

NOTIONS OF IDENTITY: HYBRIDITY VS. CULTURAL CONSOLIDATION

**NOTIONS OF IDENTITY: HYBRIDITY VS. CULTURAL CONSOLIDATION
IN SOME
BLACK POST-COLONIAL AND WOMEN'S FICTION**

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (1994)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Notions of Identity: Hybridity vs. Cultural Consolidation in Some
Black Post-Colonial and Women's Fiction

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 112

Abstract

This thesis involves a theoretical study of the dynamics of cultural interaction as represented in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Erna Brodber's *Myal*. Specifically, it considers the role that a *dialogue* between critical theory (post-colonial and feminist) and literary practice can play in the evaluation of two distinct conceptions of cultural difference: identity politics, understood as positing an essential binaristic difference between an ethnic or gendered Self and Other, and hybridity theory, which conceives of Self and Other as mutually constitutive and inescapably interconnected. While this thesis demonstrates some of the ways in which hybridity theory can revise and expand contemporary critical readings of the novels under study, it also demonstrates how literature can problematize the universalizing claims of *both* hybridity theory and identity politics, thus stressing the importance of sociohistorical and literary/narrative contexts to the evaluation of strategies of resistance to colonial and/or patriarchal regimes.

After an introductory chapter dealing with questions of theory, three subsequent chapters discuss themes of hybridity and cultural separatism in the novels by Ngugi, Hurston, and Brodber, respectively. Each of these latter chapters involves a detailed analysis of the colonial and/or patriarchal discourses represented in the particular novel or novels under study. These analyses include discussions of some of the ways in which dominant discourses attempt to co-opt cultural difference and impede equitable

intercultural hybridizing exchange by *polarizing* Self and Other in a binaristic economy. Each chapter also considers the presence of internal contradictions in dominant discourses and the implications of such contradictions for a revolutionary politics. On the basis of these discussions, this thesis considers the relative efficacy of hybridity and identity politics as *strategies* of resistance, demonstrating that different contexts call for different approaches to revolutionary theory and practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mary O'Connor, for her careful reading of early drafts of this thesis, and for the many helpful critical insights and suggestions she offered me during the course of my research and writing.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Sahra Hutchings, who continually helps me to keep things in perspective.

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My own conviction is that identity politics are indeed a risky business, but I cannot ultimately prescribe the annihilation of such politics. My position is that of an anti-essentialist who holds that identity or the assertion of essence is often *necessary* to an effective revolutionary politics,¹ for I believe that collective solidarity is a prerequisite for effective political action. At the same time, however, I am convinced that cultural² authenticity or purity can only be constructs in this increasingly syncretic postmodern world, and that, if violent cycles of conquest and revolution are ever to end, cross- or inter-culturality must be embraced as a solution to the impasse.

The notion of cross-culturality is central to hybridity theory. Such theory, however, should not be confused with the idea of a cultural "melting-pot" wherein occurs the ultimate eradication of difference. For, as Homi Bhabha, the leading contemporary theoretician of hybridity, argues, "hybridity is never simply the question of the admixture of pre-given identities or essences" (1990a, 314). Rather, hybridity theory postulates the mutual *constitution* of cultural identities--the interconnectedness of Self and Other--from the perspective of a non-essentialist, non-binarist conception of difference. Bhabha argues persuasively that *all* identities are internally complex and heterogeneous (Appiah 1994, 5). As Kwame Anthony Appiah so succinctly puts it in his review of Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, "the strategy of hybridity proposes...that the Other is already 'within' the Self" (5).

In this study, I will consider issues of intercultural hybridity versus identity politics in relation to post-colonial and/or women's struggles for emancipation in the following literary texts: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988). These novels depict and are produced from within widely disparate contexts throughout the black diaspora from Kenya to the southern United

States to Jamaica.³ Thematically, they range from the overtly political (the Kenyan Revolution) to the highly personal (but nonetheless political) (Janie Crawford's struggle for personal fulfilment); and they are set on stages that vary in size from the national to the regional. What these texts have in common is that they each deal with twentieth-century issues of intercultural relations in the contexts of racial, anti-colonial and/or women's emancipatory struggles. Hence, I may consider in my study the rich theoretical parallels and contrasts pertaining to the relationship between interculturality and the forms of revolutionary movement depicted in and among these texts. Because my space and scope here are limited, however, I must economize my reading strategy as follows: I will begin by analyzing the dynamics of interculturality in Ngugi's novel, concentrating primarily on its topical context of revolutionary nationalism. Next, I will devote a chapter to Hurston's novels, focusing on their portrayal of inter-gender relations and female emancipatory struggle. Finally, because Brodber's *Myal* offers such a rich, integrated portrayal and problematization of *both* colonial and gender divisions, I will analyse this novel for its feminist as well as its post-colonial positions.

In my reading of *A Grain of Wheat*, I will point out some of the ways in which the text demonstrates how cross-cultural hybridization overwhelmingly favours the colonizer in the rigidly polarized context of Ngugi's colonial Kenya. Because of the rigidity of colonial discursive and military structures in this setting, intercultural exchange is asymmetrical, and the indigenous Kenyans are affected by British culture to a much greater extent than vice-versa. Arguably, then, the reality of British cultural hegemony makes an identity-based or separatist revolutionary strategy crucial to the transformation of Kenyan social reality.

I have chosen *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as part of an effort to rectify its relative neglect within the institutional ranks of academic criticism. Although *Their Eyes Were*

Watching God, with its presentation of the emancipation of its protagonist, Janie Crawford, has been much celebrated by feminist critics in recent years as a landmark of black women's writing, it is my contention that the events depicted in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* are integral to, and help set the stage for, the kind of social transformation depicted in the later novel. In my analysis of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, I will focus on some of the ways in which John Pearson's patriarchal assumptions concerning the polarized nature of gendered identity and the social division of gender roles are undermined and subverted in a kind of deconstructive or hybridizing process which causes his downfall and subsequent transformation. Despite these events, however, the female protagonist, Lucy Potts/Pearson, fails or is unable to alter her own oppressed situation, for, unlike Janie Crawford, she does not assert an independent sense of identity necessary to free herself from her husband's tyrannical world-view. *Their Eyes*, then, completes the process initiated in the earlier novel, demonstrating that, although hybridity can encourage positive change by undermining polarized patriarchal structures, an assertion of independent identity is ultimately necessary to the accomplishment of female emancipation and gender equality.

I must admit here that my choice of Brodber's *Myal* as the final text in my study has been influenced by my partiality for non-violent and non-divisive forms of intercultural rapprochement. *Myal* resolves intercultural conflicts through its breakdown of rigid binary divisions (good/evil, male/female, white/black, inside/outside, etc.) upon which oppressive forms of identity and counter-identity may be asserted. The strategies of revolution which Brodber depicts in this novel lead to the dismantling of systems of hierarchy, enabling a radical transformation of the community of Grove Town and its environs and the establishment of identity based not on division but on community,

equality, and ceaseless dialogue between and among the representatives of formerly disparate cultural groups.

In the latter part of the twentieth century a certain metaphor of coloniality has been employed to describe women's political situations and concomitant struggles for autonomy and self-determination within patriarchal systems. The rhetoric which surrounds this metaphor in some instances addresses the possibility of recovering "authentic" pre-patriarchal identities which have been disrupted by the imposition of male-centred structures. Such a project finds a parallel in post-colonial efforts at cultural retrieval in the wake of anti-colonial struggle. In this context, Ngugi is emphatic about the implications of imperialism's most deadly weapon--the "cultural bomb" (1986, 3)--which, he argues, has been designed "for the flattening or fossilisation of its victims' 'cultures'" (1993, 43) as part of a Western program of "cultural genocide" (1986, 24). Ngugi explains the dire effects of Western cultural imperialism on indigenous peoples of Africa, declaring that the cultural control which is its aim has "always ensured for the oppressor nation power over the transmission of a certain ideology, set of values, outlook, attitudes, feelings etc, and hence power over the whole area of consciousness" (1993, 51). Cultural imperialism thus "undermine[s] peoples' belief in themselves" (43), encouraging them to forsake their own cultural heritages while leaving them increasingly vulnerable to outside influences. From this revolutionary perspective, then, cultural imperialism can be seen as a form of spirit thievery which enables black identity to be, as Frantz Fanon has put it, "overdetermined from without" (1952, 116)--even at the interiorized level of black consciousness.

In patriarchal societies, female identity has been subject to similar "colonialist" distortions. Alluding to Freud's discourse on feminine sexuality, Hélène Cixous has

argued, for example, that men's sexuality is "a fantasized obligatory virility meant to invade, to colonize...[the] woman as a 'dark continent'" (349). The result of this colonization, as Luce Irigaray points out, is that a woman's identity "is imposed on her according to models that remain *foreign* to her" (85 my italics). The term which best describes this process of male imposition in the realm of female identity, I would argue, is Judith Fetterley's coinage "immascultation." For Fetterley, this term refers to the ways in which women are taught, in male-centred economies, "to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values" (497). For women, the consequences of this process are as disastrous as those of Ngugi's "cultural bomb": "Intellectually male, sexually female," Fetterley declares, "[a woman] is in effect no one, nowhere, immasculated" (498).

In order to combat the processes of cultural imperialism and immascultation described above, certain strains in both post-colonial and feminist criticism have called for and supported what might be referred to as separatist agendas of cultural retrieval enroute to reclaiming a lost sense of identity or cultural specificity. In the context of African resistance, as Cardinal Paul Zoungana has put it, "the urge to reconnect in a deep way with Africa's cultural heritage" comes as "a matter of constructing a new African society, whose identity is not conferred from outside" (cited in Appiah, 74). Nigerian dramatist and critic Wole Soyinka refers to this process of reconnection as positive "self-apprehension": "the apprehension of a culture whose reference points are taken from within the culture itself" (1976, viii). For Soyinka, self-apprehension involves "a reinstatement of the values authentic to [African] society, modified only by the demands of a contemporary world" (x).⁴ Although Ngugi agrees to the necessity of this kind of programme, as is evident from the title of his critical text *Decolonizing the*

Mind, he admits that the project is formidable: "The images of this world and his place in it implanted in a child take years to eradicate, if they ever can be" (1986, 17).

A similar project of self-apprehension has been articulated in recent years by a number of feminist scholars and female authors. Mary Daly has spoken emphatically about the need to enact a process of exorcism in order to dispel "the mind/spirit/body pollution...which erase[s] our Selves" (315); Fetterley, using a similar vocabulary, speaks of the need "to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us" (498); Cixous wishes to eradicate the "deadly brainwashing" (336) of patriarchal conditioning. Like self-apprehension in post-colonial contexts, these purgative processes are seen as integral to the establishment of what bell hooks carefully refers to as "the ability to see and describe one's own reality" (24) (I shall discuss hooks in greater detail later in this chapter). What both feminist and post-colonial projects of self-retrieval share in common is the presupposition that a pre-patriarchal or pre-colonial space of self-identification exists and may be accessed through careful, methodical "cleansing" of externally imposed influences.

In the post-colonial world, influenced and increasingly constituted as it is by the colonizing and homogenizing effects of mass culture and global economics, the retrieval of cultural roots is complicated, however, by what James Clifford refers to as "the twentieth century's unprecedented overlay of traditions" (9); this overlay of traditions is a consequence, obviously, of the unprecedented intercultural confrontations which occurred on a global scale during the European colonial era; it has been further encouraged in the contemporary world through the global expansion of intercultural mobility caused by migrant labour, immigration, urban sprawl and tourism (13), not to mention refugee situations prompted by war. The reality of cross-cultural syncretism in the post-modern world has prompted Homi Bhabha to pose the following highly

pertinent questions concerning the "anguish associated with vacillating boundaries--psychic, cultural, territorial": "Where do you draw the line," he asks, "between languages? between cultures? between disciplines? between peoples?" (1990b, 202). In an era where traditional boundaries are becoming increasingly uncertain, the attempt to retrieve effaced culture is a difficult business at best.

Arguably, for a feminist politics, the effort to reformulate a pre-patriarchal "femaleness" is fraught with even greater problems than those confronting a colonized ethnic or tribal group. For unlike ethnic-based cultures wherein a distinctive sense of Self can be postulated as indeed having had an historical existence involving a discrete language and ideology or world-view, women, in general, have existed within and been defined by patriarchal social orders throughout recorded history. As Irigaray puts it, "one would have to dig down very deep indeed to discover beneath the traces of this civilization, of this history, the vestiges of a more archaic civilization that might give some clue to woman's sexuality" (25). Indeed, in considering the question of a specifically feminine unconscious, Irigaray declares that "before asking about elaborating an unconscious that would be *other* with respect to the unconscious as it is now defined, it is appropriate, perhaps, to ask whether the feminine may not be to a large extent *included* in that unconscious" (123, my italics). Irigaray addresses the possibility, that is, that, in terms of sexual difference, the unconscious might *already* be a syncretic space. In the light of these considerations, any effort to retrieve a submerged women's culture becomes as much a process of invention⁵ as of retrieval.

In this thesis I will address the issue of the assertion of identity--whether as an inventive or recuperative process--as it is dealt with in each of the four novels under study. In Ngugi's novel, notions of authentic identity are shown to be oppressive when asserted by the colonizer but of some strategic value when asserted by the revolutionaries

of Uhuru who attempt to reformulate a lost sense of cultural specificity. Thus, Ngugi suggests that positionality must play a central role in the evaluation of identity politics. In Hurston's novels, rigid patriarchal notions of gendered identity and role patterns are shown to be oppressive, while the assertion of a re-defined femininity (here largely the result of an inventive, experimental and "deconstructive" critical process) is shown to contain emancipatory potential. In Brodber's *Myal*, on the other hand, self-apprehension in the form of the accessing of any form of authentic or delimited identity is rejected in favour of syncretic, communal forms of identification of Self and Other.

While cultural retrieval and the assertion of a specific identity aim to transform the situation of oppressed cultures through the reconstruction of the primal integrity of the *oppressed* term in the colonial or patriarchal binary equations of colonizer/colonized and male/female, hybridity theory, in its post-colonial critical context, deconstructs these equations, dealing with the transformation of *both* colonizer and colonized together during the course of their mutual interaction. In this sense, the political *goal* of hybridity theory is similar to that of feminism as Toril Moi defines it: "Feminism," Moi declares, "is not simply about *rejecting* power, but about *transforming* the existing power structures" (148, my italics). Although the role of hegemony (which I shall discuss later in this chapter) must be considered in any study of inter-cultural relations (as it raises the likely possibility that cultural exchange will be uneven or asymmetrical), hybridity theorists like Homi Bhabha are wary of giving hegemony too much emphasis. According to Bhabha, no colonizing discourse is impenetrable. Bhabha contests the notion that colonial discourse is unified by "the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power," as this would necessarily imply the integrity and unity of "the subject of colonial enunciation" (1983, 25). Despite colonialism's machinery of oppression and domination,

the colonial subject, for Bhabha, remains split and therefore vulnerable to anti-colonial subversion.

Because the notion of the split subject of hybridity presupposes a poststructuralist understanding of language and subjectivity while identity politics, in general, adheres to the humanist position which posits the subject as unified essence, it is necessary here, before going on to define and explicate hybridity theory and its relevance to post-colonial and feminist resistance in greater detail, to recapitulate briefly the differences and disagreements between poststructuralist and essentialist notions of subjectivity.⁶

Traditionally, the human subject has been seen as the originator or author of the language and ideology s/he speaks. The person who subscribes to the humanist tradition considers language to be an external, transparent tool capable of reflecting reality and "imagines," as Chris Weedon puts it, that s/he is rational and unified—"the source rather than the effect of language" (31). In opposition to such a conception of language and subjectivity, poststructuralism sees the human subject as necessarily *already* constituted by, and existing within, the complex network of intersecting and contradictory discourses which precede it. The poststructuralist, that is, sees language as pervasive and the subject as fragmented rather than unified—the effect, rather than the cause, of its discourse. In short, a humanist-based essentialism postulates that there is an *essential* human element (biological or metaphysical) which precedes discourse and which is constitutive of the individual (i.e., undivided and indivisible) human subject, while a relativistic poststructuralism embraces the idea that humans, as products of numerous circulating discourses, are overdetermined by, and infinitely deferred⁷ within, these discourses which constitute them as (fragmented) subjects.

Because poststructuralist notions of language refute the unity of the subject, the construction of meaning in language may be conceptualized, from this perspective, as a

social process. Like V. N. Voloshinov, Bhabha argues for the primacy of social context to all linguistic utterance. According to Voloshinov, the word "*is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*" (284, Voloshinov's italics). Bhabha argues that, between addresser and addressee, there exists a "Third Space" within which the production of meaning occurs. This Third Space, he declares, "represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" (1994, 36). Moreover, Bhabha continues, this Third Space--the location of the "pact of interpretation" (36)--"ensure[s] that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" and that "the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). It is in this space which both joins and separates Self and Other that the mutual constitution or hybridization of the speaking subject occurs. As Bhabha declares in an exciting but characteristically cryptic passage, "by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (39).

Opponents to Bhabha's theory of hybridity argue for the impenetrability of hegemonic discourse. Abdul R. JanMohamed declares, for example, that the European imagination operates according to a rigidly polarized "manichean" economy of perception which pits the "putative superiority of the European" against "the supposed inferiority of the native" (1985, 63). From this perspective, the European *always* sees the Other as the inverted "double" of its own self image.⁸ (This is somewhat similar to the operations which underpin the Freudian conception of castration, which, as Irigaray has demonstrated, often defines the feminine "as a negative image that provides male sexuality with an unfailingly phallic self-image" [70].) In the novels I will analyze in this

study, such a dynamic can be seen to be operative, to a certain extent, in the conceptions of Self and Other which such characters as John Thompson, John Pearson, and William Brassington attempt to embrace, for these conceptions posit the Self as the positive norm and the Other as its negative opposite.

If the process of manichean "doubling" which JanMohamed describes here constitutes the colonizer's representation of the fullness of life, hybridity, in Bhabha's formulation, "is the perplexity of the living" in culturally heterogeneous contexts wherein "the representation of the fullness of life" is "*interrupt[ed]*" (1990a, 314, my emphasis).⁹ What critics like Bhabha and Sandra Drake introduce into this equation of "doubling" is the possibility that the colonizer or patriarchal male is aware at some level that the negative image he attributes to the Other is in fact an aspect of Self--an aspect which represents, as Drake puts it, "both profound wishes and profound fears" (22-3). Here, in order to conceptualize this awareness and its implications for the discourses of colonialism and patriarchy, a general understanding of the "formative mirror phase" in Lacanian psychoanalysis can be helpful.

In the mirror phase, as Bhabha argues, "the subject finds or recognizes itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational" (1983, 29). That is, in recognizing itself for the first time, the subject experiences a pleasurable sense of narcissistic attachment for its image; simultaneously, however, the identification of this image as discrete Self disrupts the subject's sense of plenitudinous and undifferentiated association with the mother, and the image is, therefore, also experienced as threatening. And so, alongside of its narcissistic attraction, the subject's reflection at the mirror phase is also the site of anxious and aggressive identification; and this ambivalence, according to Bhabha, carries with it implications for all future forms of identification, whether internal or external.

Bhabha goes on to argue that *both* forms of identification, narcissism *and* aggressivity,

constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercised in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it. Like the mirror phase 'the fullness' of the stereotype--its image *as* identity--is always threatened by 'lack'. (1983, 29)

Although the colonizer attempts to identify the native or subaltern Other according to rigid categories which relegate him or her to the status of the subordinate term in the colonial binary, as JanMohamed and others have argued,¹⁰ such an essentializing move, according to Bhabha, is ultimately untenable because of the inescapably uncertain and ambivalent nature of the process of identification itself. In Kristevan terms, the subject's "*interiorization of the founding separation of the socio-symbolic contract*" introduces a "cutting edge into the very interior of every identity whether subjective, sexual, ideological, or so forth" (1979, 210). As Bhabha puts it, "the very place of identification...is a place of splitting" (1990b, 187).

Hence, colonial authority, in its very reliance upon manichean modes of identifying Self and Other, in its desire "to *fix* cultural difference in a containable, *visible* object" (Bhabha 1990b, 193), displays an inescapable ambivalence. As Trinh T. Minh Ha argues, "the line dividing *I* and *Not-I*, *us* and *them*, or *him* and *her* is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be" (94). Trinh adds that, "*categories always leak*" "[d]espite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend [them]" (94, my italics). Outside and inside *cannot* be identified as mutually exclusive.

Ashcroft offers a summarizing explanation of the implications of this "leakage" for colonialist discourse which is worth quoting here at length:

In order to maintain authority over the Other in a colonial situation, imperial discourse strives to delineate the Other as radically different from the self, yet at the same time it must maintain sufficient identity with the Other to valorize control over it. The Other can, of course, only be constructed out of the archive of "the self", yet the self must also articulate the Other as inescapably different. Otherness can thus only be produced by a continual process of..."repetition and displacement" and this instigates an ambivalence at the very site of imperial authority and control. (1989a, 103)

Any reminder, furthermore, of the ambivalent nature of colonial--or patriarchal--authority must always be a threat to that authority (103). The disruptive potential of the ambivalent identification which underpins authoritarian structures, then, makes it possible, as Bhabha argues, "to redeem the pathos of cultural confusion"¹¹ into a strategy of political subversion" (1990b, 205). It is possible, perhaps, to explore Appiah's claim that "the colonisers were never as fully in control as our elders allowed them to appear" (9) in the light of these comments.

An analysis of the implications of the perplexity produced in agents of colonial and patriarchal discourse by ambivalent identification in the cross-cultural encounter will be of central importance to my consideration of the intercultural dynamics represented in each of the novels here under study. In *A Grain of Wheat*, I will focus on the undermining of the colonial mind-set embodied by characters such as the British colonial District Officer John Thompson; *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will provide me with a forum for the analysis of the subversion of the patriarchal mind-set in such socially powerful figures as John Pearson and Joe Starks; and, in *Myal*, I will consider some of the ways in which the Reverend William Brassington's colonial and patriarchal conditioning is disrupted and altered within contexts of cross-cultural interaction.

As I mentioned earlier, the role of hegemony must be considered in any discussion of the efficacy of identity politics versus hybridity as revolutionary strategies in oppressive intercultural contexts. In a discussion not unrelated to my concerns in this study, Talal Asad has argued that "because the languages of Third World societies...are 'weaker' in relation to Western languages..., they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around" (cited in Mohanty, 10). Asad's insight can be applied to notions of cultural hybridization in general. It is necessary when considering syncretic possibility, that is, to ask the following question: How does power enter into and affect processes of hybridity? In the context of a discussion of post-colonial Africa, Appiah addresses this concern when he warns us that we must beware of "asymmetries of cultural power" (111) which tend to favour the privileged term in the colonial binary equation in so far as processes of inter-cultural exchange are concerned. In *A Grain of Wheat*, there are instances which demonstrate some of the ways in which the politically dominant culture is able to resist being influenced by the culture of the colonized, so that cross-cultural exchange remains uneven. (In terms of religious exchange, for example, the indigenous culture is shown to absorb Christian influences, while no mention is made of British culture being significantly influenced by traditional Gikuyu beliefs and practices.) Any discussion of hybridity, then, must be informed by an awareness that hegemonic asymmetry can cause syncretic processes to become largely assimilative rather than transformative in nature.

In hegemonic regimes, peaceful conciliation or rapprochement between cultures can only occur when hybridizing processes lead to intercultural dialogue. It is important to remember that one reaction to the perplexity and paranoia engendered by the intercultural encounter can be a violent denial or repression of the truths it reveals. Although such a denial would have grave implications for the colonizing psyche, it

would still remain tantamount to co-optation of Otherness, a process which Wlad Godzich defines as occurring when a "confrontation with Otherness" seeks "to avoid this Otherness at all cost by elaborating a complex strategy for its containment and eventual reduction to Sameness" (7). Here, Bhabha might argue on postmodern psychological grounds that paranoia can never ultimately maintain positions of power (1990b, 204), but such an observation would probably be of little comfort to the oppressed person who is suffering *in the present*. As Toril Moi has pointed out, there is a need for a correlation between a utopian *theory* and the "existing repressive structures" of a given society (122-3).

Not all theoreticians of cultural self-apprehension are fundamentally opposed to hybridity. Both Ngugi and Soyinka see cultural retrieval with its separatist ideology as a means rather than an end in itself, for although they are painfully aware of the dangers inherent in colonial forms of cultural imposition, they also acknowledge the potential benefits of cross-cultural processes which take place in equitable contexts of economic and political self-determination. Soyinka asserts that cultural self-apprehension is not racist; rather, localized attacks against "alien contamination" can operate as a "preparatory exercise for the liberation of the mind" (112). Once a pre-colonial African world-view is reformulated, a process of transposition towards a "modern potential" becomes possible (115). In a similar vein, Ngugi discusses the importance of teaching Nigerian children about their own cultures. He writes that when the African child finally attains

a state of harmony between himself, his language and his environment as his starting point, he can learn other languages and even enjoy the positive humanistic, democratic and revolutionary elements in other people's cultures without any complexes about his own language, his own self, his environment. (1986, 29)

For both Ngugi and Soyinka, a strong sense of indigenous self is a crucial prerequisite to the establishment of equitable cross-cultural growth.

Many feminist theoreticians also view cultural retrieval and women's separatism as provisional exercises enroute to a larger social transformation.¹² In suggesting that women should undertake a certain strategic assumption of separatism, Irigaray explains that "with women-among-themselves¹³ ...something of a speaking (as) woman is heard."¹⁴ This accounts for the desire or the necessity of sexual non-integration: the dominant language is so powerful that women do not dare to speak (as) woman outside the context of non-integration" (135). Female separatism, then, enables women to define themselves among themselves in order "to forge for themselves a social status that compels recognition" (33). As I will argue in my chapter on Hurston, such a statement accurately describes some of the implications of the speaking situation between Janie and Pheoby as delineated in the framing plot of *Their Eyes*. And yet, for Irigaray, as for Hurston, separatism remains "a *tactical option* rather than a final telos" (Fuss 69); Irigaray warns her readers that if the aim of female separatism "were simply to reduce the order of things, even supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness: to phallograticism" (Irigaray 33). Trinh concurs, arguing that a separate female essence "remains...the safest basis for racist and sexist ideologies" (101). As with the decolonizing processes prescribed by Ngugi and Soyinka, separatism, for critics like Irigaray and Trinh, is provisional in that it lays the groundwork for a larger social transformation.

On a theoretical level, much of the argument between identity politics and hybridity boils down to the classic postmodern dispute within academic criticism between essentialist and (de)constructionist positions. On the anti-essentialist side of the debate, critics like Appiah and Kristeva argue in favour of the deconstruction of racial

and sexual categories, stating that essentialism underpins forms of binary thinking (male/female, white/black, rational/emotional, civilized/savage, etc.) which have enabled imperial and patriarchal structures to justify the subordination of blacks and women by positing them as inferior terms to the privileged and normative white/male side of the binarist equation. Appiah bases his repudiation of race as a category upon "the same logic that has led us to speak of gender--the social construction out of the biological facts--where we once spoke of sex," arguing that "a rational assessment of the evidence requires that we should endorse not only the logic but the premises of each argument" (71-72). For Appiah, race "works as a sort of metaphor for culture, and it does so only at the price of biologising what is culture, ideology" (72), thereby insidiously reinscribing the oppressive discourse of racism. A similar danger is inherent in any feminist appeal to an essential femaleness, for such appeals risk repeating (or inverting the logic of) the sexist patriarchal gesture which has traditionally inscribed female difference in terms of biological inferiority. Kristeva's assertion that "*woman as such* does not exist" (cited in Moi, 165) is matched by Appiah's declaration that "there are no races" (Appiah 75). Both of these critical approaches to the study of difference can be seen as strategic in that they overtly resist and refuse the ideological tenets of sexist and racist discursive formations, removing the basis for a monolithic bigotry and undermining any notion of cultural purity which, when taken to extremes, can provide the logic which justifies such horrors as the pogrom or "ethnic cleansing."¹⁵

Despite the above-mentioned advantages of deconstructive approaches to the study of cultural difference, the refusal of essential identity has some rather serious problems. In her text entitled *Yearning*, bell hooks reminds us that a central aspect of cultural imperialism is the denial to oppressed groups of a critical voice that might combat negative stereotyping and enable concrete change:

Considering that it is as a subject one comes to voice, then the post-modernist focus on the critique of identity appears at first glance to threaten and close down the possibility that this discourse and practice will allow those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonization and domination to gain or regain a hearing. (1990, 28)

As a possible solution to the impasse between deconstruction and identity politics, hooks, who is well aware of the ways in which essentialism can uphold and perpetuate harmful stereotypes, argues that we should endeavour "to critique essentialism while emphasizing the significance of 'the authority of experience'" (29). As a suggestion concerning how such a programme might be accomplished, hooks quotes Linda Alcoff: "If we combine the concept of identity politics with a conception of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as non-essentialized and emergent from a historical experience" (20). Certainly, as I will point out in the pages ahead in my analysis of the novels under study, the assertion of identity has different implications, depending on the position in the social hierarchy of the person or group concerned.

Certain poststructuralist-oriented critics have attempted to resolve the debate between deconstruction and essentialism in another strategic manner, agreeing with Stephen Heath's assertion that "the risk of essence may have to be taken" (cited in Fuss, 18). Gayatri Spivak goes so far as to argue that essentialism is a *fact* of human existence. In order to conduct our daily lives and to communicate with those around us, she contends, we must constantly assume some kind of identity and some sort of political position. And so, as Spivak puts it, "since it is not possible not to be an essentialist, one can self-consciously use this irreducible moment of essentialism as part of one's strategy" (1987, 109). For Spivak, a "self-conscious" essentialism would be informed by a "deconstructive awareness" which would act as a political safeguard against the

privileging of a homogeneous concept of female identity and the movement toward an orthodox or totalitarian feminism that such a concept might imply (105). For, as she states elsewhere, "[u]nless one is aware that one cannot avoid taking a stand, *unwitting* stands get taken" (1981, 174-75).

This is the spirit in which I intend to approach my discussions of intercultural hybridity and identity politics in the novels I have chosen. Indeed, I am attracted to Tzvetan Todorov's definition of hybridity for this very reason; for, as Todorov puts it, a truly hybridized context allows for *both* "difference in nature but equivalence in value" (cited in Ashcroft 1989a, 102). Todorov's remark, that is, implies an ontology wherein some form or other of cultural identity or specificity is maintained, but a social context wherein the inevitable processes of inter-cultural exchange occur on a symmetrical, and therefore equitable basis. For an effective revolutionary politics, identity is necessary, but it must be flexible. As Mary O'Connor has remarked, "[a]lthough consciousness may seem to be the ultimate goal--one single definition of self by which to live--this self must be one in constant transition because it is always in dialogue with other personalities who represent other social forces" (1991, 202).

My position, then, falls somewhere between that of an Eagleton, who declares that radical identity politics such as those which underpin cultural separatism "must be unswervingly opposed" (99), and a Daly who sees such a programme as the only and ultimate solution to a long history of oppression. My own contention is that different contexts call for different strategies. Thus, I am unable to subscribe to any theory which firmly universalizes either an essentialist or a (de)constructionist approach to the study of intercultural relations. Moreover, in intercultural contexts such as the one I am involved in as I write this, wherein I, a Western male critic, attempt to read texts from and about unfamiliar cultures, theory itself can be a dangerous tool. For, in the words of Appiah,

"the extent...[to which] African textuality fails to conform to a literary theory...is a problem for the theory, revealing it as yet another local principal masquerading as universal" (101). Hence, I will attempt to read the theory *through the novels* at the same time as I read the novels through the theory. For although all criticism involves translation and therefore transformation of the primary text, I hope to be involved here in a more equitable exchange wherein the critical theory may also be transformed--not to mention the critic who wields it.

Notes

1. I will discuss the debate between essentialism and anti-essentialism briefly towards the end of this chapter.

2. Stephen Greenblatt writes:

the concept [culture] gestures toward what appear to be two opposite things: constraint and mobility. The ensemble of beliefs and practices that form a given culture function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behaviour must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform. (225)

Although men and women often occupy the same cultural groupings in national or racial/ethnic contexts, within patriarchal societies which assign them rigidly disparate roles based on gender, they can also be seen to occupy cultural categories distinct from one another as well. In this study, I will use the term "culture" to refer to groups defined along the lines of gender, nationalistic, or racial/ethnic divisions.

3. I have deliberately chosen novels from three historically and geographically disparate areas that can be said loosely to reflect the predominant historical movement of black people during colonialism's era of black slavery, from Africa, across the Middle Passage to the Caribbean, and, from there, to the North American continent. In order to maintain the thematic flow of my thesis, however, I am unable to discuss these novels in the order implied by this movement.

4. Obviously, the "demands of a contemporary world" bring into question the concept of authenticity, rendering problematic the possibility of apprehending a truly authentic or pure sense of Self (Soyinka does not consider this problem in depth in *Myth, Literature and the African World*). I will attempt to address this question later in this chapter in the context of my discussion of intercultural hybridization.

5. This is not to suggest that ethnic or cultural retrieval does not also involve a process of invention. Michael Fischer argues that "ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual" (195), while James Clifford asserts that identity, in general, "must always be mixed, relational, and *inventive*" (10, my emphasis).

6. For insightful analyses of the contemporary debate between poststructuralist

and humanist conceptions of subjectivity, see Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988), and Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

7. "Deferral"--one of the crucial elements in Jacques Derrida's concept of "différance"--refers to the notion that the meaning of a word is dependent upon the context in which it appears: in the sentence, the phrase, the text, and in textuality or discourse in general. When one realizes with Julia Kristeva that all texts are constituted by intertextuality, then the context in which a word appears can be said to be infinite. If humans are constituted by language, and the meaning of the words which make up language are themselves endlessly deferred in language, then human identity can itself be said to be subject to a similar process of deferral.

8. For JanMohamed, the manichean structure of the European imagination produces the "fetishization of the Other," a process which "operates by substituting natural or generic categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined. All the evil characteristics and habits with which the colonialist endows the native are thereby not presented as the products of social and cultural difference but as characteristics inherent in the race" (1985, 67). This gesture on the part of the colonizer is, of course, an essentializing one which demonstrates the dangers of identity as an act of essentialist imposition.

9. During the course of my research, I have discovered that Bhabha's definition of hybridity carries an echo of, or allusion to, a passage from Walter Benjamin's "The Storyteller." Benjamin writes:

The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounselled and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living. (Benjamin 87)

Similarly, the post-colonial subject, living as s/he does in intercultural contexts where single, plenitudinous narratives do not reflect reality and cannot remain unchallenged, experiences a profound psychical perplexity which operates to belie and erode any monolithic cultural perspectives that s/he may wish to nurture and maintain.

10. Many of JanMohamed's ideas are similar to those expressed by Frantz Fanon, who introduced the concept of the "Manicheism of the settler" in *The Wretched of the Earth* (93). Fanon has also referred to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, but, in high contrast to Bhabha's use of the theory, Fanon argues that when one

grasps the mechanism of the mirror phase, "one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is...the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self--that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable" (see *Black Skin White Masks*, 161).

11. Opponents to cultural heterogeneity often speak of it as a form of confusion, implying, of course, that such heterogeneity signifies lost authenticity. JanMohamed, for instance, declares that colonialism "destroys...older cultures and replaces them with *confused hybrids*" (1983, 8, my italics). Bhabha resists such totalizing claims, seeing hybridity as a challenge to any form of monolithic authority based on the notion of cultural purity. Similarly, Wilson Harris, the Guyanese novelist and theoretician of syncretism whom I shall discuss in Chapter 2, sees hybridity as containing significant potential for cultural creativity and hence for positive social transformation.

12. On the other hand, many feminist and cultural critics argue for the need for women and other cultural groups to assert and maintain an essential *specificity*. For an angry but insightful critique of the deconstruction of the category of race, see, for example, Joyce A. Joyce (1987a, 373; 1987b, 341). And, for a helpful consideration of the problems inherent in the poststructuralist "glossing [of] 'woman' as an archaic signifier," see Nancy Miller (49).

13. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray uses the phrase "women-among-themselves" to refer to separate (or separatist) female-centred social groupings. Such a definition of separatism can be useful to the analysis of gender politics in each of the novels I have chosen. For example, the framing plot of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reveals the entire text to be the product of an encounter between Janie and Pheoby, and thereby suggests that the story Janie recounts is not subject in the process of its telling to constraints that might be imposed by the presence of male listeners.

14. From a poststructuralist perspective, such a statement is fraught with many problems (Irigaray, of course, qualifies her assertion by remarking that, within separate women's organizations, "*something* of a speaking [as] woman is heard" [135, my italics]). As Bhabha declares, "[t]he 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (1990c, 4). Working within a Foucauldian framework, Biddy Martin adds that "[t]he search for...a more authentic 'I' too often represents a refusal to account for the position from which we speak, to ground ourselves materially and historically" (15). These statements are certainly true; and yet, one cannot deny the political gains that women have made in contexts where they have asserted identity and worked "among themselves," whether in the context of local "consciousness-raising groups" or within the ranks of larger political organizations.

15. It is important to remember that difference exists even *within* seemingly discrete and unified categories. Kristeva has said, for instance, that "the apparent coherence which the term 'woman' assumes in contemporary ideology...essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures which operate beneath this word" (1979, 193). Defined monolithically, as Daphne Read declares, the term "woman" can operate to "den[y] both the differences and inequality among women (due to race, class, and other factors) and the place of conflict and difference within relationships" (283). In a parallel gesture, Appiah celebrates "the extraordinary diversity of Africa's people and cultures" (1992, 38), arguing that "the peoples of Africa have a good deal less culturally in common than is usually assumed" (25). Clearly, identity as a category must be loose enough to accommodate the heterogeneous makeup of those whom it would embrace.

Chapter 2: Hybridity and Anti-Colonial Resistance:
Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*

"Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally" (Fanon 1961, 36).

Although hybridity theory is steadily gaining currency in the academic realms of literary and cultural studies, its critical opponents continue to assert the need to conceptualize identity in oppositional terms in contexts of anti-colonial resistance. According to this latter viewpoint, colonial structures are virtually impenetrable monoliths: they are able to withstand and co-opt potentially disruptive influences from the margins, while forcefully inundating those margins with disempowering colonial ideologies which act to strengthen and perpetuate colonialism. In many ways, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) validates such a critique of hybridity, for it demonstrates that syncretic processes between colonizer and colonized are, if not entirely unidirectional, at least heavily weighted in favour of the British at the expense of the Gikuyu. When Mugo attempts to reject binarized conceptions of colonized Self and colonizing Other, his actions, as I will argue in this chapter, support, however unwittingly, the colonial regime. In instances where hybridity does in fact operate to expose the contradictory violence inherent in the idea of a benevolent colonialism (as in the case of John Thompson), the potentially disruptive process is neutralized, if not by the inherent rigidity of the manichean colonial mind-set, then most certainly by the force of its supporting governmental/military structures. Hence, Ngugi's novel demonstrates the need for the colonized subject to deploy unapologetically a separatist conception of cultural identity (grounded in a pre-colonial world-view)--one which

forcefully opposes colonial violence.

Ngugi leaves the reader no doubt, however, that this scenario of violence and counter-violence has harmful consequences. In the context of intersubjective exchange *within* the Gikuyu community, oppositional conceptions of identity are shown to be an importation of the British colonial system. Ngugi uses *A Grain of Wheat* as a forum in which to conduct a critique of the polarized conceptions of Self and Other which underpin Western individualism by demonstrating some of the ways in which individualism alienates the Gikuyu people from each other by disabling a traditional world-view which privileges the interconnectedness and mutual constitution of community members. Gikonyo and Mumbi figure prominently in Ngugi's critique of Western individualism; the only hope for the renewal of their relationship and of the larger Gikuyu community whom they symbolize (I will discuss the allegorical role of these characters in a moment) lies in a rejection of Western influence in favour of the retrieval of pre-colonial conceptions of identity. Ngugi qualifies this point, however, by demonstrating, through the character and example of Mumbi, that certain aspects of tradition (i.e., its patriarchal emphasis) must be revalued if the effects of Uhuru¹ are to be pervasive and meaningful within Gikuyu culture.

Thus, the attitude to identity embodied in the thematic content of *A Grain of Wheat* is somewhat contradictory (though never inconsistent). In terms of Gikuyu-British relations, the text reveals the need for oppositional conceptions of identity crystallized in violent resistance to colonial oppression. On the other hand, however, the text gestures toward a whole-hearted embracement of a hybridized conception of identity *within* Gikuyu society as the basis for the revitalization of a community brutalized by the violence of the colonial encounter. Hence, *A Grain of Wheat*, while overtly supporting the deployment of separatist or oppositional identity politics at the

national or macrocosmic level, offers an implicit critique of such politics at the microcosmic level of interpersonal relations.

And yet, although *A Grain of Wheat* supports a politics of cultural separatism on the levels of characterization and theme (as I will demonstrate in detail in this chapter), the text is far more ambivalent in terms of its overall structure. On the one hand, the novel's allegorical elements point to a discrete Gikuyu traditionalism, for Gikonyo and Mumbi play loosely archetypal roles which gesture towards the Gikuyu creation myth. According to Gikuyu theology, Gikuyu and Moombi (sometimes spelled Muumbi) were the primordial ancestors of the Gikuyu people; and it was to this couple that Ngai, the traditional Gikuyu God, granted the territories which were to become the Gikuyu tribal inheritance (Kenyatta 23; Sicherman 359). In allegorizing these traditional figures and the events surrounding them through the characters and actions of Gikonyo and Mumbi, Ngugi emphasizes the necessity for the Gikuyu people to assert pre-colonial cultural discourse.

On the other hand, *A Grain of Wheat* is firmly grounded in Western cultural and literary conventions. The novel's very title carries an intertextual reference to Christian discourse (1 Cor. 15:36); and, although Ngugi subverts/rewrites the teaching contained in the scriptural passage by associating the "grain" with the Gikuyu tradition of anti-colonial resistance ("Waiyaki's blood," we are told, "contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a movement" [12]), the intertextual echoes which remain in the title point not to a discrete Gikuyu cultural identity but rather to a Gikuyu-European cultural syncretism.

A Grain of Wheat's language also demonstrates Ngugi's preoccupation with European cultural conventions at the time of its composition. Although Ngugi would later reject the English language as a vehicle for Gikuyu literary representation,

arguing that "[t]he choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their national and social environment...[and] to the entire universe" (1986, 4), the English of *A Grain of Wheat* is carefully composed and crafted, betraying little evidence even of any process of vernacularization, thus emphasizing the fact that Ngugi wrote firmly from within the parameters of English discourse and for an English-speaking audience.

Moreover, Ngugi's employment of a realist mode of representation throughout the novel, while serving to emphasize the horrors of British colonialism by creating what M. H. Abrams refers to as "the illusion of actual and ordinary experience" (153), demonstrates once again the extent of Ngugi's own Westernization and concern with British cultural conventions. Only a few years later, of course, Ngugi would adopt an explicitly separatist strategy of living and writing, renouncing his Christianity, changing his name, and rejecting the English language. Although *A Grain of Wheat* was written prior to the author's personal "radicalization," however, the move toward decolonization and cultural self-apprehension, though largely absent from the novel's title, language, and representational mode, is clearly evident in its characterization and thematic concerns, supporting Ngugi's own assertion that the novel is about the "Kenyan people's struggle to claim their own space" (1991, 199).

Although *A Grain of Wheat* has been criticized for its single-mindedly harsh representation of British settlers in colonial Kenya, Kathleen Greenfield reminds us that, with regard to historical detail, "the book presents an understatement of European brutality and terror against insurgents...and peasants" during the Mau Mau rebellion (33). The settler characters in the text are oblivious to the violent nature of their own presence in Kenya, for they are constituted and conditioned by a colonial discursive

economy which presents colonial subjugation as a form of benevolent, indeed self-sacrificing, protection of the supposedly childlike and savage indigene. This discursive and ideological contradiction is certainly not lost on the Gikuyu people. Ngugi reveals in the second chapter of the novel that, as early as the 1920s, Harry Thuku, one of Kenya's first leaders of anti-colonial resistance, "cursed that benevolence and protection which denied people land and freedom" (12). It is clear that, from the Gikuyu perspective, colonial discourse is entirely at odds with social reality. Because official British interpretations of colonial events are diametrically opposed to those of the Gikuyu, productive communication between colonizer and colonized is disabled even prior to any act of negotiation; indigenous difference is effectively co-opted by the colonial myths of the "white man's burden" and the "civilizing mission."

In the opening chapter of *A Grain of Wheat*, such total absence of communication between settler and indigene is symbolized, as JanMohamed points out, by the fate of Gitogo, the deaf and mute son of "the old woman" (Thiong'o 1967, 4); for, when he is ordered to halt by the British soldiers, Gitogo continues running and is subsequently shot to death. According to the British rationale, Gitogo is "[a]nother Mau Mau terrorist" (5) who has been eliminated in the name of law and order (JanMohamed 1983, 215-16). To his fellow Gikuyu, of course, Gitogo is an innocent victim of "those messengers of whiteman's peace" (Thiong'o 1967, 104)--a man who has experienced the logical outcome of the irredeemably contradictory situation wherein "the whiteman's sword [hangs] dangerously above people's necks *to protect them* from their brethren in the forest" (3, my italics).

In dealing with an historical context marked by such total incommensurability between colonial and native interpretive frameworks, it is not surprising that Ngugi

constructs a rigid oppositional binary between colonizer and colonized in the novel. The absence of common ground between the two cultural groupings is emphasized dramatically by the very terms employed in the opening pages of the novel to distinguish them: settler and indigene are referred to not as "white man and black man" (terms which would suggest that only pigmentation modifies a commonly shared humanity), but rather as the two entirely separate and discrete entities of "whiteman" and "blackman" (3).²

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the dynamics of colonial ideology are embodied most succinctly in the figure of John Thompson, whom many Kenyans perceive as "the symbol of the whiteman's government and supremacy" (210). When we first encounter Thompson, he is presented as a liberal figure who believes, as Clifford B. Robson puts it, in "the concept of the British Empire as an egalitarian force, uniting colours and creeds of the world" (55). Indeed, Thompson does not at first appear to subscribe to the colonial binarism of Self and Other in a rigidly essentialist manner. After his encounter with the two African students at Oxford, for example, Thompson's impression--he is "filled...with wonder and admiration" (53) for these men--seems to challenge existing racial stereotypes: "Where was the irrationality, inconsistency and superstition so characteristic of the African and Oriental races?" he asks himself (53). This encounter inspires in Thompson a grand imperial vision which is based, so he fervently believes, "on the just proposition that all men were created equal" (54).

Thompson's subsequent transformation from liberal humanist thinker to colonial tyrant is not the result of "the complete collapse of [his] ideals," as Peter Nazareth has suggested (143); his fall into infamy reveals, rather, severe problems with the ideals themselves. It must be remembered that the two men who inspire Thompson's colonial vision are Africans "who in dress, in speech and in intellectual power were no

different from the British" (53). Thompson's notion of equality is flawed, then, for it presupposes the superiority of British culture: the black person can only attain equality and embody the colonial ideal through total assimilation to what Thompson refers to as the English "attitude of mind" (54). In terms of intercultural syncretic influence, colonialism, as articulated by Thompson, is a one-way street.

Thompson's second journal entry--"*What's this thing called Mau Mau?*" (55)--offers evidence, however, that, at a deep level, he wishes to know and understand the Gikuyu people outside of his own assimilationist discursive framework. Indeed, Thompson cannot even conceptualize the fear sparked within him by Mau Mau responses to British subjugation: it is something which "[h]e felt rather than knew" (45). Because Thompson's fear acts to interrupt the fullness of his cherished representations of the colonial situation in Kenya, it can be interpreted as evidence of the existence of hybridity at work within his--and by symbolic extension the British--psyche. Thompson's deep-seated desire to understand difference in its own right, however, is neutralized by the terms in which this desire is articulated in his journal entry; for *Mau Mau*, according to the British discursive economy, is a signifier which gestures towards criminality rather than authenticity. Thompson's question, then, need not ultimately threaten his assimilationist ideology, for, in the world of social relations, he is able to conceptualize Mau Mau as an aberration rather than an authentic manifestation of difference. Because of the colonial discourse which constitutes his sense of Self and Other, Thompson can believe that the Emergency was established "to *rehabilitate* Mau Mau adherents to a *normal* life as British subjects" (46, my italics). Thus, he is able to co-opt authentic irruptions of Gikuyu cultural difference.

Thompson's rhetoric, however, is far from consistent. In the journal entry immediately following the question of the Mau Mau, his reference to Schweitzer

demonstrates a propensity to encapsulate *all* the Gikuyu--indeed, all Africans--within a sweeping essentialist generalization:

Dr Albert Schweitzer says 'The Negro is a child, and with children, nothing can be done without the use of authority.'
I've now worked in Nyeri, Githima, Kisumu, Ngong.
I agree. (55, my emphasis)

Suddenly, for Thompson, it is not only the Mau Mau revolutionaries who must be *forcefully* reformed but all blacks. Indeed, juxtaposed as it is with the preceding journal entry articulating a desire to understand the Mau Mau, this passage suggests that *all* blacks are by nature revolutionaries against British rule. That this implication contradicts official colonial discourse, which continues to define the Mau Mau in terms of deviant criminality (as is evident in the British refusal to treat the detainees at Rung'ei "as political prisoners" rather than as "criminals" [134]), points to the inconsistent and ambivalent nature of colonial discourse on the Gikuyu people and thus reveals the convenient slipperiness and concomitant impenetrability of British discursive frameworks. Signs of a hybridizing perplexity may be apparent in Thompson's inapprehensible fear of the Mau Mau, but colonial discursive and institutional structures allow him continually to resist the concrete psychical transformation that such hybridization might entail in a less hostile context.

Before I begin my discussion of the Gikuyu characters in *A Grain of Wheat*, one more set of contradictions in Thompson's liberal ideology needs to be addressed. These contradictions pertain to Thompson's reactions to situations which he should view, according to his own "great moral idea" (54) of global potential for human equality under British imperialism, as signifying the accomplishment of his colonialist

"mission" (55). First, if Mau Mau supporters are criminals, then it follows that Gikuyu people who do in fact cooperate with British colonial law should be treated with the respect due to equals. Thompson's habitual mistreatment of Karanja, the Gikuyu collaborator, then, reveals further the extent of his own hypocrisy, for Thompson refuses to acknowledge *any* dependency on Karanja (156), not to mention any fraternity based on a shared vision or purpose. Indeed, to Thompson, Karanja is an object of contempt. Despite the qualities which the colonial regime attributes to him--"faithfulness, integrity and courage"--Karanja can never be more than "a trusted *servant*" (158, my italics).

Secondly, Thompson's attitudes to Kenyan Independence must be analyzed, for, according to his own youthful ideals, Uhuru could logically be seen as the ultimate accomplishment of the British endeavour "to reorient" (54) its colonial subjects and to actualize their essential equality. On the contrary, as David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe put it, Thompson is appalled rather than triumphant when Kenyans begin to show "signs of...acceding to nominal equality with himself" (72); indeed, Thompson returns to England on the eve of Uhuru defiant in his belief that "'Africa cannot...do without Europe'" (166). If Thompson is the "ordinary, decent man [who] changes when the ideal he serves is challenged," as Douglas Killam would have it (57), his example necessitates the need to question the very concepts of ordinariness and decency as defined within imperial discourse. Such a mind as Thompson's, constituted as it is by a contradictory colonial ideology which is supported by the machinery of British military might, reveals the very real power of the colonizer in Ngugi's Kenya to resist syncretic influences. Thompson's characteristics not only help to explain Ngugi's construction in *A Grain of Wheat* of a rigid binary separating Gikuyu Self and British Other; they also reveal and justify the need for violent anti-

colonial resistance strategies on the part of the Kenyan people.³

It has become somewhat of a critical commonplace to judge the character of Mugo severely for his betrayal of Kihika, Thabai's revolutionary leader. Indeed, Mugo's act of betrayal has inspired one critic to call him "the vilest of Judases" (Ravenscroft 204); and another has gone so far as to denounce Mugo as "inhuman and immoral" (Kiiru 14). Although these judgements can certainly be logically supported, such two-dimensional approaches to Mugo's character do little justice to the well-rounded complexity which the author painstakingly bestows upon him. Ngugi's careful presentation of the events of Mugo's impoverished and abused childhood and his portrayal of Mugo's bravery in the trench at Thabai are only two considerations which lend credence to my contention that character judgements based on cut-and-dry conceptions of good and evil conduct might, to a certain extent, be unsuitably applied in Mugo's case. Hybridity theory can, perhaps, enable the reader to approach an analysis of Mugo's character in a manner which acknowledges his complex makeup.

As I mentioned earlier, the Kenyan revolutionaries represented in *A Grain of Wheat* respond to colonial oppression by advocating a strong racist binarism between blacks and whites. Kihika, their leader, is certainly dedicated, as Muchugu Kiiru points out, to the humanistic ideals of freedom and justice (5), but he is also a builder of this essentialist binarism which assigns all "whitemen" to the position of absolute evil. Certainly, given the political context, Kihika has very little choice but to subscribe to and advocate such an extreme position, for he must respond to the murderous cruelty of the John Thompsons and the Thomas Robsons who prey on Kenya and its people. Nevertheless, what I must emphasize here is that, according to Kihika's perspective on colonial intercultural relations, oppositions such as outside and

inside, Self and Other, margin and metropole, must be distinct, separate, and poised in mutual confrontation.

Mugo, on the other hand, might be said to be *A Grain of Wheat's* representative of the *hybrid* imagination. Certainly, he shows evidence of resisting the polarized viewpoint advocated by Kihika and his followers. His refusal of Kihika's oppositional politics is made apparent in Chapter 2; when the aspiring revolutionary leader speaks at a meeting of the Movement held at Rung'ei Market, Mugo is repulsed by the violence of his words, for Kihika speaks "of blood as easily as if he was talking of drawing water in a river" (15).⁴ Throughout the novel Mugo resists all overt participation in the Movement, continually seeking to *escape* the pressures of military conscription and political participation. I am not suggesting here that Mugo's betrayal of Kihika is ultimately justified; rather, I wish to probe the psychology of Mugo's resistance to the revolutionary mindset, for, as Wilson Harris argues, "in the roots of escapism is a simultaneous desire for *breakthrough*, for a genuine ground of *relief* from abnormal and implicitly embattled polarizations" (1974, 8). In his theoretical writings on cross-cultural hybridity, Harris equates the polarized mindset with "a failure of the imagination within communities to make their moral codes creatively complex, creatively vital" (1985, 125). Hence, Harris privileges characters in literature who resist binary habits of thinking, lauding instead their inherent potential to apprehend what he refers to as "complex mutuality and wholeness" (126). Because of his resistance to Kihika's polarizing discourse, Mugo might be said to embody such potential. If this is the case, however, it is of paramount importance to consider the implications of Mugo's "hybrid" sensibility for the revolutionary cause.

A Grain of Wheat contains evidence that there is an intuitive level at which the villagers themselves admire Mugo for his refusal to participate in the oppositional

politics of conflict between indigenous Self and colonizing Other. Even Kihika is unconcerned that Mugo has not taken the revolutionary oath; indeed, he seems to admire Mugo for his aloofness, for it sets him apart from the rest of the villagers (192). Moreover, when Mugo gives his first speech to the people after arriving home from the British concentration camps, he is the only speaker who does not employ an empty and formulaic nationalistic rhetoric crediting his survival to revolutionary inspiration. The speeches preceding Mugo's, we are told, "were summed up by one detainee who said: 'What thing is greater than love for one's country? The love that I have for Kenya kept me alive and made me endure everything'" (65). Mugo, in high contrast, gives a more truthful account of the feelings of the imprisoned man during political incarceration--one which privileges the non-revolutionary forces of family and community over the pull of nationhood.⁵ The other former prisoners admire Mugo for speaking the truth rather than a homogeneous construction of "truth" based on an uncompromisingly oppositional and largely fictitious nationalistic fervour; his speech becomes the stuff of legends (66), and engenders a desire among the villagers to have him lead them as their Chief. Indeed, Mugo's ultimate refusal to lead the Independence celebrations increases his stature even further, causing him to become "a legendary hero" in the eyes of the Gikuyu people (177). Although Mugo's non-participation in local discourse and events is later fully explained and condemned in the text, one might say that the people's early admiration for him offers evidence of their own innate desire to free themselves from constraining polarizations. Indeed, the villagers come to think of Mugo as the embodiment of a rare wisdom, which, although it cannot be overtly apprehended, can nonetheless be seen, as Warui declares, "in his eyes" (171).

On the other hand, Mugo's non-conformist behaviour, far from stemming from

a healthy psychological distaste for binarisms, has often been seen as "unnatural," the result of his social alienation. In order to attempt to clarify the possible nature of Mugo's alienation, it can be helpful to turn to Homi Bhabha. In response to Fanon's assertion that the colonial subject is always "overdetermined from without," Bhabha declares that, from the standpoint of such polarized analytical paradigms,

Forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression--madness, self-hate, treason, violence--can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself. They are always explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognition of Man. (1990b, 186)

I have already suggested the possibility that Mugo's alienation might be partially the result of the very discourse of Revolution articulated by Kihika and his followers in response to British oppression. Here, I would like also to emphasize the ambivalent nature of Mugo's social instinct, for he continually alternates between a desire for social recognition and a desire to be left alone; that is, he wishes to identify with society *and* reject its influences. Such behavioural tendencies have roots in Mugo's childhood upbringing, during which, we are told, he both despised his alcoholic aunt and missed the ties of her kinship when she finally passed away. That Ngugi makes Mugo such a complex character, attributing his alienation to factors other than British colonial oppression *per se*, attests both to the complex nature of Ngugi's social vision and to the need for a finely nuanced rather than a politically polarized or metaphysically dualistic critical analysis of Mugo's character.

According to Wilson Harris's theory of inter-cultural interaction, Mugo's psychical makeup causes him to be open to a productive encounter with the colonial

Other, for, as Harris argues, a person must exist in a state of exile from social norms and conditioning in order to meet the other upon his or her own territory (Maes-Jelinek 9). For the cause of the Kenyan liberation struggle, however, the disabling and harmful consequences of Mugo's openness to cross-cultural dialogue and influence cannot be too strongly emphasized. In his state of social exile, Mugo is able to occupy the terrain of the colonial Other so well that he actually experiences, albeit temporarily, a profound sense of communion with John Thompson during the encounter in which he betrays Kihika (199). That Mugo is seriously deluded here is made plain immediately following the betrayal; the "whiteman" responds to his disclosure by assaulting him and spitting in his face. Moreover, at the Rira concentration camp, Mugo's openness to the colonizing Other--he is the only prisoner who consents to answer Thompson's questions (133)--exact further costs.⁶ Thompson, we are told, "questioned him daily, perhaps because he seemed the likeliest to give in. He picked him up for punishment" (133). Here, Mugo pays the price for his non-polarized mindset by being beaten and tortured, demonstrating that hybridizing processes, in such a warlike context, can lead to the physical and psychological destruction of indigenous Self.

Mugo's character demonstrates, then, the harmful consequences of intercultural hybridity for colonized people in contexts of violent anti-colonial revolutionary struggle. If his betrayal of Kihika springs even partially from an inherent repulsion to the rigid polarizations that Kihika advocates⁷--polarizations which Fanon argues are in fact *necessary* to a successful process of decolonization (1961, 60-61)--then such psychological processes plainly favour the colonialist project. In Mugo's case, hybridization engenders an act of betrayal which not only deprives Kenyan resistance of an effective leader (thus strengthening the colonial regime) but also draws British

military attention to Thabai, contributing directly to such atrocities as Wambuku's beating in the trench. As Cook and Okenimkpe put it, Mugo's attempt to stand aloof from the events of the Emergency is ultimately equivalent to a "siding with the powers of oppression" (74). Thus, Mugo proves the relevance of General R's assertion that "He who was not on our side, was against us" (221). Indeed, Mugo's hybrid sensibility makes him a dangerous enemy to the cause of Kenyan resistance.

In *A Grain of Wheat* identity is shown to have, among the various characters, different emphases roughly corresponding to the categories of individualism and community. The text privileges communal identity for it is most in tune with what Wole Soyinka calls the "traditional values" of "organic coherence" in African societies (1988, 185). Moreover, communal identity offers the greatest hope for organized and unified anti-colonial resistance for it provides a basis for revolutionary solidarity and heterogeneous interaction amongst formerly hostile tribal groupings. Individualism, in *A Grain of Wheat*, is revealed as an imported, disruptive attitude which must be purged and separated from the indigenous mind-set, for it is integral to economic capitalism (to which Gikonyo succumbs) and political opportunism (the ideology of which corrupts Karanja)--forces which are shown to exploit the Gikuyu community.

Much African writing emphasizes the foreign nature of individualistic thought in Africa. Writing about the traditional life of the Gikuyu, for example, Jomo Kenyatta declares that the "self-regarding man has no name or reputation in the Gikuyu community. An individualist is looked upon with suspicion and given a nickname of 'mwenbongia' as one who works for himself and is likely to end up as a wizard" (119). In a more general analysis of African philosophy, John S. Mbiti discusses the traditional philosophical awareness of the African person that "I am

because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (141). Fanon, to cite yet another example, speaks of the need for the African revolutionary to reject the imported emphasis on individualism on the basis of its theoretical "falseness" (1961, 47).

Ngugi's text generally concurs with the above assertions. To translate these considerations into the terms of my own study, Ngugi demonstrates in his text that European imperialism, while actually establishing the basis for a productive hybridity among formerly hostile tribal groupings, disrupts intersubjective or hybridizing processes *within* the Gikuyu community. Thus, he emphasizes the need for the Gikuyu to reject Western influences in order to re-access such communal processes.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the relationship between Gikonyo and Mumbi best dramatizes the tension between individualistic and communal emphases of identity.⁸ Early in their relationship, Gikonyo is an artist who is able to experience a profound sense of communion with other people and with his environment. While he works as a carver (work for which financial remuneration is only a passing concern) he is able to access a sense of plenitude--a "holy calm" in which he is "in love with all the earth" (81). Gikonyo's marriage with Mumbi, moreover, enhances "the *dialogue...of the home*" and the love they share is described as a "*communion*, which for him had given life a meaning" (116 my italics). The advent of open hostilities between the British and the Mau Mau results in Gikonyo's imprisonment, wherein he is deprived of this sense of dialogue and communion. Isolated in detainment from all meaningful human contact, Gikonyo begins to fear "that his identity even in death would be wiped from the surface of the earth" (107). In the traditional Gikuyu world-view, individual and community are such interconnected concepts that, in the words of JanMohamed, "the absence of community ultimately implies [for Gikonyo] the negation of the individual self." It is Gikonyo's inability to bear such isolation which leads him to

confess the oath so that he may once again hope to embrace the traditional values of family and community, values without which he cannot define his being (1983, 215).

Gikonyo's subsequent transformation demonstrates the extent to which colonialist violence impedes positive hybridizing interaction and rapprochement *within* Gikuyu culture. After six years of imprisonment and torture, Gikonyo returns home to discover that Mumbi has had a child with Karanja. Distraught and unable to accept or consider that the war could adversely affect his wife as it has himself, he comes to believe that "nothing could grow between any two people," and that "To live and die alone was the ultimate truth" (117). This terrible revelation, this absolute polarization of Self and Other,⁹ leads to the estrangement of Gikonyo and Mumbi and causes Gikonyo to betray his earlier communal ideals and embark upon a desolate quest for wealth in which he endeavours to profit from the misfortune of his fellow villagers. Gikonyo becomes, in the words of the text, "a self-made man" (57)--insulated, as it were, from positive intersubjective influence. Ngugi sums up Gikonyo's transformation succinctly: before the escalation of colonial violence "wealth and power were not important [to Gikonyo] unless they enriched that silent communion from which living things heaved and opened to the sun. The silence to which he had now returned was dead" (116-17). Gikonyo's change, largely attributable to the presence in Kenya of colonial military violence and the ideology of Western capitalist individualism (the notion of the "self-made" man), symbolizes the loss of a communal world-view and the advent of individualistic dissociation in the colonized society.

Unlike Gikonyo who adopts a dramatically polarized view of individual and community, Mumbi is able to find common ground between these two terms. On the one hand, her actions after her estrangement from Gikonyo enable her to shed her externally imposed status as "a nobody" (30) and, as S. W. Perera puts it, "'find'

herself as an individual" (71). But, unlike her husband, who becomes increasingly alienated in his new individualism, Mumbi uses her independence in a manner which, to borrow another phrase from Perera, enables her to become "a more vocal and useful member of the community" (71), for she plays a crucial role in the people's ongoing attempt to establish a dialogue with Mugo. Whereas Gikonyo exploits the community for capitalistic gain and develops a derisory attitude towards what he refers to as "*mere human voices*" (28, my italics), Mumbi demonstrates by her example that the individual need not be at odds with the larger social body. Thus, she problematizes any absolutist binarism between individual and community, demonstrating that both entities may exist in a relationship of mutuality and wholeness. If productive interaction between individual and community is the traditional Gikuyu norm, Mumbi, whose "very name associates her with the mother ancestor of the Gikuyu" (Robson 70), is tradition personified, and her example demonstrates the positive effects of a casting away of the colonial implantation of the doctrine of individualist self-sufficiency.

Mumbi's characterization as an embodiment of tradition, however, can only be a qualified one; it certainly does not represent a return to an ostensibly "pure" pre-colonial cultural world-view. When Mumbi leaves Gikonyo after he mistreats her and her son, she defies, in the words of S. W. Perera, "one of the most sacred norms of an essentially patriarchal society" (71). Later, when her mother asks her to return to Gikonyo, her answer is unequivocal: "My husband? Never" (232), she replies. Even Gikonyo's tentative attempts at reconciliation are conducted in vain; as he "invokes [Mumbi's] traditional obligations to hearth, home, and husband" (Perrera 72) by beseeching her to "go back to the house, light the fire, and see things don't decay" (247), Mumbi stands her ground, emphasizing the need to re-define traditional

social/ontological paradigms even in the process of re-accessing them.

Ngugi highlights the radical nature of Mumbi's behaviour¹⁰ by offering the reader examples with which to compare it. The most striking of these examples he presents in the form of one of General R's (Muhoya's) childhood memories; Muhoya recalls that when he attempted to intervene to stop his father from physically abusing his mother, his mother unexpectedly "took a stick and fought [against him] on her husband's side" (212). Muhoya's subsequent referral to his mother's behaviour as "a slave's treachery" (212) operates to establish a parallel in the novel between colonial and patriarchal authority, implying that *both* are unacceptable systems of oppression which must be militantly opposed.

In this chapter I have pointed out some of the ways in which *A Grain of Wheat* reveals that a hybridizing exchange between the cultures of colonizer and colonized in colonial Kenya tends, as a result of British discursive and institutional hegemony, to favour the colonial regime and to harm the cause of anti-colonial resistance. In doing this, I have attempted to demonstrate that any critical/theoretical privileging of hybridity and the "hybrid" imagination must be qualified by a careful consideration of the implications of hegemony in sociohistorical contexts represented in literature. Secondly, I have tried to show that colonial cultural influence, in replacing a traditional Gikuyu world-view (which privileges community) with Western conceptions of individualism, tends to disrupt positive intersubjective and hybridizing influences within Gikuyu culture. These considerations demonstrate the need in Kenya for a programme of anti-colonial resistance informed by a unifying strategy of oppositional separatism. At the same time, however, by privileging a return to a pre-colonial world-view based on a non-binarized conception of the relationship between

indigenous individual and community, the text offers an implicit critique of its own oppositional politics, suggesting that these politics are provisional in nature and may be subject to change with the establishment of a more equitable intercultural context.

Mumbi's actions, however, demonstrate that cultural self-apprehension--the purging of colonially-imposed foreign influence in order to re-access a traditional world-view--is not always adequate in itself. As Trinh has pointed out, appeals to tradition in Third World cultures can be used "to preach the absence of women's oppression in traditional societies" (114). A revaluation of certain aspects of tradition must be undertaken if decolonization is to be consistent with its own purpose: the ushering in of freedom. Gikonyo's internal response to Mumbi's challenge to his traditional authority, his knowledge "that in future he would reckon with her feelings, her thoughts, her desires--a new Mumbi" (247), suggests that a change in the status of colonized people must be accompanied by a change in the status of women in Gikuyu society as well. The gender-based binarism which enables Gikonyo, after his return from prison, to co-opt Mumbi's voice and dictate the nature of family and community life must be dismantled to open the way for the emergence of the "decolonized" woman and a new hybridized conceptualization of the relationship between men and women. If Mumbi is the archetypal woman in *A Grain of Wheat*, as Nazareth (138) and others have argued, then Ngugi does nothing less than question the suitability of the traditional archetype itself as a model for gendered behaviour in the context of the new, post-colonial Kenya. Moreover, Ngugi's relatively open-ended conclusion suggests, to a certain extent, that he himself will not presume to prescribe the exact nature of the new archetype. Indeed, he leaves that to the impending dialogue, examination, and planning (247) between a reforming Gikonyo and a "new," unspecified Mumbi.

Notes

1. The term Uhuru signifies freedom and self-determination--the ultimate goals of "the Movement."

2. While the British are consistently referred to in the novel as the "whiteman," the Kenyans are most often called "black man," suggesting that, apart from the colour of their skin, the Kenyans are "men," while the British are modified by white ideology to the extent that their humanity is subsumed by it.

3. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, which Ngugi studied prior to writing *A Grain of Wheat*, Frantz Fanon is unequivocal about the need for subjugated peoples to fight colonialism by violent means. According to Fanon, the terms in the colonial binary "follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous" (39). The following comment by Fanon is particularly relevant to the situation described in Ngugi's novel:

The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. [...] The development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime. (88)

4. James Decker argues that "Mugo's rage seems targeted not so much at Kihika's politics than at his eloquence" (Decker 53). Although the text makes it clear that Mugo is jealous of Kihika's social standing (Mugo is an outsider who longs for social acceptance), the latter's eloquence, I would argue, is not of paramount importance to Mugo: we are told that Mugo "could not clap for words that did not touch him." Mugo's revulsion stems, rather, from "the sight and smell of blood" (15) which he knows will flow should Kihika have the opportunity to enact his politics of violent opposition.

5. Ironically, Mugo is the only prisoner who does not have family ties or feel a strong sense of attachment to his community. His words, then, may not be relevant to his own experience; but, whether they are spoken out of longing, resentment, or to maintain his aloofness from the community, they act as *critical* words which represent the true feelings of his fellow detainees.

6. Mugo is able to talk to Thompson, of course, because he has nothing to hide: he has not taken the oath. Still, had he conformed to the behaviour of his fellow detainees, he could presumably have been spared Thompson's excessive

Chapter 3: From "Sorrow's Kitchen" to "Far Horizon":
Questions of Gender, Hybridity, and Decolonization
in Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and
Their Eyes Were Watching God

"Ah done been in sorrow's kitchen and Ah done licked all de pots....Nothin' can touch mah soul no mo'." --Lucy Potts/Pearson (Hurston 1934, 131)

"Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons." --Janie Crawford/Killicks/Starks/Woods (Hurston 1937, 182)

In this chapter, I will shift the focus of my discussion of hybridity and the decolonization of the subject from the context of anti-colonial political resistance to that of gender politics. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, colonial and patriarchal structures tend to have a profound impact on identity at the margins: Western cultural imperialism imposes a Eurocentric world-view upon colonized peoples, while patriarchal social orders operate similarly to impose upon women an androcentric conception of gendered identity. In the opening chapter of this study I referred to this latter process as "immasculation," a term which now requires some interrogation. Unlike Judith Fetterley's, my own conception of immasculation does not imply the effacement under patriarchy of an authentic female essence. From the perspective of hybridity theory, immasculation refers to the patriarchal attempt to deny or impede an equitable hybridizing exchange between men and women (just as colonization attempts to deny or impede similar processes between settler and indigene in the imperial context). Because the male inhabits the privileged term in the patriarchal *construct* of the male/female binarism, he is able to (attempt to) deny female syncretic influence

and define a subservient role for women in the social order. In such a scenario, a woman becomes, like the colonial subaltern, an object to the privileged (white male) subject rather than another subject involved in a balanced process of interaction. The decolonization of the subject--in gendered contexts the casting off of an immasculated sense of Self--can be aided by the strategic assumption of a constructed sense of specific identity; but it is my contention that a truly non-colonial, non-patriarchal Self can be actualized only with the deconstruction of *all* imperialist or gender-based binary systems of political hierarchy--a process which would establish the basis for equitable intersubjective, hybridizing exchange between and among subjects.

With the above-mentioned similarities between imperialism and patriarchy in mind, Ngugi's preoccupation with Gikuyu decolonization and self-apprehension in *A Grain of Wheat* can be seen to parallel Hurston's concern in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) with the process of the female journey from marginalized, male-identified object to re-centred female subject. In both cases hybridity theory complicates the project of self-apprehension by questioning the notion that colonizer and colonized, male and female, exist as essential and discrete terms in an inherently polarized relationship. From the perspective of hybridity theory, the decolonization of the colonial subaltern and women's attainment of subjectivity are accomplished by exposing and engendering the inherent hybridity of the supposedly "monolithic" colonial or patriarchal subject rather than through the separatist construction of a discrete cultural identity. However, as I pointed out in my chapter on Ngugi, and as I shall demonstrate here in my study of Hurston's novels, hybridizing processes are not always sufficient in themselves to the empowerment of subjugated peoples.

Although Homi Bhabha frequently gestures towards the category of gender in

his theoretical discussions of hybridity, the bulk of his published writing deals with more general issues of post-colonialism. Just as theoreticians like Bhabha tend to give relatively little attention to questions of gender, gender theorists have generally ignored the question of hybridity. Here, it is my intention to address these omissions. However, although I contend that an understanding of hybridity can productively inform questions of gender politics, I am also convinced that gender politics can problematize hybridity theory as well. Because, to the best of my knowledge, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes* have never been considered in the light of hybridity theory, and because each of these texts, in their concerns with inter-gender relations, lend themselves to the theory and problematize its universalizing aspects so dramatically, I will devote this chapter, after some introductory remarks on Hurston, to an analysis of gender politics and hybridity in these texts.

The style and thematic concerns of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes* attest to author Zora Neale Hurston's refusal to conform to the dominant aesthetic and ideological literary agendas of her era. While writers like Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and later, Richard Wright, declared prescriptively that issues of black-white race relations and certain images of blackness should provide dominant focuses and themes for the black writer¹ (Awkward 2-3), Hurston defiantly declared that she was "not tragically colored" and so avoided participation in what she referred to as the "sobbing school of Negrohood" (1928, 153 my italics). Unfortunately, Hurston's unique approach to life and literature contributed to her marginalization and subsequent fall into obscurity. Since the late 1970s, however, feminist critics, in questioning the dominant assumptions of the above mentioned black male literary figures (including the notion that racial issues should supersede, for example, those of gender), have helped to bring about a dramatic revival of interest in Hurston's writings.

Although contemporary feminist critics are at odds with most of Hurston's male Afro-American critics of the 1920s and 1930s with regard to the significance of her literary output, their respective influences on Hurston's literary reputation and the critical industry surrounding her writing attest to the importance of sociohistorical discursive and critical perspectives to literary canonicity.

The centrality of feminist criticism to present-day Hurston studies has played a crucial role in shaping our contemporary view of the Hurston canon itself.

Understandably, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, with its depiction of Janie Crawford's "journey from object to subject" (Gates 187), is a text which holds great appeal for the many feminist critics who stress the political importance of female agency and the decolonization of the female subject. Despite its social relevance and political efficacy, however, such a focus has probably contributed to the unfortunate contemporary critical marginalization of Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. Because this novel is, as Hurston herself once put it, "a story about a *man*" (1942, 151, my italics), and, more importantly, because its portrayal of the theme of female attainment of subjectivity is at best inconclusive, *Their Eyes* is usually considered to embody a more mature and accurate representation of Hurston's feminist politics. Although I do not necessarily contest this point, I would like to suggest here that the earlier novel establishes much of the preliminary groundwork for the later; for although the major female characters in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* fail to achieve independence from male-imposed standards and codes, their actions, as I shall argue in this chapter, operate to denaturalize and undermine the patriarchal social system by exposing and engendering its internal hybridity. When read together, then, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes* underscore the twofold nature of Hurston's feminist representational politics. Hybridity is important to Hurston's writing, for it plays a

crucial role in the deconstruction of male authority. However, as both novels demonstrate (the first implicitly and the latter explicitly), the assertion of a separate, autonomous female identity is ultimately necessary if the deconstruction of male-centred monoliths is to be followed by significant female self-empowerment.²

The very generic forms of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes* reflect their differing emphases concerning the nature of identity. Both novels are structured in the form of the *Bildungsroman*,³ however, unlike *Their Eyes*, the earlier novel inverts the classic form, for it is not a "novel of formation" (Abrams 120), but rather one of *de*-formation. That is, whereas *Their Eyes* loosely conforms to M. H. Abrams' definition of the *Bildungsroman* as a species of novel which charts the "development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences--and usually through a spiritual crisis--into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world" (120), *Jonah's Gourd Vine* portrays a protagonist whose identity is increasingly destabilized, and who ultimately cannot come to terms with himself or with his role in the world. The differing forms which the *Bildungsroman* takes in Hurston's first two novels highlight their respective emphases on gender hybridity (which destabilizes male-centred, polarized conceptions of gendered identity) and women's productive or formative apprehension of a female-centred sense of identity.

In terms of plot, both *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes* follow what might be termed a tripartite structure, for the central protagonists each progress through and are altered by three markedly different marriages. Thus, Hurston highlights the social transformation of inter-gender relations, first from the perspective of a male character, and secondly from that of a female one. In structural terms, however, the most striking difference between these novels is Hurston's use of a framing plot in *Their*

Eyes, for this plot not only enables Janie Crawford to act as a first-person narrator of her own tale (John Pearson's story is told by an omniscient third-person narrator), but also, in revealing Janie's narrative to be the product of a dialogic encounter between two women, this framing plot, as I will demonstrate towards the end of this chapter, stresses the importance of a strategy of qualified separatism for female decolonization and self-empowerment.

For the sake of economy and thematic continuity, I shall conduct my analysis of these novels primarily in chronological order. First, I will discuss the political effectiveness and shortcomings of gender hybridity as represented in the earlier novel; then, having established this theoretical groundwork, I will move on to consider the importance of feminist identity politics in the discourse of the later novel.

In writing of the conditions which underscore "an understanding of the *process of identification*," Homi Bhabha has written that "to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness, its look or locus" (1990b, 187). John Pearson, the male protagonist of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, is a character who, to a great extent, defines his existence in terms of his relation to a female Other: his wife, Lucy. John considers himself to be "uh man" in the most patriarchal sense of the term; his self-image is that of the all-encompassing protector of and provider for his wife and family, a self-sufficient person who requires no external aid. On the night of his wedding, for example, John explains to Lucy his conception of his relationship to her in the most pointed terms: "'Ahm gointer be uh father and a mother tuh you,'" he tells her. "'You jes' look tuh me, girl chile. Jes' you put yo' 'pendence in me. Ah means tuh prop you up on eve'y leanin' side'" (79). Although John's discourse here figuratively conflates the roles of father and mother, he makes it plain that his conception of his relationship

to Lucy is a polarized one in which he, as the male marriage partner, will assume an active, independent, adult role to complement what he perceives and constructs as Lucy's passive and childish dependency. A careful reading of John's character, however, reveals major contradictions in his sense of self-identity--contradictions which undermine the authority of his discourse on Self and Other by pointing to the hybridized nature of his personal makeup.

Although he continually attempts to convince himself otherwise, John cannot ultimately sustain the role of protector and provider which he envisions for himself in the marital relationship. This conflict of identity occurs not because he does not properly conform to male role models, but because the models which constitute masculine identity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* are themselves hopelessly contradictory in nature. Before he is married, for example, John's awakening sexuality becomes a major constitutive factor of his self-identity. John's sexual promiscuity is enabled by the patriarchal double standard which allows men sexual freedom while prohibiting such freedom to ("respectable") women. Hence, while Lucy's mother Emmeline obsessively guards her daughter's sexual chastity by attempting to regulate all aspects of her contact with men, Alf Pearson, John's biological father,⁴ displays a conspiratorial approval of John's sexual behaviour in the very act of chastizing him for "fooling around Duke's wife" (50); for, immediately following this reprimand, Alf "laugh[s] heartily and [gives] John a playful shove," calling him a "walking orgasm" and a "living exultation" (50). Later, when John is married, even Lucy is willing, to a certain extent, to look the other way, advising her husband to practice the customary discretion by keeping his personal life "outa sight" (112) of his parishioners.

It is hardly surprising that the sexual prowess which has helped to constitute John's masculinity takes him away from home in search of extra-marital sexual contact

each time Lucy becomes pregnant. What must be noted here is that John's absence compromises his masculine promise to be Lucy's protector. In the most severe instance, for example, John's promiscuity enables Lucy's brother Bud to take the wedding bed, a symbol of John and Lucy's marriage, out from under Lucy (who is on the verge of labour prior to delivering her daughter Isis) in payment for an outstanding debt. Here, masculine sexual prowess and patriarchal responsibility to wife and family, both constitutive factors of John's sense of masculine Self, are shown to be mutually incompatible. John's failure to "prop" up his wife as he has promised is symbolized here by the loss of the marriage bed which physically supports her.

In the wake of these events, John takes revenge on Bud in order to shore up his besieged manhood. As he later explains to Lucy, "'Ah wouldn't be no man atall tuh let yo' brother uh nobody else snatch uh bed out from under you, mo' special in yo' condition'" (95). According to John's discourse here, his assault on Bud Potts is consistent with his role as Lucy's masculine protector. In reality, however, the consequences of his actions are that he must leave town in order to evade the vengeance of the vigilante "patter rollers" (100). In attempting to conform to the tenets of male identity, then, John once again compromises his masculinity, for his contradictory actions temporarily deprive Lucy of what he himself has promised Lucy he would be: "uh *man* tuh fend fuh [her]" (95). Thus, Hurston's text reveals John's masculinity to be internally contradictory and hence an untenable construct.

One does not require complex analytical tools or interpretive frameworks to understand the extent to which John owes his eventual success in life to Lucy's counsel and advice. Although John vehemently opposes Sam Mosely's suggestion that he is a "wife-made man" (113), Lucy's influence is central to John's ascension of the social ladder in the town of Eatonville. She is responsible for his becoming a

landowner (109); she advises him concerning the management of his congregation in order to maintain his success in the pulpit (112); and she enables him to attain the position of State Moderator (116). Indeed, John probably owes his literacy and his very status as a practicing Christian to his wife's influence, for, prior to marrying Lucy, he attends school and joins the church primarily as an excuse to be near her. And yet, despite the obvious role that Lucy plays in propping up her husband (a role which further contradicts his discourse on masculinity and marital relations), John fiercely denies her any credit for his success: "'Ah wouldn't be where Ah is, if Ah didn't know no more'n you think Ah do'" (116), he tells his wife. And later, when Lucy reprimands him for "livin' dirty" (i.e., for neglecting his self-assigned duties as male protector and provider), John responds by saying "'Ah don't need you no mo' nor nothing you got tuh say, Ahm uh man grown. Don't need no guardzeen atall'" (128). John's continual positing of his masculine integrity and self-sufficiency are part of his overarching effort to uphold his own polarized conception of masculine Self and feminine Other. Lucy addresses the mutual alienation caused by this polarization when she tells John that it "look[s] lak wese tied tuhgether by uh long cord string and youse at one end and Ahm at de other. Way off" (95-6).

Hurston portrays the undermining of John's sense of autonomous identity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* through a complex poetic and narrative treatment of the subversive potential of the female gaze. Lucy's ability to affect John's sense of Self via the power of her gaze becomes apparent in their very first encounter. When John meets Lucy, the first thing he notices about her is her "bright black eyes" (13). Subsequently, after looking over the other school girls, all of whom are beginning to look "a little bit like women," he is ashamed when he once again encounters Lucy's gaze, for, as we are told, it "[s]eemed as if she had caught him doing something nasty"

After that look in the late watches of the night John was afraid to be alone with Lucy. His fear of her kept him from his bed at night. He was afraid lest she should die while he was asleep and he should awake to find her spirit standing over him. He was equally afraid of her reproaches should she live, and he was troubled. More troubled than he had ever been in all his life. In all his struggles of sleep, the large bright eyes looked thru and beyond him and saw too much. He wished those eyes would close and he was afraid again because of his wish. (132)

Here, John succumbs to utter paranoia; he can't bear to be with his wife, and he can't bear to be without her. Even long after her death John is haunted by Lucy's gaze:

Suddenly a seven-year-old picture came before him. Lucy's bright eyes in the sunken face. Helpless and defensive.⁶ The look. Above all, the look! John stared at it in fascinated horror for a moment. The sea of the soul, heaving after a calm, giving up its dead. (145)

John's paranoia carries profound consequences, for, as Bhabha puts it, "paranoia never preserves its position of power, for the compulsive identification with a persecutory 'They' is always an evacuation and emptying of the 'I'" (1990b, 204). With the power of her transgressive gaze, Lucy becomes for John the persecutory Other of Bhabha's hybridizing inter-cultural encounter; and, by thus subverting John's sense of masculine Self, Lucy undermines his patriarchal power.

One more observation will perhaps serve to reinforce my thesis here concerning the effect of Lucy's gaze on John's sense of self-identity. After John's final downfall, in the days after he leaves his pulpit to become an outcast and pariah amongst the members of the Eatonville community, John remembers Lucy and her gaze:

He sought Lucy thru all struggles of sleep, mewing and crying like a lost child, but she was not there. *He was really searching for a lost self* [...] Sometimes in the dark watches of the night he reproached Lucy bitterly for leaving him. "You meant to do it," he would sob. "Ah saw yo' eyes." (183-84, my italics)

Indeed, Lucy will never again be "there" for John to play the supporting role which his masculine subjectivity requires. Because of this, John's "lost self," the one which had been propped up by its imaginary relationship to the formerly passive Lucy only to be purposely subverted by her transgressive gaze, is forever destabilized and can never entirely reassert itself. Lucy's gaze not only disrupts the "ordinary boundaries of life" (130); as it haunts John's memory its influence extends even beyond the boundary which distinguishes life and death.

Unfortunately, because Lucy had for so long conformed to patriarchal codes of ideal feminine conduct prior to her rebellion, John is able, at least on the surface, to attempt to co-opt her memory into an embattled patriarchal economy of discourse. This co-optation becomes apparent when John uses Lucy's early behaviour as a frame of reference by which to judge Hattie's wifely conduct: "'You sho ain't no Lucy Ann,'" John tells her. Hattie's reply comes as a kind of manifesto: "'Naw, Ah ain't no Miss Lucy, 'cause Ah ain't goin' tuh cloak yo' dirt fuh yuh. Ah ain't goin' tuh take offa yuh whut she took so you kin set up and be uh big nigger over mah bones'" (144-45). Because Lucy behaved as a model wife for so long prior to her act of resistance, she becomes indirectly complicitous with John's oppression of Hattie.⁷ Moreover, in protecting John from public condemnation during Conference night, Lucy misses an opportunity to challenge publicly his behaviour (as Janie Crawford challenges Joe Starks in *Their Eyes*) and initiate possible change during her own lifetime.

Although *Jonah's Gourd Vine* offers an admirable portrait of the erosion of patriarchal authority by exposing the hybridity of the patriarchal mindset, it fails to supplement such a scenario with a convincing representation of subsequent female empowerment. Sally Lovelace may be similar to Janie Crawford of *Their Eyes* in many ways,⁸ and John certainly treats her with a great deal more respect than he does his two former wives, but one of Sally's major projects is to help to *reconstruct* John's shattered masculine self-image and the authority that such a self-image enables. As a result of Sally's influence, John, who came to her "sobbing like a boy of four," is able to tell her: "'Ah felt lake ole times tuhday. Felt lak Samson when his hair begin tuh grow out agin.'" Sally responds to this remark, moreover, by declaring: "'Dat's de way fuh yuh tuh feel, John'" (189). Despite the persistently transformative influence of Lucy's subversive gaze--John "pray[s] that Sally might never look at him out of the eyes of Lucy" (190)--it is clear that Sally aims, to a certain extent, to resurrect John's authoritative patriarchal identity.

Hope for concrete change with regard to the status of women does exist, however, as a potentiality in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, for, on her deathbed, Lucy offers her daughter Isis some potent and subversive advice: "'member tuh git all de education you kin,'" Lucy declares admonishingly, adding that Isis must "'always strain to be de bell cow, [and] never be de tail uh nothin'" (130). Such maternal counsel subverts John's desire that his daughter be a "doll-baby"⁹ (93) by encouraging Isis to strive for independence. Secondly, Lucy continues, "'Don't you love nobody better'n you do yo'self. Do, you'll be dying befo' yo time is out'" (130). Here, Lucy places part of the blame for her early death on her unconditional love for John, thus implying that such love, like her own untimely mortality, is in fact unnatural. Finally, Lucy tells Isis that "'uh person kin be killed 'thout being stuck un blow'" (130). This comment supports

the contention that John's treatment of Lucy even prior to his outburst of physical violence has been tantamount to serious, even deadly, abuse. All of Lucy's advice, in encouraging Isis to attempt to formulate an identity unconfined by the dictates of patriarchal custom, acts as a pointed critique of her earlier role as John's self-denying and unconditionally supportive wife.

Although Lucy is able successfully to undermine her husband's cherished hierarchical representations of masculine Self and feminine Other to the extent that his own sense of identity ultimately crumbles, she dies before she can actualize a decolonized sense of identity which might have released her from a life spent in "sorrow's kitchen" (131). Therefore, Lucy is unable to benefit directly from her disruption of the patriarchal discourse which had engendered her husband's oppressive behaviour. With her depiction of Lucy's unfortunate situation and subsequent demise, Hurston demonstrates that simply pulling down the patriarchal male, however integral this may be to the actualization of female emancipation, is insufficient in itself; in order to complete the process of social transformation, the female must cast off her objectified status and assert some form of decolonized identity as a necessary accompaniment to the exposure of the hybridity of male/masculine identity.

Such an undertaking is represented in the character of Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This novel documents Janie's struggle to move beyond objectification, a struggle which, as Nellie McKay puts it, is accomplished as a result of "Janie's psychological journey from a male-identified female to assertive womanhood" (55). In *Their Eyes*, the extent of Janie's male-identification or immasculation can be identified by the degree to which her various husbands are able to impede or support her intuitive visions of the far horizon and the pear tree, both of which can be read as symbolic signifiers of decolonized female identity.

The pear tree represents for the young Janie "a mystery" (10) and "a revelation" (11)--something that cannot be apprehended in terms of the discourses and modes of perception readily available to her in the patriarchal society in which she has been raised:

It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song *forgotten in another existence* and remembered again. What? How? Why? This singing she heard that had *nothing to do with her ears*. The rose of the world was breathing out smell. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other *vaguely felt matters* that had struck her outside observation and *buried themselves in her flesh*. Now they emerged and quested about her consciousness. (10, my italics).

The contention that Hurston employs the pear tree to symbolize an intuitive sense of *pre-colonized*, non-hierarchical sexual identity is supported by the figurative language associated with the "dust-bearing bees" (10) which pollinate the pear tree's blossoms; for these "kissing bees" sing "of the *beginning* of the world" (11, my italics), and hence conjure up the notion of an original time--"another existence"-- prior to any external imposition of identity. Although the sexual imagery surrounding the bees suggests, as Mary Helen Washington puts it, "a fulfillment in union with another" (15)--or, in the terms of my own study, a non-binarized sense of productive *exchange* in the relationship between the sexes--the recurring poetic references to the far horizon suggest that Janie must venture beyond the narrow confines of a rigidly male-centred, hierarchical society in order to access a decolonized sense of identity and human interaction. Overall, Janie's journey in *Their Eyes* becomes a quest to actualize her identity as intuitively understood in her visions of the blossoming pear tree and the far horizon. Therefore, she must resist and reject all that impedes or disrupts these

intuitive perceptions.

For the young Janie, the vision inspired beneath the pear tree may represent the intuitive apprehension of a decolonized sense of female Self existing in an equitably hybridized relationship with the male Other, but it is also potentially dangerous, for Janie's vision transforms the "shiftless Johnny Taylor" into a "glorious being," thus enabling him, at least as Nanny sees it, to "lacerate her...with a kiss" (11)--a potential signifier of the appropriation of Janie's body and co-optation of her intuitive vision by a patriarchal economy of sexuality and discourse. To Janie's Nanny, the kiss makes manifest the very real danger that Janie will be forced to occupy the traditional black woman's role as "a work-ox and a brood-sow." Nanny, who herself carries "dreams of whut a woman oughta be and...do" (15), uses the lessons of her own experience to identify the basis of women's oppression as economic. Hence, she demands that Janie marry Logan Killicks, not for himself, but for the "protection" (14) that she is convinced his status as a landowner of sixty acres can offer her. Nanny's good intentions, however, are misguided, for, as McKay puts it, her loving concern for her granddaughter's protection "ushers [Janie] into the prisonhouse of the male-identified woman, a condition that confines women from their own lives" (59).

Logan Killicks's articulated desire to "*take and make* somethin' outa [Janie]" (29, my italics) can be read as a rather succinct summary of the process of Janie's immascultation; he will "take" her own identity and replace it with one of his own "making." The discourse surrounding and constituting Killicks, moreover, contains contradictions remarkably similar to those of the British colonialist enterprise as identified by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *A Grain of Wheat*. Just as British colonialism constructs the myth of the civilizing mission in order to conceptualize its enslavement of indigenous peoples in Kenya as an act of "benevolence and protection" (12),

Killicks, whom Nanny defines as a source of "protection" (14), disguises his own oppression of Janie by subscribing to the patriarchal notion that he is her redeeming source of respectable social status. This discursive contradiction becomes apparent when Killicks plans, in the words of Rachel Blau DuPlessis, to make Janie his "third mule and put [her] behind a plow" (110). Certainly, Killicks's self-centred words and actions confirm Janie's earlier premonition that he would "desecrat[e] the pear tree" (13). If Janie is to attempt to actualize her intuitive vision, then, her only choice is to leave him.¹⁰

Ultimately, however, Janie fares no better with her next husband, Joe Starks. In a sense, Starks, in his treatment of Janie, is the antithesis of Killicks; he scoffs at the idea of Janie working "behind a plow," declaring instead that such a "pretty doll-baby" should be treated "lak a lady." Although Janie is aware that Starks does "not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees," she ultimately agrees to marry him, for, unlike her first husband, he at least speaks "for far horizon" and "for change and chance" (28). Starks's eventual success as a mayor and store owner in Eatonville enables him to raise Janie to what Barbara Johnson calls "a pedestal of property and propriety" (209). Janie soon comes to realize, however, that the prerequisite to occupying this position is total self-denial. For example, Janie is "uh born orator" (55), and yet her husband prohibits her from participating in the discourse of the community; and although she has come to the horizon "in search of *people*" (85), he forces her to experience "the weight of lonesomeness" (85) by prohibiting her from mingling with the townsfolk whom he characterizes as "dat mess uh commonness" (56). In her role as "Mrs. Mayor Starks" (40), then, Janie experiences a profound immasculation; as she later tells her husband, "Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me" (82).

Prior to the onset of his illness (which I shall discuss momentarily), Starks's hegemonic positioning seems to preclude the possibility that he can be influenced by syncretic or hybridizing exchange. As the village men declare, and as Janie later corroborates, Starks is "'a man dat changes everything, but nothin' don't change him'" (46; see also 82). A closer reading of the text demonstrates, however, that the mayor of Eatonville is not as all-powerful as he may appear to be on the surface. As Janie comes to realize, Joe is not "the flesh and blood figure of her dreams" but merely "something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over" (68). This realization enables her to understand that her husband's "big voice" (75) actually requires her support to be credible: "'Maybe he ain't nothin','" she muses, "'but he is something in my mouth'" (72). Janie's declaration demonstrates a growing awareness of her own potential power and influence.

On a psychological level, Starks's own discourse offers evidence that Janie does in fact represent a real threat to his sense of masculine self-identity. He repeatedly stereotypes Janie (and women in general) as mindless entities: "'Somebody [has] got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none themselves'" (67; see also 73-4). Moreover, to "point attention away from his own [aging body]" (74) and to support his self-representation as the omnipotent male ("I god"), Starks repeatedly stereotypes Janie as an aging crone, referring to her as "uh ole hen" (73) and declaring that she is as "old as Methusalem" (74). And yet, as Homi Bhabha points out, the repeated use of stereotyping may be a strategy of power, but it is also a symptom of hegemonic anxiety: "the stereotype...is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and *something that must be anxiously repeated*." The ambivalence of the stereotype, that is, lies in the fact that what is ostensibly self-evident about the Other,

"that [which] needs no proof, *can never really, in discourse, be proved*" (1983, 18, my emphases). Starks's repeated stereotyping of Janie offers evidence of a nagging uncertainty in his discourse on masculine Self and feminine Other.

The final proof of the untenability of Starks's masculine discourse comes with his reaction to Janie's ultimate challenge to his authority. In direct response to her husband's stereotyping discourse on her age, Janie defiantly declares:

Ah'm a woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life.
(75)

This subversive exclamation is certainly the profound insult that Barbara Johnson considers it to be (209), but it is much more besides: Janie's potent deployment of "tearin' down talk" (82) completely undermines the very foundations of Starks's essentialist masculine self-representation. Her remark is not so much an insult, then, as a revelation. Like Lucy's gaze in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Janie's voice exposes her husband's masculinity as absence or lack. Joe Starks may be a self-made man in the economic sense (as compared to John Pearson whose economic success is plainly the product of his wife's influence), but the "illusion of irresistible maleness" which invests his power and material possessions with meaning can only be supported, of course, by those who ostensibly find such maleness irresistible: women (in Joe's case, Janie). Hence, Janie steps forth as the real source of her husband's power--the female Other which crucially supports--indeed *constitutes*--the masculine Self. And, as Joe's subsequent symbolic demise makes plain, the withdrawal of this support proves no less

than fatal to the polarized and polarizing construction of the masculine male.

With Starks's death, Janie is free to shed her immasculated self and attempt to assert a decolonized sense of subjective identity. Once again, Janie's visions of the far horizon and the pear tree become frames of reference by which to measure her progress, and her third husband, Tea Cake, not only ventures with her beyond the physical and symbolic horizons which have constricted her freedom and defined her acceptable roles throughout her life, but he is also explicitly represented as a partner to Janie in a process of productive exchange--"a bee to [Janie's] blossom" (101). Here, I will not undertake a detailed evaluation of Tea Cake's character¹¹ except to say that he does not attempt to objectify or immasculate Janie by investing in the construction of a polarized sense of Self and Other (at least not to the extent practiced by Janie's first two husbands).

That Janie's relationship with Tea Cake is not entirely the ideal vehicle through which she may apprehend a truly decolonized sense of Self is made apparent in the text by Tea Cake's sudden death. As Susan Willis has pointed out, Tea Cake's demise "demonstrates that no matter if [he] was a truly supportive husband, as long as relationships between men and women are embraced by a *larger system in which men dominate*, no woman can expect to attain selfhood in marriage" (51, my italics). Just as Hurston herself had to give up what she called "the real love affair of my life" (1942, 185)¹² as a prerequisite to actualizing herself as a writer, Janie must also separate herself from "the male-defined circuit of exchange" (Willis 51) in order to apprehend a decolonized sense of identity which would establish the basis for equitable hybridizing exchange between the sexes.

Arguably, then, Janie's journey from male-identified object to decolonized female subject is only truly realized in the process of telling her tale. The

circumstances surrounding this telling are delineated in the framing plot of *Their Eyes*, a plot which occupies the opening and closing pages of the text and which reveals, most importantly, that Janie's entire narrative is the product of an encounter between herself and her closest friend Pheoby Watson. Because male or rigidly male-identified listeners are directly absent in the context of Janie's storytelling, the communal dynamic which informs the narrative can be described by Luce Irigaray's phrase "women-among-themselves," the space in which, as I mentioned in the opening chapter of this study, "something of a speaking (as) woman is heard" (135). In terms of gender and identity, Janie's decision to relate her story to a sympathetic female listener rather than to the entire community as represented by the Eatonville porch-sitters could be read as a tactical deployment of a kind of politics of feminist separatism.

The need for such a politics is made apparent by Hurston's characterization of the townsfolk, who, we are told, "s[i]t in judgement" over Janie on the evening of her homecoming. There is no possibility that Janie will receive a sympathetic or even impartial hearing from people who make "burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs" (2). As Hazel Carby points out, "Janie has broken the boundaries of social convention" (83): She has transgressed rigid barriers of age and class (she wears her hair "lak some young gal" [2] and, to make matters worse, she had left town to marry a younger man who was considered to be her social inferior), as well as gender (she wears masculine overalls). Indeed, the community's harsh disapproval of Janie can be attributed at least partially to the *hybridity* which she openly displays, for she mixes high and low, young and old, male and female.¹³ Paradoxically enough, she must protect her hybridized makeup by relating her story to a sympathetic female listener in a segregated or separatist context wherein the

hierarchical and clear-cut distinction between Self and Other, by exposing and engendering hybridizing processes. But, whereas Lucy cannot ultimately free herself from the bonds of oppressive immasculation but can only offer her daughter Isis advice concerning female self-empowerment, Janie, in stepping beyond the horizons that bind the female to her male-identified state, ultimately accesses a sense of decolonized female identity with which she can be "satisfied" (182) and at "peace" (184) and through which she can begin to initiate positive change in the community. And so, while hope for social transformation remains on the horizon of possibility in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Janie is able, in one of Hurston's most powerful poetic flourishes, to pull the horizon "from around the waist of the world and drape[] it over her shoulder" (184).

Notes

1. Hurston's representations of black life were seen by Locke, Hughes, Wright and others as quaint oversimplifications which pandered rather shamelessly to the chauvinistic tastes of white audiences, hence perpetuating dominant stereotypes. These writers argued, as Michael Awkward has put it, that "the black artist's primary responsibility was to create protest fiction that explored America's historical mistreatment of blacks, boosting black self-esteem and changing racist white attitudes about Afro-Americans in the process" (2-3).

2. Although I am primarily concerned in this essay with the topic of gender difference, I do not mean to suggest that these novels do not contain important implications concerning race and class difference as well. On the contrary, Hurston's characters exist within a complex web of intersections involving all of these categories. My focus on gender here is necessitated by space constraints. Much work on the relevance of hybridity and cultural consolidation to the *intersecting* categories of race, class and gender difference in these novels remains to be conducted.

3. I must disagree here with Rita Dove's assertion that "*Jonah's Gourd Vine* takes the *classic* [my italics] form of the *Bildungsroman*" (vii), for, as I shall argue, John's self-growth does not culminate in the coming to awareness usually associated with the genre. Dove's statement would be more accurately applied to *Their Eyes*.

4. Although John's paternal origin is not explicitly stated in the text, critics tend to agree that Alf Pearson is his father.

5. John's act of physical violence against his wife has profound psychological implications not only for himself (it is irrefutable proof of his inability to sustain his self-conceived role as Lucy's protector) but for Lucy as well; for, throughout her marriage to John, Lucy invests a great deal of significance in the maintenance of gendered behaviour, repeatedly asking her husband to "be uh *man*" (95) and "*ack lak one*" (116). According to patriarchal discourse on gender, with its internal contradictions and sexual double-standards, being "uh man" necessarily already entails violence against women; when John strikes Lucy, he simply brings this aspect of gendered discourse into the open. John's act of violence shatters the last of Lucy's illusions concerning her own identity in relation to that of her husband; and her subsequent death symbolizes her inability to bear this ultimate revelation.

6. To a certain extent, this passage can be read as a co-optation of Lucy's subversive gaze, for Lucy is reconceptualized here as "[h]elpless and defensive" (145). On the other hand, this phrase lacks a clear referent, and, considering John's own

unrelenting perplexity, could perhaps more accurately be read as modifying John himself.

7. Hattie is an extremely complex character who could provide material for an entire article; here, however, I will make only one or two relevant observations concerning her character and function in the text. As Alan Brown points out, Hattie's "animal nature is as prominent as [John's]" (84). After she is successfully married to John, that is, Hattie does not sit idly by, in the manner of Lucy, while her husband indulges in extra-marital sexual relations; Hattie pursues affairs of her own which inspire "tales of wifely incontinence" (Hurston 1934, 141) within the parish and win her a reputation which rivals that of her husband. Moreover, like John, she ignores the Pearson children (although, predictably, it is Hattie who is blamed for their dispersal). And yet, because of the patriarchal double standard governing male and female sexual, moral, and domestic conduct, Hattie's behaviour is hotly condemned by the community and, interestingly enough, in the text itself. Indeed, with the contrast between Lucy and Hattie, Hurston's text sets up the stereotypical patriarchal binarism of nurturing mother/seductive whore; and, in lumping Hattie in with the "[c]ontemptuous" "toadies" (166) who attempt to contest John's ecclesiastical authority, Hurston, arguably, demonstrates a qualified preference for the former stereotype while unequivocally condemning the latter. Finally, it is possible to blame Hattie's conjure spells for John's sudden act of violence in striking Lucy (John himself blames Hattie's hoodoo for his behaviour [145]). Although hoodoo plays a likely role in bringing the Pearson marriage to crisis, I would argue that John's violent act *is* in fact consistent with his earlier treatment of Lucy. The slap, that is, can be read as a blatant manifestation of the more subtle violence to which John subjects Lucy throughout their marriage.

8. Both Sally Lovelace and Janie Crawford are over forty when they marry John Pearson and Tea Cake respectively (1934, 193; 1937, 3). Their previous husbands, moreover, had been men of prominent social standing who had provided them with economic support but little emotional comfort. John and Tea Cake, at the time of their marriages to these women, are financially insecure while their new wives are independently wealthy. Finally, both Sally and Janie consider their new husbands, who symbolically take them fishing, to embody the pinnacle of a redefined heterosexual romantic ideal.

9. In *Their Eyes*, Joe Starks says to Janie: "'A pretty *doll-baby* lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you'" (28, my italics). According to Joe's logic, such a position makes Janie a "bell-cow" (39); although, as Janie comes to realize, the role that Joe envisions for her is that of a colonized or immasculated object. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, on the other hand, Lucy makes it plain that she holds a much different understanding of what it means to be a "bell cow." For example, the morning after her arrival in the all-black town of Eatonville, Lucy is full of high hopes for the

future. As she tells her husband: "John, dis is uh fine place tuh bring up our chillun. Dey won't be seein' no other kind uh folks actin' top-superior over 'em and dat'll give'em spunk tuh be *bell cows* theyselves" (109, my italics). When a comparison is made between Lucy's remarks here and her later advice to Isis to "strain tuh be de bell cow" (130), it becomes apparent that Lucy uses the term "bell cow" to signify the attainment of a social position unconstrained by oppression of *any* form. Her comments, that is, draw a parallel between social attitudes towards race and gender; thus she compares her own treatment by her husband to the general treatment of blacks by whites. In high contrast to Joe Starks's notions concerning Janie's identity, then, Lucy makes it plain that she desires for Isis an identity based on true autonomy and self-determination.

10. Readers of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* can apply the lesson contained in the story of Logan Killicks to a reading of the character and situation of Lucy Potts. For Logan Killicks, with his paid-for house and "his often-mentioned sixty acres" (20), occupies the same economic situation as Artie Mimms, whom Emmeline Potts has chosen for her daughter's husband. In rejecting her mother's demands, Lucy displays certain feminist tendencies: she refuses to subject herself to a blatant patriarchal economy of female exchange, preferring instead to marry for love. The subsequent story of Lucy's oppressed and abusive situation as John Pearson's wife might be read as containing a moral which discredits such feminist behaviour in favour of obedient conformity to established patriarchal standards and customs, for, as Bud Potts tells his sister, "If you was married tuh anybody you wouldn't be in no sich uh fix" (91). The story of Janie's experience with Logan Killicks in *Their Eyes*, however, serves firmly to discredit any notion that Lucy's arranged marriage with Artie Mimms would necessarily have provided her with a fate happier than the one she experiences by marrying John.

11. For brief but insightful critiques of the character of Tea Cake, see Michael Awkward (1990, 17) and Mary O'Connor (1992, 156). Awkward weighs Tea Cake's "positive contributions to Janie's life" against a general summary of his residually sexist behaviour, while O'Connor addresses some of the implications of Tea Cake's violence against Janie both prior to and after his contraction of rabies. In terms of parallels between *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes*, I would like to point out here that John Pearson's exposure to Hattie's hoodoo spells and Tea Cake's contraction of rabies--phenomena which are often blamed as the causes of their most serious acts of violence against their wives--do *not* alter their personalities completely. John's physical abuse of Lucy, as I have already suggested, has precedents in the psychological abuse and material neglect to which he formerly subjects his wife; and Tea Cake's jealous and murderous rage against Janie while under the influence of hydrophobia recalls the earlier beating he inflicts upon her.

12. According to Hurston's account in *Dust Tracks On A Road*, her love affair with the man she refers to as "A. W. P." helped to inspire her second novel. After breaking off this relationship, Hurston travelled to the Caribbean where, as she puts it,

"I tried to embalm all the tenderness of my passion for him in 'Their Eyes were Watching God'" (188-89).

13. Disapproval of Janie's transgression of categories based on age and gender can be attributed to patriarchal authority. Femininity and masculinity are constructs which define male and female social roles and enable male power. One of the concomitant privileges of male power is the sexual double standard which not only grants men discrete sexual license (as I have argued briefly above) but also allows them to marry much younger spouses (as in the instance of Janie and Logan Killicks) while attempting to prohibit women from doing the same.

Chapter 4: Fighting the Spirit Thieves: Deconstructing Binarisms in Erna Brodber's *Myal*

"I don't think that...the process of being uprooted, necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting." --Salman Rushdie (cited in McGee, 148)

Like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Zora Neale Hurston, Jamaican novelist and sociologist Erna Brodber has a strong interest in cultural retrieval and the decolonization of the subject. In an informal interview with Evelyn O'Callaghan, Brodber has described English colonialism in Jamaica as a "theft of culture." The English, she argues, have insisted on stealing the "particular world view" or "*spirit*" of African peoples in Jamaica as part of their programme of colonial subjugation (O'Callaghan 52). Brodber's second novel, *Myal* (1988), refers to this aspect of colonialism as "zombification," for, without "knowledge of their original and natural world," Afro-Jamaicans become, in the words of *Myal*'s Reverend Simpson, "empty shells--duppies, zombies, living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out" (Brodber 1988, 107). As Brodber herself has declared, *Myal* is really about the struggle to "*get back the spirit*" stolen during the course of the colonial encounter (O'Callaghan 52, my italics).

Myal does not represent cultural retrieval as the apprehension of a "pure" pre-colonial identity or world view, however, but as a creative process. The text's non-essentialist approach to decolonization is, perhaps, a result and a reflection of the heterogeneous nature of Jamaican reality, for, in Jamaica, the unprecedented meeting

and interaction of multifarious and uprooted peoples¹ has led to a dynamic process of cultural "creolization" (a particular instance of hybridization) which profoundly complicates the notion of "roots." Jamaican poet and historian Edward Brathwaite defines creolization as "a cultural action--material, psychological and spiritual--based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and--as white/black culturally discrete groups--to each other" (1971, 296). The reality of creolization, a process wherein Self and Other become mutually constitutive despite the existence of colonial hierarchy, makes it possible and indeed necessary for Brodber to conceptualize a programme of decolonization and self-apprehension which does not adhere to rigidly oppositional models of cultural identity. In this chapter I will analyze the rich complexity of Brodber's social vision as represented in *Myal*. In particular, I will demonstrate some of the ways in which Brodber's text equates binary or oppositional discursive frameworks with colonialist oppression while equating hybridity, on the other hand, with positive revolutionary transformation.

The wide variety of narrative styles and strategies which Brodber employs in *Myal* reflect the unique and complex nature of Jamaican cultural makeup. Brodber's use of numerous literary devices and techniques, including, among others, tonal variations which modulate between the formality of "objective," documentary reportage and the self-involved intimacy of community gossip, linguistic fluctuations from vernacular to metropolitan forms of English, and striking contrasts between first-person monologues and interactive dialogues (both verbal and telepathic), to name only a few, help to emphasize the wide range of cultural perspectives available in *Myal*'s Jamaican setting. Most importantly, the novel's many subtle references to regional historical and cultural events, its highlighting of Afro-Jamaican religious

practices, and its frequent employment of the vernacular (what Brathwaite refers to as "nation language"²), act as critical warning signs to Western readers like myself who, because of our lack of familiarity with Jamaican life and language, must be aware that we will, as O'Callaghan points out, "miss some of the finer shades of meaning...and some of the delights of register variation" (52). In terms of the relationship of style, language and content to culture, *Myal* is simultaneously familiar and foreign to the Anglophone Western reader; hence, in both inviting and challenging understanding, it has the potential to engender in the mind of the willing Western reader a transformative species of *intercultural* dialogic encounter.

Other aspects of *Myal*'s narrative structure also serve to highlight Jamaican social complexity. Although Brodber employs a third person omniscient narrator to relate her story, for example, the narrative point of consciousness continually shifts among the culturally diverse characters and frequently gives way to first person dialogue so that differing personal and cultural perceptions may be considered in relation to one another. The resultant sense of cultural perspectivism acts to disable a reading of the text which might attempt neatly and uncritically to polarize protagonists and antagonists on the basis of their cultural orientation.

Through her complex manner of relating Ella's experiences in the novel (I shall discuss Ella in greater detail toward the end of this chapter), furthermore, Brodber highlights the intricate nature of cause and effect, and, hence, responsibility, in the Jamaican social world of the early 1900s. Although the Methodist minister, William Brassington, blames himself for Ella's life-threatening illness, it is his wife Maydene who originally decides to adopt the young woman and remove her from her home setting of Grove Town. Then again, as Reverend Simpson, the black Baptist minister, points out, it was Kipling's poem, and, therefore, Teacher Holness (who so carefully

chose the poem for its political content and pedagogical potential [27]), who "brought [Ella and the Brassingtons] together" (60). Furthermore, it is Ella's sensitivity (6), brought on by racial prejudice among the members of the Grove Town community, which causes her to recite the poem so impressively that she attracts Maydene's attention. All of these factors, and many more, help to bring about the events which lead to Ella's marriage to Selwyn Langley and her resulting pathological condition. Brodber's allocation of the narrative point of consciousness to each of the above mentioned characters at different times in the story highlights their individual and collective contributions to Ella's fate, thus emphasizing that blame for oppression cannot be relegated unproblematically to separate individuals or cultural groups. Analyses of cultural retrieval and decolonization in *Myal* must be informed, then, by an awareness of the heterogeneous complexity of its social and cultural setting, for Grove Town and its environs provide a space wherein people and cultures interact in an intricate webwork of social relations.

Generally speaking, *Myal* depicts two contrasting approaches to cultural retrieval: a separatist "back-to-Africa" scenario, and a more complex programme of comprehensive systemic transformation. Of the two approaches, cultural separatism is clearly out of favour in the text. In recounting Bada D's dream of "flying back to Africa," for example, the narrator assumes the role of critical spokesperson representing collective opinion: "*Everybody else* want to go back and *everybody else* go back through the drums and the spirit; but that wasn't good enough for him" (7, my italics). Later in the text, this communal diatribe gives way to an intellectual argument against such separatist politics. Here, in speaking of the political implications of the Mosaic imperative "Let my people go," Reverend Simpson, a central character and opponent of colonialist spirit thievery in *Myal*, offers a critique

of the Aboukir Institute's campaign to "return home." Although he says that he endorses such a move, Simpson declares: "'But that is not what 'go' means to me. That is 'go off' and it cannot be just 'go off' *for they will follow you*. What my 'go' means, is 'take your hands from off my shirt'" (36, my italics). According to Reverend Simpson, separatist politics can effect no fundamental changes; even if the establishment of a neo-colonial system of government (such as that which Ngugi foreshadows in *A Grain of Wheat*³) could be avoided in the wake of a hypothetical Afro-Jamaican exodus, the system of Western colonialism would remain intact and untransformed and, as such, would not respect the borders of a newly-established "independent" homeland. The attainment of freedom from a system of spirit thievery which "[s]eparat[es] people from themselves...[and] man from his labour" (37) certainly requires a programme of decolonization and cultural reformulation, but such a programme, according to Reverend Simpson's logic, cannot be effective if it ignores the inescapable context of a pervasive global imperialism. The Reverend is aware, that is, that what was good for Moses and the Israelites is not necessarily good for Afro-Jamaicans. In asking God for a "new covenant for this people" (36), he problematizes the traditional "us versus them" intercultural political dynamic embodied in the Old Testament story and certain nationalistic forms of Jamaican revivalism.

This is where the political importance of "Myalism" becomes apparent. In the words of Brathwaite, "Myal" is "a fragment or aspect of a larger creolized form [of religious complex]" which includes, among other aspects, *obeah*, *kumina*, and *jonkonnu* (1979 152).⁴ The central focus of Myalism is the eradication of malign influences such as those associated with spirit thievery.⁵ As Monica Schuler has pointed out, Myalists generally believed that all misfortune, whether generated within or from outside of the community, was "the product of sorcery" (131). Because

Europeans were the agents of the profound misfortune of enslavement, they were perceived by Afro-Jamaicans as potent sorcerers (136). Thus, Myalism became, among other things, "a powerful catalyst for African and Afro-Jamaican resistance to European values and control" (131). Myalism provides a particularly effective religious and social outlook for transformative anti-colonial resistance, for in conceptualizing sin as sorcery--an offense against society rather than against God--practitioners of Myalism aim not to attain abstract rewards in a heavenly afterlife but rather to *transform* the human world of material and social relations (134).

The effectiveness of Myalism as an anti-colonial strategy in the heterogeneous society of Jamaica stems from its creolized rather than culturally discrete form. Schuler argues that Myalism "appears to have been the first religious movement in Jamaica which addressed itself to the entire slave society, rather than to the microcosms of separate African groups" (129); hence, Myalism "stimulated in its members sentiments of unity which transcended the divisions in Jamaican society" (134). In Brodber's *Myal*, this transcendence of cultural division is reflected in the makeup of the Myalist healing "team" (68) which ultimately includes members from a spectrum of religious, cultural, and ethnic/racial groupings. The title and thematic focus of Brodber's novel certainly suggest a unity of social purpose (cultural reformulation via the eradication of forces of spirit thievery); but the creolized nature of Myalism itself--its openness to all who wish to work against spirit thievery--underscores *Myal's* complex, deconstructive approach to social transformation.

Brodber presents her theoretical strategy of anti-colonial resistance in *Myal* in the context of a cryptic telepathic dialogue between Ole African/Willie and Reverend Simpson/Dan. Here, spirit thievery is presented in a manner which recognizes its complex and non-polarized dynamic. First, in response to Dan's questioning

concerning the untold "half" of the colonial story, Willie declares that "*They stole our sound*" (here, "They" can be read as referring to the master/colonizer and "sound" to the African voice, identity or spirit). And yet, only a few lines later, Willie reverses the equation, declaring that "hoodoo men, voodoo men *gave them* our sound" (66, my italics). A similar rhetorical about-face takes place only a few lines later, where Willie, after having declared that it was "the *outers*" who betrayed the people to the colonizer, suddenly declares that the colonizer "[l]earnt our tune from the brethren. On the *inside*" (66-67, my italics). Here, we are shown that zombification involves a complex process of mutual *exchange*. Because Willie does not identify the enemy solely as an external Other (in contrast, for example, to *A Grain of Wheat's* Kihika), spirit thievery cannot be fought in *Myal* through the implementation of a politics which polarizes "us" and "them," but must be dealt with using a more complex and sophisticated strategy of resistance and empowerment.

In the same dialogue between Dan and Willie the reader discovers the twofold nature of such a strategy. "Step number one" is the necessity "to stay in the wilderness...not learning their ways" in order "to root" (67). As Willie declares, "one must know this land, have this land, work this land before he can walk safely at home" (68). According to Brodber, "knowing" the land is of central importance to the Afro-Jamaican sense of self-identity, for, as she points out in an article entitled "Oral Sources and the Creation of a Social History of the Caribbean," the black person's history in the Caribbean, the narrative which is ignored in "the orthodox [historical] account" (10), "is the story of his [sic] ancestors' interaction with the Caribbean *landscape*" (3, my italics).⁶ Willie's assertion that "one must know this land," then, points to the need to apprehend a sense of self-identity and historical roots undistorted by the master narratives of the West. This task of "rooting" Willie relegates to

himself and Percy/Mass Cyrus, for both, in their respective roles as hermit and herbalist, are already close to the land⁷ and therefore relatively free from the influence of European discourse.

"Step number two" of Myalist resistance to spirit thievery in *Myal* emphasizes the importance of knowing the colonial Other. Because the blatant system of physical enslavement via the "tacky ships" has given way to a more subtle process of mental enslavement via colonial education, it is necessary, as Willie puts it, to "[g]et in their books and know their truth" (67). This aspect of resistance strategy Willie assigns to Dan, whose status as a Baptist minister with an understanding of Western discourse makes him well-suited for the task.⁸ Willie uses a medical metaphor to explain Dan's function in detail: "You are the smallpox, teacher," Willie tells him. "You learn the outer's ways, dish it out in little bits, an antidote man, against total absorption" (68). As Shalina Puri has pointed out, Willie's "metaphor of healing" unsettles the traditional colonial binary equation by suggesting that the implicit figurative referents of "disease and cure"--the discourses of colonialism and revolution respectively--are interrelated rather than essentially distinct (110). This second aspect of the Myalist resistance strategy--the need to know and understand the colonizing Other in order to empower colonized peoples--helps to explain why racially mixed characters such as Ella O'Grady and William Brassington, who have a qualified access to *both* white and black discourses, have the potential to play important roles in the process of decolonization.

Early in the novel, however, the disruptive potential of Ella and William is not readily apparent; they enter the text as characters who exist in a kind of oppositional relationship to traditional Afro-Jamaican experience. In the opening paragraphs of *Myal*, Mass Cyrus, the Obeah man, speaks with obvious distaste of "[t]hese new

people..., these trained-minded people" who have come to him seeking a cure for Ella's unspecified pathology. Because Ella and William are "in-between colours people" (1)--people, that is, of no cut-and-dry cultural distinction--the oppositional pole around which their difference turns can be conceptualized as that of the "pure" and "rooted" versus the "impure" and "uprooted." Such an opposition is borne out by the musical metaphor employed by and in reference to Mass Cyrus in the opening paragraphs of the novel, for, in opposition to the Obeah man's sweet, soft, restful musical "score," the "clashing symbols" of the "new people" are said to strike a note of "discord [that] could shake a man out of his roots" (1). Here, Mass Cyrus's discourse seems to support JanMohamed's notion that colonial intercultural syncretism is a corruption of cultural identity and, therefore, a form of confusion (1983, 8) containing little potential as a force for productive social transformation.

When Reverend Simpson is first introduced into the text he also seems to consider the "in-between colours people" as existing in an oppositional relationship to the local black population. Simpson's early criticism of Teacher Holness's decision to have Ella recite Kipling, for example, is based on her racial status: she is the only student in the school with "that colour and that hair" (6). To Simpson, who, like Ella's teachers, is bitterly aware that her "colour will carry her through" (10), Ella's role in the school assembly is a sign of privilege which delimits the opportunities and effaces the talents of black people: "You mean Holness couldn't have found another just as good?" he asks himself. "'Seems we of this hue just cannot win!'" (6).

Despite the oppositions suggested by Mass Cyrus and Reverend Simpson in these passages, Ella's potential to disrupt and transform colonial discourse becomes apparent early in the text. Ella's role as the "executionist" (a pun is evident here) of Kipling's poem, for example, acts to displace the terms of its stereotypical discourse,

for, immediately following her recitation of the lines from "The White Man's Burden" which describe the colonial subaltern as "Half devil and half child," Simpson asks himself: "'And whose burden is this *half black, half white* child?'" (6, my emphasis). As Joyce Walker-Johnson has pointed out, "[t]he identification of Ella...with the 'Half devil and half child' of Kipling's poem and early historical writing on the Negro is clear" (57). And yet, it is my contention that Ella's status as "half white" reveals the referential ambivalence of the stereotype which she articulates, for she is living proof of the transgression of the masters, who, according to the tenets of their own manichean discursive framework, had, as Sandra Drake points out, "fathered children by women 'beneath' them in the 'natural order'" and therefore demonstrated the contradictory existence of "'natural' impulses" within their own ostensibly "cultural sphere" (26).⁹ Ella, in reciting Kipling's poem, becomes a kind of living signifier of its internal contradictions; her very presence, that is, destabilizes the terms of the poem's polarizing colonial discourse (which opposes diametrically the "responsible" Christian colonizer to the "childish" and "pagan" indigene), lending credence to Mass Cyrus's earlier foreshadowing declaration that Ella is "here to short circuit the whole of creation" (4).

One of *Myal's* central spirit thieves is Mass Levi, who is renowned for his "power" and Christian "incorruptib[ility]." It is immediately clear, however, that Mass Levi obtains a great deal of his extraordinary power by manipulating his fellow villagers. His manner of dealing with women is especially telling. After unexpectedly complimenting Miss Madeline on her appearance, for example, we are told that

he would stare silently at her until she lifted her eyes to him. Then he would smile promisingly and the smile would suddenly be replaced by benevolent pastoral chastisement "Control Miss Madeline, control".

Clearly she was really at heart a loose woman who was sending signs of readiness to him. And the dear woman would be so ashamed, she would silently thank Mass Levi for saving her from sinning but in addition, for keeping her disgrace a secret. (32)

Brodber's use of the conditional tense here demonstrates that Mass Levi habitually indulges in such manipulative behaviour. Through his machinations, he is able to *construct* a binary of good versus evil wherein he sets himself up as goodness incarnate--the (false) standard by which others may be measured and found lacking. Thus, Mass Levi obtains his renowned "power" at the expense of women and other members of the community.

Mass Levi's ritualistic attack on Anita is completely consistent with his behaviour towards Miss Madeline. As Catherine Nelson-McDermott puts it, "Mass Levi's repeated psychic rape of Anita is an extreme manifestation of his life-long hunger for 'control'...over the weak" (56). In terms of the general post-colonial situation, his Afro-Jamaican status demonstrates that "systemic spirit thievery (that is, colonialism)...creates situations in which it is not simply 'them versus us.' It is also 'us versus us' and 'I versus I'" (56). Moreover, in terms of gender politics, Anita's youth and powerlessness against Mass Levi's onslaughts serve to emphasize the asymmetry of power relations between men and women in a system governed by male values.¹⁰

Part of Anita's vulnerability to Mass Levi's acts of spirit thievery stems from her colonial education. Anita's studying, we are told, is of "[t]he kind that splits the mind from the body and both from the soul and leaves each open to infiltration" (28). As Walker-Johnson has pointed out, "Anita's visitation by the poltergeist is another way of representing the psychological stress which accompanies the change of outlook which the educational process requires" (59). Colonial education, as an integral aspect

of the institutional machinery which replaces the Afro-Jamaican's traditional "world-view" with a Western one, is a subtle but insidious form of spirit thievery which helps to enable the temporary success of Mass Levi's ritualistic attacks against Anita.

Indeed, Reverend Simpson draws an explicit parallel between Mass Levi's activities and those of British colonialism, calling the former "this little spirit thief" and the latter "the bigger one" (68).

Mass Levi's overall characterization is consistent with Schuler's description of that aspect of spirit thievery which is instigated by members of Afro-Jamaican communities. Schuler writes that people of African descent subscribed to a cosmology

which posited a world in which "under ideal circumstances, good prevailed absolutely and exclusively." In the actual world of obviously limited resources, such perfection was, of course, rarely achieved, so that anyone enjoying unusual good fortune was suspected of doing so at the community's expense. Such anti-social people placed personal goals above those of the community and threatened its harmony. They were thought to employ ritual to satisfy their self-centred desires. (131)

Brodber takes great pains to represent Mass Levi as a man of unusual power and good fortune. He has "everything": wealth, social position (as an Officer of the law), moral prestige, and the admiration of the local women. By casting Mass Levi as the foulest of spirit thieves, however, Brodber offers an explicit critique of economic, social, moral, and gender-based systems of hierarchy, demonstrating their anti-social thrust and their potential to impede productive intersubjective and hybridizing processes.

Another local spirit thief in *Myal* is the Methodist parson, Reverend William Brassington. Although he is of mixed racial descent himself, William, unlike Reverend Simpson, his Baptist counterpart, subscribes to a rigidly orthodox system of

Western/Christian values, believing that it is his duty, as he puts it, to "exorcise and replace" (18) the world view of the potential converts who live in his parish.

Although William's wife Maydene feels that it would be "[m]uch better if he could find a way of linking what [his parishioners] know with what he wants them to know" (19) instead of transforming them into "sacks which he has emptied" (18), William believes that exorcism and replacement is "a stage of conversion that all new Christians have to pass through" (19).¹¹ William's unwillingness early in the novel to engage in any kind of process of intercultural/intersubjective exchange is emphasized by his inability, as Taylor puts it, to "look straight in people eye" (52). William suffers from what Maria Lugones has described as "monophilia": "the urge to control the multiplicity of people and things" (464). Thus, as O'Callaghan puts it, he "emerges as a dangerous manipulator, an agent of colonial alienation" (57). Brodber, however, refuses to allow William to remain defined by the oppositional politics of the spirit thief. Her text, as I will demonstrate momentarily, charts William's psychological progression from a rigidly polarized world view to one which begins to accept the Other on its own terms.

In contrast to her husband, Maydene Brassington (who is of white English extraction) is not quick to impose a pre-given interpretive framework upon her surroundings; rather, she possesses both the desire and the ability to adapt to her environment. At the very moment in which Brodber introduces her into the text, for example, the reader finds Maydene engaged in a kind of process of discursive adjustment: "If she were in the British Isles, the time of day that meant so much to her would have been called the 'gloaming' but she was in St. Thomas, Jamaica. Nightfall then. The right word." Immediately upon re-aligning her vocabulary, however, Maydene makes one further adjustment: "But there was something still

missing. For it wasn't just the fall of the night that was hers. It was the 'cusp'. Her personal word" (13). With this *negotiation* between environment and personal discourse (one aspect of Brathwaite's definition, quoted above, of the process of "creolization"), Maydene's character demonstrates the mutual constitution of outside and inside, nature and culture. Indeed, her partiality to "the time called nightfall" offers further evidence of her propensity for negotiation, for it stems from nightfall's characteristic as "[t]he meeting of two disparate points" (13). Unlike her husband, then, Maydene's sensibility makes her well-suited for a productive inter-cultural encounter, for she is able to "forgo a permanent fixed self" which, as Abdul JanMohamed argues, "is essential if one is going to understand and appreciate a racial or cultural alterity" (1985, 78).¹²

Maydene plays an integral role in her husband's evolution of consciousness, for her behaviour causes him to reevaluate and modify his own world view. When Maydene first becomes involved with Myalism as a member of "the team" (68) in her capacity as the "White Hen," William attempts to co-opt this authentic irruption of cultural difference by employing a gender-based stereotype: he attributes his wife's unusual interest in the activities of Grove Town to "an early menopause...that...was affecting her mind" (88). Certainly, Maydene's cultural transformation alters the nature of her habitual role as William's wife, for her earlier self-effacing identification with her husband's concerns gives way to a sense of independence (88-89). The new Maydene, like Lucy Potts in Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, "really scare[s]" her husband; for, as we are told, William "saw that [she] was thinking. Her own thoughts. Her spirit was not there at ready waiting to take his orders" (89). It is telling that William's revelation concerning Maydene occurs when he takes "a good straight look" at her, for this phrase, in recalling Taylor's earlier assertion that the

Reverend "can't look straight in people eye" (52), suggests that William, prior to this moment, has been treating his wife as he treats his congregation. With this passage, that is, Brodber implies that the traditional female role and sense of self-identity, like those of the colonial subaltern, are the products of spirit thievery. Thus, *Myal* demonstrates the necessity in colonial Jamaica for what Nelson-McDermott refers to as "the myal-ing of faulty gender relations" (63).

William attempts to employ one more common colonial/patriarchal discursive tactic to neutralize the perplexity engendered within him by his wife's transformation: He conceptualizes her as a witch "flitt[ing] all about his head on the hackneyed broom" (91), attributing her new spiritual awareness to her membership in a "coven" (90). By equating Maydene's participation in Myalism to witchcraft,¹³ William endeavours to co-opt her newfound identity as the "White Hen" into a kind of manichean economy which opposes his own masculine "goodness" to the feminine "evil" of "that dratted place" (86), Grove Town.

William is unable, however, to maintain such a polarized conception of Maydene's activities and the recent events in Grove Town. Because his wife's behaviour destabilizes the colonial discourse which constitutes his mode of thinking, forcing him to think "*as he had never thought before*" (91, my italics), William is able to find previously unconsidered parallels between the events described in his cherished Scriptures and the unexplainable experiences of the Grove Town Other: "'Those poor disciples,'" he says to himself after pondering the mystery of local events. "'How did they ever get anybody to believe that the body of our Lord had spirited itself away? My word!'" (91). Here, William's sudden willingness to compare his wife's "experiences" with those of the Christian disciples raises the possibility that he himself may be impious in doubting her personal testimony. With this point of contact

established, William's discourse of co-optation weakens, and he is able to consider that the activities in which Maydene has become involved might in fact be based on something more than menopausal delusion or pagan superstition.

William also manifests a newfound willingness to question the applicability of his own universalizing discursive frameworks to the interpretation of events in the colonial context. In reconsidering Ella's status as the living evidence of her mother "Mary's sin," for example, he asks himself : "How can a black woman really be Eve when the God of the garden had stacked the cards so that she could not say 'No'?" (87). Here, the reality of the Jamaican colonial context forces William to question the machinations of his own European God, the very (ostensible) source and guarantor of his monolithic colonizing discourse; and such questioning, by destabilizing the colonialist discursive *centre*, inevitably entails a reconceptualization of the relationship between the formerly privileged Christian/male Self and the pagan/female Other who has occupied the *margins*. Alongside of his willingness, discussed above, to consider the existence of parallels between his own religious tradition and the events in Grove Town, William's questioning in this instance of his own theological tradition is part of a hybridizing dialogue between Self and Other which emerges as a result of his "struggle with Grove Town" (86). This dialogue enables William ultimately to abandon the monolithic discourses of colonial and patriarchal spirit thievery which he had formerly embraced.

William's newfound insights bring him back into productive contact with his own stolen past. For, in "remembering words from his own childhood" (95), he is able to recall an earlier conceptualization of the colonial social system:

He was on to something else. He saw several backras in houses on the

hills. He saw the folk--black, slave perhaps,--living huddled together in the valley surrounded by backras' big houses on the hills. He thought of the rich foods backra ate. He thought of those backras with their stomachs stuck full, tumblers in each chubby right hand.... (95)

William's insight here enables him to question overtly the phenomenon of "zombification" (108); and his subsequent laughter at the expense of the backra, the colonizing authors of his earlier discourse of exorcism and replacement, symbolizes his release from a colonial economy in which he has been both perpetrator *and* victim of the oppressive forces of spirit thievery.

William's transformation in *Myal* demonstrates the non-essentialist and non-polarized nature of Brodber's revolutionary politics. For, through William's *conversion* from patriarchal/colonial spirit thief to potential member (as "White Rabbit" or "Mongoose" [103]) of the Myalist healing team, Brodber reveals that Myalism does not oppose itself to the representative agents of spirit thievery in any essential way. Brodber's politics, that is, focus on systemic *transformation* rather than cultural separation. Indeed, William's role in *Myal* points to the possibility of rewriting the allegorical script which provides the "identities" of the Myalist healing team, for there is no mention in the *Caribbean Reader's* story of Mr. Joe's farm of a rabbit or a mongoose.¹⁴ William's very presence among the healers, that is, has the potential to transgress the parameters of the colonial allegory, enabling the emergence of a new, as yet unscripted, story. Through the development of William's character, Brodber demonstrates that her anti-colonial strategy is not monolithic and pre-scriptive, but is itself subject to transformation via the hybridizing negotiation which arises as a result of contextual change.

The complexity of Brodber's social vision in *Myal* is perhaps best understood

through an analysis of the role and function in the text of Ella O'Grady. Like Anita, Ella becomes vulnerable to the forces of spirit thievery partially as a result of her colonial education. Ignored by her teachers and ostracized by her schoolmates because of her status as "half white," Ella retreats into a realm of fantasy where she travels through Kipling's fictitious colonial world with such imaginary companions as Peter Pan, Lucy Gray and Dairy Maid (11-12). Her dissociation from her own cultural context is immediately apparent to Maydene who, when she attends Ella's recitation of the Kipling poem at the school assembly, perceives her as "flying," "[t]otally separated from the platform and from the people around her" (17). Ella's alienation from her community of origin and her subsequent identification, as a result of her education and social conditioning, with characters from Western literature and commercial advertising, are themselves pathological symptoms of cultural theft. Thus conditioned, Ella becomes vulnerable to the more blatant spirit thievery practiced by Selwyn Langley, for she perceives Selwyn favourably at the moment of their first encounter as "someone like Peter Pan" (46).

Ella's conditioned openness to Selwyn enables him to impose upon her a false and contradictory sense of identity. On the one hand, Ella must express only her blackness in her private life with Selwyn, for, obsessed as he is with the desire to produce, through the extraction of Ella's cultural knowledge (O'Callaghan 51), "the biggest coon show ever" (80), Selwyn "ask[s] no questions about [Peter and Lucy and Dairy Maid]" (81). On the other hand, however, Ella must deny publicly her African antecedents, for Selwyn asks her to pretend that both of her parents were white (43). Selwyn's racism --his desire for "[i]n-laws with real pedigree...who could appear in the flesh" (80)--causes him secretly to use prophylactics to deny Ella, "his creature" (43), what she perceives, because of conditioned gender expectations (82), as the

opportunity "to fill the spaces he had created and give her too, a chance to create" (82). Ella's subsequent pathological condition--her bizarre conception of "the baby Jesus" (83)--is the final result of her experience with Selwyn; and the horror of her condition--her carrying of "the stinkiest, dirtiest ball to come out of a body since creation" (2)--symbolizes the profoundly destructive nature of cultural spirit thievery.

Despite Selwyn's obvious and harmful role as an American neo-colonial spirit thief, Brodber does not portray him in a binary fashion as a manifestation of absolute evil. Indeed, to a certain extent, Selwyn has a positive influence on Ella. First of all, he makes her understand "that she was coloured, mulatto and what that meant" (43), thus helping her to realize the social implications of her racial status in a (neo)colonial world. Secondly, the "draining" process which contact with Selwyn initiates in Ella frees Ella's body from accumulated "[p]oisons" and helps to dissolve the metaphorical "gauze" which represses her blackness by separating the black and white "section[s] of her mind" (80). Thus, through the influence of her American husband, Ella is able to engage in an internal dialogue which allows her to access a clear vision of her "carnate past" (81) as well as "a fuller view of her immediate surroundings" (82).

Brodber expresses part of this "fuller view" of colonization in Myal through Ella's understanding of her own complicity with the forces of spirit thievery. In watching Selwyn's production of *Caribbean Nights and Days*, Ella accuses herself: "It was you who let him take everything. You gave him everything" (84). Although this accusation is itself only a half-truth--it occurs in the context of a conversation "between her [divided] selves" (84)--Maydene also problematizes the relegation of responsibility for acts of spirit thievery: "Is not all the time is somebody do something," she declares, "sometimes is you do you own self something" (94). Taken together, Ella's self-critique and Maydene's remark suggest that colonialist oppression

is not a cut-and-dry matter of external imposition and that a simple economy of good slave/subaltern versus evil master/colonizer, no matter how truthful it may seem and no matter how tempting its construction may be, is itself only "half the story." Ella must face the fact that although Selwyn is one of the "outers" who has stolen and falsified Afro-Jamaican culture, she herself is one of the insiders who, in the words of Ole African/Willie, "gave them our sound" (66).¹⁵ Through her portrayal of Ella's marital experience in America, Brodber points once again to the mutual constitution of outside and inside, Self and Other, demonstrating the validity of Maydene's remark that "[s]pirit thievery comes in so many forms" (82).

This is not to suggest that *Myal* negates the notion of a quest for cultural identity. Indeed, Ole African's repeated assertion that "[t]he half has never been told" (34) underscores the necessity of developing a critical voice--a critique of zombification-- through which a sense of decolonized identity may be asserted. Ella's rage at the colonial scenario on Mr. Joe's farm, moreover, can be said to signify a degree of support for a kind of separatist politics; for if the animals in the children's textbook are viewed as a discrete culture, Ella's passionate objection to their return to the colonial situation under Mr. Joe's authority underscores her conviction that "their *natural* state [is] to live without a master *not of their kind*" (106, my italics). However, Brodber's text as a whole, in its allegory of the farm situation, reveals that Mr. Joe allegorizes not a form of cultural identity, but a political *structure*, and that the "animals" represent not a discrete culture but a group of humans (the members of the Myalist healing team) with varying cultural antecedents. Despite the cultural differences among the Myalist healers, their individual identities have a communal emphasis and interconnection of purpose (the eradication of the forces of spirit thievery) which *requires* the crossing of cultural horizons. Thus, the text unravels the

polarizations set up earlier in the discourses of Mass Cyrus/Percy and Reverend Simpson/Dan between the identity of "these new...in-between colours people" and that of black Afro-Jamaicans. For, although a sense of African "roots" is necessary to the process of decolonization, so is the administration of a cultural "antidote" or vaccination against colonialist oppression (67-68). This is, of course, where William and Ella can assume significant roles in the community. For, as "trained-minded people" (1) who have overcome their own internal discord by apprehending a clear view of the *whole* colonial story, they are highly qualified, as Mr. Dan puts it, to "correct images from the inside, destroy what should be destroyed...[and] give us back ourselves with which to chart our course to go where we want to go" (110).

Notes

1. Because of the tragic annihilation of Carib and Aruac peoples in the Caribbean during the Spanish colonial period, indigenous tradition can play no *direct* role in the creolization process. According to Wilson Harris's theoretical discourse on cross-cultural syncreticity, however, indigenous tradition may be accessed indirectly through "fossil" memories which exist within the psyche of each of us. See Harris (1974) and Kirsten Holst Petersen (1975, 16-23).

2. For insight into the nature, development, and cultural implications of "nation language" in Jamaica, see Brathwaite's *History of the Voice* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984).

3. See Ngugi's representation in *A Grain of Wheat* of the corrupt M. P. (169) and the warning, articulated by General R, of the dangers of a neo-colonial government (221).

4. For a helpful explanation of these and other aspects of Afro-Jamaican religious practices, see Brathwaite (1979, 152-53).

5. Brodber's working title for *Myal* was *The Spirit Thieves* (O'Callaghan 52).

6. In explaining the danger for Afro-Jamaicans of "orthodox" historical accounts, Brodber quotes V. S. Naipaul who argues that Western History "tell[s] the story of the slave trade as if it were just another aspect of mercantilism" (Brodber 1983, 7). Obviously, the Eurocentric focus of such a historical narrative leads to the effacement of black experience.

7. The connection of Ole African and Mass Cyrus to the land is symbolized in *Myal* by their respective identities in the allegorical story of Mr. Joe's farm as a hog (which "roots") and a chick (which "scratches" the ground in search of food).

8. Monica Schuler argues that the religion of many "so-called 'Native' or 'Black' Baptists" in colonial Jamaica was in fact a "blend of African and European religious beliefs and practices [which] were really Myalist, not Baptist" (130). This would help to explain the difference in outlook at the outset of the novel between the Baptist parson, Reverend Simpson, and his Methodist rival, Reverend Brassington.

9. For a detailed analysis of the theoretical implications of "miscegenation" for colonial discourse, see Drake 26.

10. Interestingly enough, Mass Levi's desire to regain his lost power (he has suffered a stroke) can be seen to stem from contradictory motives. For this character, who abstains from extra-marital sexual contact with women in order not to "give [them] any power over him" (32), it must be remembered, has actually been "conserv[ing] his energies for *just the right moment*" (34, my italics). The implication here is that, belying his pretence of moral superiority over women like Miss Madeline (a pretence upon which he bases his moral power and authority), Mass Levi has in fact been planning to take advantage of one or more of the "many" "willing and ready" matrons who, in response to his slightest signal, "would come running and make all the arrangements to boot" (32-33). According to his own patriarchal system of logic, then, Mass Levi obsessively constructs and saves his "power"--and tries to regain it through acts of spirit thievery against Anita once it is lost--only in order ultimately to give it away. Through these contradictions surrounding Mass Levi, Brodber demonstrates the ambivalence and ultimate untenability of a male-centred system of discourse which polarizes masculine Self and feminine Other.

11. William's early evangelical strategies are similar to those of the Spanish Dominican conquistadors who believed, as Tzvetan Todorov puts it, that "the slightest trace of paganism...betrays the very spirit of the Christian religion" (204). In such rigid colonizing frameworks, "[s]yncretism is [considered to be] a sacrilege" (205).

12. Despite these admirable characteristics, Maydene still owns certain residual colonizing tendencies of which she must rid herself. Her decision to adopt Ella, for example, is matter-of-fact in tone: "'She will be my daughter. After all, I have always wanted to have a daughter'" (19), Maydene declares rather too smugly. Although Maydene intends to offer Ella love and support, her interest in the "mulatto" girl is at first rather selfish in that it stems from her personal desire to gain a better understanding of her husband, who is of similarly mixed racial heritage. Still, Maydene's openness to negotiation and interaction with the Other helps her to realize her mistakes and adjust her behaviour accordingly.

13. The notion that Myal signifies "witchcraft" is common in Eurocentric discourse. In the authoritative *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, for example, F. G. Cassidy et al. define "Myal" as "[a] form of *witchcraft*" (Cassidy 313, my italics). Clearly, such conceptions of Myalism distort and devalue it as a form of religious practice by relegating it to the subordinate term in the binary equations of the familiar versus the exotic and good versus evil.

14. O'Callaghan points out that the story of Mr. Joe's farm is in fact taken from the *Caribbean Reader* primary school series (53).

15. In a discussion of Ella's complicity with Selwyn's acts of spirit thievery, Shalina Puri comments that "[p]erhaps *Myal* focusses on moments of complicity because these are also the moments when the oppressed reveal their agency. And it is

on that same agency that the possibility of resistance is predicated" (108).

Conclusion

The general purpose of this study has been to question and problematize two seemingly distinct approaches to the analysis of cultural identity--hybridity and identity politics--by considering them in the light of some twentieth century post-colonial and women's fiction. By addressing the theoretical debate between hybridity and essentialism from within the context of a study of selected novels by three black authors who have a practical concern with the decolonization of gendered and colonial identities, I have attempted to establish a dialogue between feminist and post-colonial theory as well as a larger general dialogue between these theories and the practice of literary representation. Through the orchestration of such critical negotiations, it is my hope to have brought into question some of the assumptions underpinning contemporary theories of identity (whether hybrid or essentialist) as well as some of the prominent interpretations of the literary texts under study.

Despite my attempt to question the political efficacy of both identity politics and hybridity as revolutionary strategies, my personal tendency to privilege a hybridized conceptualization of identity over a monolithic or essentialist one will have been apparent to the reader. Although the assertion of a distinct cultural specificity can be a potent tool of resistance, and although positionality (the consideration of the position of a given cultural group or subject in the social hierarchy) must always be a factor to the evaluation of any revolutionary strategy, hybridity theory enables the conceptualization of a truly revolutionary politics which would transform systems of

power rather than merely invert the binary terms upon which they are constructed. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have so succinctly put it, hybridization, in destabilizing and recombining elements of a given semiotic system, "generates the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself*, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it" (58).

On a less utopian note, I must ultimately agree with Homi Bhabha that no identity can exist in self-contained opposition to that of an Other. Because human subjects are constituted by discourses which we do not originate but which precede us, a certain amount of overlap always occurs between and among ourselves. Moreover, because all linguistic utterance is shaped by social, historical, and enunciative contexts, as I argued above in Chapter 1, subjects are mutually influenced and modified in the linguistic encounter. Cultural hegemony certainly plays an important role in determining the *distribution* of cultural/discursive influences in the intercultural encounter and, hence, in shaping the character of the hybridized subject;¹ but the subject's hybridity, I contend, is a fact of the post-colonial condition, for, in the twentieth century world of global intercultural interaction, no discourse can remain isolated and impenetrable.

In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, therefore, I devoted a significant amount of space to the project of exposing some of the major contradictions internal to the patriarchal and colonial discourses represented in the novels under study, for the presence of contradictions in patriarchal and colonial discourses provides "gaps" through which subversive influences may enter and transform "monolithic" regimes. As I have demonstrated, the discourses which constitute the self-conceptions of such colonial/patriarchal characters as John Thompson, John Pearson, Joe Starks, and Mass Levi, contain contradictions which render their cherished ideas of Self and Other

ultimately untenable; and the extent to which these characters are forced to confront and realize the contradictory nature of their discursive makeup plays a central role in determining the nature of their reaction to a meeting with the Other. In situations where the institutional structures supporting colonizing discourses are particularly powerful, as in the case of John Thompson (whose world-view has the backing of nothing less than British economic and military might) and that of Joe Starks (who is propped up by his wealth, social position, and a long history of relatively unopposed political control), a violent assertion of an oppositional sense of self-identity by the colonized or immasculated subject becomes necessary to the success of resistance. In contexts where colonialist or patriarchal discourses lack such concrete means of enforcement, as in the case of William Brassington (whose evangelical discourse remains relatively vulnerable to subversion by the Grove Town Other), hybridity can act without great impediment to destabilize and transform authoritative "monoliths."

Sociohistorical context is of crucial importance to any evaluation of the debate between hybridity and identity politics as strategies of resistance, for the nature of a hegemonic situation and its supporting structures can determine the relative efficacy of either approach to the initiation of social change. Hence, any critical theoretical discourse pertaining to the study of cultural identity which makes universalizing claims for either hybridity or cultural separatism should be approached with caution.

Brodber's *Myal*, with its persuasive deconstruction of all binary relationships and its representation of the creative and transformative potential of intercultural processes, brings into question, for example, Fanon's sweeping assertions that "the Manicheism of the settler produces a Manicheism of the native"² and that "[t]he appearance of the settler has meant in terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals" (1961, 93). On the other hand, Ngugi's

representation, in *A Grain of Wheat*, of some of the ways in which hybridizing processes can favour the colonialist regime while harming the Gikuyu people, encourages the questioning of the practical usefulness of Bhabha's overarching claim that the anti-essentialism which underpins hybridity provides "a strong, *principled* argument against political separatism of *any* colour" (1994, 27, my italics).

Indeed, the novels I have studied here, especially those of Hurston and Brodber, tend to support the feminist concept of a "double strategy" which negotiates a kind of middle way between deconstructive and essentialist or consolidational approaches to culture and anti-colonial or anti-patriarchal resistance. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for example, successful resistance to patriarchal oppression requires the exposure of the hybridity of the masculine psyche (through the demonstration of the contradictory nature of masculine discourse and the refutation of male-centred conceptions of male-female opposition) as well as the assertion by the female protagonists of a sense of relatively autonomous, decolonized identity. In *Myal*, moreover, a double strategy of resistance to colonial "spirit thievery" is made explicit: the Myalist healing "team" must simultaneously remain in touch with cultural "roots" while addressing and attempting to alter the discourses of the colonial world which also play an inescapable role in constituting the contemporary Afro-Jamaican sense of identity.

The final word here must go to Hurston, however, for it is my contention that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* best problematizes the *critical* and *theoretical* debate between hybridity and identity politics. In this novel, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, the author makes it clear that local opposition to Janie Crawford's behaviour stems to a great extent from the community's disapproval of her transgression of discursive boundaries which determine the binary construction of such categories as youth/age,

wealth/poverty, and male/female. If Janie is to transform the male-centred, "monolithic" discourses aimed against her, she must tell her story only to a fellow woman who is empathetic enough to give her a fair hearing and to represent her story in a non-prejudiced manner within the community. By having her protagonist deploy a *separatist* strategy of resistance (in the act of telling her tale) as a means of supporting what amounts to a *hybridized* sense of Self, Hurston brings into question the usefulness of theoretical polarizations of hybridity and identity politics, showing that each discourse is *not* necessarily distinct and separate but rather mutually affective and intertwined.

Notes

1. In hegemonic regimes, as I argued above in my chapter on Ngugi, the dominant discourses are often able to co-opt cultural difference. When such co-optation occurs, syncretic processes will not necessarily result in an equitable distribution of cultural influences.

2. Fanon clarifies this statement by adding: "To the theory of the 'absolute evil of the native' the theory of the 'absolute evil of the settler' replies" (1961, 93).

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