

Reconstellating the Postcolonial Through Caribbean-Scottish Gendered Relations

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This paper assumes that pinning down the where and when of the postcolonial is a fruitless abstraction that erases anticoloniality within discourse. It engages issues of race because it is concerned with racism, but it struggles to learn to think in terms that are not racialized, that liberate identity from biological as well as national determinism (see Paul Gilroy, *Against Race*). Likewise, it presumes that determining the male and female of gender is a normative restriction that tends to silence sexuality within representation; following Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, among others, it considers sexual difference as a place of interrogation rather than as foundation of feminist thinking. The paper struggles instead to embrace a feminist postcolonial analysis of literary representations of Caribbean-Scottish relations that foregrounds the anticolonial force of postcolonial discourse and opens up aspects of knowing that problematize gender normativity. It seeks figurations (figures capable of generating action, in the definition of Donna Haraway also embraced by Rosi Braidotti) that may counter the epistemic violence that constitutes the woman and the colonial subject as Other. The paper aims to show that these figurations are found in numerous texts by African-Caribbean women writers such as Joan Anim-Addo, Merle Collins, Jamaica Kincaid, Barbara Lalla, Una Marson, and NourbeSe Phillip.

The ideological grounding of my argument is provided by Gayatri Spivak's forceful statement that "the typecase of the foreclosed native informant today is the poorest woman of the South," and that we should make an effort to move beyond narrative and counter-narrative and towards "the rendering (im)possible of (another) narrative" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 6). In relation to colonialism and with specific regard to Caribbean-Scottish relations, this claim asks: how can history be made in terms of an (im)possible (other) narrative? In other words, what is the truth of colonialism—of nationalism, racism, patriarchy—within such (other) narratives? I invite you to consider African-Caribbean women writers who point the way towards the articulation of an (other) narrative by which we are compelled to revise not only received representations of the British Empire but also the concepts upon which the construction of identity still relies today. Sexual/gendered representations of Caribbean-Scottish relations, I contend, impose a radical transformation of the concepts *race* (around which Caribbeanness is usually constructed) and *nation* (upon which Scottishness is constructed), and the consequent re-telling of the story of colonial conflicts and postcolonial collisions.

In *Caribbean Discourse*, ("*History—Histories—Stories*"), Édouard Glissant contrasts European history with Caribbean "nonhistory"—i.e., the history imposed by enslavement, colonialism and diaspora (62), which erases collective memory but also manages to extend in all directions (67). Like Franz Fanon, who declared "I am not a prisoner of history" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 230) to claim freedom from the racialized order of modernity, Glissant offers a change of framework to liberate the human within contemporary multiculturalism. What does it mean to live outside of history, outside of the history of the Subject that already knows itself, outside of modernity and in the silence of one's own trauma, shock, and dispossession? According to Glissant, this means to quarrel not only with History but also with Literature, because History (as chronological progress) and Literature (as linear narrative) determine the mythological quest for origin, filiation, and legitimacy. He underlines the extent to which Western notions of History and Literature legitimate genealogy, a Genesis that subjects nature to culture in the name of the principle of Ordering (72). Fundamental explanations are produced through ordering narratives of origin that ascribe to Literature the task of turning the Word into Flesh and to History that of defining consciousness. In the

Caribbean, the impossibility of grounding narrative on origins, he observes, allows Literature to initiate "a cross-cultural poetics" (82). Where races are mixed and cultures are creolized, genealogy is complicated and literary/historical narrative develops by transcending Myth. This is fertile terrain for the feminist project of writing the body, of turning Flesh into Word.

In my exploratory essay "Footprints in the Sand" in *Caribbean Scottish Relations*, I have considered the characterization of Scots in Anglophone West Indian Literature, specifically in Una Marson, NourbeSe Philip, Jamaica Kincaid, Barbara Lalla, Merle Collins, and Joan Anim-Addo. Their texts break the silence imposed by the master narrative to begin the telling "an (im)possible (other) narrative" in which the "nonhistory" of the Flesh is reaching for the Word. In Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's words, these authors promote the production of theory which is made in the flesh. They do so, because they regard Caribbeanness and Creolization not merely as culture, but also as miscegenation (in ways suggested also by Edward Baugh). Rather than writing Literature and History in order to narrate Myth, thus, they narrate complex, censored, and unsayable genealogies in order to transform Literature and History. Language emerges from the body not because the body is reducible to language but because the body carries its own signs, its own signifiers, in ways that remain largely unconscious; indeed performativity in these narratives is not just about speech acts; it is also about bodily acts (see Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 198). The result is speech folding into silences, a language we need to learn to listen to and practice.

In the chapter "In History," in *My Garden (Book)*; Jamaica Kincaid (whose origin, she claims, is partly Carib, partly African, and partly Scottish) compellingly reflects upon this epistemic revolution by directly asking:

What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?

Should I call it history? (153)

Kincaid's writing is the writing of her own origin as well as the origin of colonialism in Antigua (as also well argued by Jana Evans Braziel). She writes the autobiography of a mother never known and the biography of a father never met. It all began in 1492, she insists over and over again, and in text after text she offers a new narrative of her (auto)biography. Her (other) narratives are histories and lyrical stories, fictions about herself and autobiographies about others.

A similar twisting of genres occurs in Joan Anim-Addo's work, where poetry and historiography are constantly intertwined. In her contribution to *Caribbean Scottish Relations*, "Creole Family Patterns and Scottish Disassociation," she explores the theme and theorizes creoleness through the telling of family history. The exploration of her own oral family history brings to the realization that there is Scottish blood in the family (Charles Mulzac, a powerful Scotsman in Union Island, was her great great grandfather), whose telling is distilled in verses:

Annie, who they tell us, never left Union,

Dying early, her daughter, Juliana, travelled

To Carriacou to live with her grandmother,

Mammie Jones—is how they called her—

Who kept Juliana until marriage

And the move to Grenada. (*Janie Cricketing Lady*)

The poem ends by emphasizing that "things" are not "marked" in oral history—many remain invisible, others remain nameless. Engaging memory and orality thus implies wrenching meaning and truth out of silences and ambiguities. Focusing on the stories of black women under slavery means uncovering too many relations about which there is nothing to boast:

... a history so terrible
It could only be known through story;
So painful,
Only a song could capture it
Without bruising those who heard. (*Haunted by History*)

These (other) narratives place the black woman's body at the center of colonial encounter, even when she is absent, as in Kincaid's stories telling of a lineage of motherless mothers. Yet, these stories accept the risk of conjugating biology with history—social structures and narratives. Racialized and gendered significations are interrogated to question the politics of representations they are supported by and generate. This move entails a shift of the epistemic frame that declares the possibility for the Word to be made Flesh to embrace instead the feminist struggle to turn Flesh into Word. This results in the blurring of the line separating history from poetry, biography from autobiography, as well as silence from speech.

Merle Collins in *The Color of Forgetting* tells us of a mountainous land and a history of dispossession by tracing the story of the nation of Grenada through family stories. A prophetic voice carries knowledge and memory by speaking in verses, and repeating "the blue crying red in between". The refrain captures the meaning of different generations of Grenadians experiencing dispossession: first the Caribs, then the French and the Scots (who knew no other name but "Arthur's Seat"), and finally the Africans who claimed the magic of the place by calling it "Attanseat":

Carib was like another country. A new country. Always saying something strange and new and mixed up and exciting sounding and frightening. Land confusion, Carib used to say, is not easy confusion, and in this country here, land is like life and the way we inherit this piece, that piece, look at it, the blue crying red in between. The two side not together even when they inside each other. One fighting the other. Lord have mercy! The blue crying red in between (22)

And finally, triumphantly out of so much dispossession and suffering, Carib reassuring us that,

But is all right you know. Is all right as long as we see and we know and we remember. Is young blood. Is the young people to stop the blue from crying red in between. And it going be all right. (213)

Carib's history-making is transformative action—Arthur's Seat becomes Attanseat and memory becomes the force for independence. Just like Edinburgh Castle in Maroon land in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, once owned by a Scottish doctor reputedly executed by his slaves who may have kept the name as an act of re-appropriation according to African practice, a poetics of creolization asks us to listen patiently for meanings that "allow the young people to stop the blue from crying red in between." Nothing is fixed in time and place when Word does not precede Flesh.

Relax, Livingstone—this is not about sex, but just think, your Word, my Silence—matching frequencies so low, so precise only we could hear. (73)

The exhortation is pronounced by NourbeSe Phillip who further invites us to consider that there is no returning to pure Indianness, pure Africanness, pure Englishness, pure Scottishness—never again, if such purity ever was.

Through creolization, these narratives perform a deconstruction of assumed primary ontological frames—such as nature/culture, sex/gender, self/other, and colony/empire. They develop a cosmology which projects a world constituted by lived experiences rather than classifications. Spivak in the chapter "History in *A Critique ...* differentiates representation in the sense of rhetoric as persuasion, *Vertretung*, and of rhetoric as trope, *Darstellung*. A cosmology constituted by lived experiences is both a *Vertretung* and a *Darstellung*; it is a world whose only origin is in the body and whose identity is not always known. It forces us to take into equal consideration discourse, technology, and embodied life.

These narratives show us how "to learn to learn" (G. Spivak) and reframe postcoloniality in ways that force us not only to reframe the *there and then* of the Caribbean and Scotland, but that also compel us to shape the *here and now* of creolization as both a risk and an opportunity of the current process of globalization. They bring the past, even the silenced and severed past, into the present to remind us that citizens are first and foremost people, just like non-citizens. These narratives are not simply a retrieval of the history of the margin. More compellingly, they are writings whose strong sense of rhetoric "works at the silences between bits of language to see what will work as meaning, to ward off a silence filled with nothing but noise (Spivak, 239).

By returning to the material explored in *Caribbean-Scottish Relations*, I have ventured into a tentative theoretical elaboration aimed at reconfiguring the humanistic paradigm. These texts force me to articulate a critique of the quietist discourse of creolization and hybridity, which assumes a sort of evolutionary reliance on the temporal unfolding of colonial divisions—an academic domestication of anti-colonial and anti-imperial critical thinking packaged as postcolonial theory.

African-Caribbean women write in bodies and in language the relationship between Scotland and the Caribbean; in so doing they provide an exemplary challenge to generalization in so far as it represents a postcolonial approach capable of retaining anti-colonial force, because it forces the *there and then* to confront the *here and now*, thus resisting the homogenization of a simplistic postcolonial approach and showing the need for revising some mainstream over-determinations of our theories. The body female and black, says Nourbese Philip in *Genealogy of Resistance*, "where biology and history forever tie in the black s/pace ... birthing modern technologies of power that take life as their objective".

These texts ask us to accept the risk of sharing the quest for knowledge, to find ways to articulate the widest number of shared knowledges that we happen to encounter—ours and theirs together with their own singularities, not subsumed under a homogenizing discourse and yet in conversation, reaching out, projected towards one another. This effort, I claim, helps us to shift our epistemic frame.

In my research on Caribbean Scottish Relations, I have confronted representations of biological interconnectedness and social interactions as I regarded the implications linking empire to colonies—I have analyzed racial stereotyping and prejudice from a reader-response perspective. My exploration has been carried on through readings of literary texts which foreground that national business is often also family business. They make us face the true facts of the slave-women's bodies as property of white men in

plantation colonies. They oblige us to regard miscegenation as we engage gendered representations of this tragic history. They enable us to venture into a production of theory which is made in the flesh—that is, as Luce Irigaray exhorted us over thirty years ago, to think about sexual difference as production of meaning and not simply as biological reproduction.

These writers have brought me close to the often painfully dramatic and at times fruitfully transformative particulars of a history in which the bodies of women violently exploited under the regime of the economics of slavery have started to speak. It is up to us to listen. To learn to listen. In order to learn to learn. Also to learn to move towards “the rendering (im)possible of (another) narrative” of Scottish identity, one that is capable of putting into words the history of the first British colony as well as its complicity with imperial power. Keeping race and nation within fixed categories that jointly work to separate what is interrelated is repeating History and Literature that perpetrate old Myths—useless, even dangerous, in the multicultural and transnational context of globalization in which racisms and nationalism continue to perpetrate victims.