these split constituencies; the potential reading public has entered into a contract with the writer, such that unambiguously announces the universal implications of the history to be presented for the nation as a whole.[12] The narrator here obviously feels that she doesn't have that full endorsement, thus her conflicting feelings of the urge to narrate and an almost simultaneous disavowal of that impulse, due to its dubious outcome. This split entailed at the very opening of the text in fact prefigures a predicament of potentially every ethnic writer in the act of addressing a non-ethnic or national audience. In other words, unlike historical fictions "proper" (I have in mind, for instance, Cooper or Hawthorne), the ethnic writer operates in an optative mode insofar as her fiction might after all, given some adjustments, function as a representation of a nation, or some such congruous formation. Whereas in canonical historical fictions the consensus has been reached as to what deserves to be represented, in ethnic fiction, which signifies on the allegories of national history, that consensus is still pending. I would also suggest that this reluctance, anxiety, and doubleness is reflected not only in the reception of the text, but also in its production—as the narrative voice tries to straddle the impossibility or irrelevance of telling the pain and the equally frustrating option of keeping silent about that pain.[13]

Still, there is a clear sense on the part of the implied author, also articulated in the prefatory chapter, that she conjures a wider public, a national or at least an interracial one, and thus that she wants to project her story into a wider orbit. As the narrator imagines a performance, a black woman in effect acting out her community's history (cakewalk, black bottom, "messing around" [*S*, 4]), that performance becomes overheard and spied upon by "a valley man" (their white neighbour), who in all likelihood will fail to register its import, embodied as "the adult pain" (*S*, 4). It is tempting to see in the figure of "a dark woman in a flower dress" (*S*, 4) the figure of the narrator "messing around" for her immediate community, but also for an imagined community for which she, then, has to mediate the nuances which record affective, cultural, hybrid, and historical layers of the neighbourhood complex.[14]

From this forceful gesture of summoning the potential readership, the disembodied narrative voice floats further back into the past, to the point of origin, where history and mythology blend. A story, legend, of how the Bottom came about may be just "a nigger joke" (*S*, 4), but it doesn't cancel its origin in the long-term historical formation of US chattel slavery. But again, here the narrative pushes forward, eager to chart a wider historical scope, as it almost discounts that very purpose by doubling on it—what transpires between a master and a slave, as a founding moment for the Bottom, can be written off as another piece of signifying (H. Louis Gates), which comes short of the purported intentions of historical fiction. It would seem that these alternative, subaltern ways of articulation sit uneasily with the generic blueprint of historical fiction. Still, it is precisely the foil against which they operate, repeatedly creating lacunae in the text.

Even as this centredness on the community informs the historical strain of narration and is rendered in a chronological passage of time, there is a contradictory impulse at work, from another quarter. Barbara Christian, in one the earliest comprehensive readings of black women's fictions, refers to *Sula* as a "fable," as her title suggests, and traces in the novel the cyclic movement, embedded in community's rituals and charted in the novel's plot veering between destruction and creation patterns (1980). Instead of linear progression, intimated by the sequencing of the novel's chapters set off by specific dates, critics rightfully uncover the cyclic and spiral pattern as underlying events in the novel (cf. Christian 154-56; Grant 95; Byerman 1985; Dubey 1994). Still one should not fail to appreciate the tension entailed in balancing the two distinct ideas of time in the novel. Even if history is a record of repetition, the narrative seems to say, this repetitiveness is played out each time against a different background. This doubleness, recognized and theorized through concepts of multiple articulation and heteroglossia by Henderson, is also pointed out by Houston Baker: "Rather than adapt an extant historiography, Morrison plays over, beyond, and below history, symbolically chronicling domestic rituals of black life" (1991: 157-8). So there is a sense of splitting on several levels; first, on the level of the subject and agency in the text (a black woman as a carrier of communal voice and perspective), and then at

the level of violating generic expectations, seeing that "historiography" seems incompatible with the "domestic" and "black."

A similar tendency to play around received generic and cultural standards and to let down the reader's awakened expectations is observable in events emplotted as the coming-of-age narrative, the *Bildungsroman*.[15] Nel's line of plot, even though intertwined with Sula's, is to a greater degree orderly, continuous, and spatially-temporally contiguous with the Bottom community, while Sula's line of plot actually challenges generic assumptions (cf. Grant 92). Traditionally, the evacuation of Sula and her plot-line from the narrative would discredit her as the protagonist, which is where my initial reservation with this analytical approach lay. Nel Wright stands for continuity, for the sense of place and belonging; she is the one to tend to the family's graves and to keep her own family together after her husband's desertion. On the other hand, it is her embeddedness, her fixity and reluctance to move that has placed her outside of the developmental plot which is clearly espoused by Sula, even if in the narrative ellipsis.

In fact, this "missing" and "spacing" can give rise to an interesting interpretive angle, as that assumed by Patricia McKee, who reads these gaps and unrepresented events as "a historical experience" nevertheless (1999: 147), inclusive of specific exigencies entailed in "the production of African American identity" independently of "white visual culture" which grants presence and recognition (172). Even if "woman" is not a place, an option, within the gamut of symbolic identifications due to the exclusionary workings of the patrilineal law, still it becomes possible to see the grown-up Sula, newly returned to the rural community from the city, generating a magnetic field to pull in the neighbourhood precisely through the options of disidentification and exclusion she mediates for others (McKee 167). It is through refuting their identification with what Sula presumably stands for (independence, unsettling change, anti-communitarian attitude, lack of feeling) that the people of the Bottom can begin to consolidate their own social positions and roles.

Thus we see *Sula* reiterating a standing motif in black women's fiction, that of the sustaining agency of black women, especially as mothers or care-givers (in the novel not only Nel but also Sula's grandmother, appropriately called Eva), inflected here by the post-

nationalist and feminist inscriptions, which note the pervasive and oppressive reach of this stereotype, as suggested by Dubey (52, 59, 60).

Eva's name, as well as her seemingly uncontested and competent management of her large household, invites feminist readings of her as the preoedipal, phallic mother, thus in a sense impermeable to the encroachments of abjection and denigration. However, lest we get carried away by this illusion of omnipotence, in the episode of her deliberately relinquishing or losing her leg, the narrative begs us to consider Eva as a vulnerable, castrated, now Oedipal, mother (Benjamin 266 n 3). Eva has to renounce her capacity for desire, attributable to the phallic mother, meaning that she has to give up the phallus and conform to her desire-bereft position. Thus when Hannah upbraids her for having been too preoccupied to play with and cuddle her children, Eva maintains that everything has been subordinate to the children's and family's survival (*S*, 67-9). Hannah, on the other hand, exercises her capacity to desire, and Sula also tries to prolong her hold onto the phallus, as the position of desire. The contradiction between these two positions is perhaps what Benjamin has in mind when she registers the danger to eclipse womanhood with motherhood; for it is the latter that converts a woman (for herself) into a woman (for others) (89). Apparently, to become the sustaining mother, then, Eva has to give up on her preoedipal, phallic prerogatives, which may account for her incapability to sustain Sula's identity search.

We have seen, however, that from the beginning *Sula* works with two contradictory impulses, which then intersect; one is the life-giving and life-sustaining impulse (solidarity, kinship, family and friendship networks, foster care) and the other its opposite, the destructive, murderous impulse (violation of family bonds, lack of compassion, betrayal of friendship, traumas). Often enough in the novel, we find both intersecting in the field of action managed by a single character; it is enough in this respect to think of Eva, both a generous mother and foster-mother, but also the murderer of one of her children. The other exemplary joining of these two forces, which disturbingly appear to mirror each other throughout the novel (Kingston, in less conspicuous a manner, figures the same paradox), is the dynamics of the relationship between Sula and Nel. Their friendship and intimacy becomes at one

point cemented by an act of almost gratuitous violence, a murder or accidental drowning (we cannot be quite sure) of a neighbour boy which reinforces the bonds of their friendship beyond the point of breach.

In yet another sense we see Nel's and Sula's plots ambiguously entangled: when we look at the structure of community and family groups in the novel, then it appears that for every "functional" family or social unit, there stands in another, its "dysfunctional" double. Allegorically speaking, the family is here recast as a figure for ethnic community and, ultimately, the nation. Claudia Tate has convincingly shown in her study of mid- and late-nineteenth-century black women's texts how these writers reconfigure what, on a cue from Fredrick Jameson, she calls "allegorical master narratives" (1989: 104) of the dominant white society and its black masculine version manifested through "the black liberational discourse and […] male struggle for patriarchal power" (104). She suggests that the plots of the black female novels in the period rather structure their own "allegories of female desire," hinging on the representations of, among other things, viable marital unions, functional family units, "domesticity, and commodity consumption" (106). On the whole, the Bottom initially functions almost as an organic social unit, whose organicity is reinforced by its reliance on seasonal changes. As late as 1965 Nel still can find some comfort amidst the sweeping changes in the fact that a modicum of solidarity has survived among the neighbours, and she can still draw a contrast between the estranged ways of the whites and the more family-oriented practices of the blacks. Still, this structure is challenged early on in the novel by the maverick Shadrack, a traumatized WWI veteran, embodying in his separation from the neighbourhood the forces which will slowly begin to tear the organicity apart.

The rest of the family arrangements could be said to fall into a spectrum extending between the two poles, the almost utopian communal existence and the rampant, disturbed individualism and estrangement. If the Wrights embody the ideal of the nuclear family unit, then the Peaces, Sula's family, totally evade and subvert it. The Peaces, in fact, enact Moynihan's worst nightmare—that of a promiscuous, fatherless, and almost men-free black household.[16] The Wrights' self-sufficiency and detachment, their enclosure by the typical appurtenances of the

national family (home-ownership, stay-at-home mother, providing father), is ironically undercut by the sprawling, uncontainable, extended, and fluctuating Peace household. Given the symbolic investment into this kind of alternative ethnic family, it might be expected that this family order will gain pre-eminence and serve as a pivotal point for the consolidation of the community. However, a series of accidents and tragedies, wilful and forced separations, troubled and unaccounted-for pasts, seriously and irreparably damage the potential of this alternative family, the Peaces, to represent the viable trajectory of the female plea for national representativeness.

The mystique of black womanhood is further ironically revisited in the genealogy of the Peace family. Eva, Hannah, and Sula enact a destructive spiral of desire turned sour partly because it is focused inwardly, on itself. Their self-centredness is symbolized by the boarded up windows of the house in which Eva rules immobilized in the upper-story room and where subsequently Sula dies alone. Each of the women is a staunch individualist in her own way: Eva in the superhuman sacrifice to maintain her family, Hannah in her inconsequent management of love, and, finally, Sula in her diabolic disavowal of all ties and bonds. In her resoluteness, she comes to double for Shadrack's destructive agency; her presence has been attended by unfortunate and violent incidents (the death by burning of her mother, the drowning of Chicken Little, the disruption of Nel's family), just as Shadrack's sphere of action seems to encompass various forms of dissolution, from his institution of the National Suicide Day to the river bridge building site tragedy, where he leads into death a good number of his neighbours. The community recognizes, or retroactively inscribes, the devil's work ("two devils" [*S*, 117]) embodied in both characters.

This is, however, only one side of the coin, because after Sula's death the narration does not accomplish a wished-for appeasement: "The tension has gone and so was the reason for the effort they had made. Without her mockery, affection for others sank into flaccid disrepair" (*S*, 153). The unrest, paradoxically created after the unlawful element has been removed, does not affect only social rituals, but extends to disrupt the routines of communal life and of the natural world: "Late harvesting things were ruined, […] and fowl died of both chill and rage. […] By

the time the ice began to melt […], everybody under fifteen had croup, or scarlet fever" (*S*, 152). It would seem that the circuits of identification underlying the formation of the neighbourhood rest, disturbingly, on the sensitive management of the creative and the destructive forces, in the novel exemplified by the black woman's agency.

We come back here to McKee's reading of Sula as a textual instance which does not simply denote presence but also organizes meanings, thus acting as a structuring principle itself freely shuttling in and out, outside of the regulatory range of either oppressive or communal social practices. Sula can be seen as an empty sign, a receptacle (echoing Kristeva's concept of the *chora*, the feminine space), refilled each time it interacts with other signs. Insofar as the "spacing" she has produced by her protracted absences from the neighbourhood and from the plot, and later on her virtual disappearance through death, testifies to the capacity of her function to engender "symbolic identification," such that, for Sedinger, marks the emergence of the collectivity (2002), it can be postulated that she has attained the position of the privileged signifier. However, this is before we remember that this structuring role comes to Sula precisely at the cost of herself, her body and life. It is through her languishing illness, her death, and the Bottom's refusal of mourning that she crystallizes the responses of others. Thus we can think of her in terms of the abject, whose trace nevertheless remains and skirts the boundaries of the social unit, which becomes consolidated through the action of perpetually keeping the abjected at bay.

The inexorable logic of history, which in the novel is also figured as a process of mourning losses, works by its own iron laws; every dismissed, abjected and murdered identification must be replaced by another one equally fragile and vulnerable to disruption. There is a very thin line dividing Chicken Little's death by water and Eva's "merciful" dispatch of her son through fire (*S*, 168), just as there is an unwelcome similarity for Nel between her "calm controlled behaviour" and Sula's wildness: "Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you" (*S*, 170, 169), pronounces Eva. Also, there is the uncanny doubling of the deaths of Eva's two children, both burned alive; then, the desertion by her granddaughter copies her former desertion of her children. As for Nel, one could argue that Sula's betrayal actually

responds to Nel's previous abandonment of Sula through marriage and domesticity, which flouts everything Sula stands for. It would seem as if only in Sula this troubled sequence would find its closure, she being apparently in full control of her desires. Still, even her self-contained assurance is ruptured through her troubled attachment with Ajax, her curious and deep connection with Shadrack, and most poignantly so, through her abiding tie with Nel.

Sula's disruptive agency cannot ultimately serve as a blueprint for the chastened community which is approaching its demise, so it is in Nel where the reappropriation of Sula's uncontained potential is to take place. This potential resolution, however, is constantly thwarted. As we follow the sequence of the concluding events, we have to bear in mind the foreclosure stated at the beginning of the novel: the neighbourhood has been dismantled. Still in the face of this "spacing," to echo Patricia McKee's reading of *Sula* (1996), an alternative sounding takes place, engaging Eva and Nel, and also by extension Sula. Eva, the matriarch, the place of presence and the locus of origin, according to the reading offered by the feminist paradigm, is simultaneously spaced out by the competing nationalist and racialist discourses, which Baker subsumes under the law of the phallus, as it regulates the symbolic regime (146). Nevertheless, it is Eva's personal memory which institutes a point of departure crucial for Nel's final recognition; she has to reinstate the rejected Sula as one of the possible venues of self- and group identification. Options opened up by Sula, those empty spaces which she charted incessantly by signifying on received and salient folk practices but also imposed patterns (by coercive social forces from the outside), have to be kept alive. Even as Eva herself refuses to countenance Sula's blasphemous production of meanings, she still recognizes the necessity to embrace these new practices in the changing history of the community. This recognition, interestingly, bypasses one generation (mothers are conspicuously absent) and settles for an exchange between ancestors and their grandchildren. The same interruption is then somewhat ominously repeated in Nel's present position, she herself being a mother whose position in the cultural continuum is frail, undermined by the erasure of history (cf. Wall 1450). Thus we come full circle in the installation of Sula, despite or perhaps because of her vaunted "newness," as a space where novel experiences of the black community take shape.

Significantly, that would imply that the project of the (new) feminine as the ground of reconciliation, recognition, and recuperation of the potential for rebuilding and sustaining the community, the neighbourhood, is strongly endorsed in *Sula*. Also, this potential, if it is to become operative at all, has to be intersubjective, communal, to begin with. As pointed out by many astute readers (Johnson, Novak), the tracks of female bonding and female-generated and oriented desire inform the impulse toward sociality in *Sula*: "And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. 'We was girls together,' she said as though explaining something. 'O Lord, Sula,' she cried, 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl'" (*S*, 174). When Nel acknowledges the loss as instituted by her female-oriented identification, the scripts according to which the familial and communal forms operate get to be revised along gender lines, but they hardly lose their specific weight of standing in as the model for broader affective bonds. This possibility that the female desire serves as "objective correlative" to the community's affective dynamic presents a strategy of intervening into the trenchant and seemingly ossified structures of ethnic and nation formation. It marks a moment in the text when identification invested in the making of a representative subject has opened up in a way that Benjamin, in her revisionist account of classic psychoanalytical plots, sees as embracing the feminine as the desiring and active subject position (126-31). In fact, to extend our analogies, we might even be inclined to read this acknowledgment of woman's desire as indicative of the larger forces at play in the creation not only of ethnic historical fictions, but also as a tendency permeating allegorically the whole ethnic feminist canon. As posited by Alice Walker, this desire could be satiated in the reconnection it effects with the mothers.

Morrison, however, seems to be more reluctant to announce that Nel's belated recognition guarantees some kind of closure. Still, I would like to consider the final exchange between Nel (here doubling for Sula) and Eva as an attempted revisiting of the potential presaged by Walker. Inasmuch as the framework of historical fiction and the *Bildungsroman* could only partially accommodate Sula's experience, still it has opened up avenues of the emergence of a yet unrecognized but soon-to-become one among the national subjects—the black woman. Cheryl Wall

appropriately signals this development as "extending the line," not simply in the case of family ("lineage"), but also in terms of "literary tradition" and communal history (2000: 1450).

5. Allegories of gender and nation in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976)

If Sula is slightly off-centre as a representative (black) woman, and if *Sula* on one hand flaunts and on the other punctures the generic expectations, primarily in the domain of historical fictions, the same issue of a presumably lacking representativeness also informs the context for the production and reception of Maxine Hong Kinston's celebrated ethnic feminist text. When critics such as Frank Chin (in Wong 1999) expressly denied the right of Kingston's protagonist to stand as an exemplary subject (a ban which then extended to Kingston herself), the code-word authorizing the interdiction was gender. However, other critics voiced their concerns from a different point of view, such as generic considerations and, in close connection to that, the question of historical accuracy and authorial responsibility to the requirements of non-fictional representations, as well as the question of mother-country and mother tongue allegiance versus ethnic (US) context (Chin et al. 1991; Kim 1982; Wong 1999; Cheng 2000). However, going back to the perceived salience of the cultural nationalist paradigm and the US context in which these debates took place, it was explicit that the reading and canonization of the novel (let me use this word for the moment) rely on the definitions of gender and its functioning in the domain of ethnic literary production.

Thus the implied primacy ascribed to national or ethnic/racial identity over other types of collective identities is obvious in the cultural nationalists' discourse: it structures an individual more compellingly than, for instance, gender identity. However, there is another pivot around which the debate revolved. If (speaking very generally) Kingston's hybrid text was problematic for Asian American cultural nationalists on the grounds of the protagonist's gender status, among other serious objections, then interestingly enough, for a wider national audience the site of gender (to the detriment and occlusion of its racial/

ethnic component) becomes a salient marker which precisely authorizes Kingston's protagonist and enables the book to be introduced into the national canon (for pressures entailed in the canonization process cf. Palumbo-Liu 395-416). This raises for me the question of the difficulty to apprehend two very important axes for subject emergence at the same time—one being, as already suggested, the axis of gender, the other being the axis of race. Once again, the questions are raised: which one is more important, compelling, and primary? Is it possible to decide, and if so, does the supposed primacy of one over the other hold true for good, or is destabilized in different contexts? These are some of the issues that bring Kingston to bear on the debates raised by other ethnic women writers in this period. To remind us, the implicit argument in this section rests on the assumption that if "ethnic feminists" want to pursue a larger project of inscribing racialized femininity as more than just an abject component (and doubly so: from the point of view of the dominant discourse, which refuses to recognize an ethnic subject as such, and again within the dominant ethnic nationalist discourse, which has problems accommodating gender), then they have to struggle simultaneously on both fronts, so to speak.

Kingston's interview with Susan Brownmiller (1999) familiarizes us with the curious pre- and post-publishing fate of *The Woman Warrior*; it recapitulates the by-now proverbial difficulties facing young, female ethnic writers from the West coast in their attempts to make it with the big publishing houses in the East; it also suggests that by the mid-1970s a niche had opened in the book industry for women's ethnic writing, with African American authors and Kingston riding on the crest of the wave and helping to sustain it. Finally, it also addresses the vexing problem of applying generic distinctions so as to conform to certain presupposed publishing—and by extension, cultural—standards. So the Vintage paperback edition of the book bears the compromise designation non-fiction/literature, and it informs us that the book won "the National Book Critics Circle Award for the best work of non-fiction in 1976." Yet as it becomes clear to a responsible, observant, and sensitive reader, to take this book as non-fiction, as "memoirs," even as we are being invited to do so by the subtitle, is to fall prey to the mimetic fallacy, and to re-inscribe the orientalist, ethnocentric desire to frame and render

intelligible a culture (in this case Chinese American, and from there also Chinese) which eludes simple mimetic gestures.[17]

It is my approach, then, to treat the book primarily, though not exclusively, as a hybrid of the *Bildungsroman* and a family chronicle, with programmatic blending of (auto)biographical and fictional elements. I concur, thus, with other critical readings which put the book squarely in the Western tradition of women's writing—with the predominant themes of finding one's voice, coming of age in indifferent or hostile social surroundings—and also consider it to be a poignant account of the emergence of an ethnic subject in an immigrant family. Feng proposes a summary of the text's agenda: "the first-person narrator explores her identity formation in relation to her mother and other female relatives" (107). She goes on in a conciliatory tone to point out: "What Kingston has innovated is not the autobiography as a specific genre but an 'autobiographical form,' which can be fictional and/or nonfictional" (Feng 110). Lee Quinby, on the other hand, makes a convincing case for considering the text more a memoir than an autobiography (1992: 297-301). In that sense, I would claim thematic and ideological kinship among the texts discussed previously and Kingston's contribution to the American literary canon. I admit to having circumvented by this move one of the principal lines of argument centring on the questions of "authenticity" and Kingston's supposedly unpaid debt to, or debt contracted with, her Chinese ancestry. Admittedly, if we heed the author's reluctance to positively label the book as a non-fictional account, and rely on textual signals which mark it rather as fiction posing as memoirs, then some of these concerns become moot.[18] By this displacement of critical focus I don't mean to dismiss a potential relevance of the foregoing issues, which have by now become a staple of criticism on the novel, I simply wish to demarcate what for me constitutes, to paraphrase Sau-ling Wong, an interethnic "textual coalition" among ethnic women writers. I also wish to set up yet another framework for reading the novel, one that does not necessarily invalidate the cultural nationalist perspective (advocated principally by Frank Chin) but supplements it with other textual and extratextual concerns.[19]

This brief excursion into the matters of genre is far from incidental, as one of my principal arguments in this section shows, since genre

here is taken not simply as a formal, but also ideological, mould which sustains the discourse even as it carefully constrains and regulates its contents. Lest the parallel between Morrison and Kingston seem too stretched, let me recall here a furore which Kingston's text aroused in Chinese American circles. The critical avalanche set in motion by Kingston's experimental text, primarily sustained by the founders of Asian American literary canon even if later enhanced by other, more moderate approaches, resembles what Deborah McDowell earlier characterized as family altercations among African American critics in her playfully titled 'Reading Family Matters' (Wall 1989: 75-97). Again, the family, whether virtual (the family of peers) or real, and not just in *Sula* or *The Woman Warrior*, poses as a primary site for socializing and disciplining the girl. This operation is also applicable to the critical and literary-historical discourse that appears at the historical moment of the entrance of ethnic feminist texts into national literature as a means of disciplining loose women (within and outside the texts), and which is partly executed by their cultural nationalist counterparts.

What this generic confusion surrounding the text has achieved, in addition, is to release the text from the fallacy of realistic representation of one's life.[20] (Ferraro calls it a "memoir novel" [1993: 154]). This does not in the least mean that generic concerns fade from view; it simply means that they come to figure in conjunction with gender. From the point of view I endorse here, this text inscribes itself like the texts discussed previously into an interstice within the fabric of the national imaginary where the gender and the ethnicity axis meet. It is perhaps understandable that the cultural nationalist model of predominantly masculine ethnic emergence couldn't accommodate this occasion—since it underscores its bypassing of gender. It is, on the other hand, a telling coincidence that the almost concerted condemnation of the book on the part of the male echelon was countervailed by an equally unanimous praise on the part of the literary establishment. One way to see this paradox would be to ascribe it to a greater readiness to engage both ethnic (being prepared for it by the works of the previous generation of ethnic authors) and also gender themes (this sphere opened up thanks to feminist activism).

This readiness, however, in the context of what, among others, Sau-ling Wong identifies as "the gendering of ethnicity" (1992: 111), isn't so easily extricated from its possible collusion with the ongoing cultural-historical practice of "the effeminization […] of the Asian man and the ultrafeminization of the Asian woman" (Wong 112), becoming a hotly contested point for Asian American studies practitioners (cf. Lowe, Kim, Eng). It seems inevitable, given the fraught psycho-historical conjunction between gender and Asian American ethnicity, that Kingston's text would come to function, for a cultural nationalist, as a sign of ethnic femininity's collusion with the normative conscription of ethnic masculinity, and for feminists, as a long-overdue narrative of female emancipation from the patriarchal ethnic culture. For both groups, then, the sites of gender and ethnicity cover for larger structures and are, somewhat misguidedly, made to perform cultural work which exceeds their performative reach. In other words, neither can the beleaguered ethnic femininity stand in for the over-all feminist emancipatory project, nor can it be downplayed by cultural nationalists as simply shoring up the dominant cultural pretensions about Asian American masculinity. The fact that the text has come to function in both these contexts tells us as much about the forces conducive to cultural, national, and ethnic politics, as about the politics of literary interpretation and canon-formation. (Cf. Kim, Wong, Palumbo-Liu)

At the same time, couldn't we say that the uproar surrounding the book has at least partly been generated by a perceived incongruity entailed in the coming-of-age narrative embodied in a female self? (Cf. Quinby, Chu) Granted it is so, I would like to pursue the internal links among the feminist writing agenda, the representations of gendered ethnicity, and the fictions of nationhood which I perceive to be at work in this text. The working premise, to remind ourselves, has been that these texts engage the tension among identity politics, gender and nation. This solemn conjunction between (collective) identity and its textual engendering is evoked through the concept of ethnic autobiography, as a point of entrance into the repertoire of national representations (Wong 1999: 39).

This engendering, however, just as was the case with Sula, grapples with a subject that elicits no interest, that is arguably almost invisible or that holds no special claims on the repertoire of the subjects available

in the public domain. Apparently, Spillers's readings posit an almost radical decentring and displacement of the black woman in the grammar book of US racial formations—her subject position is all but elided, and a similar claim can be made for the Asian (Chinese) American woman. Historically, and in terms of textual representations, she is not available to us until the post-war liberalization of the Asian exclusion laws, and is thus hardly visible to the discursive machinery. In that sense, she is indeed a kind of ghostly and phantasmatic presence left behind in the act of emigration, which is preponderantly a man's prerogative, even if bred by necessity. Lisa Lowe aptly and consistently traces this rather recent arrival of Asian American woman on the scene in her *Immigrant Acts*, while Kingston imaginatively reconstructs the moment of her mother's arrival in the United States and the reconstitution of the family in the 'Shaman' chapter.

This is a text which reminds us that there is hardly a smooth transition from personal to collective (minority or national) identity, specifically when it gets refracted through gender. Kingston's memoirs are poised to spell "truly […] the inner life of women,"[21] and in conjunction with that, to commemorate the experience of "minority people because we're always on the brink of disappearing," as Kingston claims in a 1991 interview: "Our culture's disappearing and our communities are always disappearing" (786). It is interesting to note how in the space of several sentences, the speaking subject easily slides from "I" to "women" to "minority people," thereby displacing the arrogant self-centred I of life-writing, unsuitable, according to Kingston, to articulate these concerns: "I think part of what we have to do is figure out a new kind of autobiography that can tell the truth about dreams and visions and prayers" (786). This would suggest a hybrid text where the tension shifts continuously between the "I" and the "we," even as these two categories are in the process of emergence.

LeiLani Nishime is careful to point out how a casual classification of ethnic (othered) experience as autobiographical, also encoded as "private, personalized history," then fails to be valued in the same way as public, seemingly "universal" language of "historical" experience (1995: 69). Therefore, she believes it is of the highest importance that Kingston upset this division between life and text, fiction and "reality,"

(ethnic) autobiography and (non-ethnic) history. In the process, the metonymic chain that simply attaches to the signifier "ethnic" a series of signifieds such as non-representative, private, personal, abjected gets to be disturbed. (By extension, non-ethnic, to all appearances white, then signifies as public, representative, historical, abjecting.) To go back to this shift between "I" and "we"—here also complicated by a fault line in American and Chinese cultures, each of which purportedly privileges one side—it reflects to some extent the dynamics permeating the discourse of the cultural nationalists, but also goes to show how a site of personal identity is always unstable, and how one identity position slides into another.

The next stage, as made clear also by *Sula*, mandates that even as we identify the debt "I" owes to "we," still it is far from certain that the textual sign of (female) personhood will be recruited unequivocally to represent, or stand allegorically, for the collective. The regime of representativeness (denied to Kingston's protagonist) and the expectations—social, psychological, and historical—are raised within the generic framework only to be subtly redeployed in favour of the ethnic female protagonist.[22] Possibly this instability occurs in the text because the protagonist may position herself simultaneously towards several collectivities—the minority group (both ethnic and gendered) and a larger national entity. She also may, and in fact does, position herself between the symbolic (representable) and fantasy (accessed through distortion and deflection as undertaken in dreams, visions, myths, fables, memory distortions, and narrative inserts). Her "desire," to echo Ferraro's words, swerves here "between family loyalty and the feminist project" (168). On yet another level, to go back to Nishime, the text struggles "to reconcile the opposition between feminism and nationalism" and does so in particular by "highlighting the difficulty of finding an identity that encompasses both nation and gender" (79, 76).

The way Kingston uses the deterritorialized "China" of the stories of her ancestors is channelled through the point of view of a decentred, emergent subject, slowly solidifying her perspective, rather than the voice of an omniscient, culturally savvy narrator who wishes to familiarize a Western audience with the "real" China. The protagonist, writer-narrator, doesn't even know what this signifier refers to, whether

it is a pre-Communist China or the one her parents were eager to leave. In Wong's words, Kingston is not trying to give her national audience a "guided Chinatown tour" (1999) but is foregrounding an ethnic and possibly also national identity in its birth throes. Secondly, according to Wong, she is self-consciously and self-reflexively violating the rules of authenticity and representativeness assumed to obtain for ethnic autobiography. (This adds strength to my previous argument that generic hybridity is a conscious strategy on Kingston's part.) Kingston commits a series of transgressions which place her with writers such as Walker and Morrison, who also swerve from the ideologically overloaded generic patterns and play freely with them.

It is interesting to follow salient sites of emergence of this new national subject. If, as claimed by Feng, "Kingston consciously suspends patrilineage and examines the subject construction of the narrator in relation to women" (114), then her narrative project equals the reconstructive project of ethnic female literary history, and, additionally, the socio-psychological reclamation of femininity in the various stages of identity formation. The suspension, albeit temporary, of patriarchal or normative family arrangements; the central place accorded to female homosocial relations, especially those obtaining between mothers and daughters; the links established between the female-centred story and history—these procedures in the novels discussed here point to the links between personal and textual engendering, and also posit an uncanny but empowering link between the female body and the textual corpus.

The first section of the book, 'No Name Woman,' functions along the lines of the Russian formalist category of *skaz*, an oral form embedded in a narrative and foregrounding not so much the content as the sheer mechanism of story-telling.[23] Both are of interest to us here. The import of the story is to function as an exemplum, a cautionary tale, which marks the young girl's entrance into womanhood: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her [a wayward aunt] could happen to you. Don't humiliate us" (*The Woman Warrior* [*WW*], 5). The overriding concern of the mother, the transmitter of the story, is to assure the proper handing down of roles to her daughter approaching adulthood.[24] As noted by critics (Cheng, Smith, Feng), the mother as a source of narrative authority provides a powerful incentive to the daughter's individuation.

Simultaneously, though, the mother's agency is appropriated for consolidating and perpetuating a culture that is potentially adversary to that same project: "Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on" (*WW*, 5). (Cf. Smith 60; Feng 112) The fact that the mother skilfully and apparently regularly manipulates the mechanism of generating stories singles her out as a source of narrative, and by extension cultural, authority, as granted by the daughter-narrator: "I saw that I too have been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story" (*WW*, 20). Apparently, then, the daughter finds herself in a position where she both imbibes a tale of woman's subordination and, later, attempts to cast herself as another powerful teller, just like her mother.

Kingston explicitly foregrounds links among race, gender, and language. (Although Morrison is also very much interested in how speech-acts ground various entities, if we remember the linguistic prehistory of the Bottom in *Sula*.) Pellegrini points this out: "Race is thus thinkable as a kind of speech-act," operative "in the fact that individuals once called and named can then name themselves as an effect of […] this hailing" (98). That is to say, racing and gendering for the protagonist are not simply reducible to the mother's language use but are caused to arise as effects of it, here for the moment synonymous with the language use of the ethnic culture and its others (American ghosts). Which of these ascriptions happens first or which defines the subject more imperiously and consequentially? Classical psychoanalysis, due perhaps to its occlusion of race, tends to place the emergence of sexual difference first, but other accounts of a minority subject's interpellation in a dominant culture place racialization at a very early stage, too (cf. Fanon; Pellegrini). Hortense Spillers has also addressed this question in conjunction with the contributions psychoanalysis can make to the study of African American culture. She claims, in extension to the Lacanian account of the crucial links between ego formation and language acquisition, that "race" as a marker of subjectivity precedes the use of language: "The individual in the collective traversed by 'race' […] is covered by it [the impact of "'race' speak/ing/ through multiple discourses"] before language and its differential laws take hold" (1997: 136). For Kingston's heroine, the consciousness of sexuality in

adolescence is activated concomitantly with her inscription as an ethnic subject through the force of *skaz*.

Hopefully, I am not endowing the mother's speech-act with transcendent generative force; on the contrary, as pointed out above, its agency is itself subject to previous constricting moves. It is therefore interesting to consider, as do Rody, McClintock, and Pellegrini, how some group identifications (race, ethnicity, and nation) will be facilitated by—while by no means originating in—the mother. If, on the other hand, the mother's body also serves as a basis for gender identity, alternatively repudiated and reclaimed by the daughter, this would indicate perhaps not-so-incidental imbrications among interpellations and ascriptions entailed in the production of these identities.

The daughter, however, has decided to write into and thus to open up a utilitarian import of her mother's story (the mother here speaks for and endorses the views of the paternal filiations, but Kingston also shows her in other, more interesting roles), and so mounts an attack on the official reading and uniform reception of the story's moral: "I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water" (*WW*, 16). If the daughter has violated the pragmatics of the cautionary narrative, and is telling on, and telling about the aunt, then we could assume that these liminal narrative acts couch the stirrings of her project of coming into a female ethnic identity. For one thing, this telling, telling on and telling about may be seen as moves equivalent to the seizure of the moment to speak, the gaining of voice even in the face of motherly constrictions in the wider context of patriarchy, as suggested by Cixous.

I would like to go back here for the moment to the form of *skaz* and address another aspect of its pragmatic reach. The point of the story is also to demarcate by speech-acts and signs what Mary Douglas calls the symbolics of defilement and purity. Language and its naming, ascribing agency is brought in to render the body readable within several intersecting regimes that it is entering. Menstrual blood is a bodily sign, which has to be placed, given meaning in the context of the emergence of gender identity. The taboo of sexuality congruent with it marks the body as female (also reproductive, transgressive, excessive, and dangerous), while some other contingencies in the story (Chinese

setting and customs, family context) make it into an occasion for ethnic emergence. The two thus assail—and at the same time hail—the protagonist concurrently.

Apart from this motherly interpellation, there are other "pattern[s] of 'call and response'" (Pellegrini 98) assailing the girl. Ethnic identification "from within," here almost imperceptibly insinuated through the sexual story, doesn't "call" on the subject quite in the same peremptory way as the one from without, what Spillers terms "out there" (1997: 137). In fact, we could argue that a part of its inevitable regulatory and constrictive power is allowed to become occluded precisely because it can be continuously transferred to the "pattern of call and response" instituted by American culture, here both dominant and "ghostly," and its whiteness paradigm. Spillers is careful to point out how "'race' […] carries over its message onto an interior," but simultaneously marks an identity brought into being by another's intervention, a paradox she terms "interior intersubjectivity" (1997: 140). In a sense in which our identity is an archive of all previous identifications, beginning with the primary (Pellegrini 68; Cheng; Butler 1997), then various identities in which we have invested, here notably sexual/gender and ethnic/national, can reasonably be called intersubjective, even if internalized or naturalized to the point of appearing as inherent and self-explicatory as kinship bonds (mother-child bonding) or character traits.

These different demands put to the subject—which she responds to at various points in her life and *Bildung*—imply further crossings among different identity positions, assumed through identification, and further articulated through various speech-acts.

In the next section, 'The White Tigers,' traditional Chinese mythology and heroic literature are reused in the context of postmodernist ironic procedures, shot through with politics of feminist reframing.[25] This chapter is also predicated on a speech-act, which is, as was the case in the first chapter, performed in defiance of an authority which controls the production and dissemination of discourse. This constriction is generated by the internal ethnic roster: "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them" (*WW*, 53). However, this breach in telling extends to encompass a broader range:

> The idioms for revenge are "report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—"chink" words and "gook" words too—that they do not fit on my skin. (*WW*, 53)

The narrator is here "reporting" on her family, her neighbourhood, Chinatown, and the nation.

The frame of the story of white tigers is an oral situation: "night after night my mother would talk-story" or chant it around the house (*WW*, 19, 20). This *skaz*-like frame again constitutes the mother as a primary vehicle and agent of the daughter's socialization, but also significantly links the acquisition of gender identity and other social roles—here also refracted through an ethnic (racial) prism—to the labour of mothering (children's bed-time stories), and evolving in tandem with the rhythm of domestic work (the daughter is chanting the story while following the mother around the house). The form of the telling strongly affects the content, as the daughter imbibes not only the heroics and the alternative role of the swordswoman, but also learns to read signals that fix the woman warrior herself as a dutiful, obedient and self-sacrificing daughter (*WW*, 23). In a story-within-the-story, or perhaps the daughter' dream, she becomes an apprentice to the wise old couple, so that her *Bildung* as a woman warrior can begin. Again, one of the turning points is the accommodation of a potentially defiled female body. What in the story of the licentious, libidinous aunt becomes a liability (her procreative potential) is for the future woman warrior an occasion to exercise her self-control: "You can have children. […] [W]e are asking you to put off children for a few more years" (*WW*, 30-1). This rite of passage is closely interwoven with the rest of her fantastic apprenticeship. The point about restraining her reproductive power is primarily to enable her to serve her community better, and to get the most out of her schooling; secondarily, of course, it conveniently harnesses her libido for a more appropriate context. Also, her reproductive power bears some connection to her other, phallic, prerogatives (she even mistakenly believes that she caused the bleeding [*WW*, 31]); to the extent that she can regulate it (defer it for a while), it resembles other trained responses that she has interiorized through her schooling. However, the fact that bleeding cannot be controlled in the

way that hunger, sleep-deprivation, or even budding sexual desire can points to the deep core of her subject emergence.

During her rite of passage, her future husband's face appears, thus assuaging any threat of unbridled sexuality like the aunt's, and subduing the sense of control that the girl can exert over her body. Both responses, the loose and controlled desire, are proscribed in this cultural scenario. As she does not want to let go of her phallic mastery over her body, and would preferably stop the bleeding, she learns that it is as inevitable as the discharge of other fluids and matter from her body, but then again not quite so, as it is accompanied and punctuated by the evocation of her familial and future marital duties. Blood in this symbolic order hails the future woman warrior in quite a specific way that other abjected matter cannot match (here excrement and urine). As soon as she is invited to surrender a part of her mastery, her assumption of a masculine position—her phallic identification—becomes undercut by a womanly desire cast in socially acceptable terms and harnessed as the sacrifice for the common good, to vindicate her family and her village.

The framework of interaction reduced to a bare minimum puts the trainee in a situation where she is supposedly free to work her way through to maturity by relying equally on maternal and paternal figures, represented by her male and female teachers, respectively. Even if her bleeding marks a decisive step in her training, happening half-way through her stay with them, it can be incorporated into her *Bildung*; it is just a stage where she passes from an ungendered being to a gendered position, firmly secured by the apparitions of her parents, her future husband, her brother, and other villagers (*WW*, 31-2). Her passage is thus framed by the family scenario, so that the family is shown to function as a site for the ascription and solidification of sex and gender roles functioning across cultures. Once the woman warrior has completed her training, which includes ejecting the bodily and abjecting or abstaining from what she cannot fully expel (bleeding, reproduction, and ultimately, in fact, her femininity), she comes home to take a son's, an heir's place. She is almost displacing her father; in a reversal of the Oedipus complex she has taken his place and thus seems to continue to pursue her masculine identification (*WW*, 34). However, lest this would seem too brash, the parents, in a rite performed in "the family hall," subject

her to another re-inscription of her identity through filial obedience and obeisance to duty. While they are carving their family's message of grievance on their daughter's back, her femininity is reactivated: "I caught a smell—metallic, the iron smell of blood, as when a woman gives birth, as at the sacrifice of a large animal, as when I menstruated" (*WW*, 34). The whole procedure forebodes for the protagonist a birth of another self she performs during her incorporation into the family: "It hurt terribly […] pain so various. I gripped my knees. I released them. Neither tension nor relaxation helped. I wanted to cry" (*WW*, 35).

This androgynous shifting between gender positions that works for the woman warrior, even as each shift is marked by painful rites of passage testifying to the violence of identity making, is also foregrounded in the childbirth episode. Here, again, the swordswoman negotiates the prerogatives of the strong, awe-inspiring, phallic, and non-castrated mother, even through a decidedly female experience of motherhood. (Benjamin calls such a figure "the primal mother" [147-59].) In the end she, however, gives up her masculine pretensions, transferring her military insignia to her son ("She gave him her helmet to wear and her swords to hold," [WW, 45]) and submitting to the pattern of "perfect filiality" (*WW*, 45).

If the first part of the chapter enacted a phantasmatic vision of gender bending, which nonetheless was mediated and checked by specific regulatory factors (biology and family), the second part brings us back to the protagonist's American reality, where the swordswoman's fantasy falls short of her adolescent and adult life. The "call and response" of her gender identity in her "American life" (*WW*, 45) works not simply to displace the left-behind reality of the Chinese, but also to thwart the dream-work of the swordswoman's fantasy.

The following two chapters, 'Shaman' and 'At the Western Palace' decentre somewhat the protagonist's perspective and bring us a mediated rendering of the mother's history, actually a history of the family's female line presumably told by the mother, but then reassembled by the daughter (which echoes especially Walker's concern to commemorate in writing the mother's stories, those told and those which can only be inferred, in *The Search for Our Mothers' Gardens*), as a way to counteract the punitive mother's voice in the first section. 'Shaman' establishes a

Chinese mirror, in which American—domestic and immigrant—gender conundrums get an interesting reflection and supplement.[26] Cheng explains this focus on the mother as, actually, a form of the mother's gender and racial melancholy transferred onto the daughter (86-7). If we continue to assume a high degree of interrelatedness between the mother's (Chinese) and the daughter's (Chinese American) experience, this portends a challenge both for cultural nationalist and for feminist readings. For the former, this further solidifies the mother (this most unlikely source of Asian American familial and cultural continuity in view of the restrictive immigration laws) as the originating point of the daughter's identity acquisition process. However, it also upsets a stable feminist reading in which China easily figures as a patriarchal culture, while Chinese America nourishes a freely emerging subject coming into her own. The mother in China is in fact a formidable presence, albeit marked by definite cultural scripts; once she transfers to the US, however, her domestication begins—not only in the domestic sphere, but on a wider social plane.

I would like to go back to the daughter's plot line, which emerges more strongly again in the last chapter, 'A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe.' The act of oral narration frames the events and poignantly juxtaposes the narrator's present verbal dexterity with her erstwhile "silence," which needs to be contextualized: "When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent" (*WW*, 165). This continues even in the first few years of school, when she "covered [her] school paintings with black paint" (*WW*, 165). This first public interpellation, sounded in English, a different idiom than the one used at home, thus produces a silencing dissociation between the sense of self and its expression. The child presumably experiences a terrible confusion of codes and is quite incapable of responding to the hailing generated by the educational machinery, this "pattern of call and response" from the outside. If speech-acts performed by the mother and then deftly appropriated by the daughter previously exemplified the inevitable developmental dynamics of female identity—individuation from and identification with the mother—then the silence enveloping the child, compounded by the bleakness of her drawings, portend almost an erasure of self. By not speaking English, she comes to figure

as a "barbarian" (one of the meanings of "ethnic," the one who doesn't speak Greek, or the one who speaks a different language), being in fact unintelligible, non-existent within the social regime, bereft of voice. If the narrator keeps silent, she will be easily pinned down by the system since she lacks the access to the language which secures self-naming in US culture. Also, this hailing that proceeds from the educational machinery obviously overrides the mother's lessons and the mother tongue (Goellnicht 1991). Thus the script of ethnic/racial formation supersedes the script of gender formation.

A similar drift is detected in another episode which addresses my principal concerns in this chapter, femininity and ethnicity. The school lavatory episode, as convincingly argued by Wong, works "[b]y projecting undesirable 'Asianness' outward onto a double—what I term a *racial shadow*" (1993: 78), whereas this "repression and projection" (1993: 82) necessary for the production of the racial shadow proceeds together with the abjection of the feminine. The intense hatred the narrator feels toward her Chinese American classmate does not yet translate as a displacement of feelings (about oneself), but it is significantly tied to the other girl's "China doll hair cut" (*WW*, 173), a decisively feminine mark. Also, it appears to be indistinguishable from the obviously disagreeable traits of specific, ethnic femininity. Still, at the beginning of the episode, the girl, Maxine, is indulging in the freedom of crossing and re-crossing a tightly segmented space—and crashing into and usurping for the moment the boys' rooms at the school. The encounter with her double, her racial shadow, as suggested by Wong (1993: 87), takes place in the lavatory, itself an abject space containing the lower status both girls seem to occupy at school (both being incompetent in a number of disciplines, from sports to speaking in the class). Maxine discounts the quiet girl by her dismissive "sissy-girl" taunt (*WW*, 175). When she observes the girl's body, this comes close to the peremptory scrutiny of the gaze exercised by the norm, which operates on the children. However, Maxine points out "I hate fragility" (*WW*, 176), and in the next moment brings this mark of (Chinese) femininity in contrast with other alternative, less feminine, therefore less amenable to abjection, "the Mexican and Negro girls" (*WW*, 176). Even at this point, as she visually decomposes the other

girl's fragile body, an invidious comparison intervenes as she comes uncomfortably close to resembling and standing for the ultrafeminized girl. It is specifically the girl's skin, her unwieldy but tell-tale (Chinese) hair, and her teeth that bother Maxine as she—much like the lawyer Acosta in a comparable episode from *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, where he stages his aversion of and repugnance for the brown body that dangerously resembles his own—undertakes the exorcism of her own bad identifications. As if wanting to stave off the threat of her own dissolution and decomposition, already presaged in her silence, the bleakness of her drawings, and her presumably substandard IQ, Maxine has to forestall the workings of (self)abjection by inflicting it on the other, who is hardly distinguishable, however, from the self.

Finally, Kingston's protagonist casts herself as an exiled Chinese (Han) poetess, a captive of a barbarian tribe; the vehicle for this identification is once again her mother's *skaz* (*WW*, 206); she leaves open, however, the question of whether that status reflects her distance from high-brow native Chinese customs and thus pertains to her status as the first immigrant generation, or if it refers to her still "barbaric" status within her claimed, targeted community—US American. To complicate this puzzle further, as observed by Goellnicht, since historically most Chinese immigrants, including the narrator's parents, hailed from the south-eastern Canton province, they were by geographic, cultural and linguistic standards distanced from the elevated Mandarin culture (126). So even in the context of her parents' native culture, they could be figured as outsiders and barbarians. That makes the children's status not only more precarious, but also uncannily similar to their parents'. Through the shared experience of cultural liminality, the children and the parents—here pointedly the mother and the daughter—could reunite. However, if the assigning of names is done from the Han perspective, then the barbarians are the Americans, or by extension, the Americanized children of Chinese immigrants. Even so, "[Ts'ai Yen's] words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger" (*WW*, 209), which suggests a somewhat reassuring perspective of translatability and communicability between the two cultures. This process is enabled only after the daughter has secured her passage through thresholds of both gender and ethnic/racial identity, and stands almost equal to her mother's capacity to "talk story" (*WW*, 206).

The two authors, Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston, forcefully show a contentious welding of the cultural nationalist with the feminist paradigm but also revisit in their texts featuring idiosyncratic female protagonists a continuous challenge that the insertion of gender brings to the national imaginary. Historically, African American women writers and activists were the first to mount a consequential challenge to restrictions attributable to the economies of racialization and gendering, but they were soon followed by others, as the case of Kingston demonstrates. If the concept of racialization presupposes the embodied subject, this also requires the postulation of a shared experience due to the endowments ascribed to a certain class of bodies. Specific forms of embodiment have served in this chapter as a starting point to address the historical and cultural conditions of the emergence of the ethnic woman. Butler states that not only are we at the mercy of our bodies given their physical vulnerability and exposure to violence, aggression, injury, or death, but also to the extent to which these bodies are also defined in the social sphere by "the normative human morphologies and capacities that condemn or efface" anybody whose body is different (2004: 33). Going back to the virtual invisibility these subjects groped in a while ago, as women whose individuality was at best tentatively acknowledged and at worst simply ignored, these novels show the impact of textual interventions as they, on one hand, chart and, on the other, reflect the changing social scene. In the process, ethnic feminist texts begin to grapple with, even if they don't quite resolve, the entrenched inscriptions of identity formations as they subsist in psychoanalytic discourse, especially as these silently inform the narratives (genres) by which we live and shape our experiences as gendered beings. In these writers, the tacit endorsement certain standard genres provide for the stories of (heroic, male) subject emergence—stressing agency, independence, self-reliance, representativeness as summed up by Patricia Chu—begins to be questioned and then applied to work in favour of their female protagonists. For these writers "the […] differential that undergirds the culturally viable notions of the human" (Butler 2004: 33) translates both as race/ethnicity and gender, while in the next section we shall see what other factors besides gender figure in the representation of ethnic embodiment.

III: Borderlands/contact zones: "reworlding" ethnicity

> To live in the Borderlands means you.
>
> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

> These haunted locations are not distant, exotic sites set apart from the turf of our normal lives. Neither time nor space, it would seem, can insulate us from these disturbing histories.
>
> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Something in the Soil* (2000)

The next key intervention into the paradigm of US national mythology was launched from so-called alternative spaces, recently grouped under the common name of the borderlands or the contact zones (cf. Muthyala 2001: 112). This beguiling name would seem to pull us in the direction of a space that is at the same time subsumed under the nation-state space and juxtaposed to it, and which simultaneously finds itself in subversive contestation of its premises and limits. Indeed both seem to be the case, as the texts considered exemplary in these new approaches project a poignant sense of an oasis of ethnic (i.e. sub-national, minority) space, but extend it across geo-political, cultural, and generic boundaries. Even as this perspective—articulated as it is from the US-Mexico border, a line already overstretched with histories and meanings—propels us towards an international context (in this case, one which pulls in Mexico) it also paradoxically encircles a space that is both beyond the United States and cut off from Mexico, a space which negotiates its terms of existence not simply with the existing political realities but engages a sort of "ghostly" positionality, a nostalgic historiography to account for its vicariousness.

Arjun Appadurai appositely captures a paradox entailed in what he calls the "global production of locality" when he claims that "the power relations that affect the production of locality are fundamentally

translocal" (1996a: 188). Such locality is not drawn on any official map but circulates in representations, be they oral, written, visual, or otherwise, and in the acts of commemorative, evocative, and memorial ethnic stories. As was the case with the previous paradigms articulating the vexed relations between the ethnic and the national—that of male ethnic subjectivity and of its female counterpart—this model has originated within the US national-cultural space as a supplementary paradigm. Supplement here can be understood in its Derridean sense, so that "the marginal becomes central by virtue of its very marginality" (Culler 1989: 196). To continue our engagement with some salient models of identity formation, most notably so in Kristeva's concept of abjection, what has been excluded or suppressed, one could even say deported or expelled across the border, returns and demands its role in instantiating potentially a new national order. This national order, however, begins decidedly as a local and regional enterprise, exemplified by localities such as the Southwest, the Hawaiian Islands, Amerindian reservations, and even the Caribbean.

If we want to pursue further some of the possible chronotopes offered by this ethnic/minority revision of the national narrative, then we find ourselves pulled into specific and distinct spaces of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (as in Rolando Hinojosa's opus), Mexican American Chicago (in Sandra Cisneros), the New Mexico of Denise Chávez's fiction complemented by the Mexico of the movies, the Pacific Northwest in Sherman Alexie's texts, possibly also the fascinating and doomed exchange enacted by the agents in the vast geo-political dramas staged by Russell Banks in his novels *Book of Jamaica* and *Continental Drift*. These invoked spaces, which elude the national paradigm, yet refuse to fit into its post-national equivalent, run parallel to the nation-state spatial-temporal configuration but are most likely to interrupt it, disrupt it, complement it, or critically comment on it. The border has been redrawn constantly, not merely under the pressure of cultural mixing but even more so due to demography, immigration, and politics. The intervention of these alternative localities is summed up by José David Saldívar, himself one of the leading voices in the newly emerging field of trans-American cultural studies: "In our subaltern U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the emergence of new 'migrant' culture shuffles the

mainline U.S. *Bildung* of assimilation, acculturation, and the polyethnic state" (1997: 19). This qualifies as the "national minority" paradigm (cf. Kymlicka, Eriksen). This does not necessarily portend a different horizon of reception for works which may be seen to belong to that corpus, but their tenuous status bears on the production of images and self-perception obtaining within each respective group (here—Mexican Americans/Chicanos and Amerindians).[1]

In his account of the end-of-century modernity, Appadurai interestingly enough sees the myriad ways of "localization," or "the inscription of locality onto bodies," as "a structure of feeling," echoing Raymond Williams's useful term (Appadurai 179, 180, 181, 182; Williams 1977: 128-35). As an aside, let me just mention that Appadurai's account, which I find applicable to the situation of ethnic localization as represented by Sherman Alexie, Rolando Hinojosa, and Denise Chávez, among others, gives way to the somewhat uncontrollable pull of the globalizing, transnational perspective and thus forsakes the situatedness which his "local subject" may experience. I would very much like to retain, if possible, the dynamics of the in-between, being in the nation-state but not entirely of it which marks the localization of some ethnic subjects. Perhaps the contrast to be activated here abides not so much between a constructivist and a primordialist concept of ethnicity (captured to some extent in Sollors's ingenious consent/descent model) as between different ways of conceptualizing distinct features of ethnicity: ties to the land, soil, or place will be imagined, constructed as more primordial and basic than other modes of affiliation, as shown by Stuart Cochran precisely on the texts produced by some Native American and Chicano writers of the Southwest (1995).

The next step, argues Williams, is to integrate this shift in perspective into the prevailing ideology, which is not petrified but adaptable to new formulas, and ready to tone down the emergent structures (134). His description offers a way to observe a possibly emerging structure of feeling in the corpus of texts which I very tentatively proposed in the beginning of the chapter, namely, to see how apparently the same signifiers (ethnic, national, gender, place, identity) begin to be reinscribed differently in "the new semantic figures" (Williams 134). I am suggesting that a subtle repositioning of the terms grounding the representational matrix of ethnic literatures in the United States has occurred due to a

number of factors, some of them being the onset of the postmodern moment, or paradigmatic shifts in a range of disciplines, which have produced a transformation in the structures of feeling and the way they are encoded in some of the texts which I propose to discuss here. This is not a decisive break because, to go back to Williams's model, there is an on-going dialogue and contest between the dominant, the residual, and the emergent models, so it goes almost without saying that this proposed "new semantics of ethnicity" will be played out against the backdrop of dominant models (the whiteness paradigm, the nation-state paradigm) and its sturdy challengers (the cultural nationalist paradigm, the ethnic feminist paradigm). A sense of transition occurring in the domain of the discipline permeates accounts of more recent developments initiated with the insertion of border studies as a nod of recognition to a practice that has been going on for some time, notably in the social sciences, and now transferring to cultural and American studies.[2]

The texts referred to this section (Hinojosa, Alexie, Chávez), which comply with the national minority model, are read against the background of "master discourses," such as ethnography and historiography. Thus it is relevant that Arteaga's endorses colonial discourse analysis when reading the Chicano literary canon. Timothy Reiss is hardly alone in recognizing such discourses as effective "instruments" of colonization (2002: 41, 446 n 7). Simultaneously, these writers, by situating their plots and characters amidst locales so far unmarked on the national map and pregnant with muted histories, engage in a restrictive—but as I see it the only available—strategy of countering the process of colonial muting and imperialist effacement. This representational strategy, to borrow from LaCapra, revolves around "the question of experience, particularly with respect to nondominant groups and such problems as memory in its relation to history" (2004: 3). So let us delve into the specific experiences of the border/contact zone subject.

1. Localization of post-national American studies

The nation-state paradigm still tailors measures for how we read various texts upon their entrance or incorporation into the national or

nowadays increasingly trans-national (post-colonial, hemispheric) canons. José David Saldívar's timely and consequential interventions (1991, 1997) into the politics of American and ethnic studies appropriately signal that when looked at from the border, US literature and its historical genealogy tells a different story than we are used to. The same twist occurs when William Boelhower proposes to insert a chorographic map, related to the concept of the (Indian) frontier, which enables him to displace another centrist position, this time with respect to Native American historical and literary canons. So *border matters* affect and inform not only the lives of the "campesinas," the salad pickers, featured on the cover of Saldívar's 1997 eponymous book, reproducing a detail from the 1983 mural *Las Lechugueras* by Juana Alicia, but also other borderlands subjects. I want to linger for the moment on the border as it is mapped out in the vast fields of the US sunbelt, giving rise to the borderline migrant and mobile labour force, exerting its pull on the Mexican regions on the other side of the border, but also evoking in its representation of agricultural labour and its gendered aspect (all three pickers in the fragment of the mural are women), its modes of operation (only one of the pickers wears protective gear over her face, while above their heads a helicopter, like a huge, menacing yellow sun sprays its deadly pesticide rays on the workers, one of whom is pregnant), the gist of the borderlands perspective which has engendered the Chicano consciousness, from its grassroots organization in the fields to the interventions in the academic field. Borderlands for Saldívar portend here not only a specific geography, although they remain firmly embedded in it, but even more so come to stand for the borderlands among various disciplines come under pressure by the unruly border matters.

If in the first two models, namely, the cultural nationalist and ethnic feminist, what was played out was the dynamics of lack/absence and its inscription as presence/plenitude/wholeness, as the ethnic subject was questioning his or her misrecognition and misplacement in the national symbolic, the contact zone/borderlands model offers yet a different vantage point. What constituted a wound, grief, and affective block in the ethnic subject, namely, precisely her condition of lacking, of foreclosed, failed, missed, or misplaced identifications, has undergone in these changed socio-cultural conditions a subtle recoding, which in

short now scripts these potential sites of crisis into enabling localities of creative emergence. As I have hinted above, this structural shift does not imply that previous sets of concerns have vanished from the horizon of representational possibilities. Quite the contrary: what has happened is that in a transformed cultural moment these affective systems are approached in a more self-conscious way, with greater flair for experimentation and semantic play. Possibly, the field of ethnic representations and the domain of identity politics has become saturated to the point of eliciting a counter-response, in the sense that once the ontological status has been secured, at least discursively, if not materially, the play of signifiers can now take over.

This is at least the sense we get from Bhabha's celebratory account of "border lives" in his influential study *The Location of Culture*. Let me just take a moment here to show how for Bhabha this ontological insecurity so much dreaded and resented, and I would argue up to a point transcended through the models I have laid out beforehand, by the in-between subject—of course, we have learned by now which markers constitute this ontologically interstitial state—now stands transformed into a veritable cultural asset, the capital which can in these changed circumstances be reinvested in a different venture.[3] Bhabha explains that there is "the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences." Further, "[t]hese 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (1-2). This provides a blueprint for the epistemological shift I have hinted at, and I don't necessarily share Bhabha's enthusiasm here. His "narratives of originary and initial subjectivities" come close to the ontological pole I am evoking here, and also to the desire to mark the presence and script identity that we have seen prevalent in the cultural nationalist and ethnic feminist models, even though laced with other adjoining strains. The changed cultural moment is signalled here in the need to move "beyond" these and towards new "moments and processes," such as also proposed by Saldívar. The novelty consists in the pressure from below, from already hybrid forms of cultural identity production

standing with one foot at the door opening onto the national stage. In other words, the condition of the borderlands is now seen as precisely the showcase for the state of a different subject; and borderlands, insofar as they enhance this play of cultural difference, come to be figured as representative precisely through their freak, differential position. What I am implicitly critiquing here is the levity with which the apparatus of theory can continue to further dissociate representations from their embodied and embedded models. Consequently, in my view, the most successful exercise of hybrid identity firmly situated in the spatial-temporal grid of the contact zone, border space, frontier, is the one which successfully engages both the provisionality and givenness of this condition (Anzaldúa, Hinojosa).

If Saldívar generously includes insights from disciplines such as ethnography and anthropology into a new model for doing American studies, then perhaps we would do well to examine in what sense inscriptions of identity and ethnicity have recently earned a reputation as a situated practice, as embedded knowledge that is perhaps better observed in ethnography and hybrid genres than in critical theory. [4] Clifford Geertz operates with the concept of paradigm change in anthropology, somewhat in line with the demise of comprehensive narratives as registered in the postmodern era. Besides this acute sense of self-consciousness, as posited by Geertz, a pluralistic approach has also set in, one which resents a single-centred, hegemonic point of view, usually indulged by the insensitive ethnographer. As this multiple perspective would have it, "the shapes of knowledge are […] local" (Geertz 1983: 4). So the local, or to match the signifier with a set of signifieds relevant for my discussion—the borderlands, the reservation, the post-colony—begins to provide matrices and paradigms, not necessarily for a wider sphere that perhaps can no longer be constituted and assembled, but establishes itself as arguably the only viable form of knowing. As the title of this section suggests, the localization is interwoven with the decisively cross-boundary, interdisciplinary and transnational outlook that American and ethnic studies have taken up lately.

The disruption that the position of Chicanos and Native Americans brings to the standard conceptualization of ethnicity as a trans-generational phenomenon straddling several phases ranging

from immigration to assimilation is exemplary in this respect. Grgas convincingly shows how the staunch territorialism of both groups contributes to the maintenance of distinct identities not easily relinquished in favour of incorporation into some abstract American identity. So their sense of distinct ethnic identity is decidedly local and regional, but also in contestation of the overarching national space (Grgas 2000: 135-78). We are moving within a model that is surprisingly both sub-national as well as supra- or trans-national, a model which therefore includes communication among different worlds, as suggested by the title of John Muthyala's insightful essay 'Reworlding America: The Globalization of American Studies' (2001).

As pointed out by Muthyala, one of the staunchest challenges to the "contained" concept of America, when meant to refer only to the part of the North American continent south of Canada and north of Mexico, comes from the Cuban intellectual José Martí, who spent a considerable part of his life in the US and was able to integrate his experiences of the Latin Caribbean and its northern neighbour. Written in 1891, Martí's text 'Our America' ('Nuestra América'), according to Muthyala belongs to a range of texts which "effectively contest the nationalist, linguistic, geopolitical, and ethnocentric biases that have, historically, informed the construction of a Eurocentric America" (2001: 98). To this version of America Martí juxtaposes a creolized culture of "our half-breed America," which flaunts its mixed racial and cultural inheritance, unlike North America, which tends to elide and suppress it (749). For Martí, America's is a Creole culture, meaning that the colonizer and the colonized cultures have mingled and mixed irrevocably. Historically, then, we find ourselves at the threshold of vast borderlands.

National space vies in this model with alternative topographies—borderlands, contact zones, local and regional spaces. Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" is another useful starting point to interrogate this paradox of the locally placed yet transborder cultural complex. Her model also enables me to extend my examination here beyond the privileging of the Mexican American/Chicano experience as the epitome of the borderlands existence, and to fruitfully engage other possible variations on that cultural paradox. Muthyala also offers a corrective to "view[ing] Chicano experience as the paradigmatic and quintessential border phenomenon" (112). I would not like to overstretch

and dilute his argument because historical grounding should be a necessary backdrop to our conceptualizations of cultural experience; however, in the context of US national space, Chicanos share with another group, Amerindians, a highly developed cultural sensitivity to their minority status within the US national imaginary predicated on their pre-US national or tribal status.

Let me bolster this argument by two critical insights. Robert Con Davis-Undiano points out that the name "Chicano" promotes *mestizaje* (racial mixing; cf. also Pérez-Torres 111) and thus slides away from the binary discourse on race, which is still standard in most US discussions on racial questions (1-3). Davis-Undiano further claims that "Chicano" affirms a long-suppressed and covered-up indigenous strain in the population of the Southwest. For political convenience, the Hispanic (Spanish) element was touted at the expense of the native (121).[5] Secondly, it is imperative to comprehend that, once we put the Amerindian and Chicano (in the sense of an already mixed, hybrid population) perspective at the centre of our enquiry and choose to consider US history from that vantage point, we are faced with processes usually reckoned with in postcolonial studies, rather than American studies narrowly considered; I have in mind the inflections of colonialism and imperialism as they played themselves out in North America, troped as "manifest destiny," "Westward expansion," and the "frontier thesis." This is also where Arteaga's deft use of colonial discourse analysis figures appropriately. This new semantics of ethnicity and race evinced already in the pronouncements of 'El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán' in the metaphor of the bronze continent and the indigenous historical layer of the Americas, compounded by an enthusiastic promotion and celebration of *mestizaje*, not in the sense of the abhorred, abjected, and denigrated "one-drop rule," but as a working principle of continental history, testifies to what are perhaps the two most crucial cultural contributions of border studies to its US cousin.

2. "Contact zones"

Colonial and imperialistic residues more than linger in Pratt's concept of the contact zone. The power differential derived from and driven by the historical logic of colonial expansion in the Americas

"usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" ([1992] 1997: 4, 6), also marks another sense in which she uses the term *contact*. I am intrigued by the linguistic provenance of the word, referring to the emergence of new languages—pidgins and creoles—due to the exigencies of communication and trade among speakers of different idioms (Pratt 6). In my ensuing remarks, I would like to maintain this linguistic drift and thus offer a potential model for the semantics of ethnicity and race in alternative spaces.

Contact can take place, for instance, between the local historical memory and the national memory juxtaposed in a way which makes it into a potential site of minority identity articulation. I would suggest that such places (a point of contact, the reservation, confiscated Spanish colonial land, the post-colony) have been potentially endowed with an alternative historical record, an alternative ethnic *langue*, which can be activated by an individual act of *parole*, of engaging the historical layers.[6] This *langue*, to extend my linguistic metaphors here, is predicated upon memories and remembering (that would be the linguistic *competence* of a member of the ethnic or minority group proper), or, alternatively, this competence entails a vicarious identification by anyone who need not share the group's history but knows its historical record.[7] I would suggest that on the level of *langue*, as figured in this example, or the lower level of the speaker's competence, some spaces, more forcefully and consequentially than others, function as contact zones. Also, some spaces which offer individuals, whether native inhabitants or ethnic group members or not, a dense network of instances for performing on various levels of competence—either engaging only its present-day function or going back to its multiple usages in the past—may effectively be termed borderlands. Various degrees of performance, and consequently the status of *parole*—individualized engagement with the elements of the borderlands or contact zones *langue*—inevitably depend on the status of the speaker, the person who employs that discourse. The assumption is that the more the subject knows about the historical layers and the archive of memories tied to those spaces—which is usually, but need not exclusively be, predicated on her ethnic background—the more capable she is of mustering the *langue* of borderlands or contact zones. Also, someone who uses a very limited range of *paroles* and consequently

exhibits poor performance capability effectively forecloses for herself the possibility of experiencing that same space as borderlands.

To give an example of the way in which varying degrees of performance hinge on the subject's competence, which approximates to a higher or a lesser degree the borderlands *langue*, let me turn to Rolando Hinojosa's novel, *Klail City* (English language edition 1987), a part of his multi-volume Klail City Death Trip Series, a fictionalized account of Mexican American life in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Differing levels of social, historical and cultural competence are one of the fulcrums in the novel's plot; the techniques of narrative transmission in fact serve as a blueprint for gauging the character's status in the Mexican American community. There is, to begin with, the chronicler's voice (the metatextual "writer" P. Galindo), whose competence is rather high but occasionally has to defer to more competent and knowledgeable narrators, such as Esteban Echevarría, one of the Klail City elders. The other narrative instance which comes close to these two is by one of the principal narrators and protagonists of the novel and the series, Rafe Buenrostro. Rafe's competence is by implication on a lower level than either the chronicler's or Echevarría's. Then there are numerous other narrators, each performing on a particular level. (It is sometimes quite difficult to disentangle the web of narrative mediation in Hinojosa; consequently, at times it is impossible to say whether different narrators exist and perform on the same diegetic level or not.)

Echevarría comes through in some situations, most notably those in public places such as popular venues, as the speaker who comes closest to a composite historical consciousness potentially shared by the Mexican American community. He is, therefore, figured in some of the episodes as a mouthpiece of the community, a container of public memory; on one occasion he boasts of "a clear memory" of a particular event, and also evinces "the brio, and the desire" to tell (*Klail City* [*KC*], 25). Echevarría's competence as the purveyor of the borderlands discourse, however, does not hinge solely on his stupendous memory but also on his capacity to recall other memories through the vicarious medium of oral stories and lore, thus extending his competence beyond the boundaries of a narrowly conceived first-hand experience. Here, then, Echevarría comes down as a competent memory-keeper, who

reminds and in a sense reprimands the younger generation, including the narrator Rafe himself: "your fathers and grandfathers can still remember" (*KC*, 26), while presumably the youngsters no longer retain that same memory. This implies that even in the same linguistic, cultural, spatial, and ethnic community the competence may change from one generation to the next, not to mention the fact that it is influenced by other factors and a wider sphere, such as the parallel competences of the adjacent but separate Anglo community.

The chronicler at times touches directly upon the submerged iceberg of borderlands history, such as in his recapitulation of the pre- and post-Treaty history of Klail City:

> Klail City's real name is Llano Grande, the name of the grant.[8] (General Rufus T. Klail came down here, took over the name, and then thought he'd swept away the traditions with the change. And so it goes…). (*KC*, 111)

The *langue* of the Mexican American intergenerational community, then, would mandate the knowledge of these historical facts; the competence, however, varies from one generation to the next, from one Mexicano to the next, also from Mexicanos to Anglos, and the like. One of the charged spaces, where the past usage is overridden by present exigencies but is nevertheless extant for those willing to see and read, is the park in Klail City: nowadays, the mall has squeezed out the veteran memorial plaques and most of the free park space (*KC*, 40). This story of the park is itself indicative of the historical dynamics, the rendition of the contact and the asymmetries of power entailed in the borderlands. One of the narrators, Jehu, Rafe Buenrostro's first cousin and also one of the prominent figures through the series, engages in exercising his competence:

> The park had been there before the Klails came, of course; it'd been laid out by the original colonials. The land had been set aside as a park under the provision of the *municipio* when the land was in Mexican hands (pre-1845), and then when the Texas and other Anglos came on down to the Valley in force, they thought it would be a good idea to leave the park right where it was. And they did, for a while. (*KC*, 105)

This confident and self-understood ("of course"), yet poignantly nostalgic evocation of history in this border town, as refracted through

one of the town spaces also prefigures the borderlands complex as a paradigm of (dis)placement, territoriality claimed and disputed, land occupancy, and land acquisition. Thus the spaces of parks-turned-malls and renamed towns, the revoked municipal grants, the struggle for ranch and farming land which runs through this text, and other texts to be discussed here, remind us that borderlands are not just a conceptual model, albeit an elaborate one, but are also firmly situated for each subject attaining the status of historical reality subject to constant re-inscription.

This provisional model, which simultaneously wishes to conceptualize borderlands and contact zones as localizable places but also as discursive domains, operates beyond any one collective version of history or mythology; that is why the systemic concepts of *langue* and competence have been used—to displace the fantasy that there is a privileged speaker, or a group of speakers, who exercise control and determine the meanings in its domain. Rather, there are groups of speakers, in this case most notably Mexican Americans and Native Americans, who are most likely than not, at some junctures, the most competent speakers of this langue, whose *paroles* in some cases come closest to the abstract idealized model of the borderlands langue, who are due to specific socio-historical and geo-political conditions most capable of integrating multiple entries into this vast borderlands encyclopaedia.

To go back to the physicality of borderlands and contact zones, two concepts mostly used interchangeably throughout the chapter, when we factor in the dynamics between space and "a sense of place," then we can begin to see how Chicano and Native American literatures explode the ethnic paradigm. They both appeared on the national literary and political horizon in the 1960s on the wings of civil rights affirmation and ethnic revivalism, but with a slightly different political rationale than is the case of the already mentioned Asian Americans and African Americans.[9] In both cases, to designate them simply as ethnic belies to some extent their status, and this political difference arguably translates into their texts. As Boelhower points out in the case of US ethnogenesis in its Puritan variant, which developed later on into a privileged narrative of national formation, the Indian element is not just an ethnic fraction, it is "the lost authority, the buried presence

of the original foundation" (96), which, following the logic of ethnic identification, thus assumes the authority to confer the status of ethnicity on others (the Puritans and all the other subsequent settlers) rather than being marked as ethnic itself.

A final note of caution with respect to the terms employed here is due. Zone, space, and territory occupancy is one of the salient, but not exclusive, markers of minority and tribal/national status (cf. Kymlicka, Eriksen). Cook-Lynn and Howe, adumbrating specific inflections of the tribal, Native American paradigm—they label it "American Indian Studies" (153)—running parallel with but distinct from ethnic studies, put the stress on the concepts of "sovereignty and indigenousness" (153), which themselves arise from related senses of being "innate to, inherent in, originating naturally (in a country)" in the case of "indigenous," and alternatively pointing to the exercise of authority over a circumscribed territory in the case of "sovereign" (*Collins Dictionary*). We can see how the condition of being indigenous to a place bolsters claims of political status and determines the paths of national/tribal affiliation or disaffiliation. The second related observation should make clear the degree of investment this paradigm has with concepts related to land, soil, territory, and ultimately the site or location. Johnson and Michaelsen, in their turn, question this overinvestment bordering almost on the fetishization of the native, especially as it appears in some seminal border theory texts by Anzaldúa, Emily Hicks and by Calderón and Saldívar, which all posit as a central tenet the notion of unqualified indigenousness and undamaged aboriginality capable of sustaining their projects of fleeting, shifting, and in-between movements (11-2, 14-6). The project of the subjectivity in the borderlands and contact zones should not be allowed to slip so easily into a version of originary myth or primal fantasy of "the special notion of 'indigenousness' […] as a kind of universal translator" (Johnson and Michaelsen 14), especially if we consider a point made by Rey Chow about internal contradictions besetting the category of the native as subject.

Chow's correct observation situates the emergence of the "native" concurrently with the arrival of the colonizer and his classificatory apparatus, the knowledge machine, outside of which the native actually doesn't exist (139). Paradoxically, then, we have to be careful not to

turn what is constructed to be the most effective "reverse discourse" (Benita Parry) in border studies, postcolonial theory, and ethnic studies, hinging on concepts such as "native," "indigenous," "Indian," "indigenous identity," and the like, into functional equivalents of grand signifiers, this time presumably from below. If possible, suggest Johnson and Michaelsen, we should keep alive an awakened "suggestion of a relation to an indigenous *mestizaje*, of an origin without history" (16), no less hybrid, contingent, or assembled than any of its subsequent incarnations tied to our critical discussions. Almost alongside this "primal" hybridity nestles ambiguously the ruptured self as a result of secondary interventions marked by processes of long duration, namely, imperialism and colonialism, and their discursive effects. As astutely observed by Chow, the native's position is therefore not compromised by default or by colonial/imperialist fiat; rather, "[t]he native's victimization consists in the fact that the active evidence—the original witness—of her victimization may no longer exist in any intelligible, coherent shape" (130). This is far from implying the irrelevance or, worse, the dilution of the office of "the original witness" to "an indigenous *mestizaje*" (to go back to Johnson and Michaelsen's formulation), even as it pathetically (in the sense of sorrowfully) admits its putative absence.

3. "Chorographic" vs national map: "Indian country"

According to Boelhower's geo-spatial reading of the discovery, conquest, and colonization of (North) America, the European scale map ousted the indigenous "chorographic map": "Contrary to the explorers' maps, which pretended to be synoptic and offered a complete view of the world […] the chorographic map is concerned with a small fraction of space and concentrates on the specific and the particular" (51). The space for the native population is local and localizable, Boelhower goes on to assert: "Territory for him [the Indian] was based on social consensus, his boundaries were natural. Memory and oral tradition and the graves of his progenitors created his sense of place" (53). This may explain why the subsequent removal of the Indian tribes, their deterritorialization, simultaneously portends the destruction of the nation (tribe).

As suggested earlier by Boelhower, the road stops short of the boundaries of a reservation; as pointed out by Grgas, reservations should not be looked for on the automobile maps. The sardonic narrative voice of Sherman Alexie's 1995 novel *Reservation Blues* admits as much in the opening paragraph:

> In the one hundred and eleven years [narrated time is 1992] since the creation of the Spokane Indian Reservation in 1881, not one person, Indian or otherwise, had ever arrived there by accident. Wellpinit, the only town on the reservation, did not exist on most maps […] . (*Reservation Blues* [*RB*], 3)

A veritable "cultural geography" is needed to deal with "enigma[s]" (Yaeger 1996: 4) contained in the space of the reservation, as this paragraph hints at, but leaves the elaboration for later, the troubling connection among the "creation" of place, the coercion entailed in its occupancy, and its invisibility. Patricia Yaeger does not specify a reservation as an exemplar of her theory but her insistence that the new approach meet "the pressure to recover what is repressed or forgotten in space," or her understanding that "[t]he omnipresence of political encryption requires a new self-consciousness about the relation of place and narration" (5) all but sum up the narrative thrust of Alexie's novel. Taking place in so-called "Indian country" (*RB*, 55), this novel pointedly engages "spatial cryptography" (Yaeger 7). Yaeger sees the "physical world" as "a site where unrequited desires, bizarre ideologies, and hidden productivities are encrypted" (4); for Alexie, these "crypts" abound on the reservation, be they in the form of government-sponsored "historical monument[s]" (*RB*, 5) or other displaced markers of layered history: "Thomas thought about all the dreams that were murdered here, and the bones buried quickly just inches below surface, all waiting to break through the foundations of those government houses" (*RB*, 7). The reservation—a place whose very act of instantiation was steeped in violence and murder (where people, even Indians, don't settle "by accident" [*RB*, 3])—thus uncannily comes to stand for the encrypted space, suffused with "repressed and forgotten" (Yaeger 5) occurrences that are available to contemporary interpreters only through ciphers.

As I have suggested beforehand, the deciphering of any such overdetermined space, whether the borderlands, a contact zone,

or a sub-national enclave, repeatedly challenges the competences of its various readers. The Spokane Indians themselves prove to be the most unreliable purveyors of the possible retrieval of "the ghost story" (Yaeger 6) entailed in the reservation's history. Their potential incompetence is signalled at variously in the text, mostly through the fact that traditional scripts aren't available any longer: "Traditional Spokanes believe in rules of conduct that aren't collected into any book and have been forgotten by most of the tribe" (*RB*, 4). The other avenue of "addressing [the] encryption" (Yaeger 6) of the reservation leads through less traditional and more culturally syncretic forms, primarily the blues, but they also fail to provide the access to the entombed, buried historical record. The use of the blues here is especially significant insofar as this cultural form embodies the past ("'The blues always make us remember,' the guitar said" [*RB*, 22]); conversely: "Those blues created memories for the Spokanes, but they refused to claim them" [*RB*, 174]). This denial, as was the case with the imposed cultural amnesia in the previous instance, bespeaks tremendous difficulties in accounting for encrypted spaces containing buried memories, unrecoverable precisely insofar as they relay inassimilable events, catastrophic and overwhelming in their reach.

The reservation for Alexie's characters, however, is not solely a place of the encrypted past; it is also concurrently a place marked by staple consumer goods ("Diet Pepsi, Spam, Wonder bread" [*RB*, 12]) and capitalist leisure practices ("gambling machines that had become mandatory on every reservation" [*RB*, 12]); these two, however, principally indicate the reservation's dependent status as a limited-sovereignty space subordinate to a larger national space. The appalling poverty of the reservation, in spite of or precisely due to its abject dependence on government stipends, grants, and subsidies of various sorts, reconstitutes the age-old argument of Indians enjoying a special status in their relations with the federal government, while the faulty economic logic delineates a space closer to the concept of the protectorate or internal colony (*RB*, 282; for the detrimental effects on people, psyche, and space of such a status). Internal colonization doesn't manifest itself solely or primarily in poor economic indicators, as the concept has been deployed by Omi and Winant (cf. esp. 44-6);

it also portends the dimension of cultural disorientation and gaps in cultural memory, such as that which I have identified earlier to have blighted the tissue of the Spokane community and so virtually cut its ties with its past.

I am far from enlisting only what Appadurai calls "the workings of colonial capitalism" (1996b: 40) on the reservation; Alexie is careful to register other equally invidious and more globally pervasive forms of cultural colonization which target not only the reservation, here evoked through basketball, music, television, and, notably, CNN. In this unequal exchange, the reservation and its inhabitants come to resemble potentially any other culturally contested space enmeshed in global cultural production (Appadurai 1996a: 27-47). Thus, the blues, rock-and-roll, country music—all these forms originate from the outside but find their rationale in the creation of a peculiar reservation music idiom, performed by "Coyote Springs" (singing Valens's "La Bamba" in Spokane), who enlist the black musician Robert Johnson and the Indian medicine woman or tribal spirit Big Mom as their godparents.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the evidence of the entanglement of the rise of the reservation with colonial and imperialist agendas in US history, we can also trace in the text a subtle transposition of the reservation as a circumscribed territory into the reservation as a long-term powerful and sustainable locality, in Appadurai's sense of the term: "The work of producing localities [as] life-worlds constituted by relatively stable associations, relatively known and shared histories, and collectively traversed and legible spaces and places, is often at odds with the projects of the nation-state" (1996b: 42). The reservation, thus, needs to be understood as, on one hand, a place weighted with "the additional pressure of what is hidden, encrypted, repressed, or unspoken in global and local histories" (Yaeger 25) and, on the other, recognized as a locus generating "the commitments and attachments that characterize local subjectivities [and that] are more pressing, more continuous, and sometimes more distracting than the nation-state can afford" (Appadurai 1996b: 42). Otherwise, we will fail to appreciate the double pull this border zone exerts on its dwellers: "[T]he reservation still possessed power and rage, magic and loss, joys and jealousy. [It] tugged at the lives of its Indians, stole from them in the middle of the

night, watched impassively as the horses and salmon disappeared. But [it] forgave, too" (*RB*, 96-97). In spite of its aloofness, the generative work of the locality in effect perpetuates a sense of tribal affiliation, whereby we can begin to understand its uncanny workings on the characters—"they suffered terrible bouts or homesickness as soon as they crossed the Spokane Indian Reservation Border" (*RB*, 61)—or why leaving the reservation is accompanied by a near anxiety attack on the part of Thomas (*RB*, 298).

4. Redefining nativism

Even though the Indian removal to the territories west of the Mississippi was completed by the 1840s, as Boelhower reminds us, their ghostly presence nevertheless has been retained in the names of localities, both evoked and suppressed in the act of residual commemoration. Again, it depends on the competence of the person who encounters such a name how much or how little will be decoded. Boelhower singles out two spaces which nowadays resist the logic of the national map: "only national forests and Indian territory present and preserve an uncodified look on the map. [B]oth […] are controlled artificial spaces and can be considered largely commemorative areas set aside for the touristic viewing of nature and the natural" (71).[10]

In Michael Apted's 1992 film *Thunderheart*, the vexed questions of reservation boundaries, the state's (South Dakota) jurisdiction, federal authority, and land ownership figure prominently and sustain a multiple murder plot. A young and inexperienced FBI agent, who is part Sioux but estranged from tribal life (Val Kilmer), constanty clashes with the prerogatives of a reservation police officer (Graham Greene). The jurisdiction of the State is virtually non-existent on the reservation; they deal directly with Washington, DC. As a result of the progressive civil rights legislation of the 1970s and 1980s in the domain of securing the Native Americans' rights, there has been a tendency in the courts to uphold the collective ownership of the land and natural resources on reservations (Fuchs 206-24), which has reversed the unpopular allotment policies of parcelling out tribal lands beginning with the Dawes Act of 1887. Still, the film records how traditional tribal power structures have

been ineffective and in fact co-opted and corrupted by the spoils system emanating from Washington as the centre of the country's political power. Tribal leaders, using the benefits of the collective land ownership, find it much easier to lease or sell the land to Washington and pocket the profits, bypassing collectively made decisions as to the use of resources on the reservation. Also, the precarious status of the reservation as a space largely outside of federal jurisdiction, a place with self-administered governing bodies, schools, and law-enforcement agencies, exempt from paying taxes, but dependent on federal aid for much of its housing, medical services, and employment programmes, is sharply undercut by the overarching rationale of "national security," given as the explanation for the illegal mining of uranium on the reservation land, which wasn't authorized by the tribe. This conflict, uranium or drinking water and clean soil, goes to show that in fact the status of reservations is peculiar in the national geo-political structure, but is far from inviolable and is largely subject to Washington's current disposition.

Simultaneously, the film shows how the reservation, just like for Alexie's characters, functions as a space marked by a postmodern cultural mix: television and popular animated cartoons coexist with religious and spiritual practices and traditions such as dream-visions, divinations, powwows, and other rituals, and transculturally inflect one another. Traditionally-minded Indians ("nationalists") oppose technocratic sell-outs (such as Milton). Code-switching, as well as Pratt's "contact language," is a nodal point of the tenuous process of transculturation. The reservation's inhabitants will use English interspersed with Sioux words; some of them are proficient in both languages and may change them at will (grandma; the old medicine man). Sam Reaches (Ted Thin Elk), the chief and the medicine man, is not oblivious to the values of trade-mark commodities such as a Rolex watch, Ray Ban glasses, and cigarettes, but it seems that he is more into the very act of "trade" and "exchange," not monetary commerce but the exchange of cultural goods, or symbolic traffic.

As suggested by James Clifford in a different but pertinent context, the cultural identity of a group is "a borderline case" containing "certain underlying structures governing the recognition of identity and difference" ([1988] 1994: 289). The nature of interaction between

the chief and the detective, rather, is to be seen as (to borrow again Clifford's words) "an experiment in translation, part of a long historical conflict and negotiation of 'Indian' and 'American' identities" (289), thus a process which has been going on for Indians on the reservation as well as for half-Indians and whites outside. So it is not simply that an "authentic" Indian identity is embraced in a resolute disawoval of western, commercialized gadgets and pop-cultural artefacts; nor is it the case that genealogy, rootedness, or domicile status on the reservation automatically confer native, indigenous status on a person or disqualifies him/her from it, as the detective's case shows. The way Indian identity is conceptualized in this film, which I use here for the purpose of illustration, may give us a sense of what is at stake for borderlands subjects but may also alert us to the ways in which this experience, rather than being amiss, is in fact exemplary, if not even constitutive, of the process of identity building. In other words, the dynamics played out in the contact zones perhaps constitutes a script according to which any one community negotiates its boundaries with respect to others and attempts to regulate its defining features arising from its supposed difference from the others. As has been posited earlier, ethnicity and any notion of group identity is always relational, and it has always already taken place in the original act of differentiation; that is, without otherness there is no sense of what constitutes one's own subjectivity.

The process of translation between the two men here involves several negotiation moves. The Indian elder gives a nod of recognition to the discredited practices of property acquisition entailed in the exchange process while he engages the outsider in a semblance of such an unfair exchange, this time to his own (the native's) advantage. The way he uses the exchange system shows what some anthropologists identify as "acculturation" as opposed to "assimilation." Native American culture on the Sioux Indian reservation is an acculturated system; this "involves the adoption of cultural traits, the borrowing of customs; it is a matter of degree" (Clifford 325). The elder balances, so to speak, the signifiers of the white culture with those of the Indian culture, just as in the example provided by Clifford, in which a cloth worn around the head can be construed, depending on how you look at it, both as "an ordinary red bandanna" and as "an Indian headband"

(346). Highlighting these distinctions, when a culture ceases to be or becomes assimilated ("the incorporation of one society into another" [Clifford 325]), ought to help us not only in taking stock of ethnic or subnational cultures but of any single culture, all of them being, albeit in different degrees, subject to these processes.

For his part, the detective, an outsider but of mixed blood, has to do some translating too. The exchange ritual does not only mock the numerable previous changes of ownership but portends the symbolic exchange of artefacts of one cultural system (white, technological, scientific, rational) for those of the other (Native, spiritual, traditional). The ritual objects contain value, but the alienated outsider is unable to estimate it; it becomes necessary for him to allow for an exchange system where the sacred objects' value will not be commodified or set down in terms of other exchangeable goods but reconstructed through their placement in the functioning cultural system—a system far from unadulterated by western practices but also distinct from them. Within that kind of exchange logic, it becomes clear that what the outsider has gained (a renewed sense of identity and belonging) may be inestimable against that which he has expended in the trade-off with the chief (a trade mark wrist-watch, fancy sun-glasses). The young detective's interaction with the Indian elder may be seen as a metonymy of a minority culture's "predicament," to use Clifford's title, to uphold a more or less continuous "idea of cultural wholeness and structure" (Clifford 337) in the face of disruption, assimilation, and destruction. What is more, this skewed generational pattern, here also given emphasis by the fact that the detective has not lived on the reservation and all but considers himself white, belies another pattern in anthropology, according to Clifford, considered crucial for the construction of communal identity, namely, that of "the narrative continuity of history and identity" (337). The young alienated member of the group has repressed his ancestry and has driven all conscious knowledge of it underground; there is consequently no continuity either on the level of the narrative of his life or on the level of his family history as it could relate to the tribe.

The indigenous component of his identity is furthermore compromised by his spatial non-belonging. If we remember that the principal markers of tribalism insofar as these can be measured are

"race, territory, community, and leadership" (Clifford 334), then we find the detective lamentably short on all these counts. Still the plot gives us a counter-story, which eschews the anthropological account. Clifford poses a significant question: "is any part of a tradition 'lost' if it can be remembered, even generations later, caught up in a present dynamism and made to symbolize a possible future" (341-2)? Even though his query concerns a different case, that of the assailed identity of the Mashpee Indian tribe in the eastern United States, it offers guidance for the set of questions concerning me here. In the first place, he disawovs the mystique of narrative continuity as an adjudicator of viable communal identity. In my case, this disawoval of continuity on the level of the ongoing historical narrative is underpinned by its uncanny disruptions in visions, dreams, and presentiments progressively overtaking the detective as he goes about his investigation on the reservation.

This dynamics, running against the logic of "the narrative continuity" is the dynamics of the abjured and the abject, of something which was not really lost but driven under, of something which can be remembered, but not within the logic of the commodified exchange. When the detective begins to pay heed to the discontinuous, chaotic, and mystifying fragments flashing through his half-conscious and unconscious states, he simultaneously helps inaugurate a system running counter the narrative logic of continuity. Within this alternative system it becomes possible to engage different layers of time—the present, his traumatic family past, even further back, the tragedy of his tribe; it also becomes possible to begin to grasp a different kind of continuity, extending from the collective and converging on the individual, transcending standard temporal and causal relations. Through this process of challenging the received patterns for the recognition of identity (Clifford [337] shows how these are derived from ethnocentric assumptions), the detective reconstitutes his own identity and finds himself deeply implicated in his tribe's present predicament and future prospects.

5. Sherman Alexie's transculturation with a twist

John Newton, writing about Sherman Alexie's poetry, notes how his corpus is marked by a productive, if surprising, merging of the categories of the postmodern and the postcolonial. However, if

postcoloniality signifies a specific temporal and political disposition, it seems more pertinent in the context not only of Alexie but also other Native American authors to think of this corpus as still inhabiting "conditions of politically sustained subalternity," as articulated by Arnold Krupat (2000: 73). More felicitous is Newton's qualification that Alexie's writing can be seen in relation to "colonial history" exemplified in the spatial regime of the reservation as colonized land (414), or that Alexie's is a "poetics of the contemporary reservation" (414), even if this contradicts his own contention of the postcolonial moment inhabited by Alexie's texts. If I am quibbling over prefixes here, I do it with the sense that the temporality of the colonial (especially amidst the postmodern) and that of the postcolonial isn't quite the same thing; namely, that each inflects differently articulations of identity, sites of enunciation, regimes of representation and the avenues of reading these texts. Simultaneously, to go back to Pratt's useful model, we should look at the reservation as a contact zone between the postmodern environment and the (neo)colonial structures, where a minority identity struggles to emerge.

Some of the important recent interventions in postcolonial theory engage dissonances between the postcolonial moment—with its, one would assume, commitment to grand narratives of modernity—and the postmodernist backdrop, here usually understood to entail the poststructuralist and subsequent theoretical denunciations of the logic underlying the prospects of postcoloniality in the first place (Appiah 1997, Hall 1996b, Bhabha). Be that as it may, and given the degree of incompatibility between the two, what happens when the rupture is registered as the effect of an encounter between the postmodern and the colonial, as I would argue for Alexie's texts? Bhabha in fact notes a degree of ideational commensurability between the two, even if they occupy distinct temporal and spatial zones:

> the encounters and negotiations of differential meanings and values within "colonial" textuality […] have anticipated […] many of the problematics of significations and judgement that have become current in contemporary theory—aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency. (173)

So if the postcolonial paradigm suggests a different logic of history than the postmodern, and yet in a sense anticipates the latter, this relation in a nutshell brings back the proposed structuring of the borderlands, a possibility that the subject be situated at such an advantage (or, rather, disadvantage) as to be compelled or induced to account for herself through a double articulation. One axis of this process of articulation would proceed from the camp of the postmodern theory of the subject and temporality, while the other contradicts and qualifies it with the exigencies of the (neo)colonial identity. The potential impasse registered here derives from the postmodern inclination to ironize precisely what turns out to be the grounding premises of the colonized identity (the narrative of emancipation, agency, subjectivity as a coherent system), thus continuously undermining its occasion of emergence. Perhaps this paradox is best approached from the vantage point of psychoanalytical theory, which owes much of its present revival precisely to its reinvention by the postmodernist theoretical turn, and has only recently begun to be more effectively applied to postcolonial concerns. We could say that subjects thus positioned experience what Diana Fuss aptly describes as swerving between *identification*, which in this interpretive scheme I would loosely link to the (post)colonial pole, and *desire*, which by contrast may be construed as its postmodern underside.

In her reading of Freud, Fuss reverses somewhat a standard psychoanalytic account of subject formation, which is seen to be based on the process of identification (with an object, presumably a parent of the same sex) in the formation here explicitly of sexual identities (67), a process then seen to be more or less successfully completed by desire (for an object): it would seem logical that you need, *first*, to identify with a parent, whereas only *later* the (other) parent becomes amenable as an object-choice marked by desire (Fuss 67-8). However, Fuss deconstructs both logical and chronological ties between these two psychic processes entailed in subjectification by showing them to be applied retroactively. It follows, namely, that we infer about the primary identification on the basis of secondary identification and only after it has taken place, as pointed out by Fuss (68). The two movements, rather, should be seen to work concurrently, to proceed circuitously and interfere with each other, creating a much less stable identity than suggested in classical psychoanalytic accounts, concludes Fuss (71, 76).[11]

In order to understand how this awkward couple (identification and desire) square with equally uneasy companions (the postmodern and the neocolonial), we ought to invoke a moment in the identity-building process where these currents become available for inspection. Newton offers one such instance: "Asked about the experience of watching Westerns as a child, Alexie replies: 'I rooted for the cowboys just like everyone else. When we played cowboys and Indians on the rez, only the unpopular kids played Indians'" (qtd. in Newton 422). Thus, this already instituted grid of identifications underwritten by desires (opting for a fantasy, image, representation of somebody else, even when that fantasy is played out at the expense of and feeds itself off one's primary identifications; for oral implications of identifications cf. Fuss 27-36), works phantasmatically to secure a transfer from the field of obviously undesirable and proscribed indigenous identity (the colonized) to the domain of the more appealing, in effect colonizing identity. This transfer takes place along the lines of layered colonial representations (the monumentalized referents of "cowboys" and "Indians") and through the (postmodern) logic of the children's game, but none less rigorously for all that.

To recall at this point the concerns raised as to the critical overinvestment in the fiction of "authentic identity" and its opposite, the wholesale refusal of the native's agency, it is important to see Alexie's texts as refusing to fetishize the "Indianness" as a putative end-result of his characters' "quest," as a place of plenitude, or even the culmination of multiple identifications guaranteeing the acquisition of a "native identity." His discourse operates on the border between acculturation and assimilation (cf. Clifford), in apposite words by Newton: "Alexie makes his stand in the struggle for subjective agency not in some autochthonous interiority but on the flat, open ground of the invader's own image-repertoire" (415). Even as his discourse freely but not randomly plunders "urban mass culture" while embedded in "the contemporary reservation" (Newton 414), we can begin to relate to his characters as dwellers in the borderlands, engaging borderlands discourses with varying success.[12]

If we assume that "the Native subject's divided consciousness," to repeat Newton's phrase (422), in an uncanny procedure recalls Du

Bois's much-cited concept of "double consciousness" ([1999] 1903: 11; the sense used here is that of seeing oneself through the eyes of the peremptory other), then it spells out for us again how colonial (racialist, nativist, nationalist, etc.) discourse works to pervert what we take psychologically to be the most sustaining paths of identifications, channelling them and the concomitant desires in ways detrimental to our own positive sense of identity.[13] Checkers's (one of the characters in *Reservation Blues*) "bluest eye fantasy" (a reference to Morrison) played out in her interaction with young white girls, testifies to how a desire implanted by the discourse of whiteness, posing as a desirable norm, may potentially destabilize the very foundation of identity, tentatively set up by previous identifications (*RB*, 140-1). As Ann Pellegrini argues, "[t]he flip side of hailing some x as y, then, is that the one so hailed may find her or himself in that hailing, may […] come to identify not just with the other, but with the image the other has of her as the human's outer limits" (70).

Identification here, for Alexie's characters, assumes a dictum of logic which places a subject in its preordained space, just as, for instance, primary identification and upon it attendant secondary identification crucially inform the placement of a subject in the sexual, gender, and familial regimes. Identification in effect colonizes the subject in the process of enabling its emergence, but for the native subject this process is an ongoing trial in complicity with other discourses reinforcing her colonized position—not just a temporary effect of the subjectivation process but a continuous historical condition. The trouble with identification, in the way it has been theorized by Fuss, Butler, and Bhabha, is that it does not solely impose itself on the subject, but is implicated with the subject's desires, for which it is presumably impossible to distinguish between the authentic and the imposed. Consequently, this interweaving also translates itself in the field of relations between the postmodern and the (post)colonial. In other words, the simple dichotomy of positive identifications because more sustaining and native-based and negative identifications because tainted by colonizers' values will not do. Chess is resolutely nativist and concerned about the "preservation" of the race, but then it turns out that she might be overcompensating for her mixed origin, her grandmother

being "a little bit white" (*RB*, 81, 82). Even though the question of the direction of identification (from the centre to the periphery, for instance) is important in the final reckoning as to how it places the subject with respect to the sub-national and national imaginary, here my primary concern is to limn the tracks of identification and desire as they are traversed by the desiring subject herself, leaving aside for the moment the vexed question of how they got there, being implanted by an ominous process of colonial grafting or steering clear from it. Desire is generated from within the subject-to-be but is also not entirely interior to it.

Desire reads as the will to cathect, occupy and possess an object already invested with an aura, and is, as demonstrated by Fuss, tied to the identification routes; consequently, it is, just like them, amenable to opt for objects installed by the colonial discourse. At this point it is also advisable to look at other implications of the divided/double consciousness concept, such a one which productively contains and balances identifications and desires, one's colonized position, and the postmodern sphere. Appiah's discussion goes to show how postmodernity in some neo- and postcolonial cultural systems actually signifies the "clearing away of space" so that new cultural arrangements can take place, both anti-Western and wary of nativism (62-3). This duality, if not multiplicity, of articulation is usually inscribed as postcolonial, but here it will not do simply to dismiss the material circumstances. Thus, it deflects, in my view, into the domain of postmodern politics: ambiguously nativist, reluctantly nationalist, locally global. This doubleness, then, comes to connote a capacity to see differentially (in Emily Dickinson's words, to discern provincially, namely, locally), also a capability of juggling at least two views at the same time, to accommodate the gap between the colonial fantasy and the colonized subversion of it.

This decoupling of identification and desire performed by the colonized subject (more as a necessity than as a matter of choice) becomes especially salutary in the context of potentially pathological situations, as witnessed in Alexie's novel. In other words, this distinction should enable us to approach psychic entanglements assailing the characters both as signatures of an overarching diseased logic (of genocidal colonial

history) but also as distinctive symptoms of an individual's existential condition. We see the characters on the Spokane Reservation desiring any number of objects: pointedly the commodities which signify the material standard touted as desirable on TV, and encoded as the things that white people have. But from there it surely does not proceed that the route of identification will follow the same logic—winding up as wanting to be white. Thomas Builds-the-Fire, for instance, seems to be aware of this potential slip (*RB*, 70). The possession of things or the ability to acquire them is in the cultural discourse decisively linked with whiteness. When the newly formed Indian band "Coyote Springs" arrive in Seattle for the first time, they don't even have a single credit card. The upshot is that being an Indian disqualifies you from the market exchange extant outside the reservation and sponsored by capitalist consumerism. So the reservation figures as a space where apparently late-capitalist consumerist practices hold no sway, except as they can be seen relayed by market oriented visual machinery of TV and advertising.

Indulging in the fantasy of consumerism and commercial success—such as extended by the Cavalry [sic] Records music label—again splits the Indian subject. Does the desire to succeed in the musical world make the band less Indian (sell-outs) and more white (but never quite so) or is this, on the other hand, a fantasy that eschews ethnic and racial markers and attaches to the conditions of global cultural and market economy, in Appadurai's words? Not quite this latter, I would argue, because Coyote Springs' ultimate failure on the market, presaged by the voices of nine hundred horses slaughtered in one of the massacres, poignantly circumscribes how lack, deprivation, the ward's (read, colonial) dependence, exclusion from the market economy, and a compromised cultural value-system determine the content, intensity, and pathway of desire. However, when we look at the obstacles to the Indian band's rise on the putatively colour-blind music market, it becomes evident to what extent the seemingly neutral signs of economic status (money, consumer capacity, mobility, access to white women, the lack of stable cultural network, etc.) must in the end be read as constitutive of whiteness in society (be it in racial or cultural terms) and so by extension, exclusive of Indian identity. Identification undermines desire here, so that, ultimately, you cannot be just anybody you like, nor can you get just anything you set your sights on.

Junior Polatkin's suicide, as well as Victor Joseph's self-destructive drinking that presages a similar end (*RB*, 293), derive equally strongly from the foiled identifications with the ideal concept of Indian masculinity, the attainment of which is for them constantly thwarted by the fact of cultural amnesia, seeing how they both fail to find meaning in traditional tribal ways, or how especially Victor refutes the "powerful medicine" and magic represented by Big Mom (*RB*, 199). Their desires, in an apparently destructive form, take the shape of pretty white women, such as Betty and Veronica, but this vicarious cannibalism off the white woman's body fails to provide grounding for their shattered identities.

Mimicry and impersonation happening on the sidelines of the colonizing project of identification can in their own right become powerful procedures to overturn the mandatory path of the crippling discourses. For Alexie's characters the counter-politics of their identifications may be located in "the space where imitation exceeds identification" (Fuss 169 n 27); imitation as a willful process takes over from identification, which is subconsciously accomplished and presumably less amenable to control (Fuss 148; 152, 153). Thus, Fuss's reading of Fanon stresses the agency and intentionality of the mimesis of subversion (contained in one of the senses entailed in "double consciousness," staging myself for the other in anticipation of the other's expectations and preconceptions) as opposed to the mimesis of subjugation (Fuss 147, 169 n 27; 147).

Even when we assume that the colonized subjects are mired in their mandatory, self-detrimental identifications, they may be engaged in impersonation, enacting "the mimicry of subversion" (Fuss 147). In one of the episodes in the novel, Junior gratifies the white boy's fantasy of an Indian, at the same time countering this misrecognition precisely by acquiescing to engage in it; if the restroom is named after a generic "Indian John," then Junior is "naturally" this Indian's offspring (*RB*, 128). There is a slippage in meaning entailed here even if one side believes that the stereotype has done its office and fixed the other's identity. Also, the desire for the other anticipates and courts the desire of the other, and the two interact (Bhabha 60-1), as is the case with white women and Indian men, or the dynamics between Indian men and women. It is hardly so that the colonizing desire has the upper hand all the way. Another slippage has been identified by Bhabha as occurring

in "the crucial engagement between mask and identity, image and identification" (64), especially in view of the fact that the subject doesn't necessarily accord primacy to the seemingly more substantial forms of identity and identification versus the inauthentic mask and image; these two levels interact at all times. Checkers, to take one example, is simultaneously an abused daughter and a feisty Indian beauty; she locates her sense of identity both in relation to her father's incestuous desire and the way she recoils from it, yet she apparently reenacts his desire in her adult relationships with older men or by transferring her desire onto forbidden objects (here, Father Arnold), just as she had figured for her father. In this slippage an interstice is created generating a play of meaning, also a plethora of options, which refuse to settle and fix one's identity position forever. Still, that game has been delimited precisely by the bounds set down, on one hand, by what is being dissimulated and mimicked, and by the available (or culturally most desirable or valued) images to identify with, on the other. "Mask" and "image" in this arrangement would then seem to inextricably implicate the content and the direction assumed by *identity* and *identification*.

Colonization, here pointedly the state of "internal colonization," produces a specific set of racial identifications, a split subject and double consciousness (Fuss 154 n 30). Moreover, Fuss quotes Fanon, who claims that colonization breeds psychosis and brings about alienated subjects, on both sides of the divide.[14] As pointed out by Bhabha, through his reading of Fanon, "the analysis of colonial depersonalization," "this colonial alienation of the person" (41), both as a system peddled by the purveyors of the discourses of power (as those who demarcate the line of depersonalization) and as a reference point to those subject to it (who still have at their disposal a range of options to work with or deflect the system and are not simply defined by it at any given moment), then becomes "a state of *emergence*" (41). What is instructive here is not so much to overinvest in this subversive potential of a subject depersonalized, but to understand how at any time the layered identifications made for the other simply do not constitute the whole array of one's avenues of emergence and identification paths.

What then is foreshadowed to Alexie's characters by this sense of being confronted with alienation, this position between the postmodern

"clearing away" of space to make room for new arrangements, on one hand, and the colonial "delirium," on the other (Fanon, qtd. in Bhabha 43)? In the spatial regime instituted by western expansion and the colonization of indigenous land, the reservation functions ambiguously—as home but also as not-home (internal colony), as circumscribed by coercion, forced removal, migration, federal laws, the "chorographic map," etc. If this colonized situation leads to "a state of absolute depersonalization" (Bhabha 40), then how does an aesthetic project come to grips with it; what strategies are resorted to in order to address this impossible situation? Masks, images, and mimicry become strategies underlying Alexie's representations of the Indian. His Indian doesn't simply react, s/he also acts (both in the sense of an autonomous action and in the sense of role-playing, stage-acting, and performance, as in the case of the band). Images, masks, and surfaces (cf. Chow 123-4), typically postmodernist appurtenances, alongside more "primordial" identifications, in Alexie's words, "fry bread" and "fried bologna" (qtd. in Newton 414), rock, blues, tribal songs, and stories become building blocks of this potentially new identity. Commenting on the concept of agency entailed in any such enterprise, Chow makes clear how the subject will not simply give up her ability to receive, recode, and recirculate images or stereotypes which fetishistically bind her (139).

Thomas, "[a] misfit storyteller" (*RB*, 5), is apparently playing out a traditional role in the tribal hierarchy, but the narrator makes clear how grotesque and pathetic at the same time his traditional ways seem to other Spokane Indians, who no longer know or perhaps care to honour traditional customs. On the reservation, the sweatlodge has long been almost supplanted by the church, the priest taking the place of the medicine man. Thus, Thomas comes across as a lost and lonely, "goofy" character, while his stories are dismissed as "pointless" (*RB*, 6). Victor, as I have pointed out, turns a deaf ear to tribal beliefs and practices and is only capable of reading Big Mom and her agency in terms of a new-age spiritualism peddled by a "Star Wars" mentality (*RB*, 203).

Reservation dreams

So far, I have contended that the logic/law of desire effectively undercuts the subaltern's quest for an authentic, native identity. This

is, on the surface of Alexie's novel, demonstrable by postmodern narrative techniques, while cultural theory gives us further grounding in viewing desire as the desire of the Other, the project of casting myself in the terms set down by a peremptory agency (Lane 4). According to Christopher Lane, "[d]esire arises fundamentally from the subject's alienation" and is not harnessed by the agent's "volition and need" (4). However, this is where the model of a borderlands *langue* and archive, as expounded at the beginning of the chapter, may offer a different angle of vision. If history is desperate to speak in these places but is muted by the din of conflicting and ultimately self-annihilating desires and misidentifications, then the characters perhaps have no other choice but to turn to alternative *paroles* in order to gain access to submerged layers of meaning.

The two possible channels of derailing the mandatory, fixed, and ultimately detrimental logic of identifications and attendant desires assailing the characters on the reservation are dreams (often unfolding as nightmares) and music. However, even dreams in the context of colonial pathology cannot be seen as straightforward psychic ciphers. The dreams and visions are being read not only as "authentic" Indian cultural practices but have already been reread through the lenses of Western psychoanalysis (the Freud and Jung course in Junior's college class), commodified through their evocation in the visual media as standard fare of "Indianness" ("Indians were supposed to have visions and receive messages from their dreams. All the Indians on television had visions that told them exactly what to do" [*RB*, 18]) or simply dismissed as a viable mode of knowledge by a whitewashed Indian mind. Still, it is an important part of Alexie's ironic-reconstructive strategy to resuscitate the aura of dreams, which is why he keeps deploying them throughout the text. We are not to assume, however, that the subconscious level opens a gate to a less corrupt and tainted past, either individual or communal; nor are we summoned to witness a triumphal resolution of all psychic and cultural conflicts prefigured by dreams or visions. Rather, they are symptomatic of a larger cultural impasse of Indian (paracolonial, to echo Vizenor qtd. in Redding 179) identity in the postmodern United States, and, as any other symptom, it needs to be contextualized and interpreted in order to signify.

Each protagonist in the novel seems to be haunted by unwelcome dreams, even nightmares. Michael Fischer posits a more than coincidental link between ethnic identity and these structures: "ethnicity is a deeply rooted emotional component of identity […] transmitted less through cognitive language and learning […] than through processes analogous to the dreaming and transference of psychoanalytic encounters" (195-6). As suggested further by Fischer: "Transference, the return of the repressed in new forms, and repetitions with their distortions are all mechanisms through which ethnicity is generated" (207). This brings us to the point where we can begin to unravel the significance of the dream language as a symptom indicative of the troubled intersections of historical, tribal, familial, and personal forces conducive to the formation of individual and group identity in the novel. It would seem that the "dream's manifest content" (Freud [1900] 1998: 131) somehow restates and underlies in every chapter what the surface narrative unfolds. At the same time, it is a strategy of at least double, if not even multiple, articulation, considering the dreams' "*latent* content" (Freud 1998: 131). It is useful here to remind ourselves of the Freudian account of the dream-work proceeding principally by means of condensation and displacement:

> The consequence of the displacement is that the dream-content no longer resembles the core of the dream-thoughts and that the dream gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious. But we are already familiar with dream-distortion. We traced it back to the censorship which is exercised by one psychical agency in the mind over another. (1998: 148)

So we are to assume that the dream-content of our persistently haunted dreamers on the Spokane reservation and beyond, as in the case of Colonel Wright, should somehow give us the access to their individual psychic entanglements. It still remains to be seen whether this agglomeration of dreams and nightmares may amount to something like a dream-archive containing a larger story, such as posited by Kathleen Brogan in a number of contemporary ethnic texts: "Stories of cultural haunting differ from other twentieth-century ghost stories in exploring the hidden passageways not only of the individual psyche, but also of a people's historical consciousness" (1995: 152).

Paying closer attention to the content of characters' dreams, we begin to see the emergence of a certain pattern: most of the dreams point back to a moment from the character's past, marked by an especially poignant, painful, and shattering experience usually deriving from a pathological family situation (such as abusive or negligent parents, parents' desertion of children, death of a family member, or incest) or occasioned by other social contacts (bullying and other forms of abuse, betrayal by friends or lovers). Here we have to pause in order to make an important note to the effect that these "familiar nightmares" (*RB*, 66) invading the characters significantly detract from standard dream logic. Cathy Caruth, in her astute readings of the role of dreams in Freud's elaboration of some aspects of trauma theory, points to this paradox: "The returning traumatic dream perplexes Freud because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (1996: 59). There is, in other words, something deeply disturbing and inexplicable in the fact that Victor or Junior repeatedly see their parents gone or dead in their dreams, or find themselves time and again subject to their parents' abuse; or in Checker's apparently compulsive repetition, or reliving, of her sexual trauma in her dreams. Caruth's insistence on the "perplex[ity]," "inexplicab[ility]," and compulsive nature of a traumatic dream, brings us close to the domain of the uncanny, be it where it crosses paths with the neurotic "*repetition-compulsion*" (Freud [1919] 1998: 164), which then clearly implies the "recurrence of the same situations, things and events" (Freud 1998: 163), or even more pointedly—this being the source of its disturbing nature—where it shows the work of the repression mechanism: "every emotional affect […] is transformed by repression into morbid anxiety"; also, "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (Freud 1998: 166). How is it that this uncanny, here figured as a series of traumatic events, then so easily invades the dreams of the Spokanes? One of the most obvious answers could be that the psychic defense mechanisms are weakened in sleep and so leave the characters as easy prey for the eruption of subconscious material. Still, this leaves unexplained the recurrent, repetitive nature of their dreams and nightmares.

Repetition is an unwelcome process for the dreamers who go through the same excruciating psychic drill in their dreams: "He [the patient suffering from traumatic neurosis] is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of […] remembering it as something belonging to the past" (Freud [1920] 1986: 228). This means that each time a person plunges into a traumatic dream, she virtually re-experiences in the here and now the whole event which led to her disturbance in the first place; indeed, we can go back to Chess's enactment of her father's departure or Checkers's dramatic reenactments of rape by different men. When we meet most of the characters on the Spokane reservation, they are all virtually stuck in and overtaken by an invariable process of "repetition" and "re-experience[ing]," rather than moving on potentially to "remembering" and working through the experience (Freud 1986: 228; for the difference between acting-out and working-through cf. LaCapra). Since we do not get a clear resolution of their conundrums at the end of the novel, we could presume that most, if not all, of the characters will remain traumatically fixed to their own pasts, that they will all remain marked by their traumatic neuroses.

However, if we retain, for the moment, our focus on the individual psychic experience, then we can discern possible efforts on the part of Thomas, Chess, and Wright, the twentieth-century incarnation of a nineteenth-century cavalry officer, to break the circle of compulsive repetition of one's own suffering as a victim of trauma or, in Wright's case, as a perpetrator of violence in massacres. Thomas's still unproven cure consists in his ability to conjure stories that will assimilate and thus attenuate the unnarratable aspects of his personal history—Thomas is acting as his own healer, drawing sustenance from traditional tribal practices however diluted they be; Chess is disputably less scarred than her younger sister and is thus more disposed to and capable of evoking a benevolent force of forgiveness; Wright is hopefully pardoned from his nightmarish enactments of the horse massacre by acknowledging his guilt before the Spokanes, pleading for pardon and presumably getting absolution from his dead wife.

Still there abides an understanding that the dreams, haunting, and the ghosts that people Alexie's and other similarly inflected texts are not simply signs of personal traumatization; as we delve deeper into

each dreamer's nightmare, even when they carry explicit personal meaning, at some point they inevitably expand to include more or less specifiable historical, communal events (the Wounded Knee massacre, the massacre of the horses, forcible Christianization, clashes with the US cavalry). These dreams, therefore, become ciphers of history which cannot be represented except as trauma—a recurrent, overwhelming, inassimilable symptom. If for Indians history as either an oral record or a living traditional practice is unavailable, and likewise, if the written or visual record repeatedly enacts what Arthur Redding in a recent article calls "the cultural entombment, the ceremonial purges and the banishment of ghosts" (166) from US history, then the single remaining "site of memory" becomes the reservation (Redding 173). In the same vein, dreams cease to be just a private disturbing experience and take on the form of "rememory," in the sense of the carriers of "historical memory," which Redding sees as "the very agonized nexus between self and community" (172). Alexie's characters then don't so much have nightmares as nightmares (of history) choose particular forms of traumatic embodiment through the characters' dreaming process. This uncanny eruption of subaltern history as trauma, what Redding calls "enactments of memory" (164) (precisely because it cannot be narrativized, worked through), circles around the tomb (Boelhower), the encryption (Yaeger) at the centre of one significant aspect of US history with respect to its "native," and will not let the ghosts off until the accumulated trauma be given its due. In the words by Fischer, this writing deftly uses "the post-modern arts of memory" (1986).

6. Denise Chávez: "colonized sexuality"

> The body holds the oldest memories. […] The hands, nails, face, legs and breasts of a woman full of the unmistakable memories of flesh.
>
> Denise Chávez, *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001)

In a much anthologized article, 'Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' ([1988] 1997), Donna Haraway calls for an "embodied objectivity," based on "the embodied nature of all vision" proceeding from "the marked body"

rather than simply emanating from a "gaze" (57). She goes on to say, "objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (59). Further, she claims that since women very often stand for these marked, situated bodies, by virtue of their gender—whether that prerogative is inherent to or thrust on them—the discourse they produce from those locations may function as "situated knowledge," such that engages its own shifting position in the process of scripting itself. Ultimately, however, Haraway's localized objectivity need not be embodied only as a woman's body, which, one could argue, sets it apart from the claims of the early feminist criticism in connection with "women's writing":

> We need not lapse into appeals to a primal mother resisting her translation into resource. The Coyote or Trickster as embodied in Southwest native American accounts, suggests the situation we are in when we give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while that we will be hoodwinked. […] I like to see feminist theory as a reinvented coyote discourse obligated to its sources in many heterogeneous accounts of the world. (67)

So the contrast she engages here is not strictly speaking between well-rehearsed objectivism and "universal rationality" on one hand and the decried "relativism" on the other, but, rather, the former challenged by knowledge based on "location, embodiment, and partial perspective" (62, 60).

Rosi Braidotti, a contemporary feminist critic and philosopher, has taken up Haraway's challenge in thinking about embodiment as a critical matrix (1994: 4). In connection with the subaltern spaces of the contact zones and borderlands, here represented by the reservation and the Southwest, it is critical to mind her warning that even these can figure as "smaller, more localized but equally exploitative power formations" (Braidotti 5). This is in line with Yaeger's and Appadurai's readings of specific localities as accumulations of complex and conflicting histories. The fault-line of gender cutting through the borderlands, as we shall see in this section, makes them an ambiguously emancipatory space—unlike its cultural-nationalist and celebratory recreation as Aztlán.

Recently, coming to an anthology of texts professing new approaches to anthropology and promoting a feminist ethnography, I wasn't surprised by the debt which some of these first-person—as well as academic—accounts bore implicitly and explicitly to Haraway's and Braidotti's formulations. (Cf. Behar and Gordon 1995) Without implying any single, clear-cut direction of influence, this is obviously another instance of cross-fertilization among different fields, which testifies to a new cultural geography directly proceeding from the articulation of specific lived experience, here pointedly of women. What is significant of these ethnographic accounts is that they capitalize on the so far proscribed device in anthropological writing, the adulterous mixing of the first person narrative voice and the experiential self, thus collapsing the boundaries between the scientific observer and the observed subject; the detached record and the unruly, discontinuous reality; the classifying mind and the sentient body.

How does the concept of the borderlands gain in immediacy and poignancy by being articulated on and exemplified by the female body and its borderline status? Chávez, for one, is decisive in instituting a "ghost story," a story untold and repressed, existing solely as a crypt on the soil, locality, or bodies, and to begin her process of decoding from there. Geo-political colonization, coupled with continuous economic dependency and exploitation, portends for authors such as Denise Chávez, while less so for Hinojosa, the scenario of the colonization of the gendered body.[15]

To illustrate a telling representational divergence between two writers firmly committed to what Appadurai calls "the production of locality" (1996b: 42), such that, as was the case in Alexie's discourse, supplements the national space, I want for the moment to dwell on Chávez's and Hinojosa's narrative procedures, respectively. In my previous discussion on some aspects of Rolando Hinojosa's work, I pointed out a weight of cultural inscription carried by and buried in a particular locality, such as the Klail City Park. One of the ways to recover these phantom significations is, as evidenced by Hinojosa's narrative agenda, to monumentalize history through material forms of remembrance (a statue, a plaque). Additionally, the layered history of the place can be reconstituted outside the occasionally biased and flawed

official, commemorated history. This is a strong concern on Hinojosa's part, which is why he deploys another channel of memorialization, namely, the narrators in the guise of sympathetic writer-chroniclers, and a host of ordinary, involved narrators or informers. The cumulative effect of his strategy amounts to recuperating the non-dominant history through a complex and layered narrative discourse posing as a variegated mix of oral and written forms: the ballad (or *corrido*), anecdotes, sketches, jokes, folk tales, embedded narrative, journalism, chronicle. Even though this formidable collage does not amount to a total reconstruction of the Mexican American history of the fictional Belken County, the narrative momentum still suggests that the underlying premise seems to be an elusive, nostalgic but nonetheless comprehensive and painstaking work of reconstruction, recovery, and memorialization of the subdued but vibrant culture. In effect, to borrow once more from the field of ethnography, which has provided a range of metaphors for my readings in this chapter, Hinojosa's "thick" representations (a reference to Geertz's phrase "thick description"), borne out by numerous repetitions with variation, don't flinch before the ultimately unattainable task of representing the totality of the history of the local yet borderlands culture. In that sense, it could be argued that his project invests in the reconstructive memory in line with the tenets of cultural nationalism, even though Hinojosa would not align himself explicitly with such an agenda.

When Chávez engages the cultural and historical layers of her fictional New Mexico (an unnamed New Mexico town, Agua Oscura, and Cabritoville, respectively), the results only obliquely might be appropriated by the cultural nationalist model; furthermore, her narrators' agendas elicit an urgency in questioning both the official historical version and the revised cultural nationalist version, and instead delve into quite different aspects of the historical and present-day borderlands locality, namely those pertaining to women. I would propose that for Chávez's female characters, the borderlands ceases to be only a fraction of the physical space, however burdened or scarred it might be; instead, it moves inward, and becomes etched virtually on their psyches and marked on their bodies. In *The Menu Girls* the developing sensibility of the narrator/protagonist Rocío hinges on home, garden and landscape, providing points of orientation, a navel in the adolescent's world. When

her favourite Willow is maliciously destroyed, it symbolically marks the end of innocence and presages the necessity to face "pain […] loss […] the dried old sorrows" and evil as parts of life (*LMG*, 49-50).

In *Face of an Angel*, Soveida Dosamantes, a native of Agua Oscura, protagonist, narrator, and not inconsequentially, a waitress, acerbically revisits salient principles subsumed under the guise of "service" as it gets recoded in the strict patriarchal and patriotic logic of her native Southwest:

> As a child, I was imbued with the idea that the purpose of life was service. […] In our family, men usually came first. Then God and country. […] When you grow up in the Southwest, your state is your country. There exists no other country outside that which you know. Likewise, neighborhood is a country. As your family is a country. (*Face of an Angel* [FA], 171)

When positioned as a woman whose profession is serving, Soveida's critical realization of the double-bind her gender and work status put her in within the larger ideological framework immediately restructures any complacent belief in the harmonic distribution of "desires" and prerogatives in a given space (Yaeger 25). Soveida begins to understand how easily and inevitably one set of relations gets translated as and transposed into another (along the continuum from God, to country, men, family, and in the very end, to oneself), all the time bolstering an order which by default, to go back to Yaeger's "geography of identity," arises from "the physical world [which] first elicits desires, then disappoints or reapportions these desires, and finally masks the ache of this disappointment and asymmetry" (25). So, if in line with Appadurai we can go on to claim the pregnant locality of the contact zone or borderlands as a "postnational social formation" (1996b: 42), when seen from Soveida's vantage point, this "social formation" bodes not only a stronger sense of emotional bonding for its potential members, but also ironically seems to necessitate the asymmetrical reappointment of individual bodies, according to their gender, ethnicity, race, class, and indigeneity, in order to set itself up as a viable socio-spatial entity capable of sustaining the communal sense.[16]

Thus, the borderlands here come close to signifying a set of values which Appadurai identifies as constitutive of the concept of "soil" as

opposed to the "national space," even as both meanings are inherent in "territory": "[T]erritory as the ground of loyalty and national affect (what we should mean when we speak of national 'soil') is increasingly divorced from territory as the site of sovereignty and state control of civil society" (1996b: 46-7). Simultaneously, strategies of producing the "discourse of belonging" and mobilizing loyalties on the basis of elusive but nonetheless strict boundary lines (state, neighbourhood, family, religious affiliation, etc.), should make it clear to Soveida that locality, the borderlands, exerts unwonted "pressure" (Yaeger 25) on her individual formation, while it launches us with a vengeance into contemplation of the borderlands as, among other things, an ominously encoded space for some subjects, notably women. The double-bind of the borderlands posits that the more sustaining its family and affiliation structures seem to be, the more exacting their pull on the individual will be, verging on the oppressive.

Also, the evocation of Aztlán (presumably located in the US Southwest) as a hallowed site, a navel of some mythic "Chicanismo" (Pérez-Torres 107), brings us back to the problematic inscription of Chicano identity. Seeing that in the past migration, mobility, was man's prerogative, women could symbolically attain this spot of national wholeness only if affiliated with men, either lawfully or outside of wedlock, but never in their own right. We learn that the Dosamantes family was instituted in "Aztlán" by the act of the great-grandfather's migration from Mexico, while it was all one state; later on, it is men who roam the land, change jobs, leave women behind, search for new land and new lovers, while women stay behind, wait, pine, and suffer. A similar pattern of mobility seems to apply even to more contemporary family structures, where men move freely between their legal and "shadow" families (Compadre in *The Menu Girls*; most of the Dosamantes men, Soveida's husbands and lovers; Lucio Valadez in *Pedro Infante*), or give up on their family responsibilities (Rocío's missing father; Luardo Dosamantes as a failed father; Tere's dead father).

From such arrangements it becomes obvious that Aztlán as a signifier cannot mobilize the loyalties or affective structures of women in the borderlands; it makes more sense in terms of the representation of gendered experiences in Chávez to observe how a conception of female

space inflects the overloaded concept of the borderlands. Con Davis-Undiano correctly postulates a fault line in "the representations of space" extending throughout the Chicano corpus, with "the reconstructed 'lived space' of Chicana writing," which "situate[s] […] the reality of a woman's body and the material conditions of being a woman," set against "the representations of space in the documents of the Chicano Movement, with its focus on revisions of Aztlán" (133).

As was the case with the uneasy interaction between the neocolonial practices and postmodernist mores occurring on the reservation, we can observe similar entanglements at work in this space where it principally plays itself out as gendering and the colonization of sexuality. In addition, just as the reservation subjected its inhabitants to varied rituals of professing their allegiance to the communal sense which it fosters and is in turn maintained by (attending church; rejecting untribal and un-Indian ideas, music, friends; showing a united front before the outside world; profiling strangers: a Lakota prophet on the reservation; Johnson, the black blues musician; the Flathead Indian sisters, etc.), also this specific locality apparently bears its own set of demands which regulate the status, mobility, and freedom of its inhabitants. A telling example would be the spatial regimentation of a local graveyard or the careful, though unwritten, demarcation of residential areas by different ethnic groups (*FA*, 105, 301; *LMG*, 151-54).

All these complementary but distinct impulses converge in a hilarious episode from *Face of an Angel* called 'The Mummy,' a reference to the embalmed head possibly of Billy the Kid (*FA*, 183). Larry, the owner of a famous local restaurant, wants to purchase the head for his collection of Southwestern memorabilia, given his "interest in history" and his sense of local pride (*FA*, 183, 186). Larry acts like an enthusiast amateur anthropologist, trusting the material artifacts to bolster up his preconceived version of an authentic history, interestingly enough landing on the highly charged period when intense Americanization (actually, Anglicization) was taking place in the territories newly wrested from Mexico. The disputed authenticity of the withered head and the welter of unreliable accounts surrounding its origin and its presumed semi-magical properties add to this already jumbled record of Southwestern history. The embalmed head of the

true-blue Anglo hero has been in the meantime turned into a scarecrow for children, a family fetish and, finally, an "authentic" piece of the Mexican American restaurant's local history collection. What Soveida's critical interventions imply is precisely the force of unreliable mythic stories underlying Billy the Kid's embellished historical record, which nevertheless continue to shape late twentieth-century accounts of Southwestern history. The mummified head's claim to any kind of historical fame is undermined not only by its dubious genealogy, but by the fact that even tracing it back to its presumed owner fails to produce the idea of the sublime merging of the past and present, at least for the disgusted Soveida, if not for other participants in this business, who see the unveiling of the smelly and shrivelled head as a moment of revelation (*FA*, 185-6). Soveida defies both the Anglos' semi-divine dread of the head and counters Larry's infatuation for the mythically embalmed but obviously falsified history, as represented by the head which might be no less fake or jumbled than other appurtenances of the borderlands with the Mexican touch (Larry dismisses all those "serapes and straw hats […], velvet paintings, or skull planters, or tacky pińatas, or gaudy paper flowers" [*FA*, 187]). She thus evacuates the local, and by extension, also her own history from its mummified stage, refusing to let it rest on fossilized or stuffed remains. It is perhaps telling that Larry would want to place his latest item alongside the geological, fossil, and zoological pieces in his collection, given the fact that these respective scientific discourses in their own domains effected what Billy the Kid's activities accomplished in the historical field of action—constituting the Southwest as a colonized territory open to all kinds of geological and anthropological prying. Furthermore, Larry's suggestion to make the head the centerpiece of his collection on "our Southwestern past, our local history" (*FA*, 187) makes Soveida physically uncomfortable with the erasures already exerted through the apparently not so innocuous agency of the mummy.

On another level, Soveida's mockery of the grandness attributed to Billy's head, whether we choose to consider it authentic or not, touches yet another chord of Southwestern history, this one much more concerned with its gendered implications. It is quite clear why, in a hierarchy of historical versions and traces, the outlaw's head, with its

stories of adventure, violence, mobility, a paragon of the masculine West, sits uneasily with Soveida's slowly emerging tendency to question precisely these reifications of some spaces as "manly," or even their general representativeness in that sense. Also, Larry's unwillingness to consider Mexican artefacts as perhaps equally illustrative of the local colour, does not amount simply to cancelling that historical layer but lends itself to the abjection of feminine appurtenances (flowers, decorations, pieces of clothing, food). Finally, the dried head of the gun-toting adventurer overshadows in its representational weight the living, evolving, and every-day activities carried out mostly by women in the Southwest, such as Chata, Oralia, Soveida's grandmother.

Soveida's "oppositional ethnography"

By-and-by Soveida comes to articulating this physical sense of unease and recoil into a version of "oppositional ethnography."[17] Her autoethnography, a project of remaking herself through articulating her own history, also encompassing her family's history from her own vantage point, begins in her early childhood through circuitous identifications with androgynous saints (*FA*, 54-58); through her refusal to identify with God or even pray to him, being figured as a male (*FA*, 91); and casting her guardian angel as female, against the prevailing custom (*FA*, 58). At twelve, she ventures to write her "autobiography," heavily marked by categories the Catholic orthodoxy hoists on women, "saint or sinner" (*FA*, 76), but also begins to question the assigned models.

Chávez is careful to tease out the varied identifications available to women within the apparently rigidly paternalistic Catholic religion. She strives to show, both in this novel and in *Loving Pedro Infante*, how a cultural system (Catholic dogma) is dispersed and applied locally so that it may even become a sub-system utilized by women to articulate possible alternative roles to wifehood and motherhood. As a nun, for instance, Soveida might have evaded the painful implications of her gender position, which she otherwise experiences in her two failed marriages and love affairs. It is primarily through their aura of celibacy and their seeming independence from men, sex, and unchecked reproduction—a legacy of the women around Soveida—that the nuns'

(by extension, also female saints') position exudes a modicum of power and control over their lives that few other women in this cultural climate could exert (*FA*, 58-60). Equally fascinating for the adolescent girl is the ambiguous encoding of chastity in various female figures in the repository of Catholic saints (Maria Goretti, Mary Magdalene), such that it comes close to the mechanism of abjection, in its titillating, uneasy closeness to violation, body, passion, and sex. As maintained by Mary Douglas, in her seminal work on the codification of filthiness and cleanliness, "we find corruption enshrined in sacred places and times" (220). As further posited by Douglas, the overvaluation of virginity is not simply a conservative taboo; it can also elicit some transformative power in a culture. As elaborated in early Christianity, for instance, it makes the female body "impermeable," viable for "the project of changing the role of the sexes in marriage and in society at large" and thus envisages a more thoroughgoing mutation: "The idea of woman as the Old Eve, together with fears of sex pollution, belongs with a certain specific type of social organization. If this social order has to be changed, the Second Eve, a virgin source of redemption crushing evil underfoot, is a potent new symbol to present" (Douglas 195).

Thus the dynamics of Soveida's early adolescence are guarded and guided by the matrices of religion, where, admittedly, taboos exert their pressure but are also locally subverted and redeployed. Teresina Ávila, the mixed-up protagonist of *Pedro Infante*, proudly and with gusto identifies with her own name-sake, the powerful figure of St Theresa of Ávila.[18] The impact of this identification is not so much in the imitation (or, more appropriately, its ironic counterpart, mimicry), for it is obvious that neither Soveida nor Tere can and will choose the same path, but in the revitalization of sidelined elements of an imperious tradition which can, after all, be seen, read, and written differently. It marks a moment when a half exposed woman takes up a pen and begins to write (culture). Within this project of oppositional ethnography, then, other rewritings of standardized folklore and religious plots, including La Malinche, La Llorona, and La Virgen de Guadalupe, all begin to figure through their re-inscriptions from a female point of view (*LPI*, 94-5, 191-2).

Soveida's history is veritably a hybrid genre, in line with the growing understanding that ethnography is itself a hybrid mix, subdued only through the imposition of the narrative perspective, continuity

and the subject/object split, but never fully tamed. The episodes from Soveida's life proceed in a jumbled, non-chronological way, following the circuitry of her memories and centering on significant events. As she grows older, the text of her life becomes ever more hybrid; soon enough she includes scraps from her "book of service," a diary of her life as a working woman, a waitress in El Farol, a Mexican American restaurant in her hometown. Another critical contribution to her autoethnography occurs when she enrolls in a Chicano studies course. Her positioning with respect to the academic version of her own situated, lived, experienced space is ambivalent, seeing how it fails to address her life in all its deviant complexity, just as the religious discourse of sacrifice and renunciation; the familial discourse of loyalty and silence; the patriarchal discourse of submission and self-abnegation; and the feminist discourse of emancipating self-sufficiency through work have all previously failed to provide a true account of her personal history. As a woman and wife, Soveida feels excluded from the high-minded but ultimately vacuous slogans touted by her first husband, posing explicitly the question of how a (Chicano and any other) nationalist programme creates sets of identifications such that effectively foreclose the possibility of women as subjects within its purview. Ivan's, Soveida's husband's, fervent commitment to the lower class and working Chicanos' rights ironically underscores his blindness to perceive Soveida herself as in need of emancipation. Thus, Soveida can only reluctantly recognize the historical role the Movement might have played in the regional and wider sphere. As a woman, she maintains all the time the double position of the participant (by virtue of belonging to a collectivity) and the excluded party (her female identity does not carry the weight of symbolic identification capable of sustaining that same collectivity, as expounded by Sedinger).

She begins to relate to the political impact of the Chicano movement at a stage in her life when she can begin to politicize the taken-for-granted realities of her and other women's lives. The Chicano movement has taken wings from effectively energizing the "topophilia" that Chicanos have always felt for their sub-national space (cf. Tuan 1974), and has drawn on seemingly natural and organic kinship practices as they get translated into cultural rituals so as to bolster a sense of belonging

and rootedness, also to reverse the potentially amnesiac effect of the English language and the overshadowing Anglo cultural norms (*FA*, 287). Interestingly, this exercise in reinforcing her deep ties to the local, popular, folk cultural practices comes immediately in the wake of a successful raid on the cockroaches infesting the El Farol restaurant. As already pointed out, *la cucaracha* retains in Chicano cultural nationalist imaginary a strong symbolic charge;[19] if then Soveida has dispelled "the Cucas" (*FA*, 273) with the spray, she has done away with that layer of identifications and has opened up space for her own inscriptions. Soveida's politics consists in understanding that these traditions are embodied and transmitted by women; that various women do have their place in this cultural continuum, and that even she can configure a history which will acknowledge the life and deeds of women such as Oralia, Chata, and Chicano mothers. In that sense, this is her version of Haraway's call for situated knowledge, which flaunts its status of a discourse in the borderlands of epistemologies and genres, while it displays its proximity to the localized subject.

Embodied identities

In her introductory piece to the collection *Women Writing Culture*, the co-editor Ruth Behar begins with a striking admission of the incompatibility between "the bare breasts of the woman" and her "clutching the pencil" (1). She goes on to expound: "In anthropology it is always the other woman, the native woman somewhere else, the woman who doesn't write […] who has breasts. Breasts that can be seen, exposed, pictured, brought home, and put into books" (Behar 1). Conversely, "[t]he woman anthropologist," here the source of discursive authority, "the woman who writes culture, also has breasts, but she is given permission to conceal them behind her pencil and pad of paper" (Behar 1). The artist has apparently committed a breach in representation by bringing in close proximity "the breasts [which] brush up against the arm and hand clutching the pencil" (Behar 2), the breasts and the pencil connoting poles wide apart even in the present-day production of knowledge. I was struck by this conjunction not merely because of its apposite illustration of one of my central metaphors in this section,

that of "embodied knowledge," but also by the way it applied to the constrictions which excluded Chávez's characters from the realm of knowledge production and dissemination (history, science, education) simply by positing the breasts and the pencil—or, rather, what they stand for—as incompatible.

Soveida's authorial project, her embedded narratives, then, all have to do with bridging and possibly doing away with the split between the consciousness and the body as a contributive factor to subjectivity. Adrianne Rich notes, however, a generalizing tendency assumed in writing: "When I write 'the body,' I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me" (Rich [1986] 1998: 639). It is important here to see the female body in its "politics of location," as the title of Rich's essay suggests, as a grounding of identity, in the face of, for instance, models of identity formation in Freud and Kristeva, or in the comparative anthropology of Mary Douglas. Here I am proposing for purposes of analysis to take the consequence which these theories identify, namely, the widespread tabooization of the female body (and consequently, also of female sexuality) across a wide cultural spectrum, as a given, and to proceed from there to possibly new modes of its conceptualization, which I see outlined in Chávez.

Take breasts, for instance. Breasts that Soveida's reckless, salacious, and abusive father (in the case of her cousin, Mara) lusts for and dreams of interminably. Breasts belong to bodily orifices, and so violate the "impermeability" of the body, make the boundary between the body and the outside unstable and vulnerable. Douglas points out how "the orifices of the body," "bodily margins," seem to be "specially invested with power and danger" (149, 150), and how their issues and secretions (also including milk, in connection with breasts) are subject to systematic semiotics in various rituals (Douglas 141-59; Kristeva 1982: 17). Still, their semantic potential is inscribed differently for different characters. For Luardo, Soveida's father, breasts of different shapes and sizes function as purveyors of pleasure; breasts function as fetishes guarding off decay and death, as well as augmenting his vital powers, if we make use of Douglas's reading of marginal zones as especially

symbolically charged. Only later, however, do women's breasts begin to figure for him as indicators of his waning sexual prowess; especially their abjected variants ("the breasts […] of an old woman, sometimes deformed, or flaccid, or, most recently, enormous, misshapen, bruised. They were an offering he could not, would not take" [*FA*, 13]). Part of his subsequent horror of women's breasts, where before was unbridled, self-serving, physical pleasure, comes from his inability to subdue the physical and signifying potential inherent in this zone; the abject turns from a (sustaining, protective) fetish into a phobic object ("there was something horrible about it" [*FA*, 13]).

For his wife, Dolores, the fact of growing breasts, a conspicuous bodily mark, functions more as a painful reminder of her changing status (alongside the bleeding), than as a source of pride or pleasure. It is instructive to connect her mother's rising concern and even Dolores's own squeamishness regarding her bodily endowments with the cases of women in *The Menu Girls*, where the protagonist, Rocío, the nurse-aid in a local hospital, reads the women patients' bodies through their records of illnesses, wounds and maiming (hysterectomy, mastectomy, tied tubes; cf. also *FA*, 364). Disfigured through its growth, and later on pregnancies, births, and lactation; bruised by sex, work, and wear; maimed by illness, the female body becomes an archaeological site where painful and physically exerting experiences leave their traces. It lends itself to a reading as if it were an autoethnographic account with bodily marks translated and transposed into signs (*FA*, 449).

Other embodied markers of this new subjectivity centre around other bodily zones, orifices and extensions, most notably the vagina and hands. Whether under-age or mature, the female lovers in *The Face of an Angel* are seen by their male counterparts as a "demon lover" (6), whom one struggles with, subdues, or is subdued by, destroys or is in turn destroyed by. The vagina is another one of the bodily openings, those boundary zones which regulate the exchange between the outside and the inside of the body. It can equally well be a fetish but also a source of phobia, given its life-giving capacity but also its threat of extinction, enfeeblement and incorporation, both to men and to women: "It was as if each dead child yanked Trancha's womb and made her blood colder and more bitter. […] And then I'll have peace from your womb, Primitivo

thought. And the ghosts that came from that womb" (*FA*, 31; Mara's mom, Dolores' sister, dies not long after childbirth [*FA*, 340]).

Metonymically, hands also function as potent symbols of women's capacity to create their own history. This becomes explicit in Soveida's extended discussions of and fascination with the hands of working women in the community, especially the sturdy Chata and the irreplaceable housekeeper, Oralia. Also, Soveida celebrates hands in her "book of service" as indispensable to the working woman, while Chata's hands are compared to Picasso's (*FA*, 211). By including in this multigenerational family saga stories built on the specific positioning and inscriptions pertaining to particular, localized female bodies, Chávez manages to bring together varied moments of this "politics of positionality," to question the implications of discourses claiming a more universal reach and to ground her female protagonists firmly in the layers contained by the borderlands complex, itself stretching between the local and the transnational. Her discourse thus allies itself with feminist anthropology in that it strives, to paraphrase Iris Marion Young, to set up "ontological categories for which female bodies would serve as the norm" (2005: 111), but also consciously elaborates on the special, minority, and subaltern status of the borderlands subject. This lived, "worlded" ethnicity is emphasized here through the vehicle of the female body, its materiality and localization, that nevertheless attends to larger social and historical structures and concerns (such as politics, language, and culture in the borderlands).

In Sherman Alexie's text, on the other hand, we witness a talking-back to the master discourses of social sciences and historiography, providing a space in which to account for an ethnic discourse not simply dismissed as neurotic or hysterical history begotten by wounds, lack, victimization, projective identifications, and fantasies. Alexie's reservation residents engage in an ethnic semiosis (Boelhower), which continuously strives to articulate and record the voice of an alternative reality (dreams) and an ineffable history, while their effort is contingent on their condition of alienation and splitting. In the next chapter, we continue to examine the voices of hysterical and neurotic subjects as we deepen our examination of the intersections of traumatic and hysterical neurosis as symptomatic of some broader social and cultural processes.

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IV: Diasporic identities: breaking and re-making ethnicity

> Whether removed from the subject by one or more generations, several decades or a few years, the memory and images of nation continue to inhabit the exilic imagination.
>
> Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001)

> I would like to suggest that the aesthetics of postmemory is a diasporic aesthetics of temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to rebuild and to mourn.
>
> Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Postmemories of Exile' (1996)

Going back to the introduction, which registers the chronological and phenomenological twists and turns in the paradigms of envisioning ethnicity and its special ties with nation, the last suggested model of representing ethnicity can be said both to follow up on the postmodern lessons bequeathed by the previous models (especially in chapters 2 and 3), and also to imbibe the alternative forms of situating the ethnic within the national, as suggested by the borderlands paradigm. The writers working within this diasporic/exilic matrix most forcefully combine and contextualize fragments of the existent ethnic discourse and make use of the archives of available ethnic representations, but do so on the background of highly ambivalent, decontextualizing, multiply encoded and experientially disjointed discourses and procedures. Thus they seem to be committed to a recreation of what Arjun Appadurai has recently theorized as an "ethnoscape," namely, "the landscape of persons [such as] tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals who […] appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (1996a: 33). Such an ethnoscape, central to my discussion in this chapter, is diaspora, with tendrils stuck deep into the soil of the nostalgically

remembered and stored place of origin as well as making their way into the new terrain, that of the target country, a place of exile or temporary residence. If we acknowledge that this representational matrix has heeded the lessons provided by serial challenges mounted by feminist theory, postcolonial and border studies, anthropology and ethnography, cultural studies and political theory, then we have to acknowledge as its dominant frame of reference not any longer a single nation-state framework, in this case that of the United States, but a supra-national or, in a relatively new turn of phrase, a transnational perspective.

The term "transnational" has come to encompass a range of meanings and has lately been taken to extend from the latest disciplinary shifts in an attempt to reinvigorate or remobilize American literary and cultural studies in the post-Cold War era to either alarming or celebratory predictions as to the fatal crisis besetting the nation-state model. Bypassing for the moment potentially troubling and Foucaultian appropriations of the term in its various disciplinary incarnations, let me go back to Appadurai's sense of the term, which appropriately joins both possible implications of the term, as in "after the nation" and "beyond the nation," and links it to the concept of diaspora in contradictory ways: "[T]he idea of the nation flourishes transnationally. Safe from the depredations of their home states, diasporic communities become doubly loyal to their nations of origin and thus ambivalent about their loyalties to America" (1996a: 172). So even when the nation is discredited in one sense, it resurfaces in the disguise of a "delocalized" kin, a diasporic and deterritorialized "transnation" (Appadurai 1996a: 172). What is interesting for my purposes here is the strong ideological and affective investment entailed in the creation (or to use the already invoked term in another context, "imagining"), survival, and perpetuation of such communities, even in the face of the double bind they come up against; the home state, given up through coercion or willingly, as an absent place, comes, ghost-like, to stand in for, and possibly even replaces, the presence of the new country, and uncannily imposes itself on the collective cultural imaginary.

This is a telling departure from the concept of identity tied to spatiality as was laid out in the previous chapter, where an imagined or lived rootedness was seen as constitutive to a sense of minority or

tribal identity. What for some groups represents an identity-building and -retaining practice for others is either simply not available or is coded differently. This means that not even a territorial issue may claim a decisive role in settling the questions of ethnic, national, or group identity; rather, it competes and mixes with other indicators to create a platform for conceptualizing a set of identities. Sometimes it exists as a minus sign against which different characters and entities are posed and recognized as, for instance, in Russell Banks's novel *Continental Drift* (1985), where the migratory nerve has been central to the plot and the ideology of the novel, but is inflected differently for each one of its subjects.[1]

1. Nostalgia, pathos and trauma

Appadurai rightly observes that these new ethnic identities are inextricably tied to the politics of affect, when he acknowledges that "very few of the new nationalisms can be separated from the anguish of displacement, the nostalgia of exile, the repatriation of funds, or the brutalities of asylum seeking" (1996a: 165). Specifically, "Haitians in Miami […] are the carriers of these new transnational and postnational loyalties" (Appadurai 165). We also need to recognize that for these communities, and in this chapter I would like to consider besides Haitians yet another group—Cuban Americans—in this light, it is "the imagination of collective interest or solidarity" which creates more solid ties than the standard fare of nationalism and nation-building summed up as "blood, kinship, race, and soil" (Appadurai 1996a: 161). It is precisely when these are muted, dispersed, and in suspension, such as in cases of mass migration, dispersal due to war, the breaking up of communities, forced expatriation, and the like, that a different layer of mobilizing comes to the fore, resting on solidarity, imagination, anguish, nostalgia, pathos, and remembering.

The scope of my enquiry here will extend to the ways in which some diasporic communities tack between "the mechanics of primordial sentiment" and "the work of the imagination" (Appadurai 1996a: 146), thus showing the constructed nature of affects but also situating them in specific historical, cultural, and representational contexts. If we can take

the reconstitution of sub-national community as entailed in the diasporic project (for instance, undertaken by Cubans in some targeted areas in the United States), then we need to move away, as urged by Appadurai and Paul Gilroy from "the primordialist argument" (Appadurai 1996a: 140; Gilroy 1993: 187-96) and examine the role of "imagination and agency" as "far more vital to group mobilization than we had hitherto imagined" (Appadurai 1996a: 145). I am not suggesting that we simply drop the so-called primordialist factors from the picture; on the contrary, the initial impulse for mobilization apparently comes from the sense of a shared predicament and a degree of group solidarity based on the reality of the lost homeland and disrupted historical and kinship lines, but it then takes "the work of the imagination," the invention of a whole new set of genealogies, ties and affects through which new solidarities and affiliations can be acted out. Diasporic public spheres are dispersed globally but are inextricably tied to the local conditions of their production, and so exemplify what many scholars see as the uncontainable effects of globalization (Appadurai 1996a: 21, 32, 147). Gilroy firmly situates the transatlantic black diaspora at the core of the genealogy of modernity (1993).

One of the venues for mobilizing "diasporic public spheres" has been identified as nostalgic imagination. However, there seems to be no critical consensus as to how to script its workings. Rita Felski, for instance, sums up the effects of "the politics of nostalgia" as it stretches in its manifold aspects throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries:

> nostalgia emerges as an ambiguous symptom of cultural malaise which can be associated with a whole range of political positions […] . There is a close relationship between modern fashionings of futurity and nostalgia; both bear witness to experiences of transition and flux which in turn engender a desire for an alternative center of stability and meaningfulness. […] Rather than an ahistorical and unitary constant, a yearning for the past is itself a historically and culturally variable result of particular experiences of movement and transformation. In this sense […] nostalgia simultaneously reaffirms the very condition that it seeks to transcend […]. (1995: 59-60)

The foundational trope is the missing home whose lack is constantly evoked in the very act of its imaginative reinstitution, and repeatedly so. As both spatial and temporal intervention, nostalgia in the sense I will

be using it here is primarily seen as what John Burt Foster, following Svetlana Boym's model, calls "reflective" nostalgia—imagining the past that never was, as opposed to "restorative" nostalgia—reflecting on what has been (514). Could we see this former as being heavily invested in the melancholic complex, such as we have to some extent also identified in other aspects of ethnic literary representations?

Stuart Hall helpfully delineates some representational nodes critical for mapping the nexus between "cultural identity" and its diasporic site of emergence (1997). Hall is focused on contexts bracketing the creation and development of the African diaspora as these processes played themselves out in the Caribbean basin:

> cultural identity […] is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return. [I]t is not a mere phantasm either. […] It has its histories—and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it not longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. (1997: 113)

Hall's temporal schema yields interesting insights: he envisions the production of a black diasporic identity as both acted out in synchrony, as a continuing process and chain of "the points of identification," and also plots the story of its crucial embeddedness in the collective past, which must be seen as a diachronic development. This double, if not even multiple, articulation therefore reenacts and disrupts a myth of origin in Africa, but Africa long ago made absent through the history of slave trade and imperialism, while it also belies the randomness of present cultural choices by constantly referring them back to this history with a vengeance. It is perhaps through Hall's invocation of what Dominick LaCapra, among others, usefully distinguishes as a "structural trauma" (1999: 699), coalescing around the sense of absence or constitutive lack as figured in the rupture entailed in the oedipal stage, that we can begin to do justice to what, again going back to LaCapra, is entailed in "historical trauma" (700) emerging through the sense of loss.

Perhaps, also, the texts at hand will prove that we are threading a thin line between the personal and the cultural, but only if and when

a personal experience is coextensive with its historical backdrop. If this alliance can be shown to work, then it is, I would argue, solely by virtue—better said, by necessity—of enunciating itself from the space of structural (individual) trauma, which in an uncanny figural extension comes metonymically to stand for collective historical trauma. In other words, we should allow for a process of translation, certainly subject to deferral and difference, where historical trauma is unavailable other than via its figuration as structural trauma.[2] Diasporic and exilic corpuses, here specifically Cuban American and Haitian American, take up the symptomatic nostalgia, pathos, and trauma as existential conditions, but turn them in the process of representation into indications of much broader processes, expressive of our historical period and instrumental in producing ethnicities in the transnational age.

In this respect, it is necessary to keep this parallelism within our horizon because it is according to Hall in the space of, among others, memory and fantasy, and in the whirl of identifications individually grounded that such history becomes available to a person in the process of claiming cultural identity. At the same time, warns Hall, "[i]n this historic moment, Jamaicans discovered themselves to be 'black'—just as, in the same moment, they discovered themselves to be the sons and daughters of 'slavery'" (116).[3] It appears that the synchronic articulation of cultural identity cannot be divorced from its diachronic shadow, that a moment of recognition of plenitude entails awareness of the period of loss, deracination, and annihilation. Can we posit that a single history acts as a cipher for a collectivity? My readings of texts of diasporas in the United States will endorse this possibility. Seyhan is resolute about the cultural significance of textual corpuses which defy the boundaries of the national canon, about "writers whose native, mother, home, or community language is not the one they write in," which she sees as a salient mark of "literary and critical texts of diasporas" (8, 13). According to her taxonomy, "'diasporic narratives' […] represent a conscious effort to transmit a linguistic and cultural heritage that is articulated through acts of personal and collective memory" (Seyhan 12).

2. "Memory and fantasy"

I see diaspora primarily as a deterritorialized structure, brought about by specific driving forces induced or precipitated by violence or other pressures, which strives in a new locality to compensate, occasionally even overcompensate, for the fact of its deracination. The investment in territory as soil has to be refashioned in some other form, and very often it tends to take on the aspect of phantasmagorically summoning a forcibly given-up space of belonging. In order to understand the layering of the diasporic dilemma, we need to recognize that in terms of the structuring of ethnic and national identity, the question of territory looms large precisely through its (permanent) loss, and that this loss rankles all the harder because it came about through the involuntary severing of the ties with one's mother country. Thus, we can see the dynamics at work here already suggested by LaCapra's model: the loss (of one's country) in the first generation gets transcribed as absence for subsequent generations in diaspora, which then apparently institutes a lasting state of yearning and remembering.[4] Memory can be "restorative," more or less successfully transmitted, capable of containing and giving form to the acute feelings of "loss and dislocation" (Seyhan 15, 16). Alternately, with respect to what Seyhan refers to as "diasporic pathos" (13), the transformative work of memory can be interrupted or even irreparably checked if traumatic symptoms set in. Thus, in this chapter memory as cultural and psychic structure will serve as a nodal point in my consideration of diasporic entities. Even though we have seen how projects of collective memorialization also loom large for other ethnic and minority structures, we could argue that for a diaspora, bereft as it is of other salient factors of group coherence and identification (soil, language, structures of political governance, spatial contiguity, cultural specificity), representations of common history and the mechanisms of collective memory become a minimum not to be easily renounced. At the same time, I will attempt to show by drawing on different cultural and psychoanalytic models of remembering—in its collective and individual aspects—how this creative, transformative, community-sustaining effort is constantly inflected, derailed, and contained by underlying fantasies, traumas, and hysterias, themselves entailed and inscribed in the course of the formation of diasporic identity.

The first generation, if we want to pursue the emergence of diasporic identity as obviously a transgenerational phenomenon, then, experiences historical traumatization, an overwhelming event which affects the whole community. We have seen how Eyerman's model of cross-generational response of African Americans to the history of their violent removal and enslavement testifies to historical trauma as a site of emergence.[5] Marianne Hirsch offers a helpful concept of *postmemory*. She sees memory as a clearly "mediated" process and examines its dynamics among the Holocaust survivors: "For survivors who have been separated and exiled from a ravaged world, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall, but also of mourning, a mourning often inflected by anger, rage, and despair" (Hirsch 1996: 662, 661). Also seeking to address the impact of "survivor memory" on the next generation, Hirsch settles for the concept of postmemory as "a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (662). Later generations face a daring challenge of vacillating between the by-now lost sense of immediacy of the historically traumatic event (removal, persecution, genocide) which has structured a diasporic entity and the demand to remember, commemorate, and give form to its aftermath. At this juncture an uneasy balance between turning loss into absence and back again takes place, as cogently expressed by Hirsch:

> Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created. (662)

It is perhaps not surprising that the operations of postmemory occur in "[the] condition of exile from the space of identity [which is no longer there or is no longer accessible to the subject; JŠ]" and confirm its affiliation with "diasporic experience" (Hirsch 662).[6]

In a more general context, Jacques Laplanche, a French psychoanalyst, identifies "the time of memory and of the individual project, the temporalisation of the human being" as one of the "attributes 'proper' to man: he temporalises himself" (1999: 238, 241). Where we can begin to see a common thread between Hirsch's "survival

memory" and "postmemory" and the temporalisation constitutive of human identity, is when we tie it to the concept of "loss," in a discussion provided by Laplanche.[7] For Laplanche, memory, the temporalisation of oneself, occurs when "the human being [is] confronted with loss"; moreover, he assumes "that the dimension of loss is probably coextensive with temporalisation itself" (241). The idea of loss, as seen in LaCapra and Hirsch, brings us back (if in fact we have ever left it with Laplanche) to the vicinity of trauma and its memorializing: "two elements which are directly linked to temporalisation: mourning is a kind of work, the work of memory […]; and it is an affect with a *duration* […]: it has a beginning and an end, it occupies a *lapse* of time" (241-2). However, here I would again like to take up the possibility that diasporic memory, insofar as it can be cast as postmemory, memory at a remove so to speak, is traumatic in that (1) it arises in direct response to loss (even if "the work of memory" then continuously strives to convert it into absence, as suggested by LaCapra) and (2) it begins its "work" belatedly, afterwards, by deferred action, suggesting a transgenerational space necessary for its agency.

Clearly, such a work of remembering is "never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection" (Bhabha 63) but extends to test the terms and boundaries of various identity formations across time. What for the first diasporic generation figures as historical traumatization cannot be available with the same poignant impact to their successors; therefore, it is all the more instrumental that they develop a vocabulary to account for the ways they have been summoned to witness the historical rift. This "haunting" of history often can be adequately portrayed only in the form of personal trauma, which complicates the circuits of traumatic genealogies in the formation of diaspora, as shown by Danticat. If structural trauma is experienced universally and is thus a common human lot, perhaps it is only through later individual traumas which, presumably, attach to it that we might get a glimpse of the way overwhelming historical events create massive traumatization of communities, endowing them in the process with the point of anchoring their identity. Petar Ramadanovic points out in his discussion of the vicissitudes of the African American and Jewish diasporas that, "'[n]ation' is thus a symptom of history" (1998: 63). This recurrence of

the traumatic dynamics ("symptom") is manifest in the ethnogenesis of the African American community, through the Middle Passage, and that of the Jews, through the murder of the first Moses (64) but is fleshed out through "the subject in or of trauma," who is "culturally and politically a diasporic subject, *en route* toward subjectivity" (Ramadanovic 55).

I will begin the discussion of the entanglements between diaspora and trauma as these are played out in the corpus of Cuban American author Roberto Fernández, whose writings engage the links among history, exile, personal, and collective identity, and simultaneously defamiliarize them through parody and pastiche, counteracting in such a move the underlying poignancy of the diasporic experience. Then I will proceed to Haitian American Edwidge Danticat, whose texts foreground an enabling but also problematic nexus between diasporic identity and its traumatic emergence, especially as trauma gets transposed into narrative.

3. Roberto G. Fernández: betrayals of memory

Roberto G. Fernández's (to be distinguished from his more renowned name-sake Roberto Fernández Retamar) last two novels, discussed here, have been brought out by a cult-status publishing house, symbolic of the emergence and dissemination of ethnic, diasporic and minority literary productions with Latino pedigree, namely, the University of Houston's Arte Público Press. While his earlier publications were in Spanish, these last two, *Raining Backwards* (1988) and *Holy Radishes!* (1995) are written in English. By extension, another second-generation Cuban American novelist, Cristina García, also moves from English to Spanish with bilingual editions of her novels, which is somewhat reminiscent of Hinojosa's highly idiosyncratic reworking and transposition (not simply translation!) of his Spanish language novels into English and vice versa. This linguistic duality, and the possibility that as a writer you might be addressing at least two audiences, the Spanish speaking, far-flung Cuban and Latino communities in the US (and, by extension, also readers in Cuba and Latin America) and also a national, US, English-speaking audience, positions these writers' discourse at a juncture where their representations function as a supra-national phenomenon, as pointed

out by de la Campa (1994: 301).[8] They are writing outside the nation, as cogently expressed by Seyhan, but are also writing their way into a new national constellation.

It is telling that in these "diasporic novels," whether by Danticat or Cuban American authors, unlike those of their "ethnic" counterparts, we see in fact a literal splitting of the spatial axis of plot, in that the narrated space encompasses both the US and a country left behind, Haiti or Cuba.[9] This would indicate that the spatial politics of these novels reflects the irreducible importance of the experience of dislocation, flight, exile, departure, migration, and movement, and so further destabilizes national and sub-national affiliations.

Fernández's novel *Raining Backwards* is set in Cuban Miami, dubbed "the capital of exile" (de la Campa 299), and it reads like a chain of loosely connected episodes centering on highly idiosyncratic characters and families of Cuban exiles in the 1970s and 1980s, more specifically, on "the Municipality of One Hundred Fires in exile" (*Raining Backwards* [*RB*], 28). In the opening episode, reflecting a sketchy and open-ended structure of the novel, we get to see how memory works both as "recall" (Hirsch) and as creative transposition even for the exiles themselves. An exchange which takes place between Mirta Vergara, the middle-aged virgin attached to her dreams of pre-revolutionary Cuba and her young neighbour, Eloy, works not only on the level of transmission of memories through their narrativization. Mirta remembers, but also through her stories recreates something that never was (her "maze of remembrances" [*RB*, 10]). Eloy, on his part, as a first generation Cuban American has already got an inkling of the recent Cuban past, but that is itself a product of exaggerated nostalgic and pathetic memory: "places which were so fabulous and sacred that his aunt refused to even mention them" (*RB*, 9). Eloy, in his urge to know and, paradoxically, to claim some memories, which are foreclosed to him, being too young to remember the island, displays the dynamics of postmemory, equally pathetic as poignant. The boy intuits that the past, unavailable to him because his family is reluctant to share it, is important to him, so much so that in this episode, where he sponges Mirta in her bathtub, the memories she "trade[s]" (*RB*, 11) precipitate his sexual initiation, his entrance into the adult world. However, this

aura of pathos is underlain and undermined by characters', in this case pointedly Mirta's, voracious, fetishistic and essentially inflated memories. Moreover, memories don't just fade or become distorted with time and distance, they can also become so endowed with nostalgic flair that they begin to function as the sublime axis sustaining the less sublime, indeed drab, aspects of Mirta's and other exiles' daily existence (drudgery of work, debts, loneliness). Mirta ingeniously, occasionally also helplessly, employs her capacity to remember Cuba presumably as it once was, but in her intense investment into the rosy past she flounders in the commodification of her memories, such that it may evacuate them of any meaning or sustaining force.

Additionally, there is an overinvestment on her part in the erotic aspects of memories, available to her only through fetishistic investment in the objects retaining direct links with the past, such as her late mother's ostrich feather (*RB*, 9) or the sponges which Eloy rubs her body with. If Mirta's rememory can be seen in part to derive from her unappeased sexual longing, such that she occasionally satisfies by her fetishes, sexual fantasies, and distorted memories, the split in her personal history can perhaps be healed through her resolute refusal to acknowledge the primacy of the US regime of the present over the half-fantasized and half-recalled Cuban past. At the same time, this heroic obstinacy also blocks her way out of "that enchanted island," tying her forever to the phantoms of the past, making the past available only through a continuous acting out which for her takes the form of recurrent sexual fantasies, ranging from sentimental and erotic to pornographic and violent (*RB*, 50). One of Mirta's projects involves "[r]etrieving Varadero," one of the most splendid Cuban beaches, which she tries to recreate in her bathroom. According to Gabriella Ibieta, "the 'authentic'" and inauthentic ("imitations") mix inextricably in this operation of remembering: "Filtered through memory, the 'reality' of the former place, when projected onto the new one, becomes illusory, a nostalgic landscape of memory in which sometimes grotesque juxtapositions abound" (1990: 68).

In a parody of the psychoanalytic cure of an exile's predicament, Eloy's supposed sexual encounter with Mirta, perhaps another figment of her wounded and wild (hysterical) imagination, is deciphered by

a popular newspaper column analyst, Dr Helen Kings: "the boy's behavior was his only way of coping with his wanting to have a past. […] I am sure that when the boy wanted to touch you, he really wanted to possess history" (*RB*, 69). Mirta's hysterical remembering, a jumble of fantasy and reality, is a consequence of trauma, insofar as the impact of a traumatic event stays submerged and largely unavailable to the subject's conscious. It is contained in unreliable memories, which are recovered only later and in bits and pieces in Mirta's narrative fragments. By extension, Mirta stands for Cuba, figured as a gendered, feminine space, which contains idyllic pre-fall, pre-discovery, pre-revolutionary plenitude and is vulnerable but also prone to be ravished by masculine forces of symbolic demands (the breaking up of the pre-oedipal dyad) and the irruption of history (colonial "discovery," communist revolution). The irony is that Mirta's disjointed memories, triggered by the mock-sexual stimulation she receives from being groomed by her young neighbour, come to serve as a means of accessing histories buried in Cuba, but the personal becomes so entangled with the cultural/collective that they constantly shift from compensating for a (historical) loss to mourning for the (trans-historical) absence. If here Mirta's sexual trauma comes close to her historically traumatic experience as an exile, how are we to discern where her *hysterical* fantasy ends and her *historical* memory begins?

The conflicting demands on the articulation of the exiles' trauma, in the novel constantly refracted through irony, pastiche, and the grotesque, become registered at the Christmas party, one of the rituals which serve to bolster the communal spirit and sustain diasporic identity. In this cross-section of the Miami Cuban community, several generations interact, from the die-hard conservatives immersed in the Cuban-US deadlock to their plainly complacent and estranged children, fairly assimilated and uninterested in the Cuban past. The past that is conjured at the "festival" harks back to the salient point of the Spanish colonial rule, the arrival of Admiral Columbus, whose possession of and penetration into the Caribbean evokes the gendered genealogy of historical memory, casting this historical moment as a point of origin for the exiled community. The moment of the Admiral's reaching Cuba is construed as an instance of the consummation of historical possibility,

indeed as the beginning of history in the region, just as the socialist revolutionaries' actions are read as a violation of that historical logic. Cuba poses again as a prone female body suffering the ravishments of history (*RB*, 47), but staying *virgo intacta*, as maintained by the exiles, in fact waiting for them to save her. Thus, they need to erase the traces and memories of violation proceeding from the Spanish arrival and centering on some salient points of Cuban history, as recapitulated in a burlesque of condensed historical collage at the end of the book, as they continuously strive to reconstitute their motherland as a place of undisturbed bliss, as site untouched by the effects of colonial history, whose progeny in fact is the Revolution. It is not surprising that in this scenario, the exiled Cubans figure themselves as being expelled from heaven. In that way it becomes possible for them to translate their historical loss (of their land, status, family, and all that grounds a person's identity) into a yearning to fill the absence, once presumably materialized as an idealized Cuba. Thus, Mirta's falsifying of her own personal history is not all that different or more pathetic or pathological than the community's adjustment to their diasporic plight.

If diasporic longing is defined as an impossible desire (Clifford 1997), just as it is impossible to "rain backwards," then it is instructive to note several other instances in which the exiles' desire fetishizes its loss (of motherland) by instituting substitutes for the virgin island. One of these, on a communal level, is a young girl, Linda Lucia, "Cuba incarnate," the flag girl, who is rented by her mother to patriotic Cuban rallies to impersonate Cuba itself. However, once Linda "receives her honor," begins to menstruate and so steps out of the scenario laid out in "Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty" (*RB*, 121), she can no longer embody a dream of Cuba and the impossible desire to return to the past. Mirta and other exiles have come to a stage where they fabricate their histories back in Cuba. Linda Lucia's mother, by trying to turn back time (another motif of the elusive and illusory return and backward movement) and stop her daughter's maturation, in effect cripples and traumatizes her by subjecting Linda in her inexorable exile's logic to the dream of eternal innocence. Similarly, other emigrants obsess over the purity of their wives and/or daughters, which might be seen as a remnant of the purportedly chivalric aristocratic culture of pre-

revolutionary Cuba, but is also a token of their inability to move beyond the traumatic moment of exile (the ravishment of their motherland, which they failed to protect), possibly also to acknowledge new historical realities—those of the revolutionary island. Instead, the colonial history with the Spanish pedigree continues to anchor the exiles' sense of their elevated social status, sadly reduced in their new, temporary haven. The sublimity of the first generation's longings, to save their martyred island and to retrieve its glorious history, and paradoxically, as indicated in the miracle of the restoration of Connie's virginity and Mirta's "immaculate" conception, to bring back the time of supposed pre-socialist paradise, is counteracted in the slogan driving the second and third generation of their descendants: while the former still vouch to die for their fatherland, the latter only strive to make their life in the adopted homeland more livable (*RB*, 190).

Further literalization of the metaphors of gendering the diasporic identification is worked out in the line of plot centering on Caridad Connie Rodriguez, an ARC, too young to remember the act of uprooting but too immersed in its implications to escape the effects of postmemory imposed by her elders. Like most of the stories of her peers, hers combines the elements of tragedy and burlesque, engaging typical trappings of American teenage culture and the weight of the Cuban—her parents'—past. In the end, her death by hanging in a town park is both a crime of passion and self-inflicted death, since there are hints that she was pressured by her overachieving mother, her disillusioned father, and their impossible expectations. As rumours about her adolescent pregnancy spread through the neighbourhood, we also learn from her father's testimony that the daughter's body figures as a token of family honour, also bringing together for a moment the Virgin of Charity, the powerful intercessor, and Caridad (Charity). This identification is obviously a minus-device; on the foil of the Virgin's utter sublimity unwraps Connie's budding sexuality and her transgression of the sexual and gender norms espoused by her strict Catholic, upper-class background. How the exiles' culture continues to fetishize and circumscribe woman's sexual and reproductive capacity is evident in one of the salient rituals of initiation for girls, their fifteenth-birthday party, the coming-out ball, when they in fact become marked as objects

of sexual desire subject to marital exchange. Significantly, Connie has emerged at the party as Venus coming out of a sea-shell (*RB*, 29). This parodic identification will resurface later, when in a turn illustrative of the tenor of the novel's carnivalesque and collage style, Connie ascends through her "martyrdom" to a cult status: by the end she is proclaimed a saint and a mystic; like the Virgin, she appears posthumously and answers the believers' prayers. Continuous overinvestment on the part of male characters in the idealized projection of femininity and their overvaluation of female bodies (as immaculate and chaste) displays similar obsessional neurosis as in their recoil from considering Cuba's violation by the rebels, and simultaneously signals that they seek to retain an active, aggressive role in sexual and political exchanges even when these are clearly slipping out of their hands. They can no more contain the disobedience of their wives, daughters, or sisters than they can check the rambunctious overturning of centuries of sainted history by the revolutionaries. Connie's shifting status is at the same time a figural extension of Cuba's predicament, inasmuch as the dogma of Connie's virginity, proclaimed by her brother, the iconoclast pope, is capable of arousing fierce passion, acrimony, and animosity between the two superpowers, the Soviets and the Americans, possibly even precipitating the next world war.

The poetics of hyperrealism and the absurd that permeates the novel does not allow for a complacent reading of the transmission of diasporic rift; fragments of characters' disclosures prevent us from assembling a total picture of their disconnected existences in keeping with the impossible project that their life in exile has become, namely, to transplant the totality of life in Cuba to US soil, to reinvent Havana's famous street Calle Ocho to Miami. The inherent impossibility of this reconstructive, and not merely commemorative, undertaking is embodied in the pastiche-like composition of the novel, suturing together in a jumbled and bizarre collage varied (para)genres such as advice column, exile newspapers, immigration documents, recipes, testimonials, newspaper notices, TV shows, political shibboleths, letters, confessions, and parodies of poetry, erotica, and history. Narrative histrionics apparently renders moot, if not even totally undercuts, the salient questions of diasporic community and its desperate hold on the past as it never was.

The narrative, rather, attempts to engage and question what Timothy Reiss calls "kitsch memory," heavily reliant on nostalgia and pathos and thus producing "an etherealized past" (335). Calle Ocho's authenticity has to be prepackaged to suit American TV-audiences' expectations. There is a sense in which it is false and contrived, in the episode of a televised show—the street's "authentic" flavour smacks too much of commodified multicultural fair, in which Mima Rodriguez, as a "native" informant, leads the American viewer through the ultimate experience of exoticism, fabulousness, and historicity of Cuban Miami. It is a reassuring difference, which can be cast in expected terms of an almost accomplished Americanization:

> 'As you're witnessing right now on your T.V. sets, all the ladies are standing up and are singing 'God Bless America' to the tune of Mrs. Rodriguez's castanets. […] [S]uch an outpour of gratitude and patriotism has never happened during our interviews.' (*RB*, 131)

This outburst reinforces the spectral, transitory, and temporal identification proffered by diasporic status. Throughout the novel Fernández constantly foregrounds how Cuban-derived and US (adopted) cultural practices shape and direct the current of the diasporic identity, refusing to let it settle as a clear-cut, ideologically immaculate project. In the televised version of Calle Ocho, television might provide American but also Cuban American audiences with the point of identification or recognition, but it is a mediated image. Ibieta quotes from "a Cuban-American's description of Cuban Miami" as "a mythical country we have fabricated […]. In Little Havana nostalgia turns to nightmare as it mixes with American kitsch" (69). Fernández seems to challenge us to think whether this kind of visual mediation is any more tainted, loaded or simulated than some other forms of identity (re)construction witnessed previously (fetish, hysteria, dreaming, disavowal, fantasy). In the context of "the geography of identity," as outlined by Appadurai, "human motion in the context of the crisis of the nation-state encourages the emergence of *translocalities*" (1996b: 42), which is how I propose to read Cuban Miami.[10] A translocality may harbour a sense of more stable, even if displaced, identity, such as is much less available to the Cuban exiles in Fernández's other novel, where Cuban characters are

as yet unable to "produce[…] localities," still being attached to the idea of Cuba left behind and unprepared to begin recreating a semblance of "attachments of local subjects to local life," fresh from their uprooting (Appadurai 1996b: 42, 43). What adds to the poignancy of this reconstructive move (always already marked by loss) is, as summed up by Herrera, that it remains poised between "Miami [as] a pale mirage or 'imitation' of Havana and […] its Calle Ocho *cubanía* [as] 'hybridized' and 'false'" and the realization that these mediated forms are the only remnants of the original presence and plenitude (xxii-xxiii).

Conversely, we could claim that Fernández's disavowal of narrative coherence and closure testifies to the paradoxical tenuousness of this identity-building scenario. Diaspora remains true to its vacillating nature insofar as it can never be fixed or grounded and is by definition constituted in the act of dispersal (scattering) and movement between at least two destinations. In the title-giving story, Miguel and his Abuela (grandma) are trying to reach Cuba in compliance with Abuela's wish to die in her homeland. This poignant sense of homeland as a navel, as a point of origin and final destination, is one of the defining cultural traits of diasporic experience. However, the grandson's faulty navigation eventually lands Abuela in Norway rather than in southern latitudes. Her wish is cruelly forestalled, but her grandson, the third generation of Cubans in exile, relives in his old age the same experience of longing to return—the unlikelihood of it being signalled by the rain falling backwards.

Another process is also at work in testing the diasporic imaginary, and that is the capacity of trauma to exert its pull on all members of the community. During the 1980s, for instance, the structure of the incoming Cubans challenges the prevailing image of the Cuban American community, adding to it class, cultural, and ideological diversity thanks to the Mariel boat-lift, a massive government-sponsored operation, which together with the willing emigrants brought to the US other, less desirable categories of newcomers: felons, political prisoners, psychiatric asylum inmates (as reconstructed in *Latin Jazz*, through the narration of Hugo, one of the protagonists and an escaped political prisoner). For one thing, the communist regime Cubans will no longer assume similarity with the Cuban identity based on hysterical rejection and denial of the revolution and its potential benefits, while uncritically

and sentimentally embracing the past. Secondly, they are just as much economic (if not more so) as ideological immigrants or freedom-fighters; the past they would care to recover is as yet nonexistent, while the past they have been offered by the older exiles doesn't apply. Even American Raised or American Born Cubans retain an ambiguous relation to their incomplete recovery of the Cuban past, lining it with the officially promoted array of memories:

> I hate [communists] because I don't remember the Yacht club, the maids, and the ranch so big it reached from coast to coast. I hate them because at family gatherings everybody talks about it and I'm left out because I don't remember because I was only five when I came. (*RB*, 95)

Language politics is also addressed critically in the novel, not surprisingly in view of the positioning of some ethnic and minority corpuses within broader literary histories and canons of both Americas. In fact, for the Cuban diaspora, the language issue becomes a staple of identity politics; de la Campa saw his increasing "bilingualism" as stripping him of his Cuban "identity" (299). In the novel, the Tongue Brigade, a vigilante English-speaking organization, also a disturbance, ironically dubbed "disglossia," affecting more and more people in Florida (including a Japanese baseball pitcher), both testify to the stakes involved in adjudicating the status of respective languages in some areas of the US. Also, contemporary Supreme Court rulings on language policy indicate the high profile this issue has earned in the most recent chapter of the country's immigration history. The point here, among other things, is the extent to which the arriving Cubans, or elsewhere Mexicans and other Latinos, only partly fit into the immigrant's assimilation model, if we assume that giving up or losing one's language is one of the principal signs of the loss of one's culture, or a signal that such a process is taking place. Conversely, language politics becomes yet another symptom of diasporic longing, going against the politics of assimilation and, consequently, cultural amnesia. The growing use of Spanish, not merely as a second language, and not only in restricted communicational situations, creates a challenging situation for the US ethnic paradigm of Americanization via Anglicization. Conversely, this bilingualism in some areas of the US

may open other sorts of questions, such as, to what extent is a national culture identifiable only or principally through a common language? On the level of the incorporation of Spanish into the novel's texture, as well as on the level of language as an explicitly addressed issue in the novel, this points to another fixture of the diasporic identification—the awareness of its language-driven and sustained politics of remembering. This is another one of those nodal points where diasporic identity will be made or broken.

The Calle Ocho beauty pageant, the patriotic rallies, the coming-out parties, the religious festivals—all these stand for ceremonies through which a culture strives to maintain its sense of distinct identity, and to keep alive a sense of its origin elsewhere and of its "temporary" domicile in a foreign country. The diasporic imaginary, therefore, has to invest all the time into the Biblical story of exodus, wandering through the desert, temporary respite in foreign lands, constant bitter struggle to survive as a distinct unit among the strangers (even if they themselves are continually cast as ethnics, foreigners; cf. the etymology in Sollors 1996: 2-12) and the eventual return to the homeland. It is by definition, then, an identity always in motion, generated by wandering; the myth of return sustains it, while the actual return cancels it, making it, paradoxically, an identity teleogically committed to its own dissolution (through the final reaching of the homeland). (The etymology of nostalgia reverberates with the notion of homecoming; from Greek *nostos*—a return home.) Along the way, however, this diasporic plot undergoes changes and redefinitions; while still potentially rallying many of the community, it nevertheless cannot streamline the divergent and dispersed, mobile and acculturated desires and demands of its potential subjects. According to Ibieta, "the juxtaposition of memory and desire in all its grotesqueness touches on the nature of the exilic experience" (71), especially insofar as the gap between the two can never be sutured so as to promote a sustained recuperation of history, itself an elusive signifier. A surplus of fantasy (desire, affect, pathos, etc.) continues to compromise this search.

Hysterical memories: Holy Radishes! *(1995)*

In Fernández's next book, *Holy Radishes!*, the futility of diasporic longing is even more poignant, being centred on the break-up of a family of Cuban exiles in the aftermath of the Revolution, and less interspersed with ironic or meta-narrative inserts than his previous novel. Still, Fernández remains committed to undermining the illusion of verisimilitude through irony, satire, parody, and pastiche. The centre stage is taken by a family of the once well-to-do Cuban "ruling class" (de la Campa 313), now stranded in the small backwater town of Belle Glades, Florida, whose principal landmark is a food-processing factory. (This is partly where the title of the novel comes from.) The narrative spans the 1960s, when most of the exiles are still reeling from the shock and painfully adjusting to a complete reversal of their fortunes. Many of the women, once the elite of Cuban high society, now find themselves not only working for a living, but relegated to menial labour, poverty, and the resulting loss of status. Among them is Nellie Pardo de Guiristain, the progeny of a wealthy industrialist and land-owning family, who strives to scrape back together a semblance of her former life.

Diasporic rupture is registered through narration in this novel even more conspicuously than in *Raining Backwards*; by focusing on an extended family and its dissolution due to forced exile, we come to recognize the limits of the diasporic model of ethnic emergence. The final break-up of the Pardo-Guiristain family, effected through the pursuit of fantasy by both Nellie and her husband Nelson, shows how the strain of homelessness, the pull of nostalgia, and the indulgence of fantasy and desire—all constitutive of the diasporic project of memory—may ultimately undo the house they helped to get erected in the first place. Memorialization is indeed crucial for diaspora, even if it suffers constant displacement due to its grounding in trauma, here both individual and collective. Individual traumatization is addressed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a result of hysterical neurosis, in which "'hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences'," bringing the subject back to "the experience which started the illness" (1986: 223). Freud then goes to note a similar mechanism at work in what he terms "traumatic neurosis" (222). I propose to read different

trajectories of memory as they are traversed by the protagonists of the novel, specifically as they arise at a meeting point between hysterical and traumatic neuroses.

The plot is almost evenly divided between Cuba, both before the outbreak of the Revolution of 1959 and several years after the setting up of a new revolutionary society, and a small community of Cuban exiles in semi-rural Florida, specifically, the Guiristain family and their friends, neighbours, and relatives. Nellie and Nelson do not seem to be able to pick up the pieces and move on from the deadlock that the trauma of exile has bequeathed them. Nelson's insistent repetition of the story of his flight from the communists, Nellie's daily ritual of going through her suitcase packed upon her departure from Cuba and her album—these recurrent actions signal a dead-end of acting out. Nelson "was frozen like a pre-Cambrian bug in a drop of amber," while Nellie feels lost in time: "the two years her family had spent in the bungalow seemed like twenty" (*Holy Radishes!* [*HR*], 9, 8). The flow of time has ceased to be punctuated by meaningful events, activities, and signs; it no longer provides a sustainable framework for shaping the characters' lives in the present. The meaning is lodged solely in the past, and the past has been lost in Cuba, which is itself gone, irreversibly transmogrified by the Revolution.

It is interesting that Fernández presents here how the generation most severely wrecked by exile—namely, the one most privileged and pampered before the Revolution occurred—tries to negotiate its position. He does this by resolutely undercutting pathos by strategies of defamiliarization (usually, anti-mimetic representation), and instead prefers his characters as anti-heroes, as pitiful and yet resourceful creatures, as both deserving of our laughter and slowly winning our sympathy, in their unlikely feat of defeating time and history. This is the "survivor" generation, as suggested by Hirsch's model, and their response actually prefigures, if we go back to the dynamics of diasporic, intergenerational cultural memory, how subsequent generations will construe the defining moment of their collective identity formation. One of the reactions resorted to is, as I have pointed out, traumatic repetition, acting out, and melancholic attachment to an object in the past that cannot be released. The question that deserves our attention is to

understand the force of attachments and loyalty to the past, which itself was far from idyllic. This is where the concept of repressed memory, as it works itself out in hysteria, may be helpful.

According to Freud, "[t]he hysterical symptom is a substitute, produced by 'conversion,' for reactivation of […] traumatic experiences by association" (1997a: 117). Moreover, it "can never dispense with a sexual significance," proceeding from "the recurrence of a form of sexual gratification which was real in infantile life and has since been repressed" (117). Hysterical memory then works by associations, not straightforwardly, and is marked by deferral and by repression. According to Laplanche, these two processes set in because the subject is not yet capable of decoding the sexualized content of the message implanted by the adult other (2001, pars. 7, 34, 72). Nellie is particularly apt at such memory dynamics. Her line of plot is in fact marked on either end by episodes with explicit sexual import (her father's unbridled carnality she might have witnessed in her childhood and her rape at the hands of her neighbour-turned-revolutionary just prior to her family's departure from Cuba), such that invites us to look into the ways sexual trauma, at the base of hysteria, may be constitutive of Nellie's identity formation. Her refusal to speak and her spitting out of food follow after her mother's death by choking on a piece of meat, but these symptoms are also tied to her father's continuous and flimsily masked sexual advances towards Delfina, a young maid servant, as well as to the onset of Nellie's own sexual maturation ("her developing body" [*HR*, 251]). The warping of the time continuum, inherent in traumatic memory, occurs when Nellie acquires a piglet, Rigoletto, as her pet, just like her mother had done once. Rigoletto miraculously never seems to get old and so bolsters Nellie's fantasy of arrested time.

A similar scenario is replayed years later, when it becomes evident how Nellie's denial of what is entailed in her father's shaving ritual (in fact, his erotic games), sustains her refusal to remember similar events from the past and freezes her development on the level of a sexually unsuspecting child, even though she is pregnant at the time. This recurrence of the childhood traumatic episode is accompanied by another significant condensation: after giving birth, Nellie reluctantly breastfeeds her daughter (wet-nurses are scarce just after the

Revolution), but refuses to become a "milkmaid" (*HR*, 21) to her father, dying of malnutrition in the prison, possibly because he had so many other "maids" in the past, and possibly also because her repression of the bodily functions refuses to recognize her father's needs.

She is strenuously at work on the process of memorialization grounded in her skewed personal recollections. This is not to understate, even in the hyperbolized context of the narrative, the ironic implications in her hysterical adherence to her largely imagined past. Another symptom is entailed in Nellie's refusal to come to terms with the multiple ways her existence has been entangled with salient historical and collective forces. Nellie's memory is hysterically selective, much like a hysteria-induced temporary blindness, and so prevents the subject from apprehending what doesn't fit into her preconceived scenario (Oliver 2001: 164). Nellie registers numerous details, episodes, and encounters, which position her with respect to the demands of others, but her psychic mechanism prevents her from understanding what is literally before her eyes.

This induced blindness and "false recognition" (Oliver) places her efforts at reconstruction and remembering in a dubious mould. First, it becomes clear that her reconstructive project clings to a notion of the past which is static and streamlined; secondly, it fails to extract from the past any reinvigorating elements except those which ritually reinscribe the inadequacy of her present position. Nellie inhabits a world which even in Cuba previous to the Revolution stood on wobbly legs, heavily dependent on dissimulation, abuse, and coercion for its perpetuation. (For instance, Nellie's father's violation of his under-age servants; the neo-colonial and imperialist practices of the domestic or imported elites; the glaring social inequalities.) I am trying to account here for the dual impact of nostalgic evocations; to understand the ways in which they may function as the single most effective buffer against a traumatic rupture which an individual cannot bear to face, and, simultaneously, to foreground the implications which this nostalgic deadlock portends to the subjects caught up in it, turning them into pathetic, weary victims of history.

Other strategies include mourning, a process that I have highlighted here in particular as it can be contrasted with melancholia, a foreclosed

mourning; once the melancholic investment in the lost object, by now incorporated and narcissistically revered, can be untied, a more productive process of mourning takes over. Several characters in the novel court with and occasionally employ strategies which place them on the side of mourning, also as individual recreation. I have in mind especially Nelson's resourceful cousin, Bernabé (Barney), who attempts to recreate himself and spectacularly succeeds in doing so to the point that he accepts a new impersonated identity (*HR*, 180). His re-birth literally takes place in the ashes of a burnt-down pawn shop, and it presents us with the challenge that haunts many previous interrogations of identity building as represented in a number of texts discussed here: namely, the inherent impossibility of fixing the bottom line of the identification process, which constantly slides from the ascribed, given parameters (family history, personal history, memory, "race," geography) to a free-ranging play of fantasy and imagination. Are we chosen by our identities or do we get to choose who we become? The other instance of a more successful coping, of a de-cathected pain and sense of loss are strategies employed by some of the Guiristains' counterparts, other exiles stranded in the Florida backwater. Mirta Vergara cherishes illusions of a victorious return to Cuba (*HR*, 265); the former poet laureate stoops down to write commercial slogans; Pepe, who in Cuba was a menial worker, now starts his own business.

The case of Nellie's abused workmate and friend Mrs James B Olsen II is especially illustrative in this respect, even though her ability for reinvention is not tied immediately to the Cuban experience. On the contrary, she initially shares the narrow-minded, racist, and condescending bigotry of other white Southerners, especially her husband and others of his ilk banded together in a parody of KKK supremacist and masculine solidarity. Still, her abused position and also her desperate need to counteract the destructive effect it wreaks on her life bring her closer to Nellie, who nourishes her own wounds. Mrs James B is an ingenious memory manipulator; on the outside merely a neurotic overcompensating for the constant psychic and physical abuse by her husband, but in the world of other exiles, refugees (the pawn shop owner) and the disillusioned, she stands out as a survivor, diligently and artistically—because imaginatively—affecting the constant

sliding between the pole of melancholia and the pole of mourning. If she doesn't have a past (at least the one she desires and aspires to), then she will invent one (*HR*, 202). And she goes meticulously about it—carefully choosing, acquiring, and pasting pictures in her "family album," making up her two ideal children, inventing stories of her quasi-aristocratic, slave-holding Southern family and her grandmother's plantation, providing episodes from the family history carefully edited for greater effect and rife with appurtenances of Southern nostalgia (*HR*, 17). Like Nellie, Mrs Olsen demonstrates the mechanism of "reflective nostalgia," in the process redefining the very foundations of individual, and also collective, memory. In their nostalgic evocations of an absence (which they reconstruct as a loss, as something that has been there but is now taken away or relinquished), these women continuously reenact their questionable capacity to annul the slippage situated, as pointed by Bhabha, "between mask and identity, image and identification" (64). I call it questionable even as I recognize its potential to sustain them when faced with adversary situations. What is in question, namely, is the degree to which reflective nostalgia, released through traumatic memory, can function as a fulcrum for the reestablishment of individual and collective identities in exile.

The lurking fear, embracing all the hapless protagonists of this parody of the immigrant saga, replete with misfits, maladjusted, and scarred characters, some of them reluctant to grab their "American dream," some hopelessly dedicated to it, is that ultimately there is no home, at least not such that is worthy of being reclaimed and returned to. The symptom of this deep anxiety is traced by Freud: "neurotics are anchored somewhere in their past […] in which they were happy" (1986: 546). However, he goes on to add: "The kind of satisfaction which the symptom brings has much that is strange about it. […] [T]he surprise lies in the fact that these scenes from infancy are not always true" (1986: 546). This opens up an interpretive impasse where, according to Freud, "we are in doubt to begin with whether we are dealing with reality or phantasies" (1986: 548). To transfer this insight to the situations in the novel, this would suggest that the characters' hysterical symptoms are simultaneously their manipulations of the uncanny (the strangeness inherent in the symptom) residing in their

personal past. This goes beyond an indirect concession of victory to the communists, which precludes the exiles' return to the island and indefinitely prolongs their homelessness, but pertains to something that runs deeper than and previous to the physical exile, as we see it articulated by Nelson's melodramatic rebellion against his tyrant father, or Nellie's frightening silence after witnessing her mother's death, and her subsequent absolute attachment to her pet, the pig Rigoletto. Even when "home" these characters were already weaving webs of fantasy to undo the homely but horrific doings of the family dynamics. Their selective and repetitive memory has already winnowed the more reprehensible elements, and, after the spatial dislocation, has continued to feed the wounded imagination. In other words, if in neurosis fantasy and reality may be indistinguishable, they also become so in (diasporic) identity-building process.

I am not suggesting that a fabrication of the past takes any less effort to become operational than drawing on a past that was actually experienced; their ontological statuses of course differ, but their role in providing sustenance to one's sense of identity makes this difference for the moment irrelevant. Freud speaks in the context of neurosis "not only of a *loss of reality* but also of a *substitute for reality*" (1986: 572), meaning that psychic reality for the moment supersedes the outside reality. (However, the point is precisely that for the protagonists this difference becomes moot, the substituted reality comes to figure as the only reality they acknowledge.) Where the short circuit between the reality and the substituted reality becomes relevant is when it comes to the capacity of the fantasy (memory in hysteria) to ground a viable group identity. Engrossed as Nellie and Nelson are in the vain pursuit of their respective fantasies—he of finding and settling down with a prostitute who he idealizes, and she of transferring to an Italian Alpine village of Mondovi—they cannot take stock of what has happened to their country, their families and their former way of life, much less of imparting the lesson to their children who are growing up amidst mere scraps of reminiscences and customs rendered incomprehensible and outdated in their new country. In Laplanche's words, they have lost the capacity to temporalize themselves. Without the temporalization entailed in the concepts of "belatedness" or "deferred action" (Laplanche) as we

have seen, there is no space to engage "an understanding of the relation between trauma and history" (Felman qtd. in Ramadanovic 2001 n 2). The effect of trauma remains enacted as a constant substitution of reality for the fantasy by regressing into the wished-for past. Nellie and Nelson thus lack survival strategies insofar as their fantastic reconstructions must remain within the limits set down by their personal trauma. It is indicative how another character, whose own plight serves as a counterpart to the Cubans', overcomes this block inherent in traumatic enactment.

Benjamin Stein, the Belle Glades pawn shop owner, trades on other people's pasts; his shop accommodates renounced objects (photographs, jewelry) which once contained and are now emptied of history, but can become endowed with it again in the hands of another person, such as Mrs Olsen or the Mormons, who crave to reconstruct their family's past. Stein himself possesses an object which to him is priceless, a photograph of his mother, who perished in one of the European concentration camps. Stein's connection with the photograph is, one could postulate, somewhat similar to the sense of estrangement which permeates Nellie's contemplation of her family photos: an inability to make a meaningful connection between the past frozen in the picture and the present. Nellie tries to bridge this gap by continuously putting premium only on the past version, unable and unwilling to integrate it with her present. (The glamorous girls from her club photos are now drab housewives or her own workmates at the food-processing factory; the Sultan, one of the fixtures of Xawa's high-society is dead, etc.) Stein attempts this linkage through a most unlikely channel: that of a confidence man (another "survivor," Bernabé) passing as his long-lost survivor cousin, who besides tattooing a prison-camp number and undergoing circumcision (all in the hope of getting Stein's money) wins Stein over through his stories. As suggested by Benedict Anderson, the photograph,

> child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence […] which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. (204)

A rift which cuts through Stein's identity, symbolized in his alias, his inability to connect with the time captured in the picture, to his past, is filled out by Bernabé's fabricated history as a Holocaust survivor. Anderson

points to this paradox, that the "estrangement" from one's own personal history, the "loss" of certain aspects of our life has to be "narrated" (204), here also in a sense imagined, recreated, fabricated. Bernabé's flowery tales, even though on one level poor reconstructions of gory experiences of others, for Stein nevertheless function as narratives which provide continuity, resuscitate his family memory, and offer him a renewed sense of identity. The tenuousness of this process of narrativizing the past, and in effect engendering identity, underscores the constructedness of such projects, but hardly invalidates their consequentiality. According to Seyhan, "stories and histories" in the diasporic grain "recuperate losses incurred in migration, dislocation and translation" (4). Also, through the gradual transposition of a traumatic past into stories, extrication from the repetitiveness of traumatic memory can be effected. Trauma begins to be incorporated into one's life story (Freud 1997a: 11).

An aura of pathos permeating Fernández's novel is reinforced in yet another sense. Given the interrupted, almost checked, transmission of cultural memory as it fails to materialize in the Guiristain family—their son is more interested in baseball than in reading the *Iliad*, the staple book of elite education in the erstwhile Cuba—one begins to question the likelihood of any sustained communal sense developing out of the exilic experience. What in *Raining Backwards* was an implied foil, guaranteed by the constant flow and recruitment of new immigrants who swell the ranks of Cubans in the Miami metropolitan area, against which Fernández's satire could pick up force, in a more isolated rural Florida, where Cubans are outnumbered, scattered, and under the threat of relocation, turns into exiles' greatest liability: the work invested in maintaining semblance of former social and kinship structures has to be very vigorous. (That place cannot be satisfactorily filled by Pepe's grocery.) The constitution of diasporic identity is shown to be contingent on a "link between identity and place" (Yaeger 16), even when in its dislocation "this link has been […] severed by our growing recognition of the hybrid nature of all localities and the arduous cultural work required to maintain local customs" (Yaeger 16). Thus, reterritorialization portends a challenge but also a field of action for the institution of diasporic communities.

Even the reverse order of narratives in Fernández's two novels—the second one coming first in the chronology of the institution of the Cuban diaspora in the USA, and the first one a satiric and parodic sequel on its projects of memorialization of its origins, the perpetuation of its logic, and efforts at maintaining its distinct nature—this reversal as a belated going back to the heart of historical trauma in itself bespeaks a course taken by diasporic identity. It is an identity emerging at the core of what is both unforgettable and unspeakable, proceeding to rebuild itself by its forward direction, still always looking backwards through its work of mourning losses by converting them into memory. When the two novels are considered as a part of a composite project, that of instituting diasporic memory through narrative, we can see how postmemory and the parallels between hysterical and traumatic memory enable the buried, encrypted history of the first generation to acquire a shape, even when this form is itself imbued with a sense of its own impermanence.

4. Danticat's fiction: captives of history

> I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head.
>
> *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (234)

It is almost an understatement to qualify most of Edwidge Danticat's characters as perilously but inescapably obsessed and haunted by history, and at the same time drawn to it with an ever renewed force, thus bringing us back to the logic "beyond the pleasure principle." Her writing project insists on revisiting constantly salient moments in the historical repository of her native Haiti, either in its immediate or more distant past. Unfortunately, this deep-seated need to address history, and to detect its uncanny duplication in the present, seems to be a mainstay for the writers of this history-laden region, enabling us perhaps to link it to the discourse of traumatic repetition as compulsory acting out. Again, as was the case with Fernández's emerging diasporic subjects, there is an on-going, if tenuous, link between individual traumatic dynamics and collective/cultural trauma, operating synchronically among displaced subjects and diachronically, across generations.

If displacement, exile and involuntary emigration mark the rise of diaspora, then Haitian (American) experience is representative in that respect. Haitian "boat people," poverty-stricken and politically persecuted, enact as it were in regular cycles what might be called "the return of history" (Elliott and Lebowitz). Simultaneously, however, they are involved in decrying that same history, in their immigrant trail reversing the one-way US interventionism in the region.[11] Still, even as they are writing a counter-script in the wakes of their puny boats, they are marked by the same history that propelled their movements in the first place and will continue to haunt them even when they have seemingly extricated themselves from it upon arrival on US soil. One of the markers will eventuate that they be treated differently from other refugees/immigrants in similar circumstances, such as the Cuban boat people. Another will prompt putting them down as "pos[ing] a threat to national security," according to INS officials (Elliott and Lebowitz A6). Sophie, a young protagonist of Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, dreads going to an American school, where Haitian pupils are likely to be seen as infectious, ill, and smelly (1994: 51). Therefore, these would-be-Americans seem to be disqualified and abjected on the grounds of their foreignness, which materializes in the fear of AIDS and contagion. On a different level, their continual migration translates into political language as a disruption of regional stability. So the immigrant body, carrying the inscriptions of race and postcoloniality, here takes on a huge representative burden. It seems that the Haitian boat people's history is not so much resistant to the telling—as Danticat, among others, convincingly denies by her works—but unwilling to be heard, as testified by the lack of the interpreters at their bond hearings, also by the refusal of US government officials to fit their stories into contemporary Haitian history and recognize the indelible traces that link it with twentieth-century US policies.

In that sense, my primary interest in the subsequent paragraphs will be to outline the workings of Danticat's narrative encounter with the inescapability of history, as entailed in its repetition that her Haitian and Haitian American protagonists are subjected to and taking part in. In her texts, however, it is not primarily the grand, political history that gets represented but instead a plurality of histories, especially those of

families and communities. So even in her most decidedly historical novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998), which engages the 1937 massacre of Haitians living in the borderlands of the Dominican Republic, Danticat's narrative scope is restricted through the first person narration and so explicitly undermines any pretense to speak for a people, or a nation. April Shemak in her article on the novel asserts that such a choice of narrative voice is dictated by the desire to "mimick[...] *testimonio*, a genre that arose out of Caribbean and Central American social and political movements as a way to foreground the voices of the oppressed" (2002: 83). What sets *testimonio* against the official historical representation is, continues Shemak, "a narrator who serves as an eyewitness to acts of brutal oppression," who gives a direct, first-person account of the events and thus challenges the impersonal, seemingly objective, and disinterested discourse of history writing (83).

Linda Hutcheon (1988) has identified a strong impulse in contemporary fiction writing to engage the historical discourse in a dialogue with mutually enriching possibilities, giving rise to a hybrid genre which she terms "historiographic metafiction." Although we can recognize in Danticat and other writers from the region the self-same impulse, namely to wed history and fiction, their project nevertheless considerably diverges from a mere epistemological exercise. For Danticat, it is not enough to unravel the textuality of history, or to point out the untenable claim to truth held out by the official history; the stakes in her project of writing history are at once to rehabilitate and to repossess history through witnessing, or (to borrow from Cathy Caruth) to give voice to the wound caused by history.

The grounds for such an engagement with history as trauma are rehearsed by Caruth (1995, 1996), who claims that "trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication" (1995: 4), which makes it of special interest to ethnic writers, since these often enough have to contend with histories erased or repressed, and arising from specific traumatizing events (immigration, uprooting, exile, violence). Such a history can be "claimed" (Caruth's phrasing) only through the reading of symptoms, because due to the workings of traumatic memory "largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control" (Caruth 1995: 151), it evades a straightforward narrative.

If diaspora is thus a symptom of history as trauma, for a number of writers—by all means also the two discussed in this chapter—a crucial issue is: "how we in this era can have access to our own historical experience, to a history that is in its immediacy a crisis to whose truth there is no simple access" (Caruth 1995: 6). It would seem pertinent, therefore, to follow Danticat's descent into the limbo of Haitian personal and communal history through the lenses of trauma theory as it touches upon the representations of history and the figurations of memory. My focus will be on her two novels, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Farming of Bones*, and on the short story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1995).[12] At this point it is worth mentioning that the first novel and the collection are in setting asymmetrically divided between Haiti and the United States, whereas the second novel is set exclusively in Hispaniola, the common name for the Caribbean island politically divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

The Caribbean as the "repeating island"

The history of the Caribbean, here represented by Cuba and Haiti/Hispaniola, lends itself to a reading infused by the dynamics of potentially traumatic repetition. Benítez-Rojo fosters a vision of the Caribbean space as displaying

> the features of an island that "repeats" itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and the lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs. I have emphasized the word *repeats* because I want to give the term the almost paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness [...]. (1992: 3)

In her reading of Freud, Caruth also raises the question of "repetition compulsion" in patients suffering from traumatic neurosis, making "the history of the traumatized individual [...] nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction" (1996: 63). Her reading then moves beyond the threshold of individual history, where, borne by the tenor of Freud's text, she considers a wider cultural framework, that of "historical trauma." Another symptom of trauma—

whether considered as an individual moment or a cultural formation—that she underscores is latency (Caruth, 70). A general observation could be made to the effect that most historical cogitation is to some extent marked by a period of latency, or to use another Freudian term the "incubation period" (Caruth 1996: 70), after which it becomes possible for a historian to read the signs of transformations, upheavals, and violent changes as is the case with the Caribbean. Indeed, one cannot escape the feeling that the history of the archipelago, as told here by Benítez-Rojo, and as will be shown later on by Danticat—in other words, as encompassed in historical and literary discourses—is a series of repetitions and reenactments of singularly violent events that have assailed the region ever since its ravaging inception into transatlantic history (Benítez-Rojo 5). Caroline Rody, in her study on Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean women's fictions, contends that our global and postcolonial moment was ripe for the emergence of such a compelling form of engagement with the loaded past (2001). In that sense, Benítez-Rojo's words that deliver us the Caribbean as the child of repetition perhaps embody the deepest truth about those islands.[13] Here, I am aware of the repetitive seductions of my own argument, such that reenact their own returns to the spaces/sites marked by history as a wound. In the course of the argument, however, there might appear alternative soundings of the culturally traumatic moments as possibly approaching a phase of working-through.

Trauma as a site of witnessing

If diaspora is one of the symptoms of traumatic history, such that the characters obsess over and are possessed by, and yet unable to gain access to in comprehensible terms, this requires the language of trauma to evince a set of specific retrieval, reconstructive strategies that inhere, as suggested by LaCapra, in "the status and nature of testimony" (2004: 3). Writing the symptoms of trauma, or in the face of them, "[does] not simply serve as testimony of an event, but may also […] bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred" (Caruth 1995: 151). In Ellie Ragland's words, "[t]he enigmatic meaning of suffering or passion in a story, play, poem, or case study is not an allegory or a

myth that is disassociated from memory or affective life"; there has to arise a trauma discourse that will account for the "reality" of trauma as it is symbolically and enigmatically relayed to us in what she, borrowing from Lacan, calls symptoms (2001, par. 18).

There are perhaps textual/representational junctures at which a meeting between trauma as Caruth's "unclaimed experience" (unclaimed because the language has yet to be found to account for the traumatic incursion of the real) and the necessity of bearing witness could take place. Following theoretical contributions by scholars working in border studies and more broadly postcolonial theory, it would appear that the testimonial (*testimonio*) might be such a mode of engaging a traumatic reality. The fact that the first interrogations into the "content of the form" were undertaken under the auspices of border studies and an "aesthetics of the border" (Calderón and Saldívar 1991) gives credence to an attempt to see the form as occupying that slippery, interstitial position between reality/representation, public/private, traumatic/narrativized, form/content, literature/politics, theory/practice, written/oral. Among the salient features of the *testimonio* Saldívar Hull includes the first person address and the position of the authority of the speaker/writer who has not only participated in the events presented but has also shaped them by her activism (2000: 170-72). However, this could be seen as a point of divergence between the subject who is constructed as an active and (politically) conscious agent through her testimony and the subject who is summoned to bear witness but more often than not finds herself silenced, repudiated or overwhelmed by the task.[14]

It is in that sense that the bodies and trajectories of Haitian immigrants have become sites of enacting "a history of traumatic departures" (Ramadanovic 1998: 57), even when they do not have a language in the legal sense to account for it or their testimonials in court are not being validated, as suggested by Danticat's character: "This past is more like flesh than air; our stories testimonials like the ones never heard by the justice of the peace" (*The Farming of Bones* [*FB*], 281). This deafness of an official institutionalized validation of history signals yet another breach between historiography and history of/as trauma.

In this argument I would primarily be dealing with the demands the discursive form of testimonial puts to a young Haitian American

woman, Sophie Caco, the narrator and protagonist of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Prompted by Seyhan's insights, I will offer a reading of Danticat's texts as examples of "diasporic narratives" which grapple continuously, on several levels, with "the irreducible untranslatability of one's language and cultural idiom" (here, that of Haiti), while they also enact "a conscious effort to transmit a linguistic and cultural heritage that is articulated through acts of personal and collective memory," often based on the mechanism of trauma (13, 12). One of these levels is extra-textual, in which the writer-in-history (Danticat) bears testimony to the originating events of a trauma through a specific temporal structure of traumatic "belatedness," "deferral," or, to use the term suggested by Laplanche, "afterwardsness." The attendant burden of witnessing is laid on the reader, too, for whom the testimonial inscribes a place of a reader-turned-witness in its structure of enunciation.[15] However, my interest here will be limited to the intra-textual model of narrative transmission, such that posits the narrator (or narrators, personal or impersonal) as the enunciative source and posits the narratee (in case of its explicit absence from the text, then the implied reader) at the other end of the chain, as a recipient of narrative discourse (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 86-105).

The symptoms of such a history, however, are not available straightforwardly (just like previously hysterias and derogatory identifications taken up by Alexie's or Fernández's characters were elaborately covered up by conflicting desires, fantasies or fetishes), but are accessible only retroactively, belatedly, through deferral, and only afterwards. According to Laplanche, traumatic latency can only bring "an after-the-event-understanding" (2001, par. 15). It is in this sense that trauma informs, indeed engenders, history, by recasting it as a drama of the intrusive return of the forgotten or repressed in its literality, as a first step, and as a second, demanding the processing of the message that it sends (Laplanche 2001). I would argue that the obsessive returns to the sites of violation and the repetitive structure of Danticat's texts, as well as the insistent retracing of the routes to freedom by the Haitian immigrants, could all be seen as specific forms of engagement with "the history of a trauma" (Ramadanovic 1998: 57), which is in the context of the Haitian diaspora simultaneously the only history available. Thus Sophie must go back to Haiti and to the

cane field in which her violent inception occurred; Amabelle in *The Farming of Bones* has to return to the site of her traumatization even if this means reliving the experience. Driven by similar logic, Sophie's mother refuses after the incubation period to pay her dues to the trauma assailing her, which brings about her death.

The form of *testimonio* enacted through witnessing, an act of bearing testimony, brings us to the point where we have to consider that what is at stake for the witness—and a survivor of a traumatic event (the Middle Passage, the orchestrated massacre, exile, immigration, rape)—is not so much the encounter with death as the fact of survival itself, as insists Caruth (1996). As Lacan reads Freud's account of the "dream of the burning child," which is glossed by Caruth, our psychic constitution economically longs to resign itself to dreaming (i.e., to death), but at the moment of awakening the trauma calls upon our psychic organization demanding that we face up to the risks (Caruth 1996: 104). This double bind besets both the characters and the narrative instance. Next, I will try to disentangle the conjoined but distinct responsibilities for the participants in the revisiting of traumatic history.

These concerns are observable in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, a novel which could loosely be termed the diasporic *Bildungsroman*. It weaves a story of a young Haitian girl, Sophie, who after being raised and reared for twelve years by her Tante Atie, leaves for the United States to reunite with her mother, Martine. The novel is a first person account of her growing up in Haiti and her subsequent struggle with her mother in New York up to a point where she starts her own family. However, this is not where her *Bildung* ends; no neat resolution is offered by a glimmer of domestic happiness. Sophie's life after delivery, we learn, is marred by bulimia and a pathological fear of sex, which prompts her to temporarily leave her husband, return to Haiti, there reconcile with her mother, again return to the States with her, learn that her mother is pregnant anew, and finally experience the shock of her mother's violent self-inflicted death, which brings her for the third time to Haiti to arrange for the burial ceremony. Is it possible to read from the novel's recurring structure, centering on repeated departures and returns, yet another model of history as traumatic repetition? If so, what are the stakes for the participants and how does traumatic recurrence square with giving testimony to one's own or another's trauma?

Dori Laub distinguishes among others between the level of "being a witness to oneself within the experience" and "the level of being witness to the testimonies of others" (1995: 61). Laub concedes, however, that the act of witnessing entails enormous risks: "The historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*" (68). In the novel, the solemn procedure of bearing witness seems to weld the mother and the daughter together in an enactment of (primarily the mother's) terrifying history of violation. Martine was brutally raped in a cane field in Haiti when she was a young teenager, and Sophie is the result of that violation. Martine is called upon to act as her own witness, but is incapable of fulfilling the demands that the fact of survival has put before her. Sophie, on the other hand, is also a survivor racked by the guilt of her origin (a child of violence), but she is acting up to the demand, even though she would like to resign from the responsibility (thus her suicidal thoughts). The trauma of rape and, as I will show later on, the trauma of initiation into sexuality, create a pivot around which the mother's and the daughter's stories revolve, blending together their bilateral strands sustained by exile (Martine) and immigration (Sophie) and the haunting of the past, stretched between Haitian and US space.

This bifocality, also recognized in the linguistic and representational politics of Cuban American authors, centres on the matriarchal family.[16] Danticat admits that she "wanted to explore how a family of rural women passes things down through generations" (2003: 186). The "things" bequeathed to the daughters, however, initiate new disturbing insights as to how intergenerational, and thus socio-cultural, continuation doesn't simply reenact identity affirming practices, but is also capable of nurturing seeds of identity obliteration. What is meant by this double agency is reinforced by Donette Francis's observation that "Danticat writes another version of Haiti's political history by focusing on women's bodies—and the stories embedded there" (2004: 76). It should also be noted how such a juxtaposition may bring about the danger of an all too easy allegorization of the woman's body as the national body, ravished by history and marked by violence, a link which occasionally intrudes into the text (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* [*BEM*], 230). Rody has pointed out how the collective imaginary of the Caribbean contains and enlarges this metaphor to the point where it demoniacally engulfs

everything else in an anti-dialectical circularity of history and freezes the image of Caribbean women into a nightmare of the incessant return of a turbulent past (112-7).

When the political in Haiti is re-inscribed through the woman's—here specifically the daughter's—body, this conflation immediately casts it as a grist in the mill of prevailing practices of socialization and the acquisition of gender roles for women. This is primarily underscored through the odious practice of testing, by which the mothers (or senior women in charge of the younger ones) act as an extended arm of the society committed to its idea of chaste femininity. By ensuring the sexual abstinence of their daughters by making them undergo an absurd mimicry of rape at the hands of their own mothers, the mothers set the scene for all kinds of "traumatic heirlooms" (Francis 82). Such an unwilling heritage has been thrust both on Martine and on her elder sister, Atie, who later acted as Sophie's surrogate mother until her departure for the States. Atie remains in Haiti, ostensibly to take care of her aging mother. She also has to confront the weight of witnessing her own victimization, principally by facing up to her own mother and, paradoxically, her violator embodied in the same person on a daily basis.

Atie's testimonial procedures, given her inability to flee from the site of trauma, as Martine does, or to shuttle between Haiti and the States as practiced by Sophie, are very instructive. As an elder unmarried daughter, she obediently fulfills the standard demands, making herself available to others in the family. She even dutifully transmits the cautionary and comforting tales which through their fantastic re-inscription in fact rationalize and subdue unsettling emotions entailed in the paradoxes of the Haitian women's existence. When, however, she begins to learn the letters, this move from the sphere of the oral (in the text pointedly the sphere of the maternal) towards the practices of "the scribal" (Francis 89) marks for Atie a new moment of becoming responsible for herself. Grandmother Ifé is, significantly, opposed to this project of memory through written records, archives: "If a woman is worth remembering […] there is no need to have her name carved in letters" (*BEM*, 128). Oral tradition is grounded in the repetition of some underlying structures which are in fact transmitted rather than resemanticized, as pointed out by Sophie:

> I realized that it was neither my mother nor my Tante Atie who had given all the mother-and-daughter motifs to all the stories they told and all the songs they sang. […] Somehow, early on, our song makers and tale weavers had decided that we were all daughters of this land. (*BEM*, 230)

As opposed to this, once Atie engages in writing, she conceives of it as a private experience, as an imaginative exercise where she can change, add, excise, and rewrite different texts, rather than simply follow a standard oral pattern (*BEM*, 164). It seems that writing in her own notebook provides Atie with an imaginative space that she can claim as her own, rather than just an extension of all her other prescribed roles.

Martine has tried to shut off the Haitian experience; her survival strategy consists in denying the reality of trauma and eschewing the demands of witnessing. In Haiti, "[t]here are ghosts […] that I can't face, things that are still very painful to me" (*BEM*, 78). Sophie notices early on that her mother is using a bleaching facial cream (*BEM*, 51), and in a sense Martine is desperately trying to bleach her past and cleanse it of the traces of violence. That this becomes an impossible task is due not simply to the dynamics of the traumatic reenactment (in her case through nightmares and voices), but even more so through persistent links among the circuits of diasporic, colonial, and postcolonial histories crisscrossing with the story of the Caco family. Martine's inability to cope with her trauma thus becomes figured as the postcolonial subject's impossible demand to bear witness to incessant repetitions entailed in the Caribbean historical record. An individual becomes answerable not only for her traumatization, but finds herself called upon to testify to the trauma of history.

From the very first connection in the book made between Martine, the absent mother, and her favourite flower, the daffodil, the narrative takes on a broader view, as we are led to consider that the flower itself is a hybrid, a transplant from France, which has adjusted to the Haitian soil:

> my mother loved daffodils because they grew in a place that they were not supposed to. They were really European flowers, French buds and stems, meant for colder climates. […] A strain of daffodils had grown that could withstand the heat, but they were the color of pumpkins and golden summer squash, as though they had acquired a bronze tinge from the skin of the natives who had adopted them. (*BEM*, 21)

Therefore, the island flora itself bears traces of colonial interventions, even if the former weaknesses are turned in the process of cross-fertilization and adjustment into strengths of the new independent nation born out of the anti-slavery revolution. This evocation of some salient features of the Caribbean (Haitian) landscape is far from an idle exercise, as is reinforced in the recurrent motif of the cane field.[17] For the Caco family, work in the cane fields is primarily an economic necessity, an intransigent and largely intact remnant of the large-scale plantation economy forming the backbone of the erstwhile Caribbean slavery system and of the present-day neocolonialist economic practices (*BEM*, 4). The cane field figures as a historical metonym for the Haitian embroilment in colonial and postcolonial dynamics played out in the Caribbean and between this region and the USA, in particular. This metonymic chain gets an added weight at the moment when a cane field becomes the place of Martine's violation at the hands of a militiaman, a member of the paramilitary troops set up by Dictator Duvalier, the so-called Tonton Macoutes. Sophie's primal scene is thus a historical occurrence, a record of a nightmare of recurring history, which is therefore traumatic. Her father is literally produced by the violence endorsed and bred by the postcolonial state, as suggested by Francis (77-9), while she can appropriately be named a child of the layered and sedimented traumas of the Caribbean.

When we begin to fathom the depth of Martine's responsibility to stand as witness not only to her personal violation but to the violence done to her as an epitome of the violence of history, it becomes clear why this demand becomes such a burden to her. The immediate weight of witnessing, before a psychic engagement can take place, is borne by the body, where trauma leaves its imprint. This is even more poignant in the case of bearing witness to the genocidal massacre, as is the case in *The Farming of Bones*. Thus, Amabelle, the witness/narrator in the novel, describes her body significantly as "beyond healing" (*FB*, 199); disfigurement and pain will be her constant companions and visible signifieds of the invisible trauma: "my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament" (*FB*, 227). It is significant that Danticat seems not only to enlist the body as a site of witnessing, but also strives to dismantle the primacy accorded to the psychic trauma when

she asserts the remembering body (*FB*, 229), and so bridges a gap in trauma theory from the original meaning of "trauma" as a wound to the present-day prevailing sense of psychic trauma: "As I lay in bed with my arms and legs coiled around myself, I ached inside in places I could neither name nor touch" (*FB*, 245). Sophie, Amabelle's counterpart in contemporary Haiti, also contains an archive of memories etched on her body (*BEM*, 169). When Martine gets pregnant the second time, this reads as her insemination by the recurrent, haunting violator-history. Martine is aware of the uncanny repetition materializing as a child (of history, personal and collective) within her ravaged body: "It bites at the inside of my stomach like a leech" (*BEM*, 191), ultimately bleeding her to death.

Martine's and Amabelle's mental and physical torments are singular and most poignant aspects of witnessing in these two novels, no less for their failed impact. All the other attempts, including, as described by Laub, that "of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself" (61), are tragically inadequate and misguided. The institutions, it would seem, have only a limited ability to incorporate trauma before they relegate it to the realm of the written archive. It is thus up to the culture to take up and carry on the rememories of trauma, a problem that I will discuss in the next section.

The true witness is constantly both aware of her absolute responsibility to bear testimony and her equally vast inability to carry it out properly; for Amabelle, it takes place in nightmarish revisiting of her failed attempts to produce the testimony: "I dream all the time of returning to give my testimony to the river, the waterfall, the justice of the peace, even to Generalissimo himself" (*FB*, 264). Sadly, her nightmare does not bring her to a performative awakening; the testimony remains locked inside her and the survivors, like Yves, who know her story. She has failed, in Shoshana Felman's words, "to tell the story and *be heard*, to in fact *address* the significance of [her] biography—to *address* [...] the suffering, the truth, and the necessity of this impossible narration—to a hearing 'you,' and to a listening community" (1995: 45). Thus we are brought to an understanding of the heroic and self-annihilating nature of Amabelle's burden and summoned belatedly to become her listening community, as a figural extension of other uncomprehending listeners in the novel.

In dream-like sections of Amabelle's testimonial Danticat brings to the fore a paradox that besets Amabelle and other survivors: the gap between the fact of their survival (in order to bear witness) and the betrayal entailed in that very fact, which remains unresolved to the end. Felman has pointed out that testimony does not tolerate closure, but institutes "language [...] in process and in trial" (16). This repetitive speech-act (Felman 17), this doubling of the voice, I would argue, engages the tenuousness of the novel as a testimony of history of/as trauma because it shows that such history necessarily entails a break-down of the novelistic narration and a dissociation of the narrative voice. Even typographically, *The Farming of Bones* is split into two parts: one is in bold type and the other is in ordinary typeface. The latter is Amabelle's voice speaking in the conventional past tense, recounting the events previous to and following the massacre. Potentially, these passages can be construed as pointing to the process of working-through, bespeaking a long and tortuous transformation of traumatic into narrative memory that, however, has not been completed. The bold sequences, which are also Amabelle's, materialize the witnessing, which is simultaneously "a crisis of witnessing." Ultimately, Amabelle as a narrator comes to the realization that the trauma extends beyond the imperatives of witnessing, either with your body and mind (as for Amabelle and Martine) or in narration, but can claim both as its sites of re-enactment.

How a culture remembers

Caruth has drawn consequences from Freud's varied examples (such as combat trauma, accident trauma, the child's play *fort-da*, and so on) to the extent "that the theory of trauma, as a historical experience of a survival exceeding the grasp of the one who survives, engages a notion of history exceeding individual bounds" (1996: 66). In *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat has shown the entailed impossibility of giving a true record of a traumatic history affecting a collectivity. Elsewhere, however, she will provide other nodal points around which cultural and narrative representations should and indeed do rally. Danticat has identified two of them as the Haitian revolution and the

Haitian diaspora (2001: x, xiv-xvi). In one of the short stories from her collection *Krik? Krak!*, a Haitian school boy diligently rehearses the lines of his role in a school enactment of the Haitian Revolution. His role, as he informs his proud parents, is that of Boukman, one of the great slave revolutionary leaders.[18] When he declaims his lines, the force of cultural representations is brought in, such that often distorts and re-figures history in a way that obliterates the unacceptable elements and promotes the condoned aspects of culture. The import of the words put in Boukman's mouth absolutely belies his rootedness in African traditions: "It was obvious that this was a speech written by a European man, who gave to the slave revolutionary Boukman the kind of European phrasing that might have sent the real Boukman turning in his grave" (*Krik? Krak!* [*Krik*], 56).

Even so, such a doubly-coded take on a powerful national icon suffices to stir the whole layer of suppressed affects that the boy's family shares with other citizens in their national symbolic repository (*Krik*, 56). This episode points to the several uses that a recasting of national history has in a culture: through education these figures are inculcated and disseminated to an unprecedented degree, at the same time consolidating their claim for historical veracity and claiming new authority by the sheer force of their dispersal. The play between various representations and their staging of national, collective, and communal identity is at the heart of the concerns of the theories of cultural trauma, as espoused among others by Ron Eyerman in his book on its impact in the formation of African American identity energized through their response to the historical experience of slavery (2001). There he distinguishes between a historical consciousness and the collective memory of a group, which would entail access to the mythic dimensions of collective historical experience (7-8) enabling this Haitian family to regain their past through a representational form.[19] Central for Eyerman's consideration is the latency effect—which we have also identified elsewhere in trauma—of slavery, which, as it were, assails African American subjects at the historical moment of the post-Civil War emancipatory efforts at "forg[ing] a collective identity out of its [slavery's] remembrance" (1). This double movement, so to speak, the pull of the belated understanding of the event's immense

(unutterable, unknowable) implications and the projective nature of the whole enterprise of creating a space in the public sphere for themselves as emerging national subjects, this duality of engaging simultaneously the past and the future while struggling in the present, again suggest the structure of trauma as a vehicle of understanding these cultural and mental processes.

This urgency in addressing the deferred, belated truth in history is precisely what is at stake in Danticat's writing. It is hardly an accident that the first two stories in *Krik? Krak!* deal with two salient moments in modern Haitian history—migration and the Massacre, which itself hinged on what was perceived by Dominican ideologues as a threatening incursion of Haitian immigrants (Lundahl 120-33). The first one, 'Children of the Sea,' engages an episode of civil unrest during several but mutually interchangeable periods of dictatorship in Haiti. There are two voices and perspectives in the story, one is by a young man who is on a boat full of people sailing to the States to claim asylum as a member of the opposition; the other is that of his girlfriend, who remains in Haiti and witnesses the uprising there. His movement, however, is repeatedly likened to other distinct movements, which perhaps cannot be considered together on the level of referential history but are interwoven on the level of traumatic history. What I have in mind are primarily the historical uprooting of the Middle Passage, which is evoked in the story as a symbolic heritage (of the African diaspora), and twentieth-century displacements as occasioned by the political turmoil in Haiti. Elsewhere in the collection, the references to the traumatic truth of the Middle Passage in particular are claimed as an ultimately unknowable experience but all the truer for that since they violate the linear and causal plot of historiography and institute the demands of witnessing. For one of the sisters in the story 'Caroline's Wedding' (*Krik*), that witnessing takes place on the site of her body; she was born crippled as a somatic testimony to the brutality her mother suffered as a boat person arriving to the States.

A running theme underlies all these events, that of the Haitian boat people, which in an episode in a New York church during a service for the most recent victims of drowning—those very same from the opening story—hurls us back to the "primal scene" of the African

identity formation in the New World, that of the violent transposition from Africa to the Americas. A priest consciously develops a parallel between the seaward passage of the African ancestors and the present-day "[t]ransients" and "[n]omads" (*Krik*, 167). That we are indeed meant to see Haitian (and African diasporic) history as grappling with the traumas of the Middle Passage and slavery is reinforced further in the story as religion and folk beliefs retrace this same connection: "There are people [...] in Haiti, who believe that there are special spots in the sea where lost Africans who jumped off the slave ships still rest, that those who have died at sea [hapless immigrants] have been chosen to make that journey in order to be reunited with their long-lost relations" (*Krik*, 167-68). However, if the drowned have rejoined the ancestral ghosts and even if the ghosts of unutterable history come back to taunt the living, it is up to the survivors to commemorate, witness, and live on, a task as paramount as it is unfeasible. Or is it? Ramadanovic develops the link between the institution of diaspora and the demands of witnessing based on Caruth's account of traumatic history derived from Freud's description of the Jewish diaspora, to which he appropriately adds the historically distinct but structurally *similar* emergence of the African American diaspora (1998: 57). Ramadanovic suggests that the underlying "history of trauma, enslavement, and persecution" which materializes as "traumatic departures" (whether once as captured Africans or recently as immigrants) testifies to the emergence of "another, diasporic, entangled 'we'" (1998: 57, 58). Danticat's texts engage these points of emergence, already existing in the cultural imaginary, and reinforce their traumatic and powerful reach in "solidify[ing] individual/collective identity" (Eyerman 15).

Hemispheric trajectories of postcolonial, post-slavery identities are also addressed through the concept of creolization fostered by what Gilroy has aptly theorized as the culturally mixed space of the "black Atlantic." This visible and audible (cultural) graphing of the history of trauma, materializing symptomatically through non-linguistic forms, occurs in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* through the music that Joseph, an African American musician, weaves together joining African, Caribbean, Latino and Southern US strains (*BEM*, 73, 214-5). Through uncanny parallelisms and shocks of recognition, where a

Negro spiritual doubles as "a *vaudou* song" (*BEM*, 215), the Middle Passage as a primal scene announcing a common origin, a veritable diasporic nation, gets reechoed and ritually enacted. In Gilroy's words, "particular elements of musical performance […] serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory" (198). The group addressed in the novel is in fact the African diaspora, whose common genealogy is also solidified through Sophie and Joseph's child, Brigitte Ifé Woods. The migration and (forced) mobility of the peoples in the region further reinforce this logic of colonial history extending to the postcolonial era.

Structural trauma: unbearable secrets

If my previous remarks have tried to situate Danticat's writing in the context of collective traumatic experience and the inherent (im)possibility of its truthful account, now I turn to trauma as a decisive marker of the Haitian woman's existence. For Sophie, the engagement with the Haiti she leaves behind but goes back to repeatedly is complicated by the fact that the island figures as "home," and so contests the pull of Sophie's other home, her self-contained domestic universe in the States (*BEM*, 195, 196). If the doubling of one cultural, psychic, and historical layer for another (past-present, colonial-postcolonial, social-personal) is seen as a pivot of the novel's diasporic drift, then this becomes another irresolvable symptom of the characters' engagement with history.

Even on the level of narrative technique from the earliest passages on, as observed by various critics, there is an almost elusive quality to Danticat's writing, something that at first defies definition until it embodies itself in the reader's initial uneasiness with the text; it is the tauntingly sparse quality of her writing (which, it may be added here, Danticat retains and refines in her subsequent books) (Chancy 130; Dash 157). This shorthand, I would argue, is a transcript of traumatic experience as it eludes understanding, as it defies description and mocks the coherent, detailed, logical type of narrative that is demanded by the conventions of biographical narration. One reason for such a departure may be located in the novel's pervasive preoccupation with

the individual, the family, and the national pasts, and the manner in which they intertwine.

In the light of the doubling in the novel, let me address additional implications of episodes charged with sexual violence, here within the purview of initiation into sexuality. As we know, Sophie's point of origin is simultaneously the moment of the brutal violation of her mother by an unseen/unknown man. Shortly before that, as both Atie and Martine approach a marriageable age, their mother begins to "test" them: "She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside" (*BEM*, 60).[20] It is hardly coincidental that at the very moment when Sophie's mother reveals to Sophie this ubiquitous Haitian practice, she simultaneously unfolds the story of her violation by a man, establishing a running link among various forms of violence that are either socially condoned and interiorized by women themselves ("testing") or merely tolerated and overlooked (it would be illusory for a rape victim to expect any kind of legal retribution). This reality of random violence is strongly reminiscent of trauma theories that endorse a specific feminist perspective and point out how women's lives are subconsciously shaped by the subdued but imminent threat of eruptions of violence (Brown 1995).

What does it mean to Sophie that she is a child begotten of violence? The answer to this question is at the same time very obvious and not so clear. I will argue that, initially, to put it bluntly, it does not—it cannot—mean anything to Sophie. It only gradually, belatedly acquires a meaning which, in its structure of a deferred impact, dramatically recalls a model of trauma. When she first finds out about her mother's rape, she is twelve, still unsexual and unknowing: "It took me twelve years [afterwards] to piece together my mother's entire story. By then it was too late" (*BEM*, 61). When her mother was raped she was "barely older than [Sophie]" and so at the moment of the violation couldn't fully experience/know the event, which comes to haunt her afterwards—both later and belatedly—in the shape of horrendous and ultimately fatal nightmares (she will kill herself in a bout of one such nightmare). As Laplanche and Pontalis elaborate on Freud's seduction theory, trauma incorporates two stages separated by puberty. The first "presexual" event "cannot be integrated by the subject" at that stage of development;

it requires "the second event by association linked with the first for the first one to be interpreted as traumatic" (Laplanche and Pontalis 405). This latter occurs in puberty. It is arguable that this primal seduction (whether fantasized or enacted) is repressed and only drawn to the surface in a state of neurosis; as such, it provides us with a model for the incorporation of sexuality in the subject. For both women, this onset is to say the least marked by the unclaimed and inassimilable experience (Caruth). Shortly after Martine's mother (Sophie's grandmother) begins to test her, Martine is raped. Not only has she not had the time to integrate her mother's violation but also finds herself utterly incapable (and without help) to account for the demand that the horrific event has put on her psyche. She never even gets to a stage where she can begin to include the story of violation into her life story; in other words, the transposition from traumatic into narrative memory never takes place (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 176).

For Sophie the trajectory of trauma is reinforced in two stages. The first stage spans six years, from the point when she learns about the testing and her origins to the point when she falls in love with Joseph, an African American and her future husband. One night when her mother catches her off-guard with Joseph, Sophie undergoes the testing (*BEM*, 84-5). At that moment she links the previously floating account of the various forms of daughters' and women's violations with the violation inflicted by her mother and it is only then, I would argue, that her "primal scene" becomes indeed a trauma to plague her henceforth. However, her story evolves into the provisionally speaking second stage, that is, the commencement of her active sexual life with Joseph, now her husband. We learn retroactively, which is a very significant strategy for this aspect of the plot, that she fears sex to the point that she identifies her otherwise gentle, understanding, supportive husband as a violator (i.e. a rapist) every time they attempt to make love. This retroactive direction of the plot pulls us to the past, together with Sophie, to the knot of her personal history, which is by now inextricably tied with her mother's painful story.[21] By association, which is a trajectory that memory traverses in marking the history of trauma—and in that sense, "*memory has a greater power than the experience that triggered it*" (Laplanche and Pontalis 405; emphasis mine)—Sophie comes to experience her

husband as her mother's rapist (whose face the mother couldn't see or wouldn't recognize, and thus can signify any man and all men) in her belated recognition. In such a traumatic scenario, every time they make love, the rape is enacted and her body is being violated.

Also, by instituting her daughter's testing at the moment of her attempted physical intimacy (which at that time amounts to occasional kisses and holding of hands) with Joseph, Sophie's mother triggers another chain of experiences which will culminate in Sophie's traumatic rejection of her sexuality. It is because Sophie might have had sex then, that Sophie now cannot bear to have it. This is because Joseph's presence and touch occasions her mother's pain-inflicting response, so that from then on, he will also come to represent both her mother's and her offender, and sex will come to stand for something painful and shameful. As Sophie's mother warns her after the first testing, "[t]here are secrets you cannot keep" (*BEM*, 85), but she might as well be applying the words to herself, as her secrets regularly and frighteningly burst forth every night.

Another way in which structuring trauma permeates and inflects intergenerational relations (here among several generations of the Caco women) is outlined by Hirsch (2002). She reads "the […] transmission of trauma" based on "the distinctive cultural expectations bestowed on daughters and the gendered dynamics of subject-formation by which they are shaped" (Hirsch 2002: 73). So, the mother-daughter plot is likely to be bogged down by traumatic ruptures, following on the primal rupture. Danticat makes it clear in an interview how she conceives of the mother-daughter relationship in terms of "separation" and "absence," where "[b]ecoming a woman and defining what that means" poignantly implies reacting to "a mother who may have been there in fragments, who was first a wonderful memory that represents absence" (1996: 382). The daughter already has to contend with the absence of the mother, even before she is summoned to translate that absence into loss through the story of individuation. Again, the underlying structures of intransigent historical forces (forcing the separation of mothers and children) intrude into and mark the circuits of psychic separations.

As I have tried to show in chapter 2, psychoanalysis recognizes the mother as the primary source of identification and thus both upholds her

indispensable role in the child's earliest development and also stresses the need to break away from the mother—or the mother figure—if the child is to develop a distinct personality (Freud [1963] 1997b: 184-201). In Freud's account of the subjectification process, the Oedipus complex, the mother-daughter interaction is left open and unended, signalling possible blind spots in his model but also pointing to the long duration of the mother-daughter interaction, which extends well beyond the daughter's early years (Freud 1997b: 185). It is this uncanny duality of the relationship, its indispensability but also its possibly dangerous impact, that is fully articulated in contemporary women's writing of the Caribbean as emphasized by Rody in the images of "strong and nurturing mothers coexisting with dead and dying, inhibiting and compromised ones" (120).

Mothering in the novel is complicated by the fact that the child's biological mother is away—absent, but also present as a referential point. In her absence Tante Atie acts as a mother substitute, but Sophie doesn't go beyond the "positive," non-confrontational phase with her, the ferocity and rancour of the mother-daughter relationship is reserved for her later years with her mother in New York. Martine, the mother, can thus be seen as Tante Atie's shadow, a vile stepmother, upon which all the anxieties and hatred of the child, primarily Sophie's permanent fear of abandonment, can be projected without remorse or repression (*BEM*, 210). Theirs is not the only fraught relationship in the novel; the other is the one between Tante Atie and her own mother, burdened with unspeakable secrets of the past and missed opportunities in Atie's life. This doubling on the level of the plot is reinforced at the moment when Martine evokes a magic nexus between mothers and daughters, the *marassa* (twin spirits, twin deities) of voudou (cf. Chancy 15, 22; Danticat 1996: 385). Despite its potentially empowering effect, the implications of the doubling in the novel are mostly negative. When Martine recreates, so to speak, her daughter as her double/marassa, she simultaneously transfers onto her the burden of her own history: "The daughter's body, like the mother's, is surrounded by the inscription of her mother's story, and as their bodies intertwine, the two women risk losing their physical boundaries and merging with one another" (Hirsch 2002: 87). Sophie knows that she must evade this commission if she is

to bequeath a more serene history to her own daughter, Brigitte. Lest she fails to do so, this potentially catastrophic merging, by failing to foster an independent self or precluding a more encompassing narrative which would transpose "traumatic memories that preceded her birth but that nevertheless define her life's narrative" (Hirsch 2002: 86), will continue to claim her daughter's mental space. Her insight is reaffirmed by her grandmother's admonition that echoes mythic and empowering, but also debilitating, links between mothers and daughters, which tie the ritualistic sense of identity formation in African based religions with some of the insights of psychoanalysis: "the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother has passed on before her" (*BEM*, 234). So it is only in the wake of her mother's burial that Sophie finds the strength to revisit the site of her mother's violation, also of her "primal scene," and thus to stand witness for her mother and herself as the only way to face up to her traumatic history.

Even if in the end diasporic identities as represented in the works of two Caribbean American writers, each engaged with specific facets of their respective group entities (namely, Cuban and Haitian), fail to find a stable and reconstructive grounding, these novels show several possible strategies of reconstitution and retrieval used by the besieged identities. In Fernández's case, the emphasis is on the structures of hysterical memory as an analogy for traumatic memory, and in the attendant displacements following the course of fetishism, neurotic symptoms, and fantasies. For Danticat, the issue is that of giving a reckoning of the submerged but, again, symptomatic history of Haiti, available in its startling and uncanny repetitiveness as a structure of trauma, and thus best accessible through the workings of deferred understanding and through repeated acts of witnessing.

Afterword: the wheel keeps on turning

In a recent novel by Jonathan Raban, a British writer residing in the US, the narrator muses on the inextricable links between aliens and America: "aliens were figures as necessary as cowboys to the national mythology. In the great polyglot sprawl of America, people constantly needed to be reminded of their Americanness" (*Waxwings*, 147). It has been my aim throughout this text to examine manifold ways in which US ethnic literature has from 1965 to the late 20th century taken up, deployed, and redefined the figure of the immigrant, the stranger, the "legal alien," the sojourner, the undocumented worker, and the racial Other as an ethnic and raced subject who is nonetheless crucial for the continuous production of the people's sense of their national identity.

Nowadays, however, multiculturalism—in the sense of a liberal doctrine which endorses the co-existence of varied ethnic groups within a fairly democratic political framework—has been mostly bad news, and this is not only the case in the US, as expected by the developments in the wake of the World Trade Center attacks, but perhaps even more so in West European countries, which, it seems, could subscribe to the politics of contained immigration and some degree of integration of immigrant groups into society. Not so long ago, it was fairly easy to distinguish between what we might call the models of good and bad management of ethnicity (in the Western democracies and in the Balkans, respectively).

This, however, no longer seems to be the case. Polyethnic states, whether they have been so from their inception (the so-called settler states in the Americas, Australia, etc.), or have increasingly become so under the pressure of immigration (arguably some of the West European nation-states are tending towards this model), today face tremendous challenges. Settler societies continuously redefine and modify their immigration laws (witness the latest reform under way in the United

States), and so effectively confirm a centrality of the principle of exclusion (abjection), detention, gradual acceptance, and inclusion of potential citizens into the nation-state.

Recent rancorous debates in the USA on immigration and possible amnesty for illegal immigrants preponderantly from Mexico, Central, and South America have even split the ranks of political parties and disturbed standard political allegiances. Let us not forget that in many cases, disputes over immigration and the status of immigrants, new or old, are coded as discourse on ethnicity/race, in conjunction with other factors (as shown by Lowe, Palumbo-Liu, Skerry) such as education, professional skills, gender, national origin, financial status, family status, and religion.

Such discussions inevitably end up in a tie, since obviously the immigrants come and are indispensable for the economy, which absorbs them and is a generator of the process of integration. On the other hand, the immigrants come too many and something has to be done about the US-Mexico border, which results in predictable tightening of immigration laws. Still, the prevailing tale of the US national formation is structured as a saga of successful assimilation and acculturation by means of willing immigration.

In this process of scripting the production of citizens, an interesting oversight takes place, which I have tried to address among other concerns in chapter 3 referring to the borderlands and contact zones, where I have dealt with the cases defying the ethnic paradigm based on immigration and acculturation. It is increasingly the case that public discourse tends to conflate and fails to make a distinction between the established minority communities in the US Southwest and the illegal newcomers. The generic category of Latino or Mexican is applied to mark the moment when an immigrant becomes an alien, a stranger, or even an invader. This oversimplifies any discussion on the status of Latinos or Hispanics in the USA, and occasions rifts within this broadly defined community. At the moment, this goes to show how other significant markers have to be taken into account, besides ethnicity, in the formation of ethnic or minority groups in the States (here, notably, national origin, language, citizenship status, etc.).

National and racial minorities in the United States are in a process of flux and change, as evident in the wake of the 2000 decennial Census,

where for the first time a symbolic barrier was crossed indicating the trends for the next century in terms of demographic shifts among significant (new and long-term) ethnicities and minorities; namely, the number of Latinos/Hispanics surpassed that of African Americans. This prompts questions as to the possible historic shift in white-black relations towards a multiracial paradigm, since the possibility of multiracial self-identification made its debut in the 2000 Census questionnaire. For the last several decades, scholarship in American studies and related disciplines has been going steadily in that direction, as also shown by this study and its multiple foci. This, however, does not mean that Du Bois's famous proclamation of the salience of the colour line in the twentieth century is invalidated—it is perhaps that the stress has moved elsewhere along the line, pressured by other racialized groups, or new ethnicities.

One would expect the European Union countries to be alert to the way the United States in particular has been handling its immigration policies, given the EU's continuing influx of immigrants from non-European and abjected European zones.1 Recent developments in the Netherlands, Denmark, France and, most recently, the UK, invite questions as to the viability of the different multicultural models adopted and promoted by liberal democracies under pressure from their increasingly diverse populations. The government of the UK, as we know, has reacted by proposing a new model of facilitating and promoting the integration and assimilation of its ethnic/racial and religious others, a model akin to that of the more vigorous assimilation that was thought to be implemented in France up to now, but will have to be rethought or revamped ('UK must tackle ethnic tensions'). In that sense, the stranger—for the purposes of this discussion this is a type, an ascription or interpellation given from the outside and hoisted on the self—becomes indeed an exemplary case of the production of a citizen, a borderline site where the workings of the apparatus are displayed. If he or she is not turned into Agamben's *homo sacer*, held and repatriated, profiled or circumscribed, then they stand a good chance of integrating to some degree. In Kristeva's reading, it is indeed the case of the stranger (on the way to becoming a citizen or in her failure to do so) that tests the ultimate boundaries of Western democracy.

Obviously, a new phase has been reached by all these essentially democratic, pluralist societies, and a major factor there has been played by the notion of individual and collective identity (one of my central concerns throughout this study), more often than not cast in terms of an irreducible, inassimilable, and thus, as we have seen principally in the last chapter, potentially traumatic difference.

Where do we go from here? Does this specific discourse, US ethnic literature as it has been evolving for the past several decades, carry any weight when confronting or clarifying the present "state of emergency"? Let me approach this urgent question, no less so even if in my introduction I have given a more conservative estimation of the impact of (ethnic) literatures on US society and beyond, in a roundabout way. Namely, let me ask, together with Walter Mignolo, what good is literature, even its ethnic or subaltern avatar, today when

> the logic of coloniality is nowadays reproduced through financial flows and financial debacles, control of international markets, the re-inscription of the supposed Muslim menace that was one of the concerns of Las Casas five hundred years ago, arms control and enforcement, legal regulations to defend freedom that go beyond legality and the exercise of freedom, and the relentless rhetoric of development accompanied by the increasing poverty around the world. (448)

Even more to the point, comparatist and interdisciplinary enquiries such as Mignolo's and Timothy Reiss's, also raise the question of the direct complicity of the project of literacy, thus by extension literature, with the whole enterprise of coloniality as it is interwoven with modernity. It is this complicity which imbues and, paradoxically, energizes the texts I have taken to exemplify a contemporary moment of emergence of a different perspective in what Mignolo calls the essentially creole and immigrant culture of the US, which has been going on for quite some time now. At the same time, even as these artefacts testify to an already transculturated cultural horizon, they also engage in a powerful denunciation of the terms under which some of these processes have taken place. If, as suggested by Mignolo, "[t]here is an active silence in the dark half of modernity; a silence that in the second half of the twentieth century began to be theoretically articulated" (441), then an essential part of my project and the approach which I have taken to the

texts at hand has been the need to understand them as documents of an irruption, of silence discontinued, of a voice and perspective of others. Still, they continue to share in the history and the logic of modernity, which has created most of these subjects and collectivities and has inscribed their sites of enunciation and emergence in the first place, through the inexorable logic of economic or political immigrations, forced displacements and other upheavals.

So even if these and similarly positioned texts, contingent in their moment of production and reception on the recognition of the need to break the silence surrounding some histories and to delve into "the dark half of modernity" (and here that task is taken on by the concept of racialization, the inscription of difference based on the embodiment), cannot in and of themselves affect a change in the structures listed above by Mignolo, they nevertheless figure a potentially new public sphere. This on-going cultural struggle taking place not only in the United States but at the least in all the other creolized, *mestizo*, and immigrant cultures and societies is precisely the thing which reinvigorates the principles that would become worn out were it not for their continuous state of upheaval.

Even if these remarks sound a note of pessimism, they are also meant to suggest possible directions for examining further the potential of the discourse on ethnicity, difference, and various (collective) identities. For us, here and now, it is I believe of the utmost importance to try and understand just how and why these texts, their protagonists, and their plots speak to us, and to take their words to heart.

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Notes

Introduction

[1] The 2006 conference of the American Studies Association, 'The United States Inside and Out: Transnational American Studies,' took place in another one of the "border states," i.e., California.

I: Impassioned discourse and "passionate politics": cultural nationalism and the ethnic revival

[1] Important documents on the vicissitudes and impact of cultural nationalism are Frantz Fanon's writings; I have also relied on Hutchinson's model of cultural nationalism. Individual instances of ethnic investments in this scheme will be presented in the course of the chapter. Useful documents for the general aims of this array of tendencies, applied in two particular contexts, are Alurista 1986b (in the context of the Chicano revival) and Ture and Hamilton's *Black Power* (1967; African American context), this latter a strong blend of political and cultural nationalisms, even though it is occasionally hard to break them down; cf. also Sollors 1978 (his book-length discussion of Baraka, himself an icon of black cultural nationalist poetics); Eyerman 2001.

[2] So the process evolves in the following direction: 1) presupposed identity as a "pure" essence and an attainable goal; 2) expanding that ideal to encompass a range of people (community). The definition of ethnic identity is thus both superimposed on and derived from a community.

[3] Leiwei Li communicated this working division in a discussion in one of the panels at the 4th MESEA conference in Thessalonica, June 2004.

[4] The emphasis here is on "almost," as I hasten to add that, for instance, Leslie Marmon Silko in her first novel *Ceremony* (1977) endorses some of the procedures associated with the cultural nationalist agenda: communitarian sense, a representative (male) protagonist, communal memory retention procedures, mythic consciousness, symptomatic gender questions, etc.

[5] See, among others, Adamson and Clark; Shamir and Travis; also recent studies in ethnic formation working, respectively, with the script of melancholy (Cheng), fetishism and (racial) castration (Eng), abjection (Shimakawa) and pathological visual regimes (Hartman).

[6] In his speech 'The Ballot or the Bullet,' delivered in 1964, Malcolm X cites as the principal sources of black grievance not just "political oppression" and "economic exploitation," but also "social degradation" (1965: 24). Although my scope is not directly the African American struggle for civil liberties, it is important to note, as I will do throughout this section, that African American activists provided some affective scripts ("emotion work"), models for movement organizing, which mustered motivation for political action and attendant forms of harnessing powerful and durable emotions for forms of significant social and cultural behaviour, for other minorities to make use of.

[7] It bears repeating, in light of the emerging postnational and the connected globalization paradigm in American studies, that in view of the 1960s and the 1970s cultural politics the angle of vision is simultaneously domestic, with an intricate web of identifications, solidarities, and co-operations among various ethnic groups, racialized groups, and national minorities (for these terms cf. Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Kymlicka 1995), and international, addressing the consequences of American foreign policy or simply registering the impact of international economic and political movements (emigration, the Vietnam War, decolonization, political struggle). Let me point out at the outset of this section that the political theorist Will Kymlicka considers Native Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans as national minorities and views their position as demanding of special provisions within the spectrum of the liberal theory of citizenship (cf. especially 107-130). In its admirable brevity his classification is perhaps more helpful than Eriksen's (2002: 14-15).

[8] Every discussion of the emotionalism and the soulfulness which African Americans have contributed to American cultural forms, along with the central role which grief and sorrow, and the attendant affective structures, play in African American cultural production is virtually unthinkable without W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The last chapter of his book specifically addresses the question of the "sorrow songs" as a moving testimony of African American history laying claim as the American history *par excellance*.

[9] Frank Chin will reciprocate by holding up Malcolm X's ideas and policies to the members of his community, in the sense of masculine activism and cultural assertiveness, as I try to show in the section on Asian American cultural nationalism. Cf. Chin et al.

[10] James Baldwin, in his very vocal statement on the sorry state of 1960s US society, *The Fire Next Time*, tellingly evokes how the atmosphere of a big and seemingly harmonious family he witnessed at a Black Muslim leader's house carefully demarcates the male and female spheres and accords particular place and role to its every member. For the way the family reinforces and reflects the economic and social orders see Chodorow; McClintock; Collins.

[11] Not the least among these African-Asian links is the fact that the first edition of the anthology was put out by Howard University Press, a pre-eminent institution of black higher education in the US.

[12] Ling (1998) and Li (1998) provide incisive readings of the interrelatedness of nationalism, cultural nationalism and Asian America ncultural formation in this period.

[13] For extended discussions of the model minority thesis, its origin and application cf. Kim 175-80; Palumbo-Liu 174-79; Wu and Song 158-63.

[14] Later, this move would be subverted and revisited by numerous critiques coming mostly from Chicana feminists and critics, as my Chapter 3 shows; cf. also Anzaldúa, Arteaga, Calderón and Saldívar, Chabram, Con Davis-Undiano, Pratt.

[15] In this way, the language and the underlying principles of the Plan bear some resemblance to the tone and the general drift of the Declaration of Independence. In fact, the universal appeal of the Declaration, despite its partisan application, is what enables its appropriation in quite unexpected situations. My claim here is not that the drafters of the Plan consciously adopted formulations from the Declaration, but simply that the Declaration in the past addressed a rather similar set of concerns that the Chicanos have been grappling with since 1848. Also, we have to recognize an obviously divergent political reality that the two documents address: if the Declaration ushers in national independence and statehood, the Plan, and the movement in which it was embedded, in its rank and file would never have boasted of such ambitious claims. As pointed out by Kymlicka on the import of the ethnic revival as such: "The ethnic revival [...] involves a revision in the terms of integration, not a rejection of integration" (67). Also, this goes in line with the precepts of *cultural* (not necessarily political) nationalism.

[16] In a growing discussion on the specifics of minority mental health needs, manuals such as the one commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1986 gives an overview of some of the minorities' distinct problems. In this context, when approaching a Hispanic community, the health worker, for instance, has to be sensitized to the set of values that constitute the "cultural identity" of the group, which accords a relatively high symbolic value to "[c]oncepts such as *machismo* (manliness), *confianza* (confidence), *respeto* (respect), *verguenza* (shame), and *orgullo* (pride)," which "predominate in the culture," according to this report (N. Chávez 146). Also, the high valuation of the family is another of these cultural markers (N. Chávez 147). This can be corroborated by instances from popular culture; in films, such as Gregory Nava's *My Family* (1995), the multigenerational Mexican American family acts as a linchpin in a tumultuous and changing world. In another film, *American Me* (dir. Edward James Olmos; 1992), the break-up of the family is both a symptom and a cause of the protagonist's plight, and this credo informs his attempts to salvage the remaining family structure, after his mother's death and his release from prison. In the language of the manifestos here, we see embedded a solemn sense of the family's inviolable status. The point is not that the "family" successfully and indefinitely resists the onslaughts of the encroaching social and cultural order (exploitation, discrimination, cultural denigration)—it obviously changes and gets affected by it— but that it is perceived as a viable and hallowed site of refuge and sustenance, and as a site of the regulation of gender roles (cf. N. Chávez 146).

[17] Sociologists writing about this period from outside of the groups involved also tend to employ strong language, with expressions denoting urgency, crisis, disaffection, social radicalization, etc.; cf. Gleason 1992; Glazer and Moynihan 1975. Obviously, the sense of crisis in the society as a whole, spilled over into different communities, has additionally fuelled the cultural nationalists' fiery language.

[18] The Chicanos base their claims on the state of affairs prior to the 1848 Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty, while Native Americans can proffer various agreements and treaties between individual tribes and the federal government. For the crucial—but not exclusive—importance of the land occupancy and territorial rights for the emergence and consolidation of a nation cf. Dawson; Eriksen; Kymlicka.

[19] I owe this insight to Professor Orm Řverland; the psychological twist I add to this "simple" historical fact is my own. For additional historical information and its cultural interpretations cf. Chan; Chin et al; Chu; Palumbo-Liu.

[20] Behind this is a whole history of attaching names to account for difference, the threat posed by it or fear and insecurity fuelled by it. Suffice it to say that each immigrant group in America has had its share of nicknames.

[21]Chinatown as a pregnant locus and intersection of political, historical, social, and cultural currents obviously plays an important role in the Chinese American imaginary, where it is, not surprisingly, inscribed in different tones than in the wider popular culture, as is often the case with films and tourism and the usual air of exoticisation accorded to it. For further elaboration see Wong 1995. An alternative, non-sentimental rendering of New York's Chinatown is given in Louis Chu's novel *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961).

[22]An account of Native American activism since the late 1960s states: "The occupation of Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Tribes from 1969 to 1971 marked the beginning of the decade-long Indian activist movement known as 'Red Power.' [...] Many protests of the early 1970s followed the model of the Alcatraz occupation, with Indians taking over possession of federal land and claiming it for educational and cultural uses" (Josephy et al. 1999: 1).

[23] Incidentally, the two books are marked differently in the Library of Congress classificatory system, the former as an autobiography, the latter as a novel, which goes to show the tenuousness of generic classifications.

[24] In fact, this "rediscovery" or mythic inscription of the Indian layer as the primary grounding for the emerging Chicano consciousness constitutes one of the central markers of the cultural nationalist agenda (cf. Arteaga 5-19). Further, Arteaga defines "the facts of the border and of Indianness" as crucial for Chicano self-consciousness (9). Often this discovery rests on mythic plots rather than hard facts, but that is precisely the point. The other point is to turn this abjected but recovered Indian segment into a rich fount of cultural identifications for the Chicanos. This strain is observable in Acosta, Anzaldúa and Denise Chávez but not at all, for instance, in Rolando Hinojosa's work.

[25] In one of the most often referenced and contentious ethnic autobiographies of late, Richard Rodriguez, a child of Mexican American immigrants, spins the tale of "education that has altered my life. Carried me far" (1983: 5). Apparently, it was

education that enabled his passage into the American middle class, thus engineering not only a new class, but also a new cultural identity for Ricardo-Richard. He is careful, however, to point out some Calibanesque stakes in the project of educating the other (3, 5). Also, this parallel is not to understate the underlying differences between the literary-political projects of the two writers in question.

[26] Robert E. Lee's article places Acosta's writing firmly within the ranks of American countercultural writers, deriving from the Beats (2000).

[27] He ironically reverses a direction typical of the revelatory/salvation journey—it usually takes a hero to the real or imaginary West. Here the overcivilized, jaded, culturally cluttered East potentially serves to civilize, refine, and cultivate a wild, uncontainable protagonist (a would-be writer). Also, the East here may signal Americanization.

[28] Here it is interesting to juxtapose Rodriguez's language politics with his claims that Spanish, as a private, familial and intimate language has to be shed ultimately in favour of English if one is to claim one's place in the public sphere and wants to have one's voice heard. Even though he is loath to admit it, this dichotomy of public/private, English/Spanish ultimately boils down to the questions of control over education and cultural politics; that is, to the questions of the fate of one group's cultural identity, centred on language. The point he never really addresses is that the two spheres do not carry the same symbolic weight.

[29] A number of articles deal with a generic question with regard to Acosta's hybrid texts, especially *The Revolt*. Tonn looks at this blend of fiction and reality in the context of New Journalism (1986); Alurista addresses the problem of historical and biographical accuracy in *The Revolt*, and finds it problematic (1986a); Raymund Paredes is also of the opinion that the text "seems more a novel than traditional reportage" (1984: 213); finally, Hames-García situates the text closer to the fictional realm (2000).

[30] Acosta's language politics is also revealing; some critics suggest that he deliberately downplayed his knowledge of Spanish, perhaps to contribute to the plot of the emergence of the revolutionary hero at the expense of the disaffected and estranged intellectual at the beginning.

[31] Drawing on Eyerman's model grounded in the social sciences and tinged with the cognitivist approach, as laid out in his "theory of cultural trauma," this concept should be understood "as collective memory, a form of rememberance that grounded the identity-formation of a people. [...] As cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory" (1).

II: Summoning a new subject: "ethnic feminists"

[1] The emphasis will differ in this chapter, however, from the model espoused in Chapter 1. There, the abjective dynamics was played out on the body of the lacking national subject, an ethnic man, who counteracted by fantasies played out on

women (here seen as a sign), while in this instance the targeted and abjected woman's (specifically, mother's) body, is being recuperated by reinscribing its potential to become a (national) subject.

[2] The variations of abjection, according to Kristeva, which nicely display this connection are defilement, food, taboo and sin (1982: 68). Besides, as she pointedly asserts of Freud, he properly identifies the "two founding taboos," namely, mother-phobia (dread of incest) and father-murder as constitutive in founding societal ties (1982: 56-57). Diana Fuss has also demonstrated what she calls "a politics of identification," especially in the chapter on Frantz Fanon (141-72; see also 32-51), where she situates the phantasmatic plane of identifications within the historical and material exigencies of race and colonial moment.

[3] Genette comments on Lévi-Strauss's use of terms *bricolage* and the *bricoleur* (from Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*): "The nature of *bricolage* is to make use of materials and tools that […] were not intended for the task in hand. […] The rule of *bricolage* is 'always to make do with whatever is available' and to use in a new structure the remains of previous constructions or destructions […]. The instrumental universe of the *bricoleur* […] is a 'closed' universe. Its repertoire, however extended, 'remains limited.' […] The engineer 'questions the universe, while the *bricoleur* addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors, that is, only a subset of the culture'" (1988: 63-4). The implied hierarchy is also instructive here.

[4] Besides Woolf, the evocation of madness and feminine creativity has been teased out in the incisive readings by Gilbert and Gubar, albeit on a different corpus of texts. Still the conjoining of femininity with madness, abnormality, resonates as a culturally mandated metaphor, which then can be ironically revisited.

[5] This concern in fact informs Kingston's hybrid book and partly explains her obsession with ancestral, mother's stories, even when she retells them with a twist (*The Woman Warrior*, 5, 19, 87, 206). Cf. Šesnić 2004.

[6] This contradictory move reflects the forth-back movement, repetition with variation, circling, spiralling, which has been recognized as underlying the mother-daughter relationship. Cf. Chodorow 1978; Abel 1981; Hirsch 1981; Homans 1983. I apply this model in my reading of this corpus in Šesnić 2004.

[7] Alongside Chu and Seyhan, Hitchcock recognizes that "the intimate etymological ties between genre and gender shed significant light on the gender wars in the formation of the subject and the category of literature as well" (2003: 308).

[8] McDowell similarly notes differential use of the trope of "the journey," a departure form one's birthplace, in the works of black male and female writers respectively (2001: 32-3).

[9] For instance, Sula's rejection of the mother, following on the heels of her mother's ambivalent remark, is apparently in compliance with the Black nationalist recoil from the mother (cf. Dubey 58-9), while it simultaneously enlists the feminist ambivalence about the agency of motherhood, as a source of origin and an oppressive structure (cf. Dubey 59-60).

[10] My position here, entering the text from the vantage position offered by the historical fiction, may be validated by referring to another more often pursued line of analysis of the novel, that of its ironic signifying on the *Bildungsroman* tradition. I acknowledge these readings and turn to them later on, but also note a crucial insight by a critic, that the novel is not centered either on a single character or on a concept of character as "a coherent or unified Subject," but is also about "the organismic and microcosmic black community" (Grant 1988: 95). Susan Willis also offers a powerful argument in favour of historical impetus informing Morrison's fiction, including *Sula* (1982).

[11] Other perspectives on this recuperative and commemorative, but also ironic, slant of the narrative include Wall 2000, Willis 1982; Johnson (1998) joins it with a psychoanalytic reading.

[12] Fredric Jameson alerts us to the contractual nature of literary genres: "Genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact. […] Still, as texts free themselves more and more from an immediate performance situation, it becomes ever more difficult to enforce a given generic rule on their readers" ([1981] 2002: 92-3).

[13] Patricia McKee comments on the necessity to keep the experience bounded, because the characters in the novel cannot claim the representativeness which inheres in white identity (1999: 148); rather, they produce what she calls "black spaces."

[14] Wall, addressing the time-span of the novel's plot, proposes that "the novel mourns the passing of the segregated communities that nurtured generations of black folk in the United States," even as it looks forward to the new phase of African American communal existence, the Movement (2000: 1451).

[15] Among the critics who choose this point of entrance into the novel one should take note of Dubey; Feng.

[16] Again, we see a trend to ascribe historical agency due to complex and intertwined forces (primarily linked to changes in the macro-economic system from an industrial to a corporate-services economy, which affected a considerable number of African American workers, among others, and precipitated their sliding into the underclass, poverty, unemployment, etc.) to a restricted agency of the black family, which is simultaneously criticized not simply as culturally incompetent and incapable of securing the proper socialization of its members but as "constitutionally" incapable and pathological. Simultaneously, another myth was debunked, that of the superhuman maternal feeling ("instinct") ascribed to black mothers (which Morrison resolutely attacks in *Sula*). For an overview of how post-WW II "ideology of the family" depends on requirements posed by the reigning definitions of race and gender, cf. Kunzel 1995.

[17] Wong (1999) and Kim (1982) pose the question to what extent this marketing decision was prompted by a steady flow of Asian (American) auto-biographies, which generically predominated in this corpus.

[18] Interestingly, *China Men*, the book to appear after *The Woman Warrior*, has also been labelled by Vintage misguidedly, in my view, as non-fiction/literature.

[19] In the context of the observed discrepancy between the cultural nationalist camp and the women's camp, we have to be careful not to magnify and reify the perceived, but by no means absolute or irreconcilable, poetical/political assumptions on both sides. The debate has moved, slowly but steadily, from the entrenched positions to a more fruitful exchange of different concepts of poetic, enunciative positions and politics of representation. Cf. Baker; Dubey; Wong; Chu. This polarization, notwithstanding its potential for hypostasis along the gender axis, where gender comes to figure for a whole set of presumably inherent, absolute and universal sets of differences—alongside the above-mentioned man/woman also authentic/inauthentic, political/self-serving, and the way it has organized the reception of African American and Asian American women writers, prompts us to pay heed both to the professed and to the actual differences between these two conveniently outlined approaches. Temporal distance should enable us to assess the potentialities for dialogue and exchange rather than mutual acrimony and dismissal.

[20] It seems odd that for Chin—especially given the experimental, jarring, and anti-realistic procedures in his fiction and drama, which are uncannily similar to Kingston's in fact—one of the major failures on Kingston's part would be the "inauthenticity" of textual representation with respect to some kind of a given ideal. Here he favours a one-to-one correspondence between the sign and its referent, while in his writing he consciously complicates this relation by his use of postmodernist narrative strategies, among other things.

[21] This appeal points to its universalising tendency and considers a possibility of Sedinger's mimetic and thus counter-symbolic identification underlined by gender; hence its feminist agenda.

[22] Deborah Woo observes "the burden of dual authenticity" being heaped not only on Kingston, but also on Walker and Morrison, for instance (1990: 173). This duality proceeds not only from the positioning of their discourse within the majority, national culture, but is also perceived to inhere in the expectation that they "concretely document an authentic cultural experience" of their respective ethnic groups (Woo 189).

[23] For a useful brief definition of *skaz* cf. Jones 1991: 202.

[24] Cautionary tales in *Sula* also centre around the culture's obsessive concern to demarcate and circumscribe, in Kristeva's terms to abject, dangerous proclivities of the female body to procreate outside socially imposed constrictions, which thus tends to curb its capacity to undermine the dominant social and familial economy. Seen through a gendered aspect, this handing down of stories assumes a larger cultural importance and is not necessarily tied to any one ethnic or social group. It rather illustrates the predominant concern, as expressed by Kristeva, to keep the female at bay for the sake of gaining entrance into the symbolic order. That is why the mother tells the story which in effect serves to displace her genealogy the moment the daughter is ready to pass on to another level of her psycho-social existence.

[25] Linda Hutcheon (2002), among others, has shown how the two impulses, the ludic and the political, cohabit uneasily in much of contemporary literature and arts.

[26] The readings by Smith, Ferraro, and Cheng especially foreground the mother as the locus of meaning production to the point even of occluding or at least paralleling the daughter's experience.

III: Borderlands/contact zones: "reworlding" ethnicity

[1] A note on usage with respect to Chicano and other related terms. The 1980s were termed the "decade of the Hispanic," so "Hispanic" would seem to be an official, government-endorsed term, conveniently covering a range of ethnic groups, only loosely connected in reality (being of vastly different geographical, national and class affiliations). This common term lumped together both Mexican Americans native to the Southwest and the most recent newcomers from, for instance, Guatemala or Honduras. As for Chicano and/or Mexican American, the notion today is that these may even be used interchangeably, but it certainly depends on the context. Given that the former arose in the highly politicized atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, it may still be slightly more charged. Latino, as another umbrella term, highlights geographical provenance but also fails to take into account in-group differences. Usage varies as evident in the following cases: the University of Houston's (Texas) ongoing project bears the name of "Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage"; by contrast, "the most important professional academic organization in the field" carries the name the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies; additionally, most academic departments would seem to follow suit (Maciel at al. 2000: xxxii, 121). As pointed out furthermore by the editors, historically, Mexican American communities were linked to the term, namely, "Chicano." Relative to the authors I mention here, Hinojosa opts for the distinction Mexicanos vs Anglos, otherwise Mexican American, while Chávez is more on the side of Chicano, alternatively Mejicano, etc.

[2] Singh and Schmidt thus readily provide a genealogy of new disciplinary arrangements, citing as their progenitors notably W.E.B. Du Bois, Américo Paredes, José Martí, and C.L.R. James, among others (2000).

[3] I understand the concepts of ontological insecurity and interstitial position as hallmarks of the postmodern era, which conceptualizes identities as less fixed and more fluctuating phenomena, including ethnic, minority, or postcolonial identities. Besides Bhabha, cf. Appadurai 1996a; Hall 1996a, 1997; and Fischer, among others.

[4] In fact, ethnography from the beginning (cf. Paredes) seems to have been implicated in the study, and emancipation, of the Chicano literary and cultural canon. However, ethnography is itself embedded in the objectification of its subject-matter; therefore, the crucial intervention offered by border theory/discourse has been to change the assumptions of the discourse production and authorization of one's enunciative position in an ethnographic account. This implies favouring the perspective of the informant or the experiential subject. So what initially may have been a weak spot for

the discipline has turned into an asset within a borderlands perspective. Just as what initially was construed as the provincialism and lamentable regionalism of Chicano literature has been refigured as its indicative otherness, casting it as a link between the northern and the southern hemisphere, a veritable example of inter-American discourse. I address these issues in greater detail in the pages that follow. For articulations of the basic disciplinary premises cf. also Chabram, Lomelí, Leal, and Saldívar 1991.

[5] To give some examples: Acosta explicitly codes his indigenous origin, assuming the hyperbolic name of the Brown Buffalo in his fictionalized autobiography; Anzaldúa studiously attempts to document the Indian contribution to the cultural and biological lines of descent of the people in the US-Mexico borderlands and beyond (23-73). Chávez acknowledges this strain in an interview (1998: 17). Lomelí uses the concept of "neo-indigenism" (1998: 36).

[6] The concepts *langue* and *parole* are taken from Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory. For my purposes here, langue can be defined as "the language system" while parole would be "the act of speaking". Further, "[t]he former [langue] is the totality of a language, which we could in theory discover by examining the memories of all the language users: 'the sum of word-images stored in the minds of individuals'. *Parole* is the actual, concrete act of speaking on the part of a person—a dynamic, social activity in a particular time and place" (Crystal 411). Cf. also de Saussure 1983: 77-78. For their help and advice on terminology and its tricky implications and for their sound advice on the bibliography for this section I would like to thank Vlatko Broz and especially Mateusz Stanojević.

[7] *Competence* here harks back to, without engaging all its rich implications, Noam Chomsky's dyad competence/performance. Here is a convenient explanation of the links between de Saussure's and Chomsky's models: "A *language –system* [what de Saussure designates as langue] is a social phenomenon, or institution, which of itself is purely abstract, in that it has no physical existence, but which is actualized on particular occasions in the *language-behaviour* of individual members of the language-community. Up to a point, what Chomsky calls linguistic competence can be identified […] not with the language-system, but with the typical speaker's knowledge of the language-system. […] Saussure gave special emphasis to the social or institutional character of language-systems. Therefore, he thought of linguistics as being closer to sociology and social psychology than it is to cognitive psychology" (Lyons [1981] 1997: 10).

[8] Spanish colonial land grants: some of them were honoured by the US government, but most of them were overridden in the aftermath of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

[9] It would be possible to consider the early novels in the revivalist Native American literary canon as straddling the two paradigms outlined here, namely, the cultural nationalist and the borderlands model. Texts by Momaday (I have in mind his *House Made of Dawn*) and Silko (*Ceremony*) articulate concerns which my proposed model of reading situates at different phases of ethnic and identity representations.

[10] Grgas reads this unmapped status of the Indian space in similarly charged terms, when he quotes Michael Dorris's comments which equate the erasure of the reservation boundaries from the official American Automobile Association map with the more sinister projects of face-lifting unpleasant history and erasing the difference. Paradoxically, reservation boundaries are not drawn on the map, unlike those of the cities and counties, as Grgas sums up Dorris's argument (161).

[11] Cheng's view of identification supports this deadlock between identifications and desires in her reading of the contemporary African American performance artist Anne Deavere Smith, where she summons recent critical accounts of melancholic identification as perhaps the grounding process of identity formation. Cf. criticism of such a potentially reductionist move in LaCapra 1999; Butler 1997: 132-66.

[12] The first telling slippage, which caught me unawares, occurred in a paratextual space of acknowledgments preceding the text of Alexie's novel, where it becomes clear that the putative narrative authority of the text's impersonal narrator partly relies on and draws from other textual authorities, not simply for the questions of the blues but more importantly for my point here on the information closely related to the author's tribe's history and a larger history of the Northwest. Thus, the fantasy I have entertained as the reader, of course utterly complacent, of the fund of knowledge transmitted uninterruptedly, despite all the ruptures in and interruptions of Native American—here specifically, Spokane—history, was quickly laid to rest. Further, this move challenges one of the dearest misconceptions held in some postcolonial quarters; namely, that of the putatively indigenous, preferably oral, cultural/historical layer, as a fountainhead of (post)colonial cultural production (cf. Krupat 2000). What strikes me in Alexie's text is his refusal to take almost any cultural form as a straightforward cipher of either individual or collective identity. This procedure shows once more how the ways in which literary representations are generated and read may effectively undermine either primordialist or utterly constructivist versions of personal and collective identity formations.

[13] Bhabha (especially in 'Of Mimicry and Man') and Hall (1997) comment on how this discourse cripples and hurts, how "the other" caught in it consequently becomes subjugated by knowledge.

[14] Note the important motifs of psychic trauma, loss, dislocation, and alienation in the novels by Alexie's predecessors and contemporaries, Silko and Momaday, for instance; even though Alexie's texts are no less frequently peopled by split, neurotic, and alienated characters, their therapy doesn't necessarily consist in going back to prior, primordial, non-ambiguously positioned elements of tribal culture. These returns in Alexie may as well take the form of the blues or basketball. Thus, he revises to some extent while also drawing on the vacillation between the forces of acculturation vs outright assimilation, a process taken up for inspection by Silko and Momaday.

[15] Although Hinojosa will take this question up more comprehensively in his novel *Becky and Her Friends* (1990). Chávez's preoccupations resonate in her female-centred accounts of life in the Southwest, especially New Mexico, as it unfolds in her three

texts: *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986), *Face of an Angel* (1994) and *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001). I will constrict myself mostly to reading *Face of an Angel*, although I will occasionally call on examples from the other two texts. Generically, the first text moves between a loosely connected cycle of short stories and a *Bildungsroman*, while the other two are more unambiguously classifiable as novels, albeit highly hybrid. Pratt's concept of autoetnography may be useful to account for these texts, as I will try to show (1997: 7).

[16] In chapter 1, I have tried to show how the Chicano cultural nationalist programme vigorously promotes and bolsters affiliation based on kinship and masculine identification, and so effectively circumscribes the feminine as a basis of solidarity building. Cf. also Pratt 1993.

[17] I borrow this term from Chabram (1990), who approaches the field of Chicano studies as an instance of counter-discourse. Also, the revisionist strain of contemporary anthropology sees this project as critical for the field. Cf. Behar and Gordon; Shohat.

[18] For the potentially empowering duality of St Theresa's example see also Douglas 201.

[19] Anzaldúa also reinforces this connection in the wider context of Mexican immigration: "Faceless, nameless, invisible, taunted with 'Hey cucaracho' [...] . Trembling with fear, yet filled with courage, a courage born of desperation. Barefoot and uneducated, Mexicans with hands like boot soles gather at night by the river where two worlds merge [...]" (33). However, her take is in line with the cultural nationalist celebratory tone.

IV: Diasporic identities: breaking and re-making ethnicity

[1] Bob Dubois, one of the protagonists, moves from the rust-belt to the sun-belt, prefiguring the trail of interior migration; Vanise, her baby, and her brother Claude, make their move from Haiti to Florida; the whole of the Caribbean basin is one incessant whirl of motion, migration, traffic, and the smuggling of people and goods; finally, the drift in the title encompasses the whole planet.

[2] We could posit that individual trauma is symptomatic of larger ruptures, which would then enable us to activate the Freudian concepts in the approach to hysterical symptoms, seeing how these are comparable to the symptoms of traumatic neurosis. Given that these symptoms are subject to distortions and repression, overdetermination and condensation, displacement and transference, etc., it is only through the disentanglement of these mechanisms that we can arrive at the meaning of trauma and its range of impact (Freud 1997a: 120-1).

[3] This quote conjoins two salient moments of traumatic experience; since I approach this complex in greater detail later on, let me just mention here a period of "latency" (Caruth 1995: 7) which makes the recognition belated, deferred, but which at

the same time invades the individual consciousness and pulls it back into the moment of emergence (recognizing that one is "black"), inextricably tied to the trauma of slavery, available through mnemonic traces (cf. Gilroy 198).

[4] From the point of view of the narrative structure in several novels from this corpus, it could be argued that one of the fault lines stretches across several (usually three) generations of a diasporic family, which is, by rule, itself physically split, divided between Cuba and California (Suárez, *Latin Jazz*); Cuba, Brooklyn and Florida (García, *Dreaming in Cuban*); Haiti and New York (Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*); and Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Danticat, *Farming of Bones*). The project of memory requires a continuation of affiliation among the family members, which often proves difficult or untenable; however, occasionally the burden of memorialization can be taken up by some substitutes to the closely knit kinship network, such as music, dreams, art and, interestingly, personal trauma.

[5] It bears repeating here that theories of subjectivation similarly locate the subject's site of emergence in the territory marked by structuring traumas, such as the separation from the mother or subjection to the exigencies of the Oedipus complex, so that the sense of self seems to be generated by the moment of crisis produced by a trauma. Cf. Judith Butler 1997; Bhabha 1994; Cheng 2001.

[6] Hirsch is herself willing to consider the possibility that her notion be used to account for "the second-generation memory of other cultural and collective traumatic events and experiences" (662), which may create a welter of secondary issues such as conflation, overinvestment, faulty identification, failure of recognition, false witnessing, etc. Cf. Oliver 2001.

[7] Interestingly, Laplanche's conception of "the work of memory," heavily reliant on Freud's account principally in the seminal work 'Mourning and Melancholia' but also his other writings, derives from the schema of the temporality of trauma, principally observable in its deferred, belated impact. More on this in my discussion on Danticat's fiction in the latter part of this chapter.

[8] García, Fernández, and Suárez are "'ARCs' […] American-Raised Cubans, who left the Island as infants and toddlers" (Herrera xix), the first generation transplanted to US soil, meaning that they have presumably retained some memories of Cuba and have gone through the event of displacement and exile. Their generation is summoned to recall the act of displacement regardless of their actual memories of the events in question.

[9] This spatial ambivalence runs through the novels I have considered under the minority literature model; however, there the rivalry between the culturally imperious space of the nation-state and its shadowy formation is not grounded in the sense of deracination and displacement, but rather in the feeling of belonging and rootedness countering the weak affiliation ties available to outsiders.

[10] Possibly also Haitian New York in Danticat's fiction; to a lesser extent the outposts of Cuban communities in LA as represented in Suárez's *Latin Jazz*, where they have almost blended with other Latinos; also the Cuban community in Brooklyn,

as constituted in García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, which strives to disassociate itself from more disadvantaged and lower-class, supposedly crime-prone Puerto Ricans.

[11] Historically, the ties between the United States and Haiti—the first two republics in the Western hemisphere—were marred by the US occupation of Haiti (1915-34), as well as by subsequent US overt and covert interventionism, which culminated again in September 1994, in the US invasion of Haiti in a peace restoring effort (Chancy 1997: 48; Dash 1997: 22-44; Nicholls 1979: 142-64). The most recent coup, deposing President Aristide, who was backed by the US, occurred at the outset of 2004.

[12] Danticat's other publications, besides the ones listed in the bibliography, include: *Behind the Mountain* (2002), aimed at younger readers; *A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel* (2002); and most recently a short story collection *The Dew Breaker* (2004). As a sign of her stature and reputation in national letters, let me just note that her recent works have received attention in major US literary magazines (a review of her latest short-story collection appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, March 21, 2004), while her most recent collection has been short listed for a prestigious US literary award.

[13] Reiss also looks at the writing proceeding from the Caribbean and its diaspora as a composite, which in turn enables him to reconstruct the Caribbean as a space shaped by specific socio-historical conjunctions (principally those of colonialism, slavery, migration, revolution). Especially in Chapter 9 Reiss addresses the difficulty of conceptualizing the region through "vernaculars of historical descent" due to their ruptures and instead points to "vernaculars by geography" as vehicles of at least partial retrieval and recovery of the lost history (329-59).

[14] In fact, the characters in Danticat novels and short stories fall predominantly into this latter category, qualifying somewhat a recuperating potential of the act of bearing witness (to oneself or to others). The characters regularly lack words to account for what has happened to them, what they are going through, or what they have observed; instead, they recourse to silence, evasion, the shutting out of painful memories, repression; in other words, they pose as "unwilling witnesses" to their own pain and that of others.

[15] This is more pronounced in Danticat's second novel, which sutures together historical discourse, first-person account, and testimonial discourse.

[16] It bears repeating here how haunting is not simply tied to an individual's neurotic symptoms but is shared and transmitted transgenerationally, as posited by Juliet Mitchell, among others: "unconscious thoughts may be communicated between people, and even through people, across generations—but this is only inexplicable if we deny a shared mental terrain" (2000: xxii). Thus the possibility that the mothers may traumatize their daughters since they themselves have been afflicted, or that a community shares, even if through deferral, a sense of traumatization. For a similar point cf. LaCapra 2004: 42-3, 108; cf. also Hirsch's aforementioned concept of postmemory.

[17] My reading here owes to Reiss's analysis of the way colonizing practices map and remap the colonized space, so that different aspects of material surroundings may be read as powerful ciphers of a shared macrohistory of the Caribbean region (cf. especially the chapter "On Languages, Flowers, and Geography," 329-59).

[18] For his paramount role in the instigating of the Revolution cf. Benítez-Rojo 159-62; Dayan 1995: 29, 46, 70; Nicholls 1979: 31-32. His heroic-tragic stature as a voudou priest, cast almost as a cultural and political anachronism, lies in the fact that voudou practices would be promptly discouraged in post-revolutionary Haiti mostly for political reasons (cf. Benítez-Rojo 162).

[19] What I find potentially enabling in Eyerman's discourse on cultural trauma and the role of collective memory is his reliance on the cognitive models ("supra-individual") of data processing and framing and also on "the impact of material culture" in the process of memory-building (6, 8). This may also offer a panacea against the tenuousness of individual memory which is in Ball's words riddled with contradictory scripts of selectivity, repression, desire, displacement, and condensation (2000: 12).

[20] Note that the point here is not "purity" or "chastity" strictly speaking, but the socially valued "virginity." In 'The Taboo of Virginity' (1918) Freud gives an interesting ethno-psychological account of this apparently prevalent feature of human sexual behaviour in many societies ([1963] 1997: 60-76).

[21] Ellie Ragland's Lacanian reading explains the knot as "central to any interpretation of trauma, insofar as it ultimately resides in the real, while retaining properties of each of the other orders of meaning [i.e. the symbolic and the imaginary]." She relies further on Jeanne Granon-Lafont's contention: "The imaginary, real, and symbolic are placed one on the other such that the fourth exigency which knots them—what Lacan called the order of the symptom—represents the Freudian concept of psychic reality. Insofar as this reality rests on an unconscious fantasy, it remains invisible" (qtd. in Ragland 2001, par. 7).

Afterword: the wheel keeps on turning

[1] Note a recent remark by a British right-wing party spokesman that, as regards the latest newcomers in Great Britain from the new EU member-states, the issue is, one almost sighs in relief, not that of race. Cf. Wheeler.

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