

Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects

Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects:
Colonial and Postcolonial Representations
of the Female Body

Edited by

Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego
and Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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To our mothers and foremothers
who have given us roots to grow and wings to fly

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
David Glover	
Introduction: Repossessing our Bodies and Ourselves	1
Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego and Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz	
Chapter One	13
Toni Morrison's <i>Love</i> : The Celestial Whore and Other Female "Outlaws"	
Justine Tally	
Chapter Two	27
Women's Identity and Migration: Stead's Articles in the <i>Pall Mall Gazette</i> on Prostitution and White Slavery	
Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz	
Chapter Three	55
Black Bodies in History: Bernardine Evaristo's Fiction	
Pilar Cuder Domínguez	
Chapter Four	75
Gender, Migration and Identity: Agnès Agboton's <i>Canciones del Poblado y del Exilio</i>	
Mar Gallego Durán	
Chapter Five	99
Migrations of the Self: The Search for Identity and Wholeness in Bebe Moore Campbell's Novel <i>What You Owe Me</i>	
Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego	
Chapter Six	125
About Face, or, What Is This "Back" in B(l)ack Popular Culture?: From Venus Hottentot to Video Hottie	
Mae G. Henderson	
Index	157

PREFACE

DAVID GLOVER

At the close of the first decade of the new century mass migration is now said to have reached unprecedented levels, with perhaps as many as 200 million people on the move worldwide. This statistic is merely an approximation, a rough guess based upon estimates of the total numbers of both legal and illegal migrants. No-one can be certain of their accuracy, yet in an increasingly unstable and unequal world, in which the men and women known in Italy as *i clandestini* are prepared to risk their lives in order to reach a better, safer place, such statistics ring true and in any case are part of the rhetoric of uncontrollable numbers deployed in debates about immigration. In the West they are figures that the public want to hear, confirming their worst fears, their most cherished stereotypes.

But from a historical perspective, mass migration has always been integral to industrial modernity and the current sense of crisis is the latest episode in a series of long-distance migration flows involving millions of people. Between the middle of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of the Second World War, when modern transportation and communications systems were still developing, around 160 million migrants moved to new locations, two thirds of them to North and Southeast Asia, while the rest travelled mainly from Europe to settle in the Americas. So, with the benefit of hindsight, one might well question whether the basic character of migration has changed in any significant respect. One influential writer who believes that it has is the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. In his important book *Modernity at Large* (1996), Appadurai argues that there has been a convergence between mass migration and the availability of cheaper and more portable forms of electronic media which has brought about a *qualitative* shift in the nature of global culture. By loosening people's ties to particular national or regional locales, these powerful forces have unfettered the popular imagination, generating new social and cultural possibilities that radically transcend the horizons previously set in place by their countries or communities of origin. Despite the constraints and deprivations that inhibit their everyday existence, these diasporic

cultures of mobility are genuinely transnational spaces in which different futures can be glimpsed from a present that is continually being reinvented.

Of course not all of these developments are emancipatory. There are cultures of loss as well as cultures of hope and the mobile phone that sustains the vital social networks that keep these mobile subjects alive are also the means by which an itinerant worker trapped in tidal waters can send a final message to a distant loved one. But Appadurai is surely correct in claiming that the highly mediated conditions under which migration takes place interrupts and unsettles the ways in which the world is imagined – and not only by people on the move. Nevertheless, two caveats should be entered here. Firstly, Appadurai's account of what we might call the migrant imaginary does not go far enough. When emphasising the potency of the imagination, Appadurai aligns it with social fantasy, the collective dreams that can be a spur to action. Yet, in even the most doggedly empiricist accounts of the human mind, imagination is recognised as an indispensable source of *knowledge* since it is this faculty that synthesises the most disparate sense impressions and allows us to make sense of them. And part of the imaginative work of fiction – what makes them works of the imagination – is that they allow their readers to think through and reach a critical understanding of the worlds of others, and perhaps to grasp our own otherness.

Paradoxically, a second, related difficulty with Appadurai's account of these cultures of mobility stems from his presentism, his reluctance to look back and examine these developments from a historical standpoint – though he does recognise the continuing salience of print within the new, primarily electronic, mass media. Since the appearance of Benedict Anderson's exceptionally influential book *Imagined Communities* (1983), we have become acutely sensitive to the close connection between print culture and what it means to feel part of a nation-state, sharing an identity with countless, unknown others. But print has been a crucial resource through which differences can be explored too, not least within the field of gender and particularly of women's writing. Indeed, one could say that Appadurai's historical myopia is also gendered.

As an example, consider the case of *Quicksand*, a seminal text from the Harlem Renaissance by the great African-American writer Nella Larsen. Larsen's novel was published in 1928 just as the "First Great Migration" of African-Americans from the largely rural Southern states to the Northern cities was coming to a temporary halt, a movement involving some 1.6 million people across the USA. *Quicksand* is an intensely personal book, profoundly immersed in Larsen's own complex biography, but it is also an extraordinarily nuanced examination of the relationship

between personal identity and internal migration. Because the most dramatic instances of population movement are between continents, internal migration is often overlooked; but in a rapidly developing nation-state like modern China, where the numbers of people leaving the countryside to seek work in the new industrial towns and cities had reached 130 million by 2008, internal migration is quite literally transforming the cultural and physical landscape.

Although *Quicksand* is not a novel of *proletarianization* as such, Larsen does deal with the trauma of downward mobility experienced by her protagonist Helga Crane after abandoning a secure but seemingly soul-destroying job as a teacher in a black college in the South and moving north. Struggling to make a living in Chicago, Helga finds herself thrown on to the city's unskilled female labour market, making the rounds of the employment agencies, her cultural capital almost wholly discounted. Recent readings of the novel have rightly drawn attention to those recurrent images of the urban crowd in *Quicksand* that form a constant backdrop to Helga's search for a new life and a new identity, drawing her in, inciting her desire, while also inducing a fear of purposelessness, of losing control. Yet one needs to add that the source of this ambivalence lies in the fact that the crowd ultimately figures as a contradictory image of the migrant body itself, a sign of the movement of peoples. Thus, at the end of the novel Helga fades into the crowd when, feeling herself to be utterly lost, she is lured into a revivalist meeting by the promise of salvation, a step that precipitates her downfall, since it fatally initiates her return to the Deep South, effectively reversing the migratory process. On a more positive note, elsewhere in *Quicksand* the crowd appears as a kind of maelstrom of possibilities when it serves as the vanishing point of racial difference. In a memorable Harlem nightclub scene the dancers who whirl by are simply "shades" of a single "swirling mass," a unified "mosaic" of contrasts, the briefest glimpse of truly different world. (In comparison, Helga's extended visit to Europe in pursuit of a fresh start merely provides an occasion for old racial and gender prejudices to be re-articulated in a new register).

In his posthumous collection of essays *La prise de parole* (1994), the philosopher and cultural theorist Michel de Certeau argued that the migrant is the outsider who tests society to its limit, the foreign body that acts as an irritant, forcing us to re-examine the intimate foundations of the ways in which we live. In that sense, the migrant is a force for truth and for self-knowledge. This excellent volume takes the migrant at her word and tries to find new paradigms for a world on the move.

INTRODUCTION: REPOSSESSING OUR BODIES AND OURSELVES¹

SILVIA PILAR CASTRO BORREGO
AND MARIA ISABEL ROMERO RUIZ

The present volume explores the contributions of women to the construction of knowledge through cultural and literary representations in an ever-changing global world as migrant subjects. The essays contained in this book focus on the historical and literary aspects which are connected with the social consideration of the female body in several academic discourses, as framed by factors such as those of gender, class, race and ethnicity, challenging stereotypes about women's representations and women's identities. Women's issues have become more visible in the age of globalization, and the trends of post-modernism and post-structuralism against essentialism are being questioned. Definitions of identity should not ignore aspects such as experience, culture and history which are closely connected with notions of race, class, gender and sexuality.

This collection enters a forum of discussion in which the colonial past serves as a point of departure for the analysis of the contemporary issues mentioned above. The book contends that women's strategies in their search for building possible identities, according to the essays in the book, are seen to be based on their own experiences, seeking the ways in which the public marking and marketing of the female body within the western imaginary contributes to the making of women's social and personal identities.

The different articles contained in this volume will examine issues of gender and boundaries, the realities of women as colonial and postcolonial subjects, and the fragmentation and alienation resulting from migration, racism and colonization analysed through a variety of critical and cultural

¹ The editors wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Research for the writing of this volume (Research Project FEM2010-18142).

perspectives insisting on the diversity and layeredness of women's experiences. As women, we need concepts to question our reality because, as Mohanty reminds us, experiences count.² Thus, we need to produce, as Alexander and Talpade explain, critical tools and ways of reading our realities that produce liberatory knowledge, which "enable collective and self-determination for colonized peoples"³ in order to contest the already existing cultural paradigms in a dialogic fashion. We need to direct the ethics of our thinking towards producing the kind of knowledge which aims at decolonization in the twenty-first century. As Lawrence Grossberg points out⁴, we are facing the challenge of attempting a different way of doing intellectual work, since politics and cultural criticism are self-conceptual, because there is change, and ideas are contested given a certain time period. As different realities are articulated, we need to enter into conversation with the world's social form, with Africa, and Asia, and out of the Western, Eurocentric analysis. Therefore, we need interdisciplinarity in our challenge.

We would like to establish the status of women writers and activists as "cultural workers," because from their frontier-like standpoint they support and encourage cultural interaction. They bring forward a coherent body of knowledge which fosters self-determination and self-representation. The articles contained in this collection follow the context-based approach⁵. They offer ways of reading texts and culture rooted in the form of the story and in the cultural expressions inherent in the tradition out of which the text grows, offering, in many instances, an oppositional reading, questioning conventions and reworking European defining narratives. In other words, we would like to break a new path, together with other scholars, towards an epistemology of anti-colonial feminist struggle.

It is our intention to explore both the dialectic and the dialogic immersed in the relationship between the old and the new, the colonial and

² Mohanty Satya. "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity. On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula Moya & M. Hames-García, (Berkeley: U. Of California Press, 2000), 29-66.

³ Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements," in Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997), ix.

⁴ Lecture given at the Iberian Association of Cultural Studies "Identity and Identification" Conference held in Ciudad Real (Spain), 24 April 2010.

⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. delineates this approach in his book *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

the postcolonial, in their humanist and political dimensions, because we understand that this relationship and its dynamics will help us to theorize and better understand the nuances of hierarchical relations across time and cultures in the era of globalization. We deem it necessary to create new and provocative conversations among humanist scholars involved in transformative political projects in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. These dialogues drive us towards reconsidering neo-colonial practices and the ways in which they reproduce colonial forms of domination that are sexualized, gendered and racialized.

The essays of this volume look at the gaps or the interstices as sites for creating alternative knowledge, theories that allow for the construction of critical, self-reflective selves. As Alexander and Mohanty suggest, an active view of decolonization, coupled with a sense of being part of the collective feminist practice, will enable us to rethink and question patriarchal, heterosexual, colonial, racial and capitalist legacies in order to move forward in our lives as full agents of our struggles,⁶ pushing further the concept of decolonization by actively and consciously taking part in it, and fostering a definition and vision of agency which becomes central to the decolonizing process.

The gendered, raced and classed dimensions, as well as mixed heritages not only of women of colour and belonging to the African diaspora, but also of white women, are important issues for the construction of knowledge and identity in our present multicultural societies, where genealogies or legacies do not mean the traumatic embodied inheritance of domination and resistance, but “an interested, conscious thinking and rethinking of history and historicity, a rethinking which has women’s autonomy and self-determination at its core.”⁷ Therefore, as migrant subjects, women can use these genealogies potentially to change the ways we conceptualize, situate, and engage the Humanities in our scholarly work, and also in our social and cultural policies. In this sense, Mar Gallego’s chapter highlights different aspects in the construction of migrant women’s identities, discussing all the elements in the struggle for adaptation where patriarchal values of women’s subordination to male authority are still prevalent, even in the new culture. In order to acknowledge the crucial interaction between migration and gender, Gallego focuses on the notions of displacement and cultural negotiation, and the different ways in which they affect women, bringing forward

⁶ Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements,” xxxiii.

⁷ Ibid., xvi.

agency as a fundamental issue in her analysis of the poem by Agnes Agboton's entitled *Canciones del poblado y del exilio*.⁸

Within this context, grasping agency, the "person's socially acknowledged right to interpret and speak for her/himself"⁹ is pivotal to achieve any degree of identity. Experiences do not contain meaning in themselves; it is the way that we interpret our experiences through the framework provided by the social narratives among which we live, as well as our past attempts to understand our experiences and lives. Within this framework, the cognitive task of re-memory (laying claim to a past) is dependent on an emotional achievement, on the labour of trusting oneself, one's judgements and one's companions. All in all, it is the capacity of feeling with others. This is why the realist theory of identity helps to explain how we can distinguish legitimate identities from false ones. The realist theory accounts for cultural decolonization, which involves an interrogation of the epistemic and affective consequences of our social location, of historically learned habits of thinking and feeling.¹⁰ Identity-based politics becomes a necessary first step in coming to know what an oppressive social and cultural system hides. Cultural assimilation signifies the repression of alternative sources of experience and value. In this way, from their specific locations, people interpret their own experiences, and from this standpoint, by testing out the accuracy of their interpretations against imposed identity schemes, people of marginalized groups are able to negotiate the social world, gaining more reliable, theory-mediated knowledge about themselves and organizing or reorganizing their identities to fit their material interests. The ways of expression rooted in the community and solid cultural traditions help subaltern groups to construct their worldview, since our access to our remotest personal feelings is dependent on social narratives, paradigms and even ideologies.¹¹ As identities are ways of making sense of our experiences, they allow us to

⁸ *Songs from the Village and Exile*. Our own translation. Agnès Agboton, *Canciones del poblado y del exilio* (Barcelona: Viena, 2006).

⁹ Brent R. Henze, "Who Says Who Says?: The Epistemological Grounds for Agency in Liberatory Political Projects," in Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and The Predicament of Postmodernism*, 230.

¹⁰ Mohanty Satya, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity. On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, 63.

¹¹ Laura Gillman, "Revisiting Identity Politics in Contemporary Mestiza Thought: The Case of Domesticana," in Silvia Castro-Borrego and María Isabel Romero-Ruiz, eds, *Identity, Migration and Women's Bodies as Sites of Knowledge and Transgression* (Oviedo: KRK, 2009), 93-100.

read the world in specific ways: in them and through them we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, and we give texture and form to our collective futures.¹² There is, therefore, a need to theorize not only about identity but also about agency. The concept of agency as “the conscious and ongoing reproduction of the terms of our existence while taking responsibility of this process,”¹³ understood from the dialogic perspective of engaging the world from the vantage point of agency, facilitates wholeness, or the dialogic interaction between self and other, past and present. These ideas about agency and wholeness are the standing-point in Silvia Castro’s chapter which contends that the search for wholeness with the aid of re-memory, double consciousness and agency, become the trigger for an active expression of black women’s spirituality throughout the African Diaspora. She gives emphasis to the importance of women being the owners of their destinies when they engage in the building of their identities, which are shaped by the interaction of time, community and experience, claiming that identity is performative, indeterminant and multiple, grounding her ideas in the post-positivist realist theoretical approach.

Some of the chapters in our collection are devoted to history and its implications for women, especially as female historians nowadays are involved in rewriting women’s history, leaving behind the patriarchal perspective used by most male historians. Women’s history has become an important publishing field since the 1970’s. Before that, only biographies of women deemed to be “relevant” came to light; however, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the economic and social life of the nation-state became a new field of enquiry, the lives of ordinary women of the working-class redirected the focus of interest for research in academia.¹⁴ Nonetheless, this social history was written by men, and women were usually excluded, and when they were represented it was as the victims of sex stereotypes. Feminism, both in Western Europe and the United States of America made a great contribution to the impulse given to the analysis of relevant questions for women such as subordination, oppression and inequalities in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. But, in June Purvis’s words,

¹² Mohanty Satya. “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity. On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition,” in *Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, 29-66.

¹³ Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements,” xxviii.

¹⁴ Purvis, June, ed., *Women’s History: Britain, 1850-1945, An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-4.

women's history takes women as its subject matter and may be written by men [...] and women alike. Women's history is not, therefore, necessarily feminist history, despite the fact that the links between the two have been strong.¹⁵

With the same aim, women's studies were born as an academic field where "the silencing, stereotyping, marginalization and misrepresentation of women" were challenged.¹⁶ Similarly, other voices, apart from those of white, heterosexual middle-class women began to be heard, and political and feminist concerns began to be separated from cultural and historical matters. In this sense, post-structuralism and postmodernism have had an enormous impact on women's history and women's studies as critical frameworks of analysis and debate. It is in this light that "genealogies" and "legacies" are used to rethink and rewrite history on the part of women historians, but this time historicity takes "women's self-determination and autonomy at its core."¹⁷ In this sense, the chapter written by Maria Isabel Romero analyses issues such as women's identity and sexuality, migration and white slavery and prostitution from a colonial perspective, trying to (re)construct the history of working-class women that were labelled as *deviant* by the dominant Victorian discourses, and giving them a new sense of identity according to their own sex and class values.

History, in general, and women's history in particular, is also concerned with migratory movements and their cultural and social implications for women and their identities. Human beings have been migrant subjects throughout history and their movement has been sometimes voluntary, such as when they colonised new territories or sought for a new life or a better economic situation, and at other times people have involuntarily migrated to other territories in order to flee from difficult and extreme situations, such as when they were suffering from poverty or political persecution, even becoming refugees.¹⁸ This human movement has likewise had social and cultural consequences for the individual and specifically for women. Concepts of cultural identity and diaspora have appeared in the scenario simultaneously with citizenship and difference regarding sex, age, and class, as Mar Gallego argues.

¹⁵ Purvis, June, ed., *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945, An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷ Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements," xvi.

¹⁸ Hayter, Teresa, "Open Borders: The Case against Immigration Controls." (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 8.

The articles contained in our volume investigate black and formerly colonized women writers' and activists' emphasis on representing the diversity of women's experiences, and on the validity of forms of self-expression and community rooted in their indigenous cultures which turns into a multi-vocal, fragmented, "frontier style"¹⁹ in response to the more unifying tone of European realism of the nationalist novels of male writers during the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ These women writers push their heroines just as themselves to inhabit borderlines, adjusting to new times and shifting towards new forms of bringing to the fore the specific textures of their own existence and at the same time remaining loyal to the traditions of *home*.

These very traditions have been transferred to the European metropolis by these cultural travellers in a syncretic ethos produced by colonization. The varieties of style and writing technique which compose the migrant text, and which started as a response to colonization, are transforming the colonial metropolis into a hybrid. These writers and cultural activists are usually former colonial citizens by birth, Third World in cultural interest, cosmopolitan, and at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national background. The achievement of these women writers is that they have successfully bridged the gap between the Third and First worlds, establishing themselves at the centre. Their commitment to hybridity has resulted in uniting what colonialism put asunder and emphasizes that dislocation can be culturally regenerative. The positioning of their work both inside and outside Western traditions, both in the past and in the present, moving towards a possible future, entails a spiritual dimension that we might call ancestral spiritualism. "Ancestral spiritualism" signifies the connection of past, present and future, and the life force that makes it possible for the physical and spiritual worlds to be one, as defined by Silvia Castro in her text. And this is what we find in the analysis that Pilar Cuder makes of the non-white British women novelists from the late 1970's onwards who show in their texts the struggle of African women immigrants against British racism and African sexism, being thus the victims of a double discrimination. In particular, she discusses the black British writer Bernardine Evaristo's novels which draw on history to approach the workings of race in Britain. As a consequence, the forgotten and ignored history of the "subaltern" and the marginalized comes to light, and history as genealogy and a source of identity emerges.

¹⁹ Gayatri Spivak, "The letter as cutting edge," cited in Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford UP), 227.

²⁰ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 227.

Cultural identity can be defined in terms of one shared culture. In this sense, it reflects “the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning.”²¹ But there is a second sense to the notion of cultural identity as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’ which also belongs to the future as much as to the past.”²² It is this second sense that is present, in our opinion, in the different chapters included in this book: the concept of an essentialist past is dismantled by new conceptions of the subject being at play in history, culture and literature, and in particular women have claimed their role in the construction of cultural identity through agency. The notion of diaspora emerges “by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”²³ These diasporic identities, which can be seen in the characters that are protagonists of history and literature in our volume, are in a process of constant change, producing and reproducing themselves endlessly, despite being frequently classified as different, deviant or “the other” as part of the discipline that Valerie Smith calls “doing otherness,” that is, investigating “the ways and means of negotiating borders and centers.”²⁴ In the case of women, otherness has been defined in sexual terms in most cases. Thus, women prostitutes and lesbians have been traditionally excluded from mainstream society and have been defined as corrupters of heterosexual white males, neglecting their procreative patriarchal assigned role.

As a result, these migrant subjects become citizens of the world, and the idea of cultural citizens arises. Stevenson’s definition of a cultural citizen as “a polyglot who is able to move comfortably within multiple and diverse communication while resisting the temptation to search for a purer and less complex identity” can be applied to many of the formerly stigmatised women who underwent a transformation to appropriate their true selves.²⁵ There are no homogeneous national cultures any more

²¹ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in Jonathan Rutherford ed., *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 223.

²² *Ibid*, 225.

²³ *Ibid*, 235.

²⁴ Hortense J. Spillers, “Introduction: Who Cuts the Border? Some Readings on “America” in H. J. Spillers, ed., *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, (New York: Routledge), 17.

²⁵ Stevenson, Nick, ed., *Culture and Citizenship* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 2.

because the course of globalization has brought to the fore aspects of inclusion and exclusion, and the movement of people across countries has produced new symbols and cultural representations, which mean new approaches to difference and concepts of the other when talking about race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, or disability and old age, especially when applied to women. These new social movements which have developed notions of identity imposed by dominant cultures and ideas about what is normal, aim to include new representations which are not exclusive or marginalising.²⁶ In this respect, differences between women have to be considered, and the voices of poor, black and third world women must be heard. Following this trend, the characters in Toni Morrison's novel, *Love*, are described as "outlaws" by Justine Tally: they are women who have been controlled by the patriarchal order that oppressed them and were obliged to exercise prostitution, having been raped or sexually abused before. Tally's article points towards the historical digressions present in Morrison's text, which serve the function of retrieving a part of African American history that remains untold and unaccounted for. Concepts such as subordinate, bad or inferior have to disappear in relation to these women, and the positions associated with racism, ageism, sexism, hetero-sexism, elitism and classicism must be banished.²⁷ Violence against women has been the result of these patriarchal attitudes, especially sexual violence.

Sexual abuse and violence are exercised on the female body, which has been the site of knowledge and transgression throughout history and literature. Women's bodies have been disciplined in different ways throughout history and also in recent times as global labourers and sexual workers, within religious fundamentalisms and specifically nationalist discourses, and also within state discourses on patriarchal families, sanctioning their roles as mothers and wives and condemning every form of deviancy from the norm. In other words, women's bodies have been and still are the sites of sin and transgression, discrimination and control, exploitation and commodification, as Maria Isabel Romero argues. In this respect, Mae Henderson's contribution puts the emphasis on the sexual exploitation of the black female body, in particular the "black bottom," historically associated with black racialized sexuality. This body is shaped by the commodification of the marketplace and by its being desired as "the other" by the Western imaginary. For her analysis, she focuses her discussion on two well-known black women, Sarah Baartman (the icon of

²⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁷ Lorde, Audre, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Sister Outsider* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), 114-115.

the Hottentot Venus) and Josephine Baker (*Le Tumulte Noir*), and then on the contemporary “video-hotties,” where the “rear end” becomes the object of attention of the male gaze, giving a biased image of black women in mass popular culture.

Similarly, female bodies have been given different cultural meanings. Following Susan Bordo’s ideas, “different bodies are assigned to different locations, are represented differently in prevailing cultural codes, and are accorded different authority as producers of knowledge.”²⁸ She turns her attention to the body as a “text of culture” which reflects prevailing and enforced cultural notions of gender differences. Accordingly, the female body has to adapt to cultural demands which affect its appearance and behaviour, and “femininity is ideology (a culture’s dominant notions of the feminine) inscribed on the body.”²⁹ According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, the body is a powerful symbolic form where different aspects of a culture are inscribed, and following anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Michel Foucault, the body is a site of social control, producing the “docile body” which is regulated by the norms of cultural life.³⁰ The female body becomes then a docile body through subordination and regulation and physical abuse by patriarchal institutions and gendered cultural productions. As a consequence, notions of sexual identity arise, which, in Judith Butler’s opinion, are associated with sex and gender in the different cultures. These sexual identities are not always natural, and heterosexuality is imposed as the norm. Butler argues that they are socially constructed, but that “established and conventional connections between anatomy and desire, and between sexual activities and ascriptions of identity, are not inevitable.”³¹ However, the female body is still subject to male dominance, exploitation and abuse, as can be seen in some of the papers included in the present volume.

²⁸ Leitch, Vincent B. ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, (New York and London: W-W-Norton and Company, 2001), 2360.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2361.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2362.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2485.

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CHAPTER ONE

TONI MORRISON'S *LOVE*: THE CELESTIAL WHORE AND OTHER FEMALE "OUTLAWS"

JUSTINE TALLY

According to the author herself, Toni Morrison's eighth novel, *Love* (published in 2003¹), deals with "the losses as well as the gains of the Civil Right Movement," an idea ably illustrated by Mar Gallego in her chapter in the Cambridge *Companion to Toni Morrison*.² Taking its temporal "present" as the 1990s, the novel, in traditional Morrison style, contains many historical digressions that retrieve a part of African American history that is seldom mentioned in standard history books. Ostensible the story of Bill Cosey and the women who loved him, the book is set out in nine chapters, each with a title that refers to the relationship the focalizer of that chapter has with this ubiquitous character, who, though not granted a voice of his own in the text, seems omnipresent in the lives of the other characters. Very briefly, the opening voice of "L," a chorus-like figure³ who establishes herself as sympathetic narrator and whose access to information that other characters do not have give her more than a self-importance in the text, is later revealed to be dead though as present in the text as the deceased Bill Cosey. "L" introduces the reader to the setting, Silk and "Sooker" Bay, and mentioning the new contemporary tourist development called "Oceanside—which it isn't" (11).

¹ Toni Morrison, *Love* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003). All other references will be included within the text and will refer to this edition.

² Mar Gallego, "Love and the Survival of the Black Community," in *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, ed. Justine Tally (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 92-100.

³ Shirley A. (Holly) Stave, "Unreliable Narrators and Others: *Love*, Masculinity and (Post)modernism. "Unpublished paper given at the Collegium for African Research conference (Madrid), April 18-21st, 2007.

Equally important is the author's description of the "Police-heads," dark storm-clouds which would appear suddenly and suck the incautious out to sea before they were even noticed:

A clarinet player and his bride drowned before breakfast [...] Whether the bride had played around during the honeymoon was considered and whispered about, but the facts were muddy (7).

Again in traditional Morrison style the initial paragraph concerning the Policeheads condenses much of the information crucial to the rest of the book: black music, control of women, "muddy" facts, the menace and unpredictability of the Police(-heads), the popularity of the resort, whose motto was "The best good time [this side of the law]" (36), and its decline after the Civil Rights movement. Yet while "L" poses the question that sparks her story, the decline of the Cosey Resort—"Listen to me: something else was to blame" (10)—, she finalizes her introduction with an awareness that her story is just "trash," "just another story made up to scare wicked females and correct unruly children" (12). "L"'s version of what happened to the Cozy family is simply her embellishment of the facts and her obfuscation of her role in them. She ostensibly rewrites the story as one that shows "how brazen women can take a good man down" (12), yet there is certain irony here in that ultimately the "brazen" woman will be revealed to be "L" herself.

Though Cozy—now dead—has no voice of his own in the novel, he does have plenty of stories, all divulged from a different point of view, forming a picture of a troubled, enigmatic man who leaves no one unaffected. Chapter 1, "Portrait," introduces Junior Vivianne, a run-away from the correctional where she has spent her adolescence; arriving in the temporal present of the novel, she only "knows" Cosey through his portrait, but feels she has found a special father figure in him. Chapter 2, "Friend," is focalized through Sandler, who works for a while at the resort, but then is invited to Cosey's fishing expeditions where the local sheriff and other big-shots congregate and indulge themselves in Cosey's "counterfeit world invented on the boat" (130). Yet "Sandler's chapter" is also an excuse to introduce the feelings of Vida, his wife and also an employee of Cosey's after he took her out of the cannery and made her a receptionist for nine years, as well as of Romen, his 14-year-old grandson, whose sexual *affaire* with Junior grows in intensity until the final chapter. Chapter 2 is "Stranger," the story of the "Settlement," "a planet away from One Monarch Street" (57), focalized through Junior whose yearning for her father is made palpable through her fascination with the portrait of Cosey, and whose sexual yearning straightforwardly tempts Romen.

Chapter 4, "Benefactor," is Heed's story of her supposed "devotion" to Cosey for "saving" her from her Up-Beach life of poverty, and Christine's early marriage to a soldier who "took her out of there into an organization with the least privacy, the most rules, and the fewest choices—the biggest, totally male entity in the world" (107).

"Lover," Chapter 5, concerns both the intensity of Romen's *affaire* with Junior as well as her attempts at age 15 to escape the abusive sexual advances of the administrator of the Correctional, which resulted in the administrator's fall and her expulsion one week before she was to graduate as an exemplary student. Not wanting to return to the Settlement, Junior meanders her way south to the job at One Monarch Street. (And while the text would have us believe that "monarch" refers to the butterfly, in truth it applies much more easily to the "sovereign" who ruled over all the women). "Husband" fills in the background of the split between Christine and Heed over Cosey's marrying the latter at age 11, effectively sundering their friendship. "Guardian" refers both to Cosey as Junior's "Good Man" as well as Sandler's attempt to counsel Romen, while "Father," Chapter 8, chronicles Christine's adolescence and early adulthood as member of a Black Revolutionary group during the 1960s, and then as the "kept woman" of a wealthy doctor ... until he tires of her, replacing her after three years with another woman, thereby prompting Christine's return to the house on One Monarch Street. The last chapter is entitled "Phantom" and deals with the "disappearance" of Cosey in the lives of all the women except "L" and "Celestial," who are both dead (and also, therefore, "phantoms"). Junior has "betrayed" Cosey's trust in her, and Christine and Heed are at long last reconciled, though Heed dies. All these chapter headings, then, simultaneously refer not only to Cosey but also to some other character(s) as well, while on a metaphorical level Cosey can easily be interpreted to be the manifestation of a patriarchal order that systematically uses and oppresses women.⁴

This brief run-down of characters and plot is only scratching the surface of this richly textured novel. More interesting is its commentary on the historical and contextual milieu, manifest through its various female characters, all of whom are ultimately "outlaws" in one way or another; through them it becomes clear that another story is being told. These allusions to long forgotten and "disremembered" circumstances comprise

⁴ One of my graduate students, John Frerer, astutely pointed out that this patriarch's name differs in only one letter from that of the famous television (beneficent) Black patriarch, Bill Cosby. Are we to infer, then, an appropriation of this kindly character by the white patriarchy to obfuscate the underlying mechanisms of the dominant class? The un-masking of another "imitation of life"?

an undercurrent that pervades the novel every bit as much as the condemnation of pedophilia and patriarchy in the figure of Bill Cosey. It is precisely in the depiction of the female characters that Morrison brings up an exceptional amount of the “historical origins” of a variety of black people currently in the U.S. They are pictures of extremes.

First, and perhaps most striking, is the problematic character of Junior, whose story as a runaway from the “Settlement” vehicles the larger story of reconciliation between Christine and Heed. It is possible to glean from the text certain “clues” as to exactly where this young woman is from: obviously from the north, as Sandler remarks both on her skimpy clothing in the midst of an usual cold snap in the South, and because of her accent. Christine notes the name Junior gives as a surname, “‘Vivianne’ with an ‘e’,” and the shifty eyes, and easily recognizes the answers to her questions as those of a run-away. The “Settlement” is depicted as a lawless place in the hills, from which “unteachable” children come to the school at District 10 for a total of only a few months. Its only unspoken “law” is that no one is allowed to leave. Junior, excelling at and enjoying the academics, is the exception, but with no father and a mother whose interest is limited, she is run down by her uncles for her attempt to escape, and left with a lame foot whose toes are welded together. Susana Vega has written a very interesting essay describing Junior as a typical “trickster” figure, whose lame foot reinforces her identity with Legba, Voudoun god of the crossroads.⁵ But Junior is also an outlaw figure in her escape from patriarchal determination.

In creating a character from the “Settlement,” Morrison is directly calling to a “forgotten,” isolated people whose “District 10” corresponds to northwest New Jersey: The Ramapo Mountain people. Though the text says that “Junior had no past, no history but her own” (197), her lack of knowledge about that past is, in fact, another indication that she is from the Ramapo people. When at school she is asked by a Jewish boy if she is “Colored,” “Junior said she didn’t know but would find out for him” (61). In his book-length study of *The Ramapo Mountain People* (1974) David Steven Cohen contrasts the oral history, traditions and legends of the people themselves with the available “facts” dug up from historical records. The earliest “historical” publication dates from a 1936 booklet entitled “The Origin of the Jackson-Whites of the Ramapo Mountains,” written by a newspaper editor named John C. Storms. In it Storms alleges that the so called “Jackson-Whites” were a mixture of, first, members of

⁵ Susana Vega-Gonzalez, “Morrison’s *Love* and the Trickster Paradigm,” *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, vol. 18 (November 2005): 275-289.

the Tuscarora Indians, originally routed from North Carolina by white settlers in 1713⁶; second, of Hessian mercenaries who fought for the British during the revolutionary war, deserted and found shelter in the mountains; and third, escaped slaves. The name "Jackson-Whites," however, was allegedly attributed to a certain Jackson, who, under contract from the British, supplied the multitude of soldiers stationed in New York with young English females to the tune of thirty-five hundred women "to become the intimate property of the army quartered in New York City."⁷ The story goes that Jackson was to receive two pounds for each female, and he therefore sent his agents to "recruit" women from the brothels of coastal cities in England, or downright capture respectable young women to carry them off "to a life of shame."⁸ However, of a fleet of twenty ships full of young women "pressed into service" one ship was lost at sea. In order to comply with his contract, it was said, Jackson dispatched one ship to the West Indies, "loaded it with negresses (*sic*) collected in the same manner as the others had been, and brought to New York."⁹ All of these women were garrisoned near New York, whose soldiers under attack from the Americans eventually evacuated in 1783. But the women were almost forgotten until at the last minute a soldier was sent racing back to open the gates. This menagerie of "throw-away women" was somehow supposed to have made their way to the Ramapo Mountains.

According to Cohen's research, this account of the origins of the Jackson Whites "was in oral tradition more than ten years before Storms wrote his book;" he writes that this "legend apparently originated in parts over a fifty-year period between 1870 and 1920."¹⁰ The earliest written reference to the Ramapo Mountain People that Cohen found was printed in 1872, in which several "myths of origin" were included. The most credible was the mixture of run-away slave with "fugitives of other descriptions," all antagonistic to the world outside as they settled in the gorges and ravines of these mountains, "and reared children, wilder and more savage

⁶ David Steven Cohen, *The Ramapo Mountain People* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 3.

⁷ John C. Storms quoted in Cohen, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Storms' tale of the women being forced below deck with the sailors fastening the hatches to prevent escape, "even from suicide by leaping overboard," is a story of a different "Middle Passage" that Morrison will pick up on in her ninth novel, *A Mercy*, in the character of Rebekka and her "throw-away" companions on the transatlantic voyage from England to the New World.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

than themselves.”¹¹ Among a number of noted journalists, writers and poets, William Carlos Williams also included another version of the legend in a prose section of his epic poem “Paterson,” published in 1947: “If there was not beauty, there was strangeness and a bold association of wild and cultured life grew up together in the Ramapos: two phases.” Williams describes a harsh life in the hills where “[t]he pure products of America go crazy” and mentions the promiscuity of “young slatterns” who couple with “devil-may-care men,” most condemned to a slovenly life in the hills, unless perhaps one young desolate girl is rescued by an agent, “reared by the state,” and sent out at age fifteen to do housework:

[...] some Elsie—
 voluptuous water
 expressed with broken
 brain the truth about us – [...]
 (Williams, “Patterson”)

(It is easy to speculate that this description is the basis for the character Junior in *Love*.)

However, the various versions of the legends Cohen recounts do not particularly satisfy the name, “Jackson-Whites,” which is an offensive term for the Ramapo people themselves. Anthropologist Frank Speck of the University of Pennsylvania wrote that “some claim that the term is the corruption of a contemptuous title, Jacks-and-whites.” The Vineland Training School study concurred with his hypothesis and explained that freed slaves were contemptuously called “Jacks” and when they began intermarrying with the white outcasts described above, they were spoken of as “Jacks and Whites,” later contracted into “Jackson Whites.”¹² The Ramapo people themselves find this term derogatory, but none of them mentioned the reasons just mentioned. As the Mountain People had no tradition of written history, it is possible that the legends were created to fill in a need for “origins.” On the other hand, because the term is so derogatory, it is more believable that the legend was created by outsiders to this population.¹³

What matters, however, is not so much the imposition of an identity as the writing of legend to create an identity that is acceptable to the people themselves: “Generally, when the Mountain People are asked who they are, they will respond that they are descendants of Tuscarora Indians and

¹¹ Qtd. In Cohen, 12.

¹² See Cohen, 21.

¹³ See Cohen, 22.